



Culture Contact and Conflict in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* as an Amelioration of Women's Condition

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ABSTRACT

Using the feminist qualified by the sociological critical framework, this paper demonstrates how the psychological disposition of the characters in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* exhibits the mentality of urban-dwellers, revealing some western culture contact and conflict with traditional African culture. Consequently, it also attempts to analyse how Aidoo artistically exploits the disorganization of social life and the disintegration and erosion of traditional values in post-colonial Africa extrapolating from Ghana for the amelioration of women's condition. As part of the action, influences and narratives flow, once in a while, from the town to the countryside, like Esi's consultation with her mother and grandmother in the village whether or not to get married as a second wife to Ali Kondey, these influences reveal western culture contact and conflict with the traditional African culture as demonstrated, especially, by the thoroughly enjoyed sexual escapades by both the woman Esi and the man Ali when they are not yet married, thus exhibiting western or urban culture contact and conflicts with the traditional African ethos which are represented by Esi's grandmother's ideas and truths derived from her unadulterated pre-colonial African past. She informs us that in the past, no man who had more than one wife, lived with any on a permanent basis in order to give the woman some respite to do some things for her personal interest like her economic self-sustenance. That was because people just had to be rational rather than emotional. Aidoo is, therefore, advocating that we should glean the positive aspect of our indigenous African culture concerning women's plight and add the good aspects of western or foreign culture like women's emotional involvement in coitus, and try to formulate a more favourable condition for the post/neo colonial African woman contemporarily for the positive transformation of the entire society.

INTRODUCTION

In his doctoral thesis, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, Emmanuel Obiechina asserts:

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For most Africans, life begins in the village, and wherever they go after that, they carry the village with them – [At least mentally, they carry with them the village concept of life]. There is often a certain ambivalence in their attitudes and behaviour when they move into modern urban culture (201).

This reaction is also true of characters in the African novel that migrate from the village to the urban centres. Obiechina adds that most of the writers deal with these ambivalences of individual behaviour as well as conflicts and tensions in social relationships. But Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* goes back in time to the earliest contact between the western and the traditional cultures, revealing the great shock which followed the first impact (201). Like most other items of cultural borrowing, the novel in Africa is still undergoing change. The best way to describe the domestication or indigenization of the African novel is to recognize the disparity between the rural and the urban African novel. Novelists like Chinua Achebe and Ama Ata Aidoo who have lived both in the rural and urban environments tend to locate their novels within either or both settings.

However, for a novel to be classified as urban, most of the action should be located in the city. The psychological disposition of the characters should exhibit the mentality of urban or city-dwellers, revealing some culture contact and culture conflict. For most of the city-dwellers who originate from the village and migrate to the urban centres, the non-traditional element should dominate the rural and traditional. The peculiarities of thought, action and feelings in the urban novel approximate to the bureaucratic, commercial, industrial and individualistic urban situation. All the same, the influences and narratives do flow once in a while from the town to the countryside. The African novel, like most other written literary forms of African literature, reflects features which belong to both the oral and the literary traditions. The reflection of features from the oral tradition injects a truly African sensibility and flavour into the African novel. Like Achebe in his urban novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, Aidoo in *Changes: A Love Story* represents local speech habits, beliefs, customs and mores in order to give a distinctive quality of life and action which reflect African realities. According to Obiechina, one of the marked differences between the novels written by indigenous West Africans and those by non-indigenes is the use of oral traditional elements by indigenous novels and their near complete absence in the others, such as Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1938), and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1891), written by non-indigenous novelists who use the West African setting (26). The blending of the oral and literary traditions has given the African novel its texture and distinctive local colour. The featuring of both the oral and literary traditions in the African novel is consequent upon the peculiar circumstances of colonialism which caused the meeting of Europe and Africa.

The novel, as a western by-product of literacy and the only major literary genre which has no strict equivalent in the African oral tradition, has

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emerged in West Africa based on the social factors which determine the change from the old traditional culture to the modern literate and industrial culture. Before the introduction of western education and literacy in the coastal, non-Muslim parts of West Africa, the literary form was exclusively oral. The entire cultural repertoire of the people at that time was contained in their oral tradition made up of folktales, praise songs, parables, proverbs, myths, legends, dirges, among others.

The African novel, a good example of literature of commitment, referred to in French as *la littérature engagée*, explores the problems of the society. The novelist, in this case Ama Ata Aidoo, indicates the social reforms she would want to see through the aspects of the contemporary African life which she criticizes. The African novel tends to depict individual characters not through their private psychological experiences but through community or social life; and to portray activities of a collective or general nature with individual sentiments; and actions deriving force and logic from those of the community.

Theoretical Framework

Using the feminist qualified by the sociological critical framework, this paper demonstrates how the psychological disposition of the characters in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* exhibits the mentality of urban or city-dwellers, revealing some western culture contact and conflict with traditional African culture. It also attempts to analyse Aidoo's *Changes* as an urban African novel, to artistically explore the disorganization of social life and the disintegration and erosion of traditional values in post-colonial Africa extrapolating from Ghana based on Obiechina's view-point which states:

The disorganization of social life within the urban situation, especially the disintegration of traditional values, before there is time for them to be replaced by new ones, has left people at the mercy of social and economic forces (Obiechina 36).

Culture Contact and Culture Conflict in *Changes: A Love Story*

In Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, the psychological disposition of the characters exhibits the mentality of urban or city-dwellers, revealing some culture contact and culture conflict. This corroborates the fact that *Changes* is indeed an urban African novel since most of the episodes like Esi and Ali's erotic relationship, Esi and Oko's, and Kubi and Opokuya's problematic marital lives are situated in the city. However, part of the action, influences and narratives do flow, once in a while, from the town to the countryside, like Esi's consultation with her mother and grandmother in the village whether or not to get married to Ali Kondey.

Some of the instances when part of the action, influences and narratives flow, once in a while, from the town to the countryside, revealing some

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culture conflict include: when Ali goes with his deputy manager to see Esi's parents; when he goes to his own relations to ask them to accompany him to see Esi's people; and later when he goes with Esi to the village for their traditional marriage. Some of the other incidents which reveal culture contact and culture conflict include Esi and Ali's relationship, the clumsy manner in which their engagement and marriage are enacted, the fact that Esi resorts again to marriage whereas her original intention was simply to enjoy Ali's company, the original exclusion of Fusena, Ali's first wife, from being privy to the information that her husband intends to take Esi as his second wife, the conflict between Nana's pre-colonial truths and ideas and the post/neo-colonial ideas and practices of her granddaughter, Esi. This paper concentrates on most of these episodes which demonstrate how the psychological disposition of the characters exhibits the mentality of urban dwellers, revealing some culture contact and culture conflict.

Esi and Ali Kondey's Relationship

Esi's relationship with Ali Kondey further corroborates the fact that the psychological disposition of the characters in *Changes* exhibits the mentality of urban or city-dwellers, revealing some culture contact and culture conflict. The mere fact that Esi wants the relationship to last without getting formally married to Ali is in conflict with traditional African ethos. The following episode is a case in point.

Esi misses Ali for two long weeks without knowing his where-about. Just when Esi begins to think that, after all, living alone is not the unpleasant business people make it seem, Ali suddenly re-emerges. Esi feels fresh and relaxed after the previous night's rain, and after visiting her daughter, Ogyaanowa, the day before. She plays some Christian music which reminds her of a previous episode with her grandma who asked Esi to go to Church instead of playing Christian music, if she wants to be with her God on a Sunday morning. The third person omniscient narrator informs us that "to her guilt of laziness was added shame" (81).

Here, Aidoo is definitely making a case for the possibility of women's celibacy or living single lives without feeling guilty or ashamed. This proves that marriage is a socio-cultural construct which can be changed, and debunks the traditional compulsion attached to marriage for every woman as her ultimate goal and sole ambition in life. All the same, the idea of single lives for women is unacceptable to most societies the world over. It is felt that a woman's single life poses a challenge to manhood. Therefore, there is culture conflict in this situation caused by urbanization and colonialism which affords Esi the opportunity to enjoy herself while living alone, after her divorce of her first husband, Oko. In true life situations, it is just when one is about to give up on something that the long expected happens. Ali shows up just when Esi is beginning to bask in the joy of her aloneness. This proves that the novelist Ama Ata Aidoo is a psychologist.

Because Esi has missed Ali badly and is afraid of what this long absence might portend, she resists the usual long kiss which starts from the front door and ends up on her bed. Rather, she requests that they talk first, but Ali pleads that talking should come later. Esi's continued insistence on an explanation is part of Ama Ata Aidoo's encouragement to women to stand up for their rights or to insist on fair-play in their love relationship with men. In the middle of Esi's parlour, Ali asks a similar question to the one during their first meeting, thus exhibiting his usual disarming French gallantry which is an evidence of his western cultural contact: "But can I at least sit down" (82)?

Ali rushes through his explanations for the long period of his absence. Part of the explanation, according to the third person omniscient narrator, is that he returns to the office from Esi's place that evening and finds some messages on the telex machine which necessitate his travelling out of the country to Abidjan for two weeks to quell a problem that is brewing in his office there. This explanation appears contrived so as to explain off his sudden departure or period of loss of touch with Esi. This could be referred to as a contrived literary technique similar to *deus ex machina*. The third person omniscient narrator continues that the rain makes it impossible for Ali to phone the following morning before his departure.

As a means of satirizing the authorities or African elite who have replaced the former colonialists, Aidoo gets the two, Esi and Ali, to ridicule the non-functional telephone lines and the lack of maintenance of the system, like re-erecting fallen telephone poles knocked down by rain storm. This is blamed on the authorities' inefficiency which prevents Africans from using their rich resources to solve problems caused even by natural elements such as the rain storm or drought.

According to the third person omniscient narrator, going back to the office after being in Esi's place is an essential part of managing his situation. Ali is happy to pick up his wife's, Fusena's, calls sometimes when she phones the office very late at night, even though he has given up trying to dispel her suspicions. The narrator continues,

In fact one evening she had been so suspicious that she had actually driven over to check things up for herself. Ali had been absolutely alone. "Fusena had felt so ashamed she had never repeated the trip" (83-4).

However, subsequent revelations prove that Ali is a philanderer, and perhaps that trip to Abidjan might be a hoax. The following comment by the narrator exhibits Aidoo's own opinion as a psychologist or reader of people's minds: "There are few pleasures left, and surely one of them must be having the chance to prove you are a faithful spouse – especially when you are not" (84). Aidoo, thus, ridicules marriage and the frequent infidelity of spouses, especially husbands, as in Ali's case.

The *duo*, Esi and Ali, also ridicule themselves for being too serious on a beautiful Sunday morning. Ali's explanation of his two weeks of

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unceremonious absence is capped with beautiful love-making that is initiated by fun-play and thoroughly enjoyed by Esi and Ali, without shame or inhibition. This proves that African feminism which is explored here by the novelist, Aidoo, advocates that coitus should be enjoyed by women as well, and not by men alone. It also corroborates the fact that African feminism is not opposed to man as a sex but to man as a misogynist and oppressor of woman when he attempts to annihilate woman's better self in marriage.

In this urban based relationship between Esi and Ali, Esi has to believe any information given to her by Ali without proof or cross-checking. For instance, Ali claims that, prompted by messages received on the telex machine, he had to travel. Although there are always other factors, Esi can only guess at these claims because she does not know enough about Ali's life to make any other type of deductions (83). This is in contrast with the traditional rural situation where agents are sent out to investigate not only the would-be spouse but also his family background as is almost the case during Fusena and Ali's traditional Muslim marriage.

It is remarkable that in the urbanized environment, Esi fashions out some rules to guide her in her relationship with Ali. This is a clear indication of Esi's attempt to be rational, that is, "to do the serious business of living with the head and not the heart" (79) – a credit which is not usually given to women in male-authored works. That also proves that a woman can think or be rational. It is note-worthy that most of those rules for rational living usually favour the man and protect or respect his polygamous or promiscuous relationship with multiple women. Here is a good example:

In the course of building whatever there now was between herself and Ali, Esi had laid down some rules for herself. One of the rules was that she would never [ever] phone his house to ask [of] him. Another was not to make a habit of dropping into his office unexpectedly (79).

As a hypersensitive person, Aidoo notes, thus, one of the psychological problems in life: During the long period of Ali's unceremonious absence, "(Esi) discovered the difference between not having people around but knowing where they are, and not having someone around and not knowing where he or she is" (79).

The proverb in which Ali is compared to a burdensome child who is needed or missed sometime or some day is note-worthy. It talks about ". . . having to love a burdensome child because one day you will miss her" (79). Also worthy of note is the word 'rain' which is used metaphorically by Esi to infer that something unusual would happen if Ali fulfilled his promise of visiting her two consecutive evenings. This is what Esi says: "It is surely going to rain" (79). The narrator picks up that metaphor and puns on it thus. "And it had rained" (79). The knocking down of the telephone poles by the rain storm explains why Esi could not communicate with Ali and was almost tempted to call his house to inquire about him, or go to his office in person to

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see him or ask of him. This explains why it is stated: "For the first time, she was completely alone, and that made a big bag of emptiness to handle" (79).

The second part of the episode represents Ali's proposal of marriage to Esi after much flattery. For instance, Ali says to Esi:

I keep wondering how any one woman can be as beautiful as you are, and still manage to be so clever. ... Esi replies: Okay, I too keep wondering how any one man can be so handsome as you look, and still manage to be so sharp (84-5).

According to the omniscient third person editorial narrator, charm is one of Ali's strong weapons for disarming Esi. When Esi asks why Ali did not send one of his workers in the office to her, Ali confesses that he is ashamed of himself for not thinking about it. The third person omniscient narrator adds; "the confession was made with great charm and accompanied by another squeezing of her ribs" (83).

Then starting from the top of her head, he began to feel her all over, with his eyes tightly shut, therefore genuinely groping like a blind person. Each time he touched any part of her that he found specially erotic, a massive shudder shook him. It happened with her nose, her mouth, her breast, by the time he got to her public hair, he could not hold himself any longer, he moved to part Esi's legs, feeling his way into a cave that was warm, of uneven surfaces, wet and dangerously inviting . . . On her part Esi felt somewhat cramped because the couch was rather narrow, but then she also thought that she would rather not be comfortable if it would mean having to give up all those different kinds and levels of sensations she was enjoying without shame. She wanted to scream, and scream and scream (84-5).

Aidoo takes time to describe the erotic building up of the sensuality of both the man and woman in an act of coitus unlike the male writers of the old tradition who believed that the enjoyment of sex was the exclusive reserve of men. This act is described in such detail so that inexperienced African men like Oko, Esi's first husband, might learn to handle their women well in order that both parties, especially the women, might thoroughly enjoy sex without inhibition and any sense of guilt or shame. This proves that Aidoo is not nostalgic about every aspect of her eroded African culture. That is because she is prepared to borrow some of the positive aspects of western culture like the emotional involvement or participation of women in a sexual act or coitus which should normally start with fun-play. Aidoo may argue that such a culture like pleasurable erotic love-making in which women are made full participants, just as the aspect of giving a ring during betrothal, might have originated from Egypt in Africa and not from the west. This is what the couple say to each other in a dialogue at that occasion:

Esi: Ali, I'm sorry. But the ring, this ring, it's not exactly a part of our way of doing the two or more wives business, is it?

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Ali: No, I mean not according to recent traditions. But let's look at it carefully.

Besides, as usual, it probably started with our ancient Egyptian ancestors. In fact we heard they did. Lovers exchanging rings and all that (90).

Esi and Ali's Marriage Proposal and Engagement

The marriage proposal and engagement of Esi and Ali come in as clumsy a manner as the subsequent marriage introduction itself. After their mutual flattery and compliments, Esi adds that she missed Ali very much. In surprise, Ali says he thought that Esi could never miss anybody. After Esi confesses that there isn't a single human being who does not need somebody, Ali suddenly asks Esi: "Does that mean you will marry me" (86)? Esi enquires, "Must I"? Ali responds: "Yes Esi, I want to marry you" (86). Ali lies from the on-set that he has informed his first wife, Fusena, about his intention to marry Esi. On her part, Esi tells Ali the truth that she has told her mother about their relationship, but also confesses that her mother and Opokuya, her friend, still like her first husband, Oko, very much. This makes Ali angry and jealous as he draws the conclusion that Esi's mother would not like him at all. In spite of Esi's true confession that her mother and her friend prefer her first husband, Oko, Ali still states vehemently: "Esi, I just want you to be my wife. Very much, that's all" (88). Winning Esi's hand in marriage appears to be for Ali a fierce battle in which he must come out as victor, not as the vanquished. That is why Ali says: 'I can see what I'm up against' (88), after Esi mentions her mother's and friend's disapproval of him.

According to Opokuya's information to Esi, in the rural traditional African ethos, the first wife, Fusana, should have been informed and her consent or approval given as a pre-requisite before Ali's attempt to marry a second or subsequent wife. Opokuya states that "In fact, it was the first wife who gave the new woman a thorough scrutiny right from the beginning of the affair" (97). In this case, Ali and Esi almost go to see Esi's "fathers" or uncles in the village without informing Fusana about Esi, until Opokuya advises Esi to the contrary. In fact, Ali takes his deputy manager, his official subordinate in his business company, Linga Hide Aways, to Esi's relations, to seek her hand in marriage. The disapproval of his deputy as witness by Esi's people forces Ali to go to his relations in the village at Nima to request them to accompany him to see Esi's people. All the same, by the time Ali makes the trip to his relations, Esi has still never met or seen Fusana. Whereas marriage in the traditional African ethos involves two extended families of the couple, Ali and Esi consider marriage as an affair concerning the happiness of only two of them, owing to the individualism acquired from urbanization and their western culture contact which conflicts with the traditional African culture. To corroborate this point, this is what Esi says to Opokuya: "Listen Opokuya, you often accuse me of lacking passion. But I

think I care very much for Ali and we are going to try and be very happy, he and I" (97-8). This life-style is in conflict with the traditional African culture in which, according to the omniscient third person narrator, polygamous marriages flourish and where "happiness, like most of the good things of life, is not a two-person enterprise, but rather the business of all the parties concerned" (98).

Ali's engagement to Esi is unconventional because it reveals a bit of western culture contact, on the one hand, and conflict with traditional African culture, on the other. Anxious about sustaining the relationship, Ali proposes that he and Esi should go and see Esi's father the very next day after their discussion, but they settle for a Sunday a month afterwards. "Without a witness, Ali slips an engagement ring, carefully worked over with fine filigree of that area, on Esi's finger (91). This manner of engagement without a witness constitutes cultural conflict with the traditional African ethos, and exhibits individualism arising from western cultural contact as a result of colonialism and urbanization.

Ali's reason for putting his ring on Esi's finger sounds very much like the manner in which the imperialists or colonizers demarcate an occupied territory: "To let the rest of the male world know that she is bespoke" (91), meaning that she is already occupied or "that she has become occupied territory" (91). To Esi, it sounds so lunatic and contemporary African that she would want to save her sanity by not trying to understand it. Esi considers this as the insolence of the modern African male who believes that winning a woman to accept him as a husband is like a war conquest which should be followed by the demarcation of the conquered territory. The insolence to the African woman by the African male is comparable to that of the white colonizers to Africans after the latter's colonization. Aidoo deliberately uses this comparison as a literary technique so that others who have ever suffered any form of oppression can imagine how it feels to be permanently oppressed as a woman because of her sex or biological constitution.

According to the third person omniscient narrator, the intention of the colonizers who first inhabited Kubi's residence, for instance, was "to administer the territories on behalf of their Royal Majesties and generally civilize the natives" (16). The words in quotation-marks are presented from the white colonizers' perspective, and insinuate that Africans were primitive and without a culture before the arrival of the colonizers. This demonstrates that Aidoo is a social critic and is satirical of the colonizers. Like Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo intends through this novel, *Changes: A Love Story*, to teach her audience or readers that Africa was a viable and cohesive society before colonization. This is most obvious in Aidoo's representation of the wisdom of women like Esi's mother and grandmother, and the intelligence of Mma Danjuma, Ali Kondey's auntie who raises him after his mother's death, and who initiates the idea that he should be sent to school to undergo western education.

Nana: An Epitome of Pre-Colonial African Wisdom, Cohesiveness and Viability

As Esi drives to visit her mother and grandmother in the village to seek their opinion whether or not to marry Ali, she gives the reader an insight into the traditional African ethos. This is one of the instances in *Changes* as an urban novel when part of the action, the influences and narratives flow from the town to the countryside. Asked by her grandmother why she abandons her first husband, Oko, Esi complains that Oko is one of the few men or the only son in his family. As a result, his mother, “his other mothers” meaning his aunties, and his sisters adore him, and hate her for not being subservient to him or for not allowing herself to be subjugated by him.

Nana sets her premise of wisdom before she replies to Esi's question, whether or not to accept to become Ali's second wife, after divorcing Oko, her first husband who demands too much of her and her time. Nana promises to tell the truth the way she understands it, thus exhibiting the wisdom of an old un-aculturated or un-westernized African woman. Nana uses this opportunity to ridicule those who parade or pamper lies like the only children and nephews of queens and kings (109). This may include Ali's female relations who pamper him. Nana then contrasts the communication of meaning in the pre-colonial past, in the traditional rural environment when people meant what they said, with that of post/neo-colonial Africa where politicians say one thing and mean another, and execute wicked deeds – probably, such as the killing of their opponents at home – an action which should strictly be done in the bush. Here, Nana might be referring to the evil forest where an authorized killing like that of Ikemefuna, a captive from a war enemy community in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, is executed. Aidoo uses this opportunity to extol the pre-colonial African integrity and quality of life, and to criticize the ills of the post/neo-colonial African society. Even though as a social critic, Aidoo might not approve of such pre-colonial killing, she thus, justifies the role of *Changes* as a novel of commitment.

Because Nana believes in communal or family harmony, following the traditional African culture, she disapproves of Esi's divorce of her first husband, Oko. Ridiculing Esi, Nana complains that Esi's reason for leaving her first husband -because he demands too much of herself and her time (109) – is a very new and golden reason for leaving one man for another. This writer's contribution is that since time is dynamic, women's reasons for leaving one man for another seem to change just as men's reasons for abandoning one woman for another also do. This is so, especially if we remember the effect of urbanization, literacy and professionalism which can be adduced from the novel on a contemporary African woman like Esi, because Esi's personality is affected by all these factors. She has a government job as a professional statistician and head of the Federal Unit of Statistics. This enables her to be allocated an official residential

accommodation and to own a car. Her heavy pay packet also enables her to hire the services of a house-keeper. Esi has also proved her mettle as a reproductive woman because she has a daughter, ogyaanowa.

Agreeing with the traditional African ethos, Esi's grandmother, Nana, states that the best husband that a woman can ever have is one who demands all of her and all of her time. Nana reiterates this when she asks: "Who is a good man if not the one who eats his wife completely, and pushes her down with a good gulp of alcohol" (109). One would have liked to agree with Nana if only the demand by Oko were not done from a selfish perspective, but with love and the involvement of his wife as a participant in the fun-play as Ali does. According to Nana, here again are the qualities of a good male citizen in the pre-colonial past during Nana's time, or in the unadulterated, non-westernized African environment.

In our time, the best citizen was the man who swallowed more than one woman, and the more, the better. So our warriors and our kings married more women than other men in their communities. To prove that they were, by that single move, the best in the land (109).

The theory of regarding women as decorative slaves in order to add to a man's glory is note-worthy. It corroborates the postulation that the greater the number of diamonds - representing women - on a crown - referring to the man - the more beautiful the crown. No cognisance is taken of how fairly those women are treated as human beings by the man. Even Ali who initially treats his women with so much gallantry fails to treat his two wives, Fusena and Esi, equally. This causes Esi to initiate their separation, although without a formal divorce. By not subjecting herself to a divorce in the second instance, Esi is challenging the social institutions under which women exist. Nana informs Esi that a woman has always been diminished in her association with a man. In fact, socially, the diminishing of any woman's integrity is supposed to add to the man's glory. Nana confirms this thus:

My lady silk, remember a man always gained in stature through any way he chose to associate with a woman. And that included adultery, Especially adultery (109).

Correspondingly, the increase of any woman's integrity, like that of Esi, tends to diminish her man's glory, in this case, her first husband Oko's glory. By creating a position of superiority for Esi over her first husband, Oko, Aidoo is creating an envisioned ameliorated political and social domain for the contemporary African woman. Nana contrasts, thus, the qualities of a good woman during the pre-colonial era with those of the contemporary African woman:

A good woman was she who quickened the pace of her own destruction. To refuse as a woman to be destroyed was a crime that society spotted very quickly and punished swiftly and severely (110).

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One of the ways that a woman quickens her own destruction is through getting married. That is because in marriage, the freedom of each woman is put under the check and control of her husband, for effective monitoring and subjugation. Perhaps, that is why every woman is expected to get married so that her freedom can be checked and curtailed.

For the single women who refuse to get married, the third person omniscient narrator tells us that they are ostracised, driven insane and quickly driven to their death. Such women are eliminated through social inhibitions and ostracism. That is because most societies refuse to acknowledge the existence of single women, despite the fact that they have always existed from time immemorial even here in Africa. However, the western law like - the English law, for instance - has aggravated the plight of single women in Africa by not accommodating them at all, as if they do not exist. Therefore, the colonized African woman in Ghana and Nigeria, for instance, suffers a double bind from the indigenous African sexism and the English law imported to Africa during colonialism. According to Esi: "It is even more frightening to think that our societies do not admit that single women exist . . . Yet, single women have always existed here too" (47). This is corroborated, thus, by the third person omniscient neutral narrator:

"Oh yes, and all over the continent." Women who never managed to marry early enough. "Or at all, widows, divorcees." I wonder what happened to such women. "Like what?" Think about it carefully. I am sure that, as usual, they were branded witches - - - (47). "You are right, because it is easy to see that our societies have had no patience with the unmarried woman. People thought her single state was an insult to the glorious manhood of our men. So they put as much pressure as possible on her" (47).

This is similar to how Opokuya and Esi's mother and grandmother put pressure on Esi when she divorces her first husband, Oko. Elaborating on the single or divorced woman, the third person omniscient narrator continues:

"... Until she gave in and married or remarried, or went back to her former husband." "And of course if nothing cured her, they ostracised her and drove her crazy." And then soon enough, she died of shame, loneliness and heart break" (48).

Aidoo uses this opportunity to condemn one of the social ills - that of non-tolerance of single women in the society - especially as entrenched in the English law which has been imported to Africa. For the amelioration of the African woman's condition, Aidoo tends to plead for the tolerance of the single or divorced woman. She even advocates that a wife in an incompatible marriage should initiate the divorce process, the way Esi does in her first marriage to Oko, instead of dying in silence.

Ali Informs his first Wife Fusena about his Intention to Marry Esi

Having been turned back to Accra by Esi's "fathers," meaning Esi's father and uncles, Ali is compelled to inform his first wife, Fusena about his intention to marry Esi. The circumstances of Fusena and Ali's marriage and the relationship between them also demonstrate culture contact with the west and culture conflict with traditional African ethos. As Ali informs Fusena about his intention to marry Esi, ever before the words are fully uttered, Fusena asks whether she has a university degree (99). This is because Ali has succeeded in persuading her to abandon teaching, and even prevented her from undergoing a university education while in London, and now he informs her that he intends to bring into their marriage a woman who has a higher educational qualification than herself (100).

Unlike male authors of the literary tradition, Aidoo takes time to describe a female character's, that is, Fusena's day's activities as a wife. We are told by the third person omniscient editorial narrator that she takes all her jobs seriously. When she is in the kiosk, she is there, and when she is home, she is home, and that she takes time organizing herself and her home. She plans the meals for the day and the rest of the house-keeping for months ahead. Because her husband cares about how the home is run, he buys many things for house-keeping during his journeys outside the country. We are also told by the third person omniscient narrator that Fusena is financially more comfortable than many other women or house-wives. For instance, Fusena drives her own car whereas Opokuya has to beg her husband Kubi daily for the use of his official vehicle until Esi hands over her old car to her friend, Opokuya. Owing to the economic crunch in the country at the time, other women cannot afford to plan their house-keeping the way Fusena does because only few commodities are available in the market. For that reason, other house-wives are jealous of her. Aidoo succeeds in capturing the political repression and corruption of her immediate environment in Ghana at the time, and casts them in a larger mould that embraces the rest of African nations in her second full length novel, *Changes\; A Love Story*. This corroborates the fact that *Changes* is a typical African novel because it criticizes the ills of the society. All these situations exhibit western culture contact through colonization and urbanization on the one hand, and conflict with traditional African culture, on the other. Aidoo also succeeds in representing the vicissitudes of life through this and the subsequent episode.

It is just when other house-wives are beginning to feel envious of Fusena for her apparent comfort in her marriage to Ali that something disappointing happens to her. Ali introduces this topic about his intention to marry a second wife who is a Christian and more educated than Fusena. This information is so devastating to Fusena that her behaviour becomes abnormal this fateful morning. Such unsteady or abnormal behaviour is not limited to women alone but is common to anybody who feels subjugated as an

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oppressed under-dog. Even though Fusena appears financially comfortable, yet she has an oppressor or a master in Ali, her husband. That is why oppressed Africans, whether male or female, in the pre-colonial or post/neo-colonial times usually behave in an odd manner. But when the power dynamics that oppress women are reversed as in the case of Esi versus Oko in this novel, *Changes*: *A Love Story*, man too tends to behave in an irregular or abnormal manner, just as Oko does that morning when he commits "marital rape." In Fusena's case, on this fateful day, this is what we are told by the third person omniscient narrator:

When Fusena drove to the kiosk the first time, she did not go in. After she had parked and was getting out of the car, she changed her mind, banged shut the car door which she had just opened and drove back to the house. She met Ali in front of their gate just as he was backing out. She drove her car to where the two cars became parallel, and stopped... "Is she a Muslim?"... Ali said just "No" (100).

Fusena hurries back to the house only to ask another question in clarification concerning the intended second wife. Her first question is whether she is a university graduate. The next one which brings her back is whether she is a Muslim. Ali simply answers: 'No.'

Aidoo advocates an ameliorated condition for every African woman whether married or single so that each might not feel as subjugated as Fusena in this episode. To create room for the improvement of the African woman's condition in the post/neo-colonial era, Aidoo makes it possible for even Fusena's situation to improve on her return to Africa when her husband buys her a massive kiosk at a very strategic site in Accra. This happens after her remaining immanent in England doing house-chores making and nursing babies for her husband, Ali, while he pursues his university studies. We are told by the third person omniscient editorial narrator that "like most West African women, she [Esi] had been brought up in a society that had no patience with a woman who did not work ... her husband's wealth or ability to support her" (67) notwithstanding.

Culture Conflict in Esi and Ali Kondey's Traditional Marriage

Ali Kondey and Esi's marriage powerfully demonstrates culture contact with urbanization and western civilization on the one hand, and culture conflict with their indigenous cultures, on the other. Esi is ready to try an alternative life-style in urbanized polygamy, and Opokuya thinks she is brave to dare it. Esi and Ali travel in separate cars to the village for their marriage in accordance with the traditional custom. Yet that aspect of the culture which demands their travelling separately has not strictly been adhered to, owing to urbanization and contact with western culture. The original reason for the staying apart of the betrothed was for the preservation of the woman's

virginity and the prevention of her defilement by the man until they got married.

In spite of their cultural and religious differences, Esi and Ali still get married because they are city-dwellers. This should have been prohibited in the indigenous traditional African culture. Even the earlier monogamous marriage of either of them is in conflict with their indigenous cultures. Ali Kondey, as a Muslim, should have been involved in a traditional polygamous marriage from the onset. So should Esi if she had strictly adhered to her indigenous, coastal, southern, Ghanaian culture. Esi becomes a Christian through her contact with the western culture, and gets involved in a monogamous marriage with her first husband, Oko, in an urban environment. She is compelled by circumstances to serve as wife all the time, and is not allowed enough time for her official duty as head of the Federal Unit of Statistics or for her private interests. This depicts western culture contact and constitutes culture conflict with the traditional African ethos. Oko's traditional mentality of regarding his wife, Esi, mainly as a sex object meant for his sexual satisfaction and for "manufacturing" more babies for him conflicts with Esi's modern mentality of taking her official work more seriously than that of being a wife. This is confirmed by the third person omniscient editorial narrator who reveals Ali's introspection thus concerning Esi: "Esi definitely put her career well above any duties she owed as a wife" (8).

In Aidoo's attempt to demarcate political and economic domains and alternative life-styles for the contemporary African woman in the novel *Changes*, she demonstrates that the overwork of a wife and her permanent enslavement without enough time for her self-improvement and financial empowerment constitute part of women's subjugation and the erosion of African traditional values. She would want women's condition ameliorated because this is contrary to the original pre-colonial indigenous African polygamous culture in which wives took turns in serving as wives and had the rest of the time for their private business. This is what we are told by the third person omniscient editorial narrator:

When it was one wife's turn, she cooked for the man and undertook the house-keeping for him completely. She either went to his bedroom or he slept with her. When her turn was over, he just switched (78).

That gave women in pre-colonial times or in the non-westernized African communities more time for themselves and for diverse activities other than wifehood alone. Whereas there were no confusions in the past, and each wife simply complied, just as each husband tried to do also, by not choosing any wife as his favourite, the reverse is the case in modern times. Ali Kondey's urbanized situation is a case in point, where he wonders on a New Year eve which woman to sleep with, Esi or Fusena (78), because Esi lives in her separate home while Fusena lives with him in their matrimonial home. Even

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on the very first day after their marriage, because Esi and Ali travel in separate cars, Ali deserts Esi, his newly married second wife, with whom he should have been enjoying a honey-moon, and decides to return home to Fusena, his first wife. In the past, no man who had more than one wife, lived with any on a permanent basis. That was because the serious business of living was done more with the head than with the heart (79). That means people just had to be rational rather than emotional. Aidoo is therefore advocating that we should glean the positive aspect of our indigenous African culture concerning women's plight and try to formulate a more favourable condition for the post/neo colonial African woman contemporarily.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that in Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, the psychological disposition of the characters exhibits the mentality of urban or city-dwellers, revealing some culture contact and conflict. The blending of both traditions and settings brings about culture contact and conflict. Most of the episodes in the novel, like Esi and Ali's erotic relationship, Esi and Oko's, and Kubi and Opokuya's problematic marital lives are situated in the city. However, part of the action, influences and narratives do flow, once in a while, from the town to the countryside, like Esi's consultation with her mother and grandmother in the village whether or not to get married as a second wife to Ali Kondey. These influences reveal western culture contact and conflict with the traditional African culture as demonstrated, especially, by the thoroughly enjoyed sexual escapades by both the woman Esi and the man Ali when they are not yet married, thus exhibiting western or urban culture contact and conflicts with the traditional African ethos as shown by Esi's grandmother's ideas and truths, derived from her unadulterated pre-colonial African past. She informs us that in the past, no man who had more than one wife, lived with any on a permanent basis in order to give the woman some respite to do some things for her personal interest like her economic self-sustenance. That was because people just had to be rational rather than emotional. Aidoo is, therefore, advocating that we should glean the positive aspect of our indigenous African culture concerning women's plight and add the good aspects of western or foreign culture and try to formulate a more favourable condition for the post/neo colonial African woman contemporarily for the positive transformation of the entire society.

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