

Gender-Based Violence in Selected Novels of Ifeoma Okoye and Zaynab Alkali

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Abstract

Gender-based violence is a social menace that cuts across societies. Women, irrespective of social, economic or religious status, can be victims of violence at different stages of their lives. Nigerian female writers, portray the harrowing and subjugating conditions women endure and its attendant toll on their physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. Adopting the feminist theory, this paper discusses the different forms of violence women experience and their coping strategies as depicted in selected works of Ifeoma Okoye and Zaynab Alkali. It also reveals the patriarchal system and stereotypes that tend to validate these heinous acts against women. The paper concludes that violence against women does not affect the victim alone, but has a reverberating effect on all segments of the society, hence the need to adopt proactive measures towards ensuring a complete eradication.

Introduction

Gender-based violence is one of the most notable human rights violations and it cuts across social and economic spheres of life. Although majority of the victims are women and girls, men also undergo this type of violence. Due to its prevalence and embedment in cultures around the world, millions of women consider it as a normal way of life. Gender-based violence exacts a heavy toll on the mental, emotional and physical health of women. Violence against women encompasses a wide range of abuses – from physical and psychological violence occurring in the family to the type occurring in the general community. These include rape, female genital mutilation, sexual abuse of children, wife-battering, sexual harassment and intimidation at work and other harmful traditional practices. Nigerian female writers, have over the years, revealed the different types of violence women endure in the private and public domain.

Violence and Abuse

The general acceptance of domestic violence and wife battery in many societies is depicted

in the works of female writers. From Buchi Emecheta to Alkali to Adichie, violence against women has been a major thematic concern. To a large extent, many women are ashamed to report such cases to the appropriate authorities in order to seek justice and protect their lives. This attitude stems from the fact that patriarchal societies do not condone such perceived ‘excesses’ from a wife. Moreover, patriarchy is ‘a culture that regards wife beating as daily practice that is passed from one generation to the other’ (Sayed 173).

In Alkali’s *The Descendants*, Peni is physically abused by her old husband. When she goes to report the incident to her uncle, Ali Ramta, she is reprimanded for bringing such shame to her family thus:

A little beating from your husband and you run back home like a spoilt child. If your mother had run away each time your father beat her, would you have been born... Tell me why you can’t remain quiet in your husband’s house like

other married women
(*Descendants* 27-28).

In another incident, barely three weeks after the birth of Peni's baby, her husband, Madu Chimba, physically abuses her in the night in the presence of very young Hauwa. He then 'pushed out his wife, son and Hauwa and firmly closed the gate after them. Peni tied the infant on Hauwa's back and carried a little bundle of clothes under her arm and led the party away from Madu Chimba's compound' (*Descendants* 36). In spite of this pathetic sight, Ali Ramta grudgingly allows them to stay for the night and sends her back to her husband's house the next morning. Ali's attitude to Peni makes her resort to seek advice from her grandmother, Magira Milli. She eventually walks out of the marriage a year later.

In addition, in Alkali's 'Cobwebs', Ladi is physically, emotionally and psychologically abused by her husband because of her inability to bear him children. Ladi 'had tried to be good wife, but in the society's context, a good wife also included being a mother and that she had no control over' (*Cobwebs* 54). As a result, her husband marries another wife that is already pregnant and tells Ladi to prepare for divorce.

In male dominated societies, young girls are forced into marriage without taking the health implications on the girl to consideration. Seytu in Alkali's *The Descendants* is forced to marry the village chief, Lawani Dam, at the tender age of thirteen. During her first child birth, she contracts Vesico-vaginal fistula at the age of fifteen. Her husband abandons her to her fate and sends her back to her family without making any effort towards taking her to where she will get medical help. Magira singlehandedly tries to get the finances needed for her to undergo the expensive corrective surgery from a kindhearted relative.

Aunt Hildi in Alkali's 'The Vagabond' initially had a wrong perception about the education of the girl-child. As a result, she

forces her daughter, Bibi, to marry an older man at the age of fifteen. To Aunt Hildi's utter dismay and regret, she realises that her daughter's life is ruined at the age of seventeen due the Vesico-vaginal fistula she contracts during childbirth. Bibi's inability to develop the strong will needed to fight and remain strong in her sad predicament leads to the deterioration of her health. She resorts to drug abuse and her physical appearance shows that she is dying gradually as a result of the ill-health. Aunt Hildi is traumatised by her daughter's situation and regrets her rash decision. Unfortunately, it is too late because, Bibi is at 'seventeen maimed for life' (*Cobwebs* 104). Nevertheless, Aunt Hildi learns from her sad experience and encourages parents to send their daughters to school instead of subjecting them to negative, and at times, permanent effect of early marriage. Amsa in Alkali's 'Saltless Ash' is also married to an old man at a young age. In her own case, she tries to make the best out of her predicament by trying as much as possible to adjust to the realities around her.

It is a common practice in patriarchal cultures to subject a widow to unwholesome widowhood practices that endanger the life of the woman and have adverse effects on her physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. She is dispossessed of her inheritance by the members of the family and forced to undergo strange rites in order to prove her innocence and exonerate herself from her husband's death.

Kodili in Okoye's *The Fourth World* (2013) is dispossessed of her husband's lands shortly after his demise. Her brother-in-law, Mr Amos, insists that he needs to mortgage the land in order to pay for the expenses incurred during the burial of her husband. Members of the family are aware that the expenses incurred are solely settled by the efforts of Chira and contributions from her friends and well-wishers in the city. Nonetheless, no one stands to defend the defenseless widow. Chira's several

attempts to recover the lands from her uncle proved abortive. In spite of Chira and Kodili's dire financial situation and the fact that they are struggling to eke out a living, no member of her late husband's family comes to their aid. Sadly, Kodili dies of complications from hypertension and stroke. Her death would have been averted if the necessary assistance and emotional support are rendered during her time of grief.

It is no gainsaying that a large percentage of the Nigerian population suffer from abject poverty. The dire need for survival forces parents to send their children to hawk goods instead of sending them to school. These parents are unable to fend for their children thereby exposing the children to dangers on the streets. In Okoye's *The Fourth World*, Mama Egodi tries all she can to feed her children from her meagre resources. As a widow who is saddled with the responsibility of fending for her children, she augments her efforts by sending her children to hawk goods. Unfortunately, 'Egodi and Donatus had been killed by a lorry as they tried to cross Obiagu Street. They were coming from hawking bananas' (*The Fourth World* 235). Okoye also portrays how the children who escape fatal road accidents are sexually abused by deceptive buyers. The buyers take advantage of their age and poor financial strength to molest them. The experience usually leaves an indelible mark in the lives of the children and causes psychological trauma.

Survival Strategies of Battered Women

Women who suffer different forms of abuse and have been victims of male chauvinism usually devise means of overcoming male oppression and subjugation. Although the women are battered emotionally, physically and psychologically, they try to devise survival strategies in order to liberate them from the shackles of male oppression. This section discusses the steps taken by the women such as

female bonding and reclamation of self-worth to get over their traumatic experiences.

Female Bonding

In situations where women are faced with difficulties due to male oppression and subjugation, they come together in order to have a common front to fight and liberate themselves. This stems from the fact that a group achieves more set goals than an individual. Opara avers that female bonding is 'a facet of female power'; it is used by women to 'provide crutches for one another to lean on in adverse moments' (34-35). Ugbabe also posits that 'friendship, empathy and sisterhood exist between women – cousins, co-wives, sisters, or a step daughter and stepmother. The women gain strength and security from the wider networks of kinship as well' (17).

In Alkali's *The Descendants*, Peni joins forces with her grandmother in order to form a formidable team against the frequent physical assault from her husband. When Magira Milli realises that Ali Ramta refuses to take the necessary steps towards bringing an end to the abuse, she stands by her granddaughter and enables her to walk out of the abusive and oppressive marriage.

Also, Amsa and Yabutu in Alkali's 'Saltless Ash' (*Cobwebs*) unite to stop their husband, Hassan, from marrying a third wife. Although they acknowledge the fact that the culture permits him to marry as many wives as he wants, they are concerned about the strain that a new wife will exert on the already meagre and insufficient resources. Hassan is barely able to meet the needs of his family and the children are already showing signs of malnutrition. His wives try to augment his little income by engaging in petty trade. The unity between the women eventually yields positive results and Hassan stops his plans of sending the first wife away and marrying a new wife. The women, though co-wives, 'have learnt to live in harmony within an obviously hostile polygamous structure' (Sayed 172).

Okoye, in her *The Fourth World*, reiterates the need for women to unite when faced with oppressive situations that are beyond their control. The members of the Kasanga Avenue community live in abject poverty and squalor. Their living conditions pose a severe threat to their health and the lives of their children. In some cases, children get drowned during rainy seasons due to the absence of good drainages. Some parents lose their children to manageable and preventable diseases as a result of their inability to pay the medical bills. However, in the midst of these myriad of challenges, the women unite to give to each other succour and the needed emotional support. Okoye vividly describes one of such instances:

Mama Egodi... had been expecting her third child when her husband died... Although life had treated her badly, it had not succeeded in destroying her large heart. The evening before, she had been one of the women from the avenue who had paid Kodili a condolence visit. Mama Egodi, indigent as she was, had donated a tuber of yam. It was heart-rending for Chira to watch these women present their gifts to her mother, women who had to borrow money to feed their own families. Their situations had not prevented them from helping a fellow woman who had become a widow, like others amongst them. (*The Fourth World* 101)

In addition, the women that live outside the Kasanga community associate with the less-privileged women in spite of the obvious difference in social status. Ogom, Chira's

secondary school friend, is privileged to come from a wealthy home. She tries as much as possible to assist Chira financially and materially. During the hospitalisation and eventual demise of Chira's father, Ogom provides the emotional support and prevails on her father to make financial contribution to the burial expenses. She also accompanies Chira in her job hunt because she is aware of her friend's desperate need for a job since the task of fending for herself and her mother rests on her. While leaving for the United States to meet her husband, Ogom gives most of her clothes and shoes to Chira.

Dr Agali, a university lecturer and the owner of a computer business outfit, employs Chira in her establishment. When she becomes aware of Chira's background, her hard work, resilience and determination to succeed, she does all within her limits to alleviate Chira's plight. At the end of the novel, Chira is called for a job interview in the university which is facilitated by Dr Agali. She also encourages Chira to go back to school and tells her how she can work and still achieve her goal of becoming a university graduate. During the demise of Chira's mother, Dr Agali stays by her to give her the needed emotional support.

Okoye also depicts that there is bonding between Nigerian women in the Diaspora in order to survive in a foreign country. Ogom is confronted with the rude shock about the real status of her supposed husband in the United States. Chikeson does not attend the marriage ceremony, yet Ogom suspends her education in order to marry a man she has never seen. On arrival at the airport, she discovers to her utter dismay that Chikeson is married to an African American woman with two kids and he is not ready to call off the marriage so he does not jeopardize his stay in the U.S. Agatha, a fellow Nigerian woman, having undergone a similar predicament in the hands of her husband and survives the terrible experience, recounts how she helps Ogom: 'I took her to live with me and did my best to help her recover from the

shock and learn to stand on her own feet. I had travelled that path before so I knew what to do to help her. She is studying and working at the same time now' (*The Fourth World* 290).

Also, Chimere and her mother, in Okoye's *Chimere* (2002) form a formidable team in order to survive male oppression and discrimination. Having been abandoned by Mr. Enuma on discovering that the young Miss Etu is pregnant, she singlehandedly raises Chimere from childhood to adulthood. Chimere, being aware of her mother's sacrifice for her upkeep, bonds with her mother in order to survive in a male-dominated society and amidst abject poverty. Sayed opines that female bonding is 'the concept of sisterhood – women working together for their collective good as well as that of the society' (180).

Reclamation of Self-worth

Although some women succumb to male oppression and unfavourable conditions, most women try to make the best out of their sad experiences. Alkali exemplifies this truth through the character of Seytu in her *The Descendants*. Seytu suffers from Vesico-vaginal fistula as a result of complication from childbirth. Her education is temporarily stopped and she undergoes three surgeries in order to correct the damage done to her reproductive organ. However, instead of resigning herself to fate, she picks up the pieces of her life and goes back to school. She eventually studies medicine and becomes a very successful paediatrician. In addition, Magira Milli is traumatised and psychologically battered due to the frequent loss of her children and her husband to the cold hands of death. In a bid to protect her sanity, she relocates with the surviving members of her family from Ramta to Makulpo and begins life afresh. Fortunately, they become prosperous and successful in their new environment as a result of her foresight and determination.

Chira in Okoye's *The Fourth World* is not discouraged by her challenges and misfortunes in her young life. She refuses to wallow in self-pity and succumb to the pressures from her mother to marry Maks. She decides to take advantage of the little opportunities available to her. Although she leaves secondary school during her final year due to her father's demise and her mother's inability to pay her tuition fees, she views it as a temporary setback and makes plans to return to school. These women, though battered, do not allow the prevailing unfavourable situation to deter them from their set goals. Their resilience and perseverance lead them to their eventual success.

Women are usually regarded as docile, passive and weak in male-dominated societies. In the selected works for this study, the women work hard to debunk this age-long myth by asserting themselves and proving their mettle regardless of the oppression and obstacle before them. In Okoye's *The Fourth World*, Maks flaunts his wealth and expects his wife or fiancé to obey his decisions without questioning. He also emphasises that he does not want an educated and working-class wife; rather, his wife should stay at home to fulfil his demands and also work towards satisfying his wishes. His first marriage fails because his wife, Bella, refuses to be cowed into such form of submission and a lifetime of servitude. She boldly asserts herself and quits the marriage because of Maks' domineering and selfish attitude. Bella refuses to be enticed by his wealth and opts for a life of independence and freedom of thought and expression. Also, Chira, in spite of her abject poverty refuses to be attracted by Maks' wealth. She is aware that marriage to him will be a far cry from what she expects and she will perpetually be a servant in the relationship. She asserts herself by making Maks understand that she cannot be controlled like a slave in a relationship that is meant to be cordial, friendly and respectful. Despite the pressures from her mother and some of her

neighbours and the final resort to emotional blackmail by her mother, she remains resolute and stresses that she cannot make a wrong decision that portends a great danger to her future because of her dire need for money to meet her basic needs. She rather decides to work hard towards achieving her dreams of becoming a university graduate and improving her living conditions. Magira Milli, one of the remarkable characters in Alkali's *The Descendants*, is assertive in the face of male domination. Although she is uneducated, she is aware of her rights and ensures that they are not trampled on. As a result of her boldness and assertive posture, she earns the respect of the members of the Ramta family and the entire Makulpo community.

The identity of the woman is usually tied to the man's in patriarchal cultures. In other words, she is regarded as the man's appendage. A woman can only command respect and have a sense of dignity when there is a male figure in her life. It is either she has a father or husband to be identified with. In situations where one of these figures is absent due to circumstances, she is scorned, humiliated and in some cases, ostracised. Alkali portrays the fact that old spinsters are not respected in most societies irrespective of their successes and the contributions that they make to the development of their communities. In *The Initiates*, Avi Dayyan is a successful geologist and she is involved in philanthropic activities in her community. She also adopts and properly caters for orphaned children. Despite these kind gestures to the members of her community, she is not accorded the respect she deserves because she is unmarried. The people in her community are of the view that she is too old to still be bearing her father's name and, moreover, there is no need for her to adopt when she can have children of her own. Nevertheless, she is not perturbed by the snide remarks that usually get to her hearing but continues with her philanthropic activities. She later earns the respect and admiration of her

community when she exhibits boldness and perseverance during the search for her elder brother who is allegedly said to be involved in a failed coup. The arduous search poses a great danger to her life and the other members of the search team by the military leaders. She remains resolute and their efforts eventually yield the desired results. After the long search and wait, they come home with their brother to a huge welcome ceremony by the Batancha community. 'This image of the new woman who decides the turns in her life is Alkali's idea of empowering the woman to attain the optimal within the society like Seytu in *The Descendants*; Avi-Dayyan is poised to serving her people and making a difference' (Razinatu and Kurfi 182).

Chimere in Okoye's *Chimere* is humiliated by her fiancé's family because of her questionable identity. She suffers from low self-esteem and avoids any conversations that will lead to unravelling her identity. Her society attaches a lot of importance to an identity that is tied to the father's. When she realises that this problem will affect her chances of getting married, she resolves to prevail on her mother to reveal her father's identity and the circumstances surrounding her birth. The previous attempts she makes at getting the truth from her mother is met with stiff resistance. Her struggle for dignity and respect leads her to the tedious search for her father. Although she is disappointed and deeply hurt when she meets her father and she realises that he is not enthusiastic about restoring the father-daughter relationship but prefers to keep her existence a secret from his family, she is contented with the idea that at least she can now boldly say that she has a father.

In addition, Chimere's dire need for money to augment her mother's earnings and the finances needed to facilitate the search for her father leads her to search for a vacation job. To her utter dismay and astonishment, her friend's father, one of the directors in the company where she goes job hunting offers to

give her the job on the condition that she has a sexual relationship with him. Chimere boldly turns down Mr Etu's sexual advances and decides to meet the Managing Director of the company. She knows that no respectable woman that wants to protect her integrity gets a job in exchange for her body. The Managing Director offers her the job without smearing her reputation. In her relationship with Weluche, she is not enticed by his financial status and decides to tread with caution after her nasty experience with Jude. When Weluche discovers the reasons for her frequent rebuffs, she earns his respect and he offers to assist her in her quest to reconcile with her father.

Okoye in *The Fourth World* reveals the deplorable living conditions and the state of poverty of the citizens living on Kasanga Avenue. In most cases, the young people that find themselves in such situations resort to vices such as armed robbery, prostitution, drug trafficking and abuse thereby constituting a social menace. After the death of Chira's father, she drops out of school in her final year due to financial constraints. She is also saddled with the responsibility of catering for her needs as well as her mother's. In spite of these enormous challenges, she does not resort to prostitution or other vices in order to earn a living and survive. Rather she struggles to protect her integrity and desires to have a decent source of income. Fortunately, she secures a job at a computer outfit.

Female Empowerment

Female writers have over the years portrayed the need for women to be financially empowered in their works. They also reiterate the importance of the education of the girl child as one of the ways of ensuring that women are liberated from male subjugation. There is an obvious move of women from the position of self-ignorance to awareness, assurance and self-reliance thereby making them increasingly resourceful. This assertion tallies with Chioma Opara's view that 'simply put, female

education is projected as the fillip to economic empowerment which is starkly contrasted with poverty and deprivation' (98). Brook and Halfari, cited in Makama, define women empowerment as

a multinational process involving the transformation of the economical, political, social, psychological, and legal circumstances of the powerless with its aim of dismantling the cultural, traditional and social norms, which disvalue, disempower and dispossess women with its central objectives tied to the needs of women to opportunities, facilities, skill acquisition and position of authority, especially within the political sphere. (135)

In Alkali's *The Descendants*, Magira Milli, though uneducated and well advanced in age, is aware of the importance of educating the girl child and insists on it for her grandchildren. During her teenage years, people had not been enlightened on the importance of getting a western education, but as she grows older, she observes the developmental changes and the change in values.

Magira Milli might be a yesterday's woman, but she was a wise one, not blind to the changes in her society... She was a good listener who constantly tuned in to her small transistor radio. She was also a watcher of events. She knew that education was the master

key to opportunities for a better life. Education opens doors and gives an individual option in life. She may have missed those options, but she wanted those options for her grandchildren (*The Descendants* 18).

Sayed comments on Magira's stance about education thus: 'the only way out of the atmosphere of antagonism governing this society lies in educating the younger promising generation to form a society characterized by tolerance and equality'(174). Magira knows that women have a role to play 'in bringing radical changes in society by schooling and socializing their children' (Sayed 175). Her convictions spur her on to ensure that her grandchildren are educated.

Seytu in Alkali's *The Descendants* is not deterred by her challenges due to her failed marriage and health condition. She is aware that education will empower her to overcome the challenges in her life. Through the immense support from her grandmother, she trains to become a consultant paediatrician. She undertakes the arduous journey from failure to success. Her financial and educational independence gives her courage to move out of a marriage that is based on self-centredness and male domination. Her co-wives do not have the options that she has and are therefore tied to a marriage that gives no room for their independence. Seytu's success makes her stand

for something more important than just the daughter of Ramta, and a successor to the great medical chief. She was a model for young and aspiring men and women, a symbol of growth and progressive womanhood. She had left Ramta a young disabled girl with little hope, and had come

back a conqueror. (*The Descendants* 267)

In Alkali's 'Cobwebs' Ladi remains in an unhappy and oppressive marriage because she is financially dependent on her husband. Due to her need for his roof over her head, she endures the frequent humiliation and abuse because she does not have other options that will lead to her liberation. However, when it dawns on her that her husband is going to divorce her after serving him for ten years she says,

I no longer feel bad about it. Imagine me free in the world at last. After my *idda*, I go to Lareri to join a sewing institution.... I am determined that no man will ever consider me a burden and a useless mouth to feed anymore; I am determined to make it in life even though my education is little. (*Cobwebs* 55)

Her sad experiences expose her to the importance of being empowered as a woman. Ugbabe agrees that 'The stories show the importance of education for women; without it they blindly submit to marriage and subordination to their husbands' (15). She also submits that 'education leads to self-reliance and self-worth, which in turn brings economic independence. Men are peripheral to the pursuit' (17).

Mama's access to Western education gives her the boldness to make crucial decisions for herself without recourse for male approval. She refuses to be perturbed by the dire consequences that may follow her decisions. After

acquiring a different world view, she now has a different set of values which did not fit

into the values of her own people. She now believed in living by one's own standards. Knowing one's nature and where one was going. What one wanted in life and being in full control of one's destiny. (*Cobwebs* 57)

Amsa in 'Saltless Ash' tries to be economically independent despite being uneducated. She is confident that she can provide for her basic needs without her husband's support. Little wonder she threatens to leave her marriage if her husband marries another wife.

Chira in Okoye's *The Fourth World* refuses to get married as a teenager and remains resolute in her quest for western education and financial independence. She refuses to be enticed by the temporary comfort that Maks's wealth has to offer and chooses to endure the hardship in her journey towards success and independence. She is of the view that 'Education is not all about money. It's also about being able to stand on your own, about believing in yourself, about having choices, about having a measure of control over your life' (*The Fourth World* 207). She knows that marriage to Maks will prevent her from getting 'more education and acquiring some financial independence' (*The Fourth World* 208).

Miss K, one of the teachers in Chira's school uses her opportunity as a teacher to emphasise the need for financial and educational empowerment especially for women. Ogom says that while in school, Miss K 'was always talking about education and studying and financial independence and life goals as if they were the only things to think about' (*The Fourth World* 114). These teachings during the formative years of Chira's life help her to remain resolute later in life despite the numerous challenges that she is plagued with.

Feminists do not seem to be begging for these liberties, they

are simply insisting in taking them as their right. Alkali, like other feminist writers have identified education as a crucial liberating force for all her female characters. Her ignorance and illiteracy as destructive agents of backwardness and degradation as they expose humanity to mysterious deaths. (Alu 14)

It is worthy of note that contrary to the earlier perception of men about the education of the girl-child as portrayed in some of Alkali's works, Okoye portrays a changing trend in the attitude of men towards the education of the girl-child. Akalika, in *The Fourth World*, though very poor, mortgages his lands in the village in order to ensure that Chira gets a sound western education. In the same vein, Ogom's father is sad and worried about his daughter's decision to quit school and marry a man she does not know. He expresses his misgivings about the arrangements that are spearheaded by his wife. He is of the opinion that she continues with her education since her parents can afford the best for her. This attitudinal change is attributed to the men's awareness of the remarkable contributions that women have made to the progress of their society and the obvious advantages that are accruable to the immediate members of the woman's family. Ironically, Okoye depicts the worrying fact that women still accept the patriarchal notion about the role of women exclusively as wives and mothers and encourage their daughters to do likewise. 'Lolo and Kodili were the same in way. Neither of them believed in young women forging a life of their own or in young women hankering after higher education. Chira mother's lack of enthusiasm for her acquiring a university degree was disturbing' (*The Fourth World* 115-116). When Lolo discovers that her daughter has been abandoned by her 'husband' in a foreign land, she realises the foolishness of her

decisions. The shame and the feeling of remorse make her unable to disclose her daughter's predicament to Chira, Ogom's bosom friend.

Alkali sums up the importance of the education of the girl child thus '...without a sound western education, a woman has very little chance of making success of her life' (*The Descendants* 235). Isaac Attah Ogezi posits that 'As a social crusader, Alkali is preoccupied with the plight of women in our male dominated society and feels that the only way forward is through the medium of Western education as only this way guarantees a woman's economic independence and the awareness of her fundamental human rights' (np). Hansen's golden statement that 'education is the very essence of social change' (26) is the crux of the works studied in this section.

Conclusion

The study showed that Alkali and Okoye's women refuse to be perceived as weaker vessels and act according to the expectations of their patriarchal society by being resourceful and enterprising. These novelists are not encouraging women to usurp men's position and authority, rather by demystifying the myth about male superiority; they advocate that women should be bold to assume roles that are stereotypically perceived to be the man's in order to contribute to the development of their society. Okoye and Alkali also reiterate the need for women to bond in order to form a formidable team in the struggle for liberation from male subjugation and oppression. In essence, the women do not allow the prevailing unfavourable conditions and abuse to deter them from their set goals. The network gives them the strength to persevere. A recurring decimal in the works is the importance of education and financial independence in the actualisation of the woman's quest for liberation from male subjugation. From Nwapa to Alkali to Adichie, these women

reiterate the fact that educational and economic independence are key in the struggle against gender-based violence. The girl-child's access to quality education guarantees her economic independence and also makes her aware of her fundamental human rights. Inasmuch as the woman plays a complementary role to the man, she is not coerced by the man into submission and subservience because she is able to fend and make critical decisions for herself.

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Fwangyil Gloria Ada: Gender-Based Violence in Selected Novels of Ifeoma Okoye and Zaynab Alkali

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