

# WE ARE NOT OUR MOTHERS

By Chioma Abiakam

We see the world through a different lens, this generation. We are not like our mothers.

Our mothers married our fathers without knowing them. “You don’t need to know a man before marriage”, their mothers had told them. “That is what our *Ikwu na Ibe* (kinsmen) are for”. Our mothers walked into strange houses, saw unfamiliar faces, and each laid with an unfamiliar man. If they were welcomed with love, they were lucky. If they were welcomed with scorn, they had to adapt.

The adaptation process was frightful if they were unlucky. Our fathers’ mothers would shun their greetings and complain about every tiny action that did not suit their taste. Our fathers’ sisters would sashay around the house and stop doing their house duties. They would ignore our mothers’ existence. The times they acknowledged them, they came with the intent to provoke. Our fathers’ brothers would attempt to sow seeds of discord in our fathers’ hearts. Some would fall on rocky soil and dry up, some would fall on thorns and get choked up. Some would fall on fertile land and grow up, blossoming into strong fists that damaged our mothers’ faces and broke their bones.

Our mothers would run to their mothers, seeking solace and possible retrieval from those houses of horrors. If they were lucky, their mothers would press them on their breasts and never let go. If they were still unlucky, their mothers would hand them back to their oppressors, sending a stern warning not to bring shame to their families. “Even your father used to beat me”, they would say “Am I not still in his house? One day, your husband will stop”. Our mothers would hold on waiting for that day. For some, the day came. For others, it was just wishful thinking.

Our mothers would have one or two allegiances who were most likely mothers facing the same trials in our fathers' houses. They would share their sorrows and cry on each other's shoulders, occasionally telling themselves to endure. “Let’s do it for our children”, they would say to themselves. So our mothers would stay. The new lands they should call home became jungles; a survival of the fittest. Some of our mothers died under the pounding fists of our fathers, some were poisoned if our fathers refused to turn against them. Some were left alone with us, our mothers' children, while our fathers took wives that suited the taste of our fathers’ mothers. Some eloped with us on their backs. Some of us were left without our mothers (the ones who ran away and never looked back). Our mothers who stayed for our sake became strong. They took the beatings our fathers shamelessly delivered in front of our eyes.

Our mothers would tell us their stories and ask us not to hate our fathers and the new lands we now originate from. They would tell us that they will never make the same mistakes their mothers made. Some of our mothers kept this promise, some did not; succumbing to doubt, fear, and hopelessness.

We learnt to see this world differently. We who saw this brutality and pledged never to face the same fate. We will not bow down and submit to men who do not deserve our submissions. We will not eat blows for breakfast and drink our tears as wine. We will know our men before we marry them and judge who is worthy of owning our womanhood. We will not tolerate aggression like our mothers did. Our children's fathers will be men who love and respect us, men who will be deserving father figures to them. We will not do this life blindfolded.

We see the world through a different lens, this generation so that the ones after us will have a better perspective of what marriage should be.