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From Confinement to Defiance: A Feminist Critique of Agency in Olisakwe's *Ogadinma; Or Everything Will Be All Right*

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Abstract

Gender inequality is still largely driven by patriarchal dominance. Women's attempts to challenge the oppressive patriarchal structures are often met with violence to reinforce men's dominance and women's subjugation. Addressing violence against women necessitates confronting its root causes, not merely its manifestations. From a feminist perspective, this study examines how patriarchy serves as a fundamental cause of violence and systemic control in Olisakwe's *Ogadinma; Or, Everything Will Be All Right*, arguing that although resistance is essential, it is not always sufficient. Where resistance is suppressed by patriarchal dominance, escape becomes a powerful act of claiming agency and independence.

Keywords: Patriarchy, violence against women, agency, feminism, resistance

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Introduction

For decades, feminist scholarship has identified gender inequality as the root cause of violence against women, highlighting how patriarchal systems reinforce male dominance and normalize men's use of violence (Namy et al., 2017). This understanding is formalized in frameworks like the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*, which underscores the need to dismantle gender hierarchies and "hegemonic masculinities" to achieve effective prevention. However, successful interventions must move beyond simplistic models that neglect structural inequities. Barker (2016) advocates framing such violence as *patriarchal violence*, rather than merely "gender-based" or "domestic" violence, to effectively reflect the intersecting power dynamics, including violence marginalised men may face from more privileged men

This intersectional lens retains a focus on male-perpetrated violence against women while advocating for prevention strategies that address systemic complexities (Barker, 2016).

Feminist theory posits that violence against women is both a tool and an outcome of patriarchal oppression, sustaining women's subordinate societal positions (Fanslow et al., 2023). While foundational feminist critiques centre power imbalances, recent integrative models incorporate additional causal factors without diluting this focus, enhancing the efficacy of community-based intimate partner violence (IPV) interventions (Fanslow et al., 2023). Crucially, such violence must be understood as systemic rather than incidental—a product of political, economic, and cultural

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inequities that perpetuate women's vulnerability (Saunders et al., 2022). Perpetration is fuelled by patriarchal norms and institutional failures that tacitly endorse misogynistic beliefs (Saunders et al., 2022).

Despite the critical role of formal support systems (e.g., healthcare, legal, and community services), survivors face pervasive barriers, including limited access, material insecurity, and institutional inadequacies (Saunders et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2020). These challenges are compounded for marginalized groups, such as immigrants, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people with disabilities, necessitating targeted prevention efforts (Robinson et al., 2020). Recent societal shifts, spurred by movements like #MeToo, have amplified scrutiny of misogyny, linking rigid patriarchal ideologies to diverse forms of gender-based violence (Rottweiler et al., 2024). Scholars further draw parallels between IPV ("patriarchal terrorism") and violent extremism, noting shared tactics of control through fear and the enforcement of gendered expectations (Rottweiler et al., 2024).

Yet, despite global initiatives (e.g., CEDAW, feminist advocacy), violence against women persists across societies, underscoring the need for sustained structural challenges to patriarchal impunity (Sarieddine, 2018), which Ogadinma advocates in Olisakwe's *Ogadinma; Or Everything Will Be All Right*

Overview of Olisakwe's *Ogadinma; Or, Everything Will Be All Right*

The novel opens in 1980s Nigeria, a period marked by political turmoil, social instability, and entrenched patriarchal oppression. Ogadinma, the bright and hopeful seventeen-year-old protagonist, lives with her Igbo family in Kano, Northern Nigeria, dreaming of university and a

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better future. Her father, Osita, arranges for her to meet Barrister Chima, a respected family friend, to assist with her university admission.

However, her dreams are brutally shattered when Barrister Chima rapes her, betraying her trust and exploiting her vulnerability. Traumatized and pregnant, Ogadinma secretly terminates the pregnancy with money from the lawyer. When her father discovers the abortion,but not the rape,he reacts not with protection but with shame and fury, seeing her as a stain on the family's honour. He exiles her to Lagos to live with her aunt Ngozi and uncle Ugonna, severing her from support and her educational aspirations. Far from a fresh start, this relocation deepens her oppression, reinforcing society's control over her fate.

In Lagos, her relatives pressure her into marrying Tobe, a charming, financially stable older man who is presented as the solution to her "ruined" reputation. The marriage is transactional, not about love, but about submission and societal reintegration. Initially, Tobe appears kind, and Ogadinma resigns herself to this new life. But soon, his true nature emerges: he grows possessive, manipulative, and violently abusive, isolating her and demanding absolute obedience. He weaponizes cultural and religious norms to justify his cruelty, exposing how marriage, as a patriarchal institution, dehumanizes women, stripping them of autonomy and demanding silent endurance.

When Ogadinma becomes pregnant again, Tobe's abuse escalates, endangering her and the unborn child. After a brutal beating nearly causes her to miscarry, she finds no solace, only judgment and dismissal from her family, underscoring how Nigerian society normalizes women's suffering.

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Yet, in the depth of her despair, Ogadinma begins to resist. Through small acts of defiance, speaking up, leaving her unborn child in the care of others, and finally fleeing her husband, she reclaims her voice and agency. Her decision to walk away is fraught with risk and uncertainty, but as the saying goes, "Little drops of water make the mighty ocean." It is not a triumphant escape, but a hard-won step toward liberation.

The novel closes not with a grand victory, but with a quiet, transformative awakening. Ogadinma, whose name means "It will be all right", embodies not just hope, but resilience and self-determination. Though she may never recover all she has lost, she has reclaimed herself: her choices, her body, and her future.

Challenging Patriarchal Structures in Olisakwe's Ogadinma; Or, Everything Will Be All Right

In the beginning of the novel, *Ogadinma; Or, Everything will be All Right,* Ukamaka Olisakwe designs the protagonist, Ogadinma, to be a character who endures systemic violence and patriarchal control from different spheres of her life and categories of persons ranging from Barrister Chima's rape, her father's assault, her husband's violence, and Onye Ekpere's (a prophet) rape. She is violated, subdued, rejected, and dominated due to her lack of autonomy and control over herself and everything concerning her, but at the climax of the violence towards her, Ogadinma becomes an assertive woman who reclaims her agency by asserting control over herself and challenging the oppressive patriarchal structures. She becomes assertive through her escape from violence. Ogadinma's escape from patriarchal dominance did not happen at the twinkle of an eye. It takes her some thought, attempts, trial and error, and full consideration to reject violence and escape from it. Her attempts to escape from violence depict her wake to agency:

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> She was convinced that he would find another reason to hurt her again. She imagined that next time, he could pin her to the wall and drive his fist into her good eye, over and over, until it erupted into a gooey mess... She went to her wardrobe, pulled out her bag and hastily began to stuff her clothes in. A film of sweat coated her entire body, dripping from her neck, under her breasts, in between her legs. She dragged the bag out of the room and into the passage...She placed one foot after the other, dragging her bag behind her slowly, until she was out of the compound. (Olisakwe 144-15).

Ogadinma's first attempt is to run to her father. Her escape from her abusive husband is not just about leaving a violent man; it is an act of rebellion against the patriarchal structures that expect women to suffer in silence. Ogadinma does something that many women in her position are unable to do (Aunty Okwy and Osinachi Nwachukwu, the Nigerian gospel singer who died due to her inability to escape or leave a life-threatening marriage); she chooses to go. The act of packing her clothes is urgent and almost frantic, revealing both her desperation and determination. Her body trembles, sweat drips from her skin, but she pushes through because she knows that if she hesitates, she may never get another chance. This moment is significant because it marks her decision to prioritize her own survival over societal expectations. Returning to Kano should bring her a sense of relief, but instead, it fills her with anxiety. Her father, standing in the doorway, represents another form of patriarchal authority. She ran away from Tobe, but has she truly escaped? The fear that grips her at that moment suggests that her battle is not over. Though she has broken free from one oppressive space, she is not certain whether she is walking into another. Her attempt is not just about escaping an abusive husband, it is about challenging an entire system that expects women to stay, endure, and remain silent. It is about the courage it takes to walk away, even when the path ahead is uncertain. It is about the ongoing struggle for self-preservation and independence in a society that offers women so few choices. And above all, it is a reminder that for many women, the fight for freedom does not end with leaving; it is a battle they must continue to fight every single day. The violence she endures represents the physical and psychological chains of

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patriarchy, while her escape is an act of resistance, a refusal to accept the role that society has forced upon her. Yet, the uncertainty in her future raises an important question: “Is true freedom possible for women in a world that continually seeks to control them?” Amidst Ogadinma's return from an abusive husband with a redesigned face which Ogadinma's friend, Ejiro, resents with unreserved honesty and says that any man who is capable of redesigning the wife's face like Ogadinma's is capable of murder and concludes that "once a man beats you like this, he never stops. He may stop for a while and apologise and promise never to do it again, but he will do it again and again, until he kills you" (Olisakwe 158), her father sends her back to the same abusive husband who finds it undeserving to apologise to Ogadinma. "When Tobe beat me up the first time, Papa took me back to him." (Olisakwe 221).

After Ogadinma's first attempt to escape, which turns out to be unproductive, she becomes assertive and challenges the oppressive patriarchal structures that blame her for the assaults she receives and equally expect her to accept the assault with all humility. She reclaims her agency:

> Then she leaned back on her chair, rubbed her satisfyingly full stomach, and thought of all those times she had served him large portions and ate very little. She wished she could go back in time and do things differently...That night, she sang as she showered, and when she lay down to sleep, she ignored the irritating, tender part of herself that told her to call Ugonna’s home and ask if they knew about Tobe’s whereabouts. This new misfortune was entirely his fault, and so she felt no compassion for him. She felt no need to carry any emotional burden on his behalf...Mana, let me ask you o, do you even put your family in the hands of God? Do you pray at all?’ ‘Uncle, what I don’t understand is why everyone must hold me responsible for Tobe’s decisions...She had spoken too hotly, and her words had come out too rashly. She took a deep breath and said, ‘Tobe is too stubborn'...He makes too many bad decisions. All of this would not have happened if he listened to me. (Olisakwe 205-207).

Tobe’s next misfortune after Onye Ekpere's prayer and the rape that follows leaves Ogadinma with a symbolic act of freedom as she eats her bowl of *nsala* soup, meat, and maltina without any emotional labour or trying to know Tobe's whereabouts since he leaves without giving any good

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information. She ignores the irritating urge to call uncle Ugonna's home and concludes within herself that: "this new misfortune was entirely his fault." (Olisakwe 205). She vehemently rejects carrying any emotional burden on his behalf. She asserts control over her feelings by feeling no compassion for him; rather, she wishes to turn the hands of the clock and do things differently. Ogadinma further challenges the societal norms that fault the women for their husbands' misfortune. She defends herself with rash words at uncle Ugonna's house when she is being blamed again for Tobe's decisions which mostly leads to his misfortune, she says: "Uncle, what I don't understand is why everyone must hold me responsible for Tobe's decisions'...'Tobe is too stubborn'...'He makes too many bad decisions. All of this would not have happened if he listened to me." (Olisakwe 207).

However, Ogadinma's patriarchal challenge leads to the climax of Tobe's assault towards her, which forces her to escape at a much unexpected moment. The moment her family, husband, and her new baby need her most, she chooses to escape:

> After the girl left, she got her bag from the wardrobe. She hastily stuffed her clothes and the money into the bag...She carried the bag out into the passage. Mercy was lugging the basin full of baby clothes into the bathroom when she saw her...'I am going somewhere,' she told the girl. 'Please take care of him. His food is in his warmer' ...Her entire body was shaking, and it did not stop until she had gotten out of the compound and hurried to the junction...She did not know where she was going, where she wanted to go, but she sat and kept her head down, until the bus eased onto the road and rolled away (Olisakwe 216-217).

Ogadinma asserts control and challenges oppressive structures when she finally escapes her abusive marriage. Ogadinma hurriedly gathers her belongings and leaves the house, even without a clear plan, and this depicts a powerful moment of personal rebellion against the patriarchal structures that sought to dominate and silence her. Her shaking body reflects the deep fear instilled by abuse and societal expectations of female obedience. However, despite this fear, her decision

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to leave signifies an act of agency, where she chooses to prioritize her freedom over the oppressive domestic role that has been imposed upon her. She challenges the societal expectation that a woman must remain bound to caregiving roles at her own expense. Ogadinma instructs Mercy to take care of her child, and this underscores that she entrusts the responsibilities that society deems her primary duty (motherhood and caregiving) to another at that moment. This illustrates her rejection of the idea that a woman's worth is solely tied to her service to others (husband and children). Her departure challenges the patriarchal structures that seek to confine women to spaces of subjugation, silence, and suffering. Even though she is uncertain about her destination, her willingness to step into the unknown signifies resistance. It also signifies her refusal to continue enduring violence and her insistence on reclaiming autonomy over her life and body. Symbolically, Ogadinma's escape is more than a physical movement; it is a deliberate act which is inspired by abuse that many women are expected to accept as their fate. By boarding the bus and allowing it to carry her away from the site of her suffering, she asserts her right to self-determination. Through her courageous flight, Ogadinma challenges not only the personal domination she faces but also the wider societal norms that enforce and sustain such domination.

At Ogadinma's final escape, she goes first to her aunt's place (Aunty Okwy) where "she suddenly feels like a small child seeking comfort in her aunt's embrace." (Olisakwe 220). And this fills her with peace as the burden is lifted off her shoulders, which calms her tensed nerves. Aunty Okwy is another feminine gender who is also dominated by patriarchal control. She faces the same ugly circumstance as Ogadinma. Ogadinma's father insists on Aunty Okwy's marriage and swears to throw her out into the streets if she refuses to stay with her new husband. And this is because she brings pregnancy home from nowhere. "She had told Ogadinma's father that she didn't know the

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man who got her pregnant."(Olisakwe 28). Ogadinma's father drags Aunty Okwy into her room and locks the door, and Aunty Okwy shrieks as the zipping sounds of the rattan canes land on her body. After Ogadinma's father was done, he locked Aunty Okwy inside her room and shipped her off to their home town the next morning. Aunty Okwy was subjected to a hasty wedding to an old widower, which depicts submission and dominance by patriarchal control. She lacks assertion and autonomy, and that is why she succumbs to being controlled by Ogadinma's father's threat: “he swore to throw her out into the streets if she refused to stay with her new husband."(Olisakwe 219). Ogadinma views Aunty Okwy as one who accommodates subjection and dominance without freedom, as she notices Aunty Okwy's "roughly strung isi-owu hairstyle, the thinness of her neck and the dark patches on her cheeks...Aunty Okwy looked twenty years older"(Olisakwe 220). She agrees “to share the narrow bed, which was not large enough to fit two people...with an old widower." (Olisakwe 222). She accepts patriarchal control and advises endurance and submission to it, as she tells Ogadinma: "You must go to your husband, kneel before him and beg him to take you back. Look at your blouse, it is stained with breast milk. Your son needs you." (Olisakwe 223). She believes in the societal expectation that a woman must remain bound to caregiving roles at her own expense. Aunty Okwy's belief depicts her inability to protest against the oppressive patriarchal structures that cage her. But Ogadinma's escape shows that she chooses to protest against the patriarchal control over her by challenging it and asserting control over her autonomy. Ogadinma makes up her mind as she glances down at the wetness and replies to Aunty Okwy's advice: ‘I can’t go back, Aunty.'(Olisakwe 223).

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Ogadinma finally goes to where her decision will be fully acknowledged. She goes to a place where her escape will be supported. Ogadinma goes to Ejiro's house, where she finds comfort and strength.

> Ogadinma wanted to tell her everything, how Tobe had almost killed her this time, how her son was cut out of her body, how she had become repulsed by Tobe, that she had nowhere else to go. She wanted to tell Ejiro that she was the only person in the whole world who would understand why she had left, who would never ask her to return to her abuser. But when she opened her mouth to speak, cries surged up her throat, her knees finally gave way under her and she and Ejiro sank to the floor. Ejiro held her, muttering comforting words, until she stopped crying. 'You should have come immediately, but I am happy you are here now. (Olisakwe 225).

Ogadinma's friend, Ejiro, is an assertive woman who rejects patriarchy with honesty. She is "a married woman would speak with such authority without attributing every decision she made to her husband." (Olisakwe 226). When Ogadinma stumbles through Ejiro's doorway, broken and trembling, she enters more than just a physical shelter, she actually crosses into a space or territory where patriarchal rules hold no power. Ejiro's home becomes an immunity to violence or patriarchal control, a temporary autonomous zone where the usual societal norms about women's suffering are rejected through radical acts of care. Ejiro rejects the interrogations that abused women typically face and the justifications given to their abusers' actions. She shows this through her words: 'You should have come immediately, but I am happy you are here now.' (Olisakwe 225). Ejiro offers Ogadinma a space where she could spill her pain if she wishes or bury it in the warmth of Ejiro's shoulder if she could not yet speak. Ejiro's arms become both cradle and citadel, demonstrating that true strength isn't about domination (like Tobe's violence) but about the courage to share another's pain. Crucially, Ejiro never once suggests reconciliation. She never suggests that Ogadinma should return to abuse, just as Ogadinma's father and Aunty Okwy suggest. And this

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explains her radical stance against patriarchal expectations. In a society that conspires to send abused women back to their tormentors, Ejiro's simply refuses to do so by keeping her door open to accept Ogadinma. While society might frame Ogadinma as a runaway wife, Ejiro treats her as what she truly is, a survivor claiming her right to exist unharmed. In Ejiro's home, Ogadinma was not a failed wife as her father sees her when she attempts to escape, not a disobedient woman as Aunty Okwy sees her, but to Ejiro, she was simply a sister who had endured enough and is to be seen not as a possession to be returned, but as a person to be sheltered. In Ejiro's house, Ogadinma "stood under the warm shower for a long time, letting the water wash pain and fatigue from her body." (Olisakwe 225-226). This depicts her full rejection of all forms of patriarchy as she steps out of the shower and changes into a new dress. Her new dress represents new life with freedom. Even at the run, Ogadinma feels the need to call her father:

> Papa,' she said when he picked up the phone, 'Papa, it is me, Ogadinma.' There was a heavy silence. Then he spoke in a gravelly voice, the voice she had never heard before in her entire life, croaky and cold. 'Do not ever call this line again,' he said. 'I am not your father. (Olisakwe 228).

In the context of a patriarchal society, a father's identity is closely tied to control over his daughter's sexuality, choices, and conformity to traditional values. When Ogadinma becomes pregnant outside of wedlock and aborts the baby, she disrupts these expectations, and her father perceives it as a loss of honour and a challenge to his authority. But when she leaves her marriage, Ogadinma's father's words, "I am not your father," reflect a deep sense of betrayal, not just personal but cultural. It is a reaction to her defiance and escape from patriarchal control. His disownment occurs after she flees the oppressive circumstances that endanger Ogadinma. Ogadinma's escape disrupts not just the father's authority but the gendered expectations of silence, submission, and endurance that women are meant to uphold. Rather than supporting his daughter, the father chooses

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to align with the very structures that endanger her, suggesting that in a patriarchal order, a woman's safety and selfhood are secondary to male control and reputation. His rejection is not about moral disappointment; it is about power lost, and he uses cruelty to reclaim it. His cold, gravelly voice, unfamiliar to Ogadinma, marks not only the emotional distance but the symbolic break in control. From a feminist perspective, this moment reveals how patriarchy renders family love and recognition conditional upon submission. Ogadinma's refusal to continue in silence and suffering is perceived as insubordination, and her father's denial of paternity becomes a tool of punishment and reassertion of male dominance. Rather than protecting his daughter, he chooses to preserve his authority and public image, demonstrating that patriarchal systems often prioritize power over compassion.

However, Ogadinma feels the need to be independent. She feels the need to stay without Ejiro's help. But her inability to get hold of a job signifies another form of rejecting control:

> A stint at a restaurant which she left after a leery man slapped her bottom. A poorly paid cleaning job at a bank which she hated because the staff and visitors always peed on the toilet seat and did not flush their shit. She thought she had found the perfect job at a local supermarket, but then burglars struck one night and cleaned out the store. A month had passed since her last job and she had yet to wrap her mind around her situation. (Olisakwe 231).

Ogadinma's inability to maintain steady employment after escaping her abusive marriage is not merely a sign of economic hardship but a reflection of the broader systems of control and dominance that continue to limit her autonomy. Her brief stint at a restaurant ends with sexual harassment when a man slaps her buttocks, reminding her that even public workspaces are saturated with male entitlement and violence. Her next job, cleaning toilets at a bank, degrades her further as she is made to deal with the bodily waste of a society that disrespects and devalues her labour. Even the promise of stability at a supermarket is disrupted by a burglary, stripping away

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her fragile sense of security. These repeated failures are not coincidences but are symbolic of the structural oppression that women like Ogadinma face, where systems of patriarchy conspire to keep them vulnerable. Her struggle to find and keep work demonstrates how economic instability becomes another form of control. This ensures that even outside her father's or husband's authority, the world remains hostile to her independence. Ogadinma constantly rejects control and dominance by choosing resistance over silence, leaving abusive spaces, and asserting her autonomy in moments where it is most dangerous to do so. She refuses to tolerate exploitative and degrading labour conditions, leaving jobs where she faces harassment or humiliation. These actions, though they leave her financially vulnerable, represent her refusal to systemic disrespect. The series of failed job experiences Ogadinma endures after leaving her abusive marriage highlights how dependence is socially constructed and maintained, even outside overt male control, and it is difficult for women to survive independently in a patriarchal society that withholds security unless they submit.

Ogadinma never wanted to do anything with anyone who knows Tobe, but Kelechi, Tobe's friend, is the only one she could run to for help, since she is tired of leaning on Ejiro. At the city of Aba, she meets Onyedika, who tells her about her mother's teaching: "It is good for a woman to learn a skill or a trade so that she can earn her own money." (Olisakwe 242). This supports Ogadinma's journey to independence. Before this incident, she resolves to find Kelechi. On her way, she encounters an incident that reminds her of her strong determination to reject control. She encounters a public protest:

> Bịa, Okenna, stay away from me. Why are you harassing me inside this bus? I don't want you again. Leave me alone, ahn, ahn! What is your problem? The public rejection apparently stung because other passengers gasped, and the man cussed under his breath

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> and said she should be grateful he even looked at her. And she tipped her head back and began to laugh. 'You think because of this thing you have between your legs every woman must bend over and eat your shit? Taa, gbafuo here ọsịsọ! I said, get out of here, my friend! Get out of here!' She clapped in his face...Ogadinma...fleetingly wished she had clapped and cheered for her when the man got down. She still thought of the woman when she walked into Kelechi's company. Inside, the secretary...gave Ogadinma a dirty look after she asked to see Kelechi...But then she remembered the woman on the bus, and so she stood straighter, pushed her chest out, and she held the secretary's gaze. (Olisakwe 233).

Ogadinma's observation of a woman boldly confronting a man's sexual entitlement on a bus marks a pivotal moment in her growing resistance to patriarchy. When the man insults the woman for rejecting his attention, she responds fiercely: "You think because of this thing you have between your legs every woman must bend over and eat your shit?" Her loud, unapologetic protest not only silences the man but also creates a public moment of defiance that challenges gendered dominance. Ogadinma, though initially a bystander, is deeply moved by the woman's boldness, thinking, "She fleetingly wished she had clapped and cheered for her." Though she does not directly intervene, she is clearly moved, even inspired, wishing she had applauded the woman's defiance. This admiration signals her growing identification with feminist resistance: the woman's boldness ignites something in her. The woman becomes a model of how to confront dominance without fear or shame. She carries that strength into her next encounter as she faces a judgmental secretary at Kelechi's company. Where she once might have shrunken or apologized for her presence, Ogadinma instead "stood straighter, pushed her chest out, and she held the secretary's gaze." This subtle act becomes her own form of protest, asserting her right to occupy space without shame or submission. Through these moments, the narrative reveals that protest against patriarchy does not always begin with loud confrontation. Sometimes it starts with observation, admiration, and the courage to carry that spirit into one's own life.

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In Kelechi's office, Ogadinma blurts that she has left Tobe. But instead of interrogating her and justifying Tobe's act, he supports her escape as "He stood back, watched her with concern in his eyes. But he did not ask why she had left Tobe, why their marriage failed, or if Tobe had hurt her. He did not ask why she had come to see him, or even how she had learned of his address. He instead asked if she had had any meal yet". (Olisakwe 234). After this, Ogadinma restructures the originally situated ideal, that a woman must give sex even against her will. This is a structure or norm that, when a man needs sex, he goes to the woman and has it, which suggests that a man should spark the feelings for sex. But Ogadinma restructures this as "she moved closer and kissed him. She did not think, did not even pause to consider, of what she was doing...Everything moved quickly afterwards. She had always accorded a certain reverence to lovemaking...But this was different.'' (Olisakwe 237). This reflects her assertion and autonomy over her feelings. It shows that a woman must not be subjected to sex and should also be able to spark the feelings of sex at her will. Ogadinma's resistance to patriarchal control becomes evident through her emotional and verbal rejections of relationships that echo her traumatic past. When Kelechi visits unannounced and initiates physical intimacy, Ogadinma stiffens in his arms, sensing the unease that stirs within her. Her decision to pull away and declare, "I don't want to do this anymore," marks a pivotal assertion of control (Olisakwe 247). She prioritizes self-respect and healing over rekindling a relationship rooted in lust and neglect. Her autonomy becomes more pronounced when she tells Kelechi, "I will not become your property. This is not why I left Tobe" (Olisakwe 248). This statement shows Ogadinma's awareness of how patriarchal affection often portrays domination. By challenging Kelechi's assumptions and rejecting his surprise visit as an act of disregard, she reclaims the power to make decisions about her body, her space, and her future. She equates

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Kelechi's behaviour with the controlling patterns of Tobe, refusing to be defined by another man's expectations.

Ogadinma further refuses to be ashamed of her family's judgment. When Ifeoma harshly accuses her of abandoning her son, comparing her to her mother, Ogadinma responds with clear boundaries: "I see you have come to judge me... You will watch how you talk to me" (Olisakwe 250). Rather than succumbing to guilt, she defends her actions as necessary for survival. She says, "I used to resent my mother for leaving, but I don't any more… if she experienced a quarter of the horror your uncle put me through, then I am glad she did" (Olisakwe 252). Ogadinma supports her mother's abandonment and her own, not as failure, but as resistance to patriarchal violence. In doing so, she rejects moral narratives that shame women for choosing escape rather than motherhood.

In a kitchen conversation with Ogadinma, a subtle but powerful rejection of patriarchal ideology comes from Nnanna, her cousin, as he reveals his intent to delay having children after marriage, saying, "Once we marry, the first thing is to make sure she does not get pregnant... I want to enjoy my wife. Just the two of us and no one else" (Olisakwe 253). In a society where women are expected to bear children almost immediately after marriage, Nnanna challenges the traditional equation of womanhood with motherhood and emphasizes companionship and emotional intimacy over biological reproduction. His thoughtful reasoning, "the couple become strangers…I don't want that" (Olisakwe 253), indicates a deeper awareness of how societal expectations rob women and men of genuine connection. Unlike Tobe, who treated Ogadinma as his property, Nnanna sees marriage as a partnership grounded in mutual understanding. Finally, when he tells Ogadinma that he sees she is "happier," and that if ending her marriage "brought (her) peace," he supports her

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decision (Olisakwe 254). Nnnana's empathy contrasts with the judgmental attitudes of others. It affirms that healing and freedom are valid, even when they contradict tradition. Together, Ogadinma's verbal resistance and Nnanna's evolving beliefs present a shared rejection of patriarchal expectations. Through these characters, Olisakwe critiques a system that reduces women to roles of wife, mother, and possession and instead celebrates the right to choose freedom, escape, healing, and autonomy.

Through the protagonist's experience in the beauty salon and her encounter with Karima, a significant personal growth is crafted. This growth not only shows Ogadinma's emergence into a woman of independence and purpose but also underlines a subtle, ongoing critique of the patriarchal structures that seek to confine and define her. The atmosphere of the salon introduces a form of "organized chaos" (Olisakwe 258), where women engage in self-improvement and skill acquisition. For Ogadinma, this new phase is liberating. Though it is not her earlier dreams, being in a classroom again awakens a sense of purpose. Here, women are not merely working but recreating themselves. Madam Vonne, the lead instructor, becomes a pivotal figure in this environment. Madam Vonne is a commanding woman who has reclaimed societal respect by marrying a younger man and demanding to be called "Madam." This decision reflects the intense pressure on women to earn dignity through marriage or marital status. Her choice to marry on her own terms, especially to marry a man instead of being married by one, symbolizes a reversal of traditional norms. Though her demeanour is harsh, she is respected and obeyed, not because of her marital status alone but because of the authority she has built through competence. For Ogadinma, Madam Vonne represents the possibility of being a woman in control and not being controlled. Ogadinma volunteers to work with Madam Vonne outside class hours, not just to escape boredom

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but because she admires the woman's autonomy. Ogadinma admires and wishes to have the sense of power and structure that Madam Vonne embodies. In assisting her, Ogadinma isn't simply learning makeup artistry; she is observing how to be a woman who commands her space in a male-dominated world. Her willingness to be present and helpful is not submission, but an investment in becoming a version of herself that is firm, skilled, and independent.

This self-realization culminates in Ogadinma's bold decision to stop hiding her marital history. When confronted by Ifunanya's persistent matchmaking, Ogadinma firmly states, "I used to be married and I have a son, too." (Olisakwe 161) This revelation is more than personal honesty; it is a conscious rejection of the cultural shame that often follows divorced women or single mothers. By refusing to be silenced, Ogadinma resists the patriarchal expectation that women must erase their past to be considered valuable or marriageable. Her words are a powerful assertion of identity: she will no longer be defined by shame or others' expectations.

Through Ogadinma's encounter with Karim in an eatery, a new dimension of resistance is introduced. When Karim harshly rebukes two women for laughing loudly, Ogadinma steps in to defend them. Her statement, "It is my business when you feel you can intimidate women because you are what – a man?" (Olisakwe 262) directly challenges male entitlement and everyday dominance. This confrontation may seem ordinary, but it reflects a growing confidence in Ogadinma's ability to stand up for herself and others. Unlike her earlier interactions with men, particularly Tobe, here she asserts herself without fear.

Conclusion

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Ogadinma reclaims the assertiveness, respectability, and selfhood that are denied by the patriarchal constructed society. From Madam Vonne's dominance to Ogadinma's growing sense of control, the narrative maps out a journey of feminine strength in subtle but deliberate acts. Ogadinma's decisions to stop hiding, to challenge male arrogance, and to protect her boundaries are all part of a broader resistance to patriarchal dominance. She is no longer simply surviving; she is defining herself.

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