

# THEMATIZING MARRIAGE IN AMA ATA AIDOO'S *CHANGES* AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*: THE DYNAMICS OF MODERN AFRICAN MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

## Abstract

The task of this paper is to highlight some of the marriage relationship tendencies that have changed in the modern African Marriage, in relation to the traditional norms, as manifest in two texts of two African Feminist writers. The study thus examines how Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* and Chimamanda N. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* explore the marriage institution in Africa and unearth the changing dynamics in it, as it pertains to the modern or post-modern African society. The study concluded that though the dignity of marriage coupled with its necessity as a social institution is unquestionably maintained in our focused African texts, its dynamics, in modern society, must yield to positive change, at least, to reflect the emerging socio-economic trends in African society today.

**Keywords:** marriage, patriarchy, career-wifery, loyalty, change.

## Introduction

It is suggested by numerous writers that marriage in both traditional and modern societies hardly guarantee the safety of home or a clear identity of women (Nayar, 2008). The general depiction of women in the marriage institution, found in several women writers, is that marriage invariably is detrimental to the women's identity and place. Traditionally, "marriage makes unreasonable demands on the woman and offers little in turn", she is only identified as "the self-sacrificing, unselfish, constantly slaving woman – of – the house" (Nayar, 2008.131).

Literary critics such as Olaussen(2002) and Azuikwe(2009) have presented reviews on the place of African women in marriage in particular and in society in general at least, as portrayed in the work of African feminist writers like the Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo and the Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In this paper, however, the effort is made to highlight some of the marriage relationship tendencies that have changed in the modern African Marriage, as far as the traditional norms are concerned, which these selected authors have consciously or unconsciously placed in the literary domain. In other words, the intention of this paper is to examine how Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* and Chimamanda N. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* explore the marriage institution and foreground the changing tendencies in it in light of a changing African society. The main discussion is structured under: Marriage as a traditional institution, representation of the marriages of the three central women characters in the two texts, dynamics of marriage highlighted in the two novels, such as property and ownership in marriage, career wifery in marriage, sexuality in marriage, place of institutionalization of marriage, and conjugal loyalty among urban couples.

## Marriage as a Traditional Institution

Generally, marriage is perceived as a social union or legal contract between individuals of the opposite sex, described as spouses, which establish rights and obligations between the spouses. Though the definition of marriage differs with cultures, the basic idea that it is an institution that defines interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual, is generally acknowledged. Marriage in the context of Africa, according to Amakiri (unpublished) is the institution that

regulates sex, reproduction and family life” (p. 8). As an institution, it is arguably perceived to function as an economic and political unit, which fosters the creation of kinship bonds, inheritance control, the perpetuation of family lineage or history, and the sharing of resources and labour.

Traditionally, marriage is made legitimate with the payment of a dowry or bride price to the wife’s family by the husband, usually in a ceremony organized in the wife’s family house. This ceremony, irrespective of how moderate or pompous, formalises and consummates the marriage. In most colonial societies, however, the traditional ceremony is climaxed with wedding or ordinance in church or court or marriage registry. Both the traditional ceremony and wedding explicitly or implicitly define the role of the couple in the marital relationship, usually in favour of the husband. That is to say that institutionalised marriages in Africa are generally biased in favour of the patriarchy. No marriage can therefore be formalised without a dowry or bride price.

### **Representation of the Marriage of the Three (3) Central Women Characters in *Changes* and *Beatrice* in *Purple Hibiscus***

This section involves a sequential presentation of the marriages of the three central characters in Aidoo’s *Changes* and that of Beatrice, in *Purple Hibiscus*. An effort is made to explore the inherent peculiarities of each of the marriages in relation to the author’s possible intentions.

In *Changes* the first marital home the reader enters is that of Esi Sekyi and Oko. This marriage is portrayed as one built on tension emanating from social and economic disparities between Esi and Oko. Esi is a highly educated wife, a government statistician, who earns a higher salary than her husband and who accommodates the husband in her bungalow. She is subsumed by her work. Her insistence on her rights and independence of her husband puts the husband’s patriarchal authority at risk. When Oko forces sex on Esi to re-assert his authority in the home, Esi uses that “marital rape” as a cause to get rid of Oko. (pp. 13, 38).

Esi and Oko’s marriage represents post-colonial feminist marriages in which husbands are often below their wives in political and economic ranks. Such marriages usually thrive on tension and suspicion from within and outside the marriage, respectively. Aidoo, undoubtedly, may be cautioning her African readers that Esi’s behaviour in marriage is contingent on her socio-economic independence. It is likely to learn from this relationship that African post-colonial marriage is no longer perceived to be enslavement or servitude for wives and that a woman can re-assert her personality rights by initiating divorce against her husband anytime she wants, and for whatever action she deems unacceptable. However, it is equally necessary that the reader also learns from this marriage that Esi’s reaction is contingent on her social and economic independence and that not all wives in similar unsatisfactory conditions in marriage can possibly react the same way as Esi does. Her resolve to marry Ali and be a second wife shows that there is an emotional and psychological need that only marriage provides.

The second couples we meet are Opokuya and Kubi. Their marriage is characterized by some level of serenity, though not devoid of recurring squabbles. In this marriage, the reader meets a career wife constantly antagonized by material inhibitions to her freedom. Though educated and a career woman, Opokuya is not as financially independent as Esi and Fusena. Their only ‘car’ which is the main cause of the quarrels, becomes the symbol of the independence she craves: “How was she to work full-time and medical work of that and look after a family as big as theirs without transportation of her own?” (p. 14).

Opokuya and Kubi's marriage relationship suggests that conflict in marriage is a reality that can be managed **because** it must not degenerate into divorce. Besides, sustenance and satisfaction in marriage is a matter of mutual consent and responsibility. This balance eludes Esi and Oko who allow their individual socio-economic disparities to cloud their mutual benefits.

The final marriage in *Changes* for attention is Fusena and Ali. Like the other couples, they are both educated and, in addition, are professed Muslims. Their relationship is traced to their friendship in college and in Tamale when they were both stationed to teach after their training. Fusena symbolizes, in this marriage, a career woman who sacrifices her career for the sake of marriage and motherhood – a strong contrast of Esi. She has even sacrificed a wealthy suitor, Alhaji in Tamale, for Ali. Ali provides her with a kiosk in place of her career, and her business flourishes remarkably. However, she usually reflects on her lost career with nostalgia: "It was this business of Ali getting more and more educated while she stayed the same". (p. 65). Their marriage portrays how different marriage is from friendship and the fact that the two institutions alternate: "By marrying Ali, she had exchanged a friend for a husband" (p.65). **This remark implies** that the mutual benefits derived and enjoyed in friendship **are** absent in marriage- the husband's hegemony under which the wife is a servant (or a slave?). It is where the woman's "actions, needs, and desires can be understood only in relation to wifeness". (Odamatten,1994). It is for the same reason that Esi's friendship with Ali ceases with the formalization of their relationship into marriage. Thus, Fusena-Ali's marriage reveals that marriage takes away friendship, diverts personal dreams - predominantly the **wives**, and demands remarkable sacrifices - again, often by the woman. Perhaps, Aidoo's general intention for representing these marriages is to alert her audience about the changing and challenging dynamics of the perennial human institution called marriage. Marriage itself does not change; its dynamics do.

The next relationship for consideration in this section is the marriage between Eugene and Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus*. Their marriage portrays a wife under complete servitude of a colonized African affluent who manipulates Christian and cultural values to assert his superiority over his family (ALTRHASS, 2013). Beatrice is an educated woman but is not allowed to work and so becomes over-dependent on her husband. From this marriage, it is clear that even in post-colonial Africa **wife enslavement can** still **be** found in marriage. Generally, African men seem never to perceive marriage as a complementation of the two parties in it. It takes wisdom and schema for a suffering and enduring wife to free herself from such a painful servitude in marriage, sometimes through unconventional means as in the case of Beatrice. The place of a poor wife in marriage is suffering.

### **Dynamics of Marriage Highlighted in the Two Novels**

The word dynamics describes forces or realities within a system or process which stimulate its growth, development, or changes. ([www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com). Accessed 10-07-2016. 2:45p.m). In this regard, the term is employed in this paper in reference to identified realities militating within the marriage relationships in the selected novels.

Such dynamics include property and ownership, career wifeness, sexuality, place of institutionalization of marriage, and conjugal loyalty among urban couples.

### **Property and Ownership in Marriage**

Traditional African marriage usually places the wife (wives) inadvertently under the husband's roof. This is one of the ways in which a woman is controlled by the institution of marriage. In this respect, the man often exercises absolute control over everything in the house – including the

woman (or women in a polygamous marriage). He owns all, the wife inclusive. So that, in principle, the wife does not own property. This attitude is expressed in an Akan proverb that “when a woman purchases a gun, it is kept in the husband’s room”.

In Aidoo’s *Changes*, however, this trend is not the case. The three central post-colonial female characters – Esi, Opokuya and Fusena, each represents a new wave of post-colonial marital home in which the woman owns almost all the property or shares with her husband.

This transformation, in modern marriage, is glaring in Esi and Oko’s marriage. Contrary to the patriarchal norm, Esi accommodates her husband, Oko. Rather than the woman being at home to fulfill her domestic role while the man goes to work, this time, it is Esi who is usually over engaged **due** to business pressure. She solves that problem by rather hiring the service of a maid (p. 8). Her salary is far higher than that of her husband. Esi owns the house and has full control over it. Under normal circumstances, men divorce women. The opposite is the situation in Esi’s marriage. She throws Oko out of her house to assert her ownership. Finally, when Esi divorces Oko, she even pushed their only daughter on Oko’s mother to take care of the child – a deviation from the traditional expectation that children follow their mother after **the** divorce. In Esi’s marriage, it is the husband who suffered incessantly and complained (pp. 7, 8, 9). Esi now takes the place of the patriarchal husband. She decides when to be at home from work, the number of children to have, and above all, when to meet her husband in bed, damn what Oko’s friends say or do to him. (p. 8). So, the husband asks: “Is Esi too an African woman?” And he admits that “There are plenty of them around these days ... these days... these days” (p. 9)

In Opokuya and Kubi’s marriage however, a different trend of change is represented in which control over the marriage is vested neither in the wife only nor the husband. Mutual ownership and control appear to be the case. Thus, in this marriage, for example, property seems to be mutually owned, and that the husband alone does not have **the** final say on their usage. In fact, Opokuya is vocal on “how to coordinate the car’s movement” (pp. 18, 19, and 20). When she informs her friends at the workplace that her husband is ‘unreasonable’ **regarding** the use of their car, they condemn her behaviour **because** it is commonplace to find wives buying cars only to be hijacked by their husbands. Yet, Opokuya insists that the “most ethical” and the “most common sense” operate for the good of ‘us’, the family (p. 20). Again, on p. 22, Opokuya and Kubi argue about the use of the car until Kubi agrees to pick her home in the evening at ‘Hotel Twentieth Century’. **Though** Kubi hates shopping in town after work, **the narrator’s comment that** he becomes aware that he has to make “some concessions” is revealing. Here, Aidoo seems to be pointing out that postcolonial marriage in Africa no longer thrives on the patriarchal assumption and dominance, where the wife possesses **tiny** place in the marital decisions about family property. Even when the question comes on how many children to produce, though Kubi agrees before Opokuya undertakes the surgery, it is she who initiates the idea, not the husband. When Opokuya finally decides to buy Esi’s old car, the reader perceives her African post-colonial feminism and presumably applauds her. It is **entirely** appropriate that she owns a car to function more effectively as a nurse, mother, and wife.

Fusena, on the other hand, is not as vocal and ‘present’ in her marriage with Ali as Opokuya appears. However, unlike Opokuya, she owns **a** car and a kiosk, which she **runs** without the husband’s intervention. In portraying women in *Changes* as Olaussen (2008) indicates, Aidoo introduces a new element into the discussion of different varieties of socially sanctioned or enforced intimate relations in marriage the function of which is establishing and perpetuating social and political structures. Thus, such representation discloses the feminist writer’s apparent

intent of fostering in marriage the overriding question of how its subjects are “shaped and changed in changing societies” (p. 61). The modern African wives no longer approach marriage as the husband’s bonafide property, as Amma Darko’s protagonist in *Beyond the Horizon*, cynically puts it “Akobi’s father bought me very handsomely .... Three weeks later he came straight from work on a Friday evening ..... and left for the city the same Saturday with me as his wife.....and property.” (p.7) Far from that, these contemporary wives in *Changes* perceive their position in marriage as partners or mates who maintain their personality and dignity in both their marriage and society.

On the contrary, in *Purple Hibiscus*, Beatrice, the wife of Eugene, persistently endures her husband’s de-humanizing treatments in silence. She remains docile and dormant in her marital home. Her voice is not heard in the house except with her children when Eugene is not present. Her appearance is witnessed only when cleaning her ‘figurines’, preparing and serving food with Sisi, the house girl, and of course, in company with Eugene to church. Unlike the three wives in *Changes*, Beatrice does not possess humanity or dignity in her marriage relationship. When she eventually poisons Eugene to assert her freedom and dignity, though her method appears unconventional, the reader is likely to come to terms with Adichie, the novelist, that men’s abnormal acts of bashing and torturing women must stop and that perpetrators of such inhumanity, such as Eugene, need to be done away with to give way for social transformation (Azuike, 2009).

### **Career Wifery in Marriage**

Another area where change is evident within the African marriage enterprise in Aidoo’s *Changes* has to do with career wifery. Esi, Opokuya and Fusena, are all educated women, and Aidoo places them at the centre of the city – Accra, the capital city of Ghana. In an article titled “In diverse literary tradition, the city functions as a trope connoting freedom” (Olaussen, 2008 p. 66), the author submits that the “wives” find themselves in Accra so they can freely exercise or practice the European values regarding marriage, motherhood and the family inculcated in the educated Africans. This probably explains the reason Kubi does not like Accra or any city much (p. 36). The novelist is aware that keeping these women in the village where tradition and culture are deeply invested in the people obviously, will impede their effort to overly manifest the fruits of their hybridization in the way they want. For example, though the people in the countryside respect the educated elite, their expectation for the modern educated woman in marriage is still tradition-bound and patriarchy favoured. This sense is portrayed by Esi’s mother and her grandmother, whose view is that, as (Reid, 2011) puts it, “The life of a woman is by their interpretation of the cultural traditions, meant to be unsatisfying. A woman is to marry, work for her husband, have a career, take care of her home and family and be a loving mother”. (p. 1). In *Changes*, Oko finds himself in marriage with a woman more educated and gainfully employed than he. Esi is a completely modern career wife whose life is dominated by business pressure, with a lot of travels sometimes, internationally. As a career wife, her regular absence from home is not a bother to her though her husband complains. To her, career is a priority; marriage and motherhood come second. She must have time for her work. When Oko tries to secure the normal patriarchal attention from her, he loses her forever.

Opokuya, on the other hand, employs a different career wifery approach. Even though her profession as a nurse demands ample time and energy, she chooses to manage it within the constraints of her marriage relationship. It is her husband, Kubi, who appears a bit passive towards her wife’s selfless effort and the changing trends within the marriage setup. Why should

it be a problem for Kubi and the children to organize their already-cooked supper while Opokuyaa has not returned from work? (p.37) Is it for sheer patriarchalism? Perchance, Aidoo's intention is to caution her readers that this passive attitude of a husband in marriage cannot be entertained in the 21<sup>st</sup> century African society.

What is envious about Opokuyaa is how she carries herself as a wife, mother, and career woman in such a balanced manner. This is attested by Esi: "you have got a full life. You have been able to keep your marriage, look at your four wonderful kids", and Opokuyaa herself adds, "Yes, and my job" but she admits that it is not easy (p.37).

The truth is that in a more contemporary society such as ours, men (as husbands) cannot maintain their unquestioned subservient adherence to perennial patriarchalism. What Aidoo seems to be suggesting is a positive adjustment in marriage – in which case husbands must descend from their patriarchal 'high table' and share the conjugal role with their wives, after all the wives moved from the traditional housewife to career wifehood. This is what Kubi ought to do – to borrow Opokuya's words, "It is a question of ethics .... it's common sense" (p.19).

Thus, through Opokuya, Aidoo appears to be placing to the fore-changing ethics surrounding the marriage, motherhood, and wifely obligation in modern African societies. In the words of Oluassen (2008), "Aidoo insists on a vision that tries to express the possibilities of female empowerment without succumbing to cynicism and manipulation" (p. 64). This kind of vision appears to be epitomized in Opokuya and Esi, who are least influenced by their husband's manipulation or the cynical reactions of friends, and families including in-laws, in the case of Esi. In the case of Fusena, the reader meets a career woman who agrees, on account of marriage and motherhood, to alter her professional career from a teacher to a trader. In any case, her new trade flourishes, and she seems to enjoy conjugal peace until Ali resolves to marry Esi as a second wife.

Aidoo's representation of the modern African wife as a career wife seems, no doubt, to weaken the dominance of men in marriage, which usually is motivated by their role as 'sole' breadwinners. Possibly, Aidoo's purpose appears not to present 'ideal' wives, who are neither outdated nor out of touch with the possibilities of the modern. Again, Aidoo's task is far from presenting 'ideal' wives who, in the circumstances of modern urban marriage lives, make idealized contributions to their marriage and homestead. Rather, she presents to her readers modern African wives who are "simply seen as women who have learned to survive, and their wisdom is presented as the successful strategies of survival of the powerless" (Olaussen, 2008.65).

Adichie's Beatrice, in *Purple Hibiscus*, however, presents a different picture of a modern African wife. In her case, Eugene, her husband, is overly rich and 'generous' to outsiders, but Beatrice, his wife, lives on nothing (p.248). He keeps her poor to manipulate her. Even though Beatrice is educated, she cannot choose to become a career wife under Eugene's atrocious, autocratic, and hegemonic overlord. A befitting description of her husband, Eugene, is given by Azuike (2009) as 'a ticking time bomb' who regularly explodes on his poor family, crushing anyone in his path. His wife, Beatrice, leads a life of servitude" (p. 82). The opportunities available to Aidoo's career wives in *Changes* are unavailable to her in her marriage. However, as a post-colonial African woman, she must learn to survive and her wisdom, though devoid of conventionality, presented as a successful strategy of "survival of the powerless". When she poisons Eugene, she frees herself and her children from such abuse. Interestingly, that modern African feminist

writers amply represent African wives who 'bite' sooner or later to disentangle themselves and assert their dignity within the conjugal environment.

### **Sexuality in Marriage**

In her article, " 'About Lovers in Accra': Urban Intimacy in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*", Maria Olausen (2008), states among other things that, in the work of African feminist Writers, "the question of women's sexual self-determination is central" and that "it takes a protagonist who has everything to bring up the issue of the meaning of sexuality within marriage against the overwhelming common sense - 'knowledge' that the essence of marriage is sexual fulfillment on demand for the husband" (p. 63).

The above quotation offers a clear view of the African perspective of sex in marriage amply represented in the text world of Aidoo's *Changes*. We meet this protagonist in Esi Sekyi. Esi muses that in our society, "...sex is something a husband claims from his wife as his right. Any time and at his convenience (p.13). This statement presupposes that in marriage, sexual intercourse belongs to the husband, and in it, he asserts his authority over the wife as head, in addition to satisfying his emotional desire. True to Olausen's observation, Esi Sekyi meets the requirement of that 'protagonist who has everything to challenge that patriarchal ethos. Esi is sexually unashamed and in charge of her own reproductive life. She chooses to have sex when she wants and independently opts to use contraception without seeking Oko's consent. The husband's incessant complaint (p. 9) does not bother her. Esi thus, wields the highest degree of freedom of sexuality among the women in the text. She is economically and emotionally independent of her husband: no wonder Aidoo seems to have been using Esi's attitude to castigate the societal idea that women must be subservient, dependent, and unquestioning towards men, and the traditional African notion that womanhood is mainly for the kitchen as well as the bedroom.

Esi further asserts her sexual independence by resisting Oko's initial attempts to force sex on her that morning. When Oko 'rapes' her to reassert himself as the husband, Esi chooses not to disclose it to anyone, not even her friend Opokuya. She is aware that such demeanor is not a crime in our culture. Knowing that she is bound by marriage and her role as a wife, meaning her body belongs to Oko, she radically sacks him from her bungalow. This way, Esi re-asserts her sexual independence and resistance to such a weak and obsolete communal definition of womanhood. It is important to note that Aidoo is aware that Esi's behaviour is contingent on her economic standing, and therefore, not all women who find themselves in a position such as Esi's can react in the same way.

The two other women, Opokuya and Fusena, as well as Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus*, like all typical African traditional women, keep their sexual experience in their marriages behind closed doors. But again, Esi and Ali exercise their sexual freedom in an adulterous relationship. The fact that Esi loves and resolves to be Ali's second wife surprises not only the family and friends of Esi, but the reader too. Probably Aidoo wants her readers to understand that even though changes in society have made way for her (and her likes) to rise to such high status, making her economically and socially independent, the institution of marriage itself has not changed, and as such, it continues to relegate women to a position of subservience.

### **Place of Institutionalization of Marriage in *Change***

Contraction or institutionalization of marriages (traditional or religious) is a very important occasion in traditional societies of Africa, during which time certain norms and beliefs are repeated. Aidoo, however, does not give any profound or elaborate place for formalisation in *Changes*. Perhaps, Aidoo decides to avoid placing the three African women representations under the strict subservience to tradition or any Europeanized religion to allow them to exercise their post-colonial African feminism in their marriages. But do they really free themselves? Of course, they do but not to the same degree. Esi, for instance, lives the highest degree of independence. It appears that by placing such profound institutionalization or ceremony in the background, Aidoo is prompting her readers that firstly, the majority of urban dwellers are not interested in such elaborate tradition. Besides, the African feminist writer, consciously or unconsciously, endeavours to prevent her characters from tradition's impositions. Such impositions obviously will inhibit the progress of her married women and deny them their right and freedom of choices in marriage. Esi's mother and grandmother's insistence that she remains in her monogamous marriage and the older women's influence on Fusena's acceptance of Ali's proposal to marry Esi are cases in point. Undoubtedly, putting tradition at the periphery and not the center is itself a change in modern African society.

A critical reading of the novel reveals that overly supported and endorsed customary inhibitions on the wife in favour of the husband find no expression on the lips of any of the central characters – Esi, Opokuya, and Fusena. Only the husbands, especially Oko and Kubi, the “Patriarchal lords”, and the peripheral characters such as Esi and Oko's families, as well as the old women that Ali employs in his favour validate such male dominance in marriage.

It is, therefore, surprising to the reader that when Esi rejects Oko and chooses to opt for a second wife to assert her independence of social constraint – a daring challenge of the traditional ethos, her major hurdle now is her family's acceptance of her chosen man, Ali. This action of Esi is explained by Pauline Onwubiko Uwakweh (cited in Olaussen, 2008. p. 64), thus, “this modern female chooses a traditional institution to resolve the conflicts of time and space in the monogamous relationship”.

As for Ali Kondey, his behaviour towards tradition is typical of “the actions of husbands who are free to manipulate different institutions to fit their own needs” (Nnaemeka, 1997). To Nnaemeka then, Ali, like some elite and affluent husbands in Africa, transforms traditional African institutions into modernity and manipulates the transformative stages for his own advantage, thereby creating pain for his female partners. Ali thus takes advantage of the ‘old women’ in his religion (Islam) to obtain Fusena's ‘silent agreement’ to his intention to marry Esi. (p. 107). Again, Ali employs custom or tradition as a tool to formalize his patriarchal authority over the ‘conquered territory’, Esi. After achieving that goal, his visit to Esi dwindles, leading to Esi's firing him. To highlight this manipulative intention of several affluent men toward traditional and religious institutions in African societies is the most likely justification for Aidoo's representation of Ali's actions.

In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene manipulates religion, the Catholic tradition, and institutions, to exercise unreasonable authority over his household. He again uses religion to shirk his responsibility to his poor father. His nature of person finds a perfect description in Azuike (2009) “Eugene is not an ideal Christian husband – neither is he a good example of what a father should be. He is, instead, a sick, demented man who is caught between the archaic African culture which permits wife battery and the true Christian doctrine which does not” (p. 83). Adichie seems to be exposing numerous affluent African religious men who fill the

cathedrals and the mosques yet put up behaviour in their marital homes contrary to what they profess to be.

### **Conjugal Loyalty in Marriage**

Conjugal loyalty describes a strong feeling of support or allegiance for each other within the marriage relationship. This notion brings to bear the individual partner's duty to be faithful to and expect faithfulness from the other partner in the marriage. Such that denying each other of sex, as well as engaging in sex outside the wedlock is not welcome. According to Amakiri (unpublished) "the African and Christian ethics support greatly, this mode of affair in that it expresses the natural utility of sex" (p. 17). In the same way, in Islam, adherents are allowed to satisfy their sexual urge only within the confines of marriage (Quran 25: 54). The presupposition here is that African tradition, Christianity, and Islam, all set marriage aside as the only legal way sanctioned for the couples to sexually satisfy themselves and then procreate. As such, any willful action or inaction of a partner which denies the other of sex or which attempts to satisfy one's sexual drive outside the marriage is an expression of conjugal disloyalty.

Critical reading of *Changes* reveals that whereas some of the central characters evince loyalty to their partners, others prove to be disloyal. For instance, Oko proves beyond doubt that he is loyal to his wife Esi. As he contemplates on Esi's apparent non-commitment as a wife (p.7) and reflects on the implications of "showing a woman you love her" (p. 8), he admits how much he had invested in the marriage with Esi and how much he had fought to keep it going" (p. 7). He further indicates that "for a long time, the thought of sleeping with anyone other than Esi had left him quite cold ... (p.8). The above quotation suggests Oko's high sense of loyalty to his partner, Esi. His wife, Esi's disloyalty to him, is not expressed in sex affair outside marriage; it rather rests with putting "her career well above any duties she owed as a wife, (p. 8), of course availing herself in bed inclusive. Opokuya and Fusena are also seen as loyal wives in their respective marriages. They are not noticed with any sexual involvement outside their marriages, and they remain committed to their conjugal homes throughout the story.

Conjugal disloyalty is consistently demonstrated by Ali Kondey (Fusena's husband). He appears to be consistently guilty of adultery. Before his marriage with Esi is formalized, he engages in an adulterous relationship with her. Both Fusena and later Esi suspect him for sexual behaviour outside marriage. (p. 92). Through Ali, Aidoo exposes the untoward disloyalty and hypocrisy of the affluent in modern African societies who play the sugar-daddies of young women lavishing expensive gifts on them, at the expense of such men's families and their companies or communities at large. Again, Aidoo uses Kubi's unreasonable exhibition of his sexual weakness at Esi's house to disclose several men's common unfaithful behaviour in modern African societies. It must be pointed out, however, that in *Purple Hibiscus*, such conjugal relationship challenge is not hinted at in the marriage between Beatrice and Eugene.

### **Conclusion**

From the discussion so far, one may not be far from right to conclude that the core issue for societal transformation, as revealed in the focused texts, is change. "Life on this earth needs not always be some human beings' gods and others being sacrificial animals. Indeed, that can be changed" (p.126). That is to say that men and women in Africa ought to become willing and committed to change, with "a lot of thinking and a great deal of doing" (P.126), "to tackle the violation and the continuous subordination of women" (Azuike, 2009. 79), to enable life in our

society “to be good for us all” (p.126), within the conjugal confines, in particular, and the large society in general. It seems, from the two texts, that marriage as a human institution is not attacked; its dynamics must rather change to reflect the positive changing trends in African society.

## REFERENCES

- Adichie, C.N. (2006). *Purple Hibiscus*. Nigeria: Kachifo Ltd.
- Aidoo, A.A. (1995). *Changes*. ISBN: 978-9988-1-9104-7
- Amakiri, P. (unpublished). *Sex and Marriage: An African Perspective* (1-40)
- ALJRAHSS (2013). *Denigrating Influence of Western Thought and Christianity on the Status of African Women as Represented in “Purple Hibiscus” by Chimamenda Adichie: American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*. 4. pp.118-120  
<http://www.iasir.net>
- Azuike, M.A. (2005). *Women’s Struggles and Independence in Adichie’s “Purple Hibiscus” and “Half of a Yellow Sun”*. *African Research Review: Multi-Diciplinary Journal, Ethopia*. Vol. 3(4) pp.79-91
- Darko, Amma. (1995). *Beyond the Horizon*, England: Heineman.
- Nayar, P.K. (2008). *Postcolonial Literature. An Introduction*. India: Dorling Kindersley.
- Nadiaye, I. (2002). *Space, Time and Empowerment in Ama Ata Aidoo’s “Changes”*.  
[chass.ncsu.edu](http://chass.ncsu.edu)
- Nnaemeka, O. (1997) “Urban Spaces, Women’s Places: Polygamy as Sign in Mariama Ba’s Novel”. *The Politics of (M) Othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in Africa Literature*. Ed. Obioma Nnaemeka. London: Routeledge. pp 162-91.
- Odamatten, V. (1994) *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading Against Neocolonialism*. Gainesville: Up of Florida.
- Olaussen, M. (2002). “About Lovers in Accra.” *Urban Intimacy in Ama Ata Aidoo’s “Changes”*:  
*A Love Story. Research in African Literature*, vol.33 (2) pp. 61-80.