
OBSTETRIC FISTULA AS TRAGIC EFFECT OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN ALKALI'S *THE DESCENDANTS* AND BOBI'S *BONGEL*

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Abstract: *This study employs Alkali's The Descendants and Bobi's Bongel to amplify the ordeal child brides experience as young females in patriarchal societies, particularly in northern Nigeria. Although child marriage and its accompanying travails have long existed and are scarcely explored by writers, contemporary northern Nigerian female writers have mustered the courage to uncover the traumatic health issues inundating child marriage, especially obstetric fistula and the consequent abandonment, towards engendering optimism and profound agency in the victims while systematically reprimanding the practice through their creative endeavours. This study adopts the African Feminist theory with particular emphasis on "Motherism" to x-ray the trials and travails of child brides compelled to shoulder the onus of motherhood at a tender age, through textual analysis. The study finds that, through the selected texts, Zaynab Alkali and Maryam Bobi condemn the effects of child marriage, that is, obstetric fistula, abandonment, and social stigmatisation. It is stressed that victims of child marriage, and especially those affected by obstetric fistula, experience untold suffering in a highly patriarchal African society; however, when shown love, care, and financial support, they can achieve healing from the emotional, physical, and psychological trauma that follows their disdainful and horrendous experiences.*

Keywords: *Bongel, child marriage, early child birth, obstetric fistula, The Descendants.*

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INTRODUCTION

Several children around the world, today, are rendered vulnerable to an avalanche of exploitations which, as (Gecaga, 2007, p.) notes, result from incessant abandonment and malnutrition plus insufficient education and discriminatory treatment. More concerning is the realities of African children, especially in Nigeria, who experience tragic events that jettison their freedom to play and grow in a safe environment. One of these awful experiences is child marriage as it has proven to do no good but harm to child brides. Many young girls, ostensibly too young to marry, face traumatic issues such as obstetric fistula during childbirth. In many traditional societies, such as those in northern Nigeria, women who develop obstetric fistula are ostracized by their families and communities. In a similar vein, Gondwe, Maharaj, and Sewpersad (2024) explored the perceptions of survivors of obstetric fistula about childbearing after receiving treatments for the health problem. The study establishes that the majority of the women lost interest completely in childbearing, while some of them could not bear children anymore as a result of the fistula surgery. Albeit the women are scared of death and the fistula surgery pain, the researchers point out the need to communicate the risk of subsequent pregnancies and mitigation techniques to women to reduce the cases of obstetric fistula in societies. More so, different scholars have critiqued the selected texts from different perspectives.

Fadare (2021), for instance, examines *The Descendants* by focusing on the reconstruction of women's identity in connection with their roles in national development. He identifies that education and economic empowerment played a predominant role in redefining and reconstructing the new image of women. He highlights that these tools help to erode the previous stereotypes and patriarchal dominance which have hitherto hampered women's contribution to national development. While the study raises issues of child marriage, it is largely predicated on its obstruction of women's optimal contribution to national development, without pointing out the issues of obstetric fistula and social stigma. From a religious perspective, Edwin argues that the exegesis of *The Descendants* is a revelation of African Muslim women's complicated personal and private interaction with Islam, broadening and shaping our understanding of Muslim women in general. The author emphasizes that the novel does not intend to disrupt Muslim society but to expose the overly knotted feelings towards Islam. Umar (2019) aims to discuss the injustice of the circumstances that enable the neglect of the girl/woman's feelings when making decisions that concern her in *Bongel*. The novel reveals that education gives the woman the desired personality, self-esteem, and confidence to excel in life and curtail male chauvinism, while the lack of education jeopardizes the lives of females and increases their level of vulnerability in life.

Dzukogi (2022) explores the effectiveness of *Bongel* as a medium of communication. The researcher scrutinizes the text as a means of transmitting information to a variety of audiences, thus acting as an effective courier of information to the people and society. The study argues that despite the unfashionable deployment of literary text by media practitioners, literary text remains an effective means of communication and an agency for changing the opinions and behaviour of readers. He concludes that literary communication, although a relatively new concept, is a form of language communication that can be studied as a self-contained phenomenon. This current study, however, is hinged on the issues of child marriage and the commonly occurring issue of obstetric fistula, which leads to social stigmatisation of the affected child brides. Kaba, Toure, Camara, and Johri (2024) investigate the experiences of community reintegration after surgical treatment of obstetric fistula in



Guinea. The study finds that inordinate delay of obstetric care invariably leads to obstetric fistula, and this delay is caused by early marriage, illiteracy, and poverty. It also confirms that upon receiving obstetric treatments, women grapple with discrimination, stigmatisation, and sometimes arrant rejection in their community, lacking appropriate psychological and social support to surmount their health problems. The scholars accentuate the necessity to create awareness on the cause and effect of fistula among women and their families so that necessary psychosocial measures can be taken in supporting the victims.

It is, therefore, worthy of note that while there have been a plethora of medical efforts to combat fistula, literary works have contributed immensely to awareness creation on many societal problems for long, and the issue of early marriage, which reportedly leads to obstetric fistula and social stigma among child brides, is now boldly represented in some contemporary Nigerian novels. Literary works from northern Nigeria, where the condition is prevalent, have become essential tools in exposing the traumatic experiences of women living with obstetric fistula. When Northern Nigerian women started writing in the Hausa Language in the 1980s, they also addressed themes like issues of forced marriage, polygamy, childbearing, motherhood and other domestic concerns. They represent themselves in depth and wrote on issues which continue to be important to them (Whitsit, 2009 p3).

In the 1990s, new female voices emerged and the themes and styles of the novels started to expand from the traditional pre-marital love stories to more serious themes about family life. Prominent among these literary voices are Zaynab Alkali and Maryam Bobi, who, through their novels respectively, bring to light the painful realities of obstetric fistula and the resulting social stigma as a result of child marriage. Both authors draw a direct link between early childbirth, often a consequence of child marriage, and the development of obstetric fistula. Through their storytelling, they offer insight into the emotional, social, and physical struggles of women affected by this condition, thereby contributing to the broader effort to raise awareness and curb the occurrence of obstetric fistula and the practice of child marriage.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Obstetric Fistula is a debilitating, tragic injury of childbirth significantly affecting maternal health and quality of life, particularly in low-resource settings, including Northern Nigeria (UNFPA, 2020). The affliction which often follows prolonged and obstructed labour without medical intervention leaves the birthing mother with a hole or tear in the birth canal, bladder, or rectum. Such women are left incontinent, unable to control the leakage of urine, and /or faeces (Ameh&Mairiga, 2017 p.139).

The medical community defines obstetric fistula as a gynaecologic condition where an abnormal communication occurs between the urinary tract or gastrointestinal tract and the genital tract, produced by obstetric causes, prolonged and obstructed labour. The affliction of obstetric fistula leads to a range of consequences, resulting in severe physical and social challenges. Such women are vulnerable to infections, discomfort, and deep social stigma (Iliyasu, 2018 p210). Beyond its physical impact, obstetric fistula profoundly affects the mental and emotional well-being of its victims. Women suffering from this condition often experience social isolation, depression, and abandonment due to the stigma associated with their condition. The inability to control bodily functions resulting in foul smell is seen as a source of shame, leading to their rejection and loss of self-esteem, thereby deepening their sense of rejection and psychological suffering. In many



traditional societies, such as those in northern Nigeria, women who develop obstetric fistula are ostracised by their families and communities. This isolation, compounded by chronic medical problems and the inaccessibility of effective healthcare, pushes many victims into a cycle of poverty, further diminishing their chances of recovery and reintegration into society (Akan, 2003 p80).

Northern Nigeria, where the prevalence of obstetric fistula is alarmingly high, presents a striking case study for understanding the intersection of medical, cultural, and social issues contributing to this condition. Moreover, cultural norms and economic barriers often prevent women from seeking timely medical help, which could mitigate the risk of fistula. Instead, many women give birth at home or in poorly equipped facilities, increasing their vulnerability to complications during childbirth (Ameh&Mairiga, 2017 p141). In response to the devastating effects of obstetric fistula, various sectors, particularly medical professionals and social workers, have launched concerted efforts to combat the condition. Enlightenment campaigns are a central part of this strategy, aiming to educate communities about the risks of early pregnancy/marriage, the importance of skilled childbirth care, and the need for timely medical intervention in cases of obstructed labour.

Fortunately, with advancements in the medical world, there is hope for a full recovery for victims of obstetric fistula with the opportunity to live normal lives. Medical interventions such as surgical repair by correcting damaged tissues, reconstruction surgery, physical therapy, and post-operative care can help restore normal bodily functions. However, many women affected do not have access to treatment due to certain factors, which include cost of treatment, lack of awareness, misconceptions about the illness, fear of surgery, and limited access to health care (UNFPA, 2018).

CHILD MARRIAGE

The World Health Organization explains that child marriage is any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. It is a form of child abuse and exploitation which can lead to serious health problems, including maternal mortality, birth injuries, and sexually transmitted infections. The International Planned Parenthood Federation [IPPF], (2007) believes that child marriage is a situation a young girl below 18 years of age is married off, with limited or no consideration for her physical, physiological, and psychological readiness to withstand the profound demands of childbirth and other marriage-inclined responsibilities. Although child marriage affects both sexes, girls are disproportionately affected as they are the majority of the victims, according to UNICEF (2020).

The practice is a violation of the rights of the girl-child and has substantial negative effects on her physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. When a young girl who is not physically and emotionally prepared to face the onus of marriage is betrothed to an older man, her "ideal feminine body and womanhood, which are associated with motherhood" (Handojo&Djundjung, 2016, p.25) is liable to be seriously affected, rendering her handicapped when she needs them.

UNICEF (2020) explains that girls married prematurely are also at a higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Many interrelated factors can be said to be the cause of the high prevalence of this cultural practice in Africa. They include the existence of cultural and religious norms that promote child marriage. For instance, countries with a preponderance of Islamic belief in child or early marriage are known to have a high prevalence of child marriage since influential religious leaders often support the practice and voice strong opposition to campaigns against it. The prevalence of child marriage is noteworthy in poor countries



of the world and within the poor section of any given country's population. It is worth noting that the majority of the underage girls are oftentimes forced into marriage with old men to lessen the economic burden for the families of such poor girls and, in some other instances, to ensure that there is the prospect of financing the education of the male siblings of the unfortunate girls.

In the Northern part of Nigeria, child marriage has been identified as a major consequence of the backwardness of the female gender in the region, and to address its high prevalence, some Northern Nigerian female writers, through their fictional works, raise realistic gender issues. They draw attention to issues of choice, conflict, enslavement, trauma and injustice that becloud the Northern female gender as they attempt to fit into cross-cultural relationships in a modern world. The increased number of literary works written by Northern Nigerian female authors about forced and unplanned childhood marriages remains invisible as a Nigerian protest sub-genre that strives to glorify the suffering girl-child. The inconsistent literature portrays women exclusively as victims because they face no way out from patriarchal control. The literary world currently presents stories where women who experience oppression fight back and become heroines. These literary works remain insufficiently examined by critics.

Through this research we aim to promote gender equality because it teaches oppressed child brides how to fight oppression the way main characters in the analysed novels do. Through these writings, victims demonstrate their ability to fight against their suppressors and break free from domination. Modern-day Northern Nigerian female authors have formed a powerful movement that fights against cultural suppression and male-dominated collaboration.

The authors construct a literary body of work that challenges traditional oppression while establishing women as transformative figures. Through their writings female authors transform the tacit role of victims into active fighters who challenge patriarchal institutions by creating stories about modern female protagonists who take down these systems.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is predicated on the model of African feminism called motherism, propagated by Catherine Acholonu (1995), who believes that the tenets of African feminism should revolve around motherhood as an unavoidable source of core African philosophies to ingrain its doctrines. The rationale behind this is that motherhood is salient to the African metaphysical reality, alongside the survival and unity of the African race (Acholonu, 1995). The cardinal principles of this model revolve around motherhood, nurturing, and care.

The proponent of this theory notes that, "the Motherist is the man or woman committed to the survival of Mother Earth as a hologrammatic entity. The weapon of Motherism is love, tolerance, service, and cooperation of the sexes (Acholonu, 1995, p. 3). In other words, the motherist is expected to be tolerant, ready to serve their family through cooperation and unadulterated love.

The principles of Motherism are not exhibited by women only, as men can also be Motherists. What is paramount is that Motherists are concerned about the menace of racism, malnutrition, political and economic exploitation, hunger and starvation, child abuse and morality, drug addiction, the proliferation of broken homes and homelessness around the world, the degradation of the environment and depletion of the ozone layer through pollution (Acholonu, 1995). Motherists believe

that women should be afforded the liberty to care for others genuinely by shunning hatred, even when there is lots of hate around.

Achalonu (1995) maintains that hateful and militant fights against men cannot release women from suppression; rather, love and cooperation are the best weapons to free anyone from any form of subjugation and dominance. This model is suitable for this study as it helps to disinter the traits of motherhood as exhibited by any of the characters amidst their struggle for a peaceful home. Also, the theory underscores how men and women could display their motherhood trait in assisting characters experiencing child abuse and/or homelessness as explored in this study.

METHOD

This study adopts the qualitative approach, dwelling on textual analysis to uncover relevant thematic preoccupations that substantiate the argument presented in the research. The qualitative design is considered appropriate because it allows for subjective interpretation of texts, guided by theory, while giving room for expression of thoughts at a reasonable length. The study is based on the two selected texts, *The Descendants* and *Bongel* which echo the issue of obstetric fistula that forms the fulcrum of this research undertaking. The study aims to investigate how the novels, *The Descendants* and *Bongel*, depict the social, psychological, and emotional trauma associated with child marriage and obstetric fistula. The selected texts are written by Nigerian female novelists, exposing the lived experiences of young girls who grapple with early marriages and the traumatic health implications, such as obstetric fistula. This study is contextualised in areas of gender studies, reproductive health, and women's rights in northern Nigeria. It largely draws on the social and cultural background where child marriage is pervasive, making fistula a social and medical quagmire. This study ultimately amplifies the representation of traumatic child marriages and obstetric fistula as tenable in northern Nigeria.

The research paper did a study of the characters in *The Descendants* and *Bongel*: Seytu and Bongel, respectively. This is because the study is a textual analysis of the predicaments the characters grapple with based on the realities of their environment. The characters form the conduits through which the study ascertains how child marriages and obstetric fistula affect the mental, physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of the victims in northern Nigeria. Further, the study deploys secondary materials such as articles, health reports, and African feminist precepts, which explore the psychosocial impacts of child marriage and obstetric fistula, validating the findings of the selected texts.

Upon engaging in voracious reading of the selected texts, this researcher pointed out some themes such as child marriage, obstetric fistula, early childbirth, trauma, and abandonment. The novels were read again and again to reaffirm the predominant themes and how the characters are strategically employed to project the topical issues in the novels. Thereafter, the recurring dialogue, imagery, and descriptions of the child brides' social neglect were manually coded to facilitate the process of data collection and analysis for the study.

In the selected works for this study, *The Descendants* and *Bongel*, obstetric fistula does not only surface as a medical condition but as a metaphor for the traumatic lives of women caught in the intersecting forces of patriarchy, silence, and social abandonment. These narratives center on female

protagonists whose experiences with fistula isolate them from their communities, sever intimate relationships, and reduce their identities to symbols of shame and brokenness. In spite of their grappling with these bodily wounds, the protagonists have quietly and persistently asserted themselves. Through fragmented memories, internal monologues, and acts of resistance—however small—the child-brides in *The Descendants* and *Bongel* navigate trauma and reclaim aspects of their agency. In the texts, the authors depict the traumatic experience of their protagonists living with vesico-vaginal fistula through their lead characters, Seytu and Bongel, respectively.

Alkali presents the harrowing experience of Seytu, a young woman who is afflicted with an obstetric fistula and whose life is to be altered irrevocably if not for her resilience and support from her grandmother. Seytu, like many young girls in Northern Nigeria, is married off at an early age “to the district head Dam at the age of twelve” (Alkali, 2007, p. 28). She experiences complications during childbirth, which leads to “the damaging of her Virginal walls” (Alkali, 2007, p. 73). Consequently, she is abandoned by her husband. Alkali, drawing a link between child marriage and obstetric fistula through her character, Seytu, who in later years becomes a successful medical consultant, describes her traumatic plight as being “a victim of an early marriage with all its consequences (Alkali, 2007, p. 165). Unlike the fate of others in her society, fortunately for Seytu, through the support and mentorship of MagiraMilli and her resilience, she is cured, returns to school, and self-actualizes. Alkali uses Seytu’s story to highlight the physical and emotional toil of women living with obstetric fistula, portraying her as a victim not only of cultural and social forces that devalue the girl child but also of medical neglect that affects women’s health and wellbeing.

In *Bongel*, the eponymous character, Bongel, is not just another statistic of child marriage—she is a fully formed young girl with dreams, emotions, and the simple desire to live without pain. However, upon her early marriage, her body suffers under the pressure of forced adulthood. When fistula sets in, it marks the end of her sense of self. She stops talking and withdraws. The people around her treat her as if she has somehow brought this upon herself, when in reality, it is the system, the traditions, and the silence around girls’ suffering that are to blame. Bobi explores the traumatic and haunting experience of Bongel, who is afflicted with an obstetric fistula as a result of child marriage and childbirth complications. Bobi reveals that her protagonist, as a young girl of twelve, is denied secondary education by her father and instead “marries her out at twelve to a very wealthy man, whom she did not even know, much less love” (Bobi, 2015, p. 27). The wealthy Alhaji, desperate for a male child, is in a hurry to ensure that young Bongel gets pregnant, and the pregnancy results in complications during childbirth. After a prolonged and “extended labor” (Bobi, 2015, p. 75) she is rushed to the hospital at Mariga already “physically exhausted” (Bobi, 2015, p. 75). As such, despite the efforts of the medical team, she is delivered of a stillbirth and the doctor declares; “Now your daughter is infected with VVF” (Bobi, 2015, p.76).

The emotional and social abandonment of women living with Vesico-Vaginal Fistula (VVF) is portrayed with accuracy in Zaynab Alkali’s *The Descendants* and Maryam Bobi’s *Bongel*. Both novels explore how the experience of VVF is not only physically traumatic but also psychologically destabilizing, especially when women are rejected by the very people who should protect and support them. The authors, through their respective protagonists, passionately address the devastating reality of abandonment faced by women afflicted with VVF, drawing attention to the socio-psychological consequences that the act has on victims accompanying this condition. In the Northern Nigerian context of Alkali’s and Bobi’s fictional world, women suffering from obstetric fistula are often treated as social outcasts. Alkali and Bobi here expose the devastating reality of abandonment

by spouses and the socio-psychological consequences of obstetric fistula on the victims. The trauma of abandonment in the two novels manifests as conscious and unconscious rupture of self.

In *The Descendants*, the protagonist, after developing VVF, is not only physically isolated but emotionally exiled. Her condition becomes a marker of shame, both for herself and those around her. The lack of empathy from her family and community sends a deep psychic message that her worth is tied solely to her body's ability to conform to societal expectations. This rejection feeds an internalized self-loathing that aligns with Freud's concept of melancholia, where the subject turns the loss inward, leading to a fractured sense of identity. Alkali uses silence, detachment, and shame in her character's behaviour to depict the psychological damage caused by abandonment.

Seytu's experience of being abandoned reflects the social reality in Northern Nigeria, where child brides who are afflicted with obstetric fistula through no fault of theirs are abandoned and suffer social isolation. In some cases, women are abandoned not only by their spouse but also by their families and community, leading to significant emotional and psychological distress. (Nduka et al., 2023). Alkali exposes her stance on this abandonment through MagiraMilli, who vocally condemns Lawani's actions, and establishes that “a real man does not abandon his woman no matter the circumstance” (Alkali, 2007, p. 94). This displays the author's belief that abandonment, especially in times of crisis, is unacceptable. With this mindset, MagiraMilli hopes that after a successful operation, “Seytu will marry again, and this time to someone who cares” (Alkali, 2007, p.94). To her, it is a lack of love and empathy that makes spouses forsake their wives; instead of ostracizing victims, Alkali advocates for a compassionate response, urging spouses, families, and the extended society to offer moral, emotional, financial, and social support to those affected. In this wise, the author uses her symptoms of support- MagiraMilli to help raise funds to finance Seytu's medical treatment. This is evidenced in her discussion with her son.

Your uncle Heman, my only brother, may God bless him a thousand times, without reproach, sold half of his herd of cattle, and all the money went to the herbalist in Ramta and the surrounding villages. When I went home and told him about the hospital in Makulpo, he quickly sold the other half of his herd to enable Seytu to come to Makulpo for treatment... None of us could have been able to afford the hospital bill. Today, Herman is penniless because of another man's irresponsibility (Alkali, 2007, p. 93).

In *Bongel*, the main character's experience reflects a similar pattern. Her pain is compounded by the absence of emotional support. Instead of being surrounded by care, Bongel is met with suspicion, judgment, and rejection. She becomes invisible in her own story—a defense mechanism that could be interpreted through the lens of trauma theory within psychoanalysis. Her withdrawal signals a breakdown in her ability to process her reality, a way of coping with the unbearable burden of being unwanted. Her body, which is already violated by early marriage and childbirth, becomes a space of constant betrayal and as a site where unresolved trauma plays out.

The young protagonist, who successfully gains admission to a secondary school of repute, is prevented from resuming at the school; she is rather forcefully married off to a wealthy sixty-five-year-old Alhaji. Unfortunately, she suffers prolonged and extended labour during childbirth that results in a stillbirth and the affliction of “vesico-virginal fistula” (Bobi, 2015, p. 76). Ignorantly, the father and husband accuse her of being the cause of the baby's death, and she is subsequently abandoned in the hospital by both of them. The men, Bongel's husband and father, are so



disappointed at the death of the baby boy that they show little regard for Bongel's health. The author rebukes this cruel practice of abandonment of obstetric fistula victims, seeing such practice as a direct result of the devaluation of the girl child. The African practice also portrays the girl child as a mere property whose worth is tied to her ability to produce male children. She reveals in her text that it is the disappointment and realization that Bongel's affliction leaves her unable to give birth to other male children that makes "The father Buba storm out without giving Bongel a glance" (Bobi, 2015, p. 77), while her husband sent her "a divorce letter" (Bobi, 2015, p. 77). Patriarchal norms like this are strongly reprimanded by African feminists who seek not to villainize men universally but to critique oppressive structures that silence and devalue women in Africa. Maryam Bobi upbraids this cruel treatment and calls for empathy, a show of love, and care for victims. She uses the characters of Jummai, Bongel's mother, as symbols of care and support for the vulnerable victims.

While the protagonists suffer obstetric fistula, the response to their suffering cannot be shaped by patriarchal assumptions about womanhood as defined by purity, fertility, or usefulness. Support must go beyond charity or pity and acknowledge the full humanity of the victims and include systemic reforms in health care, education, and cultural practices. The two authors, Alkali and Bobi, advocate that care for victims should be gender neutral. They therefore show a case of male relatives being instrumental in financing the surgeries of the two protagonists afflicted with Obstetric fistula.

In Alkali's *The Descendant*, it is Herma, Migari Milli's "only brother who sold half of his cattle to enable Seytu to come to Makulpo for treatment" (Alkali, 2007, p. 93), while in Bobi's *Bongel*, it is Ardo, Bongel's maternal grandfather, "who sold some of his cattle to ensure she had three surgical operations" (Bobi, 2015, p. 78). In depicting this neutral gender care, the authors agree with Acholonu's (1995, p. 50) assertion that "motherism is not restricted to women only and that men can be motherist", as such nurturing is not necessarily a woman's role but a humanistic one. The authors, thus, emphasise the need for empathy and active involvement in helping victims find treatment, ultimately calling for a societal shift that values women and recognizes their inherent dignity, regardless of their health conditions.

Ultimately, through the selected texts, the study uncovers the physical, psychological, and social abuse faced by young girls subjected to marriage under the age of eighteen. Key themes affecting mental health, such as depression, suicidal ideation, and obstetric fistula, are central in the narratives as consequences of the abuse. The two authors, Alkali and Bobi, effectively illustrate the severe trauma of vesico-vaginal fistula through characters like Seytu and Bongel, emphasizing the physical and emotional suffering women endure due to early marriage and childbirth.

The World Health Organization (2017, p.1) defines obstetric fistula as "a hole in the birth canal caused by prolonged obstructed labor". Young girls who become pregnant before their pelvises are fully developed are at a higher risk of developing the condition. Ahmed and Holtz (2007, p. 60) assert that "limited access to quality maternal health care, poverty, malnutrition, and harmful traditional practices such as child marriage are factors that contribute to the high rate of the affliction". Northern Nigeria has one of the highest rates of obstetric fistula in the world due to multiple socio-cultural and health-related factors.

The authors render the physical and emotional toll of fistula not merely as an affliction but as a shaping force of female consciousness. The texts offer insights into the traumatic scars that accompany bodily rupture, as well as the societal frameworks that deepen the women's suffering. To this end, the texts compel readers to witness the complexity of survival in an African setting where



femininity is acutely bound to reproductive normalcy and social conformity. The authors expediently make their readers understand the cost of early marriage in Africa, and how the girl-child wallows in excruciating pain that leads to inevitable trauma. VVF becomes more than a medical diagnosis but a metaphor that tears apart the young female's innocence, the breakdown of their support systems, and the lasting damage of treating girls as women in their inchoate conditions. The authors challenge us, Africans, to look closer, show deeper care, and question the patriarchal norms that let such pain go unnoticed.

CONCLUSION

The study analysed obstetric fistula as a tragic effect of child marriage in Alkali's *The Descendants* and Bobi's *Bongel* to re-echo the untold suffering child brides are subjected to in the name of early marriage. The authors present the critical issue of obstetric fistula as a serious consequence of early marriage and childbirth in Northern Nigeria. They delve into the social and emotional ramifications of this condition, portraying their protagonists' experiences of abandonment, stigmatization, shame, low self-esteem, and trauma. The authors depict through their texts that victims of obstetric fistula can be cured through surgical repairs and reconstructions. The study finds that, through the selected texts, Zaynab Alkali and Maryam Bobi condemn the effects of child marriage, that is, obstetric fistula, abandonment, and social stigmatisation. It is stressed that victims of child marriage, and especially those affected by obstetric fistula, experience untold suffering in a highly patriarchal African society; however, when shown love, care, and financial support, they can achieve healing from the emotional, physical, and psychological trauma that accompanies their disdainful and horrendous experiences.

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