

Feminine Violence in Onyemachi Benvolio's *Jewel* and Its Emancipation in Chimamanda Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists*

by

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Abstract

This paper undertakes the study of feminine violence in *Jewel* and its emancipation in Chimamanda Adichie's *We should all be feminists*. The objectives of the study are to identify types of domestic violence, causes of these violence, and manifestations of this violence as seen in the study texts and then some solutions to such violence. The theoretical framework adopted for the study is cultural feminism. At the end of the analysis, from our study texts the following types of violence were identified: battery, starvation, denial of educational rights, intimidation and so many others. It was also found out from our study text that the helpless nature of the protagonist and her dependence on other people are causes of femine violence. Other causes of violence identified in the study are the society, biblical injunctions and the female physiology. From our study text also, some solutions to feminine violence are that feminists should be accepted and feminism embraced, the female should be allowed to make her choices, and have the right to education. She should also be enlightened on her rights and empowered.

Introduction

We live in a world that is virtually controlled by violence. Be it for power, position or to establish a right and even for safety purposes, violence in different ramifications seem to be employed. The fact that it has become a universal phenomenon is lucid for all to see as it is evident from the grassroots(family and basic human relationships) up to the 'grand' stage (wars among countries, disputes between world leaders) etc. Having asserted that violence is found virtually everywhere, it is pertinent to point out that the recipients of violent acts and activities are more often than not those of lesser power or strength. In our society today, this more often than not reflects the state of the female. And due to their "reduced" role in an African setting, whatever plight that befalls them is not taken very seriously. This has been the case until recently that the stance began to change as affirmed by Kabeer (2014:2)

'Violence against women was, until very recently, invisible on the human rights discourse and absent from concerns with human development.' Women have been relegated, ignored, looked down on for too long and as such, this paper seeks to address feminine violence, its diverse forms and possible manifestations as well as the way towards its emancipation using Benvolio's novel *Jewel* and Adichie's

popular essay *We should all be Feminists* in the hope that this work will lend a voice to the welcome breath of change that has blown in the direction of the woman.

Theoretical Studies

Feminist Theory

The study of the plight of women in a general sense, ranging from different societies to different cultures could be narrowed to an umbrella term called feminism. Feminism is one of the theories used in evaluating or criticizing a literary text. Theory is a systematic, analytical approach to everyday experience. It offers a general account of how a range of phenomena are systematically connected by placing individual items in a larger context. It explains terms in a larger perspective. The feminist theory suggests the attempts to develop an understandable account of the subordination of women, including its essence and origin. It is an essential practice for developing effective strategies or plans to liberate women and to identify the underlying causes of women's subordination.

Feminism started first with the westerners. That is why some scholars or Africans would prefer to view it as a western concept. According to Odi (2015), feminism emerged as the most powerful movement that almost swept the literary world in the second half of the twentieth century. This concept has been interpreted differently in different parts of the world, by different people especially women depending upon their class, background and level of consciousness. Feminism stands for the struggle or protest by women against their continuing low status at work, in society and in the culture of the country. Initially, in the western countries, women revolted to fight for emancipation and liberation from all forms of oppression by the state, by society and by men.

This movement is sometimes called Women's Movement or Women's Rights movement to secure movement. Thus, feminism is a socio-cultural complete equality of women with men in enjoyment of all rights like moral, religious, social, political, education, legal, economic and so on. It originated in Europe and gradually emerged to become a worldwide cultural movement. The history of western feminist movement or feminism and the efforts to overturn gender equality has been divided into four major periods which the feminist scholars termed as 'Four Waves.'

The first wave refers to the Suffrage movement in the early twentieth century. It took place between 1860 and 1930 and this movement played a significant role in uniting the women of different backgrounds. Women campaigned for suffrage and fought for their rights. They realized that they would have to fight for equality and justice and should not rely on political parties. The early feminists such as Aphra Ben and Mary Stell in the later part of the eighteenth century and in the beginning of the nineteenth century advocated women's welfare and the importance was given to the notion of natural human worth, individual value, equality, equal rights, reason, education, free opportunity, privilege, heredity, wealth and power.

The second wave of Feminism started during the nineteen sixties when the Women's Liberation Movement grew out as the wide-spread radical protests by students, workers, blacks and women especially in the USA and France. Betty Frieden's 'The Feminine Mystique' brought it to life in 1963. Women formed their own groups and raised their voice against the secondary role of women. In their groups, class and race had little importance and sisterhood was the only one motivating force. Eminent feminists who had played an important role in women's liberation movement were Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Betty Friendan (*The Feminine Mystique*, 1963), Kate Millet (*Sexual Politics*, 1969) and Germaine Greer (*The Female Eunuch*, 1970). After 1970s, there came a sudden change in the feminist movement. During 1970-80, different groups of women were fragmented and fission of women's movement had started after the recognition of the complexities of women experience. The 'Universalist'

claims of the 1960s have been challenged by the working class women, third world and black women. Thus, second wave feminism dealt with inequality of laws, gender as well as cultural inequalities.

From the year 1980 onwards, further changes were seen into political and critical realms in the feminists' point of view. The single term 'feminism' changed to 'feminisms'. Comparative models of parallel feminism from different cultures came into existence. In the Anglo-American tradition, there was a growth of 'Radical Binarism' (Radicals distinguished from Liberal or social feminism). This can probably be referred as Third-wave feminism, which concerns sexism and issues related to it. This strand sees sexual oppression as primary and the fundamental element of women's oppression.

The fourth wave which recently emerged is a phase of feminism that began around 2012 and is characterized by a focus on the empowerment of women. It examines the interlocking systems of power that contributes to the stratification of traditionally marginalized groups. Fourth wave feminists advocate for greater representation of these groups in politics and business, and argue that society would be more equitable if policies and practices incorporated the perspectives of all people.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Feminism

Cultural Feminism is developed from radical feminism. It is an ideology of a 'female nature' or 'female essence' that attempts to revalidate what cultural feminists considers undervalued female attributes. It is a theory that commends the difference of women from men. It is based on an essentialist view of the differences between men and women and advocates independence and institution building. It has led feminists to retreat from politics to lifestyle. Brooke Williams propounded the term 'Cultural Feminism' in its true sense and considered cultural feminism as an offshoot of radical feminism.

Radical feminism is a current within feminism that focuses on the theory of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex relationships based on an assumption of male supremacy used to oppress women.

Cultural feminists believe that the cause of women's oppression is biological. Their body is the material base of reproduction of human beings. It is a natural procreative mechanism; its sexuality is controlled by men through the institutions of marriage and family. The male-culture dominates and oppresses women in the socio-economic field. In cultural feminism, feminists are committed to change the patriarchal system which is the root cause of many social problems. They see institutions and systems (including the family) as mere vehicles of male intent and reject psychologist explanations of female submissiveness as blaming women for collaboration in their own oppression. In the late 1970s and 1980s, cultural feminism, as an extension of radical feminism demanded basic human rights for women as reproduction freedom, child birth, abortion, sterilization or birth control, in short make their choices freely without pressure from individual men, doctors, governmental or religious authorities. They also demanded change in the organizational sexual culture e.g breaking down traditional gender roles and re-evaluating societal concepts of feminity and masculinity.

Cultural feminism commends the positive aspects of what is seen as the female character or feminine personality. It is also a feminist theory that praises the positive aspect of women. Early theorists like Jane Adams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman argue that in governing the state, cooperation, caring and non violence in the settlement of conflicts society seem to be what is needed from women's virtues. They believe in equal partnership of men and women who have separate existence and different basic functions.

Empirical Studies

From the above general remarks made in the essential components of this study, this aspect reviews the thoughts or views of different scholars concerning feminism. Women have been interpreted differently according to one's perception and knowledge about them. They are contributing to historical and contemporary society. Just like experiences of men are important, so is the study of women and the way they have contributed to and been affected by society. Through Igbo literature, some eminent scholars have aired their views concerning the plight of women in our society. Here are different perceptions of women from different scholars.

Mari (2007)'s study on 'Woman's position in Igbo society according to *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta' highlighted the different roles and perceptions of women in Igbo society. The study is aimed at studying the position of women in Nigeria with the aid of a novel by Buchi Emecheta. Conclusively, Mari (2007) observed that having sons is a way to get respect and climb the social ladder in Igbo society and other parts of Nigeria. Giving an example, the researcher found that Nnuego's first junior wife, Adaku, was under tremendous pressure to have a male child because she had only two daughters. Furthermore, the researcher found out that women are less valuable not only by the patriarchal society but also by the perceptions of women themselves that they are less important. That is, some women lack self awareness and see themselves as weaker vessels. The similarity between Mari's work and the present study is that both studies are interested in accounting for the position of women using literary texts but the difference is that while Mari studies the woman's position in the Igbo society using *The Joys of Motherhood*, the present study uses *Jewel* and *We should all be feminists*.

Mary (2009)'s 'Choice and discovery: An analysis of women and culture in Flora Nwapa's fiction', contends that women face different problems in the world today due to colonialism, religion, ethnic as well as regional practices. The objective being to redress the critical imbalance that have undervalued or neglected African women writers by considering the novels by Flora Nwapa, Mary expressed the ill treatments that women receive due to poor recognition and poor credence to their works. Citing Ogundipe-Leslie (1987) to highlight her thought, the researcher asserts thus: 'Are African women voiceless or do we fail to look for their voices where we may find them...'. Similar to Udenweze's observation, Mary drew her line of findings by saying that tradition, colonialism, post colonialism and regional practices complicate the many changes and issues in the lives of women in Igbo culture. Through literary works, the marginalization of women and issues concerning them are presented because of self expression, self definition and self discovery are made known through literature. The relationship between both works is that both have the study of women as their priority using literary texts. They differ because Mary's study is concerned with Women in Nwapa's fiction while this is concerned with the state of women in Benvolio's novel, *Jewel*.

Udenweze (2009) in her study, 'Structures of female oppression in selected African novels' contends that the problems of female marginalization in Africa today is caused by some revisions of some African cultural practices that denigrate the image and status of the woman in the society. In her view, preference for a son is a powerful tradition in many cultures of the world and Igbo society in particular. The objective of her study was to analyze the structures of female oppression with emphasis on authority and subservience using three African novels. She analyzed her work textually by studying the stylistic structure of the literary texts she used. In her findings, Udenweze (2009) observed that the way forward to expressing and curtailing the oppression and struggle of women is through artistic works. In her own thought, women can speak their minds and share their perceptions about their lives and societies through literary works like prose, drama and poetry. The similarity between the reviewed work and the present study is that both are interested in studying women descriptively using literary texts but they differ because Udenweze studies a range of novels but the present study examines *Jewel* and *We should all be feminists*.

Nwosu (2012)'s study on 'Gender role perceptions and the changing role of women in Nigeria' contends that women are not only perceived as inferior to men but are marginalized and denied equal

opportunities as they are treated as 'lower gender' or 'weaker sex'. The objective of the study is to point to the different dimensions of gender role; that is different interpretations of a male and a female in Nigeria and also the fast changing role of women. According to the researcher's observation, women in the traditional African society have remained victims of gender discrimination. Women are marginalized, undervalued and unrecognized. They are subordinated to the male folk and considered inferior. The similarity between both works is that both are interested in accounting for different ways in which women are perceived but the difference is that while Nwosu studies gender role perceptions, this study is concerned with feminine violence.

Makama (2013)'s study of 'Patriarchy and gender equality' in Nigeria lamented on the discrimination and exclusion of women both in the politics and economic struggle in Nigeria. The objective of the work is to challenge all forms of inhuman discrimination and gender inequality. Conclusively, Makama found out that womanhood is reduced to a mere infidel and a second class citizen, hence there is a commonality of general belief that the best place for the woman is the kitchen especially in the Igbo culture and Nigeria. The point of convergence between Makama's work and the present study is that both works are interested in studying the plight of women, but the difference is that the present study is based on a novel while Makama's is not.

Udensi (2013) in studying 'Male speech pattern in the plays of G.I Nwaozuzu' using selected Igbo texts, observed that the male inflate and abuse their powers through speech while women are meant to be receptive. Udensi examined the aspect(s) male speech pattern affect that of the female in the study texts. In the findings, the researcher found out that women are overpowered while men are empowered through their use of language. Backing up her claims, the researcher cited an example in the Christian bible 1st Timothy 2:11-12 where women are advised to learn in silence with all submission. The relationship between Udensi's work and the present study is that both works study the condition of women and they differ because Udensi is concerned with Male speech patterns while this study is concerned with feminine violence.

Some causes of violence towards women

As stated earlier, the female largely has been on the receiving end of violent treatments and deprivation. This is due to many reasons popular among them is the '...women's subordinate status hierarchal gender relations and the dependencies associated with it.' (Kabeer 2014:2) The society, especially the African one has long held the woman captive in the bars of societal norms and customs such that her basic rights are infringed on without anyone batting an eyelid and her wellbeing is not prioritized. In the voice of our society, if anything is wrong with anyone and the person in female, she either brought it upon herself or she should deal with it.

Biblical beliefs

Biblical injunctions have played a role in the subjugation of women in our society. Certain injunctions in the Scriptures have been taken to the extreme by the patriarchal societies that are predominant in Africa. Let us examine the following scriptures; 1 Corinthians 14:34 'Women should always remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission as the law says.' 1st Peter 3:5-6 says that

They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughter if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

Meanwhile, Ephesians 5:22-23 says 'Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the savior.'

When one considers these passages, they tend to exalt the man above the woman in some sense, since submission involves yielding to the verdict or ordinance of another party. These laws that were primarily given to maintain peace and order in the home have now been utilized as a springboard to subjugate the female into doing things against her will and are sometimes to her detriment.

The physiology of women

Another major factor that has played a role in the pitiable plight of women in our society is their physiology. Women are widely regarded as weaker vessels and this term has somewhat contributed to the treatment they get. The thought is that they can do little or nothing since they are weaker.

Violence Manifestations in Onyemachi Benvolio's *Jewel*

We have earlier established the fact that women are more likely to suffer violence of any sort than their male counterparts and we itemized some of the reasons why it is so.

Jewel is a novel that is authored by Onyemachi Benvolio that speaks volumes and shows in graphic detail, the plight of the girl child. The novel follows closely, the life of the protagonist, Olanma who faces untold hardship and different kinds of suffering in her bid to make a life for herself. Furthermore, she virtually had to go through life all by herself because very few people were willing to help. In the end, her doggedness and resilience pays off as she is able to achieve her goals. In the novel, we find different types of violence but domestic violence is most pronounced. In the light of this, a very interesting fact is discovered.

Women against women

Men have always been believed to be more often than not, the perpetrators of violence that the female faces. While this is largely true, that's not all there is. Women can also be tools to carry out domestic violence. Let us give an example. The following tells the story of Olanma's mother and her encounter with aunty Eberé, her immediate younger sister.

Aunty Eberé decided it was too risky to let Olanma's mother in. She had so much to lose: the armed robbers could rape her and her precious little daughters; they would definitely take all the money she had in the house and she couldn't even imagine that. No! Let the armed robbers do whatever they wanted to so that the rest of them could be spared from the trauma of such attack (11)

Here, Olanma's mother is left outside in the cold at the mercy of criminals by her younger sister.

Violence caused by family members

We also find out that domestic violence can come from one's family. Olanma's siblings in the novel bind her legs and hands, gag her after which they locked her in the store at the back of their house (21) Her money was also taken by Uloma, her sister all in an attempt to prevent her from travelling to Port Harcourt. We also find the familiar scenario of violence meted out by men in the novel. Olanma's uncle, Mr Ike tries severally to violate her but is not successful. Her spouse, Edward also beat her up on

numerous occasions in addition to denying her education with the thought that she would become proud while subjecting her to his every will.

Steps to feminine violence emancipation in Adichie's *We should all be feminists*

Having examined the concept of female violence, the forms it could take and different people who it could come through, we would now look at the popular essay by Chimamanda Adichie and how it proffers solutions to the female violence obtainable today as well as explore other solutions outside the essay. The essay speaks elaborately on the meaning of feminism, its tenets and why it is relevant. Originally delivered at the Ted Talks in 2010, the revamped edition now a published essay has become a hallmark when referring to the female, her place and rights in the society.

Rebranding

The essay begins by highlighting the bad light that feminism has been seen. This is no news because of the African setting in which we find ourselves. It is one which is highly patriarchal and makes very little space for the exercise of the rights and opinion of the female. On page five, she tells of an encounter she had with a man in Nigeria who on recognizing admonished that she stop referring to herself as a feminist because such women were always unhappy.

While I was promoting the novel in Nigeria, a journalist, a nice, well-meaning man, told me he wanted to advise me. (Nigerians, as you might know, are very quick to give unsolicited advice.) He told me that people were saying that my novel was feminist, and his advice to me- he was shaking his head sadly as he spoke- was that I should never call myself a feminist, since feminists are women who are unhappy because they cannot find husbands. (5-6)

The essayist then decides to refer to herself as a 'Happy feminist.' Feminism is so criticized in our society that even an academic who is assumed to be enlightened told Adichie that feminism was un-African. Such is the strength of the patriarchal roots in our society. The author decided to see herself as a Happy African feminist.

Making feminine friendly resolutions

The reduced role of women in our societies is nothing new. It has always been a norm that women learn to speak when they are asked to, act when they are required to do so; and also carry out instructions meted out to them. Such has been handed over generation to generation. However, the time has come for us to rethink what we accept in our societies. So women need to learn and understand that they alone hold the key to their happiness and not the society. When individuals tried to criticize her, she simply decided to be happy while standing her ground. This goes to say that women can be happy even when they go against the run of play in the society. Happiness, after all is a choice. Many can draw strength from the person and experiences of the author in their quest to lead better, happier lives.

Other possible solutions

Giving males and females equal right

Furthermore, recent studies have begun to clamor for equal rights between the sexes. Gender equality would not only solve the problem of neglect on the part of the female; it could also lead to a better economy.' It is not until the society and men begin to see women as humans with rights, feelings and privileges that we can make headway in the quest for feminine emancipation.

Giving women the right to education

Education is another tool that can be used to curb this menace. Women according to the UNESCO(1998) report lists out the role of women in traditional society as:

- Rearing of children.
- Taking care of domestic chores.
- Providing water and firewood.

Any woman who is tied solely to the aforementioned roles can hardly have societal impact. The woman's duty should not be restricted to the home.

The place of education in the role of emancipating women cannot be overemphasized. It is on the wings of education that the author of the essayist has been able to make such brilliant contributions to scholarship. She holds the Commonwealth and Orange prizes for literature to mention a few. She has also been a major drive towards the realization of feminist societies all over the world. Education is important in feminine emancipation because it gives women the ability to think critically, develop their innate talents as well as make contributions as men do. It is education that eventually turns Olanma's life around in the novel. Furthermore, according to Akubילו and Omeje(2012:1), 'Recent trend in enrolment at various levels of education shows an improvement in favour of women,' In view of this, they argue in their paper that , 'if the current momentum is sustained, women will not only achieve equal status to men in educational but also have the tendency to surpass men within the next ten to fifteen years.' This is one of the importances of education in emancipating women.

Women empowerment and enlightenment

Empowerment and enlightenment can also bring about the change we desire in women in our society. The truth remains that, most women especially those in the rural areas hardly know anything about rights. They are accustomed to what tradition and customs place on them even at the detriment of their peace and wellbeing. An enlightened woman is a free woman because she would abreast with what her rights and privileges are as well as know how to enforce them.

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study show that violence is real and obtainable in our society. It also shows that the female due to the reasons given in this paper are the most affected in the face of violence. We have also been able to see some of the reasons why violence takes place. Africa, as a continent, due to its beliefs and traditions serve as one of the areas with the highest record of feminine violence. We find that the girl child is also the recipient of most of the feminine abuse in our society today. Feminine education has also been on the rise recently which is good for the cause of the women.

This paper has been able to examine violence in our society using Onyemachi Benvolio's *Jewel* and Adichie's essay *We should all be feminists*. The work shows the level of maltreatment that the girl child undergoes and how such treatment can affect her wellbeing. We therefore conclude that if all these solutions noted above and more are implemented, the female conditions especially in this part of our world will be improved if not completely eradicated. On this premise, we recommend that more effort be made on the part of individuals, families, organizations and the government to present opportunities to the female for expression. It is also recommended that cultural practices, traditions and norms be reviewed so that none infringes on the rights and wellbeing of the woman. Times are changing, humans are evolving and so should our methods.

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