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Narrating Sexual Violence: Portrayals of Rape in Ejiet's 'Aida' and Okurut's 'Prisoner'

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Abstract:

This article examines the portrayal of rape in Austin Ejiet's '*Aida*' and Mary Karooro Okurut's '*Prisoner*', foregrounding sexual violence as a recurrent theme in Ugandan short fiction. Dominant discourses often frame rape exclusively as violence against women, with some scholars denying the existence of male rape. Close readings of these stories, however, reveal that both men and women are vulnerable, challenging essentialist assumptions deeply embedded in Ugandan society. Using a comparative feminist lens, this study interrogates how literary representation exposes the gendered dimensions of sexual violence, highlighting societal perceptions and biases that shape our understanding of rape. I argue that Ugandan short stories employ language, characterization, and narrative strategies to articulate the experiences of both male and female victims, offering a nuanced critique of patriarchal violence. By examining these texts together, the article demonstrates how literature can unsettle conventional notions of gendered victimhood, broadening the discussion of sexual violence in Uganda and advancing a more inclusive framework for understanding its social and cultural ramifications.

INTRODUCTION

Austin Ejiet and Mary Karooro Okurut are among Uganda's most influential literary figures, whose works have significantly contributed to the development of Uganda's literary landscape. Born in 1951 in Kumi, eastern Uganda, Austin Ejiet emerged as a prominent columnist, educator, and author. Equally, Mary Karooro Okurut, born in 1954 in Bushenyi, western Uganda, emerged as an outstanding educator, politician and author. Both Ejiet and Okurut pursued their academic and professional careers at Makerere University, where they studied and taught literature, thus influencing generations of Ugandan literary scholars and students. Ejiet's contributions to literature include his short story collection *Hurray for Somo and Other Short Stories* (2004), which, despite its literary significance, has received limited critical engagement. Similarly, Okurut's oeuvre—including *The Invisible Weevil* (1998), *The Curse of the Sacred Cow* (1994), *The Switch* (2016), *Child of a Delegate* (1997), and *Milking a Lioness and Other Short Stories* (1999)—has attracted relatively little scholarly attention, even though it addresses pressing social issues affecting Ugandan society. Both writers, therefore, represent an underexplored yet vital component of Uganda's literary canon, particularly in the short story genre, which remains less studied compared to novels and plays.

This article examines the portrayal of rape in Ejiet's short story 'Aida' from *Hurray for Somo and Other Short Stories* and Okurut's 'Prisoner' from *Milking a Lioness and Other Short Stories*. The study focuses on rape as a form of sexual violence that affects both men and women, emphasizing the pervasive yet often silenced nature of sexual violence in Uganda. Sexual violence is defined as any sexual act or activity that occurs without consent (WHO, 2012). Consent, or the lack thereof, becomes the defining factor that distinguishes lawful sexual activity from sexual violence. Societal power imbalances often exacerbate such acts, with perpetrators exploiting positions of authority, social status, or cultural norms to commit violence. Sexual violence manifests

in multiple forms, including child sexual abuse, rape, sexual assault, stalking, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and cyberviolence (Sivakumaran, 2007). By engaging with these issues, literature provides a nuanced lens through which to understand not only the acts themselves but also their sociocultural and psychological ramifications. While sexual oppression is a broad phenomenon, the selected short stories specifically depict rape, allowing for a focused analysis of narrative strategies, thematic exploration, and societal critique.

Depictions of rape and sexual violence in literature are complex and double-edged. On the one hand, they offer powerful avenues for raising awareness, eliciting empathy, and exposing societal injustices. On the other hand, they can inadvertently perpetuate harmful myths, normalize violence, and desensitize audiences to trauma (Sielke, 2009; Easteal, Holland, & Judd, 2015; Schwark & Bohner, 2019). The tension between impact and risk underscores the importance of examining how writers represent these acts, the narrative techniques they employ, and the ethical considerations of such portrayals. In literary studies, scholars have argued that the representation of sexual violence is often shaped by broader cultural narratives and societal expectations (Horvitz, 2000; Ocan, Okumu, & Sekiwu, 2022; Sills-Briegel & Camp, 2001). Authors utilise silence, testimony, fragmented narration, and other stylistic devices to engage readers with these sensitive topics, navigating the delicate balance between confronting and normalizing violence.

In the Ugandan context, the depiction of rape and sexual violence in literature is closely intertwined with socio-political realities. Conflict, poverty, and entrenched patriarchal norms create conditions in which sexual violence thrives and remains underreported (Namirembe, 2022). Literature, particularly short stories, functions as both a mirror and a critique of these realities. These narratives foreground the experiences of survivors, shedding light on the profound psychological, social, and economic consequences of

sexual violence. They also interrogate systemic failures—legal, cultural, and institutional—that allow such acts to persist. Short stories become sites of testimony, resistance, and social commentary, offering marginalized voices a platform in both private and public spheres. Ejiet and Okurut's works, through their vivid storytelling and nuanced characterizations, expose the brutal realities faced by men and women, compelling readers to confront the uncomfortable truths that society often silences.

An important feature of the selected texts is their attention to both male and female victims of sexual violence. In many societies, including Uganda, men who experience sexual violence are frequently silenced due to stigma, cultural expectations, or disbelief. By addressing the experiences of male victims alongside those of women, Ejiet and Okurut challenge the traditional gendered framing of sexual violence and highlight its pervasive and indiscriminate nature. This inclusive approach not only broadens the scope of literary engagement with sexual violence but also underscores the necessity of amplifying silenced voices, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Despite the significance of these themes, scholarly engagement with Ugandan short stories remains limited. Most research on gender in Ugandan literature has focused on novels and plays, particularly in analyzing character development, gender roles, and patriarchal structures. Studies outside literary analysis have predominantly examined violence and gender inequality in economic, religious, and educational spheres. Consequently, the portrayal of sexual violence in Ugandan-authored short stories—especially by both male and female writers—remains an underexplored area of critical inquiry. By situating Ejiet and Okurut's works within this scholarly gap, this study not only addresses an overlooked aspect of Ugandan literature but also contributes to broader discussions of gender, power, and social justice.

This article argues that Ejiet and Okurut employ the literary techniques of silence and testimony to navigate the complexities of representing rape. Silence operates as a narrative strategy that reflects both the societal silencing of survivors and the internalized trauma that inhibits disclosure. Testimony, in contrast, foregrounds the survivor's voice, demanding recognition and response from both characters within the story and readers in the broader public sphere. Together, these strategies reveal the contradictions inherent in representing sexual violence: the tension between exposing brutality and acknowledging the limitations of language to fully convey trauma. Through these narrative strategies, the authors do more than depict acts of sexual violence; they critique the patriarchal and socio-cultural norms that enable such acts, illuminating the intersection of gender, power, and societal complicity.

Moreover, the focus on short stories is particularly significant. Short fiction, with its concentrated narrative structure and stylistic precision, offers unique opportunities to examine sensitive and traumatic experiences. The brevity and intensity of the form allow authors to foreground key moments of violence and response, emphasizing the psychological and social dimensions of trauma. In 'Aida' and 'Prisoner', Ejiet and Okurut harness the power of the short story to create immediate, compelling encounters with sexual violence, making the reader both witness and interlocutor. This narrative intimacy fosters empathy while simultaneously challenging readers to interrogate societal norms and their own assumptions about consent, victimhood, and justice.

This study situates Ejiet and Okurut's short stories within the broader landscape of Ugandan literature and the global discourse on sexual violence. By examining the narratives of 'Aida'and 'Prisoner', the article explores how rape is represented as both an individual and social phenomenon. The authors' use of silence and testimony not only captures the contradictions and limitations of representing trauma but also functions as a critical

intervention against the normalization of sexual violence. Also, silence and testimony facilitate the short stories to thrive on compression since it sharpens the intensity of the omitted events and, at the same time, reveals some of the painful truth. In doing so, their works amplify marginalized voices, challenge patriarchal structures, and contribute to a growing literary and scholarly engagement with one of Uganda's most pressing social issues. This study, therefore, fills a significant gap in literary scholarship, offering a nuanced understanding of sexual violence in Ugandan short fiction while highlighting the ethical, aesthetic, and socio-political dimensions of its representation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study, which examines portrayals of rape and sexual violence in Austin Ejiet's 'Aida' and Mary Karooro Okurut's 'Prisoner', is grounded in African feminist theory and trauma theory. The African feminist theory provides a critical lens for interpreting how sexual violence is depicted within specific cultural, historical, and socio-economic contexts. Unlike Western feminism, which often generalises women's experiences, African feminism focuses on the unique challenges faced by African women (Steady 1981; Quayson and Olaniyan 2009). Additionally, the theory emphasises the importance of female involvement of men in fighting oppression. Mekgwe (2006) posits that: "African feminism is not antagonistic to men but challenges them to be aware of those aspects of women's subjugation which differ from the generalised oppression of all African people" (Mekgwe 2006: 8).

Given that the texts are Ugandan, African feminism provides a critical lens for interpreting how the authors depict sexual violence within culturally specific contexts. In the two stories I analysed, there are illustrations of the existence of male oppression within the societal systems that Ejiet and Okurut portray through the characters and setting. Mekgwe's notion of African feminism, which emphasises that men and women need to work together to fight systems that oppress both of them, helps me to make sense

of the sexual violence against men and women that Ejiet and Okurut depict in their short stories.

The other notion I invoke in this article is that trauma, as theorised by Cathy Caruth (1996), which focuses on the idea that trauma, apart from being painful, disrupts an individual's sense of self and reality. The memory of trauma is unspeakable and is often manifested in the victim's silence and failure to narrate their own experiences. In the selected short stories 'Aida' and 'Prisoner', there are examples of male and female characters who were traumatised after being sexually abused and the victims' inability to engage in intimate relationships and psychological breakdown are manifestations of traumatic memory. Hence, this study applies these principles to elucidate how sexual violence is represented in the selected short stories by Ejiet and Okurut, enabling a culturally grounded and theoretically informed analysis.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative design since it involved analyzing texts to gain an in-depth understanding of sexual violence in Ejiet's 'Aida' and Okurut's 'Prisoner'. Data for analysis was generated through close reading of 'Aida' and 'Prisoner' as primary texts, while secondary texts were in the form of critical works and journal articles. Discussion was based on themes from the selected narratives to gain a deeper comprehension of sexual violence. The researcher utilized purposive sampling to identify primary texts and content related to rape and sexual violence. Data were systematically recorded through detailed note-taking centred on the study's core arguments. Through ongoing textual analysis, emerging insights were continually refined and reorganised to support a coherent interpretation. This approach facilitated a critical examination of setting, language, and character, as well as their roles in representing sexual violence in Ejiet's 'Aida' and Okurut's 'Prisoner'. To analyse the data collected, the researcher identified the themes that emerge from the selected short stories to consider

what they reveal about the topic—portrayal of rape in Ejiet and Okurut's short stories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Rape and Sexual Violence in Ejiet's 'Aida'

Although Austin Ejiet's short story collection generally lacks substantial scholarly attention (Nansubuga, 2021), he addresses different aspects of life, including rape, which this study seeks to address. The argument he advances illustrates that in society, women and girls are vulnerable and fall victim to sexual violence. Ejiet uses the third-person omniscient narrator to disclose rape and oppressive sexual behaviour as forms of sexual abuse against women in his story 'Aida.' Although there are several other forms of sexual violence, such as: defilement, incest, forced sodomy or anal rape, sexual exploitation, forced prostitution and sexual harassment as listed in UNHCR (1995), it is rape and oppressive sexual behaviour that Ejiet depicts in 'Aida.' Cole et al. (2007) posits that oppressive sexual behaviour manifests in: forced marriage, trafficking, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment and female genital mutilation. In the story 'Aida,' forced marriage is seen as an oppressive sexual behaviour against a girl child, as the narrator reveals. The perpetrators of sexual violence are usually in a position of power and authority, and they exert control over their victims. These may include: husband or partner, family members, friends and community members (Omanyondo, 2005). The fact that in a family setting the perpetrators are close family members causes sexual violence to be considered as an invisible form. However, Ejiet, through his story 'Aida', brings to light sexual violence in a family as seen in the forced marriage of Aida, the female protagonist. This makes Aida the archetypal female character who becomes a victim of this form of abuse. My argument here is that there is no safe zone; the family that is meant to offer shelter and protection to children becomes an insecure place for children to be, as represented by Aida.

Ejiet uses Emenitai, the narrator, to retell the story of Aida and what befalls her in both her childhood and womanhood stages. This reveals that some trauma cannot be told by the victims. Through flashback, the narrator, using a conversational tone, brings the story of Aida to life. He confirms what befalls Aida to his classmate in a barroom conversation through giving details of the incident. The writer uses flashback to introduce the readers and listeners to the protagonist, Aida, whose

beauty leaves many men in awe. The narrator reveals that: "She was as remote as an oracle in one respect but also voluptuous and desirable. She had the finest figure I have seen on a woman. And she carried it well" (Ejiet 2005, pg 2). The above extract reveals Aida's remarkable charm in Akisim, which makes her desirable to almost every man.

In the story, Aida is introduced as a beautiful young woman who arrives in Akisim with a secretive background. Aida's character in Akisim forces people to fabricate many stories about her. Some say she is a former child-bride who had run away from the rich old man forced on her by her parents at a very young age, while others say she was gang-raped as a child. Another theory advanced to describe Aida by the heartless people of the depicted society is that she is a school girl who had failed her exams or had been expelled from school on account of an unplanned pregnancy. Others say a spell was cast on her by her former husband and she was HIV positive since her name rhymed well with the AIDS scourge. The above speculation about Aida's background scared away some suitors, but Kassim is very determined to pursue her regardless of the stories surrounding her. To protect himself from contracting AIDS, he wears three condoms, but to his dismay, he discovers the three condoms had disappeared after having the painful sexual encounter with Aida. Kassim who believes he contracted the disease from Aida is psychologically tormented and develops a mental breakdown. Similarly, Aida who is victimized flees Akasim where her life is endangered. The above speculations are indicators of oppressive sexual behaviour which is a form of sexual violence. This is evident in the language and descriptions Ejiet uses in the short story. Ejiet in the story, 'Aida', emphasizes the point that young girls are routinely sexually abused in society. This is in form of defilement, rape and forced childhood marriage as revealed by Emenitai, the narrator, who had encountered both Aida, the victim, and Kassim, the perpetrator.

Ejiet in 'Aida', depicts rape as a form of sexual violence against girls and women. Ejiet through the omniscient narrator, reveals that Aida is a victim of rape. Scarce (1997) defines rape as: "any penetration of a person's mouth, anus, or vagina, by a penis or any other object, without that person's consent" (1997: 7). Throughout this article I also use the term rape in reference to the act of an adult male raping a woman or girl, or adult male raping an adult male or boy, without the victim's consent. In the story 'Aida', the narrator reveals that Aida is gang-raped in her

childhood. This allegation is revealed by one of the characters in the short story, whose account, as reported by the narrator, exaggerates aspects of Aida's past. Readers of Ejiet's short story are informed that Aida was raped as a child by some gunmen in uniform and that an inconsiderate gunman had penetrated her with the help of a bayonet to facilitate his entry. The omniscient narrator quoted the unnamed woman thus:

> But the woman stood by her story. Aida had told her that she had been raped as a child by some rabid gunman in uniform. The man had penetrated her with a bayonet to facilitate his entry. Even though she had mercifully fainted, the pain and terror of that first sexual experience at the age of six had traumatized her to an unspeakable degree (Ejiet 2005, pg. 6).

Ejiet in the above quotation depicts sexual violence as manifested through the rape of Aida as a young girl. The description given reveals Aida as a representative of what most young, innocent girls go through in real life. I argue that gang-rape is still common in Ugandan society, and people are no longer scared of the AIDS scourge since they are comfortable taking ARVS medication.

Ejiet, through flashback, points out the genesis of Aida and Kassim's affair. The point that young girls are at the mercy of men who exploit them and cause them pain is heightened by the character of Kassim. Kassim is known for his unrestrained appetite for life and is envied for his athletic good looks. The all-knowing narrator reveals that Kassim is arrogant, ruthless and has no respect for women. He reduces women to musical instruments and labors that there is no virgin around him. Kassim is determined to pursue Aida and win her just like he does other women. He does not pursue her out of love but because he always believes that no woman should challenge him. The text shows that patriarchy gives men power to sexually abuse women, as represented by Kassim who even boldly states that he has never met a woman he could not have and is surprised that no man had sexually engaged Aida. I argue that Aida's beauty and character contribute to what happens to her in the story. Perhaps if she had not fallen for Kassim's tricks, she would not have experienced the sexual violence she went through with Kassim.

Similarly, Kassim's character contributes to his downfall in the story. Ignoring the rumor that Aida is HIV positive, Kassim uses all possible tricks, including tempting her with several presents so as to have sexual intercourse with her. He boasts that

he will protect himself against HIV by wearing three condoms. Although Aida rejects him severally, she finally gives in due to Kassim's cunningness. Kassim applies force to victimize Aida and could not heed to her pleas until his sexual desires were satisfied. Through Kassim, Ejiet depicts males as perpetrators of sexual violence . He represents the males who transform from complete gentlemen into sexual predators with the desire to satisfy their greedy sexual appetite (Kruger 2011). Scully (1994) argues that men who rape lack the ability to control themselves and considers them sick since they have an uncontrollable sexual impulse. Although I agree with Scully that men who rape lack self-control, I argue that they still should be blamed for the sexual abuse and should not misuse the power that patriarchy gives them. The males use their power to sexually abuse women and young girls who are not strong enough to resist them.

Ejiet also uses setting to bring to light the places which promote sexual violence in society. Through vivid description, the narrator reveals Akisim as a place which promotes sexual violence. The omniscient narrator shows that the place was a hazardous festering brothel, decorated with lodges, bars, night clubs and casinos. Places such as bars, lodges, casinos, and brothels rarely go without cases of rape, defilement, sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence. However, although the narrator paints Akisim as a dangerous place, it has not caught the attention of the authorities. The authorities take the least concern about it and yet they should be implementing the policies put in place to fight and reduce sexual violence in society.

Although the authority's negligence can be viewed as a way of promoting sexual violence, the narrative illustrates that patriarchy has contributed to the persistence of sexual violence in the depicted society. We see Kassim using his male power to sexually abuse Aida when she finally moved in with him. This is in agreement with Simister (2012), who posits that it is patriarchal when men use their power to sexually abuse women. Also, Scully (1994) affirms that "in a society where status and power belong to men, rape is expected" (Scully 1994:37). Ejiet in his story 'Aida', depicts marital rape among married couples and that sexual violence has strong effects on both the victims and the perpetrators. In 'Aida', Ejiet uses Aida to depict the effects of sexual violence on the victims. The narrative shows both physical and psychological effects on the victims and perpetrators. Aida, who is victimized, is always living in fear due to the trauma she experienced as a young girl. Having

faced the gang-rape, she fears having relationships with men and worse still having sexual intercourse with any man. She also experiences marital rape on her wedding night, although she is still recovering from her childhood fears. Kassim, who wore three condoms trying to practice safe sex, caused a lot of pain and a lot of bleeding due to friction on the victim. The narrative reveals the severe consequences of sexual violence on the victim.

However, the short story also reveals the effects of violence on the offenders. The perpetrator of sexual violence, as represented by Kassim, is psychologically tortured as a result of sexually abusing the victim, Aida. The narrator of the story, 'Aida', reveals that Kassim after realising that the three condoms he had put on to protect him from getting HIV were no more except their rings, goes mad. This recalls Caruth's(1996) observation that trauma is delayed and sometimes the victims suffer a mental breakdown. This is what we see happen to Kassim in the story due to the fear that he has contracted the AIDS virus from Aida. As readers, we see man's selfishness exposed in the story.

Through Kassim, Ejiet, in his story 'Aida', explores the connection between education and violence. Kassim is a graduate, but this does not prevent him from abusing Aida. By portraying Kassim as an educated individual who is also a perpetrator of sexual violence, Ejiet underscores that education alone is not a sufficient solution to curbing violence. Although Simister (2012) argued that educating both men and women can help curb violence, Ejiet's depiction of Kassim as a graduate, learned, young man doesn't stop him from perpetrating sexual violence. The narrator reveals: "The crowd wanted to know if Kassim had really been to Makerere. When I confirmed this adding that he was a qualified civil engineer, the incredulous crowd wanted to know why he had come to this pathetic state" (Ejiet 2005, pg.11). My reflection here is that one can be well educated and still be a perpetrator of gender-based violence as represented by Kassim in the story 'Aida'. One's level of education might not stop him from sexually abusing others. We see patriarchy still exercising much influence, even amongst the educated. The male use their power to sexually abuse females who try to fight against it without success. Aida doesn't sit back to see herself being sexually abused. The narrator reveals that Aida fights back by beating Kassim:

> He wore his three condoms to bed as promised. In the false security of his triple protection, he appears to have pulled out

> all the stops, if you know what I mean, never mind the fact that Aida was literally screaming her head off in rabid pain. It is possible to determine with any accuracy how long Kassim pursued this course of events… to Aida he seemed set to go on forever. She tried to fight him off. But he was stronger than an ox. He slapped her, calling her a filthy name. She bit and scratched him in vain. Finally, when she thought she must faint, he stopped and withdrew. (Ejiet 2005, pg.16)

Ejiet, as seen in this quote, not only exposes the brutality in the act but also depicts physical violence as an effect of sexual violence. My opinion is that though the women who are victims fight back in self-defence, the men who are perpetrators fight back as a way of defending their position and the urge to satisfy their sexual desires, which supersedes them.

Can men be raped? Rape Victims in Okurut's 'Prisoner'

Mary Karoro Okurut, in her story 'Prisoner', uncovers prison rape against men, showing that even men can be rape victims while at the same time offenders of the same form of violence. The story is a crucial literary piece because it dismantles the misconception of females as the only rape victims. This corresponds with Healicon's (2016) observation that although men mostly victimise girls and women, they are also victims of this form of violence. Okurut depicts prison rape as a form of sexual violence against men in the story. She uses the setting of the prison cell to depict this form of abuse, which is perpetrated by men against their fellow men. This recalls Scarce's (1997) and Stemple's (2008) argument that men, just like women, are raped and that sexual abuse against males continues to flourish in prisons and other forms of detention, hence requires attention. The short story 'Prisoner' by Okurut is told by the third-person omniscient narrator who takes us through the victim's life in the various settings. Okurut uses a male protagonist, Jumba, as a representation of the male who silently suffer prison rape. She uses the prison setting to depict the challenges faced by male prisoners in the cells and reveals the prison as another place that harbors victims and offenders of sexual violence. The story begins when Jumba is sitting outside the bank waiting for his friend Sendi to give him the money he had promised to lend him. He waits for Sendi for five hours, but he does not show up; consequently, he chooses to go home. After an hour, he is woken up by

the police who have come to arrest him for a case he is not aware of. He later during the interrogation process realizes that he is being arrested for bank robbery. He attempts to prove his innocence by explaining to the officers why he was at the bank for five hours, but no one believes him. After two hours of torture, Jumba is left alone. However, he is taken to a maximum-security prison, two men come in the room and rape him. He undergoes torture when he is wrongly taken from a murder cell to a cell for treason suspects. The story ends when he muses at the absurdities in life and prays to God for laughter in such tough moments.

Okurut in her story 'Prisoner', succeeds in her meticulous depiction of prison rape as a form of sexual violence against the male. The story suggests male vulnerability in prison cells. The male protagonist, Jumba, who is mistakenly arrested as a bank robber is raped while in a prison cell. The narrator reveals that:

> Suddenly, he was left alone…Two men came in. They had boots and Jumba guessed that they were cleaners. He thanked God that they were not policemen who had come to inflict more pain on his body. He lifted his hand and painfully asked for water…One of the men sat on a low stool and commanded Jumba to crawl to him. He decided to do as he was told. Painful as it was, he crawled ever so slowly as he wondered what they might want. When he reached the man's knees, the man grabbed his head violently and squeezed the sides until Jumba found the pain impossible to bear…The second man was behind Jumba and roughly yanked off his trousers. Jumba then realized that these men were going to do the most despicable thing next to bestiality and rape. He pleaded but his pleas fell on deaf ears. He whimpered and started crying like a small boy. He let out a loud hollow cry as the man behind him let out a loud deep growl. Jumba threw up…By the time they changed places, Jumba was near faint. As he collapsed on the floor at the end of the exercise, he overheard one of the men saying, 'this fool tore my condom!' with that, the stars in Jumba's head blinked off (Okurut 1999 pp.42-43).

The above passage extract is so significant because it evidently addresses the form of sexual male abuse in prisons and its effects on the victim. Using the three male characters and vivid descriptions, the narrator exposes prison male rape. The victim as shown in the extract is raped by two men who came in wearing boots. The vivid descriptions and the choice of words used depict the nature of abuse: 'roughly yanked off his trousers', 'let out a loud deep growl', 'they changed places', 'at the end of the exercise', 'this fool tore my condom.'

More so, the above extract depicts the effects of rape on the victim. Okurut's use of imagery, and descriptive language exposes the effects of the sexual abuse on the victim but also allows the writer to stay within the short story constraints, compelling her to effortlessly voice the unspoken with as much significance as the spoken. Just like the female victims, the male victims are equally affected by this form of GBV. Jumba, the victim, during and after the abuse is seen crying, throwing up and worse still faints after the rape. The language used evidently brings it out: 'he whimpered and started crying like a small boy', 'Jumba threw up', 'he collapsed on the floor', 'the stars in Jumba's head blinked off.' The imagery used 'crying like a small boy' depicts the emotional breakdown of the victim. While the idiomatic phrase 'the stars in Jumba's head blinked off' shows that the victim blacked out or fainted. All the above are effects of the sexual abuse on the male victim.

Furthermore, Okurut's portrayal of male rape reveals that males rape their fellow men for the same reason they rape women. The narrator discloses that the male victim is raped by two men who take advantage of the pain he was feeling at that time: "After two hours of excruciating torture, Jumba thought he was going to die any minute. He was bleeding. His body was badly injured, and he had pain in his chest (Okurut 1999 p.42). The passage illustrates that the men who rape Jumba took advantage of the fact that he was already too weak to defend himself and because he appeared vulnerable and weak before them. This reminds us of Stanko's (1990) observation that men rape their fellow men for the same reason they rape women, which is to exercise power and control over the victim who is inferior, weak and subordinate.

Also, Okurut reveals that in the setting of a prison, rape is one way for the males to maintain their hegemonic masculinity. It is one way the male attempt to maintain and practice masculinity and maintain their position in times when there are no female subordinates. This is comparable to Javaid's (2018) observation that prison

rape is one way in which inmates practice hegemonic masculinity when other resources for attaining socially dominant forms of masculinity are difficult to access. Okurut's short story challenges and contradicts some of the status quo and gender expectations of men, hence making it difficult for men to achieve hegemonic masculinity. The narrator says that: "He pleaded but his pleas fell on deaf ears. He whimpered and started crying like a small boy. He let out a loud hollow cry…" (Okurut 1999 p. 43). The victim's act of 'pleading', 'whimpering', 'crying', 'hollow cry' contradicts the hegemonic masculinity status quo. This depiction of the victim's conduct is contrary to Smith's (2016) and Javaid (2018) features of hegemonic masculinity such as: being a father, husband, head of a family, strong, dominant, provider and above all protecting the family. The irony in these masculine features is that how then is a man meant to protect the family if he is not strong enough to protect himself? This leaves hegemonic masculinity questionable and lacking.

More so, Okurut employs silence of male inmates who have suffered rape not only as a tool to maintain brevity but also to depict the painful reality of their experience. as Jumba, who is sexually victimised, does not report to any authority after being abused. Javaid (2018) observes that inmates are reluctant to report for fear of being disbelieved and being ashamed to admit their vulnerability (Javaid, 2018, p. 64). It is important to note that although male rape is constructed as abnormal, placing male rape victims at the margin, reinforcing that real heterosexual men cannot be raped (Javaid, 2018, p. 27), it exists. Weiss (2010) confirms that although male rape myths are promoted in heterosexual spaces, myths such as men cannot be raped leave men vulnerable. The assumption that men are not vulnerable, as stated by Apperly (2015), undermines our understanding of violence. Based on these male rape myths, the researcher observes that men are left vulnerable and marginalised at the expense of maintaining patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities.

CONCLUSION

Austin Ejiet's 'Aida' and Mary Karooro Okurut's 'Prisoner' provide distressing and distinct portrayals of sexual violence, highlighting the suffering experienced by victims within a Ugandan context. The analysis above underscores the complex ways in which Ugandan literature confronts, represents, and critiques the pervasive realities of rape. Through their narratives, both authors resist the erasure of victims' experiences, challenging societal silence and the cultural taboos surrounding sexual violence. These texts do not merely recount incidents of assault; they engage in a

nuanced interrogation of power, gender, and social norms, illustrating how rape functions as both a personal trauma and a broader sociopolitical instrument.

In 'Aida', Ejiet foregrounds the psychological and emotional dimensions of sexual violence, portraying the protagonist's struggle with shame, stigma, and the internalisation of trauma. The narrative emphasises the invisible effects of rape, demonstrating that the act's repercussions extend far beyond the immediate physical violation. Conversely, Okurut's 'Prisoner' situates sexual violence within institutional and systemic frameworks, exposing how structural inequalities, legal inadequacies, and societal indifference perpetuate cycles of abuse.

Both works employ narrative strategies that complicate conventional representations of rape. The use of multiple perspectives, fragmented temporality, and introspective narration allows the authors to convey the disorienting and fracturing effects of sexual violence on victims' identities and life trajectories. These literary techniques serve not only as aesthetic choices but also as ethical interventions, compelling readers to engage empathetically with the survivors' experiences while confronting uncomfortable truths about societal complicity. The texts' insistence on bearing witness aligns with African feminist theoretical frameworks, emphasising the importance of amplifying women's voices and validating their lived experiences within patriarchal contexts.

Ultimately, Ejiet and Okurut's portrayals of rape transcend mere documentation; they operate as acts of resistance and social critique. By confronting the persistence of sexual violence, the authors challenge cultural complacency, prompting readers to interrogate prescriptive assumptions about gender, power, and justice. The narratives of 'Aida' and 'Prisoner' thus function simultaneously as literary achievements and interventions into pressing ongoing dialogues and social debates, revealing how storytelling can illuminate silenced realities while fostering dialogue on accountability, empathy, and structural reform.

Hence, the examination of sexual violence in these Ugandan literary texts affirms that rape is not merely an individual misfortune but a socially mediated phenomenon with deep ethical, and cultural, implications. Ejiet and Okurut's works exemplify the capacity of literature to bear witness, challenge hegemonic structures, and foreground the voices of the marginalised. By engaging with their narratives, readers gain insight into the complexities of rape, the nuances of gendered oppression, and the transformative potential of narrative as a tool for both

understanding and advocacy.

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