To Be a Woman in a Man's World:

Gender and National Identity in Aidoo's
Changes: A Love Story

Fawohodie:
Ghanaian symbol for independence, freedom and emancipation

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Introduction

‘Leave one man, marry another. Esi, you can. You have got your job. The government gives you a house. You have got your car. You have already got your daughter. You don’t even have to prove you are a woman to any man, old or new. You can pick and choose. But remember, my lady, the best husband you can ever have is he who demands all of you and all of your time. Who is a good man if not the one who eats his wife completely, and pushes her down with a good gulp of alcohol? In our time, the best citizen was the man who swallowed more than one woman, and the more, the better. So our warrior and our kings married more women than the other men in their communities. To prove that they were, by that single move, the best in the land. (109)

This quote is taken from Changes: a Love Story, the novel dealt with in this essay, and it represents just one of many contending views on gender identities the novel deals with. It also gives us a hint of a different way of seeing nationality, and that gender relations are closely connected to national identity. In the novel the author Ama Ata Aidoo presents the problem of negotiating gender identity in a postcolonial setting, more precisely in contemporary Ghana. Reading the novel we meet a number of people with different approaches to surviving in a society that has failed to merge tradition and modernity.

The novel’s main character, Esi Sekyi, is one of the women who has profited from the modern educational programs that the country’s first president Kwame Nkrumah instigated when he first led the new nation of Ghana to independence in 1954. With a master’s degree in statistics and a well paid government job, Esi tries to combine her career with her role as a wife and mother, but feels trapped by her husband’s expectations on her of subordinance and adherence to traditional norms. In search of independence she leaves her husband and enters into a polygamous marriage with another man, Ali Kondey. Although Esi’s air of independence is what attracts Ali to her, it is still he who is in control in their relationship. Esi is once again subject to a man, and in her quest for independence she ends her romantic relationship with Ali as well.
As Esi’s story develops throughout the novel we meet other women and men and are invited to share their struggle to unite competing femininities/masculinities with a sense of national belonging in their young nation. Many of these will be discussed in the following analysis in which I will argue that the formation of gender identity and national identity is intertwined and co-dependent. Through my analysis I aim to show the intersections of the two identities in the novel and with that claim that the novel is a strong plea to people in West Africa, as well as the rest of Africa and the world, to recognize that women have always been active agents of nation building and therefore should have equal right to reap the benefits from that strife, as well as equal power to define national identities as their male fellow citizens have. In this endeavor I will apply theoretical perspectives on gender and nation presented in detail further on in this introduction. To my aid I will also have articles and essays by critics such as Elisabeth, Jane Bryce, Maria Olaussen and Tuzyline Jita Allan who deal with the works of Aidoo. All of the above deal with Changes in their writings, some exclusively and others within the context of her other works. Much of the critical analyses on Aidoo deal with her entire authorship and not single works; and where the focus is on a single work it is usually on her first novel: Our Sister Killjoy: or, Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint. Why there seems to be a larger critical response on Our Sister Killjoy than on Changes is probably because the prior was published fourteen years earlier and thus has been exposed to criticism much longer. Another reason could be that some critics found Our Sister Killjoy controversial in its “pointed attacks against the Western world” in a way that Changes is not (“Aidoo, Ama Ata.”).

Analyses concerned with Aidoo’s authorship as a whole deals with themes ranging from her narrative technique to her inevitable political feminism; with the greater part of the analyses discussing various African feminist issues. It has thus not been an altogether easy task to find critical texts that concern nationalism and national identity in regard to Changes. It has also been somewhat difficult to come across discussions of gender and nation within the context of the novel. The only exception is the text by Willey that I will be using. Although a lot of critical work has been done to explore the women’s conditions in the novel, not much (or even any?) deal with the situation of the men. While the lack of criticism on aspects mentioned above presents a challenge it also gives an opportunity to investigate previously unexplored areas and hopefully add new perspectives on both the novel and the theoretical perspectives used in the analysis.

Over all, Aidoo has received mostly positive response to her literary achievements, however she has, according to Tuzyline Jita Allan encountered a good deal of opposition and
patronizing attitudes from predominantly African male literary critics and fellow scholars who believe that feminism is a threat to African nationality (171-72).

Having given this introduction I will now move on to the theoretical background in which I explore and develop the ideas of gender and nation with their subcategories of gender identity and national identity. With that I will give a basis to the subsequent analysis of Changes.

**Gender & Gender Identity**

**Gender Theory**

The word gender may be found in many different contexts. It may relate to gender in language or simply denote the biological sex of animals or humans, but often it is defined as the social equivalent of biological sex, that is, the practices we engage in in order to express our sex. Forthwith I will use the term ‘gender’ to exclusively denote the social dimension of sex to avoid the confusion that appears when the word is used as a synonym to the term ‘biological sex’.

To divide humans into female and male based on biological sex creates a binary structure of opposites. According to Anne Cranny-Francis et al. (1) there is a general agreement that sex is binary and that its two sides, female and male, define each other. This notion is problematized, both by the authors above and by Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna in *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*, with the example of children born with both female and male genitals. The example of transsexualism¹ is also put forth in this context (viii).

But, all the same, the thought of sex as binary is heavily rooted in Western tradition. According to Toril Moi, the feminist theorist Hélène Cixous claims that the binary pair of male/female is the prototype of all other binary pairs, such as high/low, light/dark, true/false and so on, where the positive half of the pair is associated with the male and the negative with the female. This creates a hierarchical structure in which men are the privileged norm by which everything is measured. This hierarchy creates an unbalance between women and men where the men wield the power (Moi 211). However, this Western male dominated paradigm does not remain uncontested, and its most successful adversary is the feminist movement.

¹ A transsexual person is someone who identifies with the opposite sex instead of with the sex it was assigned at birth (“Transsexualism”).
With feminist thought the concept of gender enters into the discourse of relations between the sexes. Cranny-Francis et al. define gender as “a set of meanings that sexes assume in particular societies” (3). These meanings are organized into femininity or masculinity and are attached to biological females and males, assigning certain behavior to a certain sex.

**Gender Identity**

Gender is thus the practices and behaviors a person uses to identify her/himself as either female or male to her/his surroundings. These notions of femininity and masculinity are, according to social constructionists, learned from the social or cultural environment, and they may vary between different social and cultural contexts. Accordingly, gender is constructed, that is, what is seen as feminine in one culture may be seen as masculine in another. An example of this is the occurrence of men holding hands. In most contemporary Western societies this is seen as something unmasculine, but in countries in the Middle East this is completely acceptable behavior for men. It was also acceptable behavior in 19th century England, which shows that notions of gender also change over time, and consequently puts concepts of innate gender practices and essentialist theories into question (Cranny-Francis et al. 3).

This social constructionist perspective is, as already mentioned, a reaction and a resistance against patriarchal dominance and the essentialist notion that gender is fixed and unalterable. Essentialist scholars, on the other hand claim, that gender is a biological production, that is, biological females “produce feminine behaviors” and thus a female identity, and consequently biological males produce masculine identity and behaviors. Accordingly gender is innate and inextricably linked to biological sex. A child is born with an essence of femaleness or maleness; these essences making the different sexes naturally suited to perform different tasks in society. In this manner an essentialist view on gender is an excellent tool to maintain the status quo of the gender dynamics in an unequal male dominated society (Cranny-Francis 3).

There are of course many different theories about gender, ranging from essentialist to social constructionist where those in between are more or less influenced by the two poles. The most essentialist theorist would claim that gender is purely a biological production, and the most constructionist theorist would maintain that gender is an entirely social or cultural construction. Judith Butler, who puts forth a theory on gender as performative, is such a
theorist. She argues that gender is totally separated from the body and that the production of gender sets in when we label a newborn as a girl or a boy (Pilcher 41).

I believe, as Simone de Beauvoir, that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (qtd. in Cranny-Francis et al. 5), that one learns from society and family how to behave in order to be a “proper” woman or man. I also believe that this is culturally defined, and may even differ within a culture, which leads me to argue that there may be multiple femininities/masculinities at work simultaneously.

Nation & National Identity

Nation

The concept of nation is, as most concepts are, a disputed one. According to Nira Yuval-Davies (15) there are theorists (such as Pierre van den Berghe) that view the nation as a natural phenomenon that stems from the family and kinship relations. In their eyes the family is, in Yuval-Davies’ words, “based on natural sexual divisions of labour, in which men protect the ‘womenandchildren’” (15). By basing the concept of nation on the family the nation “inherits” the value of something natural and, thus something eternal and universal.

As an antithesis to the above, Benedict Anderson, according to John McLeod, paints a picture of the nation as an “imagined political community” (qtd. in McLeod 68). It is “imagined” because the members of a nation think that they are a part of a community and that they share “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (qtd. In McLeod 69); they cannot be sure of this since it is not possible for all members of a nation to know or even hear of each other (69).

McLeod argues, basing his argument on theories by Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, that nations are “fabrications” and claims that the nation is an idea, a Western construction developed alongside Western capitalism and industrialization (McLeod 68). The idea of the nation was spread through imperialism and colonization, and was later adopted and used for their own purposes by many nationalist movements in the struggle for independence from the colonial powers (75).

National Identity

I will now revisit Benedict Anderson and his “imagined community”, as it is presented by John McLeod, and from there pursue the thought of national identity as it trails ahead.
In Anderson’s “imagined community” the members of the nation depend on the feeling of “deep horizontal comradeship” (69). This emotion of community and belonging is central to the idea of the nation, and has to be reinforced by “narratives, rituals and symbols” in order to form a national identity (69). Notions of a shared history and common origins are also important elements in the forging of a national identity according to McLeod, who here recounts theories by Eric Hobswam (69). McLeod specifically refers to Hobswam’s concept “invention of tradition”, a concept which all nations engage in (70). The national anthem and national flag are examples of such traditions, as well as holidays with reference to events that are considered important to a nation. A shared historical narrative, which is one of the stepping stones to a national identity, is created through presenting one single account of history and then adhering to it (70). In addition to this, Anderson (referred to in McLeod) mentions another central characteristic of a nation’s identity formation, namely language. A national language that everybody understands unifies the nation and helps create a sense of “we-ness” (72). John McLeod presents yet another necessary feature for the formation of national identity: the construction of otherness. The national self is defined in relation to what it is not, that is the other, drawing imaginary borders between the people of the nation and the ones outside (74).

In National Identity and Democracy in Africa Mai Palmberg puts forth Anthony Smith’s ideas of national identity which are quite similar to Anderson’s which she also discusses. Both Smith and Anderson declare that national elites are tools used to produce true feelings of national identity (12). The elites are meant to create new symbols out of imagined common roots; they are supposed to be “the inventors of tradition”.

Palmberg also calls attention to the fact that the modern nations that were once colonies have the borders they have as a result of colonial gamble for power. When borders were drawn they were drawn with no regard to existing ethnic groups, and communities were often either divided or shattered into pieces, or bundled together with other ethnic groups (11).

During the time of oppression under their colonial masters the colonized elite in many colonies found the concept of nation and national identity very useful as a tool to unite the masses in anti-colonial movements. Since many of the colonies were a mishmash of tribes or ethnic groups that often did not feel much loyalty towards each other, the colonial representation of the nation was the only unifying force available (McLeod 75-76). The nationalist movements’ endeavors were now to use the colonizer’s tool to create a national identity strong enough to subvert the colonial power and achieve independence. Léopold
Senghor’s and Aimé Césaire’s *Negritude* and Frantz Fanon’s work on national culture were two such endeavors\(^2\) (76). So was the Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah’s theories on an *African personality*, and I will devote a few lines to describe his philosophy, seeing as this essay deals with a work by a Ghanaian author.

Nkrumah and his political party were the leaders of the elite and the dominating voice in the ongoing debate of national identity in Ghana during much of the decolonization and post-independence period until 1966 when Nkrumah was ousted in a coup d’état (7). According to Elizabeth Willey, Aidoo claims that these leaders were the decision makers of the whole community. She also calls in question the elite’s power to define and impute the African Personality on the people (7).

Nkrumah’s theories of the African Personality had, as mentioned earlier, its origins in the desire to form a national identity that had roots that ploughed deep in the denigrated soil of African history. He wanted to retell the narrative of history from an African perspective, where Africa has an active history long before European adventurers happened to stumble across the African continent. Nkrumah also advocated the view that Africa used to be a single community and that there could and should be such a thing as a Pan-African political unity. His choice to name the country ‘Ghana’ at independence, instead of the Gold Coast as the former colony had been called, mirrors his Pan-Africanist view of history. The name Ghana was taken from the 11\(^{th}\) and 12\(^{th}\) century empire of Ghana, which was a prosperous and powerful kingdom in what is now Mali and Mauritania and had no connection to the present day Ghana and its people other than being situated on the same continent (7-8).

In his strife for African unity and promotion of the African Personality, Nkrumah, overlooked and ignored the diversities within Ghana, both the ones of ethnicity and of gender (9-10). Palmberg acknowledges these diversities and points out several more, among them education. She states that: “education abroad or in an educational system modelled on foreign ideals provide further sets of identities that compete with or colour the formation of national identity” (14). Thus, national identity competes with the very tool meant to promote it, and instead of improving an already confused social situation education with foreign influence exacerbates it. Gender identity and national identity are sometimes also in opposition, just as

\(^2\) However, Fanon was critical to the Negritude movement because he “rejected the call for nostalgic celebration of a mythic African past central to Negritude writings”, and because he saw the danger in that “the native intellectual” of the Negritude movement might identify more with the colonizer than the indigenous people he was meant to serve (McLeod 84-85).
the others mentioned. However that relationship will be dealt with more deeply later in the analysis since that is my field of study.

Having introduced the two theoretical perspectives of my study I will now move on to the analysis. In the two first parts, *Gender Identity in Changes* and *National Identity* *in Changes*, I deal with how the two perspectives are represented in the novel respectively. In the third and last part, *Gender and Nation in Changes*, I explain how the two identities intersect, both in theory and in the novel.

**Analysis**

*Gender Identity in Changes*

The novel deals with many different representations of gender identity, many different femininities and masculinities which either endorse traditional values or try to negotiate traditional and modern standards into a new equitable approach. It is not possible to analyze each one of these representations in depth in this limited space, I will therefore touch briefly on some and analyze others more deeply while others have to be left without discussion. I will examine the different views of femininity represented and how they interact with each other but also how they interact with notions of masculinity put forth in the novel.

The femininity represented by Esi stands out in comparison to other notions of femininity put forth by the other characters. Formed by an education with influences that do not seem to agree with the society she lives in she is forced to compromise her ideals with reality. Her ideal is to be able to have a career and a family without being looked upon as less of a woman or an unfit mother just because she brings work home and travels a lot. Clearly her ideals are not shared by her first husband, Oko, with whom she has constant fights concerning her work and her role as a wife. Although he loves her very much he cannot handle her independence in relation to him. He wants her to spend more time at home with him and their daughter and to be more like a traditional woman, that is, a woman whose first priority is to take care of the household and to serve her husband and family. As Esi does not fulfill these requirements Oko feels neglected and also hurt because his love for her is unrequited. Contemplating their marriage Oko is thinking: “…what had he got out of it? Little. Nothing. No affection. Not even plain warmth. Nothing except one little daughter!...He wanted other children…a boy if possible” (8). According to him “Esi definitely [puts] her career well above any duties she [owes] as a wife” and this makes him look bad (8). He complains to Esi that her behavior makes his friends laugh at him for not being man enough to
control his woman. However, I believe the main reason for his discontentedness is due to the fact that he is unclear about his role in their relationship. He has been taught that it is the man who is head of the house and who is the main, if not sole, breadwinner of the family. In his and Esi’s relationship she earns more than him and the house they live in is a fringe benefit from Esi’s job. From his perspective Esi must seem like an usurper trying to claim the power rightfully belonging to him, the male; and in an attempt to regain dominance and self-respect he rapes her. The fact that Esi defines Oko’s advance as marital rape instead of thinking of it as him exercising his right as a husband suggests an unsubmissive spirit. While resenting Oko’s assault she also ponders the fact that there is no word equivalent to “marital rape” in her native language, nor in any other African language she knows of. She thus identifies a rift between her world and the world of her “mothers”. I will return to this rift and discuss it further later in the analysis. However, choosing to call Oko’s action a rape is critical point to Esi’s because in choosing to do so she takes an active approach towards a new and improved understanding her own femininity.

As Esi divorces Oko she continues her quest to live a full life and ends up in a relationship with Ali, a man who is already married. Choosing to enter a relationship with a married man indicates a negotiation from Esi’s point of view. She has already tried marriage but it failed on the grounds of her husband demanding too much of her time. However, being divorced and having no man in her life becomes too lonely. Esi’s solution is thus to have a extramarital relationship thinking that Ali will demand less of her than Oko did, since Ali already has a wife and children to devote his time to. Esi is finally free to dispose of her time as she wishes, and in control of her life. But she soon realizes that her relationship with Ali is under his control; he decides when to come to her house and when to go home to his wife and children. Ali also divulges a desire to control Esi by asking her to marry him, to become his second wife, instead of remaining his mistress. In this instance we can see a relapse to a traditionalist pattern, or rather a sexist pattern, when Ali, though admiring her independence, wants to mark Esi as occupied territory and claim ownership of her.

Answering Ali’s proposal with a “Must I?”, Esi reveals her ambivalence about accepting it (86). However, she does accept it despite her own apprehensions of looming complications as well as her mother’s and grandmother’s advice against the marriage. This decision seems to go directly contrary to Esi’s independence and the only clues we get to why she agrees to marry Ali is that the idea of a polygamous marriage fascinates her greatly, and that she likes the fact that he is an only child with no interfering relatives near by. The solution to the riddle might lie in Esi’s almost desperate proclamation to Okopuya that
“monogamy is so stifling” (98). By choosing a form of marriage that resembles a “real” (that is, monogamous) marriage the least she hopes to avoid some of the unpleasantries she had with Oko and his, in her eyes, interfering family. Another explanation of her consent to the marriage may simply be that she is in love with Ali, and that she is afraid that he will not want to continue their relationship unless they marry. Whatever the case may be Esi is compromising her ideal of autonomy nonetheless by agreeing to the marriage, because her first choice would have been to stay unmarried. Some of the reasons to why she, and her likes, cannot stay unmarried will be dealt with further ahead in the analysis.

Upon hearing of Esi divorcing Oko her mother and grandmother are wondering whether Esi has gone completely crazy. To them it is pure madness to have let go of a good husband such as Oko. Esi’s argument that he demanded too much of her time is stricken down by her grandmother, Nana, retorting: “…doesn’t a woman’s time belong to a man? My lady Silk, that one is a very new and golden reason for leaving a man, if ever there was one …. The best husband you can ever have is he who demands all of you and all of your time” (109). When the question of Esi becoming Ali’s second wife comes up she questions the idea of exchanging one man for another. As far as she is concerned Esi had the best husband she could ever have, and if he did not satisfy her no man ever will. Esi’s mother, Ena, does not like Esi’s divorce or marriage to Ali at all on the grounds that with such an education as Esi’s she deserves better than being somebody’s second wife. Both Ena and Nana were raised in societies where polygamy was common and are thus used to the concept. They are also aware of the hierarchies in such a society, hierarchies that Esi seems oblivious of. To Esi’s mother her choice to trade a husband of her own for a husband to share is a step down in that hierarchy. Ena’s dislike does not emanate in the fact that it is a polygamous marriage, but that Esi is the second wife and not the first. In her view the first wife is the “proper” wife, and in renouncing that place she is also renouncing the power it entails to be the senior wife.

For Esi this is a deliberate choice, because in renouncing that power she also believes she avoids the obligations that accompany that role. She believes that Fusena, Ali’s first wife, will fill the needs Ali has that Esi did not want to fill for Oko, and that she, Esi, can get away with being the “bonus wife”. What she does not take into consideration is the fact that Ali feels somehow indebted to Fusena for sacrificing her career as a teacher to stay home while Ali educated himself, acquiring one degree after another. Besides the feeling of indebtedness Ali loves Fusena and tries not to “hurt her deliberately” by flaunting his love affairs or acting in a manner that would “leave her feelings unnecessary bruised” (78). The obligations Ali has
as a husband and father thus compete with time he spends at work and with Esi. In this lottery, where the prize is Ali’s loyalty and presence, Esi inevitably draws the shortest straw.

As mentioned earlier Esi is at first not at all discontented with the fact that Ali is not with her all the time. In fact, in the following passage her feelings seem contrary: “…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” (137-38). However, as time passes, a feeling of dissatisfaction comes stealing up on Esi. She is lonely and she starts examining the nature of her marriage to Ali. The fact that she is in love with him (with Oko she had felt only gratitude) complicates her situation further. Tuzyline Jita Allan writes: “As Esi gets entangled in love, her sturdy independence begins to turn flabby, leaving her enervated almost to the point of a nervous breakdown” (183).

When Esi hears of Ali’s new secretary and his habit of driving her home every day she does not like it at all. While Ali’s phone calls and visits grow sparse his gifts and souvenirs for Esi come more frequently. After three years of marriage, a marriage of constant waiting and uncertainty when to expect Ali, Esi is finally fed up with it. She is fed up with receiving gifts as substitutes for Ali’s presence and thus ends their relationship, although they formally stay married. Esi concludes that she believes Ali loves her, in his own way, but that “his fashion of loving [has] proved quite inadequate for her” (Aidoo 166).

As stated in the confession/apology preceding the first page of the novel, Esi is “a somewhat privileged young woman” (n. pag.). Although this short introductory paragraph is without a doubt highly ironic the previously quoted phrase is essentially true. Compared to many of her fellow “countrywomen” Esi is indeed privileged. It is only when her life is put in juxtaposition to the life of a man that she seems much less privileged all of a sudden.

I have briefly dealt with some of the women in Esi’s vicinity who think and act differently than her, those being Nana, Ena and Fusena. What unites these women is that they conform to the conventional way of living, accepting an inferior position in relation to their husbands and other men. They are not so much interested in altering their position towards men as they are in creating a position for themselves in relation to other women, because they feel, unlike Esi, that it is a lost cause.

One of the beauties with the novel is that these women are not depicted as primitive subdued women that uphold ancient values for their own sake, but as intelligent women conforming (sometimes with hidden resistance) to a male dominated world in order to survive (Olaussen 65). Most of them do not have the means to break free, for as Nana intimates to Esi,
there are certain variables needed in order to escape male dominion. “You have got your job. The government gives you a house. You have got your car. You have already got your daughter. You don’t even have to prove you are a woman to any man, old or new. You can pick and choose” (Aidoo 109). Esi’s independence is not granted any of the women mentioned above, mostly because they do not have the same degree of financial freedom she has, but it seems as if they also lack the desire or courage to effectuate a change in their situation. Or perhaps what is mistaken for lack of courage is really a sense of pragmatism. Maybe these women just have a different approach than Esi. As Maria Olaussen writes “Their strength lies in their resignation and their power in their cynicism that makes it possible for them to pay lip service to high ideals while gaining what they may from any form of double morality and duplicity” (Olaussen 65). This statement is seconded by Fusena’s relatives realizing that “it [is] a man’s world. You only [survive] if you [know] how to live in it as a woman.” (Aidoo 107). In this quote it is made clear that women and men have different roles in society, and that it is essential to now how to play the part. It is also shows the advantage of power men have over women, the men being the ones who define the world.

A character I have left without discussion thus far is Esi’s best friend Okopuya with whom Esi discusses the demands on and possibilities available to the modern African working woman. My choice to deal with Okopuya so late in the analysis does not reflect any lack of importance; on the contrary she is central in the novel. Okopuya’s function is to be somewhat of a mediator between rebellion and conformity; she stands somewhere in between Esi and Fusena in that respect. Just as Esi and Fusena, Okopuya is an educated woman. She has worked as a state registered nurse and midwife for fifteen years and contributes to the household income. Despite this she chooses a different path in the encounter with marriage and the expectations of it compared to the two other women. While Fusena very reluctantly conforms to a more conventional and traditional lifestyle in which her husband wields the power, and Esi decides to rather stand outside of marriage than to conform, Okopuya accepts the rules and roles of marriage to some extent but also, in her own way, tries to resist them.

Okopuya’s role towards Esi is somewhat double-faced. While agreeing with Esi in theory on the topics of their discussions, that is, marriage, divorce, motherhood, independence and career ambitions, in practice Okopuya is more realistic and pragmatic. When Esi tells her about the divorce Okopuya is as shocked as Esi’s mothers concerning her reasons for the break-up, but mostly she is shocked by Esi’s childishness. When Esi complains about Oko craving too much of her attention Okopuya asks her to be realistic and realize that it is normal for a man to want to be with the woman he loves as much as possible, even to the extent that
he wants her to change her job. As they go on to talk about women’s independence and intelligence and men’s demands on them Okopuya says: “men are not really interested in a woman’s independence or her intelligence. The few who claim they like intelligent and active women are also interested in having such women permanently in their beds and in their kitchens” (45). They both agree that this is a contradiction and feels the hopelessness of the situation. The choice for the educated intelligent woman is either to succumb to the demands of marriage and motherhood, or to stay alone. After Esi’s assertion that she will stay alone unless she meets a man who will accept her lifestyle, Okopuya is once again the realistic one and retorts: “You just can’t have everything your way, and not expect to be lonely, at least some of the time….No matter what anybody says, we can’t have it all. Not if you are a woman. Not yet” (49).

The passages above show a side of Okopuya that is complying with, yet not agreeing with the conventional way of thinking. However, as I mentioned earlier, she also acts out some kind of resistance, although she chooses her battles. When, at an early stage in the novel, we get to know Okopuya we learn that, after the birth of her fourth child, she decides that that is enough and has a tubal ligation. According to Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi this operation is something very few African women would willingly submit themselves to whether they are educated or not. The reason is that African women often view their womanhood as almost interchangeable with motherhood, and sterilization would thus mean a loss of femaleness (285). This conflation of motherhood and womanhood is an excellent example of how gender is constructed on the basis of specific tasks assigned to women in a society. Despite this view on femininity, Okopuya goes through with the operation, and in this way shows great independence from existing notions of gender.

Another instance of deliberate resistance is Okopuya’s constant quarrels with Kubi about the car. According to Olaussen sexuality and mobility are connected. She writes: “the men in control of the cars are usually also the ones who control the women’s sexuality” (67). Throughout the novel cars represent freedom of movement for the women, and, to take Olaussen’s view on it, cars would thus also represent sexual freedom. Whether or not this is the case for Okopuya, it is quite clear that by buying Esi’s old car when she gets a new one from Ali she gains some kind of autonomy, and takes control over yet another part of her life.

In this first part of the analysis I have established that there are several types of gender identities at work at the same time in Ghanaian society. I have also exposed the inequalities within this society where men wield the power and exercise control over women; it is in deed “a man’s world” (Aidoo 107). As women like Esi and Okopuya resist male
control and try to form new ideas of femininity they are confronted with a refusal to accept these from both men and other women. Another thing that becomes clear is that the struggle for female autonomy is not a one (wo)man enterprise, but a task for a whole nation.

**National Identity in Changes**

An analysis of national identity in this novel is by necessity of a somewhat different kind than the one on gender identity that we just have dealt with. This is due to the fact that the theme of national identity is treated in a lesser extent and much less obvious in the novel than that of gender. I will therefore focus on Esi and the fact that education plays an important part in her life and the lives of so many other Ghanaians and Africans. I will also deal with Ali and his sense of belonging in regards to nationality. Some space will also be devoted to how ethnical identities of people, such as Fusena and Okopuya, sometimes stand in opposition to national identities.

As I have mentioned earlier, Benedict Anderson and other theorists on national identity have claimed that a nation is built by its intellectual elite, relying on them to negotiate traditional and modern values and shape new national ideals. In post-colonial nations the intellectuals are educated in an educational system built up by their former colonizers. Based on different ideas and values than those of the indigenous peoples this system brings a foreign influence to the ones undergoing this education, and as Esi they become “fundamentally changed by [their] education” (109). For Esi this is a problem that turns into a crisis. Being an intellectual it is her duty to “invent tradition”, but as someone having been fundamentally changed by her education she finds no bond to her roots strong enough to do this. That this bond is weakened becomes painfully clear to her when she overhears her mother and grandmother talking about her and her impending marriage to Ali. The conversation between them reveals a closeness and the following quote makes Esi’s feelings clear to us: “She could never be as close to her mother as her mother was to her grandmother. Never, never, never. And she knew why” (114). She continues with asking herself: “Why had they sent her to school? What had they hoped to gain from it? What had they hoped she would gain from it? Who had produced the educational system that had produced her sort?” (114). Further on we learn that entering into the world of education had meant for her to be sent to one boarding school after another and losing touch with her mother and her first language. Thus she is “only equipped to go and roam in strange and foreign lands with no hope of ever meaningfully re-entering her mother’s world” (114). The bond between herself and her origin
being cut presents her with difficulties to perform her task as nation builder because the gap between her schooling and tradition is so great. As Esi realizes that “all this [is] too high a price to pay to achieve the dangerous confusion she [is] now in and the country [is] now in”, she also understands that she alone will not come up with the answers to all the “serious personal, and not so personal, questions” this confusion gives rise to and hopes that “a whole people [will] soon have answers for them” (115).

Further more I have discussed in this essay the fact that most post-colonial nations consist of more than one ethnic group and that ethnic identity often compete with national identity. In an endeavor to unite Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah advocated a stance towards national identity including his philosophy on the African Personality with which he meant to deemphasize the ethnic differences within the country. That the college where Ali and Fusena study before they get married bears traces of this endeavor becomes clear in the following passage: “The college was one of those that had been almost deliberately placed in confluent towns of Ghana to attract aspiring teachers from the dominant ethnic groups in equal proportions” (57). However, the attempt to make the students socialize over the ethnical lines is not very successful, neither at the campus in Atebubu where Ali and Fusena are at, nor at the others. The fact that most of the students keep to their ethnic groups indicates that the ethnical affiliation is stronger than the sense of being a Ghanaian, or an African for that matter. Another sign that might lead us to conclude that ethnicity has precedence of national identity is that both Fusena and Ali are referred to as belonging to a part of the country or the sub-continent by reference to the vegetation. Ali is called a “man from the Grasslands” by Nana (111), and when Fusena feels displaced in rainy London she thinks of herself as a “daughter of the dry savannahs” (66). Even Okopuya’s worries about Kubi’s safety may be seen as an expression of the importance ethnical affiliation has in the novel. Her husband’s safety is vital to her because he is her “excuse” for living in Accra, that is, in his part of the country. She has lived away from her own region since she was about fourteen, always living among Kubi’s people. Still, without Kubi she does not really belong in his part of the country, and she is as good as a stranger in her own part. If Kubi would die she would have to stay in the city, “a native of nowhere” (56). Hence we may conclude that a sense of belonging is important, and to Okopuya the feeling of belonging is primarily connected to being a part of a geographical or ethnical group, not to a nation.

Ali is somewhat of a puzzle in regard to nationality and national identity. With a tradesman as a father he has traveled the whole sub-continent of West Africa as a child, and
as an adult he continues to do so through his own business. Born and brought up in Bamako he decides that this is home, and:

having settled the question for the convenience of his heart, he had proceeded to claim the entire Guinea Coast, its hinterland and the Sub-Sahel for his own. In any case, since he had learned that his grandfather’s house had stood on the exact spot where Burkina Faso, Ghana and Togo met, he had assumed the nationalities of Ghana, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Nigeria and Togo. Naturally, he carried a passport to prove the genuineness of each (23-24).

Ali thus has the freedom to choose which country to belong to, and what nationality to assume, and somehow the idea of national identity does not seem important to him. In the quote above he decides that Bamako is home, not Mali. This decision is based on the fact that Bamako is the place he was born, but also because it is where Mma Djanuma, his aunt who raised him, lives. In this manner, his feeling of belonging is first and foremost to his family and the city he was born in, not to the nation. As for regional borders and nation lines he ignores them and goes on “to claim the entire Guinea Coast, its hinterland and the Sub-Sahel for his own” (23).

In her article, Jane Bryce suggest that Ali’s character might question “the whole idea of nation, of ethnic affiliation, identity tied to place, home, country” (n. pag.). This thought resembles Nkrumah’s pan-Africanist aspirations, although he considers the African continent to have been a single community before colonial influence and hence he must believe in some kind of continental identity. Elizabeth Willey holds the view that Aidoo, through the novel, maintains Nkrumah’s idea that “the answer to ideological disruption in African societies lies in the community not the individual”, which indicates that Bryce might be right (24).

However, one thing Ali promises himself early in his traveling life is that he will always live in the zongo of the cities he stays in. The reason Ali gives himself for this promise is that the zongo is the only place in the southern cities where he can be sure to get the kind of food specific to the region where he grew up. Although this seems a simple enough explanation, I believe there is more to his wish to live in the zongo than this. Being brought up a Muslim, Ali feels at home in the zongo surrounded with Muslim culture; this is

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3 Bamako is the capital of Mali.
4 Zongo is a “West African term for a ghetto of northern peoples in southern cities. Most people who live in zongos are presumed to be Islamic” (Aidoo 167).
his home away from home. Therefore the total disclaim from all kind of cultural affiliation we seem to get from Ali in his claim to be a West African has a hollow ring to it. Although he wants to think of himself as a man of the world, a collector of nationalities, he is not a collector of cultures. He is still undeniably marked by his own culture, and does not wish to relieve himself of it or add to it from other cultures.

This does not entirely negate the question posed by Bryce when she wonders if not Ali’s character rebels against the concept of identity connected to nation, ethnicity and geography, but neither does this affirm it. He does in deed mock the notion of nation and does not show any signs of national identity towards any one of his nations, nor does he contribute to the formation of a Ghanaian national identity or any other national identity for that matter. He is a free-floating collector who collects nationalities as well as women, but does not commit very strongly to neither of the categories. At the same time he cares about his Muslim heritage, and acknowledges his feeling of connectedness to the peoples of the zongos. However, the fact that Ali’s house is located in the very outskirts of Nima, the zongo of Accra, is symptomatic of Ali’s unwillingness to commit, even to his own culture. As he picks and chooses which boundaries and traditions to ignore and which to uphold, Ali remains an enigma when it comes to national identity.

With this section of the analysis I have brought to light that there seems to be a problem with the concept of national identity with regards to once colonized nations such as Ghana. While we see how attempts to unite the different ethnicities in the country are made by the leaders, as with the location of the teacher’s training college of Ali and Fusena; we also see how they miserably fail. I have also shown the difficulty it entails for Esi to be an educated woman and a Ghanaian woman at that, a difficulty bringing with it a state of confusion about her role in the nation building process. Meanwhile, Ali has the freedom to choose whichever national identity he likes. There is thus a difference between the possibilities women and men have to engage in the formation of a national identity.

**Gender and Nation in Changes**

**Theoretical background**

I will now deal with the intersection of gender identity and national identity, and shed some light on how these two fields overlap and constitute each other.

The fact that there is an intersection of gender identity and national identity is quite obvious, since most, if not all, people have been assigned both a gender and a nationality.
These two aspects of identity are only part of what constitutes a person’s full identity, but they are none the less important.

As mentioned in earlier sections of this essay gender identity is constituted largely by cultural norms of femininity/masculinity. As these norms are repeated they reproduce culturally specific norms and behaviors which help create and recreate the identity of the entire nation (Mayer 5). With the help of Otto Bauer, Tamar Mayer puts forth the idea that “the nation is bound up with ‘ego’”, i.e. the “ego” of a single person is inseparable from the “ego” of the nation the person belongs to. The “ego” of the nation helps the individual create her/his own identity. With this she explains the male hegemony in the discourse and practice of nation building, since the concept of nation was produced by heterosexual males. Their “egos” constructed the norms of the nation (6).

The two concepts of gender and nation have both been used as repressive tools to subjugate women by denying diversity in gender identities and national identities according to Tamar Mayer (1). She also claims that the concept of nation is gendered, i.e. women and men tend to have different roles in the production and reproduction of a nation, and that “through control over reproduction, sexuality and the means of representation the authority to define the nation lies mainly with men” (2). In this way men become the active agents and protectors of the nation, while women reproduce it, biologically, culturally and symbolically (Mayer 6, Yuval-Davis 2).

Nira Yuval-Davis similarly claims that the reproduction of a nation is gendered. She questions the idea that national identities are reproduced by bureaucrats and intellectual elites only and claims that women “reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically” (2). She brings forth that many scholars in the field of nationalism and nation building are blind to, or at least fail to acknowledge, the fact that national identity is reproduced both in the domestic sphere (which is traditionally assigned to women) and the public sphere (which is conventionally occupied by men) (1). She even leans towards professing that women are the sole reproducers of the nation, but in the end leaves that with a question mark (2). I believe what she is reaching for with that claim is to reveal that women actually are a part of reproducing national identity, and because of that women should be acknowledged as active agents and given equal power in constructing nations and reaping the benefits from them. This scenario has not been a reality, and is still not fully accomplished in most parts of the world. Yuval-Davis shows this by pointing to several areas where women and nation meet, in which women are used as tools of patriarchy, reproducing male ideals and male “egos”. Some of
these areas I have mentioned in passing, namely the areas of biological, cultural and symbolical reproduction, and below I will explain them briefly.

Writing about women as biological reproducers of the nation Yuval-Davis, according to McLeod, refers to the fact that it is women who give birth to new members of the national collective. This fact has been used to make women believe that it is their duty to produce children to ensure the nation’s survival (McLeod 116) and to secure the ethnic purity of the nation, controlling it by marriage and procreation between women and men who both belong to the proper ethnic group (Yuval-Davis 22, McLeod 116).

Women also function as cultural reproducers by way of being “the primary educators” of the nation’s children and responsible for teaching them traditional norms and values (McLeod 116). Women are thus cultural transmitters who reproduce a specific set of norms preferred by the “ego” of the nation.

Lastly, women serve as symbolical reproducers, or as Armstrong puts it “border guards” (qtd. in Yuval-Davis 23) between “us” and “them”, that is, the nation and “the other”. The division between categories is upheld by symbols that are supposed to signify the culture that is being reproduced. Such symbols are closely connected to specific cultural codes, ways of dressing and culturally specific behavior, but also to notions of femininity/masculinity and gendered relations of power adhered to in the nation (23). As symbolical reproducers women are often iconized as the image of the nation and, as I mentioned earlier, they are represented as passive and in need of heroic men to protect them and defend their honor (McLeod 114).

However, it is of importance to note that even though women have been seen, and to a large extent still are seen, as passive reproducers and not as active agents of the nation and creation of national identity, women are producers of cultural and moral codes which are defended against those outside the cultural collective. They also partake in exerting power and control over “the Other” (Mayer 6). Yuval-Davis also holds the view that women in some cases wield a similar power over fellow women and people outside the collective as men wield over them. She argues that it is especially older women that are given the power to decide what is to be considered appropriate behavior or deviant behavior (Yuval-Davis 37).

In order to be classified as “the other” it is enough to fail to live up to the standards set up by the collective. When it comes to gender women are the ones represented as “the other” because of the male hegemony in most societies, and thus “feminine” and “other” have in some respects become mutually exchangeable. Consequently, what fails to live up to male standards is considered feminine. This conflation of feminine and “the other” has metastasized to the relationship between imperial powers and their colonies. The colonizing
nation is in power and therefore the one who sets the standards and puts up the normative fence that keeps the colonized people at a distance, maintaining their “otherness”, assigning them femininity. The connection between femininity and the colonized is explained by Ania Loomba with this passage quoted from Helen Carr:

    in the language of colonialism, non-Europeans occupy the same symbolic space as women. Both are seen as part of nature, not culture, and with the same ambivalence: either they are ripe for government, passive, child-like, unsophisticated, needing leadership and guidance, described always in terms of lack – no initiative, no intellectual power, no perseverance; or on the other hand, they are outside society, dangerous, treacherous, emotional, inconstant, wild, threatening, fickle, sexually aberrant, irrational, near animal, lascivious, disruptive, evil, unpredictable. (159)

    In the passage above colonized and women are said to “occupy the same symbolic space”; they are both declared “the other” in relation to something, namely the male norm. For colonized men this “otherness” has sometimes meant a depiction of themselves as men with deviant sexuality, and with all the lusts and forbidden desires that the colonizers tried to repress within themselves. That which was unbecoming to a man was attributed to the colonized (Loomba 155-156).

    In the same spirit colonized women were also depicted as lascivious and full of promise for the colonizing male’s sexual fantasies (McLeod 175), that is, the opposite to the “goddess” or “angel” the colonizer kept in his own home. The feminization and marginalization of colonized men had as one consequence out of several the effect that they became more tyrannical at home, that is, to their women (Loomba 168). According to McLeod, Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford thus claim that women have undergone a double colonization. They suggest that women are colonized “by colonialist realities and representations, and by patriarchal ones too” (McLeod 175), that is, women have been suppressed by being assigned certain gender identities shaped both by colonial influence and by patriarchal dominance.

    In both colonial and postcolonial theories on nationalism and national identity women have been portrayed as “the moral barometers of a nation” to use the words of Willey, instead of being seen as the “active participants in the nation” they really are (3).
Analysis

In once colonized countries such as Ghana, colonial powers have influenced national identity and thus also gender identity. By reproducing the notion of nation and national identity, ideas of foreign gender identities are also reproduced and incorporated in a new set of gender roles. That is why resistance to male dominance has to include opposition to existing norms of national identity. But before I begin to describe how the opposition against the male hegemony in both gender identities and national identities shows itself in Changes, I will find and analyze examples in the novel of where these two areas intersect. In order to locate these intersections I will use Nira Yuval-Davis’ previously mentioned classification of women as biological, cultural and symbolical reproducers of the nation and national identity. Although this perspective inevitably has its focus on women it will undoubtedly reveal a lot about men as well.

In the following sections I will describe how Yuval-Davis’ three areas of intersection are represented in the novel. I will also deal with the resistance showed by various characters to each of the areas, in order to analyze how this resistance and the ‘dangerous confusion’ Esi speaks of, affect the various people involved.

Biological reproduction

As biological reproducers women are expected to marry and have children. This view is endorsed by several of the novel’s characters, for example Fusena’s mothers who scolds her harshly when she refuses to marry the “alhaji” at the age of twenty-six but is contented later when she marries Ali. The mothers finds it unbearably stupid to turn down such a rich and prominent man as the “alhaji”, especially as Fusena will no doubt have problems finding a man who would have her at her age. The questions her mother poses to the “mallam” shows the gravity these matters bear for her. “Was [Fusena] ever going to [get married]?....when that time comes, would she not be too old to have children?....How many children would she have?” (59). The fact that both Ali’s and Fusena’s families insist on that

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5 Alhaji: “is a term of respect used to address a Muslim man who has completed one of the Five Pillars of Islam by going on the Hajj, or religious pilgrimage to Mecca” (“Alhaji”).
6 Mallam: I cannot find any definition of the word, but judging from the context it appears in in the novel I would interpret the term as a West African word for mullah. A mullah is part of the Islamic clergy, the equivalent of a Christian priest (“Mullah”). In any case it seems like a mallam is some kind of a holy and/or wise man.
Fusena should become pregnant before Ali leaves for England also indicates the importance of child bearing.

Nana’s attitude towards marriage does also advocate the view that the first and foremost duty of women is to procreate. This is evident in Nana’s answer to Esi’s question about what some of the reasons for marrying are. She says: “Esi we know that we all marry to have children…” (42). In this conversation between grandmother and granddaughter Esi questions Nana and the essentiality of marriage when she replies that “[c]hildren can be born to people who are not married” (42). This way Esi takes procreation out of the realm of marriage, and thus implies that marriage is old-fashioned and unnecessary. Nana’s second argument in favor of marriage is that it is a means of increasing the amount of people to share a sense of belonging with. This argument resembles Yuval-Davis’ claim that production of children is a way to ensure the survival of the nation, and can hence be seen as a nationalistic argument. It also goes hand in hand with Benedict Anderson’s thoughts on imagined communities, which share a sense of belonging, as it creates national identity. Therefore, in questioning Nana’s view of marriage, Esi is also challenging her view of the nation.

When Esi and Okopuya are at the Hotel Twentieth Century talking about the impossible situation for single women, they swiftly identify the oppressive mechanism in the fact that single women are invisible in their society. As women situated outside of marriage single women cannot/are not allowed to procreate, and are thus not fulfilling their duties as biological reproducers. Okopuya expresses this well as she says: “…our societies have had no patience with the unmarried woman. People thought her single state was an insult to the glorious manhood of our men” (48). As she continues she describes the circumstances that put Esi in the predicament of not being able to stay unmarried after her divorce from Oko. Here Esi and Okopuya fill in each other’s sentences speaking of how people treat the unmarried woman.

‘So they put as much pressure as possible on her – ’
‘ – until she gave in and married or remarried, or went back to her former husband.’
‘And of course if nothing cured her they ostracised her and drove her crazy.’
‘And then soon enough, she died of shame, loneliness and heartbreak.’

(48)

A woman’s alternative to the role of biological reproducer is thereby nonexistent.
As I have mentioned earlier in this analysis Nfah-Abbenyi claims that African women’s sense of womanhood is contingent on motherhood. The example of Okopuya and her choice to have a tubal ligation, which I have dealt with earlier, is still valid and worth mentioning in this context. Her choice is a deliberate resistance to the simplistic view of women’s role as biological reproducers. She firmly believes that she is no less of a woman despite the fact that she no longer can have children.

Just as Okopuya claims that their society has had no patience with unmarried women Oko shows a lack of patience towards Esi when she does not fulfill her role as child bearer. He feels that Esi neglects her duties as a wife when she decides to use contraceptives. He is eagerly supported by his mother and sisters who suggest that Oko should “make some other children ‘outside’”, that is, outside his and Esi’s marriage (8). But no matter how much Oko tries to persuade Esi to give up “those dreadful birth control things: pills, loops or whatever” she will not part with the sense of autonomy it gives her to be in control of her own body (8). And that is why Oko’s violation is so severe. For women like Nana and Ena, Oko’s actions that morning when he raped Esi do not seem very grave. In their minds Oko was in his full right to do what he did. “Sex is something a husband claims from his wife as his right. Any time. And at his convenience” (12). But for Esi with her “new and foolish ideas”, which Fusena’s mother calls “a sickness that so many educated people seem to suffer permanently from”, the rape is a violation on her self-determination and independence in a way her mothers would never understand (60). There is thus, as I have mentioned before, a rift between Esi’s world and the world of her mothers, or the greater part of Esi’s contemporary society for that matter. This rift is being epitomized in Esi’s realization that the term she uses to describe Oko’s violation, that is “marital rape”, does not exist in her native language or any other African language she knows of. In her choice to name the incident rape she deliberately takes a step away from her mothers’ world and moves towards an alternative world view in which, as Bryce puts it, “[t]raditional rules have been superseded, but not replaced” (n. pag.). With this action Esi has freed herself from the restraints of an oppressive role as merely a biological reproducer, but what she becomes conscious of throughout the novel is that there are no new roles ready-made to put on for her. Esi’s liberation consequently results in confusion of how to define herself and how to create a new form of female identity, since she is counteracted in this task by both women and men.
**Cultural reproduction**

To act as the primary educators of children is another task that has been given to women, and this is what makes Yuval-Davis define them as cultural reproducers. This role is closely connected to the function of biological reproducer; women produce children whom they then stay at home to raise. Here, as well as in the previous section on biology, the roles are used as tools to construct national identity. This is done by stressing, as Nana does, that we marry to produce children and to give these a home in order “to help them grow up well”, that is, to foster them to become good citizens of the nation (42).

That this is a role that should be assigned to women seems to be quite obvious to among others Ali. He gladly goes off to England to study, leaving Fusena in Ghana to give birth to and to raise their first child. It is only after three years has passed that he sends for her and their son. As Fusena comes to London and becomes a housewife, Ali does not reflect on that she might want more. To him it goes without saying that she will give birth to his children and be at home to take care of the household. Fusena accepts this, but to a limited extent. After spending some time in London, isolated in their home doing housework and caring for their children, she contemplates her situation. She realizes that she, by marrying Ali has traded a friend for a husband. By agreeing to marry Ali she gives up her independence and her ability to make decisions about her own life, but this is something she realizes only when it is too late. This realization is shown in the passage below.

…there was no chance of her getting back her friend [Ali] if she left or divorced Ali the husband. She would only have an estranged husband….she kept telling herself that given the position of women in society, she would rather be married than not, and rather to Ali than anyone else. (66-67)

Just as Esi and Okopuya, Fusena is painfully aware of the inequalities in marriage and society as a whole, but unlike Esi, and to some extent Okopuya, she does not take action to fight them. She stays married to Ali, becomes the perfect housewife, and in exchange Ali gives her a kiosk to manage. As most West African women Fusena has been brought up to work and the kiosk is Ali’s concession to her wish to go back to work after staying at home for five years bringing up children and minding the household. Ali’s reason for buying her a kiosk instead of letting her go back to teaching is because it is “a more lucrative job [she] could do and still have time to look after the children” (67). This is an outstanding example of
how Ali, and with him the major part of society, limits the women and prevents them from moving out of the domestic sphere. Ali has no problem with having Fusena work, as long as she performs her duties as wife and mother as well, that is, acts as a biological and cultural reproducer.

The same applies for Oko in his relationship with Esi. He knows when he marries her that she will have a high education and be well suited for a prominent job. What he probably does not expect is that Esi will not give up her career to have children and play house with him. As for Esi, she most likely believes, at least in the beginning of her marriage, that Oko shares her ideals of a modern marriage and that she can have both a career and a family. As we know she proves to be wrong. Oko demands that her time should be spent more on their home and less on her work. Just as he feels that Esi does not fulfill her duties as a wife when she uses contraceptives he also feels that she neglects her role as a mother and primary educator when she is away from the house so much. In a sense Oko is right, and that is part of Esi’s sacrifice to reach a higher, and to her an acceptable, level of autonomy. Another sacrifice she is forced to make is the one of leaving her daughter Ogyaanowa to live with Oko’s mother. Thus the repressive system forces Esi to give up her daughter in order for her to be able to compete with her male colleagues in her work life. Esi is by no means alone with this problem, and Okopuya makes sure to remind her of that when she complains about how her male colleagues are given promotions while she is passed over time after time.

Okopuya herself struggles to combine her work as a nurse and midwife with being a wife and mother and consequently has experiences of her own in that field. In contrast to Esi, Okopuya has managed to keep her marriage, but only through neglecting herself. Her reaction to Esi’s suggestion that she should have “a proper drink” when they met at the Hotel Twentieth Century is evidence to that. Okopuya claims that alcohol makes her sleepy and makes her want to go to bed too early in the evening, and that a drink would be absolutely out of the question. When Esi ask why sleeping early would be bad Okopuya answers that that would not do at all. She continues to think: “How could she, Okopuya Dakwa, sleep anytime she felt like it? With a fully grown man, a young growing woman and three growing boisterous boys to feed?” (34). Here Okopuya’s demands on herself reveal that she, although resisting oppressive gender roles in some instances, also feels that she is not performing her roles as woman and mother properly if she does not take care of her home and family. She is judging herself with measures she does not really believe in, making herself slide into roles she does not want to play, and is thus upholding male norms of femininity. This brings us to the third and final area of reproduction, namely the symbolical one.

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Symbolical reproduction

As symbolical reproducers women are supposed to reproduce culturally specific behavior and cultural norms of gender, just as Okopuya does in the example above. They are seen as ambassadors or representatives of what the nation stands for with all its attributes inherent in them.

Another instance of Okopuya as symbolical reproducer is when Esi tells her about the engagement to Ali.

Upon hearing all about it, Okopuya remarked that if she were a white woman, she would have fainted away. But as an African woman, she could only do her thing, which was exclaiming ‘Ei, ei’ several times over, marching up and down the length of the sitting room, and finally taking hold of Esi’s hand, having a proper look at it and asking whether she was sure of what she was saying. (93-94)

Here Okopuya expresses that there is a difference between African women and “other” women. She creates a national “us” (or rather a “continental us” since she is talking about African and not Ghanaian women) by contrasting herself and her fellow African sisters against a “them” of “white women” with unidentified national or continental affiliation. In this way Okopuya expresses some sort of national identity with the help of her own gender identity.

What also becomes clear in this passage is the mechanism of making “the other” inferior. As I have mentioned earlier “the other” has been classified as feminine, that is as inferior and weak, in relation to the strong superior “us”. I have also mentioned that women in some cases also exert power over other women or people outside the collective. This is exactly what Okopuya does in the passage above. She constructs African women as strong active agents in contrast to the weak white women who cannot handle the pressure of strong feelings.

Being the nation incarnate, women are often represented as weak and in need of male protection. Just as single women are seen as an insult to “the glorious manhood” of men, women have to be represented as weak in order for men to feel strong, and this is exactly what Ali does after he first meets Esi. According to Nfah-Abbenyi, Ali’s fear that “the threatening storm might sweep that woman and her car away” indicates that he sees Esi as a woman in need of protection (Aidoo 4). In his eyes both the car and Esi looks frail (Nfah-Abbenyi 284-
85). Ali thus uses Esi’s womanhood and alleged frailness as a tool to create his manhood and masculinity.

However, when Oko tries to assess his masculinity the same way he fails because of Esi’s independence towards him. It makes him feel like less of a man. Her independence lies in that she has control of her biological reproduction, that she prioritizes her career and that she travels a lot with work and as a consequence has an unusual freedom of mobility. All of the above leads Oko to ask the question if Esi really is an African woman. In his eyes her independence invalidates all the norms of femininity he is accustomed to.

Nevertheless, he is not blind to the fact that there are alternative femininities at work in his society, because he answers his own question with a yes. Not only is Esi an African woman, “but there are plenty of them around these days…these days…these days” (Aidoo 8). The problem for Oko seems to be that he is not willing to let go of the privileges and comfort it brings to hold on to his old set of gender roles in order to embrace new ones. Esi’s alternative assertive femininity also invalidates his role as protector and renders him useless. She does not need him and he is thus made passive, while she is active. Esi recognizes, just as the mothers of Nima, that it is “a man’s world”, but instead of accepting that “[y]ou only [survive] if you knew how to live in it as a woman” Esi chooses to act as if the fact that she is a woman does not matter (107). That choice has severe repercussions for her since the society she lives in has no place for a woman acting as if she were a man. The result is once again a state of confusion and a sense of rootlessness.

In the analysis above I have established that some of the female characters accept the roles as biological, cultural and symbolical reproducers of prevailing gender identities and national identities, and play the part without a battle. Others resist some or all of these roles on the grounds that they confine them to a narrow world of passiveness. These women know that they are more than reproducers, they are producers and constructers of gender identities and national identities, albeit that these identities do not necessarily converge with the ones based on male ideas. However, in their strife to evade male control and gain recognition as active agents of the nation their subversion of existing gender roles has brought with it a state of confusion. As they contribute to the society just as much as men, and maybe even more, their demand is to be recognized and rewarded as producers and not only as reproducers. This is a demand yet to be granted, since the male hegemony in society is reluctant to make the adjustments needed for this to happen.
Conclusion

My aim with this essay has been to point to the intersections between gender identity and national identity in *Changes* and by that theoretically prove what the novel claims, namely that women are producers, not just reproducers, of the identities in question; and as producers and active agents of nation building women should be awarded for their work with the power to define national identities on the same terms as men.

With my theoretical background on gender identity and national identity I have laid bare principles that govern society such as power relations between men and women as well as between nations. Such principles are the processes of identification which are the same in the formation of both gender identity and national identity and are based on the binary pair of “the Self” and “the Other”.

In the first part of the analysis I have examined how gender is portrayed in the novel. What I have found is that there are multiple gender identities at work simultaneously in a society weighed down with inequalities between women and men. In a society controlled by men, femininities that resist male dominance, such as the ones of Esi and Okopuya, are met with opposition both from men and from other women. Another matter that becomes clear is the problem to redefine gender roles. It becomes apparent that in order to bring about a change of women’s conditions there must be a transformation of the society as a whole.

The second section has had its focus on national identity and how this concept is contended by other influences, such as education, ethnicity and also gender. The belief that education and mingling of ethnicities will promote a national identity is proven wrong with the example of the teacher’s training college of Ali and Fusena which was meant to make different ethnicities come together but did not succeed in doing so. I have shown that while education is of good it may in some cases, as the case with Esi, bring with it confusion about national identity. The fact that Ali does not experience the same confusion as Esi drives me to the conclusion that there is a difference between the possibilities that women and men have to define national identity.

In the third and last part of the analysis I introduce and explain the intersection of gender identity and national identity both in theory and in the novel. This intersection of the two identities lies in that they constitute each other. Ideas of gender identities help form national identities which in their turn consolidate and reproduce gender identities. This relationship has its grounds in that national identity and the nation has its roots in gender
identity and the family. Power relations between men and women that stem from the family are reproduced in the nation and thus constitute national identity, and the gender inequalities in the former are therefore also present in the latter.

With the help of Nira Yuval-Davis’ classification of women as biological, cultural and symbolical reproducers of prevailing gender identities and national identities I have analyzed the novel. In that analysis I have established that these traditional roles confine women to be passive reproducers while men remain active producers. Yet, the novel shows that women not only are reproducers but also producers of both gender identities and national identities and accordingly contribute to the creation of the nation and national identity. As such they should be rewarded with the same benefits as men, but due to cemented gender roles invented by a male dominated society they are not allowed to do so. While some of the female characters conform to these traditional roles, others resist them with more or less perseverance. When trying to claim their right to the benefits just mentioned they are forced to break traditional gender roles of femininity, and since there is not room for more than one “legitimate” femininity they are seen as unfeminine or, as Esi and Okopuya state as the case for unmarried women, they become invisible. The problem however does not lie in the actual opposition but in the confusion that comes with it, a confusion that emanates from the fact that there is no room in society for other gender roles than those produced by the male “ego”.

My conclusion is thus that the novel shows that in a nation such as Ghana, women and men have very different possibilities to define gender identities and national identities, and women have little or no chances to define themselves as active subjects, both as women and as Ghanaians. I hold that this is due to the fact that women are welcome to contribute to the society on a level of reproduction but barred from the public sphere where norms of gender identities and national identities are formed. Furthermore I maintain that the novel claims that women’s struggle towards autonomy is hampered by the state of confusion that arises when women are prevented from redefining the old roles they have superseded.

However, despite this dreary depiction of the lives of African women I discern a ray of hope that their situation can be bettered in the speech that Nana holds to Esi. As an answer to her own rhetorical question if the gender dynamics and political dynamics always have to remain as they are Nana says:

Certainly not. It can be changed. It can be better…. But it would take so much. No, not time. There has always been enough time for anything anyone ever really wanted to do. What it would take is a lot of thinking and a great deal of doing. But one wonders whether we are
prepared to tire our minds and our bodies that much. Are we human beings even prepared to try?
‘Otherwise, it is very possible for life on this earth to be good for us all. My lady Silk, everything is possible.’ (111)

Although this passage contains a speck of doubt whether Nana’s scenario ever will take place it also holds a hope and a possibility that it will, if people are willing to try.
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