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Gendered Violence and Human Rights in Black World Literature and Film, edited by Naomi Nkealah and Obioma Nnaemeka. London: Routledge, 2021. 259 pages. ISBN: 978-0-367-74806-7: Paperback. £36.99

Gendered Violence and Human Rights in Black World Literature and Film, edited by Naomi Nkealah and Obioma Nnaemeka, offers a necessary contribution to the intersection between pre-existing research on human rights in literature and the growing interest in gendered violence in Africa and its diaspora. The collection explores how interrelated local and national institutions "perpetuate, condone or ignore gendered violence and human rights violations" (2) while remaining attentive to the creative ways in which individuals resist oppression in the face of individual and state violence.

The first section, "The language of violence in gendered spaces," contends with the linguistic nexus of gendered violence and human rights violations. Gloria Onyeoziri-Miller's and Olutobe Gboyega Oluwasuji's chapters examine how violent language can "play a part in sustaining and perpetuating dominance and oppression" (43). Onyeoziri-Miller argues that sacred discourse can operate in the public sphere to veil the sexual abuse committed by male authority figures, while Oluwasuji suggests that both men and women are capable of perpetrating linguistic violence. Katwiwa Mule's chapter examines how Athol Fugard's novel *Tsotsi* and Gavin Hood's film adaptation of the same name both remove Black South African women's voices from their narratives, thereby denying subjectivity to women who experience violence within male-dominated stories of class- and race-based human rights violations. In perhaps the least congruent chapter, Kenneth W. Harrow offers a valuable overview of the prevailing trends in women migrants' stories in African film, arguing that these stories highlight the need to foreground women's perspectives in cinema representing the migrant's journey.

The second section, “Sexualities, cultures and exclusions,” questions the role of heteronormativity and patriarchal power in curtailing the human rights of men, women, children and nonbinary people across a range of African texts. All three chapters position sexual rights as integral to human rights. Together these chapters consider the use of rape as a form of violent patriarchal power (Asante Lucy Mtenje), examine the role of female lesbian agency in resisting gendered violence and the politics of shame (Jessica Murray), and complicate assumptions of gendered violence by foregrounding both women and non-binary people’s experiences (Sally Ann Murray). Their shared attentiveness to the complex nature of gendered violence positions this section as a valuable part of the overall volume’s larger focus on gendered violence and human rights beyond narrow considerations of either concept.

The third section, “Subverting stories of war,” analyzes gendered violence in wartime. In her chapter, Valerie K. Orlando examines how two films by female Algerian filmmakers offer counter-narratives of *les années noire* (“the Black Decade”) to the official discourse provided by Algerian authorities, instead privileging the agency of Algerian women who fought for human rights on behalf of themselves and their communities. In each of their chapters, Lynda Gichanda Spencer and Tomi Adeaga explore narratives of female soldiers from Somalia and Uganda, respectively. While Spencer examines Nadifa Mohamed’s depiction of female soldiers in her novel *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, Adeaga focuses on China Keitetsi’s *Child Soldier*, an autobiographical account of Keitetsi’s time as a female child soldier in the Ugandan National Resistance Army (NRA). Adeaga argues that gender based violence is the driving force that pushes Keitetsi to join the NRA, thus highlighting the violation of children’s rights as an important aspect of both domestic violence and human rights abuses. Both chapters foreground the role of domestic and gendered violence as central factors in motivating women to take up combat positions in armed conflicts. Similarly,

Obioma Nnaemeka challenges notions of passive female wartime participation, arguing that women in Biafra not only performed domestic roles, but also took up arms and fought across the "vast terrain that absorbed the war front and the home front" (176).

"Re-reading trauma and dehumanisation," the book's final section, examines how women respond to experiences of trauma across a range of African and Caribbean contexts. In his analysis of the film *The Night of Truth*, Frank Ukadike argues that Fanta Régina Nacro defies dichotomies of good and evil to highlight the absurdity of war and the fragile possibilities of peace in the aftermath of extreme violence. Jennifer Thorington Springer's chapter on Marie Elena John's *Unburnable* examines the role of "doubly colonised" (211) women who use violence against women to reinforce their own limited power within patriarchal structures. Springer ultimately concludes that sisterhood offers solidarity so long as it can overcome the fractures between women which arise as a result of their shared but various traumas. In her chapter, Naomi Nkealah provides a critical examination of the South African state's complicity in male violence against migrant, indigenous and otherwise marginalised women. Nkealah highlights the distance between future potential for gendered protections and the current reality in which state structures enable and perpetuate the violent exploitation of women in South Africa. In the final chapter, Mercedez L. Thompson foregrounds the acts of daily resistance which female characters perform in Edwidge Danticat's novel *The Dew Breaker*. Thompson suggests that despite their experiences of human rights violations and gendered violence, the women in Danticat's novel strive to voice the often silenced stories of Haitian women.

Overall this book offers a diverse examination of the intersection of human rights violations and gendered violence in some African and diasporic literature and cinema. Perhaps what makes this volume so valuable is its insistence on foregrounding agency and ongoing resistance, and its effort to complicate notions of gendered violence by considering

women, men, non-binary people and children as they strive against the oppressive structures that inflict gender-based harm. Another strength of this book is its relatively wide reach, which includes work from several African countries. While Caribbean literature is less heavily represented and there are no chapters on Caribbean film, this book nonetheless provides several insightful literary analyses. What remain absent from this volume are North and South American perspectives, which partially undermine its claim to Black world literature and film. Nonetheless, this book offers a great deal for scholars interested in the impact of gendered violence on understandings of human rights in African literature and beyond.

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