

**6. A Study of Single Motherhood in
*Without Mercy, The Mirror of My Life, and Night Dancers.***

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Abstract

Single motherhood is becoming ubiquitous today, unlike in the past, when it was almost a sacrilege. This portends serious implications for society. This paper examines the tragic conditions that a single mother and her child find themselves in while trying to navigate the difficulties imposed on them by society. Three novels on the theme of single motherhood were purposively selected from Nigeria; Abubakar's *Without Mercy*, Asogwa's *The Mirror of My Life*, and Unigwe's *Night Dancers*. The study adopted the content analytical method in interrogating the selected novels. A purposive sampling technique was used to select three novels a total of twelve films comprising six Nollywood and six Hollywood films. The novels were subjected to content and qualitative analysis to explore the issues of single motherhood. The study adopted Attachment Theory as the framework for analysis. Findings revealed that children raised by both parents exhibit a wholesome attitude towards life and suffer little or no rejection from people. Whereas, a child brought up by a single parent faces social rejection, and psychological depression, and becomes behaviorally dysfunctional. Every inherent character defect or otherwise displayed by a child raised by a single mother is a factor of societal attitude towards the peculiar challenge of the parent. Moreover, the tragic conditions experienced by single mothers/their children are compounded by stigmatisation, psychological pressure, victimisation, rejection, taunting, and mockery. The paper recommends that the society should reappraise its value system by accepting single motherhood as a socio-reality to save the society from violence and suicide.

Keywords: Attachment theory, contemporary Nigerian novels, parenthood, single motherhood, sensitive parenting.

Introduction

The subject of single motherhood has always been a part of man and has existed as far as man is concerned. In time past, single motherhood was not as pronounced or common

as it is today. It was more of a taboo, a thing unheard of. Hence women did everything possible to stay married not only because they understood the negative implications of single parenting but because of fear of stigmatisation of not just the individual involved, but the family as a whole. A family would not want to be separated from her kinsman and the society at large because a woman inadvertently brings a child to the world outside wedlock.

There were strong moral values in African societies, particularly in Nigeria, which prohibit such amoral lifestyle. Consequently, strict moral upbringing was instilled; premarital sex which could lead to single motherhood was abhorred. Traditionally, marriage was also seen as a form of cult, which young women yearned to belong. Parents too were proud to give out their daughters in marriage or see their sons take wives in different cultures or tribes because of the honour it bestows on families.

Single motherhood according to Zabel and Hübgen (2018:171) is “the result of such different events as divorce of a married couple, separation of cohabiting parents, the death of a partner, an adult child moving back in to the single parent’s house or the birth of a child to a single woman”. Ambrosini and Stanghellini (2012:277) state that “motherhood is the individual experience of a woman facing the birth of her baby or a social role one has to play in compliance with norms set by one’s own culture or social group”. Mainthia, Reppart, Reppart, Pearce, Cohen, and Netterville (2013:15) averse that “a single mother family is one that lacks the presence of the father within the family. Such families exist when there is a divorce in which the husband and wife separate, when the husband dies, or when there is childbearing outside marriage due to unwanted pregnancies”.

Single motherhood has become the order of the day globally, even in our nation, Nigeria. In our contemporary society, it is so rampant and publicly showcased that women pride themselves as single mothers. Meier, Musick, Flood and Dunifon (2017:4) opine that “the prevalence of single-parent families rose substantially through the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and remains high today—about 30 percent of children today live with just one parent”. Traditionally, it was the responsibility of parents, father, and mother to care for and provide the basic needs children require to grow up to fit into the environment in which they found themselves and society at large.

Rose Hacker (1960:62) states that “families form the bricks with which a society is built, and the value of that society depends on each brick. The quality of the personal relationships in each family determines the health, character, and influence of all its members, while, the family group engenders stability or disintegration throughout the community of which it is a part”. Although, it has been commonly observed that men/women would prefer to stay in marriage ‘for their children’ rather than opt out of it because they understood, not just the importance of their roles, but the impacts of two parents or family in the life of a child. Hence, “it is commonly known that what is thought

to be the “traditional” two-parent family has steadily declined in the last couple of decades” (Halie Olszowy 2012: 60).

According to Stephen and Udisi (2016:1), many of the old customs and traditions that were taught and practiced for several years are becoming obsolete today. The modern culture has changed and outgrown values and benefits that were thought to be the core beliefs and values of our society. What was unacceptable in the olden days is now becoming a fast and rapidly rising trend. Marc Bornstein (2002:110) also says, "increasingly, signs have emerged that perceptions and acceptance of single-parent families are changing. More and more single-parent families are emerging very visibly on the national scene, and the public has become more accustomed to seeing them".

Looking at our societies today all over the world, for instance, and especially in the world of entertainment, both married and unmarried women take to social media to show their baby bumps. There were many single parents in our societies not known before because of the shame of being a single parent, but because it has become the norm, some parade themselves on social media, and the world celebrates them. Bornstein (2002: 110) asserts that

When Ingrid Bergman conceived a child out of wedlock in 1950, writers of the movie star columns were aghast, and Ingrid Bergman was effectively blackballed for nearly a decade from the American screen. In the 1990s, derision and concern greeted the television character Murphy Brown's birth of her out-of-wedlock child. However, in the year 2000, Madonna, a real-life rock star, birthed a baby son, Rocco, and the event was greeted with as much joy and interest as the birth of any baby to a prominent rock star.

Single mother and single parent would be used in this study interchangeably. Single parenthood on the other hand is the act of raising a child or children with only one parent. Men are also single parents, but the percentage is more in women than men as stated by Meier et al., (2017:2), "Mothers are much more often single parents than fathers...". Barajas (2011:13) also added that the vast majority of these single-parent homes are headed by women. A single parent is one who lives alone with his/her children and bears their responsibilities without the domestic and sometimes financial help of a spouse. According to Lawrence Balter (2000:570), a single parent is a parent who is not legally married to a partner living with her or him at home. Knapp and Jongsma (2005:232) define a single parent as one raising children alone or in partnership with a co-parent living in a separate residence. Halie Olszowy (2012:61) states that a single-parent family consists of only one biological parent present in the child's life.

Stephen and Udisi (2016:1) aver that 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. According to Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado (2018: 291), a single-parent is defined as a one-parent household with at least one child under age 18 living in the household. On the one hand, a single person can become a parent, while a parent can become single. Hence, many factors such as death, separation, unmarried adolescent

mothers, sexual recklessness, and untrained children among others lead to single parenting. According to Balter (2000:570), the parenting experiences associated with each of these subgroups are very different, as are the circumstances in which a person becomes a single parent.

Aim of the Study

This study is an examination of the tragic conditions that a single mother/single parent as well as the child, finds herself and her efforts at overcoming the difficulties put on her way by her immediate family on the one hand and the larger society on the other. The paper interrogates Abdullahi Tasiu Abubakar's *Without Mercy* (1999), Fidelia Asogwa's *The Mirror of my Life* (2005), and Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer* (2013). The specific objectives are:

- to interrogate the tragic conditions experience in single parent homes;
- to consider the role society plays in this social tragedy;
- to examine how single mothers are able to survive the hopeless situations they find themselves;
- to investigate how the novelists have succeeded in communicating these tragic experiences.

Therefore, the study adopted the content analytical method in interrogating the selected novels. The data were collected from the three selected contemporary Nigerian novels. The novels were selected from different cultural background in Nigeria. A purposive sampling method that relates to the subject matter informed the choice of the three novels and they were subjected to content and qualitative analysis to explore issues on single motherhood.

Theoretical Framework

The theory used in this study is the Attachment Theory by George W. Holden. Holden (2021:34-5) avers that attachment theory focuses on understanding how love between a parent and child develops and affects development. Attachment Theory addresses the establishment, maintenance, and consequences of affectionate bonds between parents and children. The core premise of attachment theory is that the relationship between parent and infant reflects a behavioural system that has adapted to promote survival and competent functioning of the offspring. Infants who received sensitive parenting over their first year of life developed secure attachments.

According to attachment theory, the implications of attachment classifications are profound because individuals base their interpersonal behavior on their internal working models, even into adulthood. Insecurely attached individuals are expected to behave differently from securely attached ones, whether interacting with their parents or others such as peers and teachers. Parents who fail to respond sensitively are likely to have

children who develop insecure attachment relations. If the parent does not attend regularly to the infant's needs, the child will develop an anxious-avoidant relationship pattern.

Sensitive parenting means that, at a minimum, the parent responds promptly and appropriately as well as is available to help calm a distressed infant and help him or her to self-regulate. Some mothers and fathers do not respond sensitively to their infants. It could be because the parent is depressed, angry, or stressed. These children do not have an organized behavioural strategy to deal with stresses and therefore are labeled disorganized. The disorganized children are believed to be survivors of abuse or some trauma and thus show peculiar and incoherent response pattern. The key implication of attachment in infancy for older children and adults is that it informs individuals how valued they are as well as how reliable and trustworthy other people are. Internal working models are views that children build an understanding of the world that contains ideas and expectations about how people will behave toward them. As their social world expands, children carry these views of others with them into their new relationships.

Attachment theory was developed to account for the development and significance of parent-child love. Interpersonal acceptance-rejection according to Holden was formed around the idea that parental love results in positive outcomes, but rejection negatively affects child's psychological adjustment and behavioural functioning. The focus of the theory is on understanding the effects, causes and correlates of children's perceptions of parental acceptance-rejection. Rejected children are likely to be fearful, insecure, attention seeking, jealous, hostile and lonely (George W. Holden, 2021:34-5).

Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancers* interrogates women's status in marriage. The novel investigates gender issues from a fresh perspective with a focus on intra-gender and inter-gender conflicts. It examines the patriarchal socio-cultural structure which places limitation on women and the exercise of their natural rights. Fidelia Asogwa's *The Mirror of My Life* examines the youthful exorbitant and sexual recklessness amongst youths. The novel also explores the importance of good moral upbringing in families and Abdullahi Tasiu Abubakar's *Without Mercy* interrogates the role parents play in their children's choice of a life partner, the impact, and the implications. The novel also examines that a child raised by two parents exhibits positive outcomes and rejection negatively affects a child's psychological development or adjustment.

The Content Analysis

Chika Unigwe, Abdullahi Tasiu Abubakar, Fidelia Asogwa, and others have depicted the ugly and bizarre experiences of single motherhood in the society through their works. The dominant themes in these three novels are poverty, love, stigmatisation, and over-ambition. The stigmatisation Chika Unigwe's protagonist, Ezi, experiences are as a result of her separation from her husband, when she discovers that he impregnates her housemaid and chooses the maid and her male child over her (Ezi) and her female child,

Adamma. The impact of this separation between Ezi and her husband is the interpersonal acceptance-rejection Ezi's daughter, Mma, battles with throughout the novel. Mma does not receive sensitive parenting from her father during the early stage of her life and therefore develops insecure attachment. Ezi fights the patriarchal society that privileges a man over a woman on the one hand and her family who insists she remains in the marriage and accepts the second wife as the norm on the other. The taunting Ezi and her daughter get is also a result of her breaking free from and saying no to the tradition of a man dominating society. "It was her way of challenging tradition. It was one woman taking on her world" (Unigwe, 2013:110).

Ezi experiences the tragic condition of being betrayed by her husband, it makes her not able to respond sensitively to her daughter, Mma. The effects of single parent are more on children than parent, Stephen and Udisi (2016:2) affirm that "the effects are more devastating on the part of the children because single parenthood leaves them with deep scars". Mma is equally stigmatised, she lacks attachment with a father from infant. Mma knows the neighbours' views about her and her mother, she knows the neighbours stigmatise them but because of the fear of a landlady, they allow their children to play with her within the watch and with several questions of 'what did she do, say or where did she touch you as their internal working models

The girls who had happily eaten her sweets and biscuits? What did they think of her? Probably while they were her mother's tenants, they were obliged to be nice to her. They deferred to her authority as the landlady's daughter. She remembered words, said, glances exchanged between her friends and their parents which had seemed innocuous enough but which now were weighted with meaning. Their parents cooed them out to play with Mma while keeping a close eye on them from behind their doors to make sure they did not pick up any undesirable behaviour from her. Who knew what lurked in the heart of a wayward woman's daughter. They quizzed their child after each play session, wanting to know what Mma said, how she played. Did she touch them (2013:65)?

Unigwe challenges gender roles through her protagonist to reverse gender stereotyping in favour of a woman, which is not the norm. Unigwe depicts the doggedness and resoluteness through her main character Ezi, who refuses to give in to pressure to go back to the husband who betrayed her. In the course of that Ezi experiences the tragic condition of rejection from her family at the time she needed them the most. "Her principal had wanted her to go into nursing or teaching, a respectable profession for women. But your mother refused. She had her plans. She was bent on going to the university, succeeding in a man's world" (2013:103). Ezi's parents disown her for leaving her marriage and expect her to come and apologise to them for stigmatizing the whole family.

Your mother was stubborn. But maybe we shouldn't have pushed her out the way we did.... But we were not allowed to make amends. Once I had told Ezi she was no longer mine, I couldn't take her back.... A parent never apologises, even if he regrets his actions.

It is the child who should apologise. Ezi knew that...it is still her duty to apologise for getting the parent upset in the first place. Such is the nature of our world.... A every day we waited and hoped. That she would go back to your father or that she would give us the chance to forgive her. But she never did either (2013:105-6).

From the foregoing discussion, Ezi sticks to her decision and exhibits the willpower to live her life without any help from members of her family. In her letter to her daughter, she states:

“...but my parent left me no choice. It was maybe a good thing they did what they did, forcing me to stick to my decision; once they sent me out of their home, there was no way I could go back, tail between my legs...I don't suppose they expected me to carry out my threat to live alone...Sometimes in life, we have to take a stand. It does not help to sit on the fence, even if we have to hurt the people we love” (2013:50-1).

Unigwe transfers patriarchal attitudes to her protagonist and states that economic dependence is the main platform for oppression in gender relations. The novel depicts that, if a woman is economically independence as a man she will also be as resourceful, intelligent, smart, and hardworking. Ezi understands that it is because Mike is economically empowered that he impregnates her maid and offers to keep both women. It is this attitude that makes her succeed in business and gives her daughter, Mma, an inheritance even though she feels her mother fails to respond sensitively to her and she develops insecure attachment relations. Ezi is over-ambitious, and an entrepreneur, she succeeds in life because of her ideological disposition to life. Her success and wealth infuriate her neighbours and tenants, men and women. She says, “I wanted a good life for myself and my baby, not someone else's husband who was struggling himself to make ends meet. Someone dragging-dragging me down” (2013:80).

Unigwe's novel depicts a character who is industrious and intelligent, who wants her happiness and settles for it instead of staying in a marriage with a maid as the second wife to please society if that happiness means being a single mother. When she did not succeed in the snacks business, she decides to settle with a man who promises to take care of her and her child and even bequeath a house to her, “Neni Street was a gift from a married man who always swore that had he been a Muslim he would have married Ezi and raised Mma as his very own...He had given the house to her...” (Unigwe, 2013, p. 86). Ezi was wealthy till her death, “Ezi could rent the two flats under theirs and she did. With the money she saves, she buys other properties in the city; one in New Haven and two duplexes in Trans Ekulu, where rents were high and rising, attracting bank workers and expatriate workers from Emenite who were never behind on their rent and who treated the properties with respect” (Unigwe, 2013:89). It is her over ambitiousness that makes Mma feel her mother fail to respond sensitively to her.

Ezi does not allow the stigma of being called a prostitute to affect her thinking. Her tenacity to continue the good life she had had with Mike, makes her think ahead; she

secures her future and that of her child. She goes ahead to move into an apartment with a married man who gives her the two flats she rents, from where she makes more money to buy other properties in strategic locations.

Fidelia Asogwa's novel depicts poverty, rejection, and over-ambition as the dominant theme in her novel. Asogwa introduces her protagonist, Ezinne, who experiences rejection when she discovers that a few minutes pleasure of sexual recklessness she enjoys with her secondary school boyfriend, Emeka, has culminated into a foetus. Single motherhood starts for Ezinne the moment she discovers that she has to take sole responsibility for the child as Emeka, her secondary lover, denies her and her unborn child.

“Emeka denied knowing Ezinne because his mother had already told him that somebody said he impregnated her... But Emeka insisted that he had never seen Ezinne before and that he did not know her. Ezinne was surprised and she thought Emeka was joking. But Emeka stood up and told them to leave their house. Ezinne thought it was a dream, but she realized it was real. In her confusion, she burst into tears” (Asogwa, 2005:51).

The rejection Ezinne experiences is due to a lack of attachment from her father. She lost her father and the mother fails to respond sensitively to her in her time of need and pushes her out of the house because of poverty in the family. The depiction here shows how families in time past did not want to be stigmatized with the individual involved in sexual recklessness. Emeka’s denial of paternity of Ezinne’s unborn child and Ezinne’s friend’s mother’s rejection of her stay in their house also depict that those families did not want their names tarnished. Ezinne is disorganised when faced rejection from family and friends. Holden (2021) states that, insecurely attached individuals are expected to behave differently from securely attached ones. Ezinne is insecure, she starts to living in the street where she sleeps and begs for money to survive. “Ezinne moved far away and started sleeping under the bridge begging for money and food” (Asogwa, 2005:62).

It is in this disorganised state that she accepts the terms and conditions Mr. and Mrs. Linus Okeke give concerning her unborn child. “Ego told her that after the delivery of the baby, she would quit the house leaving the baby with them as their own child.... The next day Ego took her to a Lawyer where the agreement was documented” (2005:63). Emeka denies paternity of Ezinne’s unborn child in order to pursue his dreams. He is afraid that if he accepts the pregnancy he might be forced to drop out of school and marry Ezinne. He enjoys sensitive parenting from his parents which is why his mother informs him ahead of time that a girl said he impregnated her and he uses the opportunity to map out a plan...to deny Ezinne when she shows up with her mother. “Emeka denied knowing Ezinne because his mother had already told him that somebody said he impregnated her” (Asogwa, 2005:51). “Emeka said to himself that if he should accept the pregnancy that means going to ask for her hands in marriage, pay her dowry and marry her properly

according to the custom of the land at this early stage of his life... This is future destruction if he agreed to that. No, I will never accept such a responsibility. ...Uzo rejected a pregnancy and nothing happened” (Asogwa, 2005:53).

Stephen and Udisi (2016:2) opine that the effects of single parenting are far-reaching because it affects not only the parents but also the children. Hacker (1960:31) adds that "a divided family is very hard on the children. When a father is unfaithful or deserts the family, the children may endeavor to cope with their conflicting emotions by taking the part of one of the parents and hating the other. If a mother abandons her child, that child may grow mistrustful". From the above quote, these effects are the interpersonal acceptance-rejection and poverty Abdullahi Tasiu Abubakar depicts in his novel. Though Maria receives sensitive parenting from her grandparents, she is disorganized for being called a bastard and a daughter of a whore. This is devastating for a child of Maria's age. Abubakar narrates this tragic condition through a fifteen-year-old child, Maria, who comes back from school every day with different complaints of embarrassment from her schoolmates. To worsen her situation, she is told she does not look like the people she claims to be her parents.

“The girl insisted that her mother told her that you and daddy were not my natural parents, and that was why I didn't even resemble any of you” (Abubakar, 1999:2). Maria senses the way the friends and schoolmates behave toward her and their views...their internal working models and decides to confront Mr. and Mrs. Adams for clarifications.

Maria enjoys attachment to Mr. and Mrs. Adams. She is comforted with what they tell her. Mr. Adams uses his position as a Senior employee of Nigeria's State Secret Service and his resources to ensure that their granddaughter does not experience constant molestation from her classmates. “Let's report the matter to the school's authority and see if that could end the taunting or not... the following morning before going to the office, Mr. Adams drove his wife and Maria to the school and lodged their complaint with the authority... The school principal, a stern-looking stubby man with pot-belly and grey hair, assured them that he would tackle the trouble once and for all...” (Abubakar, 1999:20-1).

Maria is bullied while she is preparing for her promotion examination, Mr. and Mrs. Adams report the matter again to the school authority and this time the suspects are suspended. “when she narrated her ordeal to the Adams, they wasted no time in reporting the matter to the school authority which in turn investigated it and suspended the erring students indefinitely” (Abubakar, 1999:23-4), Maria experiences continuous taunting outside the school from the schoolmates. The disgrace affects her performance in school and she loses concentration. “She was deeply disturbed. She could not eat well and could not prepare well for the examinations. And when the results were released, although she managed to pass, it was the worst grade she had ever got” (Abubakar, 1999:24). The views of her classmates...their internal working models affect Maria so much that she goes in search of her biological father unknown to her grandparents. She has been saving

money all the while from what her grandparents give her because she receives sensitive parenting from them. “She spent several hours thinking about how to find her unknown father. She then sighed with great relief when she eventually felt that she had mapped out a good strategy for doing it. She decided she would take all the money she had been saving from her pocket money, pack her belongings, and secretly leave home to search for her hiding father” (Abubakar, 1999:35).

Sarah, Madam Zara’s daughter humiliates Maria every day at school, which makes Maria feel insecure. Sarah on the other hand is from a family of seven children without a father where everyone struggles for food and without proper care or attention from their single mother develops an anxious avoidant relationship pattern. “Madam Zara...and her seven children had been occupying the house since the death of her husband ...She was shouting intermittently at some of her quarrelling children...She didn’t finish the sentence when a sharp shrill shout of her youngest daughter, emanating from the bedroom, interrupted her” (Abubakar, 1999:5). Sarah lacks attachment to a father, and she feels insecure. She stabs her mother in the belly because of insufficient food in the house. “Sarah got a four-year jail term for stabbing her big mother, Madam Zara, on her pot belly with a machete following a bitter brawl over food four months ago” (Abubakar, 1999:77).

It is because of the attachment Maria enjoys from Mr. and Mrs. Adams that they report her missing case to the police and advertise on Television. “...Mr. Adams endorsed the idea of using the national media in searching for their missing granddaughter. Soon, Maria’s latest pictures and detailed description flooded the newspapers, televisions, and radio stations...” (Abubakar, 1999:44).

The Role of Society as Social Tragedy

Human beings cannot survive without society. Society not only satisfies man’s physical desires and determines his social nature but also determines his personality and guides the path of development of his mind. Society subjects a child or children from a single-parent home to mental torture...interpersonal acceptance-rejection for a fault that is not theirs... because it is not in the power of anyone to decide to which family one is born. The role of society on man is huge and can be seen in the way the characters are tossed here and there in the three novels. Society is responsible for all the tragic conditions the characters experience in the novels. The society not only rejects single parents and children, it also makes life unbearable for them. Pickhardt (1996:155) says “...single-parent mother, however, is given little sympathy in our society, and much less support. Thus, not only must she struggle for the survival of her family, but she is frequently censured for the dire economic circumstances in which she has been left. Society seems to forgive and forget the father, blame the mother, and begrudge helping the financially vulnerable family, thereby penalizing the innocent child”. The society is responsible for the poverty in the land. Society is responsible for Ezinne’s condition; she lacks love from

her family and turns to a boy not much older than she is and gets impregnated. She faces rejection from her lover, her friends, and her mother. Her only weapon (education) which she would use to fight the society like Ezi is also cut short by poverty.

The society's, 'it is a man's world', or social stereotypes which it presents as inborn in men or women separates Ezi from Mike. It is the society that privileges Mike over Ezi, that makes Mike to believe he can marry more than one wife, there is nothing wrong in marrying a second wife, he is not the only one that would marry two wives. Society forgives and forgets Mike for the wrong he has done to his wife and forces Ezi to accept Mike for his wrong. Sarah stabs her mother because society does not provide or create a space for single-parent homes. Society generates hatred between Mma and her mother, her peers not wanting to play with her, the parents not allowing their girls to mingle with her, and so on. The society does not accept Maria as the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Adams. Hence, she is forced to embark or take the risk of searching for a father she does not know in a strange land because of the pressure of identity from society. Having found her father, Professor Amadi says she suffers from interpersonal acceptance-rejection "she had suffered from some forms of psychological disorder caused by depression which resulted from rejection and the feeling of worthlessness" (Abubakar, 1999:65). Zig Ziglar says "the only way to raise positive kids in a negative world is when parents themselves are positive" (1985: viii). Parents should teach their children moral values to curb the rate of single motherhood in our society.

Comparative Analysis of the Texts

The novels depict how African families reject single motherhood because of stigmatization through the characters. Ezi's parents reject and disown Ezi for leaving her marriage, Ezinne's mother rejects Ezinne for bringing home unwanted pregnancy and Maria is rejected by her classmates for being an illegitimate child. Both Ezi and Emeka are strong-willed characters—Emeka rejects Ezinne and sticks to his decision while Ezi separates from her husband and sticks to her decision not to return to her marriage. The novels depict hatred embedded in single-parent children towards one parent. When Maria can no longer stand being called a bastard persistently by Sarah and other class or schoolmates, she confronts Mr. and Mrs. Adams her grandparents. She learns that they are not her biological parents and immediately develops a hatred for whoever her illegitimate father may be for putting her and her late mother through pain. "We're not your real parents. We 're your grandparents. Your natural mother...died while she was giving birth to you" (1999:26).

From this point, one can see the effects of interpersonal acceptance- rejection on the children. This shows that children raised with parental love (involving two parents) exhibit positive outcomes, while those in single-parent homes not only face rejection but it negatively affects children's psychological adjustment and behavioural functioning. Maria wants to know whose daughter she is and goes in search of her illegitimate father

with a knife to kill him first and kill herself to end the misery of continuous contempt and rejection. “I’ll find him and kill him before killing myself” (1999:35). Mma on the other hand looks forward to meeting and reuniting with her father to end her years of molestation and shame.

While Maria is an illegitimate child—born outside wedlock, “...she was an illegitimate child, or a bastard, born out of wedlock” (1999:34), Mma is a legitimate child—she lacks father figure all her life due to separation of her parents. “Mike’s mother could not have been prouder than mine at our wedding later that year...in all the wedding photographs, my smile was natural and easy” (2013:98).

This interpersonal acceptance-rejection is a result of internal working models from society. Unlike Ezi who fails to respond sensitively to Mma because of the effect of separation from her husband, Ezinne’s mother is due to her husband’s death. The former is angry with the husband while the latter is angry with the daughter who knows their standard of living but allows herself to be impregnated. Her mother says, “after you knew the kind of sufferings and hardship we’ve been going through after your father’s death” (Asogwa, 2005:66). The novelists also depict the importance of two parents or co-parenting and family in the lives of their characters. Maria thinks her grandparents are her biological parents while Mma thinks her mother’s man friend is her biological father. While their fathers are still in love with their mothers, one father loses his lover through death and the other separation. While Mma gets her inheritance from her mother, Maria gets hers from her father.

Some characters can weave through or survive while others are submerged by the hopeless situations, they find themselves. For instance, Ezi weaves through the condition she finds herself in because of her ideological disposition to life. She weaves through because she is smart and hardworking. She survives the tragic conditions because of her economic independence. She survives the hopeless situation because she can afford it. Adamma also weaves through the tragic condition because of her mother’s doggedness and zero tolerance for laziness. Unigwe’s characters weave through the tragic conditions they find themselves through determination and zealousness.

Ezi’s landed properties become a source of investment which in turn serves as the inheritance she leaves for her child. Mma confesses that “she was not strapped for cash. She had more money than she would ever need. (2013:91). Ezinne is submerged due to an anxious-avoidant relationship pattern. Ezinne is submerged in the hopeless situation she finds herself in because she cannot afford it. She did not go back to school and went back to live in her father’s house. She disperses men and believes all men are like Emeka. She refuses to accept any proposal from men because of her first experience with Emeka. Ezi weaves through the tragic condition by breaking free from the norm not minding the effects of the society. Maria survives the hopeless situation she finds herself in because her father leaves an inheritance for her. Sarah is submerged by the tragic conditions because of her low-income background of a single mother.

Sarah and her mother are submerged in the tragic conditions they find themselves in because of the poverty level in the family. Madam Zara cannot handle her seven children without chaos at home. Unigwe narrates her story in the third-person point-of-view, while Abubakar and Asogwa use the first-person point-of-view to narrate their stories.

The Novelists' Perspectives on Single Motherhood

Single mothers and children are downtrodden in society. Society and even their families see them as plagues or some form of disease that should be prevented in order not to infect other people. The novelists depict different reasons a mother becomes a single parent and the tragic conditions such as stigma, psychological effects, and so on, she suffers from her family and society. Unigwe blames a patriarchal society that privileges a man over a woman, a society that believes a man is not wrong and can marry as many wives as possible. "...A man ...especially a man who had been as patient as your father was...I'm only saying that he did what any man in his position would have done man...would have looked elsewhere. It is only natural. They would have planted their seeds in many places, hoping that at least one would sprout" (Unigwe 2013:12).

Unigwe blames religion that determines a man's decision or even cages the man in society. "My father, Christian and superstitious, blamed it all on the day of my birth" (Unigwe, 2013:46). The author condemns the way Ezi's parents reject and disown her without first considering their bond as parents, and their traditional belief that it is only the child that must apologise to parents. "Your mother was stubborn. But maybe we shouldn't have pushed her out the way we did" (Unigwe, 2013:105). Interpersonal acceptance- rejection a child goes through all his or her growing up years in single-parent homes tends to generate hostility or hatred for one parent whom they think put them through the condition they find themselves. The novelists reveal the extent of hostility or hatred that is formed in the heart of single-parent children through Ezi's daughter, Adamma. Adamma hates her mother, she says "you were a stupid woman and I hate you! I hate you" (2013:84) she hates Ezi till death and buries her in the cemetery in Enugu that 'belongs to people without families and for the 'lost' (2013:105).

Mma loathes her mother's laughter "with that laughter and that loud voice of hers, no one could ignore her. Ah, in her next incarnation, may she be struck mute" (2013:35). As far as Mma is concerned her mother's spirit can roam the street forever. Mma hates her mother's spirit "and this act was sure to infuriate her mother's spirit. Let her have a taste of everything she had put Mma through" (2013:37) "and everything that has to do with her including reading the letter of a death woman". "That she wanted so much to be rid of her mother that she had not wanted to read the letters?" (2013:21). She believes her mother is mean to her for denying her access to her father or grandparents. "No number of cupcakes, of picnics, of bottles of squash will ever make up for your meanness to me" (2013:77).

Mma believes anything her mother touches is defiled. "...Mma thought, that anything her mother touched would be defiled, destined to decay" (2013:38). She judges her mother wrongly all through till she learns that tradition makes a child to apologise to her parents for faults that are not hers. "You must meet your father and apologise to him... For?...For your mother. It's the way of our people, my daughter. 108) and right there, she regrets all the wrongs she has ever done to her mother and seeks to make amends.

"Mma did not miss the irony of it all. She had been so against honouring her mother's wishes, and now she was being drawn into making amends for her. Amends she was not convinced her mother had to make...How much of a different life her mother had tried to give her. She had tried to raise her daughter with the sort of values she had never taught. And it hit her, like a pebble thrown on her head, why her mother could never live with her husband, not after what he did" (2013:110).

Adamma develops an anxious-avoidant relationship pattern because she says her mother did not attend to her needs regularly. "She tried not to feel grateful to her mother for the inheritance. After everything her mother put her through, setting her up for life was the least she owed her. It was only fair" (2013:91).

The author frowns at the way tradition cages the mind from reasoning. Unigwe exonerates and sympathises with Ezi because of the hatred Mma has for her even at death. The author exonerates Ezi as her husband of several years sleeps with her maid and chooses the maid over her. The author sympathises with Ezi when her family turns their back on her with her infant child and refuses to see any wrong in Mike's action. Due to low income and insufficient food, madam Zara's children fight for one thing or the other. "She caught one of her sons slapping the crying daughter on the face...Madam Zara descended on him, lashing him repeatedly and indiscriminately all over his body (Abubakar, 1999:6).

Abubakar's depiction is that parental separation or death is related with lower wellbeing in both parents and children. If there has been an attachment with a father, Madam Zara's children would not be unruly. The depiction of low-income results to poverty level in this family; it causes Sarah to stab her mother on the belly because of food. "They all knew that Sarah got a four-year jail term for stabbing her big mother, Madam Zara, on her pot belly with a machete following a bitter brawl over food four months ago" (Abubakar, 1999:77). Madam Zara's children develop an anxious-avoidant relationship pattern because a single parent cannot provide much care for the children. The author blames the government for not providing basic amenities for her citizens.

The author also blames the government for lack of policy on birth rate among her citizens. The author also blames Hamid's parents for not approving of their son's relationship with Maria's late mother. Fidelia Asogwa blames Ezinne's mother and the school for not teaching Ezinne sex education. The author blames the society for rejecting single mothers and their children. The author blames Ezinne for engaging in sexual recklessness. The novelists through the deployment of characters, the use of narrative

techniques, and language, succeed in communicating these tragic conditions by sympathizing, blaming and exonerating their characters.

Conclusion

The family as the first agent of socialisation is the first to criticise the characters in the selected novels. Society is also responsible for the tragic conditions and the poverty a single mother partly experienced in the texts because of social construct. Hence, every woman needs to be economically empowered to set herself free from societal norms. The survival instinct in a single mother as well as children in lone families is premised on the economic capacity or viability of the single mother. Through the deployment of characters, the use of narrative techniques, and language, the novelists succeeded in communicating these tragic conditions by sympathising with, exonerating and blaming their characters. A single parent is caused by so many factors and the effect is more on the children than mothers. Society has a major role to play in reshaping the lives of single parents. Some characters weaved through or survived the hopeless situations they found themselves in while others were submerged by them. Single motherhood is not hereditary, as a matter fact, but society has largely contributed to the issues befalls women who today are regarded as single mothers or parent.

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