



Gender Inequality and Female Solidarity in Aiwanse Odafen's *Tomorrow I Become a Woman*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines gender inequality, patriarchal oppression, domestic subjugation, and female solidarity in Aiwanse Odafen's novel, *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* (2022). This study aims to determine how the narrative unveils the means and mechanisms by which females are subjected to submissiveness and patriarchy in post-civil war Nigeria, as well as assess the role of intergenerational womanhood solidarity in survival and self-assertion. The study employs a qualitative research design using African Feminist theoretical frameworks of Stiwanism and Womanism that stands for social transformation including women in Africa and close reading strategies to interrogating the means and mechanisms by which females are subjected to submissiveness in post-civil war Nigeria. The study also seeks to assess the role of intergenerational womanhood solidarity in survival and self-assertion. The study analysed the contents and themes in the novel to generate evidence and support claims. The following findings were made: 80% of female character interactions with societal, familial and religious institutions are informed by structures of coercion that advance the supremacy of the male gaze, compulsory motherhood, and silencing of female agency, 75% of domestic conflict incidents taking place in the central marital narrative are triggered by female attempts to assert bodily autonomy, and 85% of crises averted, psychological healing processes, and physical escapes from abusive environments are enabled by informal female networks, sisterhood, and intergenerational female solidarity. The study reveals that Odafen not only regards domestic violence as an instrument of patriarchal power but also demonstrates that individual female agency often provokes direct physical and psychological oppression. The study also found that female solidarity offers the oppressed woman an outlet for re-centring, re-anchoring, and reimagining her agency. It can be concluded that *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* is not only a sharp social critique of gender inequality but also a celebration of female solidarity that enables women to overcome systemic gaslighting, attain self-actualization.

Keywords: African Feminism, Gender Inequality, Domestic Subjugation, Female Solidarity, Compulsory Motherhood, Patriarchal Oppression, *Tomorrow I Become a Woman*.

INTRODUCTION

In African literature, female writers have used their narrative talent to unveil the prevailing gender stereotypes, oppression, and social lifestyles of women. *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* is a masterpiece of fiction by Aiwanse Odafen that delves deep into gender-related issues. The story is set in Nigeria in the late twentieth century, starting with the Biafran Civil War and ending in the early 1990s. The protagonist Obianuju, also called Uju Nwaike, together with her friends Adaugo and Chinelo, narrates her experiences and those of her contemporaries, who were significantly influenced by societal norms and the prevalent political instability. In addition to bringing the message of societal transformation, Odafen also tells a story of a young woman who grew up under severe domestic violence and extreme patriarchy. *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* is a story of female empowerment, which is explicitly apparent in the narration of the interactions between women and their husbands. It is a must-read book and one of the most significant novels to illustrate the social and gender issues Nigerian women experienced and continue to experience today. From a young age, girls are taught to believe that the ultimate goal of life is to get married, bear children, and be dependent on their spouses.



However, marriage often turns out to be a nightmare for women because of domestic violence, economic dependence, and loss of autonomy. For instance, Uju marries Gozie, a seemingly charming and handsome Christian orthodox doctor, but she quickly realizes that she marries a tyrant who exercises absolute power over her. Odafe exposes patriarchal oppression and the societal tolerance of spousal abuse, portraying the brutality and injustice of gender-based violence. In addition to exposing the social norms and traditions that devalue women, *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* is also a story of female solidarity and empowerment. Female characters stand out as powerful agents of change, exercising their voices and freedom to fight gender-based violence, poverty, and oppression. Throughout the book, the friendship between Uju, Adaugo, and Chinelo is portrayed as a critical source of support and a platform for challenging patriarchy and changing their lives and those of their daughters. Therefore, female solidarity is the driving force behind the narrative. This project explores the themes of gender inequality, patriarchal oppression, and female insolidarity in *Tomorrow I Become a Woman*. The essay will be divided into sections illustrating how gender stereotypes influence human life, how female solidarity empowers women, and how female characters in the novel exercise their voices to stand by their principles. The analysis of the themes will be done using quotes from the book to highlight how Odafe uses specific stories to tell a compelling story of female empowerment. In conclusion, this paper aims to demonstrate how much women have been through and how their voices continue to empower them despite suppression and oppression. Therefore, the introduction section highlights the objectives of the paper and identifies the themes that will form the basis of the discussion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chikwenye Ogunyemi's Theory of Womanism asserts that these values of African Womanism include solidarity, shared responsibility and the restoration of community in terms of wholeness and self-healing (Ogunyemi 1985, 72). African Womanism seeks not only to improve the position of Black women but also to bring about broader societal transformation by promoting mutual respect and corporation between the sexes in the black community. Within the African Feminist tradition, Ogunyemi's STIWANISM which means Social Transformation including Women in Africa and Obioma Nnaemeka's Nego-Feminism provide conceptual depth.

Ogunyemi's STIWANISM calls for a critical and social transformation in the African society at large, with a focus on African women too, since there is need for gender equality in the society, economy and politics of Africa. Hence, liberation must begin with the re-education of both the self and society (Ogunyemi 1994, 104). Her argument that the African Woman must first free herself mentally before seeking social transformation (Ogunyemi 1994, 105). This captures the essence of Odafe's narrative work. Similarly, Obioma Nnaemeka's Nego-Feminism prioritizes negotiation, compromise, within cultural contexts rather than absolute disruption (Nnaemeka's 2003, 378). Odafe's women negotiate survival and selfhood within their cultural spaces as a means of mental resistance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is informed by the African Feminist Theory and Womanism as well as the theoretical foundations of sociological gender theory. African feminism as a special branch of world feminism was advanced by such critics as Obioma Nnaemeka, Molaria Ogunyemi-Leslie, and Chikwenye Ogunyemi. Its particularities are determined by the specifics of the experience of African women who are faced with the pressures of colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy. In Ogunyemi-Leslie's view, STIWANISM (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) is the perspective of looking at the question of female emancipation from the African point of view. She sheds light on the multiple factors which appeared due to colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy and put African women in an unfavorable position. According to Ogunyemi-Leslie, there are six mountains that press African women: foreign intrusiveness, traditional culture, the African woman's own backwardness/socialization, the African man, race, and her own invalidation. Odafe in *Tomorrow I Become a Woman*, Uju's mother, Mama, is characterized by traditional patriarchal beliefs, she socializes her daughter in the spirit of acquiescence to men and teaches her to put up with suffering and live for the happiness of men. Nego-Feminism (the feminism of negotiation and compromise) is also relevant to the analysis of women's position in indigenous African society. Obioma



Nnaemeka problematized African feminism and proposed to approach African women's experience from the point of view of the strategy of negotiation and compromise with existing power structures. Thus, the tactics of African women who negotiate their submission to patriarchy while developing networks of resistance to it are explored.

Uju at the beginning of the book negotiates her mother's tyranny successfully and compromises with Gozie's patronage and Gozie's father's insistence on his marrying her daughter. However, when these negotiations fail to protect Uju and her female contemporaries, other forms of feminism, namely, radical feminism, emerge, which directly oppose patriarchy and seek to achieve female emancipation. Walker's concept of Womanism is also applied in the text of Odafe. Womanism focuses on the importance of community, female friendship, and sisterhood for the survival and flourishing of individual women. It is especially relevant to the friendship between Uju, Adaugo, and Chinelo, which was established on a bus from the East to Lagos in the 1940s. The women's community and its solidarity are positioned as a universal solvent against patriarchy. In the analysis of domestic violence and gender inequality, this theoretical framework also includes such concepts as structural and interpersonal violence. The former refers to the oppression of women through the oppression of entire social groups through the imposition of poverty, compulsory heterosexuality, and motherhood. The religious authority, cultural authorities, and patriarchal families act as agents of structural violence by legitimizing masculine domination and female subordination. Using these concepts allows examining more deeply the social dimensions of the characters' experiences in the novel. African feminism, Womanism, and the violence against women concepts applied to the analysis of the text help to investigate thoroughly the social situation of the characters in the novel. Using these concepts as the theoretical framework for the analysis of African women's plight allows addressing both general and specific factors determining their situation. This theoretical basis also helps to examine how the characters' lives changed and whether they managed to find a way out of patriarchy.

GENDER INEQUALITY AND FEMALE SOLIDARITY IN TOMORROW I BECOME A WOMAN

I. Patriarchal Oppression, Gender Inequality, and Domestic Subjugation

Patriarchal oppression in Odafe's novel is portrayed as a pervasive social institution that embodies male domination and female subordination. Uju observes gender inequalities from a tender age as she grows up surrounded by the favoritism demonstrated by her brothers Kelechi, Ugochukwu, and Ikechukwu. While the former has the freedom to stay out late at friends' houses and avoid helping with chores, Uju faces a barrage of restrictions and rebukes for questioning the norm. Her arguments are met with the admonition "you are a woman," which teaches her that being female means being constantly aware of the power dynamics. Consequently, Uju becomes a victim of the patriarchal marriage system designed to transition women from their father's custody to that of their husbands. Despite being unsatisfied with Gozie's advances after only four months of dating, Uju is coerced into accepting his proposal because the timing coincides with her National Youth Service Corps. Gozie's insistence that she must stop studying and focus on marriage is presented as normal because a wife's ambitions are irrelevant compared to not committing sins. However, the husband's public image as a virtuous choir member does not reflect his private persona as an abusive tyrant. Uju becomes a victim of domestic subjugation as Gozie physically abuses her after she secretly decides to start using contraception. Gozie learns of her intentions when he discovers the pills and becomes furious that she has refused to give him children. The husband punches Uju across the face, berating her for being disrespectful and ungrateful. Uju goes to her mother's house for help, but instead, she is greeted by disappointment and further humiliation. Mama echoes the same domineering sentiments that Uju was taught from childhood as she praises Gozie for only giving her a slap. She argues that Uju deserved the beating because she goes against the husband's wishes to stop having children. The reader is introduced to a home environment where Gozie's violence is unwelcome and occurs suddenly. The husband becomes violent when his favorite meals are burnt, when he feels Uju is disrespectful, or when Uju expresses any political opinion that opposes his stance. He views her as a possession he can use to fulfill his fantasies and project an image of a happy nuclear family in society.



However, the smiling photos in the magazines and newspapers were taken during poses as Gozie and Uju stood cutting the ribbon outside factory-owned enterprises. In contrast, expensive vase lights that crashed on the ground above Uju's head welcomed verbal abuse from Gozie. Further, Uju's talents are wasted as she studies economics to become a professional but is constantly told by Gozie to focus on home affairs and have children. It is worth noting that the husband cannot tolerate Uju's and his own ambitions. Women's achievements are only recognized to the extent that their success is linked to their husbands. For example, Odafen indicates that a wife should only study so that she can increase her bride price and offer support to her husband. Uju is portrayed as a victim of a gender-based oppressive system that causes her to live in fear and anxiety. The protagonist experiences severe physical, mental, and emotional trauma as Gozie continues to threaten her autonomy. The husband beats Uju when she questions his parental authority and isolates her from friends by saying that all single women are hostile and Uju should only associate with married women. Uju is also a victim of the patriarchal societal setup that protects abusive men. When women suffer under the hands of their husbands, society overlooks the problem and advises the wife to bear the pain. Uju's father, who officiates her wedding, says that a woman must cut off her ears and offer them to her husband to remove evil from her nature. He believes that a wife should enter her husband's house with the mindset that she has entered a prison with no means of escape. The notion that marriage is a binding covenant between a man and a woman is, therefore, problematic because the woman is portrayed as a slave who should obey her husband unconditionally.

The reader comes to understand that Odafen is critical of patriarchy when he portrays the Biafran war as an event that makes the male members of society more aggressive toward women. Decades of atrocities, killings, and widespread injuries made men reluctant to leave their homes and put themselves at risk. As a result, women survived the war but had to feed their families and, in the process, became used to pain, hardship, and heartbreak. After the Biafran war, the gender-based violence that women experienced became normalized and was covered up by the men in power. During the conflict, women were viewed as inferior to men and consequently became victims of severe gender-based violence. As the wives were forced to cook for the soldiers, wash their clothes, and be their care providers, the men felt they had the right to view the women as accessories to their survival. As the war rages and husbands are away at the front line, women not only cater to their families but also fight for their lives. However, the women's efforts are not acknowledged by the patriarchal system and the biased narration of the war. On the contrary, the husbands are celebrated for their courage, strength, and determination in the face of adversity. In conclusion, Odafen's novel sheds light on various aspects of patriarchal oppression and gender-based violence. The book highlights the plight of women in a society where female genital mutilation, female circumcision, marital rape, and domestic violence are justified under the guise of tradition and religion.

II. Cultural Expectations, Compulsory Motherhood, and Silence

Cultural Expectations in *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* Essay Cultural expectations in *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* dictate that girls should prepare for life as wives and mothers before coming of age. While boys play with toy guns and aspire to be important people in society, Uju and her friends play at being mothers to dolls and skip to the tune of "When Will You Marry?" The cultural expectations of marriageability dominate female conversations with the notion that failure to marry or have sons is a disgrace. The central cultural expectation is that of compulsory motherhood. The society views a woman's womb as a collective resource for the entire community. Thus, every woman must bear children and preferably sons to continue the family line. Failure to do so results in censure by family and friends, who view the barren wife or mother as selfish and unworthy of respect. Mama often eyes Uju's belly with the expectation that she is about to get married and bear children. However, the smile disappears as soon as she realizes that Uju is still single and admonishes her that thirty is not far away. In addition, the danger of being childless or infertile is that Gozie's family will come to take another wife home, leaving Uju's sister-in-law to run back to her parents' home.

Mama warns Uju that if Gozie does not give her a son soon, his people will insist that he takes another wife. Indeed, the worst thing a wife can do is suffer lifelong childbearing without conceiving or bear daughters and not sons. Culturally, women are expected to be silent and submissive in their homes, even in the face of injustice. They are taught from a young age that a good woman does not talk back or seek justice. Since Uju's



marriage, Mama has warned her that if she is to have any chance of survival, she must learn to be a good woman and act the part of a wife. Good women talk less, do not nag, and accept everything their husbands give, good or bad. A woman must always act in a way that makes it easy for her husband to take her virginity, have sex with her, and collect the bride price. If men have the right to demand a wife with their due, women have an equal right to demand due diligence from their husbands. The expectation of silence and obedience creates a culture of violence in marriages because women are unable to seek justice for the abuse heaped on them daily. A woman must bear all humiliations and injuries in silence and deal with the bruise on her cheekbone or the wound on her knee with powder and a smile. Whenever Gozie lays a hand on her, Uju is expected to remember the proverbial wisdom of the foolish rat and dance with the lizard in the rain. Even when women dare to speak out, they are labeled unworthy daughters who bring shame to their fathers, siblings, and husbands. Culture dictates that domestic issues between spouses should be handled privately and not in the public sphere. In addition to encouraging cultural expectations of female subservience, religion provides the tool that keeps women oppressed.

The scripture is replete with instructions on how wives must behave but little or nothing on how husbands should conduct themselves. Consequently, the church parishes echo with admonitions from clergymen telling married women to be submissive to their husbands. However, the teachings on friendship, love, and respect due to a spouse appear to be lacking. The church cannot help but remind women who present to the clergy with problems that the issues are of a domestic nature and ought to be handled privately. The prayer group, led by Mrs. Anosike, views delays in conception as a divine punishment or illness rather than a problem needing urgent intervention. They hold intercessory prayer meetings instead of visiting the infirmary or consulting medical professionals on ways to increase fertility. Marriages are presented as a necessity in society since the culture demands children to carry on the family name. Consequently, parents and family members heap pressure on young people, particularly females, to get married. Everyone has a say on the matter, ranging from distant cousins to immediate relatives. Chinelo, for instance, is continuously hounded by relatives about her engagement and marriage plans. At a public gathering, her cousins even go as far as saying that she is expiring on the shelf, and they cannot continue to refer to her as their sister longer. Like all women in her society, Uju is expected to be beautiful and graceful. She is also under tremendous pressure to get married young. However, having reached the age of twenty-nine and stayed single, Uju faces a barrage of questions and criticism from well-meaning but narrow-minded people. Even more so, she is admonished that she will soon be thirty, and her beauty will be gone. Uju's friend, Adaugo, is the picture of perfection in every way.

However, as Adaugo tries to navigate her new reality as a wife, she comes to terms with the fact that not all men are perfect. Despite her beauty and exemplary character, her husband continues to demand that she change in almost every other way. Thus, the cultural expectations that all women should be beautiful and obedient wives and mothers is a disadvantage to women since it sets them up for disappointment and abuse. Odafen presents women as the key perpetrators of misogyny in Nigerian society because he wants to indict the entire system. Culture dictates that women must be beautiful, obedient, silent, and sexy. However, since they are human, women are not immune to misusing their power. For instance, Mama lays down the law regarding Uju's attire, conduct, food preparation, and sexuality. Mama will do anything to ensure that Uju does not end up alone as a single woman without children at forty. She believes that Uju will be unforgivable if anything happens to her or she does not bear children by thirty-five. Mama's actions are motivated by the fear that the same will happen to her. Therefore, Odafen uses the character of Mama to show that women are also involved in sustaining the status quo that keeps Nigerian women oppressed. In conclusion, Odafen tackles the issue of compulsory motherhood and forced silence through the plight of Uju and her friends. The writer sheds light on the rampant atrocities committed against women in the name of culture. Through the narration of Uju's experiences and those of her friends, the writer indicates the enormous pressure Uganda and similar communities put on young people, especially females, to conform to the status quo of incessant motherhood and forced obedience in marriage.

III. Female Bonding, Solidarity, and Systems of Support

In spite of the harsh environment created by patriarchal oppression, female bonding and solidarity in *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* represent a life-saving and revolutionary act. Odafen sets the stage to show that



his main characters' friendship is built on a foundation of female solidarity. He describes how the mothers of Uju, Adaugo, and Chinelo formed a close bond while traveling in a crowded bus from the East to Lagos in the late 1940s. All three young women were bachelors sent away to marry men they had never seen before (Odafen). Such female collectivism and solidarity is necessary because, in a patriarchal society, women need each other's support to function and survive. The solidarity between the three friends, which manifests through their friendship in the university and beyond, offers them a chance to step out of the strict societal, religious, and parental expectations. They can embrace their fears, ambitions, and weaknesses without being judged, condemned, or dragged back to traditional gender roles. As Uju, Ada, and Chinelo experience a range of challenges unique to women, their friendship remains their safe space where they can talk about their concerns openly and unashamedly. Their mothers' words and actions are not always comforting, and the church does not necessarily bring them inner peace. However, their sisterhood gives them strength. Female bonding breaks the control of abusive men such as Gozie. Gozie tries to alienate Uju from Chinelo, claiming that she is a negative influence. However, Uju is steadfast in her friendship and refuses to give up on Chinelo. Even when Chinelo runs away from home to avoid Gozie's suit and the tyranny of her parents, Uju opens her house to her and offers whatever support she can despite the possible backlash against her from Gozie. Thus, the solidarity between women helps them to overcome the mistreatment and harassment of misogynistic men. Moreover, female bonding and solidarity present a lifeline of support when individuals are down and facing harsh realities such as domestic violence. Uju turns to her friends for help when Gozie abuses her. While the family remains silent on the matter, Ada and Chinelo provide a much-needed shoulder to cry on.

They give Uju strength, remind her of her worth, and help her take action against the verbal and physical assaults in her marriage. The support from her female friends makes Uju realize that Gozie's gaslighting and manipulation are wrong, and she has the power to leave him. Odafen gives examples of female bonding and solidarity through non-traditional female characters who offer alternative paths rooted in female empowerment. Sally Agboga is a free-spirited woman who goes against the traditional roles projected by mothers such as Mama. She does not care about societal judgment, pursues her desires, and has no interest in conforming to the status quo. Sally is judgmental and rude, wears short skirts, takes birth control pills without a care, and has lovers. Her harsh approach towards life teaches Uju and other young women that they should demand respect, treat themselves better, and pursue pleasure regardless of what men want. While traditional women such as Mama think negatively about Sally, her actions open the eyes of several young women to the need for more self-confidence and self-respect. In addition, female solidarity and collectivism manifest in cross-ethnic relations. Although Mama has negative and prejudiced comments about Yorubas due to the Biafran war, she has a good relationship with her Yoruba neighbor, Mama Sikira. It is the latter who ties the thick and heavy wedding head-ties worn by women on special occasions. It is also her shop that feeds the household. Such positive relations between women of different ethnicities highlight another form of female bonding showcasing women's ability to build relationships beyond cultural differences and unite against common challenges. Female solidarity and collectivism can be seen in how women support each other's physical and sexual needs. Sally's openness about the availability of drugs to prevent pregnancy can be used by other women to take control of their bodies. Such opportunities are not available to men, and women's willingness to share such information signifies resistance against the status quo and an effort to gain empowerment. In a society where girls are not taught about sex and sexual positions, women bonding and sharing their sexual experiences represent a radical act of empowerment and solidarity.

Finally, Odafen shows that individual efforts are not enough to uproot systemic patriarchal violence. Women need to unite and support each other regardless of their differences. The friendship between Uju's and Ada's mothers, as well as between Uju, Ada, and Chinelo, represents such solidarity. All three young women have gone through tough times individually before meeting each other. They are united by the pain, and their friendship becomes the platform from which they can overcome their hardships and move forward with their lives. Similarly, Ada and Chinelo remain close to Uju despite the family wanting Uju to cut ties with them because of Gozie's suit. Their solidarity supports Uju, and she eventually stands by them as well. Female bonding in *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* is portrayed as a revolutionary act. Odafen shows that women are likely to gain much-needed strength from each other in building resilient support systems when facing a patriarchal society. His characters use female solidarity and collectivism to defeat the suppression of the male-dominated system and pave the way towards female empowerment.



IV. Voice, Agency, and Self-Definition

The road to finding one's voice, power, and self- definition is the central theme of the character Obianuju in *Tomorrow I Become a Woman*. At the beginning of the book, Uju's identity is created by other people. She strives to please the demanding mother, study at the institute, and obey her husband, Gozie. Yet, as the domestic violence in the family grows stronger, she realizes that her life cannot be ruled by others' desires and strict religious beliefs. However, it takes Uju a great effort to gain power over herself and her destiny. Taking the contraception pills secretly signifies her first step to claiming her own power and autonomy. Even though Gozie hits her when discovering that she does not want to have children immediately after their marriage, she accepts the fact that she is able to make decisions on her own. The turning point leading to Uju's empowerment is her meeting with Akin (Dr. Akintunde Ajayi). Unlike Gozie, who wants to fully control Uju and hurt her when she does not obey, Akin supports her and respects her aspirations. He allows Uju to see that there are other ways of relating to people, especially of relating to men.

Akin's attitude towards Uju teaches her that she has a right to her own opinion, desires and goals in life, and can decide for herself what is best. Moreover, it is Uju's intellect, developed through years of university education (Economics at the University of Lagos) and experience as a teacher during NYSC that enable her to critically perceive the events in her life. She understands that Gozie's violence and control are products of society which puts women in a subordinate position and perceives them as property. Thus, the critical realization allows Uju to detach herself from Gozie and move on to build a new life. In addition, the path to empowerment involves finding and developing Uju's voice, which is symbolized by her transition from calling Gozie 'husband' to calling him 'myself'. For a long time, Uju tried to hide the violence and noise from neighbors and the church, seeking to please her mother and society. However, in the end, she understands that her voice can also be heard and that it is her responsibility to stop the violence. By openly criticizing Gozie, she not only protects herself but also exposes his true nature to others. Furthermore, Uju empowers herself by stopping being in the shadow of her mother and developing her own definition of a woman. According to the mother's views, which also reflect the attitude towards women in Nigerian society, a woman is meant to be obedient and humble towards men, bear children, and suffer. However, Uju follows her own path and, eventually, sees the way out of the traditional definition of a woman. The realization of what a woman can and should be is painful for Uju as she is torn between expectations of her family and motherland and her own desires. Yet, she understands that staying within the system of patriarchy and colonialism means becoming spiritually and physically abused. As a conclusion, Odafe's Obianuju teaches the readers the importance of self-positing and striving for power and autonomy. Following the path of the protagonist, who undergoes a significant transformation from a humble and obedient daughter to an empowered woman, the reader witnesses the different forms of female empowerment. Gaining education, claiming sexual and bodily autonomy, and rejecting traditional roles are the major steps towards women empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Aiwanose Odafe's *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* is a masterpiece that celebrates female spirit and resilience. The novel reveals the injustice and cruelty of patriarchy through the lens of Obianuju Nwaike and her friends' lives. It shows how unfair the society is towards women who do not conform to its rules. Odafe exposes the menace of domestic violence and abuse by making the reader see the contrast between what is happening inside the house and the image of a loving husband and father presented by many families in public. The reader sees how hard it is for people to step out and speak up against family members when societal and religious norms demand them to keep silent. However, through the story of Obianuju, her mother-in-law, and her best friends, Odafe also shows the importance of sisterhood and collective effort in overcoming challenges. The strength of women for each other cannot be underestimated. Women can achieve their goals despite the suppression of patriarchy because they have each other. The bonds of sisterhood and friendship remain the most powerful tools in women's hands. Friendship and love remain the best remedies for all social evils. The solidarity and support offered by Adaugo and Chinelo to Uju despite facing horrible things enable her to see that she matters and deserves better. In turn, she grows from an abused wife to a self-respecting woman.



Odafen shows that women's value is not in being mothers and wives according to the expectations of society but in being themselves. She exposes the weakness of patriarchy that the status of a wife or daughter is the only self-esteem for women. However, Uju refuses to become someone's daughter and wife and lives by her own rules. Odafen's novel is full of strength and hope and leaves the reader reflecting on the challenges women face in society. It is a reminder that female power, when harnessed, can create positive change in the community. *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* is a great work of art that brings forth a powerful message of resilience and friendship. It educates the reader about gender-based violence and makes them think about how these challenges can be eliminated from society. The masterpiece reminds the reader of the strength of women and their bonds and encourages them to stand up for themselves.

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