



BLACKLASH

The Africana Collective

REPORT NO. 3

Gendered Intimate Household Violence



INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago, a friend of one of the collective's member called. Her voice was a mixture of tears, bruises and looking for answers. That member listened. She had been assaulted by her unmarried male partner and father of their new child. She asked, "how could I have let this happen to me?" Continuing, she said, to this male member, "would you have done this to your wife?" He said, "no," and insisted she not blame herself and that the male partner has a responsibility, a burden for which she should not shoulder. The focus turned immediately to getting her and her 6-month old child to a safe place, with support, and where they could gather themselves, and then turn to healing under the bruises and the backaches. Next steps or room for reconciliation could wait. A sister friend of hers was on her way to pick them up; with her, the mother and baby would stay. Separated by hundreds of miles and Covid-19, the collective member told her she can call him anytime and he would be there. This story is not an isolated one nor one we need to be touched by to know its severity and wide reach. In this, multiple people are affected, not simply the recipient of violence. We've turned our attention to a series of tightly-braided issues in our communities, in our world, under the topic of gendered intimate household violence. For all members of the collective, a topic such as this was a tough one to face. We, like the families and communities to which we belong, must confront and that, no easy task, we have begun to do. Join us.

Blacklash: The Africana Collective (BTAC) engages in interdisciplinary research to provide analysis and recommendations on a range of issues affecting the African(a) world—linked communities with peoples of African ancestry. Using our collective knowledge and skills, as well as our grounding as thinkers, educators, activists, organizers, and parents, our objective is to support and inform action toward safeguarded humane development throughout the African world. We are independent in our funding, research, and directives, allowing us to work decidedly in the best interests of said communities.

Each month, we consider one topical issue as a collective. In the process, we prepare individual statements, meet (virtually) to hammer out our findings, then prepare our report. That report is then shared with the African world via online outlets and through various networks a week prior to a (virtual) town hall meeting, where we invite members of the African world community to join us, debate, (dis)agree, and come away with perspectives that inform collective action. We strongly request that all attendees at the town hall read the report **beforehand**. This way, you are an active participant in shaping your own views and subsequent decisions. We encourage you to sign up, or register, for the town hall, so we may keep you abreast of upcoming events, key resources, and ways to translate the reports' ideas into collective betterment scaled to wherever you are and with whom you have to work.

In this thought paper, report no. 3, we consider the topical issues surrounding debates about gendered intimate household violence. Join us for the virtual town hall brunch, titled "Gendered Intimate Household Violence," on Wednesday, August 12, 2020, at 7 pm EST.



PERSPECTIVE: DR. IYELLI ICHILE

I struggle to write this. Our community is ill. The data about rising numbers of domestic violence reports during this coronavirus lockdown is alarming. It is a global crisis, to be sure, but the data reveals an acute manifestation of these wicked incidents among people of African descent. The solution to this internal crisis seems more and more elusive to this writer, as Black women and men seem to be shouting at each other from opposite sides of this fault line.

I can almost hear the voices of angry Black men in my head as I type this; voices accusing me of being a race-traitor for pointing out the crime of domestic abuse that has been visited on too many of my Black sisters, at the hands of my Black brothers. I have to say this anyway, because while we sit and intellectualize this issue, Black women and girls are dying. Hundreds have been murdered by romantic partners, spouses or male relatives already this year. In fact, a Black woman is more likely to be killed by someone with whom she is in a relationship than any other group of women (or men) in this country.

The most consistent questions raised by detractors are: “What about Black men/boys who are also being abused?” “Black men feel powerless, and that’s why they act out; white supremacy causes the Black man’s rage, which he then takes out on the Black woman.” “Why are you trying to tear down Black men and start a gender war? Isn’t this divisive feminist nonsense? Shouldn’t we focus on advancing the race as a whole before we start fighting these internal battles?”

To these, I say: Of course, some Black men and boys are victims of abuse, and of course, women do abuse others. Identifying this rampant issue does not absolve Black women abusers of any guilt or hold them less accountable. It sheds light on a specific problem. Black women and girls are still significantly more likely to suffer this kind of abuse than men. Yes, some of this intimate/household abuse stems from the gendered systemic anti-Blackness under which Black men and boys often feel ‘emasculated,’ and disempowered. Knowing this does not excuse these heinous acts. To ask Black women and children to be silent about this until some unspecified date upon which white supremacy/racism is defeated is to ask them to suffer and die by the thousands while they wait. It is a clear sign of the devaluation of Black feminine lives, and to think that Black liberation can be achieved without the complete liberation of Black women is ridiculous. How can a family—the building block of a nation—function if this type of dysfunction is allowed to proliferate mostly unchecked?

This is a plea for action from Black men by the people who love them and fight for them the most in this world: Black women and girls. Black women are still out on the front lines fighting for ALL members of the race, while being largely gaslit and ostracized when we report abuse in the home. Our most sacred teachings—including the Ifa corpus—and our most sacred teachers—like Thomas Sankara—caution men against marginalizing/excluding women, or else nothing we do (collectively) will succeed.

Perhaps for a variety of reasons, we have strayed from this wisdom. Unfortunately, some Black women have strayed, too. Anti-woman ideology could not survive without the support of women. We’ve all got work to do. That said, and moving towards solutions:



Because the legal systems in most territories colonized by the purveyors of Abrahamic masculinist religions do not fully/adequately recognize household violence and its victims, because of a very real global rape culture, AND because the imperialist racial order lends itself to the criminalization of Black people, we must work collectively to create *community-based* solutions to this problem.

Men should form civilian groups that will intervene in domestic violence incidents, so that those individuals who wish to intervene do not take on that high risk alone. Citizens' accountability/advisory boards, neighborhood watch, etc. could also have a domestic violence committee that directs all of its energy towards identifying/preventing these crimes.

We must raise our children—of any gender—to practice self-control and to be responsible for their own sexuality, aggression and behavior. We must raise them to hold themselves to the highest possible character standards, particularly in their interactions with other people of African descent.

Our community therapists and healers must offer counseling and other services for families, couples and individuals; we have cultural tools that can help us heal, and we must use them to their fullest effect. We must create safe spaces in which to discuss this issue and make it a top priority. We must take away shame and stigma that is all-too-often misplaced onto victims of abuse and let it rest heavily with the violators and those apologists who turn a blind eye to the abuse they have witnessed. We must be willing to not only police our own communities in relation to external threats, but also internal ones. We must protect Black women (and girls), even those whom we are not attracted to, those to whom we are attracted, and those who are not related to us in some way. If we do these things, then the problem of intimate/household abuse can be addressed, even for male victims.

PERSPECTIVE: DR. JARED BALL

My admitted difficulty and the basis for the sideways approach to this topic is born largely out of my own ignorance, recognition that so much of our relationships go undiscussed among even our closest loved ones, and the ways in which the topic has touched my family (pun unavoidable). But my thoughts with this and any subject almost always goes initially to asking questions about our “media ecologies” or environments, the hostility in their design, and the predictive results or impacts they will have on target populations. Specifically, where do African people go in our world for love and life affirming messaging? And what messaging is targeted to these communities and with what impact.

Three years ago my oldest daughter's 6th grade class went to “Outdoor Ed,” a two-night over-night stay in the very rural eastern coast of the state. Gender allocation meant that I would have to bunk those two nights with boys who were, as it turned out, primarily chaperoned by a father who was on bare-minimum duty. On the evening of the second night, after lights out, the transition time to actual sleep was being taken up by boys rhyming their favorite and most vulgar rap lyrics, with an increasing focus on sexual activity, with then a



transition to what was headed toward a discussion of which girls in their school these boys were planning to engage in these vulgar acts. Before names could be mentioned, and I admit, before my daughter's name could come up, I sat up, and intervened. No one knew who I was given that I had only come to the bunk at bed-time and had not been assigned to those children throughout the two days. So in that moment I answered as truthfully as I could, "Right now, I am everyone's father." I proceeded to empathize, and to say that I remember vividly what it was like at their age, hormonally, and that I also understood that their claimed performative abilities were based on fantasies. Most importantly, I said, none of these girls – indeed no one – exist to serve these fantasies, they are people too, going through their own versions of all of this and that you all are responding to adult fantasies, which are themselves just that.

But this was all just one more reminder that so much of what becomes a behavioral outcome is precisely that, an outcome. And though it is only one of an array of contextual hostilities the media environment in which we are all forced to exist encourages that women, Black women in particular, can be targeted for abuse as an acceptable response to what is often a monstrous anti-Black world. In fact, just this week, the Billboard number one song, with 471.1 million U.S. streams so far, is "Rockstar" by DaBaby whose opening lyrics are: "Brand new Lamborghini, f--- a cop car, With the pistol on my hip like I'm a cop (yeah, yeah, yeah)..." It then continues... "My daughter a G, she saw me kill a n---a in front of her before the age of two And I'll kill another n---a too 'Fore I let another n---a do somethin' to you Long as you know that, don't let nobody tell you different Daddy love you (yeah, yeah)." While not specific to the abuse of women it certain sets a context where anti-revolutionary gun possession is linked (appropriately?) to the monopoly of violence held by the state but is turned inward, only to negatively impact community and family. This is just one song, owned and controlled by UMG, a subsidiary of Vivendi, and distributed to our communities with funding from private equity groups who own prisons and systems of surveillance (Blackrock, Vanguard).

Where are we to turn to find solutions that, to borrow from a recent comment from Dhoruba Bin Wahad, "redistribute the pain?"

PERSPECTIVE: DR. KWASI KONADU

We live in a society, but the bridge between that society and ourselves is family—in the elongated, African sense. Born into a family, we recreate it so others can cycle in and out. We each entry and exit, we accrue unresolvedness that plays out in parts of our being and family, at times violently. My view is simple: the source of and success against **gendered intimate household violence** is our families. If Covid-19 is an exposé, laying bare more than some imagined, the (ill-)health of family exposes inter-generational violence while granting us the tools to expunge it. I've digested Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí's *The Invention of Women*, as well as Tommy Curry's *The Man-Not* and Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*. And yet, I'm unconvinced the central problem is nor can be resolved by focusing on women/girls or men/boys as if contestants in the oppression game—



jostling for who is the most oppressed. These approaches seem too schizophrenic and divisive. They fall short because they embody rather than challenge assumptions about this topic's bullseye—gender.

The idea of “gender” is not cross-culturally valid in social relations. Though widely accepted, this concept, based on what Oyèwùmí calls a *biologic*, poses an acute danger for human relations. The English *gender*, from the Latin *genus*, only came to be used in the 20th century to mean “sex of a human,” its sense colloquial. In the 1960s, feminist writers ascribed to it social attributes and biological qualities. Created or extended was a central problem: gender exists when biological sex distinction carries moral and social expectations attributed to fe/male. *Fe/male* refers to biological anatomy, while *masculine/feminine* are social constructions that signify specific moral and social attributes/expectations. Gender fuses the biological and the social/moral, especially in “Western” societies and languages. Think of Romance languages: gender is always declared via the article that comes before the noun, which is to say *what* a thing is more important than *who* it is. African languages such as Yorùbá or Akan/Twi, which I speak, are gender-neutral, offering up a different set of ideas to work through human relations. What I’m suggesting is that family is the arena where we have to confront intimate household violence and that we need to reconsider the violence fixed in the language (a system of ideas), in the very grammar and syntax, we have used in that confrontation.

When we think out loud or act out our lives through this conception of gender, we play into the culturally structured thoughts and behaviors of “Western” societies. On several levels, we accept their faux ideas: women are emotional or the receptacles of violence. These ideas are anchored in biologic, in that to be “women” is to be without penis, power, prowess of logic—the possessions of men. Women are also potential property, as in the assumption of a man’s surname upon marriage or referring to a room full of women as “you guys,” or the idioms “my wife” and “the girl is mine.” What, then, does a woman possess? The traits belonging to but also exclusive of motherhood: menstrual cycle, pregnancy, nurturing—all packed with emotion. Under the disguise of gender, women accept and act out this script, partly due to social expectation, partly due to real biological and chemical interplay. They also yield to this script when they tolerate boys under no pressure to grow up, men who think their penis will fall off by changing diapers, fe/males who violently reduce intimacy to codes—*hittin’ that, smash that, beat it up*. Women concerned about their own emotions and the desire for men to affirm them are seldom concerned about men’s emotions. Rejected is the idea that boys and men have emotional lives, and yet boys and girls find themselves stubbornly socialized into these understandings.

Our three daughters have a role in shaping this mutual conditioning, which begins early. There’s not a boy I know who hasn’t cried and cried a lot. Around age 10 or 11, something not so magical happens. At puberty, most boys stop crying, at least visibly, and they not only develop penis consciousness but discover that girls possess something different. At age 10, I was embarrassed when my mother wanted to bathe me, so I said to her one evening, “I got it.” By that age, the physical pouncing, verbal ridicule, and emotional assaults force a metamorphosis, which convinces boys that only girls cry when hurt, crying is weakness and vaginal, and real men are strong, demonstrated by the sheer will to fight back those tears. And yet, I recall my younger sister being comforted with the patronizing line: “It’s okay to cry and share your feelings.” Rarely did mother or father comfort me as a child or allow me to express a feeling other than anger. Fe/male kin and friends curate this conditioning, where male emotional content might live on, but his affection and capacity to humanely connect dies a slow and inevitable death. The concept of gender accelerates a conflict it initiates—sexes are always in



conflict, and one has to win! Why do you think men authorize and fight wars, conflicts in which the premise is always that the opponent is less than human? I know conflicts are inevitable, but I wonder what men sacrifice to become dehumanized male bodies. I wonder if surrendering their humanity is worth the price of losing their loved ones. Surely some resurrection is possible, but the labor and self-inducing love required is so tremendous the task might be too daunting.

Girls and women have come to expect an emotionally amputated man, a process underway since boyhood. As boys learn not to cry and pretend not to feel pain, our daughters hit me, sometimes very hard, thinking it is fun to do so. Not once do they think or even ask if their punches, jabs, chops, jumping on my back, etc. hurts. Their ramp onto gender and social conditioning are that men are physical but not emotional beings. This physical male, however, embodies the people to which he belongs, for white societies and those under their tutelage tell us peoples of African ancestry don't feel pain. What I am poking at is not merely the violence of the language we use, the social spaces where we live (or try to do something called living), the intergenerational conditioning in front of us, but also that we are a wounded species. The areas where our wounds hurt the most need the most urgent care, but not by fe/male adults competing against each other, with child(ren) bystanders, to play out a gendered script authored for us. We need not a script but a premise. We are all wounded but in different yet not essential ways. Our fight-flight instincts are always on, never allowed to rest or recalibrate. Without rest, we turn on those who offer some solace, a safe space to bleed, lick our wounds, and keep fighting or fleeing. Our language is honesty at all costs, working and fighting in the arena of us, a series of linked families.

PERSPECTIVE: DR. MJIBA FREHIWOT

The Global African community was in shock when we read the news that in mid-July 36 year old Sibongiseni Gabada's corpse was found in a bag covered with garbage behind her partners house. As her grandmother wailed at the site of the discovery in a CNN interview, she cried that women were expendable in South Africa. As the sting of the death of yet another woman by her boyfriend in South Africa broke in Washington, DC Olga Ooro, 34 was discovered missing and presumed dead. Her missing and presumed dead status was discovered because her 7-year-old son was wandering the halls of their apartment complex. Subsequently, her boyfriend has been arrested for her murder although her body has not been found.. How can we reconcile these horrific examples of violence against women? This is squarely **violence against African women and girls at the hands of African men?** At some point we must **STOP** and confront the violence head on. We must interrogate our individual and collective culture and rhetoric and collectively identify solutions to protect women and girls.

Gendered Intimate Household Violence on the surface is an individual act that is perpetrated by an individual who has made personal decisions to unleash their anger and frustration loose on someone close to them. At the community level individuals who are victims of household violence are viewed as weak, misguided, and helpless. The preparators are secretly viewed with disgust but are also pitted as they must have been abused themselves or witnessed abuse. Are we robbing individuals of their agency when we assume that they are simply ghosts in their lives? As an African nation we recognize that both victims of intimate household



violence and perpetrators of victims of the larger capitalist and patriarchal system. We also recognize that toxic masculinity and elements of our culture accepts, explains away and even supports *Gendered Intimate Household Violence*. How can we explain that some men participate in gendered violence while other do not? What is the defining line? Is it access to resources or class? Can we conclude that those who perpetrate this violence are victims of violence themselves or are they simply victims of their own rage? Finally, as a community how are we engaging with both victim of said violence and those that have indiscriminately meted it out?

When we interrogate this intensive period of violence against women we cannot do so in isolation. We must recognize that these individual acts of violence are connected to the larger system of exploitation and repression. Nevertheless, one would be naïve to absolve those responsible of gendered intimate household violence because the root cause is capitalism. To be clear capitalism as an economic system exploits everyone and everything for profit without regard for human life, mother earth or any living thing. Even though the exploitation and repression of African women and men at the hands of the capitalist system is at the root of *Gendered Intimate Household Violence* we must cross-examine patriarchy over space and time. Patriarchy is a system in which men rule or hold power positions in the family, community, nation and internationally that also promotes the subjection of women globally.

Gender and gender roles are socially constructed and is a manifestation of culture which means violence against women and girls can be de-constructed by society just as it has been constructed. At this juncture it is important to remind ourselves that society is formed and continues to transform by the contributions of every individual in society. As we turn to African (and we know this is not a monolith) culture we must examine how or why this continues to happen. One of the many challenges is that women and girls are regarded as occupying a certain gendered space in the larger African community. This space is directly connected to patriarchy where men hold power and where women are regulated to support the power that men hold. Let's also be honest that although, African men are severely impacted by capitalism they are also benefactors of patriarchy. Despite the harmful effects of slavery, colonialism, apartheid and neo-colonialism on Africa and African people we cannot allow these systems to drive *Gendered Intimate Household Violence*. We must honestly and directly fight against this culture that advocates, promotes, and celebrates *Gendered Intimate Household Violence*. How can we say, "Oh I don't promote Gendered Intimate Household Violence" but do nothing about the oppression of women inside the African community? We must all face that facts that we are not only celebrating gendered violence but we are promoting it with our silence.

PERSPECTIVE: DR. TODD STEVEN BURROUGHS

The first newspaper literary-type essay that ever blew my mind was probably also my introduction to feminism: Joan Morgan's "The Black woman's Guide to the Tyson Trial." It was published in *The Village Voice* in the early 1990s, a time I was a *Voice* (and *City Sun* and....) devotee. Since I was not even 25 at the time, everything was new. So there were only two things I remember about that article: one, when Morgan said that Desiree



Washington had the same right to be in her nightclothes alone with Tyson in a hotel room “that Donald Trump’s daughter would” (she was talking about Ivanka, in 2020 White America’s alternate First Lady) and two, that when she interviewed the male members of her Black conscious-ish Brooklyn crew about what constituted rape, more the one said, “Well, I guess I’ve raped someone, then.” Silence. Violence. Invisible: Not the violence itself, but the silence behind it. The silence that sees nothing, does nothing, changes nothing. So it’s 2020, and I’m reading this Black/African-news-rewrite site [that is talking about](#) how 7,000 teens and “tweens” in Malawi—10 (!) and up—are now pregnant since COVID struck. As if these *children were pregnant* (a neutral/natural condition, mistakenly and accidentally infers this article) *because of COVID*, and not that they had been *African girls who had been raped*, presumably by African men and boys who they know. Says the rewrite, “The director of the Civil Society Coalition on Education, Benedicto Kondowe, said the [COVID-19](#) pandemic has adversely affected the lives of young women in the country, adding that the period has also seen a spike in gender-based violence, exploitation, as well as other kinds of abuse against adolescent girls, *Nyasa Times* further reports.” (It’s not just Malawi; scroll down the article if you want to be more depressed.) Somehow this article brought me back to the “oh, well” male attitude documented by Morgan during our African medallion days. Tyson got a six-year sentence in 1992 (released in three) for what he did to 18-year-old *adult*, so why aren’t any of these men in Malawi at least threatened with jail and boys threatened with something? Silence is a constant, invisible enemy in this case; as Martin Luther King said about Vietnam, that there “comes a time when silence is betrayal.” Tyson is a convicted rapist; the Malawi boys and men who did this to 7,000 tweens and teens are un-convicted rapists. But my mind keeps going back to the conscious Black men who only saw blurred lines 30 years ago, who only talked about it when asked. I have no choice to believe they have since raised themselves properly as parents. *The Voice* is no more, but the year 2020 is more visible and more loud [and talks about equality are ever continuing](#). But we as an African people must set up serious justice mechanisms—private or public—where interpersonal violence is viewed as, discussed and accepted as *violence*, where education and justice are balanced. Not Truth and Reconciliation, but Education, Truth and Consequences or Reparations.



TOWN HALL AND RESOURCES

Town Hall

August 12, 2020 at 7 pm: <https://www.crowdcast.io/e/gendered-intimate>

Other Programs:

May 30, 2020: Dealing with the silence of sexual violence and human trafficking: a pan-Africanist approach

June 27, 2020: Violence against women and girls in the age of covid: using culture to challenge sexual violence: <https://youtu.be/3fxmyltopvo>

Resources

Books

Ampofo, A. A., & Boateng, J. (2008). Understanding masculinities, empowering women: what have boys in Ghana got to do with it?.

Cole, C. M., Manuh, T., Miescher, S. F., & Miescher, S. (Eds.). (2007). *Africa after gender?*. Indiana University Press.

Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí, ed., *Gender Epistemologies in Africa: Gendering Traditions, Spaces, Social Institutions, and Identities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

---, ed., *African Gender Studies: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

---, ed., *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003)

---, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

Sékou Touré & Jesse Sloan (Translator) (1973) *The African Woman: Text and Poem* by Sékou Touré, The Black Scholar

Tommy Curry, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Temple University Press, 2017)

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (Spiegel & Grau, 2015)

Tsikata, D. (2007). Women in Ghana at 50: still struggling to achieve full citizenship?. *Ghana Studies*, 10(1), 163-206.



Journals

Feminist Africa: <http://www.agi.ac.za/agi/feminist-africa>

2010: Rethinking Gender and Violence: <http://www.agi.ac.za/agi/feminist-africa/14>

2015: <http://www.agi.ac.za/agi/feminist-africa/20/>

2017 Special Edition: <http://www.agi.ac.za/agi/feminist-africa/22/>

Web

<https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/july-2007/taking-violence-against-women-africa>

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

<https://ncadv.org/statistics>

Films

Antwone Fisher (2002)