

Child psychopathology and power abuse in selected classics of Nigerian children's fiction

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Abstract

The classics of Nigerian children's novels identify various sources of child psychopathology. This article focalises the adult role in the etiology of child psychopathology. Viewed from the critical lens of postcolonialism as enunciated by Edward Said, the article avers that the abuse of power by adults is a major cause of psychopathology in children. And from textual exhibits, it proves that child psychopathology may be remediated through a reorientation and conscientisation of the adult on the centrality of the child. This is achieved through a juxtaposition of the ideal and the flawed in the adult-child relationship.

Keywords: Child psychopathology, Nigerian children's classics, Child abuse, Othering, Existential realities.

Introduction

A content analysis of the classics of Nigerian children's fiction identified four sources of child psychopathology: the existential realities of life, childhood naivety, the incidence of deviant children, and power abuse by adults. The protagonist of *Sugar Girl*, Ralia, does not go to school because her parents are too poor to send her to school; in addition, her mother is blind and depends on Ralia and Ralia's father for all her daily activities. Eze in *Eze Goes to School* loses his father to the man-eating leopard and his education is threatened; consequently, he and his mother suffer financial distress. Mabel, the protagonist of *My Father's Daughter* and its sequel *My Mother's Daughter*, loses her father towards the end of the narrative. In the sequel, there is a vivid sketch of the impact of this loss: reversal of fortune. The family is dispersed and the children have to live with other relations under unpleasant circumstances. In *Akin Goes to School*, Mr. Komolafe, the kind-hearted sanitary inspector who takes Akin in, dies in a road accident. In *Eze Goes to School*, Eze is involved in an accident and is hospitalised. Goliath, a child character in

The Village Headmaster, dies in the forest during the tropical storm. In *Chike and the River*, Chinua Achebe narrates in the first paragraph that Chike lives with his mother and two sisters in Umuofia and that his father died many years before. Akin, the protagonist of *The Drummer Boy*, is blind and wanders about, relying on the goodwill of others for daily survival as he plays his Samba and tours the towns. In *My Cousin Sammy*, Sammy comes to Lagos to live with his uncle because his father and mother died in a road accident. Ene, the 11-year-old narrator, reports that she also lost a sibling, Uma, five years earlier and cried as she watched her mother cry. Osaik, main character and narrator in *Boom Boom*, loses his mother to sickle-cell anaemia and watches in helpless distress as his younger sister has frequent crises from attacks of sickle-cell anaemia.

The above survey shows an overwhelming depiction of the existential realities of life. Children have lost parents and siblings; they have been involved in misfortunes and accidents. They have experienced abject poverty. They cry. They are distressed. They experience sorrow, pain

and anguish. In all these narratives, no attempt is made to refract reality, and childhood is not romanticised. Thus, some of the psychopathologies that children undergo have been linked directly to these existential facts of life.

Children have also suffered anguish as the direct result of childhood naivety and ignorance. Mabel in *My Father's Daughter* is sorely distressed after her secret farm yields no harvest because she has no knowledge of the process of farming before going into it. Akin and Dele suffer dread and insomnia in *Akin Goes to School* because of the noise they hear at night outside of their bedroom window, unaware that the noise is made by a bull-roarer, a common knowledge among adults. In *My Mother's Daughter*, Mabel suffers the same fear, unaware that the shrill sounds heard at night during the Oro festival were made by mortal men, not spirits. A similar incident is also recounted in *The Drummer Boy* with the voice of the Oro.

The psychological distress that deviant children cause other children is also focalised in these classics. In *Trouble in Form Six*, Akin Tayo is the perfect example of the social deviant who causes anguish and provocation not only to other students such as Rikku but also to teachers like Mr. Adebayo. He causes Rikku who was representing Ilubi College to lose the 120 yards hurdles and is unremorseful about it. Later, he promises to give Mr. Adebayo headache during his week of supervision. In *Eze Goes to School*, Igwe, Nwafor and Onu are examples of deviant children who cause psychological stress to other children. Azi has to fight with Nwafor, just as Eze fought with Onu to gain respite from harassment. In *The Village Headmaster*, Frederick Osiogu fights with a bully who is not named. In *Akin Goes to School*, Akin fights with Olu who mocks him. All these children who

resort to self-help by fighting in these narratives, especially within the context of the school environment, are responding against harassment, bullying and intimidation of one form or the other. However, available textual evidence in the classics of Nigerian children's fiction show that power abuse by adults ranks next to the existential troubles of life in the etiology of child psychopathology.

Child psychopathology

Pertinent questions arise with regard to how child psychopathology may be perceived. Is it to be viewed as a psychological disarray within the individual child, a relational disruption, a response to environmental conditions, or a blend of all these? Is it to be constituted as a psychological state at variance with the normative? Can it be identified as a layout of synchronised disorders or a portrait of psychological features? (Mash & Barkley 25). There are no specific answers to these questions, and how they are answered is determined by disciplinary and theoretical choices, for the field of child psychopathology has attracted interests in disciplines such as medicine, psychology, education, literature, etc. What is certain, however, is that child psychopathology is a systematic study of mental disorder in children. Although the etiology of child psychopathology from different fields has been generally identified to include neurobiological dysfunction, parental psychopathology or discord, social-cognitive deficits, challenging child behaviour and numerous other factors, this article focalises the abusive employment of the asymmetrical power relations between the adult and the child and how this accounts for certain maladjustments and psychological distress in children.

Childhood neediness and adult abuse of power

Childhood in relation to adulthood is defined in terms of adult notion of the child's limited knowledge and understanding of the world. Adult perception of childhood is one of childhood ignorance, inexperience and naivety, which in turn inspires the need for guidance and tutelage. Perry Nodelman postulates that this perception instigates the creation of stories for children, and he also draws a nexus between this perception of neediness of childhood and the colonisation of the child.

Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which examines the historical, cultural and political perceptions of the West about the East, reveals intriguing aspects of colonialist thinking that find correlation in some aspects of adult thinking about childhood, and which, as a corollary, necessitates the creation of literature for children. In *Orientalism*, Said highlights the deprecatory stereotypes that the West holds about other people that are not like them. The Europeans assume the superiority of their culture and the inferiority of the *other*, the subalterns. *Othering*, therefore, provides justification for hierarchies and legitimises the domination of the *other*. European colonialism justifies its adventure because it identifies the *other* with the infantile state of man (Rose 50), for, according to Said, 'The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"' (40). Nodelman argues that if colonialist thinking conceives of people as colonisable partly because they are perceived of as childlike, it is only 'logical to suggest that adult thinking about childhood is inherently colonialist already' (163) because the metaphor of childlikeness applies directly to children and the literature instigated by adult notion of child childlikeness 'works to colonise children by

persuading them that they are as innocent and in need of adult control as adults would like them to believe' (163). However, is childhood not genuinely in need of adult mediation, control and guidance? The answer is apparent; but if childhood is apparently in need of adult guidance and tutelage, why and how does the relationship between the child and adult result in child psychopathology? Child psychopathology traceable to relations with adulthood stems primarily from adult abuse of power.

Nodelman also draws a parallel between Orientalist thinking and the field of children's literature, for just as, according to Said, 'The Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and a moral fact' (21), so are mediators of children's literature outside of childhood. Those who write children's literature and delineate its ethos, including editors, reviewers, librarians and publishers, are outside childhood. The implication of this, according to Nodelman, is that 'adult practitioners of children's literature must speak for and about and to children, who are presumed, as Orientals are by Orientalists, to be unable to speak for and about and even (in the form of literary texts, at least) to themselves' (164).

The classics of Nigerian children's novels – texts that adequately portray universal and peculiarly Nigerian notions of childhood, and which are often passed from one generation to another – enact adult notions of childhood (which includes childhood neediness that necessitates guidance and tutelage). They draw connections between these perceptions and child psychopathology and the remediation of such pathologies. Such texts include: Cyprian Ekwensi's *The Drummer Boy* (1960) and *Trouble in Form Six* (1960); Onuora Nzekwu and Michael Crowder's *Eze Goes to School* (1963) and *Eze Goes to College* (1988); Nkem Nwankwo's *Tales*

out of School (1963) and *More Tales out of School* (1965); Kola Onadipe's *Sugar Girl* (1964); Mabel Segun's *My Father's Daughter* (1965) and *My Mother's Daughter* (1987); Chinua Achebe's *Chike and the River* (1966); Anezi Okoro's *The Village School* (1966), *The Village Headmaster* (1967) and *One Week One Trouble* (1972); Christy Ade-Ajayi and Michael Crowder's *Akin Goes to School* (1978); Akachi-Adimora Ezeigbo's *My Cousin Sammy* (2007); Jude Idada's *Boom Boom* (2019), etc.

Ajayi and Crowder's *Akin Goes to School* enacts the asymmetrical power relations between the child and the adult and how this leads to psychological maladjustment. The narrative begins at the point where Akin the protagonist and his brother Ojo are woken from their sleep by their mother with a stern reprimand. She has been up since five in the morning, preparing their breakfast, yet at six Akin and his brother are still asleep, neglecting their chores. Akin's father comes upon him suddenly and cuffs his ear, telling him not to talk back at his mother, for Akin has protested that they were tired. After this episode, the narrative recounts that 'Only yesterday morning, Akin had at last summoned up courage to talk to Mr. Komolafe' (7). Mr. Komolafe is the sanitary inspector who comes to Akoka village once a week from Ofa. He goes round on his shining Raleigh bicycle, telling people to clean their environment. As he goes round the village, Akin, his brother Ojo and other children follow him. Then one day, 'One brave boy has asked Mr. Komolafe why he kept telling people to clear away dirty water' (8). It is intriguing to interrogate why it requires bravery for a boy to ask an innocent question.

One of the traits of childhood identified in the classics of Nigerian

children's fiction is that childhood is a time of curiosity. Chike's adventure across River Niger in *Chike and the River* is driven by curiosity. Bayo's curiosity in *More Tales out of School* instigates him to investigate Big Cigar and the farmer Omidje. Mabel and Ene both eavesdrop on adult conversations out of curiosity in *My Father's Daughter* and *My Cousin Sammy* respectively. It is, therefore, curious and paradoxical that the boy requires bravery to ask a simple question and exhibit a common childhood trait. They have been acculturated into their subordinate status that discountenances the right to express themselves. Evidence of this is seen in Farmer Segun's response when Akin tells his mother that they woke up late because they were tired; Farmer Segun responds to Akin: 'Don't you argue with your mother, you lazy good-for-nothing boy. You're old enough to know better' (7). Respect for elders, especially parents, is taught in African culture. However, the line between respect for adults and self-expression is so blurred that expressing oneself could be represented as being disrespectful.

The child is acculturated into what it means to respect elders, and one of such is found in *Eze Goes to School*. Mr. Okafor, Eze's teacher, leads him (Eze) and four other children to Obodo after passing the examination to the Central School at Obodo. On the journey, the children do not speak much: 'They did not talk much along the way for, though Mr. Okafor was their friend, they respected and feared him as their teacher. It was only when he made a joke, asked a question or pointed out something that they spoke or laughed' (107). The child not expressing his thoughts or feelings to an adult is, therefore, seen as a mark of respect. A further illustration of what it means to respect adults, this time a teacher, is also enacted in the story. On his first day at the

school in Ama, Eze returns home and tells his father about the school and a conversation ensues between them. Eze asks his father if he knew his teacher's name:

'No, my son. What is it?'
'Mister Okafor,' Eze said with pride. 'But he says we must not call him by his name. We must call him: "Teacher".'
'Really!' his father exclaimed in pretended surprise. 'Why?'
'Because we are not his equals. Moreover, it is a mark of respect.'
'That is true. What else did Mr. Okafor tell you today?' (35)

While the atmosphere enacted here between Eze and his father is convivial, it is not the normative against which most adult-child relations may be evaluated. Exhibits in the classics generally show otherwise.

So, the young boy who summoned courage to ask Mr. Komolafe a simple question was actually going outside the norm, and there normally is supposed to be a backlash. To the children's surprise, however, Mr. Komolafe does not get angry with the boy 'for speaking out of turn' (8); instead, he proceeds to lecture the children on the imperative of cleanliness. The boy's courage inspires Akin to ask Mr. Komolafe some questions; he too 'summoned up courage to talk to Mr. Komolafe' (7). On the day he finally approaches Mr. Komolafe, he does so with a lot of trepidation: "'Oga, I beg, sorry to worry you" Akin burst out nervously. "But I have a big question"' (10). The tension that Akin undergoes because he wants to ask a simple question captions a child in a struggle to get out of a psychological cocoon in which he has been imprisoned by adult notions of what it means to be respectful. Mr. Komolafe enlightens Akin on how and why he knows

so much than his own father, for Akin wonders why he (Mr. Komolafe) knows a lot of things. Mr. Komolafe tells him that if he gets educated, he could know more than he (Mr. Komolafe) does.

Further, in spite of his father's stern reprimand that morning at the start of the narrative, he summons courage to ask his father pertinent questions that evening: "'Father," Akin asked, his heart thumping against his chest: "Why didn't you go to school like Mr. Komolafe? And, why can't I go? I would like to be like him, when I grow up"' (11). His father's response is predictable: 'Farmer Segun's face clouded and he turned angrily on Akin: "Don't you talk to me about school, young man."' (11). He goes on to deride school, calling those who go to school thieves. His response initiates another round of internal turmoil in the mind of young Akin: 'Father must be wrong about those who go to school. And yet, is it proper to question Father's words? I wish I knew what to do. Oh! Oh! I wish I knew, Akin thought aloud' (12-13). A repeat of the following expressions in the narrative highlights the psychological throes that Akin undergoes all in a bid to ask questions: 'Akin burst out nervously' (10) while asking Mr. Komolafe a question, and 'his heart thumping against his chest' (11) while asking his father a question. The tension generated in the minds of these children just because they wanted to ask some adults some innocent questions in consonance with their curious nature is indicative of a certain kind of acculturation that subordinates them, all adult notions of what it means perhaps to be respectful.

Onadipe's *Sugar Girl* further reaffirms the neediness of childhood and the imperative of adult guidance in the encounter between Ralia and Ayawa. Ralia's mother sends her to fetch some firewood from the farm. Ralia, out of childhood

curiosity, attempts to catch a bird that keeps on hopping away. In her childhood naivety, she keeps on following the bird until she loses her way in the forest and finds herself in Ayawa's hut; Ayawa is a bitter villager who has been banished by the people of Apampa on allegations of witchcraft. Ayawa is hostile to Ralia. Ralia pleads: 'I did not mean to come here. I lost my way in the bush. Can you help me find my way back home?' (17). What Ralia needs is someone to show her the way home and Ayawa is in a position to do that, but she chooses not to. She tells Ralia: 'I don't help people. I don't even want to see them. I like to harm them, don't look for help here. I may even kill you tonight' (17). Ralia attempts to run away, but Ayawa goes after her, catches her, pulls her back into the hut and throws her on the ground, and 'Ralia did not get up. She just lay there. She was sad and tired' (18); she remembers a song and begins to sing sorrowfully.

Ralia escapes that night but she is still lost in the forest until a hunter finds her. Onadipe reports that 'the hunter was a kind man. He knew that Ralia needed shelter, food and warmth. So, he did not waste time. He took her hand and pulled her up. Ralia was very weak and cold, but she followed the hunter and his dog' (34). After a series of events at the hunter's home, Ralia eventually returns home.

Anezi Okoro's *The Village School*, more than any of the other listed classics, details the emotional throes or stress the child suffers at the hands of the class teacher within the context of the school environment. The child is placed under the tutelage of a teacher who is supposed to be more knowledgeable to provide the needed guidance for the proper development of the child to cope better and live happily in the world, because of the need to acquire knowledge, to learn, to become aware, and

to understand the world. However, sadly, as depicted in *The Village School*, 'children's dependency sets the stage for their greater vulnerability to a wide range of damaging experiences, including maltreatment' (Wekerle and Wolfe 633). The narrative begins by portraying goings-on in Mr. Okehi's classroom in the Central School, Amanzu. He physically and verbally abuses the children. While calling the class register in the morning, he calls David Eze's name twice, but the boy is absent and he says, 'Where is he? I say, where is the fool?' (6). He calls Ikechukwu Ogbuehi, but Ikechukwu is also absent and he (Mr. Okehi) consequently says, 'Where is that unbaptised pagan?' (6). The description of the class activities that follow the routine of roll call can be described as traumatic.

The first lesson for the day begins with Scriptures. Israel Nwandu, one of the pupils in the class, is described as fortunate because he was baptised at infancy and so did not need to attend catechism classes required for baptism examinations. Nevertheless, because he did not attend catechism classes, his knowledge of scriptures is shaky. The narrative states that 'Mr. Okehi knew Israel's weakness, and enjoyed tormenting the boy' (11). He cannot recite the Ten Commandments beyond honour your father and your mother, and so 'Switch! Switch! Switch! Israel dodged and fended, but the strokes still got through' (12). Mr. Okehi continues with his rampage on the pupils; fortunately, however, the big hand-bell for change of lessons rings and the pupils 'were thus saved from further bruising in the name of scripture' (12).

The pupils are temporarily relieved that the next subject is English and they are required to write a composition on 'My Best Friend' while Mr. Okehi marks the home work he gave to them on mathematics. The period comes to an end too early, and the

same bell which relieved them from the trauma of Scriptures sounds again 'like a death knell' (15) as the time for mathematics begins, and the pupils 'stepped themselves for another blistering forty minutes' (15). Then 'the girls could not conceal their dejection and resignation. Some were beginning to dry their moist palms (moist from fear and anxiety) on their khaki shorts' (15). Mr. Okehi's style after marking the mathematics home work is to call each pupil and hand back his or her notebook to the pupil. If the pupil gets all four sum wrong, he or she gets four strokes of the cane. The first exercise book at the top of the pile is for Dorcas. Mr. Okehi calls her first, and she stands up, 'looking forlorn' (16). As Dorcas, who obviously has challenges with Arithmetic, prepares to move out of her seat 'to the slaughter' (16), Mr. Mozie the Standard Five teacher arrives and disrupts her slaughter. Anezi Okoro uses strong words to capture the mood of the pupils and the psychological distress they undergo, all traceable to the abuse of adult power by Mr. Okehi, their teacher.

Mabel Segun's *My Mother's Daughter* presents a similar account of the abuse of power by class teachers and its psychopathological impact on children. Mabel recounts her experience at her new school, St. David's School, at the hands of her class teacher. She states that there were 'some sadistic teachers in the school that took delight in flogging their pupils' (94). One of them usually brings a walking stick to the school and uses it on the pupils because he feels it inflicts the harshest pain on them. And when the pupils scream as he uses it on them, it 'usually delighted the cruel teacher' (95). The same teacher uses the walking stick on the narrator's head 'where a lump, as big as an egg, immediately appeared' (95). Her offence? 'The reason for the beating was that I had

failed that week's history test, scoring 12 out of 25. As the entire class had failed the test, it was obvious that this teacher had purposely made the test very hard so that everybody could fail, and he could then have the opportunity of beating pupils to his heart's content' (95). Mabel is the only one the teacher beats on the head, and she states the reason for his action:

This particular teacher was in the habit of singing love songs to me in class. Although I was not one of the shortest in the class, he had purposely put me in the front row, directly in front of his table. While we were doing some writing, he would lean towards me and start singing a love song. I was only ten at the time and did not really understand the song, but I knew I did not like his manner and the look in his eyes. I was too frightened to report him but I showed my dislike of him by scowling at him whenever he started singing the love song. No doubt it was this that earned me the lump on my head (95-96).

That children were beaten, not only for misbehaving but for providing wrong answers to questions, makes Mabel, the adult narrator recollecting childhood, to remark that 'this was the only part of schooling in those days, which I found unpleasant' (12). The teacher's sexual harassment and physical assault on Mabel the protagonist speak volumes to adult abuse of power over children.

Idada's *Boom Boom* has a similar story of children's experiences at the hands of abusive teachers. Osaik the narrator tells of his class teacher Mr. Ojo and says: 'He was old and he was not exactly friendly.

Actually, I called him mean' (73). Mr. Ojo beats his pupils when he asks them questions in arithmetic and they could not provide the answers: 'His punishments were always strokes of the cane. Six strokes on the open palm for the girls and on the buttocks for the boys. None of us liked him, but because we didn't also like the strokes, we were forced to work hard to get the answers to the questions' (74).

These classic texts have not only recreated reality, but also refracted this reality by juxtaposing what is along with what ought to be. Where there is Farmer Segun, he is contrasted with Mr. Komolafe in *Akin Goes to School*; and for every Mr. Okehi, there is also a Mr. Mozie in *The Village School* and its sequel *The Village Headmaster*. Mr. Komolafe's responses to questions from the children provide a model of what an ideal relationship should be between the adult and the child. When the brave boy asks Mr. Komolafe why he always asks people to clean their environment, he does not get angry but lectures them on the dangers that dirt poses to their health and 'the children were all fascinated by this little lecture from Mr. Komolafe' (9). When Akin eventually summons enough courage to ask Mr. Komolafe how he knows so much, he 'replied kindly, for he had a seven-year old son – the same age as Akin – and he was forever asking questions' (10). He tells Akin about school and is surprised to know that Akin knows nothing about school, and so 'Patiently, Mr. Komolafe whose son was already in primary school at Ofa, told him all about school and what education could do for people' (10). Although Akin is unable to fully understand what Mr. Komolafe explains, because he has not experienced it, he says excitedly: "You mean, if I went to school, one day I could be like you, Oga?" 'Kindly' and 'patiently' are used to describe

Mr. Komolafe's responses to the questions and the emotional impact on the children are obvious: 'the children were all fascinated' (9); and Akin 'said excitedly' (10).

Mr. Okehi is unable to proceed with his slaughter of Dorcas because of the interruption – indeed intervention – of Mr. Mozie, for he has to leave the class for some unstated reason, and Mr. Mozie takes over running the class. Okoro uses this strategy to demonstrate the ideal class setting and how the relationship between the teacher and the pupils (adult and child) should be. When he takes over, he solves the arithmetic questions on the board, 'encouraging the pupils to ask questions about anything they did not understand' (17). Mr. Mozie also takes them through the multiplication table, and even though this was quite elementary, the pupils 'relished it nevertheless' (18). When the bell eventually went for break, the pupils 'would very willingly have spent more time doing Arithmetic' (18).

Anezi Okoro's preoccupation with the theme of child-centredness in *The Village School* is wrapped around the persona of Mr. Mozie, who later becomes the new headmaster of the school. As the new headmaster in *The Village Headmaster*, he summons a meeting of all staff and enunciates an agenda that prioritises the child within the school system. He says, 'His interest therefore comes first and ours, last; his happiness before our own' (28). According to Mr. Mozie, by centralising the child, he aims to 'make him look forward to class work not with jitters but with joy' (28). The content of this agenda of centralising the child includes the abolishment of caning during lessons, although caning for deliberate lateness to school, truancy and other misdemeanours remained. The result of this shift in approach becomes immediately apparent. Okoro narrates that 'the pupils were less frightened of class

work. They were beginning to think more clearly. They talked more freely but talked more sense' (37). When Mr. Dewar the supervisor of school visits the school later and notices that the teachers did not use canes, he asks Mr. Mozie the benefits of this approach. Mr. Mozie remarks, 'So far, quite encouraging. The children certainly seem to be more alert, less frightened, and more responsive. They are generally keener on school work' (66).

Contemporary classics such as *My Cousin Sammy* and *Boom Boom* have constructed the adult-child relationship in ways that are beneficial to the child. These texts are signified as contemporary because they reflect modern lifestyle in society. We find children eating with their parents at the dining table ... they eat spaghetti or fried eggs and fried plantains. They are driven to school instead of trekking miles to school. They sleep in mattresses instead of mats spread on the floor. They live in modern homes with social amenities instead of carrying water pots to the streams to fetch water, and they are usually in the urban areas instead of the rural areas.

In these contemporary classics, we find children who are confident and are able to express their thoughts and feelings without the strictures of adult limitations. Ene, the child narrator in *My Cousin Sammy*, portrays the nature of the relation between her dad and his children. She says, 'My father had a good sense of humour and enjoyed jokes. He did not get angry easily. However, he tried to be strict with us as much as possible. He called me "Sweetie" and Adaka he called "Son"' (5). The portrait of the father is one of a man who respects his children. Their cousin Sammy, whose parents are dead, is coming to live with them, and he calls his children to let them know. He tells them, 'His name is Sammy and he is about eleven, almost your age,

Sweetie' (8). Adaka has no fear asking his father any question; so, he asks, 'Why is he coming to live with us ... Why does he want to leave his parents to come here?' (9). His dad replies, 'I will answer those questions later ... First I want you to know that Sammy has lived in the village all his life. He will not be as smart as you and will need time to adjust to life in the city. He will be rustic. I want you to be kind to him ...' (9).

Idada's *Boom Boom* also sketches a similar portrait of harmonious adult-child relationship that engenders healthy psychosocial development in the child. One night as the family sat around the dining table, eating fried plantains and eggs, Osaik's father tells the family about a doctor friend of his who told him about another doctor in London who could heal Osaik's sister of her sickle-cell anaemia. Osaik reports: 'I had asked if the doctor could heal my mum too and my dad had said that he hoped that would happen, but first, the doctor had to see my sister because she was younger and the treatment worked better on younger people' (12-13).

Conclusion

Power abuse by adults is ranked next to existential problems in considering the sources of child psychopathology. The neediness of childhood makes it inevitable that it must depend on adulthood for guidance, tutelage and, in fact, survival. It is this dependency that makes it vulnerable to maltreatment. Childhood will continue to require adult guidance and tutelage and will, therefore, continue to depend on adulthood. To remediate the abuse that this dependency instigates, the focus of cognitive reorientation and education in these texts is shifted from the child to the adult. The adult needs to be conscientised on how to relate with the child. A strategy employed in these texts is the juxtaposition of the ideal with the

abnormal or flawed. For example, Farmer Segun is contrasted with Mr. Komolafe in *Akin Goes to School*. Mr. Okehi is juxtaposed with Mr. Mozie in *The Village Headmaster* and *The Village School*. Ayawa is placed in a binary against the hunter in *Sugar Girl*. This strategy highlights what is and what ought to be in the adult-child relationship. Child psychopathology stemming from adult abuse of power can be remediated by reorienting and humanising the adult on the central place of the child not only within the family and the school but also in the larger society.

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