



The Predicaments of Women in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path*

By:

ANGELA NGOZI DICK

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES, VERITAS UNIVERSITY ABUJA

Corresponding author: angelaphilips125@gmail.com

Abstract

Women are faced with formidable burden in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path*. These predicaments manifest as rape, male dominance and patriarchy portrayed through Morayo and Morenike who are the protagonists of the story. Each of these predicaments have effects on the victims and the society. The theory used in this research is eclectic. It was found out that men in the novel do not address the perpetrators who assault the women just because they are men. This researcher urges women to continue to shield their girl children from every man until they are old to practice emotional intelligence.

Keywords:

Rape, sexual assault, patriarchy, depression



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Introduction

Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* is a novel that portrays what women suffer while growing up in Nigeria. These two women Morayo and Morenike adapt themselves to achieve through the actions of their mothers who do not want their children to perish because of patriarchy. By sending twelve-year-old Morenike to live with her grandmother when her pregnancy came out, she is saved from censure and trauma of the rape by Chief Komolafe her father's friend. *Daughters Who Walk This Path* presents to readers a tortuous path of growing up and being a woman in Nigeria. The problems of rape and sexual assault, the dominance of patriarchy and the unending societal inequality between the sexes tends to increase the ravaging sexual assault on women.

Rape and Sexual Assault

According to Savino and Turvey, "rape or sexual assault will be defined as non-consensual sexual penetration." (1). According to the American Psychological Association (APA), rape is the non-consensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration of an individual by another person with a part of the body or an object, using force or threats of bodily harm or taking advantage of the individual's inability to give or deny consent. Rape is a forceful penetration of a more powerful male into the vaginal body of a powerless female.

The first mention of rape in the novel is the sexual assault of Morayo at the age of twelve years when her cousin, Brother Tayo popularly called 'Bros T', comes to stay with her family due to his recklessness at school. Although he is sent to a reformation institute through the efforts of Morayo's father he became the enemy of the courtyard (p.46). He displays sexual antics which Morayo's mother does not comprehend for example, Bros T reports Morayo to her mother whenever there are boys in the compound so as to prevent her from associating with the boys (p.61). He also starts to invade her private space and gets more physically

casual with her, going as far as making her sit on his lap and grazing her breasts (p.64). This is all confusing for Morayo as she regards him as an older brother.

Unfortunately, taking the opportunity of the parent's absence, Bros T sneaks into Morayo's room while drunk and rapes her. Furthermore, she is threatened into silence out of fear for her sister, Eniayo. This part of the text serves to support the notion that the perpetrators of sexual violence and assault are often domestically related to the victims. This is regarded as domestic violence and according to the UN WOMEN, it is the most common form of violence experienced globally (34). In the case of Morayo, the abuse continues constantly and it is made easy for Bros T as both the perpetrator and victim live in the same house. Morayo is constantly threatened into silence. Afraid of Eniayo, her younger sister being violated, Morayo finally finds the courage to tell her parents leading to the immediate expulsion of Bros T from the household. However, the damage has already been done and it has left a long-standing effect on the female victim.

The second female character to suffer rape and sexual assault is Morayo's aunt, Auntie Morenike. Auntie Morenike's story forms part two of the novel. In her case, she was a victim of the immunity given to men in power in the Nigerian society. She is preyed on and raped by Chief Komolafe, whom she and her family regard as a second father. He rapes her on her way to secondary school and the act unfortunately leads to an unwanted pregnancy. Auntie Morenike's mother, Mama Ibeji, upon hearing the news confronts Chief Komolafe in his office and throws insults at him. Chief Komolafe however, uses his high position in society as well as his friendship with Morenike's father to deny the accusations and escape justice. Morenike's father believes Chief Komolafe. Morenike and her mother became liars and immediately Morenike is disowned by her father. She drops out of school and goes to stay with her maternal grandmother in Omu for the duration of her pregnancy (p.122).

During Morenike's stay in Omu, she continuously felt pain and hatred for her circumstances. Furthermore, she had been cut off from her family, the only form of support she had. All these lead to her being tempted to curse the father of her child during the birth, however, she is stopped by her grandmother who forbids her from cursing what is part of her. Morenike is vindicated of lies when her son comes out looking a perfect copy of Chief Komolafe. Meanwhile, Chief Komolafe has no son to perpetuate his polygamous home so he comes to claim his son with a retinue of relatives. UNWOMEN no doubt contend that Gender Based Violence is shrouded in a culture of silence and thrives because of the high premium placed on patriarchy and harmful social norms entrenched in the society (36).

Morayo tells Aunty Morenike: "Aunty, nobody understands how much it hurts." And to which Aunty Morenike whispers a response "Morayo, I do." (*Daughters who walk this path* p.101- 102). In Amma Darko's *Faceless* where an innocent and young Baby T is raped by Onko, a male character that is known as a kind and generous figure to all the young children in the compound (*Faceless*,139). It is these young girls who remember and bear the pain of the burden. Bros T goes on to be successful and start up his own family. This goes to show how unpunishable the perpetrators are. In contrast, female victims bear the stigma of being raped and also face harsh criticism in society with attendant psychological bash.

Rape and Depression

The most immediate physical effect of rape is the risk of getting pregnant by the victim. Oyetade Elizabeth Modupe's article on rape scores that the first and most common physical effect of rape found in women is pregnancy. Most victims of rape and sexual assault are often left with painful reminders of the crime and can either choose to raise the child or abort it. Unfortunately, there is often no choice allowed for women who live in countries where abortion is illegal. In the novel, as a result of Bros T's carelessness and irresponsibility,

Morayo ends up being pregnant much to her dismay. She rejects Bros T's pills because she doubts his intentions and believes he is trying to kill her instead (*Daughters who walk this path* p. 83). Nevertheless, a minor accident makes Morayo suffer a natural miscarriage.

Aunty Morenike is resentful about her circumstances at first but she grows to love her son, Damilare, despite the painful circumstances that led to his birth. Despite her love for Damilare and the acceptance of her faith, society still criticises her for being a single mother. Her depressive mood left her to whisper instead of talking. Another effect of rape and sexual assault is depression and suicidal thoughts. According to WHO, "Depressive disorder (also known as depression) is a common mental disorder. It involves a depressed mood or loss of pleasure or interest in activities for long periods of time. The organisation also states that depression is 50% more common in women than men. Morayo's mother was reticent but she sends Eniola to a boarding school in an effort to separate her from Morayo who falls into a state of depression and she complains to herself:

"In the months that followed, I lived a double life. At school I pasted a happy smile on my face and pretended that everything was okay . . . Even when I turned away from their gaze, I could not escape the shame that followed me around like a bad smell. 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" (*Daughters who walk this path* pp. 93-94).

Morayo's depression quickly made way for suicidal thoughts: "These thoughts had started soon after Aunty Adunni left. When I stayed awake in my room at night, I often wondered what it would feel like not to be trapped in this heavy body but floating free" (p. 99). These thoughts lead her to take her life by swallowing half a bottle of Panadol Extra (p.100). She does not die.

Besides depression, another negative effect of rape as revealed in the text is increased sexual activity. After Morayo's admission into the university, she becomes sexually free and often finds herself in multiple heterosexual relationships. "Children who are assaulted may show increased sexual activity or sexuality for their age, and this is often a clue that something out of the ordinary has occurred" (Neelam p.1).

Through the character of Morayo, the author portrays how the behaviour and mind-set of victims of sexual assault change drastically in order to overcome the trauma of sexual assault. These women in a way to escape the trauma and gain some kind of control over their reproductive rights tend to cause lethal damage in their lives.

Male Dominance and Patriarchy

According to the *Population Media Centre*, patriarchy is a social system that has historically given primary power and privilege to men in various aspects of society, including politics, economics, and culture. The influence of patriarchy extends to many aspects of modern life, contributing to disparities in education, employment opportunities and income between the sexes. It also plays a role in normalizing gender-based violence and controlling women's reproductive rights. Men gain from genderization because rulership in human community depends on men (Dick p.138).

The domination of patriarchy in homes and households in the African society makes the father an autocratic figure whose words must be heard and obeyed. His judgements are final and the wife has to submit to his will. This further highlights how gender inequality works in a traditional African household. This is portrayed after Morayo reveals how Bros T's continues to rape her. Morayo's mother immediately starts to beg her husband for mercy for her nephew rather than Bros T's apologising to Morayo. She does not comfort her now traumatised daughter. Her mother is consumed more about the wrath of her husband rather

than her daughter's pain. "In that moment, my anger towards Mummy re-ignited. She should have been worried about me! She should have been coming after me!" (*Daughters who walk this path* p.84).

This inequality in the household is also shown in the house of Auntie Morenike after her father discovers she is pregnant. He does not hesitate to disown and chase her away from the house despite disapproval from his wife. He then makes Mama Ibeji, Auntie Morenike's mother, choose between losing her home or her daughter: "Woman, listen. Shut up and leave me alone, or leave with your daughter. It is your choice." (p. 120). In *A Good Name* (2021), Yejide Kilanko creates female characters that could not break the hold of the society on women. Two of the female characters die in diaspora when the hold on gender could not be disentangled (p.292; p.359).

Another female character who suffers under the oppressiveness of patriarchy is Sister Bose. During Morayo's short-lived stay with Sister Bose, it is revealed that Sister Bose's husband had been sleeping with the house help called Abundance. Instead of confronting her husband about his infidelity, she is pushed to chase away all-female presence around him to prevent a repeat of his actions (p. 230).

Towards the end of the novel, Morayo is now married, pregnant and working in a bank. Female officers are encouraged to visit hotels and night clubs to attract rich customers to the bank (p. 285). This leads to Morayo being pressured by her boss, Mr. Idris, to get a highly important client by the alias "Mr. Philips" which ended up being Bros T. She successfully overpowers him but she falls on the staircase as she leaves his house. Bros T rushes her to hospital where Kachi, Morayo's husband beats him up. He was saved by a combination of the guards in the hospital.

Conclusion

The predicament of women in the society is enormous. Yejide Kilanko has created characters who are sexually assaulted but through the actions of their mothers they still attained good education and self-independence. Morayo studied to become a banker while Morenike becomes a university lecturer. The traitor lives in the courtyard and continues to assault the victim until she reveals what has happened. The action of the fathers and the society do not tend to scare the perpetrator away but the victim has to live above sexual assault, get education and skill to equip her to live a good moral life as Morayo and Morenike have done.

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