

## **Awareness of Domestic Violence in *Your Name shall be Tanga:* A Beyalean interpretation**

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### **Introduction**

It is agreed upon that most individuals believe themselves that they have compassion for others, and if they do not harm anyone, they themselves have practiced non-violent action. Yet these individuals do grant no attention and importance to the corrupt thoughts and feelings lying within the self. It seems obvious, in this sense, that cleaning up the self becomes a useless act. This way, the particular individuals, albeit their committed violence, consider themselves passive subjects. Such category of people is a concrete specimen of the commotion permeating the world. For, according to Neil Wollman's<sup>1</sup>, understanding violence is the action or the structural arrangement that results in physical or non-physical harm to one or more persons. He identifies a set of violence's characteristics including it as harm to humans; he goes further arguing that the action which causes harm is purposefully done, perpetuated or condemned.

Man has to be selective when using his power, and attentive in deciphering his conception about the fundamentals in order to be wise to develop a certain understanding over the meaning of non-violence, otherwise, it would be almost impossible to relinquish to violence.

The view that man adopts to soothe and/or harm others makes him forsake discerning perceptiveness and begin to look outwards. In this sense, man starts accumulating external instruments and agents' thinking that success, ineluctably, lies in acquiring, to a certain extent, means and materials. One should understand, thereafter, that he/she would gain a given power at the expense of one's weakness, yet has not to allege that external means and materials are the only ultimate forces that remain central to the self (the central element the self focuses on).

### **1. Debate over the Emergence of Violence in Africa**

Five general categories of theory appear in literature on domestic violence in Africa. The first one is the rights *theories* which see that abuse results from a failure to recognize the individual human rights of women. Most African countries have ratified numerous international covenants that either explicitly or implicitly construes domestic violence to be a violation of human rights. In spite of this fact, theories about domestic violence based on the assertion of individual human rights are not frequent in African literature. Human rights conventions, declarations, resolutions, and international conferences, nowadays, perform the same function for women raising claims to the right to be free of violence in Africa by means of transforming claims that might, otherwise, be seen as inconsequential and domestic into universal rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Wollman, the director of the Manchester College Peace Studies Institute, and his colleagues defined violence to include many kinds of harm and identify ways to measure the trends in the different types of violence.

Secondly, some *Feminist interpretations* prove that domestic violence is the result of the pervasive inequality of men and women, i.e., the struggle against domestic violence is clearly seen as just one facet of the different facets of the broad gender discrimination social context. Another set of causal theories in the emerging African literature is the *Cultural Explanations* which emphasizes the power of tradition and norms within African culture as explaining the widespread incidence of domestic violence like wife rough treatment which is, as well, regarded as normal within traditional African culture<sup>2</sup>. So, this change will, undoubtedly, lead to similar re-socialization campaigns and education to change attitudes about male-female relations in general. Another theory of domestic violence is *Society in Transition* that sees it as emerging from the fact that African societies are in transition from traditional cultures to a modern, urbanized society<sup>3</sup>. Many of the violent quarrels are occasioned in many instances by social change and men's sense of threat. For example, quarrels erupt owing to man's inability to face with modern economic challenges, and, therefore, to support multiple wives or extended families; woman's growing independence as she takes "second jobs"<sup>4</sup> and interacts with other men, and the difficulty for a woman to perform household work in traditionally expected ways in a time she proves satisfactory the cash economy. These are all situations which might have not arisen if African society had remained untouched by the modern world, a think which seems almost impossible in the current social changes. Finally, some observers attribute part of the blame for domestic violence, and violence against a woman in general, to an alleged "*culture of violence*" in modern Africa, within which violence is conceived as an adequate alternative to dispute resolution and conflict transformation<sup>5</sup>, while it is very possible to manage any type of conflict.

## 2. Beyala's Novelistic World and the Notion of Violence

Beyala Calixthé one of the black feminist writers, through her literary endeavours, has been dealing with black women experience to reach the universality of women's cause. She puts her great focus on portraying the African woman's issues as a human being who suffers from being deprived the choice of his own destiny; she focuses on the status of the African woman as an individual who suffered from alienation, violence and men's supremacy.

As a consequence, Beyala as other African women writers such as Flora Nwapa who was joined by Buchi Emecheta and Adaora in the mid 1970s, in the 1980s, Ifeoma Okoye and Zaynab Alkabi, felt a necessity to struggle in order to write their stories by themselves and from their perspective, and to grow within themselves a sense of dignity and awareness of their rights as human beings

The immigrant African writer Calixthé Beyala's freedom of writing provides her with a honest and truthful depiction of the ambiguous realities which the other non-immigrants dare not tackle directly owing to the constraints they faces. Furthermore, the active role that the African woman has played in public life and her participation even in political affairs is undoubtedly another reason an author like Beyala is seen in an adequate position providing her the right to deal in a very overt way with the issue of women. This fact has radically change the African society in

<sup>2</sup> Personal point of view.

<sup>3</sup> Urbanization was an inevitable stage among many other stages corresponding to the series of cultural upheaval in Africa. For more details , see the *Emergence of the African fiction* , by Charles Larson

<sup>4</sup> Second job, because, in Africa, some people think that a woman, has one job : to be a house-hold who takes care of the husband, give births and look after the children.

<sup>5</sup> This unwillingness to manage a conflict goes back to the colonial heritage, when Africans, specifically women, were treated coercively and violently by their colonizers.

the way that it helped the quasi totality of the African woman to germinate within herself a sense of dignity and consciousness of her rights, as well as to take part in the national development of the African society.

To talk about the relation between feminism and violence is prerequisite in that they are seen as equal poles in most Beyala's literary works; as it is necessary to drop a line on Beyala's perception of Violence. It would seem obvious, thereafter, that both the socio-analysis and psycho-analysis are practical approaches to deal with the issue of violence and alienation which are in fact nothing but the resultant of the indifferent African society. While the socio-analytical approach is required in trying to account for the social realities that urged the writer to write, the psycho-analytical approach is needed to set an interpretation to the actions of the writer through her major character Tanga from a psychological orientation.

If feminists today argue that feminism is a grass-root movement that seeks to cross boundaries based on social class, race, culture, and religion, Calixthé Beyala, culturally, specifies and addresses issues relevant to the woman of her society (for example, female genital cutting in Africa), and debates the extent to which certain issues, such as rape, incest (Tanga's father who raped her, *Your Name shall be Tanga*), and mothering, are universal.

In Beyala's novel, violence against women and children, physically, emotionally, and/or sexually, is a product of the social construction of masculinity, which often condones male dominance over women; in African literature, male writers attempted in most their literary works to restrict the African woman's role as it was already restricted in reality in that they did not bring something new. It is undoubtedly why many African women writers come to the floor to give the woman her share in being positively included in African literature.

The author of *Your Name Shall be Tanga* created a world of fiction through which the reader perceives the echo of the 'real world'- that is, the one where the children of Africa are deprived of their childhood through *poverty, prostitution, corruption, and violence*. Girls suffer most in this world, as unbearable social and political pressures combined with patriarchal values, it rises self-doubt, and pushes into womanhood before the due time, usually through a chain of traumatic experiences.

*In Your Name Shall be Tanga*, the author portrays her major character Tanga as a *girl child* which means a female child in the adolescence age of between 12 and 19 years, the age between childhood and adulthood. The list of burdens that the girl child goes through are endless education, health, poverty, basic human rights are violated, rape, sexual abuse, early pregnancy, Female Genital Mutilation which leads to early marriage and early pregnancy.

Moreover, there is more than a faint glimmer of hope on the fringe of Beyala's dark view of the human condition. Even when they are roughed by life, failed by the society, and threatened with annihilation; most of her characters survive the bruising of their bodies and the torments imposed upon their minds. They always have hope of better change, like Tanga who dreams of being a clean mother despite forced prostitution and societal values of being a whore. (Beyala: 1988)

Beyala alluded in her novel to the status of the post-colonial women in post-colonial Africa, a status which is a bit violent in the eyes of an emancipated woman. She shows woman-to-man relation, woman-to-woman relation and society-to-woman relation, as she has made a clear reference to violence which is also a global phenomenon.

Many research have been carried out to show the keenness of the issue in almost all over the world<sup>6</sup>; Beyala, as an African woman writer, does not exclude herself from the world constellation in that she dealt with the problem from her perspective, referring to her society (the African society)

#### A. Woman-to-man relation

It is referred to as a patriarchal one; we see woman serving man and taking care of her family in the absence of her husband. Beyala states through her female character Tanga, who represents the African woman, she said:

*Evening had fallen...my mother lit a lamp...midnight. Man, where are you? On to what gravestone have you crashed down? Worry cut itself into her face.*  
(1988:28)

Tanga's mother was waiting for her husband, who never cares about her and his family, worrying about him, but when he arrived, as Tanga noticed, he didn't care about her worry but rather humiliates her in front of her children:

*Where have you come from? ... You're dishonouring me in front of my children-in front of the whole world. You can't manage to spend a single day with your family ... 'Listen...'*  
'No!'  
*She raised her hand; he grabbed her wrists and pushed her firmly to the mat... Mother old one remained silent.* (Ibid: 29)

Concerning woman-to-woman relation, Beyala explains through her novel that women consider Tanga as a dirty *whore*.

The last category, society-to-woman relation, is represented as unmerciful one; society remains severally critical, never giving chances for woman to survive or forgiving her about any small mistake she commits. *Kajaba*, Tanga's grandmother, when she was pregnant of an illegitimate child people said ironically:

*Look at her... She has swallowed a coconut!* (Ibid: 25)

Societal values such those have a great impact in changing woman's view about herself it might lead her to punish herself severally even for trivial matters like the case of *kajaba* as Tanga explains:

<sup>6</sup> See, Eurobarometer 73.2; *Domestic Violence against Women*, Conducted by TNS opinion & Social at the request of Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security (DG Justice after the administrative reorganisation) Survey co-ordinated by Directorate-General. Communication TNS Opinion & Social Avenue Herrmann Debroux, 40 1160 Brussels Belgium

... *Kajaba cut the umbilical cord spat on the ground three times to put an end to her fertility. She swore that no child's cry would ever come forth from her entrails... this illegitimate birth poisoned kajaba's maternal instincts. (Ibid)*

From all what precedes, one notices that Beyala, besides standing as a writer, she stands as a social critic and a psychoanalytic of her characters. All this was for nothing in fact but to make the situation clearer for her readers, to draw them nearer since she sees her task as a message transmitting.

## B. Domestic Violence

Domestic violence occurs when a family member, partner or ex-partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate or harm the other. The term intimate partner violence (IPV) and other terms like wife beating, wife battering, relationship violence, domestic abuse, spousal abuse, and family violence are often used synonymously with some legal jurisdictions having specific definitions. Domestic violence is seen as very serious in all its forms by a clear majority of people, though a significant minority continues to see the problem in a less serious light. Domestic violence like any other type of violence takes many forms, including physical violence, sexual violence, and emotional violence.

### B.1. Physical Violence

In fact physical violence refers to the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing injury, harm, disability, or death, for example, hitting, shoving, biting, restraint, kicking, or using a weapon. It includes direct and indirect physical violence. The direct physical violence ranges from unwanted physical contact to rape and murder, whereas indirect physical violence includes destruction of objects, throwing objects near the victim, or harm to animals. Physical abuse may result in:

- Difficulty in establishing intimate personal relationships.
- Difficulty in adulthood with physical closeness, touching, intimacy, or trust.
- High levels of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, medical illness, or problems at school or work.
- Becoming an abusive parent or caregiver.

One aspect of physical violence is the physical abuse of a spouse or intimate partner in a way that ends up by injuring the person, or puts the person at risk of being injured. Physical abuse of a spouse includes pushing, slapping, hitting, beating, battering, choking, pinching, breaking bones, burning, and murder.

In Beyala's *Y.N.S.T*, spouse abuse appears clearly in the relation between the father of Tanga and her mother. When she asked him where have he been, and blamed him in not being able to stay with his children a single day he replayed her with indifference but later on he pushed her, Tanga witnesses:

*She raised her hand; he grabbed her wrists and pushed her firmly to the mat...  
Mother old one remained silent. (1988: 29)*

Another aspect is the Child physical abuse. It consists of any act or failure to act that threatens a child's physical health and development. A person caring for a child is physically abusive if he or she fails to nurture the child, injuring him physically, or relating sexually to him. Physical abuse is any non-accidental physical injury to a child. Even if the parent or the caretaker who inflicts the injury might not have intended to hurt the child, the injury is not considered an accident if the caretaker's actions were intentional. This injury may be the result of any assault on a child's body, such as beating, whipping, and paddling, and other severe physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age.

In *Y.N.S.T*, child abuse constitutes a major manifesto in that Beyala seems willing to state the child's status in a corrupt world. She, as an African writer questioned the concept of home as far as it is linked to child. The image of youth in the novel shows that the continent cannot be called a refuge and does not have the characteristics of home, that is, may be, why throughout the novel children are abused both physically and emotionally. Tanga thus laments:

*[A]ll these children who are born adult and will never know how to measure the harshness of their destiny; these children who are widowers of their childhood, to whom even time no longer makes any promises. (Ibid: 47)*

Child beating is also a major topic in *Y.N.S.T* since parents are allowed to beat or physically hurt their children. Tanga is one of those children that experience the daily violence, she claims that both her mother and her father see themselves naturally entitled to beating their children she said that her mother once punished her for just being innocent:

*Violence unfurls. I protect my face. The first smack comes, followed by a volley of blows. I lie down. I play dead. She pounces upon me, crushing me. (Ibid: 98)*

Tanga's father as well was known for his severe punishment and treatment. He once slaps her (the child Tanga) for disturbing him when he was sleeping with another woman, the fish vendor, Tanga adds:

*His fear makes me laugh. He lets go of his companion. He leaps to my side. He slaps me. My eyes are blurred with tears. (Ibid: 90)*

The ill treatment of the child may raise some abnormal attitudes and deviant behaviour. Abused child mutates into someone who lies, resents, fears, and retaliates, rather than loves, trusts, and listens. He may as well become reclusive, and alienated from persons and from the rest of his family. He may likewise have a low self-esteem, or engage in self-destructive behaviours. Moreover, his psychological development and social behaviour will be impaired. As a result, he may abuse his / her children, or as an adult, he may exclude his parents from celebrations and family gatherings. His parents may not be permitted to spend time with their grandchildren who are his children. The results of being abused as a child vary according to the severity of the abuse and the surrounding environment of the child. If the social environment of the family or school is nurturing and supportive, the child will probably have a better outcome.

The last aspect is concerned with the older persons. Elder abuse is the intentional or unintentional hurting, either physical or emotional, of a person whose age is sixty or older. Physical abuse is either physical force that results in injury, impairment, or physical pain, or the threat of such physical force. Physical violence against an elder in the home is a form of domestic violence.

## B.2. Sexual Violence

Sexual Violence refers to the use of sex as a weapon to commit aggression against a person, to take a person's resources, or to gain power or control over a person. It depends on erotic abuse to commit intimate aggression. Sexual abuse can result in having low self-esteem, a feeling of worthlessness, an abnormal or distorted view of sex, personality disorders, difficulty relating to others except on sexual terms, tendency to become child abusers or prostitutes, or other serious problems in adulthood.

Among the aspects of sexual abuse and/or sexual exploitation, spouse or intimate partner appears at the top of sexual violence. It is characterized in the way of forcing someone to participate in unwanted, unsafe, or degrading sexual activity. Sexual exploitation, in other cases, can be seen to force someone to look at pornography or to participate in pornographic film-making. An example of sexual abuse is stalking which is a kind of harassment of threatening another person, especially in a way that haunts one physically or emotionally in a repetitive and devious manner.

Stalking of an intimate partner can take place during the relationship, with intense monitoring of the partner's activities. It can as well take place after a partner or spouse has left the relationship. The stalker may be trying to get their partners back, or they may wish to harm their partners as punishment for their departure. Regardless of the fine details, the victim fears for their safety for stalkers usually employ a number of threatening tactics like repeated phone calls, sometimes with hang-ups, following, tracking the person targeted or watching him/her with hidden cameras.

Sexual exploitation of a spouse does not appear in Y.N.S.T but stalking as a phenomenon appeared when Hassan was following Tanga for the sake of pleasure: Hassan is following me. I turn around to make sure. (Ibid: 13)

Another aspect of sexual abuse is the child's sexual abuse that consists in sexual act between an adult and a child. This includes fondling, touching, kissing a child's genitals, making the child fondle the adult's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, oral sex or sodomy, sexual exploitation or making the child witness a sexual intercourse.

Beyala devoted a large portion of her work to the sexual abuse of a child. This type of abuse pervades almost all her novels. In Y.N.S.T, approximately all features of sexual abuse appear including incest, rape, making the child witness a sexual intercourse and sexual exploitation.

Concerning rape, Tanga was subject to her father's irresponsible, indifferent, irrational, and above all unjustified sexual intercourse at the age of twelve. Making of one's child a source of pleasure is tantamount to make of oneself of a slave or a captive of one's sexual instincts and desires. This scene is witnessed by Tanga:

*...and so it was that the man my father who, not content to bring his mistresses home, to fiddle with them under my mother's disgusted gaze, would later rip me a part in the budding of my twelfth years. And so it was that this man, my father who made me pregnant and poisoned the child, our child, his grandson. (Ibid: 30)*

Speaking about incest, it is also the case with Tanga; she used to sleep with her father when her mother is outdoors:

*Mother old one is in the village. I sleep with my father old one. I wake up. The middle of the night filtered light mosquitoes father old one's body is at rest. I slip my hand underneath the mattress. (Ibid: 65)*

Tanga also was sexually abused when, at the age of six, her father made her witness a sexual intercourse between him and another woman, fish vendor whom Tanga describes:

*[Taking]... his hands and puts it on her breasts. He looks her up and down with his eyes like torches, he kisses her...she looks down at me strokes my hair, hand me a balloon and pulls father old one on the bed....(Ibid: 89-90)*

The last kind of sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation of children. Beyala makes it clear as a manifesto in almost all her novels, she insists on making people aware of such spread phenomenon in the African society. Children are forced to prostitution to feed their families. Tanga is raped by her father under the eyes of her mother. Her father is, unfortunately, the very cause leading her and her younger sister into prostitution. Not only do daughters lack their parents' protection, but end up providing emotional and financial support to parents. In Y.N.S.T, Tanga is not the only subject to this kind of exploitation; other children are also victim of this sort of abuse. Beyala's main character Tanga says when Hassan asked her to take her back home but she refused:

*How can I tell him that in my world both mother and father accept that he will besiege me and cause me to swell up as long as it brings material gain. (Ibid: 19)*

And in another context Tanga said:

*Hassan stood right in front of me. He is waiting, sure that he will submit me to his desire. The only two words [how much?] he has spoken are enough to mark me, to take the husk off any amorous embrace in which I offer my body to feed the family....(Ibid:12)*

Beyala does not forget to juxtapose both females' and child' sexual abuse; they both share the suffering of exploitation. This is, may be, the reason why one finds that Beyala has given a deal of importance to female children in her novels. Concerning the state of the child, through Tanga, Beyala says:

*...Children, real ones, not this childhood of Ininguè where the child does not exist, has no identity ... has parents to provide for and gets beaten so it will obey.... So it is for Mouèlè's daughter, sold into prostitution .... (Ibid: 46)*

Beyala's opinion of in the novel is undoubtedly relevant to that of the social reality. For the abstractness of things implies ineluctably the denial of the human value and thus his existence.



Being a child or adult, conscious or not, male or female the nature of man does not allow him to act indifferently and at the expense of the other individuals sharing him the space he occupies. Let alone if the nature of the bond amidst the individuals is qualified as having a bloody relation. Yet the most serious issue is that when the subject is a child who is committed to live idyllically without constraints, and having essentially that quality of innocence. What seems prerequisite is to take into consideration the human feeling and emotion as having the ability to mediate the human intention and his conduct. This does not compulsory erase the rational thinking. The absence of such way of viewing things may allow rooms for chaotic milieu. That is, may be, why one dares talking about other types of violence that have nothing to do with instinctive qualities of the human being.

### B.3. Emotional Violence

Emotional abuse is any attitude, behaviour, or failure to act on the part of the caregiver that interferes with a child's mental health or social development. Other names for emotional abuse are verbal abuse, mental abuse, or psychological abuse. It can range from a simple verbal insult to an extreme form of punishment. There are many examples of emotional abuse, such as ignoring, withdrawal of attention, or rejection, yelling or screaming, or threatening or frightening.

Emotional abuse can be verbal or nonverbal. Verbal or nonverbal abuse of a spouse or intimate partner consists of more subtle actions or behaviours than physical abuse. While physical abuse might seem worse, the scars of verbal and emotional abuse are deep. Recent studies have shown that verbal or nonverbal abuse can be much more emotionally damaging than physical abuse. Emotional abuse of a spouse or intimate partner may include threatening or intimidating to gain compliance, destruction of the victim's personal property and possessions, or threats to do so, violence to an object (such as a wall or piece of furniture) or pet in the presence of the intended victim, as a way of instilling fear of further violence, yelling or screaming, constant harassment, saying hurtful things while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and using the substance as an excuse to say the hurtful things.

In *Y.N.S.T*, emotional violence appears when Tanga's father humiliated her mother in front of her children saying that:

*She has ruined him. She has stolen his oxygen pump, and that from now on he'd get himself dirty in other women's asses in order to survive....(Ibid:29)*

The emotional violence may mutate into physical one as in *Y.N.S.T* when Tanga's grandmother attempted to *put an end to her fertility* because of the social judgment which were against her illegitimate pregnancy.

### Conclusion

One of Beyala's objectives in her novels in general is to unveil to the world certain social realities among which, I have tried to underlined violence. Society is seen as the only responsible for this phenomenon, and not taking it seriously enough and by treating it as expected, normal, or deserved, is by itself another issue. If, for instance, police may not treat domestic abuse as a crime, but, rather, as a *domestic dispute*, courts may not award severe consequences, such as

imprisonment or economic sanctions, a community usually doesn't ostracize domestic abusers, people may have the attitude that the abuse is the fault of the victim, or that the abuse is a normal part of marriage or domestic partnerships.

Domestic violence or abuse has certainly so many repercussions on the individual, and they can be very long-lasting such as, sleeping problems, depression, anxiety attacks, low self-esteem, lack of trust in others, feelings of abandonment, anger, sensitivity to rejection, diminished mental and physical health, inability to work, poor relationships with their children and other loved ones.

In this case, one can deduce that the literary works, or a fictitious works, such as the ones of the author in question, have essentially didactic ends. They teach people the ways how to avoid conflicts and or to manage them in order not let them mutate into violent acts. One may pretend that those works, on the contrary, remind people of the negative social aspects that might one has gone beyond. Indeed, they could be so, but if they are not given a deal of importance then the phenomenon will persist and live strong impact, and thus nothing is done in this sense. Yet there has been a major societal shift in many social spheres, with far more people now saying that domestic violence is unacceptable and deserving of punishment. That's may be why, I feel ambitious to meet an overwhelming majority say that violence against women is unacceptable and should always be punishable by law. Something positive and hopeful

I believe literature joins the pleasant to the useful to acquaint man with certain realities he can never understand in real life, or even deny purposely. The literary piece of writing, indeed, provides real images through depiction, yet one does not expect all the readers to be preached through.

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