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The Reparative Potential of (Self-)Love in *Daughters Who Walk this Path**

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ABSTRACT:

Yejide Kilanko's novel, Daughters Who Walk this Path *(2012), follows Morayo's journey towards self-reparation and self-love amidst the backdrop of sexual abuse and societal expectations in Nigeria. This article delves into Morayo's formation of emotional and sentimental attachments as an adult. I argue that her narrative powerfully explores self-love amid societal pressures. For this, the focus is on Morayo's struggle with trauma against expectations of Nigerian "good citizenship" (Ahmed, 2014: 108), especially regarding marriage and sexuality. My contention is that Morayo's journey towards self-reparation is self-driven as a result of the social barriers that prevent her from developing self-pride. In this respect, I explore Morayo's agency in detaching herself from national and customary impositions, positioning her journey towards self-*

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love as a critique of societal expectations, testifying to the transformative power of personal agency. Drawing on key events in Nigerian history during the 1990s, the article examines Morayo's evolving journey towards self-reparation and contrasts it with Nigeria's own reparative trajectory. Additionally, the article analyzes Morayo's relationship with Kachi, her childhood love, and the tensions arising from his adherence to societal norms of masculinity and romance. In this sense, the focus turns to how Morayo's path toward self-love is threatened by Kachi's willingness to follow Nigerian customary laws on masculinity (Uchendu, 2008: 15) and social expectations involving marriage and romantic love. Against this backdrop, Morayo's sense of self-preservation and her love for Kachi will be introduced as positively contributing to repairing the damage that expectations of Nigerian masculinity exert upon Kachi's self-esteem.
KEYWORDS*: Reparation; Love; Nigeria; Good Citizen; Masculinity*

El potencial reparador del amor (propio) en *Daughters Who Walk this Path*

RESUMEN:

La novela de Yejide Kilanko, Daughters Who Walk this Path *(2012), explora la evolución Morayo hacia la autorreparación y el amor propio tras sufrir abusos sexuales. Este artículo profundiza en la formación de apegos emocionales y sentimentales de Morayo en su etapa adulta, postulando que la novela explora el amor propio ante presiones sociales. La atención está en las dificultades de Morayo para confrontar el trauma ante expectativas sobre la "buena ciudadanía" nigeriana (Ahmed, 2014: 108), particularmente sobre el matrimonio y la sexualidad. En este sentido, exploro la agencia de Morayo al distanciarse de las imposiciones nacionales y consuetudinarias, posicionando su camino hacia el amor propio como crítica de las expectativas sociales, dando testimonio del poder transformador de la agencia personal. Basándose en acontecimientos clave de la historia nigeriana durante la década de 1990, el artículo examina la evolución de Morayo hacia el amor propio, contrastándolo con la propia trayectoria reparativa de Nigeria. Además, analiza la relación de Morayo con Kachi, su amor de infancia, y las tensiones derivadas de su adhesión a las normas sociales de masculinidad y romance. La atención se centra en cómo el camino de Morayo hacia el amor propio es amenazado por la voluntad de Kachi de seguir las leyes consuetudinarias sobre masculinidad (Uchendu, 2008: 15) y las expectativas relacionadas con el matrimonio y el amor romántico. En este contexto, la autoprotección de Morayo se analizará como*

positiva para reparar el daño que las expectativas de la masculinidad nigeriana ejercen sobre la autoestima de Kachi.

PALABRAS CLAVES: *Reparación; Amor; Nigeria; Buen ciudadano; Masculinida*

Introduction

Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk this Path* (2012) delves into a sad reality in Nigeria, where a sociological study carried out among adolescents in 2017 reveals women's age of sexual debut to be between ten and fifteen years old (Envuladu et al., 2017: 2).[1] Sadly enough, a high number of women, especially those out of school, report having been forced to have sex by older men, "including family members" (3). Kilanko's novel explores Morayo's journey towards reparation and self-love after being repeatedly abused as a child by her cousin, Bros T. Kilanko's first-person narrator retells her evolution from the 1980s to the mid-2000s, describing the pain and sense of abandonment she experiences, the family shame she endures, and her difficulties to conciliate the memories of the assaults with an affective relationship and healthy sexual life. The only consolation from the cruel reality she is enduring at home is Kachi, her childhood love, but they must part with each other when Kachi's family moves from Eleyele to Awka.

This article delves into Morayo's formation of emotional and sentimental attachments as an adult[2]. I argue that *Daughters Who Walk this Path* serves as a powerful exploration of Morayo's journey towards self-love amidst the intersecting forces of sexual abuse and societal expectations in Nigeria. The focus is on Morayo's need to

[1] Male adolescents in the study report their age of sexual debut to be between eleven and sixteen (Envuladu et al. 2017, 2).

[2] I have elsewhere discussed the role of anger as a catalyst of emancipation, delving into Morayo's evolution from the moment she is abused for the first time, in the mid-1980s, until she shares her shameful secret with a non-responsive family and ultimately leaves behind her city of birth, Eleyele, and starts her university training in Lagos in the early 1990s (Cruz-Gutiérrez 2024).

deal with her trauma against the expectations on Nigerian "good citizens" (Ahmed, 2014: 108) and their behavior regarding marriage and sexuality. This article analyzes Morayo's journey following Sara Ahmed's take into the power of traditions upon personal choice (2014), Lauren Berlant's exploration on personal autonomy and choice when it comes to love and nationalist discourses (2012), and theorizations on Nigerian masculinity postulated by Egodi Uchendu (2008) and Andrea A. Cornwall (2003). I seek to demonstrate that Morayo's journey is self-reparative by exploring her need of making amends with herself as part of a process of growth and self-acceptance. For this, I argue that a process of reparation must be carried out by Morayo herself, since her family does not support her at an emotional level. Similarly, her potential sentimental partner, Kachi, adheres to a model of good citizenship without questioning its implications. In this sense, I seek to prove that Morayo's journey towards self-love is characterized by detaching herself from national and customary impositions and expectations. In the first section, the focus is on key events in Nigerian history during the 1990s affecting Morayo's evolution. This period is described as the beginning of an ongoing reparative journey which, very much like the Nigerian nation, has suffered setbacks. As part of the analysis, I explore Morayo's reunion with a grown-up Kachi who cherishes the memory of their childhood love. In the second section, the focus turns to how Morayo's path toward self-love is threatened by Kachi's willingness to follow Nigerian customary laws and social expectations involving marriage and romantic love. For this, I discuss Kachi's embodiment of good citizenship through conforming to expectations on Nigerian masculinity (Uchendu, 2008: 15). The third section focuses on Morayo's sense of self-preservation and self-love positively contributing to repairing the damage that expectations of Nigerian masculinity exert upon Kachi's self-esteem.

Personal and National Quest for Reconciliation

This section underlines the parallel evolution between Morayo building a sense of stability and self-acceptance and Nige-

ria's attempts to foster a sense of security and union amongst its citizens. Particularly, I focus on the period from the 1990s onwards, when Nigeria underwent a military dictatorship at the hands of General Sani Abacha (1993-1999) before the country celebrated democratic elections in 1999[3]. In this respect, this section will discuss the role of the National Youth Service Corps program (NYSC)[4] in attempting to repair the Nigerian nation after the Biafran war (1967-1970). Such a discussion will be intertwined with Morayo's views on the program and her critical perspective towards Nigeria being a reflection of her evolution. Subsequently, I turn to Morayo's reunion with her childhood love, Kachi, when both are completing their tasks as part of the NYSC. I discuss Morayo's reticence to engage in a romantic relationship with Kachi as a reflection of an incomplete sense of emotional reparation and protection.

By the late 1990s, Morayo is an independent woman, as she moves from her parent's house in Eleyele to Lagos in the mid-1990s to complete her university training. After graduating, Morayo is expected to join the NYSC. The military leader Yakubu Gowon established the NYSC after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) in an attempt to promote "understanding and togetherness" among Nigerian citizens (Bourne, 2015: 253) by sending graduate students on internships to different Nigerian territories. The ultimate purpose was that young Nigerians lived in different parts of the country so they could meet people from

[3] During the 1980s and 1990s, Nigeria endured three consecutive military regimes. General Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985), General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1985-1993), and General Sani Abacha (1993-1998) ruled the country before civilian rule was restated in 1999.

[4] The National Youth Service Corp scheme was set up in 1973 by Yakubu Gowon to further the goal of building unity in diversity after the Biafran war. The scheme "made it mandatory for graduates from universities and other institutions of higher learning who are under the age of thirty to serve their nation for one year in states other than their own" (Adibe, 2012: 22).

different ethnic groups and learn to respect and accept different cultures and ways of living. Ultimately, the establishment of a compulsory NYSC program constituted an attempt to foster not only national pride but also a sense of reconciliation or reparation during the aftermath of the Civil War.

Daughters Who Walk this Path introduces Morayo's critical perspective towards the NYSC program when she is called to fulfill her duty with the Nigerian nation after graduating:

> my National Youth Service Corps posting letter came three weeks after [graduating]. I was not happy when I read that I had to report to Anambra State for the one-year period. […] The program may have been started with good intentions, but I really doubted if it had significantly changed the level of distrust people from the different tribes had for each other. (Kilanko, 2012: 227-228)

With this comment, Kilanko brings to the forefront two unresolved questions in present-day Nigeria: the still ongoing inter-ethnic conflicts (Sahara Reporters, 2008) and the questioning of the NYSC to live up to General Yakubu Gowon's expectations of "foster[ing] unity, national cohesion and national integration in [their] journey to nationhood" (Sahara Reporters, 2008).

Indeed, Nigerian historians Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton claim that, with strategies such as the imposition of the NYSC, the Nigerian armed forces, which remained in undemocratic power until 1999, took to almost completely overlooking public opinions while corruption spread as quickly in the government (2008: 180). The consequence was the establishment of "a government apparatus that became increasingly divorced from its subjects, creating a stark disconnection between the will of the people and the actions of government officials – a disconnection that continues to afflict Nigeria" (180-181). In this manner, during almost thirty years, citizens' opinions became irrelevant to the extent that "corruption, dictatorship, terror, and an increasingly desperate citizenry were the new hallmarks of the

Nigerian state" (Schwab, 2004: 93-94). As a result, Nigerian critic Jideofor Adibe claims that "the NYSC scheme, one of the very important nation-building projects, [has] become engulfed in a crisis of relevance" (2012: 93), as young Nigerians feel threatened and avoid moving from their northern or southern region. The novel's critical perspective towards a lack of national unity and sense of reparation when it comes to Nigeria's history of inter-ethnic violence is evident in Morayo's acceptance of this compulsory training as she remains critical of it.

Despite Morayo's view of the program, she does complete her compulsory training in Anambra State because "unless [she] completed the one-year posting, no reputable employer would give [her] a job" (Kilanko, 2012: 228). The threat of unemployment is meant to act as a cautionary tale for those willing to oppose the national imperative. The consequence would be to bring shame not only upon oneself but upon the nation in not approximating the form of "the good citizen", which is synonymous with being able to reproduce "the national ideal" (Ahmed, 2014: 108). In this context, good citizens are those who fulfill the government's request of collaborating with other citizens of different ethnic groups, thus fostering unity and nationalism among Nigerians. With, her future at stake, her enrolment constitutes an instance of being forced to complete a task which, despite her beliefs, is seen as fostering national unity and is thus socially fostered and endorsed. This is indeed her father's view on the matter:

> Daddy insisted it was good for me to experience living in another part of the country. 'Morayo, you young people don't understand that the program became necessary after the civil war. If the government did not make it mandatory, how many young people would leave the familiarity of their towns to learn about their fellow Nigerians?' I listened to Daddy's words with mixed feelings. (Kilanko, 2012: 227)

Coinciding with her acceptance of the NYSC imposition, thoughts of a series of abuses she sexually suffered as a child at the hands of her cousin, Bros T, return to Morayo's mind bringing her a new sense of shame and guilt, recalling how she "could not escape the shame that followed [her] like a bad smell" (90). The specific memories she recalls and the subsequent nightmares she has are not described in the novel. This hints at Morayo, a first-person narrator, as too ashamed of the abuses to specifically describe them (229). When her sister, Eniayo, reassures her that it was not her fault, Morayo cannot help but wonder "why couldn't [she] still believe that?" (229). In this manner, her being forced to perform a public duty reminds Morayo of her being abused by Bros T in the private domain. In turn, that her father supports the NYSC projects recalls how her parents did not protect her from the abuses as a child nor punish Bros T when she reported him. Upon knowing the truth, her father had "turned his tired-looking face away" and her mother "too turned around, leaving the room" (89). Instead of offering their daughter some consoling and reparative words, Morayo describes a shaming atmosphere in which she "could not get away from the unasked questions in [her] parents' eyes as they lingered on [her] face. […] *Why did you let it go on for so long? Why did you let this happen to you?*" (90; emphasis in the original). As time goes by, Morayo ponders about how "the shame [she] felt turned into anger" (228) towards her parents, thus preventing any sense of reconciliation.

This failed reconciliation in the private and public spheres prevents Morayo from developing a sense of nationalism. Nigerian critic Ademola Adediji claims nationalism aims to perpetually "re-create a sentiment of coherence, wholeness and continuity with the past" (2015: 71). In Morayo's case, her being forced to join the NYSC brings back memories of the past that do not instill wholeness and a sense of continuity but a sense of self-rejection and continuous identity negotiation. The impossibility of fostering national pride on a subject that has been the object of

abuses reveals Nigeria's strategy of unity and reparation before traumas of the past to be faulty, as those who have suffered cannot feel comfort in national ideals.

Following those intrusive thoughts about Bros T, in 1999, before finishing her period at the NYSC, Morayo is reunited with Kachi, whom she remembers as "the first boy [she] had kissed—the boy whose letters were once hidden like precious gold in [her] mattress" (Kilanko, 2012: 231). Morayo describes her reunion with Kachi in terms of happiness and ease: "my heart started pounding as I shook his hand. […] For the first couple of minutes, we just stared at each other [and] over the next three weeks, Kachi and I spent most of our free time together" (232-233). Excited as she is about being reunited with him, Morayo dreads the moment in which Kachi asks her "to pick up from where [they] left off" (233). Her reticence to establish an emotional attachment to Kachi is not related to a lack of feelings towards him, but rather to a fear of the idea that "he was really enamoured with a childish dream" (233). Morayo is inevitably scared of not conforming to Kachi's romanticized version of her. In this manner, and despite her wishes, she convinces herself that under no circumstances would Kachi "want a serious relationship if he knew about [her] sexual past" (234). Based on this idea, despite her evident critical thinking, her evolution suffers a setback when she confronts Kachi's expectations. Hence, at this point of her evolution, Morayo puts her emotional stability first and, in an attempt to protect herself from prospective shame, tells Kachi not to write or visit her when she leaves the NYSC (234). This is a reflection of how Morayo has learned to take care of her self-esteem and emotional well-being as a result of her parents' lack of emotional support and positive reinforcement when she was abused as a child. In this regard, Morayo's decision hints at her journey as self-reparative, as she is aware of her need of protecting herself from potential traumas.

That Morayo's emotional setback and the beginning of nightmares about the abuses are set against the backdrop of 1999 is perhaps not a coincidence, for this was precisely the year of transition

from armed to civic rule. These events can be indeed interpreted as a parallelism between the personal and the political spheres. Having Morayo question her self-worth evinces the fragility of her evolution and stability. In this sense, the novel can be read as denouncing the fact that military regimes betrayed those Nigerians who hoped for the protection of human rights during the transition (Hassan, 2018: 468). Such hopes were rather met with the flamboyant display of corruption in the Parliamentary elections of 1999[5] (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 235). This lack of reconciliation at a political level is echoed in Morayo's questioning of her personal reparative journey when she faces Kachi, whose attraction to Morayo brings forward the social tabu of sexual abuses and expectations of virginity before marriage. This is precisely what shall be explored in the following section, where I focus on the impact of customary laws upon individual choice and critical thinking.

Love, Customary Laws and Masculinity

This section shall delve into customary laws and "Nigerian masculinity" (Uchendu, 2008: 15) as a burden to overcome if emotional and national reparation are to be achieved. I will explore the tension between Morayo's autonomy and Kachi's need to adhere to the imperatives of Nigerian masculinity. Against this background, Morayo's self-reparative evolution will be analyzed as depending upon critical thinking and setting personal boundaries that challenge customary laws and thus threaten the stability of her romantic relationship with Kachi.

[5] The year 1999 marked the end of the military reign in Nigeria and the beginning of Olusegun Obasanjo's Administration, which prolonged itself from 1999 to 2007. That all political parties were involved in vote rigging during the 1999 elections borne witness to the fact that "corruption is endemic" in Nigeria (Schwab 2004, 94). The desire on the part of the electorate to overcome the three decades of military control played in favor of Obasanjo's rigged elections, as the illegitimacy of the electoral process was overlooked (Falola and Heaton 2008, 235). As a result, on May 29, 1999 Obasanjo became the first civilian president of the Fourth Republic (235).

After their bittersweet reunion in 1999, Morayo and Kachi see each other again in 2002, when Morayo has just been hired in a national bank, thus consolidating her independence. Kachi reappears at a moment in which Morayo's mother pressures her to get married, as she is "convinced that [Morayo is] purposely causing her a heartache by refusing to get married" (Kilanko, 2012: 245). Comically introduced as saving Morayo from missing the bus, Kachi refers to her as "princess" and starts joking about marriage while Morayo teases him back, telling him that he talks as if he still lived in the 1970s and not in the 2000s (250). This brief interchange of words serves both to display the intimacy they share and to announce Kachi's idealization of marriage and tradition as one of the problems they shall face in their relationship. Contrasting with their last meeting, now Morayo ponders about having evolved when it comes to self-confidence: "I had made it through. Not only did I no longer need someone to save me, I knew I was worthy of being loved" (248). With such a statement, she positions herself on a self-conscious path of healing, self-acceptance, and self-love.

In spite of such a reparative evolution, customary laws are promptly introduced as imposing too heavy a burden upon the couple. On their second date, Kachi bluntly states that he is looking for a traditional relationship, based on marriage and a family, as he plainly asserts: "what I look for is a wife" (254). With such a statement, Kachi displays that he blindly follows the social expectations he has been taught to pursue to become a happy Nigerian man. The relevance of the battle between feelings and the need to fulfill customary expectations is evident in the manner in which the events are narrated, as there is a lack of romanticization of Morayo and Kachi's relationship. Evidence of this is the manner in which Yejide Kilanko chooses to narrate it: in just a few passages the novel describes their encounter on the bus (250), Morayo's doubts, and her decision to tell Kachi about her past (258). Similarly, few references are made to the intimate moments they share during the first months of their

relationship. It is Morayo's newly found anxiety towards her past and about whether or not she should share her memories of sexual violence with Kachi that become central to the narrative (256).

Kachi's attitude and beliefs echo the expectations on "Nigerian masculinity"[6], which Egodi Uchendu claims are shaped and influenced by values stemming from "the family, mass and audio-visual media, religion, education and interpersonal interactions" (2008: 15). Hence, the family, as an institution, and religion, as the basic core of customary laws, play a fundamental role in masculinity. Fatai A. Olasupo defines Nigerian customary laws as a combination of cultural biases which, under the guise of "religion, custom, [and] tradition [seek] to suppress and repress women" (2013: 177). Indeed, the so-called customary practices are not unbiased, as it can be argued that the ultimate purpose is to foster a sense of union among inhabitants of the same territory across time and space. Sara Ahmed refers to the power of tradition as resulting from repetition, for "it is precisely through repetition that social forms—the family, heterosexuality, the nation, even civilization itself—become traditional institutions, the non-written norm" (2014: 12). Non-coincidentally, Daniel. J. Smith's study on Nigerian masculinity reveals that Nigerian men perceive that "the social rewards of marrying make it almost impossible to imagine anything else" (2017: 61).

That Kachi blindly and gladly follows what is socially expected of him reveals that his principles and mindset have clearly not changed, as he has not developed Morayo's critical view of the family and the nation. Quite contrarily, he naively expects

[6] At a general level, "masculinity" refers to "a cluster of norms, values, and behavioral patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others" (Miescher and Lindsay 2003, 4). Thus, notions of masculinity are context-dependent "expressions of social practice[s]" (7). For this reason, I adhere to the notion of Nigerian masculinity that Uchendu presents in "Are African Males Men?: Sketching African Masculinities" (2008).

Morayo to normatively partake in his romantic plans, without asking or wondering whether she is willing or even capable of doing so. Morayo's self-acceptance is then tested before Kachi's nationally endorsed dreams, in the form of a traditional marriage determined by customary laws. Although the development of their mutual affection is evident when Morayo says that their "limited time together [became] very precious" (Kilanko, 2012: 255), Kachi's flagrant display of self-determination in what he assumes should be their common wish to get married conducts Morayo to a path of insecurity she believed she had overcome: "in truth, I was scared. Scared of what Kachi's reaction would be when I told him about my past" (255). At this point, Morayo's predicament follows Chielozona Eze's postulate that Nigerian contemporary novels present women who are "disabled by the abstractions of ideologies" (2016: 174). This is the consequence of her re-encountering customary laws and traditional conceptions of marriage which she has strived to leave behind. These instances of forcible personal re-assessment affecting fictional women are a reflection of wider social changes impacting Nigeria's society, where human rights are constantly violated and "people fail to encounter one another; when they see one another as means to their individual ends" (174).

Morayo cautiously tries to defend the emotional stability and self-acceptance she has achieved. Although shame towards her past and fear for the future still condition her, Morayo promises herself not "to hide anything from the man in [her] life" (Kilanko, 2012: 255). She has come to firmly believe that she deserves to be appreciated for who she has become despite her circumstances. Morayo's resolution demonstrates that for a path of repairing her sexual trauma to be successful an analytical and self-assertive feminist mentality needs to be reinforced. Thus, reparation is not to be perceived merely as a static outcome, but rather as a process which depends upon self-determination and a constant self-defense from possible socio-affective attacks aiming at re-integrating a woman in the normalized structure of nation build-

ing. In this respect, as already hinted, Morayo's evolution can be referred to as a process of self-reparation, as there is a fundamental need of active critical thinking and self-reassurance in order to overcome and come to terms with past traumas. In turn, successful self-reparation depends on her being aware of prospective manners in which such traumas can newly threaten her well-being and stability. When it comes to a potential relationship with Kachi, Morayo needs to remain aware of the necessity of keeping any possible sign of romanticization at bay. This is a thought reinforced by her Aunty Morenike, who instills in Morayo the idea that if Kachi stops loving her "that does not stop [her] from loving [her]self" (256).

The threat of not being loved if social expectations are not fulfilled recalls Ahmed's aforementioned notion of the "good citizen", since "attempting to define one's identity can become an ideological war for those not conforming to the expectations of customary laws, thus becoming divergent because they decide not to or cannot follow pre-established so-called traditions and social dictums" (2014: 108). In this manner, for Morayo to be a good citizen, she should choose to remain silent and join Kachi in his wishes to engage in the customary practice of marriage. The approach of silencing those who cannot follow social dictums can be read as part of the "state failure experience" (Idowu, 1999: 43). Defining this post-independence phenomenon, Nigerian scholar William O. Idowu delineates an experience of disaster which results from the exclusion of certain groups of citizens, which is translated into a malfunctioning apparatus of government unable to protect and take all Nigerians into consideration (43). Nigerian Professor and critic Enaruna Edosa posits that the national loyalty of its citizens is achieved through "unity, fair treatment, cooperation, consensus and peaceful conflict resolution" (2017: 186). This lack of fair treatment and protection is what leads to state failure. Thus, instead of promoting national reparation, Daughters Who Walk this Path bears witness to how "the state claims and distributes a violence that consolidates an

imagined national self" (Osinubi, 2018: 683). Such violence is exerted upon Morayo, first through sexual abuses at the nexus of the family and then through the imposition of silence in order to fulfill customary expectations associated with marriage.

The conversation between the lovers that ultimately takes place echoes such state failure. In turn, it is a reversal of the clichéd declaration of love associated with conventional romantic narrative. The stereotypical emotional profession is substituted by an affective declaration of intimate love which brings relief to Morayo because she can both display her affection towards Kachi and share with him the traumas of her past. Yet this moment is also tinged with anguish. This is showed in the fact that readers do not have access to the conversation in itself, but to Morayo's summary of this intimate moment:

> I kept my eyes locked on his face and I started from the very beginning. I told him about Bros T, about my life at the university and the men […] that had passed through my life. I told him about […] the numbness and the shame. […] When I was quiet, Kachi hung his head.
> […] "It is you that I love."
> Kachi inhaled sharply. This was the first time I had ever said those words to him.
> "I love you Kachi."
> Looking away from my face, Kachi stood up and backed away towards the door. "Morayo, I need to think…" (Kilanko, 2012: 259)

Morayo's passionate and sincere love towards Kachi forces not a detailed declaration about what she feels about him, but about what she feels about herself. While this moment underpins Morayo's confidence and determination, it shatters Kachi's normative expectations and symbolizes the death of his romantic ideals. Before such an open threat to romanticism and to his beliefs associated with his embodiment of Nigerian masculinity, Kachi can barely speak and feels compelled to leave Morayo's

house immediately. The conversation is indeed anti-climactic for Kachi, but it constitutes a positive turning point for Morayo, since it is the first time she refers to the abuse she has endured and her sexual experiences to a prospective sentimental partner. Her decision shows her deep affective attachment towards Kachi and her hope for a reparative future with him in which he can understand her trauma and share its emotional implications. For this to be possible, Kachi needs to deconstruct what customary law has taught him in relation to the discussion of premarital sex, which, as Morayo's parents taught her as a child, is not only "morally problematic" (Smith, 2010: 142), but deemed a social taboo.

Morayo's sincere approach also underscores the relevance of personal boundaries as quintessential within a reparative trajectory. Individual limits are recognized as a requisite within a process of communication which involves "opening out to the other" when in search of "confluent love and the sustaining of intimacy" (Giddens, 1992: 94). In turn, Anthony Giddens presents autonomy as essential for "individuals to be self-reflective and self-determining" (185). I borrow Giddens' postulate as part of my delineation of self-reparation because it introduces the idea that self-cognition and personal boundaries are necessary for the interplay between a couple to be affectively productive. In this manner, an effective emotional relationship would not depend upon romanticizing "the one and only," but upon analyzing and being able to convey to that person one's hopes, fears, and expectations. Correspondingly, the personal examination of one's emotions shall contribute to ascertaining the affective barriers one is not willing to cross. The capacity to establish such barriers already underlines a perceptive and observant point of view which is necessary both in intimate relationships and in public forms of community or nation building if the outcome is to be fruitful and long-lasting. Such a display of autonomy can arguably prevent certain episodes of intimate violence if it is accompanied by the effective communication of one's emotional and

ideological limitations to the prospective affective partner. The very same principle applies if citizens establish and ascertain their ideological, socio-cultural, religious, or even sexual boundaries to the political representatives of a democratic state-nation who must in turn ensure that those boundaries are respected by the establishment of protective laws. In this manner, far from becoming an impediment, the establishment of boundaries within a personal or civic relationship can help to delineate a secure, reliable, and long-lasting intimate bond. In this respect, the following section explores Kachi's reaction before Morayo's setting personal boundaries and the possibility of deconstructing the impositions of customary laws upon Nigerian masculinity.

(Self-)Love and Reparation: Deconstructing Nigerian Masculinity

This section explores the effect that Morayo's newfound self-esteem exerts upon Kachi's embodiment of Nigerian masculinity. The focus is on the reparative potential not only of Kachi loving Morayo but of Morayo's self-love. I will argue that Morayo's sense of self-preservation forces Kachi to deconstruct and repair the negative impact of Nigerian masculinity. I will discuss Kachi's capacity for self-analysis as well as his struggles to cope with his impulses when dealing with Morayo's background of sexual abuse. In this context, Bros T's return to Morayo's life shall be analyzed as testing the reparative potential of Morayo's love and self-love and Kachi's new-found embodiment of masculinity. Furthermore, Bros T will be read as a brutal masculine figure embodying Nigeria's lack of national reparation.

Daughters Who Walk this Path introduces how Morayo's self-reparation through the establishment of personal boundaries unmasks Kachi's insecurities concerning masculinity. Some days after the afore-described anticlimactic conversation, Kachi tries to rekindle their relationship returning to Morayo's flat with what she describes as "an unfamiliar guardedness in his eyes. It was as if he was not sure who I was" (Kilanko, 2012: 260). Kachi

takes up the role of protector, displaying a mix of jealousy and fear whenever Morayo is with other men. Kachi's inability to refrain himself from controlling Morayo is the result of the impact of "the provider/controller discourse" burdening Nigerian men with the task of protecting and exerting authority towards their partners (Cornwall, 2003: 243). Andrea A. Cornwall argues that the internalization of the controller role leads Nigerian men to experience a sense of failure if such tasks cannot be successfully performed (243). Ultimately, this provokes a sense of anxiety that negatively permeates in Nigerian men's behavior in their romantic relationships, provoking a sense of isolation (243). This experience is reflected not only in Kachi's inability to talk about emotions, but in his latter attempts at controlling Morayo. Kachi's action unmasks his inability to find supportive strategies in Nigerian masculinity precepts to respectfully respond to Morayo's sexual trauma. Learning about Morayo's sexual past can be read as a sexual trauma for Kachi, who sees Morayo's past as a burden when it comes to fulfilling his sexual role as a man. His reaction is in line with that of the Nigerian men interviewed in Smith's study claiming that "sexual conquest" is widely recognized and accepted as a symbol of "successful manhood" (2017: 12). Due to Morayo's trauma, Kachi cannot successfully display his manhood in a normalized manner. As a result, he starts "dropping by at [Morayo's] flat unannounced at different times of the day" (Kilanko, 2012: 260), provoking that she "wonder[s] if [she] had made a mistake in telling Kachi about [her] past" (260).

Kachi's lack of resources to cope with sexual trauma becomes defining in Morayo's journey of self-love. Resolving that she cannot "spend the rest of [her] life explaining the identity of every man [they meet]" (Kilanko, 2012: 261), Morayo confronts Kachi in an attempt at self-protection: "Kachi, I love you but […] I have worked so hard at not hating myself. […] If you can't live with my past, […] please let me go" (261). Morayo's reaction bears witness to Cornwall's description of how contemporary West African women leave behind conformist and submissive roles to

"adopt covert or directly confrontative measures in negotiations on the contested terrain of intimate relationships" (2003: 243). As part of such confrontation, Morayo declares her love towards Kachi only as secondary to her self-love. Non-coincidentally, Lauren Berlant highlights that "personal autonomy, consent, choice, and fulfillment" are as powerful in love or romantic discourses as in nationalist discourses (2012: 109). Reclaiming personal choice and self-love serves as a weapon to counter romanticized discourses imposing customary practices on Morayo. In the same manner in which she has shown rejection towards nationally imposed structures such as the NYSC, Morayo rejects Kachi's attempts at control, demonstrating that she shall put her self-love and independence first, renouncing to romantic love if necessary.

Kachi's reaction before Morayo's threat, immediately apologizing (Kilanko, 2012: 262), reflects his willingness to repair the emotional damage he has caused by reassessing and letting go of the controller role. His willingness to critically evaluate these actions correlates with Smith's study on the existence of "more egalitarian gender relationships" (2001: 133). Yet the very same study "acknowledges that modern [Nigerian] marriages still reinforce patriarchal hierarchies" (133). Morayo and Kachi's relationship can be read through the prism of egalitarianism insomuch as he wants to learn and transmit the message of understanding love that counters Morayo's trauma. Yet his willingness to understand is countered by fear and insecurity, which he tries to fix by proposing to Morayo. Kachi must conciliate the performance of masculinity he is used to with his predisposition to change his attitudes to meet Morayo's needs of empathy and reassurance. Kachi's internal negotiation reflects a reality in contemporary Nigeria in which men face the challenge "of living up to the ideals [of Nigerian masculinity]" (Cornwall, 2003: 235). Very much like the participants in Cornwall's study, Kachi reflects a willingness to reassess and negotiate his masculinity in spite of customary practices and nationally endorsed ideas on

masculinity (244). Such a negotiation proves to be challenging, for what ensues is a six-months period in which Kachi continues displaying his love in the only manner he has been taught: by performing his masculinity through protection. In order to prove his love and commitment, he asks Morayo to marry him:

> Listen to me. For a year I have been asking you to marry me. I am not saying we should get married tomorrow. You know I am not a rich man. […] I will need time to gather money for our wedding. But all you say is no. Morayo don't you love me? […] When you are ready to tell me the real truth, you can come and look for me. (Kilanko, 2012: 263)

This almost authoritative proposal proves that the reparative process is not to be romanticized as a smooth change prompted by love and the need of reconciliation. It is rather an ongoing process in which setbacks are to be faced and overcome. His need to be in control is evident to Morayo, who describes his proposal as "impatient" (Kilanko, 2012: 263). In this respect, following customary laws, Kachi appears to conceive marriage as the cure for Morayo's pain and shame. Kachi's words display both insecurity and lack of understanding towards Morayo, for asking her to marry him without even discussing her emotions is but a way of continuing with their relationship ignoring her trauma. A sign of his inability to empathize with Morayo is that he seems unable to come to terms with the fact that Morayo may indeed love him and yet not want to marry him.

It takes two years for Kachi to progressively change his mindset. Only when Morayo decides she can trust him, does she let him know she is ready and willing to marry him (271). This unromantic moment is briefly introduced as a casual conversation which takes place after each of them has met each other's parents, when Kachi whispers into Morayo's ear "we are going to get married" and she answers, "yes, Kachi. […] We are" (271). This lack of romanticization once again reinforces the idea that

self-reparation and self-love entail a constant process of negotiation. Thus, this short conversation differs from Kachi's previous proposal; it is a statement which appears to naturally germinate from Morayo's perception of their relationship having reached a moment of intimacy and affective stability.

Thus, Morayo's self-love positively contributes to prompt Kachi towards self-questioning, ultimately leading to his challenging customary laws in what concerns expectations on masculinity. This change is a reflection of Nigerian contemporary couples increasingly emphasizing "the primacy of the individual couple" even if this entails a "conscious opposition to the constraints imposed by ties to kin and community" (Smith, 2017: 73). In this context, the ties on masculine expectations can be encompassed within nationally endorsed customary practices. Thus, as a heterosexual Nigerian man educated according to the masculine precepts of customary law, Kachi becomes a metonymical figure to suggest the possible reparative outcome for Nigeria. The implication is that love as a tool for self-reparation allows for the existence of "new forms of conjugal intimacy" (Smith, 2017: 74).

Yet Morayo and Kachi's reparative prospects do not correspond with the actual ending of the novel. In 2006 their union is once again tested when Morayo sees Bros T, her abuser, again at a family meeting. After the incident, Morayo has problems to sleep, as the nightmares of the abuses return (Kilanko, 2012: 294). When having sex with Kachi, her body recalls the trauma of the abuse and Morayo recognizes that "the flashbacks soon began to threaten the intimacy [they] had worked so hard for" (294). She is afraid and ashamed of telling Kachi "that the touch of his fingers grated on [her] skin like sandpaper" (294) as a result of those nightmares. Since Kachi has evolved enough to understand Morayo's reactions and emotions, he "quickly learn[s] that any random grabbing for [Morayo's] body in the middle of the night made [her] blood run cold" (294). As a result, they decide to sleep with the light on as Kachi accepts that he cannot always

be in control and Morayo does not always know how he can help (294). In spite of his respectful approach, as time goes by Morayo notices that "Kachi's frustration grew daily" (195) before the impossibility of actively helping her. Yet he does not try to impose his opinion upon her. Self-conscious of the setback this represents in her journey of reparation, Morayo states that "even though [she] had tried so hard, now [they] were back at the starting point" (195). Hence, Kachi's evolution cannot be romanticized as an instance of love automatically prompting change and happiness. This episode proves that he still needs to gradually learn to help Morayo through accepting his lack of control.

In turn, Bros T's return does not limit itself to his presence in a family meeting but continues as he visits Morayo at her workplace, the bank, asking her for help in a business matter. Kachi becomes increasingly worried about Morayo's mental stability because she is forced to see her cousin every day and she "[jumps] any time he came too close" (Kilanko, 2012: 304). Yet Morayo refuses to leave her job insisting that she "can't keep running" (303). This action once again bears witness to Morayo's self-reparation as an ongoing process. In spite of Morayo's stability after having helped Kachi to overcome the traumas and expectations associated with Nigerian masculinity, Bros T's reappearance in her life suggests that trauma cannot be erased but progressively negotiated and overcome. This new threat to her stability also suggests that the notion of reparation functions as waves, with new forms of self-reassurance and self-love countering new threats to stability and well-being. In Kachi's case, Bros T's return serves to demonstrate that Kachi can remain stable and support Morayo without trying to interfere in her actions and decisions. Accepting Morayo's refusal to renounce her job, Kachi proves to have redefined his masculine performance, accepting that he must let Morayo deal with her past to continue with her self-reparation. His support through accepting her need of space also suggests his having found a non-toxic mechanism of protection through respect and emotional reassurance. In this manner, it can be argued that the love they mutually profess each

other helps the couple to overcome the emotional earthquake that Bros T's reappearance initiates.

Conversely, Bros T's re-emergence bears witness to the Nigerian state failure situation still being a reality in the mid- and late-2000s. He returns to the narrative as a corrupt public figure related to the oil industry. With the pseudonym of Mr. Philips, Bros T has become the CEO of Eagle Oil, a major importer of petroleum products laundering government-stolen money for a group of ex-politicians (298). Bros T invades Morayo's personal boundaries by going to the bank where she works and requiring her services for one of his mischievous transactions (300). In this respect, Bros T can be considered the epitome of a brutal kind of Nigerian masculinity that not only exerts sexual violence against the protagonist, but perpetuates corruption upon the body of the nation.

Through this depiction, Bros T's morally corrupt essence transitions from sexually violating a member of his family to laundering money stolen by the ruling elite. His personal evolution recalls Antonia T. Okoosi-Simbine's claim that corruption in Nigeria "affects institutions and influences individual behavior at all levels [, as it is] embedded in specific socio-cultural environments [to the extent that it] has deposed democratic principles of probity and accountability as guidelines for official conduct" (2011: 160). This can be read as a lack of reparation when it comes to Nigerian state failure. Bros T's invasion of Morayo's body and workplace evinces that Nigeria's lack of reparation is double folded. On the one hand, Morayo does not receive social justice and support for the abuses committed against her, as her family continues inviting Bros T to family events years after the abuses, condemning Morayo's pain to silence and forcing her towards a path of self-reparation. On the other hand, Bros T becomes the epitome of social and political corruption in a country in which "oil is the dominant form of accumulation for the politico-military class, successive factions of which change batons as high-level state officials" (Olukotun, 2013: 59-60). In fact, it has

been argued that the spread of political fraudulence and bribery practices in Nigeria is specifically related to the increasing growth of the oil industry (Hill, 2012: 87).7 Significantly, Bros T reappears during Obasanjo's last years as Head of the State, and his behavior proves that efforts "to curb the menace of corruption [had] been in vain" (Okoosi-Simbine, 2011: 161).8 That Bros T's reappearance occurs towards the end of the novel serves not only to underline Kachi and Morayo's resilience, but to contrast their reparative path with Nigeria's progressive decay in the form of social and political corruption and lack of social justice.

Morayo's self-reparative triumph is ultimately presented towards the end of the novel, when his cousin approaches her and offers her money as a form of compensation. Encouraging Morayo to accept his money to pay for the cancer treatment of her Aunty Morenike (Kilanko, 2012: 309), Bros T's intention is to buy his way into forgiveness. Morayo's repulsion towards her cousin, and her knowledge that Aunty Morenike would not approve of the deal, take her to reject the money. Yet Bros T approaches her in private, urging Morayo to accept the money and explicitly referring to the abuses in order to put his mind at ease: "Morayo, you did nothing wrong […] You were a child. It was my fault. It was my fault. It was all me." (309). Bros T's eagerness to buy away his crimes are here equated with Morayo's urgency to stay away from his touch, described as "hot oil" (309). Facing Bros T grants her the opportunity of closing an emotional circle, overcoming her experiences of sexual violence and ultimately feeling in control by rejecting

[7] Jonathan N. C. Hill argues that there are two main reasons that explain the links between Nigeria's corruption and the oil industry: "first, the country's increasing dependence on its oil revenue. Second, the Federal Government's steady expansion of state control over the oil industry" (2012, 87).

[8] In fact, "Immediately upon taking office, one of the executive's first bills [Obasanjo] sent to the National Assembly was an anti-corruption bill. As a result, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the EFCC, among others, were established" (Okoosi-Simbine 2011, 157).

his money. Thus, she condemns the affective and political decay her cousin embodies, reinforcing her self-empowering resolutions personally and socially. Morayo's final rejection of the deal is a clear reference to the novel's criticism of nepotism in Nigeria.

Briefly after this episode, Morayo gives birth to her baby girl, Anuli (322). After these final events, the very last pages of the novel focus on Morayo's positive evolution. At a party to celebrate the birth of Anuli, Morayo makes a feminist promise to her baby daughter: "I promise to talk about shame. I promise to listen even when I do not understand. I promise because you are worth it" (326). Through this pledge of not keeping secrets the novel advocates for a model of motherhood based on communication, freedom, and the avoidance of patriarchal indoctrination. Additionally, the last lines of the book describe Morayo's dancing alone, feeling "the waning sunrays warming the right side of [her] face" (329). The novel thus finishes with a clear reference to warmth, which is in direct contrast with the coldness experienced in the past by Morayo, and to dancing as evidence that Morayo is now in control of her body and destiny.

Conclusion

This article has explored Morayo's journey toward self-love and self-reparation, emphasizing the impact that such evolution has upon Kachi's identity and masculinity. I have analyzed the existent differences between Morayo's personal journey towards self-reparation and Nigeria's state failure experience, highlighting the interplay between individual autonomy and societal expectations. In this context, the disillusionment with political regimes mirrors Morayo's questioning of her own reparative journey amidst societal expectations. Morayo's struggle with customary laws, particularly those regarding masculinity, has served as a point of departure to analyze Kilanko's critique of gender roles in Nigerian society. Against this background, Morayo's setting of personal boundaries underscores the importance of autonomy and self-assertion both in intimate relation-

ships and in civic contexts as a mechanism of self-protection. Morayo's journey of self-repair and self-love has been introduced as positively contributing to Kachi being able to confront and overcome his own insecurities related to masculinity. In this respect, Kachi's positive evolution, freeing himself from the expectations of Nigerian masculinity, has been read as a hopeful example of the possibility of finding routes towards reconciliation in the form of overcoming customary laws that disadvantage those citizens who have suffered any form of abuse.

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