

Male Experiences of Spousal Abuse in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*

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Abstract.

This paper explores the portrayal of male spousal abuse in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*. This endeavor arises from the inadequacy in society and the academic community not actively recognising spousal abuse as a male issue as much as it is a female issue. Likewise, within literary discourse, more focus is paid towards the portrayal and critique of female victims with lesser attention paid to male victims. These shortfalls have created stereotypes that impact upon the way issues concerning spousal abuse are handled in that there is tendency to discriminate against male victims. These stereotypes and discrimination cause male victims to suffer in silence. In the light of this, this paper examines the portrayal of spousal abuse from a male character's (Oko Sekyi) viewpoint in the selected text. Specifically, the paper identifies forms of spousal abuse portrayed in the text and using psychoanalysis as theoretical guide, the paper investigates the effects of the identified forms of abuse on the selected character, as well as his reactions to these effects. The paper reveals the conflict that arises between Oko's experiences of spousal abuse and trying to conform to societal imposed roles for a man. Also, among others, the study identifies emotional abuse and verbal abuse as forms of abuse perpetrated by Esi Sekyi to exert control and power over her first husband (Oko). Issues such as low self-worth, frustration and bitterness arise as effects of Oko's spousal abuse experiences, while aggression and violence are revealed as the victim's reaction to experiences of spousal abuse. The paper concludes that females are capable of being perpetrators of abuse against their husbands as portrayed in the text. It also submits that revealed feelings and thoughts of the male victim in the text show that just as in female victims, spousal abuse has negative implications on male victims. As such, prevailing attitudes and endeavours that attempt to deify female experiences over male experiences may be somewhat prejudiced. Spousal abuse should therefore be regarded as a human issue and more focus should be given to the portrayal and critique of male experiences in literature and scholarship in general.

Keywords: Male experiences, Psychoanalysis, Spousal abuse.

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Introduction

Spousal abuse is “a pattern of abusive behaviours by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating... or cohabitation...used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner”. (Chhkara et al: 71). Spousal abuse affect both male and female victims, but the main focus, by academics and society, is female spousal abuse studying the impact on the victims’ lives and the help available to support and retrieve them from the violent environment. There is little discussion surrounding male victims of spousal abuse. Within the literary discourse, portrayal of spousal abuse mostly examines female perspectives and where male perspectives are portrayed, critique in such direction is scant.

This paper therefore focuses on the portrayal of male experiences of spousal abuse in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes*. The main aim of the paper is to gain an understanding into how women can be capable of being perpetrators of spousal abuse and the thoughts and feelings of abused husbands as portrayed in the text. To provide insight into this aim other relevant studies have been consulted to understand the main arguments surrounding the issue of male spousal abuse. The studies suggest that there is a lack of adequate discussion on the topic generally, most importantly, within the literary context. The methodology considers the appropriateness of the selected text as well as the theory selected for evaluating the text. It further subjects the text to in-depth textual analysis as well as psychoanalytic evaluation of the identified male victim in order to understand his thoughts and feelings towards experiences of spousal abuse.

The main argument that arises in the body of the paper is that spousal abuse towards men is scantily depicted and critiqued in literature, which ought not to be. The topic should be given as much recognition as female perspectives and should be treated as a human issue not one of society or gender.

Conceptual Review

Spousal abuse may be defined as a violent or dominating act by either of the two partners in a romantic relationship. It often occurs in relationships that are romantic in nature and where one partner, either male or female tend to exert power over the other. In doing this, the relationship may deteriorate and may become violent and toxic for the partner being victimized. In more succinct terms, Chhkara et al 2013:71 defines spousal as “a pattern of abusive behaviours by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating... or cohabitation. They further assert that these partners of abusive behaviours is “used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner (P.71). LaMance further supports this by defining spousal abuse as;

Any abusive conduct between intimate partners who are married, dating or residing in the same residence... spousal abuse refers specifically to violence between two adults who interact in an intimate way. (P. 1).

These definitions of spousal abuse indicate that either of the sexes in an intimate relationship may fall victim. However, a continuing topic of controversy has been whether men can be victims of abuse by their female partners. Throughout history, society has repressed male victims creating a prejudiced disposition towards spousal

abuse. Government of different nations have further elevated this attitude with female victim focused policies and intervention schemes and disregard for male victims. The effect of this trend on male victims is that they remain invisible as they are reluctant to get help because of the humiliation and ridicule they may experience. Dobash and Dobash (1979) contends that from medieval times, within patriarchal western culture, a husband was expected to dominate his wife, making her, if the occasion arose, the focus of marital control and not the other way round. Also, Malcolm George 2001:1 opines that

This “Great Taboo (George, 2004) is the Coalescence of two forbidden beliefs in society: first, that a man can be beaten by a woman, which is an anathema particularly to men; second, the uncomfortable reality that women can be aggressive and violent, which contravenes stereotypical notions of femininity and is an attribution that neither men nor women wish to acknowledge. (P. 1).

More so in Africa, this “Great Taboo”, is even more incomprehensible as the underlying cultural belief in Africa hyper-masculine society considers men who suffer spousal abuse as weak. Pala 2016 says that the African society considers men who admit to being abused “as not man enough” (P:3) and further claims that admitting to spousal abuse as a man is a taboo and as harmful to one’s social worth as, say an erectile dysfunction (P:3). The inadequacy in these revelations is that spousal abuse is not regarded as a human issue but as a gender one. However, this ought not to be as a number of studies have revealed negative implications on both male and female victims of spousal abuse (Migliacco, 2002; Dobash and Dobash, 2004; Hines et al, 2007; Lambert, 2008).

In literary portrayal and criticism, it also appears that ample focus is given to the portrayal of female victims of spousal abuse over male victims. Texts such as Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter* (1981), Buchi Emecheta’s *Kehinde* (1994), Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *A Thing Around your Neck* (2009), among others support this claim. In cases where there is an attempt to portray male perspectives, there tends to be attempt to ignore critique in that direction. For instance, in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes* (1993) (the text selected for investigation) the author’s portrayal of a male character’s (Oko Sekyi) experiences of spousal abuse is glaring, nonetheless, majority of the analysis and critique done on the text examines the text as mostly feminist, trying to bring to bear the Urban woman and her struggles with juggling career and the demands of a highly patriarchal African system (Curvy 2011), Abdou (2013), Ogunrotimi (2015).

Furthermore, in a Guardian online report titled “Taking Male Spousal Abuse Seriously”, the author of a quite recent novel titled *A Suitable Lie* (2016) explained the challenges he encountered in getting his novel published. He attributed the difficulties he faced to the fact that his novel portrayed a “forbidden topic” of male spousal abuse. He also blamed it on the refusal of different publishers “to believe in the existence of male spousal abuse, despite the presence of links to research from the office of National statistics”.

It is therefore in the light of establishing the reality of the existence of a group of abused husbands as above and the prejudiced portrayal and critique of this reality in scholarship,

specifically literature that this paper examines the portrayal of male experiences of spousal abuse in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*. The study specifically set out to achieve the following objectives: identify forms of male spousal abuse as portrayed in the text, examine the effects of male spousal abuse on the selected male character as portrayed in the text and investigate the reactions of the selected male character to spousal abuse as portrayed in the text.

Methodology

The study focuses on the literary analysis of the portrayal of male spousal abuse in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* which serves as primary data for the study. To obtain this understanding, the selected text is subjected to close reading, in-depth and critical analysis. Forms of spousal abuse in the text are identified and discussed, while aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis such as the tripartite approach are used to examine the effects of spousal abuse on the selected male character as portrayed in the text as well as the victim's reactions. The text is purposively selected because of its African background as majority of studies that have been carried out on spousal abuse originate from mostly American and European contexts. Also, the fact that the text is written by a female poses the idea that the portrayal of male spousal abuse in it is not likely to be sentimental and bias. Appropriate excerpts from the text that reveal the abusive actions of the wife as well as the unfavourable experiences of the abused husband are cited in the analysis as needed.

In addition, the choice for psychoanalysis is also deliberate as it is deemed a suitable approach to examine thoughts, feelings, actions, experiences among others. In this case, the victim's thoughts, feelings and actions are appraised to draw out spousal abuse experiences in the text. Other secondary materials such as books, journals, online resources among others are also consulted in the study

Spousal Abuse and its Forms

As explained earlier, a number of scholars have agreed that any deliberate attempt to control or dominate a partner by the other partner in an intimate relationship is spousal abuse (Chhkara et al, 2013; LaMance 2007; Younger, 2011). Nonetheless, it is very poignant at this point to mention and describe various forms through which spousal abuse may manifest. Studies such as that of the aforementioned scholars identify the following as the major forms of spousal abuse.

(i) **Emotional abuse:** emotional abuse includes conflicting actions or statements which are designed to manipulate the feelings of the victims and are also targeted to confuse and create insecurity in the victim. Chhkara et al (2013) posits that emotional abuse is also called "Psychological abuse" and "mental abuse" and contains behaviours by the abuser that "lead the victims to question themselves, causing them to believe that they are making up the abuse or that the abuse is their fault". (72).

(ii) **Economic/financial abuse:** Younger (2011) explains that abuse from an economic perspective is defined "as not letting the victim be financially independent". (15). In this case, the abuser exercises power to control the finances of their partners.

Younger (2011) further explains that the abuse affects all types of income level and contains behavioural patterns such as “harassing the victim at the workplace, stealing from the victim, and punishing the victim by means of physical or sexual abuse because money was not accounted for”. (15-16).

(iii) **Physical abuse:** physical abuse involves violent assaults that are directed towards body areas that may or may not be visible to others. Physical abuse according to George (2007) “often escalates into more frequent and serious attacks such as pushing, slapping, pinching, punching, kicking, biting, sexual assault, tripping and throwing. Finally, it may become life threatening with serious behaviours such as choking, breaking bones, or the use of weapons” (8).

(iv) **Verbal abuse:** this involves manipulative and controlling behaviours such as blaming, accusing, being aloof, hostility, talking down or confusing an individual in conversations in order to hurt or attack such an individual’s nature and abilities. Over time, the individual begins to feel a sense of low self-worth and may feel that he or she has a problem. Verbal abuse like the other forms may escalate, and may degenerate into more violent forms such as physical or sexual abuse.

(v) **Sexual abuse:** victims of sexual abuse are coerced or manipulated into having sexual relations with the abusive partner by violent or non-violent means. The reality remains that sexual relations becomes abusive when a partner is made to engage in it against his or her own will, most times in order to pacify or satisfy the abusive partner. Martin and Younger-Lewis (1997) maintain that sexual abuse may include acts such as “unwanted sexual contact, uttering threats to obtain sex, knowingly transmitting sexual diseases, being rough, unwanted fondling in the public...” (1558).

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis was developed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) in his work (*The Interpretation of Dreams, 1901*) where he examines the functioning of the human mind and this theory is significant both practically and significantly as it continues to influence contemporary thought. Freud’s innovation was his recognition of conscious psychiatric processes that follow laws which are different from those that rule conscious experiences. The concept of the unconscious was central to Freud. He believed that the majority of what we experience day to day takes place in the unconscious. According to Jacobson 2013, Freud ...used the concept of repression to demonstrate that although an individual may not remember something traumatic happening to them, this memory is locked away in the unconscious and can reappear in consciousness under certain circumstances.

Freud developed various approaches to the study of the human mind. In this paper, relevant aspects of the personality theory such as the tripartite approach and denial under defense mechanisms are used in the appraisal of the selected male character’s experiences of spousal abuse as portrayed in *Changes*.

a. Freud’s Tripartite Theory

Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of personality is composed of three elements which are referred to as the id, ego and super ego, Dobie (2009: 51). These tripartite psyches are

unconscious most of the time, and the three aspects of personality work together to bring about a complex behavior in human beings.

i. The *Id*.

The *id* is the aspect or element of personality that a person is born with. The *id* is that part of the human personality that is completely unconscious and includes all the instinctive and primitive behaviours. According to Freud, the *id* is the source of all psychic energy. This means that it is the primary component personality. The *id* is driven by the pleasure principle, which strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants and needs. In a case where the needs and wants are not met immediately, the result is that there will be a state of tension. The *id* operates without any regard for the consequences of its action; it lacks moral, ethics, logic and precaution.

If one is solely ruled by the pleasure principle, such a person will be destructive and will display socially unacceptable behavior.

ii. The *Ego*

The *ego* is the aspect of personality that deals with reality principle. According to Freud, the *ego* develops from *id* and ensures that the impulses of the *id* can be expressed in a manner acceptable in the society. The *ego* operates based on the reality principle which strives to satisfy the *id*'s needs in socially acceptable ways. The reality principle takes into consideration the consequences and benefits of its action before deciding on taking the action or abandoning the instincts. The *ego* mediates between the demands of the *id*, the super *ego* and reality. The *id*'s instincts in most cases can be satisfied through a process of delayed gratification. The *ego* will ultimately allow the behavior but only in the appropriate time and place. The work of the *ego* is also to discharge tension which is created by the unmet instincts/impulses through secondary process, in which the *ego* tries to find an object in the real world that matches the mental image created by the *id*'s primary process.

iii. The *Super ego*

The final aspect of personality to develop is the *super ego* which is the aspect of personality that holds all the internalized moral standards and ideals that one acquires from both birth and the society. The *super ego* provides additional balance to the *id*. It is known as one's conscience. It states the rules for making judgments. The *super ego* has two aspects, which are the *ego* ideal/ideal self and the conscience. The *ego* ideal comprises the rules and standards for good behaviours, an imaginary picture of how one ought to behave based on parental societal ideals. When these rules are obeyed, there is the feeling of pride, value and accomplishment. Behaviours which fall short of the *ego* ideal may be punished by the *super ego* through guilt. The *super ego* also rewards through the ideal self when one behaves in an acceptable manner.

The *super ego* tries to perfect one's behaviour by making it acceptable. It works to suppress all unacceptable urges of the *id* and struggle to make the *ego* act upon idealistic standards instead of working on realistic principles. To have a healthy personality, there must be a balance between the *id*, *ego* and the *super ego*, however, conflicts are bound to arise as a result of the conflicting forces of *id*, *ego* and *super ego*. In the following

appraisal of spousal abuse in *Changes*, Oko Sekyi's reaction to spousal abuse is subjected to analysis using the tripartite psyche in order to reveal the conflict that arises in his status as an African man and his experiences of spousal abuse in his marriage to Esi.

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*

Changes: A Love Story, published in 1993, portrays a period in the life of a career-centred African woman (Esi) as she divorces her first husband (Oko Sekyi) and marries a second (Ali Kondey) who is a polygamist. Esi, the protagonist of the story is initially married to Oko; a man she already has a girl-child for. Unfortunately, their marriage experiences turmoil. Despite the fact that Oko is a rare and pleasant kind of man in the opinions of Opokuya, Nana and Esi's mother who has good intentions towards his wife, he is nettled by some of Esi's egoistic actions and use of sexual denial. Voices of friends, family and tradition constantly remind Oko that he is being treated lesser than a man by his wife, but the commitment to make his marriage work at all cost makes him to initially turn deaf ears to all the opinions. He finds himself webbed in a struggle to live up to social expectations of a man and making his marriage work at all cost. According to the omniscient narrator, Oko thinks:

It's not safe to show a woman you love her...showing a woman you love her is like asking her to walk over you. How much of your love for how heavy her kicks? (*Changes*: 8).

Out of frustration, bitterness and a need to re-assert his manliness, he eventually complies with the voices of friends and tradition and resort to raping Esi, although he immediately goes back into feeling guilt and responsibility for the decline in their marriage. This is rather too late as Esi capitalizes on this to quicken the dissolution of their marriage, even though what really hastens her is her encounter with Ali Kondey.

On the other hand, Esi sees Ali Kondey as everything Oko is not. She is especially fascinated by the freedom he seems to be giving her to affirm her independence. Esi divorces her husband Oko and marries Ali, ignoring the fact that he his is already married to Fusena. Esi sees herself as

Settled in her new life... her basic hopes for marrying a man like Ali had been fulfilled. Ali was not on her back every one of every twenty-four hours of everyday. In fact, he was hardly ever near her at all. In that sense she was extremely free and extremely contented. She could concentrate on her job (*Changes*: 163).

However, this feeling is short lived as Esi begins to desire some level of companionship and emotional dependence from Ali, virtues she freely got from Oko but took for granted and abused. Esi becomes sensitive to Ali's attitudes of lateness, lack of concern and constant unavailability due to a need to be around his first wife; Fusena and his children. In the words of the narrator "it took her only a while before she began to wonder about the kind of marriage she was involved in (*Changes*: 165). The painful truth that marriage in order to be successful requires a level of compromise and sacrifice from both partners

comes staring in Esi's face. At the end of the novel, Esi is more alienated than she is at the beginning because her rather too rigid and idealistic expectations of a man and marriage frustrate her two marriage experiences.

Forms of Male Spousal Abuse in *Changes*

In Esi and Oko's relationship as portrayed in *Changes*, one is presented with two imperfect partners, but with one (Oko) willing to commit all that is necessary to restore the marriage. On the other hand, Esi seems comfortable with the continuous dwindling of intimacy between Oko and herself. She hides under her commitment for her career and her admiration for Ali Kondey to manipulate Oko's feelings, thereby making Oko feel less than a man. Emotional and verbal spousal abuse are identified in the text. Under each form, action(s) perpetrated by Esi to inflict these forms on Oko are also examined.

i. Emotional abuse

As earlier noted, emotional abuse involves behavior and actions which are targeted at manipulating and confusing the victim's feelings thereby creating a sense of insecurity and low self-worth in the victim. As portrayed in the text, Esi exerts behaviours such as sexually depriving Oko, having extra marital affair and being too career centred to keep Oko emotionally abused. From various instances in the text, one sees that Esi's obsession about her career is one that Oko has to contend with in their marriage. For Esi, driving herself more and more into her work is a better ambition than meeting her marital demands and family needs. This attitude is affirmed in the beginning of the story when the narrator reveals that:

Esi definitely put her career well above any duties she owed as a wife. She was a great cook, who complained endlessly anytime she had to enter the kitchen. Their home was generally run by an elderly house help, whom they both called 'Madam' behind her back. (*Changes*: 8).

The name 'Madam' as indicated in the excerpt above is suggestive of the fact that the house help could as well be regarded as the woman of the house as she basically performed most of the duties. To further confirm Esi's career centeredness at the expense of her home, she confides in her friend Opokuya that "monogamy is so stifling" (117).

Also, Esi readily accepts Ali Kondey's proposal because she feels that since Ali now has two wives, expecting too much from her in the home front will likely not surface. Of course for a woman who is obsessed with her work, this thought seems soothing as Esi becomes:

Settled in her new life...her basic hopes for marrying a man like Ali had been fulfilled. Ali was not on her back every one of every twenty-four hours of every day. In fact, he was hardly ever near her at all. In that sense she was extremely free and extremely contented. She could concentrate on her job...Now she had almost lost the harassed feeling that attacked her every late afternoon of every working day: that she had to hurry

home, or to the market or the shops to buy something in connections with her role as a mother, a wife and a home-maker. (Changes: 166)

On the other hand, to imagine that Esi considers meeting the demands of being a mother and wife as a burden and hindrance to her career does not add up for Oko. The narrator says that for Oko:

Gradually his enthusiasm began to die down. This was the point from which he had begun to feel genuinely baffled. To think that your woman is being cold to you because of another man is almost ennobling... But to have to fight with your woman's career for her attention is not only new in the history of the world, but completely humiliating... (Changes: 69).

Having extra marital affairs with Ali Kondey and sexually depriving Oko are other behaviours that Esi use to exert control and power over her husband. In marriage, it is deemed that a healthy sexual relationship between married partners is a vital weapon for building intimacy and promoting effective communication. Esi is aware of this, but constantly denies Oko this benefit. One is aware of Esi's understanding of this position in an attitudes when she is with Ali Kondey as the narrator reveals that:

... Esi and Ali reserved their love-making for the comfort of Esi's bed... they would immediately fall into each other's arms and hold her welcoming kiss from the front door through her bedroom onto her bed. Then for the next hour or so it was just grunts and groans until, quite exhausted, they fell quiet (Changes: 74).

This assertion suggests that Esi is sexually active against impressions she gives in her marriage to Oko. She is so at ease with her sexuality that Ali notices it and perceives this ease as one of the qualities that fascinate him to Esi. In fact, Ali constantly compares this easiness with that of his wife; Fusena and this intensifies his resolve to marry Esi. This easiness is contrasting to the air she creates when around Oko. For Oko, all he gets is "occasional lusting over her body when she dresses up for work in the mornings" (6). One might presume that Oko had a part to play in Esi's cold attitude, but each time Esi is questioned by her friend Opokuya, her grandmother and mother, she confirms Oko as a man of little or no faults, suggesting that her sexual denial of Oko is borne out of no tangible reason.

ii. Verbal abuse:

Verbal abuse is said to involve manipulative and controlling behaviours such as blaming, accusing, being aloof, hostility, talking down or confusing an individual in conversations in order to hurt or attack such an individual's nature and abilities. In the story, verbal abuse is detected in some of the interactions between Oko and Esi. Aloofness and hostile responses are identified as acts through which Esi inflict verbal abuse on Oko. For instance, a conversation between Oko and Esi one morning as Esi prepares to go to work reflects these:

"My friends are laughing at me, he said"

silence.

"They think I'm not behaving like a man". (Changes: 8).

Here, one perceives that in Oko's interaction with friends, he is ridiculed for not proving his manliness with Esi and being so vulnerable to her abusive acts. What develops out of this interaction is feeling lesser than a man compared to his friends. Esi's reaction to such a sensitive claim from her husband further reveals her aloofness towards such sensitive matters. With such an assertion coming from her husband, one will expect a gentle approach from Esi rather, the narrator states that "Esi was trying to pretend she had not heard the declaration" (8). Oko asks if she is not going to respond to his declarations and in response, the narrator reveals that when Esi spoke again;

...the irritation was out, strong and breathing; "Oko, you know that we have been over this so many times. We all make friends. They either respect us for what we are, or they don't. And whether we keep them or not depends on each of us. I cannot take care of what your friends say to you, think of you or do to you". (*Changes*: 8)

Esi's approach to handling the matter shows that of hostility and the excerpt reveals that the issue is not new as Esi herself confesses that it has come up over and over in their discussions. This presumes that Oko is still not satisfied with the type of response he receives on the matter. However, Esi's hostile and aloof response bring to light an attempt to keep the issue lying under the carpet and by so doing causing more hurt to Oko's feelings.

Effects of Spousal abuse in *Changes*

As portrayed in the text, low self-worth, frustration and bitterness are the three major effects of spousal abuse on Oko. These effects are intertwined in the story as a sense of low self-worth is reflected in the narrator's reflection Oko's feelings of hurt and frustration.

Esi's behaviours towards Oko overtime makes him nurture the thought of being cheated and betrayed in their marriage. According to the narrator, often times, Oko thinks of how much he has invested in the marriage against how much Esi has. On these occasions, his thoughts reveal that he has suffered unreciprocated love and commitment. In an instance, the narrator reveals this stance:

Two solid years of courtship, six years of marriage. And what had he got out of it? Little, nothing. No affection. Not even plain warmth, nothing except one little daughter. (*Changes*: 8).

This statement suggests that the narrator is of the opinion that Oko feels cheated as he presumes that he has committed more than Esi has. In another instance, the narrator reveals Oko's thoughts, he says:

If you are being honest with yourself, you would admit that you have always given this relationship a chance, he told himself. Thinking of how much he had invested in the marriage with Esi and how much he had fought to keep it going made him feel a little angry and a little embarrassed. With all that going on his head, his Penis which had than become really big and hard, almost collapsed. (*Changes*: 7).

Psychoanalysis and literature share a concern with the human subject, in that they both deal with the complexities and contradictions of human actions and emotional life. (Schwartz, 1999: 18) Psychoanalysis proposes that human relationships are an integral part of human growth and development, that failure to satisfy these relational needs have lasting negative effects on human lives. This nexus between psychoanalysis and literature is established in the excerpts above as the narrator reveals Esi's inability to meet Oko's needs and reciprocate his love and commitment. This inability has negative implications on Oko's self-worth as a husband and as a man which are constantly reflected in his thoughts and statements.

Also, Chhkara et al (2013: 72) also contends that partners who inflict emotional abuse exert certain behaviors that make the victims blame themselves for the abuse. This position is portrayed in Oko's mental dealings as he constantly takes the blame for the degeneration in their marriage, despite attitudes from Esi that has been discussed earlier. In an instance after Oko rapes Esi out of the need to exert his sexual rights after various instances of being denied sex, the narrator explains that "In the meantime, Oko was collecting his thoughts together. He was already feeling like telling Esi he was sorry" (10)...Oko blames himself for overstaying in bed. He could not stop thinking that perhaps if he had got himself up at his usual early hour he would later have found a better way to show his determination to give their relationship another chance. (*Changes*: 69). The fact that Oko feels immediate remorse after this event suggests that his action is driven more by frustration rather than being deliberate.

Aside the above, Oko uses denial, an aspect of Freud's defense mechanism to keep himself in guilt. At several instances, he denies the fact that Esi is actually the problem and exerts pressure on himself to keep looking for ways to make the marriage work. Anna Freud proposed that denial involves denying certain experiences as reality, when such experiences are too much to comprehend. The narrator once confessed:

These days communication between them had ground to a halt, each of them virtually afraid of saying anything that might prove to be potentially explosive...but Oko had, on his own, decided that the months of frustration and misunderstanding were behind him...in any case, he had decided to give the relationship another chance. (*Changes*: 7).

The narrator immediately reveals that Oko does this often times: "if you are being honest with yourself, you would admit that you have always given this relationship a chance" (7). In fact, efforts by family and friends to make him accept reality and be freed from Esi's non-chalant attitudes by marrying another wife always failed because "the idea hadn't appealed to him at all" (8).

The concept of denial under the defense mechanisms further proposes that this approach tends to be dangerous as the failure to accept reality does not get away for too long, bringing back harmful results later on. The position is true and aptly reflected in Oko. Overtime the frustration and bitterness he once refuses to accept comes back when "...his enthusiasm began to die down...By the time Oko finally left Esi's place to take up his new post, he was tired and bitter and it all showed" (69). Unfortunately, this time

the bitterness he feels culminates into aggressive and violent behaviours that are discussed in the next segment.

Reactions to Spousal Abuse in *Changes*: A Freudian Tripartite Approach

According to Freud's personality theory, to maintain a healthy personality, there must be a balance between the *id*, *ego* and the *super ego*, however, inevitable conflicts that arise among these three may make it difficult for an individual to maintain a healthy personality. This position comes to bear as Oko constantly finds himself in the dilemma of maintaining his position as a good husband to Esi and the pressure to give in into the advices of friends and families to exert his rights as a man in the home and take a better wife. The story reveals the formation of an unhealthy personality based on Oko's spousal abuse experiences. His personality type in the cause of his experiences alternates between the *super ego* and the *id* with no form of mediation at all from the *ego*.

Initially, the story begins by presenting Oko as one that is basically driven by the *superego* personality; the final aspect of personality that holds all the internalized moral standards and ideals. All attempts to make him conform to tradition fails, he continues to invest in his marriage even though on several occasions he ruminates on reasons why he should not. Oko holds the belief that if he keeps at being the perfect husband, Esi will change overtime. The drive to remain the one without blame makes him to constantly evaluate himself to see possible areas of weakness and how he can be better. The super ego blinds him to see that Esi is only taking advantage of him and may never change. What he chooses not to see, his family members see on his behalf and make occasional efforts to talk sense into him and fight Esi. At an instance when Kubi visits Oko's mother after the duel between Oko and Ali Kondey, Oko's mother asks Kubi what charm Esi has casted over her son to keep him out of his senses.

However, overtime the *id* personality which operates based on the pleasure principle takes over Oko. Oko gears towards aggression and violence as the only resort to get what he desires of Esi and prove his worth as a man. The *id* strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants and needs. It operates without any regard for the consequences of its action and makes a person behave in a socially unacceptable manner. In an instance, when Oko gets frustrated from Esi's constant denial, the narrator explains that:

Oko flung the bedcloth away from him, sat up, pulled 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 breasts repeatedly, thrust his tongue into her mouth, forced her unwilling legs apart, entered her, plunging and just pounding away. (*Changes*: 9)

At this point, the story reveals Oko's acts as a reaction that spurs from bottled up feelings of unmet needs. He is driven by the pleasure he will get from the act rather than the fact that the act may cause more damage to their relationship, which is eventually the case. This incidence suggests that overtime; victims of abuse may tend to also become aggressive and violent towards the abuser. The pressure to obtain pleasure is however short lived as Oko immediately begins to feel a sense of guilt. The *id* personality that

operates in the spur of the moment is immediately questioned by the *super ego*. While Esi calls the incidence “Marital Rape” (10) and capitalizes on that to finalize the dissolution of their marriage, Oko goes about with feelings of guilt and ways to make amends:

“In the meantime, Oko was collecting his thoughts together. He was already feeling like telling Esi he was sorry” (10)...Oko blamed himself for overstaying in bed. He could not stop thinking that perhaps if he had got himself up at his usual early hour he would later have found a better way to show his determination to give their relationship another chance. (*Changes*: 69).

Again, the highly moralized Oko is driven into acts of aggression and violence when all efforts to reconcile with Esi after she starts seeing Ali Kondey more prove futile. Oko temporarily seeks solace in drinking because “This development had so startled him that for a day or two he had almost become disoriented, and had taken to drinking a little more than usual”. (70). He finally resolves to go after Esi even when he is aware that she is now married to Ali Kondey. On one of the days when Esi and Ali are making out, the narrator states that:

Just at that moment they heard a car come through the gate...There was knocking on the door...poom, poom, poom. “Esi...”...Then Esi knew who the voice belonged to. It was Oko’s voice...Finally, she and Ali got up at the same time and hurriedly put their cloths on...when Oko saw him, he dashed towards him, he dashed towards the door, as if to rush in...frustrated, Oko turned and faced Ali “where is she?... “My wife”, “Oko thundered”... he was shaking with rage, as he tried to shake Ali...Oko left the door, turned to Ali with a raised fist. (*Changes*: 120-122).

This incidence happens after Oko and Esi’s divorce and Esi’s marriage to Ali Kondey. One expects Oko to have closed the chapter and move on, which initially seem to be the case. However, the violent act can be said to be borne out of Oko’s inability to totally accept marital failure as the outcome of all the years of commitment he invests in his marriage. This dilemma unravels his inability to comprehend the slap on his face as an African man and one follows the journey of Oko’s personality decline as one with high standards of staying out of trouble, to one who gives little or no regard to the consequences of his violent impulses.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the portrayal of spousal abuse in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes*. It identified emotional abuse and verbal abuse as forms of spousal abuse in the text; effects of spousal abuse include low self-worth, bitterness and frustration while reactions to spousal abuse are aggression and violence. The aim of gaining more understanding into the portrayal of spousal abuse in the selected text is achieved and added discussion to this under researched debate. The findings from the study generally supports the notion that spousal abuse has far reaching negative implications on the abused, the abuser, and family in general. Moreover, the repression of male victims can cause men to develop unhealthy personalities that can make them become aggressive

and violent out of fear of being dominated. As such, the idea of a population of male victims of spousal abuse needs to be given more attention by the society. Male victims should not be repressed so that a circle of marital abuse does not continue.

The significance of the study lies in its attempt to bridge a gap on the topic of spousal abuse in literary context by examining a male perspective. It has also opened up a fresh perspective to the appraisal of the selected text (*Changes*) by evaluating it from a male angle rather than previous studies that have examined the text from feminist lenses.

Finally, the paper provokes the debate concerning whether women can perpetrate abuse against their spouses and whether men can be victims of spousal abuse which turns out to be positive in both cases. For these reasons, there needs to be balance in the depiction of and attention given to female and male spousal abuse, without male victims having the fear of being ridiculed and humiliated. As resonated in the entire cause of the study, the issue of spousal abuse should be approached as a human issue and not a gender one.

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