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Silence and gestures as patriarchal tools for sexual exploitation in selected African novels

Hilary David Njoegbu

Abstract

This paper examines Darko's Beyond the Horizon Season of Crimson Blossoms and focuses on the sexual relationships among married couples to determine if the male characters exploit their wives sexually. Using a qualitative methodology, the study adopts feminist theory and argues that, beyond the aggression, battering, violence, insults, and imperative sentences often highlighted by critics, men in these novels also use silence and gestures as tools for the sexual humiliation of women. The paper posits that the absence of rapport and affection between couples in the novels, both during and after lovemaking, may stem from the patriarchal belief that women are incomplete humans and merely sexual objects for men. It is discovered that this humiliating treatment drives Mara, in Beyond the Horizon, to prostitute her body for herself and her family, while in Season of Crimson Blossoms*, it leads 55-year-old HajiaBinta into a salacious affair with a much younger 25-year-old drug baron named Raza. The paper reveals the insidious ways men abuse and demean women and calls on all men to cease all forms of ill-treatment towards women.*

Key Words: *silence, gestures, patriarchal, feminism and exploitation*

Introduction

The relationship between men and women has always been fraught with crisis. It is almost a cliché to state that women have suffered unjustly at the hands of men since ancient times. This unjust treatment of women by men is broadly termed patriarchy. Painfully, most contemporary societies are, in practice, patriarchal. Chinyelu Ojukwu tells us that patriarchy manifests most prominently in marriage. According to her, "It is in the marriage institution that the subjugation, oppression, and humiliation of women are most conspicuous and indubitable" (125). Ojukwu seems to suggest that the institution of marriage empowers men to weaponize their phallus for the oppression of women. Women get married seeking companionship, affection, and sexual ecstasy, but this hope is often truncated by patriarchy.

What happens when a woman is treated like a common piece of wood by her husband? What happens when lovemaking in marriage is devoid of the usual rapport, cuddling, and foreplay that love generates? What happens when a man resorts to silence and gestures before, during, and after sex? Your guess is as good as mine: the ego that holds a woman together will be shredded. According to Fernando Poyatos, "gesture is a kinetic and paralinguistic form of communication that involves using different parts of the body to communicate instead of using

words. In fact, just like words, one can through gestures alone construct quite elaborate messages" (206). On the other hand, according to Poyatos, "silence is a non-verbal means of communication that is totally devoid of sound or words. Silence, not only in conversation but in general, is something everybody feels uncomfortable about during an interaction in Western cultures (and even African culture), causing anxiety as soon as it lasts beyond a few seconds" (319).

It is through these paralinguistic features that the male characters in the selected novels, Akobi in *Beyond the Horizon* and Zubairu in *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, who are husbands, carry out their patriarchal tendencies. Many feminist writers and critics who have inquired into the status of women in relation to patriarchy, specifically how men subject women to sexual exploitation, have limited their inquiries to issues such as wife battering, coercion, scolding, rhetorical questions, shouting, overworking, cheating, and polygamy, to mention a few. None of them have focused critically on silence and gestures as tools for patriarchal domination and sexual exploitation. This gap is what this paper sets out to fill. It explores how men in the selected texts weaponize silence and gestures as tools for the sexual humiliation and exploitation of women.

Theoretical Framework

All versions of feminism assert that women have in the past been suppressed and oppressed by men through patriarchal norms and values which have been rationalized as natural.

According to Ann Dobie, "the premise that unites those who call themselves feminist critics is the assumption that Western culture is fundamentally patriarchal, creating an imbalance of power that marginalizes women and their work" (102). Laurel Richardson Walum has looked at patriarchy from two major perspectives. The first is the biogenetic theory while the second one is bicultural. According to the renowned sociologist,

> The biogenetic explanation is based on the idea that, because male dominance is culturally universal, it may be genetically caused and it must play a major role in the survival of the human species. Males and females, the proponent argue, are physically and hormonally different. Male have a higher level of androgens, the "aggressivity" hormone, whereas females have a monthly hormonal cycle. (141)

It is believed that because of the hormonal difference, men are taller and heavier than women. Besides, the skeletal structure and muscles are adapted to doing tasks that require great energy. Walum seems to be of the opinion that the anatomical and hormonal systems of women are not suitable for energetic tasks, but rather for performing biological roles such as childbearing and lactation. It is because of these biological factors that women are seen as domestic workers in the years gone by. The other explanation for patriarchal domination is bio-culturally based. Walum explains thus:

> In hunting and gathering societies, meat (protein) is scarce, and men have a monopoly on hunting and fishing. However, contrary to common opinion, men are hunters not because they are physically strong or more agile… It is primarily because hunting and carrying burdens are incompatible activities. Women are not only carrying fetuses in utero, offsetting balance in latter month, but they carry nursing infants… (142)

Another alternative explanation for patriarchy is bio-cultural; emphasizing that male dominance exists because they have more access to the distribution of scarce goods and services. Women are usually playing the role of childbearing and childrearing. As a result, they do not have enough time to engage in other activities. Furthermore, because this primitive societies are governed by a "generosity" norm, the meat and other scarce resources are divided by men. The male sex is thus seen as the provider, he has greater control over meat distribution and he is seen as the stronger sex. Lynne B. Iglitzin looks at the issue of patriarchy from a religious angle:

> Patriarchalism is evident through the Old Testament, beginning with the moral imperfections and weak virtue attributed to Eve. Muslim, Jewish and Christian religions share the view that woman was solely responsible for the fall of man… women, sex, and sin are interconnected in religious teaching. (13)

Viewed against this background, women are seen as inferior to men. Men are portrayed as the superior gender because Adam is seen as an epitome of purity before the creation of Eve. The biblical story shows that Eve is responsible for the fall of Adam, and even the fall of the entire Eden.From the foregoing, it can be seen that the concept of patriarchy cuts across bio-genetic, bio-cultural and religious perspectives. This concept emphasizes the innate superiority of the male-folk. Virtuous qualities are said to reside in the male personality, while women are associated with vices. A thorough examination of the bio-genetic and bio-cultural theories underscores the issue of masculinity. They show more than ever before the perception of a woman as a weaker sex that can be used and humiliated during sex. This is the reason characters like Akobi and Zubairu deploy silence and gestures to demean and exploit their wives sexually.

In this connection, the purpose of this study is to show how male characters, created by Darko and Ibrahim weaponize silence and gesture as patriarchal tools for the exploitation of women during sexual intercourse.This research is based on feminist theory. According to Nnolim (2009), feminist theory advocates for the total liberation of women. The movement began with Mary Wollstonecraft's publication of her book, *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), which highlighted the cruelty and tyranny of men and argued for women's right to vote and be elected. Although Wollstonecraft laid the foundation for feminism, many other feminist writers and activists have since contributed significantly to the cause. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Germaine Greer's *The*

Female Eunuch, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* theorize the total emancipation of women. The choice of feminist theory for this research is well-founded, as the novels under consideration highlight the ordeals faced by women at the hands of men. These novels explore how men use demeaning tools to exploit women sexually and how women respond to such exploitation.

Literature Review

Amma Darko is a veteran novelist who has displayed an admirable craft in her fiction. The beauty of her works, especially *Beyond the Horizon,* has uncovered her to the literary world. Her "craftsmanship" is mostly demonstrated in her creation of warped male characters whose stock in trade is to abuse women. Also, the way she threads and manages her plot is elicits admiration. A number of scholars have examined Darko`s novels from different perspectives. Annin, Hannah Woode Amissah Arthur, in a comparative study of El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero* and Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* submits that the novel is a "book that depicts the phallic masculinity, sexual violence and abuse" (298) that pervades the Ghanaian society. She further stated that Akobi uses "gestures and rhetorical questions to bring about his 'phallocentric' and 'logocentric' abuse and masculine authoritativeness" (298). The point made here is that words insult but silence insults more. Akobi in *Beyond the Horizon* does not only batter his wife,

Mara, to the point of ridicule, but also perpetrates this act through rhetorical question to show his "logocentric" authority. Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike observes that women are abused sexually by husbands at home and abroad and are treated as common objects for sexual gratification. He denounces Akobi, who makes love to his wife wordlessly. He argues that:

> The wordless [way Akobi makes love to his wife] denotes absence of rapport, just as the whole love-making portrays Mara is depicted essentially as an instrument for sexual objectification. She is not "human" enough to be offered any form of intimacy, not fit enough to be cuddled after love-making. In fact, she is good enough only for the fulfilment of male pleasure. She is nothing more than sex object. (298)

It can be observed that both Arthur and Umezuruike seem to have done something similar to what we have set out to do. However, the rigour, level of analysis and choice of novels make this essay unique. In another thematic study of *Beyond the Horizon*, Umezurike, again, examines resistance in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* and argues that: ''Amma Darko's fiction essentially tackles the tragic experiences and fate of African women caught in the stronghold of patriarchal structures and how these women strive to achieve agency in such a debilitating condition" (155). He concluded that ''Mara`s story reveals the travails she suffered in

the hands of Akobi, her abandonment, her oppression and exploitation and the series of sexual abuse and violence to which her husband subjects her'' (156).

In addition, Laural Barberan Reinares, in her PhD thesis, entitled: "Commodified Anatomies: Disposable Women in Post-Colonial Narratives of Sexual Trafficking and/ Abduction," argues that:

> […] despite being Darko's first foray into the literary writing, *Beyond the Horizon* does not lack merit. Above all, Darko seduces her audience with an uninterrupted flow of her prose and her honest, often sarcastic depiction of the situation of poor African immigrant in Europe (117). Women are commodities to be traded, used and discarded by men. Darko also targets a culture where marriage and prostitution intertwine as one and the same, with women becoming exchange currency from which only men enjoy its profits. (120)

The treatment meted out to Mara by all the men in her life is such that she is more like a common commodity. Mara initially depends completely on her father; she later becomes Akobi`s appendix, and finally her pimp`s property. This is why her father sells her cheaply to Akobi, and Akobi in turn sells her to the first pimp, Pompey, just like our normal item in the market and Pompey uses her for commercial gains.

In their essay entitled "Exploiting the Exploiter: Some Violation of Society's Expectations in *Beyond the Horizon* and

The Housemaid" Charles Marfo, Philomena Abeca Yeboah and Lucy Bonku argue that "Darko's two novels challenge the prevailing view of motherhood held by many African societies. In these novels, mothers are portrayed in their real complex natures as nurturers with potential to exploit even their own" (35). They conclude that almost all mothers in these novels fail due to the 'wrong choices' they made, and which are fuelled by challenging economic conditions in the society. Our focus in this essay is not to pass buck on who is responsible for the plight of women on the street but to explore how gestures and silence demean women sexually and the effect they have on them.

On the other hand, Ibrahim is a Northern novelist and Journalist, whose debut novel under study won the Nigerian Prize for Literature in 2016. Although a relatively new novel, being a Northern male novelist arrival into the literary world, *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, have been examined by different scholars. One of such critics who have examined Ibrahim's works is Paul Liam. He says that Ibrahim's novel "is a quest to tell a Northern story that functions as a counter narrative to Southern stereotypes. Ibrahim's work represents something that fundamentally massages the ego of Northerners in an interesting way." Liam's concern in his essay has nothing to do with mode of abuse. His, is more of the emergence of the northern novel into Nigerian literary scene. It has to be pointed out that when Southerners write, they project southern perspectives. Overtime, these views become stereotypes. Ibrahim's novel seems to present the long missing northern perspective. Susan Adaora Okpala posits that:

> At its core, the narrative is about the quest for love and healing amidst the grimness of an immense sense of loss, unresolved grief, filial abandonment, repressed emotions and sexual desires, unspeakable trauma, and societal disillusionment. Each of the central characters grapples with existential angst. For example, after enduring a loveless and sexually deprived marriage as an underage bride, Binta also bears the grief of the sudden loss of her first son, Yaro, with whom she is denied maternal connection, and the subsequent loss of her husband to interreligious violence.

Okpara's analysis is very important as it enumerates the major thematic thrust in the novel. From all the essays reviewed, what is obvious is that no scholar, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has examined how silence and gestures have been used as weapons to demean women in the selected novels. Therefore, this paper focuses on the weaponization of silence and gestures as patriarchal tools for the exploitation and humiliation of women in *Darko's Beyond the Horizon* and Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*.

The Deployment of the Weaponry of Silence and Gestures in *Beyond the Horizon*

In *Beyond the Horizon*, the novelist presents Akobi, a character who exhibits serious patriarchal tendencies against his wife,

Mara, a village girl whom he marries and brings to the city merely as an object. Akobi viciously indulges in acts of wife battering and sexual abuse, particularly when he hears the word "pregnancy." He treats his wife like a slave, sending her on ridiculous errands, beating her up, raping her, and ultimately selling her off to a pimpto prostitute for him in Munich to live on. (30) However, it is Akobi's ways of making love to his wife that interests the researcher. A close reading of the novel reveals that sex with Akobi is patriarchal and humiliates and abuses Mara sexually. Through sex filled with silence and gestures, Akobi, demeans his wife and makes her feel less of a human. The narrator captures one of the scenes in the excerpt below:

> He was lying on the mattress, face up, looking thoughtfully at the ceiling when I entered. Cool, composed and authoritative, he indicated with a pat of his hand on the space beside him that I should lie down beside him. I did so, more out of apprehension of starting another fight than anything else. Wordlessly, he stripped off my clothes, stripped off his trousers, turned my back to him and entered me. Then he ordered me off the mattress to go and lay on my mat because he wanted to sleep alone. (22)

It is pertinent to note that this event happens after Mara, the heroine had been beaten white and blue for announcing that she is pregnant with Akobi's child. What is of interest here is the deployment of silence and gestures in the way Akobi invites his wife for love making and the wordless and loveless way he

carries out the act. The lack of rapport or foreplay that characterize the way Akobe makes love to his wife, is an exhibition of his patriarchal domination over the woman. To him, she is merely an object of sexual satisfaction for men that should not be communicated with or satisfied sexually. It is our argument in this essay that Akobi employs these paralinguistic tools to exploit, abuse, humiliate and suppress the acclaimed lesser gender sexually.

This Akobi's unhealthy idiosyncratic love making is not a onetime off thing. And it should also be noted that it has nothing to do with African culture or environment. It is purely a case of patriarchy. This is because even after Akobi, now called Cobby, had lived in Germany for several years, upon the arrival of Mara, his wife, whom he invites for his own selfish reasons, Akobi welcomes her with a more humiliating and demeaning love making. The narrator captures this event in the scene of Amara's arrival in Germany:

> Without a word he got up, picked up the cassette player, switched it on loud and with just a slight nod of the head, towards the bathroom, beckoned me to come receive my welcome dose. I don't know why I obeyed him and got up at all but I did, drained of all dignity, filled with abhorrence, and tottered behind him into the bathroom, to the chuckle of Osey and his wife. Once inside, he drew the plastic curtain. Then, very rigidly and businesslike, ordered as loud as loud as the loud music would allow. Remove it quickly, pointing to my trousers. By the time I

> got out of them he too had got his own trousers down to his knees. Emanating the aura of no-nonsense, time-is-too-precious-to-be-wasted-on you, he signalled with his forefinger that I should kneel; which I did, still in my sweatshirt. Then he took my jeans, spread them on the bathroom floor, and knelt down. I felt him enter me from behind… (83-84)

As the saying goes, you can take a man out of the bush but you can't take the bush out of him. One would have expected Akobi to exude the aura of a Western man which he lays claim to. But the reverse is the case. Akobi is still the same Akobi as far as his treatment of Mara is concerned. It is also observed that when words are used during sex, they are always authoritative words that should not be countered. What makes Mara's case pitiable is that she is given this ill-treatment few minutes after Akobi has informed her the real reason why he has invited her to Germany. Mara does not only grapple with the news that Akobi is married to another woman in German, she is to live with Akobi and his wife and play a sister to him, in the presence of the white lady. She is to serve and slave for them.

This type of objectification of the female body is one of the reasons many radical feminist writers advocate for the subversion or total elimination of men from the face of the earth. Some even wish to cut off the phallus, the instrument with which man oppresses woman. It is also the reason why Nawal El Saadawil and ChimamandaNgoziAdichie create characters like Firdaus and Mama, who murder the male oppressors in their

lives. But Charles Nnolim seems to frown upon such recommendation as he calls it "the scandalous path of African Feminism" (46).

However, it is ironic and shocking to note that the same Akobi who treats his wife like sexual object during and after love making is seen to pet, pamper and treat his German wife, Getti, with respect. Reading the novel further, the narrator informs us of how Akobi kisses Gitte, his German wife, outside and apologizes for coming late to pick her up. What is at play here, the study observes, is post-colonial construction. It is the argument of this study that post colonialism strips African man his patriarchal tendencies and makes him submit to colonial hegemonic femininity. Though that is not the focus of this paper. Akobi's different treatment of women in different ways, one as an object of humiliation and sex machine, and the other a queen to be kissed, caressed and worshiped, plays out in Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood.* In the novel, Nnu Ego, who finds succour in the house of her father, Agbadi, after a very abusive and childless marriage to Amatokwu, her mother's death was quickened by the ill treatment she suffers in the hands of Agbadi.Ojukwu points out that:

> It is ironic that the house that provides such soccour for a daughter is the same house where a first wife is starved of emotional support and warmth, which hastens her death. Emecheta's clever juxtaposition of Agbadi's attitude to his wives with that to his daughter brings out the conduct of many men who are usually protective of their daughters

> and sometimes their sisters but could be mean and nasty to their wives. (187)

The evil that Akobi does to Mara does not end with his humiliating sexual encounter which he carries out through silence and gestures. After subjecting her to play a sister to him in the presence of Gitte and serving them as a maid, Akobi, through orgy sex video he films of Mara and other men, which he organizes after making Mara drunk, blackmails her into prostitution by threatening to send the video to her parents. In the end, he sells her off to a pimp called Pompey and he lives off the profit. As Mara laments, "my husband brings me from home to a foreign land and puts me in a brothel to work, and what money I make, he uses to pay the rent of his lover's apartment, and to renovate a house for her in her village back home." (137-138). It must be pointed out at this juncture that Akobi also has an African mistress called Comfort whom he truly loves and cares for. He started dating her while they were in Africa and also invited her to join him in Germany as life became better for him.

Now, at this point, one begins to wonder and probe into the main reason Akobi would be so cruel to only Mara. Which man will treat him wife this way? Is it because she was a choice made for him by his father? Or is it because Mara's father used her to settle the debt, he owed Akobi's father? Is Akobi's treatment of Mara his own revolt against the fact that Mara was chosen for him? A lot of questions pop up in the mind of a critical reader. Anyway, what is obvious is that Mara's father is the one that

opened the door of humiliation for others like Akobi to come in and demean Mara.

Upon getting the information of how Akobi uses the proceeds of her prostitution to cater for other women like Comfort and Gitte, Mara decides to leave Pompe's brothel in Hambury for another brothel in Munich managed by another pimp called Oves. The difference is that this time, she hopes to prostitute for herself. To Mara, prostituting for herself is a triumph or is better than prostituting for another man. But OyeI does not think so. According to I, contrary to what women think, prostitution does not mitigate patriarchy because, according to him, "sex is a huge industry ultimately controlled by men" (1). Prostitution does more harm than good.

Prostitution deteriorates that subordinate status and robs women of true dignity, social prestige and power. I seems to be of the opinion that it is only through empowerment that women's liberation can be achieved. William and William re-echo this point when they said that:

> Today, it is sounded very loud that the empowering of women is what is needed to ensure what is called the restructuring of human societies and the establishment of a truly humanistic confederation of people disregarding sex characteristic qualities and religious orientation. Thus, the idea of woman empowerment stands very crucial… (302)

The Deployment of the Weaponry of Silence and Gestures in *Season of Crimson Blossoms*

In this phenomenal debut novel, Ibrahim paints an engaging, intricate, and cleverly layered portrait of the human condition. The narrative is set in the ultra-conservative Hausa Muslim society of Northern Nigeria and revolves around the subversive relationship between a fifty-five-year-old widow, Hajiya Binta, and Reza, a twenty-five-year-old drug peddler and political thug. With the deftness of an expert, Wordsmith Ibrahim weaves the threads of the narrative into a tapestry against the canvas of the tragic aftermaths of interreligious and socio-political upheavals, violence, and despicable corruption on the psycho-social fabric of individual, familial, and communal existence. The captivating narrative opens with Binta's dramatic encounter with Reza during a burglary attack at her home: "Hajiya Binta Zubairu was finally born at fifty-five when a dark-lipped rogue with short, spiky hair, like afield of miniscule anthills, scaled her fence and landed boots and all, in the puddle that was her heart" (9).While Reza shuffles around with Binta, a dagger held closely to her throat, "the friction of her rear against his jeans made his crotch bulge and push hard against her"(14), she realizes "in the muted terror of the moment, that this was the closest she had been to any man since her husband's death ten years before" (13). Reza takes her things and leaves, "having sown in her the seed of awakening that will eventually sprout into a corpse flower, the stench of which would resonate far beyond her imagining" (14). This chance meeting rekindles the dormant

embers of Binta's unrequited desires and repressed sexuality. By their second meeting, "the little spark of concupiscence deep within her had burst into a flame" (55), and swiftly flares into a fiery affair, one that does not only defy rigid religious regulations and stifling patriarchal dictates, but also significantly alters the trajectories of their lives. The narrator narrates Binta's love making with her husband, Zubairu, thus:

> Two nights later, when he was tossing and turning on the bed next to her, she knew he would nudge her with his knee and she would have to throw her legs open. He would lift her wrapper, spit into her crotch and mount her. His calloused fingers would dig into the mounds on her chest and would bite his lower lip to prevent moan from escaping. She would count slowly under her breath, her eyes closed, of course. And somewhere between sixty and seventy – always between sixty and seventy he would grunt, empty himself and roll off her until he was ready to go again. (53-54)

Unlike Mara who does not see anything wrong or decode the humiliation associated with the pattern Akobi has sex with her, Binta, despite her Muslim upbringing, maybe due to her education, abhors this one sided, silent and gestures pattern of love making. Nevertheless, she tries to reason with her husband. However, efforts to put things right is rebuffed by Zubairu.

> She wanted it to be different. She had always wanted it to be different. And so, when he nudged her that night, instead of rolling on to her back and throwing her legs apart, she rolled into him and reached for his groin. He instinctively moaned when he caressed his hardness… what the hell are you doing? His words half-barked, half whispered, struck her like a blow. He pinned her down and, without further rituals, lifted her wrapper. She turned her face to the wall and started counting. The tears slipped down the side of her closed eyes before she got to twenty. (54)

In view of the above, one is no longer surprised when Binta after being widowed starts off a salacious affair with Raza, a 25-year-old drug dealer who has come to rub her. Though this relationship takes a nose dive as Binta's older children find out about this unhealthy relationship. The novelist gives us a glint of what is different between Zubairu's love making pattern, characterized by silence and gestures and Raza's love pattern filled with foreplay, cuddling and rapport:

> When Raza slipped his hand under her wrapper, he discovered, much to his surprise that the lump of ancient hair he had encountered the first time was gone. She was amused by his startled expression and offered only the fainted resistance when he undid his wrapper and looked at her. She allowed him to sit her on the cushioned stool before the dressing table. When he knelt before her, she

> turned her face away and pressed her thighs together but once he prised them apart, gently, and took his tongue to her, she held his head of miniscule anthills and quaked. And because they were alone in the house, because she had always wanted to, because she could not stop herself, she moaned. With his tongue, he unlocked something deep within her. (60)

The difference between Zubairu's love making with Binta and Raza loving making with Binta is made clear from the above quotation. We observe that while that of Zubairu is devoid of cuddling and foreplay and shrouded in silence and gestures, filled with command and rhetorical questions, love making with Raza is characteristic of rapport, foreplay, moaning, and cuddling; during and after love making. All Binta's buried desires are fulfilled by this sexual encounter with a younger boy, young enough to be her son and who reminds her of her own son, Yaro, who was killed by police brutality. It is ironical that what her deceased husband could not give her for years, she gets from a young boy who has come to rub her.

Conclusion

From the study above, it is evident that the two novelists, Darko and Ibrahim, present male characters who use silence and gestures as patriarchal tools for the sexual exploitation and humiliation of women. The novelists depict how lovemaking

with Akobi and Zubairu is devoid of pleasure, and how these unfulfilled sexual desires and brutal marriages compel the women to take drastic actions. For Mara, this leads to her helplessly giving up her dignity by resorting to prostitution as a means of livelihood for life. For Hajia Binta, it results in her engaging in an unhealthy sexual relationship with a thug and drug dealer young enough to be her son.

It is important to notethat both Mara and Binta are trapped in forced marriages to men they knew nothing about. Through this portrayal, the novelists seem united in condemning patriarchy and empowering women to take full control of their bodies and use them as they please. According to the novelists, life is supreme and unfortunately short, and no woman should endure a loveless marriage for eternity. The novelists advocate for consensual marriages rather than arranged ones, as seen in the cases of Akobi and Zubairu. They suggest that parents should refrain from interfering and allow their children to choose their life partners.

Finally, the essay concludes by urging all men to desist from acts that dehumanize others, whether male or female, and to view women as equal partners rather than mere objects for sexual gratification.

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Hilary Njoegbu is a researcher at the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State

