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**THE FEMME FATALE ARCHETYPE IN ELECHI
AMADI'S THE CONCUBINE AND FERDINAND
OYONO'S HOUSEBOY**

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the University of Zambia in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Literature.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

LUSAKA

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this research report is mine and that it has not previously been submitted for any other degree at this or any other university.

Signed..... **Date**

APPROVAL

This dissertation of Royd Chanda has been approved as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Literature of the University of Zambia

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my children: Royd Mwamba Chanda, Theresa Chanda and Chilufya Chanda. I hope my work will be an inspiration for them to do more than myself.

ABSTRACT

The *femme fatale* concept has been there from time immemorial especially in Western culture. It is a male construct that stereotypes women, thereby perpetuating male dominance.

This study, using the qualitative method, looks at the representation of the *femme fatale* in Western culture and in African culture, focusing on the treatment of the *femme fatale* in two novels: *Houseboy* and *The Concubine*, comparing their similarities and differences.

The findings in the representation of the *femme fatale* in Western culture show her as beautiful, attractive, intelligent, mysterious, subversive, double-crossing, unloving, predatory, tongue-sweet, unreliable, irresponsible and manipulative, at times a femme vampire who is extremely dangerous.

In African culture her image has been equally mystified. She is a figure enriched by sensuality and luxury, depicted in powerful colours, with waist beads, lush fabrics, indigo, henna, patchouli, and nipple tassels. Glamour is her uniform. The African *femme fatale* is accused of witchcraft and murder.

Although the findings in the two texts show that the *femme fatale* (literally, the woman who brings death) exists in the African literary tradition, there are crucial differences from the modern and contemporary Western examples. The traditional African *femme fatale* is given strange, mystical, mythological and supernatural attributes like the ancient Greek Medusa or Circe. Meanwhile Ihuoma in *The Concubine*, although her association with the sea and water links her to the ‘mammy wata’, a figure in West African tradition, she is not conscious of her fatal power but is ostensibly a good, well-behaved and innocent village woman. In *Houseboy*,

Madame's mysterious power lies in the fact that she is Toundi's boss and therefore has power over him. Toundi has a fascination for this older yet attractive, sexually active white woman who cheats on her husband, and this fatal attraction and fascination stem from his childhood experiences.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter covers the background of the study, aim of the study, research objectives, research questions, statement of the problem, significance of the study, methodology, scope of the study, theoretical framework and definition of terms.

1.1 Background to the study

Women have been stereotyped as *femme fatales* in literature, cinema, and visual arts throughout history. This is found in different cultures and other aspects of life which call for women's participation. The *femme fatale* stereotyping originate from the Western culture. Scott (2005:66) explains that the *femme fatale* archetype exists in the culture, folklore and myths of Western cultures. Ancient mythical or legendary examples include Mohali, Lilith, the Siren, the Sphinx, Seylla, Aphrodite, Circe, Medea, Lesbia, Helen of Troy and Visha Kanyas. Historical examples from classic times include Clytemnestra, Cleopatra and Messalina, as well as the Biblical figures Delilah, Jezebel and Salome. An example from Chinese literature and tradition history is Daji. It is from this historical understanding that the *femme fatale* archetype has been perpetuated in the unconscious mind of people especially the patriarchy in the European culture.

But what exactly is the *femme fatale*? According to Barthes' (1977:13) rather ambiguous definition, the *femme fatale* is "any irresistibly attractive woman, especially one who leads men into danger or disaster." In Bade's (1979:9) *sketch in Femme fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women*, "she is malignant, threatening, destructive and fascinating". In *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon*, Allen

(1983: Vii) states that “she is a woman who lures men into danger, destruction, even death by means of her overwhelmingly seductive charms”. Khun (1990:154) explains that “the *femme fatale* is primarily defined by her desirable, but dangerous, sexuality-which brings about the downfall of the male protagonist.” While these analogous descriptions provide brief, if somewhat vague, explanations of what a *femme fatale* might be and possibly how to recognize her, they do not even point to the cultural, historical, political, social and ideological catalysts that might have produced, and continue to produce, such a character.

This archetype of the *femme fatale* is rare in the African culture though dotted examples from the Sub-Sahara exist. Minna (2014: 1) argues that while she certainly exists, the African *femme fatale* is absent from cultural production at large. “Most of us can name women such as Marlene Dietrich, Mata Hari or mother of all *femme fatales*, Eve, but their African counterpart is not as well known. Yet as a cross-cultural study about the *femme fatale* archetype found, the *femme fatale* is incredibly popular in sub-Saharan African folklore.” It is evident in the Nigerian Nollywood films like ‘High Way to the Grave’ (2000). It exhibits a powerful woman, mother figure, ‘Mami Wata’ who is found in the oceans and controls life in terms of birth and death. She is able to give children to those who desire them in case of infertility in their lives. She is so powerful that she directs the nature of life on earth for her products. And mainly such people are involved in destruction as seen in ‘High Way to the Grave’ film. She is described in literature and films as a very powerful *femme fatale* with many agents to assist accomplish her destruction especially that of men. She is a very beautiful water goddess.

In Western culture according to Camilla (1992) the *femme fatale* archetype is perceived as dangerous and a source of evil in society. And it is a well rooted archetype exhibited in films, paintings, oral and written literature. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *femme fatale* became a more fashionable figure, and she is found in the paintings of the artists Edward Munch, Gustav Klimt, Franz von Stuck and Gustave Moreau.

One traditional view portrays the *femme fatale* as a sexual vampire; her charms rely on the virility and independence of lovers, leaving them shells of themselves. Camilla (1992:5) states that “the *femme fatale* hides an unpredictable threat that is usually sexually hidden. Because of this, an erotic curiosity drives the narrative. Sexual difference becomes a threat to the hero. She embodies an uncontrollable drive (sexual desire) and is therefore a product of anxieties regarding feminism.”

The *femme fatales* are held accountable by the patriarchal systems for societal problems and the failure of man in morality and other achievements. The best example is the story of Eve in the Bible in the book of Genesis. Eve is blamed for having been enticed by the serpent to eat the fruit from the tree of death and she later made the husband, Adam take part of it. It made them have the knowledge of good and evil. This began the suffering of humans. Ever since, humans lost the favour of God and sufferings entered the world. This means the source of sufferings in this world today including death is blamed on a woman, Eve. She is described by Adrian (2003) as the first *femme fatale*, and all others who follow are her products; and all other women are seen as Eve and cannot be trusted. Adriana (2003:19) states that, “Eve – the first woman on earth, created by a male god from a man’s rib as a gift for a male Adam was also without flaws. She sought the Tree of Knowledge and

famously bit into the apple in the Garden of Eden, ending paradise and letting all the evil into the world.” Eve and Pandora are described as the first bad girls, and ever since, women have been linked in the popular consciousness with the concept of sin and their sins with sex. It is from that that a woman is mythologised as *femme fatale* archetype. It is planted in the unconscious mind of many people as reflected In Jungian psychology, (1971:89). It is by the existence of this stereotype in many Western societies that women find themselves tagged negatively in social, economic, political and religious life, i.e. *femme fatales*. The unconscious mind of many people reveal that extremely sexually attractive women are dangerous.

Another woman cited to be a *femme fatale* is Helen of Troy, the first anima image in classical literature who sowed sorrow, war, and confusion among her people in classical times, (Frye, 1986:45). He further states, “Her ‘dangerous beauty’ caused a lot of trouble for her and other people.” Medusa in Greek mythology is portrayed as a very ugly and dangerous woman as opposed to her initial portrayal of being a very beautiful and friendly woman. Her beautiful hair turned into snakes having power to turn anyone who looked directly at her into stone (Phillip, 2003:36). The myth of Medea is also a portrayal of a powerful woman who uses her witchcraft to gain command and power (Bullfinch, 2007:151). The Siren mythology is continuously used as a symbol for the dangerous temptation labelled on women regularly throughout Christian art of the medieval era (Linda, 1988). Circe turned men into swine in Homer’s *The Odyssey*.

Beauvoir (1989:56) argues that “the concept of *femme fatale* is male constructed with the idea to demonize women and continue with the patriarchal supremacy.” She further states (58) that “men oppress women when they seek to perpetuate the family

and keep patrimony intact” (58). This is evident from the texts under study. They are authored by men and portray women in the context of the *femme fatales*; destructive, powerful in a negative way and generally dangerous or deadly. The author of Genesis in the Bible is also a man, Moses, who treated a woman, Eve, as a *femme fatale* and contributed to the strengthening of this archetype of the *femme fatale*. It is unfortunate that men in the same texts are treated as innocent but led into compromising situations by women. They make women appear evil and dangerous.

Jung (1971:66) also considers the *femme fatale* archetype as “an expression of the negative aspect of the anima of how the woman appears to man.” Beauvoir (1989:91) argues that “man fears woman because she is castrated which provides an underlying template from which dangerous women in classical noir texts, films and novels, are generally constructed.” Walker (1969:123) highlights film noir’s ability to demonize women through the guise of the *femme fatale*. Pagia (1992:5) states that “Generally, as the evidence overwhelmingly indicates, men operate at higher levels of socio-sexuality, as predicted by Sexual Selection and Parental Investment Theories.” It is a scapegoat theory of the patriarchy in the Western literary tradition’s view of a woman as an embodiment and of male fantasy.

Some feminists have countered this kind of perception of women with a strong desire to correct the image of women. Lisa (1986:184) states that “women have also began to employ anti – patriarchal themes to protest the historical censorship of literature written by men. The rise of decadent feminist literature in the 1990s was meant to direct challenge the sexual politics of the patriarchy.” A good example is Beauvoir (1989:15) who states that “man succeeds in the world by transcendence, but immanence is the lot of women.” Doane (1991:2-3) asserts that the *femme fatale* is “a

symptom of male fears about feminism,” while Hart elaborates in *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (1994:141) that “the *femme fatale* is a functional construct of the masculine imaginary, a representation that, at once, expresses a patriarchal sociosymbolic order’s fear of femininity and disarms that fear by disabling her.” Allen (2003: ix) argues that “one social factor underlying the birth of the *femme fatale* was the threat to men inherent in the rise of feminism. According to Barthes (1977:3), feminism is essentially “a doctrine advocating, or a movement for the attainment of, social, political, and economic rights for women equal to those of men.” Therefore, ‘feminist’ advancements, meant to create equality between men and women, are interpreted by patriarchy as a threat to the male’s position at the apex of the power structure. This threat is made visible in the image of the *femme fatale*. Other women writers have also come on board in order to deconstruct the wrong image cast on women. Such writers include: Hortense Spiller, Susan Gubar, Nabar, Nancy and Irene Tayler (Moil 1982:2010). Some sayings have been coined in order to treat women as good as men e.g. ‘behind any successful man is a woman.’

Hooks (1992) states that “throughout history, many if not most – cultures have perpetuated the myth of the evil woman, the *femme fatale*. And this is universal and evidenced from literature and oral cultural narratives.” This is a perception due to some historical literature and tales which have run from one generation to the other affecting many peoples’ unconscious mind.

Moil (2010:61) argues that “the *femme fatale* represents the threat of female independence. She comes out of a system that defines women as marginal to the symbolic order, and construes them to be at the limit, or boarder line, of that order.” She further states on page 102 that “the *femme fatale* represents the necessary

frontier between man and chaos. Being a male construction, locatable neither inside or outside, or even straddling the border, her position is fluid, and changes to meet the needs of the society.”

The researcher developed the interest in the *femme fatale* archetype after studying some literary works which includes even the Holy Bible. This provoked a need to research on how the same archetype is treated in the African culture through the novels; *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi and *Houseboy* by Ferdinand Oyono.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to investigate the portrayal of the African *femme fatale* archetype in Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine* and Ferdinand Oyono’s *Houseboy* and compare how they differ from each other.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To describe the *femme fatale* as a Jungian archetype in Western tradition and in African tradition.
- ii. To investigate the traits of the *femme fatale* archetype in *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi and in *Houseboy* by Ferdinand Oyono.
- iii. To discuss the similarities and differences of the *femme fatale* archetype in the two texts.

1.4 Research questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

- i. What is the description the *femme fatale* as an archetype in the Western tradition (by Jung) and in the African tradition?
- ii. What are the traits of the *femme fatale* archetype in the two chosen texts?
- iii. What are the similarities and differences of the *femme fatale* archetype in the two texts?

1.5 Statement of the problem

Many literatures have portrayed beautiful and sexually attractive women as dangerous for men, *femmes fatales* especially in the Western culture. This has made the position of women awkward in many societies.

Therefore the problem which prompted the researcher to embark on this study was to investigate the treatment of the *femme fatale* archetype in the African literature in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* and Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*. The study investigates the traits of the *femme fatale* in the two works under this study. In short, the question is 'what traits of the *femme fatale* are in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* and Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*? What are the differences and similarities in the traits of the *femme fatale* archetype in the two texts?

1.6 Significance of the study

It was anticipated that the findings from this study would generate knowledge which could minimise the existing knowledge gap about the treatment of the *femme fatale* archetype in *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi and in *Houseboy* by Ferdinand Oyono. It was also anticipated that the information generated by this study could be used to understand the treatment of the *femme fatale* archetype in the African societies. Data generated could also be useful to other researchers on the *femme fatale* portrayal in African literature.

1.7 Methodology

This methodology covers research design, data collection procedure (approach), data analysis and samples

1.7.1 Research design

A research design can be referred to as the structure of the research and is defined as the scheme outline which is basically used to find answers so as to address the identified research problems. It is further referred to as ‘glue’ that holds all of the elements in a research project together (Kambo and Tromp, 2013). It further lays down conditions for collection and analysis of data. The research design used is qualitative study with the use of documentary analysis methodology to explore the traits of the *femme fatale* archetype in *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi and in *Houseboy* by Ferdinand Oyono.

1.7.2 Research instruments (samples)

Two novels were used for this study. These are *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi and *Houseboy* by Ferdinand Oyono; literary criticism; literature on *femme fatale* archetype.

1.7.3 Data collection procedure (approach)

Data collection refers to the process of gathering specific information which is aimed at proving or rejecting some facts (Kombo and Tromp, 2013). The study used the documentary analysis procedure i.e. reading the two novels under study and pick the relevant points related to the topic.

1.7.4 Data analysis

Data analysis refers to examining what has been collected. Cohen and Maria (1995) argued that data analysis involves the reduction and interpreting of data. The analysis of collected data was done thematically by categorizing data into themes/ objectives.

1.7.5 The Scope of the study

The research did not look at all the aspects surrounding the novels selected but on the *femme fatale* archetype in the two selected novels.

1.8 Theoretical frame work

This study is guided by the theory of archetypes which calls for the collection of symbols, characters and motifs that evoke similar response to peoples. It is about the myths which societies have held for some time, which become a symbol or point of reference and finally an archetype in peoples' unconscious mind.

The main advocate of the archetype approach is Carl Gustav Jung, who talked about the 'collective unconscious.' Jung (1971:109) believed that the collective unconscious, which reflects the cosmic order and the history of the human species, is the most important part of the mind. "It contains archetypes, which are manifested in symbols that appear in dreams, disturbed states of mind, and various products of culture." For example, the idea of some very beautiful, sexually attractive women being dangerous to men is a male construction in the unconscious mind of some people and particularly the males. This is because of the stories they have heard in their societies which have made a myth in their lives. It has become a symbol in the unconscious to represent a dangerous woman. It can be passed from one generation to the other and falsely taken as a fact. As a result, such women may be stigmatised

and fail to fit in society because of such type of beliefs on them. And this is the main aim of the patriarchy to suppress the women so that competition with them is reduced or stopped. In this case, men remain dominant in all societal matters and women remain passive or controlled by men. Any woman who may exhibit some powers becomes a threat to the patriarchal dominance hence invites male attack so that she is controlled and remains in the position a woman is expected to be, that of a mother.

Archetypes are a reflection of a society's philosophy (Walker, 1995). The behaviour of members of societies is highly dependent on the archetypes which exist in their unconscious. This can be seen in people's approach to life, their aspirations and the cultural organisation of a given society as explained in Jungian psychology (2001:987) that "archetypes are highly developed elements of the collective unconscious. Being unconscious, the existence of archetypes can only be arrived at indirectly by examining behaviour, images, art, myths, religions, or dreams." He understood archetypes as universal, archaic patterns and images that derive from the collective unconscious and are the psyche counterpart of instincts. They are inherited qualities which are actualised when they enter consciousness as images or manifest in behaviour in interaction with the outside world. They are autonomous and hidden forms which are transformed once they enter consciousness and are given particular expression by individuals and their cultures. Jung (1971:76) further elaborates that, "archetypes refer to unclear underlying forms which emerge in images and motifs such as the mother, the child, the trickster, and the flood among others." He argues that archetypes are not merely a psychic entity, but more fundamentally, a bridge to matter in general. He described archetype events as birth, death, separation from parents, initiation, marriage, the union of opposites; archetype figures as 'great

mother, the father, child, devil, god, wise old woman, the trickster, the hero, the femme fatale'; and archetype motifs as 'the apocalypse, the deluge, the creation'.

Although the number of archetypes is limitless, there are a few particularly notable, recurring archetypal images, chief among them being, according to Frye, (1992:56) the shadow, the wise old man, the child, the mother...and her counterpart, the maiden, and lastly the anima in man and the animus in woman. The self designates the whole range of psychic phenomena in man. It expresses the unity of the personality as a whole. The shadow is a representation of the personal unconscious as a whole and usually embodies the compensation values to those held by the conscious personality. Thus, the shadow often represents one's dark side, those aspects of oneself that exist, but which one does not acknowledge or with which one does not identify.

The anima archetype according to Jung (1989:134) appears in men and his primordial image of woman. It represents the man's biological expectation of women, but also is a symbol of a man's feminine possibilities, his contra sexual tendencies.

1.9 Definition of terms

A Myth: a widely held but false belief.

A Symbol: a thing that represents or stands for something else.

Advocate: a person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy.

Anima (in Jungian psychology): the feminine part or side of a man's personality.

Animus (in Jungian psychology): the masculine part of a woman's personality.

Archetypes: highly developed elements of the collective unconscious.

Castration: to remove the testicles of a human being or male animal

Construct: the formation of (a theory) from various conceptual elements.

Culture: the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively.

Deconstruct: to dismantle something (text, conceptual system, etc.).

Demonize: to turn someone into a demon in the minds of others.

Embodiment: a tangible or visible form of an idea or quality.

Fantasy: the faculty or activity of imagining improbable things.

Folklore: the traditional beliefs and customs of a community, passed on by word of mouth.

Generation: all the people born at about the same time, regarded collectively

History: the whole series of past events connected with someone or something.

Legend: a traditional story popularly regarded as historical but which is not authenticated.

Patriarch: the male head of a family.

Scapegoat: a person who is blamed for the wrong doing or mistakes of others.

Stereotype: an image or idea of a particular type of a person or thing that has become fixed through being widely held.

Stigmatisation: regard as worthy of disgrace.

Unconscious: the part of the mind which is inaccessible to the conscious mind but which affects behaviour and emotions.

1.10 summary

This chapter has presented the introduction to the study, discussed the background, aim of the study, research objectives, research questions, statement of the problem, significance of the study, methodology, scope of the study, theoretical frame work and operational terms. The next chapter presents the literature review related to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The previous chapter has covered the introduction to the study. This chapter presents the literature review relevant to the topic of study and covers a review of literature on the mythological *femme fatales* of Siren, Harpies, Furies, Pandora and some biblical figures like Eve, Lilith, Jezebel and Salome.

2.1 Overview

The *femme fatale* archetype is a common phenomenon in many cultures more especially in the Western culture where it originates from. Doane (1991:60) explains that the *femme fatale* archetype has existed in Western culture for a long time from ancient times. This covers in history figures like: ‘Harpies, Siren, Pandora, Jezebel and Lilith.’ It is a stereotype which has made women to appear evil, untrustworthy and dangerous to the patriarchy. Doane further explains that while the term might not have come into common usage until the twentieth century, the fatal woman herself has been generally represented in the popular cultural expressions of several major

eras: Classical Antiquity, biblical times, Medieval Europe and, most clearly, mid-twentieth century America.

Kuhn (1990:83) explains that “although most of the studies on the *femme fatale* acknowledge at least some of her numerous past changes, the attention given to the possible reasons for her origins has consequently led to various other oversights, most importantly why this figure is perpetually revived throughout Western history as a negative force of the barren female.”

Kuhn further explains that concern with this figure of *femme fatale* may be due partially to how deeply settled this figure is in the collective unconscious.

According to Mario, *The Romantic Agony* (1933), there have always existed Fatal Women both in mythology and in literature for the advantage of the patriarchal institutions to dominate women, since mythology and literature are imaginative reflections of the various aspects of real life, and real life has always provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female characters created by the patriarchal systems and her image is more numerous during times in which women want to compete with men; and this is the crucial point when the patriarchal system champion this cause with a view to suppress the dominance of women.

Mario illustrates both the initial concern given to the reasons for the *femme fatale's* existence and, perhaps more importantly, the tendency to blame women for a construct spread by and for the appeasement of men's troubled minds about the potential of women which men have never wanted to acknowledge but to suppress them for their own advantage.

The *femme fatale* according to Mario (1951:201) is portrayed in a traditional view of the Western culture as a sexual vampire; her charms leech the virility and

independence of lovers, leaving them shells of themselves. This is vivid in the article by Finlay Sara Jane Finlay, *Sexuality* (2005) in which some women in the three films elaborated have been portrayed as powerful by using their sexuality. The stereotype here is of female sexuality as excessive and uncontrollable, which eventually leads to destruction in order to secure the woman's unbounded sexual freedom. All of these above labels on the *femme fatale* according to Finlay (2005:2) are obviously antagonistic, anti-feminist attempts to devalue the gains that a very few women have made in achieving social equality with men and, at a deeper level, to delegitimise the feminist demand for women's self-definition and sexual independence from familial- or male centred social relations. In the film 'Disclosure', Tom Sanders loses a job promotion to an old girlfriend, Meredith Johnson. After attempting to seduce him, she complains that she has been sexually harassed. Tom makes a counter-claim and wins but finds that his job is still threatened because he is blamed for production mistakes made by Meredith. Meredith is depicted as powerfully sexual and aggressively ambitious. She is represented as a symbol of dominance by sexuality. But throughout the film Meredith is characterised through the negative stereotype of a female executive. "She becomes a new version of the *femme fatale* which comes to situate her as a powerful woman whose threat quite overtly lies in the context of work" (Tasker, 1998:21). Like the other films discussed in Jane's article, the female character's power is not only with her sexuality, but also to her physical, social and economic power. Some researchers have suggested that Meredith is a threat to Tom because she inverts the natural heterosexual order where ideologically men's function is economic, women's function is biological' (Green, 1998:92). The full explanation for why Meredith attempts to seduce Tom is difficult to understand. The reason given in the storyline is that it is part of the overall conspiracy to get rid of

Tom, although no reason is ever given for why they want him out of the way. We see how a woman uses her sexuality in the company to lure Tom into a 'honey-trap'.

In 'Body of Evidence', after the murder of her boyfriend, Rebecca Carlson is charged with his murder. Acting as her lawyer, Frank Dulaney becomes intrigued by her sexual practices and begins an affair with her. Although all the evidence points to Rebecca's guilty, she takes the stand in her own defence, rebuts the evidence and the jury finds her not guilty. Leaving the courtroom she admits her guilty to Frank. Rebecca is clearly linked with 'dirty' sexual practices. "What has begun as Frank's desire to 'make love' to Rebecca, becomes an opportunity for Rebecca to dominate Frank and use sex to convince him of her innocence. As with most *femme fatales*, she is 'the possessor of sexual powers, autonomous, a devourer and a castrator of the male'" (Lloyd, 1993:47). Rebecca used sex to kill her elderly boyfriends and inherit their money. At the end of the film, she admits that she used Frank and Dr Patey saying 'I fucked you. I fucked Andrew. I fucked Frank. That's what I do, I fuck.' She becomes too powerful sexually. The character of Rebecca reasserts many of the hackneyed portrayals of women. Her strength lies in her sexuality, not in the achievements of her life. She is strong because she can manipulate men.

In the film 'Basic Instinct', Beth who is Nick's psychologist and ex-girlfriend is also characterised as a potential murderous female.

In conclusion, the films analysed portray that this strong and threatening female sexuality must be controlled and punished by patriarchal societies. This is an archetype in the un conscious mind of the western patriarchal systems that the *femme fatale* sexuality can be a dangerous tool for man's destruction.

Jankowiak and Ramsey in their article 'Femme Fatale and Status Fatales' (2016:83) highlight the anxiety, romantic expectations, and conflict that are recurrent themes in the fatale folktales. One of them is from Nigeria among the Ibo people and it states like this, "The pursuit of a beautiful woman may result in serious problems that range from humiliation to death. In the Southern Nigeria Ibo tale, 'A pretty Stranger who killed A King, 'a man falls for a strikingly pretty woman who is really a witch in disguise; after falling asleep she cuts off his head.'" (quoted in Bascom, 1975, (33)). He makes another narration (quoted in Wilbert & Simonean, 1988, (160-161)) that "in South America, among the Mocovi Indians, there are numerous 'Fox as Trickster' tales that deal with a fox who transforms itself into a woman for the sake of seduction. The man who is the object of the seduction and/or other characters who serve as obstacles to the seduction (object's wife, parents, etc.) are often destroyed by the fox/ woman." Another folklore in the Australian Aborigines belief is that "there are spirits who live in the water who can assume the shape of a pretty woman 'who will sing all day and night sweetheart songs as they lay on rock places like the crocodile do in cold time... [it is assumed that once a man hears their magic songs], he must go to that water girl who will hold him her finger like crab till him dead" (quoted in Harney, 1959, (40)). The Chinese also have a way of expressing fear of not getting what they want by using a female threatening figure as the cause. (63) "The male anxiety over wanting yet fearing that which they desire is a familiar theme in Chinese literature. There are many well-known and popular stories involving a fox fairly or spirit (hulijin) who takes the form of a beautiful woman in order to seduce and then kill her lover. Chinese young men often tease one another that a particularly beautiful woman might be a fox fairy. As such, these stories constitute cautionary tales that remind men that beautiful women can be potentially dangerous."(quoted in

Jankowiak, (183)). Due to such perceptions in tradition folklores, William Jankowiak and Angela Ramsey found that in the cultures they conducted their research, 94% of the cultures had images of the *femme fatale* (57).

2.2 Femme fatale-mythological

Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949:3) states that “a myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestations”. In *Words with Power* Northrop Frye reveals that, the narratives of literature, descend historically from myths, or rather from the aggregate of myths we call a mythology. Frye further supports a claim that such a mythology is the product of ideological biases of the ruling class like the patriarchal institutions in many societies. The manner in which ideological control works is that the group in power manipulates the basics of a mythology so as to be synonymous with its own doctrines. This is how the patriarchal systems have imparted the idea of the *femme fatale* archetype in order that this might most readily be disseminated to the masses who will accept it as the way things are. These myths are then reflected in the most popular cultural expression of the time, thereby contributing to the maintenance of the status quo of the patriarchal dominance. Frye’s (1992:23-4) clear explanation of the nature of ideology is as follows:

An ideology starts by providing its own version of whatever in its traditional mythology it considers to be relevant, and uses this version to form and enforce a social contract. An ideology is thus an applied mythology, and its adaptations of myths are the ones that, when we are inside an ideological structure, we must believe, or say we believe. Belief, in its usual sense, does not go beyond a declaration of adherence to an ideology. Persecution and intolerance result from an ideology’s determination, as expressed through whatever corresponds to a priesthood, backed up by its ascendant class in general, to make its

mythological canon the only possible one to commit oneself to, all others being denounced as heretical, morbid, unreal or evil

The image of the *femme fatale* is a necessary evil of man's ideological application of mythological sources (Frye, 1992). Frye further alludes that this is because she is symbolic of the threat independent women pose to a patriarchal power structure. This archetypal *femme fatale* is to be found in such mythological winged representations as the "Sirens, the Harpies, the Furies, and is also aligned with Pandora, classical mythology's first mortal female." He says she is unfavourably matched with the Muses, Iris, the Graces, and Demeter, respectively. This mythic image of the often barren yet sexually aggressive, and thereby ideologically undesirable, *femme fatale* is, in Frye's words, "denounced as heretical, morbid, unreal or evil" while her person, the subservient, nurturing, maternal virgin, Frye states "is an explanation of what the ideological network desires its subjects to believe as part of its social contract." Due to various means of communication because of technological advances, and cultural, economic and political shifts, Frye (1992) argues that the characteristics of both categories of signs will emerge again in biblical writings, Medieval Arthurian tales, nineteenth century era prose and painting and twentieth century cinematic versions.

2.3 Some Femme fatales in the Greek Mythologies

The Siren, Harpies, Furies and Pandora are some of the Greek mythological *femme fatales* portrayed in Greek literature. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (1988:6) Campbell suggests that *femme fatale* types such as Sirens and kindred spirits represent the male fear of incestuous libido (love, desire) and patriarchal danger (death, hostility) projected onto the image of mysteriously seductive female tempters. This figure is synonymous with the 'bad,' or absent mother and is almost always set

up in opposition to the ‘good,’ or present, nourishing, and protecting mother. Kaplan (1978:5) argues that “the fact that most of these evil female mythological creatures are vulture-like is also indicative of the present mother system which positions the *femme fatale* character on the unexplainable negative side of the equation.” Kaplan further explains that symbolically, wings and birds bodies represent feminine, nurturing characteristics while the claws are a depiction of a childish projection of destructive impulses which converts the maternal figure into a cruel predator, *femme fatale*. This representation tells how a woman can be so good and nurture fellow humans and portrays how at times she can become very dangerous and destroy fellow humans, and in this case, man.

While the Sirens are portrayed as bird like women who sing and/or play so alluringly that sailors are drawn off course to their deaths and then devoured. Campbell (1988:69) explains how originating in Greek mythology, the Sirens figure prominently in the legends of Jason and the Argonauts and of Odysseus. While Jason and his Argonauts are able to pass the Sirens because the lyre of Orpheus drowns out their singing, Odysseus and his men in Homers Odyssey sail by safely because Odysseus is strapped to the mast and the crew’s ears are plugged with wax. Campbell (1988) explains that according to numerous versions of the story, the Sirens perish after Odysseus sails by, possibly at their own hands, fulfilling a prophesy that they will die if a man survives exposure to their song. Campbell (1988:74) adds that this sets up the belief that “men must resist the advances of aggressive females and that it is the females themselves who are to blame for men’s weaknesses.” Campbell explains that in other versions the Sirens are altered from bird to mermaid-like creatures by the Muses as a form of punishment because of the Sirens boldness for first challenging and then failing to defeat the Muses in a singing competition. Doane

(1991:10) states that “The Sirens are necessarily adversely compared with the Muses who inspire and keep men in their artistic pursuits. Explained as evil female demons who use beauty to lure men to their deaths, the Sirens can be interpreted as expressions of a male fear of female sexuality.”

And the Harpies are portrayed as predatory, winged, vulture-like creatures with great claws and women’s heads and breasts. In ancient myth they carry off anyone the gods want to disappear while in later legends they seize down from above snatching food and then vomit or excrete it over anyone left dining below. Campbell (1988:17) explains that to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, the Harpies allegorically represent high priced *femme fatales* who devour the patrimony of young men. They are negatively portrayed as destroyers of life, the messengers of darkness and the object of masculine fear and hatred. They are unfavourably compared with their sister, Iris, who is considered to be a messenger of light. Iris, like the Muses, is a servant of ways to masculine desires; she unquestionably responds to the will of the gods and sets in motion their wishes. Walker (1969:107) states that “the Harpies are proverbially associated with gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins, though they are also connected with avarice, another of these mortal transgressions, pride, wrath, envy, lust and sloth comprise the remainder of this group.”

The Roman Furies, known as Erinyes or Eumenides to the Greek, are female spirits who are relentless instruments of destruction of the patriarchal systems.

Pandora is logically, according to Campbell (1988:490) considered to be the first mortal woman. As vengeance upon Prometheus for his theft of fire from the heavens, Zeus has her created by Hephaestus and has the other gods provide her with a variety of powers calculated to bring about the destruction of man. “One such gift is the

ability to provide excessive sexual pleasure.” She brings a dowry jar filled with a multitude of evils to her marriage to Prometheus’ brother Epimetheus. Upon opening the box out of morbid curiosity, Pandora releases all of the evils onto the earth and leaves only hope trapped inside. She is unfavourably compared with Demeter, the Greek Goddess of the earth, agriculture and of fertility in general, known as Ceres to the Romans. Berthes (1977:89) explains that Demeter is the mother, by lesion, of Plutus, the god of wealth, and of Philomel, the farmer inventor of the chariot/wagon. It cannot be a random occurrence that Demeter, the good mother of plenitude produces sons who are aligned with economic prosperity and technological advancements while Pandora, concerned only with her own acquisitiveness and personal gain, is responsible for the world’s pestilence and disease. Over the centuries Pandora has become aligned with both Eve and with Lilith. Each of the above non-maternal mythological figures and their good mother counterparts are especially important in a discussion of the *femme fatale* as they set up the archetypes which are to follow throughout life. Allen (1983:59) argues that the ideologically written message is clear, “a good nurturing mother benefits man, allowing him to be prosperous and progressive, while a selfish and single-minded female, concerned only for and of herself, is destructive and disgusting. While the former is a patriarchal necessity, the latter must be power put within the safe workings of the status quo or destroyed.”

This oppressive positioning of women according to Doane (1991:167) is most readily accomplished by the recurring patriarchal ideological construction and representation of the uncooperative half of the completely Eternal Feminine-the *femme fatale* who in all future pictures will possess the predatory greed of the Harpies, the spiteful

vengefulness of the Furies, the sexual aggressiveness of the Sirens and the bad curiosity of Pandora.

2.4 Some Biblical Femme Fatales

Frye (1978:187) explains the impact of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, on contemporary Western thought that it is actually rather formidable considering the rigid seriousness adopted by many institutionalised Christian and Judaic religion's literal interpretations of its various versions. From its inception as a complete work, the Bible, in its various versions, has influenced the world's population with its decidedly patriarchal ideology. Frye (1978:190) in his second study of the Bible and literature, *Words with Power*, explains how the creation myth of the Christian Bible, as part of an ideologically informed mass cultural expression, is the rationalising of the supremacy of the male. His further explanation that "clearly one intention of the Eden story is to transfer all spiritual ascendancy of pre Biblical earth-goddess to a symbolically male Father-God associated with the heavens" (191) corresponds with the desire for a hierarchically based patriarchal political and economic system.

The Bible's male-centred belief system according to Frye (1978:74) is evidenced not only by the creation tale but also by so many other specific and general examples that it is impossible to mention each individually. Instead few pertinent examples of such recycled, constructed, female stereotypes as the barren woman, the virgin mother and the *femme fatale* expose how the bible, as a means of cultural expression similar to mythology, attempts to justify a patrifocal dominancy.

In *The Gospel According to Woman*, Karen (1986:700) explains that "the conventional attacks against women list the wicked women of antiquity, starting with Eve and working through to Delilah and Jezebel, in order to show that women have

always been the ruin of men.” According to Campbell in *The Power of Myth* (1988:48), the reason why Eve in particular, and women in general, are held responsible for man’s fall is because “they represent life. Man doesn’t enter life except by woman.” Actually, Eve’s greatest sin according to Barthes (1977:129 “is not so much that she disobeys the word of God but rather that in so doing, she involves Adam and then because the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked,” they become afraid and hide their sexual differences (Genesis 3: 7-10). This event, described as the Fall, is paramount in how certain translations of biblical doctrines position woman as the cause for man’s ejection from paradise and is utilised to justify “the instituting of a patriarchal society” (Frye, 1992: 208) which is made clear in Genesis 3:16 when God states to Eve “your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.”

Although Frye (1992:220) acknowledges that “as we should expect, the *femme-fatale* is sometimes associated with Eve after the fall,” he also briefly exposes the paradox of using Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden to justify male superiority:

Frye (1992:192) details how according to Paul, Christ is the second Adam, reclaiming the Eden that Adam lost, and in traditional Christianity the Virgin Mary is a second Eve, bringing about the redemption of man by giving birth to the redeemer. This however, according to Frye (1992:223) suggests only that man is redeemed by or through woman, not that humanity is redeemed as woman. But because virginity is the state prior to knowledge of sexual differentiation, the image of a virginal mother i.e. Mary, “is the one most conducive to the perpetuation of a patriarchal ideology.” Within such a male infrastructure Frye argues that it is not unexpected that Eve, and by extension all women, “are relegated to their biological capabilities and can only

be redeemed by the pain of childbirth.” Although God merely punishes woman for her disobedience in the Old Testament, stating “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; and in pain you shall bring forth children” (Genesis 3: 16), its interpretation in the New Testament is much more explicit and detrimental to women’s position in society (Frye 1992:225). In 1Timothy 2:11—15 Saint Paul dictates “Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was informed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.” The massive impact of such a doctrine according to Frye cannot be underestimated considering that Paul is regarded as the most effective missionary of early Christianity and the church’s first theologian and that more than one-fourth of the entire New Testament is attributed to him. Mario (1933:286) also argues that “a woman’s fertility is also associated with man’s prosperity in the bible” because woman’s childbearing is aligned with man’s agricultural livelihood (Genesis 3: 17-18). Woman’s redemption through childbearing according to Mario (1933:289) can therefore be seen to metaphorically allow for man’s productiveness. “This is literally the case as well because by having women biologically oppressed by a reduction to mere population maintainers they are excluded from economic advancement and independence. The corollary of this is, of course, that an infertile woman poses a threat to male authority and progress and cannot be tolerated.” The ideal woman, according to Proverb 31:10-31, is a non-sensual wife who is strong, competent, and able to succeed economically within a familial setting, family centred, and always acting for the provision of her household. Women who do not fulfil the requirements of the optimal woman, are thereby

detrimental and often fatal to men, both literally and figuratively, according to Frye (1992:181). Doane (1991:193) states that “reflective of patriarchal fears of potential break in its dominance, the bible reconstitutes the characteristics of mythology’s Pandora into the Christian Eve, and the Jewish Lilith and, more generally, the personality traits of the Sirens, Harpies and Furies within Jezebel, Salome, Delilah and Judith.” They embody the prerequisite qualities of the *femme fatale*’s selfish and predatory greed and curiosity, her sexual aggression, and her retributive drives. Doane (1919: 194) states that “these women are assertive, independent, self-willed individuals whose refusal to accept Christian authority qualifies their exemplification as heretical evils who are not to be emulated.”

Jezebel (1 and 2 Kings) is a Phoenician princess married to King Ahab. She incites her husband to sin against God through her devotion to the Phoenician god Baal and her desire to suppress the worship of Yahweh. Her disregard for Israelite custom and her ruthless use of power make her a formidable adversary of the prophet Elijah. As retribution, Jezebel is pushed from a window and physically killed by the populace.

In the Gospels according to Mark (6:17-28) and Matthew (14: 3-11) Salome is identified only as the daughter of Herodias. Her dance before her uncle/step-father Herod Antipas so pleases him that he promises to give her whatever she desires. Salome requests the head of the imprisoned John the Baptist on a platter at her mother’s cause. Herodias desires the death of the Baptist because he has condemned her marriage to Herod, her first husband’s brother. In later interpretations, because Salome is the sexually provocative instrument leading to the saint’s death, she is deemed responsible for her mother’s motives and for Herod’s overactive hormones.

Barthes (1977:174) states that “although the Christian bible fails to provide a truly demonic female figure, Lilith of traditional Judaic legend possesses what might be

considered monstrous qualities. In cabalistic myth, she is the first wife of Adam who is created separately from him. She is considered to be the first feminist in that she challenges Adam's authority as head of the household, and leaves him because he is too stubborn to compromise." Then, according to legend, "God attempts to make up for the failure by creating Eve from Adam's rib so that there will never be any doubt as to man's superiority over women. Arguably, Lilith's exclusion from the Christian tales and the Judaic transformation of Lilith into a demon says a lot more about male fears of a truly self-sufficient woman than it does about male supremacy."

Other treacherous biblical women according to Webster include Delilah (Judges 16: 4-21) and Judith. While Delilah, having discovered the secret of Samson's great strength, cuts off the seven locks of his hair in order to betray him to the Philistines who then pluck out his eyes, Judith captivates Holofernes with her beauty and then cut off his head. Considering that decapitation, the putting out of eyes and/or the cutting of hair are each according to Campbell (1988:371) symbolically representative of castration, these *femmes fatales* are literally, figuratively and psychologically harmful to male autonomy. Frye (1992:115) explains that the negative delineation of each of these biblical *femmes' fatales* combined with the clear pronouncement that fertility is the answer to spiritual salvation clearly puts women in an oppressive and subordinate position. "The enduring ideological power of the Church as expressed through the Bible will impact on all future Western generations and will eventually help to inform cinematic representations of women."

2.5 Feminists' reactions

Hart (1994:63) states that "Feminist seen publications in recent times have managed to arrive at a more deep explanation of the image of the *femme fatale* with men's fear of female equality." In *Femmes Fatales: Feminism. Film Theory. Psychoanalysis*

(1991:2-3), Doane states that the *femme fatale* is “a symptom of male fears about feminism”, while Hart argues in *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (1994:141) that “the femme fatale is a functional construct of the masculine imaginary, a representation that, at once, expresses, while producing, a patriarchal sociosymbolic order’s fear of femininity and disarms that fear by disabling her”. Allen (1993: ix) also explains that “one social factor underlying the birth of the *femme fatale* was the threat to men inherent in the rise of feminism”.

According to Beauvoir (1989:69) feminism is essentially “a doctrine advocating, or a movement for the attainment of, social, political, and economic rights for women equal to those of men.” Therefore, feminist advancements, meant to create equality between men and women, are interpreted by patriarchy as a threat to the male’s position at the top of the power structure. This threat is made visible in the image of the *femme fatale*.

Place (1978:51) argues that “from the very beginning of civilisation, men have found it necessary to manipulate the representation of women in order to maintain the patriarchal male power imbalance.” Kaplan in her *Introduction to Women in Film Noir* (1978:15) states that “one of the depressing aspects of the study of women in art works is the repetition of the same structures, showing the strong hold of patriarchy.” She further explains that “the alterations in the conventions reflect a continuing ideological struggle within patriarchy to maintain control over female sexuality and to assimilate its new, would-be liberating manifestations” (20).

Hart (1994:16) states that “the representation of the *femme fatale* throughout history in various mediums is clearly ideologically constructed. Patriarchal ideology uses wide means to maintain and perpetuate its right to power.” A Marxist interpretation of how ideology functions insists that “the class which rules by virtue of its

ownership of the means of production has power thereby to disseminate a society's 'ruling ideas.' The ideology of the ruling class explains society in terms of its natural fitness to rule, and thus misrepresents the place of other classes or groups in that society's power relations" (Kuhn 1990, 214). And while ideological control tends to stem from a ruling class's institutional governing systems, its doctrines are circulated through that society's popular cultural expressions. The image of the *femme fatale* is used as such a contrivance. She occurs in the cultural discourses of various historical periods in an attempt to put an end to any social change considered to be threatening to the patriarchal system.

Allen (1983:196) explains that massive population expansion combined with changes in a culture's primary means of production changes the old clearly separated sex roles and other organisational boundaries in a civilisation and produce these stress points in the historical sequence. "Technological breakthroughs which allow for the successive transitions from a hunting and gathering to an agricultural to a commercial and trade to an industrial and then to a technological and computer economic base permanently changes societal frameworks. Because such shifts open up possible avenues for improvement in women's and other subordinates' positions, the dominant ideological network, through its institutions and cultural productions, must respond in order to maintain its control."

Doane (1991:103) states that "while the society's mainly male-directed and male-biased, legal and religious institutions are quite quick at imposing restrictions on personal and sexual freedoms, this control is most practically and much effected through its ideologically informed representational systems." Comparing to the variations in the economic base, these representational systems must also adapt to the changing technologies. Barthes (1977:165) argues that "originating in primitive

mythologies, these cultural productions and their archetypes, like the *femme fatale*, are then created in such subsequent, though not mutually exclusive, some frameworks as religion, art, drama, literature and film.” These complex networks present a seemingly simple and unproblematic method of understanding the world yet because they express dominant ideologies, “they make the culturally constructed into what is regarded as natural so as to be clearly invisible” (166).

Barthes (1977:155) states that “the representational system of any particular patriarchal civilisation, and all of its interconnected institutional networks e.g. legal, governmental, religious, strive to show how women are still, always have, and always will be, best suited to the pure and virginal roles of wife and mother.” The meaning of this is that, excessive female sexuality is shown to be dangerous and clearly destructive. According to Kuhn, (1990:362) “female characters are generally defined in relation to their sexuality-either by its excessiveness ,the vamp, *femme fatale* and sex goddess, or by its absence ,the spinster, the mother, the virgin”. And because sexuality/sexual difference is actually an ideological, cultural, social and psychic construct of a biological category in which a female’s femininity is defined as ‘passive, receptive and compliant’ while a male’s ‘masculinity’ is defined as ‘active, initiating and powerful’ (147), it is understood to be a primary source of women’s repression (362). This oppressive representation and stereotypical boundary of female sexuality is actually a means exploited by patriarchy to prevent women from attaining political, economic, social freedom and equality.

Many feminist film critics, historians and theorists according to Kuhn (1990:386) explain how, “male stereotypes were soon broken down and male characters in films became increasingly differentiated and individuated, female roles remained shallow stereotypes reflecting the ideology of femininity as eternal and unchanging” and

therefore ahistorical. The representation of women by men tends to be repeated through the decades in its effect eternally feminine essentials so that it changes only superficially in accordance with current styles and fashions. Subsequently, the image of women is compared to a position of absence, silence and marginality, outside of boundaries of historical discourse. Because the patriarchal network perpetuates that unequal sexual relations embedded in ideologies of romantic love, family, and maternity systematised in the institutional practices of the home, school, church and media and in the representational practices of journalism, fiction, film, television, advertising (Kuhn 1990: 213), “the asexual mother figure continues to offer a safe, contained and subordinate female image. Conversely, the non-maternal female is a threat to the ideological system and the male’s position at the summit of the patriarchal power structure because she has control over her own sexuality.” Women’s power over their own bodies, enabled by breakthroughs in birth control and combined with advancements in political, economic and social arenas, releases them from male dominancy.

Kuhn (1990:214) further argues that “the *femme fatale* is the most mythic representation of this non-maternal female. It is not therefore surprising that the treatment of her image is doubly manipulative in that it shows her as a confident, independent and powerful female who exists outside of the restrictiveness of such patriarchal institutions as marriage and motherhood and then either destroys her and associates her with all things negative and condemnation.” Doane (1991:2) explains that “it is appropriate that the *femme fatale* is represented as the antithesis of the maternal-sterile or barren, she produces nothing in a society which fetishizes production”. Allen (1983:x) states that the image of the *femme fatale* emerges from the “fear and desire experienced by men confronted with women who demand the

right to control their own desires, their bodies, their reproductive tracts-women who, in other words, deny men to control female sexuality”. This independence desired by the *femme fatale* is often interpreted by patriarchal ideology in cultural production into a self-absorbed, excessive and weaker female. Place (1978:47) believes that “self-interest over devotion to a man is the original sin of the film noir woman and metaphor for her sexuality represents to him”. Plainly put, because a single, childless woman refuses to be defined by her relationship to others, as wife or mother, and desires something for and of herself, she is therefore a hindrance to male-oriented ‘progress’ and is a problem to a male dominated system. Furthermore, because the barren female refuses to produce the births per woman necessary to maintain the population (Bianchi, Suzanne 1986:48), she is negligent of her reproductive responsibilities. Hart (1994:116) explains that “the fantasy of sex - death is built upon a biological metaphor in which ‘sex’ is consonant with reproduction.”

According to Hart (1994:116) the *femme fatale*, due to her barrenness, is easily aligned with the lesbian, each of whom “bear the onus of the unproductive woman and her threat to the future of the species. The ‘unnaturalness’ of the lesbian has always had much to do with a sexuality that is no reproductive.” In that the non-productive woman is located in a category constructed as sexually abnormal, women who aspire to normality are simultaneously enjoined to reproduce and to be heterosexual. She further explains that “Indeed sex and reproduction are thereby made entirely consonant, and any woman who fails to prove herself in either category is suspect of lesbianism” (118) and therefore of mutiny against the patriarchal system. The *femme fatale* falls into this suspect category. Molly Haskell in *From Reverence to Rape* (1974:2) describes how women are ‘allowed’ to pursue whatever goals they might have “as long as they do not forget their paramount

destiny to marry and become mothers, an injunction that effectively dilutes intellectual concentration and discourages ambition. Women are not ‘real women’ unless they marry and have children”. The non-maternal female’s rejection of her biological role subsequently makes her guilty of threatening patriarchal authority which is so easily exercised within the dominance of the nuclear family unit where members subscribe to the traditional roles of father, mother and child much more readily. Moreover, the barren woman is thereby not only capable of attaining the economic means to equality, simply because she has the freedom to do so, but, in refusing to be governed by her biology and thereby maintain or increase the population, she also declines to perpetuate the need for many patriarchal system firmly grounded within Western civilisations.

It is even possible, as Kaplan (1978:216) explains in *Motherhood and Representation*, “that any mother-self is inevitably already a patriarchal construct, part of a patriarchal ideology that depends for its coherence on the binary opposition ‘Father-Mother,’ and on an unconscious repression of the mother’s possibility to become something ‘other’ than a mother”, although it is more reasonable to assert that motherhood, like sexual freedom, in and of itself, is not an inherently oppressive state, but rather that it becomes such by patriarchal ideological system.

The existence of the *femme fatale* can also be psychoanalytically explained. Mulvey in her seminal essay (1975) ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ explains that women are represented as passive objects of a male torture and mistreatment agenda, that they exist simply to fulfil the desires and express the anxieties of male needs. A psychoanalytic approach insists upon how male desires about women and castration anxiety structure the representation of sexual difference. The male desire to possess, control, and punish female sexuality reproduces the patriarchal organization of

sexuality around an active, masculine and passive, feminine divide. Bianchi (1986:162) states that “in patriarchy the female form is a privileged object of visual desire and therefore woman can be a source of poisonous pleasure. But a woman is also a source of un pleasure since she represents the threat of castration.” This anxiety motivates the male unconscious to find a way out of her threat through two avenues. He can become preoccupied with a revival of his original distressing experience through watching and investigate the female in an attempt to see her source of shame-her lack of a phallus-which is generally counter balanced by the devaluation punishment saving of the object guilty of provoking the anxiety.

Bianchi (1986:29) argues that “the male unconscious can also go round the woman’s threat of castration by fetishism which is a complete disavowal of castration by substituting a fetish object, even to the point of turning the represented figure itself into a worship. In this manner the female as a whole becomes a substitute for the absent phallus.” This phallic substitution is seen as man’s attempt to deny woman’s difference from man and thereby increase his castration anxiety. It is a method of dominating women in a representational system and of lessening the threat that her sexuality holds in patriarchy. Because of the physical images of her elongated, stretched body, the *femme fatale* is regarded as such a fetishised phallic woman.

Kuhn (1990:313) explains that “this figure points to a crisis within the workings of sexist ideology because it inverts the power dynamics within male-female relationships.” Images of the *femme fatale* are initially so attractive to a feminist interpretation because according to Place (1974:35) these “women are active, not static symbols, are intelligent and powerful, if destructively so, and derive power, not weakness, from their sexuality”. Expectedly, it is for these exact same reasons that the *femme fatale* is a threat to male dominance. In her contribution to *Women in*

Film Noir (1978), in an essay of the same name, what Place attributes to the attitudes toward women evidenced in film noir-i.e., “fear of loss of stability, identity and security-as reflective of the dominant feelings of the time is actually applicable to all of the instances of the *femme fatale*’s various incarnations throughout history.”

In *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film. Feminism. Psychoanalysis* (1993:157) Creed, influenced by Kristeva’s work on horror and abjection, argues that men’s fear of women is due in part to their generative powers. “While it is difficult to deny that the male may be unable to truly ‘conceive’ of what pregnancy and labour entails, it seems more likely that the patriarchal system in general, as evidenced through its depictions of women within its representational systems, finds motherhood to be a safe and comforting position in which to contain women. In fact, a pregnant woman is more often regarded as a sign of the male’s potency rather than interpreted as the power of the female to reproduce.”

Horney (1981:146) explains that “the person who is wholly ‘other’ than the self is understood to be threatening to the point of terror and that for man, woman is the ‘other.’” This unacknowledged dread of women in men produces their need to conquer her, to objectify her as a thing to be dominated and possessed, since it is only through domination that fear can be removed.

This oppression is further promoted by the fact that representation of this ‘other,’ spread by the dominant ideology of the ruling class is structured by a two system; Kuhn (1990:320) “which classifies in terms of oppositions e.g. man/woman, father/mother, white/black in order to define the ‘other’ e.g. woman, mother, black as inferior.” The *femme fatale* is both a receptacle and a symbol of men’s fear of this ‘other’ and of his possible redundancy or destruction. Horney (1981:151) explains that “she resurfaces at those periods when the smooth workings of the patriarchal

social complex are under stress and when the male population has been especially hard hit by war, disease and/or substantial disenfranchisement from the power base.” The *femme fatale* is repeatedly offered as a sacrifice to the patriarchal network because she and what she represents contradicts its power dynamics in every way imaginable. Although feminist advancements are actually only interpreted to be harmful to the male’s power position, the ideological system presents it in an inverted form, situating the woman as the culpable party.

Horney (1981:156) states that “from her mythological origins as a selfish, sexually aggressive, vain, and predatory destructive weapon and fortified by her biblical, Medieval and era literary and visual reincarnations, the *femme fatale* has been, and continues to be, a recurring ideological instrument for patriarchal manipulation.” And because the twentieth century has experienced the most rapid technological and consequently the most extreme societal changes of any period in history combined with the fact that women have also made vast advancements in the fight for equality in political, social, economic, and sexual life, the figure of the *femme fatale* has emerged at closer and closer intervals.

2.6 Conclusion

From the reviewed literature, it was found that women are stereotyped as dangerous and a threat to patriarchal systems. They are described as intelligent and use this intelligence to subvert the patriarchal institutions. Their main objective is to attain freedom from male dominance and freely be independent from male suppression. They remain dangerous to the patriarchal institution because they act as a prey on men particularly by using their sexuality. Ramsey (2000:59) explains that the origins of the dangerous woman arose out of male-male sexual competition that threatened male solidarity. Their model of the dominant male holds that sex with women makes

them a source of danger to men, as a source of cuckoldry and as a source of male temptation to adultery that in turn threatens male solidarity by creating conflict between men. But women have also reacted to protect their image by accusing men of being afraid of feminism.

The next chapter presents the description of the *femme fatale* in Western culture (by Carl Jung) and in African culture.

CHAPTER THREE
DESCRIPTION OF THE FEMME FATALE IN THE WESTERN CULTURE
AND AFRICAN CULTURE

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter has covered the related literature review of the study which mainly dealt with the *femme fatale* as an archetype. This chapter presents the description of the *femme fatale* in the Western culture and in African culture.

3.1 Western culture femme fatale description by Jung.

In Jungian psychology, the *femme fatale* is an archetypal figure who represents the manifestation of the feminine part of a man's personality in the unconscious contents of the male psyche. Carl Jung explains that the *femme fatale* is a representation of male sexual imaginations and fears as well as the sexual empowerment of women. Although portrayals of the *femme fatale* in literature and film have changed considerably, as a mythic creature she continues to be suppressed by the patriarchal systems. Jung (1971:100) states that "sociologically the role of the *femme fatale* can be interpreted as representing female independence and rebellion against traditional female gender roles." That women would take up any role in society as men without fear and compete favourably with the male counterparts, is a situation which the patriarchal institutions do not favour. It is a threat to the patriarchal institutions hence a source of conflict between the two sexes. Therefore as a scapegoat for man's fear, the image of the woman, *femme fatale* is perpetuated with demeaning description so that some women can be seen as destroyers especially of the male counterpart, hence they must be prevented from taking active roles in social, political and economic life

of the society with the idea for the patriarchy to occupy the dominant positions and make it difficult for the women to compete for the same positions with men.

He further states (115) that the typical description of the *femme fatale* include her being mysterious, subversive, double-crossing, unloving, predatory, tongue-sweet, unreliable, irresponsible and manipulative. She is often portrayed as a woman who is extremely attractive with a sexually attractive voice, a provocative body and a complex character. She tends to be very intelligent, in addition to her beauty. She often speaks, behaves and dresses in an unusual and attractive manner designed to lure male attention. Most importantly, she is extremely dangerous; an association with a *femme fatale* often involves devastating consequences for a man. The women who look extremely beautiful make the males more uncomfortable as it is a challenge to them, as a result it is misrepresented as a source of evil from the women. The beauty of some women according to the patriarchal institutions is their power over men because they can use it to manipulate them; and the men do not like any woman who may appear so powerful before them as a result they find a way of attacking her by labelling her as a *femme fatale*.

The description given above by Carl Jung about the *femme fatale* makes this figure to appear untrustworthy and dangerous to patriarchal society. It is also a label which can make the women not to associate freely with men for fear of getting this label. As a result, the male's dominance in society is more than that of the domination of women and this makes the patriarchal system more comfortable as compared to allowing women to dominate men. And many women in literature have appeared as *femme fatales* as they were feared by men due to their competitive potential with the patriarchal institutions.

From the enchantress Circe's transformation of men into pigs to the alluring song of the Sirens in Homer's epic poem 'The Odyssey', to Biblical characters such as Delilah's emasculation of Samson to Salome's erotic dance, examples of the *femme fatale* occur throughout the world literature. Other known literary characters include Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Carmilla' and De Quiros' Genoveva in The Tragedy of the Street of Flowers but there are many other portrayals of the *femmes fatale* scattered throughout world literature. They increase the belief of the dangers associated with the *femme fatales* all over the world.

Depictions of the *femme fatale* often increase whenever there is rapid social change and disruption because that is when men fear the rise to power of women hence want to protect themselves by using this image of *femme fatale*. An early cinematic portrayal of the *femme fatale* can be seen in Von Sternberg's 'The Blue Angel' (1930) in which the infatuated fall of school-teacher Professor Rath through nightclub singer Lola Marlene Dietrich, occurs. Here the woman is blamed as to have bewitched the teacher with her charm of beauty, seduction and made him fall. Another historical period in which the role of the *femme fatale* was prominent was after the social sudden change in American society which was caused by World War II, as depicted in *film noir* cinema. Here women positioned themselves for the economic positions same as men and this was not welcomed by men as a result, to stop the women from such a challenge, a description of *femme fatale* on them was championed by the male dominated system. Notable *femme fatales* in *film noir* include Rita Hayworth in 'Gilda', Lana Turner in 'The Postman always rings twice' and Barbara Stanwyck in 'Double Indemnity'.

The writings of Jung (1971) provide an understanding of the psychological significance of the *femme fatale*. In Jungian psychology, the *femme fatale* is a

somewhat negative manifestation of the *anima*. Jung defined the *anima* as “the feminine component in a man’s personality and the totality of all the unconscious feminine psychological qualities that a male possesses. In his words, a woman has carried for man the living image of his own feminine soul and likewise man has carried for woman the living image of her own spirit.”(161) This means that man has some qualities of a woman in himself and a woman also has some qualities of a man in herself as well. This makes man to be uncomfortable with the woman hence treating her with fear and mistrust.

Central to Jungian psychology is the concept of projection, that is, active but unconscious thought towards another, often towards the opposite sex. Projection in itself is neither good nor bad, but an unconscious activity, it is what one does with the projection which matters. Negative effects of projection upon the *anima* (*animus* in a woman) are directly related to a man’s unawareness and devaluation of his feminine side, and vice-versa in a woman. But it unconsciously troubles man especially when he receives some competition from a woman which is challenging. He always wants a scapegoat from such challenges by labelling a woman as *femme fatale*.

According to Jung, the entire process of *anima* development is about the male opening up to emotionality and to a broader spirituality, this includes intuitive processes, creativity, imagination and psychic sensitivity towards himself and others. Just as the *anima* is the master of a man’s moods and irrational behaviour, so too the *animus* is the master of opinions and judgements in a woman. It is important here to emphasise that a woman is as much in the unconscious grip of her *animus* as man is of his *anima*, resulting in unconscious judgements, opinions and over-intellectualism at the expense of feeling in her.

Jung (1971:52) proposed that “there were four stages of the *anima* in man’s psyche, these being Eve, Helen of Troy, the Virgin Mary and at the apex of development of the *anima* the spiritual wisdom of Sophia.” The character of the *femme fatale* in literature and film, the lowest rung in the stage development of a man’s *anima* similar to the temptress of Eve takes on a clearer understanding and profounder meaning in the light of Jung’s psychology.

The problem of relationship and the frequent misunderstandings between the sexes according to Jung (1971:94) arises from the fact that, more often than not, rather than accepting and listening to the real person whether true or fault, there frequently arises unconscious and projected *anima* or *animus* activity which overtake true relating. “Whenever a man or woman attracts, we can be sure that a projected content of the unconscious is at work. For a man, this means recognising that his moods, compulsive sexual imaginations, and insatiable restlessness have a dark feminine side at their source. For a woman it means recognising that the opinions and destructive criticisms that suddenly come into her consciousness have the inner figure of the *animus* behind them.”

Woman as a *femme fatale* in Jung’s psychology is none other than an immature and undeveloped aspect of a man’s *anima* figure. The misunderstandings between the sexes are clearly stated by Jung (1971:105) that “no man can converse with an *animus* for five minutes without becoming the victim of his own *anima*. The *animus* draws his sword of power and the *anima* ejects her poison of illusion and seduction.”

The *femme fatale* archetype has provoked some debates with some scholars like the sociologists who consider this concept as to demean women by men and at the same time others consider the *femme fatale* concept as a symbol of female freedom from

men's dominance on them because women compete with men favourably. Jung (1971:151) explains that, "the idea of the *femme fatale* divides opinions amongst sociologists. Some consider the *femme fatale* to be closely tied to male hatred of women, while for others the role of *femme fatale* remains an example of female independence and a threat to traditional female gender roles; for it, 'expresses woman's ancient and eternal control of the sexual realm.'" Doane (1991:3) has argued that Jung's psychology, based upon mythology, simplifies the complexities of relationships between the sexes and makes it clear as to why men can create such an image on women.

The *femme fatale* stereotype can be a source of some personality change on individuals affected as Jung (1971:162) argues, "the modern *femme fatale* is as likely to have the same self-destructive tendencies and mental health problems which are usually associated with men, that is, problems arising from alcohol abuse, drug addiction, violence and aggression," negative effects from empowerment not resulting in true equality for women. This in other ways may perpetuate their *femme fatale* status because men won't spare them until they are put in their right positions by the patriarchal institutions or else the conflict of sexes continues.

Jung's psychological observations, although less fashionable now when fully comprehended, continue to clarify the often confused relations between the sexes today but makes an understanding as why men and women confused relationship exists. The conclusion is that it is because of the anima in man and the animus in the woman and the need for the patriarchal society to dominate women. The independent elements in a woman would always be a threat to the patriarchal and the best way to suppress such a threat is to portray a woman as the *femme fatale* so that they are looked down upon.

3.2 African culture femme fatale description

In African culture, according to Doane (1991:201) the *femme fatale* archetype is very rare mainly because of the educational, historical background of the continent. In the past centuries, there were not many women to pose a challenge or threat to men. This is because many women had not attained a level in education to compete favourably with men because “School was meant for the men who later attained all the important positions in politics, education, industries including in social organisations like churches” (Doane, 1991:202) further explains that women were respected by the patriarchal system for their role of being mothers and never expected to compete with men in other aspects of life. This maintained the peace between men and women. It is in recent times that the African woman has become educated and aspires for the same positions which men have in various sectors of life. They now compete with men. This has become a source of conflict between men and women hence the emergence of stereotype of the *femme fatale*. Minna (2014:1) explains that “while she certainly exists, the African *femme fatale* is absent from cultural production at large. We can name women such as Marlene Dietrich, Mata Hari or mother of all *femme fatales*, Eve, but their African counterpart is not as well-known” because there is not much captured in the African literature. But she further alludes to the existence of this *femme fatale* archetype in the sub Saharan African folklore like in the narration of the Mami Wata, water mermaid story which is a threatening figure to all the listeners. It makes the image of the woman threatening and disgusting.

The African *femme fatale* has a lot in common with the *femme fatales* all around the world but Kaplan (1992:16) states that a few things distinguish an African *femme fatale*. “Firstly, the African *femme fatale* lives and has for very long lived in a world,

where much like the continent from where she comes, her existence has been equally mystified and condemned.” She is believed not to be a normal human being but some form of water goddess like the Mami Wata or some reincarnation of evil sent to torment men like in the story of Ihuoma in *The Concubine* to be analysed in chapter five. The modern African *femme fatale* according to Kaplan (1992:19) knows that “female freedom always means sexual freedom.”

Unlike her Western counterpart, to whom history can seem unfashionable, Allen (1983:25) states that “to the African *femme fatale*, reflecting back is reflecting forward.” The discovery of women like Cleopatra, Nefertiti, Nzinga, Winnie Mandela and deities like the Mami Wata and Oya, connect the times between the modern African *femme fatale* and her ancestors like a string of high valued persons. She further explains that “the African *femme fatale*’s existence is enriched by luxuries of the senses: powerful colours, waist beads, lush fabrics, indigo, henna, patchouli, nipple tassels, etc.” (26) These features portray her as a seductress figure for men because they attract men upon seeing them on a woman. They are powerful tools in seduction theories of an African *femme fatale*.

Minna (2014:56) also explains that “Glamour is her uniform as she fearlessly and irresponsibly navigates the edges of her world. As for the men of her continent, they are equally frightened and seduced by her power. They sing songs, write stories and make movies about her. They accuse her of witchcraft, they murder and adulate her.” Therefore the African *femme fatale* is also under pressure because of her beauty which the patriarchy translate to be her witchcraft on them. They admire her with a killing heart because her beauty is a threat to them. She controls the patriarchy because of the power of her beauty and sexuality but this brings about the conflict

because the patriarchy feels threatened hence wants to suppress her. Allen (1983:57) states that “her casually unconcerned wildness threatens the status quo and precisely therefore she, the African *femme fatale*, ignores the rise of conservative values. She knows that their primary goal is to make her extinct and the priority above all for the African *femme fatales* is to avoid extinction.” And this become the source of conflict with the patriarchal institutions who now align her with some evil connections in order to suppress her activities and continue with dominance of the female society.

3.2.1 Mami Wata

Van (2005:23) explains that Mami Wata is a perfect example of the African *femme fatale* resurgence in the sub-Saharan region literature and folktale with her image adorning walls of bars and living rooms, album covers, and other items. She is a surprise and a threat to the lookers on her images drawn everywhere in many African public place with total beauty of her face.

Van (2005:6) further explains that “Mami Wata is often described as a mermaid-like figure, with a woman’s upper body, often nude, and the hindquarters of a fish or serpent.” This existence of her hindquarters with a fish or serpent is the meaning of danger attached with her; meaning that she can bite and kill. Van (2005:8) explains that the existence and spiritual importance of Mami Wata is deeply rooted in the ancient tradition and mythology of the coastal south-eastern Nigerians, Ibibio and Annang people. Mami Wata often carries expensive baubles such as combs, mirrors, and watches. A large snake, symbol of divination and divinity, frequently accompanies her, wrapping itself around her and laying its head between her breasts as a symbol of power. The items she carries are described as for seduction of men because they are very attractive to them. The snake is a symbol for her danger as

earlier alluded to meaning that she has power to destroy. Oluwagbemiga (2009:97) states that “other times, she may try to pass as completely human, wandering busy markets or patronising bars. She may also manifest in a number of other forms, including as a man.” This is a symbol of her mysteriousness and makes men to fear any strange looking beautiful woman thinking that maybe she is a *femme fatale*, Mami Wata. And any woman who portrays some strange beauty and behaviour is jokingly labelled as *femme fatale*, Mami Wata by the male counter parts.

Oluwagbemiga (2009:176) explains that Mami Wata has also proved to be a popular theme in African and Caribbean literature. Authors who have featured her in their fiction include Wayne Gerard Trotman as Mama Dlo in his novel *Kaya Abaniah and the Father of the Forest*, Patrick Chamoiseau, Alex Godard, Rose Marie Guiraud (Côte d'Ivoire), Flora Nwapa, and Veronique Tadjo (Côte d'Ivoire). “*Mamy-Wata* is also the title of a satirical Cameroonian newspaper.” Some have referred to mami Wata as ‘river monster’ as for example by Jeremy Wade when Mami Wata appeared in the second season of the Canadian television show *Lost Girl* on Showcase Television as he was fishing in the Congo River in episode *Congo Killer* as well as the ‘Body Snatcher’ episode set in Guyana.

Nicholson (1995:97) explains that all of ancient Africa possessed a multitude of water-spirit traditions before the first contact with Europeans. Most of these were regarded as females, dual natures of good and evil were not uncommon, reflecting the fact that water is an important means of providing communication, food, drink, trade, and transportation, but it can drown people, flood fields or villages, and provide passage to intruders. This was one way of painting women as spirits and dangerous. It also made the position of women in society to be inferior as they were

untrustworthy as were associated with killing as the water spirits were portrayed as dangerous, fatal. Van (2005:17) suggests that “she may be based on the West African manatee which is an idea that has been proposed by scientists of the Ghanaian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).” In fact, ‘Mami Wata’ is a common name for this animal in the region. Salmons (2005:70) also argues that the mermaid image may have come into being after contact with Europeans. As other deities become absorbed into the figure of Mami Wata, the spirit often takes on characteristics unique to a particular region or culture. Van (2005:16) states that “in Trinidad and Tobago, for example, Maman Dlo plays the role of guardian of nature, punishing overzealous hunters or woodcutters. She is the lover of Papa Bois, a nature spirit.”

Another prominent aspect of the Mami Wata deities is their connection to healing. This makes her to command respect and feared by even the patriarchal system but this same threat is not healthy for her because the patriarchal system would find all the possible means to destroy it. Oluwgbemiga, (2009:61) states that “If someone comes down with an incurable, languorous illness, Mami Wata often takes the blame. The illness is evidence that Mami Wata has taken an interest in the afflicted person and that only she can cure him or her. Similarly, several other ailments may be attributed to the water spirit.” In Nigeria, for example, she takes the blame for everything from headaches to sterility. Oluwagbemiga further elaborates that “In fact, barren mothers often call upon the spirit to cure their affliction” (62) as illustrated in the story of Sonia below.

According to Misty (2005:207) “Mami Wata’s association with sex and lust is somewhat paradoxically linked to one with fidelity. According to a Nigerian

tradition, male followers may encounter the spirit in the guise of a beautiful, sexually promiscuous woman, such as a prostitute.” In Nigerian popular stories, Mami Wata may seduce a favoured male devotee and then show herself to him following technical sexual intercourse. She then demands his complete sexual faithfulness and secrecy about the matter. Oluwagbemiga (2009:34) states that “acceptance means wealth and fortune; rejection spells the ruin of his family, finances, and job.” This is how she easily controls the males and makes them obedient to her but a source of her danger to men.

Nevertheless, according to Oluwagbemiga (2009:64) she largely wants her followers to be healthy and well off. More broadly, people blame the spirit for all sorts of misfortune. In Cameroon, for example, Mami Wata is ascribed with causing the strong undertow that kills many swimmers each year along the coast. This makes the people to fear the coast at times and have a hatred of the Mami Wata.

3.2.1.1 Highway to the Grave

In the Nollywood film entitled ‘*High Way to the Grave*, (2000), Mami Wata is a threat to men through the protagonist, ‘Sonia’ who wages war against men. Sonia gets Mami Watas’ recognition by sending many men to their death. It is here that the image of Mami Wata as the *femme fatale* is portrayed through Sonia. The *femme fatale* engages in her job with amazing efficiency. She is portrayed as a mysterious, seemingly – very attractive woman. She is a maiden living and moving in the real world, but empowered with peculiarities of the river goddess. She is excessively beautiful; however, there is a hypnotic danger in her beauty. She never strikes’ men for fun, rather only on the instructions of the goddess. Ogunnleye (2004: 10) states that “the film makes it suitable that women are very powerful tool for converting, but

they are also portrayed as agents of destruction employed by marine spirits and the world of the witches to cause disorder and pain on man.”

The film begins with a nightmare that captures the circumstances that led to the birth of the main character, Sonia. Sonia’s mother, whose only expressions are sobs, throws herself before the throne of the water goddess, ‘Mami wata’, for the fruit of the womb. Behlsen (2006:62) explains that “the Igbo mother water goddess, Mami water, controls the entry and exit into and from the world.” Nnaemeka (1995:12) also adds that “the water goddess is associated with birth and life.” It agrees with Jung’s argument that, the mother controls birth and death, thus the whole span of life from the womb or cradle of the earth to the womb or grave of the earth is controlled by the Earth mother. This is why the worship of this goddess still remains very popular in Nigeria regardless of the preponderance of Christianity. Sonia’s mother is made fertile by the sea goddess, and the product is Sonia, the *femme fatale*. Sonia is spiritual, but a mortal; better still, she is a woman with increased ordinary human powers, a superhuman creature with mortal cladding. Comaroff (2000:74) argues that “women sent from the underworld to torment the people in the terrestrial plain are usually distinguished by their extreme beauty.” Sonia is sent by the goddess to unleash terror on men. She callously sends a stream of lovers to their graves. Adesanya (1997: 53) states that “By this token, Sonia is not a mere instrument of pleasure for men, but also a tool for the ‘Mami Wata’.”

Sonia’s first victim is Pat. Pat picks Sonia up along the road even though they have never met before. As soon as Sonia hops into his car, he begins to play with her body as he drives. But he is stunned as she disappears, and he hurriedly hops out of the car and runs hysterically. He dies later. She runs into another male character, Dave, also driving, who dies shortly after their affair in a hotel.

Sonia is once again saddled with a more deadly responsibility. This time she is not just going after an ordinary man, but a man of God. She refuses to approach this mission casually. She employs an advance seductive mechanism, with which she breaks into Pastor Nicolas's psychic network as a succubus. This she achieves by invading the pastor's dreams. The pastor falls for her bait and has sex with her in a dream and she kills him

This film portrays how a woman, *femme fatale*, can be a danger to man and how Mami Wata, one of the known African *femme fatale* operates. Men consider those women who appear to be extremely beautiful to be the agents of Mami Wata on a mission of destruction of the males by using sexual allures.

3.2.2 Succubus

The other way the African woman has been stereotyped as dangerous is through the image of the Succubus who torments men in the night. The Succubus appears in African literature and tradition in which a woman is demonised.

A succubus according to Davidson (2012:13) "is a demon in female form or supernatural entity in folklore that appears in dreams and takes the form of a woman in order to seduce men, usually through sexual activity." Davison further argues that some men have had such complaints of having mysterious sex with unknown beautiful women in the night. Religious traditions hold that repeated sexual activity with a succubus may result in the deterioration of health or even death. In modern representations, according to Ellen (2008:77) "a succubus may or may not appear in dreams and is often depicted as a highly attractive seductress or enchantress; whereas, in the past, succubae were generally depicted as frightening and demonic."

Geoffrey (2004:89) argues that a succubus may take a form of a beautiful young girl but closer inspection may reveal deformities upon their bodies, such as bird-like claws or serpentine tails.

3.3 summary

This chapter has presented the description of the *femme fatale* in the Western culture and in African culture. From this description, in both cultures, the *femme fatale* is treated as a mysterious figure.

The differences are that in the Western culture, the *femme fatale* seeks or intends to subvert an established system or institution and particularly that of the patriarchy. She is involved in the double crossing of men with a view to exploit them. She speaks with a sweet tongue which lures men to her and she cannot be relied on because of her being irresponsible and manipulative. The African *femme fatale* is described in relation to some dangerous spirits like the Mami Wata and the Succubus. She wears powerful colours to make herself look more beautiful and attractive to the men. She is accused of bewitching men into sexual relationships.

The next chapter presents the synopsis of the two texts studied.

CHAPTER FOUR

SHORT SYNOPSES OF THE TEXTS STUDIED

4.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the description of the *femme fatale* in the Western culture and in African culture. This chapter presents the short synopses of the two texts studied.

4.1 Houseboy by Ferdinand Oyono

Houseboy is a novel authored by Ferdinand Oyono in the form of a diary, first published in 1956 in French as *Une vie de boy* and translated into English as *Houseboy* in 1960 by John Reed for Heinemann's African Writers Series. The story is told from the first person point of view by the narrator, Toundi.

The story starts in Spanish Guinea with a Frenchman on vacation, who finds a man named Toundi, who has been injured and soon dies. The Frenchman finds his diary, which is called an 'exercise book' by Toundi. The rest of the story consists of the diary (exercise book) that the Frenchman is supposedly reading. There is no further discussion of the Frenchman after this point.

The first 'exercise book' starts with Toundi living with his family. His father beats him constantly, and one day Toundi runs away from home to the rescue of Father Gilbert, a priest who lives nearby. His father comes back for him, telling Toundi that everything will be all right if he comes back. He rejects his father's offer and after this point no longer acknowledges his birth parents.

Toundi treats Father Gilbert as his new father. Father Gilbert teaches Toundi to read and write, and about Catholicism. Toundi believes in Catholicism, but as the story progresses he drifts from his beliefs until the end, when he does not believe in God.

Father Gilbert dies in a motorcycle accident a few months after meeting Toundi. Toundi is eventually taken to live with the Commandant, the man in charge of the surrounding colony. Toundi serves as houseboy for the Commandant. It becomes very clear that the events that go on in the house are more important to Toundi than his own life.

About six months after Toundi comes to live with the Commandant, Madame, the Commandant's wife, arrives from France. She initially is a warm and caring woman, who is very beautiful. She catches the eye of almost every man in town, much to the Commandant's dismay.

Soon after Madame arrives the Commandant leaves to go on tour again. Toundi is left with Madame to take care of the house. As time goes on, Madame becomes more and more hostile and disrespectful towards Toundi. When the Commandant returns, she is portrayed as a ruthless woman. While the Commandant was still on tour, it becomes obvious that she is bored with her life. She begins an affair with M. Moreau, the man in charge of the prison. M. Moreau is perceived to be ruthless against the Africans. One of Toundi's first experiences with M. Moreau was him whipping two other Africans nearly to death.

In the 'Second Exercise book' The Commandant returns from touring, and it is later discovered that he knew about his wife's affair and returns because of it. The

Commandant has a terrible argument with her, but after a few days they are getting along again.

Madame becomes very disrespectful towards Toundi, partly because she does not like him being there anymore, but mostly because she knows that he knew about her affair. Sophie, the lover of the water engineer, is accused of stealing his workers' salaries with the help of Toundi. He is taken to prison, where he is tortured into confessing to a crime he has not committed.

Toundi is held in a hut near the police headquarters. Fortunately he has a friend who works there named Mendim, who is described as a very muscular man. He is feared by most other people but he soon comes to be known as Toundi's ally. M. Moreau orders Mendim to beat up Toundi, but Mendim throws ox's blood on him to make it look like he is injured. They spend the rest of the day playing cards.

Toundi becomes sick and Mendim takes him to the hospital. They have to wait a very long time to see a doctor because the black doctor is the only doctor there, the other white doctor having been promoted to captain. The doctor finds out that Toundi's ribs are broken and have punctured his bronchi.

While Toundi is still at the hospital, in a dazed state, M. Moreau returns with the white doctor and talks about punishing Toundi some more. After M. Moreau has left, Toundi escapes the hospital and heads to Spanish Guinea, where he was first introduced in the beginning of the novel.

4.2 The Concubine by Elechi Amadi

The Concubine, published in 1966, is Amadi's first novel. It was hailed as an outstanding work of fiction. The story is told in the omniscience point of view. It is

about Ihuoma, a beautiful young widow of exemplary character who has the admiration of the entire community in which she lives, and especially of the hunter Ekwueme.

The story is set in the village of Omokachi in Eastern Nigeria. It begins with Madume and Emenike fight in the forest. These are long-time enemies due to a number of reasons; they differ over land matters, on competences and above all, Madume claims that Emenike snatched Ihuoma from him. This fight lead to Emenike's suffering from chest lock and he finally dies.

Madume sees a chance after the death of Emenike to marry Ihuoma, but this fails to work out. The clear warning to him include cutting of his toe at Ihuoma's compound when he goes to make an attempt to propose to her. During the sacrifice, Anyika, the dibia (medicine man) tells him that in fact he was lucky to come out of Ihuoma's compound safe because many spirits of the dead were after his life. Next time, Madume confronts Ihuoma on her farm. It is here that Madume suffers a serious tragedy. A serpent spits in his eyes as he tries to cut a plantain in Ihuoma's farm of dispute.

Madume becomes blind. At the same time he becomes short tempered and aggressive such that the life of his wife is under threat. She runs away from him with all the children. Madume becomes further frustrated hence kills himself by hanging in his house.

Ekwueme, the young man of Umuofia and the secret admirer of Ihuoma indicates his interest to marry Ihuoma also. But this is hindered because Ekwueme has a childhood fiancé, Ahurole whom he is expected to marry; and Ihuoma emphasises

this point. Ekwueme marries Ahurole but the marriage ends shortly due to some misunderstandings. He is given a love potion which makes him run mental. Ahurole runs away from him. Ihuoma takes care of Ekwueme during his sickness and this convinces the parents of Ekwueme that Ihuoma is good enough for Ekwueme to take as a wife.

Therefore when he comes back to his normal senses, Ekwueme's long-time proposal to marry Ihuoma is accepted by his parents. But before they marry, Anyika, the medicine man proposes for a divination to be done. In his divination, he announces that Ihuoma is not a real human being. She belongs to the sea. She was married to the Sea - King before she was born. The-Sea King allowed her to be born as she persisted to live on earth among the humans; but with a caution that any man who develops a relationship with her would be attacked; he would suffer and finally die. The Sea - King is very jealous of his wife. He concludes that the death of Emenike, her husband was nothing but the attack by the Sea- King. Madume's blindness caused by the spit in his eyes by the cobra is the Sea - King himself who reincarnated in that form and attacked him. But Anyika offers no solution to the problem for he declares that the Sea - King is so powerful. He advises the marriage not to take place or risk the life of Ekwueme. But Ekwueme himself declares to die over such a beautiful woman like Ihuoma.

The parents suggest to see another medicine man, Agwoturumbe whom they take to be more powerful than Anyika. The divination is the same like that of Anyika only that Agwoturumbe is ready to bind the Sea - King. He asks Ekwueme to prepare the sacrifice which would be taken to the middle of the river at midnight. Among the items for the sacrifice is a male red lizard. Ekwueme asks Nwonna, the son of

Ihuoma to go out and catch one. It is in this process that Ekwueme is killed by the arrow thrown by Nwonna. He is coming out of the house where he is seated and chatting with Ihuoma. Just by the door way, Nwonna was aiming at the lizard when the arrow misses the lizard and enters the upper part of Ekwueme's body. The book ends with Ekwueme's death in the mid of the night.

4.3 summary

The chapter has presented the short synopses of the texts studied which include: *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi and *Houseboy* by Ferdinand Oyono. The next chapter presents the findings in the two texts studied.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS IN THE TWO TEXTS

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the short synopses of the texts studied. This chapter presents the findings in the two novels studied concerning how each portrays the *femme fatale* traits.

5.1 Houseboy

The text of *Houseboy* reveals two women as *femme fatales*. The first one is Madame who is the wife of the Commandant. The second one is Sophie, the house girl of the Water Engineer. Both are described by Toundi as very beautiful women. But their beauty becomes a danger to men. They have sexual relationships with men and this in the end makes men involved to be very unhappy; and leads to the suffering and death of Toundi.

5.1.1. Madame's femme fatale traits

Madame is portrayed as a seductress with her beauty. Men are seen as victims of Madame's seductress nature. This is evident from the description she is given as "the wife of the Commandant who opens her legs in ditches and in cars." (99).

She is described by Toundi of having seduced M. Moreau, the director of Dangan prison. She invites him at her home especially when the husband is away on tours (60). They drink whisky together as a way of sexually appeasing M. Moreau and putting him in an excited mood. (79) "When Madame saw him coming, she called me and told me to bring two whiskies. Madame always drinks spirits when her husband is away. She jumped out of the hammock and offered the prison – director her arm. It was bare to the shoulder and he kept his lips pressed to it for a long while.

He was confident and expectant.” Toundi even witnesses M. Moreau kissing Madame. (65) “There was a crack in the drawing – room window through which the light was shining. I peered in. M. Moreau was kissing Madame on the mouth.”

They have sex freely as seen by the Sentry when M. Moreau leaves Madame’s house at mid night, (60) “The sentry came to me this morning on tip toe with his big finger on his lips. Madame was still asleep. He laid his arms on my shoulders and I felt his wet lips at my ear. I had no idea what the secrecy could be about. ‘The truth is, ‘he said under his breath, ‘can I deny that I saw the prison – director leaving Madame after midnight?’” The behaviour of Madame this time around makes Toundi come to believe what he doubted before. (63) “A thousand thoughts rushed into my mind. I used to wonder, before this, how Madame, being so feminine, could be altogether satisfied with the master.”

Toundi finds the ‘rubber bags’ under the bed of Madame with the contents of some liquid which is a clear sign that Madame and M. Moreau were having sex using some protections, condoms. She becomes so annoyed with him for she realises that Toundi would tell everyone about it hence destroy her name. (86) “‘get out’ she screamed. ‘Get out. You don’t know what they are? She went on, out of control. ‘You don’t know? Contraceptives: contraceptives. Go on, tell everybody. What a subject for all the houseboys in Dangan to talk about. Go on. Get out.’” This marks the climax of the dangerous situation of Toundi. She does not want him around again but she finds no quick reason to clear him out. Toundi is advised by Kalisia, the new Chambermaid to leave the Commandants’ compound before it is too late. (100) “‘if I were in your place,’ she said, ‘I’d go now before the river has swallowed me up altogether. Our ancestors used to say you must escape when the water is still only up to the knees.’”

This is the exact portrayal of Madame as the *femme fatale* by Kalisia for she knows that Madame is going to destroy Toundi if he remains in the compound. According to Kalisia, Madame is a very dangerous figure. Unfortunately, Toundi does not heed Kalisia's advice and instead remains in the Commandant's compound. This is because he thinks that he is not the only one who knows that Madame sleeps with M. Moreau, but Kalisia advises him that for him is a different case because he is like a supervisor. And surely time comes when he is now in trouble (100).

Therefore, when the police come to pick Toundi for the theft implications, Madame finds it necessary to get rid of him and be relieved from the pressure she has. She even smiles, (104) when Toundi is being picked, a sign of gratitude and relief.

The husband, Commandant, learns about the relationship of Madame and M. Moreau and accuses the wife of infidelity (66). He accuses her of seducing M. Moreau, and thinks about ending their marriage, (98) "yes. You sleep with Moreau – the man you considered such a boor. 'We can't go together after this' 'you didn't even give it a bit of time before you started deceiving me out here as well...and the natives had to know all about it before I did."

He becomes a very disturbed man thinking of how the wife sinks so low to start sleeping around with men. (71) "there was not a soul unaware that the wife of the Commandant was deceiving her husband with M. Moreau the Prison – director and our greatest terror." He is even disturbed about the description he is given by the local people of Dangan that a Commandant whose wife opens legs in cars and ditches (99). This is usually said in their local language which Madame could not understand. (98) "for them I was 'ngovina ya ngal a ves zut basalak a be metuna.' Do you know what that means? Of course you don't. You never bothered to learn the

local language.” Toundi explains that the Commandant tells his wife that the words in the local language means everywhere he goes he is now the Commandant whose wife opens her legs in ditches and in cars.

Madame is seen trying to seduce Toundi earlier in the story before the duo start having some differences. She talks to him in a romantic manner about his social life and smiles at him with loving eyes on him. (56) “She gave a smile which curled her upper lip. Her eyes gleamed. They seemed to be trying to make some discovery in my face. To cover up, she emptied her glass and said: ‘Are you married?’ ‘No, Madame.’ ‘Yet you earn enough to be able to buy a wife....Robert says that as the Commandant houseboy you would be a good match...you must start a family. She smiled.”

This is clearly put forward by the new Chambermaid, Kalisia, who quickly concludes that the duo, Madame and Toundi are in a relationship though Toundi denies it. She even asks how many times they have sex in a week. (95) “‘See, I was right,’ she said. ‘That’s already had a taste of white flesh, I know. It’s you. It’s you that’s Madame Man. I knew right away. You only have to look at her eyes when she talks to you.’... ‘What is she like?’ she asked me after a pause.... ‘How many times do you do it a week? She went on Questioning.” Kalisia comes out on this matter in this manner because she observes, from the time she joins the Commandants’ compound, Madame trying to seduce Toundi. This is as explained earlier that she talks to him with smiles and loving eyes.

5.1.2 Sophie’s femme fatale traits

She is a house girl of the Water Engineer but they are secret lovers at the same time (105). She is portrayed by Toundi to be having sex with him. Sophie is again

recorded to double cross him with M. Moreau. She is reported by Toundi of having seduced him to have sex when she spends a night with him in the same apartment (43). She questions if truly he is a real man to spend a night in the same room with a woman without doing anything. “What a man you are! Really. I’ve never come across a man like you. You are shut up all night in a hut with a woman and you say your mouth is tired. When I tell people they won’t believe me. They’ll say, ‘perhaps it’s because his knife is not very sharp he prefers to keep it in its sheath.’” She seduces Toundi to ask for sex from her despite her being in other relationships already like that of M. Moreau and the Water Engineer. This turned to be opposite to her expectations hence she tried to provoke him though it fails to work out. Sophie is clearly portrayed as a seductive woman in the text and that she is loose for having relationships with the three men recorded in the text though that of Toundi is not successful for Toundi has no interest. At the same time, she is presented as Gold digger as she remains in the relationship with the Water Engineer for the need to enjoy his wealth. She finally runs away with his money (105) the matter which leads Toundi into problems and puts an end to his life.

5.1.3 Toundi’s victimisation

Toundi’s victimisation is seen as a result of his relationship with the *femmes fatales*: Madame and Sophie. As Likando says to Mosho in Gideon Phiri *Ticklish Sensation*: “get a tip from me. You have to be tough with women and know how to handle them otherwise they will be the major cause of your problems and misery throughout your life.” (72), Mosho receives similar advice from his father “there is a lesson you’ll have to learn if you have not yet done so, women, if you are not careful, can turn you into a fool” (93).

M. Moreau, the man friend of Madame knows that Toundi knows his secrets with Madame and he tries to punish him so that their secret is concealed. Therefore, as Toundi is taken to the police station, M. Moreau ensures that Toundi is punished (113). This punishment leads Toundi in hospital where he later runs away to Spanish Guinea and is reported to have died there. His disappearance is a relief to Madame and M. Moreau for they are sure that their secret is concealed.

Another form of victimisation comes from his association with Sophie, the girlfriend of the Water Engineer. He strongly suspects Toundi of having an affair with Sophie; meaning that she is suspected of double crossing him with Toundi. This comes clearer when the four: Water Engineer, the Prison Director, Toundi and Sophie goes out on a tour. Toundi and Sophie are made to sleep in the same apartment, (43) and this makes the Water Engineer to conclude that the duo had sex though that was not the case. This suspicion makes the Water Engineer to hate Toundi the more and just waiting for the opportunity to punish him. Therefore when Sophie runs away with the money of the Water Engineer, he concludes that Toundi should know about it (109) because the duo according to him are secret lovers. This leads to him being picked by the police and tortured. He was happy for Toundi to be punished not because of the theft of the money but because of the suspected relationship with Sophie who is his girlfriend too.

5.1.4 Conclusion

The two women in *Houseboy* have been portrayed as double crossers, seducers of men and gold diggers especially Sophie who runs away with the money of the Water Engineer. They are made to appear as *femmes fatales*, a source of troubles for the men.

The sufferings of Toundi and his eventual death are attributed to his association with Madame and Sophie. The unhappy life of the Commandant is caused by the wife, Madame who double crosses him with other men. The wife of the local doctor even advises Madame to stay away from M. Moreau before the husband discovers it (74). This implies that Madame has the sexual power as a woman in this relationship either to continue with it or to end it. The only good attribute for these women mentioned is their beauty. But the same beauty has been criticised as the source of men's seduction as this is seen when Toundi and Madame go to the market. The local men stood along the road for the purpose of admiring Madame (54).

Now there's a woman,' he shouted.' Comments came flying from all sides. The men saluted us and then stayed frozen in their attitudes. 'See the way those buttocks go! 'Someone said. 'What a figure, what hair.' 'What couldn't I do with what's inside those slacks,' said someone else longingly. 'Man, your shorts must be soaked,' a third shouted at me. 'What a shame it's all reserved for the uncircumcised,' came yet another, pulling a face to show his vexation. The women admired in silence. They passed the palms of their hands over their lips. One of them said she thought Madame's buttocks were too soft. At the market, the crowd opened up in front of us of its own accord.

For the men, "Madame seemed a kind of vision. They had forgotten all the attention they lavished on their wives in the streets of Dangan. There was no attention now except for Madame. Yet among them all there was not one who was able to hold Madame's attention." (48).

5.2 The Concubine

The Concubine portrays one woman as the *femme fatale*. She is called Ihuoma. She is described to be very beautiful such that all the men of Omokachi village admire her especially the hunter Ekwueme. (10) "She was a pretty woman: perhaps that was

why she married so early. Ihuoma's complexion was that of the ant – hill. Her features were smoothly rounded and looking at her no one could doubt that she was 'enjoying her husband's wealth.'...Ihuoma's gap in the front teeth was natural and other women envied her. Her smiles were disarming. Perhaps the upper row of her white regular teeth did the trick."

She is of exemplary behaviour and this makes her command respect among all the age groups in the village. (11) "She was sympathetic, gentle, reserved. It was her husband's boast that in their six years of marriage she had never had any serious quarrel with another woman. She was not good at invectives and other women talked faster than she did...in this way her prestige among the women – folk grew until even the most garrulous among them was reluctant to be unpleasant to her. She found herself settling quarrels and offering advice to older women."

She is constructed as the *femme fatale* because of the deaths of the men who desire a relationship with her. In this case, she is portrayed as a dangerous woman for men. The men who die because of their relationship with Ihuoma include: Emenike (her husband), Madume and Ekwueme. These types of deaths affect the whole community of Umuofia because the young men who should be developing the community die leaving behind the old people. It compromises the security of the village as people to fight for the village are dead.

5.2.1 Ihuoma as a Mythological figure

Ihuoma is put in the Igbo mythology of some very beautiful women not to be true human beings. This is explained by Anyika, the medicine man who questions her beauty. He asks if at all they have seen such a person who carries no blame and she is extremely beautiful (195). He further states that "there are few women like that in the

world, Anyika continues, it is death to marry them and they leave behind a harrowing string of dead husbands. They are usually beautiful, very beautiful, but dogged by their invisible husbands of spirit world” (196). From this analysis of Ihuoma, Anyika states that Ihuoma belongs to the sea; she is not a normal human being. She is married to the Sea – King (195).

Therefore, despite her being innocent in life style, it is believed that there are some powers within her which she does not even know. These powers destroy men who desire a love relationship with her. The powers can only be curbed by offering sacrifices (199) to the Sea – King who is believed to be the husband of Ihuoma and the attacker of other lovers of Ihuoma. Anyika declines to offer such a sacrifice for he believes it cannot work. The fears of Anyika become a reality when another medicine man tries to offer a sacrifice in order to bind the Sea - King. It fails and ends up in the death of Ekwueme (216).

5.2.2. The Sea – King

The Sea – King is in the Igbo mythology has some women are married to him. He is described as a very powerful and jealous husband. He has several wives and does not want to share any of them with anyone. Ihuoma is believed to be one of the wives. She is born with the permission of the Sea – King but on the condition that no man should desire a love relationship with her. If such a man dares, he would definitely suffer and there after die. (195).This makes Ihuoma a fatal woman.

‘Listen,’ the dibia began. Ihuoma belongs to the sea. When she was in the spirit world she was a wife of the Sea – King, the ruling spirit of the sea. Against the advice of her husband she sought the company of human beings and was incarnated. The Sea – King was very angry but because he loved her best of all his wives he did not destroy her immediately she was born. He decided to humour her and let her live out her normal earthly span and come back to him. However, because of his great love

for her he is terribly jealous and tries to destroy any man who makes love to her.

This myth is applied on Ihuoma by Anyika, the medicine man. With the death of Emenike and Madume who are attacked by the Sea – King according to Anyika, Ihuoma is deemed a *femme fatale* in the sense that she is believed to have some powers beyond her own understanding. These powers destroy men who seek to win her love. The Sea – King can use any dangerous trap to attack.

5.2.2.1 The death traps

These are the means the Sea – King uses in the text to attack the men who fall in love with Ihuoma. They are all quite dangerous means and spare not any man in the text as long as he becomes a target. In the case of Emenike, he takes an advantage of a fight between Emenike and Madume in the case of Madume – he manifests as a serpent and in the case of Ekwueme – he takes advantage of the arrow thrown by Nwonna.

5.2.2.1.1 The Fight

Emenike dies after the fight with Madume in the forest (2). He is thrown against the stump of a tree which makes his chest to be in pain. This leads to Emenike's suffering and finally his death. Therefore according to Anyika, the Sea – King takes advantage of the fight to destroy Emenike, (195) "Ihuoma's late husband apparently died of 'lock-chest' but actually it was all the design of the Sea-King. As soon as Emenike married Ihuoma his life was forfeit and nothing would have saved him." This is questioned by many people of Omokachi as how possible 'weak' Madume could beat the 'strong' Emenike. It is concluded that it is not the mere fight between Madume and Emenike which brought the suffering of Emenike and later his death; it

is the attack of the Sea – King on Emenike for having married his wife (195). The fight in this case is used as a trap for Emenike and makes Ihuoma appear as a fatal woman.

5.2.2.1.2 The Serpent

Like in the story of Eve in the Bible, the serpent appears to Madume in his farm of dispute with Emenike. But different from the story of Eve, it spits poison in his eyes. He then starts to suffer and finally dies by hanging himself. According to Anyika, the Sea – King took the form of the serpent to attack Madume for the reason that he too desires a relationship with Ihuoma, and that he tortured Ihuoma at the farm (195).

Madume became blind through a spitting cobra and eventually hanged himself. Many thought his death was the result of an unfortunate accident, a just reward for his ‘big-eye’. I must say I had the same views at the time. But it is now very clear. Madume’s real trouble began after he had assaulted Ihuoma while she was harvesting plantains. Added to this was the fact that he had a secret desire to make Ihuoma his lover or may be marry her. All this was too much for the Sea- King and he himself assumed the form of a serpent and dealt with his rival.

Being a very dangerous animal, the serpent is used to describe very serious and dangerous attacks. Therefore, the existence of the serpent is a very dangerous indicator for Madume as he is attacked by it.

5.2.2.1.3 The arrow

The arrow causes the death of Ekwueme. It was released by Nwonna, the son of Ihuoma as he hunts for the lizard to be used in the sacrifice to bind the Sea – King. It enters him through the chest and he dies later, (215) “the arrow flying parallel with the wall just missed a lizard. It hit the upper part of Ekwueme’s belly and he fell back across the doorway with a cry.” The arrow is a very popular dangerous weapon

in the African culture hence the Sea – King takes advantage of it to kill Ekwueme. This is for the reason that Ekwueme planned to marry Ihuoma hence an attack from the Sea – king taking advantage of the arrow released by Nwonna. This is unexplainable to a mortal human being but the medicine men were able to understand such matters and advise accordingly.

5.2.3 The medicine men

The medicine men in Omokachi are men of authority and substance. Their word is respected and taken as the truth. They are the ones who reveal that Ihuoma is a *femme fatale* (195) according to their description of her. This announcement is taken so serious especially by the Wigwe family who want their son, Ekwueme to marry Ihuoma. The first medicine man to announce this is Anyika and later Angwoturumbe. They make it clear that she is a reincarnation of an evil woman and a danger to whoever man falls in love with her. (196) “with some spirits marriage is possible if an expert on sorcery is consulted, with the Sea-King it is impossible. He is too powerful to be fettered and when he is on the offensive he is absolutely relentless. He unleashes all the powers at his command and they are fatal.” Anyika reveals that the deaths of Emenike and Madume are because of their relationship with her and warns that Ekwueme is at risk if he dares to marry Ihuoma (195). But assurance from Agwoturumbe that he would bind the Sea – King makes Ekwueme confident, but it fails as Anyika had earlier warned.

5.2.4 Conclusion

The *femme fatale* Ihuoma is constructed by the males who are the medicine men i.e. Anyika and Angwoturumbe (195). They bring in the mythology of reincarnation in order to convince the populace. What makes them take advantage of this tag on

Ihouma is the persistent deaths of men who happen to desire a love relationship with her. They question her beauty and exemplary behaviour then conclude that she cannot be a normal human being. Therefore they go deep in their mythological beliefs and conclude that such women are there in the world who cause havoc on men, but the arrangement is not theirs (195). It is a supernatural arrangement such that even themselves do not know.

Ihuoma is not aware of her status as a *femme fatale* and when revealed to her, she cries. It is a background she cannot understand or connect to herself. She cries that beauty is a curse on her as she refuses her friend Nnenda's praises on her.

To sum up, Ihuoma is not a seductive *femme fatale* but it is the mythological aspect which puts her in that stereotype. According to the Igbo society, any extremely beautiful woman carries some question marks of belonging to the underworld like Mami water.

5.2.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the findings on the *femme fatale* traits in the two texts studied. The power of sexuality is tagged on those portrayed as *femmes fatales*. The next chapter presents the similarities and differences of the *femme fatale* traits in the two novels studied.

CHAPTER SIX
THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE FEMME FATALE
TRAITS IN THE TWO TEXTS

6.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings in the two texts and revealed that in both are found the *femme(s) fatale(s)*. This chapter presents the similarities and the differences of the *femme fatale* traits in the two texts.

6.1 Similarities

The similarities shared by the *femme fatales* in their traits in the texts studied include: beauty, seduction, fatal causes and communal concerns. In both, these elements are so vivid and they are clearly explained in the following paragraphs.

6.1.1 Beauty

All the three *femmes fatales* discussed in the previous chapter are described as beautiful. Beauty is one of the characteristics in the definitions of the *femme fatale* qualities by Hornby (2006:542) in *Advanced Learners Dictionary* as “a very beautiful woman that men find sexually attractive but who brings them trouble or unhappiness.”

Madame’s beauty in *Houseboy* attracts the whole community of Dangan such that wherever she passes, both men and women could stand along the road side for the main purpose of admiring her. This is evident when Toundi and Madame walk to the

market. Native men would pass such comments as “now we see a real woman” (54). They even wished they could be given a chance to talk to her but Madame paid no attention to any of them. They admire Toundi being in her company and suspect that he is sexually aroused already, as someone comments “man, your shorts must be soaked” (54). They forget all about their wives and concentrate on Madame’s beauty. Women also admire her and could also stand to watch her when she passes. They comment on her buttocks saying they must be very soft (54). In other words, her beauty is an admiration of every one.

Sophie in *Houseboy* is also described as very beautiful (43) though much emphasis has not been put on her.

Ihuoma in *The Concubine* is extremely exalted about her beauty. She is described to have the complexion of the skin like that of an anthill, meaning that she is brown in complexion. She has a natural gap in her front teeth which adds to her beauty (10). She is admired by both men and women of Omokachi village as clearly indicated by Nnenda, her friend.

6.1.2 Seduction

The women analysed in the two texts are portrayed by the narrators as able to seduce men using their beauty. It is difficult for men to stand the beauty of these women. Beauty is a trap for the men. In the case of Madame, she uses both her beauty and tactics to seduce men. This is seen when she tries to seduce Toundi. She uses the eye contacts on him and smiles. Kalisia the Chambermaid observes this and concludes that Toundi and Madame are already in a relationship. She asks him about it (95). She later in the story seduces M. Moreau, the Prison – director. She calls him to her

home especially when the husband, the commandant is away on tours. She offers him some whisky and kisses him. They finally have sex (79).

Sophie's beauty acts as a seduction to men like the Water Engineer and M. Moreau. She even goes to an extent of double crossing them. Sophie's seduction is vivid in the case of Toundi as they spend a night in the same apartment (43). She seriously challenges Toundi for a sexual act but Toundi refuses it. She questions him if he is a real man who could spend a night with a woman without doing anything. She is disappointed with him for she really wanted to have sex with him.

Ihuoma's beauty is the attraction trap for the men. No man could stand her beauty in Omokachi village. Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme are attracted to her because of her beauty. Ekwueme clearly states that, he could die a happy person if he married Ihuoma even for a day. "If I am her husband for a day before my death my soul will go singing happily to the spirit world" (197). He is ready to die by marrying Ihuoma especially after the revelations that Ihuoma is not a normal human being but belongs to the Sea – King. In other words, beauty plays a very big part in men attraction to Ihuoma.

6.1.3 Fatalities

All the three *femme fatales* are associated with one fatality or the other. In the case of Madame in *Houseboy*, she contributes to the death of Toundi by hating him to an extent that she does not want him in her compound again. This hatred comes about because he knows the secret affair of Madame and M. Moreau. The climax of hate comes when Toundi is found by Madame pushing some 'rubber bags', condoms from under Madame's bed. She becomes annoyed with him for she suspects that Toundi would tell the story to many people (86). Therefore when the police come to

pick Toundi at the Commandant's compound for theft, Madame is happy that finally he is gone. This is evident from the smile she produces when Toundi is led out by the police (113). Toundi is tortured by the police which leads to breaking of his rib. He is later admitted to the hospital. He runs away from the hospital to Spanish Guinea where he is reported to have died.

In the same way, Sophie in *Houseboy* contributes to the death of Toundi as she makes him become a suspect when she steals the money of the Water Engineer (105). She runs away with the money and the Water Engineer concludes that Toundi must know about it. Therefore he is picked by the police which leads him to his death as explained in the preceding paragraph. At the same time, the Water Engineer is looking for the opportunity to punish Toundi as he suspects him to be flirting with Sophie who is his girlfriend. He hates him. Hence an opportunity comes and Toundi is punished (121), leading to his death.

6.1.4 Communal concern

The three *femme fatales* in the discussion raise communal concerns because what happens is in the community. In the case of Madame, her secret affair with M. Moreau is known by everyone in Dangan. The community is not happy about it hence they pour disparaging remarks on her (98). The workers in her compound know about it and they are disappointed with her. The husband, commandant, is more disappointed and he threatens to end their marriage (98).

Sophie has not attracted much attention of the community in her *femme fatale* dealings apart from when Toundi is being taken by the police and the community complains of how he suffers for the crime he has not committed (106). His predicament is a source from Sophie's behaviour which the community condemns.

In *The Concubine*, the deaths of the three men; Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme raise concern as these are young men who should be there to maintain the village security and production (77). Their death is attributed to their relationship with Ihuoma who is believed to be a *femme fatale* as Anyika, the medicine man reveals it.

6.1.5 Conclusion

The *femme fatales*: Ihuoma, Sophie and Madame have portrayed some similar traits in *femme fatale* analysis. They are very beautiful but dangerous. Their beauty is the attraction power of men. They bring about some unhappiness to men and lead them to their deaths, like Toundi in *Houseboy* is led to his death by his association with Madame and Sophie; Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme by their association with Ihuoma in *The Concubine*. Their acts or attributes raise communal concern.

6.2 Differences

Though similar in their *femme fatale* traits, there are some differences observed in the same traits. The following paragraphs outline these differences which are guided by beauty, seduction, fatalities, communal concerns and mythology.

6.2.1 Beauty

Beauty has been attributed to all the three women in the discussion but with Ihuoma in *The Concubine* it is not her pride. She does not even want people to talk about it in praise of her. She takes beauty to be a source of her problems because men want her every time. She tells her friend Nnenda that the ugly ones do not suffer as she suffers herself especially with the death of her husband. She is humble and reserved as earlier described.

For Sophie in *Houseboy* beauty is a glory to herself and she feels good about it especially when she realises that men love her. She questions Toundi as to why he refuses to have sex with such a beautiful woman like herself (43). She understands that she is very beautiful and she is proud of it.

And Madame also in *Houseboy* is extremely delighted with her beauty. She is very proud of it and feels good when people praise her. She questions Toundi about the comments she hears from people as they go to the market and Toundi explains that they are saying “you are so beautiful” (54). She smiles and remains quiet. She is happy that her beauty is recognised by many.

6.2.2 Seduction

Madame and Sophie in *Houseboy* actively seduce men. This is clear when Madame seduces M. Moreau, the Prison director (60). She calls him to her home, they have whisky together, kiss and have sex. She also tries to seduce Toundi, her houseboy which is noted by Kalisia, the chamber girl (95).

Sophie seduces Toundi in the apartment where they spent a night together though it could not happen because Toundi is not interested (43). It is through her seduction that she double crosses M. Moreau with Water Engineer.

But Ihuoma in *The Concubine* is not recorded to have seduced any man intentionally but men on their own go for her because of her beauty. She is a good woman with exemplary behaviour. Men like Madume try to love her but she refuses (68). She only agrees with Ekwueme because the proposal is formal and for marriage purposes. She is a disciplined woman.

6.2.3 Mythology

In *The Concubine*, there is an aspect of mythology as connected to the life of Ihuoma. Her beauty is described as not ordinary (196). She is believed to have been married to the Sea – King hence the title of the novel ‘The Concubine’. Any man who desires a love relationship with Ihuoma would suffer and finally die. This makes the three men: Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme to face their fatalities because of their association with her. Therefore she is a *femme fatale* in mythological sense.

But the two women in *Houseboy* have no myths attached to them. They are ordinary human beings but *femme fatales* in their ordinary sense.

6.2.4 Communal concern

Communal concern is more on Madame’s behaviour in *Houseboy* as compared to Sophie and Ihuoma. She is rebuked by the community because of double crossing her innocent husband with another man, M. Moreau. She is given a very ridiculous description by the community that she is very loose because she can sleep with men anywhere (98).

With Sophie, the public concern is when Toundi is picked by the police. People feel for Toundi and condemn Sophie for the act of stealing (105).

As for Ihuoma, the community sympathise with her in all her sufferings. This is seen when Emenike dies and when Ekwueme dies; every person comes in sympathy with her and makes her comfortable (215 and 28).

6.2.5 Conclusion

The differences seen in the traits of the three *femmes fatales* of the two novels is in the areas of how they handle their beauty in relation to seducing of men, how men find themselves in relationships with them, the extent to which they contribute to the

fatalities recorded in the texts and how the communities react to their situations or contributions labelled on them. We conclude that the beauty of Ihuoma in *The Concubine* does not make her so proud as compared to that of Madame and Sophie in *Houseboy*. But the beauty of Ihuoma is mythicised whereas that of Sophie and Madame is ordinary. Madame and Sophie are actively involved in men's seduction whereas Ihuoma is not involved in such behaviour; she is a descent woman who deserves respect. And communal concerns are seen mainly on Madame and Ihuoma. On Madame it is a negative concern of people and on Ihuoma is a positive concern of people. This is because of their contributions as perceived by the community.

6.2.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the similarities and differences in the *femme fatale* traits in the novels studied. The next chapter presents the general summary and conclusion of this discussion.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

7.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the similarities and differences in the traits of the *femme fatales*; Madame, Sophie and Ihuoma. This chapter presents the general summary and conclusion of the discussion with a guide on the topic of study.

7.1 Summary

The *femme fatale* archetype is evident in both *The Concubine* and *Houseboy*. It is preceded by the description given in Western culture archetype by Carl Jung and in the African culture archetype. This becomes a basis of tracing the *femme fatale* traits in the two novels.

7.1.1 Description of the femme fatale archetype in Western culture (by Carl Jung) and in African culture

Carl Jung (1971:115) describes the *femme fatale* especially that of Western culture archetype as a very beautiful woman but with traits of being seductive and dangerous to men. She is un reliable and double crosses men in sexual relationships. Men who fall in a relationship with a *femme fatale* face very serious consequences by the end of it all. Her typical descriptions include her being mysterious, subversive, double-crossing, unloving, predatory, tongue-sweet, unreliable, irresponsible and manipulative. She is often portrayed as a woman who is extremely attractive with a sexually attractive voice, a provocative body and a complex character. She tends to be very intelligent, in addition to her beauty she often speaks, behaves and dresses in

an unusual and attractive manner designed to lure male attention. Most importantly, she is extremely dangerous; an association with a *femme fatale* often involves devastating consequences for a man. Some of the qualities highlighted for Western culture *femme fatale* archetype can be depicted in African *femme fatale* archetype in the novels studied and be reflected on the traits of Ihuoma, Madame and Sophie.

Minna Salami (2014:16) suggests that a few things distinguish the African *femme fatale*. The African *femme fatale*'s existence is enriched by luxuries of the senses: powerful colours, waist beads, lush fabrics, indigo, henna, patchouli, nipple tassels, etc. though these portray her as a seductress figure for men. The African *femme fatale* existence in Africa has been mystified and condemned.

7.1.2 The femme fatale traits in The Concubine

In *The Concubine* is found only one *femme fatale*. She qualifies on the description of the African *femme fatale* archetype by Minna Salami's description. She is mythologised and condemned by the medicine men Anyika and Angwoturumbe. In her general behaviour and societal perception, she is a very good woman but she is portrayed to be in a mysterious world, and a very dangerous woman for men. She is linked to the deaths of the three young men in the text who include: Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme.

The mythological attributes given to this woman are her not being an ordinary human being. She is portrayed as a reincarnation of evil according to the medicine men Anyika and Angwoturumbe in the text. That before she was born, she lived in the sea and was married to the Sea - King. She is born with the permission of the Sea-King but on the condition that whichever man desires to be in a love relationship with her

would suffer and finally die. And this is evident in the deaths of the three men; they fall in love with her and as a result are attacked by the Sea-King and die.

Ihuoma is not able to connect the revelations on her; it is a surprise. But Anyika, the medicine man explains that there are few women like that in this world,' it is death to marry them and they leave behind a harrowing string of dead husbands. They are usually beautiful, very beautiful, but dogged by their invisible husbands of the spirit world. With some spirits marriage is possible if an expert on sorcery is consulted. With the Sea-King it is impossible. He is too powerful to be fettered and when he is on the offensive he is absolutely relentless. He unleashes all the powers at his command and they are fatal. This makes the situation of Ihuoma to be tricky and classified as a *femme fatale*. But the community sympathies with her for the losses she suffers and encourages her to remain steady fast.

7.1.3 The femme fatale traits in Houseboy

Houseboy contains two *femme fatales*: Madame and Sophie. Madame is a white woman married to the Commandant. She is portrayed with the *femme fatale* traits of the Western archetype as described by Carl Jung (1971). She is unfaithful to her husband; the Commandant, double-crossing her husband with M. Moreau; the Prison director, she is unloving to Toundi especially after knowing her secrets as he discovers some 'rubber bags', condoms. She is a predator as she brings M. Moreau in her web and tries to do the same to Toundi. She is tongue-sweet as seen when she is with M. Moreau in her house; kisses him and makes him feel sexy and finally have sex with him. She is unreliable, irresponsible and manipulative as she is seen manipulating her husband to an extent that even when the husband learns about it, she still refuses and takes it as a mere allegation.

She is often portrayed as a woman who is extremely attractive with a sexually attractive voice, a provocative body and a complex character. She tends to be very intelligent, in addition to her beauty she often speaks, behaves and dresses in an unusual and attractive manner designed to lure male attention. Most importantly, she is extremely dangerous; she puts the life of Toundi in danger as she has come to dislike him for the reason that he learns many of her secrets hence he becomes a danger to her. She becomes relieved when Toundi is picked by the police to go and answer to theft allegations levelled against him; she even produces a satisfactory smile. This begins the end to the life of Toundi as he is tortured by the police, who breaks his ribs, taken to the hospital, and runs away from the hospital to Spanish Guinea where he dies.

Sophie qualifies under the description of an African *femme fatale* archetype by Minna Salami (2014). But she partly takes the Western description of a *femme fatale* archetype by Carl Jung (1971). She is described as very beautiful but this makes her to seduce men. She is double crossing M. Moreau with the Water Engineer. She tries to seduce Toundi but it fails because Toundi shows no interest. She becomes a gold digger as she runs away with the money of her boyfriend, the Water Engineer. This theft puts Toundi in trouble for the Water Engineer connects Toundi to Sophie and that he should know about it. This makes him to be taken to the police station and end his life as earlier explained. She is portrayed as a sophisticated woman.

7.1.4 The similarities and differences in the femme fatale traits in The Concubine and Houseboy

The similarities are that all the three *femme fatales* discussed are described as very beautiful. Their beauty makes men to be attracted to them. It becomes a power in

their sexual being as women, hence able to control men. This is evident with Ihuoma when she refuses a sexual relationship with Madume after making all his possible efforts. Madame too makes men of Dangan parade in order to admire her beauty. Sophie is in a relationship with very important figures; M. Moreau; Prison director and the Water Engineer, all because of her beauty. Therefore there is power in their beauty.

Another similar occurrence is that, each *femme fatale* is identified of leading a man to his death. Madame and Sophie lead Toundi to his death. Madame hands over Toundi to the police proudly because of the hate she has for him. This is because of the money Sophie steals from the Water Engineer. Ihuoma is portrayed to have caused the deaths of Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme because of their association with her.

On the contrary, Sophie and Madame of *Houseboy* actively seduce men, they are not trusted, they double cross men and they are portrayed as sophisticated women. Ihuoma is portrayed as a descent woman but becomes a *femme fatale* because of her background. She is portrayed as a mysterious figure and a threat to men.

The attributes of the *femmes fatales* discussed stir their communities concerns and people show some reactions to the situations. There is a difference with the way people show reaction in each situation. For Ihuoma, people show sympathy when the husband, Emenike, dies. The medicine man who tries to bind the Sea-King is because of sympathy on Ihuoma. They again show sympathy when Ekwueme dies. But for Madame, the community of Dangan rebukes her for the reckless behaviour she exhibits. They insult her in their local language and no one is happy with her behaviour.

7.2 Conclusion

The *femme fatale* archetype is a male constructed concept in order to prevent the female folk from competing with the male folk in social, economic and corporate sectors. It originates from the Western culture where competition in political, industrial, educational sectors etc were exhibited. Therefore women were stereotyped as *femmes fatales* in order to prevent them from competing with men. In this case, terms such as seductress, gold diggers, untrustworthy, double-crossers have been used on them. They are associated with dangerous figures like snakes, Mami Wata and succubus just to express how dangerous women are and suppress them. Literature and folklore have perpetuated this image of the *femme fatale* which makes the situation of women difficult and threatening

The *femme fatale* construction in *The Concubine* is by the author himself, Elechi Amadi. This is by giving the title to the novel 'The Concubine' which literally means according to Hornby A. S (2006:300) "a woman who lives with a man but has lower status than his wife or wives." This kind of a title on description of a woman tends to reduce a woman to a level of *femme fatale*. The front cover of the novel shows the head of a very beautiful woman but surrounded by a fearsome snake which portrays how dangerous this woman is. Three skeletons of human heads next to the woman and the snake symbolise the deadliness of this woman (1994, version). In the content of the story, it is Angwoturumbe and Anyika who portrayed Ihuoma as a *femme fatale*. These are medicine men. They carry authority in the land of Omokachi hence whatever they say is respected. They stand in for the mortal and the spirit world. To sum up, the beauty and personality of Ihuoma poses a challenge to the patriarchal system as these appear to be her power to control the patriarchal system. This makes it a reason for them to try and find out what is behind such a person so that she can

be put in the right place as a woman. It works for them as Ihuoma is seen clearly under their instructions (213).

The construction of *femme fatale* in *Houseboy* is also by Toundi as a narrator. He contributes much to the existence of this figure in the text. The two women in *Houseboy* appear to be powerful and sophisticated hence a threat to the patriarchal systems as a result the patriarchal institutions cannot spare them until they are put in their right places. This makes what appears to be like a struggle between women and men in this text.

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