

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Adoption of Violence as Survival Strategy in Zainabu Jallo's *Onions Make us Cry*

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Abstract— Domestic violence is a phenomenon that cannot be dismissed as far as mental health is concerned. Domestic Violence affects all social groups but women suffer disproportionately. The culture of silence and other social practices compels women to keep silence over many forms of abuse, they suppress hurtful emotions and continuously live with traumatic experience until it begins to manifest through anxiety, social disorders and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. From findings of this study, it is gathered that unexpressed emotions can lead to extreme depression and psychological imbalance with culpable effect on mental health of the victim. People with Mental health challenges and social disorder will want to escape from painful emotions but they unconsciously do so by engaging in violent acts. In order to curb violence and Social disorders, measures must be taken to enable women speak against abuse rather than suppressing hurtful emotions that can lead to mental disorders.

Keywords— Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Social disorder and Violence

I. INTRODUCTION

There is an alarming concern for mental health challenges in Nigeria and the world at large. Mental health is suspected to be one out of many factors that are responsible for the rising trend of suicide, social disorder, domestic violence and homicide especially among men and women of child bearing age. In the world rating of happy nations in 2016, Nigeria is rated the 6th in Africa and 97th happiest nation in the world against the first position it occupied in Africa. By implication more people are becoming disoriented and unhappy which may have adverse effect on relationships, productivity and the general mental health of citizens.

Mental Health according to encyclopedia Britannica is a condition of mental well-being that affects an individual's social functioning and psychological state. Mental health promotes social cohesion, life goal achievements, economic growth and to a large extent political stability in any given society. But when there are mental health challenges, a society tends to suffer gruesome social disorders like violence, crime and other stress related disorders.

Violence is an act of human inflictions, deprivations and discrimination resulting in or likely to result in unlawful physical, sexual and psychological harm, suffering or

deprivation (UN, 1993) (as cited in Uzuegbunam, 2013, p.185) Domestic Violence could be perceived as violence among members of a family, same household, clan etc. which includes any aggressive behaviour, maltreatment or hostile acts committed by any family member against a spouse, parent, child, siblings or any relation irrespective of sex, status, race, age, religion or emotional state, Internal partner violence can also be categorise as domestic violence. But when violence is directed towards the female gender it becomes violence against women. (Uzuegbunam 2013, p.186)

There is a close relationship between violence and mental health especially among women. According to global report, Domestic Violence or intimate Partner Violence is a precursor to mental health challenges among women. It may cause the victim to indulge in risky behaviour like smoking, alcohol addiction, drug misuse, unsafe sex, and can contribute to lifelong ill health like heart disease, stroke, HIV/AIDS and so on.

According to (Okemgbo et al., 2002) (as cited in George 2015, p.8) Domestic violence whether physical, sexual or psychological affect all social groups, but over 95 per cent of domestic violence has the man as the assailant. This assertion however, does not negate the fact that men can be affected by domestic violence, it simply connotes that women suffer disproportionately. George (2015) opines that if violence against men occurs, it is most frequently within a relationship and mostly as homicide, which are usually based on acquittals either on the basis of insanity or self-defense. Although, this assertion has been refuted in several controversial critical works and theories like the Gender Symmetry (the theory that women perpetrate violence at the same rate with men) and Battered husband syndromes. These theories argue that men are not encouraged to report violence perpetrated against them by women, and that the society as well stigmatizes men who are victims of domestic violence therefore the rate at which men perpetrate violence against women cannot be properly ascertained. But proponents of violence against women counteract this argument on the basis that gender symmetry undermines violence perpetrated against women by men as such, refuting such allegations is an attempt to entrench patriarchal dominance and denying that women, who perpetrate violence, do so in self-defense.

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There studies that have found that the majority of domestically violent women also have experienced violence from their male partner's examples are the Temple et al.'s (2005) study of Black, Mexican American, and White women.

"One consequence of the high rate of violence against women in the family follows the principle that, ironically victimization tends to train people to victimize others. Being a victim of violence does not turn one against violence". (Straus 1980:691) On the contrary, it tends to be a powerful pro-violence learning experience". (Carroll, 1997; Owens and Straus, 1975) as quoted in Straus (1980, pg. 690)

From the above assertions it will be gathered that, Understanding that most violent women have violent backgrounds will help understand their motives, either for self defense or the natural instinct to hit-back-if hit and that, the likelihood of PTSD is strongly associated to violent traumas experienced by women in relationships.

The 2014 WHO Global report lends credence to this assertion with a statistics that indicates that one in three women has been a victim of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in her life time. In Nigeria, CLEEN Foundation (2012) reports that, about 31 percent of women population have been victims of domestic Violence. If these reports are anything to go by, then it is pertinent to note that there is a likelihood that women who indulge in violent acts towards their spouse or family members do so, as a result of the traumatic experiences they might have garnered from exposure to verbal, emotional or physical abuse by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. Thus, it is the assumption of this study that indulgence in domestic crime and violence by women, is a psychological reaction to traumatizing events that they may have been or are exposed to in previous or present relationships/marriages.

Trauma as defined by Patti Levin (2004 p.5) is; "An experience that causes physical, emotional, psychological distress or harm ... or an event, or series of events, that cause moderate to severe stress reactions. They are characterized by a sense of horror, helplessness, serious injury, or the threat of serious injury or death".

Trauma is an experience that invalidates one's normal assumption of order, predictability, safety, identity, a very severe environmental challenge, calling for the utmost energization of coping resources (Suedfeld, 1997) The Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders listed Trauma among the number of mental disorders that is most prominent in the classification of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

It is sad to state that, in spite of the growing number of abused women in Nigeria and other developing countries, there are no sufficient schemes that are designed to help such women access justice, or find safe shelters and emotional support. Women who find themselves entrapped in abusive relationships more often than not try to survive by living in denial, self-efficacy/ideation or suppressing hurtful emotions. But unhealed trauma, repressed pains and pent up emotions are

just but temporary escape. Like a canker worm, it embodies the victim showing signs of flashbacks, avoidance of memories, and aggression. These may also lead to extreme and severe psychological distress which often results in the breakdown of social relations culminating to an increase in interpersonal conflict, domestic violence, alcohol and drug use. If these symptoms affect the person to a point that they are no longer able to function in other important task of life for more than one month, then a person may be diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder(Hereafter referred to as PTSD) (NIMH 2010)

"Post-traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety disorder that some people develop after seeing or living through an event that caused or threatened serious harm or death". (NIMH, 2010, p.15) Mary Sykes Wylie (2004) commends that the costs of PTSD are enormous. They include poor performance, community squabbles, absenteeism, stress-related illnesses, increased crime rates, and a generalized state of depression that usually set the framework for renewed violence.

People with PTSD usually react to situations and events with intense emotions, such as anger, fear, or panic, especially when they see something that reminds them of the source of their trauma, but intense emotions don't usually end as feelings, the victim often over react and tend to threaten others. Thus, victims who try to avoid memories of the traumatic events do so by staying away from reminders, consuming drugs or alcohol, and usually detach themselves from everyday activities.

But to what extent can the mental health of a victim of violence be affected such that, they become Violent?

II. MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STRESS

When a woman goes through any form of physical abuse she also suffers emotional and psychological trauma which in turn affects her mental condition. This is why the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey Summary Report (2010 p.9) projects that; "psychological aggression may even be more harmful than physical violence by an intimate partner". Two different studies in the type of violence committed by women and men by Swan & Snow, 2002; Swan et al.(2005) reveal that, "women were about 1.5 times more likely to experience coercive control as they were to be coercively controlling. Similarly, women were 2.5 times more likely to be sexually coerced than they were to use sexual coercion against their partners. And women were 1.5 times more likely to be injured than they were to injure their partners"

In Nigeria, Amnesty international (2007) reports that a third (and in some cases two-thirds) of women are believed to have been subjected to physical, sexual and psychological violence carried out primarily by husbands, partners and fathers.(Fareo 2015, pg 25)

Based on the above postulations, it will not be farfetched to conclude that, women undergo physical pain and mental stress than men. But because there is a thin line between physical and

psychological abuse it is more likely than not that a victim of physical violence also suffers psychologically.

This also suggests that, women in this condition have more tendencies to develop psychological imbalance, mental health issues and social disorders. Stark (2006) commends thus;

...it is coercive control, more than physical violence that contributes to the devastating psychological effects of domestic violence on many of its victims, such as depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. (Swan et.al, 2008 pg.)

III. REPRESSED EMOTIONS

In the highly repressive "Victorian" society women were forced to repress their sexual needs, in many cases the result was some form of neurotic illness. In 21st century Africa, Asia and other parts of the world, women are forced to repress not just their sexual needs but emotional, psychological and to a large extent physical needs, this is usually considered "Virtuous".

In some part of the Middle Belt region in Nigeria (Ganawuri of Plateau State) Women are not expected to cry publicly or wail when they lose a loved one, doing so is tantamount to weakness.

Psychologists and Neurotic experts however argue that; consistent suppression of emotion may increase physical stress, high blood pressure, incidence of diabetes, heart disease and lowered immunity. Research has also shown that avoiding emotions can lead to poor memory which may cause misunderstandings in conversations with others due to absent mindedness resulting in unhealthy relationship patterns and decreased satisfaction in relationships and marriage.

Suppressing emotions denies the brain the freedom to work properly and efficiently. This is because withholding painful emotions cause the subconscious mind to find other ways to manifest what it is truly feeling. Those other ways are usually unhealthy and damaging; they can be manifested as severe depression, anxiety, alcohol dependence and/or substance use. Mental health experts and psychologist suggest that pent up emotions or denial have high implications, one of such is the ability to threaten the victim's psychological wellbeing and mental Health, which may sometimes result in the victim indulging in violence as survival strategy or escape from bottled-up emotions.

When emotions are saturated they begin to find ways to escape or the victim begins to crave for a means of surviving such hurtful feelings. Thus, when this craving meets with stressors (Threats, aggression, and violence) the victim is likely to act violently. However, adopting Violence as survival strategy leaves so much to be desired.

IV. SELF-IDEATION/EFFACING

Women tend to tolerate a great deal or more victimization by their husbands before engaging in severe assault. (Strauss 1998. Pg 689)

This is exactly where the danger lies; women tolerate and excuse their spouses for perpetrating violence against them until it begins to erode some of their mental functioning. In the Nigeria society today, a lot of women tolerate abuse just to keep their relationships, homes and the "Married" status, since being married gives a woman some form of social acceptance and respect. It is considered culturally, religiously, morally and socially wrong for a woman to abandon her marriage "Simply" because she is being abused. She is expected to be silent, protect her husband's image and family's name. The Government and the justice system is also not doing enough to protect abused women

This Day (2011) newspaper Most women endure abuse, believing they have nowhere to go and in any case, believing, for good reason, that the law will not protect them. 97.2% of the number of women that were interviewed was not prepared to report to the Nigeria Police. (Fareo, 2015, pg.25).

Jallo (2010 pg.57) illustrate this condition with this analogy "...We are too grieved to speak out, so we say...it is the onions that make us weep so"

In order to cope with this social, cultural and religious pressure, some women take to drug and substance abuse, some engage in antisocial behaviours, and to a large extent become violent.

But the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence (2005) reports that, the consequences and risk factors of coping strategies that women employ in the face of intimate partner violence sometimes outweigh the problem itself.

V. DRAMA AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

The relationship between human beings and drama provides materials for psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis is both a theory and method of therapy. As a theory it attempts to understand the human mind, how human beings become what they are and why they exhibit certain behaviour. And as a method of therapy, Psychoanalysis uses the free association method for treating mental illness. It does so by finding ways to penetrate the unconscious mind that obscures the hidden structure of thought processes of personalities. As propounded by Sigmund Freud, he believes that the unconscious mind governs human behavior, therefore, the goal of psychoanalysis is to make the unconscious conscious (McLeod, 2007). In order to achieve that, Freud introduces a topographical model of the mind with the use of ice-berg as an analogy to explain the conscious, preconscious and subconscious part of the human mind. The conscious which is like the tip of the iceberg perceives and records external reality that can be easily accessed, the preconscious consist of realities that can be retrieved from memory. But the unconscious which is the most significant receives and stores hidden desires, ambitions, fears and irrational behaviour that are too painful or frightening to acknowledge. These crude feelings or desires are locked down in the unconscious mind through repression which needs to be revealed. This revelation

however can occur through various ways like dreams, arts, literature, plays, jokes and slips of tongue known as the Freudian slip. Psychoanalysis relates with drama through different approaches. First, as an art, it can be taken as a dream or a manifestation and it is used to psychoanalyze the artist. Secondly, the characters can be under studied in order to see the motives working behind their psychic mechanism and behaviour. Psychoanalytic theory in drama can tell how literary texts are actually formed. It reads past the manifest content of the author's life, the character's actions, and the society's practices to arrive at the hidden content which tell the real story.

Drama that embody and reflect the manifestations of trauma like all cultural production have information to offer and can serve as an entrance to a particular nature of trauma. Such dramas go beyond the traditional story telling but make use of real experiences of trauma and the many disturbing memories of terrors of violence as texts to mirror and enact the unspeakable experience of traumatized victims in societies, which are usually locked down in the unconscious part of the mind.

Sigmund Freud's technical discovery about the value of free association, found that if the patient were persuaded to say freely whatever came into their mind, without censoring their thoughts, eventually the "forgotten" elements could be made conscious, and in the process of becoming conscious, the neuron suffering will be relieved. (Thompson: 1957) This also the function of drama, as usually stated drama is an expression of thought or feeling and by expressing feelings catharsis is achieved.

VI. POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER IN *ONION MAKE US CRY*

Zainabu Jallo is a prolific playwright from the Northern Part of Nigeria whose thematic purview often captures the psychological milieu of human struggles and existence. In *Onion Make Us Cry* the playwright through dramatic dialogue discusses the effect of suppressed emotions in the face of domestic violence. As the scenes unravel, the playwright bare to light the devastating consequence of undue tolerance to domestic abuse which on the long run may have negative effect on the mental health of the victim. The dramatic personae are a reflection of psychological struggles of women as victims of domestic violence and how violence becomes a resort to expressing hurtful emotions and mental depression. The playwright's systematic application of Sigmund Freud's Concept of psychoanalysis serves as a theory to analyse Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and a method of psychotherapy.

A. Play Synopsis

Onion make Us Cry was written in 2010, by Zainabu Jallo a Nigerian. The setting of the play is a psychiatric hospital ward somewhere in Nigeria. It is a play about a 36 year old woman, Malinda Jandayi who awaits trial for the murder of her husband. She is being diagnosed of PTSD and undergoing a therapy session with Lola a 28 year old psychologist and a

wife. Malinda and Lola have a shared experience; they are all victims of domestic violence even though Lola lives in denial. The conversation that ensues between Malinda the patient and Lola the psychologist is a role reversal whereby, the patient became the psychologist and the psychologist became the patient who needs an immediate break from her repressed hurtful emotions, which according to Malinda may turn Lola into a murderer just like her.

In situation one, the play opens with a brief exposition of the symptoms of PTSD exhibited by Malinda as she reads the dailies on her bed. She stares into space, talks to herself and assumes to be someone else.

Malinda: Malinda Jandayi Diagnosed of psychotic symptoms...

Malinda's trial countdown.

Ward six The first room of ward six

Here I am for a fix.

The room seeking of doom.

Or it could be of a woman's ghost.

Or of ghost of women?

My Host.

A patient in ward six

Today she is a ghost

And a Host (Jallo 2010, P.1)

In the above excerpt the character is engaged in a random conversation with herself. This is a symptom that is referred to as Dissociation in PTSD. Dissociation is a disruption in the integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception of the environment. It is a splitting off of feelings about a traumatic experience which usually leads to emotional numbing and avoidance. The dialogue below explains further;

Malinda: Here now is Malinda Jandayi

Wife of Daniel Jandayi...

He isn't anything anymore

Doesn't occupy any material space...

In this space ...is me, Malinda.

I choose to speak

From my peak of indignation (p.1)

Dissociative symptoms most commonly encountered in trauma include emotional numbing, fear of death, or feeling of helplessness. Trauma Victims may totally annihilate themselves, often shocked and confused and unable to take in what has happened they may become silent and withdrawn, or become excited and talkative. (Brewin & Holmes, 2003) In domestic violence women who keep silence and continue to suffer emotional and mental torture from their spouse are likely to develop mental depression which on the long run may distort their schema of understanding; they become withdrawn and find it difficult to connect with their immediate environment. The Psychologist response to the Patient's new attitude in the dialogue below illustrates this;

Lola: I have never heard you speak. We have never spoken, and now you call my name like we have been good friends (p.4)

In the play, a psychological distress in PTSD known as altered consciousness can be identified, it is characterized by alterations in defense mechanisms and changes in personal Identity, usually accompanied by feelings of shame and inadequacy which Brewin and Holmes (2003, p.343) describe as "Mental Defeat"

Malinda: You feel I am a total nutcase, who cannot hold an intelligent conversation, don't you? one who snaps in and out of catatonic state or was it schizophrenia... (p.12)

Trauma Victims suffer Intrusions or flashback which is characterized by intense emotions, nightmares, and reenactments of terrifying events. These intrusions often leave a person feeling a sense of great loss, anger, helplessness, betrayal and they suffer inability to control emotions.

Malinda: In grand fear and High fever;
Lived in a lovely white house. Turned out to be Hades
One after the other, I raised my babies.
With a broken tooth, bruised limbs,
Cracked ribs, countless black eyes...
Shifted jaws.

I had died many a time but I carried on (p.27)

In this conversation, Malinda tries to warn Lola the Psychologist not to let her get drowned in bitter emotions to the point where homicide will be an option of ending such violence from her husband, which is usually the case with women from violent backgrounds.

Malinda: you must help yourself....so you don't end up like me (p.32)

In the play, Malinda though, a patient seem to fear more for Lola the psychiatrist who is about to be in the same shoes as her because she (Lola) has taken a dangerous path in dealing with domestic abuse, and that is denial. Denial or self-effacing is a common issue that arises in cases of domestic violence. The shock of the traumatic events in abusive relationships usually overwhelms the victim such that they begin to engage in self-blaming or denial. They blame themselves for being violated and excuse the perpetrator; they deny that the perpetrator abuses them for

Trauma destabilizes the internal balance that people normally have over emotions, and that makes victims react to situations and events with intense emotions, such as anger, fear, or panic, especially when they see something that reminds them of the source of their trauma. This is referred to as 'Fragmented Thought and Emotions': Victims often over react and threaten others, mostly because they have no trust or they see the world as an unsafe place, Hug (2009, p.22)

But what happens when tears are dry? What happens when the mind loses the capacity to manage those hurtful feelings again?

Malinda: so I deviate from normal behaviour...like stabbing my husband to death...flinging my cat into the fire place... (p.18)

Lola: Is there anything you crave so badly?

Melinda: (Stupefied) ...something I crave? Are you unwell? Are you mad?

Cut the crap...Get out! Get the hell out!...Get out of my life! (p.21)

Re-living the past: For some individuals or groups of people, trauma can occur frequently through flashbacks and if not harnessed can become part of everyday experience which is capable of re-traumatizing the victim. Re-traumatization occurs because the mind no longer has the capacity to sort out incoming signals, like sounds, sights and smell that were experienced during the trauma event, and when the internal space in the mind of the victim that retains thoughts of past events is lost the past will become real (Griffiths 2005) The dialogue below explains thus;

Malinda: A handful of hair...gripping

Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly. This might never heal completely...Got to a point I thought I was the evil one...that's where you are now. (She pushes off a tea cup and saucer...it crashes into many pieces...she squats on the floor gathering the pieces)

Lola: Stop it Melinda! You are hurting yourself.

Melinda: my life...my ugly pieces (Jallo 2010 p.40-41)

Dominic (1999) in a widely supported argument proffered that traumatic events numb the sense of impact of a traumatic event at the moment of occurrence therefore cannot be registered it is only after a period of latency that the impact of the event is felt. It is important to highlight that, while the return of the event is an imagined re-living (or remembering) it is nonetheless a powerfully visceral experience that the survivor embodies which according to Caruth (1997) is capable of re-traumatizing the victim and causing unpleasant feelings like hysteria, anxiety and aggression. A summary of this condition can be deduced in Hudgins (et al., 2009, p.37). Submission; Violence and trauma operate with multiplier effects: one act of violence produces more violence as the victims seek revenge or act out of a strong new desire for self-protection. As people seek vengeance or release from the pain of new wounds, old hatreds increase along any fault lines... that a group happens to have, from race to gender or sexuality. Families are torn apart, often witnessing the brutal loss of loved ones before their very eyes; even at the hands of other loved ones. Domestic violence and addictions increase as people shift their anxieties and energies to available targets, or seek to numb impossible feelings".

This describes the peak of unhealed trauma, when repressed emotions and psychological distress can no longer be contended, the victim exhibit heightened emotions, aggression and a strong desire for revenge. It is at this point that the victim turns violence at the slightest provocation.

VII. CONCLUSION

A number of reasons are given to why women perpetrate violence against their spouses, one out of so many is because they have been or are victims of violence themselves. Women

in abusive relationships suffer the brunt of cultural or social practices that, promote the subjugation of women, especially when they keep silence over any form of abuse. Women especially in Nigeria have also been cultured to show resilience even in the most distressing relationship as such; they bottle up painful emotions usually out of fear or shame of being thought weak or incapable of keeping a home. From the textual analysis it can be deduced that the culture of silence, self-ideation and denial in cases domestic violence has enormous effect on the mental health of its victim. If there is no emotional relief from hurtful emotions, depression is likely to set in with its attendant consequences like anxiety, psychological disorders or indulgence in crime and violence. This submission however, is in no way an attempt to generalize that women who become homicidal are victims of Domestic Violence however, mental health challenges are not to be shoved aside when issues of domestic violence arises. In other to curb a boomerang of violence and outbreak of psychosocial disorder, the culture of silence and other social practices towards women must be re-examined to avoid devastating consequences of mental disorders that may crop up as a result of domestic violence.

Also identifying the causes of violence from a psychological framework is important in developing intervention and treatment for victims and finding ways to reduce violence.

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