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Navigating the Complexities of Male-Dominated Societies: A Study of Selected Texts by Ama Ata Aidoo

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Abstract— *Ama Ata Aidoo's artistic works have focused on Ghanaian realities of feminism, as evident in her novels and fictions, Changes: A Love Story (1991) and The Girl Who Can (1999). In these two texts, Aidoo attempts to depict modern feminine masculinity through the lives of Esi and Adjoa. This study is guided by the questions of how Aidoo navigates the complexities of contemporary women's lives, grappling with societal expectations, and how she presents the journey of self-actualisation in male-dominated societies. Using the masculine feminist approach and content analysis as the design, this study asserts that the Ghanaian woman is a strong individual who allows for ambition and choice and stresses the need for emancipation in a male-dominated society through resistance and assertiveness. While existing studies have examined feminism in Aidoo's works, few have explored how her concept of "masculine femininity" in both texts redefines resistance in male-dominated Ghanaian society, either through a comparative lens or in comparison with the texts themselves. This underscores Aidoo's dedication to portraying the struggles and successes of women, making her a central figure in this cause. With her powerful narratives and rich character development, her works engage with feminist and masculine perspectives. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on feminist masculinity in contemporary society and deepen our understanding of the Ghanaian woman's life and environment, thereby expanding self-awareness to achieve transformative change and shift perspective on how African society views women, ultimately calling for a new feminine identity.*

Keywords— ***Complexity, Empowerment, Feminism, Male-Dominated, Masculinity.***

I. INTRODUCTION

In African literature, the portrayal of women has often been shaped by patriarchal norms. Ama Ata Aidoo challenges this tradition by highlighting the voices and experiences of women. Her works depict the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as between individual agency and societal expectations. As Sackeyfio notes, Aidoo's fiction "presents paradoxical outcomes for women characters as they respond to patriarchy, urbanisation, and the conflicting demands of modernity". African women novelists have made significant progress in their creative writing by redefining the image of women and reducing stereotypes present in novels from decades past. Through their talent, they have created strong, capable female characters. Today, many resilient and admirable women are portrayed in African literature such as Efuru in the text *Efuru* by F. Nwapa who was independent, successful, and a trader who was also deeply spiritual, Mariam and Laila in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini who faced extreme patriarchal oppression and stood their grounds, Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga who was brilliant and a complex character who fought psychological and cultural battles, Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi who is exploited by every man she meets-uncle, husband, pimp, and client yet her resilience culminates in a radical act. Elizabeth and the Women of the Cell Block in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* by Njabulo S. Ndebele presents a collective resilience that re-imagines the lives of women who, like Winnie Mandela, were left behind by their husbands who were political exiles, prisoners, or

migrant labourers. These examples highlight values that offer more constructive models for society.

Literature reflects life; the events it portrays mirror societal realities. Therefore, it is fitting that social inequalities between men and women gradually diminish in our society, as Mezu asserts in her work *A History of Africana Women's Literature* (1993). She describes the reconstructive phase of female writing, a more hopeful stage she calls womanist creativity, which uses literary devices and resources to create strong female characters. These women are no longer passive victims of social injustice but are women who command their communities' attention through their creative power.

The circumstance mentioned above is demonstrated by the increasing awareness among African women writers that their novels and dramas create heroines who portray women's self-definition as an evolving process. Some authors from the earlier generation of African women writers have shifted how they depict African women, presenting them as radical heroines and symbols of social change. Their portrayal of the African woman not only as a symbol of social change but also as radical heroines can be seen in works like Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1977), Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1979), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* (1980), *The Girl Who Can* (1999), and *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) among others. These shifts in the perception of the African woman are evident in recent writings by African female authors. Examples include Kauna, a radical heroine created in Neshani Andreas's *Purple Violet of Oshantu* (2003); Ifeoma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003); and Nyansha, in Tsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006), among others.

Ama Ata Aidoo is a prominent literary figure in Africa. Her works focus on women and their struggles within a patriarchal society. In *Changes: A Love Story* and *The Girl Who Can*, the author introduces readers to unconventional women who challenge traditional notions of femininity. These texts showcase what scholars refer to as 'masculine femininity,' meaning the portrayal of traits typically associated with men (such as strength, independence, and resistance) within female characters. This study examines how Aidoo portrays women navigating male-dominated social environments and analyses how she conveys the experiences of her female characters to redefine resistance and create new spaces for a renewed sense of womanhood.

1.1 Background to the Study

Gendered roles in African societies have been shaped for centuries by traditional, colonial, and religious practices that often value men and, typically, subordinate women. Across Africa, and Ghana in particular, women are frequently defined by their roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers through identities and images associated with womanhood that often imply subservience and sacrifice. Although the fight for women's rights across the continent has made significant progress over the years, many women still must navigate a profoundly patriarchal society. Literature has often served as a vivid space where these gendered realities are challenged and reimagined.

Ama Ata Aidoo, a trailblazer in Ghanaian literature, has explored the intricate dynamics of gender relations in African society through her fiction. Chakraborty (2024) notes that Aidoo writes as a feminist and, through her work, questions cultural norms that limit women's choices and undermine patriarchal systems that suppress female power. Her novels and short stories focus on the intersection of tradition and modernity, examining the potential for female self-definition and offering complex, layered portrayals of women that defy stereotypes.

Two of her most explored works, *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) and *The Girl Who Can* (1997), contain sharply honed critiques of how society defines what it means to be a woman. In *Changes*, Aidoo represents a woman, Esi Sekyi, who dares to challenge the cultural and romantic ideologies that underpin marriage. Through her decision to divorce the husband who has raped her and the transition into a polygamous marriage of her choosing, Esi practices a kind of resistance which disrupts the stereotyped notions of what it means to be feminine. In Esi, Aidoo draws a character who epitomises some personality traits typically considered to be male, such as independence, ambition, and emotional control, while remaining distinctly female.

Similarly, *The Girl Who Can* tells the story of Adjoa, a little girl living in the village, who struggles to come to terms with her body and the cultural expectations of womanhood. Told that her "thin legs" disqualify her from childbirth (which, along with the ability to cook and "satisfy a man," is the bedrock of a woman's worth), Adjoa gains a sense of identity and control through athletics. Her triumph very gently sends up the calculation with which female bodies are judged by reproductive value, and how even very young girls are subject to social evaluation. Her subtle assurance and eventual vindication are the earliest indications of a self-aware woman who takes her body and her future back into her own hands.

Both texts foreground what scholars, such as Bell Hooks (2004), have termed "feminist masculinity," in which strength, autonomy, and assertiveness are repatriated as not-male traits. Although previous feminist readings of Aidoo's works have addressed such issues as marriage, polygyny, and gender disparity, less attention has been given to how Aidoo employs the notion of "masculine

femininity" to redefine forms of resistance within male-dominated environments. This paper aims to close that gap by exploring how Aidoo's women characters embrace a revised feminine identity that refutes, negotiates, and, eventually, redefines what it means to be a woman in present-day Ghana.

However, these books are significant: they push the dialogue about African feminism beyond the rut of victimhood. They underscore how African women, whether professionals like Esi or schoolgirls like Adjoa, can fight back against domination not by rejecting oppressive systems outright, but by transforming those systems from the inside out. It reflects how deeply Aidoo's feminist vision runs: between an uncritical African traditionalism and a romantic Western ideology, we see her staking out an authentic, African-centred feminist identity.

In an age of contested and fluid gender identities, Aidoo's depictions are still relevant. They invite readers to view African women not as passive recipients of change, but as catalysts, women who, through daring risks and quiet resilience, negotiate the difficult circumstances of patriarchy and emerge anew.

In the traditional African context, particularly in Ghana, a woman's dress, speech, and very being are ultimately shaped by her gender expectations. Women are still often expected to conform to traditional roles of submission, marriage, and motherhood, sometimes at the expense of self-actualisation, independence, and ambition, despite progress in education, employment, and rights awareness. These hierarchical gender roles are upheld by cultural, religious, and socio-political systems that diminish women's voices and suppress their agency.

Despite the increase in feminist consciousness, much of the feminist discourse has been shaped by the focus on women's oppression, victimisation, and the quest for freedom through resistance. Yet, very little attention has been paid to "masculine femininity," the ability of a woman to empower herself through qualities deemed masculine, such as independence, dominance, and autonomy, without necessarily forfeiting her femininity.

Ama Ata Aidoo's writings, especially *Changes: A Love Story* and *The Girl Who Can*, present an intriguing and unexplored perspective for analysing this trend. In these works, Aidoo depicts female characters who adopt masculine traits not to reject femininity but to survive and thrive within patriarchal societies. Although Aidoo's work is among the earliest contributions to African feminist literature, little has been written to date about how her portrayal of these "masculine" women shapes our understanding of resistance and identity in a Ghanaian context.

This lack of scholarship raises essential questions: How does Aidoo employ her characters to challenge traditional womanhood? How do Esi and Adjoa challenge and reconstruct "femininity" by way of male characteristics? And what does this narrative strategy add to our comprehension of African feminist theory?

By examining these issues, this paper aims to fill a gap in the scholarship and to contribute to the dialogue on feminist identity, power, and resistance in postcolonial African literature. The study is essential for literary scholars and those discussing gender across Africa more broadly. It contributes to the expanding field of African feminist literary criticism by exploring an overlooked aspect: the concept of masculine femininity as both a strategic response and a declaration of self within a patriarchal society.

Furthermore, the study shed light on Ama Ata Aidoo's writings. Although Aidoo is well known for her feminist themes, this analysis shows that her characters, far from just being victims of patriarchy, are women who respond to oppression in non-conformist, non-traditional ways. Characters like Esi in *Changes: A Love Story* and *Adjoa in The Girl Who Can* are not just fighting; they are redefining what it means to be a woman in their cultures. This reading adds further nuance to Aidoo's feminist vision, enabling her to strengthen and maintain her influence in both academic and public discourses on gender stereotyping and identity struggles.

Again, in an educational context, the study will be highly beneficial for students and teachers of literature, gender studies, and African studies, as it examines how what we read reflects and challenges dominant gender norms beyond the written page. As a result, students become equipped to read more critically. It will be better able to use literature to engage with other societal issues they encounter. It promotes critical thinking about gender roles, power dynamics, and cultural identity.

Ultimately, this study has the potential to contribute to ongoing debates about gender equality, identity construction, and social change in contemporary Ghana and Africa. In a world that appears deeply unsettled by shifting ideals about gender, works like Aidoo's are a reminder that, for many women, rejecting culture is to lose a piece of oneself, rather than asserting independence.

1.2 Feminist Masculinity

The analysis draws on the theory of feminist masculinity, a term popularised by Bell Hooks (2004), who argues that masculinity does not need to be associated with domination or violence. Instead, women can adopt so-called masculine traits, such as courage, agency, and assertiveness, without losing their feminine identity.

Raewyn Connell (2005) also describes "hegemonic masculinity" as the dominant form of masculinity in any society but notes that alternative masculinities, including those embodied by women, can challenge this dominance.

Aidoo's female characters embody these alternative masculinities. Her portrayal challenges not only patriarchal norms but also calls for a redefinition of what it means to be a woman in contemporary African society.

Georgina Brookman et al. (2020) analyse how education empowers Aidoo's female characters to assert themselves in their paper Education and the Assertive Woman: A Case Study of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* and conclude that there have been positive changes in women's roles over the years. This change has resulted from women's pursuit of self-assertion through education and their efforts to help liberate their families from cultural and societal dogmas where women faced subjugation and marginalisation. They highlight that a notable observation is the increasing intentionality with which writers assign more respectable roles to female characters in novels over time. A key conclusion from the study is that education remains a vital tool for enhancing women's assertiveness; however, it is not the sole solution to this issue.

Olumide Ogunrotimi (2015) discusses the tension between feminism and womanism in Ama Ata Aidoo's portrayal of Esi in "Womanist Dilemma in Africa: A Study of *Changes*" (2015). Through the discussion, he concludes that the quandary of the protagonist further externalises the dilemma of Womanism in Africa: to imbibe the individualistic and confrontational values of Feminism or to remain faithful to the tradition of Womanism, which celebrates femininity as a complement to masculinity and venerates motherhood as a unique female faculty.

Monique Oshame Ekpong (2011), in "Creating Political Space for Women in Social and National Domains", examines how Aidoo's short stories, including *The Girl Who Can*, challenge gender myths and promote female agency. She concludes that Aidoo breaks down complacency and reveals that most myths that tend to inhibit women are social constructs that can be reversed. Aidoo seems to input that if women could be so self-effacing, other-oriented and generous as to produce such achievers and rivals to men in their, hitherto, exclusive domains of life's endeavour, then they should all be allowed to participate as collaborators in the development of Africa in alternative economic and political roles and the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour and the natural resources of their African continent.

Again, Rituparna Chakraborty in Interrogating the repressive voice of patriarchy: Analysis of Ama Ata Aidoo's story, *The Girl Who Can*, interrogates the repressive voice in a patriarchal society and concludes that the struggle of African women in postcolonial African society is portrayed across generations; therefore, education is deemed as the only tool to combat those inequalities.

Makonnen Tendaji (2018), in his paper A Critical Analysis of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, explores gender oppression, classism, and the contradictions of modern African womanhood. It reveals the struggles African women face in balancing societal pressures regarding marriage and personal independence. Through the dialogue between the two main characters, Esi and Opokuya, the narrative explores themes of gender oppression, classism, and the precarious nature of female relationships, ultimately portraying the complexities of postcolonial African womanhood. Aidoo's work not only highlights personal dilemmas but also reflects broader socio-economic challenges, providing a powerful commentary on the status of women within African societies.

II. DISCUSSION

2.1 The Challenges Faced by the Modern Woman in Aidoo's Works

In *Changes: A Love Story*, Esi Sekyi is a highly educated, independent woman working as a government statistician in Accra. Her decision to have children challenges societal norms and expectations. While her husband expects her to assume the role of a wife by giving birth, Esi, after her first child, decided not to limit herself to childbearing. She insists on not giving birth anytime soon. She was never under pressure from society and her husband to give birth, which highlights her body autonomy. Aidoo informs, through Oko, that,

> Esi had never stated it categorically that she didn't want any more children. But she was on those dreadful birth control things: pills, loops or whatever. She had gone on them soon after the child was born, and no amount of reasoning and pleading had persuaded her to go off them. (p. 8)

While Oko believes it is good for Esi to give him at least two boys in addition to a girl, Esi asserts that she isn't ready to bear another child. Society believes that a man leads in making decisions about childbearing in marriage, but Esi here takes complete control of this, insisting on what is good for her instead.

Esi does not allow for limitations in the name of a wife. She challenges the restrictions placed on many women in their marriages by prioritising her work over her duties as a wife. Oko recounts that, "*Esi puts her career well above*

any duties she owed as a wife" (p. 8). This sense of pride and competence situates her within a traditionally male-coded space, public service, statistics, and decision-making. Her husband, Oko, is threatened by her ambition, lamenting,

Esi's refusal to apologise for prioritising her career demonstrates her masculine femininity. "*It's not as if I want you to stop working. But must the work come before me and the child*?" (p.10). She is not rejecting her gender, but expanding its definition. Esi's resistance to patriarchal expectations is framed not as rebellion for its own sake but as a desire for autonomy and self-definition. This aligns with Bell Hooks' (2004) concept of feminist masculinity, which calls for women to embrace strength, emotional discipline, and independence as forms of resistance and self-love.

Esi subsequently divorces her husband, Oko, after he rapes her, a marital rape often silenced or dismissed in society, marking a bold assertion of her bodily autonomy. "*If a man can rape his wife," she asks, "what then is marriage?*" (p. 49). This question exposes the violent undercurrents in patriarchal marital expectations. Perhaps the most radical assertion of Esi's agency occurs when she divorces Oko after he rapes her.

"*I just lay there, unable to believe it. I mean, it's not as if I'm his wife or anything*." (p. 37) Aidoo uses irony to critique the cultural normalisation of marital rape. Esi's decision to walk away from the marriage is a bold act of resistance. She asserts that her body is her own, echoing Bell Hooks' (2000) idea that feminist masculinity centres on "respect for boundaries and self-determination". (p. 68 Routledge edition).

Esi's rejection of societal norms reflects her masculine femininity. She is career-oriented, chooses to live alone, and only remarries under the terms of a polygamous arrangement that grants her personal space.

In a surprising turn, Esi agrees to become Ali's second wife, even though he is already married. However, she does so not out of submission, but calculation:

"*She thought, with Ali, she would have the freedom she had always wanted, no expectations to cook or mother. Just herself, and her space*" (p.143). While polygamy is a patriarchal institution, Esi reclaims it for her purposes. She is not emotionally dependent on Ali, nor does she surrender her professional life. This aligns with Connell's (2005) notion of *gender performance*; Esi performs traditional roles (wife, lover) on her terms, subverting their original intent. Yet, her experiment fails. Ali begins neglecting her, proving that structural patriarchy remains resilient. Aidoo writes: "She had wanted freedom. But it came wrapped in emptiness."

This moment reveals the limits of masculine femininity in a profoundly patriarchal society. Esi's resistance is not romanticised; it is complex, painful, and sometimes isolating.

Similarly, in *The Girl Who Can*, Adjoa, a young girl in rural Ghana, is mocked for having thin legs, seen as unfit for childbearing, the ultimate feminine role in her community. *Her grandmother says, "A woman must have good, strong legs to be able to carry children"* (p. 27).

Yet, Adjoa excels in athletics, winning races at school. This becomes her form of empowerment. Through sports, she reclaims her body not as a reproductive tool but as a symbol of strength and purpose.

To highlight how the pressure to be marriageable begins at a shockingly young age, robbing a girl of her childhood, Adjoa says, "My mother and my grandmother always disagreed about whether, with my legs, I would be able to find a husband. They seemed to have forgotten that I was only seven years old." (p.1-2) Breaking free from tradition requires not just defying men, but also disappointing or challenging the women who have raised you and who represent the established, "safe" path.

"Nana would argue that you need good hips to be able to have children. 'Slim people, and especially slim women, don't have children easily" (p.3). Nana here represents the voice of tradition, linking physicality directly to a woman's perceived biological destiny.

"My mother would have replied, 'But Adjoa is not a boy' (p. 4), and that would have been that." This simple statement shows how gender roles are rigidly enforced. Adjoa's potential (running) is initially dismissed because it doesn't align with what girls are "supposed" to do.

Adjoa is caught between navigating two models: her grandmother Nana, who is traditionally rooted and focused on family and her mother, who is slightly more modern, a working woman, but still constrained by tradition. This represents the modern woman's challenge of forging a new path from disparate influences. The entire dynamic between Nana and Maami represents this conflict. Adjoa is the battleground for their differing, yet both limited, views on what a woman should be. She has to reconcile the wisdom of the past with the opportunities of the present without completely rejecting either. She must find a third way.

To resolve this, she must use her unique talents and achievements to prompt a re-evaluation of the outdated norms that her grandmother especially clings to. She uses her athletic prowess to succeed so visibly that the community is compelled to redefine what is valuable and beautiful in a woman. And for the first time, she asserts,

everybody in the village agreed that my legs were not too thin... In fact, they decided, my legs were not too long... they were just the right legs for a runner... (p. 25 - 26). This is the moment of triumph.

Again, after Adjoa won her race, Aidoo states, "*And Nana... had been shaking her head and saying something like, 'Who would have thought it?'*" (p. 27) Adjoa's success compels Nana, the bastion of tradition, to question her own deeply held beliefs. Adjoa hasn't just won a race; she has earned the right to define her own body and its potential.

2.2 Masculine Femininity and Resistance

In *Changes*, Esi Sekyi embodies masculine-coded traits: she is career-driven, emotionally detached, and sexually autonomous. Yet, her story critiques the limits of masculine autonomy in a patriarchal society that still expects women to conform emotionally and socially. Her decision to leave her marriage and enter a polygamous relationship is a masculine feminist act, asserting agency while navigating cultural constraints.

In *The Girl Who Can*, Adjoa's physical strength and competitive spirit challenge traditional femininity. Her triumph in running symbolises a way of reclaiming masculine energy to empower girls. Her grandmother's eventual support reflects a shift in generational thinking, where masculine traits in girls are no longer feared but celebrated. Similarly, Theresah Ennin (2014) examines how Aidoo's Anowa challenges hegemonic masculinity, demonstrating that both men and women are influenced and limited by gender expectations.

The characters of Esi and Adjoa reflect Aidoo's reconstruction of femininity through resistance. Their defiance of expectations is not aggressive but rooted in quiet strength and personal agency. Scholar Lindsay Green-Simms (2012) points out that *Changes* presents "feminism not as ideology, but as lived contradiction." Esi seeks love, but on her terms, challenging both patriarchy and the romantic ideal.

Esi's masculine femininity also shows in her emotional restraint. Unlike the typical image of the emotionally dependent woman, she remains calm and detached, even when her second marriage to Ali disintegrates due to neglect. Aidoo writes: "*She did not cry. There were no tears left.*" (p. 164). Her strength is rooted in endurance and self-possession; qualities often culturally coded as masculine.

In Adjoa's case, her resistance initially remains silent. She listens to the debates about her legs but never internalises the shame. When she begins to win races, her grandmother's tone changes: "Those are the legs of a winner!" (p. 29). This transformation illustrates how even subtle resistance can gradually alter one's perspective. As Nana Wilson-Tagoe (2000) suggests, Aidoo's young female characters often "challenge adult perceptions and redefine strength on their own terms." Olusegun Olu-Osayomi (2023) suggests that Aidoo's feminist imagery frequently conceals a deeper masculine energy, implying that her protagonists adopt a male perspective to challenge traditional gender roles.

Again, Adjoa does not argue with her critics; she simply goes out and wins. By becoming a champion runner, she uses her "thin legs", the symbol of her inadequacy, to accomplish something extraordinary. She demonstrates that the definition of a "useful" or "admirable" female body is flawed. "And for the first time, everybody in the village agreed that my legs were not too thin... In fact, they decided, my legs were not too long... they were just the right legs for a runner...'She uses resistance through excelling in what is believed to be the "Masculine" domain.

It is undoubtedly clear that Adjoa's most significant resistance is her silence turning into unignorable action. She couldn't find the words to defend herself, so she let her body do the talking. Her victory is a powerful, non-verbal argument that is more effective than any plea she could have made. "There are some things that you cannot say to anyone, not even to your own mother." (p. 117) This implies that some truths can only be *demonstrated*, not spoken.

2.3 Comparative Analysis of Esi and Adjoa

Although Esi and Adjoa differ in age and circumstances, they share a common trait: self-determination. Esi's struggle is intellectual and existential, navigating modern urban life while balancing work, love, and motherhood. Adjoa's challenge is physical and social, asserting her body's value beyond reproductive function.

Esi's decisions are deliberate, even when painful. She chooses polygamy not out of tradition, but pragmatism. Yet her disappointment with Ali's divided attention reveals a critique of polygamy that still favours men. Aidoo writes: "She had wanted freedom, but not loneliness." This paradox reflects the fact that masculine femininity is not a perfect solution but a necessary stance for survival in a world with no easy answers.

In contrast, Adjoa's story concludes on a more hopeful note. By embracing her body through athletics, she gains acceptance and empowerment within the same society that once doubted her. Her grandmother's eventual support shows that change can occur even within traditional frameworks.

Both Esi and Adjoa complicate the meaning of being a "woman" within their respective contexts. They are neither symbols of Western liberalism nor strictly bound by tradition. Instead, they occupy liminal positions, navigating complex social expectations. Esi, with her cool detachment, prefers solitude over performative happiness. Adjoa, with her quiet resilience, reclaims her body through sports. Together, they challenge what Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) calls the "seven mountains" African women must climb: tradition, poverty, male dominance, colonialism, race, motherhood, and internalised inferiority.

2.4 Aidoo's Narrative Style and Symbolism

Ama Ata Aidoo's narrative style and symbolism are crucial to her literary strength, enabling her to challenge patriarchal norms and explore African identity with subtlety and depth. Her writing style also supports her themes. In '*Changes*,' she employs free indirect discourse to fluidly move in and out of Esi's thoughts, revealing her internal struggles. The title itself, '*Changes*,' signifies transformation, both personal and societal.

Again, Aidoo often writes in a style that mimics oral storytelling, drawing on Ghanaian traditions to convey a conversational and intimate tone. In *The Girl Who Can*, the child narrator Adjoa speaks with innocence and wit, creating a tone that is both engaging and revealing of adult contradictions.

Aidoo employs first-person narration to centre female voices. Esi in *Changes* and Adjoa in *The Girl Who Can* offer deeply personal insights into their worlds, revealing their internal struggles and triumphs to readers. In *The Girl Who Can*, the use of first-person narration from a young girl adds an innocent tone to serious critiques. The title, once again, is symbolic: Adjoa can, and she does.

Dialogue and silence are tools Aidoo uses in *Changes* and *The Girl Who Can* to reveal tensions among her characters. Silence, especially in *The Girl Who Can*, is symbolic: Adjoa's mother's quiet resistance contrasts with Nana's vocal traditionalism. For Adjoa, like her mother, silence is not a sign of weakness; it is a tactic. She waits, observes, and ultimately proves her worth through her actions rather than her words. Her victory in the race becomes a powerful statement made without words. It forces others to reconsider their assumptions, demonstrating that resistance does not always have to be vocal to be effective.

In *Changes*, Esi's conversations with her friend Opokuya and her husband Oko reveal her internal conflict between independence and intimacy. And her dialogue with Ali, her second husband, is often clipped and pragmatic, echoing her emotional distance and the transactional nature of their relationship.

Symbolism relies on the reader's capacity to interpret underlying messages, often influenced by cultural or contextual clues. Aidoo employs Adjoa's legs in *The Girl Who Can* "thin legs" to symbolise societal expectations of femininity and reproductive ability. Initially regarded as a flaw, they become a source of pride when she wins a race, challenging the notion that a woman's worth depends on her body's conformity to tradition. She then uses the symbol of "running and walking" to signify freedom and self-discovery once again. Adjoa's skill in running swiftly becomes a metaphor for breaking free from restrictive cultural narratives.

Marriage acts as a symbol of societal control over women's autonomy. Esi's rejection of monogamy and her embrace of polygamy are not acts of liberation but serve as a critique of how even alternative structures can sustain male dominance.

She again employs silence and her characters' voices to symbolise repression and resistance. Characters who speak out, such as Esi, and the quiet ones, like Adjoa, often face backlash in different circumstances, yet their voices remain central to the narrative's strength. The recurring symbolism of the body, Esi's need for personal space, and Adjoa's legs serve as a powerful feminist device. It reclaims the female body from patriarchal expectations and redefines it as a site of agency. Her portrayal of silence challenges the idea that empowerment must be loud. In both texts, silence becomes a tool of agency, enabling women and girls to navigate oppressive structures while preserving their inner strength.

2.5 Broader Implications for African Feminist Discourse

Aidoo's work makes a significant contribution to African feminist discourse. Her characters do not reject culture outright, but negotiate with it. As Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues, African feminism must be "responsive to the peculiarities of the African woman's condition." Aidoo echoes this by placing her characters within their cultural context, yet allowing them space for individual agency. Her characters are not just fictional; they are ideological tools that challenge readers to rethink gender roles and societal expectations. Her concept of masculine femininity also aligns with Sylvia Tamale's (2006) view that African women often use "creative pragmatism" to resist patriarchy. Esi does not shout or march; she simply lives on her own terms. Adjoa does not argue with her grandmother; she runs. These subtle acts of resistance are influential in their own right. She doesn't just write about women, she writes for them, with them, and through them. Her work is a call to reimagine feminism not as a borrowed ideology, but as a lived, local, and freeing force.

More than just books, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* and *The Girl Who Can* are transformative works that push the boundaries of African feminist discourse. Aidoo develops a feminist framework that is both radical and rooted by emphasising local experiences, authentic voices, and nuanced representations of African womanhood. Her writing entirely shifts the narrative by enabling African women to define themselves on their own terms.

III. CONCLUSION

Ama Ata Aidoo's works provide deep insights into the lives of Ghanaian women who challenge and redefine traditional gender roles. Through the characters of Esi and Adjoa, Aidoo convincingly argues that strength, choice, and resistance are not opposed to femininity but are part of an evolving understanding of what it means to be a woman in African society. These characters break stereotypes not by rejecting femininity but by broadening its scope, adopting traits typically associated with men and reshaping them to serve their own purposes. In doing so, they become symbols of masculine femininity, women who are independent, self-aware, and powerful in their own right. Notably, Aidoo does not romanticise resistance. Esi's isolation and Adjoa's quiet struggle remind us that change involves sacrifice. Nonetheless, these stories also suggest that transformation is possible, both within individuals and across generations. Aidoo's characters often embody what Olu-Osayomi describes as "feminist imagery and masculine energy". Her female protagonists are assertive, intelligent, and emotionally complex. They challenge the binary of male dominance and female submission, instead embodying a spectrum of identities that reflect the fluidity of gender roles in postcolonial African societies. Her literary contributions offer a strong critique of male-dominated societies. Through her nuanced characters and layered storytelling, she uncovers the contradictions of patriarchy and envisions alternative futures for African women. These characters spark discussion within African families, communities, and institutions, as well as among readers. Her works remain essential for understanding the intersections of gender, tradition, and modernity in African literature.

The study, therefore, concludes that masculine femininity is a vital strategy of feminist resistance and self-definition in Aidoo's fiction. It provides an empowering framework for understanding the complex identities of African women as they navigate the intersection of modernity and tradition.

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