

CHAPTER FOUR

Lifting the Silence, Narrating the Self: *Lemona's Tale*.

There is a brief but evocative commentary in Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* about the relegation of women in the community of Dukana. At the village meeting called by Chief Birabee to raise material and monetary donations for refugees, women had not been permitted to speak. The narrator, Mene, had observed wryly that "women do not talk in Dukana meeting. Anything the men talk, the women must do. Dukana people say women does not get mouth. And it is true" (*Sozaboy*: P.8). Ironically, Chief Birabee's decision that women contribute less to his dubious scheme had drawn the ire of the men who argued that since the women worked harder and had more resources, they should have been made to pay more. Apparently, although the women of Dukana worked harder to uplift the community, they could not in the cruel patriarchal logic of Dukana publicly express their views.

Often, the subjugation of women in most dominant culturalist discourses takes the form of silence or absence from the arena of representation. Considered inferior, weak and exploited by men, women are pushed to the fringes of narrative where they are sentenced to a life of silence and masculinist slander. In denigrating the humanity of women, patriarchal discourses try to project the male person as the superior human form, the active human agent through which the universe

expresses its fullest meaning. As women become more and more minoritized, tag terms such as the “weaker sex”, the “helper” and the “less fortunate sex” are used to consolidate and habitualize their marginalization. Through the putative weakness of the women, the strength of the man is made all too apparent and justified.

However, like other minoritized subjects, women understand the myth of their inferiority as a cultural construct imagined by men to justify their discriminatory practices against women. Following this understanding, women, writers and scholars working within the libertarian tradition evolve counter-discursive strategies which are aimed at restoring the humanity and dignity of the female person. In the imaginative discourses, a major counter-strategy is to subvert the silence imposed upon women by according them narrative voice in order that they may tell their stories.

As a writer preoccupied with the vicissitudes of minority experience in a majoritarian context, Ken Saro-Wiwa treats the marginalization of women in society with abiding concern. In his collection of short stories, *Adaku & other stories* (1989) which he dedicates to his sisters, the writer explores the pain and strivings of women in a male-dominated world. Twelve of the eighteen stories in the collection deal with the “condition of women” and in story after story, the writer portrays the various forms of the exploitation and subjugation of women in

society. In one of stories of that collection “Her Last Duty” (162-176), for instance, the writer tells the story of Nimi a woman who suffers enormously in a loveless marriage to an irresponsible man who mistreats and psychologically abuses her. Yet upon his death, she is compelled by a terrible and dehumanizing cultural practice to mourn him in an outrageously expensive fashion, far in excess of what her meager and subsistent income could afford. This was to be her last duty to her husband. And in yet another story “A Trophy for the Old Man” from the same collection (80-89), the writer captures the image of the woman as a cultural trophy acquired by men through mostly forced marriages.

But it is in his posthumously published novel *Lemona’s Tale* (1996) that Saro-Wiwa narrativizes female experience with telling pathos, and through the voice of Lemona his central female character. *Lemona’s Tale* tells the story of Lemona a beautiful but impressionable woman who lives out a harsh and harrowing life in a world of seamless sexual exploitation, greed and cant. Born into poverty in the village of Dukana, Lemona’s education is truncated at primary level when her single mother could no longer afford her fees at school. Soon enough, at a tender age, she is sent off from the village to the city of Port Harcourt to serve as domestic servant to the family of Mr. and Mrs. Mana. But as she settles to an unremunerated life of servitude, Lemona soon becomes the object of Mr. Mana’s licentious desires. Many times, Mr. Mana rapes and sexually exploits Lemona but as Mrs. Mana discovers these sexual escapades, she throws Lemona out of her

home labeling her a prostitute. Thus begins for Lemona a life of sexual vagrancy and exploitation. She returns to Dukana to preside over the death and funeral of her mother, but returns once again to the lascivious den of sex and sleaze in the city. On occasion, her relationship with her male partner leads to his death and Lemona is docked and convicted for murder. Lemona's life on death row sparks further events which bring the narrative to its final tragic catharsis.

The most significant point of *Lemona's Tale* is the way in which the writer handles the aesthetic of voicing as a strategy of power – the power of self narration. In dominant patriarchal discourses the experiences of women are muted or at best processed through the eyes of men. Through the imposition of narrative silence, women become mere disposable subjects who are manipulated away from the arena of central focus in dominant narratives. But in *Lemona's Tale*, the voiceless, invisible and docile creature in patriarchal discourses is positively reimagined and resubjectivized as the writer abrogates the aesthetic conventions which constrain the expressive capability of the woman. In this narrative, then, Lemona speaks. And as she speaks directly of her experience, the very act of narrative voicing becomes an agency of freedom.

Indeed early in the narrative, we get the hint of a discursive tussle between the imperative of silence and the equally pressing necessity to narrate an experience. For a quarter of a century Lemona has kept an egregious silence about the chain of

experiences that put her twice on death row in a Nigerian prison. Her silence belies the truth, and mystifies her personality as well those whose identities are shaped by her experience. On the day before her execution by hanging, the controller of prisons expresses an anxiety to get Lemona to tell her story besides what is recorded in the official judicial files. He tells Ola, Lemona's daughter:

All I have is what I've seen in the files. Someone should pry her story out of her. And that's why I'm happy that you are here ... I hope, anyway, that she's willing to speak at some length to you. She's been quiet the last twenty five years. I hope she can break the silence of a quarter of a century and pour her story out to you... Do that for her, for us, for posterity... (P. 4, 5).

Interestingly, Ola is herself on a journey of self-discovery. She needs to hear Lemona's story in order to clear nagging questions about her own identity, and to make sense of the myriad events that led to the death of her father. Even Lemona seems eager, on the eve of her death by hanging, to narrate her life's ordeal saying that "Hopefully, it may help other women find their way through life and help them to avoid the errors I made. It may not be interesting, but it probably has its lessons" (8). Through this emphasis on voicing, the writer prepares to free his character from the discursive bondage to which years of muteness has subjected her.

Writing on the vital significations of speech in another context, the revolutionary theorist Frantz Fanon (1967:17), has noted that “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (See also George, 1997: 64). Here, however, Lemona’s narrative capacity enables her to assume the power of self representation, to overcome the half-truths embedded in official narratives of her life and more importantly, to project her story as a cautionary template that may serve to guide women everywhere as they negotiate their survival in a male-dominated world. This is why in the final moments of her life, Lemona seems unusually eager to lift her silence and to regain her voice.

But side by side with the power of voicing as a counter-narrative practice, the writer also uses a complex combination of irony and pathos as techniques of subversion in the text. As will be evident shortly, the writer uses what I shall term “situational irony” to deplete and erode the trado-cultural prestige enjoyed by men in society, even as he uses pathos to revert compassionate attention to the plight and strivings of women in an unequally gendered world. I theorize situational irony as that context in narrative where the negative standing of characters, events, etc, is surreptitiously re-engineered by the artist to create a greater understanding of the forces at work in the universe of the narrative. Thus, for example, the plight of a down-trodden character, even though objectionable, has the positive

advantage of offering us the necessary insight into the nature of the particular agent of oppression. In narrative, then, situational irony functions uncannily by reversing negativity towards a general positivity.

What is particularly striking about *Lemona's Tale* is the insufferable harshness of Lemona's life and the role played by other characters, notably men, in her plight. Throughout the narrative, Lemona is buffeted as though by some pitiless fate from one calamitous relationship with one man to the next. These encounters leave her psychologically and emotionally scared and here, her name Lemona which means "Happy encounter, lucky meeting..." (84), bears the imprint of cruel irony. Indeed as the characters that relate with Lemona act more and more contrary to her interest and expectations, the narrative takes a deeper ironic spin and moves inexorably to produce a tragic outcome.

But the situational irony in *Lemona's Tale* is that it is Lemona, the supposed victim in the narrative, who also bears the knife of the writer's aesthetic assault on the institution of patriarchy. It is through her victimhood that the dark underbelly and hypocrisy of patriarchy is exposed. And it is because of the unconscionable exploitation of her innocence as a child, and later her sexuality as a woman by the men that she meets, that Lemona compels our sympathy. Through Lemona's encounters with other characters in the narrative, the writer tries to chronicle the moral ravages of patriarchal order of things.

Early in the narrative for instance, we find that as Lemona is sent away from school due to her mother's inability to afford her school fees, it is the headmaster of her school, a patriarchal figure, who is used by the Mana family to persuade Lemona's mother to release her daughter to them as a domestic servant. Lemona's mother explains the headmaster's proposal to her daughter thus:

You saw the headmaster of your school talking to me when you were going to the stream. He came to ask if I would allow you to go and stay with someone in the township (14).

In her desperate circumstances, Lemona's mother had been persuaded to believe that her only child would be happier with her new guardians who would send her back to school. And so as Mr. Mana turns up to take Lemona away, her mother's parting words were those of affectionate reassurance: "Go well, my daughter, my beautiful Lemma, my only daughter. Behave well and you will be happy. The man will send you to school after some time". (P.15). Even Lemona in her infant naivety looks up to life in the city with high expectation and excitement. She imagines the city as:

A place with big store houses and cars, where there were lights day and night, where there were a lot of nurses in hospitals, all dressed in white. I dreamt of a wonderful life, beyond anything I had ever imagined (P.14).

The promise of education and of good life turns out to be a bitter hoax, however, and Lemona is forced to live out the rest of her life as a hostage of hope.

Here, if we deplore the violation of Lemona's childhood by the Manas, we find it almost unforgivable that it is her school head – presumably a symbol of education, enlightenment and cultural freedom – that serves a role that encourages illiteracy, domestic slavery and child-trafficking. It seems that through the strikingly ironic role of the headmaster, the writer seeks to intensify our moral outrage at a system of exploitation which loots the innocence of children. Using Lemona's plight, then, Saro-Wiwa indirectly alerts us of an important moral danger in society in which individuals and institutions are not what they may appear to be: the teacher may be a slave agent, and the school which expels poor students over unpaid fees emerges as an encourager of child exploitation.

Meanwhile, Lemona remains a victim of hope after her unpleasant experience with the Manas. In hope, she makes a detour to the city after her mother's interment, where she takes up temporary accommodation with Mama Bomboy, a poor but hardworking and compassionate woman. But Lemona's stay with the Mama Bomboy household is important in at least two significant respects. First it presents a sharp contrast between the moral depravity of the Manas, and the deep filial compassion demonstrated towards Lemona by Mama Bomboy. While the

Manas treated Lemona as a domestic slave, the Mama Bomboy household recognizes Lemona's humanity and treats her with kindness and compassion.

But it is also possible at another level to identify class overtones in the differing attitudes of both households toward Lemona. Besides representing the patriarchal exploitation of Lemona's sexuality, the Mana family may also be taken to represent the capitalist exploitation of Lemona's labour. For example, while Mr. Mana sees and takes advantage of Lemona as an object of his sexual pleasure, his wife Mrs. Mana tutors her on how to become an effective domestic servant.

Thus as a child-labourer, Lemona's work was cut out for her, namely, to meet Mrs. Mana's highest standards of domestic cleanliness and to be a "nanny" to her two daughters, Sarah and Paulina. After the first flush of the excitement of living in the city was gone, Lemona begins to realize her status as a domestic slave. She says:

Since that period of my life ended, I have realized that I was no more than a slave. For all that labour, I was not paid. I was to be grateful that I was being fed and given clothes and shelter. There was the possibility of my being sent to complete my primary education and being taught a trade. This was broached from time to time, but I believe it was a way of keeping me quiet and contented so that I could continue to take proper care of Sarah and Paulina as they pursued their education. I was manna to the Mannas.

Mr. and Mrs. could pursue their careers knowing that their children were in safe hands. What happened to the hands did not particularly matter (23).

Even when Mr. Mana repeatedly rapes and sexually abuses her, it is Lemona who is blamed for his criminal lasciviousness (P.30).

But if the Manas were driven by capitalist greed to exploit Lemona, the Mama Bomboy household is an example of the accommodationist ethic of African communalist living. Unlike the exploitation she suffers in the hands of the Manas, Lemona receives a far warmer and compassionate reception in the home of Mama Bomboy. A loving and empathetic woman, Mama Bomboy accepts to accommodate Lemona at a time she practically has nowhere else to stay. Here, in this humble home, household chores are shared by members of the household, and Lemona is not exploited in spite of her vulnerability as a homeless stranger (P.38). When Lemona assists Mama Bomboy in her hair braiding venture at the market place, she actually gets paid by Mama Bomboy for her assistance. Contrasting this with her experience with the Manas, Lemona says appreciatively: “And when I thought that the Mannas had not paid me after the three years of slaving for them, I regarded Mama Bomboy as an angel (P.39).

Through these contrastive encounters, the writer tries to point to the moral ambivalences that characterize social interaction in society. But here again, the

anti-hegemonic irony deployed by the writer is unmistakable: the Manas are rich, apparently well-educated, socially respected and yet are criminally exploitative of Lemona; while the Mama Bomboy household is poor and yet compassionate and egalitarian in their relationship with Lemona. In using irony to draw moral contrasts between the two archetypal households, Saro-Wiwa again underlines the moral poverty of the capitalist and patriarchal ethos that the Mana family represents.

But Lemona's association with Mama Bomboy is important in yet another sense. Through Mama Bomboy, Saro-Wiwa introduces a strong and sensitive moral voice into the narrative. This character is not only compassionate towards Lemona whom she sometimes calls "my daughter" (P.39), she is also a sensitive woman who is keenly conscious of the vicissitudes of a woman's life in a patriarchal world. For instance, even before Lemona speaks of her experience with the Manas, Mama Bomboy accurately perceives that Lemona must have suffered unfair sexual molestation from Mr. Mana. And she tells Lemona: "Don't ask me how I knew, my daughter, I am a woman and can see that your beautiful face and extraordinary figure, coupled with your youth and inexperience, are meat for wolves to eat" (P.39).

Indeed, Mama Bomboy's characterization of men as wolves in their relationship with woman is eloquently strengthened by Lemona's experience throughout the

narrative. But earlier on, speaking to a young and inexperienced Lemona, Mama Bomboy spells out how the humanity and dignity of the woman is spitefully negated in society. She tells Lemona:

Lemona, you are a woman. You are growing up, and will soon be face to face with all the problems women face. For what is a woman, I ask. Beautiful, she is at the beck and call of every man who will try to take advantage of her. Ugly, she is most likely at the mercy of a man who will none the less find in her something of value – her character, upbringing or something intangible which he only knows. In either case, the lot of a woman is to slave for the man. To provide his pleasure, bear and rear his children (P. 40).

But here, Mama Bomboy fairly overstates her case since inter-sexual relationships are more complicated than the one-way street of male vindictiveness that she imagines it to be. Indeed as events in the narrative itself show, women are themselves not the paragon of all virtues. Using their beauty and feminine grace, some women have been known to also exploit their relationship with men to their own advantage. For instance, after months of cohabitation with Mama Bomboy, Lemona gets an invitation from Maybel, a client, to visit her home. On being told of this invitation by Lemona, Mama Bomboy's reaction was that of healthy skepticism "...be careful" she tells Lemona, "this is township. People are not what

they seem” (P. 46). Indeed, Mama Bomboy’s repeated words of caution to Lemona in her relationship with Maybel indicates that in spite of her earlier perspectives on the subjugation of women in society, Mama Bomboy still does not romanticize women as faultless species. “Don’t get over-excited” she warns Lemona again after the first visit, “this is a township. It has all sorts of characters” (P. 49).

As Lemona moves in finally to live with Maybel, Mama Bomboy’s suspicions and apprehension are confirmed. If Mama Bomboy is a poor, hardworking and compassionate woman, Maybel is the rich head of a syndicate of child-prostitutes whom she recruits for the pleasure of men for a fee. On living with Maybel, Lemona is soon sucked into this harem of prostitutes. She begins to have sex with different men, and thus enriches Maybel’s purse as a “business” woman. Being homosexual, Maybel also sexually exploits Lemona (P. 53). Lemona herself had become quite a “bad girl” in her sexual adventures with men, and no longer has moral compunctions about her own activities (P. 52):

Things were just happening to me which I expected to happen in my circumstance. Nor did I do it for money I suspect it was Maybel’s tutelage that did it. I offered myself and the men, impressed by my looks and the fact that I was not bargaining like a trader, paid and paid handsomely. And then offer her what she wanted – business, contracts (P. 52).

Like the Manas, Maybel is presented as an agent of exploitation and is used by the writer to remind us that even in a male-dominated world, women play a role in the process of oppression.

When Lemona finally parts ways with Maybel, she settles into a romantic but ultimately tragic liaison with Donatus Adoga, the rich general manager of United Africa Company. In important ways, Lemona's relationship with Adoga throws up the usual complexities around notions of loyalty, commitment and betrayal that characterize inter-sexual encounters. Although happily married, Adoga strays out of his marital home to establish a parallel love affair with Lemona, a girl young enough to be his daughter. He rents and lavishly furnishes an apartment which serves as their love nest. He places Lemona on a monthly allowance and opens other sources of income for her as a commission agent. For Lemona, for a while, Adoga becomes a godsend. Describing Adoga and her relationship with him, Lemona says:

He was tall, handsome man, old enough at forty-five to be my father. But he was kind, and would spend hours and hours with me, chatting and not necessarily wanting to go to bed with me. Whatever I wanted, he immediately provided. It was as though I mesmerized him. Indeed, I think I did.

But underlying and shaping this relationship and Lemona's apparent emotion of love is the power of money – Adoga's ability to overwhelm Lemona and cancel out all disparities of age and marital status by intervening in the life of the young lady at her most vulnerable point of need. When Lemona remarks that "Whatever I wanted, he immediately provided", she was in fact unconsciously alluding to the capitalist ethos that governs their relationship and Adoga's position of strength within that ethos. Although she was not immediately aware of it, then, Lemona is involved in a relationship of power in which she is ultimately the victim.

Evidently, therefore, this is an impotent affair and one destined for a disastrous end; for there are other odds as well. For one, despite his secret liaison with Lemona, Adoga has a strong sense of family commitment and desperately needs to keep the affair secret. Secondly, as one who has his eyes set on the next prestigious post of managing director of UAC, he is increasingly absorbed in work-related commitment, finding too little time to spend with Lemona. On occasion, he travels abroad for three months, leaving young Lemona in an agonizing emotional lurch. In spite of Adoga's tight schedule, however, Lemona insistently presses him for more times with her. Young and vivacious, she expands her social network by attending parties, interacting with other young people of both sexes. In the first of the series of parties, while Adoga was away from the country, Lemona strikes an affinity with a young man, Edo, with whom she finally goes to bed. Adoga discovers Lemona's unfaithfulness upon his return and

engages Edoe in a bloody brawl when he catches him actually having sex with Lemona in her flat. This is how Lemona narrates the incident:

As fate would have it, Edoe and I returned one night from a party, fairly drunk, and we moved into the bedroom without locking the doors. Don came in and found us making love, and all hell broke loose. They went at each other, Edoe in the nude. I ran out of the bedroom. I threw a bathrobe over myself and trembling while the two men bloodied each other..... By the time they were done, the lounge and bathroom. Both of them were gone. I was left to clean up the aftermath of the fight (P. 74).

Edoe dies in a car crash a day after the brawl with Adoga, and Lemona is promptly evicted from her flat by Adoga's thugs. Her properties are later looted and her other sources of income shut down by Adoga, thus bringing the affair to a traumatic end.

As noted earlier, this was a relationship doomed to fail from the start. But again through Lemona's victimhood, we are made to see the subtle as well as overt viciousness of patriarchy and capitalism in determining the lives of people.

But in examining her relationship first with Donatus Adoga and later with John Smith, her white lover, it is necessary to move beyond sympathetic pity for

Lemona, and to conduct a deeper moral audit on her emerging personality. While it may be all too tempting and easy to hold Adoga guilty of exploiting the vulnerability of Lemona by providing pecuniary comforts hard to refuse, it would appear that had Lemona opted for a more focused and financially prudent lifestyle, she would have made good of it and led a decent and responsible life. By all accounts, Adoga seems to have provided a reasonable measure of support for her, good enough to form a sound basis for Lemona to have carefully planned her future and become financially independent. As Lemona herself confesses of Adoga's generosity:

He had made every arrangement not only for my comfort he told me, but also to ensure that I was not short of spending money. Apart from the monthly allowance which he would pay into my current account, he had also made arrangements with the manager of one of the trading companies... to appoint me a commission agent for their goods, particularly those that were in high demand. I would earn a commission on all such goods sold. Buyers were easily found. In this way, I would be in a position to earn a lot of money without much effort (P. 56).

Throughout his affair with Lemona, Adoga keeps his promise to provide for her comfort in every imaginable respect. But rather than put her resources to some beneficent use, Lemona squanders them all in fashionable dresses and in throwing

wild parties. The poor little Lemona from the depressed community of Dukana has, almost overnight, become a fashion aficionado in the city leading a charmed life and failing tragically to reflect on her past and saving for the proverbial rainy day:

I moved into the flat with my suitcases. My wardrobe had grown so much that I now needed five suitcases. And i was content, surrounded as I was by all comforts, and with the assurance that funds would be available to me in a way I had never imagined or dreamed of. (P. 56).

Again to his credit, and unlike the dozens of faceless men who related with Lemona as an object of sex and a prostitute, there is evidence that Adoga treated Lemona with respect, consideration and even adoration. Indeed so lavish was his affection and care for her that Lemona seemed to have exploited this to her advantage, as she remarks: “Whatever I wanted, he immediately provided. It was as though I mesmerized him. Indeed, I think I did”. Using her youth, charm and famed beauty, Lemona materially exploits Adoga and manipulates a man old enough to be her father into a slave of passion. Then she brags about it: “If you described him as my slave, you would not be mistaken” (P. 53).

In his book *Anatomy of Female Power* (1990), Chinweizu articulates the exploitative power of female beauty. According to Chinweizu, women naturally gain an early awareness of the mesmerizing effect which their beauty can have on

a man, and that even the youngest of women exhibits a narcissistic urge to manipulate and exploit men many years older than they are. As Chinweizu puts it:

The narcissist personality is what makes a peasant girl of 15 take it as quite natural that a general or tycoon three times her age should lay all his hard-won power and riches at her feet when he courts her. It does not occur to her to ask if she is worth such tribute: she knows, in her womb-sure narcissism, that she is worth much more, that she holds the most precious thing in her suitor's world, and should be paid for with all that he has in the world (31).

In *Lemona's Tale*, Adoga seems to be trapped if momentarily in the thrall of Lemona's irresistible beauty and she manipulates him to good effect. Nor was sex with Lemona necessarily a thing of priority for Adoga: "He didn't even ask to make love to me" she tells us on occasion. In fact it is his unavailability for regular sexual intimacy with Lemona that sparks the rift between them, resulting in the events that led to the end of their affair.

Furthermore, although Lemona accuses Adoga of being a jealous lover (54), she is herself intensely jealous of his wife and would not brook any mention of her by Adoga:

Indeed, I remember that once when he dared to mention Aduke (his wife), I threw a tantrum, most uncharacteristically. I don't believe he thought me capable of the anger I displayed on that occasion. After that, "the family" became the code for his wife (57).

Within the dark moral economy of their relationship, however, Adoga would seem justified for expressing reservations about Lemona's unrepentant liaison with Edoo. Not only has Adoga provided sufficiently for Lemona, she had herself promised to be faithful to him (64). If her parallel relationship with Edoo violates this promise, the defiant and reckless abandon with which she carries on with the relationship demonstrates a lack of consideration for Adoga's feelings. Despite Adoga's protests, Lemona gets the encouragement of her friend and former co-prostitute, Uche, to defy and psychologically manipulate Adoga. Uche's advice to Lemona reveals exploitation in its many forms as the organizing ethic in most inter-sexual relationships. She tells Lemona:

With your face and figure, I know dozens of men who would fall over one another to please you. You can do whatever you like with men. Honest. Men are like kids. Make Don jealous and see if he won't come begging on his proud knees (72).

Indeed, Adoga did go down on his knees to apologize and to try to win back Lemona, but she was too far gone in her sex binge with Edoe to return faithfully to Adoga.

But it is possible to contend, on the other hand, that Lemona's unfaithfulness to Adoga is poetic justice for a man who is himself in breach of his marital vows of faithfulness to his wife. Similarly her material exploitation of Adoga may also be considered as an appropriate comeuppance for a man who sets her up as an alternative site of sexual pleasure, to which he may return at will. Viewed in this way, Lemona's rebellion is an attempt to reclaim her dignity and to take control of her life. As their affair progresses and Adoga becomes increasingly unavailable, Lemona begins to feel trapped in an arid and unexciting relationship. Lemona's sharp reaction to Adoga's protests about her relationship with Edoe reflects her frustrations:

You are a heartless, unfeeling man so full of yourself you do not care whatever happens to anyone else. You don't know what it is to sit here waiting on your pleasure. You don't know what is, preparing dinners you will never eat. You don't know what it is, being left alone because the man in your life cannot spend the night with you. What haven't I borne for you? I have to wait on you, wait for you, be at your beck and call, obey your every wish. (71).

As Lemona defies him, Adoga's final act of hiring thugs to evict her forcefully from her flat strikes us as dastardly, and portrays him as a ruthless individual.

Of all her relationships with other characters, Lemona's meeting with John Smith shortly after her dramatic break up with Adoga is perhaps the most fortuitous one. Even as she moves into Comfort Guest House after her forced eviction, Lemona gets no comfort as her suitcases are all looted by bandits who invade her hotel room. John, a white man in the colonial civil service meets a distressed Lemona outside the police office and a relationship develops as he gives her a ride to his home.

In a manner reminiscent of Mene in *Sozaboy* whose association with other characters produces a new but not necessarily positive experience, so too does Lemona's despair deepen as she is buffeted by fate from one male company to the other. Even as John hopes that their meeting would turn out to be a "fortunate event" (84), events take an ironic and precipitous twist and tragedy occurs.

Like the previous relationships, Lemona falls again "in love" with John who acting in every way as her benefactor cares and shows affection towards her. For a while, Lemona thinks that in John she has finally found her ideal soul mate:

A new chapter in the book of our life had opened. And we wrote and read it together, with Joy and satisfaction. We shared, and hoped that it would never end. We made promises to each other. I thought I had, at last, boxed the jinx that had followed me, making my life a misery. I hoped and prayed that all will be well now (89).

Although their relationship bears no obvious hint of sexual exploitation, Lemona's hope of a settled married life with John is dashed when he tells her of his plans to marry a white lady with whom he had fallen in love during his brief visit to Britain. Is John's decision to marry a white woman rather than Lemona whom he had known and "loved" a form of racial and cultural *Othering* of Lemona?

Unable to bear yet another betrayal and disappointment, Lemona throws a knife, her only symbolic inheritance from her mother, at John, piercing him to death. If the heart is the seat of all human emotions such as love and affection, then Lemona's fatal piecing of John's heart represents the destruction of what she has longed for but could not possess – his marital love and affection. Yet the inadvertency of her act, the death penalty she faces and the death-wish she expresses after the death of John restores a feeling of pathos to the narrative, and we are moved to view Lemona's serial misfortune with sympathy. Expressing her bitter remorse at the death of John, Lemona laments thus:

Mine was an unlucky star... Now all I wanted was for the court to sentence me to death. I would gladly die and join John wherever he was. I would, on meeting him, apologize to him and request his forgiveness. (P. 97-8).

But even as Lemona is incarcerated in jail on death row, the monster of sexual exploitation resurfaces and haunts her. Through the controller of prisons, the trial magistrate who decided Lemona's fate arranges to sneak her out of the prison from time to time, for his sexual pleasure. Earlier, during the trial, Lemona had observed the magistrate's unusual lustful interest in her when she notes: "the magistrate seemed entirely taken with me, he stared at me endlessly and I could see, as a woman of some experience with men, that he was excited, lustfully excited." (99).

From this point of the narration onwards, the narrative thread of the novel becomes both complicated and revealing, and we are able to see some hidden linkages between the characters in the narrative and to unravel the motives behind their deeds. Kole Bamidele, the trial magistrate, and his wife Elsie, are the two Nigerian law students who were friends of John at a university in Britain. Many years after, in a twist of fate it falls sadly on Kole to try Lemona for the murder of John. When crisis rocks Kole's marital life due to his wife's inability to bear a child as a result of complications arising from an earlier abortion, he reaches a deal with Albert Chuku, the controller general of prisons, to sneak out Lemona, a

state prisoner, to have sex and satisfy his procreational needs. Ola, a baby girl, is born in prison by Lemona.

In the event that follows, Lemona is discharged after over twenty years in jail, through the efforts of Kole. But upon her release, she is soon held for the murder of Kole and his wife, Elsie, in a plot carefully orchestrated by a vengeful Albert Chuku. Back in prison and on death row, Lemona is visited by Ola, her daughter, to whom she narrates her life's ordeal.

As Ola listens to Lemona's story, the fragments of her own identity begin to fall into a neat coherent whole and she comes into a new awareness of herself. She finds that the woman whose story she has come to hear is indeed her mother. Here, there is an uncanny unity of both stories – Ola's story and Lemona's. Ola is justified then when she asserts early in the narrative that Lemona's narrative is also her own:

I shall record it as I had memorized it. The tone of the voice may be hers and it may be mine; it does not matter. As she narrated the story, I increasingly felt it to be mine, and I adopted it as such... (8).

Throughout his writings, Ken Saro-Wiwa inscribes an ineradicable affiliation with the plight of the weak and the oppressed. Using a range of representational devices

he builds an imaginative universe in which he reconstructs the inner workings as well as the failings of a hegemonic system of thought. If we see an almost suicidal striving and determination on the part of his characters, it is because for Saro-Wiwa the weak are never too weak to resist oppression.

Yet the writer is never simply concerned with the dialectic of domination and oppression in its irrevocable rigidity. Rather, his art intervenes polyvalently at that critical intersection where the two energies meet in contest. The role of the writer here was always to reflect the resulting tussles and to mediate on the side of the oppressed.

In *Lemona's Tale*, as we have seen, the writer uses Lemona's experience as to portray the self-duplicating power of patriarchy and capitalism as discourses of domination. As a social parable, the topsy-turvy world of Lemona challenges us to reexamine the social systems that reproduce the exploitation and subjugation of the female person in society. And like most narratives of opposition, it tries to instigate in us a feeling of revulsion at those forms of social exploitation – child labour, prostitution, and other inequities which only serve to diminish our humanity.