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## EDITORIAL NOTE

The *Ethiopia Journal of English, Literary, and Cultural Studies* (ISSN: 0795-5413) is an interdisciplinary journal that explores topical and generative issues in English linguistics and in literary and cultural studies. We recognise that African humanities research is both problem-based and knowledge oriented, and our aim is to provide a platform for scholars to analyse and theorise Africa in a way that is generative, conversational and decolonial. Specifically, the journal focuses on both the analytical and theoretical approaches to knowledge production in the context of Africa and the Global South. We want to curate papers that are hinged on African indigenous paradigms and approaches or that seek to extend, reimagine, or contextualise current theoretical or analytical approaches in English language studies and in literary and cultural studies.

We invite papers that dwell on all aspects of English language studies, including phonetics/phonology, semantics, syntax, discourse analysis, pragmatics, stylistics, ESL, ESP etc. We also welcome papers that theorise literary and cultural texts, including film, still and moving images, music and dance, photographs, cultural objects, spaces and places, society and social formations, and other relevant corpora. While we accept purely analytical essays, we encourage authors to focus on theorising the texts or data they engage with. In particular, we welcome theoretical conversations that implicate postcolonial subjecthood, ecocritical approaches (especially postcolonial ecocriticism), feminism and gender studies, new trends in linguistics, object-oriented criticism and approaches, and other generative approaches to knowledge production. Authors are encouraged to do original theorisation rather than adopt extant theoretical frameworks. They may also extend the scope of extant theories and approaches based on the material they present and discuss.

Furthermore, papers with interdisciplinary approaches are also welcomed. We recognise that knowledge production is an elastic phenomenon, and that bright ideas might implicate various fields. Interesting multi-modal, eclectic, or collaborative research is encouraged in this journal.

## JOURNAL POLICY

The *Ethiopia Journal of English, Literary and Cultural Studies* is published biennially by the Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. All papers submitted to this maiden edition of the journal had undergone double-blind peer review and published papers are well researched, original and data-driven.

Contributors are to submit an e-copy of their manuscript for assessment and publication to [ethiopejournal@delsu.edu.ng](mailto:ethiopejournal@delsu.edu.ng) or [ethiopejournal@gmail.com](mailto:ethiopejournal@gmail.com). Such manuscripts should be original and not under consideration for publication elsewhere and should not have been published in any other journal.

Submitted manuscript which should not exceed 7000 words should be typeset in MS Word Times New Roman Font 12, with double line spacing. The first page should include the title of the manuscript, name(s), and institutional affiliation/address, abstract (not more than 250 words and with not more than six keywords). Manuscripts should conform to the current APA or MLA style sheet. Author(s) of published papers will derive the benefits from peer-review of contributions by seasoned scholars, global visibility and receipt of hard copies as well as soft copies of their papers.

The twelve papers in this maiden edition of the journal cut across disciplines in cultural, media studies and sub-disciplines in English and literary studies. The contributors include seasoned and renowned scholars of international repute and young astute scholars with burning desire to excel in academics. The first article titled: “Folklore and African Poetry in the Age of Globalization” by Prof Ojaide is on cultural studies. Prof. Ojaide is a renowned poet and professor of international repute from the University of North Carolina, USA. It is pertinent to note that the contributors are from universities across the globe. We believe that the twelve articles will be of immense interest to researchers and students.

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## FATHER-ABSENTEEISM AND DISPLACEMENT IN KAINE AGARY'S *YELLOW-YELLOW* AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *ZIKORA*

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### Abstract

Single-parenthood is a global phenomenon that has been of interest to scholars from different disciplines. Literary scholars have also probed into the idea due to its impact on the lives of children and young adults. However, this theme has not been widely interrogated through the theoretical lens of feminism. This study takes a look at how the literary creation of some third-generation Nigerian female novelists has explored this social phenomenon. Through a radical feminist reading the article adopts the qualitative analytical methodology to interrogate Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Zikora* (2020) and concludes that they explore the theme of father-absence and single-motherhood in ways that differ from that of previous-generation of female novelists. Here, the focus is on the development of the girl child and how the absence affects their life choices. By doing this, they use their characters as agency in espousing radical feminists' sensibilities that are slightly different from how previous generations engaged the concept in their works.

**Keywords:** Absent father, Single parenthood, Agary, Zikora, Adichie, Displacement.

### Introduction

The Nigerian literary culture is a buzzing one, thematising a wide range of ideas and issues by both male and female writers. Of the plethora of ideas

thematised in their literary expressions, single motherhood, which is a result of father-absence, has not been properly examined. As much as themes of single-motherhood have featured generously in Nigerian literature, academic papers examining them are few across literary scholarship. This essay paves the way for a more intentional academic analysis of father-absence and single motherhood in Nigerian literature. From time immemorial, not only has the society been classified into economic structures, but it has also been organised on gender borders. These gender borders have resulted in structures that seem to dictate the role of a particular gender. These roles are expressed in what Judith Butler (1999) describes as the performativity of gender and argues that gender and gender roles are social performances that one puts on in day-to-day life, the hegemonic versions of which underlay popular conceptions of “man”/“masculine” and “woman”/“feminine”. The implication of roles being assigned to gender is that men's and women's participation in the development of their children is unique and crucial. The absence of any parent – male or female – in a heterosexual family creates a void that affects the lives of children in multiple ways. East et al. (2006) aver that each parent has a unique role in the psychological, social, educational, gender role and career development of his or her children.

According to Stephen and Udisi (2016, p.1), a single parent is a parent, not living with a spouse or partner, who has most of the day-to-day responsibilities in raising the child or children. Towing a similar line, Ali and Soomar, (2019, p.2) define single-parenthood as a parent either father or mother alone practising and taking responsibility for nurturing children in the absence of another parent. Evidently, single-parenthood can be either male-headed (single-fatherhood) or female-headed (single-motherhood). A female-headed single-parenthood leads to the idea of the absent father. Father-absence is a difficult term to conceptualise. Different scholars (Boothroyd and Perrett, 2006; Mancini, 2010; Nock and Einolf, 2008; Langa, 2014; McLanahan and Sandefur, 2009) among others have attempted to define the term. Boothroyd and Perrett (2006) describe father-absence as a concept used to refer to a situation where a child grows up in a household without his biological father. This may be the case where the father and the mother are separated or have not lived together from the start. Barber and Eccles (1992), Silverstein and Auerbach (1999), Spruijt et al. (2001), all postulate that father-absence is a nebulous term because all parents are absent or apart from their children sometimes. It is also a term that is seldom defined in the literary space. Jensen et al. (1989) and Phares

(1993) opine that because of the lack of definitional clarity, the term 'father-absence' can encompass a range of circumstances, including having a father who is non-existent in one's life, lost through death, divorced, absent through work commitments, absent from the family residence due to incarceration or institutionalisation, or physically present yet absent due to disinterest or neglect.

Furthermore, East et al. (2006) aver that the lack of clarity around the term 'father-absence' means that contact between a father and child could refer to contact being non-existent, weekly, monthly, and so forth. From the foregoing positions by different scholars, it is apparent that the ambiguity of the term is contingent on the unspecificity of the cause of absence. According to Richter et al. (2012), being raised in a father-absent home requires numerous adjustments on the part of the family. The absence of the father figure in the home creates a void in the structure of the home, requiring the mother to function in a dual capacity. The psychological effects of being raised without a father-figure are reportedly debilitating for children and young adults throughout their lifespan. Furthermore, girls may become promiscuous in an attempt to seek emotional attachment from different partners to compensate for the lack of, yet longed-for, experience from their absent parent with the hope that these men could provide them with the safety and assurance that they lacked from their fathers (Gladys, 2020). This essay examines how the absence of the father-figure affects the protagonists: Sikora in Adichie's *Zikora* and Zilayefa in Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*.

### **Radical Feminism at a Glance**

This study is tailored after radical feminism, a social theory which interrogates the cause of the social imbalances and seeks to tackle them. Vukoičić (2013, p.35) defines radical feminism as "a feminist theory that starts from the idea of conflict between the sexes as a fundamental conflict, and oppression against women as a direct implication of patriarchy". Lorber (1997, p.16), avers that radical feminists theoretical watchword is patriarchy, or men's pervasive oppression and exploitation of women, which can be found wherever women and men are in contact with each other. Patriarchy is most prominent in the family, while it also thrives in all spheres of society. Radical feminists identify marriage as a patriarchal institution since it treats women as the private property of men. This wave of feminism differs from other types in the way it sees and interprets the root cause of female subjugation in society. The theory is based on the fact that

gender inequality is the foundation of all other inequalities and oppression. To address this imbalance is to attack the system on which it is built – patriarchy. At its core, radical feminism is of the view that society should be reordered in a way that patriarchy is abolished. In Nigeria, patriarchal structures allow men to dominate women, leading to objectification of women. This creates an environment where men can leave homes without effects, resulting in father-absence and single-motherhood. Sikora (*Zikora*) and Zilayefa (*Yellow-Yellow*) not only challenge patriarchal standards by taking charge of their own empowerment but they also actively work to dismantle patriarchy. Radical feminists claim that by changing the gender structure as a whole, women's oppression will vanish.

Adichie and Agary have in their texts not merely explored themes related to gender and society but have, through the lens of radical feminism, emphasized the need for fundamental societal change to address gender-based oppression viz-a-viz characterisation and storytelling techniques. It is on the premise that the female protagonists in the novels are examined as their characterisation aligns with radical feminist objectives.

### **Empirical Review**

Nadaswaran (2011) carries out an exegetical analysis of family relationships in third-generation female Nigerian writings, taking into focus Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Unoma Azuah's *Sky High Flames* (2005), Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* (2007) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), which she juxtaposes with works of the previous generation female writers such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emencheta, Mariama Ba, et. al. It argues against the tradition of the previous generation(s) of female writers whose works, although espouse feminist sensibilities, portray their female characters as appendages attached to their male counterparts. While Nadaswaran engages family relations along the lines of female characters fighting against a patriarchal system, and simultaneously exploring the concept of the "absent-mother", Chukwumah (2011) explores the theme of father-displacement in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* along political, cultural, biological and environmental lines. The rationale for this is understandable as the novel is set in the Niger-Delta, a region in Nigeria that is almost synonymous with ecological issues. While Nadaswaran locates her research within the womanist theory, which is a trend of the feminist theory, Chukwumah, (2011) locates his within the Freudian psychoanalytical dream theory. Furthermore, Kekeghe (2014) reflects womanist characteristics of fluidity,

Self-definition and agency, in depicting the rise of the young Nigerian female character. He locates his study of Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* (2007) within the womanist theory expounded by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Alice Walker. His study is crucial to this essay as it is one of the few essays that deal with the idea of a wounded mindscape in inter-gender relationships. However, his study leaves some questions unanswered as it does not adequately explain the effects which father-displacement and single-motherhood have on (female) children and young adults and how that void created by the absence of the father influences them even as they navigate their way in a patriarchal system. Other scholars, such as Egbedi (2020), interrogates Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* as a feminist bildungsroman. Egbedi (2020, p.1) argues that "Agary adopts the German Bildungsroman form to question the socio-political challenges of her time". Her study is unique in the sense that it explores the text from a perspective only a few scholars have viewed it.

### **The Absent Father in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Zikora***

Adichie's *Zikora* is a story that explores the development of the protagonist from a child to an adult faced with the challenges of heterosexual relationships. Adichie makes extensive use of the flashback technique as she presents Zikora's childhood and the wind of challenges that puts a strain on the relationship with her father that should have blossomed. Her mother, unable to give birth to a male child, is resigned to welcoming a second wife for her husband. The absent father first begins as a distant figure, with divided attention, considering that he has two wives and their children to satisfy. Then it gradually dissipates into an unfulfilled longing from Zikora. Adichie captures the event of the final exit of Zikora's father and the response of her mother, a response that reveals the fear of single parenting and foreshadows what is to come to her:

My father decided to move in with Aunt Nwanneka to set Ugonna right. "He needs to see me every morning when he wakes up. Boys can so easily go wrong, girls don't go wrong," he told my mother. I remembered that afternoon in drawnout, static images: my father blurting out the words... and my mother staring at him, her body so rigid and still. Later, she stood at the top of the stairs, in my father's way, as he tried to go downstairs.

She reached out and pushed him backward, and he, surprised, tottered. "This is not what we agreed!" she shouted. She was a different person, shaken, splintered, and she held on to the railings as though she might fall. My father left anyway (*Zikora*, pp.89-90).

What is striking from the excerpt above is the patriarchal ideology of the father and his unfounded conclusion that boys need more care, words that depict favouritism and preference. The devastating effect of such a conclusion surfaces in the person of Zikora as the story progresses. Adichie's radical feminist posture is first revealed at this point. The response of Zikora's mother is an expression of the resistance that the radical feminists who question the hegemony of institutionalized gender discrimination and segregation attempt to introduce. Zikora's mother, for the first time stands off against the man, with an understanding of the negative effects the absence of the man would have on herself and her only daughter. This reaction presents a dynamics that was not found in the feminist writings and concerns of earlier generations who were a more submissive group that represented their characters as women that accepted all that was thrown at them in the society without question. This is in spite of the fact that these first generation writers were also feminist authors, although they present feminism in a more liberal and accommodating manner.

Adichie establishes that father-displacement as a social condition of absenteeism is possible by a mere emotional distance between father and child that creates a void that is not filled by occasional physical presence alone. She describes the gradual disintegration that sets in and the inevitable absence that cuts through the bond that would have grown and existed between father and daughter: "Slowly, things thawed, and my mother accepted that he would no longer come home to us, that we were now the family who would merely be visited. She began to hang her newest dresses in his wardrobe, which was almost empty, a few of his unloved shirts hanging there" (*Zikora*, p.91).

It has been stated in the preceding paragraphs that girls who are made to contend with early absence of their father are prone to emotional challenges and an uncontrollable desire and longing for emotional safety, assurance and care from men who are not their fathers. Zikora, a victim of an absent father, whose absence although not absolute like death, finds solace in a Ghanaian man, Kwame who shows her love which she had lost in

her childhood. Like most girls, the absence of a father has a psychological effect on the protagonist as she struggles with building sustainable romantic relationships with the opposite sex. Zikora is a 39-year-old lady, who is still single. This revelation by Adichie is a clear indication of the negative impact of an absent father on the female child, one of which is the struggle to have a life partner as a result of the betrayal of trust that lingers from childhood to adulthood. What is most striking is that even at 39, Zikora is unable to find a love relationship that progresses into a lasting union. Kwame with whom she felt she enjoys all the expressions of perfection and true love in a man, abandons her as soon as he hears that she is pregnant. This experience of rejection and abandonment creates an unavoidable psychological effect on the single mothers. They are left overwhelmed with the prospects of having to beget and take care of a child without the aid of a partner and the act of abandonment that ensues:

Each time I called, I felt newly surprised at the burr-burr-burr of his phone ringing unanswered. How could he have turned, and so quickly? I knew him well, but I could not have known him well. He ignored my calls and texts, and sent back my apartment key in an envelope, the lone metal key wrapped in plain paper (p.40).

Zikora becomes a lady in dilemma who at her age, has not gone through the processes of learning and maturation necessary to understand a love that is genuine and differentiate it from one that is masked. However, Adichie throws a subtle shade at the system and structures of patriarchy that has normalized absenteeism and reveals a generation of women who are no longer bound by the desire to be defined by having husbands. The lack of proper training on abandoned daughters in turn produces a vicious circle, where absent fathers have become a norm in the society, passed on to children. Zikora's son is abandoned by his father even as a foetus yet to undergo the full biological processes of a baby. She is immediately confronted with the stark reality that her own son would have to be taken care of by herself alone as a single mother.

Adichie artfully describes the pain and frustration expressed in Zikora's thoughts, which embodies the pains of a woman, almost humiliated at the mere thoughts of abandonment of her supposed spouse and the father of her baby. She gets irritated and frustrated as she imagines the nurses mocking her within themselves. Every action of some of the nurses



infuriated her and she felt they were an affront directed towards her baby whose father is absent even before he is to be brought into the world:

Was she thinking that it should have been the father of my baby here with me? How dare she judge me? Was the father of her children in their life, what with her outlandish lashes and all? She probably had three children, each with a different father, and here she was judging me for having a cold mother instead of a husband by my side (p.15).

Mmiliaku opens up perhaps another dimension of single-motherhood, where the men are not completely out of their lives, and yet abandon their responsibilities to their spouses who now serve as single mothers even when their husbands are around and alive. Mmiliaku says, “Some of us have men and are still doing it alone” (p.40).

Adichie's *Zikora* is a novel that centres basically on the themes of abandonment, displacement and its negative effect on the girl child. The story of *Zikora* is one of a girl from a wealthy family, who still suffers nonetheless as a result of the emotional damages and the psychological effect of this abandonment on the girl child. This reveals that money and affluence alone cannot replace the needed love, care and bond that a father's presence can have on his daughter and the unavoidable consequences of his absence.

### **Father-Absenteeism and Displacement in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow***

While Adichie's *Zikora* does not explore the challenges of single-motherhood in the area of child care, she gives a very clear description of single-motherhood during labour and at birth. *Yellow-Yellow* on the other hand is focused on the socio-economic struggles of a single mother and the challenges of providing the necessary education and moral training and basic needs of her child in the face of abject poverty. Agary explores absence and displacement from the perspective of a full absence and its devastating effect. The novel explores the diverse themes of displacement and the effect on a girl raised by a single mother. She delves into the economic, educational, social and psychological implications of the complete absence of a father on Zilayefa – the protagonist also known as “Yellow-Yellow” – because of her complexion as a child of both European and Nigerian parents.

Agary focuses on the challenges of finance, which is the most



common implication of single-motherhood in Nigeria wallowing in a palpable level of poverty and lack. The protagonist, Zilayefa is born outside wedlock to a woman who is abandoned by her European lover, a Greek sailor. Set in the Ijo community of the Niger Delta, this experience is further aggravated by the ubiquitous level of poverty in the society. Agary reveals the determination that is first birthed in every single mother and the inspiration towards achieving the best training for their children, the burden of doing it all by themselves notwithstanding. First, Zilayefa's mother vows to give her daughter the best in spite of her condition:

Disillusioned, my mother went back to her village to face the shame of being unwed with nothing but dreams about my future. She will make sure that I accomplished what she had not. She had inherited a small piece of land from her family which she farmed on and sometimes she will go fishing. With the proceeds, she was able to feed us and pay my school fees. She took care of all my needs and even went to make sure that I got an education. For instance, she expelled herself from the women's group so that she would not be forced to spend money on wrappers for their outings. (p.8)

The single mothers in Nigeria are known for their sacrifices for the child or children under their care. They deprive themselves of temporary pleasures to train and groom their children morally, and give them proper education. However, the poverty and lack soon catches up with her as she is unable to keep up with her plans for her daughter. She notes: "By the time I finished school, my mother did not have enough money for university. I could not even take the qualifying exam because she did not have the registration fee" (p.11).

The financial demands on a single parent particularly in a socio-cultural environment like the Ijo land where there is poverty and lack prove to be too great a task for her. Soon Binaebi begins to wane in her responsibilities without the needed presence and physical and emotional closeness to her daughter, because she works all day to provide, and yet struggles to get it done. This soon degenerates into helplessness as she realises that she would be unable to keep up with her goals and dreams for her daughter as a result of financial constraints. Consequently, she begins to loosen her discipline and

grip on the direction and path of her only daughter, Zilayefa. Zilayefa soon confronts her mother and categorically states her desire to leave the home for the city of Port Harcourt. The manner at which Zilayefa presents this reveals the inevitable; that Zilayefa's growth process has been affected negatively by the absence of a father-figure that would aid the process of instruction, correction and discipline:

My mother was in the kitchen one day when I told her I was going to Port Harcourt... just want to go and try my luck... Who do you have there? You want to go and become a prostitute in Port Harcourt?... Well, if prostitution will feed me, then I will prostitute no problem. This fear transported her back to her own experience eighteen years before. The same fear that made her ask "Where will you stay? (p.43)

As the responsibilities of single motherhood weighs heavily on Zilayefa's mother, she resigns to fate. One of the results of single parenting is that the child seeks outlets outside the home, in search of a feeling of closeness, bonding, and emotional assurance. The downside of this is that more often than not, when a child in her teens is thrown into the outside world to be trained by strangers outside her home, it often turns out bad. This is the case as Zilayefa's mother resigns to the hand of fate and soon releases her daughter to the world, where she learns the hard way.

Girls without the warmth and love of a loving father seek that warmth and love outside. This is also the case because from a psychoanalytic perspective, girls are usually drawn to their fathers and crave that love and acceptance. An absence of a fatherly bond creates a void which perhaps a single mother cannot fill. Zilayefa, like her mother, is attracted to a white man, Sergio, who she also expects a future with. She first expresses this dearth of male attention in her obsession with Sergio and her desire that he gives her his attention. The longing for love and affection is a recurrent theme in the novel as it best reflects the desires of most teenage girls in the stage where juvenile delinquency proliferates and there is a level of vulnerability to them. Zilayefa eventually gets pregnant for one of her sexual partners, (Admiral), who tells her that she would have to terminate it. This is the same story for Zikora who at a younger age had been careless in a relationship with a basketballer during her high school days in the US. She is eventually impregnated by the young man and she has to terminate the

pregnancy because she knew there was nothing serious in the relationship. However, while in another relationship where she misconstrues the nature of the love her new partner, who was so loving and caring, she is obliged to keep the pregnancy on her own accord. This decision to keep the baby is helped by the fact that she is almost passed the age for childbirth and so considers it her final chance to have a baby of her own, a situation she perhaps would not have found herself in if she had experienced earlier fatherly care and successes in her romantic relationship.

## **Conclusion**

This study has explored the social, economic, and psychological effects of single-motherhood on the victims in both texts. Both novels are two parts of a whole as one chronicles single-motherhood and abandonment during childbirth, while the other examines the challenges of raising a child in Nigeria as a single mother. Above all, both novelists explore these extremes of loss and suffering to inspire radical feminists' sentiments and discontent for the status quo in Nigerian and African societies. Zikora and Zilayefa are victims of the monstrous society that gives no room for naivety, a society that is hostile to the female gender. They are made to grapple with the socio-cultural and economic challenges that they face and the fact that they cannot be permitted to be careless irrespective of the absence of the father in their lives. Both authors while revealing this, question the systemic patriarchy that is deep-rooted in society. However, Zikora and Zilayefa represent a more radical posture, embodying the notion of freedom to be who they are and do what is best for them, in spite of what society says or thinks. By the time both texts arrive at the denouement, readers are only faced with the lingering disadvantages and implications of an absent father in the life of a female child.

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