

International Journal of Current Research in the Humanities (IJCRH)
No. 28 2024 (P-ISSN: 0855-9740) (E-ISSN: 2773-837X)

Single-Parenthood Life of a Child in Yoruba: A Thematic Analysis of Tunde Kelani's *Maami*

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Abstract

This study is about the how single-parenting affect the life of a child as portrayed in Tunde Kelani's *Maami*. The qualitative analytical method of research was used to gather data for this study. The film was purposively selected based on the travails of a single-mother. The study reveals that single-parenting is difficult for both the single-parent and a child raised from a single-parent home. Single-parenting can lead to poverty (financial strain), emotional imbalance, decision pressure and guilt on the part of a single-parent, psychological imbalance, poverty and deprivation and social isolation and stigmatization. Single-parenting can change the life possibilities of a child. *Maami* film exhibits the need for married couples to properly raise their children.

Keywords: Nollywood film, *Maami*, Single-parenting, Tunde Kelani.

Introduction

Films play vital role in the lives of Nigerians. It is, perhaps, because of this that scholars, scriptwriters such as Hyginus Ekwuazi, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Herbert Ogunde, among others, have continued to canvass for the total independence of the film industry in Nigeria. Films serve as purveyors of culture, promoters of education and human resources development, social mobilization, information, entertainment, therapeutic and propagandistic ends (Adeleke, 2003; Olushola, 2008; Omoera, 2021). Also, film mirrors society when it portrays and interrogates negative and positive happenings about society.

Single-parenthood has both negative and positive influences on the children raised in such homes. In a society where a family is expected to have a

two parenting system, people stigmatize others from single-parenting family as they may consider it as imbalanced. Oftentimes, a single-parent faces difficulties in carrying out the parenting duties such as taking extra working hours to make sure their children enjoy all available opportunities like other children. Therefore, this may lead to abnormal working conditions and health challenges (Idowu, Edewor & Amoo, 2014; Fadayomi, 1991, pp.87-98).

The family is the basic unit of a community, and many families come together to form a community. The nuclear type of family is expected to consist of a father, mother, child or children. Every member of a family has their symbol of authority, which helps the family and society to run smoothly. Each parent has a significant function in the family and the inability to function as expected a member has its own consequences. For example, the father provides means for financing the family, he is the symbol of authority as everyone listens to him. It is the fathers that usually instil discipline in a family. On the other hand, the mother is a symbol of care in the family. She cares about the social development of her child or children. She interacts more with every member of the family, and serves as the bond of the family. Studies have shown that children who were not brought up by their mothers may find it hard to socialize and interact properly in the society as there may be time constraint to spend enough with the parent available (Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014, p. 2257).

The issue of single-parenthood and the influence it may have on children has been portrayed meagrely in Nollywood film, which is also known as the Nigerian film industry. Film has the capacity to represent or misrepresent an issue of concern in society. Based on backgrounds, people tend to interpret films in different ways to soothe their cognitive dissonance. *Maami* by Tunde Kelani portrays the plight of single-parents and also the effect of single-parenthood on a child. In Nigerian society, having both parents is often normal until one of them is absent. Paton (2010) claims that living apart from natural fathers can be associated with negatives outcome for children. The single-parent in *Maami* depicts a single-mother and the ordeal of raising her child. It is within this context that this article examines the plight of a single-mother and that of a child raised by a single-mother in relation to the child's psychological and social status in society as portrayed in Tunde Kelani's *Maami*. The objectives of the paper are to examine the issues of single-parenthood, the struggle of single-parenthood and the influence of single-parenthood in the development a child as portrayed in *Maami*.

Review of Literature

Single-parenting according to Salami and Alawode (2000) have their result from divorce, separation of various kinds, having children out of wedlock or death of one spouse which leaves the responsibilities in the hands of a single-parent. Single-parenting has effects on children's behaviour, psychology and academic performance (Mabuzza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014). The way children from single-parent homes are raised extensively differs from the way children from a complete parent homes (homes with father and mother) are raised. Amato (2005) argues in his conclusion of different findings that it is a fact that single-parent households are worse off financially than households with both parents. This is not only for the parents taking care of their children, but for the academic and social development of the children.

The rise of single-parenting has been linked to the rise in adolescents' crimes. In a study carried out by Howell (2015) on the link between single-parenting and crime, it was found that parent behaviour and the income of a single-parent household contribute to the increase of crime in urban communities. However, parents who support and supervise children enhance their well-being (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parental qualifications and household income had a major effect on children's behaviour at a young age, which could have damaging long-term consequences. In fact, poor parental monitoring has proven to be one of the most powerful predictors of youth involvement in problem behaviours (Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984). Some scholars assert that single-parents and step-parents monitor their children less closely and know less about where their children are, who they are with, and what they are doing than parents in intact families (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington, 1989; Steinberg, Brown, Cazmarek, Cider & Lazarro, 1988; McLanahan & Booth, 1989; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Single-parents are also less involved in their children's school activities and have lower educational goals for their children (McLanahan & Booth, 1989; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), two factors known to jeopardize academic achievement (Steinberg, et al, 1988). Benson and Roehlkepartain (1993) argue that, single-parents who are more involved in school have children who are less apt to experience problems.

Poverty is the most profound and pervasive factor underlying developmental problems of the young. Roughly, one of two families headed by a single-mother is living in poverty compared to one of ten married couples with children (McLanahan & Booth, 1989). Paton (2010) affirms that children raised by lone-mothers are likely to have less economic security. Garfinkel and McLanahan (1986) claim that single-parents are twice as likely to report that they worry "all

or most of the time” that their total income is not enough to meet family expenses. On average, poor children in mother-headed families are poor for seven years, more than a third of their childhood). However, being a single-parent and struggling for money often coincides. Economic hardship may have been found to cause emotional distress in parents, which can in turn hamper parent’s ability to be supportive, sensitive and consistent with their children’s upbringing (Amato & Keith, 1991).

Amato and Keith (1991) also found out that parental divorce is associated with lower socio-economic status in adulthood, compared to children from two-parent families, children with divorced parents are more likely to drop out of high school, less likely to attend college, and complete fewer years of education overall. Many believe that this is due to the emotional disturbance that is caused in disrupted and chaotic households and a child’s potential to form a poor sense of self (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). This poor sense of self and instability in relationships can lead to other relationship troubles, including infidelity, reoccurring divorce and remarriages and in extreme cases spousal and domestic abuse. Single-parenting could also have psychological effect on children. Azuka-Obieke (2013) states that the process of socialization depends on both parents playing complementary roles in raising children; which will definitely impact positively on the children during school years. On the other hand, children from single-parent homes are more likely to suffer deprivations and denials of some rights and opportunities that will have negative psycho-social impact on them in school years. Beckford (2008) argues that children from broken homes are almost five times more likely to develop emotional problems than those living with both parents.

Offiong (2014) opines that the foundation of what a person becomes in society is laid in the home and at the initial stage of life. Research has consistently shown that family structure can facilitate or limit the ways in which parents are able to positively influence the psycho-social and educational outcomes of their children (Amato & Keith, 1991). Azuka-Obieke (2013) claims that a child from a home where the father and mother are present will be well taken care of and socialized in the best way possible. Such a child is likely to achieve self-socialization later in life. The problem of deprivation of a second-parent is bad enough but when the remaining parent cannot cope with the resultant problems, a tragic situation arises. In such a situation, the child becomes a misfit in the society. Hence less attention is paid to the psychological well-being and education of the child (Azuka-Obieke, 2013). Although growing up in a single-parent family is frequently viewed as a risk, the inability of the single-parent to

cope is as a result of double responsibilities he/she (the parent) faces that requires extra time, attention, and money of the parent factor for children. (Amato & Keith, 1991).

As Nollywood expands, Nigerian film producers have embraced the adaption of Nigerian literature to films. Examples of these literature are *Maami* (2007), a novel written by Femi Osofisan, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2013), a book written by Chimamanda Adichie, and *Dazzling Mirage* (2014), a book written by Olayinka Egbokhare. Hence, as stated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Nollywood has grown to be the second largest film industry in the world as at 2014. Nollywood has so far portrayed issues and ideas that concern Africa as a whole and beyond. UNESCO is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) with the aim of promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture. This article busies itself with *Maami* (2012) as adapted into film by Tunde Kelani.

Methodology

This study adopts qualitative content analytical approach to explore and discuss in-depth, the various themes embedded in the film under review. Qualitative content analytical approach as used in the study is a thematic analysis that enables the researcher to engage intimately with the communication material to unravel the various issues and themes contained in the content of the film material. Hence, by using this method, the major issues in the film are grouped into themes and discussed, vis-à-vis the overall theme of single-parenthood in society. Tunde Kelani's *Maami*, was selected because it deals with the issue of single-parenthood in Yorubaland which is a critical problem in the upbringing of children in the Nigerian society.

Maami

Maami (2012) is an adaptation of a novel written by Femi Osofisan in 2007. It revolves around a single-mother, Ebunoluwa and her son Kashimawo who live in Abeokuta. In her quest to survive and take care of her child, she goes through a lot of hardship. Kashimawo becomes an international footballer who plays for a premier league club. He seeks vengeance against his occult father who had used his brother for ritual. Tunde Kelani in an interview says: He found himself creating strong female characters because he was separated from his mother at age five and has always missed her. But he was never short of mothers as he grew up in a family compound. This made him realize that African women have not

been accorded their place in society and they have been underrepresented which he plans to change through his films. This is the inspiration behind *Maami* that portrays the plight of single-mothers in an African society.

Emerging Themes and Discussion

Maami is endowed with themes that are reflective of the realities of single-parenting in Yorubaland. This section identifies and discusses some of the themes under three broad categories, namely, the causes of single-parenting, the struggles of single-parenting and how single-parenthood influences the development of a child. These themes are explored to see how collectively they have contributed negatively to the development of a child in the society as reflected in the film.

Poverty

Poverty can be the major issue confronting most single parent homes especially that of single mothers. Ebunoluwa known as 'maami' (my mother) in the film; as a single mother suffered from abject poverty due to lack of sufficient income. Kashimawo's mother could not even afford good sandals or uniform in the movie as the first scene that introduces him shows him barefooted with his friend killing crab to eat and stealing cashew. He could not even have friends who are not like him but a friend who has a similar situation of having to see his father once in three days. Kashimawo's mother's small stall of pepper and vegetables was destroyed despite her appeals explaining how tedious single parenting could be for her. She explains that she does the responsibility of the two parents which includes feeding, clothing and formal education. In the hope of not getting her stall destroyed, she went to the one in charge of the market stalls and she was sexually harassed because of her inability to pay. Poverty is also expressed through his mother's inability to buy him a gift for his academic excellence nor his birthday as Kashimawo requested for meat. She went as early as possible on her son's birthday to the mortuary to wash dead bodies just to get money to buy meat although the money was not enough.

Unfavourable Situation

Mothers are generally known to be determined about the upbringing of their children in the face of adverse problems and situation. Therefore, resilience is exhibited through love and the way they cope with unfavourable situation to satisfy their children. This is portrayed in *Maami*. Kashimawo's mother was determined to raise her child against all odds. She is presented as a strong character because of determination to give her best to her child, Kashimawo. She tells her son that as long as she is alive, she would make sure he finishes his formal education. Also, she assures him that his dreams would be fulfilled. The matter issue was also expressed when Kashimawo's mother decided to get him meat for his birthday present. She was so desperate that she lied of being an old school friend to a stranger's wife. Also of how she was robbed to get money from the stranger. Her desperation was also expressed when she got to the market with her child. She had to scrap bones because she could not afford meat. The people at the market got to know and decided to give her gift because of her child's birthday and someone even paid for the meat to be given to her.

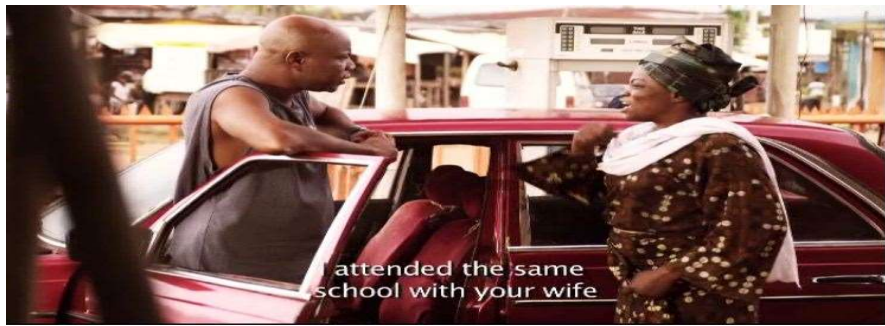


Plate 1: Ebuoluwa sourcing for money to buy meat (Maami:14th January 2025)

Bitterness and Vengeance

Kashimawo's mother was bitter when Kashimawo asked for meat and she expressed the agony and struggle she went through to feed him and to send him to school, in that bitterness she told Kashimawo to go to his father's house (who had deserted them) to eat meat. Kashimawo on the other side felt bitter not having to eat meat or fish that his friends made jest of him and his mother for inability to afford meat or fish. Kashimawo (Kashy) becomes a football super hero who was to play for 2011 Premier League could help remembering his awful experience of the last birthday he ever spent with his mother. The thought of his experiences as a child made him bitter that he could not help showing love to the children at the orphanage. Having heard of how a boy at the orphanage was rescued at a ritual spot, he could not help remembering his experience with his

mother at his father's house where he saw a boy that has been used for ritual in a room that made him throw up.

Kashy was so eaten up by the memory of his childhood that he could not clear up his head to decide whether to play at the premier league or not. He was consumed by bitterness and vengeance on his father Otunba Bamishaye for making him and his mother suffer so much that she had to die untimely and the thought of how he was called "a child without father" by his school mates made him take vengeance as the only solution he has to clear up his head in other to play with the Super Eagles in the football premier league. He embarked on this mission unknown to anyone to Otunba who was staying in his father's house at Abeokuta, met with him who had now been paralysed and unable to speak. He reminded him of his mother, Ebunoluwa, how she had escaped with him so that he would not be used for money rituals and how she died. He called him evil and eventually removed the big chain which his mother told him about, how Otunba never removed it to kill him; he guessed it must be connected to Otunba's being alive.

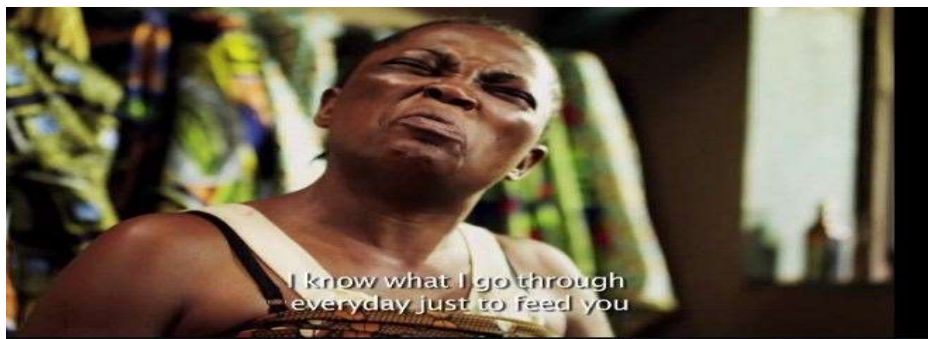


Plate 2: Expression of bitterness for her single-parenthood (*Maami*:14th January 2025)

In effect, the issues of single-parenting portrayed in *Maami* are poverty, bitterness and vengeance and determined motherhood. Different scholars have discussed some of these issues. The most prevailing issue is that of poverty and bitterness which could result to emotional imbalance and even serious health issues. Most single-parents, especially mothers worry about the sufficiency of their income to feed their children (Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986). Some single-parents might not be able to cope with handling the responsibility of two parents, therefore, rendering their child or children societal misfits (Azuka-Obieke, 2013). Poverty and deprivation may in turn lead to psycho-emotional imbalance in

single-parents and their children. Hence, the importance of two-parent family cannot be undermined as single-parenting has diverse negative effects.

The Struggle of Single-Parenthood in *Maami*

This refers to the ordeal of a single-mother raising a child. Ebunoluwa as a single-mother in *Maami* experienced a lot of difficulties raising her child, but the joy of being a mother kept her persistent.

Tenacity in the Face of Abject Poverty

In the face of Ebunoluwa's hopeless situation, because it was not revealed in the film that she had any relative or friend to support her, she still did not give up until her death. The joy of being a mother kept her going. Ebunoluwa in the face of abject poverty and helplessness was able to persevere and would not give up. She could have opted out to marry another husband but she stood with her son despite the suffering. She assures her son that she would make sure he finishes his formal education. Her tenacity was also expressed when the local officers headed by Mr. Lawani came to destroy her stall. The way she described her situation expressed her tenacity. She wanted to save her son at all cost that necessitated a protest she embarked on that almost resulted in her being raped. But in all, she made the interest of satisfying her child's growth paramount. Her child's interest made her to lie to a stranger that his wife was her classmate to collect money to buy meat for child on his birthday. Even after she was robbed by the men in a taxi, she still got up to tell her child a lesson to learn from their experience. She is a woman that never accepted defeat. When her child was taken by the Hausa gateman, she quickly shouted in Hausa language to bail her child.

Emotional Imbalance

Due to the stress and poverty Ebunoluwa went through, she experienced emotional imbalance and she was unable to meet her son's need. Her emotional imbalance was expressed when she was pondering and crying. This situation showed when she went to the market with her son to scavenge bones instead of meat when she cannot afford money for meat. It was also showcased in another occasion where she went into her ritualist husband's ritual room without considering the consequences because she wanted to satisfy her son.



Plate 3: Ebunoluwa scavenge bones instead of meat with her son (Maami:14th January 2025)

Social Isolation and Financial Strain

This was showcased throughout the movie. Ebunoluwa was not seen with any friend chatting or talking because she had to work all day to feed her son. Even when some women were talking about a party they are supposed to buy cloth for, they did not even think she could attend the party because they believe she cannot afford the cloth as she spends everything she gets on her son. Her husband was supposed to be the partner she can share her joy and her pain with but he is absent making her isolated. Mother-only families are more likely to be poor because of the lower earning capacity of single mothers, the insufficient benefits provided by the state, and the lack of child support from the non-residential father (Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986). Most responsibility of full parenting rest on the shoulder of a single mother, she faced financial strain as she has to work extra to get money. An instance was the time she woke up early in the morning to wash corpse in other to get money. Her son did not even wake up to see her. With all her struggles, she is still unable to feed her son properly. She could not get her son meat for his birthday.

Pressure of Decision Guilt

Decisions are made for children by the two parents most especially the father. Ebunoluwa could not make a specific decision as to what her child will grow up to be. She wanted him to be an educational scholar but her son wanted to grow up to be the best football player like 'Segun Odegbami.' The guilt of not having enough to give to her son filled her when she realized she had no money to get her child meat for birthday and also the guilt of not having to give her son what he deserves. She also suffers from the guilt of making Kashimawo her son fatherless, she later told Kashimawo why she had run away from his father's house to save him from his ritualist father. Single parenting could be very stressful and none fulfilling. This was the experience of Ebunoluwa in *Maami*.

The Influence of Single-Parenthood in the Development a Child in the Film

Poverty and Deprivation

Children that are being raised in a single parent homes oftentimes suffer deprivation of certain rights and opportunities (Crosnoe, 2007), which could result from the inability of such single parent to provide. Kashimawo as a child growing up experienced child poverty. The inability of his mother to provide for him deprived him of some child rights. He could not even get the complete uniform as the first scene that introduces him in the film shows him barefooted and with a friend killing and cooking crab to eat. This must have been as a result of poverty as the two friends were also spotted eating cashew under a cashew tree of which they were chased away by a man. He was never spotted in the film with a good school uniform, sandals and school bag which are the basic things every child should have. As Kashimawo grows, he was deprived of having a father which exacerbated his deprivation of not having basic care. Although he enjoys the love bestowed on him by his mother but he wished he could know what it is like to be with his father.

Kashimawo was also deprived of a good meal as he wanted meat for his birthday but could not get it. He wanted what all other children are eating but could not get. He told his mother of how they have not eaten meat for a long time. Another instance that expresses Kashimawo's deprivation was when some women were talking about party clothes (*Aso-ebi*) he felt that his mother should also have, so all he did was to tell the woman selling it he would pay for her mother's cloth by doing her house chores for weeks. This shows how he was deprived of seeing his mother buying and wearing clothes like other women which must have made him feel sad. Kashimawo was sad when he saw his mother lying just to get money to feed him. Deprivation was also expressed in the film when Ebunoluwa told Kashimawo they would take a taxi home' his joy knew no bound showing that he never entered a taxi and that he had trekked all his days till that day. Kashimawo danced throughout his stay in the taxi from the joy of being inside one until they were robbed. Kashimawo was also deprived of not having to know his dad as everyone in school insults him by calling him *omo ti ko ni baba* (a fatherless boy). This made him to want to know if he really has a father and if he does, wants to know him.

Psychological Instability

Nkereuwem and Udisi (2016, p.6) explain how studies has shown children from intact-homes are being be taken care of and better socialized. This is due to the

fact that the process of socialization depends on both parents playing complementary roles in raising such children; which will definitely impact positively on the children during school years. This issue is portrayed in *Maami* as the effect of being raised by a single-mother which was evident on Kashimawo as a grown up. His experiences while he was being raised by a single mother built his psychological disposition. Having to be called fatherless makes him sad that he even dreamt that he had decided to become *Thermogene* to touch his teacher, his teacher became a masquerade, told him he has no father and asked him where his father is. The thought of having no father made him psychologically unstable that he could not help recalling instances in school that he was called fatherless. His experiences as a child became a lesson out of which he formed different ideologies, one of which is to be a great giver to the poor because he was once poor as a child.

Social Isolation and Stigmatization

After his mother died in an accident he had to live in an orphanage for six years which could have been the greatest social separation he experienced. Right from the start, his mother has been the best social company aside from his friend who was seen with him at the first scene that introduces him. An instance shows his isolation from the rest of the children at the stream when he was summoned by a boy to come and bath in the river, one of them insulted him that his mother could not buy meat or fish in the stew, this got him angry that he fought with the boy that insulted him. He could not just be a normal child to play with the rest of the children. The phrase “fatherless” isolated him and made him socially separated. His schoolmates call him fatherless at any slight brawl. The effect of single parenting like poverty and deprivation, social isolation and stigmatization, and psychological instability on the development of a child are revealed in *Maami*.

Conclusion

Maami portrays single-mothers as objects of tough luck that everyone in society should pity and help raise their children. Hence, single-parenting is seen as a system that can bring stigmatization on a child raised from such family and poverty is a major challenge of a single-mothering. This is as a result of lack or low income, which is insufficient to manage the family. This easily leads to psychological problems and low self-esteem as portrayed in *Maami*. The film is an attempt to project the lifestyles of single-parenting mothers and to put up a narrative that both reflect the negative and positive effects of single-parenting. The film was framed in a manner that causes the film audience to be conscious

of the reality of single-parenthood. Some antiquated traditions were framed in the film in a manner that causes the film audience to rethink and re-evaluate them, and possibly adjust to modern reality.

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