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INTRA-GENDER CONFLICTS AMONG WOMEN IN AKACHI ADIMORA-EZEIGBO'S TRAFFICKED AND ABIMBOLA ADELAKUN'S UNDER THE BROWN RUSTED ROOFS

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ABSTRACT

Some Nigerian female writers have devoted much time to fictionalising patriarchal society in which men always intimidate and subjugate women. Men are always alleged the linchpins of domestic violence and women's predicament in gender-related discourse. In this study, through qualitative research methodology, the notion is deconstructed and relationship among women is explored to assert that no gender is the sole mastermind of domestic violence. Conflict is a part of the dynamics of human nature which has no gender bound. To deconstruct erroneous views and foreground textual data, the tenets of feminist literary theory and its African offshoots – Motherism and Womanism – are deployed on the analysis of Akachi's *Trafficked* and Adhlakun's *Under the Rusted Brown Roofs* purposively selected for the study to reveal conflicts among women in female-authored texts. The finding shows that women hardly tolerate one another in many spheres. Malicious gossip, envy, jealousy, intolerance and cantankerousness are the common causes of squabble among women. Therefore, the study recommends conscientious efforts and cooperation among women to surmount disunity for their collective benefit and the society's. Inter-gender unity, not conflict, should be fostered among men and women by all literary writers if parity must be achieved over macho chauvinism.

KEYWORDS

Conflict, macho chauvinism, intra-gender unity, inter-gender unity

Introduction

Some Nigerian female writers have devoted much time to the relationship between men and women and fictionalised prejudiced patriarchal society in which men often maltreat women. In such female-authored texts, men are either alleged as the architects of the deprecation of women, dictators or nonentities that cannot fend for their families (instances abound in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-class Citizen*, 1974, *The Joys of Motherhood*, 1979; Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, 2006; Akachi Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, 2008). Emecheta creates and finds an idle husband in Francis, the villain (character) of *Second-class Citizen* (1974), who is the mastermind of the unrest that tears his family apart. In *Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Nnu Ego

and Adaku have to sell paltry goods in order to take care of their children and feed their husband, Nnaife, who squanders his salary on liquor but has little or no money to augment his wives' feeding expenses. Whenever squabble arises between Nnu Ego and Adaku, whether or not it emanates from intolerance between the duo, Nnaife is seemingly held responsible. Akachi, in *Trafficked*, portrays Ogukwe as an unsuccessful henpecked husband who lives at the expense of his wife, Adaeze, whose inactiveness brews the attending conflict between his wife and his elder brother's. In like manner, Adichie creates Papa Eugene, a totalitarian and architect of domestic

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imbroglio who does not cease to foment upheaval until he is being poisoned by his wife.

Statement of the Problem

A close assessment of the relationship between Nigerian women reveals that there is distrust, disharmony and a great deal of intolerance among them. These negative attitudes hinder their emancipation from macho chauvinism. The disharmony exhibited in the relationship among women does not manifest only in the domestic sphere but also prevents them from asserting the benefit their numerical strength could have afforded them – to present a potent frontier group in the national politics.

A number of Nigerian gender-scholars have carried out extensive study on feminism and other gender-related theories. They have ventilated their submissions about the masterminds of conflict, nothing that intra-gender conflict exists between women. Acholonu (1995) submits that “what one finds among the modern....African women, most of who are feminists, is a constant struggle for position, mutual antagonism arising from rivalry and mutual jealousy. This tends to mar attempts towards meaningful progress even in the women’s movement”. (53) Kolawole (1997) corroborates this submission asserting that “there is feminism (sexism) where all problems in the society are seen as caused by men”. Hence, she advises that “men and women have to work together to solve the problems in society” (15). In a similar vein, examining the disunity among women in the works of selected female Nigerian writers, Ezeigbo (1993) admits that women are the “worst enemies” (7) of women. Decrying the situation, Akorede (2011), laments that it has affected women so much in their consideration for political appointments in Nigeria. These scholars affirm that men are not always the architects of the problems in the society; there are *enemies within* the women’s cycle decimating their efforts to succeed.

Serial Syndromes: Envy, Jealousy and Disunity among Women

Conflict is a contradiction arising from perceptions, behaviour, struggle over claims to resources, power, status, belief and, more often than not, preference and desire (Darling and Walker, 2001 in Abdullahi, 2016). Intra-gender conflict exists between people of the same sex. Akorede (2011) identifies three levels of woman-to-woman interactions and possible areas of conflict: (a) women being wives to the same husband; (b) women in in-law relationships, especially the mother-in-law, daughter-in-law and sister-in-law’s conflict; (c) women who live together or relate as neighbours by virtue of circumstance. Intra-gender conflicts among women in the novels purposively selected for this study interrogate these three levels.

Trafficked aptly portrays the complex nature of people in an extended family living in the same compound and women found living together by circumstance. Akachi narrates the trafficking of a young lady, Nneoma, together with other Nigerian ladies, to European countries. The ladies are taken abroad for commercial-sex-work. The dehumanising agonies of the girls, the callous disposition of the pimps and the sadistic pleasure of the clients of the ladies, repatriation of the trafficked girls as well as the belligerence nature of women when living together, are the thematic preoccupations of the text. The novel is replete with intra-gender conflicts resulting from malicious gossip, envy, jealousy, hatred, covetousness and

intolerance not only among the deported trafficked ladies but also among co-wives occupying the same household. The novel is a compendium of conflicts across gender with emphasis on women brought together by marriage and those who are not related by birth or marriage but live together in the same apartment.

Upon the taxiing of the airplane conveying the deportees and the disembarking of the passengers at the Murtala Mohammed International Airport, two women, possibly workers at the Airport, discuss the repatriated ladies at the earshot of the concerned girls. One of the women working in the airport dubs the deportees “Shameless girls” (22). Such incautious and pejorative utterance from a fellow woman irks Nneoma a great deal.

As the narrative proceeds, conflict ensues between Nneoma and Mma (the former’s younger sister). The conflict brews when Nma hassles to sit on their father’s knees since Nneoma has been sitting for long. Nneoma denies Mma the opportunity to sit and a scuffle follows as Mma tries to push Nneoma down. Nneoma slaps her sister and pushes her to the ground. The fight continues until their mother intervenes and whacks Nneoma’s buttocks, warning her not to treat her sister heartlessly. Adaeze comforts Mma while Ogukwe calms Nneoma down.

The African society is basically communal and family members live together in very close units within the community. Community provides the essential link which forms the basis upon which interaction is established (Akorede, 2011) but not without its own conflict. It is in that circumstance that conflict ensues between Ogukwe’s wife and Lebechi, the latter’s elder brother, Ezeozo. The genesis of the conflict is not unconnected to the dispute between Ogukwe and Ezeozo after the demise of the duo’s father. Before their father died, they had jointly built a “spacious six-room bungalow” (43) for him. Upon his demise, there has been serious argument on who should claim ownership of the six-room bungalow. Ezeozo claims that the house belongs to him because he is the first child and confines Ogukwe to their mother’s two-room hut.

After Ezeozo’s death, his wife, Lebechi, maintains the status quo – insisting that the six-room apartment is exclusively her husband’s. Lebechi nurtures the feud in the family and subjects Ogukwe to all sorts of insult. The insults persist to such an extent that she unleashes physical assault on Ogukwe; she does not apologise to him when some water she and her son had used to wash their hands splashes onto Ogukwe’s feet. Lebechi does not only maltreat Ogukwe but also transfers the hatred she has for him over his wife and children. Whenever Mma, Ogukwe’s daughter, greets, “often Lebechi did not respond to her greeting” (45). Like a burning fuel, the spite spreads from Mma to Adaeze, Ogukwe’s wife. Lebechi flew at Adaeze like a hen defending her chicks against a predator. They tore at each other and before Ogukwe could intervene, “they are raining blows on each other like ripe Udara falling from a windswept udara tree...the blows fell unrestrained” (46). What starts as mere dispute over six-room apartment results in physical combat and infliction of injury on one another. The pandemonium from the main compound resonates to the makeshift bathroom at the back of the hut; Mma hurriedly dresses

up and joins her mother, "hitting Lebechi's back repeatedly with her fists" (47). In like manner, Ezike, Lebechi's son, lashes out at Mma, pushes her to the ground and punches her until she begins to scream. Mma in return

...made a grab for his genitals and pulled away just in time. As he hit her head, she caught his left thigh and gave him a vicious bit before she passed out (47)

Each member of the opposing families sustains various degree of injury. Mma faints. Lebechi nurses bleeding nose and lip while Ezike cots his lacerated thigh.

Few days after the judgment by their kinsmen over the mayhem, Aadaeze has put down her load and is assisting Mma with hers when Lebechi comes out and stands in the narrow passage between the main house and the hut. Lebechi taunts Aadaeze and her daughter, stating that "the champion trader is back with her apprentice daughter" (119). The narrator captures the incident thus:

Lebechi jibed..... "you are the one wearing the trousers in your household, the breadwinners. Am I wrong? Lebechi taunted. Aadaeze glanced at her. "I have no time for you". Is that so? You will perish in your destitution: you and vulture you call a husband. That weak good for nothing thinks he can drive me away from my house". "A weak husband is better than a dead one, is he not? Aadaeze said, tilting her head and smiling. I pity you (page 119).

More often than not, Ogukwe bears insults from Lebechi and prevents his wife, Aadaeze, and daughter, Mma, from fighting with Lebechi. During one of such occasions, when the women are attacking one another, Ogukwe emerges from the hut and orders both his wife and daughter in. He does that to prevent the women from launching an attack at each other. As the wrangle deteriorates, Ogukwe makes move to broker peace between his family and his brother's but his wife, Aadaeze, rekindles the feud, insisting that Lebechi 'is evil' (86) and the conflict lingers on. It continues to erupt between Aadaeze and Lebechi.

Envy and unguided utterances do cause conflict among women. An instance is between Ogukwe's family and Lebechi. This time, it is Lebechi who unwittingly breaks the spell when Hannah is sweeping the space in front of the hut. Lebechi stands watching her. She begins, without cause, to abuse the former indirectly, calling her unbearable names. Out of anger, Aadaeze comes out to defend her daughter and both women begin to abuse on one another. The omniscient narrator captures Aadaeze's response and Lebechi's reaction in the excerpt below:

What is the mad women of Ihite-Agu saying this morning?... let your foul mouth not mention my daughter's name". "Ha, mother of tramp, or should I call you mother of tramps? Where is your second daughter? All your daughters are wayward. Who will marry them? Lebechi hissed (page 181).

To avoid incessant quarrel between the two women, Ogukwe shepherds both his wife and his daughter into the hut. He cautions his wife against abrasive utterances, warning her not to respond to Lebechi's impertinence.

Conflict also rocks the unity expected among the deported trafficked ladies. At the Oasis Youth Centre for Skill Development, one expects that

the ladies should tolerate one another but such expectation is dashed. Nothing but intolerance causes the conflict among the ladies. The Oasis Centre is a place where the deported ladies are kept in order for them to engage in vocational trainings. The first case of conflict is between Nneoma and Fola on the first day of their arrival. In the night, Nneoma awakes in bed listening to Fola's snore which the narrator likens to a car with a broken exhaust pipe. Unable to bear the snore any longer, Nneoma, gets up and taps on Fola to stop snoring. Although this did not lead to fight between the ladies, it is an attribute of conflict emanating from intolerance.

Conflict also arises between Nneoma and Alice. Alice is known to be troublesome and stubborn. Nneoma went to the lounge to watch the midday vision news. After the news, coming back to her room, she found Alice entertaining a male visitor against the regulations of the Centre. Nneoma stood at the door for a moment, stared at Alice and later went away to meet her friend, Efe. Few minutes later, Nneoma and Efe were discussing outside, then, Alice came to join them but they restricted her company. Reminding her of the regulation, Nneoma ask: "Alice do you remember that we're not allowed to bring visitors into our rooms?" Alice disparagingly turns and walks out on Nneoma away and scornfully asks her: "who cares" (96). .

Alice and Fola are not spared of conflict either. They both live like cats and rats and/or parallel lines that cannot meet. Alice is well known to be troublesome. She brings male visitors into the room against the regulation of the centre and is ever ready to challenge whoever reports her to the Oasis' authority. It is horrible that when Alice and Fola are fighting, Nneoma and Efe come in to separate them while the other ladies watching seem to enjoy the fight. Efe grabbed Alice around her waist while Nneoma pulled Fola away and both of them fell on their bed and continue to insult on each other. The extract below contains Alice and Fola's hilarious words:

Efe, leave me alone, let me teach this rat a lesson", Alice yelled. "Just look at this Odibo, this wretch, daring to talk to me. You are below my notice, let me tell you." I have not finished with you, witch, Fola fumed, breathing hard. Prostitute! I'm glad I was trafficked as domestic servant and not a sex slave like you. Ashawo" "yoo! You're too ugly to be a sex worker! Gbere girl.(137)

After the intervention of Nneoma and Efe, security guard arrived and ordered everyone back to their rooms. Although the authorities of the Oasis Centre strived to restore peace, the antagonists still fidgeted all night. Alice shook the top bunk hoping that the vibration would irritate Fola. Instead, Fola responded in wind, lifting her legs and giving the top bunk a vigorous kick. Few days later, Alice was ejected from the Oasis Centre. She brought her boyfriend to the room again against the rule and Fola reported her to the matron because of the conflict between them. Nneoma and Efe watched Alice packing her luggage thinking that she might pilfer their belongings.

Through the novel, Ezeigbo has been able to affirm that women find it difficult to tolerate one another when living together. She also makes us understand that men are not usually the cause of women's problems in the society. *Trafficked* is a compendium of conflicts

across gender with emphasis on women brought together by circumstance and those who are not related by birth or marriage but live together in the same apartment without men.

Intolerance, Resentment and Malicious Gossip among Co-wive

Adelakun's *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs* is replete with conflicts, especially among women. The first instance would have ensued between Afusa and Fasila if the former had not been in labour at the time of their encounter. Fasila hawks round the *Agboole*, calling people's attention to her wares when some of the items Afusa throws from the *eede* narrowly miss her. Afusa is in serious pang, labouring to deliver a new baby. Lonely and, as common with women in her situation, unconsciously or in a bid to draw someone's attention for help, she throws calabash, plates and clay-pot from the veranda to the open space in the *Agboole*. Coincidentally, however, some of the items nearly hit Fasila. Provoked, Fasila rains abuse on the person who may have thrown the objects at her and hurriedly dashes into the house where she suspects the items may have come from in order to challenge him/her. The narrator notes that:

Fasila balances the tray of *ewedu* on her head..... She took a turn in front of Alhaji's house to make an exit when a clay pot swung past her, narrowly missing her head and landed on the floor, braking into pieces. Which oloriburuku, whose head has totally attracted bad luck, dare do this? ... She exclaimed and marched furiously into Alhaji's house to see who dare throw things at her (11).

Fasila opens the small gate at Alhaji's house and enters. Upon entry, she sees Afusa groaning in pain. Although Fasila goes in with the intention to fight, she cannot but sublimate her anger to an honourable and appreciable gesture by assisting Afusa. She places Afusa in a comfortable position and calls Iya Abiye, the (traditional) midwife, to help deliver the baby successfully. Fasila's foresight is commendable in this wise compered with the conflict among Sikira, Afusa and Motara.

Motara, Afusa and Sikira are Alhaji Arigbabuwo's wives in the order of seniority. Sikira and Afusa quarrel over whose responsibility it is to prepare their husband's mother's meal. The setting of Alhaji's home is in conformity with the principle of *motherism*, which is an alternative theory to feminism propounded by Catherine Acholonu (1995). This principle upholds division of responsibility among men and women but with little adjustment at old age. The children born by a woman, according to this principle, are expected to take care of her at old age. They must provide for her needs just as she did for the children when they were young. No matter how highly placed a man may be — a king, an elder or a warrior — he must respect and honour his mother. He must listen when she speaks. The norm underlying such adherence places high premium on motherhood. This, perhaps, is the responsibility Alhaji wants to fulfil.

Although Sikira is the "junior" wife who, as the custom demands and in line with African *motherism* as propounded by Achonolu, should prepare the meal except otherwise pre-planned that shift-cooking should be operated among the women in Alhaji's house. In the Yoruba polygamous setting, age is not the criterion used to share responsibilities among co-wives; rather, emphasis is placed on the time a woman is married into the household. It is obvious that, at the first appearance of Sikira in the narrative, she is cantankerous and always wants to defile tradition. Sikira

expects Afusa to do the cooking. The pandemonium that ensues from the contention reverberates, making Motara privy to the conflict. In a bid to arbitrate the dispute, Motara insults Afusa and Sikira. Not minding Motara's age and position in the household, Sikira warns her seriously thus:

Iya Agba, don't curse me. I don't have scales over my eyes that can prevent me from looking an elder in the face and talking back!" Sikira shouted at *Iyale Agba*. Afusa also courteously euphemises "*Iyale Agba*, Afusa muttered, still looking away. Don't drag your seniority on the floor. Please respect yourself. (17).

Motara is not happy with the manner the dispute is settled. Alhaji beats Sikira because she insults him when he is adjudicating the dispute, and the beating sufficiently lays the dispute to rest. Meanwhile, Motara harbours resentment against Afusa because Alhaji does not beat her. Motara expects both Sikira and Afusa to be beaten. She expresses her displeasure to Alhaji at night when they are alone:

You know Afusa and Sikira were both fighting over who will cook for your mother but it is only Sikira that you beat.... That is what I am saying. Both of them were wrong but Afusa knew when to keep her mouth shut. She will cause trouble and push Sikira forward to be punished. You should have drawn her near and deal with her too. (20).

But Alhaji has to ignore the statement tactfully to prevent mayhem.

Sikira is indeed skillful especially in an issue that does concern her. She is equally smart at causing trouble that usually involves almost all the woman of the household. During one of those convenient periods she advantageously employs to disrupt the peace of the household, Sikira observes Afusa preparing a palatable meal for Alhaji. Afusa prepares Alhaji's favourite food — *Amala* with *abula* — generously spiced with chunks of bush meat. Afusa has suspected that Sikira will obstruct the relative peace in the premises as she watches her cavorting to and fro. Afusa's suspicion comes through. When the table is set for Alhaji to take his dinner in the parlour, she meets Sikira standing by the table opening the dishes one after the other. She accuses Afusa of using "soup to snatch my husband" (31). As each of the women ties her head veil round her waist, the statement Sikira makes and the next line of action she takes are better quoted than described:

I cannot open my eyes and watch as *talubo* enters it. See! Sikira shouted, picking up the dishes and showing each one to Alhaji and the mother. "See the kind of soup she made! Tell me, what I can ever cook for Alhaji again?" "Alhaji, I said you won't eat this food and I mean it" she said and immediately used her hand to swipe the food off the table and everything became one huge mess on the floor.

.... "My life!" Afusa shouted and began to cry. Alhaji rushed at Sikira and gave her several blows. She fell on the ground but he did not stop beating her (31).

All the women in the *Agboole* at the moment try to rescue Sikira to no avail until the men intervene. Seeing that the beating could be murderous should it continue unabated, Afusa had to stop crying and help hold Alhaji. Sikira stays at home for two week convalescing after the beating.

Gossip, envy, jealousy and covetousness often cause conflict among women. Acholonu (1995) calls these phenomena “women-against-women syndrome”. Alake and Sikira are the originators of these anti-social vices in the studied text. Alake usually goes round the *agboole* to foment gossip that always has detrimental consequences among women in the *Agboole*, bringing them at loggerheads. When she observes that Mulika visits Rafiu, she leaves her wares at the shop with her child, goes into Alhaji’s compound tip-toeing towards Rafiu’s door and delicately positions her ears in the mood she can eavesdrop the discussion and/or romantic fantasise between the lovers. Iya Agba, Alhaji’s mother, caught her red handed and sarcastically scolded Alake for the dastardly act. “Alake rushed out quickly but not before she heard the old woman hiss and call her a gossip. She got back to her goods only to find that her child had neglected it and goats were feasting on the bread” (46).

It is not uncommon among women to jealously give primacy to the order of seniority in polygamous home. This issue is not left in Adedokun’s *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs*. At the demise of Iya Agba, Arigbabuwo’s mother, and the interment rites that follow, women in the *agboole* who come to render assistance quarrel among themselves. Some of the women argued that they were senior wives because they were married into the *agboole* before others. “I don’t know if you are older than I am!” One of the women shouted. All I know is that I was married into this *agboole* before you!” (61). This implies that women who lay emphasis on seniority, especially when conflict arises in the *agboole*, intentionally do not give cognisance to age difference. Thus, by the virtue of marriage order, age is sacrificed on the altar of polygamy.

The uniqueness of motherism is the organisation of women into different social groups, clubs, associations, and their industriousness without possessiveness to be equal with men at all costs. In these associations, women discuss trade, festivals, religion and avail themselves of the opportunity of the gathering to settle squabbles. Many a time however, these associations are plagued with conflicts. Among women of the same social interest or those who belong to the same social club where men do not intervene and/or interfere in women affair, conflicts still abound. For instance, during Iya Agba’s Fidau funeral, Sikira invites two of her social clubs merely made up of women. Members of the first club wear the same blue *Ankara* material chosen as a uniform. The second club, dubbed *Ifesowapo*, arrives in a green “andco”. The arrival of these two clubs puts Sikira in a state of dilemma as the leader of the second club feels uncomfortable seeing her wearing the uniform of the first club. Afusa is fetched to plead to them to no avail. The first club, *Egbe Obinrin Ife*, also complains that she does not give them enough attention. This dilemma prompts Sikira to give way to tears. Eventually, Motara, Alhaji’s first wife, is called to resolve the matters. Motara advises Sikira to wear *Egbe Obirin Ife’s* buba and *Ifesowapo’s* wrapper. “Thus, she wore two different types of *Ankara*” (65).

Baba n’ sale succinctly captures the rudiment of conflicts among women. According to him, “A woman throws out her character and blames her

head for not giving her a good husband” (19). This good character that is lost especially in Alake’s case makes her suffer from what one can term as verbal diarrhoea. This is precisely exemplified in the case of Sidi’s lost goat. In the cause of searching for the lost goat, she meets Alake who informs her that Fatai’s wife (Iyawo) is seen dragging the goat away. She succeeds in creating conflicts between an elderly woman and a young new wife. The dichotomy does not only rest with the two women but reverberates on men in the *agboole*. As typical of every gossip, Alake beseeches Sidi to pledge anonymity of the person who reveals the secret to her. In other word, she makes Sidi promise that she will not tell anybody that the information comes from her:

Alake came out of the house and beckoned to Sidi who came close to her. She looked around furtively and drew Sidi aside. I know who stole your goat”, she said “Ehn!” “Hush! If I tell you, promise me you won’t tell anybody...” “I swear”. “Good. I saw Iyawo, the new wife, Fatai’s wife”. “The one that sells palm oil?” “Yes. I saw her dragging the goat yesterday I beg you, don’t tell anyone it was me who told you”. “I won’t, thank you. Your children will live”, Sidi said as she charged to the other end of the *agboole* where *iyawo* lived. She entered the veranda. (79)

Alake also brings reproach to her husband in this case. When the case is being adjudicated, it is discovered that the accused person, Iyawo, has not really stolen the goat. The goat Alake saw Iyawo drag the previous day is black, while the colour of Sidi lost goat is red. Alake’s expertise at lying is captured in the following words of Baba n’sale: “Alake that if you catch a penis in her vagina will tell you is a mere corn cob?” in this rhetorical question, Baba implies that Alake is often economical with the truth and whoever believes her does that at their own peril.

Young women at tender age also have their experiences in conflict. It is interesting that the narrator is a lady who may have narrated from her own quotidian experiences – things in her environment or information available at her disposal which she gets from someone else. She succeeds in bringing her childhood experiences to bear on the conflict between young ladies who always play with sands in the *agboole*. Many a times, works seem to be a collaborative effort or game that should maintain peaceful co-existence among these young ones often results in conflict. Bili and Anifa end up their jumping game in conflict even without men’s intervention. The game involves jumping from one square to the other, throwing asbestos into the squares either by closing one’s eye or turning one’s back to the square. The square in which the asbestos land is claimed as the house of the thrower and the co-contestant will not be allowed into such square. In this case, however, Bili seeks Anifa’s permission to step into her house but the latter refuses. Her refusal exasperates Bili so much that she curses Anifa: “shio, see her ear as wide as court summons” (94). Replying, Anifa impetuously asks: “what of you?” “Your mouth is flat like the knife use in cementing a house!” (94). Exchange of insults between these young ladies interest the onlookers so much that they hail and irk them on.

Conflict is the driving force of the narrative, especially among the female folk. Through effective use of flashback, the hardship Buhari’s

draconian decrees bring to the women in the *agboole* is brought to the fore. Among the decrees, "War Against Indiscipline (WAI)" is one that women find difficult to comply with. Despite the fact that the only functioning water pump in the *agboole* cannot satisfy members of the community sufficiently, everybody rushes and tries to get water at the same time and at all costs. Women who gain access close to the tap always fight each other over who should get water first. One woman throws out another woman's bucket to put hers. The owner of the bucket gives her a slap immediately. In turn, the woman that is slapped puts the baby on her back down, takes the clothes with which the child is strapped on her back and ties it around her waist. The other woman assumes the same fighting posture and, before long, they begin to fight.

Mulika, Rafiu's pregnant wife who desperately needs water, also has her experience of the conflict. The patrolling soldiers beat her mercilessly not minding that she is pregnant and leave her screaming on the ground. As Mulika picks up her empty bucket to go home, she slumps and faints. She narrowly escapes death, because some people who identify her with Alhaji quickly resuscitate her. Eventually, Mulika has complications arising from the beating, when she is about to give birth. She only succeeds in giving birth to a dead child through caesarean section. Alhaji does not want the story about Mulika's complication to go round the *agboole*. But the secret goes around before dawn; Alake has spread it all over. Amid picturesque metaphor, proverb and omniscient narrative technique, the narrator, speaking through Baba n'sale, analyses Alake's subconscious proclivity for gossip:

The vagina says she can trust the penis in all things but it can never see her and look away. Alake can never see gossip and turn the other ear that much I know about her. You think she would have stood there for nothing? God knows how long she has even been there. (123).

The prosperity of a woman's children is a course of concern and conflict for other women. This is also mentioned by Adedokun. Mulika is jealous of Jimoh's academic performance. Jimoh is Afusa's eldest son who always comes first in the school examinations. Afusa is enthusiastic about the brilliancy of her son and dances in acknowledgement of this. Displeased however, Mulika murmurs to Alake that, "Because her own children are doing well in school, she thinks she knows everything. You should see her dancing because Jimoh came first in school today" (159). The me-first spirit among women does not go un-noticed in *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs*.

Acknowledging the strain hospitality Sikira displays in the night preceding the day she plans to oust Chief Arigbabio's household, Alhaji, though aware of the plot as it had been revealed by Alake, sarcastically praises Sikira and promises that if she should keep such habit up, she (that is Sikira) will be taken to the next Arafa to climb the mountain in Mecca. Upon hearing this however, Motara becomes jealous and accuses Alhaji of partiality, pointing out that he chooses to send Sikira to Mecca while her senior co-wives have not been sent. This is what she means by saying that: "you want to send her to Mecca when her Iyales have not yet gone?" (165). Towards the end of the narrative, it is obvious that Alake contributes immensely to the matrimonial conflicts between Alhaji and Sikira and the two women are the crook wood that upsets the fire-base in the *agboole*.

Through *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs*, Abimbola Adunni Adedokun has been able to re-orientate and correct people's perception of conflicts especially within the marriage circle. Conflict occurs between men and women (inter-gender conflict), among people of the same gender (intra-gender conflict). It is a natural phenomenon inherent in human social interaction. One obvious thing in the narrative is that, in a polygamous setting, both man and woman should share the blame of any conflict that ensues because, according to Catherine Acholonu (1995), "western and even some African feminists speak of polygamy as if it is forced on African women. This is definitely not the case; girls also do choose their own husbands secretly and then encourage prospective suitors to approach their parents to ask for their hands in marriage" (52). Acholonu's assertion manifests in *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs* as Sikira exclaims that: "My life is destroyed!" "I have married a wrong husband. They warned me not to marry another woman's husband but I refused to listen...." (19).

Conclusion

Kolawole's (1997) submission in *Womanism and African Consciousness* helps to establish what this study sets to correct in relation to how conflict is perpetrated – which is "...incomplete and one-side understanding" (79) of perpetrators of conflicts in society. *Trafficked* and *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs* are replete with societal problems including conflicts across gender with emphasis on intra-gender conflicts among co-wives and women who are not related by birth or marriage but live together in the same apartment or as neighbours. Men are not always the linchpins of conflict and women's predicaments. Women hardly tolerate one another in many spheres. Malicious gossip, envy, jealousy, intolerance and cantankerousness are the common causes of squabble among women. Rather than ascribing blame, men and women should work together to solve the problems in the society. Women should make conscientious efforts to unite, overcome disunity among them and assist one another for their collective benefit and the society's. Inter-gender unity, not conflict, should be fostered among men and women by *all* literary writers if parity must be achieved over macho chauvinism.

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