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Women Experience Of Violence and The Resurrection Faith

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1. Introduction

A cursory analysis of the evolution of human history, right from the time when theogonies¹ dominated as the cornerstone of human thinking, through the Ancient, Medieval and Modern Epochs to the Contemporary Era, reveals that women have for a very long time been relegated to the background of second class citizens or even insignificance. The experience of women in Nigeria, with all its attendant characteristics of subordination, oppression and marginalization, has attracted the attention of scholars, religious bodies, activists, feminists and development workers. Titi Salaam observes that the conditions of women in Nigeria conveniently compete for the worst in the world among other third world countries.² This issue keeps reoccurring in every academic and informal discussion in Africa. This piece is a contribution to the ongoing academic discourse on the socio-economic and religio-cultural experience of women in Nigeria, with particular interest on violence against women. However, while not suggesting any intention to trek all the allies of this experience, this piece adopts a new pedagogy to tackle the problem, by focusing on the resurrection faith as a credible Christian eschatological hope.

2. Women And Violence In Nigeria

Violence against women can be understood as any "physical,

¹Theogonies refer to the mythologies that dominated Greek thought in 600 BC, through which explanations were drawn for the nature of reality. This system of reflection was overthrown by rational explanations given by the Ionian Philosophers. Joseph Omoregbe, *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, Vol. 1, Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Ltd, 2003, p.3.

²Titi Salaam, "A Brief Analysis on the Situation of women in Nigeria Today" <http://www.socialistnigeria.org/women/1-3-03.htm>, March 1, 2003.

sexual and psychological behaviour occurring in the family, community or condoned by the state. This includes wife-battering/beating, sexual abuse of female children, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices that are harmful to women. It also includes, sexual harassment at work or within educational institutions, trafficking in women and forced prostitution,"³ which "results in humiliation, open ridicule and torture."⁴ Violence against women and girls is today's most pervasive human rights challenge.

In many cultures in Nigeria, women are treated as inferiors and second class citizens. This violence varies from 20% in adult relationships and 81% of all married women,⁵ and until recently violence in a marriage situation is not treated as a crime against the woman, this is because it is often seen as the prerogative of the man to tame the woman.⁶ Rose Uchem argues that our African marriage ritual predisposes the man in the marriage relationship towards violence against the female partner by the customary emphasis on the headship of the man over and above the woman.⁷ The unfortunate thing is that after women are violated by their male counterparts, the men do not get the adequate punishment for their crime from the court.

Among the Yoruba of Nigeria where the husband is the most important person followed by the members of his own kin, Tola

³UNIFEM, Retreat for Church leaders, Enugu, November 27th-29th, 2002.

⁴Ugwu S. T., *The Agony of a Woman*, Pankshin: Academic Trust Foundation, p.20.

⁵UNIFEM, Retreat for Church leaders, Enugu, November 27th-29th, 2002.

⁶A: Tola Pearce told the story of the case of a 12 year old girl in the North which was brought to the country's attention in 1987, given away to a man in marriage who macheted her for attempting to run away. The reluctant bride subsequently dies after an operation.

B: One act of violence against women which I witnessed, and which has refused to leave my memory occurred in 2001, in Yola, the Capital of Adamawa State. I was coming out of the Federal Medical Center, and there was the corpse of a Fulani woman lying on the ground with her

Pearce observes that the woman is exposed to a great number of possible assailants. This is because the family is patriarchal in nature. Traditionally, it is also an extended family unit, housed in large compounds (*agbo ile*) where the eldest male was usually the head (*baale*). The Yoruba also practice polygyny. Within this family unit, a woman is a member of a number of dyads which expose her to more than the husband/wife, or child/mother type of violence seen in the nuclear home. Thus a co-wife, the child of a co-wife, a resident mother-in-law or sister-in-law are possible assailants besides a husband.⁸ Added to all these is the indigenous patriarchal code of husband/wife conduct which can also itself trigger violence. In the opinion of one Yoruba male,

Traditionally, a good Yoruba wife should be respectful and obedient to her husband and never quarrel, oppose or argue with him. She should keep his secret and guard his property as her own. She should do many things without being told. She should be prepared to do anything she is asked to do, rapidly and well, even if she must do it in the middle of the night. However, she should be receptive to her husbands sexual advances. In short, please him in every way.⁹

Women do not only face violence in their homes, they are

head cut off from the body. When I made enquiry I was told that they had a rift with the husband who in anger decided to slaughter her. Here the man has taken advantage of his physical strength over the woman.
⁸Rose Uchem, *Violence Against Women in Marriage Rituals, A Prelude to Domestic Violence*, ed Cyril Obanure, p.125.
⁹Tola Pearce, "Assaulting a Wife: Perspectives on Conjugal Violence", in Mere Kisekka (ed.), *Women's Health Issues in Nigeria*, Zaria: Tamaza Publishing Company, 1992, pp.191-192.
¹⁰Kolawole Salami, "Morality and Social Acceptability in Yoruba Society". A Paper presented at the conference on Ethics in African society. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, 1987, p.9.

constantly harassed outside the home by men in authority for sexual favours. This is worsened by the fact that Government institutions are slow at accepting domestic violence as a crime even with the UN's treatment of domestic violence against women as a crime in 1995. Moreover, regardless of the official codes of conduct, violence is accepted among many Nigerians as a way of making an erring wife listen to reason.

2.1 Rape

Section 357 of the Nigerian Criminal Code (only applicable to Southern Nigeria) defines rape as "any person who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, without her consent. If the consent is obtained by force or by means of threat or intimidation of any kinds, or by fear of harm, or by means of false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act. Or in the case of a married woman, by impersonating her husband, is guilty of an offence, which is called rape." Karl Peschke puts it more simply; rape is "illicit sexual intercourse with a woman against her consent."¹⁰ Rape can be committed with the use of physical or moral force (grave fear, reverential fear, deceit or fraud); likewise by a sin committed with a woman who has not the use of reason, who is either insane or intoxicated.

Many women are raped by their husbands; but in Nigeria there is no such thing, your wife is like your personal property. Many girls have also been raped by their parents,¹¹ by relatives and friends,¹²

¹⁰Karl Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, Bangalore: Theological Publications India, 2004, p.479.

¹¹It was reported on the *Leadership* Newspaper for Sunday, December 7, 2008 (pp.34-35), that on Friday 5th December, in Auta Belefi in Mararaba, Nasarawa State, one 35 year old Saidu Waziri was caught by the 29 year old wife raping their 7 year old daughter and the younger sister respectively. The girls were in bed with the man when their mother came in and then rushed for the police. This was not the first time he was caught in such a mess. Neighbours who came around the scene said that the man was caught in the same act last year with the

housemaids raped by husbands, wife's relations by husbands, mother-in-laws by their daughter's husbands, and so much of this are hushed up to protect the family name; teachers raping their female students in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions,¹³ armed robbers rape many women on the highways and worst of all by security agents, in whom the weak should find comfort and protection.¹⁴ Reuben Abati reported in *The Guardian Newspaper*, how a girl living with her friend was detained overnight by the police, only to be gang-raped by the policemen all through the night. Prostitutes who stand by the roadside are constantly arrested by the police and taken to the police station where a punishment of free sex is imposed on them.¹⁵

Rape is a grave offence, because the woman's right over her body

eldest daughter when she was 6 years old. The elder sister was just in primary two while the younger sister had not yet started school for lack of funds. When interrogated by the police, Waziri said that he committed the act due to excessive intake of alcohol, he also blamed the devil and his wife whom he said had been denying him sex for some months now.

¹²*Daily Sun*, Thursday, February, 2009, (p.20), reported the case of a 36-year-old man who raped 8 year old girl to death. Olalekan Abdullahi who is reported to have committed the crime was a friend to the victim's father. Lawal, the father of the raped girl was away when the suspect visited his house. He actually had the plan of raping the poor girl, and so he sent the younger ones to go and buy bread. He took advantage of their absence and raped the girl. After the act, the suspect told the victim not to reveal it to anybody, saying she would die if she did. When the complications began to emerge, the little girl could not but reveal the source of her plight.

¹³*The Guardian*, Friday, January 30th, 2009, p.51

¹⁴*The Guardian*, Friday, January 30th, 2009, (p.51), reported the case of Queen Okoye who was raped by three police men. When she went to the Area G Police Station in Ogba, Lagos to protest that she was raped by three police men and that she was pregnant. Her cry for justice was turned away by the police authorities on the ground that she was a mad woman. What actually happened was that she went to the police station to ask the police to arrest her boyfriend who had taken her N30,000. They asked her to wait until 10p.m, so they could spring a surprise on the man. One thing led to another. She said she was charmed, and when she woke up at 2.30a.m she discovered that she was raped.

¹⁵*The Guardian*, Friday, January 30th, 2009, p.51.

is violated. This violation can bring about social dishonor or impede a future marriage.¹⁶ The sound of the word 'rape' sends shivers down the spine of most women. It is the most painful experience a woman can go through. It is bad enough for a person to make away with a woman's valuable goods, and it is very devastating when you encroach on her most valuable, carting away with that which cannot be replaced in a life time. How do you even present the terror of rape, that moment of utter cruelty on the victim's psyche? How do you capture the helplessness, fear, emptiness and loss of faith in humanity? And because it is a thing of shame and taboo to be raped in Nigeria, most girls who are victims do not disclose it to anyone, but not without a flash back of the incident.¹⁷

There are many reasons why women refuse to disclose rape. Rape in Nigeria carries a heavy social stigma, sometimes resulting in rejection by family and community members; the police are sometimes unwilling to make official reports; victims also fear reporting cases of rape when the police men are themselves the perpetrators. Some women are unable to obtain a medical examination and some do not even know how to go about it.

Minors are not left out of this rampage. Suleiman Abba, the Police Chief of Kano State lamented the escalation of the rape of minors in the state, as is the case in many states in Nigeria. In most cases he said the victims are gang-raped. The suspect's ages ranging from 45-70 while the victims are mainly girls between 3 and 11 years of age, and many of these cases he laments are not reported, to save the family from embarrassment, but to the detriment of the womenfolk. Abba revealed that in some cases, the rapists are buoyed by a conviction that sleeping with minors, especially

¹⁶The *Guardian*, Friday, January 30th, 2009, p.51.

¹⁷Yemi Shaba, "Rape", in *Action Woman*, Jan-Mar, 2002. pp.15-16.

virgins, would cure them of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. At times they do perpetrate such atrocities as part of fetish rituals to get rich.¹⁸ It is therefore not surprising that some of them use handkerchief to wipe the vagina of the children after raping them.¹⁹ Since most rapes are not reported, it is difficult to give an estimate of the problem. However, four years ago, police statistics show that 4-6 females are raped daily in Lagos, however, 60% of sexual harassment in the area is unreported officially.²⁰ Subsequent official and newspaper reports indicate that the frequency of rape, especially of minors, has rapidly increased nationwide, particularly in such cities as Lagos, Kano, Enugu and Cross River States. By official estimate, 70% of the cases were not reported.²¹

From the statistics given by CLEEN, 2,241 cases of rape and indecent assault were reported in 1999; 1,529 in 2000; 2,284 in 2001; 2,084 in 2002; 2,253 in 2003; 1,626 in 2004 and 1,835 in 2005. According to the report of Amnesty International, between 1999 and 2006, more than 13,000 women were raped in Nigeria. According to police and media reports, almost like an invading army rapists are on the prowl, raping about 100 unsuspecting women weekly in Nigeria.²²

During times of peace, rape is a problem, but it is worse during periods of violence. Reports have also shown that between 1990 and 1998, because of the violence in the Niger Delta, Ogoni women, mainly girls under 18 years have been subjected to serious sexual violence perpetrated mainly by the members of the security forces. At the Oputa Panel hearings, Hadiza, who was 12

¹⁸The Nation, Saturday, January 31, 2009, p.18.

¹⁹The Nation, Saturday, January 31, 2009, p.18.

²⁰The Nation, p.18.

²¹The Nation, p.18.

²²The Nation, p.19.

years old at the time, described how she was repeatedly raped and held in sexual slavery for 8 days in April 1994. She said the soldiers invaded their house in the night and took her to their station, during which six men repeatedly raped her and beat her continuously until she lost consciousness. When she gained consciousness, she wandered about until she met a fellow victim of rape who took her to a makeshift center in the bush. Hadiza expressed disappointment as the panel's investigations led neither to the prosecution of the perpetrators nor a reparation for the abuse.²³

Nigerian women are powerless where rape is concerned. Even the section of the criminal code dealing with rape was written by men. It doesn't favour the woman. It further exposes her to humiliation. She is required to prove that she was raped. In the courts there will be the call for medical examination and proof of penetration, and absence of consent. This makes it difficult to prove a case of rape that has lasted for a month or two. How many women will even have the courage to allow such an exposure?²⁴ It is from this perspective that Amnesty International (AI) released a report titled: "Nigeria: Rape-the Silent Killer." It stated that rape is endemic in Nigeria due to the abject failure of the Nigerian authorities to bring perpetrators to justice.²⁵ According to the Criminal Code Act, anyone who runs afoul of the law of rape would be punished with life imprisonment. Going by the Criminal Code, section 359, the penalty for attempting rape is 14 years imprisonment, with or without caning. The Criminal Code Act, section 218 stipulates life imprisonment for anyone who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under the age of 13 years. Section 221 of the code states that anyone who has unlawful

²³ *The Nation*, p.19.

²⁴ *The Guardian*, Friday, January 30th, 2009, p.51.

²⁵ *The Nation*, Saturday, January 31, 2009, p.18.

carnal knowledge of a girl who is above 13 and below 16 years of age will be liable for two years imprisonment, with or without caning. The same penalty is applicable for anyone who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman who is defective, say an imbecile. The question people continue to ask is: Are these punishments ever effected?

2.2 Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation also known as female circumcision is another form of violence against women. It is a traditional practice, which involves the partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia, sometimes by someone unskilled or a health worker. This may be for cultural or therapeutic reasons. Today some cultures in Nigeria practice female circumcision not for therapeutic reasons but for cultural reasons. The practice dates back to the time of the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt.²⁶ There are basically three categories of female genital mutilation; it varies from one country to another, from one ethnic group to another. There are conventionally known as: Sunna, Excision or Reduction and Infibulation or Pharaonic.

While male circumcision is generally practiced for hygienic reasons, no convincing reason has been presented for female circumcision. However, the most common reason readily presented, especially by the Urhobo people of Nigeria, to justify female circumcision is that it aids the curtailing of sexual promiscuity among women,²⁷ by denying the genuine romantic feelings during sexual intercourse. This reason is unfounded. A woman who wants to mess around or sexually misbehave will always do so whether circumcised or not.

²⁶Christine O. Adebajo, "Female Circumcision and other Dangerous Practices to Women's Health", in Mere Kisekka (ed.), *Women's Health Issues in Nigeria*, Zaria: Tamaza Publishing Co. Ltd, 1992, p.1.

²⁷Moses Daniel, Interview, 17th October 2008.

Another reason adduced to substantiate the practice of female circumcision is that it facilitates fertility in women. For instance, the Eza people in Ebonyi State of Nigeria perform the ritual of circumcision in a barn because of their belief that it is the habit of the god of fertility. So the mere carrying out of the act in a barn is an assurance of fecundity. In some other customs it is widely believed that unless a woman is circumcised, she cannot have a safe delivery. In most traditional societies, this act is carried out by traditional practitioners with crude and rusty instruments, which render the victims prone to infections. In this age of HIV/AIDS one can imagine the fate of the victims; most of the time the victims are placed at the risk of permanent deformity.

3. The Causes of Violence Against Women in Nigeria
The causes of violence against women are many. In many men, violence towards women is a learned behaviour. In the sense that men who abuse women grew up in homes where their mothers or sisters were abused: "Violence against women in the home has particularly serious repercussions. When the woman is a mother and the violence takes place in front of her children, the stage is set for a cycle of violence that may be continued from generation to generation."²⁸ Psychiatrists hold that cases of psycho-physical disorder could trigger cases of violence.²⁹ There are also cases when abusive men tend to be jealous, possessive and easily angered.³⁰ Alcohol in the contention of Rose Uchem is a strong contributory factor in many cases of domestic violence.³¹

²⁸US Bishops. Bishops Committee and Marriage and Family Life. Bishops Committee on Women in Society and the Church. National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *When I Call For Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*. Bilingual Edition, 1992, p.1.

²⁹Uchem, *Violence Against Women*, p.130.

³⁰US Bishops, p.1.

³¹Uchem, *Violence Against Women*, p.131

4. The Effects of Violence Against Women in Nigeria
Rose Uchem gives three types of the effects of violence against women. They are the physical, psychological and spiritual consequences. As regards the physical consequences, she argues that violence on women could lead to permanent physical disabilities or even death. After sexual abuse, some women commit suicide, while many are infected with one STD or the other. The psychological impact involves intense fear that the violence would happen again, low esteem, guilt, depression, hatred, pregnancy wastage or complications in some instances and shame are generated in the woman as a result. This is most times followed by the desire for revenge. Spiritually, the woman feels unappreciated and exploited. This affects the whole of her being and sets in her the fire of spiritual hunger and emptiness.³²

5. The Resurrection Faith As A Credible Christian Eschatological Hope

In the past, a retinue of attempts has been made by mankind to change, improve and ameliorate situations of suffering. We have the socio-religious attempts, as in the social teachings of the Church and the great deal of charity offered by religious groups and philanthropists. We have the socio-political revolutions as in Marxism, the Politico-religio approach evident in Political, Liberation, Black and Feminist theologies. Other attempts include the scientific-technological optimism (neo-positivism) and the Philosophic-practical approach evident in pessimism, nihilism, existentialism etc. Generally, they are well intended, but they all result to not being enough. Many of them are sectional and segmental, often at the great expense of others. Moreover, the hope they offer is reduced or limited to the mundane, and this makes it insufficient. However, while not attempting to

³²Uchem, *Violence Against Women*, pp.129-130.

depreciate the present or the mundane, we need to realize that if human beings, in essence, have an aperture towards the transcendental, then a hope that will be definitive has to be one that takes this fact into consideration.

The hope that the resurrection creates is one that is eschatological, meaning that it points to that which will take place at the *eschaton*. The futuristic concept forms the basic idea. The future is seen in its absolute sense as the most central issue; it deals with the ultimate. And the peculiar structure of human existence, gives credence to this futurology, in the sense that the human person is seen as a being that constitutively has a proclivity towards the future.³³ This must not be understood as a tactic for over-looking or subduing the vitality of the immediate future that is planable, projectable, predictable and more importantly, the virtually present in the dynamic presence of the actual moment. The author rather focuses on the other type of future that is not planable, not projectable, not foreseeable, not evolutive, of which in the final analysis is the future that counts in terms of responding to hope.

This futuristic approach, rather than create an immediate solution or clarify the puzzle of violence against women, often very attractive to those in pain, the futurology of the resurrection faith animates and strengthens the Nigerian woman in her struggle against evil and its attendant effects of pain with the eschatological assurance of what is yet to come. It shows evil as that which, in spite of its weight and thickness, cannot manage to, ultimately triumph over the human person.³⁴ With the resurrection faith goes the belief that, though the situation of suffering and pain cannot be rationally entirely explained, it can

³³Martin Egbuogu, *Human Suffering and the Resurrection Faith*, Enugu: Snaap Press, 2006, p.173

³⁴Egbuogu, *Human Suffering*, p.174,

have an eventual solution at the eschaton. As has already been mentioned, our constitutive temporality inserts us into an occurrence that does not end up in emptiness, nor move us only towards possibilities latent in intra-mundane structure of reality but towards a consummation which offers us *un plus de ser* (Being plus). This dimension of human existence offers the future its fascinating charm and saves mankind from remaining absorbed by nature and remaining in a cyclic course that lacks both beginning and end.

At the eschaton, all the puzzles that define human suffering would be unraveled, St Paul puts it succinctly, "the last enemy will be conquered" (1 Cor 15:26). It would offer a response to our restlessness, anxiety, fear, wandering and quest for meaning. It would offer healing to both the living and the dead. As such, offering a universal justice. The researcher believes that any promise of justice to women without reference to the eschatological hope, is not just insufficient but a fallacious deceptive promise. No amount of rehabilitation, posthumous apologies or floral wreaths can redress the injustice done to a violated woman. It is only the resurrection that guarantees that there will be justice for all, freedom for all from all forms of alienation. Death levels the destiny of the martyr and the executioner, while at the resurrection the relationship of each person with God would be laid bare. God's justice would triumph over all the injustices committed against His children. And the kingdom of God would come in its fullness, for the definitive realization of God's plan to bring all things under Christ would be unveiled. In this new universe, God will have his dwelling among us (Rev 21:5). He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death, suffering shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning

nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away (Rev 21:4).

Conclusion

The thesis stated and maintained in this article is that the resurrection faith offers hope to the existential experience of women in Nigeria as regards violence. The idea of resurrection faith is not to be understood as an eschatological event that is separable from the historical praxis of liberation. The resurrection faith affords liberty in the present to those who bear it; it brings its content to bear on the concrete and existential life of the present, even though the definitive response of the resurrection faith to the problem of human suffering is in the absolute future.