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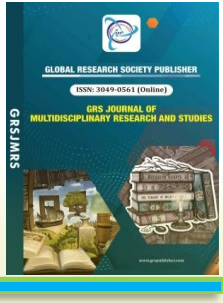

Hegemonic and Alternative Masculinities: Re-examining Gender Relations in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk this Path*

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Abstract: The major thrust of this study is to critically examine Yejide Kilanko's Daughters Who Walk This Path (2012) through the theoretical lens of hegemonic masculinity as propounded by R. W. Connell. Hegemonic masculinity, described as the culturally dominant ideal of patriarchy that upholds male authority while subordinating women and alternative masculinities, provides a position for analyzing the novel's portrayal of patriarchal structures in Nigerian and by extension, African society. Kilanko discloses how hegemonic masculinity is sustained through silence over sexual violence, cultural taboos, and the privileging of male voices within domestic and communal spheres, thereby reinforcing and encouraging systemic inequality. Yet the novel at the same time, resists this dominance by portaying female voices, resilience, and solidarity, thereby charting the protagonist's transition from silenced victim to empowered individual. The study argues that Kilanko's novel does not only critique the cultural encouragement of patriarchal power but also contributes to African feminist discourses that challenge hegemonic masculinity and envision transformative possibilities for gender relations.

Keywords: *Hegemonic masculinity, alternative masculinities, gender relations.*

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Introduction

The discourse on gender and power remains central to the study of African literature especially in narratives that question the place of women in patriarchal societies. One of the most useful theoretical frameworks for analyzing these dynamic relations is the concept of hegemonic masculinity as propounded by R. W. Connell which refers to the culturally dominant form of masculinity that empowers men's power over women while simultaneously subordinating alternative masculinities (Connell R. W., 2005). Within the African contexts, hegemonic masculinity comes between colonial histories, native traditions, and religious beliefs, creating layered and complicated gender hierarchies (Ratele, 2006). As argued by Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell, African masculinities must be understood as plural, fluid, and contested, shaped by social, political, and cultural forces that both sustain and destabilize patriarchy (Okuyade, Women, Literature, and Development in Africa, 2009). Literature therefore, becomes a fertile ground for exploring how these structures of power are seen as normal, negotiated, or resisted.

Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* (2012) offers a compelling case study in this regard, as it paints clear pictures of the complicated interplays between patriarchal authority, gender-based dominance, and female resilience. The novel dramatizes how hegemonic masculinity is institutionalized in Nigerian society through silence over sexual violence or abuse, the valorization of male voices, and the relegation of women to the margins of social discourse. Yet, Kilanko's narrative also tilts toward the existence of alternative masculinities which refers to male identities that neither conform to nor actively resist patriarchal norms, thereby complicating the monolithic representation of men as oppressors. By comparing violent masculinities with empathetic and sympathic male figures, the literary text gives room for reimagining gender relations beyond the binaries of dominance, oppression, subjugation and subordination.

This article therefore examines and beams light on how *Daughters Who Walk This Path* critiques the promotion of hegemonic masculinity while simultaneously highlighting the possibilities inherent in alternative masculinities as open windows for resistance and transformation. In doing so, it puts Kilanko's work within broader African feminist and masculinity studies discourses, arguing that the novel not only exposes the mechanisms of patriarchal control but also envisions more equitable gender relations through the recognition of a more liberal and negotiated forms of masculinity.

Theoretical Framework

Considering the vast scope of gender studies and the limitless number of gender theories postulated by different scholars, this study therefore, intends to use hegemonic masculinity, a limited scope of the broader concept of masculinity in gender studies. Emerita Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is a literary concept that has become core to the studies of gender and masculinity. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as the culturally dominant form of masculinity that enshrines the dominance of men and the subordination of women, while at the same time, marginalizing non-hegemonic masculinities (Connell R. W., 2005). Unarguably, it is not necessarily the commonest form of masculinity but rather the normative standard that upholds and institutionalizes patriarchal authority. As such, hegemonic masculinity operates as both an ideology and a practice which is reproduced through institutions such as the family, religion, education, and the state, and sustained by cultural narratives that promote male dominance.

Connell's theory also portrays the plurality of masculinities, noting that alongside hegemonic masculinity exist subordinate, complicit, and marginalized masculinities, each defined in relation to the hegemonic form (Connell R. W., 2005). This recognition of multiple forms of the theory is particularly useful for analyzing Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path*, which does not only depict violent and oppressive masculinities but also presents empathetic male figures whose practices challenge patriarchal institution. The concept of alternative masculinities therefore, becomes vital to this study and in the analysis of the text, as it highlights how non-hegemonic male identities can resist and destabilize the structures of gender-based inequality.

The studies of African masculinity also provide additional contextual grounds for this framework. Scholars such as Kopano Ratele, Lahoucine Ouzgane, and Robert Morrell stress that African masculinities cannot be understood in isolation from their socio-historical contexts. Ratele argues that hegemonic masculinity in Africa is deeply rooted in colonialism, economic differences, and cultural traditions, making both a site for power and vulnerability (Ratele, 2006). Similarly, Ouzgane and Morrell reiterate the plurality and fluidity of masculinities in Africa, while pointing out that local constructions of masculinity often exist in tension with global patriarchal norms (Ouzgane, 2005). This suggests that while hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria may be expressed through silence over sexual violence, cultural taboos, and the empowerment of male voices, alternative masculinities may emerge through male empathy, solidarity with women, or resistance to oppressive gender practices.

Applying this framework to *Daughters Who Walk This Path* enables the study to make a dual analysis: first, of how hegemonic masculinity is represented and sustained within the literary text, and second, of how Kilanko's portrayal of alternative masculinities opens pathways for re-examining gender relations. By integrating Connell's literary theory of hegemonic masculinity with African-centered perspectives on plural and contested masculinities, this study puts the novel within a broader discourse that seeks to challenge patriarchal dominance and oppression while promoting transformative possibilities for both women and men.

Research shows that scholarship on Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* is largely focused on text's engagement with gender, trauma, and resistance. Researchers and critics have equally examined how the novel delineates sexual violence and silence as recurring concerns in the representation of Nigerian women's lived experiences (Akinwale, 2015). Others highlight the text's portrayal and alignment with African feminist stance, particularly in its emphasis on female solidarity, resilience, and the reconstitution of voice as strategies of survival (Okuyade, Women, Literature, and Development in Africa, 2009). These studies indicate the novel's contribution to African women's writing as a space for challenging patriarchy and interrogating the structures that normalize inequality.

However, very few scholars have approached the text through the lens of masculinity studies. While African feminist critics have richly articulated the novel's critique of patriarchal domination and subordination, there has been limited engagement with how Kilanko equally represents diverse masculinities in the text under review. The emerging field of African masculinity studies, as advanced by Ouzgane and Morrell, and Ratele, suggests that examining both hegemonic and alternative masculinities offers a more detailed understanding of gender relations. This study therefore, focuses on feminist readings of *Daughters Who Walk* This Path while extending the analysis to show how the novel not only exposes the violence of hegemonic masculinity but also gestures toward more empathetic and transformative male identities.

Hegemony, Male Power, and Sexual Violence in the Novel

Born in Ibadan, Nigeria, Yejide Kilanko belongs to a generation of young Nigerian women writers whose works interrogate the intersections of gender, sexuality, and cultural traditions. Her fiction borrows largely from the narrative legacies of Chinua Achebe which is evident in her evocation of communal rituals such as engagements, weddings, births, and funerals. Alongside her literary career as a novelist and poet, Kilanko is a child and youth mental health therapist. This role apparently informs the psychological depth and sensitivity with which she depicts trauma and recovery. Kilanko relocated to Canada, where she lives with her family in Ontario, and has established herself as an important voice in contemporary literature. *Daughters Who Walk This Path* which happens to be her first novel has became a national bestseller since its publication. The publication brought her to national limelight in which The Globe and Mail identified her as one of the five most notable emerging Canadian writers of 2012, affirming her dual status as both a Nigerian and Canadian literary writer.

Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* aptly delineates the pervasive realities of hegemony, male dominance, and sexual violence in a society shaped by patriarchal institutions. Although the narrative is filled with various female characters, their lives are consistently overshadowed by the intrusive and oppressive power of the few men within the text. The experiences of Morayo, the central character, exemplify this imbalance. Far from dissipating with time, her anxiety and rage only get intense, as her mind remains plagued by intrusive and distressing thoughts that destabilize her emotional well-being. Her mother realises these changes but dismisses them as the common distractions of adolescence, without suspecting the deeper trauma her daughter endures inwardly and silently. This silence leaves Morayo vulnerable to continuous abuse at the hands of Bros T, who wields his power over her with threats, warning that refusal will result in her younger sister also being harmed. His presence becomes a constant reminder of terror, and Morayo allows herself to be exploited for the sake of protecting her sister from experiencing

similar trauma. This ongoing exploitation leaves her psychologically destabilized. As Judith Herman posits, "repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality," observing further that:

The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation. She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of help-lessness. Unable to care for or protect herself, she must compensate for the failures of adult care and protection with the only means at her disposal, an immature system of psychological defenses (96).

The nature of abuse continues more intensely when Morayo gets pregnant without being aware. Bros T forces her to take abortion pills, which she spits out in a subtle act of resistance. Her innocence and ignorance of pregnancy further indicates her vulnerability. However, fate intervenes when, on her way home, she flees from two labourers she assumes intend to harm her and accidentally falls into a gutter, resulting in a miscarriage. This leaves her weak and emotionally drained. Time for her becomes unbearably slow, so much so that she reflects that it "dragged on painfully" (82). Tormented by "the silent screams in (her) head" (82), Morayo's psychological state deteriorates further. Things get to a breaking point when she witnesses Bros T's sexual harassment to her younger sister, Eniayo. His feigned image as a protective elder brother contrasts starkly with his predatory behaviour, further intensifying Morayo's silent rage and despair.

The reasons for Morayo's suffering can also be traced to the conflicting cultural expectations that entangle her mother, Bisoye. Although Bisoye tries as much as possible to advise her daughter against being careless with her behaviour, she is also very careful to endeavour she upholds family customs so as to ensure that Morayo is not directly endangered. Cultural traditions oblige her to accommodate her troubled nephew, Bros T, even after his prior misconduct with a female student. By leaving him alone with Morayo, she unwittingly and unknowingly facilitates the first rape that devastates her daughter's life. Morayo recalls this initial assault in haunting detail:

I lay there shaking, my eyes filled with tears that refused to flow. My throat was on fire. My bruised lips trembled. I whimpered. 'Mummy…' I called again. But she was not there. I was alone in the dark of the room. A tear rolled down the side of my face. Others followed. I was terrified that Bros T would change his mind and come back with his friends. I wanted to drag myself out of bed and lock the door, but my legs refused to move. I could not move (68).

Morayo initially remains silent, afraid of her mother's hysteria in past conversations about sex. When she eventually reveals the abuse, her parents' reaction reinforces her feelings of worthlessness. Rather than supporting her, they stigmatize her, treating her as damaged and a threat to her sister's innocence. The social consequences of this silencing reflect wider cultural patterns, where survivors of rape are regarded as guilty or tainted rather than protected. At the university, Morayo internalizes this shame, behaving as though she has little self-worth. She becomes a little relieved only through her cousin Morenike, who offers solidarity and an example of survival.

Kilanko complicates the narrative by later depicting Morayo herself in the role of abuser when she coerces her celibate boyfriend, Ladi, into sex despite his repeated refusals. Although lacking overt violence, the act remains non-consensual, emphasizing the reality that men, too, can be victims of sexual assault. Ladi's experience highlights two truths: victims can become perpetrators, and male survivors of sexual violence often go unrecognized or unacknowledged by society. Yet, unlike Morayo, Ladi faces no lasting stigma. He continues his life without social rejection or stigma, exposing how women disproportionately suffer discrimination, shame, and stgma following sexual assault.

Throughout the narrative, shame operates as a weapon that silences survivors. Morayo, Morenike, and even Ladi illustrate how deeply entrenched this culture of silence is. Still, when survivors hesitate to report abuse, society questions their delay rather than acknowledging the retraumatization they fear. As Dave Vescio rightly insists, "It's not a lack of female modesty but a sense of male entitlement that leads to sexual violence. And the idea that women can change men's behaviour by changing their clothes is not only disconcerting, it has been debunked" (9).

The devastating impact of Morayo's ordeal aligns with observations by Matlin, who notes that though responses to sexual violence vary, "almost all the female victims who have been raped report that they were terrified, repulsed, confused, overwhelmed, and anxious during the time they were being raped. (And) some also feel detachment from their own body." Such violations not only leave lasting memories but also manifest in long-term conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder, characterized by "detailed reliving of the traumatic event, panic attacks, depression, nightmares and sleep disorders" (Bates, 2015). Morayo's parents' refusal to acknowledge or guide her through her trauma reinforces the idea that rape persists as part of the structural and social dominance of men over women.

Ultimately, *Daughters Who Walk This Path* stands as a feminist exploration of Nigeria's socio-cultural patriarchal landscape. It is a narrative by a woman, about women, and for women, reflecting the struggles of female existence in a patriarchal society. The novel lays bare the complexities of womanhood, the pains inflicted by men, and the cultural restrictions imposed by tradition. Kilanko portrays a world where male characters, though relatively few, wield destructive power, while female characters are left to bear the pain, resilience, and survival required to endure the brutality of patriarchal dominance.

Alternative Masculinities and Gender Interplays in the Novel

While Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* portrays the brutality of hegemonic masculinity, the narrative also at the same time, tilts towards the possibility of alternative masculinities; forms of male identity that resist domination, sexual entitlement, and violence. R. W. Connell's theorization of hegemonic masculinity underscores the ways in which patriarchy normalizes male authority over women and marginalizes non-dominant forms of masculinity (Connell R. W., 2005). Yet, as the novel demonstrates, hegemonic masculinity is not the sole model of being male; it is contested and destabilized through other representations of masculinities.

The character of Ladi, for instance, initially embodies a non-violent masculinity rooted in restraint, care, and respect. When Morayo attempts to seduce him, Ladi resists, insisting, "This is not the way it should be. You are too young, and I will not take advantage of you" (Kilanko, Daughters Who Walk This Path, 2012). His decision to withdraw, despite Morayo's insistence,

gives a model of sexual group that refuses the patriarchal promotion of male dominance. Ironically, it is Morayo who violates his consent, reversing the common gendered style of sexual violence: “Before he could push me away, I pressed my lips hard against his… his eyes widened in shock” (Kilanko, Daughters Who Walk This Path, 2012). Ladi’s experience delineates a neglected truth; that men, too, can be victims of sexual violation, and by so doing, the novel unsettles the naturalization of male sexual aggression as an inevitable expression of masculinity. This inversion not only complicates gender binaries but also stresses that gender relations are dialogic, shaped by power struggles, silences, and violations that can emanate from either sex.

Furthermore, Morenike’s relationship with Morayo exemplifies another mode of negotiating gender relations, one rooted in supportive solidarity rather than hierarchy. When Morayo confides in her cousin about Bros T’s abuse, Morenike assures her, “What happened to you was not your fault. You must never believe that lie” (Kilanko, Daughters Who Walk This Path, 2012). Through this act of affirmation, she disrupts the silence and shame imposed by patriarchal culture and provides Morayo with an empowering counter-narrative. This relationship demonstrates that resistance to hegemonic masculinity requires not only alternative masculinities but also reconstituted gender relations based on empathy and mutual recognition.

What Kilanko’s narrative makes clear, therefore, is that the struggle for gender justice is twofold: on the one hand, dismantling hegemonic masculinities that thrive on coercion, violence, and silence; on the other, nurturing alternative masculinities and relational models that allow for vulnerability, consent, and respect. As Kilanko illustrates, masculinity in Nigerian society is never singular but plural, contested, and open to redefinition. The novel’s nuanced portrayal of Ladi and Morenike points to the possibility of reimagining masculinity and gender relations beyond domination; a step necessary for creating a more egalitarian society.

Conclusion

Yejide Kilanko’s *Daughters Who Walk This Path* offers a compelling interrogation of the complicated entanglements between hegemonic masculinity, alternative masculinities, and evolving gender relations in contemporary Nigerian society. By exposing the mechanisms through which patriarchal dominance is upheld and sustained which include but not limited to sexual violence, enforced silence, and cultural taboos, the novel dramatizes the destructive effects of hegemonic masculinity on both women and men. Yet Kilanko does not reduce masculinity to a monolithic construct. Through figures like Ladi, who embodies restraint and respect, and through the empowering solidarity fostered by Morenike, the text advocates the existence of alternative masculinities and relational models that resist patriarchal domination. These counter-narratives complicate the gender order by demonstrating that masculinity is neither fixed nor universally oppressive, but instead plural, contested, and open to transformation.

In this way, Kilanko’s novel not only critiques entrenched patriarchal structures but also contributes to ongoing African feminist discourses that imagine more equitable gender relations. Her narrative depicts the importance of dialogue, vulnerability, and solidarity as tools for disrupting oppressive hierarchies and for envisioning new modes of coexistence. Ultimately, *Daughters Who Walk This Path* illuminates the need to challenge hegemonic masculinity while nurturing alternative masculinities that allow for consent, negotiation and mutual respect, thus advancing the broader projection of gender justice in African literature and society.

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