

SOCIOPATHIC WOMEN IN TRACIE CHIMA UTOH-EZEAJUGH'S *OUR WIVES HAVE GONE MAD AGAIN*

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ABSTRACT

*Sociopathy, the act of exhibiting apathy and disregard for other people, is a psychological condition that is embedded in social and marital frustration. Existing literary scholarship on women and sociopathy has focused mostly on women's psychological imbalances which do not define sociopathic behaviour. However, few works have been done in the area of drama and its representation of the psychological conditions of aggressive women, which result in sociopathic behaviours. This paper examines the verbal expressions of female characters in *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* by Tracie Chima Utoh Ezeajugh with a view to discussing the sociopathic traits they exhibit in their relationship with others. In subjecting the text to critical analyses, the feminist model of Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory is adopted for the study, and used to analyse the psychological condition of female characters, which brings to the fore the unconscious and conscious realities that influence the actions and expressions exhibited by the female characters in the chosen text. The verbal expressions of the women in the play are marked with egocentrism, frustration, hostility, aggressiveness, lack of empathy and overwhelming selfishness. The women's anger is directed against male characters who are involved in the dramatization of action. These sociopathic traits are revealed in the characters of Ene, Funmi, Mairo, Ifeoma, and Irene. Which are dramatized through characterization, language and plot in the play.*

*Empowered women in hence forth, *Our Wives*, exhibit sociopathic traits in their subconscious through verbal expressions resulting from social and marital castrations.*

Key words: Sociopathic women, Social castration, Feminist Psychoanalysis.

Introduction

Feminism as an ideology in art and life which exposes the oppression of women and proposes ways for their freedom, is characterized by anger, bitterness and a thirst for revenge as it reflects in many African literary dispositions. The Nigerian prose literature in particular, have proven that women are relegated to the background through, poverty, illiteracy, political, religious and cultural prejudices; Emecheta (1971; 1977; 1980), Saadawi (1975), Ba (1980), and, in particular, male chauvinistic tendencies manifested in divers patrilineal and patriarchal practices against women, Ogundipe Leslie (1994), Kolawole (1997), Jegede (1998), Ogundipe Leslie (2007), Sotunsa (2009), but less work have been done in the aspect of the unconscious motives and feelings of empowered female characters. Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi (2007) links the psychological condition of the woman 'Firdaus' to juju, Sunday Edum (2016) attempts a director's reading of Tracie Chima's *Our Wives Have gone mad Again*. Literary critics have not given enough attention to the reactions and psychological conditions of empowered but embittered women particularly in Nigerian dramatic works, instead assumptions on female reactions are made and wrongly interpreted as rebellion against the natural order of authority. This study, therefore, attempts to examine the unconscious and conscious realities that influence the behaviour of the sociopathic female characters in Tracie Chima Utoh's *Our Wives have gone Mad Again* through their verbal expressions.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Sociopathy, the act of exhibiting apathy and disregard for other people, is a psychological condition that is embedded in marital and social frustration. The term sociopath was used to describe personalities who appeared extremely deficient in conscience and who presented a fairly serious threat to the social order. Martha Stout an American author; notes in her book *The Sociopath Next Door* (2005) that some of the darkest characters among us are capable of presenting a convincingly civil and charming façade. Interestingly, such sociopathic reading of female characters in African drama is what the current study sets out to do. In *Our Wives*, empowerment comes through attainment of education, possession of financial wherewithal and occupation of political posts. When female characters are so empowered and irritated, they engage in anti-social behaviours such as aggression, self-centredness, and egoism.

In analysing the selected text, the study leans on feminist psychoanalytic theory. Feminist psychoanalytic criticism is diverse. It includes the study of the 'psychodynamics of female characters and their authors; psychoanalysis of textual metaphor and study of the psychodynamics of gendered reading (Humm, 1995:82). Feminist psychoanalytic criticism, as an aspect of literary criticism, uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature by 'investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind' (Tyson, 1999). Feminists think that women's experience is often repressed or 'unconscious'. Consciousness raising in feminist groups is like the bringing up of the repressed into consciousness in therapy or the raising of the sub-text in literary criticism: they are both ways of learning about the previously unexpressed effects of patriarchy (Humm, 1995). The method of doing this in literary analysis is to examine the repressed fears and conflicts which are causing problems among the characters. The development of psychoanalysis theory about gender representation and literature have taken a number of directions which the study adopts, they include; characterization, plot and imagery are examined as functions of individual psychology of characters which in turn are assumed to represent the psychology of the playwright, Lacan (1972) agrees on this. This study pays close attention to the unconscious motives and feelings of selected empowered female characters who exhibit symptoms of sociopathy in their subconscious through verbal expressions associated with the character's personality. These attributes can be discovered through the character's voice/speech and actions. The aggressiveness found in these characters is viewed as sociopathy.

Sociopathic characters in the play

Tracie Chima's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* dramatizes rich and random realities. The play empowers women and disempowers men. The male characters in the play are physically present but largely disempowered. They lack financial empowerment, though they are sexually virile. They are low-class, uneducated "imbeciles" (23) who were originally employed by their madams as domestic staff but have been upgraded to the positions of bed partners (husbands) of their bosses. Most of them still retain their positions as domestic staff in addition to being their mistresses' sex mates. The men are mere sex objects that are used and controlled by the women.

Women's experiences portrayed in the play include barrenness, marital infidelity, corruption, death and excesses of women in politics. These are previously unexpressed effects of patriarchy. The women in *Our Wives* are educated and economically capable, these women use their wealth and social standing status to entice younger, poorer and sexually virile men, into marrying them some of the men are used as mere sex objects by the women. The reason for the women's choice is to ascertain their will and power as retaliation to the oppression and subjugation which women suffer in the hands of their male counterparts in patriarchy. Utoh- Ezeajugh satirises women who exhibit the kind of immorality that men have been criticized for in many Nigerian literary works. They are women who are thoroughly corrupt and socially depraved. They will do anything to get to positions of authority. In the play, Irene, who is a Presidential aspirant of Liberation People's Party (LPP) kills all her opponents and bribes the police. The power tussle between the male and female gender is clearly reversed in the play. Men are the objects of oppression. They struggle for emotional freedom from women's oppression.

However, despite the social power and privileges that the women enjoy, they still show traces of anti-social (sociopathic) behaviours such as excessive irritation, aggression and ego-centrism. They are

unable to control their behaviours and expressions of irritability, annoyance and threats when faced with situations that do not appeal to them. The evident expressions of annoyance and irritability is found in the characters of Ene, Irene, Funmi, Mairo and Ifeoma in the play. Thomas C. Weiss in “Sociopaths: Symptoms and Traits” (2014) argues that sociopaths tend to resort to aggression, threats and verbal abuse:

Drawing from popular opinion about sociopaths as people who experience anti-social personality disorder. Weiss argues that no person is born with this disorder. Rather, it manifests from persistent anti-social behavior, resulting from environmental factors which include, deprivation, physical and emotional abuse among others. A sociopath appears to be wicked and selfish, while she attempts to defend her interest. Invariably, an anti-social behaviour becomes a defensive tool in the hands of a sociopath. Irene, causes the death of four political rivals. She is a liar, cheat and deceiver. She is therefore a replica of politicians who kill others so as to get to positions. The dramatist therefore portrays the fact that wickedness has no gender. Irene’s portraiture conforms to Stout’s description of sociopaths as people who appear normal in the public setting but are verbally and emotionally abusive in the private setting. Simone de Beauviour (1989) denounces Freud’s idea that there is but one, masculine, libido and no feminine libido with “its own original nature” (39), she adjudged this theory inadequate to account for woman’s otherness, for not considering the social origins of masculine and paternal power and privilege. She postulates that if women envy men, it is because of the social power and privilege they enjoy and not because of anatomical superiority, (39). These women dominate, by being verbally intimidating and emotionally manipulative. They systematically attack the personality of their victims or opponents, their objections, questions and emotional display. They do this to boost their ego or establish their dominion with no regards to the needs of their victims. Irene had to do this when her friend Ifeoma mistakenly kills her husband in the process of self -defense against battering. Similarly, Ene is always impatient with her husband who also doubles as her cook. She gets furious when he explains why he couldn’t get food ready before she came back:

Inyang: Sorry the food is remaining small to be done. I know you don’t like food to be cold. I am cooking late so that the food will be hot for you. I am thinking that ...

Ene: (cuts in) See how you are blabbering like a fool in front of my friends. A fool that cannot take simple instructions. You want us to starve and wait for his majesty ‘King Inyang’ because ‘you are thinking’ Are you capable of thinking? (25-6)

In the presence of her friends, she lambasts her husband in this manner. She wants to prove to them ??that she is in charge. One begins to wonder what the unconscious feelings and motives of these women are? This is part of Lacan’s claim that the unconscious is structured like language.

All through the play, men are portrayed in unpleasant images and described in negative terms. The men are portrayed as feeble, weak and lazy. They look up to the women for their upkeep. They are addressed as ‘imbeciles’, “necessary evils”, “mumus”:

Funmi: Ene, my sister, we all have different grades and degrees of **imbeciles** in our homes but what shall we do? Men are **necessary evils** or so they say.

Ene: What have **I** not done for this useless Inyang? **I** took him to my village and gave him money to pay my dowry. **I** sponsored the traditional marriage and the church wedding. **I** feed this man, **I** clothe him and **I** put a comfortable shelter over his head ... He is lazy, insubordinate and good for nothing. He cannot even impregnate me. Three years since our wedding and nothing has happened. What am **I** supposed to do with a **eunuch**? (24).

The men are treated as slaves. The young men address their wives as madams. This is so because of the mistress/servant relationship established between them. For example, Inyang welcomes his wife into the house and addresses her as madam.

Inyang: (straightens up) What? Madam Ene you have come ...

.... Sorry, madam. (22)

He does not have a say in his matrimonial home as he is not allowed to defend himself when accused of his shortcomings.

Ene: (Furious) Inyang, how long does it take you to walk to my fridge and bring the drinks I bought with my money? (24)

Inyang: I am cooking late so that the food will be hot for you. (25)

Ene: See how you are blabbering like a fool in front of my friends. A fool that cannot take simple instructions. You want us to starve and wait for his majesty 'king Inyang' because you are thinking. Are you capable of thinking? (25-26)

Ene: ... Inyang! Where is that good-for-nothing piece of liability? Inyang! (32)

The women are highly placed but they lack different forms of social power. None of the women is happily married. Most of them are barren. Their marriages and relationships are shrouded in secrecy. They did not realize some of the things that their husbands are doing in marriage. In the play Ene refers to her husband as a eunuch; this is a form of physical castration.

Other Sociopathic traits found in the female characters

Furthermore, the characters refuse to accept negative aspects of their personalities; rather, they attribute this to other people.

When Irene in *Our Wives* is accused of being behind the mysterious death of her political opponents she claims that she is innocent but her enemies are at work. But she is the enemy of the common man:

Policeman: (... *being pursued by other policemen*)

Madam alarm don blow! The murder has been discovered.

Irene: Which of my detractors paid you to come here and embarrass me (81).

Through characterization, one can see the egocentrism and other anti- social behaviours of the characters. The use of the first person pronoun "I" and its object form "me" in the play shows the behaviour of the characters presented. According to Martha Stout (2005), a sociopath thinks she is always right! and will not accept any correction from any one.

Ene establishes her possession of the household goods each time she sends Inyang to get any of the items for her.

Ene: Inyang, how long does it take you to walk to **my** fridge and bring the drinks **I** bought with my money? (p 24 – 25).

Inyang: But, madam Ene, I am trying to make you happy. Why are you scolding me? What is offence now?

Ene: (Incredulous) Go ahead. Abuse **me**. Disgrace **me**... It is not your fault. It is mine. **I** am the one who picked a worthless good for nothing like you from the gutter and made something out of you. (Inyang goes into the room without uttering a word). (26)

Ene: ... Take **my** Honda car from the garage and drive madam Ifeoma to her house...

Ene: ... Inyang **come back here**. Where is **my** change?

Ene: Spending **my** money! That is the only thing you are good at
... throwing away **my** money. Do you think **I** pick money from
the road? Do **I** pluck money from trees? You don't ever
appreciate the fact that **I** work for every single kobo **I** own (35).
Ene: (cuts in) **Get out of my sight!**

Another defense mechanism employed by the playwrights is transference. The sociopathic characters get easily angry and address others as if they are non-humans. The women address their husbands anyhow. Ene is portrayed as the most aggressive and abusive; she is in control of the situation of the home, she is fully in charge, she does not give Inyang, her husband the chance to defend himself in any situation, he must take the blame for their childlessness and all other mistakes or errors in the house. She uses abusive words like

'Foolish man' (22), 'Useless Inyang' (23), 'Ingratitude' (24), 'Jobless Parasite' (35), 'Lazy' 'Insubordinate' and 'good for nothing' 'eunuch' – due to their childlessness. Mairo, Ene's friend calls them – 'men from the gutter' (p 24)

Inyang: (straightens up) What? Madam Ene you have come.
Welcome ...

Ene: (stand-offish) Welcome yourself, foolish man look at the clock. Is this the time your mates clean the house? Lazy idiot! (22).

Inyang: Sorry, Madam

Ene: ... (To Inyang) Don't just stand there staring. Go and get drinks for us.

Ifeoma, Zeu's wife who tries to be humble and obedient to her husband, is beaten and cheated instead. She turns sociopathic, when she could no longer bear the regular beating and neglect from her spouse. She takes to her friend's counsel to fight back and regain her authority as the one privileged with economic power, in the excerpt below:

Ene: You are not tired. If you are tired we will know ... (pg 30).

Ifeoma: What shall I do? The situation is beyond me ... (pg 30).

Ene: Next time your husband picks a quarrel with you, make sure you teach him a bitter lesson. Keep a weapon handy. You can put the weapon in a corner of the house where you can easily reach it. That big pestle your house girl uses to pound yam can serve the purpose.

Ifeoma: It is true. I have allowed this to go on for too long.

Enough is enough I must establish my authority. Ifeoma's rebellion and refusal to submit to her husband leads to a physical fight and the eventual termination of her husband's life (58-59).

The male characters (husbands) discuss women whose violent and wicked reaction to men has led to manslaughter and is arrested by the police. Inyang narrates the story of a woman who cut off her husband's private part, in the excerpt:

Felix: (incredulous). Inyang hold on for a moment. Are you telling us that a woman picked up a sharp razor blade and deliberately cut off her husband's private part? I don't believe such a story.

Inyang: I swear to God this thing happened ...

Odera: So what happened to the man? Did he survive?

Inyang: They said the man is still in the hospital. Maybe he will survive ... You need to see the woman. She was still jumping and shouting and calling the man to get up and fight. The man's people went to the station and carried police to come and arrest her. (p 36-37).

The power tussle between the male and female genders is clearly reversed. Women control their husbands instead and are in charge of politics. When it comes to politics, they are ruthless, they could go to the extreme to get what they want. They set out to blackmail their political opponents.

Funmi: We will just go ahead and define your duties. Here are the photographs of your targets ... (p 62).

Tracie portrays the male characters in her play as men of very low self-esteem, to the extent that the one who tries to fight back (Zeus) gets killed by his wife (Ifeoma) (pages 55-58), while, her female characters are almost insatiable and over driven with pride due to their economic and political status. Ene does not give her husband a breathing space, she calls him names as she sends him on errands.

Inyang: (comes in from the kitchen. He is wearing an apron).

I have put food on the dining table. Everything is ready.

Ene: It is about time, too. Ladies, let us go and eat. (p 33).

Tracie satirically ridicules greedy young men who marry older and more privileged women for selfish interest. They expect the women to cater for their lack and elevate them economically, but they experience the opposite. Inyang, on getting to know the fate of his murdered friend, Zeus, hysterically flees his marriage with Ene, in the excerpt below:

Inyang: (Suddenly brave) I am going away. I am tired of this marriage. What my eyes are seeing is too much.

Ene: You are moving out? I see. Is that why you are stealing my property?

Inyang: Everything I am carrying is my own, but if you think they are not my own, I will leave them and go. After all, somebody that is still alive can always buy property.

Ene: And who told you that you have escaped with your life? Do you think you can disgrace me and go free. (p 73).

Conclusion

The female protagonists in the play are strong, assertive, educationally empowered women who have transcended the private life to the fore of public life where they contribute to the economic and human development of the nation. Stout (2005), affirms that a female sociopath can live next door to a neighbour in a perhaps strange and uncomfortable family situation that is ultimately harmless. Ene is more emotionally hostile and destructive than physical. These female characters are more aggressive in their fight against patriarchal oppression, instead of balancing the gender imbalance in the society, the women in the play turn their attention to politics where they break all the rules of decent political behaviour and turn political activities into oppressive and dehumanizing affairs, the exploiter becomes the exploited. This is an artistic way of presenting the issue of domestic exploitation that has been the bane of wives in the patriarchal society. The verbal expressions of all the women in the play are marked with egocentrism, frustration, hostility, emotional instability, aggressiveness, lack of empathy and overwhelming selfishness among others. The women's anger is directed against men who are involved in the dramatization of action. Thus, these women are more volatile. Their sociopathic traits reveal their painful repressed memories of abandonment, deprivation, sexual, physical and emotional abuse which lead to their emotional breakdown. They are subjected to different kinds of self-denial, lack and castration. Though empowered, all the women in the play

are childless. These are dramatised through characterization, language and plot. Furthermore, the women's sociopathic traits are represented through projection and transference. Ene calls her husband Inyang, a eunuch, and subjects him to several medical treatments whereas she does not give herself up for medical check-up, roles and statuses are substituted. The women displace the men: Inyang is the cook, errand boy and driver while Gambo is a political puppet. The power tussle between the male and female gender is clearly reversed in the play. Men are the objects of oppression. They struggle for emotional freedom from women's oppression. However, despite the social power and privileges that the women enjoy, they still show traces of anti-social (sociopathic) behaviours such as excessive irritation, aggression and ego-centrism. They are unable to control their behaviours and expressions of irritability, annoyance and threats when faced with situations that do not appeal to them. Therefore, when female characters are so empowered and embittered, they tend to engage in anti-social behaviours such as aggression, self-centeredness, and egoism.

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