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Minors' Vulnerability in le Consentement de Vanessa Springora

Anthony Kayode SALAU Ph.D.[*]
Adisa Akinkorede SOMANA Ph.D.[†]
Victoria Adeola ADEFARASIN[‡]
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Abstract

France occupies an enviable position in Europe given her economic potentials and vast political influence in the region. But despite this enviable status, quite a number of children, especially teenagers living in France are exposed to poverty and several risks. Out of the 14.5 million children living in France, about 22.8% are at risks of extreme poverty and social risks as at 2021, according to the Global Health and Politics for the Borgen Project. As a matter of fact, close to 5,800 children in mainland France, live in slum as at 2022 while over 30,000 are accommodated in hotels and other dwelling places that are considered inappropriate for family habitation. These teenagers are therefore predisposed to juvenile delinquency as aptly revealed by Vanessa in her novel, Le Consentement. We adopted the sociological theory in this work, which afforded us the opportunity of viewing the functional and dysfunctional nature of some societal components that make up the society. In this case, we considered

[*] Tai Solarin Federal University Of Education , Ijagun, Ijebu Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria. +2348038478092 salaukayode@gmail.com
[†] Dept of Languages &Literary Studies, School of Education & Humanities, Babcock University, adisaa@babcock.edu.ng, +340660071101
[‡] Dept of French studies, Tai Solarin Federal University Of Education, Ijebu Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria., adefarasin@tasued.edu.ng, +24805518244

the dysfunctional nature of home and society in the travails endured by the leading character in the novel. The close reading technique is adopted as a methodology so as to achieve detailed and relatively objective evaluation of the novel's structure. It is established in the study that both home and the society failed in their obligations to provide guidance, counsels and most importantly security for the vulnerable girl. We therefore concluded that quite a lot of teenagers are still vulnerable in Europe, particularly in France where they are still exposed to several hazards and danger as a result of parental and societal negligence.
Keywords: *vulnerable, risks, minors, home, teenagers.*

Introduction

Several teenagers especially abandoned alien minors in France are exposed to diverse forms of dangers ranging from malnutrition, access to education, sexual harassment and inadequate access to education. According to The Childhood Social Aid, more than 2 million children experience severe poverty, living below a monthly income of less than 950 euro. This peculiar poverty is prevalent among the foreign minors whose parents have challenges processing their residency papers. As a result of this unpleasant situation, about 15,000 children are without good accommodation and are therefore forced to live in the streets or in overcrowded camps, according to The Childhood Social Aid. Every year, close to 100,000 are exposed to various hazards ranging from poor feeding, poor clothing and inadequate housing. They endure several inconveniences like exposure to harsh cold weather and poor health facility. The Childhood Social Aid (Aide Sociale à l'Enfance) helps many of these children to cope with some of these challenges through 'Mistreated Children Hotline 119 (Allo Enfance Maltraitée 119) which registers more than one million calls per year.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has indicated that violence against foreign minors, particularly the undocumented ones is still high, while corporal punishment is also used forcefully to ensure

compliance in the schools. It is worthy to note that more than 3000 alien minors are currently in France seeking greener pastures and looking for means of improving their economic and social status. Regrettably, these unsuspecting minors constitute social and security threats to France and are often kept in special centres or zones at the airport. In most cases, a good number of them are sent back to their countries once they are proven to be illegal minors. Most of these illegal minors encounter linguistic challenge because of French language which is not understood by them. This situation makes it extremely difficult for these vulnerable teenagers to attend school or engage in any professional or vocational training so as to make ends meet.

Consequently, they are compelled to join bad gangs who indulge in various crimes like credit cards fraud, drug trafficking, stealing, prostitution among other juvenile crimes. The Childhood Social Aid tries as much as possible to offer some forms of succour to these minors by providing economic, social, academic and professional supports to some selected minors in order to integrate them to the French society or equip them before repatriating them to their home countries. However, the efforts of this Committee is not felt much given the number of the helpless minors who throng France daily. The Committee is of the view that the foreign born minors have fundamental rights like the native French children who are adequately taken care of. The body insists that the minors must also benefit from every right as guaranteed by the Convention on the rights of the child, (CRC).

An overview of *le Consentement* de vanessa Springora

Le Consentement is an autobiographical novel written by an innocent and unsuspecting young girl to bring her traumatic experience to the public knowledge. V. as she chooses to be known is seduced by a famous writer who is older than her father and who takes undue advantage of her naivety, methodically raping her over a long duration of time. Also

known as G., the writer uses diverse means to lure the innocent girl in order to have carnal knowledge of the girl. The novel is fundamentally written in a manner that suggests as if one is flipping through a photo album with each chapter providing a physical portrayal of the relationship between the victim and G. The story demonstrated the inexplicable thirst for love from a 50 years old man to a vulnerable teenager. V., the victim, tries as much as possible not only to bring to the fore but also to unmask the childhood unspeakable trauma she endures with the famous writer. Regrettably, virtually everyone in V.'s life, particularly her mother who should have protected her appear indifferent. The father, on the other hand abandons V.'s mother and absconds with another woman. Her relationship with G. is an open secret but the relatives and neighbours choose to keep quiet perhaps as a result of G.'s status. The author deliberately chooses the novel's title, *Consent,* to ironically emphasise her innocence and ignorance which the famous author exploits in wooing and taking sexual advantage of her. She also uses the title in expressing her condemnation of the precarious situation and the irrational society she finds herself. It is remarkable to note that V. does not give her consent to be used as a sex machine to satisfy the sexual urge of an unscrupulous man. More pathetic and devastating is the fact that V. finds it extremely difficult forging ahead with her life because of the traumatic experience occasioned by the illicit affair. She therefore attempts to expose with ruthless honesty, innocence and more importantly, precision of her relationship with the author. She notes frankly and naively in the novel 'when you are 14, it is not normal for a 50 year old man to wait for you outside your school, it is not normal to stay with him in a hotel, to find yourself in his bed at teatime with his penis in your mouth'. *Le Consentement* (Consent) is a relatively new novel but it has generated a lot of literary controversy and the end appears not in sight.

Sociological Theory

Sociological theory provides us with several views through which we can evaluate our social environment. The theory is a presumption that attempts to describe, examine and consider entities of social reality from a sociological viewpoint, making references from different ideas so as to establish and validate sociological information. It should be noted that some sociological theories are conceived to describe precise phase of the social environment and gives room for forecast about impending occurrence. This theory is made up of three major theoretical views namely, the functional perception, the conflict perception and the symbolic interactionist perception. Each viewpoint offers us a different clarification about the social environment and human actions. We shall simply restrict ourselves to functionalist perception which appears relevant to our work. The functionalist perception emphasizes the interconnectedness of society by concentrating on how every parts influence and is being influenced by other parts. Functionalists make use of the terms functional and dysfunctional to explain the significance of social components on society. Societal components are functional if they contribute to the growth of the society and are equally seen as being dysfunctional if they intersect social steadiness. We shall look at the contribution of home and society as components of society and also review their roles in V.'s life.

Analysis And Discussion Of The Novel

The home is viewed as the first agent of socialisation because it has the first contact with the child. It is seen as the canopy under which a child develops socially, culturally and even cognitively. A child's socialisation process commences at home, from birth and it lingers on through the child's lifetime through the inculcation of norms, values and behaviours that enable him to understand the society. Socialisation is the means through which people develop social behaviours, values, beliefs and skills that are essential to enhance acceptable behaviours in the society. The family or the home is viewed as the most important because it ascertains what an individual child

eventually becomes in life. Therefore, one can affirm that failure or success of a child can be attributed to the type of home of family that produces such a child.

V., the main character in this novel is introduced as an innocent and unsuspecting teenager in a high school. She is presented as a product of a broken home because the mother leaves the matrimonial home unannounced as a result of irreconcilable and recurrent marital differences. V. presents her father as a busy man and a thorough bred professional who is quite obsessed with his career than his family. He is hardly found at home. He goes out early in the morning and returns late in the night. Instead of coming home to make his wife and daughter happy, he comes home to pick quarrels with his wife. V. gives a vivid description of his father thus:

> C'est un homme occupé. Très élégant, aussi. Ses activités professionnelles variant trop vite pour que je parvienne à en saisir la nature. A l'école, lorsqu'on m'interroge sur sa profession, je suis bien incapable de la nommer, mais de toute évidence, puisque le monde extérieur l'attire advantage que la vie domestique, il est quelqu'un d'important. (p.1)

One can deduce from the above description that V.'s father is undoubtedly preoccupied with his profession. As a young couple, one would have thought that the father will be so fond of his daughter and wife but the reverse appears to be the case. It is obvious that the wife and daughter are in dire need of love, warmth and care expected of a newly

married man. V. later gives us an insight to a plausible reason for this marital anomaly. She says innocently:

> Mes parents passent désormais des heures entieres à s'envoyer à la figure les pires insultes. Jusqu'à l'heure tardive où ma mère vient se réfugier dans ma chambre pour y sangloter en silence, blottie contre moi, dans mon étroit lit d'enfant, avant de rejoindre, seule, le lit conjugal. Le lendemain, mon père dort une fois encore sur le canapé du salon. (p.2)

It is inexplicable that a young couple in a relatively new marriage will be passing terrible insults to one another, using untoward words on themselves. In most cases, several young couples enjoy the first 5 years of their marriage, more so, with the arrival of a baby. One sees love and care in the home atmosphere where the newly married are attached to one another. They are mostly seen together and not bored of one's another's presence as a result of the initial excitement and marital joy of a new relationship. At this stage of relationship, mistakes, flaws are easily ignored because of love. This fondness is always occasioned by a complete concentration on the positive qualities of one another. The initial stage of a young couple is often associated with deep feeling of fascination and passion. It is basically assumed that newly wed couples have lots of wishes, desires and are equally curious about their aspirations. They attempt to explore one another, especially through eyes contact. It is a complete romantic experience as they arrange and conceive every aspect of their life together.

Ironically for V,'s parents, the reverse is the case as they struggle with recurrent nagging, argument, insults and unending malice. She describes her parents' marriage and relationship as:

> Leur marriage est une guerre sans fin, un carnage dont tout le monde a oublié l'origine. Le conflit sera bientôt réglé de façon unilatérale. Ce n'est plus qu'une question de semaines. (p.2)

This is obviously a case of unresolved conflicts which can be provoked by lack of intimacy or attention, financial disappointment and marital disillusion. This situation can lead to bitterness, withdrawal from one another or even separation. It is remarkable to note that the best approach to remediate this marital challenge is efficient communication, warmth attention and the readiness to concede. Regrettably, V.'s parents are not ready to embrace any of these approaches as they deliberately avoid physical contact with one another. The little girl takes note of this unhealthy and hostile atmosphere at home but she cannot help or intervene . Expectedly, she is negatively influenced in school because her teacher discovers that V. does not concentrate in the class and she sleeps a great deal during class. The teacher invites V.'s mother for a discussion and she informs her inquisitively:

> Votre fille tombe de sommeil, on dirait qu'elle ne dort pas la nuit. J'ai du lui faire installer un lit de camp au fond de la classe. Que se passe-t-il? Elle m'a parlé de disputes très violentes entre son père et vous, la nuit. Par ailleurs, une surveillante a remarqué que

> V. se retrouvait souvent dans les toilettes des garçons à l'heure de la récréation. (p.3)

V.'s mother is upset and embarrassed about the teacher's complaints in respect of her daughter. She thinks deeply about the marital conflict and eventually decides to quit the marriage. Unfortunately, she does not share her decision with her parents or any relative. V. remarks painfully:

> Un jour, ma mère prend une décision irrévocable. Profitant du séjour en colonie de vacances qu'elle a secrètement planifié pour procéder à notre déménagement, elle quitte mon père, sans retour. C'est l'été qui précède mon entrée au cours préparatoire. (p.3)

The die appears to have been cast concerning the lingering marital disagreements. She makes up her mind to leave the marriage because she does not appear to enjoy the much envisaged marital peace and joy. V.'s father is not visibly affected by the marital rupture as he continues with his life without his wife and daughter. It should be noted that couples break up for various reasons which include unresolved and recurrent quarrels, poor communication, immaturity and inability to harmonise their life aspirations. V.'s parents are seemingly influenced by virtually all the above reasons. Added to these challenges is the factor of trust. V.'s mother does not have absolute trust in her husband because of the long hours spent outside the marital home and less interest in the welfare and comfort of their daughter. This ultimately metamorphosed to perceived infidelity which eventually destroys the little trust between them. V. is disappointed and terribly upset by her father's response to the marital conflict. She is convinced that her father does not have any feeling for the two of them and therefore develops

severe hatred for him. She chooses not to speak to him or write him a letter as the father-daughter love seems to have vanished.

Surprisingly, the father decides to visit them on V.'s 8th birthday to rejoice with his daughter. V. notes:

> Mon père fait encore quelques brèves apparitions dans notre vie. De retour de je ne sais quel voyage à l'autre bout du monde, et de passage chez ma mère pour fêter mes huit ans, il me rapporte le plus inespéré des cadeaux: le camping-car transformable de Barbie, dont rêvent toutes les filles de mon âge. (p.7)

V. is happy to see her father, perhaps for the different birthday gifts and also for his unexpected presence. The father leaves after spending few minutes with them and V. bids him farewell. It is obvious that V. feels the absence of her father. She lacks the love, warmth, care and most importantly, the father-daughter conversation. She is bothered emotionally but she does not tell her mum. V. is sick and her mother informs her father who later visits them at the hospital. He says enthusiastically on arrival at the hospital:

> Ta mère m'a appelé parce qu'elle est inquiète pour toi. II paraît que tu souffres beaucoup et qu'on ne sait pas vraiment comment tu as attrapé ce streptocoque. J'ai pensé que tu serais contente de me voir. (p.38)

Surprisingly, V. is blunt with her father as she tells him that she does not need his presence for healing. She notes:

> Je n'ai plus besoin de toi, d'accord ? J'ai rencontré quelqu'un. Ca veut dire que tu peux repartir et continuer ta petite vie sans moi en toute tranquillité puisque maintenant, il y a quelqu'un qui veille sur moi. (p.38)

V.'s father is not only surprised but exceedingly shocked that her daughter could make such a damning statement publicly indicting him. He feels great sense of guilt with her daughter's statement. The hatred between V. and her father can be attributed to several factors like maltreatment of her mum, neglect, negative childhood experiences and fatherly alienation. As bad as the relationship is, it is important to note that showing discouraging feelings towards one's father does not indicate that the relationship is irredeemably impaired. The father-daughter rapport can still be restored if the duo makes deliberate efforts to heal the past wounds and rebuild the relationship. But in V.'s case, she seems to have written off her dad because of the illicit affection being shown to her by the famous author.

This leads us to the second focus of this paper which is deception and infatuation. Deception is simply defined as deliberate manner of hiding information from others for the purpose of misinforming or deceiving the people. Deception is a regular incident in relationship and can appear in diverse ways. It can occur in form of telling lies, identity falsification and suppressing vital information about one's marital status. Deception has long lasting effects on individuals that are being scammed. The person being deceived can ultimately experience severe trauma which can also lead to low self-worth, anxiety and depression. G. takes undue advantage of V.'s age and exposure to lure her and to force himself on the vulnerable girl. It

is evident that V. cannot separate love from infatuation because G. is her first lover. She says naively:

> Chaque fois qu'il ouvre la bouche, les rires fusent de toutes parts, mais c'est toujours sur moi que s'attarde son regard, amusé, intrigant. Jamais aucun homme ne m'a regardée de cette façon. (p.15)

She is undoubtedly carried away and little did she know that G. is a serial rapist who is only seeking for ways of satisfying his unending sexual urge. She is fascinated and she gives her heart to G. not knowing that she will be extremely vulnerable to manipulation and abuse. This is as a result of several gaps in life perspectives, lifestyles and maturity level between the two lovers. She is overwhelmed with joy for coming across someone whose love can be substituted for her absconded father. She is equally thrilled by G.'s literary status to the point that she cannot reject his romantic advances. She says ingenuously:

> Comment ne pas me sentir flattée qu'un homme, qui plus est un 'homme de lettres' ait daigné poser les yeux sur moi? Depuis l'enfance, ce sont les livres qui me tiennent lieu de frères et soeurs, de compagnons de route, de tuteurs et d'amis. (p.18)

She considers herself of being privilege to attract the attention and admiration of such a renowned writer. G. continues to lure and woo her with his daily love letters and messages which are normally delivered by a courier man. Quite unfortunate that a teenager is being lured to a complex

relationship saga at such a tender age. It is evident that V. cannot resist the love overtures being shown to her. She admits innocently:

> Mais G. n'est pas un homme à se décourager pour si peu. II m'ecrit parfois deux fois par jour. Je passe désormais une tête matin et soir chez la gardienne de peur que ma mère ne tombe sur une de ces lettres que je conserve en permanence sur moi, les chérissant en secret, et me gardant bien d'en parler à qui que ce soit. (p.19)

V.'s father's presence would have salvaged the situation, at least, he would have seen the courier man who visits his house daily. Sadly, he has absconded with another woman, creating an opportunity for the writer to take unjustified advantage of her daughter. The writer intensifies his letters and the credulous V. is mesmerised by the superficial messages which she replies gullibly. She remarks ingenuously:

> Nous échangeons quelques mots, et je repars transie d'amour. Je m'habitue maintenant à la possibilité de tomber sur lui à tout moment, si bien que sa présence invisible m'accompagne sur le chemin du collège, comme au retour, en allant faire des courses au marché, en me promenant avec mes camarades. Un jour, il me fixe un rendez-vous par lettre. (p.37)

The exchange of letters continues unabated and the illicit love blossoms, sadly to the ignorance of V.'s mother who can hardly believe that her daughter is on such a love expedition. It is evident that G.'s presence in V.'s life is definitely filling an emotional gap created by V.'s father's absence. She needs someone to relate with and share her feeling and aspirations with, she takes solace in G. She becomes confident discussing her affairs with him and they start dating one another. On one of such amorous occasions, G. invites her to a particular bus stop with the intention of taking her to his house. She is very enthusiastic about the date as she arrives the venue quite on time. She remarks excitedly:

> A Saint-Michel, il m'a demandé de le retrouver devant l'arrêt de la ligne de bus numéro 27, Je suis à l'heure. Fébrile, avec le sentiment de commettre une immense transgression. Je m'étais imaginé que nous irions boire un café quelque part dans le quartier. Pour bavader, faire connaissance. II a acheté des pâtisseries délicieuses chez un traiteur hors de prix dont il cite le nom avec gourmandise. Rien que pour moi. L'air de rien, il traverse la rue tout en bavardant, je le suis machinalement. (p.20)

After a few minutes, they arrive his house and he welcome V. warmly. He is so happy of actualising his illicit and romantic intention. He moves up and down, trying to impress V. He serves the assorted snacks purchased for her visit and he appears happy as she eats. He also offers her different juice

drinks and expensive wines. The atmosphere is charged and filled with love but V. is a bit apprehensive visiting a strange man in his apartment. G. seems to have noticed her anxiety and he begins to indoctrinate her and also to allay her fear. She remarks:

> Mon hésitation semble le décevoir. Je ne m'étais pas préparé à ça, mais G. me dit en souriant de ne pas avoir peur, le ton de sa voix est rassurant. II ne vous arrivera rien de mal. Vous ne devriez pas écouter toutes les horreurs qu'on raconte sur moi. (p.20)

V. is seemingly afraid about the relationship and several questions run through her mind. Do I have what it takes to cope with a man older than my father? What and how do I resist if he makes attempt to sleep or rape me? Perhaps, I would have told my mum? These are some of the rhetorical questions bothering her but the fear disappeared after listening to G.'s words of assurance and encouragement. G. continues brainwashing his visitor and when he is convinced that she has succumbed, he shamefully starts caressing her. She notes with mixed feeling:

> II m'embrasse longuement, me caresse les épaules et glisse sa main sous mon pull, sans jamais me demander de le retirer, ce que je finis poutant par faire. Je me concentre sur ses lèvres, sa bouche. (p.21)

The damage appears to have been done as G. touches every hidden parts of her body and he realises to his satisfaction that V. is a virgin. He is particularly excited about her virginity and he looks forward to the next few

days that he will deflower the spotless girl. It is worthy to affirm that G. derives inexpressible joy and satisfaction from having sex with teenagers but V. does not know that he is a serial rapist. She thinks that she is in a safe relationship where natural love is being expressed. G. intensifies his letter writing and at a point he adds poems. As a renowned author, he knows the choice of irresistible words being used in wooing a young and inexperienced girl. He does this deliberately and repeatedly so as to harden V.'s heart against any distraction or resistance from her credulous mum. He invites V. to his house again and she is inexplicably happy honouring the date. She arrives promptly and goes straight to his bedroom. G. is happy seeing her and she offers her assorted snacks and a delicious plate of jollof rice with chicken. V. eats the meals with utmost satisfaction and she is prepared for any romantic exploration. She notes innocently:

> Notre premier rendez-vous a été consacré à la partie haute de mon corps. Cette fois-ci, intrépide, il entreprend de s'aventurer vers des régions plus intimes. Et pour cela, il faut défaire mes lacets, geste qu'il exécute avec une délectation manifeste, retirer mon jean, ma culotte de coton… (p.24)

V. is irreparably lost in the illicit affairs as her heart is completely filled up with G's amorous thoughts and feeling. She is exceedingly lost in the romantic voyage and the effects are evident on her academics and social relationship. Her mother notices her recent unhealthy behaviours but she feels hesitant initiating the discussion. She is scared about the attendant emotional cum sexual abuse and when she decides to offer some advice, she is shocked by her daughter's response. V. tells her mother plainly:

> Jamais, je n'accepterai d'être separée de lui. Plutôt mourir!

V.'s mother becomes quite nervous and she does not know what to do. Calling V.'s father and report to him, making a complaint in her school, invite a close relative to talk to her? None of these seems appropriate and she keeps the matter to herself while the illicit affair flourishes. V. continues to withdraw from her mother while she becomes more and more intimate with G. She does not see anything wrong or envisage any danger in the amorous friendship. V. visits G. whenever she likes and always prepared to satisfy his sexual advances. She observes ignorantly:

> G. sera mon premier amant. Et si je suis ici allongée sur son lit, c'est bien pour cette raison. Alors pourquoi mon corps s'y refuse-t-il? Pourquoi cette peur irrépressible? G. ne se démonte pas. Sa voix me sussure des mots réconfortants. (p.25)

V. allows her emotion to overwhelm her sense of reasoning as she demonstrates irrational trust and beliefs in G. She does not realise that the writer is deceiving her with false love profession. Several adults rarely tell lies while some people are well versed in the art of telling lies more often than not. In a 2002 Study Conducted by the University of Massachusetts, it is established that 60% of adults lied at least once during a 10 minutes conversation. Moreover, of those 60% who tell lies, each person tells an average of 3 lies during their conversation. There are different reasons why people tell lies but the main reason for G. is simply to impress V and give her a false of security. Other research has suggested that people with antisocial personality disorder tend to tell manipulative lies. This statement gives an apt description of G.'s personality as a serial rapist. He continues

to mislead and persuade his victim with endless lies. He tells her different fictitious stories to convince the vulnerable girl that there is nothing abnormal in their relationship as a result of age difference. He narrates to her the false antiquity stories when sexual relationship between adults and teenager was not only permitted but also encouraged. He says unrepentantly:

> Sais tu que sous l'Antiquité, l'initiation sexuelle des jeunes personnes par des adultes était non seulement encouragé, mais considérée comme un devoir? Au XIX siècle, la petite Virgina n'avait que treize ans lorsqu'Edgar Poe l'a épousée, en as-tu entendu parler? (p.28)

Regrettably, V. is taken in love hostage and little did she know that she is involved in love bombing. Love bombing is when an individual is intentionally given lots of love, attention and affection, including unsolicited amorous gifts, making the person to feel so desired to the person giving out the presents. Love bombing makes it difficult for the victim to realise that her boundaries are being crossed, privacy overrun and most importantly, independence is being lost.

To worsen this pathetic situation, the French society does not see anything bad in teenagers-adults friendship as long as there is a consent. Sadly enough, the consent age in France is fixed at 12 years, which means nothing disturbs a fully grown man from pursuing a 12 year or 13 year old girl. This is a culturally acceptable practise in France and it can even be the other way. That is, a younger man dating much older woman. G. makes his lover to know that there is nothing strange about their friendship. The vulnerable girl says in agreement with G.'s point of view:

> Une fille de quatorze ans a le droit et la liberté d'aimer qui elle veut. J'ai bien retenu la leçon. En prime, ma vie est devenue celle d'une égérie. (p.29)

To further indict the French society, notable writers, therapists, medical counsellors, psychoanalysts and equally members of Legislative House support the illicit sexual act by sponsoring a bill in the House to validate the practise. V. notes disappointingly:

> Dix ans avant ma rencontre avec G., vers la fin des années soixante-dix, un grand nombre de journaux et d'intellectuels de gauche ont en effet pris publiquement la défense d'adultes accusés d'avoir eu des relations coupables avec des adolescents. En 1977, une lettre ouverte en faveur de la dépénalisation des relations sexuelles entre mineurs et adultes, intitulée *'A propos d'un process,* est publié dans *Le Monde,* signée et soutenue par d'éminents intellectuels, psychanalytes et philosophes de renom, écrivains au sommet de leur gloire, de gauche pour la plupart. On y trouve entre autres les noms de Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul

> Sartre, Andre Glucksmann, Louis Aragon… (p.30)

This is a clear demonstration of societal indifference to a forbidden practise being legally permitted by the law. The society seems to allow the act so as to avoid of being accused of social oppression and sexual segregation. G. observes in one of his numerous books:

> Empêcher la sexualité juvénile relève donc de l'oppression sociale et cloisonner la sexualité entre individus de même classe d'âge constituerait une forme de ségrégation. Lutter contre l'emprisonnement de désirs, contre toutes les répressions, tels sont les mots d'ordre de cette période. (p.31)

The society erred in this aspect because it is expected to instil morals, discipline and also encourage best cultural practise that can enhance cultural and social growth of youths. The sociological theory that is being adopted in this study brings to the fore the dysfunctional nature of the French society. The European society fails to discourage the abnormal amorous relationship between minors and adults despite the dangers of such union. This is basically unacceptable given the age of the minors. These are innocent children who should be protected against early and undue sexual exposure. Even with the concept of cultural relativism which forbids one from comparing a culture with another one, we are still of the opinion that there will be no justification for such a teenage girl amorous union in a seemingly decent society.

Contrarily, after being led and carried away by G.'s deceitful instruction, the harmless girl comes back, surprisingly, to her senses and she begins to see her folly. She observes thoughtfully:

> A quatorze ans, on n'est pas censée être attendue par un homme de cinquante ans à la sortie de son collège, on n'est pas supposée vivre à l'hotel avec lui, ni se retrouver dans son lit, sa verge dans la bouche à l'heure du goûter. De tout cela j'ai conscience, malgré mes quatorze ans, je ne suis pas complètement dénuée de sens commun. De cette anormalité, j'ai fait en quelque sorte ma nouvelle identité. (p.34)

This is pleasantly the turning point in the illicit affairs. She realises, though belatedly that she has been a victim of sex abuse. It is a painful experience for her because of the monumental damage being done to her personality after the self-consciousness. She says regretfully:

> Et quand, plus tard, des thérapeutes en tout genre s'échineront à m'expliquer que j'ai été victim d'un prédateur sexuel, là aussi, il me semblera que ce n'est pas non plus la 'voie du milieu.' (p.62)

She is disturbed by the reality of her relationship with G. which is initially characterised ignorantly by infatuation, lust and lies. She begins to dislike and lose complete confidence in him. She develops resistance spirit

which enables her to scrutinise and demand for the motive of G.'s subsequent instructions and counsels which were hitherto obey irrationally. V. appears resolute to liberate her heart from G.'s indoctrination in order to assume absolute control of her destiny and thoughts. She remarks:

> A l'approche de mes quinze ans, G. s'est mis en tête de contrôler tous les aspects de mon existence. II est devenue en quelque sorte mon tuteur. Je dois manger moins de chocolat pour éviter l'acné. Faire attention à ma ligne en règle générale. Arrêter de fumer. (p.64)

She becomes conscious that she has been in an abusive relationship with little or no control over her diets, choice of friends, clothing and education. It is evident that she concedes much of her liberty to G. as a result of being blindfolded by infatuation. She makes up her mind to start demanding for respect for her actions, preferences and opinions. Consequently, she decides to start reading some books that are classified as forbidden. She cannot understand the reason why she cannot read the books. She notes:

> Un soir, je finis par transgresser le tabou et décide de lire les livres interdits. Depuis que j'ai lu les livres interdits, ceux qui étalent sa collection de maitresses et détaillent ses voyages à Manille, quelque chose de visqueux et sordide est venu recouvrir chacun de ces moments d'intimité dans

> lesquels je ne parviens plus à voir la moindre trace d'amour. Je me sens avilie, et plus seule que jamais. (p.69)

The resistant spirit assists her in discovering to her surprise the list of different women and teenagers that G. has had sexual intimacy with. The discovery makes her sad and she regrets ever coming across him. G. has been a liar and a pretender all along. She recollects how they meet and how she foolishly accepts his sex advances. V. begins to have a different but authentic picture of him. She notes regretfully:

> G. n'était pas un homme comme les autres. II avait fait profession de n'avoir de relation sexuelles qu'avec des filles vierges ou des garcons à peine pubères pour en retracer le récit dans ses livres. Comme il était en train de le faire en s'emparant de ma jeunesse à des fins sexuelles et littéraires. Cet homme n'était pas animé que des meilleurs sentiments. Cet homme n'était pas bon. II était bien ce qu'on apprend à redouter dès l'enfance:un ogre. Notre amour était un rêve si puissant que rien, pas un seul des maigres avertissements de mon entourage, n'avait suffi à m'en réveiller. C'était le plus

> pervers de cauchemars. C'était une violence sans nom. (p.70)

What a manner of regretting a failed relationship! She appears used, degraded, scammed and ridiculed. She remembers reading from his illicit memoirs, how he sleeps with ten teenagers at once, demonstrating his uncontrolled thirst for sex. She recollects all the pleasant stories narrated and she is convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that G. is a serial swindler and rapist. She seems wiser and well-informed about human relationship as a result of the knowledge acquired from the forbidden books. She remarks assuredly:

> Cependant, je suis assez grande pour entrevoir l'imposture de la situation et comprendre que tous ses serments de fidélité, ses promesses de me laisser le plus merveilleux des souvenirs n'étaient qu'un mensonge de plus au service de son oeuvre et de ses désirs. Je me surprends maintenant à le haïr de m'enfermer dans cette fiction perpétuellement en train de s'écrire, livre après livre, et à travers laquelle il se donnera toujours le beau rôle. (p.72)

V. continues to feel exceedingly bad and betrayed each time she has flash-back of her amorous experience which persists to run through her distressed mind. She has undoubtedly learnt her lesson in a difficult manner that will ultimately determine her future union with a man. She asks herself a rhetorical question, will it be easy for me trusting a man? V. is preoccupied

with how to remediate the ugly situation and each time she thinks about it, she ends up weeping ceaselessly. V. remarks sorrowfully:

> Je pleure comme un nourrisson qui cherche sa mère et tente piteusement d'essuyer sur ma manche la morve qui coule de mon nez quand il me tend une serviette brodée pour m'y moucher. (p.76)

This distasteful romantic occurrence creates a wrong impression about literature and writers generally. She views literature as being product of lies, deceit and illusion. Similar intuition is held about writers who use poems and fictitious stories to lure innocent teenagers to love making. V.'s notion appears justified given the literary dispute between Plato and his disciple, Aristotle about the true nature of literature. The two renowned philosophers who lived and dominated philosophical thoughts in the 4th century differed on the importance of literature. Plato insisted that literature is not only unreal but also full of illusion but Aristotle disagreed, saying that not all literary materials are unreal. In a way, Plato is being vindicated given the manner that G. misleads and betrays V. She says convincingly:

> Les livres sont des mensonges. Je ne l'écoute plus, comme si on avait effacé ma mémoire. (p.103)

It is quite evident that V. will not be able to navigate this horrible situation all alone given her age and exposure. She suffers severe trauma which ultimately affects her academics and her mental health. Some of her classmates who notice changes in her temperament approach her but she tells them that she is good. V. however confides in a male friend, Youri, telling him how a famous writer lure and deceive her into a relationship and

eventually abuse her sexually. Youri sympathises with her and encourage her to quit the relationship so that she can forge ahead. He notes:

> Tu te rends compte à quel point ce type profite de toi et te fait du mal? Ce n'est pas toi la coupabe, c'est lui! Et tu n'es ni folle ni prisonnière. II suffit que tu reprennes confiance en toi et que tu le quittes. (p.79)

Youri becomes her close friend and confidant as they are always seen together in the school. She begins to feel some succour, though still traumatised. They fall in love and she ends up sharing an apartment with Youri in her mother's place. V. notes:

> Youri a pris sa place dans ma vie. II m'a donné le courage de rompre et de résister aux tentatives effrénées de G. pour me faire revenir sur ma décision. J'ai seize ans et me suis installé chez Youri qui partage encore un petit appartement avec sa mère. (p.85)

The trauma and later melancholy persist despite her new relationship but Youri demonstrates understanding and tolerance. He continues to encourage her to put the occurrence behind her. As much as he tries to make her happy, she finds it difficult to reciprocate because making a man happy does not mean anything to her again. She appreciates Youri's effort as she notes:

> Youri fait ce qu'il peut pour contrer mes accès de mélancolie qu'il commence à trouver lourds à porter, d'autant qu'ils lui

semblent injustifiés. Mais, regarde-toi, enfin, tu es jeune, tu as la vie devant toi. Souris! (p.87)

She loses interest in love making and each time Youri tries caressing her, she appears unresponsive. V. seems to be acutely traumatised as she moves from one place to the other without a definite destination. She moves to a secluded area and from there to a desert, still wandering aimlessly. She is rescued by a team of policemen on patrol. They wonder about her mission in a lonely place and ask her few questions but her responses are not logical. The policemen know that she is greatly troubled by an undisclosed traumatic occurrence. They take her to the hospital and after some time, some medical experts and psychoanalysts are invited to interview her. She is inexplicably sad about the turn of events. She notes soberly:

> Depuis combine de temps avais-je perdu trace de moi-même? Pourquoi avais-je accumulé autant de culpabilité, au point de croire que je méritais la peine de mort? Je n'en avais pas la moindre idée. Du moins, c'est ce qu'il m'a semblé. Lorsqu'au petit matin, je me suis retrouvée dans cet hôpital sinistre où un professeur barbu, et de toute evidence révéré par les internes qui l'écoutaient tel le messie, m'interrogeait, une caméra posée dans le fond de la pièce, sur l'expérience que je venais de traverser et qui m'avait conduit là, dans ce

triste refuge de fous ambulants, délirants,

anorexiques, suicidaires, prostrés. (p.100)

She tries as much as possible to narrate her story. How she meets G. and how he tries to lure her with several gifts and how he invites her to his house and abuse her sexually on different occasions. The psychoanalyst tries to allay her fear and also encourage her to make deliberate effort to forget the past so that she can forge ahead with her life. Some drugs are recommended and certain healing processes are also suggested. Regrettably, V. is confronted with a serious challenge which is the involuntary intrusion of the past into the present. Swallow (2002) affirms that those who are distraught are deliberately or inadvertently afflicted by nightmares, flashback and distressing memories. They will constantly strive with the overwhelming feeling suffered during past unpleasant occurrence. This appears to be the situation of the leading character who seems determined to outlive the horrible occurrence. Despite all the distractions and the negative influence against her healing, V. is resolute to forge ahead. She is particularly motivated by the therapist's counsel that life is a pool of congenial and repulsive experiences. She makes deliberate efforts in erasing the experience from her memory by obliterating every traces of G. in her life. She admits sadly that she needs to be quite cautious about future relationship.

Conclusion

We have been able to bring to the fore the dysfunctional nature of family and society in the trauma of minors in the European society. The paper has enabled us to show the pain and trauma being endured by minors as a result of early exposure of sex by the adults among other child's hazards. The helpless and vulnerable minors are being sexually abused by more experienced adults who are old enough to be their fathers. It is our hope and belief that the paper will help in minimising adults/minors

amorous relationship in the world. The International Human Rights should intensify their effort in abolishing this illicit practise. Lectures, seminars and conferences should be organised to educate the innocent and unsuspecting minors about their rights and the sanctity of their bodies. Provision should be made to take good care of several minors who are in several camps as a result of immigration offenses. The fundamental rights of such children should be ensured and guaranteed irrespective of their immigrant status. V,'s decision and courage to unveil her traumatic experience is quite commendable and a clarion call is being made to victims of similar fate to endeavour to speak out given the danger of child's unspeakable trauma. They are advised to share their plights so as to accelerate the process of healing.

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