AN ANALYSIS OF THE WAY BLACK AFRICAN WOMEN FUNCTION IN 
COHABITATIVE RELATIONSHIPS AS PORTRAYED IN TEN SELECTED 
AFRICAN SHORT STORIES

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
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Abstract

This study investigated how African women in cohabitative relationships, defined as married and/or unmarried couples who live together and have sexual relationships, cope, as portrayed in the selected ten short stories by black African women writers. The short stories were selected because of recurring themes about women’s empowerment and disempowerment. The study used a qualitative approach by looking at views related to black African women in cohabitative relationships as portrayed in literature. It was informed by the black womanism, stiwanism and the feminism theories. The sample was purposively selected, because the researcher only looked at how black African female authors of short stories depict the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships. It seems to be highly likely that the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships, both positive and negative, may be traced back to the traditions of a specific society and that the attitudes and culture of a specific society determine the way they cope with their experiences. The findings indicate that black African women’s unequal position in society means that they have less power, income, protection against violence and they have less access to education and even ownership of land. The study further observed that black African women in cohabitative relationships appeared to be victims most of the time and that they did not react to their fates, thus they were often depicted as passive and submissive. There appears some bias by black African women writers, as men are often portrayed in a negative light. Furthermore, black African female authors usually present and represent a certain segment of one side resulting in imbalances of gender representation. African short stories seem to provide a
voice to voiceless women. However, it is likely that victims do not have access to the voices that present and represent them.
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Dedication

To Diana and Meilikano, as African girls who will grow to become African women.
Declaration

I, Josephine Mwasheka Nashongo, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

African women in many cohabitative relationships experience life differently, depending on the circumstances that surround their relationships. Therefore, this chapter provides a background of the way black African women in cohabitative relationships cope with their experiences as portrayed in the selected ten short stories by black African female authors from different African countries.

1.2 Orientation of the proposed study

It is clear that the way African women function in cohabitative relationships is different in each relationship. The way they cope with their experiences may empower or disempower them. In this study the definition of Berenson (2011, p. 289) was employed as a working definition. Berenson (2011, p. 289) defines cohabitation as “both married and unmarried couples that reside together and who maintain sexual relations.” Thus, the fact that married or unmarried partners are cohabitating may have a significant impact on the lives of both partners. According to Berenson (2011), the fact that two partners are living together is to be understood as a way of life in which couples are supposed to be committed to each other. An ideal relationship involves having sexual relationships and providing companionship, and at the same time fulfilling each other’s needs, be it financial, social, emotional or physical.
Partners in cohabitative relationships may have different cultural norms and traditions that can have an impact on their lives. Moore and Govender (2013) argue that a variety of economic, politico-structural and ideological explanations have been put forward to account for changes happening in relationships. As a result, the changes may be favourable or unfavourable depending on the individuals involved in the relationship. Like in many cohabitative relationships, some black African women appear to experience maltreatment and it can be presumed that the way they cope with their experiences may either empower or disempower them, depending on how they respond to such treatment.

Many critics of African literature argue the case of a sex-determined voice in African writing (Ormerod, Volet & Jaccomard, 1995). Themes such as polygamy, economic practices, abuse, gender attitudes and the perception of power are some of the issues that constantly appear in the work of African writers. Furthermore, Rhode (2003, p. 48) argues that “Christian norms enjoin wives to sacrifice their personal and material interests to male requirements in marriage, where good wifehood and motherhood remain the primary source of women identification.” Women appear to be silenced by cultural and religious prescriptions. These would always dictate women to remain silent in their marriages even though they are not happy.

Getting married or living together appears to be appreciated by partners as it gives them a feeling of security and a sense of identity. Contrastingly, some partners are in a relationship that does not offer them a secure environment and thus, they may live in
misery for the rest of their lives. Lionnet (1993, p. 134) quotes Bessie Head who points out that “[b]lack women have a certain history of oppression within African culture and women’s problems are rooted in custom and tradition.” Thus, it is likely that African women in cohabitative relationships may live a life marked by despair. In addition, African women in cohabitative relationships often appear to be dominated by their male partners. Men appear to be superior while women are seen as inferior, subsequently, they should submit themselves to their men.

This study looks at how African women in cohabitative relationships coped with their experiences and endeavours to establish whether the way in which they cope empowers or disempowers them, as portrayed in ten selected short stories by African women writers, namely Ifeoma Okoye, Tomi Adeaga, Yaba Badoe, Zaynab Alkali, Aminata Maiga Ka, Daisy Kabagarama, Lina Magaia, Promise Ogochukwu, Chika Unigwe and Catherine Obianuju Acholonu.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Studies in literature have been done regarding the treatment of women. Akawa (2014), Mufune (2014) and Rhode (2003) have looked at the gender and the political empowerment of women in Africa. Some studies redress issues of inequality amongst races and gender. “The women’s subjection to forms of social control that further marginalise them does not, however, succeed in annihilating their need for recognition and personal agency, even if this only manifests itself in dramatically violent acts” (Lionnet, 1993, p. 135). According to Ogunyemi (1985, p. 67), “[b]lack women are
disadvantaged in several ways: as blacks they, with their men, are victims of a white patriarchal culture; as women they are victimised by black men; and as black women they are also victimised on racial, sexual, and class grounds by white men.” All African women in cohabitative relationships may not cope in the same way with their experiences. Some may speak out whereas others may remain voiceless and become submissive to their partners.

Russell (2003) cited by Moore and Govender (2013) emphasises the role that ‘culturally specific rubrics’ still play in shaping domestic practices in Africa. The experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships vary. From the literature reviewed, it seems that the way in which African women cope in cohabitative relationships, as portrayed in the short stories by black African women writers in English, have not been investigated to establish whether they are empowered or disempowered.

Equally, it appears that much of the experiences of African women in cohabitative relationships have focused more on West Africa, particularly in Igbo society in Nigeria. This could be attested in the works of African female writers such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ogundipe-Leslie and Obioma Nnaemeka amongst others. Therefore, this study was concerned with the way black African women in cohabitative relationships cope with their experiences, as portrayed in the selected ten short stories by black African women writers.
1.4 Research questions

The research study seeks to answer the following questions:

a) To what extent do the values and attitudes of a specific society, as portrayed by the fictional characters in the selected short stories, determine how black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships?

b) How do black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships as portrayed in the selected short stories?

c) How is the short story as a genre employed in enunciating the way black African women function in cohabitative relationships?

1.5 Significance of the study

Literature can be a powerful tool to voice the unvoiced and represent the silenced women. Furthermore, literature is a lens through which some African women in cohabitative relationships will find their voices. Therefore, the study contributes to the field of literary research as it investigated how black African women in cohabitative relationships coped with their experiences as portrayed in the selected ten short stories by African women writers. The study contributes to the understanding of feminism and womanism as theories to unpack the way black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships as seen through the lens of literature which mirrors real life situations.
1.6 Limitations of the study

There are many short stories in Africa about African women in cohabitative relationships, but only a small number of these short stories written by black African female writers have been selected for the study. However, the selected ten short stories enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues, such as the empowerment and disempowerment of black African women in cohabitative relationships as portrayed in literature by black African female writers.

Furthermore, instead of just studying one or two novels on this issue, ten short stories gave a greater variety of perspectives. The selected ten short stories were chosen because of the recurring themes about women’s empowerment and disempowerment in cohabitative relationships. This study, however, might be biased to some extent as the postcolonial feminists’ theory seeks to unpack the lies of the Western feminists.

1.7 Outline of chapters

Chapter one was about the orientation of the problem on how black African women function in cohabitative relationships. The statement of the problem is concerned with the way black African women in cohabitative relationships cope with their experiences, as portrayed in the selected ten short stories by black African women writers. The chapter also outlined the research questions, significance of the study and limitations of the study. Chapter two deals with literature review where the term ‘cohabitation relationship’ is defined, the theoretical framework such as postcolonial and postmodern feminism, womanism and stiwanism are explored. Furthermore, the chapter reviews the
values and attitudes of a society, experiences of African women in cohabitative relationships and it finally looks at the short story genre.

Chapter three is about the methodology used in the study. The study employed a qualitative study, whereas a case study is designed by looking at the case of how African women function in cohabitative relationships, as portrayed in selected ten short stories by African women writers of literature.

Chapter four presents the data presentation and analysis. The study used both critical discourse analysis and content analysis as techniques in interpreting texts. Chapter five presents the discussion, recommendations and conclusion of the study.
CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

First of all, this chapter provides a theoretical background of the study. Theoretical frameworks, such as postcolonial and postmodern feminism, womanism and stiwanism are presented in order to establish the broad knowledge of literature on the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships. Furthermore, the literature on the values and attitudes of a society and also the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships are reviewed. Finally, the chapter looks at the short story as a genre in employing the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships.

Theories are notions arising out of research which can be put to test to help the broader understanding of the topic under study and where possible, help to fill the gaps that may have been omitted in the previous studies of the same topic. Therefore, this chapter explores theories such as feminism in the postcolonial and postmodern era, womanism and stiwanism. The study will also give a broad overview of the experiences of African women in cohabitative relationships and look at the values and attitudes of a specific society to establish whether such values and attitudes may have any influence on the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships. A specific society is referred to as the characters in relation to each selected short story. Gradually, this
chapter will navigate the strengths and weaknesses of the short story as a genre in
enunciating the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships.

2.1.1 Definition of cohabitation relationship

Cohabitation relationships may mean different things to different people. To some
people, cohabitation is perceived from co-residential dating to an alternative marriage
and it could “lead to ambiguity over relationship durability and expected obligations
between partners, which is compounded by the lack of rituals that surround moving
together” (Baker & Elizabeth, 2013, p. 262). Others, like Berenson (2011, p. 289) define
cohabitation as “both married and unmarried couples that reside together and who
maintain sexual relationships.” Moore and Govender (2013, p. 627) stress that the
‘living with a partner category’ either married or living with a partner is commonly
referred to in the literature as cohabitation.

A study by Baker and Elizabeth (2013, p. 254) found that “cohabitation encourages
couples to remain in relationships that may not be fully satisfying yet are more complex
to end, and facilitates a ‘slide’ into marriages that are less rewarding and more at risk of
dissolution.” From the definitions above, the term ‘cohabitation’ is referred to as
partners who have both undergone or not undergone a marriage ceremony, as long as
they share sexual relations.
2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Feminism

Feminism is mainly associated with women’s rights and it is usually defined as an active desire to change women’s position in society in order to improve the quality of their lives. Masule (2014) defines feminism as a philosophy that seeks to remedy the injustices and imbalances that women undergo at the hands of a patriarchal society. Humm (1992), as cited in Ebunoluwa (2009, p. 227) states that “the word feminism stands for a belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to transform society.”

Equally, Cuddon (1991, p. 338) sees feminism as “an attempt to describe and interpret (or reinterpret) women’s experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature.” Furthermore, Sircar (1995, p. 11-2) believes that “[f]eminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of colour, working class women, poor women, lesbians, old women, as well as white and economically privileged heterosexual women.”

By looking at both definitions of feminism above, it is clear that feminism rotates primarily around women’s experiences in society which could be a perspective of feminists towards their social interpretation. Ebunoluwa (2009, p. 228) remarks that apart from being a biological category, feminism also considers gender as a social category, and “therefore feminists share the view that women’s oppression is tied to their sexuality.” Moreover, Rhode (2003, p. 33) argues that “the female subjectivity lies not in feminity as a privileged nearness, the body or the unconscious, but rather in that
political, theoretical self-analysing practice by which the relations of the subject in social reality can be re-articulated from the historical experience of women.”

Feminists are of the view that patriarchy in all aspects of life is viewed as the source of social inequalities and injustices which are likely to affect the lives of women. Thus, feminists are seeking to remove all the barriers to equal social, political and economic opportunities for women. Feminists reject the notion that a woman’s worth is determined by her gender and that women are inherently less intelligent than men. In a nutshell, feminism is a way of life, a value system and a means of explaining the world and the place within women’s experiences at the hands of a patriarchal domain. Feminism recognises the diversity of women’s needs and experiences.

2.2.2 Womanism

Many black women see feminism as inadequate, as it appears to represent only the Western woman. Therefore, feminism birthed womanism or black womanism. The term, African womanism, coined by Alice Walker in 1983 in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist prose*, establishes aesthetics for the black female literary experience and sheds light on why many African American women prefer the term womanism over black feminism. Hence, womanism is not new, and much has been written about womanism as an African ideology by scholars such as Ogunyemi (1985), Dove (1998), Aegerter (2000) and Collins (2001). Therefore, the researcher used the term as an Afrocentric approach that many African female authors have used in their short stories since the 1980s, as a black woman’s stand point in the postcolonial era. Walker, as
excerpted by Ebunoluwa (2009, p. 229) gives a broad definition of a womanist when she says:

A black feminist or feminist of color ... A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist ... loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless, womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

According to Ogunyemi (1985, p. 72), black womanism is “a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom.” Ogunyemi (1985) further accounts that black womanism is more concerned with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks more than whites. Aegerter (2000, p. 67) asserts that womanism is “a philosophy that has wholeness and healing for all Black people.” Dove (1998, p. 535) illustrates that “African womanism brings to the forefront the role of African mothers as leaders in struggle to regain, reconstruct, and create a cultural integrity that espouses the principles of reciprocity, balance, harmony, justice, truth, righteousness and order.” African women who embrace feminism feel the absence of a definable framework for
their needs as individuals. As a result, Weems (1994), as cited by Ebunoluwa (2009, p. 229) defines Africana womanism as:

… an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is foregrounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between mainstream feminist, the black feminist, the African feminist and the Africana womanist.

Collins (2001) contends that the use of womanism sidesteps an issue central to many white feminists, especially, by finding ways to foster interracial cooperation among women, although white women are seen as part of the problem that black women experience. Moreover, Collins (2001) reveals that womanism appears to provide an avenue to foster stronger relationships between black women and black men. Unlike womanism, many black women view feminism as a movement that at best is exclusively for women only, excluding men and, at worse, attacking or eliminating men from the women’s paradigm. Womanism is seen as a doorway for black women to address gender oppression without necessarily attacking their black men.

From the broader explanation of womanism, it is clear that womanism is a theory that looks at a woman who appreciates other women, their culture, emotions, strength and laughter, but also a woman who loves men sexually or non-sexually. “Womanism thus furnishes a vision where the women and men of different colors coexist like flowers in a garden yet retain their cultural distinctiveness and integrity” (Collins, 2001, p. 11). The
researcher concurs with Collins (2001) and sees womanism as a theory that does not separate men and women but sees both sexes as contributing to a whole society. Womanism is concerned with the survival of the entire people and, at the same height, allows both black men and women to interact in a non-threatening environment. Womanism is aware of feminism but spreads the experiences of black women from white women.

In feminism, there is a binary position with men and women on the opposite sides while in womanism men and women complement each other. However, it is essential to extract womanism from feminism as womanism recognises the oppression of black women based on racial, classist and sexist oppression whereas feminism is chiefly concerned with sexist oppression. Black women’s culture accounts for the centrality of family as well as community. Therefore, it is clear that the needs of black women vary from those of white women. Above all, one may conclude that womanism is a theory advocated to accommodate African problems as experienced by African women or discussed by African female authors.

### 2.2.3 Stiwanism

“STIWA” allows Ogundipe-Leslie (2007) to personally discuss the needs of African women in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in African indigenous cultures for the social being of the African women.

Furthermore, Stiwanism concerns primarily the contemporary social and political transformation of African women in Africa. Ogundipe-Leslie (2007) points out that what African women want is social transformation and not necessarily rivalling with men or reversal of gender roles. African women want to build a harmonious society where both genders have a social responsibility in transforming the livelihood of the entire African society. It appears that African scholars, particularly women, find the word ‘feminism’ hegemonic and threatening and that it lacks the authenticity of an indigenous African tradition. Thus, black African women writers are advocating and formulating ideologies that synthesise an African theory to locate the oddity of women of the African diaspora – narrating their own experiences. In other words, African female writers seem to have a desire to define themselves without being limited of what they are thinking of being a black African woman.

2.2.4 Postcolonial and postmodern feminism

Postcolonial and postmodern theories have been used by contemporary African writers since the 1980s and 1990s under the influence of Edward W. Said. According to Baldick (2008, p. 265), “[p]ostcolonial theory considers vexed cultural-political questions of national and ethnic identity, ‘otherness’, race, imperialism and language, during and after the colonial periods.” It is clear that postcolonial and postmodern come into
practice after many African nations obtained independence from European powers. Therefore, the two terms are not new to contemporary African writings. Anyinefa (2000, p. 7) posits that “postcolonial theories were born in the Western, Anglo-Saxon world and therefore can be resented as ‘inauthentic’ in their application to African literature.” However, Quayson (2007, p. 647) states that “postmodernism is related to a literary and philosophical tradition of representation which could be said to have its own peculiar historical and social trajectory in Western thought.”

According to Smith (1980), as cited by Garritano (2000, p. 58), “[p]ostmodernism helps us to begin to envision alternative feminisms which are not bound to the binary split between same and other, not aimed at reinstalling the female body into the male economy.” Many of the postcolonial female authors started writing about the issues affecting African women in English and French since the 1980s. Postcolonial African female writers such as Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Flora Nwapo, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Mariama Ba and others represent female voices and present more serious challenges than the First World societies for academic feminism through literature. First World societies for academic feminists are referred to as Western-trained academics. Often, black African female writers emphasise the images of African women as either maltreated or abused by their husbands and fathers, a situation that leads black African female authors to speak out for other women through short stories or novels.

Mangena (2013, p. 8) claims that “[t]he Africana Womanist enters the postcolonial discourse by weakening the orientalist discourse of Western Feminism and exposes its
inadequacies by attempting to include what it has tended to leave out.” One of the luminaries of postcolonial theory, Spivak (1990) accuses the First Third academic feminists (see § 2.2.4, para 3) of a double standard by ignoring, reducing or explaining away the otherness of women. Spivak appears to oppose the First Third World by not allowing Westerners to speak about African issues. Spivak (1990) strongly argues that “we will not be able to speak to women out there if we depend completely on conferences and anthologies by Western-trained informants” (Spivak, 1990, p. 9). African writers should write the experiences of Africans as mirrored in the real world of being an African man and woman in different African societies.

Moreover, Sircar (1995, p. 11) adds that “Western feminists failed to deal with the specificity of the issues that directly affect the black woman and have also failed to recognise the active part played by the white woman in the oppression of the black woman.” Amos and Parmar (1984) argue that Western feminists’ perspective does not speak to the experiences of black women. However, where it attempts, it is often from a racist perspective. It is likely that the Western feminists are increasingly speaking much of the African women’s experiences, albeit not experiencing it themselves. Sharing the same sentiments, Zongo (1996, p. 176) states that “[t]he knowledge of explosion in the West has equally left a legacy of misinterpretations, misrepresentations, and outright distortions of African cultures and cultural productions”. Suleri (1992) argues that to claim authenticity, only blacks can speak for blacks because a black feminist can adequately represent the lived experience of that culture. However, speaking for one’s own culture and experience can lead to African women being biased.
It appears that the First Third academic feminists are taking up the empty spaces they imagine are left by silenced African women. However, being silent is also a voice and a means of speaking whereby African female writers are trying to bring the silent voice to the fore through representing other women in fictions. Kamara (2001, p. 214) cites Ogundipe-Leslie (1987) who points out that woman writers have two major responsibilities: firstly, to tell about being a woman; secondly, to describe reality from a woman’s view, a woman’s perspective. African female writers appear to understand and represent the pain and suffering of other African women, their oppression, experiences and eventually, their problems. Nevertheless, Ogunyemi (1985) emphasises that the black woman writer in Africa and in the United States has finally emerged as the voice of black women and the black race by moving away from black male chauvinism.

Lionnet (1993), however, differs from other scholars when he argues that “feminist critics run the risk of plunging their work into cliché and triviality if they continue merely to focus on how Black men treat Black women in literature” (p. 135). Lionnet (1993) further argues that “[l]iterary works, as the Russian Formalists have shown, produce an effect of estrangement and defamiliarization based on the application or subversion of particular literary conventions, as well as on the exaggeration of familiar scenarios that can produce in readers the shock of recognition” (p. 135). However, it is clear that African feminists do not feel well represented by Western feminists. Therefore, African feminist voices want to give a full account of a life where an African woman epitomises her complexities marked with faith and courage, as well as despair.
Basically, African female authors seem to be aspired to convey a new vision of women’s experiences.

2.3 Values and attitudes of a society

In many relationships between men and women, power surfaces, and many African women accept inferiority while African men accept mastery. Some beliefs that mirror a certain society have contributed to the treatment of African women in cohabitative relationships. The way African women react to their experiences in cohabitative relationships shapes their lives, as it could either empower or disempower them. Umeh (1995) states that the values of the community are passed on through elders. For example, the notion that women are inherently inferior to men underlies the society’s attitude towards the treatment of African women in cohabitative relationships. It is likely that the experiences of African women in cohabitative relationships may be traced in the traditions of a specific society. Some of the traditional practices, recorded by Nwapa, which oppress African women in cohabitative relationships include; polygamy, clitoridectomy, wife inheritance and property disinheritance (Umeh, p. 118).

Noteworthy, the subjection of African women in cohabitative relationships forms of social control such as patriarchy puts them in a marginalised position. Essentially, the actions of the people of any given society catalyse events, and often the fates of other people depend upon the actions of that society. Arndt (2000) claims that the white women in Western societies contribute to other forms of oppression such as the race and class of African women and men. However, the researcher disagrees with Arndt, but
concurs with Bessie Head (as cited in Lionnet, 1993, p. 134) implies that the African women’s problems “are rooted in ancient customs and traditions.” This means that the white woman had already found the Africans’ social and political traditions in existence. In other words, the heavy burden of African customs and traditional practices constitutes the way African women experience life in their relationships. Otherwise, bringing in the whites is a blame game played by players who fail to understand their own history – a history of Africans oppressing themselves.

2.3.1 Men’s values and attitudes in a society

Griffiths (2013) argues that the growth of male power in society is highlighted as the main problem many African women face in cohabitative relationships nowadays. Some African societies codified the rights of men to exercise power over women on the basis of gender. The fact that the male has a superior position to the female positions a man to regard women as inferior human beings. African men monopolise African women with their power, resulting in African women becoming vulnerable, weak and submissive to their partners. In some African societies, it is believed that gender equality does not operate in the traditional society which could relatively snag the social and economic position of African women in cohabitative relationships.

Griffiths (2013) maintains that the use and abuse of African women by African men make other women behave lowly in their society and, at the same time, put women’s position under assault. Buchi Emecheta, in *The Slave Girl* (1980) as cited by Parekh and Jagne (1998) attacks the Igbo man’s insensitivity to women by suggesting that a woman
is a slave to her husband. Emecheta, as cited by Parekh and Jagne (1998) further argues that the society itself also projects women to be slaves of their male children as well as their husbands. However, looking from a different angle, like that of African women, African men are also oppressed by whites. Thus, the researcher agrees with Arndt (2000) who concedes that African men are also oppressed and therefore, when they come home, they further oppress the women as if avenging themselves on their black counterparts. Powell (2008) asserts that the belief of men that once a woman is married she becomes the property of her husband’s community, downgrades African women to always being seen as the possessions of their partners. Powell (2008) further observes the incongruency that after marriage, women are highly valued for the children they reproduce for the husband’s communities.

African women are viewed as subjects of their male partners who are only appreciated for their sexuality. In other words, African women are seen as lesser beings who have to sacrifice their feminity to masculinity. However, it is worth mentioning that not all African men take their partners solely as objects for their own sexual satisfaction. There are African women out there who appreciate being in a cohabitative relationship with their partners and who would not want to be separated till death does them apart. This merely means that there are partners in cohabitative relationships who love, care, respect and admire others for whom they are, regardless of their biological sex. Thus, there is no debilitating otherness in such a relationship.
2.3.2 Women’s values and attitudes in a society

Like in all other societies, women’s attitudes and values cannot be ignored. In many traditional African societies, women are regarded as highly visible and influential as the custodians and transmitters of the society’s cultural heritage. In Foriwa (1967), Sutherland, as cited by Wilentz (1992, p. 20) emphasises the women’s role in passing the cultural values and actively revitalise the static traditions and work toward a more integrated modern African society. Wilentz (1992, p. 7) stresses that “[a]s upholders of tradition, women are powerful figures, economically secure and socially vibrant, yet they are limited in their choices by the restrictive cultural milieu”. African women in cohabitative relationships may see their culture and traditions through a positive as well as a negative lens. This means that their culture and traditions are seen as life-giving, but at the same time, a restriction of their rights. It appears that women uphold traditions and practices which may limit their choices and rights as women. In some instances, young women do not speak out because of their fear of, or their resistance to any painful ordeal. Wilentz (1992) claims that sometimes a young woman is silenced by an older woman who warns of the possibilities of disaster if young women disobey their men (p. 7).

On the other hand, though African women are seen as upholders of tradition, they can be the harshest critics of those who do not conform to a conventional role (Wilentz, 1992). Some African female writers appear to ignore the other side of African women’s lives and qualities. Often, the bad side of an African woman may have been overlooked by
some African female authors. Thus, the researcher agrees with Mangena (2013, p. 13) who establishes that “[w]omen are not only victims, they also victimise. Women are not always sources of life, they destroy life and when they do such actions they should not be justified.” It can thus be inferred that Mangena (2013) implies that some women can be bad wives and mothers as well. Some African female writers fail to stress the pain and betrayal of woman-on-woman abuse. For Nnaemeka (1997, p. 19), the oppression of women is not just merely a “masculinist flaw but a woman-on-woman violence which results in hierarchical female spaces that make women victims and collaborators in patriarchal violence.” African women may also act as oppressive agents toward other women. Equally, African women are regarded as the most pitiless in protecting the traditional practices from which they may not benefit.

Although there might be many practices which lead to the way African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships, many females find solidarity amongst others through female bonding. “Female bonding is female solidarity and women-centred networking. Women have always depended upon the positive voices and healing powers of an extended family of sisters - women who instruct, assist and protect other women – for understanding, compassion, empathy, and truth in order to transcend threatening situations and achieve liberation from oppressive forces in their lives” (Umeh, 1995, p. 119). A woman is seen as a unifier and a pillar to lean on.

According to Umeh (1995), in some African societies, women build a strong bond with others where they nurture and comfort one another in different circumstances presented
to them by society and nature. They hold others as partners in trade and as companions in the private space of their homes (p. 119). African women writers, such as Mariama Ba, El Saadawi Nawal and Bessie Head, demonstrate that although African women in cohabitative relationships are confined in painful marriages and sexual relationships, solidarity and friendship among women lessen pain and suffering (Nnaemeka, 1997). African women’s solidarity is seen as a sphere of survival and freedom. “Women appropriate and refashion oppressive spaces through friendship, sisterhood, and solidarity and in the process reinvent themselves” (p. 19). However, not all find comfort in others, as some women appear to be the cause of another’s misery.

### 2.4 Experiences of African women in cohabitative relationships

Although women share some common interests and face some common enemies, such commonalities are by no means universal, but are interlaced with differences, even with conflicts. Therefore, African women in cohabitative relationships may not react in the same way to their experiences. The way African women cope with their experiences from their relationships varies, depending on the culture and traditions of the partners in a specific relationship. As partners, both African men and women in cohabitative relationships are in bondage and living in two different cultures. This situation may bring tension between the two partners.

From a womanist point of view, it is clear that both men and women experience life differently. According to Davies (1986, p. 242), “[t]he condition of women in African society is fraught with contradictions, tensions and oppositions, most arising out of the
colonial domination of Africa, others intrinsic to the organisational structures of particular societies.” Moreover, Davies (1986) lists some features which make for an African woman’s independence and control, such as her economic freedom and motherhood which contribute to an African woman’s repression and submission (p. 242). Similarly, Filomina Steady (1981) in her introduction to The Black Woman Cross-Culturally, as referred to by Davies (2007, p. 562), gives an extensive discussion on what makes the black women’s situation difficult. Steady lists a lack of choice in motherhood and marriage, oppression of barren women, genital mutilation, forced marriage and other forms of oppression in some societies which afflict the lives of African woman in cohabitative relationships.

In addition, extended families, such as the in-laws, extreme poverty, infertility, a lack of choice by young African women, rape, kidnap, patrilineal, amongst others, are some of the plights that contribute to the oppression of African women in cohabitative relationships. In Igbo culture, for example, polygamy, rigid sex roles, son preference and a glorification of motherhood all execute powerlessness among African women in cohabitative relationships. In many cohabitattive relationships, African women do not object to the power (particularly of the man) in the relationship. Thus, it turns out to be almost impossible for a female to wield any considerable influence and authority. Kamara (2001) observes how African women in cohabitative relationships are hampered by their ordeals, and stresses their inability to defend themselves against the complexities that befall them. In some instances, African women in cohabitative
relationships are shackled by their own negative self-images, and their reactions to their treatment are often self-defeating.

Ba (2008, p. 32) argues that accepting their vulnerabilities, some women, including herself, the researcher believes, “bend their heads and, in silence, accept a destiny that oppresses them.” In addition, many may react with fear and may end up pleasing their partners. In the end, many become victims of the sad fate, a route they have chosen, namely, to remain silent in order not to compromise their marriages. Sambo (1991, p. 55) notes that the “most dramatic oppositions by women are from societies where status differentials of men and women are so small that it is not unthinkable for women to challenge male authority.” Furthermore, the failure of partners in cohabitative relationships to bring to the fore the issues that agitate them, may lead to partners living in threatening relationships. When African women in cohabitative relationships remain silent about their agonies, men are mostly seen as a threat rather than a source of support.

Studies about African women in relationships concentrated on the lives of African women as mothers, wives and lovers but left out the sexual aspects of their lives. For example, one may learn about an African woman’s sex life but still remain ignorant of her social and economic life. By observing the plight of the African woman in cohabitative relationships, Sircar (1995) arrives at the conclusion that “in African societies women have a position like that of a domestic animal” (p. 21). This clearly
indicates the inferiority of the African woman in a cohabitative relationship, as well as being an object and the property of her male partner.

In postulating the ethical primacy of human freedom and African women’s liberty in postcolonial realities, Nuruddin Farah (1992), as referenced by Parekh and Jagne (1998) investigates the sociopolitical issues and nature of freedom of African women in relationships, especially in Somali culture. For example, in his novel *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), Farah reveals how African women in cohabitative relationships are trapped in positions of subservience as objects of male desire. Thus, Farah (1992) in Parekh and Jagne (1998) reveals that:

> Women are not able to escape from their sub-ordinate positions: their efforts to evade authoritarian roles of the traditional patriarch are thwarted by the kinship practices of the nomadic clan-families, which deny women individual rights. Women are the property of the patriarch, who has the exclusive right to arrange their marriages and to settle their bride price. The situation of women is exacerbated by the constraints of the traditional Islamic law, which affords women limited status and few legal protections. The public and private sites of negotiation available for women, which might enable them to subvert the male social hierarchy, are confined within traditional family structures that end up suborning women’s realities (p. 177).

It is clear that black African women in cohabitative relationships experience domestic power. The society, comprising men who are supposed to love and care for their female
partners, tends to be authoritarian. It is in such a society, like the Somalian culture given above, that men control women’s bodies by enforcing social practices like polygamy and genital mutilation. Such a society is seen as a place where African women in cohabitative relationships may never live at peace. African women in cohabitative relationships are mostly dominated by male authority and chauvinist practices. However, there might be domination from a female angle, but such cases are rare in most relationships. Basically, when one looks at the various points of view highlighted from the narration above, it is clear that the plight of an African woman in a cohabitative relationship is often desperate.

2.4.1 Marriage

Marriage is usually the legal union of a man and a woman which allows them to live together and have children. Therefore, marriage is seen as an important institution in many African societies. Although marriage is often a union between two individuals, in many African societies, it is primarily a union between two families. As a result, African marriages are arranged between two families. Nwapa (2007, p. 526) describes marriage as “a sacred bond that transcends a simple union between a man and a woman; it is a bond between two families.” In exploring Nwapa’s Efuru (1966), Wilentz (1992) affirms that the choosing of a husband or wife in Africa is a lengthy process which involves not only the two lovers, but the entire extended family.

Wilentz (1992) thus asserts that marriage is ‘an alliance’ between two families instead of two people (p. 9). At the same time, Wilentz (1992) has observed how girls object to
their families and traditions, by rather choosing a husband themselves, without worrying about the consequences. Despite opposing the traditions, many who married without the families’ consent, end up in situations of disaster.

Similarly, Dolphyne (1991, p. 2) reiterates that “when a young man decides he wants a particular woman for his wife, he tells his parents about it, and it then becomes the parents’ responsibility and that of elders of the extended family to ask for the woman’s hand from her parents.” The researcher agrees with Dolphyne as this is so done to ensure the stability of a marriage. Like Wilentz, Dolphyne (1991) also emphasises that the success of a marriage depends on the considerable interests of the two families. Otherwise, he adds “several occasions such as child-naming ceremony, a wedding, a funeral, during which the two families will have to interact, may very well become a serious source of irritation and conflict that may result in the breakdown of the marriage” (p. 2). The researcher agrees with Dolphyne, because even today both educated young men and women in love would persuade their parents to accept the union. Where parents do not agree to the union, the young couples often opt to go to a marriage register against their parents’ consent.

Dolphyne (1991) tells of how African young men and women living in Europe and elsewhere outside their country, would not usually marry until such a time that the man’s parents have asked for the woman’s hand from her family. Generally, young African men and women studying abroad fall in love with their European mates and would eventually marry without their parents’ wishes. However, there are those African
students who know it well that marrying a foreigner is regarded as a taboo in some families. Hence, such young men and women have to persuade their parents to agree to the relationship. Therefore, upon return, those who have married without their parents’ formal consent will ask for a marriage ritual to be performed as a blessing of the marriage.

Ama Ata Aidoo’s play *The Dilemm of a Ghost*, (1965) as illustrated by Parekh and Jagne (1998), accentuates the unsurmountable problems of the educated African male returning home with a foreign lover. In the play, Eulalie, an African-American meets Ato in the United States and marries him. Both return to Ghana to Ato’s family. However, Eulalie is not accepted by Ato’s family until after standing her ground. Ato is finally understood and the union is accepted by her mother. It is clear that every marital union in an African society is primarily a union between two families and not solely between the two individuals.

On the other hand, some young women are forced into marriage by their parents. In her novel *Women are Different*, Nwapa (2007) tells how Agnes becomes a victim of child marriage who is made to marry a man old enough to be her father, while Dora’s husband abandons her and her five children. In the same book, Mark leaves Rose after exploiting her and abusing her emotionally by leaving her at home alone to attend to his mistresses. Dora has to carry the burden of caring for her children, when her husband returns after a long absence, she refuses to renew the relationship after she has acquired strength and economic independence.
In some cases, when the husband dies, the extended families may inherit all that the couples had together, leaving the widow bare-handed. The extended family may inherit the couple’s house, cars and any other valuable assets, leaving the widow and her children catching the sun. Driven by poverty and sometimes by the extended family’s inheritance, some African young women have no choice but to accept prearranged marriages by their parents for their survival and the provision of their immediate needs. Immediate needs include a roof under which to live and a husband to provide for basic needs such as food and security. Marriage, in this case, does not become a matter of choice, but a forced or prearranged union which may result in unhappiness for both the partners involved in the relationship.

Unlike men, many African women in cohabitative relationships seem not to find happiness in their marriages. Male partners appear to have their desires fulfilled by their female partners. It is likely that marriage does not work as favourably as expected. It is also true that marriage is not always as smooth as some may expect it. The researcher concurs with Ba (2008) who asserts that marriage reflects differences in character and the capacity for feeling.

### 2.4.2 Polygyny

Polygyny is a Greek word referring to a man who marries more than one wife. Nnaemeka (2007, p. 574) explains the originality of polygyny, that is, “polygyny comes from two Greek words: *poly* (many) and *gyne* (woman or wife). Nnaemeka (2007) considers polygyny as having possible two meanings – “many women” or “many wives”
(p. 574). Stone (2006) as cited by Anyolo (2008, p. 2) points out that “polygyny is the situation in which one man is married and involved in sexual relationships with a number of different women at one time.” Polygyny is practiced in many African societies, unlike in the West where a Western man may marry one wife (monogamy), yet, he may secretly keep mistresses.

For the purposes of this study, the term polygyny will be used forthwith. Polygyny and polygamy have been used interchangeably, but the two words have different concepts. Although polygamy is used, it is not correct because in African culture, it is usually polygyny. Polygamy is the practice of having more than one wife or husband at the same time. It is a western tradition and a feminist term related to Christianity and it does not fit in womanism and stiwanism contexts. From a feminist point of view, polygamy is demeaning because it is used to discriminate, disadvantage and disempower black African women. To feminists, marriage is a legal agreement where partners have to sign a legal paper to accept the union. Polygamy is also seen as a criminal offence and it has stigma attached to it. Nevertheless, from both womanism and stiwanism point of view, polygyny is for specific reasons about black African family and even more beneficial than polygamy. Unlike feminists, womanists consider polygynous marriage as a traditional agreement that is accepted by both families and community. There is no stigma attached to it. In many rural traditional communities, having more than one wife was for survival. A woman was not looking for money, but it was necessary to have many children to work in the field. The practice of polygyny was accepted in a rural traditional setup.
Polygyny may have adverse effects on African women in cohabitative relationships, the family and even the society at large. Although the practice of polygyny is legalised in some African countries and communities, religions such as Christianity devalues such a traditional system of marriage. In Namibia for instance, the practice of polygyny operates in a vacuum as it is not recognised by the state’s legislation, unlike the civil marriage. This disadvantages both women and children as they have no legal rights to inheritance and maintenance if the marriage splits. Similarly, the church does not lend assistance to those in polygynous marriages. Still polygyny has been practiced for so long in Africa. Therefore, African states that fail to recognise the practice of polygyny put women in insecure marriages. Nassef (2009) sees polygyny as harmful to all other forms of social development.

In the past, polygyny was introduced to remedy immediate situations, such as widowhood, orphans, barrenness and in cases where a wife has only produced daughters. Such a remedy was done to remove the shame and anxiety of the male’s ego. However, this is not the case nowadays as polygyny appears to be a man’s greed towards women. “Many are the hearts it has broken; the minds it has distracted; the families it has destroyed; and the evils that it has begotten. Many are the innocent who have been victimised by it and many are those it has led to imprisonment” (Nassef, 2009, p. 120). Echoing the same sentiments, Powell (2008, p. 167) states that “women are neglected, exploited, degenerated and indeed made to feel like outsiders.” African women in cohabititative relationships who have to bear the yoke of polygyny are usually at war with their competitors.
In polygynous cultures, women are regarded as the property of their husbands. Polygyny is seen as a “male supreme ideology which makes feminist scholar, Bell Hooks, believes that women are natural enemies” (Powell, 2008, p. 167). The researcher agrees with Nassef (2009) and Powell (2008) that polygyny is the woman’s worst enemy and the only devil that creates enemies in many polygynous households. Moreover, it is difficult for a woman to easily accept her husband’s second wife, particularly if the wife is not the initiator in asking for a second wife. Having a co-wife may lead to envy, revenge and trigger a situation that birth disunity among members of the same family.

Nassef (2009) regards polygyny as brutality and selfishness which ruins a man’s character. Some women interviewed by him divulged that when a competitor, (a new wife) is brought in the home, it clearly indicates that there was no true love in the relationship as it used to be before marriage. Among the women interviewed by Nassef (2009), one woman expresses that it is painful to have a partner and a competitor for one’s husband. “When a woman is doomed to bear the catastrophe of her husband’s second marriage, her joy disappears, and in its place burns the flames of envy, weakening her body and planting the seeds of evil inside her” (Nassef, 2009, p. 121). Likewise, it is not uncommon to read and hear tales of a woman poisoning either her husband or her co-wife or the son or daughter of the other wife, consequently destroying the family.

Moreover, The Namibian Newspaper (2015, February 27) carried an article on a certain African president’s fourth wife suspected of poisoning her husband. Thus, it is clear that
even the upper class of a society practice polygyny. According to Thamm (2015), the president’s fourth wife was suspected of attempting to poison her husband and was banned forthwith from the president’s residence. Like many other African men, the said president is also in polygynous relationships and the attempts to poison him by his fourth wife could probably be established as a result of envy or revenge. Often, older wives are degraded and their hearts broken, as they are regarded as less beautiful than the new wife. Old wives are deceived by being put in full control of the house and being the guider for the young or new wives – their competitors.

In contrast, Emecheta (2007) sees polygyny as liberating to the woman, rather than inhibiting her, especially when the woman is educated. Polygyny is seen as encouraging an educated woman to value herself and continue updating her career, as well as socialising with her friends outside her marriage. This implies that polygyny gives her the freedom not to worry about her husband as the co-wife/wives are looking after him. Nnaemeka (2007) insists that the practice of polygyny accords African women in cohabitative relationships the sharing of child care, economic and emotional support, friendship as well as sisterhood, among the co-wives. Furthermore, Nnaemeka (1997, p. 167) further argues that “African women who are in polygynous marriages are not morons or powerless, exploited, downtrodden victims.” Nnaemeka (1997) claims that many of the African women in polygynous marriages are intelligent, successful, highly nurtured in their education and independent. It thus appears that they choose polygynous marriage as being good for them.
Similarly, Dolphyne (1991) relates that polygyny, at least, gives equal status to co-
wives, although the senior wife usually commands respect, whereas the newest wife is
the most favoured one by the husband. However, the researcher argues that polygyny
only liberates educated women but leaves out the uneducated women. Many African
women in polygynous relationships live in remote areas and many are uneducated.
Henceforth, polygyny will hardly liberate uneducated African women in cohabitative
relationships. Many of these uneducated women are usually occupied with household
chores such as cultivating the field, cooking, cleaning the house and attending to the
children daily.

Life continues without even taking a holiday to visit friends and families. The only
freedom an uneducated African woman has is probably when she is relieved to go back
to her father’s house after she has either become old or less beautiful or suspected of
witch-craft in the relationship. Yet, being relieved or taken back to her father’s house is
a sign of selfishness on the man’s side and humiliation on the woman’s side. This is
similar to Ogundipe-Leslie, who in her poem titled “Ageing Woman” (1995), as referred
to by Parehk and Jagne (1998) resents a situation where men only adore women of a
young age and says that their attraction declines with age. Once an African woman has
aged, the husband may opt to find a second wife. This is an indication that the aging
woman was just primarily an object for satisfying the man’s sexual appetite. However,
not all African men see their wives in the light of satisfying their sexual needs but rather
as partners for life who do not need to worry about their ages. Without considering
ageing, some African men have taken their African women in their own right.
2.4.3 Barrenness

“As elsewhere, marriage amongst Africans is mainly an institution for the control of procreation. Every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full” (Ngcobo, 2007, p. 532). Sociologist, Ada Mere, (25, April 1984) in an interview with Wilentz (1992, p. 11) expresses that “[i]n a pro-natalist society, marriage is the expected end; when procreation doesn’t happen, that woman has failed an essential life goal.” Wilentz (1992) observes that no matter how good a marriage is, it will remain nothing to the society, unless there are children to show the fruits of that particular marriage (p. 11).

Sharing the same view, Sircar (1995, p. 169) infers that “[i]n African culture as in India, barrenness is perhaps the worst affliction (even crime) a couple can endure (or commit), and it is always attributed to the woman.” Dolphyne (1991) maintains that a woman is expected to have children in order to prove her womanhood. Dolphyne (1991) further says that “the respect and status that motherhood confers on a woman is greater than that conferred by marriage per se” (p. 16). Nwapa (2007) asserts that the greatest pain a woman faces in the world is her inability to bring forth a child from her womb. Nwapa (2007) continues that the desire to become pregnant is an overpowering one, therefore, the woman is ready to do anything possible to have a child, whether single or married (p. 531). African women in cohabitative relationships are likely to respond with negativity if they are denied motherhood.
In all the arguments above, it is clear that the primary purpose of marriage is to procreate, and that marriage is not marriage if it bears no children. Some African women in cohabitative relationships are preoccupied with agonies such as infertility, child-rearing and procreation. Moreover, in the traditional African society, barren women are exposed to misery, pain as well as humiliation, for failing to bear a child. Delgado (1997) contends that women who are barren are seen as denying men children, and are at risk that the husband may either stop supporting her, or take another woman. In Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), as referred to by Ibrahim (1997, p. 156), Nnu Ego is humiliated when her husband told her that his “precious seed” cannot be wasted on a barren woman. She is furthermore made to believe that it is her fault for failing to conceive. More painfully, she is reminded of her barrenness and assigned to nurse the second wife’s child, whereas the latter is kept sexually busy by their husband. For partners in cohabitative relationships, barrenness is seen as a curse and a shame to a man since he cannot possibly impregnate his wife. Nonetheless, a woman is usually blamed for not conceiving regardless of the difficulties that both partners might have.

Childless African women in cohabitative relationships may feel pain for their inability to conform to society. In some cases, some African women may think that they are cursed not to have children whereas others may think that God has stripped them of the greatest blessing and joy of being a mother. To some extent, a childless African woman in a cohabitative relationship may go the extra mile to look for a traditional healer to cleanse her in order for her to procreate. Some might look for an old woman believed to be a midwife who might cleanse her and, where possible, provide some herbs to cleanse her
womb. It is however, important to note that the inability to procreate is not a failure of only the woman, as men are also sometimes sterile. Nonetheless, the researcher believes that the inability to procreate should rather be seen as one of the many accidents that happen in nature. Such accidents are beyond human control and therefore, childlessness should not amount to a tragedy.

Ngcobo (2007) notes that in many instances, people do not share the couple’s agony but rather poke fun at them. In fact, instead of giving support and sharing the couple’s agony, some women will establish gossip groups about the couple’s fate. The couple’s agony may be negatively spread like fire to the whole village, which may shun them. On the contrary, Roberts (1996), establishes that through gossiping, it is easy to help other women who are experiencing difficulties in their daily lives. However, the researcher will only agree with Roberts when such gossip is positive, aiming to help those who needed assistance in reinforcing group solidarity. Many women are believed to have a sense of belonging to a social group with a common history, traditions, as well as shared standard behaviour. Nonetheless, gossip, like Roberts (1996) notes, is feared and ruins reputations (p. 208). Nwapa, in her novel *Efuru* (1966) portrays an African woman who is childless, who reacts positively to her barrenness; in return she attains high respect in her society. She believes that childlessness is not the end of the world. Despite her barrenness, her reaction empowers her as she chooses not to be silenced, but to continue playing her motherly role in the society.
2.4.4 Economic/financial issues

Economic independence in many social aspects guarantees freedom of financial dependence. Nowadays, many African women have gained access to education and are in professions such as teaching, nursing, clerical work, psychology, law, engineering and many others. “African women enjoy varying degrees of economic independence, despite social and cultural norms that put them under the patriarchal authority of men, as husbands” (Sircar, 1995, p. 29). Although African women may want to compete with their male counterparts in economic, political and social spheres, many men still pride themselves as being the only breadwinners of the family, no matter how small or big his financial standing is. Eagleton (1997) argues that while a few female contributors have stressed the importance of women being equal to men socially, professionally and economically, the majority have emphasised that a woman’s place is in the home.

In addition, an African woman is regarded as someone who does not need to climb the economic ladder no matter how schooled she is. Eagleton (1997, p. 231) argues that “the placement of African women in the kitchen and in mothering puts women in inferior positions in many African cultures.” Therefore, those who stand up against the kitchen and mothering are often regarded as ignoring and distorting the African traditions. Despite African women competing with men economically in various fields of education and politics, some males still take it for granted that men should earn more than women.

Often, partners in relationships have separate incomes which are likely to define their financial obligations. Usually, African women are circumscribed by their husbands to
take up the financial needs of the household while men consider taking up the maintenance part of the household. However, keeping up with the financial needs of the household is expensive, particularly if the husband does not provide the wife with household money. This is because household needs are catered for weekly, whereas maintenance might take place once a year or sometimes there might be no maintenance that has taken place in a year. Mehta (2000) stresses that through economic success, a woman would be self-sufficient and, at the same time, be able to provide for her family. Through economic independence, many African women are able to repossess themselves and shun the myopic view of being marginalised by males.

Traditionally, men had been the sole providers for all economic household activities. Women, as wives, played their domestic roles of caring for the children, taking care of the household while the husbands were at work, and they also ensured that the fields were attended to. However, the issue of income among partners in a relationship may destabilise as some men appear to be in total control of their wives’ wages and it is through such total control that some women become submissive to their partners. For example, in Morocco, men are in total control of their spouses’ hard earned money. Moukhlis (2003) affirms that although women are driven by economic necessity, in Morocco, the men command and decide on their spouses’ earnings. In Zambia, for instance, the husband has much power in controlling the wife’s personal spending. Munachonga (1993) attests that in urban Zambia the wife has no personal spending money and her movements, like going shopping or visiting relatives, are strictly controlled by the husband.
African men appear to ignore the fact that African women’s participation in the labour market is increasing, which secures their economic freedom resulting in the equality of the relationship between men and women. Moore and Govender (2013) argue that paying a high bride-wealth (lobola) to marry an African woman is likely related to some African men experiencing financial constraints which make some of them take control of their wives’ salaries. Some African men employ evil and despicable techniques to deny women their financial rights because of the bride-price (lobola) that men usually pay when asking for a woman’s hand in marriage.

In her book, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta (2007) describes a family in which a woman refuses to take housekeeping money from her husband, knowing that her husband is investing a greater part of his income in alcohol than in buying household and other necessities. El Saadawi (2009) notes that women are framed in boxes and windows, and some are either in support or are rejecting the framed boxes and windows that they are trapped in. Framed in boxes becomes dangerous and problematic too, because one might not know what to do with it. Thus, African women who ignore the maltreatment from their partners are likely to live hard. Traditional social beliefs stating that a man is the breadwinner of the family could probably be responsible for African women’s trouble in their relationships.

Arndt (2000, p. 717) claims that “the way a man treats you if you are independent is different from the way the man will treat you if you are dependent on him.” He continues claiming that the more a woman is self-sufficient, the more there is a certain
respect in the relationship which is seen as very important. However, respect depends on
the individual who does not only regard financial freedom as a ticket to earn respect, but
rather as something that develops mutual respect for partners in the relationship,
regardless of financial standing. However, the researcher differs from Arndt (2000)
because even if a woman is financially independent, a man may still want to have total
control of her finances. Moreover, the woman is likely to be a household slave in
providing for the household necessities while the husband’s money lies idly in his
pocket for his own leisure.

However, not all men tend to overlook the needs of the households. There are men out
there who make sure that, as heads of the family, the house is stocked with all the
necessary basic needs for the family. This does not mean that the woman is either
unemployed or dependent on her husband, but it merely means that the husband wants to
show how responsible he is towards his family. Hence, the wife in this case is not
deprived of her financial rights. It is up to her to use her money in her own interest
without having to be questioned on how she has spent her money, unlike in other
relationships where money usually divides couples.

2.4.5 Family lineage

Family lineage is very important in an African culture. Usually, the family lineage is
seen through the birth of the sons in a marriage. A woman who fails to give her husband
sons is at risk of being either humiliated or replaced by another woman who could bear
sons. In Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), as cited by Ibrahim (1997, p. 156),
Adaku is unable to produce sons, and she is at the centre of humiliation by her husband who taunts her saying, “what type of chi have you got, eh?” Adaku is not protected with her girl children in her marriage, the same marriage that bears the girl children. She is made to feed and educate her children on her own and accept the fact that her children are her only value and hope, who in turn will take good care of her when she is old. In many patriarchal African societies, women play a major role as wives and mothers where their “reproductive capacity is crucial to the maintenance of the husband’s lineage and it is because of women that men have a patrilineage at all” (Davies, 1986, p. 243) citing Filomina Steady. In addition, bearing a son entitles an African woman to more respect from both her husband and his kinsmen as the African woman would be addressed as “Mother of - ” (p. 243). Generally, wives who bear male children secure the patrilinear continuity of their families. However, female children are also valued for the patronage link to their community when they finally marry (Powell, 2008). Children become the property of their father’s communities.

In some instances, a female child who might be favoured by her father, would be asked to remain single in order to bear her father’s children who would take up his name and continue with the paternal lineage. It is obvious that an African man will praise a mother only if she gives him sons. The absence of sons may result in an African woman being regarded as hopeless and suffering at some point. Similarly, extended families, like mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law may be envious of the way their brother or son’s wife lives and would go the extra mile to destroy the couple’s marriage. For example, a woman who is too protective of her brother may attempt to keep the family’s blood by
convincing the son or brother to take her niece as a wife so that the blood stays within the family. This alludes to Ba’s *So Long a Letter*, where a mother (Aunty Nabou) vies to take her niece (young Nabou) to become her son’s (Mawdo) second wife. In succeeding with her plan, she firmly believes that “[b]lood has returned to its source” (Ba, 2008, p. 31).

### 2.4.6 Violence

Both men and women appear to experience violence in their relationships differently, but a study conducted by Spitzberg (2009) on *Aggression, Violence, and Hurt in Close Relationships* finds that women are likely to suffer the consequences more, at least in terms of injury. Some African women are often sexually abused and beaten by their male partners. Some men inflict violence on their partners. Sugarman and Hotaling (1989) as cited by Spitzberg (2009, p. 210) define violence “as behaviour intended to inflict physical harm.” Dobash and Dobash, (1998, p. 4) believe that “violence may encompass verbal abuse, intimidation, physical harassment, homicide, sexual assault and rape.” Emecheta (2007) has in many cases condemned the sexual abuse of women and children. There are cases where girls are kidnapped and forced into marriage, resulting in sexual abuse. In a novel, *Gwendolen* cited by Parekh and Jagne (1998), Emecheta (1989) portrays a minor who is raped by her uncle at the age of nine. She is later forced into a sexual relationship with her father while her mother was away for almost two years. The minor leaves home and as a result of her ordeal, she goes mad; however, “she regains psychological balance through the help of other ‘mothers’” (Parekh & Jagne, 1998, p. 153).
In addition, in April 2014, the world has witnessed how more than 200 young-school going girls from Chibok, in north eastern Borno state, in Nigeria were kidnapped by a notorious Islamists group, called Boko Haram, resulting in them becoming the wives of the militants of Boko Haram. Some of the Chibok girls who escaped from the hands of the militant Boko Haram are failing to tell their ordeals as many are unable to tell what actually happened to them. The researcher would also agree with Mehta (2000, p. 78) who argues that “[t]he raped body is presented as an amputated body that is rendered incapable of voicing its objection/abjection.” In other words, the abused body remains silent in trying to connect to the circumstances that surround the victim’s world in order for the victim to regain self-actualisation. Often, sexually abused victims do not react to imposed subjugation and remain watchers in order to survive sexual abuse. Equally, some African women in cohabititative relationships seem to accept their husbands’ maltreatment, a situation that stereotypically defines African womanhood. It appears that facing the loss of marital security through divorce, puts African women in a vulnerable position when standing up against some maltreatment from their male partners.

Men are regarded as the protectors of their wives, sisters and daughters, a situation that provides security to women. The absence of men, however, increases a sense of insecurity among African women in cohabititative relationships. Yet, some women become victims of the same people who are supposed to offer them security. Women are abducted from their homes; they are systematically raped and also violated in the safety of their homes (Akawa, 2014). All these acts of violence put women in a vulnerable position and they can become subjects of their men.
2.5 Short story genre

Leise (2015, p. 2-3) defines the short story as “a short piece of prose fiction, having few characters and aiming at unity of effect; a piece of fiction that narrates a chain of related events, and a prose narrative that establishes a unified mood to relate an incident involving a few characters often in a single setting.” Short stories appear to have bloomed in the nineteenth century where many African female authors achieved a dominant role in becoming the voice for the voiceless. Rhode (2003, p. 44) emphasises that particular short stories “offer a critique of the treatment of women and expose indigenous patriarchy which uses traditional practices and colonial religious phenomena to oppress and silence women.” Short stories often raise issues of gender and the position of women in a patriarchal society. Usually, the themes of African short stories reflect issues such as rural and urban life, love, culture, religion, family, polygamy, economic, domestic violence and others that are of crucial importance to the status and role of women in many African societies.

Commonly, short stories render a scene, tell a tale, bring a thought or subject and evoke a mood that is related to real life-situations. For Wilentz (1992), short story genre is seen as a vehicle for social change. “The short story is a good laboratory for the examination of feminist concerns of image and style” (Jacobus, 1996, p. 384). In reconstructing social values, many authors, particularly African female authors such as Zaynab Alkali, Ifeoma Okoye, Bessie Head, Flora Nwapa, Promise Ogochukwu and others, see and use the short story genre as the most approachable form to directly reflect African culture.
Similarly, these African women writers use the short story genre in their own voices as a medium to express their own experiences and to relate those experiences to suit the real world. As a result, these writers have helped to redress the monopoly and stereotyped picture of African women that have been depicted by both western and African male writers. Short stories appear to be the most convenient medium for African female writers to transform African societies where patriarchy is overarching.

However, Wilson-Tagoe (2009, p. 188) argues that some narrators tell “a story of displacement, new histories, a heterogeneity of voices and new forms of narration that challenge the monologic discourses of colonial and patriarchy.” One of the strengths of the short story genre is its few characters, usually one to three, who either know each other or are related at some point. Keeping to only a few characters enables the readers to keep the simplicity of the story.

Another strength of the short story genre is that the setting is usually confined to one area: a town, home, village, street or a room. Hence, the writer will not have many venues to describe as scenes are confined to one particular area, which is quite often small. Writers of short stories aim to challenge those past practices that oppressed individuals in Africa and to unify Africans in seeing each individual as a human being who needs respect, love, care and peace. Azodo (1999) points out that a short story wins more hearts of the readers than a novel because its themes and styles have the capacity to mirror a better understanding of the past, present and future experiences by engaging with all Africans.
African writers appear to choose the short story genre because of its ability to express similar social and cultural settings in many African societies. “With the voice of ordinary people, the short story claims to be the legitimate heir of the traditional legends through which knots chronicled community history” (Azodo, 1999, p. 15). Modern short stories narrate how varieties of economic, religious and social conditions relate to colonial times that many African writers, specifically females, reject as situations that put African women in vulnerable positions due to patriarchy. Despite challenging the past, the short story genre is very educative as it allows the audience to learn the morals, values and beliefs of a certain society, gender, race or nation.

Furthermore, short stories are maps that direct African women in cohabitative relationships to a route of freedom: freedom from oppression, freedom to have a voice, freedom to equal rights, freedom of self-definition, freedom of economic power and freedom to be a woman and human.

Short stories, particularly of the authorship of African females, provide the paradigm images and reflections of female experiences with the omission of positive reflection of males as members of a black womanism. In other words, African female writers of short stories seem to stereotype the male tradition as a source of all the social, religious and political difficulties that African women experience. Such stereotyping could clearly be seen in many central themes, such as polygamy, barrenness, patriarchal society and family lineage. This is unlike the African male-authored short stories which are frequently subsumed by public and political themes.
On the other hand, some African female writers of short stories tell their own stories which are likely to deviate from the holistic nature of the experiences being narrated. Besides, telling one’s own story may be biased as the narrator is likely to mirror a positive one-sided part of her experiences leaving out her own negative contributions. This means that the positive contribution of a male is often not appreciated. Another weakness of the short story is its risk of overinterpretation which may generally lead to superficial self-reflection.

2.6 Concluding remarks

African women writers use literature as a powerful medium for communication to reflect the experiences and history of black women. It is likely that their writing was born out of hunger, rebellion and rage to ensure that the black woman’s voice is heard. Moreover, African women writers appear to redress the one-sided stereotype that mirrors how African women are depicted by both Western male and female and African male writers in order to fill the gap formed by their depiction. Both African men and women experience life differently and their reactions to the way they cope with their experiences shape them.

Often partners in cohabitative relationships come from different cultural backgrounds, and the fact that they find themselves in such a relationship may change their lives. Although polygyny is a legal practice in some African societies, some researchers deem it as a vehicle for oppression of women and put them in a vulnerable position, compared
to men in similar relationships. On the contrary, some researchers deem the practice of polygyny as cement that bonds families together.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the literature relevant to this study and provided an overview of the theoretical frameworks, such as feminism, postcolonial and postmodern feminism, womanism and stiwanism. Furthermore, the chapter looked at the values and attitudes of a society and also the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships.

Finally, the researcher explored the short stories as a genre in enunciating the experiences of African women in cohabitative relationships. In the next chapter, the researcher will deal with the methodology applied to the study. For methodology, a qualitative approach is employed and the researcher designed a case study. Furthermore, research questions, population and sample, research instrument, procedure, data analysis, as well as research ethics are also addressed.
CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology and research questions used in this study. The first part of this study looks at the research design and discusses in-depth the research background in which the research design is based. Secondly, the researcher defines the research population and the characteristics of the defined population. Thirdly, the researcher describes the sampling technique, research instrument and the procedure used to collect data. Finally, this chapter gives a more comprehensive description of discourse analysis and how the researcher will employ it in this study. Research ethics is also considered for this study. The following research questions are the backbone of this study:

a) To what extent do the values and attitudes of a specific society, as portrayed by the fictional characters in the selected short stories, determine how black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships?

b) How do black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships as portrayed in the selected short stories?

c) How is the short story as a genre employed in enunciating the way black African women function in cohabitative relationships?
3.2 Research design

Since short stories were chosen to be the centre of the study, the researcher used a qualitative approach by looking at views related to African women in cohabitative relationships as portrayed in literature. “Qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participant in the context perceives them” (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009, p. 12). Qualitative research enables the researcher to investigate and understand the social phenomenon that human beings experience in their social setting.

Engaging in a qualitative research, Creswell (2014, p. 6) sees researchers as supporting and honoring “an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation.” One of the benefits of qualitative research is that through both verbal and nonverbal communication, the researcher is likely to expand his or her understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, without being subjective, the researcher will be in a better position to understand how people make sense of their world and their experiences in the world. People have framed meanings in a uniqueness of the way their society functions and the interaction thereof. Therefore, the researcher chose a qualitative approach to the study in order to understand the context of the themes portrayed in the fictional short stories, and determine the truth, if any because truth cannot be measured, but should be understood.

This study used a critical discourse analysis approach to analyse the data collected in order to establish the portrayal of black African women in cohabitative relationships, as
portrayed in literature by black African female authors. According to Locke (2004, p. 1),
critical discourse analysis is “the systematic analysis and interpretation of texts as
potentially revelatory of ways in which discourses consolidate power and colonize
human subjects through often covert position call”. For Gee (2011, p. 122), “[a] discourse analysis is itself an interpretation, an interpretation of the interpretive work
people have done in a specific context - an interpretation of an interpretation.” A scholar
and one of the founders of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Fairclough (2012, p. 13)
explicitly explains that “Critical discourse analysis is a form of critical social science
grounded to the better understanding of the nature and sources of social wrongs, the
obstacles to addressing them, and possible ways of overcoming those obstacles. ‘Social
wrongs’ he continues, can be understood in broad terms as the aspects of social systems,
forms or orders that are detrimental to human well-being and could in principle be
ameliorated if not eliminated.” Poverty, lack of fair justice, freedom, racism, inequality
and violence amongst others, are examples of social wrongs that may detriment human
beings.

Critical discourse analysis addresses social problems because this type of analysis
reveals and withstands abuse, social inequality, social power and more importantly,
mediates the bondage between the text and society. Society is constructed in a way that
one finds puzzles that need interpretation and explanation. Hence, authors find it vital to
write fictional short stories for investigators to understand how society can be
understood and interpreted through texts that use languages. Equally, language is used
skillfully either to lie, to benefit a certain group, to harm other people or to destroy things like marriages, reputations and institutions (Gee, 2011, p. viiii).

Usually, critical discourse analysis pays attention to views, issues and themes that are expressed in both talking and writings. Henceforth, it is important for a researcher to position himself or herself in a direction that enables such a researcher to understand, and where necessary expose and ultimately be tentative in interpreting the way society is formed. In other words, a society is not constructed in isolation, but society goes hand-in-hand with culture. Therefore, as a researcher, one has to be neutral in interpreting texts. Discourse analysis enlightens how authors arrange their ‘semantic intentions’ and how the readers interpret what they read and the “cognitive abilities that underlie human symbol use” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 6).

Notwithstanding, Bazerman (2012, p. 227) warns that there is a possibility for a researcher to be in awe and “leave the interpreter uncertain whether the produced artifact will evoke the desired meanings and effects”. Similarly, the researcher may struggle to correctly interpret the exact meanings of what the author intends to convey to the readers and when meanings are misinterpreted, more gaps are created for criticism and findings will be meaningless.

The design of this study was a case study, because the researcher was looking at the case of how black African women function in cohabitative relationships, as portrayed in the selected ten short stories by African women writers of literature. Yin (2009) as cited by Edmonds and Kennedy (2013, p. 113) defines the case study as “an empirical inquiry
that investigates a phenomenon within its real-world context, when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident, in which multiple data sources are used.” A case study focuses primarily on expanding an account of a situation that may reveal an understanding of a phenomenon as reflected by participants. A case study is exerted to increase an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon and the meaning for those involved in a case (Henning, van Rensberg & Smit, 2005). Researchers look at the complexity and the real-life situations in which the study occurs in order to determine the relationship of what is reflected in the case.

A case study, however, may be limited to the extent where the researcher is solely left to rely on his or her own intuition and abilities to make own interpretations, which could be biased at some point. Meanings from what the researcher has interpreted may be misinterpreted if the researcher did not critically pick up what the author is trying to convey to readers. Equally, some researchers point out the issues of reliability, validity and generalisation. For example, Hamel (1993) as cited by Merriam (2009, p. 52) observes that “the case study has basically been faulted for its lack of representativeness … and its lack of rigour in the collection, construction, and analysis of the empirical materials that give rise to a study.” Lack of rigour is attached to the drawback of bias which might be introduced by the subjectivity of the researcher and those involved in the study.

Another limitation of case study research, as put by Yin (2009, p. 14), is that frequently “the case study investigator has been sloppy, has not followed systematic procedures, or
has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions.” Despite the limitations, case study, if deeply studied, is likely to give multiple variables resulting in a better understanding of the holistic account of a phenomenon. Stake (2005) in Thomas (2011, p. 11) sees the case study “… not as a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied … by whatever methods we choose to study the case.” Stake (2005) continues saying that “we could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally and by mixed methods – but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on case.”

Hermeneutics allows for a relation of certain incidents to be interpreted, based on a specific culture or a society. Patton (2002) as cited by Merriam (2009, p. 32-4) explains that “hermeneutics provides a theoretical framework for interpretative understanding, or meaning, with special attention to context and original purpose … Hermeneutics offers a perspective for interpreting legends, stories, and other texts … To make sense of and interpret a text, it is important to know what the author wanted to communicate, to understand intended meaning, and to place documents in a historical and cultural context.”

3.3 Population

Population is the entire group that will represent the other part of the group that the researcher wishes to study. Usually, the population consists of the totality of units having specific defined features in common. In many cases, the population is invariably
alike in some significant facets. According to Msweli (2011, p. 63), “[a] population is a group of individuals or entities about whom you wish to generalise the results of your study.” Fox and Bayat (2007) emphasise that population is any group or individuals that share similar characteristics and represent the whole case that is involved in a study.

The population for the study was all African fictional short stories by black African women authors in English, about African women in cohabitative relationships. As previously mentioned in the limitations of the study, the selected short stories were chosen because of the recurring themes about women’s empowerment and disempowerment in cohabitative relationships. In other words, the researcher was looking at the different themes that black African women authors have portrayed in their fictional short stories. The different themes will give an understanding of different perspectives of how the whole situation of black African women in cohabitative relationships manifests or seems in Africa.

3.4 Sample

Maxwell (2005, p. 26) defines sampling as “decisions about where to conduct the research and whom to involve, an essential part of the research process.” Purposive sampling is a sampling method used in qualitative research. The researcher “selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 300). Usually, a sample is drawn from a large population to represent such a population in a smaller size where a researcher stands in a better position to understand the
circumstances surrounding the entire population. In other words, smaller sampling allows the researcher to make broader inferences of the entire population represented.

The sample for the study was ten short stories written by black African women writers from Western, Eastern and Southern African countries on African women in cohabitative relationships. The sample was selected purposively, because the researcher was only looking at how black African women writers of English short stories depict the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships. These short stories were selected because of the different themes they represent. The themes include economic practices, barrenness, polygyny, violence and education, amongst others.

The following African women writers, together with their fictional short stories, formed the sample of this study: Catherine Obianuju Acholonu’s *Mother was a Great Man* (Nigeria), Ifeoma Okoye’s *The Pay-packet* (Nigeria), Zaynab Alkali’s *Saltless Ash* (Nigeria), Aminata Maiga Ka’s *New Life at Tandia* (Senegal), Daisy Kabagarama’s *The Rich Heritage* (Kenya), Lina Magaia’s *Madalena Returned from Captivity* (Mozambique), Tomi Adeaga’s *Marriage and Other Impediments* (Nigeria), Yaba Badoe’s *The Rival* (Ghana), Promise Ogochukwu’s *Needles of the Heart* (Nigeria), and Chika Unigwe’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (Ghana).

Purposive sampling, also known as relevance sampling enables the researcher to select sample texts that might have similar themes, or situations, or genres. Texts are sampled according to their sources, time periods and intertextualities that are used without any significant reading or analysis of any sampled texts (Krippendorff, 2013). A researcher
may choose a case that illustrates certain features and or processes that one is interested in. However, the interests of the researcher should not merely be to take a study for personal interest. The researcher agrees with Silverman, (2010) that purposive sampling demands that researchers think critically about the parameters of the population they are studying and give analysis that reflect the reality of the population. By selecting purposive sampling, the researcher is able to understand, discover and gain insights of the situations under investigation.

3.5 Research instrument

To analyse data, a checklist was developed based on the issues emerging from the literature review. The issues emerging from the literature review are themes that are “broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregating to form a common idea” (Creswell, 2013, p. 302). Themes form part of the building blocks of an analysis that enables the researcher to interpret meanings that are constructed by characters in a particular fictional story or situation.

3.6 Procedure

To collect data, the researcher first had read the selected ten short stories namely *The Pay-packet, Marriage and Other Impediments, The Rival, Mother was a Great Man, Saltless Ash, New Life at Tandia, The Rich Heritage, Madalena Returned from Captivity, Needles of the Heart* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* in depth and then analysed them individually by means of critical discourse and content analysis as processes, in order to unpack the views portrayed by black African women writers in
literature, about how black African women in cohabititative relationships cope with their experiences. “Content analysis is a systematic coding and categorising approach you can use to explore large amounts of existing textual information, in order to ascertain the trends and patterns of words used, their frequency, their relationships and the structures, contexts and discourses of communication” (Grbich, 2013, p. 190). The term content analysis is as old as 60 years where Krippendorff (2013, p. 1) traces it in Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language 1961’s edition where content analysis is defined as “analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated materials (as book or film) through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect.” Krippendorff (2013) further expands his definition of content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 24). Both authors concentrate on the meaning of texts.

By using content analysis, larger texts can be simplified and some attitudes and emotions of power and inequality can be identified as well. Some critics see content analysis as being positivist and also decontextualising in its orientation. Critics have also identified that poor sampling is likely to lead to bias. Both words and meanings that need to be included in the interpretation of texts may be limited.

Firstly, in order to investigate to what extent the values, attitudes and culture of a specific society influence such experiences, the researcher looked at the different scenarios portrayed in different short stories. Secondly, in order to establish how black
African women cope, the researcher compared and contrasted the behaviours as these were portrayed in the different stories. Finally, the researcher looked at how the short story genre was employed in enunciating the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships. The researcher also looked at the different themes portrayed in each short story.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis involves organising data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organising themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation of the data collected (Creswell 2013). Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organising the data (text data as transcripts, or image data as in photographs), for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (p. 180).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher looked at the dialogue between partners in cohabitative relationships, as well as the characters in the short stories that formed part of the society in each story. The researcher particularly paid attention to the interaction between partners in terms of their specific relationship, relationships between their families or friends and relationships between other characters that formed part of the society in the short stories. Discourse analysis is embedded in the social relation of the people involved in a dialogue. For example, one may look at the particular choice of words used in a conversation, as well as the intonations. Equally, elements such as
idioms, phrases, metaphors, similes and some kind of rhetoric are essential in describing, interpreting and explaining a text. Thus, Fairclough (1995) in Thomas (2011, p. 205) is of the opinion that “[t]he method of discourse analysis includes linguistic description of the language text, interpretation of the relationship between the (productive and interpretative) discursive processes and the text, and the explanation of the relationship between the discursive processes and social processes.” Hence, in interpreting a text, the researcher will pay more attention to the choice and actual words used and how such words or phrases are used in order to infer meanings. Likewise, the narrator’s voice will also serve as part of the analysis of this study.

Due to the nature of the research as a literary study, the researcher used critical discourse analysis as a technique in analysing the data. The researcher also used secondary scholarly sources of what had already been written about black African women in cohabitative relationships and the findings were presented in themes emerging from both the literature review and the short stories themselves. The researcher did not change the data or falsify them in any way, and worked against personal bias in the analysis of the data. The researcher ensured that an account as accurate as possible was given in the analysis of the data collected.

3.8 Research ethics

In order to ensure the objectivity and integrity of the research study, the researcher aimed to report the findings fully and did not misrepresent the results in any manner. This study, however, might be biased to some extent as the postcolonial feminists’
theory unpacks the lie of the Western feminists. This means that the depiction of African women by Western feminists have been rejected and seen as a misrepresentation and misinterpretation by black African women writers.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher gave an in-depth background of the research methodology used in this study. The research questions were highlighted to inform scholars of the objectives of the study. The population of this study was defined; it consisted of all short stories by black African women writers in English about African women in cohabitative relationships. Purposive sampling was chosen by selecting ten short stories by African women writers from different African countries. Comprehensive data collection and data analysis details were discussed in this chapter. To ensure objectivity and integrity, the research ethics of this study is also taken into account.

In the next chapter, the researcher will present data analysis from the selected ten short stories by different African women writers in English from different African countries.
CHAPTER FOUR

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to analyse the way black African female authors from different countries portray how black African women function in cohabitative relationships in the selected short stories. The following African female authors, together with their short stories, formed part of the data collected in this study:

Catherine Obianuju Acholonu’s *Mother was a Great Man* (Nigeria), Ifeoma Okoye’s *The Pay-packet* (Nigeria), Zaynab Alkali’s *Saltless Ash* (Nigeria), Aminata Maiga Ka’s *New Life at Tandia* (Senegal), Daisy Kabagarama’s *The Rich Heritage* (Kenya), Lina Magaia’s *Madalena Returned from Captivity* (Mozambique), Tomi Adeaga’s *Marriage and Other Impediments* (Nigeria), Yaba Badoe’s *The Rival* (Ghana), Promise Ogochukwu’s *Needles of the Heart* (Nigeria) and Chika Unigwe’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (Ghana).

The researcher had identified themes pedestalled on specific aspects that emerged from the literature review. The themes were employed to answer the following research questions:

• To what extent do the values and attitudes of a specific society, as portrayed by the fictional characters in the selected short stories, determine how black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships?
• How do black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships as portrayed in the selected short stories?

• How is the short story as a genre employed in enunciating the way black African women function in cohabitative relationships?

Firstly, in order to investigate to what extent the values, attitudes and culture of a specific society influence the way black African women cope in their cohabitative relationships, the researcher investigated the different scenarios portrayed in the different short stories. Secondly, in order to establish how African women cope, the researcher compared and contrasted the different behaviours of the characters as portrayed in the different short stories in relation to themes that emerged. Finally, the researcher looked at how the short story as a genre was employed in enunciating the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships.

4.2 Attitudes

In this section, the researcher present the different scenarios regarding the values, attitudes and culture of a specific society, and how these determine the way black African women function in cohabitative relationships, as revealed in the selected ten short stories.
4.2.1 Attitudes of brothers-in-law

In cohabitative relationships, not only partners may find each other at loggerheads. Family members may contribute to the experience of a woman in a relationship. Often, the in-laws may have a voice (either supportive or opposing the relationship).

Ka’s *New Life at Tandia* (1993) tells a story of young Rokhaya, a traditional village girl who married Baba Kounta at 14. Her life changed after securing a happy marriage with her doctor husband. To Rokhaya, marriage is a bed of roses as her husband spoils her with new clothes and some shoes every month. Baba Kounta is such a husband who every married woman would die for. Once he knocks off from work, he always heads home to meet his wife. Therefore, Rokhaya has no doubt about her husband and she is always willing to be submissive to him as he demonstrates his unconditional love. Baba’s love could be felt even by those close to Rokhaya. For example, Auntie Aisse is heard saying:

> You are lucky to have such a husband and all this comfort. You are the only girl from our village to have married so well. Double your efforts to make your husband happy by attending to the very least of his needs. (p. 40)

It is clear from Auntie Aisse’s observation that many women are in uncomfortable marriages. Auntie Aisse is revealing that many of the women from her village, unlike Rokhaya, are not fortunate enough to have secured a happy marriage. It is likely that it is rare to find a prospering marriage and Auntie Aisse has encouraged Rokhaya to make extra efforts in keeping her marriage shining. Auntie Aisse’s encouragement signifies how a happy marriage should be handled with care, so that no loopholes are created to
destroy the blissful life of partners in the relationship. This means that Rokhaya has to
be ready for submission whenever her husband needs her in order to feel a real married
man. In other words, a happy marriage, according to the society described in this study,
requires a woman to be wholly submissive to her husband.

Rokhaya is excited to hear about the arrival of her brother-in-law, Omar Kounta, who is
coming to visit them from Sudan. To Rokhaya, it is a time to build a bond with her
husband’s relatives, something which every married woman thinks is the best thing to do
in order to strengthen the marriage. She believes marrying her husband includes
marrying his entire family and would not be hesitant to take her role as a married wife
into the entire family. Rokhaya takes the expression of “a married woman is the
scapegoat for all family trouble” seriously (p. 41). Little does she know that her brother-
in-law envies her way of living and is ready to hurt her emotionally. Omar Kounta
decides to overstay his welcome and interfere in the couple’s affairs, ruling his brother’s
house as the master. He believes his brother has made a wrong choice in marrying
Rokhaya and that Baba spoils her too much, something Omar thinks Rokhaya does not
deserve. Omar exhibits his envy:

> Her trunk overflowed with dresses and jewellery; a real waste! He gave her too
much money for the market. What an idea Baba had had – to marry a stranger,
who would do nothing but exploit him to enrich her own family. If he had known
about it, such a marriage – such a misalliance – would never have taken place (p.
42).

Rokhaya is referred to as a stranger, because she is a rural girl married to a man outside
her own group, a doctor, for that matter. There was a time when her father was hesitant
to allow Rokhaya to marry Baba Kounta because he was a modern outsider. Omar, the brother-in-law’s behaviour explicitly tells that a woman is not supposed to be treated well, or to live happily and comfortably in her marriage. It is likely that Baba’s family was not euphoric of the idea of Baba marrying a village girl. Omar believes that Baba has married into a vacuum as his wife does not attend to the household chores, because there are people who are paid to do the household chores on her behalf. There is a cook-boy who does all the kitchen and housework and a neighbour who comes in to wash and iron the laundry.

Traditionally, a man is the provider of his family and the wife is always waiting for providence from her husband. However, Omar deems it strange, or perhaps in his society, a woman does not deserve such treatment. On the other hand, Omar might have grown up in a society where household chores are attended to by the wife, rather than bringing in people to do the housework when the house has a housewife. On the one hand, Omar is an unthankful person because upon his arrival, Rokhaya has been doing her wifely role and treats him with honour. He is treated with a hospitality equivalent to that in a five star hotel. Omar refers to the couple’s marriage as a ‘misalliance’ – an unsuitable marriage. This is possibly because Omar believes that his brother is being exploited by working daily, leaving his wife at home idle and yet, the fruits of his labour are poured on his wife and her family.

Omar is someone who lives the expression, ‘when the cat’s away, the mice will play’ and has a harsh tongue. Tired of his nagging, Rokhaya reverses her guest treatment for
Omar. She no longer treats him as a respected brother-in-law and she suffers from the pain of her brother-in-law, after serving him hot food. Omar shouts at her:

Mean, nasty woman! You want to make me get out by serving red hot food. You must be made to understand that it’s my brother’s money! Everything here belongs to him, and I have the right to benefit from it. Anyway, it doesn’t surprise me that you are so spiteful since your marriage two years ago, you have been unable to give him a child. You’ll never know maternal love, barren woman that you are. (p. 43)

No married woman would take Omar’s lashing tongue lightly. Rokhaya’s life is made miserable by the person who she once thought she could build a strong bond with, but it is the opposite. To Omar, Rokhaya is not a wife but an intruder in his brother’s house. She is considered as inferior, small-minded, annoying and a dangerous person who wants to suck out of his brother’s wealth. It is likely that Omar does not enjoy the good life back home (Sudan), and it could be the reason he has decided to overstay his welcome at his brother’s house because of the hospitality he enjoys. Furthermore, he appears to think that his brother’s wealth should not benefit a stranger, but that he is more entitled to benefit being of Baba Kounta’s blood. Omar humiliates Rokhaya and continues to remind her of her barrenness. Equally, she is reminded that she is worth nothing as all the material goods and any other items in the house are his brother’s. Telling her that “she will never know maternal love”, is an indication that Omar is proud that no child is born by the union of the two partners, because in the end, he will be more entitled to benefit from his brother’s wealth. Rokhaya’s barrenness is seen as a crime by her brother-in-law, forgetting that men can also be sterile. Omar appears to celebrate Rokhaya’s barrenness instead of supporting her.
A woman is often blamed for not conceiving, resulting in being rejected by her in-laws. Omar appears to reject Rokhaya. Strangely enough, the grudges between the in-laws usually happen between sisters-in-law, but in this case, it is a brother-in-law who has a dreadful grudge against his sister-in-law. Brothers-in-law would usually fight for land and property after the death of their brother. They would not mind about what is happening in a relationship, unlike their sisters. Baba Kounta is unaware of the drama in his house as his wife keeps it a secret. If only Baba could be aware of the drama in his house, Rokhaya would not experience the emotional pain (at the hands of her brother-in-law) that she allows to continue. I believe Baba would have eased the situation immediately by either ordering Omar to return home, or to stop insulting or humiliating his wife in his home. Rokhaya keeps silent, a situation that reflects how black African women are most of the time victims who do not react enough to their fates and who become toys in the hands of the men.

When one looks at the behaviour and attitudes of the two brothers, there is clearly a difference. One supports Rokhaya and the other blames her. Rokhaya feels disempowered by being humiliated by her brother-in-law, but with the assistance of her supportive husband, she is empowered. Thus, the experience that may surround a relationship determines the empowerment or disempowerment of a woman in cohabitative relationships.
4.2.2 Attitudes of sisters-in-law

A further issue on the attitudes of a specific society is discussed, where black African women in cohabitative relationships have to deal with the behaviour of sisters-in-law.

Yaba Badoe’s *The Rival* (2006) is a hilarious story in which one witnesses the trials of a good wife who has had enough of her husband’s manipulative sister, and finally decides to stand up for herself. Through her husband’s manipulative sister, Mrs Mensah encounters a fourteen-year old girl who is determined to capture her uncle’s heart, and not in a subtle way. Her husband’s niece dreams of being the queen of her uncle’s household.

Mrs Mensah’s fate starts with a dreadful dream that warns her of the trouble awaiting her in her relationship. She dreams of fruit bats in her garden that ravage her trees until no fruit is left. She sees the dark-winged moths that turn into crows when she hits them with a broom. Being a Christian wife, “she whispered a prayer for guidance, for protection from the evils of the world, the machinations of her enemies. O Lord, let thy will be done, Amen” (p. 76).

The narrator is implying that Mrs Mensah believes in the supernatural. A dream is seen as guidance and a warning to be aware of the society surrounding her. A prayer is a powerful tool to rely on for protection against the evil forces. Like any other religious person, Mrs Mensah uses a prayer as a weapon to defeat the devil that is likely to destroy her marriage that she has nurtured for many years.
A woman, in many African families, is considered the multiplier of a clan. The family’s lineage or survival continues to depend on the fruits of a woman’s womb. Esi, being the only sister of Albert Mensah, manipulates her power skillfully to annoy and destroy her brother’s marriage. Esi has been causing all the trouble in her brother’s house. Esi is an irresponsible young woman who might not know what she wants for her life. She has children; yet, she abandons her children to her brother, leaving Mrs Mensah with no choice but to take care of them. Mrs Mensah becomes tired of caring for the children of an irresponsible and disrespectful sister-in-law.

She has had enough raising four of her children with the addition of two of Esi’s children. In other words, Esi is a dependent woman who sucks from others’ hard work. She does not respect her brother’s wife. But the narrator’s voice speaks volumes about Esi’s attitudes when she narrates that:

The ridiculous woman standing before him was his younger sister; the child he’d played with and cherished after their mother’s death. The child who, at four, had wanted to marry him and, at six, had hated him for sending her to school. At fourteen, she had begged him for a brand-new Singer machine and he had provided it gladly. And at eighteen, leaving her first child in his care, she had declared, ‘Brother, you are my everything. Please care for my child with the same tenderness that you’ve cared for me. (p.79-80)

Esi is irresponsible and would rather place her burden on others’ shoulders. She has left her first child in the care of her brother. Indirectly, Mrs Mensah has to cope with raising Esi’s children against her own desire. Esi has been spoilt so much that she cannot accommodate the changes in her brother’s life. She thinks the wife has filled her position, something she refuses to take lightly.
A quarrel erupts between the two women and Albert, a friendly and kind-hearted man, ignores the two women. His ignorance could mean he does not want to take sides. Esi, being defeated by Mrs Mensah, turns to her brother for protection. Thus, she sobs:

Brother, why do you allow her to treat me like this? Answer me, brother, why do you allow her to behave like this? (p. 79).

Esi provokes Mrs Mensah, thinking her brother will side with her. To Esi, Mrs Mensah is an intruder in the family affairs. She finds it odd that her brother does not come to her rescue. But her brother does not entertain her at all; rather, he defends his wife bravely, something that many wives will ululate to. Hence, their conversation:

Esi, remember this is my wife’s house as well as mine. Remember, you are a guest in her kitchen.

But aren’t you the head of the house Brother? Aren’t you the one who bought the stove and the fridge and just about everything in this your wife’s kitchen?

You know as well as I do, my wife controls her kitchen.

But, I am your sister! Don’t I have rights there as well?

No, as far as the kitchen is concerned, Beatrice is in control.

She seems to control everything in this house. I suppose she controls you as well.

It’s not going to work this time, Esi. You’re not going to cause dissension in my house again.

Aaah, so she’s got you by the balls, has she?

In household matters, I give Beatrice all the support she needs.

Admit it brother, she’s got you by the balls. (p. 80)

From the conversation above, it is clear that Esi’s attitudes caused disturbance in Mrs Mensah’s marriage. It is interesting to see how bravely and frankly Albert knocks out his sister in defence of his wife. He respects and values his wife. He has every answer to
every question that Esi demands to know in the circle of his household. Esi is reminded that the house belongs to both partners and that she is an intruder in the house.

Albert’s actions symbolise that a relationship is for two, the third party always destroys the relationship. Esi has an attitude of downgrading Mrs Mensah, thinking that she has more power in her brother’s house, to the extent of even controlling the kitchen despite the presence of Mrs Mensah. However, this time it was not the case, as Albert has vowed not to have Esi causing dissension in his house. His wife is worth protecting and needs respect and peace of mind. Esi appears to be rude and the way she speaks to her brother surely indicates that she has no respect for the couple. Ironically, this can be clarified by an exclamation and statements she makes, “Aaah, so she got you by the balls?” and “Admit it brother, she’s got you by the balls” (p. 80). This is an expression to show that the man is weak and he has no say as his wife remote-controls him. The balls are referred to as a man’s manhood by which his wife can pull it down. In other words, it means the husband fears the wife. It is like a dog placing its tail between the legs, a sign of fear.

Mrs Mensah’s reaction towards Esi, (her sister-in-law) shows that she is empowering herself. She cannot let herself to be taken for granted by Esi and her daughter. Esi still wants to hold on to her brother. Both Badoe and Ka bring in some kind of resolutions in their stories. For example, in Ka’s *New Life at Tandia* (1993), Rokhaya’s brother-in-law, Omar cannot destroy her relationship because of her strong relationship with her husband. Similarly, in Badoe’s *The Rival* (2006), Mrs Mensah’s manipulative sister-in-
law, Esi cannot destroy the relationship because of the strong support she gets from her husband. Ironically, the in-laws are actually trying to destroy their brothers’ marriages for egoistic reasons so that they can benefit. In other words, they are not doing it for the relationships, but for selfishness. Both wives were good wives and are often forced to do something they do not want by their in-laws.

4.2.3 Attitudes of young women

Another issue surrounding partners in cohabitative relationships is the attitudes of young women who may want to destroy a relationship for their own benefit.

A girl who grows up seeing the mess of her parents is likely to imitate her parents if not well cultured. Therefore, it is possible that Esi’s daughter starts exhibiting unusual behaviour towards her uncle. The child is innocent, but what she is exhibiting may be imposed on her by her mother. The narrator tells how the child gives her uncle a radiant smile upon waving her a good night. Upon closing the door, the child feels her desire is likely to be fulfilled.

She imagined that she lived in her uncle’s house, that she cooked for him and washed his clothes and, in return, he bought her everything she wanted: clothes and jewellery. And when she would be older, he would buy her a car all to herself, a big car. The child dreams dreams in which she is queen of her uncle’s household: on top of him, ruling his roost. His wife, she decided, would just have to go. The narrator portrays how women, even small girls, would envy another wife’s husband as provider of material goods. It is not done out of love but out of hatred to put the wife’s life in misery. The girl’s role is
portrayed as that of a go-between, a role clearly handed down from mother to daughter. The girl has been used by her mother, a situation that may jeopardise the girl’s future as she may end up living an extravagant lifestyle through manipulative tactics she learnt from her mother.

Other evidence regarding the experience of partners in cohabitative relationship, as portrayed in the two stories, is that marriage is not a union of two – it belongs to the clan. Esi tries to disempower her sister-in-law, but she fails as her brother has protected and supported his wife through her manipulative skills. Mrs. Mensah empowered herself, and disempowered the young woman who wants to take her husband. Similarly, Kounta tries to manipulate his sister-in-law, but fails because her husband was not intimidated by his brother.

### 4.2.4 Attitudes of husbands

The male power in many societies is seen as the main challenge that black African women face in cohabitative relationships.

Some African men exercise power over women on the basis of gender, whereas others see women in a dignified manner.

In *The Pay-packet* (1993) Ifeoma Okoye portrays how a husband beats his wife when she refuses to hand over her salary. The story tells how men rule over women’s financial independence.
In other words, women who are financially independent still face the male’s power over their money. Similarly, Ogochukwu’s *Needles of the Heart* (2006) illustrates a husband who beats his wife, accusing her of lust. The husband beats his wife claiming he is short-tempered. This tells how some men may relieve their anger on their women, making women their subjects. Furthermore, child-brides are abducted and raped, eventually forced into becoming young women and wives by bandits. The defenceless young women inevitably remain the subjects of male power.

In some patriarchal societies, a woman who fails to bear a son is threatened by the males’ threats in seeking a second wife to bear a son. Both Acholonu (1993) and Kabagarama (1993) depict how some women in cohabitative relationships are not protected in their marriages, and are not entitled to inheritance because they have no sons. Thus, women are weakened and become vulnerable to the male power in their societies. Moreover, some husbands take their partners solely as objects for their own sexual satisfaction. Therefore, when a woman grows old, a husband may seek another wife, as depicted by Alkali’s *Saltless Ash* (1993). However, some husbands treat their wives with dignity and support them. For example, Ka’s *New Life at Tandia* (1993) portrays a husband who supports his wife against infertility. Equally, Badoe’s *The Rival* (2006) portrays a husband who comes to the defence of his wife against his manipulative sister.

Some of these stories show how some African men downgrade their wives, projecting them as slaves, and as a result, put women’s position under assault. Much of the
husbands’ behaviours portrayed in these short stories determine the disempowerment of female partners in cohabitative relationships. Nevertheless, there are those that are empowered by their husbands in their relationships, like Rokhaya and Mrs Mensah.

4.2.5 Attitudes of wives

Some African women in cohabitative relationships may not cope in the same way in their relationships. Some may find joy in their relationships, whereas others may regret being in a relationship. However, the way each African woman copes with her experience in the relationship shapes her life. Often, when a woman is in a relationship, it may guarantee her security. On the other hand, women are often so dependent that they do not want to give up the relationship, even when the relationship is abusive. In other words, some women fear to move out of a relationship even if the relationship subjects them to slavery and maltreatment, fearing insecurity and to being alone. For example, Nana, in Ogochukwu’s Needles of the Heart (2006) and Iba, in Okoye’s The Pay-packet (1993) remain in abusive relationships fearing to move out and hoping the relationship will change for the better. The two women have been too dependent on their husbands, resulting in disempowering themselves. Some women keep silent on an issue that may haunt them, fearing possible rejection from their husbands. For example, Rokhaya refuses to openly discuss her barrenness with her husband and rather finds comfort in an old woman. Despite her barrenness, her husband has been supportive, thus she is supposed to find comfort and empowerment in her relationship.
Other women may speak up against any issue that may not bring happiness in their relationships. For example, Mrs Mensah speaks up against her manipulative sister, telling her husband that she has had enough raising his sister’s children and she cannot continue being a slave in her own house. Mrs Mensah’s reaction empowers her. Moreover, Amsa, in Alkali’s *Saltless Ash* stands up to fight for their rights by refusing her husband to take a third wife and sending her co-wife, Yabutu back to her parents. Amsa empowers herself and her co-wife, a victory that shows how a woman can protect her family.

4.3 Gender and economic power

4.3.1 Traditional economic power

Financial issues are one of the themes that arise from the data collection in this research study. In the past, some African women in cohabitative relationships might not have taken up the challenge to compete with their male counterparts in economic, political and social spheres like today. Women, unlike men, would work in the field (subsistence farming), thus it remains their economic dependence, while men look for a paid job outside to feed their families. Although African women are gaining access to education to become financially independent, there are still social and cultural norms that place women under the patriarchal authority of men, as husbands and fathers.

Okoye’s *The Pay-packet* (1993) illustrates a wretched school teacher, Iba, who is tormented by her husband Bertrand. Iba’s life is subjected in terms of economic independence. Education does not guarantee Iba economic independence. Iba has been
victimised by her husband who habitually demands her salary. Iba lives in a society where the male power always dominates women, regardless of their education, income, position or possessions. Her husband, unfailingly seizes her salary and it always distresses her. Iba’s victimisation by her husband seems to be common in her society where even small boys victimise small girls. This can be attested when she hears a scream and stamping of frustration from one of her pupils, Ebele, who is robbed of her five kobo. One of her pupils, a girl, says:

Boys always fight for things that are not theirs.

Yes, they are all greedy things.

And I dislike them all – they’re all horrible (p. 16).

These noticeable statements set the tone of how a woman is depraved by her husband. The small girls have also noticed the power that males often claim for themselves, namely, they are superior to women. Such male mala fide is considered a threat also by young girls in their society. In trying to protest against the demand of her salary by sneaking out to shop with part of her salary, Iba, met her enraged husband, Bertrand, who says:

I see you’re now getting ideas into your head. Some women in that bloody school of yours are teaching you how to grow wings, but I’ll clip your wings before they start growing (p. 18).

Bertrand thinks that no woman should disobey her husband. Iba’s protest against his hijacking her salary is seen as an act of defying the rule that provokes violence in Bertrand. It is even clear that a woman should not make decisions about her earnings, but rather surrender her salary to her husband, who in turn will determine her portion
from her earnings. Bertrand’s voice is threatening. The idiom, “I’ll clip your wings before they start growing” explicitly indicates that a woman is not supposed to act on her own, but is to adhere to the commands of her male partner. Bertrand sees Iba’s school as threatening his superior position where women want to be independent, taking the “law” into their own hands without their husbands’ consent. In his mind, the school has stone-headed women who may persuade his wife to defy him.

Iba is being beaten mercilessly. She tries to defend herself by fighting back, but it is clear she cannot suppress her husband, particularly because she is pregnant. Iba’s act of retaliation can be seen as a violation of gender rules in her society.

Iba lives in a society where husbands inflict cruelty on women and where women are the subjects of their male parents or their husbands. The beating of Iba is also fuelled by her father’s secret demand from Bertrand to have her salary for at least three consecutive years after her marriage. This is another example of male greediness which adds to the abuse of their daughters or wives. It is clear that Iba’s physical and emotional abuse by her husband is the result of her father’s participation in the act of securing money. Iba is not the only woman experiencing the heat from the males’ traditional economic practices. By trying to find out if she is the only woman/wife enduring economic disempowerment in her society, she probes other married female colleagues to find out what they do with their money. This is what her colleagues narrate:

My husband insists that I use my salary to feed the family. That leaves me with nothing for myself. My husband argues that he is responsible for the rent, for maintaining the family car and for paying the children’s school fees. But all these
Phoebe’s situation demonstrates how males continue to dominate the society through economic power. A woman is expected to fork out more to feed her family. A man uses less to maintain the family. Equally, the distribution of the expenditures is not balanced, no matter how well a woman has excelled academically. There is gender imbalance where a husband receives rent subsidy and tax rebate for having a family, whereas a woman receives nothing for having a family. It is patent that women do not see the exercise of empowering men over women to be equitable enough when much of the households needs dry up in the wife’s pocket, rather than in that of her husband. Another colleague, Uzo, tells a similar ordeal of male power:

Because of his greed, my father has made me a slave to my husband. I beg for every kobo I spend on myself even though I earn a good salary. And it’s not that my father is so poor that he can’t survive without my salary (p. 18).

Again, Uzo is made a victim by her own father. Male-dominance is portrayed in the secret agreements with their sons-in-law to secure money. The greediness of some fathers results in them opting for their daughters to become slaves of male supremacy. Uzo, however, feels that her father is right in demanding her salary, because it was costly when spending so much on her education. This tells that Uzo believes that a woman can be sold for the benefit of her father. One may conclude that a man pays for his daughter’s education, anticipating to be paid back once she is married. One, however wonders if the same exercise applies to sons as well, when they get married. The
researcher believes that such an exercise is victimising African women, making their livelihood difficult when they are married. It appears that what matters in a relationship is not necessarily the joy of being married, but being an obedient wife amid being treated unfairly. Like other colleagues, Ukachi shares her ordeal:

The worst thing about my case is that I don’t even touch my salary. My husband makes me sign the voucher while he spends the money as he likes. I am sure he keeps mistresses and perhaps spends some of my money on them. Twice I refused to sign the voucher if I wasn’t going to collect the money, but on each occasion he made life so miserable for me that I’ve decided to forget that I earned a salary. I have to accept I’m like his housemaid who receives an allowance at the end of every month. That’s the only way there’ll be peace between us. (p. 19)

Ukachi’s situation is one of slavery where she has to listen to the order of her master – her husband. It does not matter how good a salary a wife earns or how tirelessly she works for a salary, what matters is that a husband determines what his wife should get out of her sweat and labour. In some cases, the woman might not get anything. Although at times Ukachi refuses to sign the voucher, (trying to empower herself), it does not help her out as her life is made more disconsolate. She has to forget that she earns a salary, because she is not allowed to place her fingers on it. Her salary is for her husband and her husband’s mistresses. This is one of the situations that puts women in cohabitative relationships in vulnerable positions and where they may even opt to commit infidelity in the hope of finding someone who will finance them to rise above their financial needs.

From the above narration, one may conclude that marriage is not a smooth tunnel of joy. The economic power that dominates many houses can be translated to mean that women
are not required to earn money, but instead to be housewives. Furthermore, it means women are not supposed to climb up the economic ladder. Men resort to contemptible techniques to deny their wives their financial rights. However, this is not the case with Ezuma. Her husband does not know precisely how much she earns and besides, he usually gives her money for the households’ needs and occasionally buys her clothes and some jewellery from his own salary. This demonstrates that not all men wield economic power over their wives. Hence, some women are given the freedom to use their earnings as they wish. When once asked by Iba whether she spends her entire salary on herself, she replies:

Of course I don’t spend my pay entirely on myself. I often buy presents for members of the family and contribute to the food, but that is of my own volition (p. 17).

Uzama’s situation is a golden one as she does not experience quarrelling over money. Her husband sees it that a woman needs extra money to sustain the house and herself. Uzama’s case reflects that a husband is the provider of his households’ needs and bravely, does not necessarily rely on his wife’s salary to make demands and determine how the money should be used.

Uzama appears to be a happily-married woman and to her marriage being a bed of roses, unlike her colleagues who admit and believe that marriage is not a bed of roses. All these educated black African women think education has armed them against dependence, ignorance and poverty, but it is actually the other way round, as males’ traditional economic practices over women speak volumes. Women have to bow their
heads and surrender their salaries to their husbands. Okoye (1993) exposes the challenges of traditional economic practices that impede women, regardless of their education and career status. Equally, Okoye depicts women as disempowered, abused and maltreated by their husbands and fathers. Instead of being deemed as a source of support, Okoye portrays men as a threat to their wives.

Despite the beatings, Iba was still going to own her salary, a guarantee that empowers her. Owning a salary works for her, because it is her right to stand up against the tradition through her husband to her father. Bertrand is not a bad husband, but he was actually used as a tool by his father-in-law.

### 4.3.2 Gender and power

A further theme that arose from the data collection is gender and power where a man may decide to take another wife without informing his wife/wives. The theme brings in the issue of polygyny (see § 2.4.2) as practised in many African cultures.

Alkali’s *Saltless Ash* (1993) is a metaphoric validation of male power which addresses the issues of harbouring another wife in Hassan’s house despite lacking money to cater for his present wives. Hassan, having been married to Yabutu for 30 years, considers Yabutu as having reached her sell-by date. The head of the Turabe clan, Hassan, married his second wife, young Amsa, when she was 14 years old. At age 30, she already has eight children which the narrator describes as, “had her foot squarely placed on the man’s neck” (p. 27). This expression means that Amsa is dominated by her husband.
Amsa is either pregnant or breastfeeding and she is regarded as “the stomach of the pumpkin” (p. 27).

Having much power over his wives, Hassan feels the need to shelter a new wife as young Amsa is about to reach her ‘sell-by date’. Hassan comes to terms with the calamitous opposition in his own house when his wives rise up to challenge their husband for their rights. Taking a third wife is not favoured by both wives, hence they decide to show their husband their stance on the issue of devaluing women. The two co-wives come to fight the mala fide determination of their husband, despite knowing the tradition that dictates that “a woman was born to please a man” (p. 26). This expression means that a woman is only attractive at her tender age, but as women grow older, some men see them as wearisome. Equally, the expression can mean that women are objects for men that they can use to satisfy their sexual needs. A woman who is ageing is regarded as no longer attracting her husband sexually. Yabutu becomes the first victim of male supremacy as Hassan, the protagonist, has opted to send her back to her parents. Unlike Amsa, who is an expert in matrimonial negotiations, Yabutu is never straightforward in approaching her husband. She accepts her husband’s decisions, even if the issue decided upon may not please her.

Amsa’s reaction to her husband seeking a third wife glorifies the empowerment of the two co-wives. They have empowered themselves and disempowered their husband, who halts the idea of going ahead to seek another wife. Conversely, in Ka’s New Life at Tandia (1993), Baba Kounta does not opt to take a second wife because of his barren
wife. Similarly, Albert Mensah in Badoe’s The Rival (2006), does not opt to take a second wife when Mrs Mensah is aging, neither does he take the idea of marrying his niece as his sister wishes. Kyomya, in Kabagarama’s The Rich Heritage (1993), threatens to take a second wife because his wife only bears daughters. Kakwanzi, Kyomya’s wife did not hesitate about the idea of seeking a second wife. Therefore, there is nothing in these stories about polygamy but rather polygyny, which is an African norm and accepted as a legal institution that empowers black African women in cohabitative relationships.

4.3.3 Abduction of child bride

Another theme that emerges from the data collection is the abduction of the child bride. In this war-related story, a child bride is made into a young woman by the bandits who kidnap minors to become their wives.

Madalena Returned from Captivity (Magaia, 1993) is a psychological series of war-related violence in which women are victims of male combatants. Like in Nigeria where a militant group, called Boko Haram, kidnapped 200 young-school girls to become their wives, Magaia exposes how innocent and defenseless women, particularly young girls, are abducted, raped and abused by armed men. War denies women freedom and justice. Madalena, a fourteen-year-old girl, is abducted by armed bandits near Maluna, while she is visiting her relatives. Madalena is (forcibly) made into a woman/wife for the bandits. She suffers severe abuse that affects her psychologically. She has not only suffered the abuse, she also witnesses the killing of men, women and children by the bandits in the
military base where they are kept with other young girls. A police Chief Commander who is searching for the bandits discovers her. Showing his sympathy and support in trying to find out what has happened to the girl, Madalena is traumatised to tell her ordeal to the commander. This can be testified below:

Madalena trembles and holds her legs tightly together. She remains standing. She stares with eyes moist with tears that refuse to flow at the group of people watching her. She continues to tremble. (p.81)

The narrator portrays the fear that Madalena continues to feel by meeting another group of the armed forces. The statement “holds her legs tightly together” is evident that Madalena was severely raped, possibly by a group of bandits. She holds her legs tightly possibly fearing sexual abuse. She cannot move, but remains standing, possibly due to pain between her legs. Her tears refuse to flow as she is emotionally shattered. She allows herself to suffer in silence.

The commander is trying to provide his support to Madalena and continues asking her:

How do you feel, child? Why are you crying, child? Aren’t you happy to be going home? Don’t you want to talk about what happened to you? (p. 81).

Very shy and still traumatised by her ordeal, Madalena cannot mum a word. She shyly stares at the ground, trying to hide and keep her ordeal to herself. It is a painful moment that has put her life in misery. Though, willing to share her ordeal, Madalena tries to open her mouth but tears continue flowing. The commander gives up and orders his female colleague saying, “You talk to her. You women may understand each other.”(p. 82). Because Madalena is being asked by a commander, it is possible that she considers
him another abuser or she could not trust a man any more. The commander shows his mercy towards the abused girl and instructs his female colleagues:

Take the child home. Make sure she sees a doctor. She must be carrying all kinds of diseases.

The commander repeated his instructions, Take the child home. Don’t forget to ask the doctor to examine her. (p. 82)

The commander is severely touched by the abuse of the girl. He is exercising his manly role of protecting his society against malpractices against innocent people. Upon arrival back home, Madalena is welcomed by a crowd of women who show her their solidarity.

The story of Madalena is one of disempowering young women who have no choice but to accept the malpractices that befall them. As a child-bride, she is disempowered, because she cannot decide on her fate as someone else is in total control of her. She is used as an object of male power and lust.
4.3.4 Reversal of gender roles

It is obvious from these stories that an African man will praise a wife/partner only if she gives him sons. Equally, the absence of sons may result in an African woman being regarded as useless and she will be suffering at some point. Thus, some women have to go the extra mile to respond to the male issues, such as issues of bringing forth a son.

Acholonu’s *Mother was a Great Man* (1993) plainly depicts the reversal of gender roles through seditious language. Oyidiya, worried about her land and success, decides to take the responsibility of protecting her family and takes the role of the man in the house while her husband, Nekwe, was not a manly type. Oyidiya has to stand on her own feet to defend her family against her husband’s kindred, who want to inherit her land because she has no son.

In some African societies, a woman is not considered successful until she has a son. Although Oyidiya has successful daughters who have married wealthy husbands and who wield economic power, she still hopes for a son to carry on her name. Oyidiya appears to ignore her culture which calls for her to value her first-born daughter, as her name’s continuation through a son appears to be more important than her culture.

Oyidiya believes her husband’s kinsmen, who posit that:

> A son caters for continuity of the family-name and external image, but a daughter caters for love, understanding and unity within the family circle. (Achonolu, 1993, p. 11)

Oyidiya’s culture values the birth of daughters as they complete the requirements of the chieftaincy title in Ikeduru. It is only through begetting a daughter that any prospective
chief would attain his royal chair. It is also regarded in their culture as a curse to beget only sons and no daughters. In Ikeduru, a home that bears no son, is regarded as standing on spikes and would be razed to the dust. It is the value of her society that leads to Oyidiya to consider the reversal of gender roles in her family. The responsibility thus lies with Oyidiya to make sure that a son is born in her house, in her name, so that her house would not be demolished. Oyidiya believes that a son will continue to repair and breathe life into her home.

In this short story, Acholonu (1993) emphasises that African women are the spiritual foundation of every family community and the nation. Some societies carve women into roles that are supposed to be carried out by men. Given the rigorous social structure of her husband’s society, Oyidiya goes too far in trying to secure her descendant’s inheritance by hunting for young girls to bear a son in her name.

Oyidiya goes against her culture to empower herself in order to keep her land and succession. Women who are not empowered may attempt to find ways to empower themselves. However, the way some women try to empower themselves turns out to be the opposite, because they are responding to what males want them to do. Therefore, for Oyidiya, instead of empowering herself through her reaction to the males telling her what to do, is actually disempowering herself. Oyidiya becomes the protagonist who looks for a wife to produce heirs in her name.
4.4 Solidarity

4.4.1 Solidarity among women

Another theme that emerges from the data collection is solidarity. Solidarity lessens the pain that some black African women in cohabitative relationships may experience.

Ogochukwu’s *Needles of the Heart* (2006) portrays Nana, a married woman in an abusive relationship. She is living a life of denial, despite the numerous attempts by Ene, her confidante and chief bridesmaid, to save her from her monster husband, Ozolua. Shortly after her wedding, Nana already knows that Ozolua can use his hands fiercely in the presence of her chief maid. Ene, who is about to return home, “heard a sharp cry from Nana’s room.” (p. 179). This means that Nana has been beaten possibly hard. The beatings continue and Ene cannot ignore what transpires between the partners. Ozolua is “roaring like a lion”, the simile used is evidence that he is angry and wants to kill Nana. Ogochukwu describes the fight:

He had his feet on Nana’s thin neck as she crouched by the iron foot of the bed, shielding her face with her hands as she tried unsuccessfully to ward him off. Charged with anger, Ene tore at him, hitting him with all her strength as she struggled to rescue the tiny woman about to be crushed. (p. 180)

The narrator’s voice is describing one of many very dreadful fights of which some women are victims in their relationships. Although Nana may want to defend herself, her husband overpowers her. Ene takes the position of a man to protect her friend. She becomes more provoked and she strikes repeatedly to make an impact. It is rare to find a woman putting up a fight with a man in defence of another woman. Ene’s rebellion
against such treatment shows a society where women are tired of being violently abused by their partners. The narrator tells how Ene is enraged and wants to completely destroy Ozolua. Seeing her friend bleeding from the head, Ene becomes more enraged when Ozolua hurried to Nana, kneeling beside her. ‘In tears, her eyes sent daggers at Ozolua and Ene fumes:

Don’t dare touch her! How could you! How could you! You! (p. 181).

This is evident that Ene is in a position to kill Ozolua. Ene’s mind is preoccupied with war to fight. Ene is ready to die for her friend, Nana. At times, Ene has been speechless and lacks words to question the motives of Ozolua. Her repetition of “How could you! How could you! You!” clearly tells that Ene could not understand that a man who just got married and claims to love a woman has turned into a monster. She cannot believe Ozolua could be that violent.

Ozolua tries to collect himself and in a desperate voice, he whispers, “Nana, my God! What did I do?” (p. 181). Her face twisted in contempt, Ene pulls away Ozolua’s hand from Nana. She cannot allow him close to her friend, possibly fearing that he might harm her further. Ozolua tries to apologise, but Ene will not allow him to come close to her. She is a fearless woman who is ready to protect her friend in an abusive relationship.

Through solidarity and friendship, women may empower themselves. Ene tries to empower her friend to stand up for her rights and leave an abusive relationship, yet Nana cannot cope living without her husband. Ene did not succeed in empowering her friend.
Nana thinks going back to her husband will empower her, but the abuse she continues to endure rather disempowers her.

4.4.2 Solidarity among men

A similar issue on solidarity emerges from the attitudes and behaviour of some African men. Not all men inflict cruelty on women. There are some men out there with a merciful heart.

After Nana was taken to the hospital by both Ene and Ozolua, the doctor was disappointed by his friend, Ozolua. Giving an excuse that he needs to calm his hot temper, the doctor did not mince his anger. The doctor condemned him and questioned his motives:

You can’t do this to anybody let alone your newly wedded wife. What’s wrong with you? (Ogochukwu, 2006, p. 181).

Dr J. is puzzled by a husband who beats his wife. He appears to come from a society where women are respected and cared for rather than being battered. To him, a man who batters his wife is mad, that is why he asks, “What is wrong with you?”

Nana’s brothers also prove that ‘blood is thicker than water’. After Ozolua once beat her badly, Nana’s brothers besiege his residence and almost kill him. Afterwards, they take away their sister (with all her belongings). The narrator shows that men can also sympathise and provide protection against the malpractices (at the hands of their counterparts) in their society. It shows that men can act as preservers of their families.
Nana’s son, Jide grew up seeing his mother being battered by his father since birth. Tired of seeing his mother (violently) beaten, he once tells Ene that he has cautioned his father to stop beating her. In his words, Jide says:

I told him that it was going to be the very last time indeed and he read my lips right. I could no longer watch him do that to my mama. (p.186)

Jide has for so long watched his mother being physically abused. He stands up as a man to defend his mother and defeat his father. The expression: ‘he read my lips right’ shows how angry he was at his father. Jide has possibly used strong words to warn his father. It shows that Jide has had enough of watching his mother being beaten. When he has grown up, he is ready to protect his mother. Jide proves that he cannot ignore the maltreatment that his mother undergoes at the hands of his father. He shows his manly voice towards his father – a roaring voice – a voice to alert to his intention.

The son saves his mother. This tells that even though the son helps her, she still needs a man to talk to her. Nana remains silent when she could have stood up – she remains disempowered. Ogochukwu showcases how black African women in cohabitative relationships remain disempowered, because they remain silent and cannot stand up for themselves in abusive relationships.
4.5 Culture

4.5.1 Patriarchy

From the data collected, patriarchy is among the themes that arise for this study. Kabagarama’s *The Rich Heritage* (1993) tells how males continue to dominate their society, threatening women that they would take a second wife if the woman does not produce a son. In the story, Kyomya’s wife, Kakwanzi, gave birth to six daughters, but both her husband and his clan show her hardly any appreciation. Kyomya starts threatening his wife that he will marry a second wife to bear him sons. Both the girls and their mother are given inferior names to show how unpopular they are and to indicate that they are not much wanted in their society. Some men still believe that a son would continue carrying on the clan’s name, keep the family wealth growing and, through marriage, would acquire new relatives. Girls are regarded as a loss to the family and it is believed that their domestic roles would not bring any wealth to the family.

A woman is often blamed for the inability to bear sons, forgetting that biologically, both male and female’s chromosomes determine the gender of the child. Karungi, a fearless woman, tries to call a gathering to harmonise Kyomya’s family and the community to stand together and support each other. Women present are happy, but they cannot show their excitement as they fear retaliation from their husbands when they return home. It is evident that women become vulnerable in their relationships, as they cannot stand up and show their partners that they too are entitled to live a fulfilling relationship. Some
men present at the gathering admire Karungi, however, they feel sorry for her husband. An old man was heard whispering to others:

I’m sure the next step for her will be to beat her husband and then grow a beard (p. 80).

This statement shows that women are not expected to speak up, as it will be seen that they want to rule over men. African women in cohabitative relationships appear to live in a totalitarian society where the men tell them how to behave. Women with determination and opportunity hardly ever achieve their hearts’ desire in a male-dominated society. Those who use their wisdom and power as a voice for other women are stigmatized, and equally, seen as a threat in the male-dominated societies. Karungi proves to be an eloquent woman, living in a social milieu dominated by the attitudes and values of males who deny women their proper place.

Karungi succeeded in disempowering Kyomya and empowering his wife. The family is empowered through the voice of a fearless woman, unlike Ene who fails to empower Nana because Nana thinks that going back to her husband will empower her, but in fact, she is disempowered.

4.5.2 Motherhood

A further theme that arose from the data collection is motherhood. Unigwe’s Possessing the Secret of Joy (2006) narrates of Uju, the daughter of a poor widow, who marries a rich man in order to rescue her mother from poverty. Her marriage life is a sad one until
she realises one thing that becomes her saving grace, the birth of her son. Stricken by poverty, Uju’s mother, in a painful voice says:

Chief Okeke is our only hope. Don’t you want to see me in nice clothes? And you, don’t you want to be a madam? Have a driver? A big house? Servants? Don’t you want to enjoy your life, nwa m?

Uju, you are a daughter to be proud of. You do not know what a relief it is that you are marrying a man as rich as chief. Poverty is not something to be proud of (p. 223).

Uju’s mother’s continued questions prove that she is ambitious and wants to have a better life. She betrays motherhood for her economic security. Her only hope is to force her daughter to marry a wealthy man to sustain herself against poverty. Her mother does not demand a marriage for the benefit of her daughter only, but for herself as well. They say, ‘marriage is a union between the entire family.’ Therefore, forcing her daughter into a marriage would satisfy her needs, like decent clothes, a roof over her head and equally, to command respect in her society and live a fulfilling and comfortable life.

Poverty has driven this widow to secure economic freedom at the expense of her daughter. However, it would have been better if the mother found herself a suitor, instead of driving her daughter into a relationship against her desire. Uju’s mother’s decision to consider arranging a marriage for her is prompted when both Uju and her mother are kicked out of their house (by her father’s brother), after the death of her father. The narrator is depicting how widows are mistreated by the family members of their husbands. Instead of caring for his family, the death of a husband is seen by his relatives as a leeway to inheritance. Uju and her mother live in a society that is greedy
and drives widows and orphans to become destitute. It is clear that Papa Uju was the sole provider of his family. The wife depended on him for family support. It is also clear that Uju’s mother is unemployed because she “had to borrow money from women’s cooperative to start a petty business” (p. 225). This is evident that women have to beg from others to render them support in difficult situations. The women’s cooperative was established to assist those in dire need – an indication of solidarity among women. Uju is in a dilemma when her mother dictates her life without considering her own free choice. Uju’s mother has more influence on her daughter’s way of living, because of the poverty that struck the family after the death of her father.

From this theme, the widow is disempowered by her brother-in-law who kicks her out of her late husband’s house. The widow tries to empower herself by forcing her daughter to marry a wealthy man for economic security. She may think that she is empowering her daughter as well, but in fact she is disempowering her.

4.5.3 Polygamy/polygyny

The issue of polygyny has also emerged from the data collection. From these stories of black African women in cohabitative relationships, there is no element of polygamy. It shows that the idea of polygamy is a Western tradition and not an African tradition. Oyidiya, a protagonist in Acholonu’s *Mother was a Great Man* (1993), looks for young women to bear a son in her name. In other words, she brings young women to her husband to produce. Interestingly, in Alkali’s *Saltless Ash* (1993), Amsa and Yabutu have no rivalries as co-wives and appear to have accepted their husband to seek a third
wife, but unfortunately, the house is faced with hunger. If it was not for hunger, then the two wives would have welcomed the third wife in their family. Equally, Kakwanzi, in Kabugarama’s *The Rich Heritage* (1993), does not oppose the idea of her husband seeking a second wife to bear him sons. Ka’s *New Life at Tandia* (1993), portrays how Rokhaya’s husband, Baba Kounta does not seek to find another woman because his wife is barren, but rather solve the problem. Baba, a doctor by profession, shows that even the educated can solve the problem.

All these different scenarios prove that polygyny is an aspect of an African culture, where marriage is a traditional agreement accepted by families/community. In other words, polygyny is accepted as a legal institution and not punishable. None of the parties finds it unacceptable. Thus, there is no element of illegal criminal behaviour in any of these stories. Those who accepted polygyny in their relationships do not see it as detrimental. To them it is empowerment, unlike in the Western tradition where it is regarded as a criminal offence with stigma attached to it. There is nothing here that the law can interfere with. Polygyny is totally different from polygamy, where marriage is a legal agreement and marriage to more than one partner at a time is a criminal offence.

**4.5.4 Race, identity and cultural value**

Further themes that arise from the data collection are race, identity and cultural values. Adeaga’s *Marriage and Other Impediments* (2006) addresses the issue of identity among the people of colour, especially in Germany, where cultural aspects are seen as a stumbling block for students. Adeaga tells a story about the difficulties that two lovers
from different races face, as they try to convince their respective families to give their blessing to the marriage. Accepting people of colour is likely to be more prevalent in Germany where Africans find it difficult to fully integrate into the German cultural traditions. However, this story depicts objections to the marriage from both cultures. The story exhibits some of the ethnic and cultural tendencies in some societies, particularly in Germany and Nigeria. The narrator explicitly portrays the conflict between a Western-style approach to women’s marital and family relations versus the security and stability of an African traditional system. This reflects tension throughout the story.

Tola, a young Nigerian student, met Till, her German boyfriend, at university in Germany, but both lovers’ parents are not elated by the relationship because of their different racial identities. Both Tola and Till have to go beyond their culture, proving their parents wrong by showing that no mountain is too high to climb. Till’s parents start the rejection with Till’s paternal grandmother Omi Ursula, caught by surprise:

What? Are you mad? You most certainly do not believe that they can fall in love. They all get married to get papers. I recently spoke with my friend, Jerde, and she told me that her grandson, Jurden’s wife, left him after she got her papers. Nothing good can come out of it. Klaus, talk to your son; I think he’s been bewitched. This is the only explanation for his behaviour. (p. 24)

Omi Ursula is not euphoric about Till’s decision. To her, African female students pretend to have serious relationships with their German boyfriends, but it is only a leeway to acquire German citizenship and abandon them after obtaining their German papers. Omi Ursula urges her son, Klaus, Till’s father, to sit with his son and end the relationship immediately. The statement, “I think he’s been bewitched” shows that
Africans are witches. Klaus threatens to disown Till if he goes ahead with the decision to wed the ‘Negerin’ – a derogatory German word for a black woman. Margit, Till’s mother, is even more touched by the idea when she fumes:

   How can someone whose family lives in a jungle somewhere in Africa think she’s good enough for my son? What will the neighbours say when they suddenly see kleine Negerlein running around in our garden? I’m not going to have anything to do with the marriage. I will not have you bring shame into our family by tainting our blood with this woman. (p. 24)

Margit shows signs of xenophobia and she is wary of her neighbours to spot the children born from a mixed relationships running in their yard. Marrying Tola is seen as diluting their white blood. It is likely that in their neighbourhood, it is a taboo to marry a different race, specifically if it is an African.

Till comes to the defense of his decision, shunning his parents. He tells them not to make naked assertions about Tola’s family since they do not know her family, but his mother is stone-headed and rebukes:

   We don’t have to do so because Africa is a poor and uncivilised continent where the inhabitants depend on aid from hard-working German taxpayers. Once you get married, you’ll have all those hungry looking villagers asking you and your family for aid. Is this the kind of life you want to lead? (p. 24-5).

It is clear that Till’s parents have a misconception of Africa being the Dark Continent with illiterate people who lack the knowledge to develop themselves. His parents are fighting for the welfare of their son and do not want him to become a slave of his wife’s family. Till is undaunted and plainly tells his parents that Tola is the only woman of his dreams and he is not buying their idea, hence they have to get used to his wife. Till makes a bold decision that many parents would take as disobedience. He proves to his
parents that he can make his own decisions. Till proves that parents should not decide for their grown up children as far as matters of cohabitation, relationships and marriages are concerned.

Obviously, every parent will be excited to hear that his/her son/daughter is engaged and the climax will always be to know the lucky man/woman or what family he/she is from. Tola, knowing her traditions, culture and upbringing, has to stand her ground to convince her own parents that the man in her life is a foreigner. Titi, Tola’s sister, upon hearing that her sister is engaged to a German boyfriend, speaking in Pidgin English, questions her sister’s motives:

Sho, wetin happen? Of all the men wey dey for yonder, you no fit get yourself a Nigerian man? How you go come tell the family? Abi, you go paint him face black? (p. 25-6).

It is clear that like in Till’s family, in Tola’s family and society, a foreigner is not welcome. It is like a curse to bring home a white man. Race denies individuals the choice to love. The right choice that Tola should have made is to marry a man from her country, a black Nigerian man. This is apparent from Titi’s asking, “You no fit get yourself a Nigerian man?” The phrase, “paint him face black” tells that unless she marries a black man, the union will not be accepted. After Tola breaks the news that her fiancé is a German, Tola’s mother screams:

_k_mi [sic], you want to kill me! Where is all this nonsense coming from? Can you show me a member of the family who went to study abroad and came back with an oyinbo and a German for that matter? How will I show my face in public? (p. 27).
Women are upholders of tradition and would want their daughters to continue upholding their traditions. Not only are Tola’s parents shocked by her decision, her uncle, Uncle Bade also vents his disapproval by asking:

What is wrong with you? Do you want to kill your parents? If you couldn’t find a Nigerian to marry there, why didn’t you come back home to choose a husband? Must you bring such shame to us? (p. 31).

Tola’s family sees the relationship as a curse to the entire family. None of the family members has ever married an outsider. Tola’s mother is worried about how the public will speak behind her back – shame before society. The author shows that mothers are the same. The same fear of what the public will say is the same as Till’s mother. Both mothers are worried about what the neighbours will say seeing children from a mixed relationship playing in their yards. Tola’s mother objects to her daughter’s decision, fearing her bringing shame to her family. She wants to protect her family against society’s judgment. Tola’s father is most hurt by his daughter’s decision and he keeps silent for long, a sign that he is shocked and disappointed by his dear daughter. He tries to gather himself and convince his daughter, reminding her of her culture and traditions. Thus, her father reminds her:

Remember that, in our culture, when you marry someone, you marry the whole family. If this man marries you, he should know that he is also marrying the whole family. Look around you, do you think he will also be accepted in this family?” You also have to understand a person’s culture. Quite frankly, we will never understand his culture, and ours will be strange to him as well. (p. 28-9)

A society is strongly held together by its culture and traditions. Before making decisions, one has to consider the cultural and traditional norms dictated by society. It is also indisputable that a marriage in an African tradition is not only a union between the two
lovers, but an arrangement of the entire family, opposite to Western tradition where a marriage does not necessarily involve the entire family. Often families tend to have disagreements and will always adhere to their cultures and traditions that may also not suit individuals. However, there is always a pillar to lean on when a dispute arises in a family. Tola’s great uncle, Papa, comes to her rescue by telling the family that:

Although I am old, I know that once we send our children abroad to study, there is no way we can stop them from making such choices. By coming home to tell her parents and family of her intention to marry a white man, it means that Tola has not forgotten her intentions and when the white man’s family sees that we do not sell our children, that our children are precious to us, they will treat her well. They will know that we’re keeping an eye on them and will not hesitate to take action if things go wrong. Akin and Bummi, as her parents, you have to let her go. Give your consent to this wedding! (Adeaga, 2006, p. 31-2)

Papa feels that education brings changes in a society and it would not be fair to judge the actions of individuals whose world have been opened up by diverse cultures. The phrase, “although I am old”, is to create awareness that he cannot be ignored because of his age. Old man/women are the pillars of a society, thus they command more wisdom. Papa is also implying that the choice a person makes should not be ignored to just please families. Many parents make decisions concerning their children’s education, and they still want to keep the right to choose them a mate. Tola is made to endure the heavy burden of traditional customs in her society. Her parents should understand that Tola still upholds her traditions and culture, thus it is the reason she is dying for their consent. In other words, Papa is advising members of the family not to undermine and restrict the choices made by the young generation because their generation is changing. Papa wants a society that would not be judgmental but would give support and respect the choices of
individuals. Papa’s advice is endorsed and Tola informs her fiancé. Eventually, the two families give their consent and preparations are made for the two families to meet. It is thus true that the success of a marriage and/or a relationship depends considerably on the agreement of the two families.

Tola’s decision is one of empowerment. She understands the value of her culture and tradition. If she could have accepted her parents’ wish to marry a Nigerian man, which is not her choice, she would have been disempowered because she would have accepted a decision made by her parents.

4.6 Black African women coping in cohabitative relationships

In order to establish how African women cope with their experiences, this section compares and contrasts the different behaviours of women and men in cohabitative relationships as seen in the ten selected short stories analysed.

4.6.1 Coping with family lineage

It appears that a woman is considered as the prime factor in maintaining her husband’s lineage. A man’s patrilineage is worthless if a woman has not borne him a son. Often, wives who bear daughters only are humiliated by their husbands and their fellow kinsmen. Oyidiya, in Acholonu’s *Mother was a Great Man* (1993), could not accommodate the fact that she has no son to cater for the continuity of her family. Although she appreciates her daughters, she longs for a son. Oyidiya suffers pain and her desire for a son results in her hunting for young girls to bear a son in her name. She
finally summons her husband’s kinsmen and informs them that she is going to take a new wife. Firstly, Oyidiya brings a sixteen year-old girl, who unfortunately bears two daughters. Secondly, she marries for the second time, but unfortunately, the girl has difficulties in conceiving. She then invites a traditional healer to administer treatment to the girl, but to her dismay and shame, the healer elopes with the young bride. Lastly and unfortunately, she remarries again, but her husband who usually supplies the male seed, dies from a snake bite. However, that does not deter Oyidiya to fulfil her desire. She asks her husband’s kindred to provide the male seed. To her disappointment, the harvest is still a daughter and the girl is immediately sent back to her parents.

Unable to swallow her pain and shame, a distant relative who comes home, changes everything in Oyidiya’s life and society. The good news is that the eloped bride has a son with the wizard. The son was named Humphrey but to her frustration, Humphrey is a troublesome son as he is a liar, a cheat, a thief and carries all these vices with him. Oyidiya’s fight, dream and desire to have a son are eventually fulfilled. In her dying times, she summons her daughters to tell them that:

*I have fought a good fight. You two should not give up now. Before they shoot him, be sure to keep a wife here in his name. Then my life shall not have been in vain. The gods and my chi have fashioned me for great things.* (p. 14)

The behaviour of Oyidiya tells how a woman has to go the extra mile to defeat a patriarchal society that undermines women. In order for a woman to inherit part of her husband’s wealth, for example land, there should be a male from the woman’s womb that will guarantee that her wealth and succession are secured in her son’s name.
Oyidiya accepts the inferior position men placed on women, and she becomes vulnerable in all her attempts as they all fail her. She even summons and encourages her daughters to keep hunting for a woman to keep Humphrey continuing her husband’s patrilineage.

Oyidiya seems to admit that she is useless if no son is born in her name. “Before they shoot him, be sure to keep a wife here in his name. Then my life shall not have been in vain” (p. 14). This utterance shows that Oyidiya wants to be honoured in her society and among her husband’s kinsmen. On the other hand, she is indirectly telling her daughters to prepare what awaits them in the absence of sons in their marriages. The biblical verse says, “I have fought a good fight” (p. 14). The researcher does not believe that was a good fight. Indeed, Oyidiya runs a lonely fight. It was a painful fight, a vulnerable fight, a weak fight and an inferior fight to prove to men that a son is indeed a symbol of power and patrilineage, as believed in many African families.

Unlike Oyidiya, who did not want to accept defeat from the male power, Kakwanzi, Kyomya’s wife, in Kabagarama’s The Rich Heritage (1993), has to accept her inferior position without an act. She keeps silent and allows herself to be humiliated in silence. She (together with her daughters), has been called names. The narrator has not portrayed much of the wife’s behaviour, which makes the reader imagine that the wife inferiorly accepts to live in an unwanted environment, because she cannot fulfil the desire of her society – bearing sons. Kakwanzi’s husband fears hell. Her husband screams about hell, “God, if hell’s fire is like this one, please don’t send me there” (79). This utterance becomes his wife’s weapon to calm her husband from humiliation and intimidation by
bringing in a second wife to bear a son. The wife would usually light the fire with big
logs of wood and would often tell him that she had dreamt of him ending up in such a
fire. Lighting the fire is the only remedy to ease her situation until her husband is
accustomed to it. In the end, she does not succeed with her tricks, as her husband
overcomes his fear of hell.

With the support of his clan, Kyomya is convinced that it is his wife’s omen that brings
the girls therefore, “he was clean before God” (p. 79). In some African cultures, a
woman is always blamed and seen as dirty when she fails to fulfil a man’s desire.
Kakwanzi’s husband portrays selfishness. In other words, he is claiming that God has
created men purely and women were created with impurity. Female children are seen as
a curse from which a woman has to be cleansed. Equally, female children are seen as a
loss to the family, and it is usually the woman who has to accept her inability to bring a
son from her womb, as if she determines the gender of the child.

Kakwanzi has been humiliated in silence and unlike Oyidiya, who hunts for young girls
to bear a son in her name, she does not attempt to hunt for a young girl to bear a son in
her name. Kakwanzi could have probably accepted her husband to seek a second wife to
bear a son, in order to fulfil his desire. Her silence regarding her husband’s humiliation
prompts Karungi, a very well respected woman in her society who is regarded as the
voice of her community, to intervene in the affairs of the family. Karungi cautions
Kyomya and other men present sternly:
Shame on you, Kyomya. How dare you create a situation, then turn around and blame it on someone else? Can’t you be responsible? I know several of you have been hurting your wives in a similar fashion. (p. 79)

Karungi succeeded in disempowering Kyomya. The humiliation that both Oyidiya and Kakwanzi experience because they have not born sons, indicates that family lineage is very important in an African culture through the birth of a son. Both women are not empowered in their marriages, as they are not respected as married women by their husband’s kindred.

4.6.2 Coping with malpractice and physical violence

Men and women may experience violence differently in their relationships, but women are more likely to be the victims of violence than men. In *The Pay-packet*, Okoye (1993) gives a powerful critique of male violence against women, where a woman would be beaten if she defies a man’s order. Iba’s relationship with Bertrand has not been good, but a bit bitter, where Iba has to swallow the bitterness of it. Basking in the euphoria of a newly wedded wife, Iba gladly complies with the demand to hand over her salary without noticing any slavery in it. However, tired of the demand for her salary, Iba comes out of her shell and begins to question the wisdom of having to hand over her entire salary to her husband to manage it. To Iba, the demand borders on slavery, as she cannot satisfy her needs because she is given only a small amount of her salary by her husband. The third month’s salary demand is met with total refusal to surrender her salary to her husband, who earns a good salary. Iba’s total refusal could mean an attempt to empower herself as a woman. Hence the conversation of the couple:
I must have the money.

I don’t think it’s proper for me to hand over my entire salary to you every month. I have every right to spend my salary the way I want to.

I see you’re now getting ideas into your head. Some women in that bloody school of yours are teaching you how to grow wings, but I’ll clip your wings before they start growing.

I have not discussed the matter with anyone. Not even with my mother.

I want the money this minute before I lose my temper, Iba. (p. 18)

Okoye reveals how Iba’s stubbornness to comply with the demand results in Bertrand beating her mercilessly. Iba tries to fight back but she cannot overpower him. Unable to take any more beatings, Iba surrenders the money to him and she is subsequently beaten at the end of each month.

From the conversation of the couples in a cohabitative relationship, one clearly sees how this man angrily overshadows his woman. The demand for the money is forceful and self-centered. The demand is neither polite nor kind. It is a ‘MUST’ and Iba has to oblige whether she likes it or not. It is a demand that cannot be overlooked or missed, otherwise the result is torture. Speaking in a soft voice, perhaps to create a mutual understanding between them, Iba emphasises her rights to spend her earnings according to her desires without being questioned as the rightful owner of the salary. However, her self-empowerment is met with rejection. Bertrand believes that Iba is being persuaded by other women to transgress his order. Iba tries to tell him that it is her bold decision, not even her mother is aware of it. In other words, Iba is stressing that she can make her own decisions without buying the ideas of others, because she thinks it is the right thing to do. She tries to empower herself. The demand is, “I want the money this minute
before I lose my temper” (p. 18). Bertrand is demanding money regardless of whether Iba has the money or not, at that particular time.

Bertrand could lose his temper about something that is not his. The threats that Iba faces every month results in her capitulation and submission, a situation that disempowers her. Uncomfortable with her capitulation, Iba decides to take new routes in handling her salary. She goes to the market and spends two-thirds of her salary on her maternity needs, household needs, her baby’s needs and even bought her husband a shirt. She is ecstatic to go on a shopping spree, but yet, deep in her heart, there is still fear of the consequences that await her at home.

In other words, Iba acts without total freedom and regrets her decisions. But on the other hand, she feels on top of the universe when she uses her money as per her desire and wishes. Although Iba satisfies her desire, her fate continues. Bertrand has to visit his kindred at the village and calls Iba from the bedroom and asks:

Where is the money?
What money?
Your salary, of course. What other money?
I said where the money is? (repeatedly when Iba remained silent. His lower lips jutted out a little).
I’ve spent it.
Eh! What did you say?
I said I’ve spent it.
You’ve done what?
Spent it.
You’re crazy. I want the money this moment.

I can’t give what I’ve spent. When you spent money, it doesn’t come back to you, does it?

Look here, woman, I’ve not time for jokes. Let me have the money at once. And don’t provoke me.

Honestly, B, I’ve spent the money buying some food, a few baby things, and one or two items for myself. I even bought a shirt for you. (p. 22).

Okoye tells how “Bertrand walks over her and slaps her three times on the right cheek. Sparks of fire flashes from her eyes and her cheeks burns with intense heat. She hits back” (p. 23):

I must not hit back, I must not hit back. You’re a gentleman, B. A perfect gentleman.

Bertrand continues asking, “I said, where’s the money?” (He hits Iba on the mouth. She tastes blood, rubs her lower lip with the back of her hand and looks at it. Her hands are smeared with blood. She wants to go to the bathroom to spit it out, but Bertrand stops her).

You’re not leaving this room until you’ve given me the money.”

You’re a fine gentleman. Your friends will be very proud of you when they hear this” (p. 23).

Okoye depicts how women who are trying to find a voice for themselves are faced with gender and power issues in their relationships. Bertrand cannot take the fact that Iba has spent her money. When Iba informs him that she has spent the money, she is met with an expression that shows that she is the subject of her husband. Hence his exclamation, “Look here, woman”, to remind her of her inferiority and to accept that she is just a woman who cannot mess with a man. The more Iba is honest, the more Bertrand is provoked. He cannot take the fact that Iba, in her own right has used her money. It is as if she has stolen and spent Bertrand’s salary. Despite considering her husband in her
spending, Bertrand shows no remorse, but actually ingratitude when his wife has bought him a shirt.

The researcher believes Bertrand does not really want Iba’s money. In fact, he is just following his father-in-law’s order. However, Iba has to fight back not knowing that her father is behind her husband. She gives up, uttering, “I must not hit back, I must not hit back.” It is clear that in a fight that involves a lion and a ewe, the lion always wins. Iba’s shout, “You’re a gentleman, B. A perfect gentleman. You’re a fine gentleman. Your friends will be very proud of you when they hear this.” Iba is implying that Bertrand pretends to be a very good husband, but it does not actually reflect his true colours. Bertrand portrays cruelty, malevolence and even mercilessness towards his wife. The doorbell rings,

I’ll answer it.

No, I’ll go.

You don’t want anyone to know that you beat your wife. I won’t hide the fact any longer (p. 23).

Iba wants to show people out there that she is living in an abusive relationship, but her husband does not want outsiders to know what is happening inside his home. Iba, like many other women, wants to show the world that her relationship is not milk and honey. It is evident that she has been silent for too long and cannot take it any longer. She has had enough of her husband’s violence. She is ready and determined to expose him at last, but she later keeps silent to possibly protect her relationship.
Maka, Bertrand’s best friend and the man of honor at their wedding, walks in. The two men exchange greetings in the absence of Iba. Iba, pressing a folded handkerchief against her lower lip, walks into the sitting room. Iba’s husband freezes, fearing she may expose his malpractices to his friend. Noticing her, Maka, in astonishment asks:

Good gracious, what’s wrong with your lip, Iba? If I didn’t know B as a fine gentleman, I’d have thought he’s just given you a good beating.

You know B can’t hurt a fly. How could such a ridiculous idea get into your head, Maka? I bumped into the bathroom door. (p. 24)

Maka proves that in a circle of his friends, Bertrand pretends to be a humble man, a picture he paints himself, disguising his negative side. Iba’s hiding her pain from Bertrand’s friend indicates that women are often to be blamed for their fates. Instead of facing the reality and exposing the malpractices that many African women undergo at the hands of their husbands, some African women in cohabitative relationships reverse their decisions to expose the cruel side of their husbands. Iba has just proven how vulnerable and weak she is as she appears to hide her pain from Maka. She conceals her husband’s violence to either secure her marriage, or from fearing another battle when Maka leaves. Iba has to kiss the dust in order to please and cajole a man. Evidently, Iba’s ordeal cripples and defeats her because of her inability to defend herself. On the one hand, though sarcastic, Iba may want to prove to her husband that their love is growing strong, and her husband is a kind man who will not “hurt a fly”. Iba, ironically uses the idiom to protect her husband, but it is not to her benefit. Bertrand continues scoring as a humble man in the eyes of his friends – a fake colouring of his life.

After saving him, Bertrand admits his guilt and thanks Iba, saying:
I’m very grateful to you, Iba, for saving my reputation. I don’t deserve that after what I have done to you. I am sorry Iba. Your father secretly made me promise to give him your salary for every month for three years. (p. 25)

Bertrand apologises to Iba because he did not intend to hurt her, but was rather used by his father-in-law. On many occasions, many women tend to accept the apology easily and live in denial of all that has happened in their lives. Accepting an apology lightly tells that women easily forgive their oppressors in their marriages. This tells that women unwaveringly still hope to live in harmony with men. Iba cannot believe that her father is the source of all her slavery at the hands of her husband. Iba, (crying), “My father! No, not him. He would not do such a cruel thing. Not my father!” (p. 25). Her denial is a reflection of the trust she had with her father, but her father has betrayed her.

The patriarchal system of men dominating women is evident when Bertrand and his father-in-law were communicating about Iba’s salary. Iba’s father is ruling over his son-in-law through his daughter. There is a power structure – father over son-in-law and son-in-law over his wife through patriarchy. They are fighting over ruling women. Above all, Bertrand was used as a tool by his father-in-law. He is not greedy, but was made to inflict cruelty on his wife by his father-in-law. Bertrand was actually protecting his wife. The researcher believes Bertrand is an honourable man. The irony of his behaviour is that he does not want to break her heart. In other words, Bertrand was protecting her by not telling her why he wanted the money. Indeed, he was protecting her from her hurt and disappointment.
In a similar situation, Ogochukwu’s *Needles of the Heart* (2006), depicts how African women in cohabitative relationships are agents of suppression. Nana has been brutalised by Ozolua, her husband, but she has a forgiving heart, albeit that there is danger to her life. Ene, Nana’s chief bridesmaid, puzzled with the violence just a few days after the couple’s wedding, questions her:

> Nana, you did not tell me Ozolua was a violent man. Has he been putting your life in danger in this manner?

> I can’t really say if he has always been like this. But you know, this is the first time he is beating me. I still can’t believe he beat me. He has been nice to me and all of a sudden, this …” (p. 182).

Nana is trying to protect her husband and to sugar-coat the situation, accepting it as a singular incident that may not be repeated again. Nana is convinced that her husband has been good, but it could be that she did not know that Ozolua is a hypocrite. Nana is in denial regarding the fact that Ozolua could be violent towards her. Asked about what prompt the beatings, Nana responds:

> Come to think of it. It’s for something so ridiculous. I was looking at his collection and he said I was admiring a particular man in the collection. That he saw how I gazed at his photo lustfully. As I protested, he hit me. (p. 182)

Ozolua is an envious man. A woman is accused of lustfully loving another man just by gazing at a shadow on a paper. It shows that once a woman is married, she has to part with, or stay away from male friends or colleagues. Nana’s protest could mean that she cannot argue with her husband, let alone accept the accusation of being lustful. It is a bad symptom in a relationship if one has to be beaten for staring at a shadow of a man in a picture.
Ogochukwu tells how Nana calls Ene to explain that “it was just a mistake and it would not happen again” (p. 182). Nana is too protective of her husband in this abusive relationship. The violence does not happen until two years after the birth of her son, Jide. The narrator tells how often many women are soft-hearted, easy forgivers and continue giving men a second chance. By giving a violent man a second chance, a woman is clearly showing her vulnerability, and that she cannot live without a man. Hence, some men take it for granted that women are their subjects.

For the past two years after she returned to her husband, the couple has been living happily and Nana feels her husband has revived his attitudes. Later on, Ozolua continues beating her again. Feeling confident that she could trust Ene, Nana, in a tearful and painful voice calls Ene, begging:

Please come and get us. We are at Okene. We are hiding in someone’s house. Ozu threw us out. (p. 183)

Nana has become a victim of her husband again. She has been kicked left and right mercilessly and has to suffer her beatings in silence. Both Nana and her son have been thrown out, possibly at night. The narrator portrays how abused women have to seek refuge in strange environments, fearing for their lives. They are hiding, fearing the possibility of being ambushed. The narrator is implying that some African women are not secure in their relationships. Ene, in wonderment and in a pitiful voice, asks:

Jesus Christ! Who did this to you Nana? (p. 183).
Gathering her courage, putting on a false smile and wrestling with her tears, Nana, in a soft voice, says:

I don’t know. He was not like this. There was a problem in his office. I think he was under pressure. I must have uttered the wrong words. I don’t know, but he hit me hard and broke my head. I told myself I had to escape, at least for a while. He didn’t know when I left the house and went to his sister’s at Okene, but on getting there, we realised she had travelled. So, I had to give you a call. (p. 183)

Nana is living in denial that her husband is abusive. She is also overprotective, despite the violence she endures. Nana accuses and blames herself to avoid arguing with her husband. She is a victim of her own fate and believes that she is the cause of all the troubles in her relationship. Nana is not ready to fully give up on a violent relationship. She only wants to heal the pain, “at least for a while.” This prepositional phrase indicates that she is not duly giving up or resisting abuse. Nana wants to hide her dilemma from Ene, because Ene is her pillar.

Ene wants to tear up the relationship, but Nana, exhibiting her insecurity, protests:

Don’t! Don’t. I don’t want him to know we are here. Please, let him suffer a bit. Let him look for us. (p. 183).

When Ene hints that Nana should bury the idea of being searched for, Nana continues denying:

I know him; he will be going crazy now in search of us. It’s difficult to admit, but he is otherwise a good man. He really takes care of me in his good moments. He even bathes the baby, backs me at the beach, his heart actually embraces mine. I know it when he is near me and he is really near. I don’t know where he got this madness. It worries him too. (p. 184).
Nana’s defense clearly shows that a heart is a lonely hunter. Nana’s behaviour reflects how often many African women, and possibly all other women in cohabitative relationships are scared to be alone, despite the malpractices they undergo at the hands of their husbands. Nana opts to stay in a harmful relationship, wishing things will change for the better. At times, one may think she is hallucinating, but on the other hand, the abuse might have affected her psychologically, leaving her to reminisce about the good days she once had. Nana never saw the dark side of Ozolua before the marriage, a situation that puts her in a vulnerable and weak position as a wife. She turns a blind eye because she appears to be so much in love and may feel insecure without a man by her side. However, turning a blind eye is disempowering her. By seeing only the positive side, she thinks she is happy, but the reality is the opposite.

At long last, it shows that it is true when Nana says that she knows Ozolua like the palm of her hands. Ozolua has arrived. Ene thwarts him. Firstly, Ozolua pleads earnestly and later starts behaving wildly and in an angry voice, says:

Please Ene, just let me see her. I need to see my wife, after all, she is my wife (p. 184).

Ozolua shows remorse but could it be genuine? Ozolua is also implying that a woman is merely property and the object of a man; a woman is owned by a man, a man has the right to inflict any harm on his wife and the wife should humbly submit to him. A woman is the ‘other’- binary opposite of a man, the one with all the power.

Still living in denial and still wanting to keep her relationship, Nana pleads with Ene:
Please let him in. you know he is just like a lost child. He can’t go away. This is where his hope lies. I have forgiven him. Poor child! Poor soul! Don’t worry, you will understand when you get married. (p.185)

Ene, shattered by Nana’s behaviour, allows Ozolua in and “Nana flew into his arms”. A heart is actually a lonely hunter. The simile, “he is just like a lost child” suggests that Nana implies that Ozolua needs direction and he can still be guided to change his behaviour. Nana ‘wipes the slate clean’, day-dreaming that a new world awaits her. The narrator depicts how African women in cohabitative relationships struggle to cast off their blindness and naiveté and reach their potential without men. Nana believes that when a woman is married, she has to accept marriage and its impediments without revolt.

The battle continues and Nana is saved by her brothers who take her along. Ozolua begs for his wife. Nana escapes from her brothers to go back to Ozolua. Nana’s behaviour becomes wild and she keeps on hunting for a lion. She has to swallow her pride, and admit that a woman is too weak to freely leave an abusive relationship.

Nana’s son has witnessed his father’s brutality and has noticed how his mother keeps on defending him. Ozolua eventually elopes with Brenda, a woman he has been dating, but still Nana continues living in denial, believing that Ozolua has been taken through ‘diabolical means’. She keeps on believing and saying:

I know my man will come back! He didn’t leave intentionally, he didn’t! (p. 186).
Both Okoye and Oguchukwa depict how black African women remain fixated in their abusive relationships hoping for a better change. Both women live in denial and rather opt to protect their relationships. It is a fact that some African women fear the loss of marital security through divorce or separation. The acts of accepting maltreatment from a husband stereotypically define African womanhood. African women in cohabitative relationships become slaves of their lovers. In other words, loving a man is exchanged by slavery – the yoke of marriage. The narrators portray that men are no longer the protectors of their wives, but rebels that drive their wives into misery. Women often see themselves as responsible for everything that goes wrong in the cohabitative relationship; it is their fault and their male partners are blameless. Oyidiya thinks it her fault for failing to conceive a son. She hunts for wives to conceive a son on her behalf. Rokhaya thinks it her fault for being barren. She avoids discussing the issue with her husband.

The two women, Iba and Nana, have not allowed their intuitions to save them from the abuse. They have betrayed themselves, a situation that many women regret in the end. Nana keeps dreaming that the relationship will change for the better, but she lies to herself for the rest of her life.

The different ways that black African women in cohabitative relationships cope with malpractice and physical violence in this section seemed to have disempowered them. Iba disempowered herself by hiding her pain from her husband’s friend. She does not want to expose him because she wants to keep her marriage. Equally, Nana has been too
protective, and at the same time, living in denial, resulting in turning a blind eye on her abusive relationship. She only sees the positive side of her husband and thinks she is happy when she is not. Fear to be lonely and insecurity disempowered her. Rokhaya disempowered herself for failing to discuss her fate with her husband, fearing possible rejection, even though her husband has been supportive. Oyidiya disempowered herself by looking for wives to respond to the males telling her to either have a son or be ready to lose her land and wealth because she has no son.

4.6.3 Coping with culture/tradition

Another theme that developed from the data collected in this study is culture and tradition. In *Saltless Ash*, Alkali (1993) portrays how African traditions and culture have adverse effects on African women in cohabitative relationships. Possessing multiple women is seen as a symbol of wealth and power to control and rule over women. Hassan, the protagonist, begins constructing new rooms, an indication of importing a new wife. His wives are on their toes. Amsa and Yabutu are ready to fight for their rights over Hassan. In preparing for their fight, the two women converse privately:

> Ya, the old man is at it again. The village is ablaze with the news of his marriage. Amsa, put your mind at rest. How can he marry at a time like this, when money is scarce and the children are always hungry? He can’t do this to us. Look, pretend you haven’t heard anything and leave everything to me. (p. 27)

It is indisputable that African women in polygynous marriages are constantly aware that the husband can take more wives at any time. Yabutu is insinuating that a man would be allowed to take another woman, but only when he is rich enough. Yabutu could have accepted the idea of the third wife if the house was not faced with starvation. Amsa
appears to repress the idea of harbouring a third wife. Amsa’s utterance, “the old man is at it again” suggests that Hassan has previously attempted to seek another wife, which the wives have averted. Hassan, suspicious of his wives’ conspiracy, approaches Yabutu, his senior wife for her consent, only to meet with rejection, Hassan thunders:

Can’t a man tell his wife what to do without argument? Tell me, who is the master in this house? (p. 29).

Hassan is presupposing that a woman has to remain mute, bow to and accept a man’s decision without any protest. In other words, Hassan is stressing that a man is the lord of all women, therefore women should be submissive. Hassan calls Amsa to break the news that old “Yabutu is going back to her people.” Though already aware, Amsa asks why and Hassan replies:

Nothing – she needs to rest.

Rest from what?

I do not expect questions from a daughter of the Turabe. I am bringing into the house the daughter of the Imam. Daughter of the Turabe, the girl will be a great help to you.

You say, she is the daughter of the Imam?

Yes, what is wrong with the daughter of the Imam?

Nothing. Nothing my husband, except that Ya is leaving for a mere child, age-mate of your grandchild, but then you are the man, master of the house and head of the Turabe clan. A man must always be right, so do exactly as you wish, royal son of the Turabe, but accept a simple word of advice from me. While you are at it, marry the daughter of the Ladan as well.

Marry the daughter of the Ladan? Why?

Why? Simple: If Yabutu left, so would I. (p. 32)

Who do you think you are, eh? All right, you go! By noon tomorrow, all of you should vacate this house. Carry everything that you own, including your
children. Don’t leave a single broom behind. Then I will think seriously about your suggestion.

The narrator tells how Hassan becomes furious over Amsa’s interrogation and wants to strike her. Alkali portrays how men continue dominating the spheres of social structure, ruining and ruling over their relationships. Sending Yabutu back to her parents explicitly tells how ‘women are born to please a man’ and in the long run, may annoy men when they grow older. Hassan’s logic that Yabutu “needs to rest” is a testimony that a woman is the subject of her husband who only desires her sexually. Hassan is 70 years while Yabutu is 50 years, yet he wants to be a suitor for a young girl of about 20 years to replace his aging wives. This tells that a woman is a sexual object and faces deportation when she can no longer sexually attract her husband. In other words, a wife is seen as the sex slave of her husband. Hassan does not expect opposition from Amsa. It displeases him that a woman has the audacity to oppose him. Amsa shames her husband by telling him to seek another royal girl. Amsa has been calculating and vexed Hassan with sour remarks and she ridicules him politely. In a very dignified and majestically manner, Amsa announces her decision to part if Hassan sends Yabutu back home.

Amsa plays a role in female solidarity. She saves her family from the evils of insecurity. Equally, Amsa shuns a gossip-monger who comes to tell her of Hassan’s decision to send Yabutu back home, because she has become “the camel of a wife with an elephant trunk”(p. 31). Metaphorically, Yabutu has reached her sexual-erotic peak. Yabutu keeps silent for her humiliation, but Amsa, unlike many co-wives, stood tall and proud to protect her co-wife as well as her family. Amsa believes Yabutu should not be the
laughing stock of her society. Amsa strongly portrays her traditional role of upholding her family solidarity. The two wives have no rivalries, but strive to unite as women of worthy causes, and in so doing protect themselves against being invaded or subjugated by another woman.

In *Marriage and Other Impediments*, Adeaga (2006) showcases how the idea of marriage is not straightforward to the two young students in the cohabitative relationship because of their differing traditions. Tola, a young student in Germany, has to gather courage when she says:

> I have to tell my dad the truth and give him time to get used to the idea (p. 23).

Tola is aware that her parents, as strong upholders of traditional and cultural norms, are likely to forbid her to marry a foreigner. Tola is tipping that she has to cross her traditional borders to fulfil her desire. Tola’s father keeps on reminding her of the importance of her culture, but Tola is adamant and responds:

> It took me a long a long time to get used to the idea, because living in Germany has made me aware of the problems mixed-relationships face. But since love is one thing we cannot control, I am prepared to deal with the problems when they come. (p. 28)

Tola believes in herself and does not like to have ideas imposed on her. Tola envisions to break the barriers that some traditions place on the shoulders of many young Africans in love with non-Africans. She is determined to go beyond her culture.

Tola’s father attempts to convince her to consider the future. With a startled voice, he sighs:
Hmm, but what about your future, have you given it a thought? It’s one thing for you to live there as a foreigner, it’s another thing for you to be married to one of them. They will never accept you. Look around you, do you think he will be accepted in this family? It is not just enough to speak a language; you have to understand a person’s culture. Quite frankly, we will never understand his culture, and ours will be strange to him as well. (p. 29)

Tola’s father insists that a daughter should not defy her culture. As an elder, he hopes for the young generation to uphold their culture and marry within their cultural lines. But Tola is never moved; she is determined to stay put and continue with her relationship. Hence, her determination and empowerment proves robust when she assures her dad that:

Dad, I’ve thought of it a lot and I know the path we’ve chosen is a rough one. But I can only get married to him with your blessings because without your moral support, I will not survive it. Things are changing today and the world I’ve moved in is a multi-cultural one. Sorry Dad, I’m deviating again. I know it is supposed to be a marriage between two families. I’ve prepared Till for it. Please do say you agree. (p. 29)

Tola is a truly fostered African child who does not forget her roots. She has high respect for her culture. The fact that Tola is begging for the support of her parents is an indication that, in order to survive difficulties of a marriage, one has to ask for support from one’s immediate family to give consent to one’s relationship. To ensure the stability of her marriage, Tola has to persuade her parents to agree to the relationship. She eagerly shows how she does not want to object to her family and traditions. Tola’s begging is met with rejection in all spheres of her family.

After a long dispute over her relationship with Till with her family, Tola keeps glued to her determination. Tola continues to be adamant and in a strong voice, she tells her family members that:
It is not my intention to make you all unhappy. I cannot know if it is going to succeed without giving it a try. Tillman is the only man I want to marry. I have tried to explain to Mom and Dad that I am interested only in him but they feel I’m making a mistake. I know their fears are grounded but what should I do, call off the wedding because of the culture clash? (p. 31).

Adeaga tells how Tola’s Uncle Papa convinces the family to give consent to the wedding. Tola was over the moon and she flies back to Germany to tell Till the thrilling news. At long last, Tills’ parents also accept the union.

It is clear that a matrimonial union in an African society is primarily a union between families and not exclusively between the two lovers. Moreover, a cultural bondage is important in many African societies. In other words, it shows that the values, cultural and traditional norms are the foundations that direct an African into the different world. It appears that parents would want to have a hand in the decision of choosing a mate for their children. On the other hand, Tola illustrates that often young Africans are caught up in their cultures and traditions when making choices regarding their lives. Tola demonstrates that young Africans need not object to their traditions, but rather respect their traditions and at the same, make their people understand that they do have the right to choose themselves. Basically, Tola proves that one can stand one’s ground and fight for one’s rights in a way that bridges culture and modernity.

This discussion indicates that culture plays an important role in the lives of partners. The two lovers understand the value and importance of their cultures. Therefore, to empower
themselves, they have to convince their parents to understand their feelings towards each other and give their consent to their relationship. The acceptance of the union by both sets of parents empowers the young lovers. As an African woman, Tola, is empowered.

4.6.4 Coping with abduction

Many women and children often experience sexual abuse through abduction and kidnapping, resulting in forceful sexual relationships and marriage. In *Madalena Returned from Captivity*, Magaia (1993) portrays how Madalena keeps on releasing tears when asked what has happened to her. Madalena cannot say a word and keeps on staring at the ground, fighting to open her mouth. After a long probe about what has happened to her, Madalena finally reveals that they had been kept in a military base as wives of bandits, together with a number of other girls. Again, when asked whether she has a husband, Madalena keeps silent, an indication that she is petrified with fear and shame. Madalena finally admits she has a husband and was made to call him uncle. Madalena opens up and reveals that:

There were many people. Men, women and children. I don’t know how many. The bandits drank a lot of hooch every day, and when they were drunk, they would pick out someone to kill – with a knife, or a bayonet, or hatchet or even with a pestle. (p. 82)

Magaia presents how genocide perpetrated by armed men against a defenseless population puts women in vulnerable positions. A sexually abused victim remains a watcher in order to survive further abuse. Madalena’s situation could possibly result in post-traumatic disorder that may hinder her to regain self-actualisation. As a minor, her
womanhood has been destroyed. Madalena cannot fight back, but rather accepts the abuse.

Often, African women who are subjected to rape and abuse appear to be disempowered, because as women, they may live in silence for too long. Madalena is disempowered, firstly, as a minor and secondly, as a child forced into womanhood against her desire.

4.6.5 Coping with barrenness

Another theme that arises from the data collection is the issue of infertility. Often, the stereotyping associated with infertility excludes men. In an African tradition, it appears to be a taboo to say a man has failed to create.

Reminded of her barrenness by her brother-in-law, Rokhaya collapses on the ground and weeps for a long time. Inevitably, the narrator depicts how a woman is faced with great pain by the inability to bring forth a child from her womb. Rokhaya is edgy about her situation but appears to mask it from her husband. Rokhaya suffers in silence and avoids telling her husband about his brother’s tantrums. Instead, Rokhaya finds relief in telling Mother Dioulde, a neighbour, of her bitterness about her brother-in-law and her uneasiness at not having conceived a child after two years of marriage. Rokhaya reacts negatively to her infertility and fails to openly discuss it with her husband, fearing possible blame or rejection.

Rokhaya appears to believe that it is her fault for not conceiving. Instead of discussing procreation with her medical-doctor husband, Rokhaya goes to seek assistance from
Mother Dioulde, who is believed to have knowledge in cleansing a barren womb. It is true that the desire to become pregnant is overpowering many women in their relationships. Therefore, Rokhaya is ready to do anything possible in order to procreate. Rokhaya adheres to the cleansing instructions given by Mother Dioulde in her struggle to bring forth a child from her womb. Baba, her husband, has also recommended his wife to undergo gynaecological treatment. Rokhaya misses her periods the next month. Unlike, many African men, Baba has been supportive and appears to show Rokhaya that it is not her fault for failing to conceive. In other words, he is empowering her, but Rokhaya disempowered herself by keeping silent, fearing rejection.

4.6.6 Coping with in-laws

A further theme that emerges from the data collection is the issue of dealing with in-laws. Once a woman is married, some relatives, either from the wife/husband’s side, may poke their noses into the partners’ relationship.

Mrs Mensah can no longer tolerate the attitudes of her in-laws. Unwelcoming the arrival of her sister-in-law and daughter, Mrs Mensah with a determined voice uttered:

I won’t let them do it to us this time. I won’t let them take the advantage of us again. Just because Albert has a kind heart doesn’t mean he’s a money tree for them to shake whenever they want something. And though I’m a Christian, I refuse to be a sleeping mat for them to spread themselves over. She’s not going to use me again. (p. 77)

Badoe portrays how a woman in a cohabitative relationship is hampered by her ordeal and her inability to fend off the complexities that have befallen her for so long. Mrs Mensah can no longer accept the manipulative tactics of her husband’s relatives. She
stands up to defend her marriage against the bad attitudes of her sister-in-law. Mrs Mensah repeatedly addresses the time frame such as, “this time”, “us again” and “me again’ shows that she has been silent for too long. The couple has been taken for granted by her husband’s relatives. Mrs Mensah has been humbled by Christianity which her sister-in-law sees as a leeway to manipulate the couple. Mrs Mensah is ready to protect her marriage.

Unappeased by her husband’s willingness to raise the third child of his sister, Mrs Mensah, in a strong voice, resists:

Is this what you think of me? Am I here to be used whenever you feel like? Did you marry me to finish off whatever your sister starts? Albert, we’re getting old. Let’s enjoy the time left without your sister’s interference, I beg you. (p. 81)

When her husband tells her how he feels, considering the child’s future in the care of his sister, Mrs Mensah rebukes him by saying:

Well, Esi should have thought of that before she opened her legs (p. 82).

Mrs Mensah shows her husband that she can no longer be a slave to his family. She has had enough of her sister-in-law’s nonsense. It appears that since their marriage, Mrs Mensah has not enjoyed her married life. She has to nurse her own children in addition to her sister-in-law’s children. Mrs Mensah suffers pain by being preoccupied and dumped with her husband’s family residues. Standing up to face both her husband and her sister-in-law has empowered herself. Equally, the support she gets from her husband has also empowered her as she feels protected in her marriage.
4.6.7 Coping with forced marriage

Forced marriage is among the themes that emerged from the data collection in this study. Some young children, in particular girls, are forced into marriages by their parents.

Unigwe depicts how the seventeen-year old Uju has to accept an arranged marriage against her will. Uju’s mother, stricken by poverty, opts for Uju to marry a forty-six year old man. Uju refuses to take her mother’s initiation, saying:

   But I don’t love him, Mother. How can I marry a man I do not love? I can’t (p. 222).

Contradicting Uju’s intuitions, her mother persistently, and with a firm and solid voice tells her,

   Love does not matter, my daughter. There are things more important than love (p. 222).

In a weightless voice and a heavy heart, Uju rebukes:

   Love does matter, Mother. You are so very wrong. It really does matter (p. 222).

Uju’s mother goes wild, crying over her poverty, day and night, until Uju gets absorbed into her mother’s persistence. Uju, with a heavy heart nods in agreement:

   Yes. I will marry Chief. I will marry him (p. 222).
By proving her mother wrong about love, Uju is signaling that materialism and status over real love are worthless. Uju’s behaviour indisputably proves that she is being forced to accept a marriage against her will. Her decision to accept the union could mean that a child who refuses to accept her parent’s desire is likely to face a curse in her life. Uju’s repeated acceptance, “I will marry Chief. I will marry him” shows that it is an acceptance of pleasing, fearing of putting her mother in shame and disgrace. Uju chooses to please her mother, a choice that disempowers her as a young woman to choose the man of her dreams, desires and choice. In other words, Uju’s situation is not a matter of choice, but rather an arranged union which will have a huge impact on her life.

Unigwe gives a powerful critique of how women can betray motherhood where young daughters are trapped in forced marriage in exchange for status and security. Uju has been dragged into a misery. She wishes she could disappear or die in her sleep, rather than live to see Chief Okeke as her husband. The narrator manifests how Uju practically hates her mother because of the miseries she brings into her life. Uju has never been euphoric about the gifts Chief showers on her. On the wedding day, Uju cries throughout the ceremony, an indication of her unhappiness. Uju walks as if limping due to the pain between her legs after Chief’s manhood destroyed her virginity. When pregnant, Uju thinks of flinging the baby out of her womb.
Uju keeps silent about her despair and lives a painful life. Her mother’s behaviour disempowered her. She has no choice but to accept her mother’s decision. This tells that some black African women are responsible for disempowering other women.

4.7 Women as the voice

A further theme that arises from the data collection is the voice of women, standing up to fight for the rights of others.

Karungi, a brave woman who takes the position of a woman activist, stands up to deal with the domestic situation in Kyomya’s household. Karungi threatens to end the relationship with the family and report the case to the parish priest. The priest commands high respect and he is seen as the one sent by God. The narrator tells how Kyomya fears to go to hell, and reverses his threats to his wife. Mostly, his dreams are filled with hell fire and he would wake and scream:

God, if hell’s fire is like this one, please don’t send me there (p. 79).

Metaphorically, the above statement shows Kyomya’s subconscious. He knows that the current situation he is going through is a selfish one. Although Karungi wants to make a difference and to unite the family, other women in her society do not support her fight against domestic abuse. Some women still believe it is a social disorder for a woman to judge and silence men. An elderly woman was heard murmuring:

Why bring in Karungi? Does she have the medicine to make Kinobi produce boys? (p. 79).
The old woman’s statement is a clear indication that women should not fight men, but let them alone do what they deem to suit their desires. Karungi is accused of being the victim of western ideas and copycats of white women who are accused of being in rivalry with their men. Black women are usually stigmatised when they stand up to speak for themselves. This is clear when Karungi is addressing a group of men and women to stop inflicting malpractices against their partners. Karungi’s voice becomes the voice of other women, particularly those who merely accept humiliation from their husbands. Although the humiliation is suffocating some women, they have to accept the power of men. Karungi’s voice heals the family as the narrator puts it, “Kyomya thanks her and requests that a special meal be served because his family, that was falling apart, had been restored” (p. 80). The narrator is trying to imply that some voices are remedies that can heal wounds, whereas other voices are seen as reversing the natural order.

African women in cohabitative relationships may plan for a family, but the absence of a son may result in extending their family planning. Today, many women have to re-plan their families when the marriage and/or a relationship does not bear a son. There are always third or fourth trials depending on the desired gender of the children. Both partners will usually take a second chance in the hope to have a son in the family. Women are often seen as inferior because of their inability to bear a son. On the contrary, men are not ostracised for their inability to create and often do not want to be seen as producing “weak seeds”. Some would even be uncomfortable to become the laughing stock among their clans. Through her voice, Karungi empowers Kakwanzi and succeeded in disempowering Kyomya.
4.8 Bringing it all together

One of the purposes of this study was to look at how the values and attitudes of a specific society determine the way black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships. Some societies seem to shape the way black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships. For example, Oyidiya has to react to men telling her to have a son; both Rohkaya and Mrs Mensah’s relationships are almost destroyed by their in-laws, merely for their own benefit. Moreover, Tola and Till live in societies where their culture and tradition find race and identity a stumbling block for the two lovers to have a relationship. Uju has to accept her mother’s idea to marry an old man against her wishes. She has never been happy in her marriage. Equally, Madalena, as a child, has to accept to become a young wife for the bandits who kidnapped her.

Another purpose of this study was to look at the behaviours of the fictional characters in the selected short stories, to establish whether their behaviours have empowered or disempowered them. It appears that the way some women coped with their experiences in cohabitative relationships empowers them, whereas others disempowered them. Iba and Nana disempowered themselves by protecting their abusive relationships. Furthermore, Madalena and Uju were disempowered as young women because they had to accept their ordeals against their wishes. Rokhaya disempowered herself by failing to openly discuss her infertility with her husband, despite the support he gave her. Similarly, Oyidiya disempowered herself by hunting for young wives to bear a son,
because she could not tolerate the idea of losing her land and wealth because she had no son. Moreover, Kakwanzi kept silent of her husband’s threat to take a second wife, and she was only empowered through the voice of another woman. Equally, Amsa succeeded in disempowering her husband and empowered both herself and her co-wife by standing up for their rights as married wives. She refused her husband to send her co-wife, Yabutu to her parents and to take a third wife.

Many African women in cohabitative relationships in the ten short stories, selected for this study are disempowered. However, there are those that succeeded in empowering themselves. For example, Tola has empowered herself because she succeeded in convincing her parents to give their consent to her relationship with a white man. Likewise, Mrs Mensah has empowered herself by protecting her marriage from the manipulative tactics of her sister-in-law, Esi, who is determined to destroy her brother’s marriage. Both Rokhaya and Mrs Mensah have the support of their husbands.

4.9 The short story as a genre

In this section, the researcher presented the effectiveness of the short story as a genre in enunciating the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships. The researcher looked at the short story and women representation, as well as short story and gender.
4.9.1 The short story and women representation

Through the portrayal of self-experiences and the experiences of other women in short stories, black African women writers are trying to bring a voice to the fore, a new voice that may direct African women in cohabitative relationships the freedom to act and speak about the oppressive conditions in their lives. Each short story conveys a specific theme which may be relevant to many subjected women. The short story genre appears to be the voice of African women writers combating violence and abuse. Most of what black African women writers portray, reflects their own lives and backgrounds. Significantly, African women writers’ personal faith in their sexuality and marriages may bring illumination and hope to women all over the world. Moreover, black women writers are contemplating after the hardships and problems that black African women in cohabitative relationships experience in patriarchal societies. Womanists, through short stories, seem to fight the oppression of traditional customs that many African women face, in order to set black African women free from male dominance. By doing so, African female authors are showing how women can empower or disempower themselves.

In the social setting, the short story genre creates awareness in order to see things differently. On the other hand, a short story may be written just to be read for enjoyment and not to provoke an emotion. However, it is necessary to note that some short stories are about real situations, others only a little bit, whereas others are too fictional to be regarded as real representation. However, the researcher does not see the representation
adequately reaching out to the real African women who are faced with the nature of oppression and dominance in their societies. Many of the African women represented in these short stories are either those rural African women, as well as a few urban African women, who have paged some books, unlike most rural African women in cohabitative relationships. These rural African women may not be literate, nor do they have access to short stories which represent or depict them. Therefore, the voices of African womanists may serve the similar representation of Western feminists when they represented black African women unauthentically. In other words, African womanists appear to imagine the hardships and maltreatment that rural African women in cohabitation relationships undergo, but never bring these women to their conferences to give authentic versions of their experiences.

Bringing in the rural traditional African women in cohabitative relationships would enable the subjected women to tell whether their experiences had empowered or disempowered them. Postcolonial African women writers are taking up the similar empty spaces that the First Third academic feminists had taken to represent the voiceless African women in cohabitative relationships. The representation of others in short stories could only give a full account of real life experiences if African women writers allow rural African women to tell their side of their experiences. Short stories may not be enough, but conferences that engage rural African women in cohabitative relations will convince them to feel well represented by African womanists and give them a voice and a platform to advocate real change.
4.9.2 The short story and gender

Many of the African women writers in the selected ten short stories do not see men and the masculine role in a positive light.

The writers usually present and represent a certain segment of one side, resulting in an imbalance in gender representation. This means African women writers present a biased gender representation in their stories. Indisputably, African women are not solitary in their cohabitative relationships. The researcher would therefore concur with Kamara (2001) who proposes that the feminist struggle should not be a struggle for women alone, nor the struggle between women and men, but let it be a struggle that requires the partnerships of both sexes. The experiences of African men have been overlooked by black female womanists. This is in contrast to the womanism approach which aims to address gender without necessarily attacking men, when men are perpetually presented as portraying misogyny.

Just like many rural traditional African women are unaware of being represented, African men in cohabitative relationships may not be aware that their behaviours and attitudes towards their wives/women are being exposed, in order to end the malpractices. Therefore, the researcher does not believe that short stories create avenues for both black men and black women to transform the lives of the partners in cohabitative relationships. Equally, African women writers portray other women mostly in a positive light, a situation that may be viewed as being influenced by Western feminism. Usually, African
women writers depict other women as victims of the old patriarchy, resulting in a translation that a woman is a weak being. This raises the questions: Are there no active black African women out there to fight the “oppression” that they endure in a relationship? Do African women always have to be submissive and wait for the mercy of others? When will black African women writers write about the victory of many black African women in cohabitative relationships in a matriarchal, as opposed to patriarchal system? Is the presentation and representation not damaging the true value of a black African woman? The researcher believes modern black African women in cohabitative relationships are moving with new visions that describe the new black African woman.

The depiction of black African women in modernity appears to be exclusive. Many black African women in cohabitative relationships vow to marry out of community of property, an indication that some urban and educated black African women want to be independent. In a situation where a relationship becomes abusive or oppressive, a woman may opt to file for a mandatory divorce or separation. This means that modern African relationships are moving in the direction of ending a worthless commitment to cohabitation relationship when they are disempowered.

4.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented the collected data and an analysis of how black African women function in cohabitative relationships. Firstly, the researcher presented the different scenarios of how the values, attitudes and cultures of a specific society determine the way African women cope with their experiences, as portrayed in the ten
selected fictional short stories by black African women writers. Secondly, the researcher presented the behaviour of black African women in cohabitative relationships, in order to establish whether their behaviour empowers or disempowers them. Finally, the researcher looked at how the short story as a genre enunciates the experiences of African women in cohabitative relationships. In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the issues that emerged from the data analysis in this study, make recommendations and conclude.
CHAPTER FIVE
5. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study analysed the way black African women function in cohabitative relationships as portrayed in ten selected fictional short stories by black African women writers. The principal purpose of the study was to analyse how black African female authors depict other black women in literature, as well as how they address different themes relevant to many African societies.

The feminism, womanism and stiwanism theories were combined to look at issues, such as needs relating to the way African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships. Feminism is deemed as an approach that addresses the needs for women of ‘Western thought’. Although womanism has been coined by African-American women, the term is foregrounded in African culture and centres more on the experiences, needs and desires of African women. Stiwanism, on the other hand, addresses the social and political transformation of African women in Africa. Moreover, stiwanism addresses issues of African women in their African indigenous cultures and further considers the social being of black African women. Ogundipe-Leslie (2007) championed the term ‘stiwanism’ for African women as a foundation on which to build a stronger and harmonious society, where both black men and black women have social responsibilities in reconstructing and uplifting their livelihood as an entire African society.
Different themes emerged as answers to the following research questions,

- To what extent do the values, attitudes and culture of a specific society, as portrayed by the fictional characters in the selected short stories, determine how black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships?
- How do black African women cope with their experiences in cohabitative relationships as portrayed in the selected short stories?
- How is the short story as a genre employed in enunciating the way black African women function in cohabitative relationships?

5.2 African society

The cultural patterns in many African societies subject women to male power. Some scholars, like Arndt (2000), (see § 2.3.) argues that the Western societies contribute to the form of oppression of both black men and black women in Africa. However, the researcher opposes the argument because the researcher believes the ancient customs and traditional politics of our African ancestors are the root cause of all the problems and challenges that many African societies, in particular, black African women, face today. Nevertheless, the researcher concurs with Griffiths (2013) who argues that the growth of male power in society is featured as the main problem many black African women face in cohabitative relationships (see § 2.3.1). Black African women see black African men as a threat in their relationships and societies. Thus, they believe the male power that dominates women, results in black African women being marginalised and weakened, taking an inferior position in their societies.
Mangena (2013, p. 13) (see §2.3.2) establishes that “women are not only victims, they also victimise. Women are not always a source of life, they destroy life.” Women may be seen as destroyers of other women’s lives as illustrated in Badoe’s *The Rival* (2006), where Esi, Mrs Mensah’s sister-in-law almost destroyed her relationship (see § 4.2.2). However, the selected fictional short stories of this study reveal that women find solidarity in others. They build a bond to nurture and comfort one another in different and difficult situations presented to them by society and the nature of their relationships (see § 2.3.2). Through female bonding (female solidarity), women lessen pain and suffering, resulting in them finding a pillar to lean on outside their cohabitative relationships as was illustrated in Ogochukwa’s *Needles of the Heart* (2006), where Nana relies on Ene for comfort from her abusive relationship with Bertrand (see § 4.6.2). Although Rokhaya’s relationship is not abusive, she finds it uncomfortable to discuss her barrenness with her husband and rather finds comfort in an elderly woman (see § 4.6.5).

### 5.3 Black women’s experiences and lives

The short stories selected for this study reflect the experiences and lives of black African women in cohabitative relationships. Although female authors may want to end discrimination, gender inequality, and most importantly, want their voices to be heard, it is highly likely that change appears to occur without real progress for black African women in cohabitative relationships. For example, Ifeoma Okoye’s *The Pay-packet* (1993) illustrates how education has not brought any change in the lives of black African
women (see § 4.3.1). Another example, Acholonu’s *Mother was a Great Man* (1993) portrays that no matter how wealthy and successful a woman is, she is not allowed to inherit or own land if she has no son (see § 4.3.4). A further example is illustrated in Ka’s *New Life at Tandia* (1993) when Rokhaya, a village woman is married to an educated man (a doctor), yet, her brother-in-law finds the marriage ‘misalliance’ (see § 4.2.1). Equally, Karungi, in Kabagarama’s *The Rich Heritage* (1993) acts as the voice of the voiceless, yet, she is labelled a ‘copycat’ of Westerners by both men and women in her society (see § 4.7).

From the study, it was also clear that the cultural and traditional values of any society dictate the acceptance of a woman/man in a relationship (see § 2.4.1). This can be attested when Adeaga’s *Marriage and Other Impediments* (2006) depicts how the two lovers, Tola and Till have to convince their parents to accept their relationship (see § 4.5.4). Moreover, the attitudes and culture of a specific society appears to determine the way African women in cohabitative relationships cope with their experiences. Traditional practices of inheritance and poverty drive some African women to force or prearrange marriages for their young daughters/women for economic security, for example, Unigwe’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (2006) portrays a widow who was left destitute after the death of her husband. Her brother-in-law removes her out of their house with her daughter, Uju. The widow was left with no choice but to force her daughter, Uju, to marry a rich man (see § 4.5.2).
The study shows that the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships, both positive and negative, may be traced back to the traditions of a specific society as posited by Davies (2007) (see § 2.4). The findings indicate that black African women in cohabitative relationships often live in poverty simply because they are women who cannot overcome the traditional economic power dominated by men. For example, with their careers and education, black African women in cohabitative relationships are still not financially independent. Their opportunities seem to be narrow and they still have to depend on their husbands financially. This can be confirmed when Iba and her colleagues have to give their salaries to their husbands (see § 4.3.1). Equally, Iba has to surrender her salary to her husband and become submissive. Patriarchy continues to dominate women, for instance, Kyomya, in Kabagarama’s The Rich Heritage (1993), threatens his wife that he would take a second wife because she has born no son (see § 4.5.1). Moreover, Hassan in Alkali’s Saltless Ash (1993) decides to send his first wife back to her parents’ home because she was ageing (see § 4.3.2). Oyidiya, in Acholonu’s Mother was a Great Man (1993) has to react to men telling her what to do in order to inherit her husband’s land when he dies (see § 4.6.1).

A further finding reveals that black African women’s unequal position in society means that they have less power, income, protection against violence and have less access to education and even ownership of land. The study further indicates that African women in cohabitative relationships appear to be victims most of the time, and do not react to their fates, as they are often depicted as passive and submissive.
5.3.1 Women and polygyny

Polygyny is interchanged with polygamy, but, the two terms differ (see § 2.4.2). Equally, scholars such as Nassef (2009) and Powell (2008) strongly argue against the practice of polygyny, seeing it as harmful, brutal and exploiting African women in cohabitative relationships (see § 2.4.2). Despite their arguments, there was nothing harmful or any sign of exploitation in the depiction of black African women in cohabitative relationships, regarding polygyny in the selected fictional short stories for this study. Rather, the practice of polygyny is deemed as a legal traditional marriage that requires no mandatory paper, because it is an agreement between families and the community. Unlike other scholars, Emecheta (2007) and Nnaemeka (2007) find polygyny beneficial to black African women, because the practice accords them emotional support, friendship, sisterhood, motherhood, as well as solidarity, among the co-wives. Amsa and Yabutu show no sign of rivalry, competition or animosity in their polygynous relationships. They find comfort in each other, and to them solidarity is a form of empowerment (see § 4.3.2).

In other words, in the African culture, polygyny is not such a thorny issue as polygamy, which is a Western concept. The practice of polygyny works better for some partners. For example, wife/wives prefer their husband to find the right woman to cohabit with them. These co-wives share their desires and weaknesses and counsel each other. Equally, the co-wives together fight for their rights and find solidarity in each other.
Moreover, African women who experience barrenness are either humiliated or rejected for failing to bear a son. Often women who are barren are at risk of their husbands stopping to support them or taking another woman, as confessed by Delgado (1997) (see § 2.4.3). Despite the humiliation that Rokhaya suffers from her brother-in-law, Omar Kounta, for her inability to bear a son, Baba Kounta, Rokhaya’s husband was indeed supportive and did not threaten his wife that he would take a second wife (see § 4.6.5). In other words, the issue of polygyny did not feature in this relationship. Rokhaya and Baba’s relationship proves that barrenness may not necessarily separate the two partners, rather, barrenness is an issue that requires support among partners.

5.4 Voice of the voiceless

A more critical observation made from this study is that black African women writers depict other women as passive because they often have to submit to their partners, like Iba does to Bertrand and Nana to Ozolua (see § 4.6.2). However, there appears to be a kind of bias in the depiction of African women by black African female authors, as men are more often portrayed in a negative light. For example, Ogochukwa’s Needles of the Heart (2006) depicts a husband who beats his wife and often kicks her out of their house. Similarly, Okoye’s The Pay-packet (1993) depicts a husband who beats his wife when she refuses to surrender her salary to him. Furthermore, Magaia’s Madalena Returned from Captivity (1993) portrays how armed men abducted a young girl who was consequently forced to become a young woman prematurely. Acholonu’s Mother was a Great Man (1993) depicts how men made Oyidiya hunt for young women to bear a son
on her behalf. Moreover, Kabagarama’s *The Rich Heritage* (1993) portrays a husband who threatens to seek a second wife to bear him sons. Equally, Alkali’s *Saltless Ash* (1993) depicts a husband who threatens to send his first wife back to her parents in order to seek a young third wife. Although many of these black female authors depict men in a negative light, there are those who see the positive side of men. For example, Ka’s *New Life at Tandia* (1993) portrays a husband who supports his wife in coping with her barrenness. Similarly, Badoe’s *The Rival* (2006) portrays a husband who supports his wife from the humiliation and manipulation of her sister-in-law.

Other than the depiction of men as causes of most of the problems that black African women in cohabitative relationships face, there are parents who equally played a role in the way young African women coped in their relationships. For instance, Unigwe’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (2006) depicts a mother who forced her daughter to marry a wealthy man against her wishes. Equally, Adeaga’s *Marriage and Other Impediments* (2006) depicts how parents of the two lovers, Tola and Till refused to give their consent to the relationship, citing race and identity as stumbling blocks in accepting the union of the two lovers.

The study also reveals that African female authors usually present and represent a certain segment of one side resulting in imbalances of gender representation. Moreover, it seems that black African female authors use short stories as the voices of the voiceless. However, it is likely that the victims do not have access to the voice that present and represent them, thus the researcher sees this as a problem of representing
others. The authors appear to have a great deal of imagination towards their fellow black African women in cohabitative relationships. Is this not the hegemonic power being academics/intellectuals?

Short stories are vehicles that become the voice of the voiceless. They create awareness of the problems of empowerment and disempowerment of women. However, there are questions the researcher wants to raise, such as: where is the opportunity for the real woman on the ground in cohabitative relationship to bring out her voice? These black African female authors are educated women, are they speaking/writing as “Second Third” (see ‘First Third’§ 2.2.4) academics feminists, the same way they accused and opposed the First Third academic feminist for misrepresenting them? Will their voices reach the real uneducated, rural, black African women on the ground if they do not go to them and talk to them, or bring them into their conferences to tell their stories? Are short stories really accessible and beneficial to these rural traditional African women in cohabitative relationships? Are they able to read these stories that represent them? I believe black African female authors appear to write from a top-down position.

As the researcher previously indicated in the limitation of this study (see § 1.6), the feminist theory in itself is biased. It seems feminists still see the suffering from the colonial era in their societies. In addition, the researcher believe womanism, like feminism is also female-centred, as it appears to address issues of black African women empowerment, omitting or neglecting the needs and experiences of black African men in cohabitative relationships. Is the omission and neglect of black African men not an
indication of separatism which is contrary to womanism? Moreover, these educated African female authors do not really write about themselves. Their lives seem to be cushioned because of their education, which gives them the ability or opportunity to be top-down in their writing to feminist or womanist ideas or empowerment/disempowerment issues regarding black African women. Both womanism and stiwanism are not the answers, but they are at least an effort to empower black African women in cohabitative relationships.

5.5 Recommendations

Literature is a mirror that reflects the real-life situation of human beings. Through fiction, a great deal of issues regarding humanism can be explored, investigated, analysed and criticised in order to untie the knots that might be stumbling blocks to human freedom. Thus, the researcher recommend that a possible further study to be conducted by comparing how both black African female and black African male authors depict women in short stories. Moreover, future study can explore how African women cope with their experiences in their relationships in Northern Africa, as this study only investigated the experiences of black African women in cohabitative relationships in Eastern, Southern and West Africa. A future study can also investigate how African men cope in their marriages in urban areas in Africa. Another study may deal with the role of literature in the empowerment and disempowerment of urban black African women.
5.6 Conclusion

This study used fictional short stories from different African countries by black African female authors. However, many of the short stories scale heavily on Nigerian women writers, such as the likes of Promise Ogochukwu, Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, Zaynab Alkali, Ifeoma Okoye and Tomi Adeaga. It is indisputable that Nigerians are more prolific in the writing of literature than other nations in Africa. Despite coming from one region of Africa, these black African female authors portray different themes such as polygyny, barrenness, marriage, motherhood and violence amongst others, that appear to be uniform in many African societies.

An observation the researcher has made from the selected fictional short stories of this study shows that black African female authors in West Africa concentrate on issues of family patterns and economic dominance. Moreover, although female authors in Eastern Africa appear to be less concerned with the theme of polygyny, they concentrated much on being dispossessed of their ancestral land and the continual domination of males in political, social and economical spheres in their societies. On the other hand, black African women writers in Southern Africa share their exasperation and their lives under oppression and male dominance.

On the one hand, culture, globally, is deemed as a foundation that provides both identity and a sense of belonging to a specific society. Nevertheless, when it is manipulated by some individuals or groups, it becomes a tool of domination in some societies. Thus, black African women appear to be ready to fight against patriarchy in their societies.
REFERENCES


