

Men as Puns in the feminist African novel

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Abstract

The dominant hierarchy upon which the order of existence is predetermined has placed the man at the centre of creation; which is also substantiated by cultural norms that prioritized generic divides. The principles of feminism have been created to alter patriarchal hegemony in order to reconstruct the distorted female self of an egalitarian society. However, in an attempt to reconstruct these misconceptions upheld by patriarchy, most feminist texts and criticisms have denied the woman the agency of freewill and independent choices, except the continuous emphasis on feminist objectification that patriarchy seem to propagate. It is against this backdrop, that this paper interrogates the subjugation of the woman by her fellow woman and to outline a model of feminist liberation. This is consequent upon the fact that even at the disruption of patriarchy, some feminist scholars have failed to account for the role of women in using men as puns in the subjugation of their fellow women in the African novel. Consequently, this paper replicates Chinweizu's *Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy* and uses feminist-deconstruction to interrogate Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* and Nawal El Saadawi's *A Woman at point Zero*. To this effect, it submits that women are stakeholders in the structure of matriarchy and the substructure of patriarchy and men are mere puns in the structure of matriarchal subjugation of their fellow woman. The concept of pun(s) which is play on word is used in its expounded form on how women manipulate men physically and psychologically for their economic and political gains.

163

Keywords

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Introduction

Giving the power of women as a result of squaring in education, economic and political power, it does become necessary that the power of women should be examined within the structures of their subjugation in the society and of what Okereke 2009 refers to “women’s growth from naivety to experience within gender politics (11). African men including the boys are simply the finished product of matriarchy. In most cases they are fashioned by the female-portal psychologically to the extent that even their view of the physical world is conditioned. It is perceived that the society upon which the world is constructed has placed the hierarchy of the existence of mankind in a generic term with the man as the leading figure. Feminism seeks to alter this backdrop and reconstruct the society through imaginative literature and criticism of it, as a pointer to what it should be. The foregoing is in line with the Ozumba 2003 observation of “the initiators of feminist discourse meant well” for the society (1). Obuta 2011 corroborated the foregoing when he observes, “trends in modern African Literature show that attention is being focused on the place of the woman in the society” (57). However, he focuses on the women and in the attempt to reconstruct patriarchal society, the woman has not been given any responsibility of free will on how she turned out to be; and the effects of her actions on her fellow woman except the status of a robot. This has been imposed on her by most feminist critics that seem to classify patriarchy as a metaphor for oppression of the woman in the society. Feminism has over the years, failed to address women in its fight towards the liberation of women by viewing the plights of women in the society from a unilateral position of women’s plights, being a creation of a patriarchal society with the sole aim of men humiliating and exploiting women. It still has been severely misunderstood by women and feminist empathizer who only see the dictate of feminism as that of the abuse of the women instead of a movement to protect the women from all forms of mistreatment even by her fellow women and the need for females to bond together to achieve common goals. There seem to be a belief by the feminist that the problems of women are resultant effects of patriarchy, hegemony and bottlenecks. Contrary to the general belief of the society, women not only play a pivotal role to support, permit and propel the menfolk in pushing for their own virtual inactivity in the society, but also are the cause of their own misfortunes in the world. In other words, women consciously or unconsciously contribute to their own stereotyping as clearly portrayed through character delineations in *The Woman at Point Zero* and *Changes* as archetypes to illustrate this narrative. This is one basic ‘truth’ to the lives of women in the society, and since time immemorial this “truth” has not been addressed because it seems easier to blame the opposite sex for the stifling of the development and progression of women. This one sidedness seems to have been the workings of the feminist analyses of literary texts. Hence, this paper seeks to examine the manipulations of men by women in subjugation of their fellow women as manifested in the lives and actions of characters as portrayed in Sadaawi’s *Woman At Point Zero* and *Changes* respectively. The theories adopted for the analysis of the texts are feminist-deconstruction, this is referred as one under the heading of feminist-deconstruction. Feminist-deconstruction is an approach that seeks to question the traditional assumptions about certain feminist postulations as absolute truth and the only interpretational markers in the analysis of a text. It is a marriage of two theories: feminism and deconstruction. This approach identifies the contradictions in Saadaw’s *Woman at Point Zero* and Aidoo’s *Changes* by deriving its surface meaning from the text. Deconstruction sees meaning as been indefinite, for meaning is based on seeking to deconstruct ideological biases; such as gender, racism, economic and political reasoning. Feminist-deconstruction in this paper is primarily

focused on the prejudices as perpetuated by their fellow women in the society. It is a temperament that seeks to liberate the women from all forms of oppression and exploitation, even the ones that are orchestrated by the women's actions. Feminist-deconstruction, is not an implicit bias for patriarchy as element of oppression and subjugation of the women as most feminists seem to suggest through their analysis. However, feminist-deconstruction is the new frontier that gives women right to self-determination and struggle against oppression even from their female folks. Tyson corroborates the foregoing thus: "Contrary to the opinions of many students new to the study of feminist literary criticism, many feminists like men, think that 'women should be able to stay at home and raise children if they want to do so, and wear bras. Broadly, feminist critics examine the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women (83). Men are the first feminists to have written in defence of women and it will be erroneous to think that at the core of the subjugation of the women, is the fact that men that are the first and only cause of their plights in the society, for who the women need liberation from. However, the feminist writers in particular, decide to balance the narrative by telling her-story which many feminists felt must be told from the premise of the subjugation of the women from their own perspectives; without looking deeper into the contribution of the women to their own plights. The focus of feminist-deconstruction theory irrespective of its variation, is to liberate women from all forms of oppression and subjugation in the society. Derrida in making a case for deconstruction refers to language as not only non-reliable tools of communication, but rather as a fluid ambiguous domain of complex experiences, in which ideologies program an individual's thought process. He views deconstructionism as an elaborate understanding of the relationship between the text and its meaning. Fusing deconstruction and feminism aiding the individual to interpret the texts within the premise of deconstruction to reinterpret feminism. Feminist-deconstruction looks at the binary of women's oppression as aided by the women. It rejects the concept of feminism that states that the female plights are sole products of patriarchy by assessing women's action in asserting themselves and in undermining their fellow women. Feminist-deconstruction makes use of Binary opposition in the deconstruction of hierarchy, with certain figures given privilege to what they are compared to, this is exhibited in texts in the form of the relationship between masculinity/femininity, and tradition/ modernity. In view of masculinity/femininity, there is a huge distinction between these two terms as constructed in the text. However, the female characters aid this imbalance through their actions and some times pun on men and boys to achieve matriarchal intention. Feminist- deconstruction is a literary interpretation that frowns at all forms of oppression against the women in literary texts. It is a theory that aids the understanding of various oppressions perpetrated against the woman either by the woman or man in the texts under study.

1. Women punning men into the subjugation of their fellow women in *Woman at Point Zero*

The prevailing temperament of oppression and subjugation as result of cultural expectations of gender roles within East African environment as depicted by Saadawi in *Woman at Point Zero*, make the work first a feminist political tool in the disruption of patriarchy. The narrative, employs the metaphor of hostilities against the women, in other to foster pity and achieve authorial intention within the scope of feminism in the text. Through characters delineation of men and women, Saadawi demonstrated that women are victims of patriarchal society. The forward of the narrative demonstrates that the work is politically constructed to achieve a certain

aim that Miriam Cooke is prescriptive about. She says: “It does not matter if this story is true or made up, or a bit of both (which it is). ...Readers cannot but be drawn into the catastrophe of Firdaus’s life in such a way that her hope and disappointments become theirs. You do not have to be a lost girl to appreciate how great Firdaus’s need for her uncle and how terrible the shock was, when he abused her (vii). What the work is set out for is actually highlighted in the forward of the text and the writer corroborated the foregoing in the author’s name when she states that: “I had fallen in love with a man who did not love me. I felt rejected, not only by him, not only by one person amongst the millions that peopled the vast world, but every living being or thing on earth, by the vast world itself” (*Woman at Point Zero*, page 5, 2007). Consequently, through the application of supplementation the method which states that; “the relationship between any binary hierarchy, however, is always unstable and problematic” (*Bressler*, page 128, 1999). The foregoing enables us to see the imbalance in construction of males as simple “type characters” and reveals her sense of commitment to female liberation motivated by negative portrayal of men as beasts in the narrative. *Woman at Point Zero* chronicles the subjugation of women in East Africa and Firdaus becomes an archetype for the subjugated women by women and men in the society. The narrative depicts extreme bestiality of males and females in the text and their inability to profit from them. It is necessary to note the effect of abuses imposed on women by men in the narrative as a result of the privileged position they occupy in the society. However, on deeper level analyses, supplementation method of deconstruction enables us to see that women directly or indirectly contribute to the sustenance of patriarchy. Some of the actions of women are geared towards the exploitation and subjugation of their fellow woman in the society as depicted in the *Woman at Point Zero*. Most of the women in the life of Firdaus play prominent roles in the construction of her reality in the text and how her life eventually turns out to be. Consequently, in applying the binary method of difference which is premised on Derrida’s “what if question” (128), a possibility question which emphasizes the possibility of women being prominent actors in their plight as clearly illustrated in *Woman at Point Zero*, irrespective of the extreme temperament of the narrative that depict men as embodiment of evil; we could see how women contribute to the realization of such evil as perpetuated by men in the text. Women directly or indirectly contribute greatly to the subjugation of their fellow women in the text. The narrative is that of power, where Firdaus talks and everyone including the other (man) keeps silent. The narrative assigned limited speeches because feminism is actually reversing the role of silence that is imposed on the woman and it takes the supplementation method of deconstruction to see this. The narrative is so constructed to motivate the people into changing their ways through the spiting of their tradition, the feminist element of silence is strategically positioned in the narrative as a gleams of what is to follow: “Let me speak. Do not interrupt me. I have no time to listen to you. They are coming to take me at six O’ clock this evening” (*Woman at Point Zero*, page 9, 2007). The narrative is politically one sided without the objectivity of art; the text seems to be fashioned in such a way that it represents a single theme of female oppression and heroism of the protagonist as her words highlight, thus: “All my life I have been searching for something that would fill me with pride, make me feel superior to everyone else, including kings, princesses and rulers” (*Woman at Point Zero*, page 9, 2007). Firdaus is speaking from the position of hurry and hate. She celebrates her choice of been a prostitute or better still secretly forced into prostitution by the choices made for her, by her fellow women that she at the end of the day celebrates.

...I was only a successful prostitute. And no matter how successful a prostitute is, she cannot get to know all the men. However, every single man I did get to know filled me with but one desire: to lift my hand and bring it smashing down on his face. But because I am a woman I have no courage to lift my hand. And because I am a prostitute, I hid my fear under layers of make-up. Since I was successful, my make-up was always of the best and most expensive kind. (*Woman at Point Zero*, pages 9-10, 2007)

The narrator seems to be saying that the Firdausi's problem is as a result of her gender. However, a critical look at Firdausi's construction of success as a prostitute is a factor of choice she makes as a woman. The actions of the men are responsible in the making of her but we cannot absolve the women in her life whose choices and decision constructed her the way she turned out to be. Firdaus' life is that of choices on how she responds to her society. She says: "I am a prostitute, I hid my fear under layers of make-up. Since I was successful, my make-up was always of the best and most expensive kind, just like the of respectable upper-class women. I always had my hair done by stylists who tendered their services only to upper-class society women" (10). She traded her to belong to the upper-class of the society. The narrative portrays men as evil starting from Firdaus' father:

my father, a poor peasant farmer, who could neither read nor write, knew very few things in life. How to grow crops, how to sell a buffalo poisoned by his enemy before it died, how to exchange his virgin daughter for a dowry when there was still time, how to be quicker than his neighbour in stealing from the field once the crop was ripe. How to bend over headman's hand and pretend to kiss it, how to beat his wife and make her bite the dust each night (*Woman at Point Zero* page,10, 2007).

This is a clinical depiction of hostilities Firdaus' father represent to the extent that he could not be anything good in the psychology of his daughter not even a single act of love from a father to a daughter. Firdaus' mother shares the same temperament of lack of care in respect to the welfare of her daughter. Firdaus says:

On my head I carried a heavy earthenware jar, full of water. Under its weight my neck would sometimes jerk backward, or to left or to the right. I had to exert myself to maintain it balanced on my head, and keep it from falling. I kept my legs moving in the way my mother had taught me, so that my neck remained upright. I was still young at the time, and my breast were not yet rounded (*Woman at Point Zero*, page 11, 2007).

Firdaus' mother taught her to carry heavy weight that suppressed her growth without demonstrating any motherly love. Firdaus portrays the extent of domestic abuse perpetuated by her mother even when it is within the mother's purview to show her daughter love and take care of her. Firdaus is oppressed and abused by her family, first in line of her subjugation is her mother and later by her father. And when she seeks for explanation from her mother why she would tell her that she was beaten by her. Firdaus says: "So one day I asked my mother about him. How was it that she had given birth to me without a father? First she beat me. Then she brought a woman who was carrying a small or maybe a razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs" (*Woman at Point Zero*, 2007). Firdaus' mother continued her abuse and humiliation of her daughter as can be seen below: "I cried all night. Next morning my mother did not send me to the fields. She usually made me carry a load of manure on my head and take to the fields" (12). Firdaus' mother failed to show sympathy for her daughter thereby entrenching the oppression of her daughter. Firdaus further highlights her abuse in the hand of her mother who is her fellow woman.

Onuoha, Onyekachi Peter & Opere Humuani Oyindamola “Men as Puns in the feminist African novel”

Before the sun had started to appear in the sky, she would nudge me in the shoulder with her fist so that I would awaken, pick up the earthenware jar and go off to fill it with water. Once back, I would sweep under the animals and then makes rows of dung cakes which I left in the sun to dry. On baking day I would knead dough and make bread (*Woman at Point Zero*,12-13, 2007).

The foregoing demonstrates the abusive weight of a mother on her daughter. Firdaus’ sexual awakening is that of consent before it matures into the commercialisation of it for personal gain. The narrator captures this succinctly in the text thus:

Little boy called Mohammadain used to pinch me under water and follow me into the small shelter made of maize stalks. He would make me lie down beneath a pile of straw and lift up galabeya. We played ‘bride and bridegroom’. From some part in my body, where exactly I did not know, would come sensation of sharp pleasure. Later would close my eyes and feel with my hand for the exact spot. The moment I touched it, I realised that I had felt the sensation before. Then we would start to play again until the sun went down and we could hear his father’s voice calling to him from the neighbouring field. I would try to hold him back, but he would run off, promising to come the next day (*Woman at Point Zero*,12, 2007).

Mohammadain is a sexual pun in which in pretense Firdaus enjoys the touch of Mohammadain and tries to prevent the boy from answering to his father’s call. This highlights her feminist impulse of celebrating her sexuality and sexual awakening occasioned by her ability to freely feel sexual pleasure. The protagonist came to appreciate her sexual pleasure that she relives the experiences over again. Firdaus became sad when she could not experience again sexual pleasure as a result of her mother’s action. She says that: “I no longer feel the strong sensation of pleasure of my body. I closed my eyes and tried to reach the pleasure I had known before, but it was not there” (*Woman at Point Zero*,13, 2007). Due to the deprivation, Firdaus questioned the logic that she was born by both people who happened to be her parents in view of her various plights occasioned by their actions. She says:

... I had not been here, but I had suddenly dropped from the skies, or emerged from somewhere deep down in the earth, to find myself in a place where I did not belong, in a home which was not mine, born from a father who was not my father, and from a mother who was not my mother. Was I really the daughter of my mother, or was my mother someone else? Or was I born the daughter of my mother and later changed into someone else? Or had my mother been transformed into another woman who resembled her so closely that I could not tell the difference? (*Woman at Point Zero*,15, 2007)

Firdaus had to re-examine her paternity including her maternity in view of the subjugations and oppressions she had passed through in the hands of both parents. She sorts to create a distance between her mother because she could not fathom why her mother treated her the way she did. Firdaus suffers from progressive abuse and subjugation in the hands of her parents to the hand of her foster mother as she laments:

When I grew a little older my father put his mug in my hand and taught me how to wash his legs with water. I had now replaced my mother and did the things she used to do. My mother was no longer there, but instead there was another woman who hit me on my hand and took the mug away from me. In fact, she looked exactly like my mother, the same long garments, the same face, and the same of moving (*Woman at Point Zero*,16-17, 2007).

Firdaus' stepmother possesses the same oppressive characteristics of her mother. She experiences the same humiliation and abuse in the hands of her stepmother, as it is reminiscent of her mother. It seems Firdaus' parents are in a competition of who would outsmart the other in terms of humiliation and abuse of their daughter and this Firdaus remembers vividly what her father did to her.

My father never went to bed without supper, no matter what happened. Sometimes when there was no food at home we would all go to bed with empty stomachs. But he would never fail to have a meal. My mother would hide his food from us at the bottom of one of the holes in the oven. He would sit eating alone while we watched him. One evening I dared to stretch out my hand to his plate, but he struck me a sharp blow over the back of my fingers (*Woman at Point Zero*, 17-18, 2007)

Firdaus' mother is an accomplice in the lack of love and feelings that are shared between parents and children. They both lack parental care of their daughter and they put themselves first above the needs of their daughter. Firdaus' uncle's wife is of no difference to the cruelty Firdaus face. She is of the highest woman's inhumanity to her fellow woman and this is succinctly captured in her words: "Her voice was soft not with gentleness, but with the softness born of cruelty. Her eyes were large, and black with an extinguished vitality that left nothing but pools of dark, sleepy indifference" (Bressler, 1999). Firdaus' aunt's subjugation is progressive and it extends to her own husband to the extent that Firdaus could feel the weight his uncle carries and says:

I sensed that his feelings for her was more of fear than of love, and that she came from a higher social class than his. When her father or one of her relative paid us a visit, my uncle would buy meat or chicken and the house would resonate with his laughter. But when his aunt arrived, dressed in her flowing peasant garments, her cracked hands showing through the openings of her long sleeves, he retreated into a corner without word or even a smile (*Woman at Point Zero*, 23, 2007).

Firdaus' aunt uses her social class to oppress and subjugate her husband. She willed him according to her desire to the extent that when her relatives are at home the man pretends to be happy because the woman wants it so, but when the man's relatives are at home, the man retires back to the kind of man the woman wants him to be. Firdaus aunt's actions causes sadness in the heart of her fellow woman. Firdaus captures the plight of her uncle's aunt and how her fellow woman torment her because she came to visit the man she sold her things to get him educated.

His aunt would sit next to me on the bed weeping silently and mentioning how she regretted having sold her golden necklace in order to pay his studies in El Azhar. In the morning she would empty her basket of the chicken, eggs and breadcakes it contained, hook it over her arm, and leave. I would say to her, 'Stay just another day with us, Grandma,' but my uncle never said a word, and neither did his wife (*Woman at Point Zero*, 23, 2007).

Firdaus' aunt makes the house unconducive for her fellow woman to the extent that her husband's sister had to leave in tear. Her husband could not say any word because he is a weaker man and has been subjugated by his wife. Firdaus' aunt uses her like a domestic slave and this she says about her action: "I went to school every day. Once back I swept the house and washed the floor, the dishes and the clothes. My uncle's wife only did the cooking, leaving the pots and pans for me to scour and clean" (23). Firdaus' aunt plots her exit from her uncle's house and

without any explanation to why she should leave but she actually accounted for the woman's body language and the reaction of her uncle to her being.

One day when I returned from school, I found my uncle looking very angry with me. His wife also seemed to share his anger, and she continued to appear angry, until he decided to take me away from the house with my clothes and books, and put me in the boarding girls section of the school. From then on I slept there at night. At the end of each week the fathers, mothers and other relatives of the girls visited them, or took them off to spend Thursday and Friday at home. I would look over the top of the high wall and watch them as they departed, my eyes following the people and the movement of the street like a prisoner condemned to look out at life over the top of a high prison wall (*Woman at Point Zero*, 24, 2007).

Firdaus' aunt through her actions conditioned Firdaus into a life of loneliness by virtue of the things she feeds her husband with about Firdaus. Firdaus lived a life of an orphan because her aunt who is a woman did not care about her welfare and she manipulated her husband to toe the same course of action against Firdaus just to please her. Almost all women in Firdaus' life always brought her nothing but pain and sorrow. Even the principal spited her because none of Firdaus' parents were around to collect her result at her graduation. Firdaus is always humiliated and her life complicated by the women who came into it. Firdaus's uncle had the zeal to send her to further her education but her aunt rejected it and when Firdaus uncle suggested that Firdaus should stay in their house until he can find her a job, her aunt refused. Out of frustration Firdaus' uncle said: “She can stay with us until I find her a job.” But Firdaus' aunt refused and replied, “that would be years. The house is small and life is expensive. She eats twice as much as any of our children (*Woman at Point Zero*, 36, 2007). Firdaus' aunt did not even want Firdaus in her house. Her husband suggested that Firdaus replace Saadia their house help since the wife is complaining about the cost of running the home, but Firdaus' aunt replied: “She will not replace Saadia. Saadia is light and quick, and puts her heart into work. In addition, she's not too fond of food and of sleeping long hours, but this girl's every movement is slow and heavy. She is cold-blooded and couldn't care less” (*Woman at Point Zero*, 37, 2007). Firdaus' aunt looked for every reason she could fabricate to dissuade her husband from assisting her niece, but Firdaus' uncle knew that the life out there awaits Firdaus and he needed the permission of the wife of the house for him to take any decision so he suggested: “We can get rid of her by sending her to the university. There she can live in the quarters allocated to the girl students” (*Woman at Point Zero*, 37, 2007). Firdaus' aunt is the head of the family and final decisions lie in her hand and that is why her husband tries to convince her before he could make any decision in respect to the life of Firdaus, but Firdaus aunt rejected all suggestion that would have led to Firdaus' development. Firdaus' aunt says:

To the university? To a place where she will be sitting side by side with men? A respected Sheikh and woman of religion like myself sending her niece off to mix up in the company of men? Besides, where will the money come from for her lodging, books, and clothes? You know how high the cost of living is these days. Prices seem to have gone mad, and yet the salaries of us government officials only rise by a few millimes (*Woman at Point Zero*, 37, 2007).

Firdaus' aunt makes the decision in the family and the structure of the narrative and her words demonstrate the enormous power she yields as the head of the family. Matriarchy is a social and political system in the narrative and Firdaus' aunt exercises the political power of who gets what

and when because she is the woman of the house. In resistance to giving Firdaus a future, her aunt's action conditions her into progressive suffering and subjugation in the society of the text.

My uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud, is a virtuous man. He has a big pension and no children, and he's been on his own since his wife died last year. If he marries Firdaus she will have a good life with him and he can find in her an obedient wife who will serve him and relieve him of his loneliness. It is risky for her to continue without a husband. She is a good girl but the world is full of bastards (*Woman at Point Zero*, 37, 2007).

Firdausi's aunt uses her feminist power to make choices for the family even to the detriment of her fellow woman (Firdausi). Her choice for Firdausi is a vehement rejection of the suggestions Firdausi's uncle made for her future and through her rejection of them, she conditions her in the narrative. Firdausi's aunt's decision opens her up to the various exploitations she later faces in the narrative. Life is like a stage and any mistake at a particular stage affects the development of humans in the chain of humanity and this is seen in the life of Firdausi. Education and the family are some of the tools of feminist liberation and it is the same tool Firdausi's aunt appropriates first to oppress her husband and to reverse the role of gender in her home. Secondly, she deprives Firdausi empowerment vis a vis her outright rejection of her husband giving Firdausi further education. Her decision forced Firdausi into an early marriage. Even when Firdausi's uncle tries to correct his wife that: "I agree with you, but Sheikh Mahmoud is much too old for her" (*Woman at Point Zero*, 37, 2007). He says, trying to reject the marriage, which his wife wants to force Firdausi into. She replies by pressing her intention to subjugate her fellow woman thus: "Who said he is old? He only went on pension this year and Firdausi herself is not that young. Girls of her age have already married years ago and given birth to children. An old but reliable man is surely better than a young man who treats her in a humiliating way or beats her. You know young men of these days" (*Woman at Point Zero*, 38, 2007). Firdausi's aunt counters her husband in all the reasons he raises to prevent his niece from getting married to Sheikh but she refuses to listen and says: "Deformity? Who says it's deformed? Besides, your holiness, as the saying goes, "nothing shames a man but an empty pocket" (*Woman at Point Zero*, 38, 2007). Firdausi's uncle is not convinced about her decision for the future he projects for her with Sheikh and he wonders: "supposing Firdausi refuses him?" (*Woman at Point Zero*, page 38, 2007). Firdausi's aunt, the woman of the house is so certain of her decision that she asks her husband: "Why should she refuse him? This is her best chance to get married. Do not forget what a nose she has. It's big and ugly like a tea mug. Besides, she has inherited nothing and has no income of her own. We will never find a better husband for her than Sheikh Mahmoud" (*Woman at Point Zero*, 38, 2007). Firdausi's aunt redefines Firdausi's personality as "ugly" and having no "income" in order to force her into early marriage and to achieve her economic interest. She uses a redefinition of Firdausi's personality to reduce her worth and construct a privilege match making for her. Firdausi's uncle did not think that Sheikh would welcome the idea of marriage between he and herself, but her aunt through her words and action commercializes Firdausi as commodity to be profited from. She informs her husband: "I spoke to him I am sure he will agree. I intend to ask him for a big dowry, a hundred pounds or perhaps even two hundred if he has the money" (*Woman at Point Zero*, 38, 2007). She is interested in the money she would make from the dowry of Firdausi instead of her welfare. Firdausi's aunt is interested in profiting from Firdausi's plights, she says: "If he pays a hundred pounds, then Allah will indeed have been generous to us and I would not be so greedy as to ask for more. I'll start with two hundred. You know he's a man who can argue for hours over five milliner and kill himself over a piastre" (*Woman at Point Zero*, 39, 2007). She is aware of the physical and psychological deformity of Sheikh, but because

of money she is bent on conscripting Firdausi into an early marriage because if Sheikh “...pays one hundred pounds that will be sufficient blessing from Allah. I will be able to pay my debts and buy some underwear, as well as a dress.” (*Woman at Point Zero*, 39, 2007). Firdausi’s equivalence in value and the value of her future is that of underwear defined by her fellow woman. At the center of the exploitation of Firdausi in the text is a woman who is her mother, her foster mother, her aunt and her friend. The plight of Firdausi’s co-conspirators to exploit and subjugate Firdausi is seen in the society of the text. Firdausi’s aunt sold her into sexual slavery, into a family of abuse and intimidation instead of allowing the girl to go to school or learn a skill for her own good as recommended by her husband. She is an extremist by imposing sadness on Firdausi’s life to the extent that she denies her joy including her own daughter Firdausi’s little niece. She physically and psychologically stripped Firdausi of joy and a future due to her selfishness and greed. Firdausi attests to this sadness thus:

... when I was alone in the room, she would come in and jump on to the couch and say “Daus, Daus.” I would stroke her hair and answer, “Yes, Hala.” “Daus, Daus,” she would reply, and giggle, and then try to make me play with her. But her mother’s voice would soon be heard calling her from outside, so she would jump off the couch, and toddle away on her little legs (*Woman at Point Zero*, 41, 2007).

Firdausi’s aunt subjugates her daughter psychologically to trauma by taking Firdausi away from her.

Firdausi is used as a slave in her marital home. She washes and cooks for Sheikh and in her tiredness spreads her legs to perform her conjugal functions as wife. She narrates her plight thus:

But no sooner did I stretch out my body to rest from the fatigue of cooking, washing and cleaning the large house with its rooms full of furniture, than Sheikh Mahmoud would appear by my side. He was already over sixty, whereas I had not yet turned nineteen. On his chin, below the lip, was a large swelling with a hole in the middle. Some days the hole would be dry, but on others it would turn into a rust old tap exuding drops red in colour like blood, or whitish yellow, like pus (*Woman at Point Zero*, 45, 2007).

Firdausi’s aunt is aware of the deformity of Sheikh and her husband calls her attention to it but her greed to trade her fellow woman does not allow her to pay attention to the bleak future that awaits the girl. She sells Firdausi off to Sheikh and that is why Sheikh treats Firdausi as it pleases him because she is an item he bought from her guardian. A man who is not physically healthy yet she has to endure it because of lack of choice orchestrated by her aunt; her fellow woman who would have protected her interest from man exploits. Firdausi in her subjugation feels she is performing her marital duty. She notes:

When the hole dried up, I let him kiss me. I could feel the swelling on my face and lips like a small puss, or a water skin full of a stagnant greasy fluid. But on days when it was not dry I would turn my lips and put my face away to avoid the odour of dead dogs, which emanates from it. At night, he would wind his legs and arms around me, and let his old, gnarled hand travel all over my body, like the claws of a starving man who has been deprived of real food for many years wipe the bowl clean, and leave not a single crumb behind (*Woman at Point Zero*, 45, 2007).

The foregoing highlights Sheikh’s sexual temperament and how he uses Firdausi as an object of sex. It demonstrates the torment she faces as a result of the marriage her aunt single handedly

forces her into. Sheikh subjugates his wife both physically and psychologically and when Firdausi runs away to her uncle and his wife for solace they reject her and force her back to an abusive union. Firdausi laments their responses when she runs to them for protection thus:

On one occasion he hits me all over with his shoe. My face and body become swollen and bruised. So I left the house and went to my uncle. But my uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beat her. I said my uncle was a respected Sheikh, well vested in the teachings of religion, and he, therefore, could not possibly be in the habit of beating his wife. She replied that it was precisely men well vested in their religion who beat their wives. The precepts of religion permit such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience (*Woman at Point Zero*, page 46, 2007).

Firdausi's aunt by her words supports the subjugation of her fellow woman and projects perfect obedience to wife battery using religion as an aid to her definition of an ideal woman. She aids the institution of patriarchy by her own decision in forcing Firdausi into an early marriage with a man old enough to be her grand father. Before nightfall, Firdausi's uncle with the support of her aunt takes her back to her husband's house without even inquiring about why the man beat her or cautioning him. This emboldens Sheikh to abuse her the more. He asks her:

Why did you come back from your uncle's house? Couldn't he bear to feed you for a few days? Now you will realize I'm the only person who can put up with you, and who is prepared to feed you. Why do you shy away from me then? Why do you turn your face away from mine? Am I ugly? Do I smell? Why do you keep at a distance whenever I come near to you? (*Woman at Point Zero*, page 47, 2007).

He uses his deformity to torment her even with his ailing health status. He feels the rejection of Firdausi by her family is a license for him to continue exploiting her because of lack of concern and care they demonstrate in respect to her welfare and Firdausi's family action emboldens him to do more to abuse and exploit her physically and psychologically. Sheikh uses Firdausi as a sexual slave, Firdausi laments:

He leapt on me like a mad dog. The hole in his swelling was oozing drops of foul Smelling pus. I did not turn my face or my nose away this time. I surrendered my face to his face and my body to his body, passively, without any resistance, without a movement, as though life had been drained out of it, like a piece of dead wood or old neglected furniture left to stand where it is, or a pair of shoes forgotten under a chair (*Woman at Point Zero*, page 47, 2007).

Firdausi gives up her resistance mechanism because the people she believed in rejected her and supported her husband's actions. Firdausi is not sure again what is right or wrong in her own situation as she has to give up herself for the satisfaction of Sheikh who feels he is doing her a favor. Sheikh's abuse becomes severe, as days pass by and Firdausi can not help it but to walk out of oppressive marital union. She says:

One day he hit me with his heavy stick until the blood ran from my nose and ears. So I left, but this time I did not go to my uncle's house. I walked through the streets with swollen eyes, and a bruised face, but no one paid any attention to me. People were rushing around in buses and in cars, or on foot. It was as though they were blind, unable to see anything. The street was an endless expanse stretched out before my eyes like a sea. I was just a pebble thrown into it, battered by waves, tossed here and there, rolling

over and over to be abandoned somewhere on the shore (*Woman at Point Zero*, page 48, 2007).

Firdausi cannot withstand the battering in the union that was imposed on her by her aunt and she had to walk away from it. She observes that both male and female, none pays attention to her. They are so busy with their lives to the extent that she does not exist even in her plight. The world that Firdausi walks into is made of male and female but they exhibit the same degree of hostilities toward her. After Firdausi walks away from her marriage as a result of battering, her fellow woman (Sharifa) socializes her into prostitution for her own benefit. Sharifa places a price tag on Firdausi as a commodity she sells to men for exchange of cash. She accounts for how Sharifa introduces her into prostitution thus:

Sharifa says to me one day, ‘Neither Bayoumi nor any of his cronies realized your worth, because you failed to value yourself highly enough. A man does not know a woman’s worth, and be prepared to pay with the means at his disposal. And if he has no means, he will steal from someone else to give you what he demands (*Woman at Point Zero*, pages 58, 2007)Umoren, 2002).

Sharifa socialized Firdausi into prostitution as a means of economic sustenance and thereby sustaining the institution of patriarchy that patronises it. Sharifa also uses Firdausi to make additional money for herself. She places price on Firdausi and negotiates with men who come to lay Firdausi after which she takes her cut from the money and gives Firdausi whatever that pleases her. Fawzy the man that Sharifa is a go between with, captures the philosophy which he is aware that Sharifa has indoctrinated Firdausi with. That: “I don’t know. Sharifa told you me work is work, and that feelings do not come in where work is concerned’. He gave a short laugh and kissed me on my lips. ‘Sharifa’s fooling you, and making money out of you, while all you get is pain” (*Woman at Point Zero*, 62, 2007). Sharifa constructs Firdausi psychologically in such a way that she can never think of leaving the work. Firdausi weeps when she realises that Sharifa is using her as a commodity to boost her financial status (*Woman at Point Zero*,62, 2007). Sharifa’s business interest is what matters to her more than the future of her fellow woman. Sharifa’s action forces Firdausi into the street when she realises what she is using her for. She narrates her situation:

I opened my eyes. My body was stretched out on the bed without a man beside me, and the room around was dark and empty. I walked on the tip of my toes to Sharifa’s room, and found her lying naked with Fawzy at her side. I tiptoed back to my room, put on the first dress I could lay my hands on, took my little bag, and hurried down the flights of stairs into the street (*Woman at Point Zero*, 65, 2007).

Firdaus regained her freedom from her fellow woman but decided that she would work for herself. She decided to go into prostitution on a full scale and to profit from it based on her own terms. She says:

...I had chosen this life of my own free will. The fact that I rejected their noble attempts to save me, my insistence on remaining a prostitute, proved to me this was my choice and that I had some freedom, at least the freedom to live in a situation better than that of other women (*Woman at Point Zero*, 97, 2007).

Firdausi's choice of being a prostitute is patterned by her experiences in life as a result of the choices her aunt made for her by refusing her education. Thus, Firdausi becomes a victim of

female colonisation and imperialism because her aunt fails to grant her the opportunity to acquire education which is one of the tools of feminist liberation. She decides to force her into an early marriage which thereafter leads to the development of the plot and conditioned Firdausi's life from one disaster to another and portraying men as evil while the women become the powers behind the scene creating reality for both genders.

2. The progress of women in patriarchal society, the other man and the woman's plight is her fellow woman - *Changes*

Change echoes women who have come of age from operation of patriarchy and making choices on how their lives have turned out to be. The novel mirrors the experiences of Esi, a woman who has come of age to know her rights in the society to the extent that she determines what she would accept or not irrespective of patriarchal construction of her place in the society. The text according to the reversal of roles shows the superiority of the female in the text as depicted in the relationship between Esi and her husband Oko as would be analysed extensively in the body of the essay. Character delineations in the text highlights female 'privileges' and consciousness of power in Aidoo's *Changes* and the application of these privileges in the subjugation of other women and the smothering of the male characters within the text. The application of supplement method of deconstruction which reverses the binary of men as evil in relation to certain interpretations of feminist texts to highlight some men as good and victims of women in the society and women as capable of perpetuating evil in the subjugation of their fellow women in the society as seen in *Changes*. Female consciousness is one of the profound achievements of feminism because it highlights the powers of women and enables them to enforce it in literary texts. Feminism has made giant strides in its ability to disrupt certain traditional rights that were prerogatives of men in the society and that were oppressive to women. Such cultural rights ranging from marriage, education and sexuality were demonstrated and presented as the rights of men in male-conscious texts. However, from the application of deconstructive supposition to textual analysis Bressler observes that "A deconstructor would thus begin textual analysis assuming that a text has multiple interpretations and that it allows itself to be re-read and thus reinterpreted countless times" (Bressler, 129, 1999). Thus, the supposition method of interpretation of feminist achievements in the text as we can clearly see the woman exhibiting more of those rights that used to be reserved for men as a result of the economic and political powers that have been captured by female characters in the text and these powers have been wrongly used in the text. Esi's mother in-law and sister's in-law abuse and subjugate her in the text as a result of their feminist powers and by extension she subjugates her husband.

The application of the method of difference to the text helps us to see the existence of equal powers in the society as a result of women demanding for their own rights and reserving such rights through cultural and social creations as archetypal illustrations of what a feminine personality should do to seek for her own freedom in the society. The possession of certain gender rights of women in the text, and the application of such rights on their own leads to a situation whereby some women subjugate other women even to the extent that some men are subjugated and abused physically and emotionally. The method of difference and supplementation helps us to state that feminism seems not to be a movement seeking for the right of women in the society but a movement seeking to perpetuate the same philosophy of oppression

that Patriarchy seems to be noted for and which made ‘them feminist’ to seek for reconstruction and redefinition of the woman’s personality. In the opening chapter of the novel, Esi is portrayed to be abused by men because she decided to drive herself ‘The car of course stalled more than once on the way, and, of course, all the other drivers were unsympathetic. They horn, and some taxi drivers shouted the usual obscenities about women drivers’ (*Changes*,1, 1991). The foregoing demonstrates that irrespective of the actions of patriarchy there has been concessions to most women in the society as a result of the fierce battle of feminism, although some men may frown at it but they have no choice but to acknowledge it.

Many feminists are of the view that the family is the centre of oppression and subjugation for women. The family seems to be a tool in feminist narratives to attempt to reconstruct gender roles and reverse the abuses of the woman in the society. Aidoo in *Changes* uses the domestic space to portray the growth and consciousness of the protagonist Esi who grows from her stage of naivety to acceptance of her sexuality and through the application of supplementation we can see how her fellow women malign and abuse her psychologically.

When she was younger and growing up in the big compound house with her cousins and other members of the extended family, she had had to be extremely careful about starting a quarrel with anyone. Because no one lost the chance to call her beanpole, bamboo, pestle or any such name which in their language described tall, thin and uncurved (*Changes*, 10, 1991).

Esi’s body is condemned by her fellow women in her extended family through their application of the cultural definition of beauty that is dependent on a robust and curvy body structure. Interrogating the binary in the text we can see that, women set standards for women, they compete, measure themselves up and make enemies of each other and strangely enough, it is this bony structure that Oko comes to fall in love with, ‘I love this body. But it is her sassy navel that kills me...watching the little protrusion, and feeling heated up at the base of his own belly’ (*Changes*,10, 1991). His appreciation makes Esi accept her physical look and invariably accept her sexuality; the authorial voice in an attempt to describe Esi’s appreciation of her body succinctly captures her growth. Thus:

Esi had always enjoyed walking around naked after love making. For her, this was one of life’s very few real luxuries. Indeed, one miracle of her own existence was the fact that in spite of the torment she had suffered during childhood and adolescence for having an unfeminine body, as an adult she was not shy of showing that body to the men she slept with (*Changes*, 89, 1991).

She grows to consciousness and accepts her physical body construct. Her acceptance is propelled by the male acceptance and appreciation of her body. She attains maturity through contrastive analysis of her persona, especially physically, and finds out that most women have the wrong perception of what the feminine body should be which through the aid of the men in her life she is able to assert herself and redefine her identity with courage.

The family is the centre of matriarchy and the stronghold of the woman's power and this is so because like the popular Yoruba adage explains it, ‘obirin lo ni ile’, which means the woman owns the home. As much as this is so, it is practised with extreme caution for masculine intrusive authority, so it is through the family that the woman manipulates and constructs patriarchy as a

tool in her hands for the achievement of the dictates of the feminist ideology. Esi's marital problem and her resolve to assert herself starts as a result of her fellow woman having interest in her family and exercising undue influence over her husband. First, Esi creates the problem that makes the whole institution of patriarchy to rise against her without the knowledge and consent of her husband. Even in marriage Esi exercised a personal right of her body, responsibility and defined what she would accept as mother and whether she would continue child bearing. She refuses all pleas by her husband for more children and decides to take unilateral decisions without involving her husband. The narrator corroborates the foregoing thus:

Look at Esi. Two solid years of courtship, six years of marriage. And what I got out of it? Little. Nothing. No affection. Not even plain warmth. Esi had never stated it categorically that she didn't want any more children. But she was on those dreadful birth control things: pills, loops or whatever. She had gone on them soon after the child was born... (*Changes*, 11, 1991).

The reversal of gender roles shows how the man is subjugated in the marital setting. The woman seems subtly to be on a revenge mission in marriage as seen in the case of Esi. The man in the marriage is used as a pun and machinery of patriarchy to achieve feminist motives. Oko feels the pressure from the society that is patriarchal in nature and he becomes a manly tool in the realisation of patriarchal predispositions in the society. Oko listens to everyone and become voiceless because he is occupied in trying to achieve the patriarch's desires in the society. Oko becomes apologetic trying to keep his marriage amidst the pressures from all sides including his wife's. Esi attests to the above fact when she acknowledged subtly the plight of the man.

The fact that his mother and his sisters were always complaining to him about the unsafety of having an only child made him feel worse. One of them had even suggested that he did himself and them the favour of trying to be interested in other women. That way, he could perhaps make some other children 'outside'. The idea hadn't appealed to him at all. In fact, for a long time, the thought of sleeping with anyone other than Esi had left him cold, no matter how brightly the sun was. (*Changes*, 11, 1991).

The suggestion for the displacement of Esi in their marital union is championed and promoted by her fellow women who tried all they could to sustain patriarchy by making sure that the man obeys all their bidding in the situations concerning his own life. They go as far as getting women for him to marry so that he can continue procreation and preserve patriarchy because it was considered dangerously unsafe for him to have an only child. Oko is a faithful husband who could not practice polygamy because he has been domesticated by patriarchy to be viewed as wrong from one party, and right from another, even when they try to force him to achieve their political objective in sustaining their hold and the subjugation of men in the society. There is a reversal of the roles in marriage and the marriage becomes a union where the man should live and die in as binary interpretation shows. As such Oko is psychologically indoctrinated right from birth into patriarchy. The power of birth and the first six years of the child as a power structure in the way the male turns out to be as opined by John Chinweizu is clearly illustrated in the case of Oko. He is oppressed in his own home; his wife Esi has no time for him. In fact, Esi 'married' him and as such rules him the way she pleases.

Esi definitely put her career well above any duties owed as a wife. She was a great cook, complained endlessly any time she had entered the kitchen. The bungalow came with her job as a data analyst with the government's statistical bureau; its urban

department. leaving the house virtually at dawn returning home at dusk; often bringing work home? Then there were all those conferences. Geneva, Addis, Dakar one half of the year; Rome, Lusaka, Lagos the other half (*Changes*, 12, 1991)

Esi is the “woman” of the house and she reigns over it as it pleases her and has little regard for her husband. She leaves and returns as she likes and fails to perform her conjugal responsibilities toward her husband. She uses her vagina as an object of oppression by refusing her husband sexual intercourse and withholds her power of reproduction by using birth control pills to deprive her husband of more children. The man becomes the weaker vessel, the ‘other’ in the marriage caught between the ranging battle of patriarchy and matriarchy without a safe place for him. The ‘other’ man, which is the weaker man is manipulated and exploited in the society and disregarded whether we are referring to Unoka in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Fridausi’s Uncle in *Woman at Point Zero* and Oko in *Changes*. This ‘other’ man (the weaker men) live at the fringe of the society and has no stake in the society he finds himself in. Oko in *Changes* captures the plight of weaker men like himself when he says: ‘My friends are laughing at me, he says; They think I’m not behaving like a man’ (*Changes*, 12, 1991).

The focus of deconstruction is to comment on values in a text and explicate the binary operation in a text through reversal interpretation of what is prevalent in a text and this we can clearly see in *Changes*. Society although has undergone certain changes in terms of gender functions as dictated by matriarchy in its influence on patriarchy but there are still gender ascribed roles for sexes in the society. The man is consistently forced to fit into this model to the extent that the other man becomes annihilated first from his home due to the oppression of his wife and secondly by the society which are made of his friends and family related matriarchs.

Esi was trying to pretend she had not heard the declaration. ‘Aren’t you saying anything?’ Oko’s voice was full of pleading. ‘What would you like me to say?’ she spoke at last, trying very hard to keep the irritation out of her voice. ‘You don’t care what my friends think of me?’ he pressed. When she spoke again the irritation was out, strong and breathing (*Changes*, 13, 1991).

Oko’s demand irritates his wife to the extent that she tries keep it out of her voice because she has the power of narrative and as such decides how she would respond to the man’s request because of her position of power which the man’s action has no way of influencing. She uses irritation to subject her husband and corners him into acceptance of the status she has created and imposed on him through the control of her sexual and reproductive organs. Esi reminds him that his friends should respect him for what he had turned out to be in his marriage to her. She calls her husband by name demonstrating equality and superiority of the feminist power before she goes ahead to emphasize her point, that:

‘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 one of us. I cannot care of what your friends say to you, think of you or do to you’. ‘I need my friends,’ he said. ‘I also need mine,’ she said (*Changes*, page 13, 1991).

Esi’s action makes her husband literarily excommunicated from the gathering of his friends, mother and sisters who are gamuts of feminist operations in achieving the sole objective of matriarchy. There is the existence of equal voices in both gender, however, Esi demonstrates

great powers over her husband and it almost seems as if he needs her permission before he can acquire or be ascribed a stable personality in the society. Esi is an educated woman who does not care what society thinks of her whether matriarchy or patriarchy is, she is a woman who seeks for nothing but her complete benefit and enjoyment in life. She rejects every received opinion of women even in relaxation and entertainment and decides to do what pleases her: ‘...she was going to have her beer: misunderstanding or not. By this time, she was already sitting by a table’ (*Changes*, page 41, 1991). Esi does not allow societal perception of what a woman does in a hotel affect her, so she enjoys herself. This spirit of resilience is the same spirit she demonstrates when she devoices her husband Oko. Esi demonstrates the resilient philosophy of feminism that the woman does not require the man (Oko) to survive in life and to be fulfilled. First she rejects child bearing after she gives birth to her first and only child Ogyaanowa and now she has taken steps to divorce her husband. Esi illustrates her power when she responds to her mother and grandmother on why she wishes to divorce her husband when the narrator says: ‘Esi had to tell the truth. Her husband wanted too much of her and her time. No, it was not another woman. In fact, she thought she might have welcomed that even more’ (*Changes*, page 47, 1991). The binary method highlights the negative effect of feminist power in *Changes*, Esi has all the privileges she desires as a woman and she exercises enormous power over her husband but still she feels she needs complete time for herself which both her mother and grandmother find troubling. They could not impose their decisions on her because matriarchy has given the woman the room to choose what she wants to become in the society and since their daughter has decided to divorce Oko they saw no reason to pressurize her to remain because it is against the dictates of matriarchy.

As deconstruction theory shows, the problem of women in *Changes* is their fellow women. Oko’s sisters see that the cure for a woman’s oppression that her brother faces is caused by ‘a woman’ and they decide to look for another woman that could save their brother from the subjugation he is going through in the hands of his ‘woman’. Esi knows that she is wrong and decides to construct any available reason for why she should leave the marriage and stay on her own, through the narrator, we are able to see the thought process of Esi. Aidoo says:

As for Oko’s people, there never was a question of Esi talking to them. She was convinced they hated her. She knew that for some time his aunts had been trying to get him a woman, ‘a proper wife’. What had discouraged them was his lack of enthusiasm and the fact that they suspected Esi didn’t care one way or another. The purpose of the project had been two-fold: to get him to make more children, ‘because his lady-wife appeared to be very satisfied with only one child, a terrible mistake, a dangerous situation’ (*Changes*, page 47, 1991).

The only battle Esi faced in her matrimonial home was perpetrated by her fellow woman and even put her husband in constant pressure for him to take another wife which he resisted and it is this same pressure mounted by women that Esi capitalised on to divorce her husband. The foregoing illustrates that in most marriages men are victims although matriarchy has constructed the women as victims. A critical look at the binaries of female characters would enable us see that most of their actions have cumulative negative effects on the man as Oko’s life in *Changes* depicts. Women on seeing that they cannot subject Esi their through marrying another woman for their brother ‘they wanted to hurt Esi: very badly, if they could’ (*Changes*, page 47, 1991). Oko’s sisters were women and wanted to hurt their fellow woman for their ego, this demonstrates that the woman is not a robot of patriarchal creation, as most feminist critics want us to believe because they contribute directly or indirectly to the abuse of the woman in the society. Oko even

as a man is viewed from the viewpoint of patriarchy is a mere tool in the hands of matriarchy in view of how he is manipulated by his wife and sisters to achieve their aims. Through their words, they demonstrate the feminist strength and visibility in the society and their attempt to reconstruct Oko into another man from the weaker man matriarchy has constructed him to be.

...his sisters were no better. They used to come and insinuate that their brother was failing in his duties to the family because she had turned his head-with 'something'. 'She fried it with the breakfast eggs!' 'She put it into cakes!' And they would whisper and laugh. As far as the sisters were concerned, Oko never had money to spend on them because he was busy wasting his salary on her (*Changes*, page 48, 1991).

Oko is a subservient worker who lives to take care of his grown sisters who have their own rights as humans and still expect him to take care of their responsibility because matriarchy has nurtured him to look strong in the eyes of all when he is actually a weakling. Oko's sisters (women) are the ones who accuse his wife of using charm on him to the extent that they mock his wife and make the marriage unbearable for her and when Esi reminded them that she earned more than him:

... their new line of attack was that it served him right, marrying a woman that had more money than him. His wife could never respect him. It was also around this time that the hints began to drop here and there: about the need for him to get himself an unspoilt young woman, properly brought up, whose eyes have not jumped over her eyebrows with too much education and too much money of her own. (*Changes*, page 48, 1991).

These women use their feministic privileges and consciousness to construct Oko's home to suit their dictatorship. They appropriate the right to define who a good woman is and what type of woman their brother should go for to have peace in his matrimonial home. This is an evidence of afore mentioned claim that women set standards for themselves and they are their own worst enemies. Oko is the voiceless and molested character in the narrative, his sister... accuses him of the cause of his problem without giving any choice to express his own point of view and they go as far as dictating for him what to do. Oko's mother does not even spare him neither does she try to find out what happens to Esi for her to want to divorce her son. She uses Ogyaanowa as a weapon to fight Esi and she strives to confront and create problems where none exists.

However, as the marriage began to fall apart, Oko's mother had become just a little nasty about everything. It had seemed to Esi that the older woman was getting ready to use the child as some sort of a weapon to fight her with, and she had secretly sworn not to let that happen. So one day, and much to her mother-in-law's surprise, she had suggested to her that Ogyaanowa could stay on. The bungalow gets too lonely for her. Here, there would be other children for her to play with. Nearly all cousins. 'You know that in our custom there is nothing like that. Oko's sister's children are Ogyaanowa's sisters and brothers. Are we Europeans that we would want divisions among kin?' (*Changes*, page 82, 1991).

Women perpetuate the subjugation of the woman in *Changes* that is assumed as an archetype of a patriarchal society in their attempt to exercise their powers subtly while manipulating the man to achieve their purpose. The woman most times is at the root of the problems of her fellow woman in a marital union and coerces the man to side her. Esi decides not to fight her mother-in-law even when she has declared war against her, 'Esi feels completely ashamed. She suspects the older woman is seizing the opportunity to hit the issue to put her in her place' (*Changes*, page 82

1991). Even when Esi avoids her fellow women they don't allow her to be, instead continue to fight and molest her from all sides.

His people had of course learned of what had been going on between him and his wife. One day, one of his mothers and two of his sisters had marched on Esi, demanding what right she thought she had to start him on a new job with such bad luck? They had gone on to call her a semi-barren witch and told her that they thought their son and brother was well rid of her, thank God. Esi had not said a word during the entire performance (*Changes*, page 841, 1991).

The humiliation of Esi, calling her names and wanting to beat her, all these are perpetrated by her fellow women. Oko's family, through incentives thrown at Esi want to drive her out of her husband's house so that they will use the opportunity to benefit from Oko's wealth which Esi's presence seems to deprive them of.

Women's action against their fellow woman is oppressive and it also has indirect effects on men. Esi through her actions oppresses Oko and he endures his persecution because the society considers him a strong man and incapable of expressing emotions. Oko is hurt psychologically when his wife refuses to reason with him and relocates to his new place of work, Esi asserts herself by pursuing her dream but her decision has greater effect on Oko because there is no one he can turn to to share his difficulties with because the matriarchal society considers him strong and capable of dealing with the problems of a woman.

Esi had carried out her determination to leave Oko and even asked for a divorce. 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. In fact, he was later aware that what had really saved him was the newest challenge in his life-going to head the school. It demanded so much of him that he could not possibly have indulged in too much sorrowing after his collapsed marriage. But not even the new job could stop him from thinking about his broken marriage. He did, especially in the very late hours of the night, when he could finally leave his office and crawl home to bed (*Changes*, page 85 1991).

Aidoo in *Changes* captures the plights of the weaker men whom the society for long has ignored in constructing as a single personality incapable of variations. The author of *Changes* uses the family to portray the plight of the man and how he is exploited in the family which is one of the units of matriarchal dominance. Oko indulges in drinking to escape the choices his wife hoists on him.

Oko mourns his marriage and this shows that some men are also affected by sudden marital break ups to the extent that they silently mourn because the society frowns at male grief even when it exists; society refuses to acknowledge it because it serves the purpose of patriarchy in advancing female dominance that the woman is always abused in marriage. Oko has been deprived of his conjugal rights even when he is ready to fulfill it for the past ten years by his wife. *Changes* acknowledge the power of the woman in a marital union and her ability to undo the man if she is insistent as demonstrated by the actions of Esi in *Changes*. Oko nurses his heartbreak alone and he feels the weight of his wife's action at night and the loneliness it imposes on him because he had been trained from birth to rely completely on the woman right from birth. The man is made dependent by the way he is trained by the woman in a patriarchal society. Oko endures this deprivation of sex many times in his marriage and hopes that his wife

would change one day and fulfill her obligation as a wife. Even after divorce Oko hopes that he has really not divorced and that his wife would come back to him. He lives in this denial for a while before reality hits him in the face later on in the text. In a matriachal and patriachal society, the weaker man only exists through hope and pretence because the society does not consider him as humble but dislodges him because his attitudes are not in conformity with various defined norms. Oko still holds on:

.. he was able to deceive himself into thinking that Esi had not left him. That they were only separated until she could start coming for weekends. And he missed his daughter terribly too. Deep down in the corners of his being, he could not persuade himself to accept that it was all over (*Changes*, page 85, 1991).

Oko faces psychological stress as a result of the betrayal of his wife and her self-centred disposition in the marriage. In his helplessness his mother who is an active member of the matriarchal fold decides to bring him a young girl to set him free from the spell that is cast upon him by a woman.

Then Oko's mother came and deposited a breathing parcel on his doorstep, in the form of a very beautiful and very young girl. Oko was absolutely certain that he had not met her before. During their first encounter the only feeling he could recognise was extreme surprise-that it was still possible in this day and age to get a young woman in this world who would agree to be carried off as a wife to a man she had never met (*Changes*, pages 85-86, 1991).

Matriarchy is at the root of polygamy and this is seen in Oko's mother's action who tries to force a young girl on Oko when she is aware that Oko is trying to fix his marriage that is being faced with challenges.

The men are puns in the hands of women in life, it is either he is controlled by his sister or mother or wife, and sometimes all three. They use certain elements of attachment to woo or subtly pressurise him to do their bidding; hence, power play. In Oko's helplessness and confusion he rejects his mother's offer although he does not say it to her because he is powerless but insinuates it. He goes again to plead with his wife, 'You know perfectly well that if ever you really want to, you can come back to me,' he said without the slightest trace of irony and cynicism, and left' (*Changes*, page 86, 1991). The foregoing shows that in marital dispute the weaker man is at the receiving end and always pleads even when he is not at fault. Decisions are made and imposed on him although he pleads to go back to the former state of affairs even when it is not favourable to him. Oko is finally obsessed in getting his wife back and this prompts him to go to Ali to demand for his wife:

When Oko saw him, he dashed towards the door, as if to rush in. But the door had a Yale lock and Ali quickly banged it shut and locked both of them out of the bedroom. Frustrated, Oko turned and faced Ali. 'Where is she?' he demanded. 'Where is who?' Ali asked coolly, as if genuinely had not the slightest idea to whom the other man was referring. 'My wife,' Oko thundered. 'You're what?' Ali demanded. 'My wife. That's what I said, and you heard me well,' said Oko (*Changes*, pages 146).

At the dawn of feminism, the man is very willing to remain and die in marriage with the woman but the woman rejects him and he retaliates through confrontation with his fellow man that he could win the love of his wife again and he decides to engage in physical combat with Ali but he gets battered.

He was shaking with rage, as he tried to shake Ali. To break free, Ali pushed Oko away from him violently, Oko virtually fell. He didn't quite, but a button from his shirt fell to the floor. Then a child began to cry. It was Ogyaanowa. Oko picked himself up quickly and resumed banging on the door, almost to himself, 'listen, I don't know who you are, but Esi is my wife. I don't know who you are, but Esi is my wife. (*Changes*, pages 146-147 1991).

Oko decides to fight Ali and reclaim his wife back but he is battered by him, a stronger man. In his humiliation he pleads for his wife to be returned to him even when he is aware that Ali is actually sleeping with his wife. Esi could not even separate them; she runs away and allows them to kill themselves.

Oko left the door, turned on Ali with a raised fist. But Ali was too quick for him. He got hold of the raised hand. Then, as they began to struggle, Esi, who had heard Ogyaanowa from the bedroom, opened the door, rushed out, passed the two men, picked up the child, ran with her into her car and drove off. She left two very surprised men staring at the car (*Changes*, page 147, 1991).

Esi through her selfish interest exposes her daughter to unnecessary disputes and deprives her of the love and care of a father due to her choice to divorce Oko, with his only fault being that he demanded for her time and his conjugal right. She deprives her fellow woman of her husband. Fusena and her family endure unnecessary stress by taking away their father and husband from them. Ali's family had to wait for him in fear of what had happened to him before they could eat:

A few minutes later, and feeling somewhat collected, he had phoned home. Fusena was almost incoherent with concern. Where was he? Was he alright? He had assured her repeatedly. When she mentioned that they had been waiting for him to come home so that they could all eat supper together, he felt really bad. But he asked her to eat with the children. She would not agree. How could he expect her to? Eventually, he persuaded her to let the children eat so that they could go to bed. She agreed to that, but she would wait for him, of course... (*Changes*, page 156, 1991).

Fusena was scared that something had happened to her husband and this is actually triggered by her fellow woman who rejects her own husband but decides that it is another woman's husband that interests her most.

Esi has no respect and regard for Oko. She rejects and refuses Oko her husband sex but she freely gives it to Ali who is not her husband. She uses her power of sexuality to suppress Oko while she freely gives it to Ali who is still married to Fusena her fellow woman.

Esi and Ali reserved their love-making for the comfort of Esi's bed. This nearly always followed an outing, as well as any time he came just to be with her. He would shut up Linga Hide Aways at the end of the working day and drive straight to her. They would immediately fall into each other's arms holds her welcoming kiss from the front door through the length of the sitting-room, through her bedroom and on her bed. Then for the next hour or so it was just grunts and groans until, quite exhausted, they fell quiet (*Changes*, pages 88, 1991).

Esi deprived her fellow woman of the presence of her own husband Ali, she manipulates Ali that whenever he closes from work he hurries to her place just to be with her and sexually excites himself. Esi through her action supports polygamy and in effect deprives another woman of her husband as she indirectly inflicts psychological pains on her husband and her daughter. She

deprives her daughter the right to grow in a proper family setting through her choice to divorce her husband because he loves her. Esi sleeps with her fellow woman's husband even when she is aware that Ali is still married. She accepts to marry Ali even when she is aware that he is married, 'Okay. Okay, what I mean is that you have already got Fusena who was your first wife. She wears your ring, and I'm almost certain that here in this city she is the only one known as Mrs Kondey' (107). Esi wants to displace her fellow woman by her choice to get married to Ali so that she can answer Mrs Kondey.

The above shows once again that matriarchy is the driving force behind patriarchy. For her to subtly coerce Ali to marry her demonstrates that polygamy is sustained and promoted by women through her actions and not really that men are polygamous in nature. Esi's decision to share someone else's husband instead of sticking to her husband Oko affects Fusena psychologically:

The streak of abnormality managed to run through some more of that morning. When Fusena drove to the kiosk the first time, she did not go in. After she had parked and was getting out of the car, she changed her mind, banged shut the car door which she had just opened and drove back to the house. She met Ali in front of their gate just as he was backing out. She drove her car to where the two cars became parallel, and stopped. Ali had stopped, and looked at her with a question on his face. 'Is she also a Muslim?' Fusena asked him, without any prelims, and without getting out. ...Ali said just, 'No.' Fusena backed out again and drove off. She was going to look for someone to talk to (*Changes*, pages 119-120, 1991).

Fusena is disoriented when she remembers that she would be competing for her husband's attention because another woman has considered herself better by first secretly sleeping with him and now asking him to legitimise the secret affair. Esi demonstrates that feminism is somehow vindictive in the sense that in its attempt to struggle for equality and appropriate rights in the society, it also oppresses men and fellow women as character delineation in *Changes* illustrates. It was women who were sent to talk to Fusena to accept her husband's "decision" to marry another wife:

As she sat in front of older women trying so diligently to listen to them, she knew that all was lost. Besides, what could she say to the good woman, when some of them were themselves second, third and fourth wives? And those who had been first wives looked dignified, but clearly also so battle-weary? She decided to make their job easier for them. 'Yes, Mma. Yes, Auntie. Yes...yes...yes,' was all she said to every suggestion that was made (*Changes*, pages 130, 1991).

At the bottom of the perceived male domination is the woman who advances it because it benefits her the most. The social inequality that is held up against men in their choices to marry more women actually is for the interest of women to take care of excess women in the society. Fusena's situation highlights the foregoing because she saw the beneficiaries of polygamy and she knew that she could not argue for her husband to be hers alone because the other women who are husband sharers would resist her and she saw the futility to fight with them. She is aware that matriarchy always wins a war against its own and no one fights against his clan. Esi through marrying Ali deprives his children the right of the presence of their father and when Ali tries to visit his children she frowns at it and feels cheated.

'I said I can't go on like this,' she repeated. What would you consider marriage to be?' 'If that's how you see it, then I'm going--' Home! Esi finished the sentence for him with something of a flourish, like a victory declaration. 'Well, just go "home" to your wife and children and leave me alone,' she told him, more quietly (*Changes*, pages 190).

Esi wants the attention of Ali yet she rejects the company of Oko. She wants Ali to spend more time with her instead of spending it with his children and his wife. Esi in the process oppresses the man and her fellow woman. She subjects herself at the end of the day.

She had to teach herself not to expect him at all. She had had to teach herself not to wonder where he was when he was not with her. And that had been the hardest of the lessons to learn. For, Accra being that kind of place, she couldn't help hearing about his womanising activities (*Changes*, pages 198).

Esi inflicts pain on herself and those who come close to. Her choices contribute to the sustenance of patriarchy not passively, but actively.

Conclusion

Women are part of the structure that subjugate their fellow women and weaker men. Giving the power of women in the society it would be wrong to construct women subjugation as totally a product of the patriarchal society even when women are having great roles to play in identity construction and in molding characters in the human society. Consequently, a true female liberation is that which includes addressing women as they pun men to do their bidding even as they hide behind the scenes of such female motivated male actions.

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Onuoha, Onyekachi Peter & Opere Humuani Oyndamola “Men as Puns in the feminist African novel”

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