



## Gender-Based Violence and Trauma Recovery in Tosin Jobi Tume's *Not That Woman*

Shrouk Sami Abdel Jawwad, Rania Reda Nasr,  
Howayda Hassan Elsherif

English Department, Faculty of Women, Ain Shams  
University, Egypt

Corresponding author: shrouk.elazazi@women.asu.edu.eg

DOI: [10.21608/MISJ.2025.401830.1070](https://doi.org/10.21608/MISJ.2025.401830.1070)

Received: 10-12-2024

Accepted: 28-2-2025

Published: 30-3-2025

[https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article\\_450602.html](https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article_450602.html)

Citation: Abdel Jawwad, S., Nasr, R., & Elsherif, H. (2025). Gender-Based Violence and Trauma Recovery in Tosin Jobi Tume's *Not That Woman*. *Misriqiya*, 5(1), 32-49. doi: 10.21608/misj.2025.401830.1070

### Abstract

Male-perpetrated violence against women remains a pervasive crisis, particularly in Africa, where women are subjected to various forms of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. This paper examines the representation of gender-based violence in *Not That Woman* (2019) by the Nigerian playwright Tosin Jobi Tume (1980-), highlighting the traumatic experiences of Nigerian women and their struggle for healing and autonomy. The play exposes multiple forms of victimization, including incest, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence, offering a critique of societal complicity in sustaining these oppressive structures. The study explores how the play portrays the journey of female survivors as they navigate their pain and reclaim their agency. This journey is analyzed through Judith Herman's three stages of trauma recovery: the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. By tracing the psychological and emotional progression of the female characters, the research underscores how storytelling and the act of retelling trauma serve as essential mechanisms for healing. By centering the voices of female survivors, *Not That Woman* challenges patriarchal norms and affirms the transformative power of narrative in overcoming trauma and restoring selfhood.

**Keywords:** gender-based violence, trauma recovery, Judith Herman, women's autonomy, narrative healing

Gender-based violence against women is a persistent epidemic worldwide particularly in Africa. In many nations in Africa, including Nigeria, female victims are subjugated to various forms of violent acts including physical, sexual and emotional abuse. These different types of abuse include incest, child sexual abuse and battering. These abusive forms of gender-based violence are depicted in the selected play, *Not That Woman* (2019) by the Nigerian playwright Tosin Jobi Tume. The play mirrors the traumatic experiences that Nigerian females endure in most of their lives. The paper explores the journey of these traumatized females in overcoming their pains and reclaiming power over themselves. This journey is analyzed through Judith Herman's three stages of recovery represented in: the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. The paper concludes with affirming the role of retelling the traumatic experiences in healing the pain.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (2020), in Nigeria, women face multifaceted oppression that manifests in various harmful forms of abuse. As the United Nations Population Fund highlights, these include domestic violence, physical and verbal abuse, and extreme acts such as acid attacks and outright killings. Sexual violence, encompassing rape, sexual assault, and incest, is disturbingly widespread, further perpetuating the cycle of trauma among women. Harmful cultural practices, such as early and forced marriages and circumcision, strip women of their autonomy and expose them to enduring physical and mental trauma. These severe gender inequalities stem from deep-rooted cultural and structural barriers that violate human rights and perpetuate harm.

The term gender-based violence refers to harmful actions that are perpetuated against individuals based on their gender. It encompasses a wide range of abusive behaviors, including physical, sexual, emotional, or even economical abuse. It is considered as a severe type of trauma that females suffer from; it is a violation of human rights that can cause threats, injuries, and trauma to survivors.

The term gender-based violence impacts both males and females, but it disproportionately affects females. So, the term gender violence is commonly defined as "violent acts (real or threat-ended) perpetrated on females because they are females" (Green, 1999, P.1). In Geraldine Terry and Hoare Joanna's *Gender-Based Violence* (2007) it is mentioned that the term "gender-based violence" (GBV) and "violence against women (VAW)" are often used interchangeably (2).

GBV is violence directed against a person because of his/her gender. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993 as cited in Terry and Hoare, 2007, P. 2), defines VAW as a sub-category of GBV that includes:

[a]ny act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Therefore, gender-based violence includes any violation to women's integrity; it is a serious crime that is committed against women and girls.

Gender-based violence includes a host of abusive behaviors that are directed to women and girls because of their gender. This includes: “wife abuse, sexual assault, dowry-related murder, marital rape, selective malnourishment of female children, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, and sexual abuse of female children” (Heise, 2002, P.56).

Likewise, Penn and Nardos identify various types of violence that women and girls experience such as: 'gender-based violence', 'sexual exploitation' and its consequences, 'trafficking in women', 'enforced marriage', 'mail order brides', 'forced prostitution', and 'forced labor' (2003, P.9). They also highlight the physical forms of violence like: “battering”, 'wife beating', beating during pregnancies leading to miscarriage, 'spousal violence', 'domestic violence', 'torture', 'anguish', 'house arrest', verbal assault, and threatening (P.8). There are also violent traditional practices such as: 'circumcision', 'dowry burning', 'honor killing', 'female infanticide', women as the property of men, and women as the 'standard bearers of a family honor' )P. 9). The selected play contains various types of gender-based violence which are represented in: incest and child sexual abuse, and battering.

Gender-based violence and its lasting effects have remained ongoing challenges impacting people globally, especially within African communities. Okolo, N. C., & Okolo, C. (2018, November). highlight that gender-based violence is a prevalent social issue in Nigeria. However Babalola et al. note that it often goes unreported due to the culture of silence driven by fear of stigmatization from family and friends. This not only increases the cycle of harm but also intensifies the efforts to eradicate the problem.

Tosin Jubi Tume (1980- ) is a contemporary Nigerian playwright. She holds BA and MA degrees in English and Theatre Arts from the University of Ilorin and

the University of Abuja, Nigeria, respectively. She is a playwright, dancer, director, choreographer, actor, singer, and a theatre scholar with over fifteen years of experience. Tume has shared in several theatrical productions, workshops, festivals, and conferences within and outside Nigeria (Hutchison & Jephta, 2019, P. 58). She is recognized as one of the pioneering African playwrights who has led the movement of self-actualization.

Although, Tume's name may be novel in the field, she managed to establish herself as a striking African writer. As an African female, Tume knows well what it means to be a black woman living in an African society. In an interview conducted by Hutchison, Tume says:

As a woman who lives and works in Nigeria where I practice my art as a playwright, theatre creator and scholar, theatre serves as a viable medium of expression for me as it offers an avenue to communicate my opinions, hopes, and aspirations especially for African women ... Theatre is the voice I use to address issues that I am passionate about. I particularly write about taboo topics, like the ongoing violence against women, to spark conversations that could lead to future positive actions. (2020, p.2)

As a Nigerian woman, Tume knows well the inherited trauma of what it means to exist as a woman in an African society. She uses theatre as a platform to express her views, particularly on taboo issues like gender-based violence in societies where male superiority is often enforced through physical, sexual or even emotional abuse. She challenges stereotypes that affect women and provoke them towards self-awareness through her works. In the same interview Tume adds "I want women to stop playing victims, to become aware of their power and explore their full potential, as suggested in *Not That Woman*, even if this is uncomfortable" (2020, p.3). In the play, Tume portrays Nigerian female victims who are violently abused, yet are still fighters and successfully recover from their traumatic pain.

In the play, *Not That Woman*, Tume delves into the painful experiences of women who have endured gender-based violence and their journey towards healing and empowerment. This research aims at exploring the theme of overcoming trauma in *Not That Woman*, highlighting the resilience, solidarity and collective strength demonstrated by the female characters. The play represents profound forms of gender-based violence, including physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. It also clarifies the harsh traditions faced by women within Nigeria as a patriarchal society, where violence against women is normal.

Despite being oppressed, the female characters in *Not That Woman* show resilience and strength. Through their testimonial stories, they refuse to be defined by their society. They go through transformative journey, as they move from oppression and victimhood to empowerment and strength. Through solidarity, female characters reach to healing, overcome trauma and inspire others to break free from societal norms.

In Tume's *Not That Woman*, all female characters are discriminated against only because of their gender. They are sexually exploited whether by their fathers, relatives or even their husbands. The play deals with child abuse and incest; the forbidden sexual relations between the family members through Folake, Nkechi, and Zainab.

*Not That Woman* takes place in a refuge, women's association in Nigeria, which is run by Madam B. The play revolves around stories of four women, Folake, Nkechi, Zainab and Joyce, who reflect the physical and psychological abuse that most women are subject to in the Nigerian society. The four women grapple with the devastating consequences of violence. For example, Folake was deprived of her education because she was a girl. She was abandoned by her family who let her work as a servant for her uncle. Instead of taking care of her, Folake's uncle abused her physically and sexually for ten years. This reflects the deep-rooted gender oppression of patriarchal society where girls are denied education, abandoned by their family and left vulnerable to exploitation. The long duration of abuse suggests the presence of a culture of silence, fear and perhaps societal denial, where female victims are discouraged to speak about their suffering. Folake's story reveals how cultural norms allows such trauma to persist, suppressing female potential and maintaining the cycle of violence and pain.

The second character is Nkechi who lost her virginity when she was thirteen by her father. He gave her to his friend in a drinking debate. She used to be beaten by her husband and a woman has taken her to a hospital, then into an orphanage that she ran. It was an illegal orphanage where girls were forced to bear children for adoption. She gave birth to a baby boy, and he was taken away from her. Nkechi's story reveals a vicious cycle of exploitation and gender-based violence. Firstly, she was violated by her father, and after that she was given to his friend to be like his property. This act stripes her of agency and autonomy. The suffering continues in her adult life as she endured physical abuse from her husband. Nkechi's brief rescue by a woman leads to further exploitation as she was coerced



into bearing children for adoption. The forced separation from her baby boy marks another moment of loss, reenforcing her lack of control over her body and her future. Her story exposes the nature of female victimization, where patriarchal, institutional, and familial structures work together to silence, exploit, and erase voices of the vulnerable.

Another story of abuse is represented through Zainab. She was only eleven years old when she was given in marriage to a sixty-three-years-old man. She was young, barely reaching puberty before her marriage. Immediately she became pregnant, but she had no ante-natal care. At the time of delivery, she did not get proper medical care and therefore she suffered for fifteen days without being medically attended. Then a stick was forced into her abdomen to expel her dead and decomposed baby. Due to this painful experience, Zainab suffered severe complications, including an inability to control her bladder and rectum, leading to involuntary urination and defecation. After that Zainab was divorced and abandoned by her family who felt embarrassed because of her unpleasant smell and the flies that followed her everywhere. This highlights the harmful effects of child marriage and reflects a gross violation of the female body, right, and autonomy.

Finally, Joyce is a friend to the members of the refuge. She suffered low self-esteem. She was beaten by her irresponsible husband during her pregnancy. She accepted his maltreatment in silence until she knew that her unfaithful husband was trying to poison her and then elope with his secretary. This reflects psychological and emotional abuse and betrayal within a toxic marital relationship.

At the end of the play, it is revealed that Madam B, who is supposed to be their rescuer, is herself a victim of abuse as she is rescued after her husband's attempt to slaughter her, and she appears on stage to tell her hidden story about the abusive relationship that she has been enduring for years. This revelation is very ironic and powerful because it highlights that even those who act as protectors are silent victims. By sharing her suffering, she breaks the silence around domestic abuse and reclaims her voice, showing that storytelling can be an effective means of recovery and empowerment. Finally, the female characters in the play unite and decide to speak against the oppression that they have been going through. They determine not to be that woman who suffers in silence. Hence the significance of the play's title becomes clear.

The play reveals deep social issues and the impact of societal pressures and struggle faced by women in the Nigerian society that is characterized by deeply entrenched patriarchal values and widespread gender inequality. It highlights crucial themes such as gender roles, female oppression, and violence. It also focuses on solidarity, autonomy, freedom, resilience and survival. Tume uses powerful storytelling to reflect the trauma that Nigerian women experience because of cultural traditions. She shows women's struggles to encounter their patriarchal society with its restrictive societal norms.

Tume's literary work, *Not That Women* echoes her feminist spirit, which criticizes the cultural practices that perpetuate violence against women. In a personal interview Tume says, "I would not say that I'm a victim of gender-based violence like that to tell the story. But I heard the stories they have told me, and I felt the burden to tell their stories" (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024). She admits her sense of responsibility to give voice to the silenced, emphasizing the effective role of storytellers in enhancing marginalized voices and raising awareness about issues like gender-based violence. The setting of the play as a refuge is very symbolic and evocative as it indicates trauma, healing, survival and solidarity. Tume's choice for that setting specifically portrays how women under extraordinary pressures support each other.

Tume was inspired to write the play when she experienced a moment where her gender was used to define her role. In the same personal interview, she said:

I'm not that woman... we need more women who can stand up to say no you cannot subjugate me just because I'm a woman so that's where the idea came from and then I was motivated to explore the theme of gender-based violence because I belong to all female group. (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024)

The title, *Not That Woman*, suggests a rejection of stereotypes imposed by others. The women in the play have self-definition as powerful women who resist asserting their identity and worth. They will not be that women who accept the prevailing culture of silence surrounding gender-based violence.

As mentioned before, Folake was sexually abused by her uncle to be his sex slave for ten years. And Nkechi lost her virginity when she was thirteen by her father and was raped by her drunken husband. In addition, Nkechi was forced to be a prostitute. Similarly, Zainab was forced to marry a sixty-three-year-old husband when she was eleven and was sexually exploited. All these examples are

proof that the female body can be violated easily without any fear from punishment.

This reflects that in the Nigerian patriarchal society, women are considered as the weaker sex, which makes them vulnerable to sexual assaults. This crime is committed deliberately against women in order to control them. Experiencing these forms of sexual abuse in a very young age sadly inflicts psychological scars on these females. For instance, Nkechi embodies the most disgraceful type of violation to the female body. She says, “oh yes, my own father took my virginity when I was just thirteen years old” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019 p.68). She captures the shocking reality of incest and sexual abuse, reflecting one of the most horrible violations of trust and human rights.

Likewise, Folake says about her uncle “he abused me sexually for ten horrid years” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019 p.67). This tragic quotation reveals the immense pain and trauma caused by prolonged sexual abuse. The survivor’s use of “horrid” conveys the horrific nature of the experience, underscoring how the abuse shattered her sense of safety, trust, and well-being. To be abused by a family member makes the violation even more devastating, as it involves a betrayal of familial trust and love. Such experiences devastate the victim’s physical and psychological well-being, leaving lasting scars, contributing to trauma, low self-worth, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships in the future.

The play also deals with female battering, the violent physical abuse that causes trauma to these females. Folake for instance, was brutally beaten by her uncle. Also, Nkechi was badly battered by her father, her husband and Mandigo, a man who impregnated girls by force. Nkechi says “[b]eats me...Even my father, the most irresponsible father and husband in the entire universe” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.67).

Similarly, Joyce was physically abused and beaten by her husband as well, even during her pregnancy. He even tried to poison her to elope with his mistress. Joyce says about her husband, “Larry is planning to kill me, so that he can be with his secretary. He has actually been poisoning my meals for sometimes now” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.99). This captures the reality of domestic violence and betrayal that can sometimes remain hidden behind closed doors, manifesting in insidious ways that leave victims vulnerable and isolated.

Likewise, Madam B was savagely battered by her husband to the extent that he attempted to slaughter her in order to take her house. Folake says that



Madam B's husband "had stabbed her and ran away" (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.103). Besides being physically abused, all females suffered psychologically as their life was threatened by their fathers, their husbands or any male figure in their life. These women endured these forms of abuses in silence because they saw that "marriage is all about endurance and submission" (Tume, p.81).

Therefore, it is clear that all the Nigerian females in the play suffered from harsh traumatic experiences that shattered their identity causing their disempowerment, isolation, victimization, and disconnection with others. For instance, Joyce says, "I'm not allowed to keep any friends" (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.96). This shows how Joyce was disempowered to the extent that she was deprived of her natural right as a human being to have friends just to please her husband. Nkechi tells Joyce about her husband's plan "to make you dependent on him financially, emotionally and psychologically" (Tume, p.93). Joyce's husband did his best to have absolute control over his wife in every single aspect of her life. Joyce shows total submissiveness and says, "[w]hat am I supposed to do? I am an African woman, my place is with my husband" (Tume, p.75). Joyce's speech reflects the patriarchal cultural norms that trap women in abusive relationships, where their identity is tied to their role as wives.

As noted through the female characters in the play, survivors endure a range of harms that have severe effects on them. Babalola states: Survivors of GBV suffer devastating short and long-term effects on their physical and psychological health including various degrees of physical injuries, forced and unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, limited ability to complete daily tasks, and in severe cases, death. (2021, p.4-6) This highlights the severe impact of GBV on survivors' physical and psychological health. Therefore, all these illnesses must be effectively treated. Tume declares:

I hope that when people read *Not That Woman* or when people see it on stage they can connect with some of those characters you know and they can see themselves in the characters, they can see their sisters and stop repeating itself they can see what they can do what role they can play and becoming part of the solution for their problem...sensitize women of gender-based violence about the power that they hold that they do not know

or they are ignorant about. (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024)

This shows *Not That Woman's* power to promote empathy by helping audiences to identify themselves or their loved ones with its characters, thereby inspiring action against GBV. It also highlights the play's role in empowering women to acknowledge inherent strength to confront these challenges.

In Herman's book, *Trauma and Recovery*, she explains the strategy to assist survivors of trauma in their recovery from traumatic experiences. It consists of three main stages: safety, remembrance and mourning and reconnection (Herman, 2015, p.11). Herman depicts the dilemma that hunts the trauma survivors, the wish to expose those experiences, and the difficulties in doing so. Herman states:

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy. When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom. (Herman, p.1)

This shows how women are suffering the dilemma of whether to speak about their pain out loud or to keep silent. They are always afraid of society's stigma. For example, Madam B says, "my husband's maltreatment was a thing of shame to me" (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.104). This reflects the emotional and psychological impact of abuse on the victim, that makes her feel humiliated and trapped in silence. Therefore, Madam B chooses to endure brutal beating just to avoid being described as a weak wife. After experiencing these traumatic sequences, establishing a safe environment is a crucial step in the journey of healing.

The establishment of safety and restoring control upon the self is the first step in the recovery process. It is the central step since the recovery stage cannot develop without securing safety. During the establishment of the safety process, the trauma survivor should restore herself back and have control over her life. She should make her own decisions and explain her own opinions.

In the play, all the female characters are able to establish safety and get free from their fright. As victims, they are confronted with the perpetrators. This confrontation represents the process of getting their freedom from this abusive

relationship. Severing surrounding harmful relationships help these females to establish control over their body. Furthermore, throughout the play, the victims mention Madam B to demonstrate how they join with her into the same team because she symbolizes a securing shelter for any woman who survives trauma. All the females in the play manage to restore power and re-establish a new safe environment in the refuge.

For instance, Folake says, “Madam B rescued me and brought me to this refuge, and taught me how to live again” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.67). Likewise, Folake says “she rescued us, and took us to the hospital or treatment” (Tume, p. 70). Now the survivors’ first step in their journey of recovery is reached. Consequently, moving to the second step of recovery can be easily achieved.

During this stage, the survivor recognizes what happened to her. She can remember the traumatic experience and tell what exactly happened to her. This stage is the perfect time for a confrontation between the traumatized person and her own soul. The victim should tell the unspeakable stories in order to reveal horrors and the depressing emotions that are hidden inside her soul. At this stage, the trauma survivor reconstructs the story, transforms the traumatic memory, and mourns the traumatic accident that she went through. The remembrance and mourning stage gives a chance to the survivor to tell her own story and grieve the impact of trauma on her, “[t]he survivor can speak of the unspeakable” (Herman, 2015, p.175). Survivors now can have the courage to let their voices be heard.

However, grieving the traumatic loss is a hard task; its complexity is due to the survivor’s feelings of fear and pride. Yet Tume represents all female characters as courageous females who bravely testify their traumatic accidents with other females in order to make other victims aware of their rights: “As the survivor summons her memories, the need to preserve safety must be balanced constantly against the need to face the past” (Herman, 2015, p.176). This reflects that survivors must acquire the delicate balance that enables them to confront their aching memories and at the same time to protect their stability. Facing the past is a very crucial step for healing but it should be combined with safety in order not to risk their lives. For instance, Folake says:

My mother suggested that they keep only my brother in school, while I go and live with a distant uncle. My father agreed. My uncle was magnanimous enough to send me to school; however, he abused me sexually for ten horrid years. After finished school, he seized my certificate and forced me to work in his shop while he paid me nothing. I was my

uncle's sex slave. (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 67)

Through the character of Folake, Tume discusses a very sensitive topic that is considered a taboo, which is incest. Folake is able to remember and plainly tell her previous trauma without fearing any judgment.

Similarly, Tume portrays a raped girl who was violated by her father but freely shares her past trauma. Nkechi remembers her past about her abusive father. He used to beat his wife while she was pregnant. Nkechi recalls her memories and describes her father as, “the most irresponsible father and husband in the entire universe; an unrepentant wife-beater” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 67).

Nkechi courageously describes how savage her father was. She continues digging into her memories and describes the trauma that she faced after her mother's death. Her father beat her and took her own virginity when she was just thirteen years old. Nkechi becomes afraid of the stigma of her African society, so she gives up to the most shameful act, rape. She says, “there was no one I could talk to about the shameful and abominable thing he was doing to me” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 68). Moreover, her suffering does not stop at this point as her father sells her in an attempt to settle his drinking debts. In addition, Nkechi's trauma continued as her husband has no respect for her, and he treats her very “shabbily”. One day, he “beats her into a coma” and leaves (Tume, p. 68).

According to Herman, “the simplest technique for the recovery of new memories is the careful exploration of memories the patient already has,” (p. 184) so, with sorrow and sadness Nkechi here continues exploring her previous traumatic memories which reveals that her pain does not stop at that point. She is taken by Madam Peace who exploits her and by forcing her to become a prostitute. She remembers what Madam Peace tells her, “you shall be handsomely rewarded for your efforts. You will be paid fifty thousand Naira for every female child and seventy thousand Naira for every male child you bear” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 69).

Tume continues in asserting the importance of telling one's story. She says, “[b]y voicing out, by telling stories, it is; like a group therapy for all the women involved... to be aware of your own space and what could be and what is and then makes you know what you must do” (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024). Therefore, she insists on representing the model female figure who keeps silent in front of the abuse she suffers on the hands of her husband. In time, she breaks her silence and shares the ill-treatment of her abusive spouse. Madam B says:

I wanted people to believe that all was well with my marriage, because I loved my husband dearly and I wanted to make it work. But the truth is that throughout my eighteen years of marriage to that man, he battered me in every possible way; verbally, emotionally, psychologically, physically, and even sexually. (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 103)

Madam B describes a very common attitude that women in African societies do. They fear being judged as unsuccessful couples. Their fear of stigma makes them endure any type of abuse from their male partners. Herman states, “the telling of the trauma story thus inevitably plunges the survivor into profound grief” (2015, p.188). Madam B continues her story with anguish:

My husband's maltreatment was a thing of shame to me. It made me feel less of a woman. Somehow I became convinced that there was something wrong with me to provoke such incessant anger in him. So, for every one of my husband's abuse, I always found a way to blame myself. Before I knew it, I had become an expert at conjuring up excuses for every one of his misbehaviours towards me. It was easier for me to cope that way. (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 103-104)

African women used to blame themselves for the harsh treatment they got from their husbands. They even justified the violation they suffered through their husbands' hands. They doubted themselves instead of seeing the real truth. Fearing this stigma urged African women to refuse to cry out for help. They chose to die in silence to satisfy such patriarchal societies.

All females in the play become brave and fearless to speak up against any violation and topics that are regarded as taboos. By that, Herman's second stage of recovery, mourning and remembering is achieved in the play. In this respect, *Not That Woman* is a testimonial play in which each female character remembers her previous trauma. Herman states, “[t]elling the story reveals that the traumatic story belongs to the past. And the survivor will be busy in the task of rebuilding her life in the present and pursuing her aspirations for the future” (2015, p.195).

After telling the story many times, the trauma survivor finds herself no longer interested in telling the story. She sees the traumatic experience as something that belongs to the past. Moreover, for the first time she thinks about her future life, this is the exact moment in which she can move on to the third step of recovery. Herman argues, “the major work of the second stage is accomplished when the patient reclaims her own history and feels renewed hope and energy for engagement with life. Time starts to move again” (2015, p.65). This is a turning



point in the survivors' life where they see themselves not as victims but as individuals capable of thriving. Folake says "[t]hese are really sad stories, but they are also stories of power" (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 72). Now the suffering and pain have transformed into strength and resilience. After expressing their grief through these sad stories, survivors become ready to reclaim their agency and inspire other victims and lead them to empowerment and reconcile with life again. Hence comes the stage of reconnection

Survivors of trauma now get the ability to live the present. They build new lives radically different from the old damaged one they had. The process of building life is what Herman refers to as "reconnection"(2015, p.196). Herman states that "by the third stage the survivor is ready to engage more actively in the world" (p.197). Survivors now can have choices, reconnect with the world, maintain faith and develop and adjust new relationships, and can practice self-care feelings. They now feel empowered as "THE CORE EXPERIENCES of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others" (p.132).

The third stage starts with the traumatized person's increased passion in life and in creating a goal for herself. During reconnection, the survivor starts to think about her life. She compares her situations before and after the traumatic experience. She aims at replacing her damaged life with a one that is better than before the traumatic experience. She reaches a stage of engagement with herself, her society, and reality. It is a new chance for her and a turning point from the states of helplessness, displacement, disconnection, and isolation to self-reconnection, safety, and empowerment.

The third stage serves as a truth mirror, allowing her to see the whole story clearly. Now she can clearly see how she has been a victim, and she can avoid the repetition of the harmful experience in the future. Moreover, she can make her own future plans as she is now ready to control her own life. She is able to build trusted relationships and to experience a new role as a fighter who is capable of reconnecting with others. By that she becomes a survivor of trauma who is able to resolve the past and resume the future. Reaching this point brings the step of connecting with others (Herman, 2015, p.202).

Speaking about the importance of solidarity, Tume believes that, "most victims of gender-based violence eventually lose their self-esteem, they lose their sense of self, and they are finished, they are not even now confident to speak. But once they have this collective support from women specially, they are

empowered" (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024). Thus, Tume emphasizes the efficient impact of solidarity among women in helping survivors of gender-based violence to reestablish their confidence and sense of self. She highlights how collective support can combat the loss of self-esteem and silence caused by violence, enabling trauma survivors to rebuild their lives.

*Not That Woman* represents this stage through all the female characters in the play. They start to adopt new relationships. For instance, Folake is a representative of this stage as she builds a new relationship with a new person whom she did not know before represented in, Madam B. Folake states, "Madam B rescued me, brought me to this refuge, and taught me how to live again" (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 67). Similarly, Nkechi says, "Madam B... rescued us, and took us to the hospital for treatment" (p. 70). They all managed to build new ties with people, reconciled with life, and established a network of social relationships.

After a period of building new trusted social bonds, the trauma survivor is ready to create a social mission to support others. The traumatized person gets to the moment when she should find a purpose to relate her to real life. She has to get involved in society and contributes to help others. The survivor learns how to participate in social events and help other victims.

This could be traced in *Not That Woman*, as all the female characters manage to restore their power and reconnect with ordinary life. Folake says that their traumatic stories are stories of empowerment and survival (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 72). After surviving, victims of trauma try to help other women to get free from their pain. For instance, Folake gives Joyce a message to maintain self-respect and individuality in her relationship with her husband. Joyce asked "why Larry treat me this way? (p. 91) Trying to raise Joyce's awareness Folake answers, "[h]e treats you this way simply because you allow him. Now, don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with being a caring and selfless wife, but you need to retain your sense of self. It is very important! Why did you lose yourself, Joyce?" (p. 91) Here, Folake is trying to enlighten her friend, Joyce. She no longer accepts to see another woman getting abused by her male partner and stay silent. Folake pushes her to feel her self-worth and raise her low self-esteem. Likewise, Nkechi offers a helping hand to other victims. She tells Joyce, "of course, you are welcome here. SWR is always open to women seeking refuge from any form of abuse (p. 101).

Tume says, “[g]ender-based violence is all around us. There is no way you won’t be able to identify with at least one of those characters” (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024). All females in the refuge decide to cooperate with each other to rescue any abused woman. In addition, they try to challenge their patriarchal society which enforces men’s control upon women. Each one of them states the role that she will play in order to change the state of women in the Nigerian society. Madam B says, “I will not be that woman who encourages her daughter to stay in an abusive relationship or marriage.” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 107). As a victim who has survived from an abusive marriage, Madam B tries to destroy the wrong belief that marriage is all about endurance. She will participate in demolishing the conspiracy of silence that disempowers women and forces them to stay quite regardless of their suffering.

Also, Folake declares: “I will encourage every female around me to dare to dream, nurture their self-esteem, and be the best they can be. I refuse to be an enabler of women's inequality with men” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 107). Folake will offer her help to other women through erasing the stereotypes that their patriarchal society uses to deceive them with as the illusion about women as incomplete and insufficient.

Furthermore, Nkechi says, “I will not be that woman who mocks or judge any woman for being single, divorced, widowed or childless. A woman is a complete human being regardless of her marital Status” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 107). She likewise will encourage other females not to accept abuse within a relationship even if they will continue to be single. She is trying to correct the stereotypical images that stigmatize single women as incomplete, ugly, and passive. This is how Tume herself portrays Nkechi, the single lady as an independent woman who can support herself and support even other females emotionally, physically and financially.

Zainab also announces, “I will not be a party to practices that stunt the development and well-being of women. I choose to support the cause of the girl child” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 108). Zainab will stand against the cultural practices that reinforce female regression and habits that keep women backward.

Joyce as well says, “I will not be a monster-in-law or a passive mother. My sons must know that it is unacceptable to bully or hit a woman. And no, I will not be the other woman; I refuse to be the reason for a fellow woman's heartache!” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 108). As a mother, Joyce’s message in life will

focus on the new generation of young men in order to raise them on morals that tell them how to properly treat women with respect. Each female character in the play states her mission and in one voice they sing “We Shall Overcome” (p. 108).

To conclude, Nigerian women are subjected to exploitation, oppression, brutality, and coercion, they are victims of the biases of their African society. Thinking that persisting abuse is a proof for being good women, Nigerian women suppress their pain and bear harms. This state of submissiveness and passivity does not last long as these females take steps to change their condition.

The chosen play shows that Nigerian women refuse to remain silent in the face of violence directed to them. Instead, they pass through stages to survive and overcome the trauma that they have been through. Whether Nkechi, Zainab, or Folake, Joyce, and Madam B, they all strive for emancipating and improving their self-worth by realizing their potentials and asserting themselves. If Nigerian women apply the same techniques as explored in the play, they will be able to overcome the trauma they face daily in their society.

## References

- Babalola, T., Oloniniyi, I. O., Ajayi, I. A., Odewale, M. A., & Ojo, J. O. (2021). Psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on health workers in Nigeria: A cross-sectional study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 663229. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.663229>
- Green, D. (1999). *Gender violence in Africa: African women's responses*. St. Martin's Press.
- Heise, L., Ellsberg, M., & Gottmoeller, (2002). *A global overview of gender-based violence*. *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* , 78(Suppl 1), S5–S14. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7292\(02\)00038-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7292(02)00038-3)
- Herman, J. L. (2015). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence; from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.
- Hutchison, Y., & Jephta, A . (2019). Introduction to Not That Woman. In *Contemporary plays by African women* (PP.58). Methuen Drama, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Hutchison, Y., Loots, L. , & Mbele , O. (2020). Voicing the imaginative in Africa: Three creative speak [Interview]. *Agenda: Empowering Women For Gender Equality*, 34(1), 50-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2020.1773289>
- Okolo, N. C., & Okolo, C. (2018, November). *Gender-based violence in Nigeria: A study of Makurdi Metropolis in Benue State, Nigeria* [Conference abstract]. *Injury Prevention*, 24(Suppl 2), A99.1–A99. DOI:10.1136/injuryprevention-2018-safety.273. <https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprevention-2018-safety.273>
- Penn, M. L., & Nardos, R. (2003). *Overcoming violence against women and girls: The international campaign to eradicate a worldwide problem*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Terry, G., & Hoare, J. (2007). *Gender-based violence*. Oxfam.
- Tume, T. (2024, December 21). *Interview by Shrouk Sami*.
- Tume, T. (2019). Not That Woman. In Y. Hutchison et al. (Eds.), *Contemporary plays by African women*. Methuen Drama, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- United Nations Population Fund. (2020). *UNFPA advocacy brief on gender-based violence and harmful practices (FCT)*. [https://nigeria.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/unfpa\\_advocacy\\_brief\\_gbv-hp\\_fct.pdf](https://nigeria.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/unfpa_advocacy_brief_gbv-hp_fct.pdf)