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**Against the Monsters within: Resisting Patriarchy, Women Subordination and Morbid Culture in Benedict Binebai's *Karena's Cross***

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**Abstract**

African drama and theatre discourse on gender relations often address some cultural issues as salient factors that undermine the female quest to transcend marginal and debilitating spaces through self-emancipation and education. This paper examines these peculiarities and discusses the underpinnings of patriarchy and the female ordeal, particularly as this relates to the girl-child such as sexual abuse, underage marriage, female genital mutilation, sex-trafficking and other constraints manifest against her will to survive in a patriarchal society. This paper is inspired by the fact that the female child still struggles to grapple with numerous challenges in a hegemonic culture. Using the descriptive method of analysis, the paper adopts the feminist approach to analyze this dilemma head-on. It makes a critical contribution to the girl-child and explores the dominant cultural milieu prevalent in the African rural society that appears to have fostered the course of her numerous predicaments. The paper submits that the African female and the girl-child in rural settings can successfully break through such hegemonic and disconcerting yokes by sheer resilience.

**Keywords:** patriarchy; morbid culture; women subordination; *Karena's Cross*

**Introduction**

African drama and theatre discourse on gender relations often address the all-too-familiar but complex narrative of the female character, seeking undeniably to revolutionize her distorted image through positivist legendary ideals by female or male writers who seek to portray her Amazonian model of conquest, ambition and achievement. While many feminist writers have offered a modest view of her personality in multiple forms, the female character in modern times has continually struggled within the rustic crevice of social, political, religious and cultural impasse. Thus, the creative universe of feminist scholars in Africa has



been to remodel a balanced view of her ‘victimized’ and ‘distorted’ image as portrayed in contemporary literary scholarships that address her socio-psychological state of affairs.

African feminist critics and theorists widely corroborate that patriarchy has neglected and abused the female character in her social, political, religious and cultural environment. They assume that some barbaric cultural practices have hindered her quest for emancipation through education and self-fulfilment. They further attribute such factors as those perpetuated norms and value systems inherent in the African society, which seem to have constituted a major drawback to her aspiration. Thus, the rural African female unlike her urban counterpart constantly grapples with the complexities of custom and tradition, held up under certain debilitating and excruciating conditions in her locality.

In most rural African settings, women go through some practices masked within the laws and norms of their host community. From childhood through teenage to adulthood, the female personality is a subject to neglect, ranging from forced marriage, circumcision, and denial of inheritance, dehumanizing widowhood rites, spousal betrayal, rape, genital mutilation, kidnap, child trafficking and prostitution. This extends to polygamy where she has to contend with the spat of unhealthy competition from co-wives and the consequences arising from suspicion of death of the male spouse. Such ordeals not only propel her to foster the illusionary plan to escape. Thus, resistance through emancipation becomes relevant for the restoration of her dignity and self-worth. This paper, therefore, assesses textually, the female characters’ experiences of patriarchal dominance and culture that appear to have hitherto affected her femininity and the measures or attempts adopted by her to surmount these anomalies.

### **Patriarchy**

The concept of patriarchy is as old as creation itself. Being an undeniable fact common to scholars in the fields of the liberal arts, humanities and Social Sciences, within these fields of scholarly endeavours, which percolate the world of intellectual inquiries, critics and theorists have been able to offer multifaceted definitions that appeal to gender and society.

Khelghat-Doost & Sibly (2020) inform of patriarchy based on the control of an elder in a family. To them, it is “the rule of any elder male over the younger members of the family regardless of their gender” (p. 398). Similarly, Green (2000) sees patriarchy as “the rule of



the father” (p. 960). In other words, it is a situation whereby the “father dominated the other members of an extended kinship network and controlled the economic production of the household” (Barrett, 1980, p. 10). Makama (2013) gives a detailed account of patriarchy from the material base, control and the exclusion of women from labour-power. He submits that:

Patriarchy is a set of social relations which has a material base in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them which enable them in turn to dominate the women. The material base of patriarchy is men’s control of women labour power. That control is maintained by excluding women from access to necessary economically productive resources and restricting women’s sexuality. (p. 118).

From a gender perspective, patriarchy mirrors the “kingship-ordered systems with strictly defined sex roles in which women are subordinated to men” (Moghadam, 1992). In the same vein, Allagbe and Amousou (2020) believe that feminists perception of patriarchy is political; that is, it is “a system of government or society in which men are dominant or preferred” (p. 14).

Walby (1989) however, gives a sociological dimension to patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (p. 20). Therefore, patriarchal culture is a culture that may be social, political, religiously and culturally dominated by men. That the African society is influenced by the culture of patriarchy is a fact that resonates in feminist debates on culture, gender and society. This culture accounts for the plethora of uncouth practices that are not only morbid but also moribund with rapid changes in modern society. Certain practices like widowhood rites, female genital mutilations, prostitution, sex trafficking, etc are the many manifestations of patriarchal injustices against the perceived ‘inferior’ gender, women.

### **Women Subordination**

Many scholars perceive the concept of subordination differently. According to Cobuild (2010), when “something else is important than the other thing” (p.1559), it is said to be subordination. In addition, the *Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, see subordination as “someone having less power or authority than somebody else in a group or an organization” (Hornby 2003; p. 1296). Uchem and Ngwa (2014) note that “...a subordinate person is a person who is lower in rank or status than another or is of less importance in comparison to another” (p. 143). Thus, the notion of women subordination reflects the statutory position of



women as less in the structural hierarchy of the sexes. Sultana (2011) broadly explains the concept of woman subjugation in the light of gender domination, inferiority, material incapacitation and power control as:

...the inferior position of women, their lack of access to resources and decision making etc, and to the patriarchal domination that women are subjected to in most societies. So, women's subordination means the inferior position of women to men. The feeling of powerlessness, discrimination and experience of limited self esteem and self confidence jointly contribute to the subordination of women. (p. 7)

Women subordination may reflect the following outcomes of patriarchal culture such as oppression, subjugation, marginalization and subalternity in the quest to prevent the women or girl-child from co-existing fairly and equally with her male counterpart.

### **Methodology**

The method of the research is qualitative analysis in the elucidation and study of the drama text. The drama text and the topic of the research justify the use of the method. The paper has a study population of one cautiously selected African text – *Karena's Cross*; it mirrors the exigencies prevalent against the girl-child and African woman in her rural dwelling. The procedure for data collection for this study is by library material: scholarly journals, textbooks, and printed mass media.

### **Theoretical Approach**

This research is anchored on the feminist approach of Barbara Berg. According to Berg as cited in Okoh (2012):

It is the freedom (for a woman) to decide her own destiny: freedom from sex determined by roles; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of women's rights to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that women's essential worth stems from their humanity and does not depend on the relationships of her life. (p. 7)

This theory runs antithetical to patriarchal cultural machinations with the belief that the oppressed, subjugated and marginalized (woman or girl) gender is free to make binding decisions that positively affect her entirety in terms of her essence, dignity, rights and destiny, especially when they are justifiably intrinsic to all (men and women alike).



### Literature Review

Benedict Binebai – one of Nigeria's eminent playwrights is a writer, critic and drama or theatre theorist, whose employment of the drama genre and theatre to represent the collective socio-political and cultural issues bedevilling the African society from the perspectives of gender and women experiences, is worthwhile. He addresses the internal challenges of the African female and the girl-child, particularly those stuck in the cyclical impasse of patriarchy and male hegemony. Interestingly, he dedicates this play to women in the acknowledgment section this work. Thus lies the playwright's pivotal revelation. He notes that the:

...creative vision in *Karena's Cross* does not sentimentalize femininity but expresses feminist concerns particularly the oppressed women's concern to consciously recreate her destiny. The play is part of my contribution to the sustenance of two significant forms of theatres clamouring for attention in Africa. These are the feminist theatre and the solo performance tradition. (*Karena's Cross* p. iii)

Similarly, Mabel I. E. Evwierhona lends her voice to the drama. She accounts for its basic themes and other challenges addressed by the playwright. Her contribution highlights not only gender-based problems in society but also, exposes the universal problem of women subordination and subjugation in Africa and other third world countries that:

Ben Binebai's *Karena's Cross* is a monodrama drenched in many themes about women of all ages, classes and other social categories. It also has references to the different forms of domination women face in the society, or specifically, the burden the girl children face in underdeveloped nations. As a text, *Karena's Cross* is heavily eco-centred, gender-based with sundry ideological intersections between text and context. (*Karena's Cross* p. v)

This view situates the play as a monodrama with lessons drawn from the oppression, subjugation and subordination of women and the girl-child in Africa and other underprivileged worlds. To her, the playwright:

exploits the text and one expects too, the performance, to signify the tragedy of the woman and the stress on her body within that space. As performance, the style of having a solo actor, in this case, an actress enact or embody other characters on stage is attaining the popularity it deserves" (*Karena's Cross* p. v).



Similarly, Nishat Awan, in the forward section of the play, universalizes his account on the thematic forays of the work, which clearly re-echoes the cultural stance and world insight to the degree of atrocities meted to women across cultures. Thus, “the central theme of *Karena's Cross* would resonate with women all over the world – the myriad ways in which public displays of authority intersect with private desires onto the intimate topology of a woman's body” (*Karena's Cross* p. iv). Commenting on the major character in the play, he submits that:

In the play, *Karena's* freedom is linked to her gaining a sense of spatial agency. It would be easy to imagine *Karena's* world as being caught between tropes, her own individual subjectivity that gives her the power to escape and the structural conditions of society that had confined her for so long. (*Karena's Cross* p. iv)

*Karena's Cross* is a monodrama based on women subordination, oppression, violence, subjugation and marginality that navigates her desire towards freedom within the Niger Delta region and beyond; where there is apparent communal injustice and uneven treatment of the girl children in favour of privileged males as sole or overall benefactors of the natural resources and oil deposit in the region.

Fawei (2019) notes that in the monodrama, “men are out to dominate their world which is why women exploitation prevails” (124). The males enjoy the niceties provided for them from the proceeds of the land with the exclusion of the women from the same community. In addition, Odi (2019) reveals that *Karena Cross*: “chronicles the cultural practices that strengthen female subordination” (p.123). From the reviews above, it is obvious that the monodrama is based on the harrowing experiences of women in African society. It remains to be investigated, the extent to which the pivotal character resists those complexities of patriarchy, women subordination and morbid culture towards women in forms of child/underage marriage, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, sex trafficking, and the likes, hence the motivation for this research.

### **Result and Discussion**

*Karena's Cross* begins with the protagonist, wearing a piece of mourning attire under a tree. Her mood is reflective of despair and sadness. She re-enacts the story of her short-lived marriages following the death of her last husband, Duabri, whom she married under duress. Her experience of subjugation and dehumanization form the crucible of our



analysis. Olise-Epochi (2019) traces the antecedence of women subordination about the Nigerian clime where *Karena* met her ill-fortunes. She notes that:

...the Nigerian society continued to thrive on the colonial period and the postcolonial era too since it encourages patriarchal culture that makes it very difficult for the subaltern woman to express herself. But *Karena* spoke, challenged and fought for herself and by extension, other subaltern women, in spite of the ordeal she went through. (p. 95)

*Karena* was born into a polygamous family at Owei-ama where nature became for her a soothing relief against the backdrop of antagonisms resident in the village. Her description of Owei-ama is aptly captured as hegemonic, patriarchal and culturally driven, where the laws of the land favoured men. This situation presents many difficulties or challenges for women like her whose desire for freedom often meets countless debacles particularly in their quest for education and independence from male hegemony. There seem to be unexpressed fears envisioned by men of Owei-ama that if the women are emancipated through education, the men will lose their relevance or be threatened. This belief formed the motivation for the resolute control of the women who stood no chance of being free. More so, as the action unfolds, we are informed that in most homes at Owei-ama, responsibilities are not shared between men and women; rather, it is the women who bear the burden of marriage without the needed support or assistance from the men:

**Karena:** A village in which law was culture,

Culture was law and the makers

And custodians of culture

And law were the men.

It was a village where women

Lived at the mercy of men

Many women could not go

To school because it was the belief

In Owei-ama culture that

Women were possessions of men.

It was a village in which men freely

And physically inflicted injuries



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On the body of women for little mistakes;  
A village where men were the only  
Lords and voices of the land. (p. 3)

Owei-Ama community presents a microscopic depiction of women oppression by some cultural practices that are not only moribund but also unhealthy. Education should liberate the minds as much as equipping one with basic knowledge to transcend uncouth practices. However, and on the one hand, the girl-child is constrained by this scenario and secondly, she is intellectually limited by the progenitors of outmoded laws, which disfavour her. This constrains entirely affects her well-being because Owei-ama culture plays a major role in subjecting females who continuously take up responsibilities that enslave them while the males consciously maintain the status quo through coercion as wife-beaters:

It is such a village in which women  
particularly married women were culturally  
prepared to take care of  
The husband and the children  
While women toil all day in  
The rain and under the sun sweating  
To produce food on the table, men  
only sat to taste and reject food not  
palatable and even mercilessly  
Beat up their wives for  
Cooking an unsavoury food. (p. 4)

Moreover, the thematic trajectory of marriage underlies the discussions on women subjugation and feminist's attempt at subverting it. Marriage is considered a thing of joy for the intended couple but in this rural community, it is the opposite. The aftermath of Marriage at Owei-ama comes with its measure of pains and sorrows for the women, which in essence, punctures its success. Husbands constantly beat up their wives and wives often cower in obedience to the laws of the land that advocates total submission. In this community, men assume such status as lord and master over the women. This emboldens them to enforce such servitude roles on women. This act of subjugation highlights the experience of the girl-child's



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quest to attain western education, perceived as an abomination and punishable by the laws and the gods of the land:

The woman who appreciates  
Western education and makes any  
Attempt to give it a trial is handed  
Over to the gods for punishment.  
When men beat the drum of doom  
Its dancers are the women. (p. 4)

Besides marriage, one of the most crucial and potent issues in the text is circumcision. In contemporary times, circumcision is viewed as a serious issue within the gender discourse in African literature. This act is usually fraught with lots of complications, traumatic experiences and excruciating encounters by victims whose bodies have felt the brutal blades of the knife. Still challenging is the fact that such acts of circumcision are not initiated to fix the women's genital organ, but for cultural and material gratification as Nemughan, *Karena's* father reveals:

*Karena* as Nemughan: My daughter every age has  
its ceremony.  
As our customs demand  
You will soon be circumcised.  
We shall celebrate your  
circumcision  
Ceremony to make some  
money  
For the family and you will  
Thereafter be married out. (p. 5)

More so, both circumcision and early child marriage raise questions on the extremities of patriarchy and inherent cultural belief systems of *Owei-ama* that condole such acts. This microcosmic, among many macrocosmic acts of subordination, is unashamedly enforced by Nemughan, *Karena's* father, who is at the forefront of ensuring that her daughter's aspiration is foiled in adherence to culture. *Karena's* sanity and youth did not compel him to reconsider his decision. He deceptively cajoles her into submission and



threatens submission through threat and punishment whenever she attempts to resist. More so, the fact that he considers the educational sponsorship of women, especially his daughter, a waste of time and a huge disadvantage, betrays his distaste for the female child and her ambition, coupled with her inability to retain his name as part of the demands on the customs and traditional belief system of Owei-ama community. This compels *Karena* to challenge his father's effrontery not to send her to school to continue her education. He vehemently admits that women are possessions of less value:

***Karena as Nemughan:*** You women are empty

possessions

Training you is a waste of money  
and time.

When you get married, no one

Will know you are still my  
daughter.

My name will be lost. So why must

I waste my money training you?

***Karena:*** Father what you are telling

Me makes me bleed.

I don't think I can obey you,

I am not interested.

I want to complete my school.

I want to become a woman of  
substance.

***Karena as Nemughan:*** What insolence?

What insolence? *Karena!*

A deaf ear is followed by  
death.

An ear that listens

Is followed by blessings.



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Don't invite the bite of a  
Snake with your  
stubbornness.  
Karena you cannot light  
fire  
Without inhaling its smoke  
I am the head of this house.  
That's what matters and its  
is final.  
Prepare your body and  
mind for  
The circumcision and marriage. (p. 5-6)

Karena is compelled to get married at the age of thirteen, thereby truncating her wish to be educated at the school of her choice. She receives countless threats from her father, whose cockish proverbial rhetoric betrays her into silence and, pits her into a voiceless zone where speaking becomes almost difficult, if not impossible. Her inability to speak up for herself further dwarfs any iota of courage she has to assist other young girls and women who share similar experiences. Though she made impressive attempts, it yielded no fruit. Her complaints, in a monolithic manner, are portrayed thus:

I saw my destiny heading  
Towards doom's dormitory.  
My vision bled. It is as if  
Satan  
Had rubbed pepper on my skin. (p.8)

These few lines capture the horrific state of mind of the speaker whose dreams appear to have witnessed a major setback. Neither father nor mother could assuage her situation. Her sisters have been victims of cultural imposition. The insensitivity of Owei-ama towards the girl-child education is aptly captured in the manner with which women in Africa are culturally oppressed in their quest for education, which seems to be under surveillance and siege so much so that any attempt to think towards this direction is met with serious consequences. Her sorrow lies in the fact that educational rights accorded to all humans are



denied to the women but availed to men. Her determination/resolve to wrestle against the cancers of female education and independence, against male hegemony is apparent in the preceding monologue. When she attempts to resist or abscond from her community due to the immensity of her plights, she is overpowered and subdued by able-bodied men, who have creatively cast in the dramatic mould constraining male elements against her throbbing resistance. This denies her any likelihood of escape from patriarchy and overpowering forces stationed at all corners of Owe-ama to checkmate her excesses. Ironically, her father, Nemughan, successfully tricks her into believing that she could go to school to become whatever she aspires to:

Since education is what you want,  
I won't marry you out again.  
I will make sure you complete  
Your education and live a life of  
your own. (p. 9)

**Karena:** Father!

Do you mean what you  
are saying?

(Excited) I am lucky then.

I jumped and jumped  
Into his arms and promised  
Not to disobey him again.

On the morning of the day

I was to go to school.

That was three days

After my escape attempt,

Some women came to our

House singing and dancing. (p.11)

The day her father assures of her continued education, was the same day she underwent an excruciating circumcision by a group of hapless women of Owi-ama village who arrived early to carry out the rite in the pretext of immunity against pregnancy at school. The only seeming condition given to her to return to school was based on recovery from the



circumcision. The severity of circumcision dawns on her as she laments over the painful ordeal she received from Owei-ama women. Her ordeal in the hands of these wretched and old women is gory and excruciating. The playwright describes the cruel circumcision rite on Owe-ama women with oppressive and brutal force:

Karena as Nemughan: Today is your day.

Prepare yourself.

Karena: Father! What exactly do you mean?

Karena as Numughan: Today you will experience the Surgical elimination of your Sensitive female genital organs.

Karena: A woman with big buttocks Carrying a weight I can't struggle To lift and throw away Sat on my chest.

Two other women Held my two arms backward And pressed them down with resolute force

The women who did the circumcision

Sat on my lower abdomen.

Six of them

Held me down to do the circumcision

I shouted madly, I bled and

It was the cruelest

Bleeding of genital cutting. (p.12)

Female genital mutilation is one of the horrendous issues discussed in the polemics of contemporary feminist writings. It is a major challenge faced by women in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The act of female circumcision causes bleeding and eventually leads to



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the rupturing of the female delicate organs, which often is prone to infections. It further affects the mobility of the victim who feels the pains and psychological trauma:

I could not move straight  
After the cutting.  
I walked like a woman  
Whose legs have been  
Separated by a demonic malady.  
And whose private part was held hostage  
By an unbearable sting.  
The bleeding was profuse  
My life was in danger so I  
Was rushed to the village  
Clinic where I spent virtually two  
weeks  
For the wounds to heal and  
For the pains to subside (p.15).

While at the clinic, she is visited by her father's friend who shows her care and support. She is discharged and is faced with the outcome of her post circumcision phase, which is her marriage to a man, old enough to be her father; the same man who showed her love and comfort at the clinic. She is married off unexpectedly; and through her revelation and laments, we discover that her marriage is devoid of love and affection that is expected of a true consummation. Thus, she reveals:

Love is pride  
And the dignity of womanhood  
Collapses for the triumph of greed  
Empowered by culture. (p. 14)

In terms of hegemony, culture in the African set-up represents one of the many phases of its manifestations in the lives of the subaltern female category whose voice is unheard. It creates a lacuna in the lives of the balkanized female characters whose life aspirations are short-lived. To be heard, the female character has to speak aloud, if not violently. In addition, such loud responses become unyielding as the case of *Karena* seems



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pronounced and other women. However, her resolve to seek to emancipate herself from the stronghold of culture superimposed by man foregrounds her attempt to transcend the realm of the subaltern. To her, emancipation can be attained through revolt, inspired by the desire for independence through western education. Having been forced to marry her father's friend, she revolts and protests his decision. To her, he is not the one she loves. When she yearned for help, he is not heard:

I shouted for help.  
The sound of my resistance could  
stay  
In the ears of hearers of four  
Yet no one came to rescue me.  
My abductors had a leader,  
The leader gave orders to the  
Other two to spread my legs  
And hold me very tightly.  
The next thing that happened was  
He fell upon me pleurably  
As a subjugator with beefy  
strength  
And deflowered me while the  
other monsters  
Watched the act with intense  
excitement  
I felt sharp pain in my lower  
abdomen  
And bled like a castrated bull (p.16).

Her rape highlights the preposterous atrocity enabled by the customs and traditions of Owei-ama. This is reminiscent of the emotional, psychological and physical traumas in which women in this part of the world often witness in a rather volatile male-dominated space. Despite her ordeal, she is inconsolably forced into another marriage to Daubri, the leader of her rapists. She resists all efforts made by her father to get her to marry him,



insisting on the man of her dreams. Her revolt and resistance earn her the rebuke of a magical spell against her wish. She loses her virginity and is forced into a polygamous household as an “Ayoro”. Meanwhile, her father had gone behind her to collect her dowry from emissaries sent to him by her abductors. *Karena's* marriage as an “Ayoro” introduces the concept of ‘voicelessness on her part and the married women who are all fated to serve ‘the husband’ who is ‘the lord’. The height of distrust and disdainful emotions expressed by Daubri’s older wives towards her earns multiple forms of abuses as she vehemently laments:

The worst form of suffering is  
The one that has no known  
Time of cessation (p.19).

Her oppression in the hands of co-wives is worsened by restrictions from cooking and meeting Daubri’s sexual needs. She becomes pregnant and loses her child due to the ill-treatment from co-wives. She loses the pregnancy and is accused of being responsible for her predicament. She is subject to inhuman torture and momentary turmoil, especially as she goes to the farm very early to tap palm wine. When she accompanies Daubri to the farm on a fateful day, he falls from the treetop and dies. She is accused of murder. She receives no share from her husband’s will and decries the material effort devoted towards constructing his house, which has now been taken over by her husband’s brother. As a widow, her tales become glaring reflections of deprivation, exclusion, subjugation, humiliation and oppression. She is consoled by Timi-Ebi, her sister-in-law, who helps her rediscover herself. Timi-Ebi makes collaborative efforts to resist Owei-ama’s culture, which she vehemently criticizes:

A culture that violates  
women’s right  
To freedom from discrimination;  
Torture, inhuman and degrading  
treatment  
Right to life; to security;  
To physical integrity; and to good  
As soon as my finances improves



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I will ensure that you

Complete your education (p. 26).

The 'burning desire in the heart' is to be educated which was re-enkindled by her sister-in-law. And education to her meant resisting those obstacles in the way of attaining such a goal. When Karena gets to Benin with her sister-in-law, she receives the unexpected shock of her life. She is stunned by the degree of sexual promiscuity pervading the city. She gets updates about her sister-in-law's involvement in the international sex trade as a contractor in charge of recruiting young girls for sex trafficking and prostitution business for profit maximization. Timi-Ebi's prospective visit to Italy with Karena for sex trafficking and prostitution is fruitless as she absconds by way of resistance from such social vice capable of truncating her future. She vanishes from her sister-in-law's presence to a nearby supermarket where her sister-in-law never gets to see her again. Karena, thus, re-echoes such description of her culture in an objective and blunt manner, having chosen to resist it with all the strength and courage she could muster up in her:

...a loathsome culture which  
underdeveloped women for generations.  
A culture manipulated by male dominance,  
A tradition in which women's  
rights and dignity  
God constantly abused.  
A barbaric culture  
Which needed a storm to uproot  
From the face of the earth.  
I had taken so much of its tempest  
And now I am determined to take  
The tempest of my  
Own creation to Owe-ama (p.28).

Having resisted all forms of cultural, patriarchal and subordinating barriers, Karena is fortunate to meet Dr Daniel, a faithful, loving and caring man whom she eventually marries. Her meeting with Dr Daniel transforms her into an individual with a dignified sense of worth and respect. He facilitates her training up to the university, enabling her to emerge



as a lawyer of high repute. The disempowerment and marginalization she felt in her community are expunged by her transformation and fulfilled ambition as she recounts her story. Thus, the major thematic thrust of this monodrama is subsumed in these words:

My story is a story of struggle  
Against the mortal flood of oppression;  
It is a story of vision and mission  
A story in which I, a thirteen year  
Struggled through the storm to  
Develop and own a voice.  
I fought against a war of  
Inferiority because I was  
Never born to be inferior (p. 33)

The 'story of struggle against the mortal flood of oppression' characterizes the checkered experiences of the subordinated woman or girl-child in *Owei-ama*. *Karena's* ordeal is suffused in series of battle cries against inferiority even as she sought to disprove this impression of her culture towards the female folk. She is of the view that happiness derives from the rejection of norms that smoulder and deny all women the right to make rational choices and to voice their displeasure, irrespective of oppositions:

If women are creators  
Why can't we create our happiness?  
*Karena's* cross is a cross of suffering and cross of rejection  
Of culture-imposed suffering.  
It is the cross of all oppressed women. (The Orchestra Sings)  
Lets rise and stand and fight  
Women!  
Lets wake up  
Lets stand up  
And fight for our right (p.34).

### Conclusion

The analysis of *Binebai's* monodrama reveals that the African (Nigerian) women and the girl-child have had a chequered history and experience of pain, suffering and



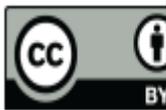
psychological torture in her retrogressive and hegemonic rural African society. This is due largely to the monstrosity of patriarchy and its multifaceted byproducts manifest in forms of women subordination and morbid culture. Thus, these factors are perceived as cancers or impediments to women's dreams and aspirations towards education and self-fulfilment. In the text, the playwright through the ordeals of *Karena* exposes the prevalent tradition of patriarchal oppression and subjugation which women in Africa and other third world countries are confronted with within the guise of child marriage, female genital mutilation, rape, denial of inheritance, inferiority status and sex-trafficking. Her spirit of resilience through resistance and her never-say-die attitude demonstrated against the status quo leads to her eventual triumph and emergence as a woman of substance and value.

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