

**THE DYNAMICS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
IN THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY:
AN EXPLORATION OF AIWANOSE ODAFEN'S
*TOMORROW I BECOME A WOMAN***

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Abstract

One of the persistent problems that cuts across cultures, religions and class is gender-based violence. It has adversely affected women in the public and private domain. Sadly, deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs in the psyche of women which make them accept abuse and their position of servitude has made the problem to persist. By adopting the African feminist theory, this study examines the dynamics of this hydra-headed monster as exemplified in Aiwanose Odafen's *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* (2022). The study reveals that gender-based violence can only be brought to an end when women take pragmatic steps that will change the narrative and raise a generation of assertive women and girls who refuse to normalise abuse. The study also posits that in order to engender desired emancipation, women need to take a radical approach which may seem alien to African beliefs. It concludes that men should also join the vanguard for change and participate in the cultural reorientation of men who perpetrate the act and women who accept the abnormality.

Key words: radical, violence, patriarchy, women and change

Introduction

The need for the apt portrayal of the interactions between the various parts of the society and the people, its effects and repercussions have been captured by literature. This stems from the notion that literature and society have a symbiotic relationship. Invariably, literature documents these interactions and seeks to expose the moral and social aspects that are crucial to the sustainability of a meaningful and cordial relationship. Although literature has its entertainment value, its importance as a tool for

bringing about change by sensitizing the public on prevalent issues and concerns cannot be overemphasized.

Demeterio opines that:

Literature is a social institution: it is created by the writer, who is a member of the society. Its medium is language, which is a social creation. It represents life, which is a social reality. It is addressed to men who form a social body. It is centrally conditioned by social and other forces and, in turn, exerts social influence. (11)

One of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in the world that continues to limit women and girls from achieving their full potential is gender-based violence. Violence against women cuts across cultures, class, religion, levels of education, societies and it knows no boundaries. It is largely underreported because perpetrators go unpunished due to social norms, societal pressure to keep silent, victim blaming, prevailing stigma and internalised acceptance of violence. Gender-based violence is deeply rooted in patriarchal norms and discriminatory cultural beliefs. Unfortunately, most societies condone the act through unhealthy cultural practices and give reasons for the lackadaisical attitude towards the problem. Gender-based violence is a global epidemic and one of the most oppressive forms of gender inequality which tortures the victim physically and psychologically. Although both men and women can be victims of gender-based violence, statistics reveal that a higher percentage of the victims and survivors are women and girls, hence the United Nations defines gender-based violence as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.’ Sadly, the perpetrators of these heinous acts against women are usually males who hold a position of trust, intimacy and power. The abusers take advantage of the established trust and confidence to molest his victim within or outside the confines of a home. Arango et al posit that ‘gender-based violence includes intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual assault, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and

abuse, child abuse, female infanticide, and child marriage.’ In the same vein, Azunwo and Kailo assert that

violence can take any of the following forms, physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects, (battery) or threats thereof; sexual abuse, controlling of domineering, intimidation, stalking passive/covert abuse (e.g., Neglect) and economic deprivation. It can also mean endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing and harassment. (99)

Wifehood and motherhood are held in high esteem and regarded as the fulfilment of feminine virtues that all women must aspire to. It is what actually marks her out as a woman - a fulfilled woman - in other words, it is a mark of identity. Other roles and experiences of the woman are not given attention in comparison with this status. The stereotypical roles assigned to women in patriarchal societies have been handed down from generation to generation. Those attributes that define the identity of a woman in modern society have not considerably changed from what obtained in traditional societies. In spite of urbanisation and education, a woman is expected to submit to male authority and dominance and adopt the title and status of wife in order to be regarded as a fulfilled human being. The expectations of the traditional African woman include the ‘humble’ virtues of passivity, docility and subservience. Education and exposure to western ideas have given women the boldness and impetus to break out of male subjugation and prove their mettle. While acknowledging the importance of the family unit as an integral part of the society, they strive to be viewed as capable and distinct individuals whose identity is not tied to the man’s.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the feminist theory as the framework albeit the African feminist theory. The peculiarities of the African people and culture have led to the tailoring of the feminist ideology by the practitioners to suit the African society. In the African society, feminism is misconceived as a movement that is anti-men or envious of the men thereby leading to the hostilities and rejection faced by the women who associate themselves with it. Hence the need to get alternative concepts or terminologies that will

address the peculiar needs of African women. These include Catherine Acholonu's motherism, Obioma Nnaemeka's nego-feminism, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism and Chioma Opara's femalism. These have all been subsumed under the umbrella of African feminism. Susan Arndt, in her book, *The Dynamics of African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African Feminist Literatures* asserts that African Feminism can be categorised under three theories - reformist feminist theory, transformative feminist theory and radical feminist theory. She is of the view that African feminist literatures can be analysed from any of these theoretical perspectives. The reformist feminist approach reveals the fact that men with oppressive tendencies and habits can change; in other words, men are criticized individually and not as a social group. This angle of approach and belief stems from the fact that reformist feminists believe in the possibility of a reformation of the criticized society and individuals in particular. Reformist feminists are of the view that the movement towards the full equality of men and women should be gradual and incremental. The transformative feminist theory directly criticises men for their actions and believes that men can be transformed. There is a generalisation of the criticism of the male folk. It presents an idealized society which can be attained if men do away with their reprehensible attitudes toward women. This theory is based on the belief that 'discriminatory gender relationships may be overcome' (Arndt 85)

The radical feminist theory regards men as sexist, oppressive, immoral and they continue to keep the woman under perpetual subjugation and servitude. It argues that the oppression of women will not end because men have imbibed a sexist attitude which is deeply ingrained in our cultures. It portrays the woman in a hopeless situation. Such women resort to aggression and violence in order to free themselves from male subjugation.

Radical feminists believe that patriarchy is a system that oppresses women through its social, economic and political institutions. Therefore, they believe that society must be changed at its core in order to dissolve patriarchy. The oppression of women is viewed as the most fundamental form of oppression that cuts across boundaries of race, culture and economic class. They are of the view that gender relations and sexism are the direct result of a system of patriarchy. Radical feminism aims to challenge and overthrow patriarchy by opposing standard gender roles and

calls for a radical re-ordering of the society. Radical feminists want to explore ways of freeing both men and women from the rigid gender roles that society has imposed on them. Therefore, they completely reject these roles and all aspects of patriarchy.

Despite the fact that certain aspects of radical feminism do not align with the tenets of African feminism, Susan Arndt (2002) posits that there are features of radical feminism that are inherent in some of the novels authored by African female writers. In her analysis, she says that ‘radical African-feminist texts argue that men (as a social group) inevitably and in principle discriminate against, oppress and mistreat women. The men characters are by nature or because of their socialisation hopelessly sexist and usually deeply immoral. Men characters who depart from this pattern are rarely found and those who do are powerless’ (85). This is symbolised by their premature death or by their inability to realise their positive ambitions. In most texts, the female protagonist finally kills a man who represents the violation of women’s rights and/or is killed by such men. ‘The texts display a devastating pessimism, fundamentally denying any hope of transformation of prevailing gender relations’ (86). Sisterhood or solidarity among women is shown as a possible source of solace or a vague anchor of hope. Radical feminist texts do not differentiate between traditional and modern forms of gender inequality and oppression. This refusal to differentiate must not be misread as implying that radical African feminist writers reject their African cultures, rather it is a result of fundamental and uncompromising rejection of all forms of oppression of African women. Typical examples of radical African feminist texts are Nawal El Sadaawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* (1983) and Bessie Head’s ‘The Collector of Treasures’ (1977). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) also has some of the features discussed by Arndt. This study examines the dynamics of gender-based violence as portrayed in Aiwano Odafen’s *Tommorrow I Become a Woman*.

Patriarchal Beliefs and Acceptance of Male Superiority

In patriarchal societies, a woman’s worth is tied to the man and this worth is only achieved through marriage and the birth of a male child. The importance attached to marriage makes single women of marriageable age to be frowned at or despised. In most cases, young women are pressurised or forced into marriage by family members. The girl-child is prepared for her future wifely duties which makes her upbringing entirely different from

that of the boy-child. He is brought up to recognise his place of importance in the family while the girl-child is trained to accept the man's position of superiority and her place of servitude. Uju, the only daughter in her family, is frequently pestered by her mother to exhibit womanly traits in order to attract a good suitor. Uju is not allowed to express her views on any issue. Uju reveals that 'Whenever I complained too much, I was warned that I was in grave danger of becoming a nagging wife; the one the scriptures had described as worse than a leaking roof. When ever my cooking didn't turn out as intended, it was, 'Uju, is this the poison you will serve your husband and children when you marry?' (60). Her brothers are allowed to come home by midnight, attend parties that lasted till early hours of the morning, yet they are not cautioned. Mama's fixation on the need for Uju to get married early makes her deny Uju the forum to express her observations about Gozie's behaviour during their courtship. On the contrary, Mama directs Uju to cook for Gozie, do his laundry and keep his home tidy in order to display her womanly virtues before marriage. According to Mama, a woman's life and desires should be centred around pleasing a man. Uju's acceptance of Mama's directives sets the foundation for the eventual abusive marriage. On the day Gozie proposes to marry Uju, she notices signs of suppressed anger when she tells him that she needs to think about the marriage proposal before giving an answer. She also notices Gozie's possessive and domineering traits during their courtship yet she ignores the tell-tale signs because she has been deeply brainwashed by her mother to believe that every woman should aspire to marriage in order to earn societal respect. On the day of their wedding, a strong feeling of uncertainty envelopes her, yet when she remembers her mother's words on the night before the wedding 'My Obianuju, you're going to be a woman tomorrow' (62), she concludes that she is making the right decision. Uju was not sure if she was marrying Gozie because she loved him or to please Mama, however, she was certain that she did not really know him.

On one of Uju's visits to her parents' home with her daughters some years after her wedding, Papa starts talking about their eligibility for marriage. When Uju asks him 'Papa, how can you be talking about marriage now? They are still children.' He smiled. 'It's never too early to talk about marriage. They are women after all' (189). Uzundu, Ada's husband, plans to marry off his daughters at the age of eighteen and begins grooming them for wifely duties. Ada refuses to confront her husband because she feels that 'If I fight, my marriage will scatter' (325). Ada's

actions reveal that staying married and enjoying its perceived benefits and respect are more important to her than her children's fate.

The girl-child is often denigrated in patriarchal societies. Sadly, she is raised to accept male superiority and her own inferiority as normal. When Uju gives birth to her first child - a daughter, one of the female nurse's whispers to her colleague thus: 'Eyha, na her first pikin and she no even born boy' (98). After the birth of her twin girls, Gozie expresses his displeasure at the fact that they are both girls. Mama tells Uju shortly after their birth to start planning to get pregnant immediately because 'Your position isn't safe with only girls. His people might tell him to take another wife' (152). Ogechi, Sister Tinuke and Ada become very desperate to have a male child after giving birth to two, five and seven girls respectively. They are constantly reminded by their in-laws and family members that a male child is better than a female child, a husband's evidence of being a complete man is tied to having a son. These women accept the erroneous perception that having only daughters is a 'shame' and a son is a 'trophy' (252). They are deeply elated after giving birth to their first male child. Lavish parties are thrown by the husbands to celebrate the birth of a 'trophy' and the 'removal of shame' (252).

The undue importance attached to marriage and the male child in patriarchal societies sets the foundation for an abusive relationship where the woman is made to believe that she is incomplete and unfulfilled without a husband and a male child.

Internalised Acceptance of Abuse

A woman is usually blamed for being physically assaulted by a man and taught to endure and accept any form of abuse. When the girl-child is brought up to accept this erroneous belief, she unconsciously accepts it and becomes deeply-ingrained in her psyche. The victim eventually loses the willpower to resist abuse and also refuses any form of help that will liberate her from the situation. The man who grows up in an abusive environment also internalises the perception that it is normal to be physically violent which is an expression of his superiority over the woman. Uju is physically battered by her husband and her brothers, on some occasions, come to beat her husband for subjecting her to such dastardly act. Uju refuses her brothers' intervention and takes the blame when she says, 'No please. It is my fault. I was rude, I deserved it.... Please don't do anything. Please I am begging' (127). Uju is rather worried about her children's plight when her

husband is punished for his actions. She tells her brothers, ‘Please don’t kill him. Please. My children will have no father. What will happen to them? I beg you in the name of God. I swear he won’t do it again. I swear! Please have mercy’ (163). On several occasions, Uju hides the physical evidence of Gozie’s constant physical abuse on her. She uses makeup and scarves to cover the bruises, swollen eyes and wounds from the prying eyes of family members, neighbours and church members. Overtime, Uju becomes so accustomed to Gozie’s violent streak at home and pretence in public; ‘I was used to it; the false display of affection, the hugs, quick pecks, the possessive arm around the waist’ (180). Gozie is a hypocritical deacon who is respected in the church, makes huge donations to the church, prepares sermons yet, he is so used to violence that ‘It was like he’d somehow not noticed the ugly bruises I’d been carrying around for days. He was used to seeing me that way’ (161). In essence, domestic violence and having a wife who is always carrying bruises is normal in their home. He only tries to suppress his violent streak in church and public places. A sad revelation portrayed in the text is that the girl-child is also taught in schools to accept male superiority. Ego, Uju’s daughter, tells her mother that ‘her Mathematics teacher, a Mrs Afolabi, had punished all the male students for ‘allowing’ a girl to top the class when Ego had gotten the highest score in the test’ (258). Ironically, a female teacher teaches the girl-child to accept that it is the man’s prerogative to lead and always emerge the best in all endeavours.

Family/Societal Influence and Pressure

Abuse thrives in situations where the victim is not given moral and physical support from family members. The family is meant to be a place of succour and safe haven for victims, however, when family members encourage and condone any form of abuse, the victim is forced to remain even if the situation is life-threatening. On several occasions, Mama reprimands and blames Uju for triggering Gozie’s violent assault. When Uju is brutally beaten for taking contraceptives without Gozie’s consent, Mama blames Uju and tells her that ‘Maybe that will teach you some sense. You’re lucky he didn’t beat you very well like other men would have done, instead he came to call your mother to talk to you. How many men would have done that? Oya kneel down! Kneel down and apologise to him. Tell him you won’t do that again’ (80). Mama always forces Uju to apologise for being subjected to physical pain. She refuses to consider the physical and

psychological effect of the frequent abuse on her daughter. Her stance on the woman's place in an abusive relationship emboldens Gozie to be more abusive because he is aware that Uju has no safe haven. When Uju becomes fed up with her plight and expresses her desire to leave the marriage, Mama slaps her and vehemently refuses when she says, 'If you're thinking of leaving permanently, better remove that from your mind. You will not bring that kind of shame to this family' (221). Uju is meant to remain in the life-threatening environment because Mama insists that 'Marriage is about forgiveness' (226). Her brothers who at the early stage of her marriage were willing to protect her from her husband's vicious attacks later plead with her to remain in the marriage. Mama is of the view that she will not be able to cater for herself and three children, 'Girls for that matter.... You must not let him go o. Hold him tight. Guard your husband with jealousy. Now that your husband is very wealthy, other women will start eyeing him. Don't let another woman steal him from you and reap the fruits of all your labour' (233, 282). Mama also connives with Gozie to stop Uju from going back to school for further studies. She asserts that giving birth to children, especially male ones, and guarding her husband jealously by humbly performing her wifely duties is more important than getting an education. Mama's rigid stance is borne out of the belief that a woman is a man's appendage, hence, it is worthless to live a life outside him.

Ada, Uju's childhood friend, confronts her husband with evidences of his acts of infidelity. The confrontation results to a physical scuffle. When the case is brought before Uzundu's family members for resolution, Ada is berated for prying into her husband's affairs. Elder Ozoemena tells her

Why would you quarrel with your husband for having other women? Does he not feed you and your children? ... If your husband beats you, it is not your place to fight him and take his children away from him ... Apologise even if you're not wrong if that will prevent quarrels from happening. Peace is the most thing, especially for the sake of your children (202-203).

This biased resolution of the misunderstanding eventually transforms Ada to a docile and unassertive woman because the family members will not be objective in their analysis of any subsequent marital

dispute. Moreover, her plight is precarious because she does not have a male child, hence her resolve to accept and endure any demeaning and abusive behaviour. In patriarchal societies, the man is expected to exercise his manly authority by controlling his wife's activities and decisions. In a bid to align with societal notions, some men become domineering, possessive and abusive. Gozie becomes more abusive because he feels it is the only way he can exert his influence as the husband.

Cultural and Religious Beliefs

Most patriarchally oriented cultures endorse violence against women and marital infidelity thereby making the man's excesses to be unchecked. Sadly, religious bodies that are meant to be a safe haven for the victim exacerbate the situation by admonishing abused women to remain in abusive and unfaithful relationships because of its strong disapproval of divorce. Uju is physically molested by her husband and she decides to go and stay at her parents' home. Mama's efforts towards making Uju accept domestic violence as part of every marriage falls on deaf ears. Mama calls Deacon Rapuokwu who 'was responsible for counselling couples-to-be, newly weds and those going through marital problems' (164). His advice and opinions reveal his biased and subjective stance. He reprimands Uju for refusing to give Gozie the proceeds from the sales at her shop and aggravating the situation by involving her brothers after she is beaten by her husband. The obvious physical evidence of the attack -red eyes, bruises and wounds- are ignored. Deacon tells Uju that 'your husband is the head of the home. No matter what happens, you're subject to him. If money is the issue, whenever money comes in, hand it over to him. You know he's a man, even if you're the one making the money. You have to make him feel like a man' (165).

A marriage seminar is organised for the women in Uju's church. Sister Ndidi, one of the leaders, tells the women that they cannot leave an abusive and loveless marriage because 'God hates divorce. You cannot break your marriage, no matter what happens!' (273-274). The women are told that it is a woman's duty to maintain a happy home and always be at her husband's beck and call. When one of the participants asks what a woman should do since she has to remain, Sister Ndidi responds that 'I know some men can be very bad tempered but with prayer, honour and trust in God, even the most terrible man can become a saint.... My dear, it is okay for a man to have a bad character as long as he is a man' (256). The

women are also admonished that relinquishing their finances to the husband is a sign of virtue. The destructive psychological and emotional effect of violence on the woman are not discussed, rather, the woman is expected to stay till death because the man is the head of the home. After one of the near fatal attacks in Uju's home, she decides to report the problem to her pastor since Gozie is one of the committed and fervent members. Moreover, she knows that her family will not listen to her. She tells her pastor 'about the years of pain, of constant abuse and emotional and mental torture and trauma' (346). She concludes her narration by reiterating that she can no longer endure the violence. Pastor tells her 'Don't talk like that, marriage is for better for worse. You have to stand strong; you have to pray for your husband.... I don't want you to quarrel with him, be calm. Most importantly, pray. Refuse to give up on your marriage' (346).

Financial Dependence and Economic Deprivation

One of the major causes of gender-based violence is the victim's dependence on the perpetrator for financial support. Most abusers ensure that the victim is not financially empowered. Sadly, some family members do not give the victim the assistance needed for attaining financial freedom. Shortly after her marriage, Uju expresses her desire to get a job and eventually secures one after many attempts. Gozie stops her from taking the job. Ironically, Mama supports Gozie's stance because 'What kind of woman abandons her primary responsibilities to pursue a job? What nonsense job is more important than having a family? (144). Mama and Gozie insist that nurturing her pregnancy and taking care of her family are more important than accepting a job offer. Uju's father opens provisions shop for her in order to placate her, however, Gozie forces her to close the shop after some months because he feels it is not befitting of his status as a successful businessman. He controls Uju by ensuring that she does not have enough money and only gives her money for specific needs. When Uju expresses her dissatisfaction at her inability to meet certain basic needs such as buying sanitary towels, fuel and groceries without asking him, Gozie vehemently refuses to allow get a job or start a business. Uju realises that 'Gozie had become a god unto himself, his money, the double-edged weapon via which he exercised his power' (306).

Stigmatisation of Divorcees

In patriarchal societies, it is an aberration for a woman to leave an abusive relationship to become a single mother. The woman is made to suffer the consequences of bringing such shame to the family. Divorcees are usually ostracised and stigmatised by family members and the community because it is regarded as a shameful act. Uju goes back to her parents' home on two occasions after brutal assaults. Mama tells her that leaving her marriage is an embarrassment to her husband and family. She is told to remain in her home and not run to them after any act of violence. Uju subsequently decides to quit the relationship after another near fatal episode and seeks refuge elsewhere because her family will not want to associate with a divorcee. When Mama eventually locates where Uju stays with her children,

her face twisted in rage. 'You are selfish' she spat out. 'You're only thinking about yourself. You're a disgrace to this family. What about your children? ... Don't you know your daughters will have issues marrying because they are from a divorced home? Don't you know they will be insulted with it by outsiders?' (368).

Uju refuses to be perturbed by Mama's outbursts and chooses to remain resolute. Sister Bolatito, a member in Uju's church, divorces her husband after years of enduring physical and psychological torture. No one in her local church is aware of her daily pains and struggles. During the marriage seminar, some of the women vehemently refuse to allow her lead one of the sessions because of her status as a divorcee.

Culture of Silence

The tacit approval of gender-based violence exacerbates the situation and emboldens the perpetrator. In the same vein, family and societal pressure leads to a culture of silence amongst victims. Ogunlade avers that

The society has innocently trained women to be silent and subservient to men so they would be socially acceptable. That has not augured well for women. It has only put them at the mercy of chauvinistic men. Thus, instead of speaking out and seeking help so the violence could be stopped, many

of them chose to be silent for as long as no one else noticed what they are going through. This silence empowers their abusers. The silence is a recipe for an unending circle of abuse and violence. (np)

Uju tells her parents about her worsening predicament at the hands of Gozie and the near fatal injuries Ego sustained during one of the altercations. Mama responds thus: ‘Are you the first to get married? Don’t you know that there are women going through worse? ... These are just some of the things you can experience in life as a woman. You must be strong, learn from them and move on’ (367). Uju resorts to using makeup and scarves to hide her bruises and swollen eyes. She subsequently refuses to confide in anyone because she already knows her family’s and society’s perception about gender-based violence. She eventually finds solace in Sister Bolatito who is also a victim and survivor of violence.

Wanjiru agrees that

women often have rational reasons for staying – they may fear retaliation against themselves or their children, or they may not be able to financially support themselves or their children. They may be ostracised by their family or community if they leave.... Women surviving in abusive relationships attempt to leave many times and routinely act in very conscious ways to try to minimise the abuse directed at them or their children. (5)

Effects of Gender-based Violence

It is no gainsaying that violence has enormous and devastating effects on the victims. The first obvious effect on anyone subjected to violence is physical pain. Uju is physically battered for various flimsy reasons such as taking contraceptives without Gozie’s consent, going out to buy detergent without his ‘permission’ (110), refusing to give the proceeds from the day’s sales at her shop, asking Gozie to stop coming home late (217), accommodating Ada and her children during her own marital crisis (206) and warning Gozie about Ejike’s dubious tendencies and the eventual confirmation of her suspicious (275-278). Anytime Gozie assaults Uju, he uses his fists, legs and anything at his disposal to inflict tremendous pain on her. He always abandons her in an unconscious state until she regains

consciousness and gets herself help. She bears the pain and carries the visible evidences -bruises, swollen eyes and wounds- until she recuperates. Ego, Uju's daughter nearly loses her life when she is brutally beaten for trying to protect her mother from Gozie's violent attacks. Ego is rushed to the hospital in an unconscious state. The doctor magnanimously agrees to carry out an emergency surgery due to the bleeding in her brain in order to avert permanent brain damage. Gozie refuses to visit Ego and Uju at the hospital or pay the bills. He is of the view that he 'will not pay for the treatment of such a rude an idiotic child. If she's going to die, let her die' (358).

The long-lasting effect of physical violence is the emotional and psychological trauma the victim battles for a long time. Although the physical wounds heal and may leave little or no scars, the psychological pain remains for a long time. Uju becomes depressed, has sleep and eating disorders and is unable to coordinate her thoughts. Mama notices these signs but refuses to acknowledge the cause of her daughter's psychological state. She insists that it is not normal for an African woman to suffer depression hence it is unnecessary to seek the help of a psychologist. Uju becomes emotionally detached from Gozie and always looks forward to his frequent travels. Overtime, their interactions become formal and lacks the intimacy, affection and friendship that characterised their courtship days. Uju's reproductive health is also affected. Years after the birth of their first child, she has difficulty conceiving and has frequent miscarriages. Several visits to the hospital reveal that there is nothing wrong with her reproductive organs, yet she is unable to conceive. Gozie blames her for their predicament without tackling the root cause.

In homes where violence is rife, the emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing of the children are not given any form of attention. Research has revealed that children who witness and/or suffer violence have the scenes etched in the minds till adulthood with its attendant psychological and emotional repercussions. Some children become withdrawn in both public and private places. Their educational performance is also affected. Uju's attention is drawn to Ego's odd behaviour at school by her teacher. She notices that Ego 'keeps to herself a lot and hardly talks to the other children. Sometimes, we find her in a corner crying' (178). Ego's teacher wants to know if there were any problems in their home that would have triggered such behaviour. Uju refuses to divulge the secret because she feels it is unthinkable to tell an unmarried woman

that my husband still beat me at the slightest provocation, and most times in the presence of my daughters? That my blood lined the tiles of our new home? That the heavy makeup I wore was to cover the heavy bruises underneath the layers? That I was mocked whenever I asked my husband for anything even though I was no longer allowed to run my shop because it didn't fit his new status? That even the car I drove was given to me as the symbol of status and could be taken away at any time? (178).

Uju's children are frightened whenever Gozie is home because his mood is unpredictable. They have frequently witnessed his brutal assault on their mother and have tried to resuscitate when she is unconscious or bleeding. Ego grows up to become deeply resentful of her parents. When she becomes mature enough to understand the situation, she tries to protect her mother from Gozie's abuse. On one of such occasions, Ego sustains near fatal head injuries. Despite Ego's reassurances to her mother that she is okay after surviving the brain haemorrhage, Uju 'knew other wounds remained underneath the surface, etched deep in the blood that would never heal' (370).

The children are usually not excited about going home. When Uju eventually files for divorce, they notice that she smiles more often and is relaxed. Although Uju enrolls them in a cheaper private school, they are happy and at peace because 'A sense of normalcy returned as we settled into our new lives' (370).

Another devastating and painful effect of gender-based violence is death. Chinelo, Uju's friend, is verbally and psychologically abused by her in-laws for her inability to conceive after birthing two children. They insist that having one son is as good as having none. Her health challenge implies that it is risky and life-threatening for her to carry a pregnancy to term. Although her husband is contented with the two children, she decides to get pregnant. She pays the ultimate price in her bid to satisfy her in-laws who are fixated on having another male child. Uju is deeply pained by Chinelo's death because she knows that 'she walked into her own death' (336).

Violence transforms both the victim and perpetrator and has the potency of making them insensitive to the effect on their psyche. During Gozie's incarceration by the military government, one would have expected

Uju to be demoralised and extremely sad. On the contrary, she enjoyed her new temporary freedom from Gozie's abuse. She 'learnt to stand on my own two feet, to live without a husband to worry about' (135). Overtime, she reveals her preference for Gozie's long absence, finds freedom, satisfaction and fulfilment in it and rebels by doing what he hates while he is away from home. The constant abuse and animosity in the home transforms Uju and Gozie from lovers to strangers and they 'never bothered to fake affection when we were alone' (195). Sometimes, when he embarked on a journey 'I wasn't sure if I really wished him a safe journey back' (195). She bemoans the grim reality that Gozie is no longer humane in his relationship with her. Gozie loses all forms of human feeling and affection because he is used to expressing only one form of emotion- anger and violence. The children have no cordial relationship with him because they are witnesses to his violent displays. He transforms from a fervent and dedicated Christian to a hypocrite who hides his violent behaviour by engaging in philanthropic activities. He 'loved ... opportunities to be benevolent, not out of goodwill but a desire to be seen as a sort of god with the ability to do and undo at will, to transform lives with the stroke of a pen, and the money would mean absolutely nothing to him' (291).

Years of enduring abuse has the potency of making the victim hardened and insensitive to others' feelings and plight. Mama is depicted as a domineering and insensitive mother and a nagging wife. She controls the affairs in her home and ensures that her husband and children do her bidding. She also interferes in her children's personal family issues which explains why Kelechi refuses to visit the family home after his wedding. Papa, to a larger extent, is more objective in assessment of Uju's plight. Mama is of the view that that preserving the family name and honour is more important than her daughter's dire situation which is an odd and irrational position from a mother. However, the text reveals that Mama is also a victim of years of abuse and mental torture in the hands of her husband. Despite having three male children before a daughter – which is expected to endear her to Papa – she still struggles to cope with marital infidelity, domestic violence and apathy. She does everything to make Papa change and get his affection to no avail. When Papa eventually begins to stay at home and stops beating her, 'Mama had undergone a transformation of her own. She had been hardened' (366). She becomes an assertive, domineering and self-centred woman to the detriment of her children.

Tackling the Menace

Educational and financial empowerment are key to ensuring freedom from gender-based violence. Uju makes several attempts to get a job in order to put an end to her dependence on Gozie for her daily upkeep. He knows the power that a financially independent woman can wield, hence he stops Uju from getting a job or starting a business. He is also aware that an educationally empowered woman has more access to knowledge and by extension, knowledge of her rights, hence, he stops Uju from going for further studies after acquiring her first degree. Since Uju knows that 'School was fulfilling' (124), she ensures that her daughters are well educated in order to equip them for the patriarchal society. When she eventually takes the bold decision of leaving the life-threatening relationship, despite its attendant financial hardship, she struggles to meet her children's basic needs. She enjoys her peace of mind in her small apartment and her work as a clerk at a government parastatal. The joy and peace in the new home are so palpable that the twin notice that 'I haven't heard you laugh like that in a long time' (370). Although she is initially worried about her children's wellbeing for subjecting them to an economic lifestyle after living in affluence, they gradually begin to understand the importance of their mother's tough decisions.

A not too popular solution to gender-based violence in patriarchal settings is divorce. A divorcee is stigmatised and, in some cases, ostracised for not remaining in an abusive relationship. The fear of stigmatisation makes most victims remain in relationships that are clearly unworkable. Uju's initial attempts to leave her marriage after near fatal beatings are met with stiff opposition from her parents. When she realises that her children's lives, not only hers, are in danger, she boldly files for divorce. Gozie resorts to constant harassment and blackmail in order to make Uju cower into submission and return to him. He is not willing to let Uju go without a fierce legal tussle because she 'was his property' (371). Although the lawyer explains the implications of her decisions and what she stands to lose due to the loopholes in the legal system, she remains resolute. She is eventually granted divorce and hopes to relocate abroad with her children to start a new life. Sister Bolatito also seeks divorce and is granted after enduring years of abuse. She refuses to be perturbed by the insensitivity and stigmatisation from her church members because leaving a life-threatening marriage is crucial to maintaining her mental, physical and psychological wellbeing.

Seeking justice in a court of law affords victims the opportunity to seek redress and protection from an abusive partner. Uju's interaction with Barrister Daniel Ogbu, the lawyer prosecuting her divorce case, reveals that

our laws aren't very favourable to women in the event of a divorce and do not enforce spousal compensation or child support system, so it may be almost impossible to get anything financially from your husband ... our laws are not very clear on female inheritance, and in many courts, customary law still supersedes statutory law on inheritance' (389).

Despite the obvious lapses in the laws, unlike the practice in developed countries, the victim gets justice to a certain degree.

Strong bonds of friendship enable victims weather the challenges in an abusive relationship. Ada, Uju and Chinelo are childhood friends who are deeply supportive of each other. Chinelo confides in Uju about her health challenge and the pressure from her in-laws to birth another son. Uju expresses so much concern and becomes extremely worried when the long-sought pregnancy starts to have adverse effect on Chinelo's health. Uju 'pestered Chinelo so much during her months of pregnancy that she'd threatened to stop picking my phone calls and letting me through the front door of her home. 'Uju, you worry too much. I'm fine. Look at me; don't I look fine? She'd always say' (328). During Chinelo's last moments and death due to complications from the pregnancy and failed caesarean session, Uju and Ada stay with her at the hospital. They are terribly devastated by their friend's death that it takes them months to accept the sad reality.

Sister Bolatito provides Uju a strong support when she notices that the latter has been enduring abuse. When Gozie refuses to pay Ego's hospital bills, she foots the whole bills. She also allowed Uju and her children live with her for weeks before they could get their own small apartment and helps them begin a new life. Bolatito's huge assistance to a fellow woman in dire need is borne out of her experience as a victim of domestic abuse. Sally, Uju's old school friend, gets her a reputable lawyer and pays the legal fees for seeking divorce while also providing moral and financial support to enable Uju wade through the difficult phase of her life.

A new phenomenon to the issue of gender-based violence and curtailing its prevalence is the need to deliberately change the narrative through radical cultural reorientation. Thus far, the study has revealed that cultural and patriarchal beliefs, family and societal pressure have contributed to ensuring that certain beliefs that are clearly inimical to women's wellbeing are still deeply ingrained in their psyche. However, there is an urgent need to change the narrative. Uju, a victim of violence, chooses to raise children who boldly denounce violence when she vehemently tells her mother that violence 'isn't normal; it shouldn't be normal. I won't have my daughters grow up thinking it's normal' (367). She raises her children 'to always ask questions, to challenge opinions and reasons behind them' (199). She is of the view that raising bold and assertive daughters will put an end to the cycle of docility and servitude. Uju encourages her daughters to be themselves and live differently from patriarchal standards which are against fairness and justice. She always tells her mother and friends that 'I am raising my children for the world I wanted, and not the one I lived in' (325). A world where the male child is superior to the female child; where the man enjoys certain privileges; where certain customs and beliefs are to the detriment of the woman; where a woman is expected to endure and remain in an abusive relationship in a bid to protect family name; where a woman can only find fulfilment in wifedom and motherhood; where a woman's opinions are not sought while taking critical decisions that concern her; where a woman is incomplete until she has a male child. Uju is happy that her daughters turned out the way she wanted. Ego has a deep resentment for her father and decides that she will never marry because she has been a witness to her mother's suffering and has also interacted with friends with similar experiences. She asserts that

I don't see how it benefits women in anyway.... You leave the comfort of your father's house for a man; you give everything, sacrifice yourself, your ambitions, put your body through the pain of childbirth, everything and he doesn't appreciate it. What's the point? We've been brainwashed to want it more when they benefit from it the most And I listen to what people say every day. We want women to put in everything and be okay with getting almost nothing in return. I'm not going to live that. (348-349).

Uzundu, Ada's husband, prepares to marry off his five daughters at the age of eighteen. Zina, the first daughter opposes his move and disappears without a trace when she realises that her father is making

arrangements to force her into an early and loveless marriage. She is not perturbed by the uncertainties and difficulties that await her in her new phase of life. She is aware that times are changing and young women have the right to choose who and when to get married. Sally calls off an engagement when she notices that her fiancé has the tendency of being abusive. She ignores her mother's stance that 'a woman's true purpose is in companionship and childbearing, so all these my career accomplishments are for my pocket; I have apparently failed in my God-given assignment' (376). She does not allow her mother's pressure to get married becloud her sense of reasoning, rather she proves her mettle in her chosen profession by being 'a high-powered executive at one of the nation's largest and oldest banks' (376). It is apparent that this new crop of women are not ready to tow the path of their fore mothers rather they are carving a niche for themselves by changing the narrative and creating a world where fairness, equity and justice prevails irrespective of gender.

Conclusion

Gender-based violence has grave repercussions on the victim, the family and the society hence the need to address the problem holistically. Deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs in women's psyche has contributed to its persistence. Nonetheless, women are beginning to change the narrative by raising a generation of daughters who are assertive, bold and not willing to adhere to beliefs and norms that are inimical to their wellbeing and personal development. Although some of the measures taken by the women to tackle the hydra-headed monster seem alien to African beliefs, the numerous grave dangers it portends to the victim necessitates the need to take radical steps in order to bring it to an end. Men also have a role to play in changing the narrative by being supportive to women and victims of violence, encouraging gender sensitivity and equality, and also speaking against violence against women.

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