

INVISIBLE CHAINS: THEMES OF GENDER AND VIOLENCE IN MALAYSIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The paper will focus on the treatment of domestic violence in literary works of Malaysian Literature in English (MLE) writers. The paper will primarily analyse intimate partner violence and examine these violence, as portrayed in the selected texts. MLE provides insights into the thematic concerns of Malaysian writers, giving rise to pertinent issues that affect a country's well-being and its people. Several scholars have studied some of the selected works, and their works centre on the thematic concerns such as nationhood and nation-building, but issues of domestic violence have been dismissed as unimportant. Departing from previous research, this paper examines the novelistic representations of domestic violence with the aim to create awareness and giving them visibility.

Keywords: domestic violence, Malaysian Literature in English, abuse

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian Literature in English (MLE) scholarly milieu has largely concentrated on issues and complexities of nationhood. As a relatively young literary tradition, MLE has always been examined for issues of nation building, language conflicts, identity struggles, and alienation. As argued by Quayum (2008: 157), "the primary interest of these (early) writers seems to be nationalism and nation formation." Because these views and thematic concerns contribute fundamentally to the cultural milieu of Malaysia and are often the core issues for scholarships, the subject of domestic violence is side-lined or overlooked. As Malaysian writers strive to create an imagined Malaysia in their writings through the discussion of who is an immigrant and who belongs, through the rejection of the "white man's burden", through the contestation of ethnic stereotypes, and many other means, the issue of woman as an identity also make up what Malaysia was and is now has hardly been the focus of our writers and critics. At this stage in Malaysian history, the discourse on nationhood and nationalism is necessary to Malaysian Literature in English, since they are the road we Malaysians have travelled, a new attachment found, and a reflection of our national identity. However, a shift from traditional concerns is equally necessary - away from identity-based concerns, in which the focus of this new thematic concern is on women and the challenges faced by women through the multiple bases of oppression or injustice often embodied in the concept of a patriarchal society.

Given the fact that Malaysia is a multicultural country, many challenges and obstacle remain as factors obstructing nation-building. One of the issues that often arise in a country like Malaysia where over a hundred languages and dialects are spoken daily by the people is the choice of language (David 2012: 16). The national language of Malaysia is Bahasa Melayu. The English Language is named as the second language of Malaysia. Given the fact that there exist many different dialects in Malaysia, one issue that many writer struggle with is the issue of writing in the National language, which is Bahasa Melayu following the establishment of the

National Language Policy and the National Culture Policy in the 1970s (Raihanah 2009; Quayum 2008; Vethamani 2005; and Kee 2000). Writers who wrote in English coped in different ways; some writers went as far as to leave the country, for they no longer felt a sense of attachment to their country (Quayum 2008). These challenges resulted in the dearth of corpus in MLE.

Of late, however, research has been conducted on the literature, and specifically literature produced by Malaysian woman writers. Prof. Dr. A. N. Zainab conducted a significant research in 2008 in which the growth and pattern on women's studies in Malaysia was closely examined. A.N. Zainab used 13 categories to list the bibliographies on women in Malaysia. According to A.N. Zainab, the section on 'Crime and delinquency' included discourses on sexual harassment, domestic violence, abusive and violence acts upon women, wives and girls (more than 58 titles). There were substantial studies on rape victims (more than 17 titles) and drug abuse among women (13 titles). These topics were great concern of researchers publishing between 1990 and 2004. (A.N. Zainab 2008). These findings suggest that Malaysian writers and women are more progressive and articulate than women of the past. These writings and findings serve to create visibility on issues concerning women; therefore, with the aim of recovering and giving full view of women representation, this paper will illustrate the challenges faced by women in the private sphere, namely by discussing the different types of violence these women are subjected to.

Several Malaysian works of fiction have addressed the issue of domestic violence. The genres of the literary works include plays, poetry and short stories. Responses of literary critics regarding the literary works produced by Malaysian writers in English will be briefly discussed here.

The Sandpit: A Monologue by K.S. Maniam is a play that narrates the mental conflict of his female protagonist as a result of a polygamous marriage in a working-class Indian family. His play explores the silencing of Santha, the female protagonist. Silencing of a woman is seen as a form of abuse as it deprives the woman of a wife, dismissing her as an object. The following paragraphs will discuss literary critics' interpretation of this play.

Wan Roselezam explored the silencing of women as seen in K.S. Maniam's play in her paper titled *Female Silence in K.S. Maniam's Play The Sandpit: A Monologue*. She argues that "everything in Santha's world is prescribed by tradition - even where and how she and Dass sit (in public view). Her initial silence here signifies Santha's positive support for patriarchal authority" (2003: 152). The short excerpt reflects the natural tendency of the Indian women succumb to societal expectation. The positive support for male dominance does encourage oppression towards women as men interpret this obedience (positive support) as their right to be forceful and powerful.

Wan Roselezam also adds that "Santha cooks for her husband; when he does not come home she does not cook. Her activities are confined within the four walls of their home but she carries out her tasks with serene obedience, without compulsion. She lives solely for her husband, annihilating her own needs even when Dass is not home for four consecutive days: "No cooking for the last four days. Just waiting" (2003: 153). Here, we can see that Santha is trapped in silence. The fact that she carries out her task with obedience and no obligations silences her. Also, her waiting for her husband can be interpreted as loyalty. But given the setting of a patriarchal society, this gesture can then be seen as her dependency on her husband. This portrayal shows Santha as conforming to her gender roles.

Besides that, with the arrival of Sumathi, Dass' second wife, we see that things worsen for Santha; "Athan wouldn't listen to my silence. He listened to Sumathi, the chatterer. He gave

her that name. He called me the Silencer. ‘Don’t open your mouth,’ he said. ‘You’ll ask me to stop doing what I’m doing.’ So I kept quiet. But I didn’t stop watching him.” Santha is disallowed to speak; she is ordered by her husband to be silent. Also, an interesting point to note is that Dass has stopped listening to Santha. Here, though Maniam does not portray an over aggressive relationship, however; the muting of Santha itself can be interpreted as a vicious act. Not being able to voice and treated as though she (Santha) is not in existence is oppressive enough as to that of a physical abuse. Here, perhaps one could say that Maniam portrays mental abuse.

However, towards the end of the monologue, the audience is thrilled to know that Santha has developed a voice of her own. She grows to discover herself and her voice without discarding her traditional beliefs and not abandoning her role as a wife. She finds empowerment after living in the shadows and voice of her husband.

A bird for the Journey is a short story, published in the *Asiatic Journal Volume 2*, by Paul GnanaSelvam. Paul GnanaSelvam teaches English for Business at University Tunku Abdul Rahman in Perak. The story narrates the preparation of a Christian-Indian wedding. Jothi and Peter are about to be engaged and married. But Jothi’s mother finds out that her daughter is already being mistreated by her future sammanthi (in-laws). She also finds out that “the groom’s family had forgone the engagement, saying that it was orthodox.” She decides that “this Indian habit of the groom’s family picking on the bride’s had to stop. Not in this century.” When she picks up the phone to give a piece of her mind to the in-laws, to her surprise, her daughter disconnects the line saying, “Mom, don’t do this...I want this wedding amma, for Peter and me.” This comment disturbed her, leaving her speechless. Nevertheless, the wedding does take place, and Jothi reassures her Mom that everything will be all right.

This story clearly exemplifies the oppression of women even before marriage. GnanaSelvam also briefly touches on the issue of dowry in this short story. But what is interesting to note is that he has portrayed Jothi, a modern Christian, as a submissive woman and future wife. Knowing well that she is and is going to be mistreated by her in-laws, Jothi still agrees to go on with the wedding. This clearly shows how women sometimes are blinded by love. Another possibility is that Jothi is simply embarrassed and is afraid that she may be oppressed by member of society if the wedding is to be called off.

Similarly, Malaysian Jacinta Ramayah (2009), the author of the poem *Abusing Love* narrates the various abuses the persona underwent. This poem was found online at VoicesNet.com. This site provides a platform for writers around the world to share their poems or simply thoughts about certain issues and themes. In her poem, the theme of appearance vs. reality is clearly evident. She portrays her lover as “such a jolly good fellow at work/ alone, she bears the brunt of his anger” (Jacinta 2009) Her lover is not what he appears to be in public eyes. In addition, we also know that “he shoots his arm out violently to hurt her.” The persona not only suffers mental abuse, but also physical abuse. She also talks about why women continue and tolerate such unhealthy, offensive, abusive relationship. She writes, “i say - it is because they find no way out/ they fear his strength and fatal retribution” (Jacinta 2009). This implies that those women are trapped and are simply afraid that their resistance may lead to fatality. Here, we see a woman trapped, as she just cannot seem to find a way out of the abusive relationship.

Besides that, *Young Women Speak Out* (2007), a Collection of Writings by the Participants of AWAM's Writers for Women's Rights Programme, presents varied and diverse issues affecting the modern women. For example, the issue of emotional abuse is explored in

My Journey Beyond Fear by K.R Pramila. Being an obedient girl all the while has somehow seemed to oppress the protagonist of the story. This notion is evident in the following excerpt:

When I exit from those pages, I see me. I, who have been an obedient daughter and put my family values before my own feelings; who agreed to an arrange marriage, although I was not sure of my own feelings about marriage; who obtained my degree locally (and even then there were suggestions from those around me that a diploma would be suffice), and never questioned why my brother could go overseas for his degree. I see a person who has never been sure of her destiny in life, and has just been going with the flow all this while, like a kite in the skies, blown about by the wind. Not in control. (p.39)

This excerpt shows clearly the oppressed life led by the protagonist. The narration above illustrates being trapped in an emotional abuse as the persona is shut from the world of her own. Instead, she is forced to live a life that is pleasing in the eyes of her family and society. Heavy traces of emotional abuse echoes the story as the persona agrees for an arranged marriage without being sure of her own feelings.

Besides that, in the concluding paragraph, the persona states her true feelings about the life she had lived:

After a while, I became more conscious of something which had been locked deep in my heart for years. It began to unlock itself gradually. The spirit of liberation has awakened within me. I now know clearly the deep desires of my heart; to take control of my heart. To detach myself from all the negativity in and around me which blocked me all this while. To give priority to my own needs in life. To tell people to stop discriminating against women. To tell people that women are not objects to be manipulated. To tell people everyone deserves to be treated equally. And most importantly, to exercise my own freedom as a woman without the slightest feeling of guilt. (p.40)

The last paragraph of the story confirms the assumption made earlier about the persona's life being dominated by her parents. She explicitly confesses that she knows what her deep desires are and that is nothing less than being able to take control of her own life. This implies that all this while, her feelings were bottled up, not being able to recognize the emotional abuse she suffered.

Pertinent to this discussion is the technique of writing employed by the author. The writer's use of flashback techniques makes the events in the protagonist's life more oppressive. It shows that the protagonist has moved 20 years ahead but still thinks vividly about the past events in her life. It also implies that the protagonist has never really escaped the emotional abuse after all these years as she is haunted by a dark past memory. Being able to recall all harsh events in her life only suggest the intensity of the abuse the protagonist suffered.

In addition to emotional abuse, patriarchal oppression is another important thematic concern brought to light by these writers. To justify my case, I quote K.R Pramila in *Young Women Speak Out* (Alina Rastam 2007) in *The Many Chains Around Me*. In this short story, the narrator addresses the sense of displeasure by society, family and friends when she decided to pursue her social justice goals;

Apart from being acknowledged by people from the women's movement, where can a person like me receive support and encouragement? Not even my loved ones, many whom question whether I am in my right mind and know what I am doing. As far as they can see, when I am at an age where I should be focusing on how to mount up my bank balances, why am I wasting my time at some women's organization which appears to be senselessly shouting about 'feminism'? (2007: 44).

Such writing magnifies the issue appertaining domestic violence. Victims of abuse are not receiving the legal and emotional support they need from the public and authorities, and these writings serve as an important contribution to Malaysian Literature in English as much as

the other work of fictions (discussed in this chapter) serve an important role in addressing issues of nationhood. Mazmi et al share similar notions as they argue that *Young Women Speak Out* 'is a book that certainly calls out for Malaysians to be aware and become active agents of change in creating a better society and future for women and children especially on issues of violence and abuse' (Mazmi et al 2012: 403).

In summary, this short literature review serves to provide evidence that domestic violence is a concern in Malaysia, and such themes are manifested in Malaysian Literature in English. However, the exposure to such reading is still limited. Issues of nationhood and nation building remains the central focus of many writers and literary critics, causing the marginalization of issues affecting women. The notion of domestic violence as a concern will be further explored in the analysis chapter using selected corpus and my proposed conceptual framework.

Due to the lack of written corpus, the texts chosen here mainly come from multiple genres; nevertheless, these texts serve to show useful insights into the lives of Malaysian men and women. This paper encompasses two major areas: writers' perception on domestic violence and the seriousness of dealing with this issue. Primarily, the paper charts the trends of domestic violence in Malaysian literary tradition; texts from various genres are selected based on their focus on the issue. Thus, the paper sets out to argue that traces of domestic violence are evident in these texts but have not been fairly dealt with by writers and critics as a point of departure. The paper studies Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*, K.S. Maniam's *The Return*, Marie Gerrina Louis' *The Road to Chandibole*, Janathani Arumugam's *The Decision* and William Tham's *Ah Beng's Wedding*.

CONCEPTUAL THEORY

According to the Domestic Violence Act 1994 (the principal act) , an act of domestic violence encompasses "hitting that causes physical pain or injury, forcing one to do something or restraining one from doing something in a threatening manner, forcing one into sex by threatening and also confining one against her will" (Chee 1987). In May 2017, the act passes a bill to account for factors that were overlooked – dishonesty leading to distress in victim, threatening the victim, communicating with the victim or others about the victim- all of which account for non-physical violence.

The feminist perspective has also supported and shown that domestic violence is predominantly born out the unequal treatment of male and female in a given cultural context. Since the feminist lens can be used to access marital and intimate relationship from a wide viewpoint, this chapter will explore feminist theory with regards to violence against women. To raise concerns that shed light on domestic violence, McCue's description of the different types of abuses will be discussed. As a form of gender-based violence, violence against women refers to any form of violence perpetrated toward women; these violence include emotional, physical, and sexual abuses.

Emotional abuse imposes excruciating pain on the victim's mind. McCue (2008: 6-7) explains that 'making hostile jokes, insulting or name calling the victim, blaming the victim for the abuse, or delivering bad news- for example, about the batterer's sexual affair- are examples of emotional abuse. Sexual abuse is the abuse on women that involves sexual characteristics. McCue explains that sexual abuse includes looking at women as sex objects, criticizing the victim in sexual terms, and touching the victim in uncomfortable ways. Lastly, physical involves using objects to hit and various methods of inflicting pain unto the victim. McCue

explains that physical abuses can encompass the simplest gestures such as pinches or squeezes in a painful way, pushes or shoves, jerks, pulls or shakes, hits, punches or kicks, and the list continues (2008: 8-9).

In addition to being subjected to these violence, a victim often finds herself trapped in a cycle, making it difficult for her to leave her abusive partners. Many scholars have studied this theory and concluded that a cycle of violence do exist in a violent-based relationship between intimate partners. In a study conducted by Mezey, Bacchus, Bewley, and White, the scholars established that women who experience domestic violence are at increased risk of developing psychiatric illness including depression, anxiety, substance misuse and posttraumatic stress disorder' (2005:202).

In exploring the issue of remaining trapped in the cycle of violence, the issue of resistance must be discussed. A victim of gender based violence can either learn to cope with the abuse and accept it as fate, or she can fight the violence using any practical technique. Simply put, to resist is to protest. In terms of domestic violence, to resist would mean to response either physically or materially —involving the resisters' use of their bodies or other material objects.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a conceptual paper; as such, this paper examines the novelistic representations of domestic violence with the aim to create awareness on domestic violence and give representations of domestic violence visibility. In other words, gathering information through the experiences and observations of the selected writers in relation to own personal experiences and observations of domestic violence creates a study that reflects the realities and problems of domestic violence. The feminist perspectives on domestic violence and psychological aspects of domestic violence are used as the theoretical framework and lens. This paper and its research methods can contribute new knowledge and understanding of this subject as it sets out to discuss the magnitude of domestic violence in Malaysia. This paper is motivated by two main principles: the feminist lens of domestic violence and psychological aspects of domestic violence. These two lens facilitate in the examination of the depiction of the various conditions of the women and male characters. The analysis will draw out evidence of the different types of abuses as presented by Malaysian writers in English. In doing so, the paper will evaluate the treatment and understanding of domestic violence as perceived by our writers.

RESEARCH FINDING

In this section, the research findings are presented. As the paper focuses on the different types of abuses evident in the chosen literary texts, the findings are divided into three sub-sections: physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.

i) Physical abuse

Scorpion Orchid by Lloyd Fernando is a moving story that revolves around four undergraduates - Santinathan, a Tamil, Guan Kheng, a Chinese, Sabran, a Malay, and a Eurasian, Peter D'Almeida – in the third year of the university. The four young men are united by the bond of friendship for they loved each other like brothers. Their circle also includes Sally, later referred

to as Salmah. The novel greatly addresses issues related to multiculturalism, but in depicting lives that takes the backdrop of a patriarchal societies, traces of violence is found, though limiting, in the text. Though not explicitly narrated, hints of physical violence can be found when Santi confronts Neela:

He strode up to her, his breath coming in short gasps. He bent down and shook her violently by her shoulders. "Is that why you've come? Is it? And what do you care?" Why did it have to be Ellman?

"Get out of here. Get out!" He turned sharply and went to his camp bed with its sheet in disorder and yellowing pillow. ...Stumping down the straight flight of concrete stairs he grabbed hold of her by the arm crying, "Neela!" He couldn't let her go like that. She struggled to free herself but he held her.

This short dialogue between Neela and Santi points to physical violence, albeit the abuse described by Fernando is not one that is explicit. Diction such as 'strode,' 'shook,' 'violently,' 'sharply,' 'grabbed,' 'stumping,' and 'struggle' carefully chosen by Fernando grant reason to conclude that this scene portrays gender-based violence. Diction plays an important role in creating the mood of the fiction, and this particular scene creates an undeniably dark, unpleasing mood for readers. Diction also plays an integral role in delivering a message. That Neela was passive could be perceived as her provoking Santi. However, Santi's words seems to speak louder than Neela's inaction or inability to react dues to distress.

K. S Maniam's *The Return* (1981) is by large a novel that reflects the struggles faced by Malaysian immigrants. The protagonist, Ravi, struggles to find and create his identity in a new land. Being dependent on a system of colonial patronage, and living a life of an immigrant, Ravi is seen embracing the English values while his family and community in not in favour of his transformation. The novel offers realistic representations of the Indian immigrant community. The theme of domestic violence is seen clearly in the portrayal of Ravi's mother and his stepmother, Karupi. Maniam describes scenes of physical violence:

One morning, he (Ravi's father) slapped my mother when she asked for marketing money (p.81). One night, Ravi heard the walls being thumped, bodies shuddering against the planks, the rotan land with a sickening thud on a sleep-choked flesh, moans, and Ravi hears his mother crying. "Kill and bury me! I didn't ask for children, she screamed hysterically" (p.83).

Though Ravi is unable to see the violence, he is able to hear it taking place. And the readers, through Ravi also get a glimpse of what happens behind closed doors. Therefore, Maniam offers readers with insightful perspective of violence, bringing to the forefront the struggles faced by women in her domestic sphere.

Karupi, on the other hand, is beaten up, but because she has agency, she is able to secure a more respectable position in the household compared to Ravi's mother. Misra and Lowry (2007) hypothesize that "women are more likely to be beaten up if they have greater autonomy in the household." He further argues that "if there are other member in the household who make decisions for the woman, she is much less likely to be abused" (Misra & Lowry 2007: 174). This hypothesis, in the case of Ravi's mother and Karupi, has proven to be invalid. Karupi makes a lot of decisions, and applying by this hypothesis, Ravi's mother is expected to receive fewer beatings. However, Karupi who has a sense of voice is seen frequently escaping violence. Perhaps a new hypothesis can be drawn from Maniam that woman who are autonomous are less likely to suffer from violence. Maniam offers a holistic depiction of domestic violence: to put up with violence or to speak up about violence.

Similarly, Marie Gerrina Louis' novel *The Road to Chandibole* tells an inspiring tale of the eventual redemption of self and the escape from gender-based violence. The novel is a moving love story with a historical setting. The heroine, Saras, suffers from a shameful burden of illegitimacy but at the end she becomes a woman that is admired and respected by many. Louis deals with abuse on two levels: abuse by the superior female in the family and the male in the family. Abuse from the superior female in the family usually refers to abuse that is committed by the mother-in-law, and Louis portrays this type of violence in her novel overtly.

As a child born out of wedlock, Saras suffers discriminations from her neighbours and more importantly, her paternal grandmother. Firstly, her grandmother does not allow her to address her as 'Patti, which translates to Grandmother. Instead, Saras is asked to call her Peruse or elderly person (p7). This action is enough to place Saras in the margins. The grandmother treats Saras poorly and causes physical injuries to Saras:

She hit me again, her face controlled with anger. I was hit over and over again for I can't remember how many times. But when I couldn't get up, my bowels automatically emptying themselves unto the floorboards and drowning the poor ant, she stopped. Letchumi rushed to see if I had fainted. I hadn't but my face was swollen. Letchumi looked worriedly at Peruse. "Patti you shouldn't have hit her so much" (p22).

The excerpt above illustrates the treatment of women by other women. This passage does not only show evidence of physical abuse, but also show how women are oppressed and abused in a patriarchal society. Louis' sentence formation sheds light on the issue of gender based violence. Using the modal 'shouldn't' and the adverb of degree 'so much' indicate that Peruse's actions are unacceptable and should not be condoned. Nevertheless, as critical readers, we argue that the adverb 'so much' allows room for some violence to take place, and it indicates that it 'shouldn't be too much.' This words portray the sad reality of victims of domestic violence, and it also brings to light the mind-set of our society. It is almost as though the author recognizes that violence is, to a certain degree, allowed in our culture, just not too much of it.

Louis further illustrates the pain and suffering endured by Saras. Even after having her bowels emptied on the floorboards, the grandmother does not stop inflicting pain for she believes that 'girls like this must be taught a lesson' (p23). In making sure that the lesson- to not disrespect the elderly- is taught, Peruse 'lifts the hem of Saras' skirt, and placed the tongs' red hot tip against her thighs' (p23). Peruse's anger is driven mainly from internal factor. Saras serves as a mark of her mother's sins, and Peruse is unable to accept Saras as her granddaughter. Peruse embodies the idea of the sinister grandmother. The theme of women inflicting pain on other women is overtly discussed in Louis's work. Louise highlights the fact that women, particularly daughters and wife, suffer from abuse by the male and superior female of the family. Moreover, with the use of internal monologues and carefully chosen words, Louis efficaciously brings private violence to the centre of her work.

Offering an alternative concern of domestic violence, Janathani Arumugam discusses the treatment of domestic violence by officials. In *The Decision*, the narrator's mother receives poor response from the police officials. The story is written in flashbacks; the narrator recalls the traumatizing times she had experienced as a child. The story starts with the narrator looking at a fading photograph of her mother and within the seventh paragraph, we are taken into the privacy of the narrator's home and what she remembers of it through a series of flashbacks:

My memory of my parents' marriage is that it was an oppressive regime run by my father. I remember that my father's anger was like a tempestuous sea, destroying everything in its way. Flaring of temper and outbursts of uncontrolled anger on his part were common. It was an amazing performance to watch; he took pride in his carefully orchestrated violence. Though small in stature, his anger magnified him physically, and

manifested in unmitigated physical abuse. I have seen him hit my mother repeatedly over the years. (p.11)

Janarthani's background of an informed writer brings to light quite vividly the experiences of victims of gender based violence. Janarthani's use simile "like a tempestuous sea" to illustrate her father's anger is very powerful because it shows the impact of her father's anger towards her family, especially her mother. He is a destroyer, causing damages to everything in his way. These rhetorical strategies suggest that he does not leave it at just beating her mother, but also resort to destroying things and objects in the narrator's home. Throughout the story, Janarthani uses carefully chosen diction to represent the violence experienced by the narrator and her mother. The narrator's father's violence is likened to a 'carefully orchestrated violence suggesting that the father is conscious of his actions. The narrator likens the whole episode to a performance, further suggesting that the father knew he had audience and that's why he had to "carefully orchestrate" it. It could also read as warning sign given to his audience, in this case his children. His obvious reasons behind this violent episode is to bring fear to the household and establish his position in the household.

More concrete images of violence is seen in *Ah Beng's Wedding* (2015) - a story of a loan shark. William Tham uses a unique technique of narration. The reader is allowed into the life of Ah Beng through his daily writings. The story largely takes place in a massage parlour where Ah Beng has small talks with his female masseur. William uses foreshadowing technique to signal that domestic violence will take place within the storyline. Ah Beng is seen stating a couple of times that he does not support violence;

All I do is go and tell them to hurry up and pay them back their money, or I will go and cut them up into little pieces (p.213) and I told the other gangsters that if they do (touch his beer stash) then I will beat them until they are dead. But I am only joking. Like I said before -I don't like violence (p.214).

The words uttered by Ah Beng are crucial because they suggest the possibility of violence, and to be specific domestic violence. He injects fear in others by threatening them, and then manipulates others by claiming that he was only joking. To further explain, the readers are aware that Ah Beng has indeed place threats on other gangsters, but he is manipulative. As predicted, physical violence is evident in the text; however, the writer does not dwell on the details of the violent act. The blow the fiancé receives from Ah Beng happens very abruptly. It also takes place in a public sphere. William offers us private violence in a public setting. The brief and abrupt yet open act of domestic violence shows that there is nothing to hide, and Ah Beng -a gangster- is not afraid to show his aggressive side even in a public setting. This portrayal does report some truth as many people shy away or ignore domestic violence when they witness it.

ii) Sexual abuse

In an attempt to illustrate how quickly a rape can occur and how painful the remnants of such an occurrence are, Fernando uses literary techniques and plot movements. Fernando explicitly narrates the scene, but more importantly, the entire subtext allows readers to use poetic strategies in understanding rape in its subtleties:

Sally, drawing her breath in short gasps, her eyes wide and unseeing, turned round to walk back the way they came. Guan Kheng gripped her by the arm. "Not that way again. Don't you see? They're after us, too." She sat on the steps of the back entrance of one of the houses, and slumped against the like one not in full possession of her faculties. Guan Kheng looked impatiently at her and then took a few steps towards the blind end

of the alley. The sun's rays caught his white shirt with a brilliance that dazzled Sally's eyes. She awoke to a feeling of cramp in one leg and sat petrified as the muscles bunched viciously when she tried to move. Guan Kheng had disappeared. (pg 84)

This excerpt illustrates how petrified Sally was that she could not think on her feet. She almost ran in the same path her rapists came, the same path in which the gang had escaped from the gangsters. In a study attempting to illustrate disturbing patterns that are persistent throughout different rape narratives and ways these texts transform the rape trope through troubling sexual gender roles, Young makes the following observation: "one interesting aspect is that these women, as with most fictional female victims, are without any male relationships such as a father or husband. The absent father (male figure) plays a disturbing role in the vulnerability of these females" (Young 2007: 9). Similarly, Sally lacks a male figure in her life; more precisely, she is raped right after Guan Kheng, her male companion, decides to flee.

Though Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* predominantly centres the theme of identity, the theme of violence against women is also strongly stressed throughout the narrative. Sally's rapists' physical appearance are described for a particular reason. The first man's 'sardonic smile,' 'dark figure,' and 'gale of silent laughter' noticeably portray the true identity of a perpetrator: he has no remorse as evident by his sardonic smile; like a hurricane (gale), he is characterized by his wickedness and immorality; and he embodies all things evil as he is seen firstly as a dark figure. Complicating matters more, when the other four men join him, his sardonic smile and gale of silent laughter transform into something even more devilish as they are seen laughing hugely.

Brownmiller argues that rape is "a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (1975: 272). Evidently, Fernando's narration echoes the same notion. The dark figure Sally spots causes her to act out in a state that is marked by manic frenzy. Her 'unseeing running' and 'panic banging on closed doors' serve as not only a metaphor for the brutalities of rape but also the cruelties of domestic violence. The 'unseen eyes peering at her through the crack' draws analogy to domestic violence as a public affair. The fact that members of the public are aware that a woman is suffering at the hands of the abuser, but remain silently while watching all the injustice, and worst of all the battering, is implied in this sentence.

Sexual abuse is also evident in *The Return* (1981) in its subtlest sense. The perpetual verbal abuse of Ratnam and Govindan as instigated by Letchumi carries heavy sexual innuendos. In their abusive verbal exchange, innocent Anjalai becomes the victim of sexual abuse. Letchumi exclaims that Anjalai is "everybody's daughter in law," which is a jeer at Anjalai. This verbal abuse is also blown out of proportion where physical violence is likely to take place; "Don't open your shit stinking mouth, Ratnam!" Govindan warned. "I'll push a broomstick down your throat." "The cashier is talking to me? How was the showing today? Did many men buy your wife's wares?" Ratnam said.

"Do you think I'm Anjalai? Do you think that thing she wears around her neck doesn't come from men wearing themselves around her?" Letchumi yelled. "Who are you calling a prostitute?" Anjalai, roused, screamed back. "I didn't say that at all," Letchumi said sweetly. "Only you go around showing your neck, arms and whatever else" (p72).

Here, Anjalai is subjected to sexual abuse by Ratnam and Govindan's wife. In defending herself, Letchumi disparages Anjalai with taunts that carry heavy sexual insinuations. Both Ratnam and Letchumi indirectly calls Anjalai a 'prostitute' and Letchumi's remark - only you go around showing your neck, arms and whatever else- allows for a deleterious interpretation.

Furthermore, Maniam also shows ways in which these abusive verbal exchange leads to physical abuse:

See what filth she's throwing at us, Mamah," Anjalai wailed. "I can go to prison again! Where's that iron rod?" Ratnam bellowed. Muniandy walked into the quarrel at that moment. "You've been displaying your jewellery! The evil snakes are hissing again," he said and thrashed his wife. "Don't touch the girl!" Ratnam said. "She's my wife!" Muniandy yelled. "Who says? Not the urine-drinking old drain scrounger!" Govindan said (72).

The excerpt bolsters the argument that a victim of violence typically experiences multiple forms of abuse. Letchumi did not deserve such crude jeers nor does she deserve to be ill-treated by her husband who has 'walked into the quarrel at that moment.' It is clear that Muniandy has little knowledge of the quarrel, yet he condemns his wife. More strikingly, Muniandy's dialogue reveals an underlying reason for violence. A woman who does not succumb to traditional gender roles may be a target of domestic violence. In this scenario, it can be concluded that Letchumi has verbalized more than permitted. She tries to get her Mamah (father-in-law) to defend her, and to put her in her place, Muniandy is able to hit her. Besides that, the assertion that Letchumi is his wife carries an ambivalent tone. One interpretation is that Muniandy sees his wife as an object or possession.

Louis incorporates different forms of sexual abuse in her novel *The Road to Chandibole*. The protagonist, Saras, suffers from taunts by the different people in her neighbourhood, including Peruse, simply because she is an illegitimate child. As discussed earlier, Saras carries the burdens of her mother's sins. Because her mother had an affair with a soldier, the society she lives in naturally view her as a sexual object. This objectification is evident in the proposals of Bala and John Phillips;

Some of the hurt and anger returned, however, when I received two proposals. No, not of marriage but offers to be a kept woman. John Phillips approached me and after some false sympathy on Ravi's change of heart, offered to give me a home. "Are you saying, Mr Phillips, that you will divorce your wife and marry me?" "Er... marry? Actually Saras, I didn't think you'd mind you know..." "No actually I don't know. What do you mean?" "Bloody bombshells Saras, you're no innocent! You surely know what im talking about." Another one who thought I slept around. "If it's marriage you have in mind Mr Philips, I am all ears. If not, I am not interested." The second offer came from good old Bala Suppiah, who I'd always thought of as another brother. (p104)

This excerpt largely demonstrates that Saras embodies forbidden desires simply because she is an illegitimate child. Her family history and sins of her mother have dismissed her to a mere sex symbol. Saras' inner thought 'another one who thought I slept around' suggest that John Phillips is not the first one to ask her if she can be a kept woman. Rather than seeing Saras as an innocent child, John Phillips' use of language exposes the notion of sexual scandals. His intentions of having a secret relationship with Saras reflect his understanding of a woman. He neither cares about his wife in London, nor does he care about Saras' feelings. Furthermore, since Saras is unable to determine her future, she even considers John Phillips proposal if it is in the form of marriage. This further sheds light on the depressing reality of a woman. A daughter, particularly in the Indian culture, is seen as a burden that needs to be gotten rid of quickly (Rew, Gangoli & Gill 2013: 152), and this conception is reflected in the excerpt above.

Furthermore, in portraying the sexual abuse that exists in Saras, Louis also sheds light on sexual values and marital cruelty. Bala also shows signs of disrespect towards woman. Bala, who is treated like a brother by Saras, lusts after her when he learns that Ravi (Saras' former boyfriend) has accepted another marriage proposal. Bala, just like John Phillips, also shows favour of illicit desire. He tells Saras that "she would be his even if she had to be a mistress"

(p105). His sense of term suggests that Saras would be “his female subject”. Saras is at a marriageable age, and her illegitimacy is viewed as sexually provocative. Saras illegitimacy represents impurity, and because of that, she frequently receives derogative comments with sexual innuendos by passer-by:

Raja was one of the estate menders, and this woman made his wife’s life miserable with sharp and unkind tongue. If I hadn’t looked at her face, the betel leaf discharged from her mouth would have hit my feet as she spat violently at me. As it was, I managed to step back in time and the mess from her mouth fell harmlessly to the ground. I wasn’t the least bit surprised. This woman, like Peruse, never hid her disgust for me. Bloody bombshells! What did I do wrong anyway? Careful old mother,” I said in my polite, clear Tamil, “spit has a way of splashing back on you.” She snorted and walked away, saying, “Bad enough to be born a bastard but has to have a big mouth as well. Let’s see if she finds herself a husband!” (p35)

Here, it is evident that Saras suffers from sexual abuse in the form of verbal harassment. She is reminded once again that she is a bastard child, signalling that she is a product of illicit sex. The idea that Saras represents illicit desire is again reinforced when Raja’s mother suggest that it is impossible for Saras to get married. Also, from Saras’ inner thought, we can understand that this is not the first time she is being taunted by the members of the society, including Peruse for being an illegitimate child. Louis sheds light on how innocent children conceived out of wedlock suffer from different forms of abuse, and sexual abuse seems to be one of them.

iii) Emotional abuse

The strongest indication of emotional abuse is apparent in Janarthani Arumugam’s *The Decisions*. As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the narrative talks about a young lady remembering in retrospect of the “oppressive regime run by her father.” After obtaining a restraining order against her husband, the persona’s mother could only imagine that her days of abuse were over. Little did she know that there was a new type of abuse awaiting her; emotional abuse. The narrator describes the new abuse that her mother undergoes:

“Everyone chastised my mother for driving away her husband... everyone advised her to repent. We experienced a collective judgment of a town bent on keeping my mother in line.”

The diction used by the writer, everyone, suggest a sense of continuous, collectiveness voice. Despite being abused terribly by her husband, the narrator’s mother does not seem to receive any support from her neighbours and relatives. Instead, she is abused further, labelling her as a woman who drove her husband away (and not the other way round). Going through a rough and critical time as such, the narrator’s mother should have received some kind of emotional support, not emotional abuse. The fact that the narrator remembers the sequence of events clearly and recalls it also shows that the narrator herself has gone through traumatizing moments due to her mother’s abuse by her father, relatives and neighbours.

CONCLUSION

Domestic violence as a theme did not emerge until ‘feminism and a concern with domestic violence emerge in the context of the Enlightenment, with its faith in the power of masculine reason to correct and check social abuses (Ellis 1989: 3). Thus, the portrayal of domestic violence in early decades (from 1970s -2000s) was one that was subtle, not one that was thoroughly observed. Portrayal of domestic violence typically took place in the home, within

the four walls, and it was one of the manifest and the secret, not the centre but the margin. The existence of violence in the texts mostly highlighted the optimistic male vantage point, and the female characters lie outside the literary sphere, if indeed their concerns exist at all. The language of domestic violence as used by the writers discussed in this research is not one that is typically literary, in the sense of deciphering images and diction. The language used in many of the texts conveys the targets of domestic violence: women, in general. The language used by the writers conveys concepts of domestic violence such as physical violence, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, and even sexual violence. The definition of home as depicted in these texts places the female characters in a place that is dangerous, thus addressing the issues of violence. Silence around the issues of domestic violence is still a problem in present day, and, similarly, such silences are portrayed in the texts, highlighting the central problem to domestic violence.

Furthermore, the language used in the selected texts serves as an indication of the gap between existing laws to protect victims of domestic violence and the enforcement of those laws. In the case of Sally, as depicted in Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*, the unspeakable rape she experiences is not dealt with much seriousness. The officers investigating her rape case were only motivated in doing so as they were curious to discover her true identity. This goes on to illustrate the realities of victims not only in Malaysia, but generally elsewhere. For readers reading these texts, the ideology of domestic violence as depicted in these fiction works and the realities of domestic violence outside the literary scenes do not seem to vary significantly. The same conditions that created silences around the issue of violence against women in the narratives are the same conditions that create silence around this issue in the real world. Fear of being labelled, lack of support, and even re-victimization seem to be reasons women remain silent and fight a lonely battle.

The Decision by Janarthani Arumugam suggests similar notions of domestic violence. The main character of the short story suffers from violence from her husband, and when she seeks legal aid, she is frowned upon by the police officers assigned to her case. One may argue that Janarthani Arumugam's position as the president of EMPOWER, a non-governmental organization, which seeks to promote and support actions that advance justice and democracy, may get in the way of her writing and narration of domestic violence. The main aim of Young Women Speak Out is to create awareness among readers and public on the issues relating to domestic violence, and I believe that Janarthani Arumugam's story does create awareness as it highlights the complex nature of domestic violence and the biased treatment of laws and the public toward the domestically abused victim.

Besides that, men's control over women is another issue that is widely addressed in many of these texts. To illustrate, I would like to draw evidence from *The Return*. Based on evidence from excerpt drawn from the texts, we argue that women with greater autonomy are less likely to suffer from violence. Although there is evidence to reinforce that the idea that both the mother and father are doubly oppressed by the father and the society in which they live in, Ravi's step-mother adopts a resourceful strategy to work around the patriarchal system. These idealized images of woman-ness as expected by patriarchal setting in maintained in many of the novel, while contested in others. These idealized images of woman-ness that are sustained in these novels serve to show the requirements of system based predominantly on patriarchal rules and ideologies, which require women to be subservient. The employment of images of women characters as passive, accepting, and submissive exemplifies the ways in which power and control is achieved in a male-dominated setting. In addition, the narratives depict various conditions of the women characters, and these depictions serve to illustrate the ever-changing roles of women, which alters their experiences.

There is a slightly more visibility on the issue of domestic violence against women in William Tham's *Ah Beng's Wedding*. However, the analysis show that there is a lack of public recognition when it comes to domestic violence, as many of the abused characters are reluctant to disclose abuse because they want to conceal their violent experiences from others. Despite the fact that domestic violence is present in many texts, the writers have dealt with the issues nonchalantly. Closure in many texts suggests that victims are often held accountable for the abuse. This is a disconcerting discovery, which implies that many Malaysian writers have not addressed the gravity of domestic violence fittingly.

To conclude, the writers studied in this paper do not give the abused the closure they need. The abused victims are pushed to the margins of their narratives. Their space within the narrative is generally limited. In dealing with domestic violence, traces of domestic violence are evident but the treatment of it is limited. The writers have not discerned any real depth representation of abused women and domestic violence. The narration of their violence too is pushed to the margins of the narratives. This thesis also largely shows that patriarchy is a circuit of violence, and it works by muting the abused and condoning violence through the championing of male. Because by far and large the women are represented as mute and compliant, issues of domestic violence are not dealt with seriously. Furthermore, the actual importance of violence and victim's voice do not seem to be the central concerns of these writers.

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