

SUBTLETY OF TEARS: THEATRICAL EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL BATTLE WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

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ABSTRACT: *The average African girl grows into a woman knowing that she must get married. When she eventually does, she must do all that is in her powers to make her marriage work. She has to submit, obey, make sacrifices and above all, endure even the meanest form of brutality just to prove to the people that her marriage is working as well as other people's. The fact that she is going through hell notwithstanding, little is to be known to the public of the true cause of the bruises she explains off as accidents, of the heartaches she covers with mere fatigue, of the tears she blames on onions. This paper examines the dramatic exploration of the emotional, physical and psychological battle women are engaged in in their various homes. Using the text, Onions Make Us Cry, this paper will critically explore how much women struggle in silence while trying not to wash their dirty linen in public and how eventually, these bottled up grievances usually lead to psychosis and even insanity; both psychological imbalances which, although mild in most cases, could birth very serious domestic violence in exceptional ones. While exploring this, the paper advocates for a speak-out; a situation where such women confide in someone in order to ease off accumulated aggression and/or grievance.*

KEYWORDS: Battle, Women, Domestic Violence, Psychological Battle

INTRODUCTION

Many people in the world, but especially women, fall victims to domestic violence, a variety of emotional and physical as well as psychological and sexual abuse within the home, among family members and couples. Domestic violence has been addressed in many advanced countries and is seen as a violation of human right. In many developing countries however, the case is different. In present day Nigeria, many women still fall victims to domestic violence, many have lost their lives and many are permanently traumatised. Olatunji Daud reports the incidence of a man who runs amok, killing his wife and five others before killing himself. Reporting for the Vanguard, Daud records that man and wife had been estranged due to domestic issues and wife had had to battle with domestic violence which eventually claims her life. It would be worth noting that domestic violence is prevalent in Nigeria because of the high level of inequality both in intra-household and societal power relations. Domestic violence calls for greater emphasis on respect for human rights and attention to gender equality.

Writing for Seven Country Services, an organisation devoted to mental, developmental and addiction issues, Kathryn Patricelli observes that the effects of domestic violence are many and varied. She notes that the survivors

develop emotional and psychological concerns that last well after the physical injuries have healed. Memories of victimization may be overwhelming, and return again and again, unbidden, to torture

the victim long after actual victimization has passed.

Some lucky survivors only live with the pains of the memory, some have been disfigured, some are left with lingering chronic pains, emotional scars and some very unfortunate ones have lost their lives.

The persistence of domestic violence and the fact that it is not being addressed in the country is very disturbing. It has come to be accepted as a manner of discipline within the home. This calls for urgent attention, and *Onions Make Us Cry* has dramatically illustrated what these women face in homes prone to domestic violence. Children also are affected psychologically merely by seeing their parents fight constantly. While there is no denying that men and children equally suffer from domestic violence, the emphasis of this paper would be on the women, rather than the men and children. While analysing this play, this paper happens to highlight the dangers women face in these homes and the damage domestic violence could do to them physically, emotionally and psychologically.

Although these women appear to only nurse bruises, 'broken tooth, bruised limbs, cracked ribs, countless black eyes ... shifted jaw' (Jallo, 2013:23), in terms of mental health, domestic violence can trigger off poor mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder; a condition of persistent mental and emotional stress occurring as a result of severe psychological shock, typically involving disturbance of sleep and constant vivid recall of the experience, with dulled responses to others and to the outside world, substance abuse and psychosis; a severe mental disorder in which thought and emotions are so impaired that contact is lost with external reality and sometimes involving hallucinations and signs of insanity (Kiersten, 2007). These may not manifest in the form of physical injuries, but they are damages that can impair decision making ability, increase risk for substance abuse, trigger suicidal ideation and prompt symptoms of psychosis. Ordinarily non-violent people face the risk of becoming violent by remaining in violent/abusive relationships. This danger of becoming violent due to domestic violence is known as violence resistance (VR); a self-defence motivated violence targeted against the batterer (Kiersten, 2007). This sort of violence manifested in Malinda Jandayi and DJ's relationship. In the struggle to defend herself, she accidentally murders her husband.

Many stories of violence abound today in many parts of Nigeria, even in the homes of the high and mighty, the rich and the educated. Alokun, 2013 notes that about 50% of women in Nigeria have suffered violence/abuse in the hands of their husbands and out of 36 states in the federation, only 4 states have laws against insidious crimes. It is much more unfortunate to note that because of the attitude of law enforcement agents, 95% of women endangered by domestic violence do not bother complaining. Because in Nigerian society women are practically 'owned' by their husbands, domestic violence is seen as a private affair.

Violence is any behaviour, action, conduct which involves physical force, intimidation or threat with an intention to intimidate, hurt, damage or even kill someone or something. Domestic violence is any violent, aggressive or abusive behaviour directed at an individual by another person who is in an intimate relationship with him/her. Intimate relationship here could be marriage, family, co-habitation or dating. It affects people in all social groups, however, women suffer more domestic violence than men do. Frisch & Frisch, note that 'wives are the frequent victims of fatal family violence' (1998:577).

Writing for *Bella Naija*, Tobi Atte observes that domestic violence could be an emotional,

non-physical form of abuse which is characterised by 'behaviour that chips away at someone's sense of self-worth'. Domestic violence takes many forms like shaming, humiliating, withholding basic needs, threatening, emotional blackmail, physical aggression or assault, sexual abuse, domineering, intimidation, stalking, etc. Women's Aid, an organisation which ensures the safety of women and children, includes those aged 16 and above in its definition of domestic violence. Thus, anyone aged 16 and above who suffers psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional aggression in the hands of someone who is in intimate relationship with him/her, is said to be going through domestic violence. Domestic violence has also come to be known as domestic abuse, battering, intimate partner violence, spousal abuse and dating abuse.

Domestic violence may have been outlawed in many western or developed countries, but in most developing countries, domestic violence is almost left unmentioned. In Nigeria, this could be as a result of the discriminatory laws that seem to give men rights over women and the dismissive attitude the police gives when they are complained to. Mikala, S. of Amnesty International's Africa Program, notes that

On a daily basis, Nigerian women are beaten, raped and even murdered by members of their family for supposed transgressions, which can range from not having meals ready on time to visiting family members without their husband's permission. Husbands, partners and fathers are responsible for most of the violence

Domestic violence is a form of aggression. Aggression itself 'is a fundamental human drive..., a rising pressure which had to be discharged periodically or diverted into other channels temporarily to slow the pressure for discharge' (Singer, 1971:3). In essence, violence is a choice and can be controlled.

Synopsis

Onions Make Us Cry is an exciting, absolutely captivating play, created in a nouvelle style with poetic lines. Beautified in a brilliant use of metaphors and coated in imagery, *Onions Make Us Cry* uses everyday words to create an amazing story that almost every woman is familiar with. It captures the intrigues, emotions, anxieties, fears and uncertainties which are birthed in domestic violence, a worldwide phenomenon which, even in our modern, civilised society, still claims lives and ruins futures.

Malinda Jandayi, a 36 year old artist and mother of two lovely kids, enjoyed a most romantic courtship and eventually married Daniel Jandayi, fondly known as DJ. It is all rosy and theirs is the perfect union until their first child, Zulei, is born. His arrival seems to have turned the wheels of romance and their relationship becomes abusive. DJ consistently finds reasons to beat her merciless and she finds reasons to endure. She accepts every black eye, welcomes every punch and endures the emotional pain that comes with battering. She does not seek help, complain to anyone, nor let her children know of the situation. She continues to pardon DJ and believe things would get better. But things go from bad to worse, until she begins to see it as normal, blame herself for the unhappy situation, steel herself against the emotional abuse and excuse the physical assault. She gets so used to the situation and obviously begins to adapt to it that her fondest memory of her husband is an incidence of intimate partner violence (Jallo, 2013:47).

But every ice has a breaking point. DJ gets out of control on one abusive outburst and seemed

ready to murder Malinda. She acts fast, out of self-defence and utter fear for her life, she grabs a weapon and counter-attacks him. In Malinda's own words, 'pestle met with nape in utmost antagonism...unimaginable reflex ever', (25) and he dies. She is arrested, but while waiting for court appearance, she is remanded in a psychiatric ward where Lola Gambari, a psychologist, visits her regularly. Much to Malinda's chagrin, Lola finds herself in similar situation, only that hers had not yet degenerated into depression and psychosis. Lola, despite being a psychologist, is unable to understand the true state of her situation until Malinda unveils it to her. There is suddenly a reversal of role and the psychologist becomes the patient, getting advice and strength from the supposedly mad Malinda.

As unfortunate as the situation is for Malinda, who, despite the danger of facing a life imprisonment, and struggling with the guilt of leaving her children fatherless, she is able to help a fellow woman out of a life threatening relationship.

Malinda is a very strong character. Like all women who suffer from domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV), she is only able to speak out when the threat on her (ie, her husband) had been moved out of the way. Many women, however strong they may seem, never say a word about the abuse. They neither confide in family members nor close friends. Although Lola asks Malinda if she had

Lola: No confidant? Family? Or friends? (30)

she was unable to tell anyone of her own predicament. She suffered four miscarriages, bumps and had a handful of her hair rooted out, she did not find the courage to speak to anyone. Most times, these women simply take responsibility for the man's constant violence.

Joanne, a wife and a mother, was constantly abused by her husband, Ben. Like most women suffering IPV, she did not know what to do.

She told herself it was all her fault. Ben wouldn't do these things if she were a better wife. She tried harder to make everything perfect, to cook better food, to stay at home more, and to keep the baby quiet. But however hard she tried, Ben still found something wrong. Often he would just be very angry with her, but he also would be physically violent. (Holford, 2004:123-4).

Domestic violence usually has a long life span, lasting as long as the couple are together except they go for a therapy in the form of counselling. In the western world, and currently even in Nigerian society, people walk out of marriages as a result of domestic violence. African society, especially Nigerian society, frowns at broken homes, thus, everyone tries to paint the picture that all is working out fine. Everyone pretends so that the people can see the perfect home; they had to see a home that is flawless, with all trauma wrapped up in fanciful outward show of affection.

Malinda: All they saw was the glistening shell. A fancy one with no cracks. Worked hard at keeping it so... was wrong. Thought it the best way to protect me and my babies. Oblivious to the rising storm. (30)

Onions Make Us Cry paints the picture many families face, both in Nigeria and the world. Many women pass through severe traumatic experiences and emotional pains due to the happenings in their homes. Many suffer in silence, believing that things can only get better.

Many keep their pains, disappointments and solitude to themselves because they either feel that it is a private family matter or they are scared, helpless and do not wish others to see them as incapable of handling their affairs. Although men and women could suffer this alike, *Onions Make Us Cry* explores domestic violence against women. It explains the many tears women shed in their closets and the swollen eyes outsiders see. It explains the many bumps on their faces and the black eyes they nurse. It helps outsiders understand why some women constantly slip and have bumps and the particles that fall into their eyes to give them the black eyes. It explains why most women in abusive relationships are too quick to justify the actions of their husbands and abusers. It equally explains the deep rooted depression which is explained off as mere tiredness, lack of rest, too much workload and the never materialising need for a holiday. *Onions Make Us Cry* explores the helplessness of women suffering from domestic violence and advocates for a speak out. Frisch & Frisch explain that

women learn to become helpless as a result of being abused. They become anxious, depressed and dependent upon the abuser and believe that they are unable to control or prevent their abuse. Their perception of helplessness becomes a reality. (580)

Helplessness is a state of mind, a powerlessness to change or influence a situation unveiled by an inability to act. Helplessness is the psychological state that frequently results when events are uncontrollable (Arbuckle, 1975:9). Helplessness comes with a feeling of emptiness, a stage one gets to and feels that he/she is beyond redemption. A helpless person usually just sulks, takes blame for the situation and sometimes, does nothing to change the situation.

In case of women suffering from domestic violence, some of them hardly even think of seeking help. They struggle to make themselves better; they listen to their husbands' complaints and try to improve. They often fail to realise that it is not usually about how well they get to do a thing, it is about him wanting to discharge a built up aggression. Like Malinda, many women work themselves up thinking of how to be better, but their efforts go unnoticed. In their helplessness, these women's moods 'are continually interrupted with thoughts of failure and worthlessness' (Seligman, 1975:1). they are often jumpy, withdrawn and constantly full of apologies. Because they willingly take all the blame, they see their husbands as the sweet lamb who gets angry because they (the women) are stupid.

Malinda: Got to a point I thought I was the evil one. Thought I didn't deserve him, so I allowed it all, if that made him feel better. *(to Lola)* That's where you are now. Point X. (32).

Being helpless, these women usually lack the will power to seek help; they sometimes feel embarrassed talking to others about their situation. Despite Lola's position and exposure as a psychologist, she still felt very uncomfortable discussing her situation with her patient who had gone through the same domestic violence. She protects her husband and like others, blames the onions for her tears and shies away from hearing the truth about her situation. Malinda, being experienced, chastises her mercilessly

Malinda: *(ignoring her)* wouldn't even let your best friend know ... cos every union should be heavenly, glorious eh? Wrong! *(Hitting her fist on bedpost)* Untrue!

Lola: *(Getting up in fury)* enough I say Malinda Jandayi.

Malinda: *(smiling)* And audacious becomes Lola.

(Lola paces around)

Superiors mustn't see you in such a fit. Take a deep breath *(demonstrating)*... relax.

Lola: oh, you shut up

Malinda: tickling the wrong nerve I see ... please look at me Lola. You must help yourself ... do something ... so not to end up like me. My fate might take me to jail for the rest of my contemptible life.

Lola: No more of your imperious, haughty ... and overbearing comments. You are my patient. Nothing more! Don't sit there trying to figure my life out when you do not have an inkling where yours is headed. *(Storms out, slamming the door)*.

One is left wondering why women still hang on in abusive relationships. Malinda's case could be explained. She had two kids who needed their father. But was that enough reason for her to risk her life? Even if her life was not endangered and her children were not threatened, why would she be willing to endure such constant, brutal treatment from someone she loved for the rest of her life?

Domestic violence, once started, does not or hardly ever stops. While counselling Lola on the beatings Lola took from her husband, Ali Gambari, Malinda asserts

Malinda: He won't stop. *(Pause)* Believe me darling, he won't. (24).

Lola however, had no child, was gainfully employed, yet she endured violations and battering. The reason why most women remain in such relationships has always been linked to dependence and societal norms. But most times, it is observed that women do not speak about their situations because they feel ashamed, scared and believe that other people would blame them (Frisch & Frisch, 1998:581). Leaving an abusive relationship is not always the best option. Couples involved in separation are often depressed and traumatised and in the first couple of months of separation, the risk of homicide is high. In Africa, especially in eastern Nigeria, it is very shameful to walk out a marriage. Many women endure domestic violence because they do not wish to be seen as failures nor do they wish to be separated from their homes. The common myth that husbands are scarce and the society's insistence on every woman being and remaining married empower men to do with their wives whatever they wish. Also, battering has come to be interpreted as a manner of discipline within the home, thus, other people try not to interfere.

Women caught in domestic violence live on hopes, believing that their husbands would cease abusing them someday. They have that brief moment when the husbands are so full of apologies, promises of change and a beautiful future, and they simply forgive them, shrug off the pain and hope for a bright tomorrow amidst their fears and doubts.

Malinda: You ... you have taken on the cloak of fear so agreeably. I'm afraid it looks embarrassingly sad on you. I know, because I was you. ... There's heaven and then there's hell, you know, they fade into each other ...

Domestic violence comes in three phases or cycles. Both Malinda and Lola experienced them.

According to Walker Cycle Theory of Violence (Townsend, 2006), phase one is the tension building phase which is characterised by escalated tension, verbal abuse and minor battering. The woman is very sensitive in this phase. Once she senses the looming danger, she tries to placate her husband by trying to do everything right, being the good woman, wife and mother. She becomes very nice to him, denies her anger, swallows her bitterness, anxiety, depression and tries to overlook faults. This phase lasts very long ranging from weeks to years. Once the tension continues to mount and reaches the climax, phase two is attained.

Phase two is characterised by acute battering, serious violence and life threatening situations. It is a short phase of about 2 to 24 hours. Usually, the reason for the outburst may not be known. This is because, violence comes as a result of built up aggression. Thus, a very flimsy excuse or reason could trigger off violence. Depending on individuals, some women simply absorb the violence, others call for help. On the part of the batterers, some try to prevent the battered from seeking help, some come to a sudden realisation of what they have done and proffer help, and some may not care what the battered does next. In Malinda's case, her husband obviously often comes to a realisation and tries to be nice. Her fondest memory of her husband was of him soothing her after a violent episode.

Malinda: My fondest memory ... He hurled me into the kitchen cabinet. Had a cut here (*above her left eyebrow*) with the speed of a cheetah, he got the first aid box. In his eyes there were tears ... real tears ... I'd never seen him cry ... ever. I cried with him, we sat on the kitchen floor for hours ... holding unto each other like cold orphans. Don't know why he cried ... I cried only because he cried ... I loved him more. He was DJ the lamb. (47).

The third phase lasts longer than the second phase, but usually shorter than the first phase. Referred to as the honeymoon phase, it comes with what seems like a change of behaviour. The batterer seeks forgiveness (no one says sorry better than a batterer), promises to change, runs errands for the battered and buys gifts to placate her. She begins to love him again, remembers good old times and believes he would change. Usually, she is eager to make him know she has forgiven him and if she is not badly injured, she lets him make love to her. Sex here, is used as a tool for establishing intimacy again. Lola keeps a mental picture of her husband in this phase. Although she had just told Malinda that Ali Gambari rooted out a handful of her, she goes

Lola: Ali is a good man

Malinda: And chickens are mammals (32)

Malinda is sarcastic here because she understood the cycle. And when Lola talked about his gifts, Malinda understood too.

Lola: Bought me two wrappers ... Hollandias

Malinda: Could be a Bentley, or the whole of Dubai. He won't stop. (*pauses*) Believe me darling, he won't. (24)

In the lines following, Malinda explains

Malinda: I know, because I was you. In those early years, after a fine diamond cut Wellendorf band was slipped onto my finger. There is heaven and then there's hell, you know, they fade into each other ...tra lala and the best man wins. Hmm my panoramic view tells me the melodrama will swallow you up ... like Jonah and the mysterious whale ... Not like you aren't aware. (25)

Lola knew exactly what she ought to do as a psychologist. But like all women caught up in domestic violence, she prefers not to raise the topic, let alone address it. When Malinda, who notices Lola's situation, tried to make her talk, Lola shies away

Lola: Enough ... please (26)

As Malinda persisted, Lola, unconsciously overwhelmed by her pains, anxiety, helplessness and desire to turn things around, loses hold of her professionalism and yells at Malinda.

Lola: No more of your imperious, haughty ... and overbearing comments. (27)

Although Lola is aware that she needs help, she fights to keep help away. Denial. It is one of the most common mechanisms women use to cope against domestic violence. They deny everything from the looming danger (posed by their partners) to the cause of injuries or the severity of such injuries. Malinda buttresses this when she led us into their secret

Malinda: “why do you weep so?” They ask us ... but Lola we are too grieved to speak our hearts out, so we say, “onions, it is the onions that make us weep so”. Lola ... Lola ... when Ali uprooted a handful of your hair, (smiling) it was onions that made you cry. (44).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite society's expectations from women in marriages, this paper wishes to encourage all women to be safe and happy in their relationships. It is not culturally accepted that a man or woman should be violent to the point of battering his/her spouse. Even the Bible advises that man can get angry, but he must not sin. When the same Bible encourages man not to let the sun go down on his anger, it is helping man to prevent a pile up of aggression. Accumulated aggression births violence.

This paper thus recommends that men, women and young ones affected by domestic violence should seek help from people. Reports have been heard about women who go to the police to complain of domestic violence. Such women have been told to go home and try to be good wives. The police needs to understand that domestic violence does not always occur when a woman is being a bad wife. Malinda serves as an example

Malinda: One after the other, I raised my babies with a broken tooth, bruised limbs, cracked ribs, countless black eyes ... shifted jaw all these, against the law. Smiled at them, “Daddy loves you” I'll quiver
I had died many a times but I carried on, a diva (23).

A good mother is invariably a good wife. Despite her efforts, she could not stop DJ from

abusing her. The police therefore, must be ready to protect these women who run to them.

Empowerment

Empowering women and helping them become gainfully employed would be essential in checking domestic violence. Many women who find themselves in abusive relationships stay on and are utterly helpless because according to Townsend (2006:803), they are financially dependent on the men. Such women do not have any skill or gainful employment, hence, no access to resources of their own. Women should be encouraged to acquire skills, learn a trade or take up employment which can fetch them some monies of their own.

Confidant(e)

Battered women or those involved in domestic violence should seek help, talk to some people or at least someone they can confide in. Bottling up the situation will leave them completely helpless and with time, they would come to terms with the situation and see it as normal. Domestic violence is a crime against humanity and victims must not accept it. Those taken into confidence must also play their roles well. They could help the women with advise, seek help on their behalf and encourage them to take charge of the situation like Lola did

Lola: I told Ali ... Told him ...

Malinda: Lola?

Lola: Either that or a counsellor ... a specialist psycho in his famous act. (48)

Confidant(e)s must know that such a woman harbours a lot of hurt, rejection, depression and anxiety already. He/she must do well to help her relax and not judge her. He/she must be a good listener.

Get a counsellor

Among other things someone who is a victim to domestic violence should do, the most important is to find a counsellor. A counsellor is a professional who establishes a relationship with another individual(s) through a psychological process and proffers psychotherapeutic solutions to given problems. Arbuckle introduces him/her as a 'behavioural engineer' whose function is 'to arrange and re-arrange the environment in order to bring about desired changes in behaviour' (1975:118). Counselling is a psychological process which focuses on 'altering how people feel, think and act so that they may live their lives more effectively' (Nelson-Jones, 1997:7). Counselling helps both the battered and the batterer adjust positively to situation. While the one gets emotional healing, self-esteem, confidence and combat her feelings of guilt, shame, fear and anger, the other learns how to and why he needs to subdue his aggression. Counselling also helps those involved to make realistic or rational decisions and be able to implement them. It also helps them have positive orientation towards a problem. This calls for 'perceiving problems as challenges, being optimistic about being able to solve them and persisting despite set-backs' (Nelson-Jones, 1997:227). It is usually a tough job to get the batterer to see a counsellor, but when he eventually does, he is often straightened out.

In conclusion, while we sit comfortably in our safe havens, we must always remember that 'somewhere a new bride stands confused' (Jallo, 2009:49), somewhere a wife is being battered, somewhere a woman is being blamed for the violence in her home, somewhere

some mothers are mute over abuse, somewhere a wife endures inhuman treatment in order to give home to her children and somewhere onions make a lot of women cry. We must all be others' keepers. If we cannot help or prevent the violence, we can be confidant(e)s and encourage the abused to seek help.

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