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PATRIARCHY AND THE NOTION OF CHILDLESSNESS IN AYOBAMI ADEBAYO'S *STAY WITH ME*

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Abstract
The essence of this study is to portray the patriarchal attitudes and tendencies towards the notion of childlessness in certain Nigerian families. The study used content analysis in Ayobami Adebayo's novel *Stay with Me* (2017), employing the theoretical frameworks of patriarchy and childlessness to trace the extent to which the disease of childlessness in marriages hinges on the collective patriarchal domineering authority to impose psychological trauma on the "claimed barren woman". Findings revealed that most infertility in marriages is more common in men than women. However, since the Nigerian cultures are biased against women, they compel them to tolerate the denunciations of sterility, even when there is substantial evidence of the man's sterility displayed all over. The study opines that although childlessness may acquire a sociological or cultural viewpoint, it is purely biological and medical problems, which should not attract superstition and diabolic means to proffer solutions. The study recommends that researchers in human health sciences proffer solutions by creating awareness and supplying adequate, comprehensive treatments to people living with sterility syndrome in Nigeria. Again, the Nigerian government should bring in medical experts from the international community to rehabilitate the victims of childlessness by proffering lasting solutions.

Keywords: childlessness, cultural values, patriarchy, *Stay with Me*, superstition

Introduction
Ayobami Adebayo was born in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1988. Shortly after, her family moved to Ilesa and then to Ile-Ife, where she spent most of her childhood in the University Staff Quarters of Obafemi Awolowo University. Ayobami Adebayo studied at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, where she obtained her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees respectively in Literature in English. She obtained a Master of Arts in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. At East Anglia, she was also awarded an International Bursary for creative writing. Ayobami is equally a recipient of fellowships and residencies from Ledig House, Hedgebrook, Sinthian Cultural Institute, Siena Art Institute, Ebeedi Hills, and

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OxBow. Furthermore, Adebayo is a contemporary of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Margaret Atwood since she studied Creative Writing alongside them.

In 2015, Ayobami Adebayo was listed by the Financial Times as one of the bright stars of Nigerian literature. Her debut novel, *Stay with Me*, was published in 2017 by Canongate Books. Kakutani (2017), in her review of *Stay with Me* for The New York Times, described Adebayo as "an exceptional storyteller", adding, "She writes not just with extraordinary grace but with genuine wisdom about love and loss and the possibility of redemption. She has written a powerfully magnetic and heartbreaking book." The book was subsequently published in the United States of America by Alfred A. Knopf and in Nigeria by Ouida Books. It has been translated into more than eighteen languages. It was selected as a notable book of the year by several publications, including The New York Times, The Economist, The Wall Street Journal, and The Guardian.

Stay with Me (2017) was shortlisted for the Wellcome Book Prize, the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction, as well as for the 9mobile Prize for Literature (formerly the Etisalat Prize for Literature), which the novel won in 2019. The novel was long-listed for the International Dublin Literary Award and the Dylan Thomas Prize. Prior to its publication, the novel *Stay with Me* had been shortlisted for the Kwani Manuscript Project, a prize for unpublished fiction. The series editor is Ellah Wakatama Allfrey. Ayobami has published other books to her credit, among which are: *A Spell of Good Things* (2021) and *A Spell of Good* (2023).

The overall aim of this paper is to investigate how Ayobami Adebayo portrays patriarchy and the notion of childlessness in fiction and real life, highlighting certain trials, frustrations, traumas, and resilience of women, especially within the confines of marriage in Nigerian cultures. This study also sets out to create an in-depth awareness of the reality of infertility syndrome, as well as appeal to the government and their agencies to assist such men/ families with proper treatments, thereby saving the womenfolk from unnecessary condemnation.

Method

Theoretical framework

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a prevailing structure in African societies and global cultures. The term "Patriarchy" literally means "the rule of the father" (Ferguson, 1999). It comes from the Greek words "Patria," meaning father, and "arche," meaning rule or domain (Green, 2010). Patriarchy exerts its influence on multiple levels, such as “dictating gender roles, shaping familial relationships, and influencing individual life choices” (Ogunjimi & Na’allah, 2012, p. 2). The origin of patriarchy in African cultures could be traced back to ancestral traditions and societal structures where the male figure, whether as a father, brother, uncle, elder, or king, held significant authority. Patriarchy and its institutions are the foremost and only identifiable enemies that oppress women whenever the notion of childlessness is depicted in the family setting.

Sincuba (2014) states that these patriarchal norms were often reinforced by early societal set-ups, folklores, myths, religious practices, rituals, and ceremonies that marked significant life events, with males as primary decision makers and upholders of family honour. Historically, Sanderson (2001) enlightens that

Aristotle, an esteemed Greek philosopher from the third century BCE, alleges that the city-state evolved from the patriarchal family. However, Aristotle represents women as morally, intellectually, and physically inferior to men. He further sees women as the property of men, implying that women's roles in society are to reproduce children, and to serve men in the households, and accept male domination of women as natural and virtuous (Harold, 2002).

The term "Patriarchy", as ascertained by Walby (1989, p. 20), is "a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". This implies that patriarchal oppressions specify their abnormality of infertility upon the womenfolk through their position as the heads. Gwen (2009) further advocates in feminist theory that patriarchy is the broad social structure in which men dominate over every aspect of women and children.

The Notion of Childlessness

The term "Childlessness" incorporates a network of social, psychological, cultural, and individual factors, where the institutions of patriarchy find their way to hold women ransom for their shortcomings. “Childlessness connotes the absence of children in an individual’s life, which might be considered voluntary; either due to medical reasons- involuntary childlessness – or by choice, whether known or unexplained” (Miettinen et al., 2015, p. 4). Gillespie (2003) posits that voluntarily childless females steer their gender personalities, confronting traditional motherly roles and creating alternative womanly identities. According to the World Health Organization (2018), “infertility is a disease of the male or female reproductive system defined by the failure to achieve a pregnancy after twelve months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse.” In consonance with the concept of childlessness, Atwood (1985, p. 1721) explains “a woman is either fertile and important, or infertile, and or unimportant whatsoever…." Atwood's claims imply that in patriarchal cultures, women's primary role is tied to motherhood. And that is why in patriarchal settings, a woman's value is often intrinsically linked to her fertility.

Nynnat's (2021) position on childlessness portrays that patriarchy usually puts much pressure on women to have children, even when they might not deem it fit, due to their health conditions or other personal beliefs known to them alone. She adds that women who are childless by choice may face stigmatisation, discrimination, condemnation, and judgment from patriarchal societies, because they may be castigated as recalcitrant, freelance women who do not want the patriarchal kingdom to procreate their progenies. However, "childlessness" may be considered voluntary when a human being – male/female – deliberately chooses not to have children. It is often observed that women who are childless, on the other hand, by circumstances beyond their control, usually attract pity, blame, or exclusion from some concerned group, including most patriarchal cultures, if they so wish to exhibit some positive aspects of human nature toward such women.

The intersections of patriarchy and childlessness are subjects that have been explored with profound depth and nuances in West African fiction, especially in Nigeria, for example, Nwapa (1966), Adimora-Ezeigbo (1996), Dare (2020), among others. This study set out to address the issues surrounding patriarchy and its notion of childlessness in most Nigerian cultures. In this case, this study had a

specific focus on the creative work of Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* (2017), placing it as the object of the study. The method used was content analysis using the theoretical frameworks of patriarchy and childlessness to trace the extent to which the disease of childlessness in marriages hinges on the collective patriarchal domineering authority to impose psychological trauma on the "claimed barren woman."

Findings and Discussion

The findings reveal that most of the difficulties in marriages, which revolve around childlessness, are motivated by patriarchy and not often caused by women themselves.

Love relations and marriage

Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* (2017) is set in Nigeria in the 1980s. She deploys the ideologies of patriarchy and the notion of childlessness to examine many topical issues which characterise the lives of the major characters – Akin and Yejide – among which include the love and loyalty relationship existing between them in the institution of marriage. Marriage is one singular institution that forms the forum for the family. The 'family', as Baber (1939) rightly observes, "like religion, is tied up so closely with certain emotions that challenge any of its basic concepts to raise the charge of heresy and sacrilege." Yejide and Akin have been in love since they met in their undergraduate days at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Their union was, and is, built on love right from the onset. Akin, in reminiscing about the evolution of their marriage, claims:

> I love Yejide from the very first moment… But there are things even love can't do. Before I got married, I believed love could do anything. I learned soon enough that it couldn't bear the weight of four years without children. If the burden is too much and stays too long, even love bends, cracks, comes close to breaking, and sometimes does break. But even when it's in a thousand pieces around our feet, that doesn't mean it's no longer love (Adebayo, 2017, P. 27).

Of course, Akin ponders upon the harsh reality of childlessness in his marriage because, as far as Nigerian cultures are concerned, children are the instruments that confirm a man's fertility and progeny. Akin, in this case, does not have children who will continue his ancestral lineage after his demise. This situation causes him to take a second thought on 'love' as he claims. Akin and Yejide are thrown into unnecessary pressures put on them by their culture, families, and even themselves, due to the singular fact that Yejide is not able to conceive, nor raise children after four years of marriage despite the 'love' and 'loyalty' her husband, Akin showers on her as his family.

The question asked at this point is: What is a family made up of? The term "family" is loosely employed to cover different kinds of groupings, as portrayed by Baber (1939): (a) the traditional categorisation consisting of married father and mother and children; (b) one parent and children, if the other parent has died, deserted, or been separated or divorced; (c) the married childless couple; (d) the

unmarried coupled, with or without children, who have lived together long enough to be considered man and wife by common law; (e) a man with several wives, with or without children; (f) a group of related persons (brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, etc., as accepted by the census) living together as a household. Furthermore, another workable definition of the concept may be: "The family is a group defined by sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children" (MacIver, 1937).

A close look at the categorisations of the concept of "family" from the sociologists' viewpoints, Baber and MacIver, respectively, portrays the incorporation of the man, wife, and children raised within the confines of marriage. Going by the above definitions, can we really claim that Akin and Yejide have a family, in spite of the claimed love that characterised them? Akin's reflection of their love is a kind of psychological torment occurring within Akin when he remembers his mother's threat to his marriage, thus:

> After four years, nobody else cared about love. My mother didn't. She talked about my responsibility to her as a first son. Reminded me about nine months when the only world I knew was inside her… When my mother threatened that she would start visiting my wife each week with a new woman if I didn't choose one within a month, I had to make decision. I knew my mother was not a woman who make empty threats. I also knew that Yejide couldn't bear that kind of pressure. I would have broken her. Of the string of girls my mother paraded through my office every month, Funmi was the only one who didn't insist on moving in with Yejide and me (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 27; 29).

By considering the third grouping of a family according to Baber (1939), earlier mentioned, the family might be made up of "the married childless couple." Little wonder we may unanimously classify Akin and Yejide's marriage as fitting more into this last group. For instance, when a typical Nigerian couple find themselves in the state of childlessness; it is often a situation characterised by strong feelings of inferiority, (with compensatory aggressiveness) (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 13-25; 32-45; 47-48; 53; 66); emotionally apprehension (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 17; 25; 28-29; 32-33; 41-45; 52-53; 81-84; 91-96; 102-103 135); variable anguish in mood (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 48-51;74-77; 87), over anxious in social life, and ambitious (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 60-63; 67-68; 75; 77; 79; 83; 98-100; 101-102); antagonism (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 21-22; 45; 85-87; 100); unwarranted pressures (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 13-22; 47; 53-54; 98-99); and or, withdrawal on the part of the man or woman or their parents, and so on.

The aggrieved parties – husband, wife, and especially the parents–in–law, etc. - may go to any extent to resolve matters on their own. A typical example of this is portrayed when Yejide takes a step to visit a certain mountain after one customer at her salon: "Mrs Adeolu, a pregnant customer, told me about the Mountain of Jaw-Dropping Victory, I went to Moomi that same day to discuss it with her…" (Adebayo, 2017, p. 52). The aftermath of this suggestion degenerated into some serious psychological emergencies that disintegrate the lives of everyone related to Yejide, beginning with herself (pp. 55-87).

Ayobami Adebayo projects the terrible situation of compromise, whereby the pressure from Akin's family, a patriarchal institution, becomes too unbearable that Akin's uncle, Babalola, with Yejide's stepmother, Iya Martha, forces a wife, Funmi, on Akin, while Yejide was at Jos. But since the laws and norms of the Nigerian cultures sometimes demand transparency in all things, both Akin's and Yejide's families come to a consensus that they could confront the need of this barren couple once and for all (Adebayo, 2017). In fact, from the way Baba Lola is advocating, he might as well have spoken for Akin, his nephew, considering the fact that ability to bear children and prolong ones' progeny is very essential among the African patriarchal cultures, that regularly a man will not marry a girl until she is either pregnant or has borne a child.

Adebayo portrays Akin as a proper Nigerian man because, he quickly reflects upon some cultural importance shared by male dominated cultures with especial reference to the economic needs associated with childbearing and child rearing, and most significantly, as MacIver (1937, p.196) succinctly puts: "a common habitation, home, or household, which, however, may not be exclusive to the family group." Having been conscious of the fact that, if he did not allow his family to force him into agreeing with them to go into a second marriage, he might be at the losing end. He calms down his wife by appealing to her understanding thus: "Yejide, try and understand. You know I am not going to hurt you... I was in a difficult situation. You know I won't cheat on you, Yejide… I promise" (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 23-24).

Speaking to confirm this position, Calverton (1931) claims "… the premarital relationship is a test of fertility. Among other tribes, where such relations do not necessarily denote intention of marriage, pregnancy is promptly followed by marriage" (pp. 164-165). In consonance with the African/Nigerian men's inordinate tendency to always oppress the female gender, Grace Ibanga (2020, p. 211) posits that, "…the oppression emanating from the male gender is apparent… man emerges as a symbolic creature that only totalises its tendency to dominate his environment…This tendency to dominate would lead to the systemic inferiorisation and oppression of the female gender; however, it becomes an existential tragedy that must be confronted."

Motherhood in Stay with Me (2017)

Adebayo ascertains that, "Motherhood is gold! Mother is treasured gold that cannot be bought with money" (Adebayo, 2017, p. 51). She brings to light the concept of "motherhood" when she buttresses that, mother–children relationship is an African cultural universal. To confirm this assertion, Ibanga (2020, p. 208) advocates thus, "The Mother-figure is a glorious virtue, and it is held in high esteem by African women…motherhood is blissful and it is the cradle of every human culture. The importance of motherhood is universally acknowledged." Consequently, Akin states the position of his own mother on this issue of childlessness when he laments to his wife, Yejide:

> … My mother didn't. She talked about my responsibility to her as a first son. Reminded me about the nine months when the only world I knew was inside her… How she couldn't get comfortable in bed and had to

> spend the night in a cushioned armchair… Moomi began talking about Juwon, my half-brother, the first son of my father's second wife… that Juwon already had four children all boys. This time she didn't stop with Juwon but reminded me that all my half-brothers now had children (Adebayo, 2017, P. 28).

The implication of Akin bringing his own mother's viewpoint into the matter of his childlessness with Yejide, affirms Lauretta Ngcobo's (2007, p. 533) observation that "…in Africa they preserve a special place of honour for motherhood…African motherhood is about children."

Ayobami Adebayo equally documents the events involving Akin and Yejide in alternating sections, and this style of narration makes it possible for the readers to learn that Yejide's mother died when she was giving birth to her. The novelist adds that Yejide's father's other wives were dismissive, cold, insulting, and hurtful towards her (Adebayo, 2017). It is possible that young Yejide, having grown up with intense loneliness and isolation and desperation, could have been the reason she is closer to Akin's mother, more than her own father's wives, who brought her up after the demise of her mother. Yejide reflects upon her own mother's virtues: "My mother had become an obsession for me, a religion, and very thought of referring to another woman as mother seemed sacrilegious, a betrayal of the woman who had given up her life for me to live" (p. 51). To be candid, Yejide accentuates the role of the mother-figure as she reminisces about when she was twelve years old. The vicar of her family church – Anglican Church – conducted a special service to honour, praise, and celebrate the values of mothers as gold (p.51).

Despite Yejide's resolution not to ever call anyone her 'Moomi', she could not resist calling her mother-in-law by the title of 'Moomi.' She claims:

> Yet every time Akin's mother wrapped me in her fleshly embrace, my heart sang Moomi, and when I called her the venerated title…She lived up to the name, taking my side if any issue I had with Akin came to her attention, assuring me that it was a matter of time before I got pregnant for her son, insisting that my miracle would be waiting once I turned the right corner (Adebayo, 2017, p. 51-52).

There is without doubt that Yejide sees Moomi as "a mother-figure" (Ibanga, 2020). She believes that she is Moomi's favourite daughter-in-law.

Moomi, Akin's mother, is a traditional and religious woman who believes in the importance of polygamy and childbearing. She is a domineering and manipulative woman who compels and coerces Akin to take a second wife. She interferes in Akin and Yejide's marriage and happiness. She is also a superstitious and hypocritical mother who seems to blame Yejide for her infertility and misfortunes. Moomi's concern over Yejide's inability to conceive is justified by her level of education, which is lacking in the understanding that childlessness may happen as a result of a man's impotency, a condition Akin hides from Moomi. Again, Moomi's ignorance of Akin's impotency compels her to believe that Yejide is the cause of the couple's childlessness. This results in Moomi's consistent confrontation with Yejide, thus:

> Why won't you allow my son to have a child?... This life is not difficult, Yejide. If you cannot have children, allow my son to have some with Funmi… I have been good to you, I beg you in the name of God, Yejide have mercy on me. (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 53-54).

The implication of justifying Moomi's outburst of emotions – psychological and physical – may be classified by her concern for Yejide as a mother-figure's instinct for her son (Adebayo, 2017).

Ayobami Adebayo equally educates her reader on Moomi's character trait as possessing some milk-of-kindness, which is often always the characteristic of every mother. Consequently, Moomi strives to conquer Yejide's childlessness by joining her on her seven days of fasting, vigil, and, of course, visitation to the various traditional herbal centres (Adebayo, 2017). The essence of the novelist engaging the readers with such detailed analysis is to educate them on how mothers (women) cope with the challenges of patriarchal norms, notions, and expectations when it comes to cases of childlessness. However, by assisting their sisters, daughters, and others to carry their burdens, women also share in what Grace Ibanga (2019, p. 222) refers to as the "Myth of Sisterhood." Moomi's character in the novel *Stay with Me* (2017) provides an example that a woman who does not give birth to a child may not be given the title of a true mother.

Childlessness, infertility, and its myths

Ayobami Adebayo, in *Stay with Me* (2017), weaves a poignant narrative that depicts patriarchal notions of childlessness in a typical Nigerian society. She depicts the family, patriarchal, and societal pressures mounted on the claimed barren woman, the complexities of sacrifices she makes to proffer solutions to her predicament. Yejide speaks out about her frustration in the course of searching for a child:

> There was a time I would have ignored Mrs Adeolu's words, a time when I did not believe in prophets who lived on mountains or priests who worshipped beside rivers. That was before I had so many tests done in hospital, and every one of them showed that there was nothing preventing me from getting pregnant…Akin also went in to get tested and came back saying that the doctors had found nothing wrong with him. Then I stopped waving aside my mother-in-law's suggestions… I became open to alternatives. If I was not getting what I wanted in one place, what was wrong with searching elsewhere? (Adebayo, 2017, p. 52).

The essence of why Adebayo presents such a pathetic analogy of a traumatised childless woman is to explain that children are a heritage from God Almighty. The Holy Bible states: "Lo, children are a heritage of the LORD and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psalms 127:3). The novelist highlights that, irrespective of where an individual or a group of people may go to in search of children, if the Supreme Creator of the universe – God Almighty – does not open

the womb of such a woman/man by Himself, there is absolutely nothing she/he can do to ameliorate the situation.

In consonance with the traumatic depiction of Yejide and Akin's hopeless conditions due to their sterility, Kakutani (2017) observes, "the novel's exploration of childlessness isn't merely a critique of societal norms, but an intimate portrayal of personal anguish, hope, and despair. Indeed, as Yejide confronts the silent pressures and overt insinuations from society, her journey becomes problematic for countless women grappling with similar challenges." Furthermore, Adebayo explains the multifarious agonised conditions Yejide suffers because of childlessness at the initial stage of her marriage (Adebayo, 2017). She is deceived into pseudocyesis, a terrible situation where Yejide enters into mental depression – believing that she is pregnant – directly after she had visited the Mountain of Jaw-Dropping Miracles, and she continued in the misapprehension for one full year plus; after which she is mesmerised by Prophet Josiah to breastfeed a goat, after she has gone through various methods of ritual sacrifices (Adebayo, 2017).

Ayobami Adebayo questions the integrity and psychology of women when they tend to allow patriarchy and the quest for children in marriage to push them into making wrong decisions, as well as plunging themselves into bestial, primitive, and paganic practices at the detriment of their sound reasoning. She, in addition, takes a deep reflection on why it should always be the women-folk who go through such psychological depression and sufferings, when in reality it takes both males and females to make children. Adebayo uses this singular occasion to project that most of the difficulties in marriages that revolve around childlessness are not often caused by women themselves. A typical example of Yejide's 'supposed barrenness' is outrightly caused by her husband, Akin is sterile. His mother and family do not know about this, except his younger brother, Dotun. Akin confided in his brother: "It was during that year that I told him I'd never had an erection" (Adebayo, 2017, P. 279).

In consonance with the concept of sterility in males, Leeners et. al. (2022) ascertain that "couples that are detected with sterility have an increased risk of sexual desire and erectile dysfunction being among the most recurring issues." Of course, Dotun, at the time that his elder brother, Akin, had revealed to him about his state of sterility, had encouraged him to relax his mind that it would happen when he met the right girl. To further confirm what Leeners et. al. claim as 'an increased risk of sexual desire and erectile dysfunction', Funmi, Akin's emergency wife, confronts him:

> So how did Yejide get pregnant?...' Do you think I'm a fool? Your lies and fake nonsense you've been doing in bed, you think I don't know? Is it because I've not decided to expose you?… Tell me… Tell me how a penis that has never been hard makes a woman pregnant? And don't tell me again that it only happens when you are with me. I don't believe that anymore (Adebayo, 2017, p. 260).

Funmi is the second imposed wife on Akin by his family to solve his infertility problem. She is a young, naive, and submissive woman who obeys her husband and his family at one point, and who hopes beyond every doubt that she might give birth

to a child by Akin. She is also a jealous and vengeful woman who hates Yejide and tries to harm her. But after she realises that Akin is not the kind of man endowed with fecundity, she gets irritated by putting up the above vengeance on her husband for a season. She died on the night of Yejide's first child, Olamide's, naming ceremony. This implies that Akin murdered her by error (Adebayo, 2017). He reflects:

> On the night Funmi died, the night of Olamide's naming ceremony, all I'd wanted was to make it to my bedroom without tripping on the stairs… Funmi was right with me, slurring her words. 'So how did Yejide get pregnant?... I've never been sure if Funmi whispered those words or shouted them. But that night, it sounded as though the words were being bellowed, it felt as though they were echoing through every room in the house. She'd already let go of my trousers when I turned around to cover her mouth with my hand…. for a fleeting moment before she staggered, fell backwards, and tumbled down the stairs (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 260-261).

Adebayo, Funmi's creator, gives diverse consequences to her death. First, Yejide interprets it as nemesis catching up with her: "So this is all it takes to snatch a man from his wife's bed…" (Adebayo, 2017, p. 126). To the vicar preaching during Funmi's burial ceremony, he states: "Perhaps when we ask the Lord to deliver us from evil, we are asking him to deliver us from evil, we are really asking him to deliver us from ourselves" (p. 135). The essence of Akin pondering over the vicar's sermon, one month after Funmi's death, is to enlighten the humanity on the consequences of one's action – good or bad – just as the Holy Bible, in Galatians 6 verses 7- 8 rightly counsels: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that sowth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sowth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." It could be as a result of Akin's contribution to Funmi's untimely death, judging from the vicar's sermon, on asking God 'to deliver us from ourselves,' that his conscience condemns him, and he attributes the infantile death of his babies – Olamide and Sesan – to Funmi's premature demise. Akin ponders:

> Funmi had been on my mind since Rotimi had been diagnosed. It was impossible not to wonder if Olamide and Sesan had died as a form of retribution. Whether, on some universal scale of justice, by some skewed process of karma or esan, the children had paid the price for my sin. Whenever I woke up from nightmares about Funmi, I couldn't help but wonder if the dreams were an omen about Rotimi's fate, if three chidren equalled an adult on the universe's scales of justice (Adebayo, 2017, p. 259).

This implies that Adebayo puts guilty consciences on both the demised Funmi and Akin, for violating the laws of nature and marriage, by conniving with Moomi and Yejide's family to sideline Yejide in her marital bliss, preventing the latter from enjoying her happiness and peace in her marriage.

By still looking at Adebayo's guts and boldness to expose the supreme male hegemony and his state of impotency, she joins forces with several other Nigerian novelists/matriarchs – Adimora-Ezeigbo (1996), Dare (2020), Aguoru (2021), and so on, to contribute immensely to the development of Nigeria literary creativity. Consequently, during the other past generations of feminist mothers, there were attempts to prove themselves by protest, self –identity and assertions, but the third – wave feminists, according to Findlen (2006, p. 6), see themselves untitled to equality and self-fulfilment and declare that, "legacy of feminism … was a sense entitlement." The group also spots out and recognises that social, political, and economic injustices are still the order of the day where women are concerned.

Why has Adebayo allowed Yejide, her fellow literary sister, to suffer so much traumatised anguish before the truth – patriarchal infertility – is finally exposed at the end of the day? This question gets answered when we consider Ray Baber's (1939, p. 512) claims that, "there is no exact knowledge of the actual sterility in our population, but that there is every reason to accept it has been overestimated." He asserts further that 'man's fecundity decreases as his life becomes more complex'. This implies that as the complexity of life increased, man had to use more and more energy to adjust himself to a new existence, and therefore has less energy left for reproduction. But Reynolds and Macomber (1924) state that quite a number of modern-day couples are infertile, most of whom are also unproductive. However, these Sociologists do not authenticate their supposition regarding infecundity, but base their judgment on the relatively few married men and women they know who do not want at least one child.

In consonance with the issue of sterile marriages from the number of infertile (childless) marriages, Whelpton (1935, p. 240), explains that "the estimate of sterile unions is too high, and points out that, having established a reputation for curing sterility they would naturally attract childless couples who wanted children, and that childless couples who wanted to avoid having children would have no reason to consult them". A close look at Adebayo' *Stay with Me* (2017) projects several instances where Akin has consulted various places – medical and native, who could proffer solutions to his sterile problem – Akin reflects:

> …I always had hope that everything would change and lies would not matter anymore. I was still seeing a specialist in Lagos University Teaching Hospital, and he had expressed some optimism. I'd had taken his cautious comment and run with them, I told myself it would be any day now, convinced myself the specialist in LUTH could work miracles. We'd find the right cocktail of medication and all would be well. Hope has always been my opium, the things I couldn't wean myself off …I felt I was ready to tell Yejide anything, even about my desperate visit to a traditional herbalist…I had travelled to IIara-Mokin to consult Baba Suke during the period I still consider as one of the the worst I've lived through… (Adebayo 2017, pp. 246-247; 281).

The novel investigates some conflicts in Yejide's and Akin's home, which their state of sterility brings – Akin struggles with the expectations and pressures of his culture, religion, as he tries to balance his personal and social obligations. After

he agrees to take a second wife, Funmi, imposed upon them to please their families and to save his marriage, he quickly regrets his decision: "Marrying her was a terrible miscalculation" (Adebayo, 2017, p. 100). Adebayo depicts both the emotional and physical torture Yejide, the first wife of Akin, goes through because she has to share her husband with another woman. In her pride and determination, she refuses to accept the tradition of polygamy because of the past experience from her own biological family (p. 32).

Consequently, Adebayo allows Yejide to suffer psychological and physical trauma supposed barrenness imposed upon her as a result of the patriarchal myth of concealing infertility. A clear instance of this psyche trauma is displayed especially on the fateful day her mother-in-law deliberately degraded her thus:

> Are you pregnant now?... are you barren and deaf too? I say, are you pregnant? 'The answer is either yes, I am pregnant or no, I still haven't been pregnant for a single day in my life.' …why won't you allow my son to have a child?... Tell me, Yejide, have you ever seen God in the labour ward?... Women manufactured children and if you can't you are just a man. Nobody should call you a woman…This life is not difficult, Yejide. If you cannot have children, allow my son to have some with Funmi… (Adebayo, 2017, Pp. 53-54).

The Nigerian cultures are complex and unpredictable for any married woman who is assumed to be barren to live in, to enjoy her psychological balance, and to progress in all senses of the word. The question Adebayo is asking her society is: Is the so-called barren/childless woman in the place of God to be a stakeholder when it comes to manufacturing children? If the answer to such a premise is no, why have the cultures grown up to be very wicked in their orientation toward women? Humanity has come a long way to realise that there are just some things they are not in control of. And so, if that is the situation, why should a fellow woman be an inherent problem to another woman? The integrity and psychology of women in the quest for children in marriages push them into making wrong decisions, and plunging themselves into bestial, primitive, and pagan practices at the detriment of their sound reasoning.

Wicked mother-figure

A close examination of Moomi, Akin's mother, qualifies to be the terrible mother, villain archetype, which Jung (2010) describes as being "yet cruel-like fate" (p. 138). How could a mother-in-law, who originally, from all indications, should be Yejide's mother (since the later does not have one- mother or siblings, Adebayo, 2017, Pp. 32; 87; 223), be the one to expose her, to vices, grieves, and other psychological ordeals that can devastate her? The implication of Moomi's, Akin's mother, utterance is more or less questioning the supremacy of God Almighty, "…have you ever seen God in a labour room giving birth to a child?" Yet, He is "The Creator and Possessor of the entire universe" (Genesis 14:19), who is responsible for manufacturing and delivering children. Little wonder, Moomi's low thinking syndrome explains what Omoera and Ibanga (2021, p. 11) succinctly capture to be: "the typical nature of original mankind – cruel, wicked, and evil

oriented; which caused the Creator initially to regret making man: "…And it repented the Lord that He had made man on earth it grieves Him at his heart" (Genesis 6, verses 5-6).

Infantile death

Yejide experiences the infantile death of her children – Olamide was the first daughter she gave birth to after she came out of a long period of supposed childlessness. Dotun, her husband's brother, is hired by Akin to sleep with her, without any prior knowledge that her husband, arranged for the act (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 145-152; 192-195; 222-225). Sesan, the son Yejide gave birth to, after the demise of Olamide, was said to have inherited 'sickle-cell disease' that was traced to Dotun's genotype, since he was the sperm donor (Adebayo, 2017, pp. 157-159; 190-191; 206-208).

Conclusion

This study advocates for proper orientation that calls for egalitarian gender roles among cultures in marriages. It posits that there should be mutual understanding where motherhood must be the criterion of unifying all humans with clean consciences. Patriarchy should admit its shortcomings of infertility and other health challenges, without necessarily making women suffer unduly. The wicked mother role should be totally eliminated from contemporary cultures. Finally, couples should ascertain their genotypes before they contract marriages.

The study recommends that health practitioners of varying categories and counsellors should raise awareness about infertility, debunk myths, and superstitions by providing support to individuals and couples living with sterility challenges. Researchers in human health sciences should proffer solutions, by way of creating awareness, and adequate and comprehensive treatments to people living with sterility syndrome in Nigerian societies. Again, since most people in the Nigerian cultures are not adequately enlightened about their health conditions, reliable information about human health problems should be disseminated even to the rural areas, using proper communication media, even in the indigenous languages. The reason for such wider coverage may prevent the populace from resorting to myths, superstitions, or harmful practices available to them in the rustic locality.

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