Queen’s College and the rape of Ajai-Lycett

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Call it evil, despicable, horrendous, unlawful and pervasive, there’re yet no adjectives that can soothe the agony of a rape victim. For me, rape is the very worst crime there is. How on earth is it possible for a human being to reach the climax of coital pleasure while inflicting life-shattering horror on a fellow human being? How? I shudder.  
  
With just one step away from the octogenarian door, world-class thespian, journalist, television presenter and cosmetologist, Madam Taiwo Ajai-Lycett, granted a jaw-dropping interview, last week, revealing a depthless insight into her incredible 79-year-old personality that has been ‘through fire, but emerged fortified’. Ajai-Lycett, who featured in the popular British comedy of the 70s, “Some mothers do ‘ave ‘em,” which had the inimitable Mr Spencer, revealed that she was raped at 65 by a human beast, who was part of a heartless mob that robbed her in her Egbe home, Lagos.  
  
The trajectory of Ajai-Lycett’s life is cocooned in the chauvinistic savagery that stalks and strikes the girl-child from the cradle to the grave. At 15, Taiwo became a pregnant child and was widowed at 16 to face a cold world, which had no retribution for her undergraduate husband. Males who impregnate young girls achieve fame and notoriety in the Nigerian society that lionises them while pregnant girls become objects of scorn. So, because of the shame she brought to her family, Ajai-Lycett was withdrawn from secondary school and marooned in her father’s house to become a maid preparing meals for sinless siblings.  
  
It’s instructive to note that with her education and exposure, Ajai-Lycett told her story to a mindless nation 14 full years after. Rape victims don’t fully heal, I suppose. There’re a million and one Ajai-Lycetts out there weighing on the conscience of the nation, with inspiring life experiences Nigerians could immensely benefit from, but who wouldn’t talk because of the sad cloud of hopelessness perpetually hanging over the land.  
  
I reckon that family is society’s cornerstone. But political leadership, more than family leadership, has a bigger role to play in building the bricks on the cornerstone and determining the swing of society’s moral barometer. A responsible government can save numberless children from the recklessness of irresponsible parenthood. Before the country lost its sanity, I remember that as youngsters growing up in Lagos in the 70s, we watched instructive TV programmes like ‘Take a Trip’, ‘Animal Games’, etc that taught us the unity, diversity, resources and possibilities inherent in the country. Hot sex is served on television today.  
  
Children of my childhood weren’t weaned on debauched reality shows, sport betting, lottery and magical gratification. Mine was a childhood raised to appreciate the dignity of labour, the essence of knowledge, the pride in patriotism, the passion in worship, supremacy of truth and the sanctity of life. I was born into an era that raised legends in academics, music, theatre, banking, medicine, arts, law, journalism, engineering, architecture, sports etc. Today, the heroes of our glorious yesteryears are looked down upon by a society under the influence of drugs, materialism, greed and nothingness.  
  
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Going by the compelling example of Ajai-Lyectt’s narrative, humanity will benefit immeasurably if some of our legends are encouraged by society to retell episodes that define their legendaries. Let’s pause and imagine our Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, periodically taking students and members of the academic community through the genius that inspired some of his works and actions. This is just as an Ebenezer Obey, a King Sunny Ade, a Victor Uwaifo, a Bongos Ikwue or an Olu Jacobs sharing untold perspectives of their personalities would pave the way to greatness for up and coming talents. But these greats won’t be acknowledged by the Nigerian society, let alone honoured, even after they kicked the bucket!  
  
At 59, Nigeria is a quinquagenarian, with just one stride away from the sexagenarian world, where life begins at 60. But our 59-year-old nation is an incontinent child forever wearing diapers and sucking from a feeding bottle. Last week, an indecent incident, which underlines our collective confusion, rocked one of the elite public schools in the country, Queen’s College, Lagos. The video announcing the show of shame at the college reveals three major dramatis personae: a woman, a schoolgirl and a school guard. In the opening footage of the unscripted video, a woman, ostensibly the mother of the schoolgirl, wo-manhandled the guard, whose uniform she clutched fiercely at the neck. The woman rebuffed all entreaties by some people to let go of the guard’s uniform. Typical of the way the nation’s elite maltreat the masses, the almighty parent seemed not to care if the guard was injured or died of asphyxiation as she held him with his uniform by the neck.  
  
Unlike the parents of Ajai-Lycett, who squished an ant with a sledgehammer, the woman in the video didn’t see anything wrong with her daughter coming to school with her nails and eyelashes dripping with blue paint. In the scenarios of Ajai-Lycett and the Queen’s College drama, we have parents, daughters and consequences. Ajai-Lycett belongs to an era when parents were gods and their word was law. Daughters of that era were supposed to be seen, never to be heard; to be married off hastily for a dowry, never to be really loved. Repression was a rod of discipline and show of love. The girl-child was a noiseless echo.  
  
Conversely, the girl-children of this era are gods unto their parents. They are the tails that wag the dogs in a capsized world. Let’s deconstruct the Queen’s College scenario: A schoolgirl leaves home with her parent. She’s dressed as though she’s going to a club. Schoolgirl arrives in school and is turned back at the gate for improper dressing. The parent picks a quarrel with the school guards who turned the girl back. To arm themselves with evidence, school guards, fearing that the mother could be the wife of an oga at the top, videoed the girl while she tried to hide her eyelashes and nails. Passersby also recorded the shameful scene. Subsequently, the video went viral. Many people blamed the girl and her mother. Some blamed the school guards for recording the scene. The video could have been uploaded by members of the public who witnessed the scene or by the employees of the school.  
  
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Nobody commended the guards for remaining calm in the face of provocation and threat from the mother. The guard whom the woman tethered to her stranglehold didn’t even attempt to break her hold. The guard could have attempted to forcefully extricate himself and may wound the woman in the process, thereby worsening the situation. The calm conduct of the guards may be a result of years of seeing parents throw their empty weight around.  
  
In the fallout of the Ajai-Lycett and Queen’s College student scenarios, the girl-child is the worse for it due to parental action and inaction. If the student’s mother had told her daughter to get the nail paint and eyelashes off before they left home, the public ridicule would’ve been avoided. If she didn’t approve of her daughter’s ill-manners, she would’ve spoken in support of the guards who turned her daughter back.  
  
I believe the truth in the African proverb which says: If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. However, mothers and fathers need to unite in raising well-behaved children so that the nation can raise desirable leaders to take Nigeria out of her present doom. Surely, Nigeria needs new leaders to halt the political show of shame in Adams Oshiomhole-Godwin Obaseki’s Edo State, the confusing judgments from the bench, the innumerable deaths across the country and the weightlessness of Aso Rock.  
  
I believe in women.  
  
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