



## Domestic Violence in the Familial Context: Feminist and Psychoanalytic Perspectives of Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara*

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### Abstract

This research examines domestic violence in the familial context with a special reference to the female gender as explored in Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara*. The study investigates variegated forms of violence related to the home such as verbal abuse, confinement, inequality, discrimination and sexism in the selected novel. The premises of this paper are that feminist concepts are relevant in discussing wholesome denigrating female experiences, and that considering the psychological implication of circumstances/behaviour, the application of Freudian psychoanalysis is essential. The study has discovered that domestic violence in the familial context breeds narcissism, a certain neurotic consequence that encourages vices which could lead to a total breakdown of self or cessation of life. The male-authored view adopts the feminist concept of negotiating spaces to accommodate oppressors—an African mentality structured under patriarchy.

### Keywords

Oedipus Figurehead, violence, sexism, superego

## Introduction

The issue of domestic violence largely needs a critical attention. This is a consequence of abnormal attitude towards another. In Steger's view, violence relating to the home or other places is "the intentional infliction of physical or psychological injury on individuals" (13). Thomas Pogge discusses it as that which dominates and "blocks the individual's exercise of legitimate rights" (67). From feminist perspective, domestic violence is a behaviour that is physically and emotionally oppressive to females at home. This has increased feminist sentiment that attacks phallocentrism. In European locations, feminist discussion and agitation have spurred all shades of feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Betty Friedan into writing for female independence. The African society was not left out of this strong wave of female quest for emotional, physical and psychological freedom from oppressive actions within and outside the home. The African feminists' quest for self and cultural liberation stems from the unique cultural orientation of the African people. The phallocratic nature of most African societies proscribes "equality of male and female in fundamental rights" (Ibezim 166) causing a feminist agitation for self-preservative consciousness that appreciates the uniqueness of every human being irrespective of biological sex" (Okereke, "Gender Literacy...", 122). In criticizing any form of violence against females, African feminist scholars in their unique African artistry and ideology have expressed consciousness that supports female struggle using different terminologies such as *African Feminism*, *Stiwanism* (Ogundipe-Leslie, 547), *Womanism*, *Snail-Sense Feminism* (Adimora-Ezeigbo), *Motherism*, *Nego-Feminism* (Obioma Nnaemeka, 378) and *Gynecologentrism* (Okereke "African Feminist Dialogics..."19). Notably, the above terminologies capture the uniqueness of African women's struggles for the opposition of oppressive cultural tendencies.

The dynamics of interaction on the subject matter of domestic violence have termed it a socio-cultural hidden problem cloned as "private matter" (Albert 67) by the assaulted. This assumed stance subtly inhibits confession of consistently applied acts of violence. The instances of this tendency can manifest in the forms of "psychological or mental violence consisting of constant verbal insults, harassment, denouncement by spouses of one another, confinement, child abuse or neglect etc." (Ibid). In the discussion of the above forms of domestic violence, Freudian psychoanalytical concepts of ego, superego, id, pleasure principles, repression and trauma are explored in the interpretation of the heroine's experiences in the face of violence. It is not unlikely that Ikechukwu Asika's novel *Tamara* was deeply inspired by the increasing cases of domestic violence in society. The universality of subjugation and inexorability of the violation of human rights of the fictional characters demonstrate an undercut with psychological consequences. This research therefore explores the novel *Tamara* to investigate the issues of domestic violence from feminist and psychoanalytic perspectives.

## Feminist and Psychoanalytic Perspectives of Domestic Violence in Asika's *Tamara*

Basically, the plot of *Tamara* is structured using an epistolary form. The epistolary technique is a literary form that adopts letters, newspapers or written diary to depict or narrate the experiences of characters in a given story. In *Tamara*, the girl

protagonist scribbles her letter under a dramatic and unlikely circumstance – on her sickbed, dying of cancer. Just like Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Asika's *Tamara* tells the story of an emotionally and physically abused teenage girl (Tamara) who tells her story through writing a letter to her father.

Asika uses fiction to elucidate the abusive treatment of the girl child and female figures in general, unfolding various oppressive conditions which stifle their existence and self-actualization in the family. Asika's female protagonist is a young girl (Tamara) who could not transcend beyond the limitation imposed on her by her abusive father. The concern on constant verbal abuse, emotional torture, and physical battery has occupied a large narrative space in discussing Tamara's father as an *Oedipus figurehead* exhibiting stringent patriarchal ideology. He is indeed "a man, a head whose role is sacred and supreme in the home" (Acholonu 38). Others, presumably females are placed under control with a critical eye. The thrust of the novel exhibits male domineering influence over the female which is "deeply institutionalized and blindly threatening" (Ibid).

In *Tamara*, family life is grossly violated in the relationships between Tamara's father and other members of the family. Tamara's world as a girl child is damnably repressive since she is constantly surrounded by protective walls in her father's compound. This repression is a defence mechanism of control and power pushed into reality by *Oedipus figurehead aura* – a patriarchal mentality with pre-literate African cultural root. Asika's portrayal of Tamara's childhood is a passionate necessity that represses certain tendencies to family pleasure which Freud termed the *pleasure principle* (Eagleton 131).

True, the narrative voice captures the identity of the protagonist's father as a patriarchal figurehead, very rich and influential. Not only has his pretentious philanthropic achievements been made visibly open, it has given rise to stereotypic criticisms of the nature of men. Specifically, his actions remain obscure in the novel as he vacillates between humanity and domestic violence. The obvious and ridiculous truisms of providing financial support and inflicting physical, emotional and psychological pain on his wife and children question the issues that spurred the commitment.

The immanent and recurrent regimented lifestyle marked by constant fear – fear of an authoritative and unaccommodating father is absurd to speak of "father" as a figurehead metaphorically perceived as *Oedipus figurehead*. Lack of socialization implicated in seclusion, forced siesta, verbal abuse, forced study sessions and rigid adherence to rules is considered as oedipal destructive power of control which is unarguably repressive.

If the *Oedipus figurehead* invariably maintains a culture of subjugation, the oppressed inevitably reacts with a special strategy for survival instinct. Central to the culture of subjugation is the cultural assumption of placing value on males which manifests in a heightened form in the novel. In essence, the ideological view of *sexism* is replete in the novel. The patriarchal notion that boys and men are inherently superior to girls and women is an ideology grasped with open arms by Tamara's father. Lack of communalism in family life and treatment perpetuates the status quo of gender discrimination. A good example hinges on the different treatment he gives to his children. Tamara confesses to the above discrimination based on sex:

We have timetables and schedules for everything we do and the training we receive. My brother was towing a different line of training and upbringing as a man and I was strictly being raised as a girl and that was why, though we stay in the same house and sleep under the same roof, our paths never crossed much like children who stay in the same house do. (Tamara 8)

The above excerpt pictures the sensitive issue of gender inequality which suppresses Tamara to the extent that “she lacks the capacity to think for herself” (Ogonnaya and Besong 451). To flout the ideals of respect, love and care not merely of one’s family but also of the society is indeed an act of abuse.

The fact that Tamara’s father does not allow his wife to visit friends or neighbours is a clear indication that the female gender is disadvantaged in his house. Kizito (his son) is given the liberty to explore life by leaving the house without his father’s permission (Tamara 33); while Tamara and her mother are confined in the house. This unequal opportunity arising from patriarchal cultural dominance of the female gender is indeed psychologically damaging. In order to assert her freedom, Tamara acquires new traits to deviate from her father’s mapped out gender role of being vulnerable to men’s sexual quest. Tamara defies her father’s expectation and assumption of girls behaving in accordance with cultural expectations – that girls must stay at home to protect them from the preying eyes of men. The above assumption contributes to sexism in society by promoting violence at home.

The psychic reconciliation of lived experiences and the natural quest for escape cum pleasure could be fraught with institutional ideology. In the novel, it is ironic that the young girl the father seems to be protecting is sexually exploited at home by the family driver (Dunga). Obviously, this treatment by Tamara’s father based on gender has psychological consequences – his wife dies of heart attack because she could not cope with her husband’s overbearing attitude towards her and their children (Tamara 28). This attitude by Tamara’s father is referred to as spousal violence in the home, because he (Tamara’s father) as the abuser has asserted greater power in his interpersonal relationship with his wife to maintain a “superior position as the head of the family” (Kashani and Allan 33).

In the novel, this spousal violence manifests in persistent verbal abuse by Tamara’s father denigrating the personality and self-worth of his wife – “woman, what’s the meaning of this? Speak now or forever speak no more” (Tamara, 25)! In a broad sense, the situation that results to verbal abuse does not require the use of hurtful words. The wife operates within the demanding immediacy as a mediator. She merely extends her motherly and wifely role as an attempt of fulfilling the filial pleasure that supports the pleasure principle. The wife is simply humiliated because she is entertaining their children with moral stories (Tamara 25). Tamara’s mother emphasizes that the reason for telling their children folktales is because they are bored and need counselling. The patriarchal kingship trait surfaces in Tamara’s father through his statement to his wife:

Counsel them, when did you become a counselor? If they had need for one, I am their father, I will willingly provide them one, not you. And you are here telling them animal stories, fairy tales, and nonsensical folktales

and songs! Look at all of you dancing like slaves released from the chains of slavery! Just take a good look at all of you! Of what relevance will folktales make in their lives? Of what relevance are animal stories, fabricated, barbaric and outdated tales to them? (*Tamara* 25)

From the above excerpt, we find the attitude that represents the Freudian “id”. The biological instinct of *thanatos* pushes or controls the aggressive destructive or violent behaviour inherent in a person. Though the heroine’s father is guilty of this destructive behaviour, his objectives define a fascination not unrelated to African cultural mentality of patriarchy. Furthermore, the destructive power of the “id” as manifested in *thanatos* creates a negative sensibility which to a large extent causes “repression” (Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* 14-15).

No doubt, Tamara is also psychologically and emotionally affected as a result of her father’s abusive words. She confesses: “that was how we disappeared with our hearts in our hand, crushed and stepped upon. That was the last time we stayed together as a family and listened to my mother’s endless stories” (*Tamara* 25). Tamara’s narcissistic behaviour has been traced to the harsh necessity that she must repress her inherent tendencies to familial pleasure and gratification.

With the possible exception of inherent traits, I consider Tamara as a girl not excluded from the emotional torture in the house. She is also a victim of verbal violence. It is not easy to find a subtle attack on parental behaviour within the home. Here in a few sentences we are let into the bastardised and hypocrisy of abuse in parenting. Tamara’s happy moment turns into emotional pain when she waits endlessly one night to impress her father with her excellent performance at school but receives a shocking reply. “What the hell are you doing at this time of the night? ...What about your report card? Speak before I skin you alive!” (*Tamara* 15).

The sharp reaction to the decadence of a bastardised form of parenting is “escape”—the grim desire for life sustaining activities. Tamara’s “ego” adopts different defence mechanisms (repression and projection) to protect herself when she could not cope with the stress of her inherent conflict. In Tamara’s situation, the vicious mental disorientation incubated at home is a chief propeller of “projection” as a defence mechanism. As a form of defence mechanism, she pushes her *ego* to resolve the internal and external conflicts by attributing her unacceptable emotions and pain to her father’s behaviour (McLeod, [www.simplypsychology.com](http://www.simplypsychology.com)).

One thing is certain – Tamara escapes from the house after the death of her mother in search of good companionship because she could not bear her father’s abusive nature. In psychoanalysis, we can say that Tamara’s quest for freedom unconsciously involves her abusive and self-destructive superego, the inward traumatic pressure of her childhood memory. Tamara is a victim of parental abusive authority. She allows her father’s attitude to deny her the most crucial part of her ‘pleasure principle’ – parental love termed emotional reality. In the novel, ‘superego fear’ replaces ‘castration fear’ which is caused by the threatening paternal attitude of Tamara’s father. Asika explores the psychological origin of assertiveness in *Tamara* through the concept of superego as an individual agency of internal conflict. In fact, the repression of *eros* (life instinct) in the novel causes the release of superego aggression that is self-abusive and destructive to the

protagonist. We become very aware of Tamara's inner thoughts through her confession in the letter, which indeed exposes her inner conflicts clearly. Throughout the novel, Tamara embarks on a quest to repress this internal conflict which harbours self-destructive instincts. It is important to note that Tamara's inner tensions and feelings of powerlessness over her oppressive condition are the major factors that forced her self-destructive superego into reality. In fact, the violent abusive behaviour of Tamara's father seems to be the major cause of Tamara's internal conflict.

In the novel, Tamara's father assumes that absolute strictness towards his family would shape them into better citizens, but, this ironically, inflicts physical and psychological pain on them. In the letter, Tamara makes a sensitive and absorbing confession: "Father....You guided us so hard until it began to pain and we all missed direction and lost tracks" (*Tamara* 11). Tamara not only struggles with a conflicting attitude of fear and hatred towards her father, but also suffers emotional instability in her quest for freedom and love. Tamara confesses: "Amdist riches and affluence, I was alone, so empty and unfulfilled. There were about many things I lacked, things miles away from what money can buy, most especially love, tender care, motivation, freedom and encouragement" (*Tamara*, 10). From the above quotation, Tamara's superego aggression is directed against her father; the effectual feeling in this unconscious aggression is externalized as rebellious hatred. On this level, *Tamara* is a novel about conflict between a father and his daughter. Asika represents this conflict as an inward feeling, reinforced by an Oedipal destructive family relationship whose psychic agility violates the protagonist's psychic wholeness.

Asika's representation of Tamara's childhood memory sustains the fact that childhood experiences contribute in shaping the mentality of a person in adulthood. Obviously, Tamara's childhood memory about her father is not a good one; her struggle to liberate herself from the emotional trauma associated with her father's attitude plunges her into grievous mistakes and deep sorrow. According to Tamara, "I hardly knew you as a child. It took me years to memorize your face and fix it properly in my memory. I still doubt that you are the same man whose smiling pictures hung everywhere around the house" (*Tamara* 11). In Tamara herself, hate and rebellion are consuming powerful passions that characterize her childhood – hatred for her father's attitude and the quest for self-assertiveness or freedom.

Asika explores her protagonist's response to abusive family relationship which is captured from the point of view of the narrator (Tamara). As soon as Tamara starts narrating her story, we are conscious of seeing her father as he is described by the narrator.

I am writing to tell you those things I had stood before you to tell you but fumbled for lack of words because the looks of a tiger on your face could not allow me speak. Father, if wishes could kill, you would have been dead by now. Many times I had locked myself in my room and wished all the bad things of life to come upon you...hoping you would someday turn to me, but you never did. Even those days you watched me sail away, you made no effort to stop me. You were too busy to take notice of the plight of your only daughter. (*Tamara* 5)

It is from the narrator's report that the reader begins to suspect that the letter is concerned with more complex conflicts that hamper the physical, emotional and psychological growth of the narrator. The beginning of the letter does not merely communicate about Tamara's father; it tells us about the narrator's willingness to narrate her painful experience and ask for forgiveness: "I am writing to purge my heart and ask you for a special favour, the last from a father to a daughter" (*Tamara* 6). Tamara's description of her father creates a general disgust which muddles the reader's sense of judgment. The readers wonder if the unpleasant values of her father are so severe to cause emotional pain, when Tamara writes:

I understood perfectly, as tender as I was that you are a very busy man, a no nonsense man, a father who can never tolerate a mother and two kids even at the sight of most minute provocation. I knew you are a very strict father, a great disciplinarian, insisting even at a gun point that things must be done your way. (*Tamara*, 8)

Admittedly, it is encouraging to find that considerations of parental behaviour weigh more than social behaviour. An implied judgment is that the family, as the basic unit of the society should create a good environment for the positive growth of a child, but the opposite seems to be the case in Tamara's family. How else can the reader describe the narrator's inability to praise her father's attitude? Tamara narrates: "I still doubt that you are the same man whose smiling pictures hung everywhere around the house. Those pictures are quite different from that of the stone-faced looking man, steaming of thunder and brimstone, that comes back most evenings when almost the whole household has fallen asleep..."(*Tamara* 11).

It is obvious that the standpoint from which Tamara judges her father is a purely moral standpoint. Tamara's father is judged solely in accordance with the way he fails to raise his children properly with love and special understanding. Tamara comments: "How I wish you realized earlier, ... that your fathership style was wrong, all wrong, father and never to be used again anywhere in this world of flesh and blood except in fiction..." (*Tamara* 11). The above quotation suggests that the protagonist's father is the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world. The reasons are not hard to find because, his words and attitude are unfit for his wife and children. He does not allow his children to make new acquaintances; they only speak to members of the family and schoolmates.

Now, it is true that the narrator's father does not make a favourable impression on the readers as a result of his mean attitude towards his family. The readers, indeed, tend to sympathize with Tamara in her harsh criticism of him. We sympathize with Tamara when her mother died and her only brother (Kizito) ran away from the house leaving her to face the wrath of an abusive father. Tamara narrates:

With my mother and brother gone, I knew I was never to become the same person I wanted to be. The house was so empty and for months, my dreams were filled with the thoughts of my mother and my only brother, and I wished the wind could bring them back to me. For years, I waited at the balcony for the gate to be flung open and usher in my mother.... (*Tamara* 32)

Asika has implied a strong critical feeling towards the personality of Tamara's father, and his values. Tension and fear are enacted within the family setting as physical and psychological violence are experienced by the characters. By implying such an attitude towards the protagonist's father, Asika has suggested that his overbearing attitude is behind his daughter's quest for moral support and companionship. This has thus pointed forward to later developments in the novel and her journey to escape. It is important to note that, psychological (emotional) violence and isolation are strongly connected to domestic violence because they reflect certain behaviours in an intimate or non-intimate relationship, which can cause physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion and psychological abuse. The consequences of these forms of violence on the female personality may include both serious and catastrophic relating to the issues of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, unintended pregnancies and other related health issues such as sexually transmitted diseases etc. The above views are explicitly depicted by Asika in his novel, *Tamara*, to expose the rhythmic violent rise and fall of the protagonist.

In *Tamara*, Asika adopts a satirical tone in documenting the experiences of a young girl (Tamara) whose childhood experiences leave nothing, but a painful memory of her father's inhuman and nonchalant attitude towards her, Kizito (her brother) and their mother. Asika focuses on satirizing the materialistic nature of parents who devote more time in pursuing material possession to the detriment of their children's psychological and emotional well-being. The plot of the novel revolves around Tamara, a lonely girl, who is always locked up with her brother, Kizito, and their helpless mother by a strict father and husband. Their lives at their lonely mansion, although very comfortable and seemingly stable, is an unhappy one with Tamara, Kizito and their mother living in constant fear of an emotionally abusive and authoritarian father and husband. Tamara laments: "we were not allowed to visit anyone and no one visited us, alone you confined us in a big house, fending for us, lavishing all sorts of wealth" (*Tamara* 21).

In the novel, Tamara's mother dies of heartbreak (depression) and her death devastates the children; Kizito runs away from home and Tamara having no confidante and friend, ends up taking decisions that distorted her chances of living a fulfilled life. The narrator, through the fictional voice of Tamara further details her experiences in a prison called home, thus:

Amdist riches and affluence, I was alone so empty and unfulfilled. There were about many things I lacked, things miles away from what money can buy most, especially love, tender care, motivation, freedom and encouragement. I lacked them all, and they made me cry. Even now, I can feel the trace of tears in my voice. It was with deep regret that I realized how wrong your style of father-ship was. Father, you were a total stranger to me, and I to you. Even till these last moments of my life, I can hardly write, two-page essay on the man. (*Tamara* 10)

Tamara, Kizito and their mother are all victims of domestic violence. However, it is important to note that "victims of domestic violence may be trapped in domestic violent situations" ("Domestic Violence" [www.independent.co.uk/news](http://www.independent.co.uk/news)) through isolation, power and control, fear or shame. Tamara and Kizito are victims of verbal and physical



abuse. Both of them experienced depression and poor ability of create healthy relationships. Tamara narrates: “My brother was towing a different line of training and upbringing as a man and I was strictly being raised as a girl, and that was why, though we stay and sleep under the roof, our paths never crossed” (*Tamara* 8). Again, the protagonist laments over the unhealthy relationship that exists between her and her brother: “How I wish I had time to know him. I never knew my brother neither did he know me. We were total strangers to each other...” (*Tamara* 30).

Analysing the character of Tamara from the psychoanalytic perspective, it could be said that Tamara has certain unconscious desire for freedom and paternal love, which does not find a practical outlet; therefore, the desire forces its way in from the unconscious, the ego blocks it off defensively, and the result is internal conflict called *neuroses*. The constant repression of which Freud named “pleasure principle” by reality principle has a certain undertone in Tamara’s case. Too much has been demanded of her as a young girl and this likely forces her to fall sick psychologically (mental stress). This form of “sickness is known as neurosis” (Eagleton, 132).

It is important to note that Tamara’s neurosis is obsessional and not hysterical, because she seeks love in Oedipal figureheads for emotional satisfaction. This emotional satisfaction according to Eagleton is “the pleasure principle” (135). This also results in Tamara having sexual desire for every man that shows kindness or love to her. Analyzing Tamara’s obsessional neurosis based on Eagleton’s view on psychoanalysis, I will suggest that her neurosis is connected to “unresolved conflicts whose roots is traced to Oedipal movement, that is, Oedipux complex which Freud calls the “nucleus of neuroses” (137).

Eagleton observes that “there is a relation between the kind of neurosis a patient displays and the point in the pre-Oedipal stage at which his or her physical development became arrested or ‘fixated’ (137). The above view captures the aim of psychoanalysis to uncover the hidden causes of the neurosis (Eagleton 138). From the foregoing, we can say that Tamara and Kizito as victims of verbal and emotional abuse have experienced serious psychological problem as children which leads to post-traumatic stress disorder. Kristen Springer et al observe that “childhood abuse is positively related to adult depression, aggression, hostility, anger, fear, anxiety disorders, and personality disorders” (864). Because Tamara and Kizito live in a home replete with domestic violence, they show psychological problems from an early age, such as depression, hatred, or aggression. According to the narrator, “Kizito never spoke a word, he hardly speaks. Except for the fact that he was my brother, I would have considered him deaf and dumb....He prefers a life of solitude as he stays in his room all day doing what God knows...” (*Tamara* 16).

Asika condemns parents’ obsession with materialism. He also condemns Tamara’s father who believes that true happiness has to do with the provision of needed material things for children without providing them with moral and emotional support. Tamara’s father rarely spends time with his family; instead of doing that, he adopts a strict form of parenting which disintegrated his family. Despite warnings and advice from his wife to spend more time with the family, he still remains adamant and comments:

How? I live in the same house with them. I provide them with all the material things they need, how close do you wish me to be? The timetable you see was prepared by experts, experts in children training. I did that because I love them and want the best for them. (*Tamara* 32)

From the above quotation, it is obvious that Tamara's father neglects his parental responsibilities and delegates his duty to the so called experts. Hence, his duty as a father is relegated to the background and timetables now become the master-guide that regulates his children's lives. The children live in complete isolation and loneliness since they are not allowed to keep friends or relate with other people. Tamara in her letter to her father depicts such senseless attitude: "On Sunday... you ordered to take us out, you did not offer, you only commanded. We never argued ... like prisoners without handcuffs, we climbed into the back of the jeep" (*Tamara* 34). As a result, Kizito and Tamara constantly seek to escape from the rigid and scheduled plans mapped out by their father. Despite Tamara's eagerness to escape from her father's oppressive home, she has learnt that the society is controlled by men who exploit and subjugate the female gender.

### **Domestic Violence as the Major Precursor of Trafficking and Sexual Abuse**

The major tensions in *Tamara* are sustained by the all-pervading themes of human trafficking and sexual violence. The United Nations (UN) defines human trafficking as "the acquisition of people by improper means such as force, fraud or deception with the aim of exploiting them" (qtd in Kaylor" 1). Tamara is trafficked to be exploited sexually. She is tricked into sex slavery by Senorita, a pimp. So far, there seems to be an established violent rhythm in Tamara's life: betrayal and sexual violence. Senorita's betrayal of Tamara's trust is heinous. Significantly, Tamara's aim of escaping her father's house is to assert her freedom and remould her personality. Unsuspectingly, Senorita betrays her trust because "traffickers frequently target the following types of people: undocumented immigrants, runaway and homeless youth, victims of trauma and abuse, Refugees" (Kaylor 1). Indeed, Tamara falls into these categories as Senorita warns: "Don't forget you are an illegal immigrant; we came through an illegal boat not the legal route" (*Tamara* 115). Tamara becomes a victim of trafficking because she is vulnerable to situations around her — away from home ( pregnant with Obed's baby) and with the painful loss of her dead mother, and runaway brother. Tamara suffers a lot of mental anguish in the novel — isolation at home and exposure to sex slavery in a foreign environment. In line with the above view, Joe Doezema observes that "feminists perceive sex trafficking or prostitution to be a violation of human rights" (61). Jennifer Lobasz also notes that human trafficking for sexual purposes is a "security threat to individuals and society" (319). Lobasz goes further to state that "feminists' most important contribution lies in the investigations of social construction of human trafficking, which highlight the destructive role that sexist and racist stereotypes play in constructing the category of trafficking victims"(319).

In the novel, sexism continues to play a major role in subjugating the female gender to inhuman treatment. Young girls are mostly victims of sex trafficking as seen in the experiences of Senorita and Tamara. This gives a notion that they are inferior to boys. Girls are mostly trafficked as a result of their biological and vulnerable nature. The chain

of trafficking is mostly carried out by young girls, men and female adults for commercial purposes. The high profit margins and low risk of arrest are motivating factors that encourage people in human trafficking. As a result, women and girl children are “forced into situations of labour and sexual exploitation” (Fitzgibbon 81). Seniorita just like Tamara is a victim of trafficking. In the novel, Seniorita confesses:

Princess brought me. For five years, I worked for her. For five years, I prostituted on the streets of Italy until I was wise enough to demand my freedom. She did not really agree to free me, she employed me and it is now my duty to recruit young girls from Nigeria for her. My colleagues cover other parts of Africa. (*Tamara* 114)

The above instances of betrayal as a result of human trafficking are evident to an average reader. Princess betrays Seniorita for self-enrichment; Seniorita on her part betrays Tamara for the same reason at her expense. By this act, Seniorita joins the crowd of pimps who lack the moral conscience to respect basic human rights. It could equally be said that, it is Seniorita who first feels betrayed by Princess after she has elicited her promise to find a good job abroad. Tamara also feels betrayed by Seniorita, so she meekly and fearfully succumbs to prostitution after several threats to her life. In addition to the sexual abuse Tamara suffers at the hands of Dunga and Obed she is deceived, trafficked and lured into prostitution by Seniorita. It is important to note that Tamara accepts Seniorita’s offer of travelling in search of greener pastures without proper investigation. Seniorita betrays Tamara, who discovers that she has been trafficked after reaching her destination. Tamara’s frustration over this betrayal is evident in the quotation below:

Why did you lie to me? You told me I was coming to Italy to work, to go to school, to become myself and find love in the end... your job is to find young girls whom you lie to be your cousins and bring them here for...for...to sleep with white men....( *Tamara* 113)

Asika’s vision of girls as betrayers of others is exacerbated by glimpses of infidelity in friendship in *Tamara*. So we have the glimpses of infidelity as a counterweight to the all-pervading violent experiences of the protagonist. Tamara flees from emotional violence at home and takes an uncertain journey with Seniorita to a new country in the hope of finding job and safety. Tamara’s reaction is indeed typical for children who live in homes characterized by abuse; in their attempts to avoid further abuse they conceptualize utopian dreams that they cannot contain. The familial reality is that Tamara’s father verbally abused her as a relevant African style of training to instil a high level of moral performance on her as a girl, but his style turns out to be a severe emotional threat. In the dimension of conceptual enquiry, Tamara’s escape from home signals parental betrayal, while her situation as a trafficked girl signals friendship betrayal.

The theme of sexual violence is evident in *Tamara*. Repressive measures and brutality take up a large part of the novel. Tamara’s story is not just a mere letter of forgiveness or negotiation; it is brought about through violent sexual experiences fuelled by human trafficking and prostitution. One thing is very clear in Asika’s novel – violence (sexual and domestic) is perpetrated by men against girls. This is indeed termed ‘gender-based abuse’. As a young girl of sixteen, Tamara is sexually molested by Dunga, their family driver (*Tamara* 77). At the same age, she is sexually abused and impregnated by

Obed (*Tamara* 83). Again, at the same age, she is trafficked to Italy as a prostitute. In Italy, the reality of her situation surfaces when a white man (Bruce) confronts her, "... I am here to fuck you....You of course, you are Tamara, the youngest of the girls from Nigeria. It is you I want. You must know I paid heavily for you, so you must give me a good treat, a worth for my money. I am going to fuck you real hard" (*Tamara* 110). Bruce in his sexual escapades is cruel as a result of his strong violent attitude and language against Tamara. Tamara narrates Bruce's violent behaviour towards her: "...he charged at me. I was trying to fathom what to do when he descended on my breasts and pushed me violently and he fell on the bed..." (*Tamara* 109). The distinction is made between choice and want. Tamara is forcibly subjected to have sexual relationship with her customers after severe beatings and threat. Princess, the pimp, acts as the chief centripetal force, pushing Tamara to sexual slavery. She cautions Tamara:

You think this hostel is a place from where you attend classes? You think these walls were built for charity or a kind of refugee camp, better still, a non-governmental building for abandoned desperate girls like you? ...Listen, as long as you live here, you work for me. These walls were not built for jamboree, it is for business. It is not for babies like you. You better grow up or consider being bundled back to only God knows where.... (*Tamara* 110-111)

From the foregoing, it is clear that Tamara has become a slave girl, enslaved by oppressive and antiquated patriarchal figures that clearly fit into Freud's concept of Oedipus, those wielding territorial and sexual powers. Tamara's father wields territorial power, while Obed, Dunga, Bruce and Carlos wield sexual power.

Tamara is the character from which radiates much of the interpersonal relationships in Asika's novel, while Senorita acts as one of the centripetal forces drawing Tamara to prostitution. While Senorita gives her humanity to Tamara, the forces of prostitution which hinge on sexual violence take it away. For Asika and the readers, Senorita is a trafficking agent under a pimp called Princess. Senorita is a prostitute. Senorita is a betrayer. The quotation below gives a clear view of Senorita's role as an agent – "I love you that was why I couldn't tell you. Other girls were aware of what they were coming to do except you. You were far too young to understand and I pitied you. I do love you and care a lot about you" (*Tamara* 113). Senorita's betrayal is evident when Tamara reveals her decision to escape from Princess and report her to the police. Senorita threatens Tamara:

Princess will never consent to that. She knows the entire tricks and anything you can ever do. It's a syndicate business, a kind of networking, heavily sponsored too. She has been into this business for years. If you ever leave the walls of this compound, you will never escape alive and no police will believe you're innocent. It is better you don't even try.... You see, she has everything about you ....The security here is high; the business is well sponsored and organized. You see, your only choice is to accept my promise and work for your freedom. (*Tamara* 115)

Tamara indeed forms the significant structural centre in the novel. In the creation of the character of Tamara, Asika shows himself as an expert in irony. There is indeed a contradiction between circumstances and expectations; that is, the condition contrary to what Tamara expects in her quest or journey for liberation as well as the reader's expectations about her. Asika uses an ironic mode to capture the derogatory phases of Tamara's experiences – as a girl whose father is wealthy and influential (no ideal family, no normal childhood), and as a character who has violent relationships with men in her quest for emotional or psychological liberation. It is obvious that Tamara abhors prostitution; this is seen in her statement to Senorita: 'if you love me I want you to take me right out of this house to a plane for Nigeria....if you don't, I will run straight to any police station and report all of you'(Tamara 115). But as the story reaches the climax, we see Tamara embracing prostitution as a pattern of living. She confesses:

Father, I know that you will read all these parts with shame but your daughter later became a full time prostitute and was reputed for it. Father, I made money, I really made money quite enough to buy a house here and train quite a number of people. The last time Senorita came to see me, she could hardly recognize me. My profile surprised her. She advised me to be cautious but the advice was useless. I was already there at the centre of it all. There could hardly be a day I did not carry up to eight men. My worst day was the day I had only two and I could not sleep. Father, if you would wish to find me, ask about Tamara, the only Nigerian girl, that's my honour, my title, my regalia, my armour! (Tamara 118)

From the foregoing discussion on trafficking and sexual abuse, it is clear that domestic violence, intra-gender deceit, trafficking, self-assertion, individualism and quest for materialism are the major forces that push girls into prostitution. It is also clear that unprivileged girls like Tamara need to be protected, loved and educated on the consequences of escaping from home and human trafficking. But instead of helping stranded and emotionally depressed girls like Tamara, other females like Senorita and Princess exploit their condition by trafficking them for their own economic benefits. Through this, intra-gender trafficking becomes unending and cyclic. This becomes a norm as "women make life hard for fellow women" (Arndt, *The Dynamics...* 119). Thus, this chain of oppression that is hinged on deceit continues and the number of trafficked girls keeps increasing. The underlying consequence is that "girls in their prime are encouraged by women who should be loving mothers (whether biological or otherwise) to sell their bodies, to hawk their vaginas in Europe for the pleasure, exploitation and satisfaction of patriarchal powers" (Owan 270).

The above view is very disturbing because morality is denigrated and the future of girls is jeopardized and crumpled thus exposing them to inhuman treatment, psychological trauma, diseases, other health issues or death. In the novel, Tamara becomes critically ill as a result of "badly damaged kidney" (Tamara 129). She also suffers from cancer of the liver as a result of substance abuse without fulfilling her dreams. It is therefore clear that the physical and psychological consequences of girl child trafficking is enormous and cannot be overlooked.

### Female Assertiveness as a Strategy for Emancipation in *Tamara*

The quest for the female gender to be liberated physically, mentally and emotionally in a male-dominated society has always been a topic of discussion in the literary world. The strategy for achieving this emancipation is through feminist consciousness such as self-assertion and female bonding. Feminist consciousness arouses self-discovery or self-consciousness and a rejection of male chauvinism which subjugates and oppresses the female gender. Asika creates a rebellious girl character whom she uses to expose the issue of domestic violence in the family which limits the female gender. In fact, her rebellion exhibits a high level of independence that leads her through liberation and finally to destruction. In essence, her escape from her father's house is a challenge to patriarchal attitude and institution which threaten her human rights.

Tamara's assertiveness is spurred by her father's tyrannical style of parenting which pushes her to escape from their mansion in search of true love and emotional succour. Tamara wishes to "escape that lonely house, mix with real people, pick up a new identity, start a new life, be herself, make her own decisions, and her own money, work and carter for herself and find a man who will love her" (*Tamara* 102). In fact her journey for emancipation puts her into deep problems. In a bid to escape her father's tyrannical style of parenting, Tamara takes decisions that changed her life forever. In search of love, she befriends Dunga, her father's driver at the age of sixteen and loses her virginity to him. When her father sends Dunga away as a result of his relationship with Tamara, she quickly entangles herself in a new relationship with Obed, who abuses her sexually and leaves her pregnant. Frustrated, desperate and lonely again, she meets a young lady, Seniorita, at a restaurant who helps her to abort the unwanted pregnancy. They become close friends and confidantes. In fact, after hearing Tamara's pathetic story, Seniorita offers to take her to Italy where she can further her education and make a living. The rest of the story details the agony of an emotionally abused girl who searches for good companionship and happiness but ends up being trafficked and sexually abused. It is important to note that Tamara adopts prostitution as a strategy for achieving equal rights with men, emotional succour, love and self-fulfilment. She becomes proud and confesses that "there could hardly be a day she did not carry up to eight men...her profile surprised her. She was at the centre of it all..." (*Tamara* 118). At the end of the story, she finds true love in her relationship with Carlos; gives birth to a baby girl but pays dearly for the harm done to her body during her years of prostituting in the streets of Europe. She becomes terribly ill with cancer of the liver and feels very miserable as she awaits death to end her life.

Asika also adopts female bonding as a strategy for female liberation. For Tamara and her mother, female bonding is indispensable because they are physically and emotionally oppressed. This bonding between a daughter and her mother is necessary because it aids them to lean on one another in their difficult moments. We see female bonding in the attempts Tamara's mother makes to help her daughter cope with the overbearing attitude of an authoritative father – "don't mind your father, my daughter, when you grow up you will understand. Inside him, he is full of love, but outside he battles with an unknown force that makes him deny us love" (*Tamara* 17). It is therefore saddening that this bonding is cut short by the death of Tamara's mother. This leaves her

empty and shattered. As a result, the agony of her mother's death and the sudden disappearance of her brother become a catalyst that fuel her consciousness—the conscious to liberate herself through escape.

At best, the psychological conditions of the girl protagonist in *Tamara* do not show extreme depression. In essence, as a trauma survivor, Tamara is not detached from reality; she has consciously repressed certain memories after her original experiences to anchor on mutual agreement, collaboration and complementarity in her relationship with her father. This is called “Active repression” (Schmid, 2). The above views have significance, because Tamara is given the chance to reconcile with her father and negotiate for forgiveness through her letter.

Asika adopts radical feminism and womanist ideology to resolve Tamara's conflict. The radical feminist stance is seen in Tamara's escape in search of self-fulfilment and development. The womanist stance is seen in Tamara's act of negotiation for peace between herself and her father. It is necessary to note that Asika's Tamara writes a letter to her father asking for forgiveness while negotiating for reconciliation. Therefore, from the foregoing, it is clear that Asika's womanist stance is not forced. It is spurred by the protagonist's willingness to make peace.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the heroine in the selected novel *Tamara* has experienced violence in different forms. She has struggled with patriarchal forces to actualize her dream of freedom in the domestic and cultural contexts through rebellion on her journey to self-actualization in the society; unfortunately, she is unsuccessful in her quest for pleasurable emancipation. One thing is clear – the heroine's violent experiences have succeeded in pushing her into the battle of self-actualization; a personal dream to recover her self-worth and freedom from patriarchal oppression.

Notably, the violation of the rights of individuals in the family is a serious problem which has been subjected to international and literary discourse. Asika in his intellectual approach has captured different violent experiences by exploring feminism from the perspectives of girls in the home. He has also succeeded in exposing and challenging traditional cultures or patriarchal structures that marginalize, stereotype, discriminate and debase the female gender. Through his girl character, he has advocated for a revolutionary reordering of the family that would allow girls to actualize their dreams and develop physically, emotionally and psychologically.

Significantly, in the resolution of conflict, Asika's novel reveals feminist ideology which remarkably adopts complementarity and negotiation as a way of achieving peace between the male and female genders; daughter and father. Her protagonist is compelled by African tradition or cultural mentality to negotiate spaces with her oppressor (father).

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