

Chapter Three

FEMALE PREDICAMENT AND THE DYNAMICS OF AFRICAN WOMANHOOD IN NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S *WOMAN AT POINT ZERO* AND GLORIA ERNEST'S *DEAR KELECHI*

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Abstract

*Acculturation, advent of civilization, democracy, modernism and globalization seem to have opened the eyes of many sex oriented individuals, especially women to the injustice, marginalization, inequality in gender and other social related matters encumbering women. As a matter of urgency, women have risen in defense of themselves, their gender, society and world as they seek to achieve marital, economic, cultural, religious and political emancipation and balance. Sadly, irrespective of globalization, there still exists several cultural norms, beliefs and harmful traditional practices in many African societies which give no chance or right to women thereby inhibiting the full realization of the potentials of African woman. The stigmatization and subjugation of the woman thus come into prominence as corollary of internal and external struggles between the oppressing and oppressed class. The African woman, in addition to experiencing and expressing some oppressive social conditions is subjected to extra repressive burdens arising from the cultural structures of patriarchy and gender-hierarchy. The need to further liberate the woman from these added burdens inevitably becomes part of the predicament that contributes to the oppressive social structures found in Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero* and Gloria Ernest's *Dear Kelechi*. Such concerns define the feminist agenda and the dynamics of the African woman this paper is set to interrogate.*

Keywords: predicament, injustice, dynamics, acculturation, emancipation.

Introduction

The preoccupation of this paper is to explore to certain degree a feminist perspective and fascinating perception of African womanhood in its striking contrariness and variety in the contemporary period using Gloria Ernest's *Dear Kelechi* and Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero*. It would be a great service to fundamental feminists if women are recreated and redefined the way they truly are; as human beings motivated like others by emotions and desires signaling love, attention, ambition, greed, self-interest, self-sacrifice and other psychological impulses. Feminism and feminist fundamentalism have become important aspects of literary studies worldwide and these in a way, reflect the unprecedented attention being focused on women and women-related issues in many countries of the world today. Feminism has contributed immensely to highlighting the problems encountered by women in the world and their dogged efforts to achieve emancipation.

However, gender inequality in human society is seen in the imbalance of power. The fundamental assumption of women as inferior creatures and the oligarchic patriarchal superiority have continued to boil hard. Consequently, feminism as a concept demands equal right and recognition of women in world affairs. Morolake Omonubi-McDonnell (2003), maintains that the "Muslim law accord men absolute rights to divorce their wives (usually through oral repudiation) while making divorce rights contingent for women" (29). This implies that only men have the final authority to decide what is permissible and inappropriate in marriages and within kinship. In synchrony, according to her, it means that "conscientious" women surrender their own aspirations, notions, and opinions in deference to their spouses, restricting the spectrum of a woman's individuality to that of an appendage to her spouse (29). She asserts that "polygyny, purdah and harem have contributed immensely to the deterioration of the social status of some Nigerian women" (30).

Feminists decry oppression and marginalization of women as well as the untold subjugation meted against womanhood in a patriarchal society. Nawal once decried losing her job as a result of being a staunch female advocate. She boldly opines that, "this was one more consequence of the path I had chosen as a feminist author and novelist whose ideas were viewed unfavorable by the authorities" (Nawal, ix).

The multiple discriminations based on gender and factors such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, culture and gender identity further compound the risk of economic hardship, exclusion and violence against women. In the bid of women in many African societies to redefine themselves against existent definitions of culture, traditions, customs, norms and values of the society, they have continued to assert their individual uniqueness and identity as they deem fit even as they demand for their equal rights in socio-political, economic, religious and cultural spheres of a male dominated society. Indeed, marriage

systems, illiteracy, religion, purdah, feelings of dependency, fatalistic attitude, poverty, social constraints and superstitions are some key factors that contribute to the subjugated status of most women in developing countries (MsDonnell, 30).

Against this backdrop, the European and American feminist stands have taken strong grips in Africa, such that many African female artists and critics are following after them as they seek to draw attention to women's experiences within the African milieu. It is significant that this new radical development, more constructively, is beginning to be reflected in the works of many African female authors. Some contemporary female writers like Gloria Ernest Samuel and Nawal El Saadawi are consciously focusing their creative lens on the African woman to the extent that they create and delineate female characters who are highlighted as achievers and acculturated women who dominate the action of the novel in a more constructed assertive (sometimes, radical) manner. This is because the African modern society has been affected by globalization but has not fully internalized its potentialities. The acculturation of the African woman in a way has necessitated all kinds of myth to support the suppression, marginalization, subjugation and other inevitable social abuses. The African woman is subjected to all manner of inhuman treatment and the time has come to put an end to them. Rose Uchem believes that this menace "like other problems, can only be solved by going beyond the symptoms to address the root causes" (12).

Samuel's and El Saadawi's perceptions of the roles and positions of women have undergone drastic changes (acculturation processes) in both novels. We can see more varied, positive and forthright female characters who explore female realities and experiences as posited in *Women at Point Zero* and *Dear Kelechi*. Samuel and El Saadawi have consistently shown positive attitudes towards women in their works. They tend to empathize with their female characters, and this manifests in their tendency to attack sexist and social injustices that have been nurtured in our society to the detriment of women. Their female characters, both in the traditional and modern settings, are never passive nor docile. They remain active in shaping their lives and the lives of their families and in influencing issues that touch their personhood as women beings. To this end, the controversial and radical ideological issue of feminism which some female authors and critics of African descent find terrifying or discomfiting constitutes no terror or threat to Gloria and Nawal as African female artists, particularly to Nawal as a Muslim and from an Arab nation like Egypt. Both authors x-ray women as human beings like other humans. To them, women play significant redemptive as well as destructive roles as they interact with others in the world of the novels. They do not think separately of gender, rather they see male and female characters as actors and catalysts who initiate further actions that propel the iconoclastic stream of consciousness and some kinds of extremist plots of the novels.

Female Predicament and Inferiority in *Women at Point Zero*

It is heart rendering that male superiority and female inferiority are still been taken for granted. This ugly trend has existed and seems to be affirmed by traditional, Christian and Islamic myths through which the phallic writers get indoctrinated. On the other hand, many African feminists do not hide their detestation of this entrenched doctrine. The much they have done is to either disprove or castigate it in their works by portraying conscious and articulate female characters or by depicting the injustice and inhumanity of the doctrine. But unlike Samuel, Nawal attempts to expose more precariously the terror, suffering and sexual exploitation as she gives a different interpretation to the pervasive myth. Nawal in *Women at Point Zero* propounds a kind of female inferiority theory and the suppression of women in black Africa. According to her, there has been disparity in the status of male and female in African culture. Boys and girls are not given equal consideration and training. They acquire skills according their gender and ability. For instance, Firdaus asserts that:

On my head I carried a heavy earthenware jar, full of water. Under its weight my neck would sometimes jerk backwards or to the left or to the right. I had to exact 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 up right.... She usually made me carry a load of manure on my head and take it to the fields. I preferred to go to the fields rather than staying in our hut....but my mother no longer sent me to the fields. Before the sun had started to appear in the sky, she would nudge me in shoulder that I would awaken, pick up the earthenware jar and go off to fill it with water. Once back, I would sweep under animals and then make rows of animal dung cakes which I left in the sun to dry. On baking day I would knead dough and make bread. (11-13)

The theory of female inferiority believes that women are "a less developed race" (Gillian, 83) but this assertion is unacceptable to Nawal as portrayed in the above excerpt. However, with the infestation of the Arab predators from the North, black men began to change their attitude towards the women. The subjugation of women was not African; it was a result of alien influence—first the Arabs and then the European but especially evident in the Arab world. This explains why Nawal laments through the protagonist, Firdaus that:

Everytime I tried to work, I fell. A force seemed to push me from behind, so that I fell forwards, or a weight from in front seemed to lean on me so that I fell backwards. It was something like pressure of the air wanting to crush me; something like the pull of the earth trying to suck me down

into its depths. And in the midst of it all there I was, struggling, straining my arms and legs in an attempt to stand up. But I kept falling, buffeted by the contradictory forces that kept pulling me in different directions, like an object thrown into a limitless sea, without shores and without a bed, slashed by the waters when it starts to sink, and by the wind if it starts to float. Forever sinking and rising, sinking and rising between sea and the sky, with nothing to hold on to except the two eyes. (15-16)

Apart from this unwholesome act, the next reaction is female succession. The men seem to have agreed that it is necessary to enslave every woman and make her an object of sexual perversion and exploitation. She is only a human being whose body is fit for utilization as a sex object. This is clearly portrayed in Fawzy's and Sharif's relationship squabble that ultimately leads to Sharifa losing her life in cold blood:

For I heard what seemed to me the sound of a hand being clapped over a mouth, followed by another sound very much like that of someone's hand patting a face. Then came a series of muffled noises. I was unable to tell whether they were gentle slaps on the face or violent kisses. But after a short while I heard Sharifa protesting: 'No, Fawzy, no!' his voice sounded like an angry hiss. 'No. No what, you slut?'... the violent shaking went to my head. It was though I awakened suddenly to what was going on around me. I saw Fawzy's face take shape out of a mist, as if in dream, and I heard his voice echoing in my ears again. (64-65)

The above excerpt portrays intense and forceful sexual intercourse (rape) against the will of the victim. It also reveals the preoccupation of a changing society in which the growths of new cultural elements have stimulated new desires, new attitudes and new values. Women and forced sex seem to be the preoccupation of the contemporary Arab male society. One is baffled by the levity and roughness with which the men treat their women who invariably become mere objects in their hands. And the authorities continue to play ostrich in addressing this ugly trend that is fast bedeviling the entire nation and even beyond.

Consequently, Firdaus grows from innocence to become aware of this ugly trend in the Arab contemporary society. She critically observes that:

when I grew a little older, my father put the mug in my hand and taught me how to wash his leg with cold 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". (16)

The origin of this suppression of women and the subsequent concept of female intimidation and inferiority as provided in *Women at Point Zero*, provides a lucid and logical explanation of the subsidiary role of African women in the Arab world today. It explains clearly the loss of initiative on the part of modern black women which makes them incapable of fighting the evils of new colonialism, as is shown in Nawal's master piece fiction. Having lost the battle for leadership and freedom from domestic abuses, modern Arab women, indeed African women are forced to turn to domestic violence. This is truly revealed by Firdaus when she asserts thus:

He took to locking me in the flat before going out. I now slept on the floor in the other room. He will come back in the middle of the night, pull the cover away from me, slap my face, and then bear down on me with all his weight. I kept my eyes closed and abandoned my body. It lay there under him without movement, emptied of all desire, or pleasure, or even pain, feeling nothing. A dead body with no life in it at all, like a piece of wood or an empty sock, or a shoe. Then one night his body seemed heavier than before, and his breath smelt different, so I opened my eyes... He sank his teeth into the flesh of my shoulder and bit me several times in the breast, and then over my belly. While he was biting me, he kept repeating: 'slut, bitch'. (53)

Denied the opportunity to play a crucial role in the political or economic recovery and reconstruction of the new world order, Nawal's protagonist, Firdaus opts to participate in the rat race to acquire wealth and freedom through dishonesty, exploitation and prostitution. She wields tremendous influence over her male folk. Unfortunately, this influence is not used positively and constructively, but rather destructively as she emancipates herself by asserting her individuality over her lovers and those she finds threatening to her existence. And for the feminist, this is not a bad omen, for it portends good riddance to the alarming disappointments the modern African women continue to experience in the hands of African men. Therefore, Firdaus channels her influence and the opportunity she has towards liberating herself through every means, fair or foul. She utilizes her abilities towards directing her society to physical freedom, spiritual health and moral upliftment.

A fact that confronts us in *Women at Point Zero* is the big contrast that exists between the role of traditional woman and that of her modern counterpart. The contrast is most apparent in the area of leadership and morality. One is struck by the constant depiction of the African woman as a whore, or a tramp. At best, a woman who is highly endowed with noble qualities like goodness of heart, industry, moral rectitude and physical beauty is easily turned into an accursed victim by a powerful man or a merciless and ruthless pagan deity. Nawal nostalgically recalls the role of women among the black people of Arab descent. Firdaus is a hard working woman who fends for herself. She is the finder and grower of her destiny. She exhibits a dynamic leadership over her life by always pulling back and escaping whenever she finds life unbearable under the dictatorship and suppressive tendencies of men either as husband or pimp.

Nawal succeeds in her firm efforts to redeem the heroine's image. For Firdaus, life is one of progressive deterioration that pushes her beyond redemption. Her outrageously dangerous propensity to crime and immorality as well as her innate ability to learn and mature make her despicable to men. She fails to win men's approval and sympathy and therefore remains a tragic figure. In Nawal's work, Firdaus is a product of the evolving African society and life, dominated by male superiority and notorious for its crimes, stinking immorality and depraved living. She remains memorable for her ability to outwit the men in her life and make her way in the den of male world.

The part Firdaus plays in dislodging the sexually perverted predator Arabs and eliminating their oppressive rules can be seen as a continuation of her dynamic leadership which women have come to provide for their enslaved gender. Her acts of courage and self-sacrifice in destroying the symbols of subjugation, injustice and oppression of her womanhood is comparable to that of the Biblical Jael who destroyed Sisera, the Canaanite Army Commander who oppressed them. That explains why at the point of arrest, she declares,

I knew why they were so afraid of me. I was the only woman who had torn the mask away, and exposed the face of their ugly reality... I have triumphed over both life and death because I no longer desire to live, nor do I any longer fear to die. I want nothing. I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. Therefore I am free. (110)

Nawal, unlike most African female writers, creates the strong impression that wifehood and motherhood are not the primary functions of women. Women have options to fulfil themselves in whatever field or profession they deem fit. Through Firdaus' successful revolts and subsequent relocation to better living quarters, Nawal asserts that, in spite of hardships, oppression, suppression, harmful traditional practices, stigmatisation and other social injustices,

individual self-assertion and progress depend more upon the victim's will than they do upon external factors. This constitutes the heroine's last minute realisation in *Women at Point Zero*. The author's argument regarding the need for the woman to rise above the restrictiveness of poverty, institutionalised dependency and marginalisation elevates her style above that of simple protest writing to that of radicalism. Firdaus' inner shortcomings and the external bureaucratic deficiencies together present a complex vision that reveals a critical stream of consciousness and a shared responsibility.

In the light of Nawal's portrayal of female predicament and inferiority, the loss of political leadership and communal influence on the part of the women in our contemporary society could be said to be inevitable; but are women justified in abandoning their traditional role as custodians of public morality? Firdaus is a complex character full of contradictions. She pushes herself and her later victims, particularly those who trust her to desperation and self-immolation through murder. She believes in the courage of her convictions and possesses as a modern female fundamentalist, the mettle of her modernist forbear to execute her plans irrespective of who is concerned. She alone among other female characters is invested with the power to save and deliver those rootless, deprived and confused young women who cannot confront their persecutors boldly and win. The heroine, Firdaus challenges the thought of Helen Chukwuma who views the economic value of women as being "analogous to chattels of trade and property for sale" (qtd in Chukwukere, 170). This means a girl's worth as a human being is reduced to the economic level and everything depends on it: her parents' sustenance, payment of her brother's fees, rehabilitation of other members of the extended family.

Nawal through her ever evolving heroine challenges the old age African traditional values found threatening to the modern African women. She postulates freedom for the woman through any available means, particularly for the sexually exploited women of the Arab regions.

Socio-Injustices and Emancipation of Women in *Dear Kelechi*

Women's economic subjugation leads to exploitation and is a denial of social justice and human rights. The development of a society requires full participation of all sections of the population and the creation of opportunities for full development of the potentialities of women. Rose Acholonu believes that the pre-literate "Nigerian society is remarkable for its clear definition of roles" (qtd in Chukwuma, 38). She opines that the man is the head of the family, and his status or role as a male is sacred and supreme (38). It is sardonically disappointing that the woman is comparatively subjugated to an inferior secondary position. The male domineering influence seems to be institutionalised and threatening to the female image. This dishonourable and despicable image is what Samuel identifies as the lot of her protagonist, Iheoma in *Dear Kelechi*. Again, the continuous and consistent brutalisation of

women in our contemporary society, the lower position or status of the African woman, very often is no better than that of a slave. It is disappointing to state that even in this post-colonial era, the illiterate woman is despised, abused and exploited while the educated woman is despicably labelled. The women are often looked upon with suspicion by men who feel their traditional superior status threatened. The bond of women has been continuously threatened by men; Iheoma states that "even our parents failed in their bid to separate us...so what tore us apart? Men" (7).

Equally, educational and job opportunities in many African states are rightly seen by most people as a blessing which has helped to raise the status of women in contemporary Africa. The heroines, Iheoma and Kelechi are well read and well bred, gainfully employed and run NGO and, Comfort Foundation respectively. But this does not help matters for them. To this end, literature being a mirror of society reflects the attendant changes in our society, particularly as it affects the woman. The evolving and changing status of the African woman and indeed the Nigerian woman in particular is definitely a crucial societal phenomenon which shows prominently on the pages of *Dear Kelechi*, although set in the metropolitan towns and cities across nations. It is a full fledged novel that pursues with vigour the social injustices as well as the emancipation of women. The Nigerian background and the plot revolves around the tensions generated by the heroines' confrontations with the status quo. By populating her story with women, the novelist establishes the primacy of female experience. And by controlling the flow of the narrative through Iheoma's epistolary consciousness, her viewpoint is accorded a high degree of credibility. One notices the glaring instances of denial of opportunity and economic exploitation of the female profoundly explored in the novel.

The female injustice in *Dear Kelechi* lies in the failure of the male characters to update and upgrade the female status in the community of the novel. In spite of this relegated position, the novelist achieves artistic realism in the delineation of her female characters. Thus, through her female characters like Iheoma and Kelechi, Gloria Samuel definitely expresses a powerful view that African female writers have come of age in creating and depicting African women as human beings and an integral part of society. She depicts them as people who do not lack the empathy, sympathy and consciousness of their female psych. Through Iheoma and Kelechi we understand what it actually means to be African women in contemporary African society.

The oppression and subjugation type of treatment is what Samuel counters in *Dear Kelechi*. The novelist portrays Iheoma who remains childless after some happy years of marriage before things fell apart. The novel pursues with vigour the author's consistent concerns such as relationships, especially those between husband and wife, mother and daughter, wife and mother-in-law, and between a woman and the society in her own self-conceived and self-realized

roles. Through these, the novel becomes a continuum of female dilemma in the male world. In another aspect, however, it represents a high point of achievement, for the novelist not only highlights the dilemma of the woman, but goes further to attempt to provide more definite resolutions. Unlike Nawal El Sadaawi, Gloria Samuel portrays her heroines, both from the inside and outside as the unidimensional African mother-types. As the story reveals, Iheoma approaches marriage filled with idealised concepts of marital life and motherhood. This leads to her physical and psychological disillusionment. She ones remonstrates that,

I think of the humiliation of loving an impotent man and still having to swallow his family's insult by being branded a witch and an infertile woman. My sanity revolts at my dignity to remain a good wife, by remaining silent even when my husband infects me with venereal diseases he picked from his numerous women, who still fail to produce the baby I couldn't give him... I think what will save me, help me, is talking to you, hearing from you, sharing with you these problems. This will equally help you appreciate your situation. (17)

In Iheoma's initial perception of her role, her conditioned acceptance confines her within the traditional cultural belief of her society. Thus, like her childhood friend, Kelechi, she initially loses her identity in her desire for adaptation and acceptance in the system which defines her being. Her respect, obedience and abject humility in the presence of her mother-in-law find an outlet in her well intentioned docility in the face of injustice. Although she has been coaxed into believing and accepting the cheap lies of being barren after being declared so, through traditional and conventional medical techniques; she believes the contrary, but out of fear of ejection from those highly priced traditional values of marriage and motherhood, she remains unassertive. The case is not different with Kelechi, Tony's wife when she relocates with her children to Nairobi, Kenya's capital city. Tony's reckless abandonment and promiscuous life style which could have ruined the marriage initially was saved by Kaycee as the narrator reveals below,

Kaycee, my friend you clung to our dreams of what we thought was the way to make a marriage work: Being overtly tolerant and understanding of your spouse, even in the face of a deep crisis; pleading with outright humility for another opportunity or chance to make amends; enduring all misleads with blank and passive rectitude. You employed all these on your husband to no avail. (40)

Thus, Samuel aims at using her protagonists and other female characters that are fully developed and daring to point out some glaring instances of the harassment, embarrassment, dehumanization, exploitation, physical and psychological torture and trauma often suffered by women, which continue to demean their status both in the family and society at large. She also uses the same medium to portray her disapproval of such dehumanizing treatment as she confronts the status quo headlong through her heroines. As a sophisticated and intellectually oriented writer, one would say that she has immortalized the image of African women. She has boosted the concept of black American womanist consciousness by extension.

According to the view of Rose Uchem (2002), "women are still not allowed by their marriage partners to work in paid employment outside the home" (21). She maintains that in some civil and church communities, women are sometimes manipulated psychologically through fine words, praises and greetings such as "Ndi Nne Mama!" Meaning: "Hail to you Mothers!" (21) Yet, the same principal beneficiaries of the women's generosity can be misogynist, that is anti-women in speech and discriminatory behaviors. This notion is sustained in *Dear Kelechi* by Nkem and Tony, the misogynist husbands of Iheoma and Kelechi respectively.

Exposed thus to the materialistic and morally inadequate world of men, aided by a big city and by their personal motivation to succeed, Kelechi and Iheoma swiftly shed the traditional ideals which had adversely affected their behavior within the township environment. This exposure leads to their tragic disillusionment and failures in their concerted efforts to challenge the status quo. Gloria Ernest Samuel in *Dear Kelechi* thus portrays women as being exploited economically when their material contributions are taken from them, while their ideas and feelings are excluded from decision-making in families, communities and churches. This exclusion from leadership in the home and in the society makes them redundant, as they remain as nothing, but objects of mockery and ridicule in the hands of men and other members of their families.

Formerly, female character's ambition revolves around marriage and procreation. Her other female obligations ranged further to cooking the family meals, honoring her husband's bed on invitation and at other times merging with the home environment peacefully. Iheoma's mother-in-law once asserts "I married you for my son because I wanted him to rear up many children for me. As you can see, Nwokoro's family is crazy about children" (57). This incident leads Iheoma to unwholesome experiences in the hands of her husband, extended family members and gynecologists including traditional and orthodox medicine men. Iheoma recounts how insulting this ugly situation is, when she tries to express her experiences to her traumatized friend. Kelechi resorts to asking her series of questions concerning her personal experiences

that she may not have thought of in order to pull her out of her dangerous condition. She queries her thus:

Can you imagine how insulting it is to spread your laps for deliberate assault before different men and women, all in the name of gynaecological (sic) examinations? Is it possible to diagnose one's state of mind after each assault yielded no fruitful result? Have you experienced the pressure and mechanical nature of being made love to, simply because your ovulation is near? Or, have you been rejected when you are feeling sexy, simply because your husband is tired of wasting his sacred semen on a fruitless exercise? Did you ever experience the strains and stress which a childless woman undergoes each time her menses occurs, or even the financial corrosion infertility causes her pockets every time she visits a doctor? (59)

From the excerpt, women's experiences of marginalization and subjugation can be issues of cultural identity and human indignity. Symbolically, subordinating marriage rituals, pre-Christian notions of ritual purity, harmful traditional customs and misogynist speeches and treatments are forms of social injustices. Kelechi's experiences become a true portrayal of these social injustices in *Dear Kelechi*. Kelechi as a female character seems not to have emerged from her cocoon of the old order in spite of her enlightenment:

I was happy with myself because though previously I was not a practising Christian, my self-righteous life had helped me: It wasn't difficult for me to become a committed Christian. In obedience to the word of God, I submitted myself, my love and life to my husband. Unfortunately, owing to his orientation, he saw me as frustrated woman. To him, I had lost the glint that made me a glamorous woman. (65)

It does appear that she has not been fully emancipated, although her husband is derided for wrong gender based attitudes.

Furthermore, if the older generation of female writers and custodians of rural values like Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Grace Ogot, Bessie Head and others experience pain and disillusionment with the intransigent behavior of the men, Gloria Samuel demonstrates that heroines who operate in urban areas are not always overwhelmed by modern complex attitudes. Through Iheoma's and Kelechi's relationships with their spouses and other encounters with men, the author approaches, in an interesting manner, the perennial issue of the conflict between men and women, especially regarding female morality and child bearing.

Both Iheoma and Kelechi have the benefits of education with its attendant exposure to modern living. Therefore, they are able to devise formidable tactics of coping with endless tensions around their lives. About their boundless emotional upheavals, and the unruly and embarrassing behaviors of immoral husbands, Iheoma advises Kelechi to draw strength from their ugly experiences and build up emotional stability. This is important because other women in the society are looking up to them for strength and survival, "a lot of women can draw from our strength, our sufferings, as well as our experiences in this society, but only if we open up ourselves, share our stories and let them in (99). It is also their confidence to open up that enable them to cope under grave dangers and unbearable situations. This is what helps them to triumph as they become role models for modern African women. Their tactics of politeness but firmness fluster their itinerant amorous husbands who are seeking temporary pleasure. Indeed, although Iheoma and Kelechi seem to be weak and vulnerable, this is a real camouflage particularly on the part of Iheoma, for we quickly discover her self-esteem and self-confidence. As the story ends, we see the futility of men's efforts in frustrating women as the audience is made aware of women's strength of character. The protagonists, Iheoma and Kelechi know their minds and what they want and any temporary relationship without emotional fulfillment is rejected. The acquired confidence of the educated woman enables Iheoma to cope with Nkem's infidelity, while the lack of a similar trait in Kelechi's life contributes to a deterioration of her mental state.

Conclusion

The exploration of the African woman in this paper is without prejudice and rancor. El Saadawi and Samuel in addition to other preoccupations, celebrate the psychological strengths, weaknesses, traumas, defeats, victories and glories of women, all of which constitute the essence of African womanhood. The authors no longer perceive women as docile, passive and helpless victims; rather they create female characters who are rebellious, eccentric and deviant. They further perceive and represent the African woman as creative, incandescent and dynamic. This is a most welcome development primarily because in the words of Helen Chukwuma "it has filled the gaping gender gap between male and female characterization and shown the other side of the coin" (Otokunefor and Nwodo, 2000). The rural, back-house, timid, subservient, lack-luster woman has been replaced by a modern counterpart, a well-rounded human being, rational, individualistic and assertive, fighting for, claiming and keeping her own space.

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