

GENDER IN WOMEN'S WRITING: RESTORING THE WOMAN IN AMA ATA AIDOO'S CHANGES: A LOVE STORY AND PEGGY OPPONG'S THE LEMON SUITCASE

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Abstract

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Purpose — This study investigates genderism in Ghanaian women's writing with women's empowerment as the centre of interest in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) and Peggy Opong's *The Lemon Suitcase* (2010)

Methods — The study adopts a textual analysis of the novels under study and the authors' novels as controversial works which promote the ideals of the feminist movement in Africa by presenting issues that address nuances in gender roles and social constraint.

Findings — The findings unveil the progression of female roles over the period in the male-dominated Ghanaian society. Also, this study contributes to debates on feminism in Africa as well as promotes gender equity and women's empowerment through education.

Conclusion & Recommendation — The study presented the representation of the female figures in a patriarchal Ghanaian society. It sought to empower women as leaders in their contributions to the society. There is more room for improvement in spite of the career progression women have achieved.

Keywords — Feminism, The Lemon Suitcase, Sustainable Development, Genderism, Empowerment

Introduction

"Very few men realise that girls they meet and fall in love with are sharp because, among other things, they've got challenging jobs in stimulating places. That such jobs are so demanding. That these are also kinds of jobs that keep the mind active - alive." (*Changes*, 54)

"It's a good idea but who would like to give me jobs or work with me? I'll not give anyone a bribe to enable me to get contracts so I'll not get jobs. I'll work to rule and who wants that? I've examined all the options available to me and think I need to remain in the public sector for a while." (*The Lemon Suitcase*, 34)

From the outset, feminist studies have limited their analyses of gender inequality to woman's biology and sexuality sanctioned by the patriarchal system. However, the woman plays a constitutive role in the development of society. The significance of the female roles is clearly indicated in the epigraphs from *Changes* and *The Lemon Suitcase*, which also highlight the gender roles and attitudes of the male counterpart towards the women. The epigraphs are the fulcrum on which the authors, Aidoo and Opong, spin off the narrative in *Changes: A Love Story* and *The Lemon Suitcase* respectively. Both epigraphs

seemingly highlight the visions of Aidoo and Oppong aimed at projecting the female figure as incorruptible and morally upright. While Aidoo unveils the challenging role the career woman plays to the admiration of the male counterpart, Oppong presents the female character as principled and unbribable. Throughout the oeuvre of the authors under study, the feminist ideals are projected to foreground gender roles in Ghana and Africa at large. In Aidoo's *Changes* (1991), we are presented with issues about love and marriage of educated women. In the narrative, the heroine, Esi, feels entangled in her marriage to Oko and decides to divorce him to enable her concentrate on her career. However, Esi remarries Ali Kondey and attains the status of a second wife. Aidoo juxtaposes Esi's love relationship with her friend, Opokuya's happy marriage to Kubi which seems the ideal perfect relationship. The story climaxes with Esi expressing her frustration of feeling lonely because Ali rarely makes time for her, instead he showers her with gifts.

In *The Lemon Suitcase* (2010), the narrative begins with a flashback in which the heroine, Mabena recounts her ordeal with Derick Khand, an impostor as the head of security of Multi-Delivery. Oppong presents Mabena as the wife of Nick, a mother of two sons, a staunch Christian as well as a career person who dedicates herself to hard work. Mabena's encounter with Derick, which involved firing of arms, results in the near death of Mabena. She recovers after six months and decides to change her job. Mabena's new employment with Nick's friend, Adams as her boss paves the way for other dimensions of her life. As a principled person, Mabena remains resolute with her decisions and refuses to fall for the wiles of his corrupt boss, Adams. At her place of employment, Mabena is set up by Adams and her co-workers using a lemon suitcase containing cocaine with the assistance of Mabena's brother-in-law, Matthew. In spite of the twists and turns, Mabena becomes an advocate for the unprivileged in society and eventually emerges as the president of the nation.

Gender and Feminism Debates

Genderism is an idea that categorises gender in human organisation as timeless and universal (Oyewuni, 2011). According to Segkulu & Gyimah (2016), gender role is a culturally and socially conditioned set of behaviour and personality characteristics that are expected of a person based on their gender. It has been posited that the male and female roles prescribed based on the idea that domestic chores in the house are assumed to be performed by women. This results in employment segregation with the male counterparts dominating traditionally masculine occupations and females having access to traditionally feminine occupations (Duorinaah, 2020). In the study of gendered household labour distribution, Chesley (2011) found that women's gender identities were rooted in obligations for care that extended beyond mothering small children to encompass spouses, adult children, and grandkids.

Feminism is the belief in social, economic and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests (Brunell & Burkett, 2019). Feminism describes political, cultural and economic movements that aim to establish equal rights and legal protections of women, according to (Drucker, 2018). A feminist is "a man or a woman who says, yes, there is a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better. All of us, women and men, must do better" (Adichie, 2018). Radical feminists have championed the notion that women's oppression and disparity in gender relations is to be found in sexual asymmetry (the division of society into distinct biological sexes) and sexual division of labour (Nfah-Abbenyi). In her study, (Re)constructing Identity and Subjectivity, Nfah-Abbenyi (1984) explores the depiction of the African women by both the male and female writers. The term feminist can apply to both sides of the gender bar who stand for the rights of women (Agmor, 2010).

The scholarship of *Changes: A Love Story* has given insightful contributions on feminism from a number of points of view. Mensah (1997) sees *Changes* as a "women's liberationist project designed to expose what the modern educated woman endures in marriage" (p.1). Also, Maria Olausson (2002) postulates that *Changes* revolves around the idea of female sexual self-determination while Anna-Leena Tiovanen (2017) expresses a wholesale understanding of mobility in the ways in which Aidoo's characters employ different forms of mobility as a process of self-fashioning among African subjects. Araba Asare-Kumi's thesis (2010) discusses the novels' feminist agenda and reflects the Ghanaian writer's nature of feminism. Research reveals no scholarship on Oppong's *The Lemon Suitcase*. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the scholarship on *The Lemon Suitcase*.

This study seeks to promote gender equity among sexes with women playing pivotal roles geared towards national development. It argues that gender discrimination continues to gain traction in spite of attempts by the early Ghanaian feminist writers to use their works to cause change in society as Aidoo's *Changes: A*

Love Story professes. A comparative study of the novels of Aidoo and Oppong will reveal the progression in the roles of women over the period and explore expectations of women in order to achieve sustainable development goals in the Ghanaian society. Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) and Peggy Oppong's *The Lemon Suitcase* (2010) have been purposefully selected for this study to investigate gender issues particularly focusing on the role of the female characters and the contribution of religion and culture to women's development. In the novels, the authors explore women's status, women's identity and women's standpoint in relation to issues of love, sexuality, equality, politics, economic, etc.

The specific objectives of the study are to i) to investigate some of the challenges educated women face in the Patriarchal Ghanaian Society; ii) to develop the nexus between gender equity and empowerment among women and girls (SDG 5); and iii) to contribute to the debate on the promotion of the feminist movement.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a textual analysis of the gender roles in the novels of two Ghanaian authors (Aidoo's *Changes* and Oppong's *The Lemon Suitcase*). It employs the feminist and gender approaches as theoretical frameworks underpinning the analysis of the study. The study makes a comparative analysis between the selected novels by tracing the development of feminist and gender roles in the Ghanaian literary writings, guided by the following research questions: i. How do writers promote gender equity in their works? ii. To what extent have writers used their works to empower the women in leadership? iii. How do writers present the woman figure as a tool for development?

Redefining Ghanaian Women in life and literature

Generally, the traditional African woman has core functions to perform within the family and the society. The woman's responsibilities include being a wife, mother and home manager. The contributions of women cannot be overemphasized, for most African women have contributed significantly towards development. Among such prominent women include traditional rulers such as Egbe Iyalode of Oyo, Iyalode of Ibadan and Yaa Asantewaa of Ejisu, Ashanti Region. Other women who contributed politically towards independence in Africa include: Mekatilili wa Menza and Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru of Kenya; Fatima Meer and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela of South Africa and Mabel Dove, Ruth Botsio, Ama Nkrumah, Ramatu Baba et cetera of Ghana. On the Ghanaian literary scene, between 1957 and 1964, two female personalities helped in the promotion of the creative writing- Efua T. Sutherland and Ellen Geer Sangster, an American. While Sutherland embarked on establishing a drama studio, Sangster formed the Creative Writers' Association in colleges of education and other institutions (Agmor, 1996). Sutherland's two plays, *Foriwa* (1967) and *Edufa* (1967) explore the plight of traditional women in the typical Ghanaian setting. Subsequently, the likes of Ama Ata Aidoo whose novel is under study and Ama Darko whose works *Housemaid* (1998), *Beyond the Horizon* (1991) and *Faceless* (2003) "demonstrates the crippling and suffocation of her protagonists as a result of the norms of the patriarchal system and machismo ethos" (Agmor, 2011:30).

Within the Ghanaian context, marriage is held in high esteem for both sexes in a patriarchal society. Marriage is defined as an institution that is important in the definition of gender roles, "as crucial in any feminist or 'womanist' attempts to redefine female subjectivity" (Accilien, 2008). In *Changes*, Aidoo presents marriages between Esi and Oko on one hand, and Opokuwa and Kubi on the other. She explores the changes that working women in Ghana face in their marriages while their husbands remain unaffected. A case in point is when the heroine Esi finds it difficult to manage her home as well as progress with her career. Esi expresses her frustration in her marriage to her friend Opokuya. Esi feels disappointed with her husband because of how Oko claimed to appreciate her "my air of independence" (54). Oko's opinion about Esi before the marriage changes after they got married which complements Opokuya's view about African men. For her "men are not really interested in a woman's independence or her intelligence. The few who claim they like intelligence and active women are also interested in having such women permanently in their beds and in their kitchens" (Aidoo, 54). Oko is not different from other men who believe that in spite of their partners' education and career, the wives should still remain serviceable and submissive to their husbands. He therefore expects Esi to succumb to his desires as the head of the house.

In the same vein, Oppong's representation of love and marriage in *The Lemon Suitcase* parallels Aidoo's in the sense that both heroines are highly educated and also married to educated men who appreciate their sense of intelligence and independence. Oppong's heroine, Mabena gets married to Nick after their graduation from the same university. Mabena's sense of independence is recognised by Nick's father,

Kwaku Nsiah, on their first meeting. In the father's view Mabena is "strong, assertive and frank in a way which can excite conflict" (LS, 45), but he ends up admiring and defending her in the presence of Nick's sisters. Their love relationship blossoms because of the support and respect for each other. We read that Oppong's representation of women and love relationship in her novel, *No Roses for Sharon* (2010) differs significantly with the portrayal of Sharon as a greedy and opportunist person who jilts her childhood lover, Jabez to marry a young doctor. Oppong depicts Sharon as a strong-willed person who does not allow her emotions to influence her future ambitions. Although their marriage fails along the line, Sharon maps out strategy to win Jabez's love again despite the opposition from Nick's mother. Similarly, Oppong's *The Lady Who Refused to Bow* (2012) explores the lifestyle of the heroine, Sandra, who suffers from heartbreak and resolves to cut links with all men including turning down the marriage proposal by the president of multinational company.

In Ghanaian society, marriage is contracted between families and the couple involved need to recognise the opinions of other family members. In *Changes*, Esi's family hold Oko in high esteem to the extent that Esi's mother appreciates him for accepting to choose Esi who kept long in getting attracted to men because of her physical appearance: "a young woman who is too tall, too thin and has flat tummy and a flat behind has slim chance of bearing children" (50). The pattern repetitions of the lexical items "too tall", "too thin" and "flat tummy", "flat behind" connote a negative description of a typical African woman who is unattractive. We see that the narrator is biased towards the woman in the description which is attributed to a "popularly held belief" (50); meanwhile, Oko is perceived as a perfect man without blemish. To the extent that Esi's grandmother, Nana sees it a privilege for Oko to marry Esi. Esi perceives Oko as unreasonable and prefers Kubi to him; however, Opokuya shares a dissenting view. Esi's perception about marriage seems different from Opokuya's, although they are close friends. While Esi feels bored with her marriage with Oko and prefers to live a single life, Opokuya sees everything wrong with Esi's preference of singleness: "Esi, you can't stay alone forever. It's not healthy" (55). "Really, why throw away a perfectly good husband for the loneliness of a single woman's life?" (56). Esi's attempt to gain her freedom from her boring marriage is interpreted as "loneliness" by her friend who in actual fact should understand her plight and support her course. This is because society frowns upon the life style of a single woman and uses derogatory terms to describe such women. Esi's decision to divorce Oko is met with opposition from the family and friends. Meanwhile, Esi finally decides to divorce Oko as a result of the fact that Esi feels she has been ravished by Oko and calls it "marital rape" (15). The narrator gives a pictorial account of the incidence as follows: Oko flung the bed cloth away from him, sat up, pulled her down, and moved on her. Esi started to protest. But he went on doing what he had determined to do all morning. He squeezed her breast repeatedly, thrust his tongue into her mouth, forced her unwilling legs apart, entered her, plunging in and out of her, thrashing to the left, to the right, pounding and just pounding away. Then it was all over. Breathing like a marathon runner at the end of a particularly gruelling race, he got off her, and fell heavily back on his side of the bed" (*Changes*, 13).

Clearly, Oko capitalises on his masculinity and strength to forcefully make love to Esi in spite of her protest. Adioo uses diction that creates imagery of violence and destruction which evoke feelings and allows the reader to internalize the description of the agony Esi encounters in the course of sexual intercourse. The repetition of "plunging in and [plunging] out of her" "pounding and just pounding away" and the use of simile in the comparison of Oko's breathing to "a marathon runner" are expressive of Esi's plight. This is a clear instance of spousal rape which is still considered as rape because it is sex without the consent of one of the partners. Esi seems defenceless in this case and becomes a victim of circumstance, and her reaction is obviously an option of divorce.

We can attribute Esi's boldness and assertiveness in taking decisions on her life and marriage to her upbringing and childhood experiences. Through the eyes of the narrator, we are privy to the fact that Esi suffers during her childhood and adolescence "for having an unfeminine body" (89). Eventually, Esi overcomes her struggles and accepts her body shape to the extent of being able to walk nakedly in the presence of her partner. A case in point is the way she turns Ali on with her naked body which for Ali was a "a source of one of the pleasures of being with her" (89). Clearly, Esi capitalises on her nude figure as her power to capture Ali's love and attention.

In juxtaposing Esi-Oko's love relationship to Esi-Ali's relationship, one can describe each of them differently. Aidoo presents Esi-Oko's love and marriage as boring and uninteresting. Their love-making seems burdensome to Esi who after their divorce feels no regret and refers to the incidence between Oko and

her on “That Morning” as “a landmark in their relationship” (83). However, Esi-Ali love relationship begins on a good note. Esi meets Ali for the first time and their encounter gives Ali hope of a future together. She excites him “a great deal” (87) and showers her with gifts. On their next meeting, Ali receives the message of Esi’s divorce, thanks Allah silently and “set about to wooing her” (88). Ali finds Esi attractive and compares her with his wife, Fusena who unlike Esi never walks “naked in the flat” (90). Ali seems to take delight in seeing Esi exposing her nudity in his presence, a situation he finds hard to get in his own house. Esi gives Ali privacy as well as food, “[another] source of pleasure” (91). The narrator presents their mutual love-making scene in the extract below:

He started to kiss her rather hungrily, and proceeded to undress her at the same time... Then starting from the top of her head, he began to feel her all over, with his eyes tightly shut, and 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... On her part Esi felt somewhat cramped because the couch was rather narrow. (101-2)

Clearly the cinematic description of love-making between Ali and Esi reveals Aidoo’s way of expressing gender roles in love relationships. Aidoo dramatizes the scene by using codified pedantic language as she presents Ali’s thirst for Esi with exotic and sensitive images: “kiss her rather hungrily”; “genuinely groping like a blind person” “specially erotic”. Esi equally responds romantically to Ali’s advances creating a balance for both sexes to enjoy each other. Eventually, Esi accepts Ali’s marriage proposal against all odds. Ali rejects the fact that by marrying another woman, “second wife”, he commits a crime, “bigamy” he interrogates as: “Why have we got so used to describing our cultural dynamics with condemnatory tone of masters’ voices?” (108). In a patriarchal system, the male figure prefers the cultural practices and values because generally, tradition seems to favour and project the male counterpart to the detriment of the female counterpart.

Gender and religion emerge as topical issue for both authors. Generally, women’s religiosity level in the view of earlier scholars which dates back to 1930s seem to be greater than their male counterpart (Gallup and George, 2002). However, David Voas, Siobhan McAndrew and Ingrid Storm’s study argue that in Europe the gender gap reduces with the influx of modernisation especially with women empowered by economic security: “it is also possible that with economic growth, women’s values converge with those of men in terms of secularity and rationality” (2013: 47). We see that Aidoo portrays Esi’s economic independence as an influence on her belief in God. For her, God can be worshiped anywhere not necessarily at church as she tells Nana who thinks that it is hypocritical on Esi’s part not to attend church service on Sundays. Esi plays gospel music in her car on Sunday mornings but refuses to go to church (97).

On the contrary, in *The Lemon Suitcase*, Opong presents Mabena as a staunch Christian who holds leadership positions at church. Unlike Esi, Mabena’s economic security fails to influence her devotion to Christianity. Her commitment and belief in God rather empower her to shape and excel in her career path. Her leadership prowess begins at church where she leads Bible studies for both children and adults. Her role as a leader at church helps to empower the women to be independent in their trade. To some extent, Mabena becomes the envy of her fellow church leaders with even pastors opposing her commitment to church activities. For instance, some elders and deacons in her church jubilate after her encounter with the robbers as a Sunday School Superintendent sarcastically declares:

Oh so God could not deliver her this time around? Isn’t she the one always testifying about God’s goodness, God’s protection, God’s vindication and so on? Where was the God when the robbers struck? If she had lived a righteous, upright life, none of those things would have happened to her (29). Mabena faces opposition from both Christian men and women in her church. From the extract above, the Superintendent interrogates and ridicules Mabena’s hypocritical belief in God’s power in the use of pattern repetition: “God’s goodness, God’s protection, God’s vindication” which highlight God’s provision for Christians. We see that even in the church where God’s centeredness should be proclaimed for congregants to understand that God is no respecter of persons, gender discrimination takes centre stage. Mabena faces criticisms from the very people who call themselves Christians. Her commitment to church activities is interpreted as evil in the sight of her adversaries. Most female figures turn out to be the haters of men including church members.

The Woman Figure as a tool for Development in Ghanaian Literary Writing

Women’s empowerment serves as a key developmental tool for the growth of every society. In both novels, there is the representation of heroines who seem to be empowered through education and gainful employment. Several studies spell out the positive and negative attitudes of the female figure. According to

Bonnici (2019), women appear to be the cause of their lack of representation because they are not persuasive enough, do not want power, lack self-confidence, are unwilling to play the game or work the system, do not seek employment, and even when employed, do not apply for line positions. In the study entitled, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, Sandberg asserts that women striving to be leaders have discovered that managing family duties and work is one of the most difficult challenges they face (Sandberg, 2013). Sandberg's study confirms the roles of the heroines in both *Changes* and *The Lemon Suitcase*. Aidoo presents equity of education and employment in the representation of the male and female characters. In a way, Aidoo apotheosizes Esi's job as higher and more lucrative than the husband's job. Esi works as a data analyst with the government's statistical bureau, it is urban department and has been assigned a bungalow where the family resides. As part of her job, she attends international conferences, Geneva, Addis, Dakar one half of the year; Rome, Lusaka, Lagos the other half (*Changes*, 12). Oko is a teacher in a co-educational school and soon be promoted as a headteacher. We see that Oko seems to have an inferiority complex about his way of life, his job and his looks, and the fact that his wife's job empowers her to support the household, a role supposed to be performed by the man, traditionally. The wind of inferiority complex blows over Oko so much that it affects his role as a man in the house. Oko seems to lose his personal ego and a sense of identity as a husband to Esi. He is deprived of the basic necessities in marriage as compared to Ali. Oko fails to manage his wife, Esi, but Ali succeeds in winning Esi's love with very little effort which also fails at the end. We see that Esi is unable to cope with her two husbands which has two presuppositions: in the case of Oko, the fact that a woman provides accommodation does not deprive a man's role in marriage; for Ali, a woman cannot dictate the pace of a love marriage relationship.

In juxtaposing Esi-Oko's relationship to Opokuya-Kubi's love relationship, we see that Opokuya and Kubi engage in an egalitarian love relationship where both husband and wife give each other equal rights and access to their properties, for she shares their car with him. Like Esi, Aidoo presents Opokuya as an enterprising lady who supports the family with her resources. Opokuya is a nurse who works tirelessly and selflessly to support the husband and children. Opokuya exhibits her maturity, honesty and integrity in the way she handles Esi's marital issues. She disagrees with Esi's decision to divorce Oko. Though she does not support Esi-Ali love relationship, she seems impressed with Ali's extravagant gifts to Esi.

On the contrary, Aidoo also depicts women who choose to allow themselves to be manipulated by others. A case in point is the woman Oko's mother arranges for him. Oko expresses his amazement as "a young woman in this world who would agree to be carried off as a wife to a man she had never met" (86). Oko juxtaposes his arranged woman to Esi as "fruit juice" and "liquor" respectively. While Esi belongs to the school of thought of women who fight for their freedom from uninterestingly boring marriages, Oko's new woman ignorantly allows herself to be pushed to a man whose heart and mind rests with another woman, Esi. Although Oko finds it incredible and uncommon to accept arranged marriages, Ghanaian tradition approves such marriages. Oko's mother exhibits leadership skills in her attempt to arrange a woman for her son. Similarly, Esi's mother seems indifferent about women who choose to be second wives; however, she disapproves of Esi's decision to marry Ali, for she prefers Esi to be addressed as "Mrs". Clearly, Esi's mother expects her daughter to lead even in her marriage, but, Esi chooses to be Ali's second wife which begins another twist to Esi's life.

In *The Lemon Suitcase*, Oppong presents the heroine, Mabena as a figure who competes with men and overtakes them. We read about Mabena whose colleagues at work despise her and wish for her downfall because of her hardworking attitude. This begins after her university education when she gets the opportunity to work as a national service person at Ryce & Ryce. While her superiors shower praises on her because of her hardworking attitude, her peers criticise her. She is elected as the chairperson of the student representative council at university (34). She excels at the workplace and is nominated to receive the Clean Personality Award (116). Mabena exhibits leadership qualities to the amazement of her friends, family and subordinates at the workplace. As a leader, she sets herself apart from corruption; she institutes checks and measures to avert corruption among her subordinates. Clearly, Oppong ridicules corruption among heads of institutions and uses the female figure as a measure to check the corrupt practices in a male dominated society. The male counterparts at Mabena's workplace, Candin Corporation are depicted as corrupt and bribable. After Mabena's release from incarceration, investigations about the company reveal the corrupt acts of the managing director of Candin Corporation, Adams. The narrator reveals conflict of interest with regards to Adams' job:

Adams owned a light aircraft which he used for pleasure and business trips across the country. Meanwhile, as the details of the corrupt practices unfolded, it came out that about half workforce at Candin Corporation were friends or relatives employed by Adams. These connived with him to loot the company's coffers. He protected workers who stole company property, drivers who siphoned fuel from company vehicles to sell, stole vehicle tyres ... and clerks who extorted money from clients and were reported (204).

The extract above presents an imagery of a bizarre society where corruption has crept into the fabric of the workers so much that individuals sell their conscience just to enrich themselves. It describes a typical work situation of the attitude of public workers in Ghana. There is pattern repetition employed in the following: "workers who stole company property" "drivers who siphoned fuel from company vehicles" and "clerks who extorted money from clients". These structures are syntactically parallel, for they belong to the same grammatical category; they are all subordinate or dependent clauses, the Wh clause or the adjectival clause used in modifying "workers", "drivers" and "clerks". Semantically the pattern repetition foregrounds the attitude of the workers in Ghanaian companies. Mabena becomes an enemy to Adams because she frowns upon corruption and refuses to fall for Adams' schemes. She is appointed as the Managing Director following the arrest and detention of Adams and his cohorts.

The heroine positions herself as a leader who influences other female characters in the novel. Among these characters include her sisters-in-law, Stephanie and Paula, who accept to work as apprentice for Mabena's dressmaking shop. Paula confesses "I want Mabena to take me on as an apprentice in dressmaking" (237). We see that Oppong portrays Mabana as a versatile person who is multi-tasking including her motherly attitude. The narrator expresses Mabena's children's excitement on seeing their mother delivering a speech on television to hundreds of young women at a conference for young women entrepreneurs: "suddenly, Nana Kofi stood and pointed at the screen in excitement. 'Mommy! Mommy!' he screamed. 'That's you!'... 'Mommy has made all of us proud'" (133). Oppong creates another leader in *End of Tunnel* (2002) with the depiction of her heroine, Sekyiwaa, as a beautiful and exceptionally brilliant person who is able to survive in spite of the parent's divorce.

Oppong uses his novel to prophesy into the future of women leadership in Ghana. Mabena receives nomination to be the running mate to the leader of the biggest opposition party and emerges as the presidential candidate after the death of the candidate. Oppong believes that the nation needs transformation and the woman should be given the opportunity to transform the nation. She presents the heroine with so much potential: "she is not corrupt; she is not greedy and she is fair. She will definitely be a mother to all Ghanaians, not as rhetoric but in truth" (252).

Conclusion

The study discussed genderism in today's society as demonstrated in Aidoo's *Changes* and Oppong's *The Lemon Suitcase*. Considering the representations of the heroines under study, we see that the study revealed some of the challenges educated women face in the male-dominated society. Both authors have presented gender equity in their novels by creating characters with equal educational status and job opportunities. Having explored the roles of both sexes, the study sought to empower women as leaders in their contributions to their spouses, their families and the society, thus bringing to light some qualities of women and the role they perform in transforming lives around them. From the foregoing, the female figures explored across the texts under consideration, appear as assertive, daring and empowered to cause changes in the Ghanaian society and promote the feminist movement.

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