

Victims and Survivors: An Exploration of Abuse against Women and Possibilities for Women Empowerment as Portrayed in Selected Zimbabwean Literary Texts

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Summary

Using a simple qualitative approach based on library desk study, this article explores Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (2004) and *She No longer Weeps* (1996) to ascertain if traditional norms and practices that oppress women are evident in these selected works of art. Further, the article analyses the literary works to unpack the reasons for the abuse of women and to explore why women tolerate abusive relationships instead of freeing themselves from such dehumanising scenarios. Finally, the article interrogates any possibilities available in helping abused women to free themselves from abuse. The analysis of the selected texts was conducted from the perspective of marginality. From the study of the chosen texts, the article establishes that women experience different forms of abuse yet stay in the abusive relationships for reasons which include the protection of patriarchal value systems, the fear of rejection by society, financial dependence and for their love of their children among others. It also emerged from this investigation that women need to be empowered through education and entrepreneurial skills in order to be self-sufficient so that they can leave abusive relationships and provide for their own well-being. The article also argues that the way men and women are socialised should also change and there is need for robust re-orientation across the social divide about gender equality and sensitivity. The conclusion the article makes is that women continue to stay in abusive relationships because of patriarchal values, norms and practices which see women as marginalised beings.

Opsomming

Hierdie studeerkamerstudie volg 'n kwalitatiewe benadering en verken Tagwira se *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) en Dangarembga se *Nervous Conditions* (2004) en *She No longer Weeps* (1996). Daar word nagegaan of die tradisionele norme en praktyke wat tot die verdrukking van vroue lei, in hierdie literêre werke aan die bod kom. Die redes waarom vroue mishandel word en waarom hulle met 'n vernederende verhouding genoeë neem word in hierdie artikel verken. Ten slotte word gekyk na die moontlikhede waarvoor vroue beskik om hulleself te bevry en aan mishandeling te

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ontkom. Die gekose tekste word met marginalisering as vertrekpunt bestudeer. Uit 'n studie van die gekose tekste blyk dat vroue verskeie vorme van mishandeling verduur. Die redes waarom hulle in mensonterende verhoudings aanbly is onder meer die beskerming wat die patriargale waardestelsel bied, die vrees vir sosiale verwerping, hulle finansiële afhanklikheid, en hulle liefde vir hulle kinders. Uit die ondersoek blyk dat vroue deur opleiding en entrepreneursvaardighede bemagtig moet word sodat hulle selfvoorsienend kan wees en 'n mensonterende verhouding kan beëindig. In die artikel word voorgestel dat die manier waarop mans en vroue gesosialiseer word, verander en dat gendergelykheid en -sensitiwiteit aangemoedig word. Die slotsom waartoe gekom word, is dat vroue weens patriargale waardes en praktyke mensonterende verhoudings verduur wat vroue as gemarginaliseerdes beskou.

Introduction

Literature generally depicts various ways in which traditional assumptions pertaining to the roles of women in societies can serve to oppress women limiting their options in life. The forms of abuse that women experience are significantly generated and sustained by oppressive aspects of traditional norms and practices. In support of this view, O'Connell (1994: 11) observes that, "Family is a dominant ideology, through which a particular set of household and gender relationships are universalised and naturalised ... and through which unequal power relations are observed and legitimised."

The family structure is deeply embedded and is full of countless stories of personal tragedies of women who are marginalised in the societies in which they live. Women's disadvantaged position arises from patriarchal rule systems that place women at the lower level of societal importance, creates misery, suffering and hardships in some women's lives forcing them to accept an oppressive system. The suppression of women starts in their own homes and is a result of a family and social mechanism that has evolved over many years. The social structure, in African societies, has been shaped according to the male philosophy, thus, separating the values of men and women in society. For O'Connell (1994), the relationship between men and women in African societies is based on the authority of men versus the subordination of women. This relationship is based on the power of masculinity and the weakness of femininity as assumed by society, leading to abuse of one (women) by the other (men).

The abuse of women is not only an African challenge but a universal one as it is also very common phenomena in Asia, Europe and the Americas. Tina Turner, an American international artist for example, revealed that she suffered abuse which resulted in a broken jaw from her husband Ike Turner. In Tina Turner's 1986 autobiography, shocking details of the abuse she endured for many years in her relationship with Ike Turner are revealed. In 1993, a movie was staged called *What's Love Got to Do with it*. In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Tina revealed that she only started gaining self-confidence after leaving Ike, a feeling she had never experienced while married to him. After she left Ike Turner, Tina became an international rock

and soul legend. Tina is one woman who has shown the world that staying in an abusive relationship is not worth it.

While the above is a typical illustration of the various forms of abuse women suffer in non-African settings, this study aims at analysing selected literary works from Zimbabwe to unpack the reasons why women who suffer abuse fail to fight and free themselves from such dehumanising scenarios. It further interrogates any possibilities available in helping these women to free themselves from abuse.

Background to the Study

This article was inspired by the observations the researchers made after studying African literary texts such as *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas (2001), *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba (1981) and *Second Class Citizen* by Buchi Emecheta (1974). In these three texts, women are portrayed as persons who can tolerate abusive relationships. Consequently, although most of the women in these texts suffered various forms of physical and emotional abuse from their husbands, they continued to live with them.

Although the above texts are by writers outside Zimbabwe, the texts portray what some women experience in everyday life yet they continue to live in abusive marriages. These texts inspired the researchers to interrogate at least three Zimbabwean literary texts to explore if they also portray women who stay in abusive relationships and search for reasons why they stay amidst such abuse.

According to Chirawu-Mugomba (2017), in the context of Zimbabwe, the Domestic Violence Act of 2016 seeks to foster a sense of gender tolerance and root out gender abuse and violence. From the analysis of women who are abused in Zimbabwean communities, most women are not willing to report the abuses they experience for fear of being blamed. There is, therefore, need for women to be empowered so that they report abuse and get assistance without any fear of consequences. Women need to be enlightened of their rights in marriages and the way forward when they experience abuse from their husbands. The Domestic Violence Act is meant for everyone's protection against all forms of abuse regardless of one's sex.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify and explain the reasons why women stay in abusive relationships; and;

2. Explore possible empowerment strategies that women could adopt to free themselves from abusive relationships.

The Methodology

This article adopted a qualitative methodology based on desktop research and the study of literary texts from Zimbabwe. The researchers read and analysed selected texts to ascertain if traditional norms and practices that oppress women are evident in the works. The analysis of the chosen texts was conducted from the perspective of marginality so as to understand the abusive situations that women experience in their various relationships with men and why they choose to stay in these relationships as portrayed in the selected Zimbabwean prose and drama.

While theoretical debates concerning the nature of marginalisation and its place in theorising social change, along with practical aspects of marginalisation experienced by specific groups are widespread in parts of Europe, Australia, the Americas and Asia, similar debates are still low-key in African contexts particularly in Zimbabwe. According to Mowat (2015), the theory of marginalisation examines how marginalisation is experienced, with a specific focus upon certain members of society, and uses the concept of resilience as a lens through which marginalisation can be understood.

Central in the theory of marginalisation is how relegation to a secondary position is experienced by an individual e.g. a woman in an abusive relationship and how the individual is construed by others (e.g. the husband and members of a patriarchal society at large for instance) as belonging to a marginalised population. For Mowat (2015), marginalisation is a global problem that impacts negatively upon societies across the world. Because Zimbabwean society is no exception to marginalisation, the researchers explore how women in relationships with men in the chosen literary texts are portrayed, that is, if they suffer any forms of abuse and hence marginalisation and how the nature of their marginalisation could be explained.

Significance of the Study

The article is critical as it explores gender related issues which may lead to new insights for literary scholars and which, in turn, may enrich literary study. Furthermore, this study probes a whole social order and its values are justified because it seeks to bring to light society's understanding of the oppression of women which has a negative impact on them being marginalised beings. The study is, therefore, important as it may lead to a critical self-appraisal by each member of a society on how members of society can unite towards the creation of a gender tolerant society as this creates national unity and development.

This study may also act as a tool for enlightening women in general and abused women in particular, to seek ways of disentangling themselves from abusive relationships and to be independent and self-sufficient. This is possible because literature helps to bring insights from prose and drama to educate both men and women on how they can relate to each other in peaceful, loving ways; to respect and appreciate each other despite differences in sex and gender roles.

Abuse of Women as Depicted in the Selected Zimbabwe Literature

The inequality between men and women in society has given rise to the marginalisation of one (women) by the other (men), leading to various forms of injustices being perpetrated on women. Some of the injustices women are subjected to could be attributed to the superiority that is bestowed on one gender at the expense of the other. The subjugation of women is all encompassing, taking away women's rights, voice, relevance and existence in society. Women are generally expected to exist for the approval of men, taking away their identity as a people. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2007) marginalisation is, "Relegating to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group." The abuse of women in the selected texts was analysed from the perspective of marginalisation. This is because women are viewed as irrelevant, insignificant and trivial. As a result of this characterisation, women often become prey to men's violence and abuse in a bid to maintain their control and superiority over women.

As mentioned before, the chapter analysed three texts namely *The Uncertainty of Hope*, *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*. These texts were analysed for recurring themes related to various forms of abuse and marginalisation of women as explained below.

Women as Victims of Physical Abuse

In Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Onai suffers physical abuse under her husband Gari who batters her at any given opportunity. One morning he returns home from his girlfriend's house and is told that their most valuable black and white television set had been stolen. Gari accuses his wife, Onai, of giving the television to her boyfriends which is an unfounded lie. In patriarchal society, the man is viewed as the protector of the family and the inability to protect his own family is the reason Gari feels useless, such that he takes out his embarrassment on Onai. Instead of showing empathy to his family which he left vulnerable to burglars, Gari starts to shout at the wife accusing her of

having boyfriends. Sadly, Gari beats up Onai ferociously for the stolen television.

This physical abuse, from the perspective of marginalisation, is a result of social inequality in the “form of a hierarchy where one is at the top most level and the other at the lowest subordinate level”. Because she is at the lowest rank, she has no right to openly glare at Gari when his precious television has just been stolen. The hierarchical structure of marginalisation is also deeply steeped in the patriarchal values of society where women are not expected to challenge their male counterparts. Prior to her being beaten, Onai had spoken with carelessness, “I said we have been burgled baba VaRuva. They took your precious TV. Get that into your thick head” (Tagwira 2006: 8). How does one so insignificant call one so superior a thick head? Garikai does not place any importance on his wife because she is insignificant to him.

However, Onai does not leave Gari but stays on because without him she would be regarded by society as less of a person and worth as a woman. From a conversation between John and Katy’s, we learn that this was not the first time Onai is beaten by Gari. We learn from the text that after the burglary Onai fails to sleep and starts to reflect on her marriage to Gari. In her stream of consciousness, Onai admits that, “Gari was not an easy man to live with. Over the years she had worn herself out just trying to conceal proof of his violence. As a model of perseverance, nobody could have done better than she had” (Tagwira 2006: 5). Onai cannot leave her abusive relationship because she admits that, “There was nothing else she thought she could do. She was, after all, only a woman. How could she fight against fate?” (Tagwira 2006: 5).

The above is a clear indication of the position of a woman under a patriarchal system, that she is the weaker sex (marginalised) and she cannot do anything without this man. Her daughter Ruva sees her distress but she clearly tells her that it was taboo discussing her father with her. This shows that Onai is suffering because she is deeply rooted in tradition. In her stream of consciousness we learn that she had talked to Katy before about her plight. Katy said to her,

Onai, I just cannot understand why you don’t want to leave Gari. Do you want us to take you out of this house in a coffin? ...Why are you holding on?

(Tagwira 2007: 6)

Onai’s answer to her friend Katy clearly states her reasons for her stay in her abusive marriage to Gari. Her first reason is, “For my children, of course. Please let me be, Katy. Gari will change. He’s going through a difficult time at work” (Tagwira 2006: 6). Onai’s perceptions are supported by Buel (1999) who argues that most women stay on in abusive relationships because they believe that the abuser will change for the better and is only going through a phase. Buel (1999) argues that women stay in abusive relationships because they want to keep the family together.

Onai fails to accept that Gari's abusive behaviour is criminal and needs to change but rather finds excuses for his actions. By so doing, Onai is trying to cover up for Gari who has always been beating her for years, even before the rumours that Cola Drinks Company, where he works, was going to close down. Katy, her friend, tries to persuade her to leave if she wanted to do good for her children but Onai turns a deaf ear to Katy.

In that stream of consciousness, Onai remembers her mother Ma Musara's marriage to her father, and that it was very troublesome and her mother stayed in that abusive relationship for the sake of her children. Onai remembers that her mother,

... had stayed for the sake of her children and marriage was not something that one could just walk away from. Once you get in, you stay Always remember that a woman cannot raise a good family without a man by her side.
(Tagwira 2006: 7)

Ma Musara's words to her daughter, Onai, clearly suggest that no matter how much a woman is battered in a marriage she should persevere for the sake of the children. Tradition has taught her that a woman cannot raise children on her own; she needs a man by her side. From this assertion we learn that girl children are socialised into believing that they cannot do anything without men. As a powerless and insignificant group in society, the belief is that a woman can only gain meaning and importance if she is attached to a man. Patriarchy further perpetuates the marginalisation of women by socialising girls into believing that their ultimate achievement is getting married.

Even at the hospital, Onai lies that the deep cut above her eye was caused because she bumped into the door as she was fumbling in the dark since there was no electricity because of load-shedding. The doctor tries to convince her to report this abuse to the police but Onai covers up for Gari by not telling the doctor the truth about her abuse.

The fear of rejection by a society that has set expectations for women is the motivating factor behind Onai's refusal to leave her abusive husband Gari. Such an attitude affects most victims of abuse who view single-parenthood in a negative light because they are part of a society that describe a woman in terms of her relationship to a man. Onai's utterances clearly show that no matter how one tries talking to a woman, who has been psychologically wired into believing that her existence is tied to a man, about leaving her abusive marriage, she will not leave because of tradition that a woman is regarded as worth because of the existence of a man. Onai will not sacrifice her marital position for ridicule because of abuse. In Onai's eyes, single-motherhood is a worse option than living with abuse. She compares traditional African women to western women who divorce their husbands and are considered worthless people for exercising their rights. She even despised education and skills in women as worthless in comparison to marriage and for this, Onai vows not to be the first to divorce her husband.

The position of women as a marginalised group, and whose position is at the periphery of the social ladder, has created avenues for all forms of abuse, especially physical abuse, and is not only reflected in intimate partner relations. Fathers also disregard their daughters' views because they are mere women. This is dramatised in the ever conflicting relationship between Nyasha and Babamukuru (her father) in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. Babamukuru is portrayed as a traditional man who believes that women are meant to be subservient and ought to respect their male counterparts. He does not believe that women should talk back to their male counterparts. Such a mentality is enshrined in the theory of marginalisation whose tenets include the negation of women and their voices. In a quarrel concerning Nyasha's dress and coming late from a school dance; Babamukuru turns into a raging lion when he believes that his position, not as father of the house, but as a man has been challenged by Nyasha who is not only a child but merely a daughter. He is so angry at such an open challenge that he declares that he would kill Nyasha then kill himself.

Because Babamukuru Views Nyasha's challenge as a threat not only to his maleness but also to his superior position over women, "he punches his daughter's head and banging it against the floor, screaming or trying to scream but only squeaking, because his throat had seized up with fury ..." (Dangarembga's, *NC*: 117). The abuse of women can, therefore, be perceived, from the theoretical framework of gendered political discourse, as a "patriarchal weapon of control wielded by men to maintain their dominant position within the broader gender hierarchy. Patriarchy dictates that men should dominate and control women, and [physical abuse] in the individual level expression of this broader social structural expectation" (Bartholomew & Allison 2006: 102). Babamukuru's anger is because of the challenge to his maleness. Nyasha, however, does not take this abuse sitting down. She fights back and the only thing holding her back from leaving the house is that she has nowhere else to go and is biologically tied to her father. After this fight, the relationship between Nyasha and her father is tense although none of them attempt to approach the other. Fighting back can be seen as one way in which women can protect themselves from abuse by men.

Tambudzayi's comments after the incident spell out the reasons for the abuse of women and subtly point out to the reasons why women stay in these abusive relationships. She points out that,

The victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them

(Dangarembga, *NC*: 118)

The relegation of femaleness to an inferior state shows how the marginalisation of women paves way for their abuse by men. The same belief that women are an inferior group and only gain significance from their association

to men is articulated in *She No Longer Weeps*. Martha's mother corroborates Tambudzayi's thought when she gives her daughter advice after she has run away from Freddy. Mother points out that,

That is part of a woman's job, you know, protecting her man. You have to make sure he never loses control of himself. You have to accept, my daughter, that by their nature they cannot take responsibility for themselves

(Dangarembga SNLW: 28)

In patriarchal society, men are allowed all their wishes and shenanigans and a woman is meant to wait hand and foot until the man is tired of playing. Men are portrayed as "cripples" who need assistance, they can get away with anything, especially abuse since they are said to be by nature unable to control their impulses. The women stay in these abusive relationships because they are afraid of society judging them as failures so they bear the burden in silence and with bravery.

In the same vein, the marginalisation of women by society has paved way for other women to also instigate the abuse of fellow women because they have been brainwashed into believing their unworthiness as compared to men. In *She No Longer Weeps*, Chipso, in reference to Martha, tells Freddy "She is not worth it. You've said it yourself many times" (Dangarembga SNLW: 26). This statement causes Freddy to physically assault Martha, his macho way of confirming the worthlessness of women. We are told in a stage direction that, "Freddy throws Martha on to the sofa. She misses and falls on to the floor. Freddy begins to kick her, unable to resist her helplessness as she lies there" (Dangarembga SNLW: 26). The fact that Martha is lying there helpless raises the macho man inside Freddy and he has to prove his physical strength by attacking a helpless and pregnant woman, who has just been confirmed worthless by another woman. It is this concept that women are insignificant that make them targets and victims of abuse. For their own protection from further abuse, women end up staying in abusive relationships, fearing men and avowing that men are superior.

Women as Victims of Emotional Abuse

In Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, the second form of abuse Onai experiences in her marriage to Gari is emotional abuse because of Gari's infidelity. On the night of the burglary he enters the house showing smudges of lipstick on his shirt and with the zip of his trousers undone. The knowledge of his promiscuity is affecting her and she is always having a migraine headache. Maya rubs salt into the wound by informing her that her husband was having an affair with Gloria who is suspected to be HIV positive. She tells her that the two of them were seen by Mazai leaving the beerhall for Gloria's home, arm in arm. That night Gari did not return home and Onai learns from

Maya that he was at Gloria's place. She goes on to confide in Katy about Gari's relationship with Gloria. Katy asks her if it is not a good reason to leave Gari but once again, she insisted that she is doing it for her children. She also says she cannot leave Gari because she has nowhere to go. She says, "It's not as simple as that, Katy. How can I leave in the midst of all this? Where would I go with the children?" (Tagwira 2006: 14).

Another sign of emotional abuse is also evident when Gari threatens to destroy or destroys personal property belonging to Onai. This trait is dramatised when Gari destroys Onai's sewing machine because he does not want her to make money out of it and he wants her to suffer looking after the family from vending. She thinks of it when she is mending her son's torn pair of trousers. The inability of women to stand up against their male counterpart is one of the causes for the emotional trauma that women suffer at the hands of men. A woman who does not question her husband's actions is the epitome of womanhood (Pele, 2017). It is for this reason that Onai builds up her anger and only vents it out on a shack during Operation *Murambatsvina*. She attacks the shack like a woman possessed but that is only as far as her anger goes. She cannot attack her husband because she is merely a woman whose thoughts and feelings do not matter. She is societally marginalised on the basis of her gender, hence, cannot do anything but attack the shack as an anger outlet. People watch her as she strikes the shack down in anger. The most surprising thing is that she does not blame her husband but instead places the blame on another woman. She feels jealous and bitter with Gloria for taking her husband. As she is socialised into taking self-punishment, she contemplates death by taking an overdose of malaria tablets. She feels like shedding tears each time she thinks of what her life had become because of Gari.

Instead of confronting Gari, Onai finds solace and is strengthened to stay in the abusive relationship by Steve Makoni's song *Handiendi*, the words sink deeply into her and she sees that she is not the only one living in an abusive marriage because Steve would not sing such a song if she was the only one. As stated by Buel (1999) most women do not leave abusive relationships in the hope that their partners will change, they explain the abusive behaviour of their partner as being caused by external forces. Onai believes that the abuse will end when Gari's work situation improves. In Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps*, Martha is certain that as her pregnancy grows and Freddy is faced with the prospect of a child, he will also change. Similarly in *Nervous Conditions*, Maiguru assumes that after the many encounters with other cultures, her husband will begin to respect her, but this was never the case.

Women as Victims of Economic Abuse

In Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Onai, as a wife, is supposed to be taken care of by her husband Gari but he states that, "I provide accommodation and

you the rest” (Tagwira 2006: 176). This means food and clothing rested on Onai’s shoulders while Gari spends his money on drinking beer and on his girlfriend Gloria. After the destruction of their shack, it is very difficult for Onai to buy food for the family. Although Gari does not stop Onai from earning her own money, he also transfers the responsibility of caring for the family to Onai. Feminists believe that men feel challenged when a woman is able to earn her own income hence they withdraw their own resources from the family to “fix the woman” (Loring 1994). A woman’s ability to earn money is seen as emasculation of the man. To reinstate their position in the home, men will abuse women as a show of power and authority. Gari does this by bringing home his own biltong which he eats in the presence of his wife without sharing. He also excludes her from knowing about his retrenchment package. Gari’s behaviour is steeped in the belief that women are useless hence should be relegated to a position of inferiority thus incapacitating them as decision makers and equal partners to men. Despite all this, Onai continues to stay because Gari holds the trump card, accommodation. She has to endure the pain and suffering lest she is thrown out.

According To Hayes and Jeffries (2013), women abuse cuts across the spectrum of society. It affects the employed in as much as it affects the unemployed, the educated and uneducated, it is a phenomenon that affects any woman despite their social, economic or educational status. Women continue to be marginalised across cultural, social, economic and political circles because society does not place any value on the worth of women.

Women’s marginalisation is also accurately portrayed in *Nervous Conditions*, where Maiguru is not acknowledged as playing a part in the development of Babamukuru’s family. Maiguru’s salary contributes to the assistance that Babamukuru gives to his family but no one thanks her, in fact she is as insignificant as all the women in the village who have nothing to contribute. Babamukuru economically abuses Maiguru in that he does not allow her to make decisions concerning her own salary.

Babamukuru regards himself as the “government” that controls all the finances. She correctly points out to Tambudzayi that “your uncle wouldn’t be able to do half the things he does if I didn’t work as well!” (Dangarembga *NC*: 103) but Tambu is aghast to hear that she never gets her salary; it is all given to Babamukuru. The system of that time is also very abusive of women in that it does not place importance on women and their right to economic freedom, a sign of the marginalisation of women by both the social and economic systems. Maiguru bears all this quietly without challenging the status quo because it is what is expected of a good woman. She loses herself in trying to please Babamukuru. Nyasha wishes her mother would walk away from it all and live her own life without suffering at the hands of her father. Maiguru’s education does not open her eyes to this abuse; she accepts it as the burden of womanhood.

Women as Victims of Verbal Abuse

The use of derogatory, defaming and insulting language against another person characterises verbal abuse (Buel 1999). Among male-female relationships, men use derogatory language to belittle women and reduce their worth with the aim of raising their own value. By verbally abusing women, men want to exert some form of control and superiority over women. Words such as bitch, prostitute and whore are synonymous with verbal abuse. As long as women do not retaliate, men feel superior, thus demeaning and marginalising women.

The story of Onai in *The Uncertainty of Hope* articulates how verbal abuse is a tool through which men continue to subjugate and control women. Onai is verbally abused by Gari who shouts at her all the time. He accuses her of bringing boyfriends to take his black and white television set. On the other hand, Onai quickly responds to his demands without arguing because she knows that he shouts and she does not want the neighbours to hear of the assaults. When Gari finds out that Onai gave food to Mawaya who is insane, he shouts at her for “wasting” his food as if he ever buys any food stuffs in the house. Onai is verbally attacked in silence. When she tries to fight back with her own words, she is walloped in silence. In all this suffering, she continues to live with the abuse. She does so to protect her children and maintain her status as a married woman. Onai’s desire is to remain a respectable woman. Onai endures the verbal attacks because she has been socialised in a patriarchal society that relegates women to insignificance. The marginalisation of women through social, economic, political and religious systems places women at the mercy of men, opening ways through which women are continually abused.

Martha also suffers verbal abuse from Freddie who constantly calls her a bitch, a whore and a prostitute. The other women who also have sexual relations with Freddie suffer the same fate. To Freddie, these women, Chipo and Gertrude, are mere sexual objects and thus do not deserve any respect from him. Martha’s reason for hanging on to Gari is that she wants to get married and please her parents, thus fulfilling her duty as a good daughter. For Gertrude and Chipo, Freddie is their source of income and they can therefore not afford to anger him lest they lose their finances. The position of women which gives rise to the abuse of women is stated by Freddy who points out that Martha challenges the status quo and is therefore less of a woman.

You are a bitch, Martha. Never forget that. No man will ever want you. You wear trousers like a man, you argue and challenge man as though you were not a woman yourself. What you don’t know is that that education of yours is good for only one thing ... it lets you earn money. That’s the only reason why men like women like you, otherwise you are useless. Women like you have no place in Zimbabwe.

(Dangarembga SNLW: 9)

A woman therefore, is expected to be submissive and accommodative to the needs of her man. If she acts otherwise, she becomes a weirdo. The abuse of women is therefore, steeped in the belief that men are superior to and more powerful than women and any woman who dares challenge that position should either be punished or rejected from society.

Women as Survivors of Abuse

As a point of departure, in Dangarembga's works, not all women who are abused continue to live as victims. Some break free of this abuse while others have fate to thank for their freedom from abuse. Such women then become survivors of abuse. Others are so traumatised that their hurt is beyond natural healing but can only be assuaged by revenge. In *Nervous Conditions* for instance, despite her good education and the fact that she is gainfully employed, Maiguru suffers in silence but with time she decides to free herself from this abuse and bondage by standing up for herself. She boldly tells her husband:

Let me tell you, Baba waChido, I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a housekeeper for them ... I am sick of it Baba waChido. Let me tell you, I have had enough!

(Dangarembga: 174)

Maiguru's brave and bold stance is what saved her from perpetual abuse by her husband and his family. Babamukuru feels challenged and dares her to leave him and go where she would be happy. She does leave and that is a wake-up call for her husband. When Babamukuru brings her back home from her brother's home, things change for the better and Maiguru's voice is heard in decisions that are made in the household. She becomes a survivor of abuse.

The title of the play *She No Longer Weeps* is symbolic of Martha's fight against physical, emotional and verbal abuse. Martha decides that she cannot take anymore of Freddy's abuse and returns home but her father orders her to go back to her husband because he had paid the bride price. Women are marginalised to the point of commodification. Gertrude and Chipo are both sexually abused by Freddy because to him they are mere sexual objects. The father does not care that she is unhappy, he cares about the bride price he got from Freddy and because she is a 'commodity which has been bought' she must return to her husband to fulfil her expected duties. The father tells her that a woman cannot do anything without a man. Martha gives her father her piece of mind. She clearly tells him that,

But the time has come for us to live differently; I don't have to be tied by those beliefs because I can support myself and I will not sacrifice myself to a man's eye just because society says I ought to. I'm as much a part of society as any

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one of you and where I see that change is needed, nothing will deter me from making that change in my own life or from working towards achieving that change

(Dangarembga SNLW: 35)

Martha breaks from the yoke of the values of traditional patriarchy and she has her right for freedom as a human being. She has her education and she can take care of herself without caring what the society will say. Martha becomes a survivor for demanding her rights. Is she a true survivor? Her relationship with Lovemore is marred by the bitterness she feels towards Freddy and her daughter is overprotected. In the end she brutally attacks Freddy with a knife. The abuse she suffered has turned her into a savage. Her means of survival though revenge cannot be applauded. She has become as brutal as her oppressor. This is a sign that abuse can have negative consequences on the victim.

Although being in an abusive relationship, Onai fights tooth and nail to look after her children. Gari's death is nature's way of emancipating her from so much suffering. After the death of her husband, she continues to sell vegetables and is later given a job by Mawaya. She gets the job because she is educated and does not need to use her body to secure employment. Society needs women like Emily, Faith and Martha who know their rights through education. Society now needs such women who take up jobs previously dominated by men, for example doctors and lawyers. When one is educated they have a different lens to view society and see where it is falling short and try to bridge the gap. We learn that Faith and Emily belong to a group which supports women's rights. In the end Onai becomes a survivor because she holds a dressmaker's certificate and is employed because of it. Education is the 'first husband'. Women need to avoid being at the mercy of men thus avoiding abuse.

Conclusion

This article analysed the abuse of women as portrayed in the selected Zimbabwean literary texts. The analysis corroborated previous findings that women suffer various forms of abuse ranging from physical, emotional, economic, verbal and sexual abuse because society continues to marginalise them in various ways. First, it was established that patriarchal norms and practices further the marginalisation of women. The position of men in relation to women makes it easier for men to abuse women because it is deemed normal by some cultures that husbands batter their wives. Women are, therefore, afraid of breaking the norms of society by leaving their marriages because they fear rejection by society. The article has also shown that, because patriarchal society sees women as insignificant beings, men find it easy to abuse women as a way of stamping their authority and superiority over women.

Apart from the above, the study has also shown that women themselves stay in abusive relationships in the hope that their partner will change or is being caused to act irrationally by external forces. This hope for behavioural change is also largely centred in the fact that women are natural romantics. Fraser (2005: 15) asserts that “social beliefs about relationships, marriage and motherhood typically associate women with acts of undying loyalty requiring them to commit to and work on maintaining their relationships even when they are abusive”. Love is the reason why they believe that the abuse will stop and they will live happily ever after.

Another critical reason for women’s endurance of abusive relationships that emerged from the analysis of the analysed texts is that of women’s dependence on men. As most women portrayed in the texts depend on men’s financial support and other vital resources such as accommodation, they find it difficult to leave abusive relationships. Women were also found to stay in abusive relationships because they want to protect their children from suffering the consequences of divorce, so they stay on. This means that women are sacrificial lambs for the protection and joy of their children. However, the critical question which remains unanswered is whether the children benefit from the prolonged stay. The children remain exposed to these various forms of abuse and one wonders what it does to them psychologically and emotionally.

However, on an interesting note, the investigation has also established that not all women end as victims of abuse. Some become survivors and change their lives through education which is a major tool of empowerment and emancipation. It has been shown that women can, nevertheless, become survivors of abuse if they emancipate themselves through education and at times by being merely bold and brave enough to declare that ‘enough is enough.’

Thus, the article has shown that women are either portrayed as victims or as survivors of abusive relationships.

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