

**African Gender Issues in Buchi Emecheta's Second Class Citizen
and Nawal El Sadawi's Woman At Point Zero**

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Abstract

This research examined African gender issues in Buchi Emecheta's Second Class Citizen and Nawal El Sadawi's Woman at Point Zero which are texts based on the African context. It investigated the issues that negatively affected the major female characters in the texts that were caused as a result of patriarchy which resulted in psychological and emotional trauma that inhibited the emancipation and liberation of women. Apart from investigating and analysing the gender issues in the selected texts, this study also investigated the linguistic and cultural implications that contributed to the oppression of women by analysing

some specific aspects of styles explored by the authors to project these gender issues. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method in carrying out a thematic analysis through the lens of the feminist theoretical framework and examining some stylistic features to explore the language used by the authors. It was discovered that religious hypocrisy, inequality in female education, patriarchal entrapments, female-to-female subjugation, female genital mutilations, marriage, and political limitations are some of the pertinent issues that marginalised and oppressed the women in the selected texts. It was also discovered that the authors revealed that violations of the rights of women were propelled through the use of violence to silence the women and their use of language revealed the feminist ideology of the texts as a revolutionary force that resist and bring awareness to the patriarchal structure that debase the female gender. The findings of this study revealed the gender issues as contemporary and recommended that all the major actors in the oppression of women in Africa; the woman herself, the men, the government and international advocacy groups should identify their roles and work assiduously to end gender inequality if not reduced to the barest minimum.

Keywords: Gender, Oppression, Patriarchy, Feminist, Emancipation, Liberation

Introduction

The major gender issue in Africa is gender inequality due to perceived social norms and stereotypes and it is a fundamental issue that violates human rights which has generated a lot of debate in African literature and other spheres of life as it is a major setback in Africa's global outlook. Examining gender issues through the feminist perspective which is the aim of this study, reveals that African society is Patriarchal and the social settings are somewhat gender biased. Women have been denigrated and relegated as objects of sexualisation, procreation and domestic grooming and care. Dwelling on the gender issues in the two

selected texts for this study is like a tool to understand and learn about the experiences and hindrances encountered by women while pursuing their identity and opportunities in a male-dominated society.

Generally, in African society, men are believed to be superior to women as they possess power and strength due to biological composition and body anatomy which shapes the sociological process of women's psychology to see them as being competent and reliable to provide sustenance and protection to them and to also rule them. Therefore, a woman in an African society is regarded as being accomplished and attracts respect to herself when married. This was portrayed in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* when Adah filled with the quest to further her education is faced with the need for a home, with "a good, quiet atmosphere where she could study in peace" but could not find any because "in Lagos, at that time, teenagers were not allowed to live by themselves, and if the teenager happened to be a girl as well, living alone, would be asking for trouble. In short, Adah had to marry". (*Second Class Citizen*, pg. 19.)

Undoubtedly, women continue to face stereotypes and discrimination in all spheres of life. According to Offei-Aboagye (2020), "It is disheartening to state that women continue to be underrepresented in political and community leadership and governance" (As cited in Gyan, Abbey & Baffoe, 2020, pg.5). A vivid expression of the imagery of a woman to an average African man can be likened to being "derogatory not because it imprisons her in her sex; and if this sex seems to man to be contemptible and inimical even in harmless dumb animals, it is evidently because of the uneasy hostility stirred up in him by women". (Simon de Beauvoir, 1949)

Emancipation and liberation of African women from the shackles of chauvinism motivate prominent African women writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Nawal El Sadawi, Mariama Bâ, and Bessie Head amongst others through their works to characterize, thereby

expose the gender issues in Africa. “Sensitivity, vision and courage inform their foci” (Owusu, 1990). They reveal the pathos of male dominance on African women by telling the story through the horse’s mouth. It is with this view that this research chose to reflect on the works of Buchi Emecheta and Nawal El Sadawi; *Second Class Citizen and Woman at Point Zero* as both women are postcolonial writers whose personal experiences inspire their works and the styles employed to convey their message because according to Bose (2012), there are intersectional variations to the study of gender issues due to geographical mappings as "intersecting axes of race, age, ethnicity, class, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, or other characteristics" accounts for the overlapping and interdependent system of gender discrimination in Africa as the continent have undergone patriarchy, wars, colonialism and racial segregations. They both explore their protagonist's experiences from childhood and how they tried to develop and maintain their identities while breaking barriers to overcome their traumas. The study aims to investigate the gender issues in selected African texts and the specific objectives are to: investigate and discuss the African gender issues in the selected texts and investigate and discuss the aspect of styles employed in the selected texts.

Theoretical Framework

This research employs a descriptive approach through the use of the feminist sociological theory of literature as used by critics for literary texts to reveal the reality and complexity of female experiences from the cultural, political, social, and economic perspectives. Feminism as recalled from Malinowka, 2020 in her article on ‘waves of feminism’ is a term coined in 1837 by the Utopian philosopher and radical socialist Charles Fourier (1772-1837) she went further to describe feminism as a movement for liberation “due to the deteriorating situation of women under the patriarchal status quo”.

Feminist struggle has been focused on a Western discourse thereby neglecting the contributions of Africans to this discourse (Alabi, 2019). African feminism was positioned at the convergence of notable activists in Accra, Ghana in 2016, as recalled from Alabi, 2019 to produce the charter of feminist principles for African feminists to position feminism in Africa as an audacious ideology (Ahikire, 2006 as cited in Alabi, 2019). He however cautioned that the event was not an inception of African feminism but signifies contemporary vibrant actions by African feminists.

African feminism strives to differ from Western feminism as it accuses Western feminism of being anti-men and against the values of marriage, childbearing, and preservation of the family. This was supported by Steady (2005) as she elucidates that African feminism transcends gender and its distinctiveness lies in its social and humanistic thrust which recognizes the unequal power relations that should not be based on gender only but also on intersecting axes of race, class, national origins and other social divisions. And that Western feminism ideology and preoccupations are focused on gender equality in jobs, positions, power and sexual expression neglecting social and humanistic transformations. The Encyclopedia of Race and Racism illustrates through the language of African feminism to be suffused of compromise, collaboration and negotiation and invites men as partners in social change.

Marxist feminism

This typology of feminism believes in the interlocking relationship between class and gender oppression. They argue that socio-economic inequalities like gender inequalities are sustained and reproduced by class in capitalist societies (Alabi, 2019). Marxist feminism merges the ideologies of Karl Marx and Feminist social protest. This Lengermann & Niebrugge in Ritzer, 2011 termed as an 'almagam' portrayed as an 'uneasy marriage' (Hartmann, 1981; Shelton and Agger, 1993, in Lengermann & Niebrugge in Ritzer, 2011).

Radical Feminism

This theory argues that "women's subordination is not rooted in production but in specific relations of reproduction and sexuality. (Makama, 2013). Radical feminists hold that:

'defeat must begin with a basic working of women's consciousness so that each woman recognizes her value and strength; rejects patriarchal pressures to see herself as weak, dependent, and second-class, and works in unity with other women, regardless of differences among them, to establish a broad-based sisterhood of trust, support, appreciation, and mutual defence (Chasteen, 2001; McCaughey, 1997; Whitehead, 2007) (cited by Lengermann&Neibrugge, in Ritzer, 2011).

Methodology

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select sixteen excerpts from the texts for a more homogenous population that is relevant to the research purpose. The data for the study, therefore, reflects the gender issues as deduced from the selected text. A descriptive qualitative method was employed to present and analyse the data. The qualitative method enabled the researcher to present a rich description of the issues that are prevalent in the texts by illuminating the experiences of the characters and interpreting the events. In analyzing the themes to reflect the cultural implications of the oppression and subjugation of the major female characters in the text, feminist theory was explored through the strands of radical and Marxist feminism, while the aspects of style explored by the authors to project the gender issues were examined to reveal the linguistic implications of the lived experiences of the major female characters in the texts.

Discussion of Findings

Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* and Nawal El Sadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* are both literary texts written by female African writers that focused on revealing the plight of women in Africa. Buchi

Emecheta and Nawal El Sadawi merge the ideologies of Marxist feminism and Radical feminism to establish the fact that class and gender oppression with patriarchy as a set of power relations that enables the men to have control over the women in all spheres of social institutions by placing their feminist discourse through the major female character's experience in the texts.

Portraiture of Females in the Selected Texts

Emecheta and El Sadawi have been regarded as feminists due to their discourses that centre on women and their travails in African society. They have both experienced marginalisation and subjugation in the patriarchal African society which was recounted in the texts. Emecheta, born in Nigeria to the Igbo tribe, got married at the age of sixteen and left the shores of Nigeria for the United Kingdom where she encountered a lot of problems that inspires her writing. Emecheta wrote *Second Class Citizen* in the guise of fiction whereas it can be regarded as an autobiographical text which recounts her life experience as a female in Africa and an immigrant in the United Kingdom.

Emecheta and El Sadawi portrayed women as victims of male chauvinism that has hindered their emancipation and they are ready to resist all forms of patriarchy without regard to customs and traditions and even religious fundamentalism as it operates in Egypt, which has relegated them for so long. They portray women as being able to achieve the same task as men and even more and seeks equality in all ramification between men and women "regardless of race, creed, economic or educational status, physical appearance or ability, or sexual preference" (Burkett & Brunell, 2023)

Adah expressed the goal of feminism that is elucidated above which disregards the set societal norms and prejudice that women can exist and survive against all odds when she was in court to divorce Francis and he wanted them to put the children up for adoption because he

knew he wouldn't be able to contribute to their maintenance as requested by the magistrate, but Adah rejected vehemently.

Something happened to Adah then. It was like a big hope and a kind of energy charging into her, giving her so much strength even though she was physically ill with her fifth child. Then she said very loud and clear, 'don't worry, sir. The children are mine and that is enough. I shall never let them down as long as I am alive. (*Second Class Citizen*, pg.185)

Firdaus also faced death gallantly in *Woman at Point Zero* as she knew that her existence would result in androicide which the men were afraid of she dared to hunt the men that had haunted women and subjected them to low self-esteem and also open the eyes of other women to the evils of men. The narrator was astonished at such bravery and realised that Firdaus is the voice of women.

I saw her walk out with them. I never saw her again. But her voice continued to echo in my ears, vibrating in my head, in the cell, in the prison, in the streets, in the whole world, shaking everything, spreading fear where it went, the fear of truth which kills, the power of truth, as savage, and as simple, and as awesome as death, yet as simple and as gentle as the child that has not yet learn to lie. And because the world was full of lies, she had to pay the price. (*Woman at Point Zero*, pg.114).

4.1.1 Women and Religious Hypocrisy

Karl Marx once posits that "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people". Guy- Evans, (2023) discovers that 'opium' is lately known as an "additive narcotic drug". In most African countries, religion plays a prominent role in the affairs of the

state and the people, which is why Buchi Emecheta and Nawal El Sadawi reflects this in their texts to expose it as a tool employed in male dominance against female in Africa. Men employ religious sentiments to control and subject women to their bidding. In other words, women must be submissive and respectful without questioning their authority and dictates.

Religion dulls the pain of exploitation, rather than the cause, also religion as opium promises an afterlife without offering solutions to earthly misery and lastly, the followers feel a mimicry of a temporary high due to taking off the opium whilst taking part in rituals. Summarily what Karl Marx tries to reveal is that religion is a temporary relief to social injustice and inequality which the bourgeois explores to confine the proletariat into its social control. Ultimately, religion provides a false consciousness that makes the oppressed in the society succumb to fate, i.e. it is the supernatural that controls their fate in life which makes the rich richer and the poor, poorer. Therefore, they accept the social order that makes the bourgeois control the economic, social and political aspects of society through capitalism and the proletariat resorts to prayer as an illusion of comfort and false hope in the afterlife.

As a *second class citizen*, whenever Francis wants to manipulate Adah into doing things, he would refer to the Bible, whereas, ironically, his religious stability is shaken as his religious stance was never established. He exploits religion to suit the situation. Francis justifies his action through the texts with religious sentiments. He is selfish, lazy and irresponsible but maintains dominance, exploitation, and manipulation by using religious whims to turn Adah into a puppet that must dance to his tunes. Although Adah was aware of these she delayed taking action because she thought Francis would change through prayers. Therefore, in explaining Francis's religious hypocrisy to suit his whims, Adah explained that;

Francis was like a Vicar of Bray. He changed his religion to suit his whims. When he realised that equipping Adah with birth-control gear would release her from the bondage of child-bearing, Francis went Catholic. When he started failing his examinations and was feeling very inferior to his fellow Nigerians, he became a Jehovah's Witness. (*Second Class Citizen*, pg.116-117)

Egypt is known for religious fundamentalism (WRITENET, 1994) and the constitution of the country states that "Islam is the religion of the state...and the principles of Islamic sharia are the main sources of legislation" (United States Department of State). Thus, El Sadawi in her activism reveals its role in the oppression of women in most of her texts. In *Woman at Point Zero*, all the men that Firdaus encountered and caused her misery were all religious who under the guise of religion demoralised her. Ironically, they are the ones that are supposed to protect her and shield her but they are the ones that meted out all the depressing conditions on her. All the men in Firdaus are hypocritical because they would attend the mosque for prayers and listen to the imam's sermon, yet they never changed their evil ways.

For was it not verily true that stealing was a sin, and killing was a sin, and defaming the honour of a woman was a sin, and injustice was a sin, and beating another human being was a sin...?(*Woman at Point Zero*, pg.11)

Inequality in Female Education

In the two texts, education was denied to the girls as it was a major practice but the major female characters in the two texts use it as the first point of revolt against the disparity between males and females in society. Throughout the texts, education was the major liberation that equipped the women with their thirst for equality and to reject oppression. Although both Adah and Firdaus ended their education at the secondary level as money was the major hindrance that prevented

them from furthering their education which made them succumb to societal norms of getting married but they both triumph over male dominance underpinnings by getting divorced (Adah) and getting executed for killing a pimp that was exploiting her (Firdaus).

In *Second Class Citizen*, Emecheta reveals that the Igbo part of Nigeria never played with education, as it is a liberation from poverty but "boys were usually given preference" and eventually if girls' education was considered like in Adah's case which her mother had always discussed among her friends, it would be for few years as she only needed the basic education.

"A year or two would do, as long as she can write her name and count. Then she will learn how to sew".
(*Second Class Citizen*, pg.3)

In *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus's zeal for education made her endure the sexual molestations she encountered from her uncle as he was the only one that saw the need and ensured she was educated. Although education filled Firdau's quest for knowledge she never got to live the life of an upper class as she does in prostitution with it. She believed so much in her certificates that anytime she encounters victimization from men she would resort to dusting her certificates and looking for a job. "I have a secondary school certificate, and I want to work" (*Woman at Point Zero*, pg. 52) she told Bayoumi who took her off the street after she escaped from her husband's brutal and endless beatings but kept her redundant in the house for domestic purposes. That statement made Bayoumi subject her to sexual molestation with his friends because her working means her liberation which he was against, before she escaped. Also, when one of her customers, Diaa, told her she was not respectable for being a prostitute then she took her certificate and went in search of work which she opted out of as she realised that she was not also respected as a worker but a tool working for the advancement of the upper class.

Patriarchal Entrapments

Makama (2012) viewed patriarchy as a system of male authority, which oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions. In other words, from the feminist purview, according to Walby (1990), it is essential and indispensable for the analysis of gender inequality (Haralambos, Holborn, & Heald, 2004). The religious myth of the creation story from the Bible and the Quran represents woman as an unconscious part of man, created from his ribs, which encourages male supremacy above females as males view females as not having a soul of their own (Abdulkadir & Shehu). Thus, it invariably means women's existence is dependent on men. This is the view of the majority of the African men in the selected texts under study as it is mainly what the authors set to reveal that Africa is a patriarchal society that strives to gender inequality in all aspects of the society and to inspire women to discover and utilise their hidden potential which the men tries to suppress because of their ego as they know women can achieve greater success if given the chance and opportunity. In *Second Class Citizen*, all the men who reflect the Nigerian context are patriarchal except the white ones that Adah met in the United Kingdom and to an extent Mr Noble, (Adah and Francis' Landlord).

Furthermore, in a patriarchal setting, the man is always the head of the house and every decision and sustenance is dependent on him. This was reflected when Adah's Pa (father) died, her mother was inherited by his brother and "Adah, like most girl-orphans, was to live with her mother's elder brother as a servant", and boy, her brother was to live with one of their father's cousin, because the society does not support female living alone without being under a man's roof. They are bound to men and Francis never failed to remind Adah all through the text and when Adah decided to break the barrier by divorcing him he went violent with her.

In our country, and among our people, there is nothing like divorce or separation. Once a man's wife, always a

man's wife until you die. You cannot escape. You are bound to him. (*Second Class Citizen*, pg. 182-183)

Furthermore, in *Woman at Point Zero* El Sadawi portrays all the male characters in the text as patriarchal and the society encourages patriarchy. Firdaus's father was a major player in the oppression and inflicting of psychological trauma on the females in his life; Firdaus's mother, her stepmother and her female siblings. The father never cared for them and Firdaus's mother was also voiceless and powerless as she has been bullied into silence and submissiveness that she couldn't fight and protect her children.

And instead of staying by my side to keep me warm, my mother used to abandon me alone and go to my father to keep him warm. In summer I would see her sitting at his feet with a tin mug in her hand as she washed his legs with cold water. (*Woman at Point Zero*, pg. 16)

In conclusion, both authors of the texts under study revealed that patriarchy exists in the family, society, law and all social institutions of the African continents and no matter the social class, education and civilisation, male chauvinism have entrapped the female from enjoying equal rights and privileges as the male.

Marriage of Inconvenience

In the texts understudy, the marriage of the major female character that was constituted was loveless and stricken with sexual assault and violence which subjected the women to psychological trauma and low self-esteem. It was a marriage of inconvenience that was borne out of means to an end. After their secondary education, both characters had to get married because there was nowhere they could stay and there was no one that could further sponsor their education.

In Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, Adah got married to her husband because she had nowhere to stay and society does not allow a single woman to stay alone, so she had to get married and keep her dreams going and she believed that an educated young man would make her

dreams of getting more education and travelling to the United Kingdom be realised and she quickly accepted to marry Francis without paying her dowry. Her assumptions were wrong as Francis proved to be lazy and selfish whose family depended on Adah's income for sustenance. In Adah and Francis's marriage, when they were in Nigeria Francis depended on his parent for decision making but when he got to the United Kingdom, he called a bluff which amazed Adah although he still write home to his parents to inform them of negative things about Adah to instil fear in her as she had respect for her mother-in-law. Adah tried to make the marriage work in the United Kingdom because she was scared of the racism that abounded there, and she endured the beatings, exploitation, manipulations, and oppressions meted on her by Francis.

...her mouth was bleeding. And once or twice during the proceedings she felt tempted to run out and call the police. But she thought better of it. Where would she go after that? She had no friends and she had no relations in London. (*Second Class Citizen*, pg. 154)

In *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus was married off to Sheikh Mahmoud an old widower with deformity on the face which oozes pus because her uncle could no longer accommodate her as influenced by his wife and the hope of a higher bride price which Sheikh Mahmoud could afford. She got married reluctantly after realising that she had nowhere to stay and the streets would make her vulnerable. She endured endless house chores and cooking amongst domestic violence and sexual assault that she once ran back to her uncle's house but he sent her back that all men beat their wives and that further increased her suffering with Sheikh Mahmoud who wanted to starve Firdaus with endless beating and sexual assault that she ran away to the streets and abandon the marriage when she knew it could later cost her life.

One day he hit me with his heavy stick until the blood ran from my nose and ears. So I left, but this time I did not go to my uncle's house. I walked through the streets

with swollen eyes, and a bruised face, but no one paid any attention to me. (*Woman at Point Zero*, pg.47)

4.1.5 Political Limitations

Second Class Citizen was set pre-independence and the struggle for the citizen of Nigeria to go to the United Kingdom like Lawyer Nweze for schooling and bring home the knowledge acquired to change their father's land, he got an appointment as a minister in Northern Nigeria but did not provide his people in the south basic amenities as expected but stayed in the north and "was making barrels and barrels of money" at the expense of his people who gave him a grand welcome as the first Lawyer in Ibadan when he newly arrived from the United Kingdom.

Also, there was seclusion of power to the Northern region of Nigeria as depicted in the text because Mr Babalola one of Adah and Francis's neighbours in Ashdown Street was a recipient of the Northern Nigerian Scholarship. What this means was that "he had more money to spend". The Northerners are not educated like their Southern counterparts and thus encourage anyone who would travel out of the country to acquire knowledge and come back home to take "jobs in the North which were then going to the southerner".

In *Woman at point zero*, Firdaus hated the politicians as they were corrupt and never cares for the citizen which was why she always spat on their faces on the pages of the newspaper. They cared for their pockets neglecting the sufferings of their citizens, especially the female gender.

They were men who sowed corruption on the earth and plundered their peoples, men endowed with loud voices, a capacity for persuasion, choosing sweet words and shooting poisoned arrows. Thus, the truth about them was revealed only after their deaths, and as a result, I discovered that history tended to repeat itself with a foolish obstinacy. (*Woman at Point Zero*, pg. 27)

Both societies, as depicted in the texts can be categorised as a capitalist society where there is social stratification where the rich get richer and the poor, poorer. All three arms of government have been compromised as it was rooted in patriarchy which encourages gender inequality that suppresses women into silence.

Breaking Free

Breaking free as women rejecting patriarchy comes with a price, but the dimensions for rejecting patriarchal oppression differ contextually. About the texts under study, Emecheta and El Sadawi tried to form a sisterhood based on the radical feminist; to expose women to forms of patriarchal oppression and reject it by promoting and advocating equality of genders in all spheres of society. While approaches depicted by the authors differ, El Sadawi preaches a radical approach to revolution against patriarchal oppressions as most of her works and activism in reality had the undertone of radicalism whereas Emecheta chose a more subtle approach as she believes in marriage institution but if it is getting unbridled and it seems all forms of salvaging and enduring the situation is not working then revolution can occur. Furthermore, both authors develop their characters to reflect their ideologies, and they can be regarded as feminist but instances of referring to El Sadawi as a radical feminist was not rejected by her as she revealed in an interview with Homa Khaleeli of *The Guardian*, in 2010, that she had been a feminist from when she was little and as she grows older, she still sees herself as a radical which she hopes to be till she dies. She was also dismayed that patriarchal oppressions is still operating despite the fight that the previous feminists have fought against while the younger generations are still relaxed because “young people are afraid of the price of being free. I tell them, don’t be, it is better than being oppressed than being a slave. It’s all worth it. I am free” (The Guardian, 2010).

However, Emecheta, as reflected in her works, rejected being called a radical feminist but rather a feminist with a small letter "f" as she does

not hate men and does not place her character to hate them. She believes in marriage with good men that will support their wives and never neglect their duties and make the woman achieve her dreams.

I am a feminist with a small "f". I love men and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me that we should abolish marriage like the capital "F" (Feminist) women who say women should live together and all that. I say no. Personally, I'd like to see the ideal, happy marriage. But if it doesn't work, for goodness' sake, call it off (Mary Umeh in Modupe Kolawole, 1997, in Ajayi, O., 2011).

Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* broke free from patriarchal oppressions and all other forms of oppression by the act of killing the pimp that tried to control her life and accepting the death sentence without appealing the judgement because she believed that her existence to the men means their deaths as she has found the identity that she craves for so long and accepting death portrays that she is above all oppressions and oppressors and had found her honour in death. Adah, on the other hand, is a *Second Class Citizen* who endured her marriage despite knowing that it was overwhelming and violent stricken while still rejecting it subtly until she decided to end it by divorcing her husband and getting a restraining order.

Stylistic Devices in the Selected Texts

The authors of the selected texts understudy employ styles and techniques in their texts to portray the plight of the female gender in the patriarchal African context that inhibits their emancipation and liberation as well as inequality in the rights and privileges of genders. "Techniques and styles are very important features that flavour a writer's depiction of experiences" (Odinye & Ogbazi, 2019).

Buchi Emecheta and Nawal El Sadawi explore their plots, the use of language, motif and narrative techniques as stylistic devices to effectively communicate with the reader to understand the experiences

of the female gender in their path to self-identity in a patriarchal structure and the reality of the experiences as it shapes their responses through self-actualization and resisting male chauvinism.

Plot

Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* has a linear plot structure that Emecheta employs to chronologically present Adah's story which enables the reader to relate to how the event unfolds. Emecheta explores the story of Adah's personal development in her quest for self-actualization and self-worth through rebellious acts against the existing social norms and order. Emecheta creates the character of Adah at a tender age with the ultimate goal of achieving the unexpected; acquiring education and travelling to the United Kingdom and which was depicted by Emecheta in two phases; the indigenous struggle and the alien struggle. The indigenous struggles were depicted through the travails that Adah went through in Nigeria as a girl denied education and other rights because of her gender who defied social norms and order to achieve the first of her dreams which was to be educated against all obstacles and to achieve her ultimate goal to travel out of the country to the United Kingdom, succumbed to tradition and got married and used the guise of marriage to travel to the United Kingdom where she was faced with the alien struggle against discrimination because of her race and colour while still resisting patriarchal dominations.

Furthermore, the structural arrangements of the texts into thirteen chapters with titles trace the development of Adah's personal development that shapes her response to obstacles as they emerge. From the titles of the chapters; *Childhood, Escape into Elision, A Cold Welcome, The Daily Minders, An Expensive Lesson, 'Sorry, No Coloureds', The Ghetto, Role Acceptance, Learning the Rules, Applying the Rules, Population Control, The Collapse, The Ditch Pull*, as employed by Emecheta to expose to the reader the experiences and

journey of Adah through patriarchal entrapments that informs her rejection and quest for liberation. The arrangements of the Chapter follow the five stages of meta-plot by Christopher Booker according to Frisella, (2017) of the anticipation stage; Adah's childhood as an Igbo from Ibuza that is underpinned by cultural milieu, the dream stage; in which Adah conceived the dream to be educated and immigrate to the United Kingdom, the frustration stage where all her dreams were almost shattered due to patriarchal oppressions and racism, the nightmare stage; where she almost give in to obstacles limiting her emancipation and the climax of the events that led to the resolution stage where she opted for divorce and remain a single mother to gain freedom from patriarchal dominations.

In El Sadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, the text has a flashback plot that allows the author to deliver information about events that occurred earlier. El Sadawi depicts *a woman at point zero* as a flashback to Firdaus's experience which is a response to her actions earlier in the text when she rejected all efforts to interview her as a woman incarcerated waiting to be executed and who never wanted to see a visitor. El Sadawi arranged the events into three chapters; the first part is the encounter where she got to know about Firdaus on one of her visits to Qanatir prison as a psychiatrist doctor on research on the neurosis in Egyptian women. Firdaus's exceptional behaviour attracted El Sadawi and her rejection made her more curious and embittered before Firdaus out of her own volition decided to narrate her story. The second chapter of the text relates the experiences and journey of Firdaus which is arranged in chronological order like a second class citizen, from childhood to adulthood that El Sadawi uses to portray Firdaus as a woman that exists in opposition to society and the last chapter in which Firdaus was taken away to be executed and faces death gallantly as a woman who cherished honour and dignity against patriarchal oppression and social stratification. El Sadawi employs the plot structure to arouse the interest of the readers to the sufferings of a woman in a patriarchal

setting coupled with the effect of social class in shaping a woman's choices to challenge and overcome obstacles. Therefore, the plots of the selected texts expose the reader to the gender issues that affect the major female characters which trace them to the path of self-actualization.

Use of Language

Emecheta and El Sadawi employ the use of simple and unambiguous language to express the sufferings of a female in the struggle against gender inequality and patriarchal oppression. Emecheta uses mostly compound sentences for a faster pace and to unite related ideas to enable the reader to a detailed and in-depth imprint of the message in texts that come alive in the mind of the reader to expose the experiences of the heroine all through the texts in the quest for self-assertion in patriarchal entrapments and racial discrimination. El Sadawi on the other hand, made use of simple sentences for clarity and brevity to reveal more to the reader while avoiding ambiguity. For instance, in the case of Firdaus, she has limited time to narrate her lifetime experience from childhood till adulthood to the narrator and the reader without neglecting details that are essential to understand her response to patriarchal oppression which led to her present predicament to be executed for committing murder.

“Let me speak. Do not interrupt me. I have no time to listen to you. They are coming to take me at six o’clock this evening. Tomorrow morning I shall no longer be here. Nor will I be in any place known to man”. (*Woman at Point Zero*, pg. 9)

The authors also employ the use of indigenous language while reflecting gender relations as typical of the cultural milieu. There are instances of the use of Igbo and Yoruba words as Emecheta was an Igbo woman who was raised in Lagos, a Yoruba environment.

Igbo- “Ezidiji ji de ogoli, ome oba” (when a good man holds a woman, she becomes like the queen)

Igbo-

“opoho” (woman)

Yoruba- “boli” (roasted plantain)

Yoruba- “iyawo” (young wife)

However, *Woman at Point Zero* was originally written in Arabic before it was translated into English and other languages, yet there are instances of Arabic words;

“galabeya” (a long free flowing dress)

“imam” (religious leader).

Significantly, irony was also employed by the authors as a form of sarcasm to reflect the men in the texts that are supposed to protect the female as the ones that led to their miseries and even death which is one of the ideals of patriarchy. In *Second Class Citizen*, Emecheta portrays the character of Francis to depict him as a male chauvinist that places so much emphasis on being a man and head of the family but couldn't provide sustenance for his family and depends on his wife for finances and general upkeep and despite being jobless, yet he kept failing his exams and blamed his failures on his wife. In *Woman at Point Zero*, the depiction of the men in the texts is ironic as they all display religious fervour, yet they perpetrate evil without second thought. Firdaus's father and other men despite listening to a sermon in the mosque still engage in stealing, killing, defaming women, sexual assault and molestations, and other social injustices, even the politicians that are also religious faithful are also corrupt and selfish. The use of simple vocabulary by the author enables the reader to make meaning from the texts without the need for a dictionary as well as making the texts appealing and well understood.

Motifs

The death and journey motif is evident in the texts as it symbolises the point of self-realization for the characters in the texts. In *Second Class Citizen*, the death motif signals the start of Adah's suffering when her

father died and her family was disorganized. This created a psychological and emotional effect on her as the death of her father left her with no home and a threat to her education. She overcame the obstacle created by the vacuum of her father in her education by being rebellious and reluctantly agreed to attend a public school to fulfil her dreams of being educated and endure beatings as a result of the mischievous acts that she deployed to pay for her exams and also the lack of a home led her into a loveless marriage of inconvenience.

At the mention of a home, Adah started to cry. If only she had had a home, she would not have married so early. If only Pa had not died when he did. If only her people in Lagos had been civilised enough to know that a girl who decided to live by herself and study for her degree was not necessarily a prostitute. If only... (*Second Class Citizen*, pg. 127)

In addition, the journey motif is divided into two phases; her journey to the United Kingdom where she thought things would be better and her dreams had come to reality, also the second phase which is the journey to freedom when she decided to liberate herself by writing a novel (which Francis burnt the manuscript as he was afraid of Adah's emancipation as a writer) and live a single life with her children but Francis still frustrated her with extreme violence that almost took her life but she took a bold step to seek protection from the court of law. Furthermore, like Adah in *Second Class Citizen* so also is the motif of death and journey manifested in *Woman at Point Zero* had an emotional and psychological effect on Firdaus. In her case, the journey motif from the rural part of Egypt where she resides with her father and her relocation to Cairo, the urban capital city of Egypt led to the discovery of her self-identity which shaped her experience through the text. The death of her father led to her chance at acquiring an education and the killing of the pimp who exploited her symbolised her response to oppression her death symbolises that of a martyr for the female gender which she believed would resonate revolution among other

women to resist all forms of patriarchy as reflected by the narrator's reaction after Firdaus was taken away to be executed.

“Let’s go...Your time has come”.

“I saw her walk out with them. I never saw her again. But her voice continued to echo in my ears, vibrating in my head, in the cell, in the prison, in the streets, in the whole world, shaking everything, spreading fear wherever it went, the fear of the truth...”

“And because the world was full of lies, she had to pay the price”. (*Woman at Point Zero*, pg.114)

Point of View

In *Second Class Citizen*, Emecheta employs a narrative hook to begin chapter one and two and at the end of other chapters as well as giving titles to each chapter that builds the reader’s curiosity to continue reading the text for instance;

“It had all begun like a dream. You know, that sort of dream which seems to have originated from nowhere...” (*Second Class Citizen*, Chapter One)

“Most dreams, as all dreamers know quite well, do have setbacks. Adah’s dream was no exception, for hers had many” (*Second Class Citizen*, Chapter Two)

“And what saved them was just like a miracle” (*Second Class Citizen*, Chapter Six)

While also employing a third-person omniscient narration with the use of the third-person pronoun 'she', 'he' 'her' and 'his' to allow the readers to deduce from the character's speech, thoughts and actions that justify their response to the event in the text. Emecheta allows a flowing stream of consciousness to explore Adah's flow of thought as a reflection of Emecheta’s thoughts herself who had been in the position of Adah in reality which is why *second class citizen* can be ascribed as an autobiography of Buchi Emecheta with the characterization of Adah as a round character and Francis a flat character whose personality

traits do not change in the texts even as the setting changes from Lagos in Nigeria to the United Kingdom, a western world where the readers hoped that he would change but heartbreaking events like when Adah had a child through caesarean section after a long and painful labour and when their child Vicky was sick was admitted didn't change him all through the texts.

In *Woman at Point Zero*, El Sadawi employs the first person narrative using the first person personal pronoun 'I' and 'me' in which there were two narrators; First, the author herself which she uses to also position the reader's reaction to the story of the heroine and Firdaus as the second narrator who narrates her story to achieve authenticity and to also justify that Firdaus was a fearless and powerful woman who wants her voice to be heard as it is without authorial intrusion and self-assertion.

“the woman sitting on the ground in front of me was a real woman, and the voice filling my ears with its sound, echoing in a cell where the window and door were tightly shut, could only be her voice the voice of Firdaus”. (*Woman at Point Zero*, pg.8)

In conclusion, the stylistic devices employed by the authors significantly expose the reader to the female connection that exists between Adah and Firdaus (the major female character in the texts) as both characters experience almost the same ordeal that is crucial to understand the texts as a feminist discourse rejecting gender inequality and patriarchal domination in the African context and to inspire another female gender to be aware of gender issues that could inhibit their emancipation and liberation. The bravery and rebellious act in the quest for self-identity and assertion is essential for women's freedom which is the premise of the radical feminist.

Conclusion

The two selected texts studied were post-colonial texts that reflect reality. It is quite sad that in the contemporary period, the gender issues that have been highlighted persist in Africa despite the level of exposure and civilisation. In the portraiture of women, there have been quite some changes as 'the media portrays dark-skinned women as beauty ideals and objects of desire' but there are still fragments of marginalisation and subjugation. Political limitations have also affected the representation of women in decision-making. In Africa, only ten female presidents have emerged so far and only three were democratically elected (Mudau, 2022). Although, "international, regional, and domestic human rights laws certainly cater to women's political rights to contest in presidential elections, within internal party structures, and in the broader multi-party democratic arena" countries like Nigeria and Egypt are yet to have a female president as efforts by women that dares to stand out to break the jinx was always futile as the men gains momentum at the polls. Significantly, the selected texts studied have been able to expose the feminist ideologies that shape the texts of African female writers as a revolutionary force that resists and brings awareness to the patriarchal structure that debases the female gender. In conclusion, Emecheta and El Sadawi reveal the violation of the rights of the female gender in education, marriage, sexual assault and molestation, and other social injustices propelled through the use of violence as the fears of the men that women's emancipation would be a thorn to their ego. They employ the use of some stylistic devices in the texts to explore the linguistic implication of their style to reveal the plight of women in hostile conditions and structures that hinder their emancipation and liberation.

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