

BROKEN HOMES AND CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES IN CHRISTIE WATSON'S *TINY SUNBIRDS, FAR AWAY* AND SADE ADENIRAN'S *IMAGINE THIS*

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Abstract

The formative years of a child are critical to their overall development, with early experiences, particularly within the family unit, playing a defining role. This study examines the portrayal of broken families and their impact on children in two selected novels: Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away* and Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This*. While Watson's novel delves into the effects of infidelity on a Nigerian family, Adeniran's work portrays the challenges faced by a young girl following her family's relocation to Nigeria. Drawing on structural-functionalism as the theoretical framework, this study explores the emotional, psychological, and academic consequences of broken homes on children, as depicted in these texts. A review of related literature highlights gaps in existing studies, particularly concerning the specific effects of broken families on children's development. Through qualitative textual analysis, this study identifies how the authors present these effects and underscores the broader societal implications of family instability. The findings reveal that children from broken homes are more susceptible to emotional and behavioral issues, as well as academic challenges, which ultimately hinder their growth and societal contributions. The study concludes by emphasizing literature's role in reflecting societal issues and fostering awareness of the challenges faced by children in unstable family environments. It advocates for systemic reforms, community support, and individual empathy to mitigate these effects and nurture the potential of every child, ensuring a more equitable and stable future.

Keywords: Broken homes, family instability, child development, structural-functionalism.

Introduction

The earliest years of a child's life are crucial, as they significantly influence the child's future. According to the National Welfare Policy (1989), a child is defined as anyone aged 12 or below, while the new draft decree on children in Nigeria classifies a child as anyone under 18 years (Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Child's Rights Act, 2003*). The foundation of a child's development is laid during these early years, and a weak foundation can lead to an unstable adulthood. Early experiences, particularly in the home environment, play a pivotal role in shaping a child's growth. Similarly, Shonkoff and Fisher (2023) asserts that early experiences play a critical role in shaping child development, particularly in

how the home environment influences long-term cognitive and emotional outcomes. This supports the argument that a weak foundation in early years can lead to instability in adulthood.

The family, especially the nuclear family consisting of a father, mother, and child, is the child's first point of contact with society and serves as a vital institution for growth. However, when one parent is absent, the family becomes incomplete, often referred to as a "broken home." According to Osunloye (2008), a broken home occurs when one of the two people responsible for nurturing and raising a child is absent, leaving the responsibility solely on one parent. This often leads to single parenthood, with children typically residing with their mothers. Apparently, there are

also instances where the mother is absent, leaving the children in the care of their father. Additionally, a court of competent jurisdiction may grant custody to either parent, further shaping the unique circumstances of each broken home. The absence of a parent, whether due to death, divorce, or separation, disrupts a child's upbringing and can have lasting consequences (Annor, F. B., et. al 2024).

Ekpenyong and Lawrence (2016) emphasizes that socialization within the family is essential for the continuity of culture, highlighting that the family is the primary agent of socialization for children. Santrock (2002, cited in Ekpenyong & Lawrence, 2016), notes that structured parenting instills moral, social, physical, and cognitive principles in children. Conversely, children from broken homes often exhibit behavioral issues, stemming from the lack of guidance and training that two parents can provide. Psychologists have also underscored the damaging effects of broken homes, noting that the absence of loving relationships and attachment with both parents can harm a child's emotional and psychological well-being.

Child development encompasses the study of growth, change, and stability from birth through adolescence. Omoruyi (2014) posit that, children develop at different rates, with some progressing rapidly while others experience slower growth. This development is often uneven, characterized by periods of rapid advancement followed by slower progress. Additionally, physical, mental, and emotional growth may not always occur at the same pace, as each aspect of development follows its own trajectory. Despite these variations, all children pass through the same developmental stages in a fixed sequence, highlighting the universality of the developmental process. The family serves as the primary context for a child's early development, providing education and social support. As the smallest unit of society, the family is vital for societal stability. However, when unresolved conflicts arise, families may break apart, resulting in broken homes.

This study explores the portrayal of broken families and fractured relationships in selected literary texts, with a particular focus on two novels: Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds, Far*

Away and Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This*. These texts explore the experiences of children in broken families, both in Nigeria and the diaspora. Watson's novel examines the impact of infidelity on a Nigerian family, while Adediran's work portrays a young girl's struggles after her family's relocation to Nigeria.

Synopsis of Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away*

Blessing narrated how her mother caught her father with another woman, which caused their separation, and in turn, a very big change in the family's life. It led to the drastic fall in the status quo of the family. They could not afford the cost of living in their home after the father deserted the family. Timi, Blessing's mother, decided to go back to her parents' village, near Warri, with her two children, Blessing and Timi. Blessing had to adapt to a life she was not used to. There was almost no furniture in the house, she was made to sleep with her mother in a room without windows, fetch water from the river, cook traditional foods, learn her mother's tongue, and a new religion. She could not go to school due to lack of money for tuition fees. Her grandfather's younger wife, Celestine, had squandered the money on Lycra materials. She later resorted to learning traditional midwifery from her grandmother against her mother's wish. Through this, Blessing became exposed to several birthing in the village.

However, her grandma, who believed in female genital mutilation was made to perform one on a child after birth. Though excused from the scene, Blessing knew the cutting was performed by Grandma and was full of questions. Ezekiel who wanted to become a doctor had to leave school due to same reason as Blessing. He joined a group of militants who were fighting against the insecurities the British and American oil companies caused to the Niger Delta region. The unnamed village in Niger Delta in this text is an exploited village and is exposed to various negativities. These militants, known as the Sibeye Boys, believed they were fighting against these and were trying to save their village, but they were also endangering the lives of the villagers. Timi worked as a barmaid at a restaurant, which kept her away from her family. With the little she earned, she could not cater for the needs of her children.

She got a white boyfriend called Dan, who worked with the oil firm. Dan was a good man and tried to bring the family back together, but Ezekiel found it hard to accept Dan as his mother's new lover. He hated him and made it known, to the extent of conniving with his group to kidnap Dan on his wedding day with Timi. After the kidnap, Ezekiel died due to the burn injuries he got from the explosion while trying to break a pipeline. He carried this out with the Sibeye Boys. The story ended when Blessing decided to keep staying in Nigeria, while her mother and Dan relocated to London.

Synopsis of Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This*

Imagine This is a diary account of Omolola Ogunwole who started writing the diary at the age of nine. She referred to the diary as Jupiter. Her story account in Jupiter started when her father decided to send her and her brother to live with his siblings in the village. Adebola was taken to stay with Uncle Joseph in Ekiti, while Omolola was taken to Idogun village by her aunt (Iya Rotimi). Omolola and Adebola spent their early days in London, though at some point, they were taken to stay in a foster home after their mother left with their father. Their father however, decided to relocate to Lagos, Nigeria, because of the fear of losing his children to the civilised life in London.

However, in Lagos, after spending some time with their father, the children were again sent to the village to stay with their relatives. This decision by their father became the rising action in the novel. It appeared to be a traumatic experience for Omolola because Idogun was a village that did not have the fundamental amenities she had been used to. No one understood her and vice versa. Iya Rotimi and her children disliked and treated her badly. She was usually accused of stealing and was severely punished for crimes she did not commit. Omolola later moved to her grandmother's place opposite Iya Rotimi's house after her father found out about the ill treatment she was exposed to by her aunt. However, her stay with Mama was no better. She was not well fed and her desperation to move back to Lagos with her father became constant. She decided to perform poorly in her academic activities so that she can be expelled

from school and this will make her father take her back to Lagos with him.

The novel reached its climax when Omolola returned back home from boarding school to meet her brother's dead body. Adebola stayed in Ekiti with Uncle Joseph before his demise. His death was as a result of lack of proper and medical care to his sickness, he was made to do more work in his sick state. Lola's pain over the death of her brother was visible and she was taken to Lagos by her father. In Lagos, Lola fasted and prayed for the return of her brother, but this only resulted in hallucinations as she began to see and talk with her brother. Not long after Adebola's death, Omolola's father married another woman who had two kids already. As she gradually recovered from her traumatic experience, she got into a fight with the new wife's kid and injured the latter. However, after beating her mercilessly, her father sent her out of his house.

Back in Idogun, she got into a serious trouble in school where she broke Akin's leg with a cutlass, thus she could not sit her final exams. She resolved to just exist and live the day in the village without a purpose until Uncle Jacob, her father's cousin, visited the village and took her back to Lagos to stay with him. She was enrolled in a learning centre in order to sit for her exams. In Uncle Jacob's house, she began to face another situation with his wife who disliked her. Omolola failed her examination and was then sent out of the house because she mistakenly dropped his baby. After leaving Uncle Jacob's house, she moved to her favourite Uncle's home, Uncle Niyi, whose wife also disliked her. However, Iya Soji, Uncle Niyi's wife, moved out of her husband's house and vowed never to return until she left the house. During this period, Uncle Niyi sexually harassed her. Omolola was left with the only option of going back to her father's place. He accepted her and tried to make up for the way he had been treating her. She struggled with her feelings for her father with his new behaviour towards her. However, her father's struggle to set things right between him and his daughter was cut short as he was murdered by unknown gunmen. Omolola resolved to move on from her past and she relocated to London to start a new life.

Related Literature

Different studies have been carried out to investigate various topics discussed in the two texts, *Tiny Sunbirds*, *Far Away* and *Imagine This*. Sunusi & Egwabor (2022) investigates the environmental degradation in Nigeria's Niger Delta as portrayed by Christie Watson in *Tiny Sunbirds*, *Far Away*. This shows the oil exploration activities by multinational companies. The study employs ecocriticism to explore the interplay between literature and criticism. It emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to address social and economic challenges in Niger Delta.

Adegbite (2023) reconnoitres the damage and unrest in Niger Delta community caused by the oil exploitation and militancy in the region. The study reveals that environmental damage from oil activities threatens the livelihoods of local communities by alienating them from their ancestral lands and eroding their sources of income. Ikechi, Rohimmi, et. al. (2020) examines the issue of the Niger Delta region from the ecofeminist point of view. The study explores the connection between women and nature, it views them as the victims in the society. Women, like nature are shown as dominated, exploited and abandoned. The narrative aligns with ecofeminism, it demonstrates how oppression of nature mirrors the oppression of woman.

Imagine This on the other have shown various studies, one, Ogunfolabi, (2022) analyses the traumatic and survival experience of the protagonist in the text. The study concludes that the novel challenges linear narratives of trauma and healing, it presents recovery as multifaceted and ongoing process. Another study on *Imagine This* centers on child molestation and abuse. Awogu-Maduagwu, (2018) examines the presentation of child molestation and gender abuse caused by a troubles society as shown in the text. Various works has been done on these two texts, however, explore the effect of broken home on children is also a gap in the existing literature which this study will fill.

Theoretical Framework

This research paper is based on structural-functionalism theory as its theoretical framework. The structural-functionalist theory is one of the dominant theories in anthropology, sociology,

philosophy, psychology and philosophy of psychology. It can also be referred to as functionalism. This theory explains how the relationship among the part of the society is created and how these parts are functional and dysfunctional. It focuses on the negative and beneficial or positive consequences to the individual and society. It sees the society as a complex interconnected system of parts that work together in harmony. The theory has its origins in the work of Emile Durkheim, who was especially interested in how social order is possible or how society remains relatively stable (Crossman, 2020).

Functionalist theory suggest that the different parts of the society are primarily composed of social institutions such as education, family, government, media, economy, and religion, each designed to fill different need (Crossman, 2020; Giddens, 2010). It attempts to explain why society functions the way it does by focusing on relationship between various social institutions that makes up the society. Functionalism explains that an institution only exists because it plays a very important role in the functioning of the society. In analysing this study using functionalist theory, functionalist theory would view the family as one of the most relevant social institutions in the society. Family provides one of the major instruments a growing child needs for positive outcome and lifestyle in a social order. Family teaches certain attributes to children necessary for their adult life.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using structural-functionalism theory. This research seeks to interpret the emotional, psychological, and political effect of broken home on the children's development in the two selected novels using the functionalism from the perspective of the writers of the texts. A textual analysis will be carried out to bring out these effects and how it affects the children. This is to be achieved by interpreting the novel within the context of the texts.

Discussions and Findings

A Critical Review of the Depiction of Broken Home in *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away*.

Nindy. R. and Rahmi M. (2019) opines that a broken home or an incomplete family is a condition where the family experiences a split or a gap in the household, whether it starts from bickering of parents, infidelity or even fight which results in the breakup of strings that strung together. Here is an analysis of broken home in *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away*.

Afful Broni (2005) identifies the type of broken homes as those that occur in form of divorce, separation and desertion. From the assertion above, it is essential to note that divorce, separation, and desertion brings about an incomplete family and a broken home. In the writer's discussion here, desertion is the real cause of broken home as portrayed in the novel, *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away*.

It was a month after that when Mama had to stop working at the Royal imperial hotel. She said that the owners only employed married women. Since father had left, I did not dare ask her anything at all. (Watson, 2011, p. 7). The cause of the problem of a broken home, as portrayed in the novel, is desertion. Desertion occurs when one partner abruptly leaves a relationship or marriage without fulfilling their parental duties or involving the court or any significant family member. The causes of desertion vary and may include a lack of proper care for the family, adultery, domestic violence, and mistrust. In the novel, two primary causes of desertion emerge: physical abuse and extramarital affairs.

Physical abuse plays a significant role in the breakdown of the marriage. Timi's husband, often described as a loud and aggressive man, frequently assaulted his wife, especially when intoxicated. Watson (2011) illustrates this brutality: "*When father drank, father hit mama so hard he broke her nose, making her less beautiful than his other woman. He cut her skin with a broken bottle giving her a train-track scar across her back. He held her by the throat*" (p. 254). Despite the repeated violence, Timi did not immediately leave her husband but instead endured the pain and suffering inflicted upon her.

However, her endurance was tested further when she discovered his infidelity.

Extramarital affairs further contributed to the collapse of the marriage. Timi became aware of her husband's unfaithfulness when she found him with another woman. She recounts, "*I had seen the woman at the gate. The other woman whom Mama had found father lying on top of*" (Watson, 2011, p. 254). This betrayal intensified her emotional pain, ultimately leading to her breaking point. Additionally, rather than taking responsibility for his actions, Father abandoned his wife and children to be with his mistress, leaving Timi solely responsible for raising the children. His departure was not preceded by any formal agreement to dissolve the marriage, reinforcing the theme of desertion in the novel.

Problems Faced by Children from Broken Home

Watson explored the societal issues both in Nigeria and in London. This issue of broken homes was demonstrated through Blessing, Ezekiel, Father, Timi, and also Dan. In the text, after the father left the family, everything went downhill for the rest of the family. They began to lose their identity in the society. The mother and her two children had to leave their comfortable home in Lagos to Niger Delta to start a new life, which seemed difficult to adapt to. Blessing managed to adapt to the new life, while Ezekiel struggled to fit in. Dan noticed this and tried to relate with him because he (Dan) was also a product of a broken home.

The general problems faced by children from a broken home are emotional and behavioural problems, as well as academic problems. In this paper, some effects of broken homes portrayed in Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away* will be outlined.

Emotional and Behavioural Problem

Andersen et al. (2019) proffers that children experiencing family dissolution had a significantly higher risk of low social well-being compared to those from intact families. Notably, the younger the child at the time of dissolution, the greater the risk of diminished social well-being. The effects of broken homes that were portrayed in the characters can be vividly pointed out in the novel. In *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away*, immediately

after the desertion of Blessing's father, things changed drastically for the two siblings— Blessing and Ezekiel. Their mother was stopped from work because she was no longer married, thus, she found it hard to cater for the needs of her family. All the affections the children received from their mother stopped: breakfast was no longer served and there were no more kisses before leaving the house. Finally, when Mama could not afford to pay the house rent, they had to move to their mother's parents' village near Warri, in Niger Delta. The kids found it hard to adjust to the new life enforced on them in a place where there was no electricity or good water. Blessing, the main character and narrator in the novel had to grow faster than her age, as she was made to fetch water and learn how to cook. Compared to her brother, she was able to adjust to the new life better because she was a girl who found happiness in little things. The only thing was that she never got the affection she wanted from her mother and was always blamed when anything bad happened to Ezekiel. This made her feel responsible for her brother's wellbeing.

Unlike his sister, Ezekiel found it very difficult to adjust to their new life. Ezekiel was an asthmatic, sickly and feeble boy who had nut allergy. This was well managed in Lagos but seemed impossible to manage in the village.

"In Lagos we fried everything in sunflower oil that I borrowed from the hotel" said Mama. 'But the sunflower oil that I borrowed has run out now; there is nothing except groundnut oil here. Ezekiel will be fine having meat or fish boiled instead of fried and cooked in palm oil stew until I get some more. Soon as I find a job, I will be able to get some. Especially if I find something in a hotel. (Watson 2011, p. 25)

This was a conversation between Mama and Grandma. Grandma could not do without using groundnut oil to cook while at the same time, Ezekiel could not eat a food cooked with nut because of his allergy. He could no longer use the sunflower oil to cook because there was no money and his mother was no longer working at the hotel in Lagos where she borrowed oil. He could not eat fish or meat and he was mostly served with palm

oil as his soup alongside any solid food. He became malnourished and sick and longed for normal food.

Also, Ezekiel was seen as an ambitious boy in the novel, but slowly this began to change as he stopped schooling. The village they lived in was full of insecurities caused by a group of boys called the Sibeye Boys. On one of their parade, Ezekiel got shot and was hospitalized for several weeks. He had to spend more days in the hospital because there was no money to pay for the hospital fee. After he finally got out, his behaviour began to change slowly. He became rude at home. He threw his inhaler and his medication away into the river. He felt he was stronger because he did not die after he was shot. He further explained that fireflies are his new medication and he believed his asthma was cured because of his new medication. He also became fascinated with the Sibeye Boys and proceeded to join the group despite much warnings from his grandmother. He made his hatred towards his mother's new boyfriend, Dan known. He never accepted him and even when Dan tried to be friends with him, Ezekiel was always rude. He was furious at his mother for wanting to marry a white man. He went as far as kidnapping Dan on the day of the marriage ceremony with his mother. Ezekiel's negative attitude led to his untimely death while he was trying to break a pipeline with his group of friends.

Academic Problem

Chidiezie-Chineke (2024) reveals that students from broken homes often experience negative effects on their academic performance. Blessing disliked the school in the village because it was nothing like her former school in Lagos. The teachers in this local school beat them for any slight mistake. She was wrongly punished and severely beaten in the new school in the village. She however began to lose interest in school and became curious about her grandmother's business. *'You're suspended. Do not look so shocked, it is temporary. The school fees are late and until they paid you cannot go to school. You'll have to do your home-work here'. (Watson 2011, p. 73).*

Blessing and her brother could not go to school because there was no money to pay for the fees. She became happy at the thought of not going to school and began to follow Grandma to attend

births. Blessing disobeyed her mother by not going to school and instead became a birth attendant just like her grandmother. Ezekiel was portrayed as an ambitious boy in the novel who loved school and was mostly seen with his books. His dream was to become a doctor. *'Mama I cannot miss school', he said. 'Not even a day, I will fall behind. Please Mama, there must be some way of me going. Can I talk to Alhaji?'* (Watson 2011, p. 74).

At first, he attended the school with his sister, but were later suspended because they could not pay the fees. He became very sad and bothered about his grades. Ezekiel eventually returned to school while his sister refused to go back. Unfortunately, he was shot on his way back home and was rushed to the hospital. At the hospital, Ezekiel became friends with the doctors, as he was fascinated with their ways. He became more determined to study hard in school, but was expelled at the end of the term because he missed so many days and performed badly in his result. He did not tell his mother about this news and decided to join the Sibeye group, which led to his untimely death. Timi could not control her two kids anymore. They made their decisions without her consent because she was always away working to cater for the needs of the family.

Critical Review of the Depiction of Broken Home in *Imagine This*

Family is the unit that provides suitable environment conducive for the growth of the children. Desertion is the real cause of broken home as portrayed in the novel *Imagine This*. This can be clearly seen from the excerpt:

Maybe he's not really our father and that is why our mother left. (Adeniran, 2009, p. 11) I'm not sure why, but father gave me the letter she wrote when she left us. She'd left it tacked to my crib. He came home to find her gone and both Adebola and me bawling. (Adeniran 2009, p. 243)

In the writer's discussion here, there are two causes of desertion in the novel: rushed marriage, physical and emotional abuse. *Now you can recollect from the past: you know we were together for only 1 month 12 days when we had a bitter unforgettable fight on the 16th of May 1965. (Adeniran, 2009, p. 244)*

This assertion show that the couple, Mr. and Mrs. Ogunwole, rushed into the marriage without knowing each other well. They did not bother to explore and compare their characters and attitudes before getting married. It was seen from the novel that 1 month and 12 days was not enough for this particular couple, as it was a short time to get to know each other before marriage. It was after getting into the marriage they began to regret the decision they made.

The second cause of desertion was emotional and physical abuse. This could also be referred to as domestic violence. The case of domestic violence arose as a result of home mismanagement, uncontrolled anger, and aggression. From the explanations given above, Mr. and Mrs. Ogunwole rushed into the marriage without really venturing into each other's life and the final outcome was that they could not endure each other's attitude which led to domestic violence.

"You imagine that not knowing each other well enough and instead of trying to understand each other well and make a mutual atmosphere, all you ever did was beat, curse and say all those horrible words to me". (Adeniran 2009, p. 244). The couples found it hard to both live with each other and understand each other well enough. They could not grow the mutual feeling expected of a married couple, hence the lack of tolerance for each other.

The text portrayed Mr. Ogunwole as a non-sense and hot-tempered man, exhibiting this by beating her. There was no love or affection between them. He abused her emotionally, said hurtful words to her, and did not show her the love she deserved. She became withdrawn, ashamed, and lacked self-esteem. He also abused her physically. *"I have experienced enough of your cruelty and I can no longer go on like this. There are many defects in my body as the result of your beating me like an animal daily-these defects I have to repair". (Adeniran 2009, p. 244).* Mrs Ogunwole (Constance) suffered cruel beatings in the hand of her husband, which damaged her body. When Constance could no longer endure the pains she got from the beatings, she decided to end the marriage. To avoid his rage, she dropped a letter before leaving. She could not take her children

along because she was not settled and they suffered from his lack of anger management. Lola testified that she felt like running away anytime he lashed out.

Problems Faced by Children from Broken Home in the Novel

Omolola never knew her mother, she was separated from her mother at eighteen months old, when she left the family in London. However, the children were taken to a foster care home in London before they were moved to Nigeria by their father. In Nigeria, their father decided that he could no longer take care of the children by himself, and so with the notion that “it takes a village to train a child”, he sent his children to stay with his siblings in the village. Adebola was taken to stay with his uncle Joseph in Ado Ekiti, while Omolola was taken to stay with her father’s sister, Iya Rotimi, in Idogun.

Emotional and Behavioural Problems

“Why, why, why? I hate them all, I want to go home. I don’t want to live with my Auntie. I don’t want to live in Idogun. I want everything to go back to the way it was, with daddy, Adebola, and me living at number 4 Edgcombe House. (Adeniran 2009, p. 3)

Lola had no one to rant to so she decided to make her diary her friend. She poured all her mind in her diary named Jupiter. This explained why the story was written in Lola’s point of view. It was clear from the assertion that she was angry and sad at the sudden decision made by her father. It was sad enough that she was moved to Lagos after spending her whole life in London and was subsequently forced to stay with her aunt and other relatives in the village, Idogun. Lola’s mother left her and her brother at a very young age. This meant that she never experienced motherly care in her life. At first, the children were transferred to a foster care home before their father took them back to Lagos, where he finally decided to distribute his children to his relatives for upbringing. Adebola was taken to stay with Uncle Joseph while Omolola was taken to stay with Iya Rotimi; both of them, Mr. Ogunwole’s siblings. The new change really affected Omolola, as the life in the village took its toll on her.

She received harsh treatment from her relatives. Her aunt never treated her like a relative.

She was falsely accused of crimes not committed, became sad, and started bed wetting; an habit she had long stopped before moving to Idogun. Having spent her early life in London where English was mostly spoken, Omolola could not understand the language spoken in Idogun and they also could not comprehend what she was saying. She was maltreated by her aunt and grandmother, was not well fed, was always hungry, and was even referred to as a “*deprived child*” (pg. 20) by Uncle Niyi. She started feeling a growing hatred for her father and she began to think low of herself because of the way she was being badly treated as compared to her other cousins. She felt alone and was constantly bullied in school by her colleagues especially Akin, who beat her up and even gave her a knee injury that later became a very serious injury because it was not well attended to. Omolola could not fight them off due to her malnourished condition. She vowed to return to her father by all means which was why she started going against the school rules in order to get expelled. “*Maybe if I kept my legs open I’d also get expelled and daddy would have to find another school for me to go to in Lagos*”. (Adeniran 2009, p. 54). She felt disobeying the school rules would help her get expelled and moved back to her father, only that these crimes are not valid enough for expulsion.

Omolola lost her brother who also suffered in the hands of their uncle at a very tender age. The death of her brother really devastated her, as they had been very close and always made sure to look after each other. Even when they were far away, they communicated by sending letters to each other. She was taken to Lagos to stay with her father after her brother’s burial in Idogun. In Lagos, she became emotionally disturbed and began to blame herself for everything happening to her. She even went as far as fasting for forty days in order to bring her brother back to life. Her brother’s death affected her psychologically. She became very mad at her father for not taking care of her and her brother. To crown it all, he got another woman pregnant and then proceeded to bring her and her two children into the house. Omolola could not contain her anger and hatred for this new people added into her family. This explained the reason she got into a fight with Ronke; her step sister after she abused her. Out of

anger, Omolola broke a bottle of iced water on Ronke's head and this resulted in a thorough beating from her father. She was rushed to the hospital by Uncle Niyi after he rescued her from the brutal beating. The hatred for her father grew when he sent her out of his house. At that moment, the way she calls him in the novel changed. In the beginning of the novel, she called Mr. Ogunwole 'daddy', however, as different events began to unfold, the name gradually changed from 'daddy' to 'father' and 'ex-father'. Later, she resorted to using pronouns like 'He' and 'Him' when referring to her father. She was then taken to Uncle Niyi's house. She said, *"I'm a football, kicked from player to player, only I don't know who's winning the game or which teams are playing. I'm an unwanted parcel."* (Adeniran 2009, p. 99)

It was obvious she made this statement because she was taken from the foster care home in London to her Aunt's place, and then after the death of her brother, was taken back to her father's place. From her father's place to Uncle Niyi's place and then back to Idogun. She seemed to not have a place to call home. She also referred to herself as an unwanted parcel because she was hated in all these places. At Uncle Niyi's house, she was disliked by his wife and was taken back to Idogun village to stay with her grandmother, who also treated her badly. Back in the village, Omolola went back to her normal routine of striving to survive, being subjected to tedious works that are more than her capability, and also being bullied in school. However, she finally got back at her bully, Akin, but in a very brutal way.

"I'm not sorry I did it. I finally got my own back on Akin, after all the bullying and the beating I got from him, which almost made me lose my leg. He deserves what he got." (Adeniran 2009, p. 117)

Omolola did not feel remorseful after using a machete to slice his leg open. Due to this, she was expelled from school and even after several pleas, the principal did not accept her back. She however resolved to just exist in life, taking everything that came her way without questioning it. She hated her father to the point of not wanting to be anywhere near him, even when he visited the village with his new wife and her kids, whom her father treated better than her. She was not allowed near her new half-brother, Ekundayo because they

saw her as a witch and was reportedly the one who killed her brother Adebola. She was nevertheless not bothered about these accusations.

Eventually, Uncle Jacob, one of her relatives, came to the village from Lagos and took her with him to Lagos where she sat for her external exams. Omolola eventually left Uncle Jacob's house because of his wife's hatred for her and was again taken back to Uncle Niyi's place. Uncle Niyi sexually assaulted her, but there was no way she could tell anyone because he was the one in the family who accepted her and was also her favourite uncle. Most of all, there was no one she could tell about her predicament. She later reconciled with her father, but this was short lived due to his sudden death. Omolola passed through various incidents that could have been prevented if only her father and her mother were together.

Moving on to Adebola, his relocation to his uncle's place in Ekiti affected him. He loved his sister and was always ready to fight for her when need be. Though, the story centred on his sister, the author did not fail to also expose how badly he was treated through the letters he sent to his sister and father. He was left alone to do all the house chores and cook for the whole family without any assistance. He was not treated like a family, but rather like a house help. *"I'm a bag of bones and can even feel my ribs now dad. Please come and get me."* (Adeniran 2009, p. 262)

He became malnourished just like his sister. However, he resolved to taking over the responsibility of his father. *"Lola, we will have to do something about our situation. Maybe running away would be a better option because quite frankly I can't take much more of this."* (Adeniran 2009, p. 73). He made sure he sent his sister letters to know about her wellbeing. He became desperate to run away with his sister to start a new life. This was not achieved because he became very sick and was not taken to the hospital. He even wrote a letter to his father telling him about the deterioration of his health but never got any response.

"Please dad come and get me, I really need to see a doctor, and sometimes I find it difficult to breathe. The other day I had a coughing fit and there was blood in my phlegm". (Adeniran 2009, p. 262)

He pleaded with his father to come get him so he would be taken to the hospital for proper treatment, but got no response. During this sickness, his uncle did not acknowledge his ill health, but was given more work to do. However, his health continued to deteriorate and this led to his untimely death.

Academic Problem

In this novel, the mother left the family, and the father, who could not nurture the children alone, took them to a foster care home before he finally resolved to relocate to Nigeria. In Nigeria, Father sent his children to the village to stay with his relatives because he believed that “*It takes a village to raise a child*”, (pg. 25). Lola could not understand the Yoruba language spoken because she was not familiar with such language, the same language that was used to teach in the school, which made her unable to attend school for some time. However, she got used to the language and started attending school. She was mostly beaten and punished because of her lateness to school, but was later taken to a boarding school. Omolola was also bullied in school because of her small size, which was as a result of not being well-fed. “*Everyone wants to pick a fight with me because I’m the smallest and youngest.*” (Adeniran 2009, p. 52). She was called several names like worm girl, so she felt everyone hated her. She was not well taken care of; she was not given the basic things she needed in school. She became desperate to get back with her father in Lagos, as she felt that if she committed crimes in school, she would be expelled and her father would be forced to take her back with him.

Omolola began to miss classes, but she attended only because she loved the teacher and English language. She hid under the bunk while

her mates went to school. She was eventually expelled when she sliced Akin’s leg with a machete in school. She missed a whole school year before she was allowed to write her final exams which she failed. Omolola’s academic performance would have been excellent if she had been thoroughly nurtured, but it went downhill. It was clear from the novel that she intentionally did not put much effort in her studies just because she wanted to be with her father. However, Omolola’s story ended in a bittersweet way. She later reconciled with her father and travelled back to London after the death of her husband.

Adebola (Omolola’s brother) also missed school while he was sick. “*I haven’t been in school since term started so I have a lot to catch up on when I do go back next week*”. (Adeniran 2009, p. 73). He could not recover fast because he was not given time to recuperate, as he was still working despite his poor health. His life was cut short due to the sickness since he was not well attended to.

Conclusion

Broken home is a smaller system of broader societal challenges. Through the narratives of Blessing and Lola the issue of broken home has been extensively explored. This helps individuals to confront the realities faced by children in unstable families. As society grapples with these challenges, literature serves not only as a mirror but also as a light showing the ills in the society and ways it can be stopped, directing one to the path of equitable and successful future.

This article emphasizes the importance of collective responsibility in addressing the effects of broken home and it is advocating for systemic change and individual empathy to nurture the potential of every child.

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