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Review Article

Violence against Children as Seen through Tunji Ogundimu's *Paradise at Night*

SIDI CHABI Moussa[1]*

[1]Associate Professor of Anglophone African Literature, Department of Anglophone Studies, Faculty of Letters, Arts and Human Sciences, University of Parakou (UP), Parakou, Republic of BÉNIN

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Abstract: This article aims at examining critically the issue of violence and its consequences on children through the lens of Tunji Ogundimu's *Paradise at Night*. Violence against children is a pervasive and distressing issue affecting children, especially orphans or children left behind without any support worldwide. This phenomenon entails significant risks to their physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being. Despite various efforts to prevent and address violence against children, it continues to be a societal problem. Hence the necessity to carry out this study in order to study the phenomenon as it appears in the novel under study and bring tentative solutions to it. The qualitative research methodology is used in this study in order to find relevant information or data through documentary research. This methodology has allowed me to collect and analyse data coming from the Internet, such as E-books and academic articles, and from the library in order to carry out this research work efficiently. To conduct this study, I have employed two literary theories, namely sociological criticism and the Marxist criticism. Sociological criticism deals with the values of the society and how they are used in literary works. As far as the Marxist criticism is concerned, it focuses on class struggle and includes the description of the competing socioeconomic interests that advance capitalistic interests, such as money and power, over socialist interests such as morality and justice. The study has found that violence against children as it appears in the novel under study is a phenomenon which needs to be eradicated. It concludes that children deserve a good treatment not only in Nigeria where the novel is set but also in Africa at large.

Keywords: Brutality, Society, Adults, Child Abuse, Plight.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence against children is a grave and pervasive issue that has significant implications for the well-being and development of children worldwide. Many children are victim of violence in their living environment. It is the case of Dara, a child who has faced violence after his parents have been killed by Borri people in Tunji Ogundimu's *Paradise at Night*. The purpose of this study is to examine and shed light on various aspects of violence against children, through a study of the novel. This issue poses serious threats to their physical, emotional, and cognitive health. Although there have been numerous attempts to prevent violence against children, it remains a persistent societal challenge. Therefore, it is essential to conduct this study to examine this issue as it is portrayed in the novel under study and to suggest tentative solutions. The qualitative research methodology is employed in this study to gather pertinent information through documentary research. This approach has enabled me to collect and evaluate data from various sources, such as the Internet, including E-books and academic journals, as well as resources from the library to conduct this research effectively. I have used two literary theories to carry out this study, namely sociological criticism and Marxist criticism. Sociological criticism focuses on societal values and their representation in literature. In contrast, Marxist criticism emphasises class conflict and addresses the opposing socioeconomic interests that prioritise capitalistic values, such as wealth and power, over socialist ideals like morality and justice. The relevance of the theories and approaches utilised is rooted in their ability to foster an understanding of the topic being examined and to provide a literary evaluation of violence

***Corresponding Author:** SIDI CHABI Moussa
Associate Professor of Anglophone African Literature, Department of Anglophone Studies, Faculty of Letters, Arts and Human Sciences, University of Parakou (UP), Parakou, Republic of BÉNIN

against children through an analysis of the selected novel. The central aspects of this work are threefold. The first aspect is based on the causes and consequences of violence against children. The second one is about the multifaceted dimensions of violence in the novel. The third one deals with the means of prevention to reduce the scope of violence against children.

1. Causes and Consequences of Violence against Children

1.1 Causes of Violence against Children

Violence encompasses all types of harm inflicted on children, whether through physical or emotional violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent care, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse (A. Zwi, 2002, p. 1085). Violence and neglect can be defined as any actions taken by parents, caregivers, other adults, or older adolescents that fall outside accepted behavioural norms and pose a significant risk of physical or emotional harm to children or young individuals. Violence also takes the form of abuse as S. F. Daley, D. Gonzalez, A. B. Mirabal and M. Afzal (2025) put it:

Child abuse and neglect, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect and exploitation. These forms of maltreatment jeopardize a child's health, development, and dignity within a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. Physical abuse involves intentional harm committed against a child, which often presents with injuries such as rib fractures, head trauma, or unexplained injuries. Neglect is the most common and lethal form of maltreatment, which results from the failure to provide essential care. Due to its profound physical and psychological effects, child maltreatment is a serious public health concern, with significant short and long-term consequences.

Violence may be defined as the use of physical or psychological force to cause harm, injury, or damage to individuals, groups, or property. This definition encompasses all types and forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, which lead to actual or potential harm to children's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Incidences of violence may be isolated or prolonged over a period of time. It is a violation of universally recognised human rights and has profound consequences for the individuals directly affected as well as society as a whole.

Child abuse and exposure to domestic violence are acknowledged as types of child maltreatment that, together with other potentially traumatic adverse experiences, frequently overlap with, and are associated with a variety of negative consequences throughout life. These consequences include heightened risks of depression, anxiety, anger, PTSD, psychosis, and addiction disorders (C. Rada, A. Neagu, V. E. Marinescu, A. Rodideal and R. Lunga, 2025, p. 3).

Religious and ethnic conflicts are the most widespread causes of violence against children. Religious and ethnic conflicts have unfortunately led to the loss of many lives throughout history and continue to do so in various parts of the world. These conflicts often stem from differences in beliefs, practices, or cultural backgrounds and can result in violence and tragedy. Religious and ethnic conflicts leading to loss of life are complex and multifaceted issues that have plagued societies for centuries. These conflicts can have various causes, including historical grievances, territorial disputes, economic disparities, political manipulation, and religious or ethnic fanaticism. Often, multiple factors combine to fuel tensions. Insecurity is thus widespread as shown in this quotation which opens the novel: "Insecurity had filled the town. The tentative peace in our area also became problematic" (p. 1).

Religious conflicts typically arise when different religious groups clash due to differences in beliefs, practices, or competition for resources. Disagreements over theological or doctrinal matters can escalate into conflict. The most tragic aspect is their impact on innocent civilians. The explanation that Dara has given to his uncle about his father's death is related to violence due to religion conflict. He has explained how his father's speech during the revival programme was twisted and amplified, overplayed and misrepresented as a one-sided religious attack. He goes on to explain to Alhaji that his father has never preached against an individual. He maintains that Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters as God's creations. That is why Dara thinks that the attack on his father is awkward and unjust. So he confirms that the cause of his father's death is never far from religious or ethnic conflicts which have led to his suffering and to the violence toward him in Borri (p. 73-74). The absence of morality and justice which is contrary to sociological criticism is vivid here. Instead, the Marxist critical approach is justified by the fact that a religious conflict is prevalent in the novel.

Parents' death is another cause of violence against children. The absence of parents in children's life can have significant effects on their well-being and development and lead of his violence within people. Parent's death can be a cause of violence against children because they play a crucial role in children's life, serving as primary caregivers, role models, and sources of support and guidance. There are some key roles parents fulfill in their children's lives: They provide the physical care and emotional support necessary for children's well-being. This involves meeting their basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, and hygiene, as well as creating a *safe and loving environment where the children feel secure and valued. For instance, Dara's predicament is due to his parents' death in the novel under study.*

Parents play a vital role in fostering children's emotional development. They also provide love, affection, and emotional support, which help children develop a secure attachment style and positive self-esteem. They teach children how to regulate their emotions, express themselves, and develop empathy, social skills and act as the primary agents of moral and values development. Parents teach children about right and wrong, fairness, honesty, respect, and empathy. They support their children's intellectual development by fostering a love for learning, assisting with schoolwork, and providing educational resources and encourage curiosity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and help children gain knowledge and experience through various activities and educational opportunities. They also guide their children in forming healthy friendships, resolving conflicts, and developing positive social behaviours (P. R. Amato, 2005, p. 76-77). Parents act as advocates within various contexts, such as schools, healthcare settings, and communities, to ensure their children's overall well-being and access to necessary resources and opportunities. Dara has not been lucky enough to have his parent stay long alive to protect him against any harmful action and violence, because the people of Borri ave murdered them (p. 4).

Religious conflicts exert profound detrimental effects upon educational frameworks across African nations. T. Ogundimu's *Paradise at Night* illustrates this phenomenon through the character of Dara, whose formal schooling ceases following a violent assault on his family. His educational interruption is directly attributable to the displacement from his home and the loss of his guardians, compelling him to depart the crisis-affected region of Borri for personal survival. Furthermore, during periods of religious strife, extremist groups frequently target educational institutions to indoctrinate and forcibly recruit minors, and to seize educators and students (M. Sidi Chabi, 2020, p. 92). J. C. Aguwa (1997, p. 349, cited by M. Sidi Chabi, 2020, p. 92-93) corroborates the idea as follows:

Schools are also many times used as recruitment ground for terrorist groups because schools provide easy access to children. In Somalia, terrorists have used schools to recruit children into their ranks. In 2016 (Nigeria), thousands of school children were abducted with their teachers from their schools. During the religious attacks, the school children were abducted for religion education sessions, and while most returned after a few days, many were abducted with the aim of having them participate in the conflicts. Between January and August 2015 alone, more than 11,800 students were abducted from rural schools by terrorist for indoctrination or forced recruitment. And most of the members of this group (terrorists) are youth.

In the foregoing quotation, J. C. Aguwa shows that religious conflicts affect education in many ways. Such hostilities inflict considerable systemic disruption upon the national educational apparatus. Beyond direct educational disruption, religious conflicts significantly impact adolescent populations, often leading to the involvement of young individuals and even children in violent activities, thereby fostering engagement in illicit behaviours and cultivating juvenile delinquency. In *Paradise at Night*, this trend is exemplified by the composition of the rioters. With the exception of their leader, Mallam Rimi, the majority of the participants are youths who exhibit deference solely to him, demonstrating a disregard for other forms of authority (M. Sidi Chabi, 2020, p. 93).

Poverty and socio-economic factors are other causes of violence against children. Poverty and socioeconomic hardships often experience heightened stress levels due to financial instability, inadequate housing, and limited access to resources. These stressors can increase the risk of violence by people coping mechanisms. Poverty and socioeconomic factors play a significant role in the occurrence of violence against children. Poverty and financial insecurity can generate high levels of stress to those who wants to help children victim of violence. The struggle to meet the children's basic needs, such as housing, food, and healthcare, can lead to increased stress and frustration. That is what makes Mallam Usman refuse to keep Dara with him when he runs to him to seek for help. What he has said in the following quotations as soon as he sees the boy proves this fact: "Have you thought about the financial implication? Getting the room will mean paying rent, furnishing the place, seeking admission, paying school free, buying uniforms and supplying food on regular basis. Why should we start something we cannot finish?" (p. 20).

Children may lack the financial means to access quality childcare, parenting programmes, mental health services, and other support networks. Living in a substandard town can bring children to be exposed to violence, unsafe environments, and the lack of privacy. This is the case of Borri where religious riots and ethnic clashes are common and where religious conflict is set as a social norm. They cannot hold inter-religious and inter-denominational prayers. Nobody is safe under such circumstances. The violence perpetrated against Dara in the novel exemplifies this sad fact. The Marxist critical approach is applied at this level since there is a kind of class struggle at this level. This class struggle appears in terms of religious conflict and ethnic conflict to some extent.

Those who lack knowledge about children's development may have unrealistic expectations or misunderstand normal behaviour from children of tender age. This is the case of Hajia Maimuna of Dualla Central Market. Although she realises that Dara is not strong enough to carry heavy loads, because of his tender age, she suggests that he should come and work in her shop as a luggage porter, which is a dangerous suggestion (p.

40). The Marxist critical approach is applied at this level again. It occurs between the haves who have power and wealth, represented by Hajia Maimuna, and the have nots, represented by Dara. In the same vein, the sociological criticism which focuses on societal values and their representation in literature is applied whether in the case of religious and ethnic conflicts or in the case of the exploitation perpetrated by Hajia Maimuna against Dara. Morality and justice as advocated by the sociological criticism do not prevail in the novel.

1.2 *Consequences of Violence* against *Children*

Infants and young babies who are subjected to abuse and neglect are more likely to develop insecure or disorganised attachment issues with their primary caregivers (J. C. Baer and C. D. Martinez, 2006, p. 188). Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa (AN) and binge-purge behaviours, may also relate to experiences of violence and neglect (T. D. Brewerton, 2007, p. 287).

Intentional acts of self-directed, interpersonal, or collective violence claim the lives of about 4400 individuals per day. Being a victim or witness to violent activities causes thousands more people to sustain injuries or experience other non-fatal health repercussions. Tens of thousands of lives are also lost, families are shattered, and enormous expenses are expended for treating victims, helping families, fixing infrastructure, prosecuting offenders, or as a result of lost investment and production (E. G. Krug, J. Mercy, L. L. Dahlberg and A. Zwi, 2002, p. 1083). The fact that the rioters are mostly kids armed with cudgels, knives and stones, some of them being Dara's age – sixteen years old – or even younger (p. 2) is a kind of violence against children which portrays the phenomenon of child soldiers which is against children's rights.

After killing Dara's mother, the rioters have killed his father and his sister, Joke. They have slaughtered his father like a ram and killed his sister in front of him, although he is not old enough to witness such a horror. (p. 2). Hence the physical violence perpetrated against some members of this family has resulted in the death of Dara's parents and sister which in turn has caused Dara's psychological trauma. He has thus endured a psychological trauma as a sixteen-year-old boy. Dara himself recounts the scene as follows:

Two of the attackers went for my father's legs. Father fell flat on his face and struggled in vain against the two men. A third aggressor grabbed his hands and pinned him down. He continued to struggle but the captors were too strong for him. A fourth man brandished a long knife, bowed and went for father's throat. I trembled with fear and closed my eyes. My father howled loudly with pain and then there was silence.

I imagined some horrible things happening to him; I almost fainted. With my eyes still closed, I prayed for his safety. But when I opened my eyes, I saw that my father's throat had been slashed. His blood was gushing out; it was like a ram being slaughtered on *Ileya* day. (p. 3-4)

The ongoing quotation clearly shows that Dara's state of mind is critical. He makes it clear in this passage: "From behind the door where I stood, I was overcome with anger and grief. I struggled not to scream as I remind glued to the wall like a statue. Tears flowed from my eyes" (p. 4). Sister Joke's sin is the fact that she has witnessed her father's slaughter and has tried to sermon the rioters. This quotation shows this sad episode:

> 'You've killed my father…' sister [sic] Joke started.
> *'Kai!'* one of them muttered and punched her face and shut her up. Another kicked her tummy, she fell down and the men closed up on her. She screamed. I closed my eyes, filled with terror. (p. 4)

As if this were not enough, one of the young men has endeavoured to check the rooms of the house for survivors in order to terminate them. This adds a more dramatic note to Dara's traumatic feeling. Dara himself refers to this as follows:

I was still stuck behind the door in the children's bedroom when I saw one of the young men come around. He started with the master bedroom. Then he checked our mother's room. When he approached the door where I was hiding I stood transfixed. A small dose of hot urine wetted my pant and I was afraid to breathe. (p. 5)

Needless to say, Dara has become a mere fugitive in his own house lest he should be killed in turn by the miscreants. He laments: "Apparently, they had derived pleasure from the terror they had unleashed in our house; they had enjoyed their show in a paradise of sorts, their own paradise; a devil's paradise where dwellers were brutish and heartlessly callous" (p. 6). He has seen too much blood and corpses, which is a kind of psychological torture. His state of mind in the quotation below is very telling:

Finally, I came out of my hiding and approached the two corpses. Both were still bleeding. With a heavy heart, I removed Daddy's wrist watch, his stained handkerchief and my sister's bloody hand rubber band.

I felt helpless and lonely. Three of us had earlier attended Mother's burial. This time, my father and sister were not that lucky. (p. 6-7)

Another form of violence against children occurs when the rioters opt to burn the house. They think that what they have done is not enough. Dara is still in the room when they set it aflame:

While I was still turning over the tragedy in my mind, a strong smell of petrol invaded my nostrils; I sniffed. A wave of smoke stung my eyes; I closed them tentatively. A current of hot air slapped my face; I stepped back and covered my nose with both palms. Just then, the front of the house also went up in flames.

I ran back towards the children's room in fright. The smoke, the rising flames and the increasing heat came after me. In my confusion, I pulled and tore the curtain off the window. I pushed the window open and, without looking, I leapt out in the dark.

I was lucky not to break my arm as I landed, falling from the window in the dark.

An old car rim abandoned by playing kids grazed my right elbow. A sharp pain ran from the nape of my neck down to my toes. I stood up slowly, rubbed my aching elbow and took to my heels, hoping and praying that I would not be spotted. (p. 7-8)

Dara's psychological trauma continues as he says: "The image of my dead father and sister ran through my mind. It was as if I was in our living room again, reliving the horrible experience…" (p. 8-9). The rioters seem to be pursuing him as he runs for his safety and sits in front of a big shop:

'No, we are going to Angwan Gana,' a voice retorted sternly from across the road interrupting my thoughts. Terrified that I might be spotted and slaughtered, I went down on my knees and quickly crawled into the nearby Saturday Market. I hid under a rickety table which was surrounded with decayed or abandoned vegetables. The acrid smell of wasted onions and rotten tomatoes hit my nostrils and, by now, my knees were smeared with spoiled *ewedu*. I tried to brush off the mess from my trousers. My hands came back sticky. […].

I was very much relieved when they left. But I was still in pain. I kept asking myself whether it was a crime to hail from the South or the West, I found no answers. I wondered whether it was an offence to be a Christian. I did not think it was and there was no one to convince me otherwise, without violence. (p. 9-10)

It was difficult for Dara to say if what happened was a mob action or a premeditated murder. He thinks that whatever name one called it did not matter though; it was an incredible scene. Although he is a sixteen-year-old boy, he says it was not new to him and that it was sheer agony (p. 11).

Violence against children has a social impact. Its impact on children's social life can be profound and long-lasting. Violence experiences, particularly when they involve caregivers or other trusted individuals, shatter children's fundamental sense of trust. The people who are supposed to provide safety and care may become sources of fear and harm, leading the child to question their reliability as it is Mallam Usman's case in the novel.

Children often learn from their experiences, and if they have been exposed to violence behaviours, they might internalise those behaviours. Dara thinks that Mallam Usman can provide him with the support and safety that he needs. At first sight, Mallam Usman, a friend of his father, is the only person whom he can now rely on: "'Come in,' Mallam Usman said, leading me into the house. I felt a little relieved to be with people who cared" (p. 14). However, Dara has a short-lived pleasure at the Usmans. He is scandalised when he hears the couple discuss his murder that very night: "'He is already asleep,' Mallam Usman whispered. 'We must decide what to do with him now. I began to sweat when I heard the statement. It must be well after midnight […]'" (p. 16). Dara has overheard their conversation and doubts:

So the Usman's kindness was a sham? They only tricked me to stay on so they could kill me too? I was tempted to jump up and run, but I dared not. The door was already locked and Mallam Usman was a very strong man. If he laid hands on my neck, I would be dead within seconds. (p. 16)

Dara's remorse for having thought that the Usmans are good people whom he can rely on is evident as he blames himself for coming to them in the first instance. He quickly pulled himself together, hoping he had not already thrown himself into the waiting mouth of a hungry lion (p. 16). "'You can't go to sleep when your house is on fire,' Mallam Usman whispered again. 'Or can you?'" (p. 17). Mallam Usman's wife seems to be sensitive to Dara's plight as she tells her husband: "'Allow this boy to rest first.'" (p. 17). Mallam Usman's reaction when his wife has suggested that they should keep Dara with them is sharp. The long conversation that they have had about this matter is a proof:

'Keep him?' Her husband's reply was sharp. 'Certainly not. How can you propose a thing like that? If you keep him here, our privacy is gone.'
'But we are very close to his family?'
'We *were*, my dear. And that was then. That was before they were killed. You cannot claim to be close to the dead. When your own life is in danger you must not think of yourself first, okay?'
'I understand; but the boy is restless,' the wife argued. 'He's a complete orphan now and he has nobody else to turn to in this town. […].'
'Look, woman; keeping this boy here will cause us trouble; we shall lose our peace. We may even be attacked. If that happens, what shall we do?'
Mrs Usman sighed. 'I don't know.'
"You should."

> 'I have not thought about it.'
> 'Well, too bad; you have to begin now. And I am helping you. Think about it. You must not wait for the worst to happen before you take realistic action. What is the benefit of keeping an orphan in a bedsit? What are the hazards? Why should we save somebody's life at the expense of our peace and security?'
> 'Bala, you know we are both indigenes of this town and no rioters can touch us. The worst they can do is to threaten or hurt the boy. That's all they can do.'
> 'Look, Aminah; by your statement, you have admitted that they may hurt the boy. That, in itself, is a risk we cannot afford to take.' (p. 17-19)

Mallam Usman has clearly rejected the idea of keeping Dara in his house lest it should be attacked by the rioters. In the same vein, he has rejected his wife's idea that they should rent a house for him somewhere. This further highlights his ingratitude towards the boy whose father has done a lot for him till his death. On the other hand, his wife has a good will towards Dara whom she sees as a vulnerable boy:

> 'Mmm…' the wife sighed again. 'Okay, what do you suggest we do? Should we get a room for him somewhere off Anambra Street?'

"Get a room? Why is this woman talking like this? Get a room at whose cost? Look; if we set that kind of agenda for ourselves, it will become an endless project. Have you thought about the financial implications? Getting a room will mean paying rent, furnishing the place, seeking admission, paying school fees, buying uniforms and supplying food on regular basis. Why should we start something we cannot finish?

'Let us ask him to go and meet his father's relatives. I will give him some money for transport. But let him go. *Walahi*! He has to leave.' (p. 19-20)

At this level, Dara is shocked at what is going on. He finds it difficult to understand what Mallam Usman has said because of his relationship with his late father. He posits:

> 'I had always assumed that Mallam Usman was my father's best friend in town. His wife only came to know my mother as a result of the two men's friendship. Now he saw me as an endless project and would not even listen to his wife's counsel!'

He had forgotten that, just a year ago, when he was broke; when his wife has a miscarriage; when her life was in danger; my father had paid all the medical bills.

I prayed silently that God should protect my life and not make me an abandoned project. (p. 20-21)

Mallam Usman speaks to Dara about the necessity of going to his father's home town where religious riots and ethnic clashes are uncommon:

He tapped me gently on the back as he began to speak. His speech was not coherent at first. 'The way things are going in this town… nobody is safe; not any more… It is sad… I mean the way things are. That is why we have found ourselves where we are today. You have seen it yourself.' […]. 'Emm… as it is now, I am sorry to say, I cannot take the risk of keeping you here. I think you will be safer at Kenta, your father's home town. At least, religious riots and ethnic clashes are uncommon down South. People speak their minds freely about a lot of issues in your part of the country. Up here we are still trying to create such awareness. Anyway, I am sure you will be safer at home.' (p. 24-25)

Mallam Usman has made the above sermon to make Dara understand that he has to go back home insofar as "There no better place than home," as the saying goes. "When he finished his confused sermon he held out a two or three five-hundred Naira notes rolled up together" (p. 25). Dara has sensed that it is the money he intends to give him for his transport, which is too far to be enough for the journey. Dara's soliloquy in this quotation is a proof of this sad fact:

I looked away from the money and stared at him in silence. Did he not know it would cost 7,000 Naira to take me home? I am sure he did. Where did he expect me to get the additional funds? What a shame! Was this not the same man who used to come to our house, laugh with father, joke with mother, eat our food, and go away smiling? I felt like snatching the notes from him and tearing them to shreds. (p. 25)

Dara rightly refuses to take the money that Mallam Usman has offered him. Instead of taking it, he has opted to struggle by himself although he is quite sure that he cannot easily raise the 7,000 Naira that he needs for his journey home. The scene where he has tried to force Dara to take the money runs as follows:

> At this point, Mallam Usman must have noticed the look of disappointment on my face. He held out the money once again, almost touching my hand. 'Have it. It will be useful.'
> I shook my head.
> 'Why are you refusing it?'
> I kept quiet.
> 'Take it,' he insisted.
> 'You will need it, sir,' I said after a pause.
> 'Need it?'
> 'Yes; for other pressing matters.'
> I saw his hand tremble. The notes almost dropped. He turned to his wife, apparently expecting her to come to his aid. It took a while before she spoke. 'Take it. He has given you?'
> 'No Ma, I don't need it.'

> Mallam Usman shrugged his shoulders and blinked his eyes like an opium taker. I looked away from his shameless face. (p. 26-27)

Chronic maltreatment, identified as "repeated episodes of maltreatment over an extended period," has been associated with more severe consequences than temporary or isolated incidents of maltreatment (L. Bromfield and D. Higgins, 2005). Child maltreatment, encompassing both physical abuse and neglect, is a globally prevalent issue observed across all nations and cultures. This phenomenon typically arises from the complex interplay of various contributing factors, such as caregiver mental health challenges, psychological distress, and limited social integration. Risk factors associated with detrimental outcomes for children exposed to violence and neglect include socioeconomic deprivation, social isolation, residence in insecure neighborhoods, etc. (H. Dubowitz and S. Bennett, 2007). Empirical evidence suggests that exposure to violence substantially elevates the propensity for suicidal ideation and behaviours among adolescent populations (B. S. Brodsky and B. Stanley, 2008). In the same vein, longitudinal research has demonstrated that encountering even a single type of maltreatment, as well as multiple types, correlates with heightened internalising and externalising behaviours during childhood and adolescence (C A. Moylan, T. S. Harrenkohl, L. Sousa, E. A. Tajima, R. C. Herrenkohl and M. J. Russo, 2010, p. 2).

The resolution of Dara's plight now depends on himself because he has to fight alone in order to raise the necessary funds for his journey home. In fact, this situation should have been avoided if his father had listened to his complaint. When Dara reported Hudu and Alli's comments about the riot to him, "including what they said about mosques and churches" (p. 33), he barely "laughed it off" (p. 33) instead of taking it seriously. He rather tells Dara: "'What do you want me to do about frivolous talk by restless youths? Can't you understand? If they say such things in your presence it simply means that our family is not their target"' (p. 33-34). Despite Dara's insistence, his father has categorically refused to listen to him:

> 'Don't count on that logic, father. There is no logic in what they can say or do; there is no one to challenge them. It is true that I am often regarded as one of them because I speak their language; but that is only until there is a crisis. When there is a crisis, a stranger is a stranger. No matter how friendly.' (p. 34)

His father's reply to his supplications is: "You may be right, Oluwadara. But God is in control. Besides, I am not politically-inclined and, in principle, my family should have nothing to fear" (p. 34). Dara has no alternative left but abide by his father's decision to make his warning commonplace. Dara ends up saying:

> Father may be right about God's unlimited powers. But I do not believe that God will come down to do things for us, especially, as we appeared to be seeing the beginning of the end. Or was it the painful end of a promising beginning; with an end in view and another beginning in the offing? I prayed I shouldn't be the end of a potentially happy marriage quietly initiated and noisily consecrated in 1914. But nobody could tell. (p. 34-35)

The depth of the emotional trauma that Dara has undergone clearly appears in this quotation: "The image of my dead father and sister ran through my mind. It was as if I was in our living room again, reliving the horrible experience" (p. 9).

Executive function skills, including self-control, problem-solving, planning, and decision-making, can be impaired in maltreated children. These abilities are crucial for academic success as they facilitate the children's ability to focus, organise their thoughts, and effectively solve problems in educational settings. Living on the street is unformal education, and children without support engage in any activity to satisfy their needs. After Dara's parents' death, his schooling has been stopped and he lived in Southern Park as an "*agbèrò*" (a luggage porter). When Dara is engaged to live as an "*agbèrò*" in a garage, he has almost run out from moral value because living on the street is dangerous, and there is no time for any good manner. The law of the strongest is the best and the strongest has power over any other subject. In *Paradise at Night,* somebody who carries loads is called *alábàárù* (a mere porter). The circumstances have forced Dara to become an *alábàárù* so as to survive, since he has lost his parents and his only sister. Later, he leaves that job to work in a garage where he serves as an *agbèrò* (someone who collect money from passengers). He is bound to do all these petty jobs in order to survive.

Violence can have a significant impact on a child's education. Children who experience violence, such as physical, emotional, and neglect, or exposure to domestic violence, may face several challenges that can hinder their educational outcomes. Here are some potential impact. Dara is not happy because being an *agbèrò* is not the career his father wanted for him. He is aware of this fact as he says: "[…] being an *agbèrò* was not the career his father wanted for me. He wanted me to go to school and acquire first-rate education from a good university. He even wanted me to be a medical doctor, although I preferred to be an engineer" (p. 45). So, he is sure that his father cannot be happy for what he is now: "Father would be unhappy in his grave about my present condition. I didn't know where his grave was. I wasn't even sure he had one. But, surely, his spirit was somewhere. That spirit would be restless and angry if I pursue this garage life and eventually graduate as a professional *agbèrò*. There and then I resolved not to betray my parents' expectations" (p. 45-46).

Chica and Mrs. Nwafor have appeared from nowhere to uncover what Dara is doing although he "had managed to dodge many a church member, including Chica Ezechukwu herself" (p. 46). Dara says: "I was taken aback when a smile lit up Chica's face. I wondered whether there anything funny about my present plight" p. 46). Fortunately, Mrs. Nwafor informs him that his uncle, Alhaji has come looking for him. The pastor has asked them to find Dara, which is a good attitude. He has gone to their church where he has met the pastor. Dara says: "This was good news of sort. It appeared the news of my parents death had eventually reached home" (p. 48). The only people who have really been anxious about Dara's safety are the Church members as the pastor says: "'Our members have all been very anxious about your safety. They will be happy to see you. Now, tell us, what would you like the church to do for you?'" (p. 53). Dara's answer is clear:

'I would like to see my uncle and my cousins. Help me to get to Kenta,' I said candidly. 'Our church has been razed three times in succession. I am conscious of the fact that efforts would be made to rebuild it; this will require sacrifices on the part of the members. My continued stay will be a source of distraction and burden on the church of God; I wouldn't like it. I need to break away from here. Honestly, I don't want anything to complete the destruction of my father's lineage. (p. 53-54)

Pastor Eze's reaction to what Dara has said shows that they determined to help him accomplish his wish: "'We shall try our best. We shall pray over it and, by God's grace; you should be on your way home in the next few days" (p. 54). Dara sys: "Pastor Eze had kept his words. It was not up to a week before my fare was raised" (p. 55). He continues:

Pastor Eze and I got to Southern Park at the crack of dawn. He paid the bus conductor and also gave me two thousand Naira as pocket money. But he did not wait for the bus to leave before he withdrew. Obviously, he did not want me to see the worries in his eyes. We both pretended as if everything was okay as he bade me safe journey. (p. 56)

Once Dara reaches Kenta, his home town, even his five-year-old cousin has noticed that there is something wrong through the way he is dressed:

Yusuf stood, hands akimbo, staring at my dress and bathroom slippers. I felt ill at ease and his look reminded me of Mother's theory: 'If you want to know how poor a man is, examine his shoes. Somebody may be able to buy a shirt or even a pair of trousers for himself. But his shoes will betray his poverty level.' (p. 62)

Although Maryam and Keji are children, they are aware of the fact that Dara needs to be protected against any other trauma. For instance, they have failed to inform Dara about his girlfriend Rachel's sickness for this sake. Keji tells Dara when he discovers the truth: "'I am sorry, Dara. We had to keep you out of another trauma; if only temporarily. It was too soon after the Borri episode'" (p. 85).

Children who have been victim of violence may withdraw from social interactions and isolate themselves from others. They may feel unsafe or fear judgment or rejection from others, leading to a reluctance to engage in social activities or form new friendships. Children who have been victim of violence might develop isolation and withdrawal as a way to protect themselves from further harm. By keeping a distance from others, they feel a sense of safety, believing that avoiding social interactions can prevent them from being hurt again. Violence can lead to a general mistrust of people, making children hesitant to form new relationships or maintain existing ones. During the days Dara lived on street at the market, he felt alone the night, isolated from people, he think about his future and in the conditions his parents are dead. It is as if his life has no more sense sometimes he feels guilty of his tragedy just as if he was born unlucky, he only thinks and imagines how his life would be to fight alone without any support (p. 41-42). Children victim of violence can disturb the normal socialisation process, impairing children's ability to form healthy attachments and develop prosocial behaviours. The violence may sever trust in authority figures and impair the development of empathy and appropriate social skills, leading to a higher propensity for engagement in criminal behaviours (R. Calam, 1987). Children often internalise and learn from their environment, including violence behaviour. This learned behaviour may normalise violence or criminality, leading to an increased likelihood of engaging in criminal activities themselves later in life (D. P. Farrington and B. C. Welsh, 2007).

The first job that Dara landed after leaving the Usmans is at the shop of Hajia Maimuna of Dualla Central Market. In Hajia Maimuna's shop, Dara doubts about his identity when she asked his name he almost said his Christian name but he realised in this time that Borri people don't like Christian name in their majority and even it is the reason his parents have been killed (p. 37). Without a firm sense of belonging to their family or community, children may experience a profound loss of identity, struggling to understand their place in the world and their own cultural background.

Loss of identity and the neglect of personal hygiene are other consequences of child abuse. The violence may involve cultural or familial norms being violated, leaving the child feeling disconnected from their cultural identity and roots. Children who are victim of violence may appear dirty or unkempt, with visible signs of poor hygiene, like greasy hair, body odor, or visible dirt on their skin and clothes. Children may wear dirty, stained, or torn clothes that are too small or

unsuitable for the weather conditions. In extreme cases, children may wear the same outfit for extended periods without anyone taking any action to ensure they have. The presence of unwashed or inappropriate clothing in cases of violence against children can indicate neglectful or violence behaviour by caretakers. Once abandoned and condemned to live on the street, Dara does not have a good care and consequently faces poor personal hygiene, and inappropriate clothing. The dialogue between Yusuf and his mother about Dara's poor dressing is very telling:

> '[…] why is he dressed like that?'
> 'I told you; he's from Borri.'
> 'I can see all is not well with people from Borri?'
> 'That is not it.'
> 'Then what is the reason? Why is he dressed like a beggar if all is well? Is that the way they dress over there?'
> 'No, there is a crisis there.'
> 'A crisis? What is a crisis?'
> 'A fight.' […].
> 'That is a bad fight. Besides, must you wear rags after a fight?'
> 'He lost his parents in the crisis.'
> 'So, if a boy loses his parents, he must wear rags?'
> 'Yes, if he doesn't have anybody to buy new clothes for him.' (p. 63-65)

The above quotation shows that Dara is dressed like a beggar as a consequence of the killing of his parents. There is nobody else to take care of him in Borri.

2. The Multifaceted Dimension of Violence against Children in the Novel

Violence against children takes a number of forms in the novel. Children maltreatment refers to any form of violence or neglect that occurs to children below the age of 18. It can take various forms, including physical, emotional, sexual violence, and neglect. Here are some information on each form. The first one is physical violence which involves the intentional use of physical force that may result in injury, pain, or harm to the children. It can include hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, or any form of physical violence. Physical violence against children is a distressing form of children maltreatment that involves the intentional use of force against children with the potential to cause injury or harm. This can hinder the children's ability to form secure, healthy relationships in the future and impact their overall development. It interfere with children's normal development. Without appropriate intervention, the cycle of violence can continue, creating a hostile and dangerous environment for the children. Intervention and support services are crucial to breaking this cycle and ensuring the children's safety.

At times, the circumstances of life can disrupt each individual's plans. In *Paradise at Night*, the protagonist, Dara, enjoys a comfortable life with his parents. However, a group of false Muslims led by Mallam Rimi arrives to change everything for him. Even though Dara is only sixteen, he finds himself sleeping outdoors. Consequently, he is destined to become a street child, facing increasingly difficult living conditions. Through Dara's struggles, the author highlights the repercussions that religious conflicts can bring (M. Sidi Chabi, 2020, p. 91). O. K. Sulaiman (2016, p. 92 as cited by M. Sidi Chabi, 2020, p. 91) denounces the extent of religious conflicts in Africa as follows: "Religious conflicts remain an issue which is ruining the African continent… Parents have lost their children and children have also lost their parents. No country will develop with this kind of situation." This quotation unveils the impact of religious conflicts on people.

It is illegal in most jurisdictions, and professionals who encounter or suspect physical violence have a legal and ethical obligation to report it to children protective services. Timely reporting can initiate investigations, assessments, and interventions to protect the children's well-being and provide necessary support services. This violence that the Bangbalas inflicted to their son in 2009: "Something memorable happened in 2009. That was the day when the Bangbalas beat their son silly; so much that the poor boy bled for hours. In the end they had to rush him to hospital" (p. 83). Rachel is then right when she says: "Dara, shall we beat our children like that when we grow up?" (p. 83). Dara answers in the negative, and Rachel goes on to add: "I thought as much. We shall not beat our children like aninmals" (p. 83).

Another form of violence which prevails in the novel is emotional violence. This form of violence includes behaviours that harm children's emotional well-being. It can involve constant criticism, humiliation, intimidation, or emotional neglect. It can involve constant criticism, rejection, humiliation, or the withholding of love and support. Emotional violence against children is a form of violence that involves the persistent negative emotional treatment, manipulation, or rejection by a caregiver. It can have severe psychological and emotional consequences on a child. Dara thinks when he grows up, he will go back to Borri. He pretends that he could not forget his parents. So, he would like to go there and hold counter-rallies because he wanted to teach them to live in peace and eschew violence. Dara says: "I had run away from a burning church in the North and must now face a jaunty mosque in the South" (p. 62). Dara compares the South to the North and plans to go back to the North when he grows up. He has made it clear in the conversation he has had with Keji, his cousin:

> 'Sure. I have not had this kind of opportunity for some time. There are rocks in the North; but none of them is like Olumo. None shares its historical relevance. Besides, because life is associated with violence over there, I often fell

fed up. However, when I grow up I'll go back to the North.'
'I beg your pardon? Did I hear you say you'll go back to the place that ate up your parents?'
'Yes.'
'That's unreasonable, Dara. Alhaji will not even allow you. He has said it. None of us will be allowed. He said we should just forget everything about Borri.'
'But I can't forget. I can never forget my parents. I'd like to go there and hold counter-rallies.'
'Counter-rallies? What is that supposed to be?
'I want to teach the people to live in peace and eschew violence.' (p. 67-68)

Keji's advice to his cousin, Dara, is very wise: "'Since you were lucky to come out alive from the lion's den; I don't think you should go back there. You may not be lucky the second time" (p. 69-70). The main reason why Dara should not go back to Borri is embedded in the following quotation:

According to Alhaji, it was difficult to bind three yams because the binding would imply one of the tubers leaning on the others. Moreover, binding three yams was not as difficult as binding three eggs. In his opinion Rabbenia was an amalgam of three different cultures, which were as delicate as fresh eggs. If you tended to them properly they would survive and prosper. But, if you bottled them up, they would choke and blow up in your face. He believed we'd bottled up our treasure eggs for too long. They were now choking and ready to explode." (p. 69)

All this aims to make Dara understand that they cannot promote peace in Borri town because it is too late to do so.

Neglected children may also be exposed to hazardous or unsafe environments that can increase the risk of accidents or injuries. The absence of consistent care, support, and attention can lead to feelings of abandonment. In this stage Dara who considered Mallam Usman as his only hope was neglected as a useless person. He says: "I'm sorry to say I cannot take the risk of keeping you here I think you will be safe in Kenta your father's home town" (p. 25). The decision that Usman has taken hurt Dara, because he did not expect this from his father's close friend. As a result, he has opted to live and work on the street.

Discrimination, bias, and social exclusion can contribute to a higher risk of violence or neglect. Religious riots and Cultural or language barriers may also limit their ability to seek help or access support services. In Borri town, Mallam Rimi is one of the people who discriminate against the people who are different from them in terms of religious belief. He brainwashes people with his words. He said only foolish people will allow strangers to direct their affairs" (p. 31).

Their reliance on caretakers or support systems can create power imbalances, making them more susceptible to exploitation. It can also stem from historical factors, such as previous violence or trauma experienced by the children. Past violence can contribute to emotional or psychological vulnerabilities that make children more susceptible to further violence in the future.

Children living and working on the streets often face extremely challenging conditions. They lack stable housing, proper nutrition, and access to education and healthcare. These children are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and violence. Their daily lives involve engaging in various forms of labor, such as begging, scavenging, or unformal jobs, just to survive. They may also struggle with emotional and psychological issues due to their difficult circumstances. The lack of stable housing significantly increases the vulnerability of children to violence. Without a safe and secure place to live, children are more likely to be exposed to various forms of exploitation, neglect, and violence. They may end up in overcrowded or unsafe environments, making them easy targets for predators. Additionally, the absence of stable housing often leads to a lack of supervision and protection for children. In *Paradise at Night*, "Dara lives at Dualla Central Market in old abandoned vehicles, and he is exploited by Hajia Maimuna to work in her shop" (p. 39-40).

Children's vulnerability to violence exacerbated by the circumstance surrounding life on the street. This physical vulnerability can make them an easy target for violence, as their weakened state might prevent them from defending themselves effectively. This can hinder their capacity to seek help or express their experiences. This might lead to increased irritability or withdrawal, making it challenging to identify signs of violence or neglect. Wicked people might exploit a children's dependency on them for sustenance. They may use food or money as a tool for manipulation, coercion, or control, forcing the children to endure abusive situations to meet their basic needs.

Children living and working on the street are subjected to physical violence and they lack access to education, they may not be aware of their rights or what constitutes violence. Without proper education, they might not recognise violence behaviour or understand how to seek help. Education empowers children to make informed decisions and advocate for their well-being. Children who are not in school may be socially isolated, which can make them more vulnerable to violence. "After Dara's parents death he has not attended school any more. He feels isolated and wanders in the park in order to find what to eat" (p. 46). Children victim of violence who have miss out on education might struggle

to find stable employment and break free from poverty, by living and working on the street increase their vulnerability. Children without access to education and healthcare may go unnoticed by authorities or support systems.

3. Means of Prevention to Reduce the Scope of Violence against Children

Religious organisations can provide assistance to help children who are victim of violence by offering emotional support, counseling, and creating safe spaces. They may also collaborate with social services and mental health professionals to ensure the children's well-being. It is important for religious institutions to prioritise the children's safety and follow legal and ethical guidelines when addressing violence cases. Religion can bring emotional support which is crucial for children who have experienced violence, as it can help them heal and develop resilience. Research suggests that a nurturing and empathetic environment, along with therapy and counseling, can aid in their recovery.

Although the scale of this issue is significant, tackling violence against children is not a priority for international organisations and governments, resulting in limited funding (Y. R. Shawar & J. Shiffman, 2021, p. 414). Providing a safe space for them to express their feelings and concerns can contribute to their emotional well-being. It is important to involve professionals who specialise in trauma and child psychology to ensure appropriate care and support. People should encourage the children to talk about their experiences and be compassionate and non-judgmental listeners. They should allow them to share their feelings and thoughts at their own pace. They should assure the children that they are safe now and that you are there to protect them. It is essential to involve professionals such as therapists, counselors, or social workers who are trained to deal with violence cases on children. They can provide specialised support and therapy (UNICEF, 2014).

Children thrive on routine, help them establish a stable daily routine, which can provide a sense of security and predictability. Offer physical affection like hugs (if the children is comfortable), and provide comfort through soothing words and gestures. Let them know they are loved. Teach the children about their rights and boundaries. Help them understand what acceptable behaviour is and what is not. Empower them to say 'No' when necessary. Dara's father is the general overseer of the Church in Borri. When the crisis has occurred, the Church is not aware of the situation at first. But when they have eventually have heard about it, the church members have initiated search for Dara to help him get out of this painful situation.

When they have found Dara, Pastor Eze explains to him how things are during his adventure on the street and he asks him to tell them what he would like the Church to do for him. His ambition is to get to Kenta, the native village of his father; then, Pastor Eze and other members of the Church, such as Elder John and Deacones Bolade have supported his idea and make him the promise that they will try their best. "Pastor Eze and the Church members have kept their words, and they have given some money to Dara in order to help him travel to Kenta where he thinks he will be in safety" (p. 53-56).

Adults should never blame or disgrace children for whatever happens. Instead, they should focus on the actions of the abuser and tell the children that it is not their fault. Adults should encourage children to maintain or build a support network of trusted friends and family members who can provide emotional support. They should keep an eye on the children's emotional and physical well-being. They should provide a protective environment, safe spaces can also be platforms for educating children about personal boundaries, consent, and how to recognise and report inappropriate behaviour. Collaborating with community organisations, law enforcement, and child protective services can create a network that addresses violence against children comprehensively. Providing emotional and family support to prevent on violence against children is crucial for their well-being and recovery. When children disclose violence, adults should listen attentively without interrupting.

Adults should maintain a calm and composed demeanor to avoid further distressing the children. Their reaction can influence the children's willingness to share. They should ensure the children's immediate safety if necessary. If they are in immediate danger, adults should contact the authorities or children's protective services. They should not blame or judge the children; instead, they should focus on the children's well-being and safety. They should tailor their communication to the children's age and understanding because younger children may need simpler explanations. The primary goal is to prevent violence against children from occurring in the first place. This involves education and awareness campaigns, teaching parents and caregivers about healthy parenting practices, and providing resources and support for families in need. Recognising signs of violence against children is crucial for ensuring children's safety, common signs may include unexplained injuries, changes in behaviour, withdrawal, fear of certain individuals, or a sudden decline in academic performance.

In cases where violence is substantiated, legal action may be taken against the perpetrator. This can involve criminal charges, restraining orders, or removal of parental rights, depending on the severity of the violence. Establishing a support network for children who have been victim of violence is essential. This may involve extended family, teachers, friends, or mentors who can provide a safe and nurturing environment. These centers often exist to provide a safe, children-

friendly space for interviews and medical examinations to address violence against children. Education programs should inform individuals about the various forms of violence. Understanding these categories is essential for recognising violence behaviours, training and awareness efforts should teach people how to recognise signs of violence against children. These signs can include physical injuries, changes in behaviour, withdrawal, aggression, depression, or fear of certain individuals. It is crucial to educate the public about how and where to report suspected children victim of violence. From a human right perspective, children are entitled to be treated with respect, dignity and protected from any form of violence and harm the perpetrated by society.

Protecting orphan children from any form of violence is a moral and societal responsibility that extends beyond immediate family. Extended family members, as well as the community at large, should actively work together to ensure the safety and well-being of orphaned children. This can involve reporting any signs of violence, providing emotional support, and advocating for their rights. Ultimately, it takes a collective effort to create a safe and nurturing environment for orphaned children. Orphaned children often face emotional challenges due to the loss of their parents. Extended family members can provide a stable and loving environment, offering emotional support, reassurance, and a sense of belonging. This support helps in their psychological well-being and resilience against potential violence. Extended family members can provide emotional stability and a sense of belonging to orphaned children. This can help mitigate the trauma of losing parents.

Disagreements within the extended family about how to raise the children can lead to emotional turmoil for the children, depending on the family dynamics, support might be inconsistent, which can lead to feelings of insecurity in the children. Orphaned children may feel pressured to conform to family expectations, potentially stifling their individuality and aspirations. Some family members may have negative influences on the children, such as substance violence issues or violence behaviour, open and honest communication among family members is vital. Discussing roles, responsibilities, and expectations can help avoid conflicts. Always prioritise the children's well-being and best interests when making decisions about their care, depending on the jurisdiction, legal issues may arise when determining custody and guardianship for orphaned children. It is essential to understand and comply with local laws.

Extended family members should ensure the physical safety of orphaned children by providing a secure home environment. Dara was homeless in Borri after his parents' death. To honour his brother, Alhaji went to Borri when he heard the news of Dara's parents' death with the aim to take his nephew home and protect him from violence (p. 48). Dara needs somebody who has the means to provide for his basic needs, including food, clothing, education, and healthcare. As far as his education, Dara's uncle has a good plan for him because his father does not want a breach in his education and his uncle promises him to sustain this wish. He says: "We shall buy an admission form from Tamedo High School so that you can resume with them in September" (p. 72).

Living with the extended family can provide a stable environment, reducing the disruptions in the children's life that can occur when placed in foster care or institutions, they can help maintain the children's connection to their cultural and familial heritage, which is vital for children's sense of identity, they may be better equipped to support a children's education, both financially and with the time and attention needed for homework and school activities. Interacting with a wider circle of family members can aid in the children's social and emotional development, helping them build relationships and develop social skills. A strong extended family network can help protect orphaned children from potential exploitation or violence.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored existing frameworks and strategies for preventing violence, ranging from individual-level interventions to broader societal initiatives. Violence against children is a persistent issue that demands urgent attention. This study has provided valuable insights into its causes, consequences, and prevention strategies. Violence against children is a deeply troubling issue that poses significant risks to the well-being and development of children. Tunji Ogundimu draws people's attention to the bitterness set to children through his novel, *Paradise at Night*. This work has explored various aspects of violence against children, including its causes, consequences and preventive measures. The methodological approaches that I have applied to the study of violence against children is documentary research. By analysing the root causes of violence on against children from this novel such as religious or ethnic conflicts and societal factors, it becomes possible to develop targeted interventions and preventive strategies. Prevention is crucial in combatting violence against children. By promoting a comprehensive understanding and taking proactive measures, we can work towards creating a safer and more nurturing environment for all children, free from the devastating consequences of violence.

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