Reading Spousal Abuses in Neshani Andreas’ *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*

Yawavi Edem AKPEMADO
Université de Lomé, Togo
edem.brigitte.akpemado@gmail.com

&

Paméssou WALLA
Université de Lomé, Togo
wallapamessou@yahoo.fr

Abstract: This article peruses spousal abuse as shown in Neshani Andreas’ novel *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. The spousal abuse is demonstrated in this novel through male physical aggressivity exercised on women in many ways. Thus, this article is mainly focused on the marital life experience of Tate Shange and Meme Kauna. Shange the husband, is known to be a violent man who beats his wife Kauna on a regular basis. This article also tends to show how women respond to this male abuse through the quest of divorce that questions the traditional system that seeks to silence women and shut down any pattern of female empowerment. Thus, a great emphasis is laid on the plight of women in African traditional setting together with their ill-treatment by their husbands’ relatives at the death of the latter. Psychoanalytical theory is used to interpret the psychological conditioning of characters’ mind that affects negatively their actions and speeches. This literary approach is used to interpret the psychological conditioning of men yielding to the maltreatment of their female partners with the purpose of preserving the patriarchal system of male power and domination. Thus, the psychoanalytical theory has been used as a critical tool to decode the traumatic and emotional wrecks that women and their children undergo through the brutality of men.

Keywords: spouses, abuses, physical, psychology, separation.

La lecture des violences conjugales dans *The Purple Violet* de Neshani Andreas

Résumé : Cet article examine la violence conjugale comme le montre le roman de Neshani Andreas, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. Dans cette œuvre, la violence conjugale se manifeste par l’agressivité physique masculine exercée sur les femmes de diverses manières. Ainsi, cet article se concentre principalement sur l'expérience de la vie conjugale de Tate Shange et Meme Kauna. Shange le mari, est connu pour être un homme violent qui bat régulièrement sa femme Kauna. Cet article cherche également à montrer comment les femmes réagissent à ces abus masculins à travers la quête du divorce qui remet en question le système traditionnel qui cherche à faire taire les femmes et à fermer tout schéma d’autonomisation des femmes. Ainsi, un grand accent est mis sur le sort des femmes dans le cadre traditionnel africain, ainsi que leurs mauvais traitements par les proches de leurs maris à la mort de ceux-ci. La théorie psychanalytique est utilisée pour interpréter le conditionnement psychologique de l'esprit des personnages qui affecte négativement leurs actions et leurs discours. Cette approche littéraire est aussi utilisée pour interpréter le conditionnement psychologique des hommes qui cèdent à la maltraitance de leurs
Mots clés : conjoints, abus, physique, psychologie, séparation.

Introduction

Since the creation of the world, men and women are called to live together in a sacred union known as marriage according to the biblical teachings. According to the Bible, the man is called to leave his parents and join his wife in order to form one flesh. This recommendation is respected by nearly every community across the globe. Similarly, African societies give a great place to marriage in their lives. What is the place of women in marital settings in African societies then? It stands to reason that women are in trouble in domestic settings in many African societies. Women are still victims of different forms of male violence in many African societies. Among many other reasons, patriarchy is considered as the chief cause of domestic violence. Patriarchy is the system in which males hold prominent power, moral authority, social privilege and where the man has the power and authority as the head of the family. In addition, in a patriarchal society, the father has the social, physical and economic power and is therefore obeyed and honoured accordingly. In this sense Ekoué Gbadoe writes: “According to patriarchy, a woman is a second-class human in many folds... She must be under the man’s social, economic, physical and psychological dominance.” Gbadoe (2015, p.14) In fact, in traditional African societies, traditional beliefs give power to men at the expense of women. It is in this vein that Sheila Ruth reveals through these lines the unequal power relationship between man and woman in marriage: “The marriage relation merely embodies the unequal power relations existing between the sexes. The marriage contract itself shows that these relations are ones of domination and subordination... The marriage contract also reflects the fact that men and women have a different and unequal relation to marriage.” Sheila (1998, p.88)

The foregoing quotation debunks the myth residing in the institution of marriage, the institution that she considered unequal or unfair. Thus, many people allow the roles the society has prescribed them, swallow them with the aim of keeping tradition alive. Many of these issues are prevalent throughout the world in many guises if one can find the common thread within one’s own society. In many traditional African societies, domestic violence is predominant, and it can possibly lead to the death of the victim. One vivid example is the case of the famous Nigerian gospel singer Osinachi Nwachukwu who recently died.
on 08th April 2022 of her abusive husband’s attitude. In fact, her death was
alleged to be a result of spousal violence and her husband Peter Nwachukwu
was arrested in connection to this. Similarly, in the The Purple Violet of Oshaantu,
Kauna’s best friend Mee Ali and her aunt Mee Fennie advise her to divorce her
husband so as to avoid a pending death.

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2007, p. 1840),
viole nce is a “behaviour that is intended to hurt other people.” For Sasse (1997,
p. 261), violence is “Physical force used to harm someone or something. Violence
may result in damage to properties or injury to people.” Violence can be seen in
various ways, it may be physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual,
economic, etc. As a matter of fact, any attitude either physical or verbal aiming at
harming someone, is a violent action. Thus, “The notion is a dreadful reality in
many parts of the world including African societies. Thus, violence is as old as
society itself.” Gbadoe (2015, p. 1)

Accordingly, The Purple Violet of Oshaantu exposes the patriarchal male
violence and injustices of traditional Namibian beliefs and practices as well as
counters the devastating effects of misogyny through critiques of the social
institution of marriage. The novel is set in a farming village of Oshaantu where
Kauna a young housewife and mother is physically abused by her husband
Shange. One day, in a visit to her parents, to recover from one particularly violent
beating, her little mother Mee Fennie tries to encourage her to leave her husband
in order to save her life.

When Kauna’s husband suddenly dies, Kauna is accused of bewitching or
poisoning him. Relatives arrive to mourn him and compete with each other for
the access to his property. They come together to decide the fate of Kauna and
her children. Consequently, Kauna and her children are cast out of the village
and all the properties are taken from them. They are thrown out empty-handed
as thousands of women in the traditional African societies.

Consequently, this article tends to show how women are abused in marital
settings, and how they respond to male abuse. Freudian psychoanalytical theory
is used to highlight the plight of women in African traditional marital setting
together with their ill-treatment by their husbands’ relatives at the death of the
latter, interpreting the psychological conditioning of characters’ mind that affects
negatively their actions and speeches. This literary approach will be used to
interpret the psychological conditioning of men yielding to the maltreatment of
their female partners with the purpose of preserving the patriarchal system of
male power and domination. Finally, the psychoanalytical theory will be used to
decode the traumatic and emotional wrecks that women and their children
undergo through the brutality of men.
In terms of structure, the first part highlights forms of spousal abuses, the second part addresses the impact or consequences of spousal abuses on the woman, on the children, and on the marital union itself showing divorce as an ultimate solution to stubborn male abuses.

1. Forms of Spousal Abuses in the Novel

_The Purple Violet of Oshaantu_ is a novel published in 2001 and sets in a traditional African society in rural Namibia, called Oshaantu where marriage is considered as a lifelong miserable experience for women. The marital life of Shange and Kauna is pathetic and stands as a typical example of marital abuse in African traditional settings. At the beginning of their marriage, Kauna is regarded as beautiful as the purple violet that grows and flourishes in Oshaantu village, but her beauty soon fades away and vanishes after a series of battering and abuse by her husband. Therefore, this part explores, physical, verbal and psychological abuses observed in the novel.

1.1. The Physical Abuse: The Husband’s Regular Beating of his Wife

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services:

> Physical violence is the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury, or harm. Physical violence includes, but is not limited to, scratching; pushing; shoving; throwing; grabbing; biting; choking; shaking; slapping; punching; burning; use of weapon; and use of restraints or one’s body, size or strength against another person.

Minkah-Premo (2001, p. 9)

The quotation above elaborates clearly on the definition of physical abuse or physical violence. In addition, physical violence also means any rough physical force, action or treatment aiming at injuring or harming any fellow human being; Gbadoe (2015, p. 49)

Kauna, a beautiful virgin woman, a daughter of a pastor who got married with Shange a miner is entrapped in a traditional violent marriage where she enjoys no peace, no joy and no freedom. Mee Ali the best friend of Kauna who cares a lot for Kauna’s wellbeing confesses to Mee Maita: “‘Mee Maita, I am really not happy with the way Shange treats his wife. He mistreats her time and time again. The other day he almost killed her when he beats her. The whole village knew about it.’” Andreas (2001, p. 8)

The foregoing quote reveals Mee Ali’s disagreement with Shange’s use of physical power on his wife Kauna. Besides, during a conversation, Kauna, a
victim of domestic violence, says: “‘Usually he beats me for nothing’” Andreas (2001, p. 64) Another evidence is that, one day after being aware that Kauna has discovered a photo of him as a cook in the miners’ kitchen, he gets upsets, bullies her and beats her mercilessly. The coming quotation says more:

‘Who gave it to her and how long she had it?’ He thought as he scrutinised his own photograph. Shange couldn’t understand his feelings. Was he embarrassed or angry? He was irritated. He started to fume and couldn’t wait for Kauna to return from the well. Then it all happened so fast. Kauna and her basket full of water landed on the ground. Kauna tried to escape Shange’s rage, but he was too fast for her. He caught her. She screamed. I have never heard her screaming like that.

Andreas (2001, p. 58)

The foregoing quote states how Kauna’s husband abuses her physically, beating her mercilessly out of a triviality or little misunderstanding. Indeed, Kauna has not done something bad that is worth a physical assault; yet, her husband is red with anger, raging like a roaring lion seeking to devour a prey.

Oftentimes, on seeing the beating Kauna undergoes, people run to their homestead to save her life. In this sense, Michael once shouted: “Shange, stop it! I said stop it! What is wrong with you? Stop it!” Andreas (2001, p. 58) In fact, Michael simply wants Shange to stop beating his wife and let her go free. At that very moment, Kauna was lying almost naked and wasted on the ground covered with sand all over her beautiful body:

She had covered her face and part of her head with both her arms and hands. Michael held Shange from behind his back in an effort to pull him away, Kauna supporting herself on all fours, bravely tried to stand up, when Shange suddenly pushed Michael away with both his elbows. Michael staggered backwards, lost balance and landed on the ground. Shange freed from Michael’s grip, rushed to Kauna who was crawling like a new born calf and kicked her hard in the stomach. She flew into the air and fell on the ground.


This scene of horror shows that Shange beats his wife Kauna as if he was in a ring fighting an opponent in martial arts. He beats his wife so rudely and flings her in the hair getting her bloodstained and dirtied when she lands on the ground: “blood mixed with sand all over her face, in her face, in her mouth, nose, eyes, ears, head and clothes.” Andreas (2001, p. 59) Such is the plight of women in some traditional African societies as it is seen with Kauna in a Namibian rural area. Kauna’s plight as a married woman is part of traditional enslavement of women related by F. D. Kandji in her book:

L’analogie de la situation de la femme mariée à celle de l’esclave a été soulignée par Kate Millet qui s’est beaucoup étendue sur la question. L’histoire renseigne en effet
que le mari pouvait séquestrer sa femme, la battre, lui faire subir toute sorte de misère avec impunité. Le mari avait tous les pouvoirs et tous les droits pour traiter son épouse de la même façon que le maître traitait son esclave.

Kandji (2015, p. 472)

The foregoing quote compares the life of a married woman in a traditional setting to that of a slave, because there is no great difference between the two in terms of treatment. In fact, women really become private underdogs and private individuals in a situation of marriage. Siro (2006, p. 16) Women are suffering because “women in all cultures had less power than men and were subjected to similar forms of patriarchal control. Women are universally oppressed.” Richardson and Robinson (1993, p. 59) Seemingly, Kauna suffers a great deal in the hands of her husband Shange in a Namibian rural area. He oppresses and bullies her in the sight of the entire Namibian traditional community. He keeps on beating the woman even when the latter is under treatment to recover from her bruises, wounds and physical pain of a former beating. Through an introspection, Kauna usually accuses her brother who connected her to her husband in these terms: “He sold me into slavery.” Andreas (2001, p. 68)

Even the nurses of the village of Oshaantu suffer from what women are going through in the village. With the recommendation of Sustera a village nurse, Kauna was brought to the hospital in order to be taken care of. While the nurses are aware of the usual beatings of women by their husbands, men usually lie to doctors that cow has kicked them in their faces. In this sense, one nurse exclaimed: “treating them [women] is a waste of time because they always return worse!” Andreas (2001, p. 61) Through this quote, the nurse is reiterating the view that nearly all women in the village are always beaten by their husbands who never give up their physical abuse of women. Consequently, after being discharged from the hospital, there remain bruises and scars to treat. This will remind everyone in the village of “the horror of physical abuse.” Andreas (2001, p. 64)

Really, physical abuse is horrible, inhumane and degrading. It is in this vein that Akpemado (2019, p. 43) writes in her book: “Married women in a patriarchal community could be identified to slaves owing to the violence inflicted on them by their husbands.” Probably, men are motivated in women physical abuse by their economic and financial power which make them family providers. So, the economic factor can be at the root cause of domestic violence since many women like Kauna, depend financially on men in many African traditional societies. A similar situation can be observed in English context,
especially in D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, whereby Mr. Morel’s economic and financial power motivate him to exercise violence on his wife Mrs. Morel.

Another important abuse women undergo in traditional African societies, is psychological or verbal abuse they go through at the death of their husbands.

1.2. **Verbal and Psychological Violence: The Plight of Women at the Death of their Husbands**

Accusing a woman of being responsible for her husband’s death is always common in African traditional societies. As mentioned above, violence takes various forms such as physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, etc. Apart from spousal physical abuse, women are also victims of their husbands’ relatives’ verbal and psychological abuse.

Generally, all sorts of abuses culminate into psychological abuse or trauma. Whatever the abuse, it ends up affecting the mind, the psyche and even the soul, which is emotional. Therefore, this part is meant to study the attitude of Shange’s relatives toward Kauna after her husband’s death. Despite the psychological condition of Kauna as a widow, the family of her late husband has not hesitated to inflict more verbal and psychological torture on her.

Usually in many parts of Africa, after the death of a man, the family-in-law can accuse the wife of being responsible for the death of their son, and this does not go effect-free on the widow who is psychologically weakened already. Accusing a woman of being responsible for her husband’s death is for sure a source of psychological trauma for nearly all women that are in this situation and this has a serious reverberation on the relationship between the woman and the family-in-law. Being aware of this thought, just after the mysterious death of Shange, Kauna started claiming her innocence by screaming: ‘‘people must know the truth. He did not eat my food. And I did not kill him! You hear me. You hear me. You evil people I know what you are thinking. I know because you are evil. Evil people, all of you!’’ Andreas (2001, p. 12)

Indeed, Kauna is summoned in order to explain the cause of her husband’s death. Evidently, as forecasted, after some days, Kauna was invited in a meeting organised by the Shange’s relatives where she was accused anyhow of being responsible for the death of her husband. The spokesperson of Shange’s relatives, Kuku Sheya started insinuating: ‘‘As relatives of the deceased, we want to know how somebody who was not sick and did not complain of any illness died just like that, just like an animal. Child, we only want you to tell us exactly what happened. You and your children were the last people to see Shange alive’’ Andreas (2001, p. 98)
A surface structure of this scene shows that through the spokesperson, Shange’s relatives want to know what happened exactly to their son Shange, which is normal. However, a deep structure of this scene shows that the woman is not simply facing an inquiry, but a judgement, a trial, a prosecution whereby she proves guilty before the trial proper. The whole family-in-law suspects and accuses the woman before hearing her, which is a strong verbal and psychological abuse. The prosecution process is already biased, somebody cannot be guilty before being tried. Thus, after telling briefly the story of her husband’s death, the relatives’ spokesman still asks: “‘what do you mean? He came home, sat down and died? What kind of explanation is that? Remember we are talking about Shange here, a human being, not a cow! Tell us something else.’” Andreas (2001, p. 98) These worries of the spokesman after the woman’s clarification of the circumstances of her husband’s death, show that the family-in-law has something in stock, which means they knew in advance that Kauna the widow is surely responsible for their son’s sudden death.

This is the reason why Kauna retorted: “I told you he did not sleep at home, he…” Andreas (2001, p. 98) However, the man did not allow Kauna to finish her explanation of the whole situation, but rather interrupted her by telling her that the whole village is already aware that Shange did not sleep at home and insinuates that he came home alive before dying. The spokesman continues: “‘Yes, even animals get sick, they don’t just drop dead like that.’” Andreas (2001, p. 98)

The aforementioned conversation between Kuku Sheya, the spokesman of Shange’s relatives, is just to accuse Kauna publicly of having her hand in the death of her husband, which is a psychological abuse in a situation whereby the woman ignores totally the cause of her husband’s sudden and incomprehensible death. Sheya’s words are like arrows that pierce Kauna’s body, mind and soul, which is verbal and psychological abuse. Kauna is sorrowful for losing her husband; unmindful of that, she is accused verbally of killing her husband. This is a psychological double yoke. All efforts are made just to make Kauna recognize her implication in her husband’s death. In the face of the crowd, Mee Ali the best friend of Kauna tries to save the situation in vain. She tried to defend her friend by arguing that only a doctor can tell them exactly what happened to Shange.

Suddenly, Kuku Sheya shouted at her and the crowd regarded her as a stranger and even a woman exaggeratedly called her a witch. As a result, a woman from Shange’s relatives said calmly to Kauna: “‘Maybe he did things to you that we don’t know about, and you got angry…’” Andreas (2001, p. 98)
Decoding the meaning of this short sentence, one can stipulate that, the woman suggests that, out of anger, Kauna might have killed her husband.

Not only do Shange’s relatives aim at accusing Kauna verbally of killing her husband, but also intend to take Shange’s property away from her and her children, which adds to her psychological trauma. After accusing Kauna of killing her husband, they tackle the process through which his properties will be shared among them excluding the widow and her orphans. Kuku Sheya said: “‘We need to know about his money, bank account, insurance policies, his cattle and all sorts of other things. Who owes him what and whom does he owe and so on.’” Andreas (2001, p. 100) Looking at them all, Kauna asked: ‘Do you honestly think I would know anything about Shange’s wealth? Andreas (2001, p. 100)

Introspecting the life of Kauna and Shange, how could they imagine that despite the high tension that existed between Kauna and her husband, he will give her his money for safekeeping? All of them are surprised at Kauna’s answer and one of them said: “‘the woman is the house. Wives are the people closest to their husbands. It is the wife who knows where her husband keeps his wealth. Where is Shange’s wealth?’” Andreas (2001, p. 100)

To give an answer to this question, Kauna asked bravely: “‘most, if not all, of you were aware of our marriage situation. You knew how he treated me. Do you honestly think that he would entrust me with his money and the papers you are talking about?’” Andreas (2001, p. 100) At last, Kauna added: “all the cattle are his except for a few goats and pigs. This is all I know.” Andreas (2001, p. 101)

After hearing the answer of Kauna, Kuku Sheya shouted at her:

‘You women these days go about making business out of your dead husband’s inheritance and this must come to an end. Your husband’s body is still cold and you are already sleeping around. Such things are not tolerated in our clan. Shange has brothers and sisters and his mother is still alive and he is her son… You cannot come from nowhere and think you can come grab everything from her, just like that.” Andreas (2001, p. 101)

All the relatives’ nodded, showing they agreed on what Kuku Sheya said. This pitiful fate of Kauna undergoing verbal and psychological violence, resembles the fate of Mee Sarah after the death of Victor, her husband. Mee Ali who is a witness of this sad event said: “‘I still vividly remember how they tore that poor widow apart.’” Andreas (2001, p. 102)

Victor’s wife, Mee Sara, is falsely accused of killing her husband. When Victor got sick and could not work as before the doctor announced that there is nothing that can be done to save his life; his wife was always at his side till his death. After consulting the Great Ngaanga from the River, to find the cause of his
death, the priest made a sad revelation about the death of Victor: “It was the wife! Mee Sara bewitched her husband!” Andreas (2001, p. 103)

As in the case of Kauna, Victor’s relatives insisted that Mee Sara explain exactly to them what killed Victor. They gathered and fired her with questions in order to know the origin of Victor’s death. One relative said: “why didn’t you just kill him instantly? Why did you have to make him suffer like that first?” Andreas (2001, p. 103)

On hearing these accusations, the narrator said: “she looked like a frightened bird. Her face was wet with sweat, like a mother who was in labour.” Andreas (2001, p. 103) These verbal accusations like darts gnaw Mee Sara’s heart, mind and soul. Another relative added: “‘You killed our relative, you are a murderer.’” Andreas (2001, p. 103) Facing these accusations, she said pitifully: “‘I would never kill Victor. Believe me. I had no reason to wish anything like that on him.’” Andreas (2001, p. 104) Despite her explanation, her in-laws are not convinced, instead they insisted that she is the one that killed her husband, which troubles her psychologically speaking.

The reason why they gathered is not only to know the origin of Victor’s death, but also share Victor’s properties. One of them added: “‘if you think you killed our brother to inherit his wealth, you are greatly mistaken. Andreas (2001, p. 103) This quote shows the way they are prepared to share the inheritance of the late Victor. When Michael complains about their rudeness toward Mee Sara, one of them said to him: “this is tradition’” Andreas (2001, p. 104) This sentence inspires the reflection on the plight of women in African traditional societies as it is portrayed in the life of Kauna and Mee Sara, after the death of their husbands.

Consequently, they dragged her to the bank to withdraw all the money, they took everything from the house and one of Victor’s sisters, a teacher, inherited Victor’s television set. Everything was taken from the widow and nothing was left for her and her orphan children. If a teacher is included in the sharing of a dead man’s property even though the deceased’s wife and children are alive, this makes one wonder what type of education she has received and the type of education she is giving to her students at school.

The truth about the origin of Victor’s death is revealed through his colleagues. After the funeral, some colleagues of Victor summon the late person’s family and informed them that the sickness that killed Victor is the new HIV. With proof and evidence, they convinced the whole family to accept this information at the time when the woman has already suffered the psychological trauma a great deal. The majority accepted this and regretted their harsh attitude toward the widow. Still Victor’s mother accused her of not being strict enough
toward him that gave room to him to sleep with other women and as a result, gets contaminated with HIV.

The following part will focus on the consequences of male domestic abuse on the woman, on the children, on the household and the society as a whole.

2. **The Impact of Spousal Abuses on Parents and Children**

Male violence on women has a lot of negative effects on the victim, on the household and on the whole society. This quotation summarizes the main issue of this part: “they were like day and night.” Andreas (2001, p. 51) Shange’s abuse of Kauna does not go effect-free on the latter. Due to his violent attitude, Shange’s homestead has become a battlefield where Shange is the beater and Kauna is the beaten. Kauna confessed to his friend: “‘My hopes for a beautiful marriage and a loving father for my children have been shattered” Andreas (2001, p. 66) Violence is the negation of peace and a violent atmosphere always drives peace and happiness away. Kauna’s beauty that is likened to a purple violet has soon vanished due to the incessant beating of her husband. The children are also psychologically affected because of assisting helplessly to their father’s beating of their mother.

2.1. **The Physical and Psychological Effects of Spousal Violence on Kauna**

The unrest, the turmoil, the agitation in Kauna’s marriage has affected her in many ways either physically or psychologically.

Indeed, physically, Kauna has lost her dazzling angelic beauty. Shange’s regular beating of Kauna has robbed her of her natural beauty of purple violet. From purple violet’s beauty she has become ugly with a body full of wounds, bruises and scars. Her physical appearance has changed due to the beatings received from Shange. In this sense Michael complained: “Do you know that since you married that child she has not gained any weight, yet the little she has, you still want, … tell me how many men have you beaten in this village the way you beat your wife? How many? Andreas (2001, p. 66) Kauna’s physical appearance has changed, her face and body are full of scars, bruises and wounds. It is shown through this quote: “The cut on the left corner of her upper lip left a scar that will remind us all, and particularly Kauna of the horror of physical abuse.” Andreas (2001, p. 64)

Truly, physical abuse is very bad, and it can lead to death as seen in the case of Osinashi Nwatchuku, the powerful Nigerian gospel singer who died recently on 08th April 2022.

Kauna’s relationship with her husband psychologically affected her inner life. This interpretation relates Kauna’s husband’s actions and speeches to
Kauna’s physical appearance and psychological state. Thus, the psychoanalysis theory is used to decode the attitude of Kauna, after the death of her husband. At times, characters perform actions without measuring the direct or indirect consequences on themselves or their surroundings.

Shange who has taken most of his lifetime to beat his wife Kauna, ignores the fact that she is going to be affected physically and psychologically. Psychologically, Kauna has accumulated a lot of stress that exceeds her ability to cope and integrate into her mind. In fact, in long term, at the death of Shange, Kauna’s attitude surprises more than one person, showing thus a deep psychological wound. One of the mourners makes the remark: “The first day she did not cry, the second day she did not cry, the third day she did not cry and still, today the fourth day, she had not cried.” Andreas (2001, p. 48)

In fact, crying when someone is dead is a way of regretting the death of that person; crying shows that the dead person is dear to us, and we regret his loss, we lament his disappearance. As a widow what motivates then, Kauna’s refusal to lament the death of her husband by shedding tears? The answer of this question is given by Kauna in the following quote. “But, I cannot pretend, she shook her head. I cannot lie to myself and to everybody else in this village. They all know how I was treated in my marriage. Why should I cry? For what? For my broken ribs? For my baby, the one he killed inside me while beating me? For cheating on me so publicly? For what? Andreas (2001, p. 49)

The foregoing quotation states the reason why Kauna refuses to cry at the death of her husband when everybody is wailing. She does not cry and regret the death of her husband because the latter killed her affection for him when he was alive. Her abnormal behavior is justified by her past experience of living a hell with her late husband. Her psychology has not fathomed her husband’s brutality. Furthermore, her psychology tells her that the disappearance of her husband is a good riddance, there is no way crying and sorrowing.

In a traditional African society, the attitude of Kauna is an aberration as it is mentioned in the coming quote: “Your behavior is affecting all of us... If you do this, you will give people reasons to accuse you of being responsible for his death.” Andreas (2001, p. 49) The rumors spread in the village that Kauna is not mourning the death of her husband. Even though Mee Ali the best friend of Kauna advised her to cry, still she refused to show any emotion or sorrow as would do a bereaved person. Facing the insistence of Mee Ali, she said sadly: “I have been angry my whole life. I have been angry about this marriage and with this man, so at this stage I really don’t think I care what happens to me if I don’t cry for him. I really don’t care. I have nothing to lose. Andreas (2001, p. 50)
These words of Kauna show the level of her depression and sadness. She has suffered her whole life due to spousal violence and decided not to suffer the death of her violent husband, a terrible killjoy. Psychologically speaking, Kauna’s sensibility and affection are nowhere to be found as a result of her husband’s aggressiveness, which has inflicted an incurable wound on her psychology.

2.2. The Psychological Effects on the Children

The situation of madhouse, in which Kauna lives, has impacted her children a lot. As every good child, when Shange beats his wife, the children are always around and feel pity for their mother. One day, in seeing their mother being beaten by their father, Mee Ali, the best friend of Kauna said: “Kauna’s eldest daughter, the eleven-year-old Kandiwpapa, who was crying at the top of her voice, ran in to give me a hand. Carefully, we carried Kauna to her hut and laid her on the bed.” Andreas (2001, p. 59) It is unbearable to see one’s mother being bullied by one’s misogynistic father as stated through this quotation. When Mee Ali wanted to go and look for the nurse to treat Kauna’s bruises, the conversation she had with the little girl Kandiwpapa, is pathetic and highlights the poor psychological condition of the girl:

‘I will go to look for Suster to come and examine your mother and show you how you can treat her bruises.’ ‘I know how to do it!’ She said defensively, ‘How do you know how to do it? I do it every time he beats her.’ ‘This time … it was worse?’ ‘Yes’, she said…’ Come here’ I said. I pulled her against me and embraced her. She cried uncontrollably. Tears that told me that this little girl had seen much for her age.

Andreas (2001, p. 60)

The scene hereby testifies to the fact that children are rarely happy in a family dominated by domestic violence. Kauna’s children are traumatized and stigmatized by the quality of life they live by the side of their parents. Instead of parents building up a strong psychology in their children, Kauna and her heavy-hand husband are destroying it.

2.3. Divorce as an Ultimate Solution to Spousal Violence

Divorce is the legal dissolution of a marriage by a court or another competent body. Divorce can be done traditionally with the presence of the two families. Divorce has a lot of causes, among which spousal violence. Accordingly, if one of the partner’s life is in danger, he or she has the right to divorce. Separation becomes therefore an ultimate solution for marital violence.

Reflecting on what Kauna is going through, Mee Ali, the best and closest friend of Kauna advised her to divorce: “Kauna, this is the last thing I should advise you to do, but can’t you leave Shange? Divorce him and go back to your
parents or whatever, just to get away from him?” Andreas (2001, p. 66) What is the use of a marriage where the woman is beaten on a daily basis? To answer this question, Kauna said: “I have left my husband about three times.” Andreas (2001, p. 66)

In fact, Kauna left her husband thrice, the first time she pretends to pay a visit to her parents and as she was not coming back Shange and his relatives turned up to bring her back. The second and the third time was the same story. Whenever she leaves, he usually comes with his relatives and shamelessly promise not to beat her again, which is a lie. Kauna said sadly shaking her head: “My hopes for a beautiful marriage and a loving father for my children have been shattered” Andreas (2001, p. 66)

In addition, when Kauna visited Mee Fennie she also advised her to divorce her husband, Kauna recounts: “Leave him, she told me again and again; leave him; if you think you deserve more than what you get out of your marriage, divorce that man. It is not an easy thing to do, and nobody enjoys a divorce, but sometimes it is a decision that needs to be taken.” Andreas (2001, p. 66)

How is divorce considered in African traditional societies? In Africa, divorce is seen as an abomination. In this sense, even though many people advised Kauna to divorce, she was not sure of divorcing because divorce is seen as a taboo in African societies and those who divorce are given disgraceful names. Mee Fennie illustrates the negative connotation of divorce by proclaiming: “your mother will certainly not approve of you wanting to divorce your husband, because when I divorced, she was angry with me. … she claimed that I embarrassed her, our parents and the rest of the clan. For a long time, she did not want to be seen with me in public.” Andreas (2001, p. 66) Out of this quote, it is clear that divorcing is the origin of shame and dishonor in traditional African society. Still, Kauna decided to talk to her mother for more advice. Her mother said:

‘How do you expect your little mother to advise you? She is divorced herself. I hate to say this, but divorced people can give no other advice. Talk to married people, people who know how to handle marriage problems, not those who run away from them. Besides, you forget a very important thing. Shange is the man God has given you and you must accept him as he is. You have made a promise before Him and the whole congregation to love and cherish your husband till death do you part. You cannot break your word now.’

(Andreas, 2001, p. 67)

The following quotation is much clear that divorce is not welcome in traditional African society. However, because of domestic violence Kauna was advised many times to run away from her aggressive husband to save her
threatened life. Nevertheless, following the advice of her mother, Kauna decided to give up her decision to divorce her impulsive and aggressive husband. “So, I just gave up, I’m tired. Now when he beats me, I simply nurse my wounds... I must accept him, bad as he is.” Andreas (2001, p. 67) Kauna does not leave her husband, she rather endures his beatings till his sudden death that sets her free. As a matter of fact, Shange’s premature death is synonymous with Kauna’s survival, which makes this widow refrain from mourning her dead husband.

Conclusion

This study has discussed the issue of spousal abuse in Neshani Andreas’ novel The Purple Violet of Oshaantu. Through the marital life experience of Shange and his wife Kauna living in Oshaantu, a traditional Namibian rural area, the study has shown the plight of women in some traditional African settings. The psychoanalytical approach to the text analysis, has helped delineate the poor plight of women facing spousal abuse in traditional African marriages whereby women are voiceless and helpless due to the entrenched and stubborn powerful patriarchal system which stands for women domination by the male gender.

The study has shown that some men exercise limitless power of abuse over women in traditional societies regulated by a patriarchal system of power domination. The marital life of Shange and Kauna in the Namibian traditional setting has been a compass to orient the study and a barometer to measure the atmospheric pressure of traditional forces that are still impeding female emancipation in a modern Africa still in conflict with some traditional patterns of life.

The study has shown that some evil communities rob women of their basic rights in the name of traditions. So, the study has sought to contribute to women’s self-fulfillment in modern Africa which has to do away with some traditional evil practices related to marriage and widowhood. Kauna’s hope for a beautiful marriage and a loving father for her children has been shattered due to these evil traditions which enslave women.

This study has also showcased that spousal abuse is a bad practice that can ruin family welfare in modern African societies which are not yet totally free from some wicked traditions. Consequently, African governments, religious bodies, national and international organisations fighting for Women’s Rights, must work hand in hand to clear off the negative forces that undermine the peaceful marital life through the process of education and sensitization.
Bibliography


GBADOE E. M., 2015, Female on Female Violence in Isidore Okpewho’s The Victims and Buchi Emecheta’s The Joys of Motherhood. Mémoire de Master en Littérature de l’Afrique Anglophone, Lomé: Université de Lomé.

KANDJI F. D., 2015, Le Vécu de la Femme dans les Récits de Buchi EMECHETA et de Flora NWAPA Endurance, Résistance et Lutte pour la Survie. L’Harmattan, Dakar.


