

Parental Negligence, Trauma and Resilience in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path*

Okolie, Lucy Louis
Department of English,
Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria.
Okolielauren@gmail.com
+2348080838106
&
Monica Udoette
Department of English,
Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria.
Msudoette@yahoo.com
+2348038021551

Abstract

There have been concerns that parental negligence has paved way for the sexual molestation of the girl-child in most families and, this has been represented in some African literary works. However, these representations have been limited to attitudes and actions of parents alone in the upbringing of children. This paper, through an assessment of Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk this Path*, interrogates explicit effects of absentee and insensitive parenthood on the psyche of the girl-child and how the longings for parental care approximates to the desire for sisterhood bonding. The paper adopts a qualitative research method and relies on textual analysis of some loci points in the novel relevant to Cathy Caruth's Trauma theory. A close reading of the text reveals that sisterhood-bonding and relations are viable mechanisms in coping and recovering from the trauma of parental negligence. The paper concludes that although the actions and inactions of the members of the family might give rise to situations which could adversely affect the girl-child's psyche, redeeming opportunities do exist through sisterhood and the solace it brings.

Keywords: Children and Trauma, Parental Negligence in Literature, Sisterhood and Bonding, Sexual Victimization, Yejide Kilanko.

How to Cite this Paper: Okolie, L. & Udoette, M. (2024). "Parental Negligence, Trauma and Resilience in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path*." Planeyo Journal of Arts and Humanities. Maiden Edition. Volume 1, Number 1, 135-159.

Okolie, L. and Udoette, M.

Introduction

The family is the building block of society and prides itself as the first institution the child is exposed to. It is the primary agent of socialisation which is vested with the responsibility of bringing up and catering for the child. This is where the child learns to discover his/her abilities, strengths and weaknesses. Usually, the family is expected to provide warmth, love and support to the child. All these are only made possible through ties and relationships between the child and other members of the family. These relationships go a long way in shaping the psyche of the child. According to Charles Zubrick, relationships within the family are associated with members' well-being, particularly for children (Zubrick, 1965, p.3). Suffice to say, therefore, that the importance and relevance of the family in child-raising cannot be underestimated. Therefore, whatever experience the child faces in the family tends to shape his/her psyche and worldview. Hence, the onerous task of members of the family becomes an attempt at being cautious in utterances, treatments and actions to the children as these mostly constitute their psychological make-up and account for their behaviour later on.

Discussions around the girl-child are one of contemporary society's construct. The girl-child was one of the twelve crucial areas of concern raised in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. It concluded in nine strategic objectives framed as a means of holding governments accountable for the welfare of the girl-child (Adeleke, 2012, p.21). This critical welfare includes protection from physical and sexual exploitation, eradication of discrimination in the field of

education and increased awareness on the struggles being faced by girls today. Governments all around the world have devised various educational, economic, political and social policies to adequately better the lot of the girl-child and one can categorically admit that life for the girl-child is steadily improving. The newly elevated status of importance conferred on the girl-child dismantles the erstwhile status quo of her dehumanising condition(s) in the society. However, in spite of these measures on the part of the government, many girls are still subjected to horrific experiences and discriminations which take place right within the home. These experiences range from sexual abuse by brothers, cousins, domestic staff and even (step) fathers in some cases, discrimination in home chores among others.

Overtime, the representation of the family relations and children in works of art has been the preoccupation of most writers both in Africa and the diaspora. These writers are Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Chinua Achebe, Amma Darko, Jude Dibia and Yejide Kilanko, among others. While exploring socio-political themes, these writers showcase the relationships prevalent between older family members and children. These projections portray the successes or failures of the family unit in their responsibilities to the child. The failure on the part of the family, in most cases, cause the children to live in deteriorating and dehumanising conditions even as they are exposed to all forms of molestations (physical and sexual) which they either struggle to recover from or never completely recover from. In the same vein, most researchers have sought to investigate family relations and its adverse effects on the girl-child. Researchers like Naomi Nkealah and Grace Okereke understudy these issues from the viewpoint of cruel step-

Okolie, L and Udoette, M.

parents and step-siblings as the cogwheel of the girl-child. As enlightening as these researches have been, they have not effectively captured the menace of absentee and insensitive parenthood which is also a core factor responsible for the neglect of the needs of the girl-child.

However, against the backdrop of Trauma theory, this paper examines Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* with a special focus on the effects of absentee and insensitive parenting on the psyche of the girl-child and also examines the survival strategies like female bonding and socio-political involvement open to the debilitating girl-child as she combats the forces responsible for her oppression within the family and society at large.

Theoretical Framework: Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory

Trauma theory is an active and interdisciplinary theory that has its roots on psychoanalytic theory. The word "trauma" is derived from the Greek word 'tpawa' meaning 'wound' and it has increasingly been applied to psychological wounds as far back as the 19th century although it is still used in its original form in medical discourses. As a field of study, the theory developed in the 1980s and helped to explain and explore the complexities of relationships during violence or violent acts. It has its roots in the early works of Sigmund Freud, who explored the concept of trauma in his studies on psychoanalysis. Freud's ideas on traumatic experiences laid the foundation for understanding how repressed memories and experiences can impact mental health. The theory further gained prominence after World War II when the psychological effects of war and the Holocaust became evident. Psychologists and psychiatrists like Anna Freud, John Bowlby and Erik Erikson studied the impact of trauma on children and adults. In the 1970s, feminist scholars

and social scientists expanded trauma theory to consider the effects of sexual and domestic violence on women. They also examined how cultural, racial and societal factors influence the experience and perception of trauma.

Prominent proponents of this theory include; Judith Herman, who authored the book *Trauma and Recovery*, emphasising the importance of understanding complex post-traumatic stress disorders and the role of social support in healing; Shoshana Felman who examined how trauma is represented and understood in literature and culture, particularly in the context of the Holocaust; and Cathy Caruth, whose work is based on the inherent difficulty of fully comprehending traumatic experiences within the concept of ‘traumatic realism’ in literature and testimonies of survivors. Caruth’s work has had significant influences on the fields of literature, psychology, and cultural studies, particularly in the context of understanding how trauma is represented and experienced.

Basically, the traditional model of critical trauma theory by Cathy Caruth centres on the idea that trauma is an event or experience that cannot be fully understood or integrated at the time it occurs. It draws attention to the severity of suffering by suggesting the traumatic experience and the irrevocable damage of the psyche. Her definition of trauma can be found in her influential book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) where she asserts:

Trauma is not locatable in the simple, violent or original event in any simple way. What is complex about traumatic experience is that it is not experienced at the same time as an event, but rather as an ordeal, not necessarily, or not only, as a physical assault, but as a crisis that throws the subject into a state of emergency where the very structure of ordinary language and the ordinary frames of reality cannot function. And it is from within this crisis state that the structure of a belated or ‘afterwards’ in others words, of the event is first experienced (Caruth, 1996, p.4).

Okolie, L. and Udoette, M.

This definition underscores the notion that trauma is not a straightforward event but rather a complex experience that disrupts the usual processes of perception, memory, and understanding, leading to its delayed and often involuntary return in the survivor's consciousness.

Caruth asserts that “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature. . . the way it is precisely not known in the first instance . . . returns to haunt the survivor later on” (Caruth, 1996, p.4). Caruth's classic trauma model utilises psychoanalytical referents for a literary criticism that establishes claims about the repressive, repetitive, and dissociative nature of trauma. The innate causality between trauma and dissociation, the idea that an extreme experience directly produces a dissociative consciousness wherein the truth of the past is hidden, supports Caruth's claims that history functions the same as trauma insofar that “history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (Caruth, 1996, p.18).

Caruth insists that “trauma is never simply one's own” (Caruth, 1996, p.24), and as such her position creates connections between the traumatised individual, society, and the historical past. The claim that trauma “is not known in the first instance” and that trauma “returns to haunt the survivor later on” conceptualises the psychological dimensions of trauma and the range of traumatic experiences and responses. Hence, trauma theory examines literature based on the experiences of the characters in literary texts and subsequent effects on their psyche and personality as a whole.

In essence, Caruth's model of trauma highlights the complex ways in which traumatic events are remembered and relived, often without the individual's conscious control, and how language and narrative play a crucial role in attempting to make sense of these experiences. It explores the psychological and emotional impact of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities. This theory can be applied to the study of child abuse and trauma in the sense that it incorporates challenges of representation, long-term effects, repetition, delayed disclosure and silences. In fact, Caruth's position that "trauma can be re-experienced in various ways such as flashbacks and nightmares" (Caruth, 1996, p.103) is in tandem with the possibility of abuse victims experiencing intrusive and distressing memories or flashbacks of the abuse; the memories resurfacing unexpectedly, disrupting the survivor's daily life.

Apparently, trauma is a psychological term explaining an experience so overwhelming that it transcends the victim's ability to consciously comprehend it at the time of its occurrence. This supports Caruth's assertion that "traumatic memories appear in repetitive, intrusive forms of visualisation of trauma scenes, nightmares or associated effect" (Caruth, 1996, p.11). From the above, it is equally evident that traumatic memories are not just affected by subsequent experiences, they are re-experienced without change and it is "... more than the simple illness of wound that cries out, that address us in attempt to tell us of the reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth, 1996, p.5). It therefore becomes apparent that trauma is encapsulated in emotional events like rape, abuse, accident and death.

Okolie, L and Udoette, M.

By using Caruth's trauma theory, scholars and researchers can better understand the experiences of child victims of sexual abuse who have endured violence and violent actions and have developed trauma as a result. This study, therefore, examines trauma as an external stressor to individual characters while underpinning the experiences of child victims in the Nigerian community, their struggle for survival and the traumatic wounds of such struggles condition in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path*.

Child Sexual Abuse and Victimisation in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path*

Child sexual abuse and victimisation and its traumatic consequences are pressing issues that continue to plague societies worldwide. Frank W. Putnam defines childhood sexual abuse as “a complex life experience, not a diagnosis or a disorder” (Putnam, 2003, p. 269). He further adds that:

An array of sexual activities is covered by the term Child Sexual Abuse [CSA]. These include intercourse, attempted intercourse, oral-genital contact, fondling of genitals directly or through clothing, exhibitionism or exposing children to adult sexual activity or pornography and the use of these children for prostitution or pornography (Putnam, 2003, p. 269).

Thus, any involvement of a child in any of the above sexual activities by an adult, adolescent, or another child is sexual abuse. Also, the diversity of these forms of abuse ensures that there will be a resultant range of outcomes. In line with the above, Putnam asserts that:

The age and gender of a child, the age and gender of the perpetrator, the nature of the relationship between the child and the perpetrator and the number, frequency, and duration of the abuse experiences all appear to influence some outcome (Putnam, 2003, p. 269).

The implication therefore is that as a result of these varieties and conditions of abuse, the resultant traumatic effect on the child victim would roughly separate them from their innocence and plunge them into a dark world of trauma.

According to Angela Browne and David Finkelhor's *Impact of Child Abuse: A Review of Research*, "only two studies have looked at children's trauma as a function of the parental reaction" (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986, p.75). Although the above statistics appear inadequate, it is indicative of the web of silences and gaps in the wide discourse of parental reaction and childhood trauma. Parental negligence would most likely cause suffering for the child. Thus, acceptance and validation are crucial to the psychological and physical survival of the child. It is from this acceptance and bonding that the resilience needed to overcome the trauma would emerge.

The number of child victims of sexual abuse and violence, as recorded by Olasunkanmi Akoni & Vivian Ahueze in *Vanguard News*, is on the rapid rise. According to their research, about 2588 children have been abused sexually in Lagos between August 2022 and July 2023. This issue has aroused the interest of many creative writers to produce literary works and papers that depict the extent of trauma and effects of the traumatic violence on the victims. Many scholars in various disciplines, including psychology, sociology and psychiatry, have written on the traumatic influences of child sexual abuse and rape, but this paper centers on parental negligence, trauma and resilience in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters who walk this Path* to reveal the influence of violence

Okolie, L. and Udoette, M.

on the child victims, the role of parents or elders in reducing or alleviating the impact of the violence on the child victims and to show various survival strategies deployed by the survivors.

Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* signals a new era in the writings of African women and a fresh reaction to the menace of child sexual abuse and victimisation in African society. Recently, public attention has been drawn to the troubling issues that affect the lives of women and girls such as forced and child-marriage, domestic violence and sexual abuse. Kilanko's novel centralises rape (child sexual abuse in particular) a subject often rushed in the African society for fear of stigmatisation. As cited by Ifeyinwa Ogbazi and Uche Amah, the novel is reflective of the "intricacies of the feminine existence, the pains induced by men and the limitations or rules set by the patriarchal society (which sets the tone for the) socio-cultural ordeals and emotional traumas encountered by the female characters" (Ogbazi and Amah, 2021, p.47).

It is worth noting that rape and child sexual abuse on the girl-child spurs from gender violence and sexist beliefs by perpetrators and abusers who are influenced by their sense of power and domination as males in the society and ultimately from their inability to control their urge for sexual gratification. Citing Matlin, Margaret Nutsukpo defines rape as:

a sexual penetration – without the individuals consent obtained – by force or by threat of physical harm, or when the victim is incapable of giving consent. . . a broader term, sexual assault, includes sexual touching and other forms of unwanted sexual contact which may be accompanied by physical threats (Nutsukpo, 2018, p.65).

Maggie Wykes and Kristy Welsh further adds that rape is a fundamentally wrong action that lies in the "sheer use and objectification of a person" (Wykes and Welsh, 2009, p.114). Clearly, rape

victims experience traumatic pain that affect every part of their lives negatively. This, perhaps justifies Margaret Nutsukpo euphemism for 'rape' as 'Child Sexual Abuse', an expression coined with the intent of cushioning the gravity of the act and its impact on child victims (Nutsukpo, 2018, p.66). Child sexual abuse is portrayed as a cruel action against children by the very persons who should be protecting their interest such as family, friends, neighbours and others to whom they are entrusted as exemplified in the characters of Morayo and Morenike in the novel.

Furthermore, Morayo's case is what Nutsukpo terms as 'intra-familial sexual abuse' in the sense that the abuse is perpetrated by a family member, Tayo, her first cousin whom she calls "Bros T". Interestingly, Bros T was sent to live with Morayo's family to benefit from the influence and guidance of a father figure after the death of his father, as Aunty Tope puts it; "he needs the firm hand of a man to guide him" (Kilanko, 2012, p.38). However, in the Ajani household, the expected guidance is practically nonexistent or overlooked as Bros T exhibits a plethora of immoral behaviours such as stealing, lying, peeping on Aunty Adunni while she bathes, forcing his way into the room of a female student he likes, drinking and even hosting parties in the absence of his guardians. Unfortunately, Morayo's parents miss all the red flags: the spying incident; inappropriate encouragement of his younger cousins to sit on his laps; his jealous rages on sighting Morayo with any male friend from school; barging into Morayo's room without knocking in order to catch her undress; all of which Morayo innocently deems as 'mistakes' (Kilanko, 2012, p.65) considering his status as her brother.

Okolie, L. and Udoette, M.

The parents of Morayo are described as “rarely home” in view of the fact that the father is “a pharmaceutical salesman and often travelled while mummy had her tailor shop . . . she did not come back until late in the evening” (Kilanko, 2012, p.2). The reader is introduced to a family of absentee parenthood where the upbringing of Morayo and Eniayo, her sister, rests upon the shoulders of the maid Adunni who in turn was “usually busy with house chores and was more than happy to have us out of her way” (Kilanko, 2012, p.2). With the absence of adults and their attention, the girls are left to wander the streets with their friends. It is no wonder then that the girls relish the infrequent moments they get to spend with their parents.

The love and affection which Morayo craved from her father is the reason why she would usually pretend to have a stomach ache “just so Daddy would put his warm lips on my stomach” and softly whisper the words he called “incantations” (Kilanko, 2012, p.10). This re-echoes the importance of the presence and attention of parents in the home rather than leaving child-raising to maids who are usually too preoccupied with chores to care about the children. Morayo is seen constantly craving for love and affection, which is why she thinks no evil of it when Bros T begins to shower her with all them.

According to Ogbazi and Amah, rape is an incidence of sexual aggression that results in traumatic experiences and severe negative consequences as exemplified in the character of Morayo. Thus:

Although the reactions of victims are many and diverse depending on the nature of the attack they are subjected to, almost all women who have been raped report that they were terrified, repulsed, confused, overwhelmed, and anxious during the time

they were being raped’ (and) some also feel detachment from their own body. (Ogbazi and Amah, 2021, p.48).

The sexual victimisation Morayo suffers is also identified as ‘child-on-child’ sexual abuse because both victim and abuser are adolescents. This is in contrast to the acquaintance rape Morenike experiences. Morenike's father's friend, Chief Komolafe, a rich business man and this supposedly "outstanding citizen” is the perpetrator who disrupts and almost destroys Morenike's life in this case.

The Physical and Psychological Impact of Childhood Trauma in Yejide Kilanko’s

Daughters Who Walk This Path

As earlier stated, rape and child sexual abuse have been adjudged to have adverse and negative impact on the physical, psychological and emotional development of a child. In which case, such traumatic events could have both immediate and long-term consequences like unwanted pregnancy; dropping out of school; societal stigma and shame; low self-esteem; mood swings; suicidal attempts; depression; sleep disorders; uncontrolled anger; panic attacks; post-traumatic stress disorder “a debilitating psychological syndrome that involves detailed reliving of the traumatic event” (Bates, et. al., 2005, pp.358 - 359). Morayo and Morenike’s sexual victimisation leave them both with deep scars that affect their lives physically and psychologically. On one hand, Morayo starts feeling suicidal and the panic attacks become frequent. Bros T’s rape on Morayo was constant and repetitive, thus causing her sense of safety and security at home to vanish. This is in line with Judith Herman’s concerns that:

Repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality. The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation; she must

Okolie, L and Udoette, M.

find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are terrifyingly unpredictable and power in a situation of helplessness. Unable to care for or protect herself, she must compensate for the failures of adult care and protection with the only means at her disposal, an immature system of psychological defenses (Herman, 1992, p.96).

Morayo's trauma triggers depression and constant migraines. She recounts, "there were many days when every part of my body felt too heavy to move, when lifting an arm or a leg in the morning was painful" (Kilanko, 2012, p.94). These depressing feelings are made worse due to her parents' inability to confront the situation and talk to her about it and she is pushed into attempting suicide by taking an overdose of pain killers, thus:

Seeing the medicine bottle on the table, I suddenly wondered what it would feel like to empty the entire bottle in my mouth. As soon as the thought came, my body became rigid... When I stayed awake in my room at night, I often wondered what it would feel like floating around free...Tilting my head back, I emptied half the bottle of Panadol Extra into my mouth (Kilanko, 2012, pp. 99-100).

From the text, Kilanko offers copious instances of Morayo battling trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, particularly the intrusive flashbacks and nightmares threatening Morayo's intimacy with her husband, Kachi. These experiences agree with Caruth's position that "traumatic memories appear in the repetitive, intrusive forms of visualisation of trauma scene, nightmares or associated effects" (Caruth, 1996, p.11). Thus, traumatic memories are re-experienced without change as a result of a number of triggers.

Morenike, on the other hand, is just as deeply scarred as Morayo. Longing to go back to her life before the rape incidence, Morenike falls into traumatic hallucinations. Describing this, a perceptive Morayo says "Morenike often had a faraway look in her eyes as if her mind was somewhere while her body was still" (Kilanko, 2012, p.56). Unlike Morayo, Morenike's abuse

adversely transforms her attitude to a grumpy personality accompanied by incessant mood swings and thus suits Bates' observation that victims may become “unmarriageable members of household and hence, further victimized” (Bates, et. al., 2005, p.358).

According to Kufre Akpan and Isongugo Akpan in their exploration of the cultural trauma on rape victims, “some of the reasons rapists get away with the horrifying act is because victims and their parents, especially mothers, fear the stigmatisation and inevitable blame for not giving her daughter proper upbringing” (Akpan and Akpan, 2022, p.32). This is the case with Chief Komolaye who, after traumatising Morenike, admonishes the mother to “teach her wayward daughter how to keep her legs together” (Kilanko, 2012, p.120). Morenike, deeply traumatised by the unwanted pregnancy and the denial of responsibility by Chief Komolaye, finds it hard to sleep at night wondering when she could see her brother again (Kilanko, 2012, p.124). These instances therefore justify the assumption that trauma, through acquaintance rape, leaves deeper psychological scars on the victim and is usually characterised by abandonment and what Ann Kaplan aptly describes it as “family trauma” (Kaplan, 2005, p.19).

Parental Absence, Negligence and Silence in Yejide Kilanko’s *Daughters Who Walk This Path*

Basically, the topic of sex is often suppressed in African homes due to a complex interplay of cultural, religious and societal factors. In many African societies, traditional values and conservative beliefs place strong emphasis on modesty and privacy. Religion also plays a significant role, as many Africans adhere to conservative religious beliefs that promote abstinence before marriage and modesty in all aspects of life. Furthermore, societal norms and expectations

Okolie, L. and Udoette, M.

often discourage open conversations about sex, and this can lead to a lack of comprehensive sex education which may result in misconceptions and inadequate knowledge about sexual health and relationships.

The foregoing cultural matrixes and religious interplay create an enabling environment where silences are encouraged in matters of sex and taboos apportioned to defaulters. As a result, conversations on topics of sex between parents and children are guarded zones of caution breeding a deeper disconnect in their relationship. The assumption then is that the child would somehow grow to become knowledgeable about such matters. Herein lies the faulty precept that exonerates parents of blame and justifies the need for parents take up protective and supportive roles in the lives of their children.

The novel equally brings to the fore the insensitive nature of Morayo's parents as they bring into the house their cousin Bro T, a notorious pervert, who peeps at Aunty Adunni while the latter is in the shower, slapped his school's principal and got expelled, steals and lies unabatedly to cover up his tracks, to live with them. The reader is stunned that amidst all these vices, Bro T is made to live in the flat with two teenage girls rather than being moved to the boys' quarters to ensure the safety of the girls. This is done with hopes that he would change, but as Adunni notes: "Character is like smoke... that boy's character will eventually rise to the surface" (Kilanko, 2012, p.31).

Hence, Bros T's "character" comes to the fore when he sexually molests twelve years old Morayo and threatens to hurt Eniayo, her younger sister, if she reports him. Interestingly, Morayo's parents are careless enough to leave Bros T alone with a sick Morayo overnight while everyone else travels

to Ilorin for a wedding. It is the same night that he abuses and rapes her. At this point in the novel, the author interrogates the attitude of parents, mothers especially, who blindly trust male relatives around their female children, forgetting that evil could occur right in the home front as Morayo laments:

We were often told that evil is that one toothed stepmother whose food we are never to eat . . . the no-good stranger lurking in the market place waiting patiently for a chance to steal little children away from distracted care givers. . . but no one told us that **sometimes evil is found much closer to home, and that those who want to harm us can have the most soothing and familiar of voices** (Kilanko, 2012, p.23).

In addition, through the character of Bisoye, Morayo's mother, the insensitive nature of some mothers is brought to the fore. Bisoye seems oblivious of the changes in Morayo after the rape, pregnancy, eventual miscarriage, how withdrawn she has come to be, and her avoidance of Bros T who was erstwhile her favourite person in the house. In the words of Morayo, "during those months, I kept waiting for Mummy to notice something different about me. A different way of walking. A new scent. Has she not said that she could smell a boy's touch on me?" (Kilanko, 2012, p.76).

As a result of the strained relationship and lack of proper communication between mother and daughter, Morayo is unable to let anyone know about what she is passing through. She is particularly angry with her mother for her inability to see her predicament and her trust for her parents diminishes. On a particular occasion, Morayo ignores Bros T's call to help search for something in his room, she is scolded by her mother who orders her to attend to him. This leads to

Okolie, L. and Udoette, M.

another bout of abuse after which he boasts “so you think you can escape me?” (Kilanko, 2012, p.80).

This seemingly oblivious push from the mum into the centre of repeated abuse further deepens her isolation and hopelessness. Unfortunately, Bros T’s abuse continues until Morayo becomes pregnant and goes through a painful miscarriage alone, both unnoticed by her parents and other family members. Significantly, she is totally unaware of the implications of these happenings in her life. Morayo is shocked and disappointed that after her revelation of Tayo’s assault; her mother’s first concern is about what her husband would do to Tayo. She expresses her disappointment thus;

She should have been worried about me! She should have been coming after me! . . . I kept staring at the door. I waited for Mummy. I was sure she would come and look for me. Finally, just before dawn, I fell asleep on the floor beside Eniayo’s bed. When I woke up, I was alone in the room. I soon found out that Mummy and Daddy had left the house during the night with Bros T in tow (Kilanko, 2012, p.88-89).

Unfortunately, the culture of silence surrounding any form of rape, and the guilt of exposing their child to this sort of abuse also result in silence on the part of Morayo’s parent which does more harm than good on Morayo’s end. In the text, Morayo’s mother, Bisoye, does not educate her daughter on sex issues and gives no room for any discussion on sexual feelings, describing it as “nonsense talk” (Kilanko, 2012, p. 54) and sternly warns her to “focus on (her) books and to behave like the well-brought “up child” she was (Kilanko, 2012, p.54). Morayo is left to whatever understanding she has about boy-girl relationships and what she is told by her peers who have had more experience than she had. The only sex education she receives from her mother is that a boy’s

touch would get her pregnant. Thus, “If you let a boy touch any part of your body, I will find out. I will smell it on you and I will know” (Kilanko, 2012, p.48).

It appears that Bisoye’s threats does not correspond with the appropriate dose of parental care. In contrast, African American literature’s projection of motherhood and the Black Matriarch as a sacrificial symbol is more progressive than Bisoye’s role in her children’s life. According to Monica Udoette, “Black matriarchs are known to manage the affairs of the home and restore order and sanity to the dysfunctional space” (Udoette, 2017, p.71). She further adds that a black matriarch “exhibits a good degree of control over many aspects of life ranging from . . . family, socio-economic and interpersonal relationship (Udoette, 2017, p.71). These observable qualities point to the negligence and parental culpability in Kilanko’s *Daughters Who Walk This Path*.

The Solace of Sisterhood in Yejide Kilanko’s *Daughters Who Walk This Path*

Christiana Rosetti in “Goblin Market” duly asserts:

For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather
To cheer one on the tedious way
To lift one if one totters down
To strengthen whilst one stand. . . (Rosetti, 1893, p.4).

The excerpt above emphasises the blood and love prevalent in sisterhood. The sisterhood motif is one that has been explored by a number of writers from Williams Shakespeare to Jane Austen, Alice Walker and even recent/contemporary writers like Mariama Ba, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and of course, Yejide Kilanko, who through their literary dexterity, have taken us on odysseys involving women bonding and helping each other. As different as their representations of these

Okolie, L. and Udoette, M.

have been, most of these writers share one ideology in common which is the belief that sisterhood is a viable tool for combating the forces oppression. These authors rethink women's relationships to the social order in their works.

With her depiction of sisterhood, Yejide Kilanko brings to the fore the twenty-first century representation of women in Nigeria, their experiences, effects, and how they eventually hold hands to ensure their survival and eventual victory. Donna Bailey, in her review of *Daughters who walk this Path*, describes these sisterhood bonds as one which is “emblematic of African women” (Bailey, 2024, p.2).

Kilanko dismantles the structure of absentee and insensitive parenting and tactically replaces it with women who take up the parenting mantle, fight each other's battles and struggle for survival under the harsh forces of patriarchy. She presents two major sisterhood relations between Morayo, Eniayo and Morenikeji, respectively, with a special focus on female bonding as therapy for solace, compassion and support for traumatic victims. Kilanko's text conforms to Monica Udoette's assertion that “It is believed that the struggle for women's liberation can be easily championed by the formation of female friends and allies” (Udoette, 2019, p.68). Therefore, female bonding is aptly foregrounded as a mechanism through which female characters can negotiate their way through the cruel forces of trauma while charting the path of resilience.

The first sisterhood bond the author presents is the relationship between Morayo and Eniayo whose birth was surrounded by a lot of controversies as a result of her albinism. This seemingly birth

defect plagues her entire life creating an inferior identity complex. Morayo, therefore, takes up the role of constantly defending of her sister from bullies who specialise in taunting her and this in turn boosts her sister's self-esteem when she begins to second guess herself. Morayo since the conception of her younger sister had always begged her mother: "Please, can you make sure it's a girl?" (Kilanko, 2012, p.11).

Therefore, in spite of the fact that everyone in the family, especially Iya Agba, is disillusioned by the birth of an albino, Morayo's love for her sister is expressly visible. From playing together in the rain to contacting chicken-pox from each other, their love blossomed. Morayo would endure the molestations of Bros T as long as it keeps Eniayo safe, but when she begins to notice Bros T's unhealthy closeness with Eniayo, she defies the threat, puts everything on the line and breaks the silence in order to protect her sister from having to go through what she experienced.

Also, through the relationship between Morayo and her cousin, Morenikeji, the author rethinks the bond and solace of sisterhood as defying age, same parenting, intellectuality and other factors. *Daughters Who Walk This Path* is not for this reason entirely a voyeuristic excursion into the disturbed mind of an abused woman. Instead, Kilanko makes the question of Morayo's survival the organising principle of the novel. Morayo goes through life confused about where and how to find healing and love. When the moment of truth comes and Morayo understands she has to face up to her past, she is not alone, there is Morenikeji. The aftermath of Morayo's abuse is debilitating, especially in a culture of silence. Morayo's parents walk on eggshells after

Okolie, L. and Udoette, M.

discovering her secret burden but no one actually listens to her. It is only when Aunty Morenikeji provides an understanding ear that Morayo begins to find a way to put her fragmented heart together. This relationship underscores the necessity of a safe place for abuse survivors and charts the path for healing to begin.

Furthermore, as Morenike becomes Morayo's haven and confidant, a true friendship and sisterhood blossoms, and the two are nearly inseparable. She teaches Morayo to come out of her shell and become actively participatory in politics through the campaign of Mr. Tiamiyu, where Morayo gets acquainted with the complex and politically charged situation of her country. This is in conformity to Ogundipe-Leslie's "Stiwanism" which advocates the involvement and participation of women in the socio-political affairs of their country. All of these sociopolitical activities add up to boost her self-esteem and elevate her from the status quo as she would get a chance to make a difference in her society alongside her male counterparts. Morenikeji, who is strong and fierce, is portrayed as staring danger in the face and unflinching, holds her grounds with the "Operation Finish Them" officers who dehumanise and try to arrest her. Like a hawk, she watches over Morayo which translates to the strength Morayo equally extends to Eniayo.

Sisterhood thus becomes a structure set up by the victimised characters to ensure their survival and assert their essence by taking the place of the absentee and insensitive parents to mentor their younger ones. As Morenike mentors Morayo, she instills in the latter the ideal qualities to enable her pass on the legacy to Eniayo (Morayo's younger sister) and even newly born Anuli (Morayo's daughter). In a sense, Kilanko's novel shows us why it is not enough to keep telling stories about

how women hurt and then turn against themselves. She shows us why the political capital in these kinds of stories and their real narrative beauty lie in the possibility that these women can find recovery through their own courage, through the support of other women, through friendships, community and love.

Conclusion

In *Daughters Who Walk This Path*, Yejide Kilanko intricately weaves a narrative that explores trauma, parental negligence, and the resilience required to overcome these adversities. Through Morayo's journey, the novel vividly portrays the devastating impact of trauma and the silence that often surrounds it. This paper, therefore, presents the prominence of the role of family relationships in the upbringing of the child. Literature has proved to be a viable tool for showcasing family relationships and its adverse effects on the (girl) child. In *Daughters Who Walk This Path*, the author portrays how the relationship between parents, siblings and the girl-child can contribute to her psychological make-up. Through the characters of Morayo and Morenikeji, the reader is presented with the story of survivors who have had firsthand experiences of sexual abuse and molestation within the same families that should have been spaces for their protection. However, Kilanko does not merely dwell on the pain; she offers a path toward healing and resilience through Morayo's eventual confrontation with her past and her commitment to breaking cycles of silence and shame. The paper, therefore, showcases the trauma which they have to battle as the aftermath of this abuse and concludes that female bonding and political participation are practical mechanisms for combating this trauma. The novel does not only proffer hope of redemption to the survivors through sisterhood relations but sheds light on the lasting scars of parental negligence

Okolie, L. and Udoette, M.

and trauma; offering a blueprint for resilience, while urging readers to create spaces where pain can be discussed, shame dismantled and resilience nurtured.

References

Adeleke, R. (2012). *The Family, the Government and the Girl-Child*. Heinemann.

Akoni, O. & Ahueze, V. (2023). "2588 Children Sexually Abused in Lagos-Govt." *Vanguard*. Accessed, 28th October, 2024 at www.vanguardngr.com.

Akpan, K. & Akpan, I. (2022). "Cultural Matrixes, Trauma, and Female Voices in Yejide Kilanko's Novels". *Voices: A Journal of English Studies*. 7(3), 29-38.

Bailey, Donna. "Review of Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path*." *Project Muse*. Accessed, 18th June, 2024 at <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=sum>.

Bates, U. U., et. al. (2005). *Women's Realities, Women's Choices: An Introduction to Women's Studies*. Oxford University Press, 3rd Edition.

Browne, A. & Finkelhor, D. (1986) "Impact of Child Abuse: A Review of Research". *Psychological Bulletin*. 9 (1), 66-77.

Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. John Hopkins University Press.

Dodhy, S. (2017). "The Phenomenon of Intrusive Thoughts in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters who Walk this Path*". *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*. 8 (5), 99-102.

Herman-Lewis, J. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books.

Kaplan, A. (2005). *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. Rutgers University Press.

Kilanko, Y. (2012). *Daughters Who Walk this Path*. Kachifo Limited.

Matlin, M. W. (2004). *The Psychology of Women*. Wadsworth.

Planeyo Journal of Arts and Humanities (PLANJAH). Maiden Edition. Volume 1, Number 1, 2024.

Nkealah, N. (2006). "Conceptualizing Feminism(s) in Africa: The Challenges Facing African Women Writers and Critics". *English Academy Review*, 133-141.

Nutsukpo, M. (2018). "Sexism and Sexual Victimization in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters who Walk this Path*". *International Journal of Advanced Scientific Research in Humanities, Legal Studies and International Relations*, 3 (3), 62-72.

Ogbazi, I. & Amah, U. C. (2021). "Rape and Identity in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters who Walk this Path*". *Interdisciplinary Journal of African & Asian Studies*. 7 (2), 47-53.

Okereke, G. (2011). "Wanted Parents: Understanding Child Upbringing through Contextual Family Therapy". *Journal of Family Studies*. 9(1), 43-64.

Putnam, F.W. (2003). "Ten-Year Research Update Review: Child Sexual Abuse". *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 42 (3), 269-278.

Rosetti, C. (1893). *Goblin Market*. Macmillan.

Udoette, M. (2019). "The Dynamics of Female Bonding and Liberation in Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols*". *AFRREV LALIGENS: An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies*. 8 (1), 65-72.

Udoette, Monica. (2017). "Dysfunctionality and Arrearage in Terry McMillian's *A Day Late and a Dollar Short*". *AKSUJEL: A Journal of the Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University*. 2, 68-77.

Wykes, M. & Welsh, K. (2009). *Violence, Gender and Justice*. Sage Publications Page.

Zubrick, C. (1965). *Children, the Family and the Society*. Pearson.