

FTAS AS AGGRESSION IN THE CONVERSATION OF SELECT CHARACTERS IN EL-SAADAWI'S *WOMAN AT POINT ZERO*

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Abstract

This paper examines the language of aggression in El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* with a view to analyzing how language of aggression generates and advances conflict leading to alteration of socioeconomic and cultural values of a people. The paper adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness theory – Face Threatening Acts (FTA) – to study the conversations of select characters in the novel. The study observes that the interlocutors deploy some situational variables, aggressive expressions and shared knowledge to carry out blunt face threatening without any redressives activated. Moreover, there is preponderance use of interrogatives as protest markers which aim at character assassination and defamation of the in-group identity of co-conversationists. This study also observes that some of the FTA's usually results in retaliatory acts or face boosting acts which in most cases overthrow some African values and mar socio-economic structure of a family and nation hence this paper concludes that FTA's/language of aggression are anti-socio-economic development. The study recommends among others that politeness is among the functional keys to healthy interpersonal relationships which by extension results in positive economic development.

Key Words: Language, Aggression, Face-Threatening Acts, Politeness

Introduction

Within novels, interpersonal discourse (dialogue) goes on among characters and the overall meaning of any literary text is affected by such conversations. Through these dialogues, characters reveal their personality, feelings, emotions, behaviours / attitudes as well as the relationship between them. Bocar (2017) avers that messages (utterances) convey a person's behavior, attitude or thought verbally or non-verbally. Similarly, Trinch (2007, p.1896) opines that "language choices are never neutral or innocent but ideologically loaded and thus revealing the attitudes and worldviews that prevail in specific practices with particular cultures."

Discourses in written texts show how language, in the form of speech, interacts with non-linguistic components of communication. Hemavathy and Devi (2016) say that communication is a reciprocity process of transferring information among individuals via words and signs. Discourses in novels can be actualized through imaginative use of language which is interpreted within situation. As humans interact, through the instrumentality of both verbal and non-verbal language forms, there is a constant negotiation of meaning and various interpretations.

Dialogues in texts are part of the intended message of the author to her audience, which helps to advance the plot of such fictional work, usually centered on conflict. Conflicts move plots of literary genres. It would not be out of place to say understanding the nature and form of conflict in a genre is central to appraisal of the genre. Aggression holds an inter-penetrative relationship with conflict; in fact, aggression is a major way conflicts are generated, advanced and managed, hence a concerted effort at understanding the linguistic nuances that depict aggression/conflict.

Buss (1961, p.1) asserts that ‘aggression has been defined by the Behaviourists as a response that inflicts harm towards the receivers.’ The Socio-psychologists define aggression ‘as any behaviour that is intentionally achieved to harm another person besides the awareness of the target person to avoid harm’ (Anderson and Bushman 2002, p.28). Aggression is one communication style identified by Nielsen (2008). Aggressive communication means “taking care of one’s rights and disregarding others’ rights. It is perceived as disruptive since it generates dissatisfaction and causes disharmony” (Hemavathy and Devi, 2016, p.119). “An aggressive communicator is close-minded and cannot listen to others; he is poor to conceive others’ point of view” (Bocar, 2017, p.3). Aggression is synonymous with violence. Violence refers to extreme forms of aggression such as physical assault and murder (Singh et.al, 2014). We have verbal (via words) and non-verbal representations of aggression. Bayer and Cegala (1992) are of the view that verbal aggression causes psychological hurts whereas non-verbal aggression manifests in acts like yelling, shouting, ignoring, throwing things at others. Kadhim and Mohammed (2021) define aggression as a negative form of an anti-social behavior, which is produced because of a particular reason, desire, want, need, or due to psychological state of the aggressor. Aggression involves injury to others physically or psychologically. Aggressive behaviours in human interactions cause discomfort and disharmony among interlocutors. Singh, et.al (2014) assert that aggression is a response by an individual that delivers something unpleasant to another person. Linguistic aggression is culture and context sensitive because what constitutes aggressive verbal and non-verbal behavior in one social group may not be regarded as such in another. Literatures of aggression capture aggressive acts through language, which is

used to trace the causes, degree, nature, purpose and effects of such aggression.

According to Singh et.al (2014, p. 10), ‘aggression is often motivated by emotions like fear, frustration, anger, feelings of stress, dominance or pleasure. Sometimes, it can serve as stress relief or a subjective feeling of power.’ They go on to assert that ‘aggression can be defensive (fear-induced), resident-intruder aggression, irritable aggression, sex-related aggression, etc.’ (p.12). Some of the causes or motivations of aggressive behavior includes frustration; generated due to hostility that results from disillusionment. Aggression can also be ‘triggered by the desire to seek safety, feel a sense of belongingness, self-esteem, self-confidence, or achieving needs, and building self-actualisation’ (Lozovska and Gudaite 2013, p. 361).

Aggression can be physical or non-physical (Bushman and Anderson, 2011; Blumenfeld and Cooper, 2010). Physical aggression include murder, suicide, physical abuse, etc., while non-physical aggressive forms include all forms of verbal abuse, cyber bullying (Blumenfeld and Cooper, 2010), which are face threatening. Researches on impoliteness (FTAs) have shown that aggression is one of the sources of conflict/crisis both at home and outside (Culpeper, 1996; Culpeper et.al, 2003; Culpeper, 2005).

Face in interaction is first noted and developed by Goffman (1967). Face is a property that all human beings possess that is broadly comparable to self-esteem (Ewurum, 2015). The notion of ‘face’ relates to notions of being embarrassed, humiliated or ‘losing face’. Goffman developed and systematized the notion defining face as “the positive value a person claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a personal contact” (Goffman, 1967, p.306). Face is also extended to be an image of self-delineation in terms of approved social attributes.

Goffman (1999, p.419) further defines face as “a person’s sense of self-esteem (positive face) and desire to determine their own course of action (negative face).” He goes further to observe that any action or utterance, however mild, which might conceivably upset the delicate balance of face maintenance is a face-threatening activity (FTA).

Face threatening acts cover illocutionary acts which aim at damaging or threatening another person’s face. Sunday and Emiola (2017) observe that FTA is opted for in crisis and its adverse effect is to advance conflict or deepen existing crisis. This is informed by the fact that FTA could generate verbal abuse, or result in psychological trauma or other negative consequences which sometimes are more fatal than physical abuse. FTAs can be in the form of destructive criticism, embarrassment, insults, gossiping, rejection by family and friends, disappointment, stigmatization, peer pressure, unnecessary demand (of sex, goods, and services), unacceptable practices, annoying repetitive pattern, etc., which affect people’s feelings of peace or being secured, and safe (Kadhim and Mohammed, 2021). Others include such verbal and non-verbal behaviours as rudeness, harsh tone, keeping silent when expected to speak, interruptions (especially butting-in). Such harmful threats to face could lead to retaliating aggression. Face threatening act is any obvious disregard for the other’s feeling where politeness is expected.

Goffman coins the expression ‘to lose face’ and ‘to save face’ and further states that “to study ‘face-saving’ is to study traffic rules of social interactions” (Goffman 1967, pp.3, 5, 12). Utterances are also assessed as to what type of face is presented by the speaker (Goffman, 1955; Lim and Browers, 1991). Hence, face presentation explains the behaviours participants display towards one another in terms of degree of politeness and or distance or closeness they want to express. Current researches on

discourse analysis and pragmatics have confirmed that face threatening acts, sometimes result in negative emotions and retaliation that can give birth to aggression (Chen, 2013). Some negative social practices make people to lose face, which may trigger emotional disturbances. And in the process to save or repair face, certain retaliatory aggression may be displayed. Chen (2013) claims that people engaged in interactions continually have the responsibilities of maintaining, saving, repairing or damaging face. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this paper adopts Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) to examine Nawal El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, to reveal the negative effects of FTAs (aggression) to the family, and society at large.

Politeness Theory and Face

Face is one of the terms discussed in Politeness theory. In conversations and other social arts, individuals engage in face want reflecting how they will to be seen or accepted. This makes Brown and Levinson (1987) to say that face is something that is emotionally construed which can be maintained, lost or enhanced each of which must be constantly attended to at every act or interaction. This situation results in either face saving Act (FSA) or face threatening act (FTA). FTA therefore covers illocutionary acts which advertently or otherwise aims at damaging or threatening another person's face. Reviewing Babatunde and Adedimeji (2008), Sunday and Emiola (2017) observe that FTA is usually opted for in crisis situation and its adverse effect is to advance conflicts or deepen exiting crisis. This is based on the fact that FTA could generate verbal abuse or result in psychological emotional or other negative consequences which sometimes are more fatal than physical abuse.

In politeness theory, threat to face is broken into two, namely, "threat to positive face" and "desire for approval" (Chen,

2013). Threats to positive face include criticism, strategic embracement, insults, gossiping, etc.; demand for approval on the other results from rejection, stigmatization, peer pressure, unaccepted practices and so forth. These (negative) social practices usually make people to lose face which may trigger emotional disturbances. And in the process to save or repair face certain retaliatory aggression may be displayed (Brett et. al, 2007; Chen 2013). It is overtly obvious that both in communication and other behavioral acts people engage in maintaining, saving, repairing or damaging face

Data Presentation and Analysis Procedure

The data presented in this study comprise conversations between Firdaus and three other major characters. The conversations are isolated based on their relevance to the theme of the paper. There are four sets of conversation isolated. FTAs are the major analytical tool. Each conversation is analysed before the other.

Textual Presentation

Excerpt A

The excerpt below is a face-to-face conversation between a religious cleric and his wife. The man, Your Holiness, is Firdaus' uncle. This takes place in their living room as they retire for the night. Firdaus lost her parents at a very tender age. Her uncle takes her to the city to live with him. He manages to send her to a boarding school from where she visits him on holidays. Within the passage of time, Firdaus' uncle marries and has his own family to cater for. She graduates from secondary school and is back to stay in her uncle's house where her space is on the sofa, a small wooden couch placed in the dining room close up against the thin wall which separates it from the bedroom. Firdaus eavesdrops on their conversation.

Your Holiness: “It’s not easy to find work these days when all you have is a secondary school certificate.” A1

Wife: “What can she do then?” A2

Your Holiness: “Nothing. These secondary schools don’t teach them anything. I should have sent her to a commercial training school.” A3

Wife: “It’s no use talking of what you should have done. What are you going to do now?” A4

Your Holiness: “She can stay with us until I find her a job” A5

Wife: “That could be for years. The house is small and life is expensive. She eats twice as much as any of our children” A6

Your Holiness: “She helps you with the house and the children. A7

Wife: “We have the servant girl, and I cook. We don’t need her” A8

Your Holiness: “But she can make the work easier for you by helping with the cooking.” A9

Wife: “I don’t like her cooking. You know, your holiness, cooking is the ‘spirit you breathe’ into it. And I do not like what she ‘breathes’ into her cooking, and neither do you. Don’t you remember the okra she cooked for us? You told me it was not the okra you are accustomed to eat when I make it with my own hands.” A10

Your Holiness: “If you keep her instead of Saadia, we’ll save the girl’s wages.” A11

Wife: “She will not be able to replace Saadia. Saadia is light and quick, and puts her heart into her work. In addition, she’s not too fond of food, or of sleeping long hours. But this girl’s every movement is slow and heavy. She’s cold-blooded and couldn’t care less.” A12

Your Holiness: “So what do we do with her then?” A13

Wife: “We can be rid of her by sending her to the university. There she can live in the quarters allocated to the girl students.” A14

Your Holiness: “To the university? To a place where she will be sitting side by side with men? A respected Sheikh and man of religion like myself sending his niece off to mix in the company of men! Besides, where will the money come from for her lodging, and books, and others? You know how high the cost of living is these days. Prices seem to have gone mad, and yet the salary of us government officials only rises by a few millimes.” A15

Wife: “Your holiness, I have a wonderful idea.” A16

Your Holiness: “What is it?” A17

Wife: “My uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud, is a virtuous man. He has a big pension and no children, and he’s been on his own since his wife died last year. If he marries Firdaus she will have a good life with him, and he can find in her an obedient wife, who will serve him and relieve his loneliness. Firdaus has grown, your holiness, and must be married. It is risky for her to continue without a husband. She is a good girl but the world is full of bastards.” A18

Your Holiness: “I agree with you, but Sheikh is too old for her. A19

Wife: “Who said he is old! He only went on pension this year, and Firdaus herself is not that young. Girls of her age have already married years ago and borne children. An old but reliable man is surely better than a young man who treats her in a humiliating way, or beats her. You know how young men are these days.” A20

- Your Holiness: “I agree with you. But you must not forget the very obvious deformity he has on his face.” A21
- Wife: “Deformity? Who says it’s a deformity? Besides, your holiness, as the saying goes, ‘nothing shames a man but an empty pocket’” A22
- Your Holiness: “Supposing Firdaus refuses him?” A23
- Wife: “Why should she refuse him? This is her best chance to get married. Do not forget what a nose she has. It’s big and ugly like a tin mug. Besides, she has inherited nothing, and has no income of her own. We will never find a better husband for her than Sheikh Mahmoud.” A24
- Your Holiness: “Do you think Sheikh Mahmoud will welcome the idea?” A25
- Wife: “If I speak to him I am sure he will agree. I intend to ask him a big dowry.” A26
- Your Holiness: “How much?” A27
- Wife: “A hundred pounds, or perhaps even two hundred if he has the money.” A28
- Your Holiness: “If he pays a hundred pounds, then Allah will indeed have been generous to us, and I could not be so greedy as to ask for more.” A29
- Wife: “I’ll start with two hundred. You know he’s a man who can argue for hours over five millimes, and kill himself over a piaster.” A30
- Your Holiness: “Do you think he will?” A31
- Wife: “And why should he refuse indeed? Through this marriage he will become related to a respected Sheikh and man of religion. Is that not in itself reason enough for him to welcome such a proposal?” A32

Your Holiness: “Maybe he’s thinking of taking a woman from a wealthy family. You know how he worships the piaster.” A33 (p.36 – 39)

A1 is an expression of concern, regret and worry over a known fact; shared background knowledge between both interactants. Firdaus’ uncle uses this declarative sentence to state the obvious. He observes the limitation of his niece; an excuse for having not fixed her up somewhere.

Instead of noticing and attending to the face wants of her husband, Firdaus’ uncle’s wife, in A2 uses interrogation that threatens his positive face; an enquiry that depicts protest and intentional disloyalty. But in A3, Firdaus’ uncle reveals his frustration (of not being able to find job for his niece) in the hope that his wife will understand him. ‘Nothing’ as used by him shows how handicapped/helpless he is. He assumes a ‘No Taking Responsibility’ stance, blames the present predicament of his niece on the government via her educational institutions that does not equip her students for the future. He brings to the fore the incapability/inability of the government in order to run down her public image; a government he is even a part of as an official. Thus, he threatens his own public self –image as well as his in-group identity. His complaint discomforts his wife and as such threatens her positive face because she does have a hand in the present situation neither is she a government agent. He literally apologizes for the wrong step he took, a negative politeness strategy since he confesses his faults.

Due to how threatened his wife feels, and due to the plan to get rid of Firdaus, she enacts an incidental face threatening act on her husband in A4. She deliberately refuses to support the husband’s face want for solidarity through the use of interrogatives in her previous utterance in A2 and currently dismisses his face want as unreasonable by speaking nonchalantly, without respect and

sympathy to him. Her plans must be executed hence she does not apply discretion strategy by ignoring those comments which might implicitly or explicitly contradict and embarrass the positive claims made by her husband thus fault/mistake more glaringly. She deliberately does not want to identify with her husband in this precarious circumstance but adversely comments on his concerns. She uses interrogative strategy as protest marker, threatening his negative face since she sounds quite imposing. She pressures her husband into responding to her query. She indirectly questions his abilities to even know what to do in the circumstance. She sounds like his supervisor/teacher, and not as a wife.

However, in A5, Firdaus' uncle uses the present modal auxiliary verb, 'can' to reveal a transfer of authority to Firdaus to decide her fate which his wife, all along, thinks absolutely lies with her. This threatens her negative face too. He indirectly opposes his wife's desire to have Firdaus leave their house. This is an off-record strategy which removes him from the potential of being imposing. She reciprocates her husband's considerate face by employing off-record strategy too in A6. She expresses her doubts and disenchantment at the indefiniteness of her husband's proposal and challenges him indirectly.

In A7, Firdaus' uncle serves his wife a reminder which threatens her negative face since it can lead to a change in her resolve to do away with Firdaus. He indirectly indicts her as an ingrate, while promoting the face of his niece. In L8, she enacts a bald on-record strategy to threaten her husband's negative face. This is a blunt face threatening act which is a direct, outright rudeness and supposes a challenge. From the utterance, 'We don't need her', 'We' though an inclusive term but it is used in this context to reveal a high level of disregard she has for her husband since she makes absolute statement and takes decision on their

behalf, thereby denigrating the status/public self- image of him and arrogating superiority/authority to herself. This is an intentional threat maliciously and spitefully done. She does not want to agree with her husband but remains uncooperative. Her outright rejection of Firdaus is to discredit her person. She maximizes/accentuates her flaws/weaknesses.

Excerpt A9 is an advice/suggestion by Firdaus' uncle to his wife which threatens her negative face. However, in A10, she uses condemnatory/declarative statement, such that is very clear and direct as to convey the exact weight/gravity of her threats to her husband's face. She condemns and criticizes everything that Firdaus represent, which threatens her husband's positive face being his relative. She remains very pessimistic. By giving unrequested explanations in a bid to diffuse or pre-empt her potentially face threatening acts/behaviours, she threatens herself. She becomes conventionally indirect; serves him a reminder to weaken him and employs sarcasm to mock and express her contempt. Paying deference or the use of deference marker, 'Your holiness', by her, is derogatory and not a mark of respect or status symbol in this context.

In A11, Firdaus' uncle offers advice/suggestion to his wife; a negative politeness strategy which threatens her negative face. But she remains adamant and continues to disagree with her husband in A12. She makes it crystal clear that she is not at par with him since she dislikes what he desires. She adopts evaluative/judgemental strategy to disbalance her husband's positive face by undermining Firdaus' self-worth. Her referring to Firdaus as 'this girl' shows distance and absence of closeness or regard for Firdaus' face and by extension, her husband's. She dwells so much on Firdaus' errors/inadequacies and accuses her of caring less to make amends.

In A14, Firdaus' sister-in-law's first utterance in this speech event, 'We can be rid of her...' is rather insulting and reveals absence of regard for Firdaus whom she feels is a nuisance. Firdaus' uncle raises alarm in A15 using interrogatives as a protest marker. Through his utterances, he indirectly reveals his ignorance and misconception about the girl-child and western education he misconstrues as unhealthy exposure due to his religious fanaticism. He indirectly threatens the public face of the government that does not provide enough motivation for staff.

Through her utterances in A18, 'Firdaus has grown...and must be married. It is risky for her to continue without a husband' and 'If he marries Firdaus she will have a good life with him, and he can find in her an obedient wife, who will serve him and relieve his loneliness', she presents the true ideology as enshrined in a male-dominated, patriarchal society; a society where women have been brain-washed and subjugated. Umoren (2002, P.3) succinctly captures the portrait of women when she states that "The general societal viewpoint is that a woman is soulless and as such has to be attached to a soul which only man possesses. If she remains single past the expected age of thirteen years, she is immoral". She claims that the African world view is restrictive with regards to women; she shows that women are subservient to men, need a man to look after her –she must not be single and must marry early, must be beaten to keep down the foolishness, she must not choose her groom, etc. (p.22-23). Thus, Firdaus' uncle's wife threatens her own negative face since she believes in these erroneous views. She brings out the evil of traditional beliefs on the girl-child and early marriage and the notion that every woman must marry to remain relevant and responsible in society. Society have made women to believe that they can only succeed (have a good life) when married.

Excerpt A19 is a partial affirmation and acceptance of the views of his wife by Firdaus' uncle. But he does not completely succumb to her wishes since the remaining part of the utterance points out an impediment of Sheikh Mahmoud, his wife's uncle, a reason why her suggestion may not be accepted.

Feeling threatened and the need to recover/restore her lost face, Firdaus' uncle's wife resorts to the use of repetitive non-optimal behavior to maximize imposition on her husband as a way to ridicule and reject his opinion in A20. She derogatorily, maliciously and spitefully comments on Firdaus' person. She uses hedging strategy, deploys sarcasm to convince her husband of the suitability of the suitor she recommends for Firdaus. The retirement age in civil service is about 65 years yet she says the Sheikh Mahmoud is not old. She claims it's not really a serious issue thereby uses diminishing strategy to make the failure/impediment less significant or insignificant.

However, in A21, he quickly serves her a reminder of the obvious deformity of Sheikh Mahmoud, an adverse comment aimed at threatening the positive face of his wife and by extension, her uncle. He uses discouraging utterance to attack her face. She employs sarcasm and arrogantly addresses him with his title, Your Holiness, as a sign of protest and disapproval.

In A23, Firdaus' uncle continues to threaten his wife's positive face using off-record strategy. He hedges his utterance and brings up an aspect of the discussion that his wife dislikes. He indirectly empowers his niece as one who should have the final say and de-robes his wife of any acclaimed influence/authority over Firdaus. This, again, threatens her positive face which she challenges in A24. She enacts retorting utterance to rubbish her husband and his niece. She serves him a reminder which dwells on the demerits of Firdaus' facial appearance and presents her in a bad light as a liability and not an asset. She threatens Firdaus' positive self-

image and dehumanizes her (in her absence). She presents her as bereft of power to reject an arranged marriage. She, by extension, ridicules her husband's family, being Firdaus' uncle.

She, from the second part of her utterance, reveals the tradition of seeing marriage contracts as money-making venture/enterprise. However, in A29, he threatens his wife's positive face, indirectly calls her a greedy fellow.

In A36, she uses a repetitive non-optimal behavior which is a face threatening act, and queries the right of her uncle to refuse marriage proposal, thereby threatens his negative face in his absence. 'Indeed' as used by her represents a mockery tone to question such audacity. She boosts her husband's positive face by calling him a man of religion.

In A37, Firdaus' uncle threatens his own face as one coming from a poor background, uses joke strategy to threaten (insult) his wife's uncle, and by extension his wife. He speaks of him in a derogatory manner when he says '...he worships the piastre'.

Excerpt B

In the excerpt B below, Bayoumi, a male coffee-house owner, and Firdaus, a young newly married lady, interacts inside his bar. Firdaus has just been battered by her husband whom she runs away from into the streets without any destination in mind. This is not the first time her husband is dehumanizing her like a slave. She roams the streets till she is exhausted and needs at least a cup of water to wet her throat. This is a face-to-face interaction in the bar and subsequently in the home of Bayoumi as they stay together. The interlocutors do not know themselves before now. Bayoumi asks her name to which she responds.

Bayoumi: "What are all these bruises on your face? Has somebody hit you?" B1

“Stay here and rest for a while. I will bring you a cup of hot tea. Are you hungry?” B2

“Is your father alive?” B3

“What about your mother? Is she alive?” B4

“Haven’t you got any family? A brother, or an uncle of some sort?” B5

Firdaus: “I have a Secondary School Certificate. Maybe I can find a job with my secondary, or with my primary school certificate. But if necessary I’m prepared to do anything, even the kind of job that requires no certificates.” B6

Bayoumi: “You take the bed, and I will sleep on the floor.” B7

Firdaus: “But I cannot sleep on the bed.” B8

Bayoumi: “I will not let you sleep on the floor” B9

Firdaus: “I have a Secondary School Certificate, and I want to work.” B10

Bayoumi: “Everyday the coffee-house is crowded with youths, who are out of work, and all of them have university degrees” B11

Firdaus: “But I must work. I can’t carry on like this.” B12

Bayoumi: “What do you mean, you can’t carry on like this?” B13

Firdaus: “I can’t continue to live in your house” B14

“I’m a woman, and you’re a man, and people are talking. Besides, you promised I’d stay only until you found me a job.” B15

Bayoumi: “What can I do, get the heavens to intervene for you?” B16

Firdaus: “You’re busy all day in the coffee-house, and you haven’t even tried to find me a job. I’m going out to look for one.” B17

Bayoumi: “How dare you raise your voice when you’re speaking to me, you street walker, you low woman?”
B18

(p.48 – 53)

Bayoumi’s enquiries in B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5 threaten Firdaus’ negative face since she may not be willing to open up to a stranger she is just meeting for the first time, except that these interrogatives are such that she is prevailed upon by the speaker to respond to them else she will be threatening Bayoumi’s negative face. In B2, Bayoumi threatens Firdaus’ negative face, and if she ventures to reject the offer it will mean a threat to Bayoumi’s positive face as a nice guy. In B6, Firdaus threatens her own positive face as she employs self-humiliating strategy. She serves a self-effacing behavior since she sees herself as weak, depressed, inferior and wards off anxiety by self-depreciation. This makes her very vulnerable and easy to be exploited by a powerful, narcissistic partner. This vulnerable state of pulling sympathy from people pushes Bayoumi to offer her an accommodation in his two-room apartment. This too threatens Firdaus negative face as she accepts the offer. But from a cultural perspective, it is not appropriate for a man to offer a single lady accommodation as it is a sexual advance/overture. Firdaus, from her speech acts in B6 too, uses an off-record strategy, an indirect request for help from a stranger she just burps into. She uses this strategy of giving hint and hedging to minimize the degree to which the negative/positive faces of her co-conversationalist are threatened.

Bayoumi, in B7, makes offer to Firdaus which continues to threaten her negative face. However, in B8, Firdaus mildly protests/objects to Bayoumi’s offer; an offer she turns down maybe out of respect since it is not proper to inconvenience her host (Bayoumi) in his own house or out of her chequered

experiences. She feels threatened by this ‘unusual/abnormal’ care and preference for her. She deliberately refuses to be understanding and cooperative thereby threatening Bayoumi’s negative face. Bayoumi, in B9, continues to threaten Firdaus’ negative face by disagreeing with her and carrying out his resolve. He takes advantage of her body by ‘using’ her as a bedmate and maid he’s got for himself without taking responsibility.

After living with Bayoumi throughout the winter and the following summer, Firdaus is insulted on her way to the market by school girls who regard her as mad. This prompts her to resume talks with her host, Bayoumi, on how to get her a meaningful job. In B10, Firdaus enacts an on-record baldly strategy; a complaint which reveals her self-determination. She makes a request which is she knows he won’t consent to. She raises a subject matter; an unsolicited/unwelcome conversation that threatens the face of her co-interactant and host, Bayoumi, without any redress. Firdaus’ straightforward declarative speech makes Bayoumi uncomfortable. She sees her full time ‘house wife’ status as insulting to her public self-image. But in B19, Firdaus’ possession of an ordinary secondary school certificate to a university degree is a weak point which he observes indirectly but hopes Firdaus understands this short-coming without directly stating same. Bayoumi threatens the public image of the government in power and gives a true picture of the state of affairs in the country as regarding the high rate of unemployment.

In B12, Firdaus services an aggressive behavior as though Bayoumi is the cause of her joblessness using on-record baldly strategy without any redress; a rude interruption/confrontation. This is like placing a high demand on one’s interlocutor which one knows they cannot agree to. In B13, Bayoumi requests for clarification of Firdaus’ previous utterance through an interrogative which is a protest marker, thereby threatening his

own positive face and Firdaus' negative face. In response to Bayoumi's request in B13, Firdaus enacts a bald on-record strategy - direct and clear speech act (declarative) to state her resolve, in B14. 'I can't continue to live in your house' threatens/questions Bayoumi's right/moral justification to keep her in his house as if she is his personal property. She sees Bayoumi as interfering with her goals/aspirations which threatens her negative face.

In B15, Firdaus questions the ability of Bayoumi and why pick a role he cannot play. She threatens his positive face for his acts of kindness; sheltering and feeding her, in the first place, and then his lack of interest in finding her a job as he promised through blame game and indictment instead of commendation. She fronts the failure of Bayoumi in keeping part of their bargain which has breached the trust between them. She portrays herself as a victim of manipulation. All these fault-finding mechanisms put in place is to disapprove of his acts. She accuses him of being less concern about her fulfillment and happiness. Firdaus as well threatens her own negative face since she accepts and believes Bayoumi's promises and offers. She seeks to maintain and restore this lost face by trying to recognize and maintain the moral values; the status quo – a woman is not supposed to live with a man who is not her legally married husband. She challenges Bayoumi's face by criticizing, complaining and pointing out his inabilities/failures to getting her a job which is her ultimate expectation. This is an intentional threat to his face since she maximizes blame, refuses to offset certain weaknesses of Bayoumi.

In B16, Bayoumi shamefaces Firdaus as her face is challenged or undermined spitefully. She needs support from Bayoumi but she is ridiculed, although incidentally because Bayoumi's threat to her face is a by-product of her actions. Bayoumi becomes defensive, reinforces his threatened positive

face by using interrogative as a protest marker, thus a bald on-record strategy. However, in B17, Firdaus does not minimize the threat to Bayoumi's face, continues to complain bitterly on how neglected she feels since her face wants have become unnoticed, apports blame and refuses to agree with him. She tries recovering her threatened negative face through her utterance 'I'm going out now to look for one'; a blunt face threatening act since she issues a threat to Bayoumi

In B17, Bayoumi retaliates, uses diminishing strategy to manage threat to his face by making his failures/inabilities less significant or insignificant. Thus, he dismisses Firdaus' allegations (which are her face wants) as unreasonable. He raises voice, issues warning and hauls abusive curses at her, using global label (You street walker, you low woman) to insult her self-image. This is a bald on-record without redress strategy which dehumanizes a co-conversationalist. Bayoumi then resorts to domestic violence using non-verbal face threatening acts – slaps, hits her with his fist in the belly that she loses consciousness immediately. He even locks her up in the flat like a fugitive as he goes out everyday. Firdaus' freedom is taken away; her right to feel, numbed. She is assaulted; ordered to sleep on the floor instead of the bed. Bayoumi rapes her and invites his friend to take turns with him to the extent that Firdaus initially does not know the difference between them (Bayoumi and his friend). As soon as she notices, she queries the new entrant/predator who rather becomes hostile towards her. He uses interrogative as intimidation tool to cow Firdaus into silence and resorts to using global label - 'Slut, Bitch' to deface Firdaus. He inflicts physical/emotional pain/torture on Firdaus, his prey, by biting her breast and belly in the course of sexual intercourse, and goes on to insult and abuse Firdaus' mother.

Excerpt C

This is face-to-face conversation between a pimp, Marzouk, and a prostitute, Firdaus. This takes place in Firdaus' apartment after she had quit her office job broken-hearted on account of Ibrahim's (a colleague) disappointment. She goes back to street life and gets reunited with Marzouk who seeks to control her life by all means. She offers him money which he refuses and insists on sharing in her earnings. One day, Firdaus decides to break away from Marzouk but he resists and gets killed by her.

- Marzouk: "Every prostitute has a pimp to protect her from other pimps, and from the police. That's what I'm going to do." C1
- Firdaus: "But I can protect myself" CL2
- Marzouk: "There isn't a woman on earth who can protect herself." C3
- Firdaus: "I don't want your protection." C4
- Marzouk: "You cannot do without protection, otherwise the profession exercise by husbands and pimps would die out." C5
- Firdaus: "I refuse your threats." C6
- Marzouk: "But I am not threatening you. I'm first giving you a little advice." C7
- Firdaus: "And if I don't accept your advice?" C8
- Marzouk: "Then I may be obliged to threaten." C9
- Firdaus: "How do you propose to threaten me?" C10
- Marzouk: "I have my own ways of doing things. Every craft has its tools." C11
- Firdaus: "What do you want of me?" C12
- Marzouk: "I want to protect you from other men." C13
- Firdaus: "But no one else besides you is menacing me." C14

- Marzouk: "If it isn't me, it will be someone else. There are pimps running around everywhere. If you want me to marry you, I'm perfectly willing to do so." C15
- Firdaus: "I don't see the need for you to marry me as well. It's enough that you take what I earn. My body at least is mine." C16
- Marzouk: "I'm in business. My capital is women's bodies and I don't mix work and love together." C17
- Firdaus: "I can't go on like this." C18
- Marzouk: "Where are you going?" C19
- Firdaus: "I'm going to look for work. I still have my secondary school certificate" C20
- Marzouk: "And who said you are not working?" C21
- Firdaus: "I want to choose the work I'm going to do." C22
- Marzouk: "Who says anyone in this whole wide world chooses the work he wants to do?" C23
- Firdaus: "I don't want to be anybody's slave" C24
- Marzouk: "And who says there is anyone who is not someone else's slave? There are only two categories of people, Firdaus, masters and slaves." C25
- Firdaus: "In that case I want to be one of the masters and not one of the slaves." C26
- Marzouk: "How can you be one of the masters? A woman on her own cannot be a master, let alone a woman who's a prostitute. Can't you see you're asking for the impossible" C27
- Firdaus: "The word impossible does not exist for me" C28
- "I intend to leave." C29
- Marzouk: "You will never leave" C30
- (P. 100 – 104)

In C1 and C3, the pimp, Marzouk, indulges in psychological manipulation of Firdaus in an effort to make her feel inferior and thereby make her an easy prey for his control. C1 is an offer of protection; an offer that is not without a price to pay. It is not cost-friendly to Firdaus since his ulterior motive is to control her life. He threatens his own negative face by offering to do an unsolicited favour. He, however, threatens her negative face by burping into her space/territory since he forces himself on her, and positive face since he regards and calls her a prostitute just to bring low her self-esteem/ public self-image, on the one hand. On the other hand, he tarnishes his own public self-image as he regards himself as a pimp – a parasite. Although both of them know themselves too well from shared background knowledge as engaging in illicit/unrespectable profession/trade, in the real sense of it, none of them will like to be openly insulted in the manner Marzouk does. His uses circumlocutions/deceptions and evokes a feeling of empathy and exaggerated interest in her wellbeing. He conveys how much he likes her and tries identifying her face wants. C3 is an advice that re-enacts the African ideology that every woman needs the protection of a man. Thus, he asserts his relevance by using a declarative sentence. He threatens the negative face of women generally.

C2, C4, C6, C8, C10 and C16 are Firdaus' outright rejection of Marzouk's offer of protection and marriage, a challenge that threatens his negative face since, in his wildest imagination; he never thinks/conceives he will meet any kind of resistance. He believes he is a personality that must be obeyed because of his numerous connections. Firdaus uses declaratives/interrogatives that are confrontational and threatening.

In C5, Marzouk's insistence continues to threaten Firdaus' negative face through his employment of direct instructions. He contradicts himself since both husbands and

pimps do not provide any protection for women in their lives or they associate with. This obviously implies that the protection/superiority that is alluded to is not without expecting gratifications. This is so because if it is real, the recalcitrance or rejection of same by women should not affect its existence and necessity rather such women would have regrets only. Thus, Marzouk threatens the positive face of men (pimps and husbands alike), as predators that feed on their prey – women. But in C15, Marzouk offers Firdaus marriage not blessed with love which also continues to threaten her negative face. Through this proposal, he intends to bring her within his sphere of influence and manipulation. It is assumed that every woman needs love in marriage. Marzouk trails Firdaus to her apartment and forces himself in and takes out a knife, threatens her negative face since he barges in on her, encroaches into her own territory.

Firdaus uses interrogatives and declaratives as protest markers, and blunt face threatening acts to threaten both Marzouk's positive and negative faces in C12, C14, C24 and C26 respectively.

In C18, Firdaus resolves to leave behind her old life but in C19 Marzouk appears at her door uninvited. He protests her decision through employment of interrogatives, which threatens her negative face. He comments adversely on the subject matter raised in C21 and threatens her positive face since both of them know that her work is not a decent trade. However, in C22, C24 and C26, Firdaus maintains her negative face, asserts her right which should not be abused by anyone using interrogative and declarative statements. But in C27, Marzouk continues to question her acclaimed rights and freedom, uses retorting statements to make a fool of Firdaus, declarative statement to assert his position and blunt face threatening acts to cow her into agreement. He calls her a prostitute, a tag which Firdaus is not even ashamed to identify with. As she makes for the door,

Marzouk pushes her and shuts the door behind them, imprisoning her dreams/visions/aspirations. She feels caged and trapped. These non-verbal behaviours threaten Firdaus negative face. She continues to boost her negative face in C29 using declaratives in a gentle manner as she uses the verb ‘intend’ but Marzouk continues to threaten her negative face by using orders in C30. To assert her right to freedom of movement, she struggles with him and kills him eventually with the very knife he uses to threaten her.

Excerpt D

This face-to-face conversation occurred between three participants: a prince, a prostitute and a policeman. This conversation takes place in the street, and later inside the hotel room of the Prince. Firdaus meets an Arab Prince as she hits the streets immediately after killing the pimp, Marzouk, in her apartment and abandons his body there. They negotiate and eventually agree on a price for her service. The prince pays her but she tears the notes into shreds. His interrogations land him a slap from Firdaus. She wants to repeat the slap again but he screams and the police arrives the scene. A police man queries Firdaus further to know her true identity. Then, they arrest her, put steel hand cuffs around her wrists and lead her off to prison. There she is kept in a room where the windows and doors are always shut. Eventually, they condemn her to death by hanging.

- Prince: “Come with me.” D1
Firdaus: “You cannot pay my price, it’s very high.” D2
“I accept.” D3
“I am not a prostitute. But right from my early days my father, my uncle, my husband, all of them, taught me to grow up as a prostitute.” D4

“He never taught me to kill. He left me to learn it alone as I went through life.” D5

Prince: “Did life teach you to kill?” D6

“And have you killed anybody yet?” D7

“I cannot believe that you are capable of killing anything, even a mosquito.” D8

Firdaus: “I might not kill a mosquito, but I can kill a man.” D9

“Now you can believe that I have slapped you. Burying a knife in your neck is just as easy and requires exactly the same movement.” D10

“Perhaps now you will believe that I am perfectly capable of killing you, for you are no better than an insect, and all you do is to spend the thousands you take from your starving people on prostitutes.” D11

Prince: “Don’t let her go. She’s a criminal, a killer.” D12

Firdaus: “I am a killer, but I’ve committed no crime. Like you, I kill only criminals.” D13

Firdaus: “For me the feats of kings and princes are no more than crimes, for I do not see things the way you do.” D14

Police man: “You are a criminal” D15

“And your mother is a criminal” D16

Firdaus: “My mother was not a criminal. No woman can be a criminal. To be a criminal one must be a man.” D17

Police man: “Now look here, what is this that you are saying?” D18

Firdaus: “I am saying that you are criminals, all of you: the fathers, the uncles, the husbands, the pimps, the

lawyers, the doctors, the journalists, and all men of all professions.” D19

Police man: “You are a savage and dangerous woman.” D20

Firdaus: “I am speaking the truth. And the truth is savage and dangerous.” D21

(P.106 – 110)

In D1, the Prince uses direct imperative to make sexual advances at Firdaus just to show the asymmetrical relation between them, thus threatens both her positive and negative faces. She overtly rejects his invitation, threatening his negative face. She indirectly underrates his ability which is quite insulting, and in D21, she uses a declarative sentence to state the obvious, that is her resolve not to be impeded on but treated with dignity and respect. Firdaus later changes her mind and accepts his sexual advances at the detriment of her negative face in D3.

After sleeping with the Prince, he pays her but Firdaus snatches the notes (a whole sheaf of bank notes) from his hands and tears them up into little pieces with a pent-up fury because he keeps asking her unnecessary questions which threaten her negative face. This non-verbal act of tearing the notes, threatens the Prince’s positive face. In D4, Firdaus refutes/denies his claims, uses a declarative statement to boost her positive face. She blames her bastardized public self-image on the men in her life, and by extension, the Prince. Thus, she assumes a ‘No Taking Responsibility’ stance. However, the Prince uses interrogatives in D6 and D8, to dig deep into the secret of her life. His consistent rejection of Firdaus’ claims is borne out of misconception of Firdaus’ identity which is informed by her previous non-verbal threat of tearing the Prince notes he uses to pay her. This behavior confuses him that he tends to reason that Firdaus is truly a Princess and not a prostitute because prostitutes go for the money. Her

carriage/demeanor as well deceives him and he does not know that the time he meets Firdaus is a wrong one because she ceases to even value the money, and life itself. In D5, Firdaus embarrasses her positive face, states emphatically that she is a murderer. And to get him to believe her, slaps him. This non-verbal act threatens his positive and negative faces. He is at the verge of receiving a second slap but he screams for help from the police who rescues him. In D11, Firdaus continues to issue threat to the Prince, calls him an insect, questions his sanity since he uses his starving people's money on prostitutes. She threatens his positive and negative faces because as a Prince, he is not supposed to descend into low life; he is supposed to be considerate and much more responsible than going awhoring. His non-verbal act of screaming gives him away as a weakling, and threatens his positive face. The Prince uses imperative/directives on the Police whom he controls. He resorts to global label, calling her a criminal and killer just to tarnish Firdaus' image.

Upon interrogation by the Police, Firdaus, in D14, admits she is a killer just like the Police. She deploys humour to present a serious issue. She threatens her negative face, and by enacting comparison strategy which she uses to comically compare her work with those of the Police, she threatens the Police positive face as well. She makes caricature of the Police force for not doing their duty. Instead of identifying the Prince as a criminal, they are busy protecting him because of his wealth and influence.

In D16, Firdaus threatens the positive face of the Prince, and by extension Kings and princes, equates their feats to crimes. But in D17, the Police man uses blunt face threatening act (a declarative) to threaten Firdaus' positive face. He continues to abuse her mother by calling her a criminal too in D18. This is to tarnish her in-group identity/public self-esteem. This calls to question the crop of police men we have in our society these days; men who

are morally bankrupt, men who lack discipline in themselves, men who are debased and insane and lack dignity.

In D19, Firdaus threatens the Police man, and by extension all men, calling them criminals. But the Police man in D20 commands her using an imperative just to threaten her negative face. Firdaus, in D21, uses blunt face threatening act committed bald on-record strategy, emphatically stated to accuse all the men: the father's, the uncles, the husbands, the pimps, the lawyers ... all men of different professions. However, the Police man retaliates in D22, resorts to using global label to deface her - 'You are a salvage and dangerous woman'. This declarative is a face threatening act spoken in clear and plain expression to convey the intended threat fully.

Discussion of Findings

From the above analyses, there is a preponderance of employment of bald on-record strategy (complaints, confrontations/interruptions, 'No Taking Responsibility' stance, accusations, aggressive affronts, diminishing strategy, interrogatives as protest marker), all of which are intentionally enacted except for one where it is incidental, by the interlocutors in the dialogic sample excerpt. Both interactants use various strategies of positive (offer promise, do unsolicited favour, disclosure strategy, etc.) and negative (off-record through giving hints/hedging, mild protest/rejection of offer) politeness. Also, we observe that interlocutor threaten their own face through self-humiliating/effacing behaviours. In addition, we also recorded face threat to government of the day, an absent participant in the discourse with no representative.

FTAs, Language of Aggression and Its Implication for African Values and Crises in 21st Century

What constitutes African culture and identity may not be well articulated because some notions about it are off-record while some have been contaminated while some other ones are borrowed from other cultures and infused in the present African culture. According to Tchindang, Bopda and Ngamgne (2008), the identity of a people is common to members of the group and is expressed in the form of rules, norms, values and language. In communication and other forms of social experiences, members of the group enact their identity (i.e. norms, values, etc). A people's identity is not separate from their being or behaviour hence this paper investigates discourse patterns of African characters in the face of crises.

Excerpt A, which presents the conversations between Firdaus and Bayoumi, seems to present a normal situation in which the male interreactant offers to help a helpless girl. But bearing in mind that the interlocutors are maintaining some level of moral order it will be seen that Bayoumi employs language of aggression which violates moral orders. Moral orders comprise evaluative beliefs which are socially grounded and linked to a set of moral evaluations (Parvaresh and Kadar, 2019). Non-observance of moral orders usually results in impoliteness or linguistic aggression. Baron and Richardson (1994) define aggression "as a behaviour that is intended to harm another individual who does not wish to be harmed." From the conversations in excerpt A, Firdaus repeatedly tell Boyoumi her ultimate goal: to find job in order to take care of her need. This is aligned to the social belief that one needs to work before one eats. But Bayoumi who is a member of the same society as Firdaus promises to help her. Bayoumi is aware that many graduates are roaming streets without job yet he promises to help Firdaus who hold secondary school certificate. To Firdaus who wants to maintain face/moral orders, Bayoumi 's fake offer is a kind of instrumental aggression which

its Intention is to receive sexual gratification. When Firdaus realises that offering sex cannot rescue her from unemployment she stepped on moral orders to reject Bayoumi's continued "take no responsibility" stance.

Similar "take no responsibility" stance and instrumental aggression is noticed in the conversations in excerpt B, that is the conversations between Firdaus' uncle (His Holiness) and his wife, in which they plan to get rid of Firdaus. Their verbal behaviour exhibits both reactive-inexpressive aggression and instrumental aggression. It is reactive aggression because the interlocutors exhibit hostility towards Firdaus. In the context of culture, His Holiness is Firdaus caregiver since Firdaus is supposedly an orphan, but he relegates this social responsibility and helps his wife to push Firdaus into matrimony. In African culture, African men are heads of the family and with strong voice and will maintain social/moral orders in the community and family. In Firdaus' case, His Holiness' voice is weak which gives his wife a complementary role of stronger voice and so husband and wife co-act in selling their dependent out in the name of marriage. Whereas Bayoumi bullies Firdaus for sexual gratification, her uncle and wife bully her for economic gain. Both Bayoumi and His Holiness blame government for their inactivity.

In excerpt C, Marzouk, the pimp stepped on moral orders to devalue Firdaus and to impose his trade on her. In African culture and context, it is generally believed that women need to be protected by men. It is based on this that Marzouk takes it upon himself to protect Firdaus even when Firdaus says she does not need his protection. Marzouk says women and their bodies are his capital which implies that the protection he offers is business. In African value system sex work is seen as a debased profession. Marzouk hedged his verbal abuse on Firdaus because he knows that her profession lacks social, political and religious security.

When Firdaus decides to look for meaningful job in order to avoid Marzouk's verbal and economic abuse, Marzouk objected, telling her that she cannot leave. This results in physical abuse; Firdaus stabs Marzouk to death.

In excerpt D, Firdaus assigns herself the role of aggressor of both physical and verbal aggression. She threatens the prince's face when she objects to sleeping with him. To boost his face, the prince accepts to pay three thousand. The destruction of the money she received from the prince is a threat to men's ego. When Firdaus says she can kill somebody and the prince doubts him, she slaps him.

In African culture and others cultures of the world women symbolise love, meekness and peace. But in recent times, there seems to be a paradigm shift. Women have now become perpetrators of evil. From the novel, we see how Firdaus' Psychology is being conditioned from childhood to adulthood. Her uncle who later becomes 'His Holiness' abused her sexually, Bayoumi and Marzouk abused her both physically and verbally. These cumulatively and decisively planned abuse make Firdaus to adopt a defensive mechanism which result is her adopting the role of the perpetrator of aggression.

Conclusion

Using FTAs and language of aggression to examine *Woman at Point Zero*, this paper has established that people employ face threatening acts not only when they want to emotionally harm the 'other' but also when they want to benefit themselves. From Firdaus' experience, the study concludes that FTAs/language of aggression is part of everyday conversations and some of them are capable of causing psychological trauma and retaliatory acts that could result in cultural shifts. Also, from the data analysis, this paper has also established that every conversation experience is culture based and every interactant is

expected to show loyalty to their cultural identity and moral orders otherwise conflict would be generated. From Firdaus' experience, this paper also concludes that disregard to moral orders is one of the sources of conflict generation in social interactions. The effect of an aggressive behavior is that personal and social identity as well as people's relationships can be damaged. The study therefore recommends that government and some social agencies should organize value re-orientation programmes to sensitize citizens of their cultural identity. The study also recommends the use of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to appreciate *Woman at Point Zero*. It is believed that this will expose the psychological condition of women who are sexually and verbally abused.

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