

Representation of Sociopathy in Empowered Women in Ahmed Yerima's *The Sisters* and Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives have gone Mad Again*

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Abstract

Sociopathy is the act of exhibiting apathy to people and indifference to situations. It is a psychological condition which is found in people, especially women who are faced with difficult marriage experiences. Existing studies on women's psychological conditions have often focused on their imbalances in novels with little attention paid to their anti-social behaviors in dramatic texts. This study is designed to examine the representation of empowered women with a view to discussing their actions and anti-social behaviours in the selected plays.

*Psychoanalytic feminist theory was adopted as the framework while the interpretive design was used in the study. Two plays were purposively selected due to their affinity to the subject of the study: Ahmed Yerima's *The Sisters* and Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives have gone Mad Again (Our Wives)*. The plays were subjected to critical analyses.*

*The verbal expressions of all the empowered women in the selected texts are marked with egocentrism, frustration, hostility, emotional instability, aggressiveness, lack of empathy, overwhelming selfishness among others. These sociopathic traits reveal the women's painful repressed memories of abandonment, deprivation, sexual, physical and emotional abuse which lead to the victims' emotional breakdown. The women are embittered in *The Sisters* and overbearing in *Our Wives*, Their psychic energy shifts from repression to the expression of unconscious thought. Physical and verbal abuse characterise their outbursts against their husband's past actions of infidelity, betrayal and murder in *Our Wives* and *The Sisters*. They are economically and socially empowered and thus assume the status of breadwinners. Their empowerment and subjectivity replace their stereotypical marginal positions. Despite this, they exhibit different kinds of self- denial, lack, castration and negative behaviours. The plays unveil their multiple*

*experiences and their assertiveness as an affirmative mode of communication which is often linked with self-esteem, in the realm of specific sexual politics and the politics of representation. As a result, they become embittered in *The Sisters* and sadistic in *Our Wives*. All their husbands and sons are dead; though in their lifetime they engaged in covert extramarital affairs. Their husbands are absent, traitorous, disempowered or incapable. This creates psychological conflicts in the women. Although Funmi, Nana and others, in *The Sisters*, are socially well-positioned, they suffer from marital frustration and exhibit this through concealment, self-denial and doubleness. Dreams become an escape route and a disguise for repressed fears and wishes. They are presented through, condensation, repetition and substitution. In Taiwo's dream in *The Sisters*, her parents and husband, Joe, who was a coup plotter, are condensed into the single symbol of the coffin. The president's death is a repetition of the death of all the male characters in general and Joe, in particular.*

Women tend to become sociopathic when they are under pressure, even if they are economically and politically empowered.

Keywords: *Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Sociopaths, Ahmed Yerima, Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh's*

Introduction

Drama is a work of art that represents people in action. Aristotle in his *Poetics*, emphasizes the concept of mimesis while defining drama as an imitation of human beings in action. John Dryden a renowned poet, literary critic and playwright in the English renaissance, quoted by Emeka Nwabueze (2010), asserts that "drama ought to be a just and lively image of human nature reproducing the passions and humours and changes of human kind" (54). This connotes that a play must imitate and impersonate; it must deal with the actions of human beings, with the aim of educating, informing and entertaining a target audience. Brian Crow (1994), in his working definition of drama, describes it as:

A type of theatrical performance in which the active participants impersonate characters, and through a usually predetermined sequence of physical actions enact a story for the audience to see (2).

The impersonated characters in the real world are the inhabitants of a given society which comprises the young and old of both male and female gender. This is why a dramatist's work is a product of his enabling society. Since Ibsen, drama has been approached from the realistic point of view by reflecting and refracting the actual condition and the psychology of the female

characters in a play. Ibsen's play titled *A Doll's House*, paints a bleak picture of the sacrificial role played by women of all economic classes in his society. The play's female characters exemplify Nora's assertion that even though men refuse to sacrifice their integrity, "hundreds of thousands of women have." (26)

Karl Marx (1818-1883) believes that it is the existence of man that determines his consciousness. Bertolt Brecht (1965) corroborates this by insisting that in the midst of conflicting impulses which affect the human psychology, man's nature (consciousness) is moulded by the actual conditions of his existence; by implication therefore, what an individual conceives, utters and how he/she utters it (in expression and with action), becomes a major means of understanding (factors that shape) his/her psychology.

The application of psychoanalytic principles to the study of literature however, has been an ongoing phenomenon, initiated primarily by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and in other directions by Alfred Adler and Carl Jung. The notion of the 'unconscious' can be found in the works of many thinkers prior to Freud, notably in some of the romantics such as Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Freud's fundamental contribution was to open up the entire realm of the unconscious to systematic study, and to create a method of mind investigation by bringing the unconscious to consciousness. According to him:

The insane are no longer absurd and pitiable people, to be herded in asylums till nature either cures them or relieves them, through death, of their misery (Freud, 1920)

The insane who have not been made so by actual injury to their brain or nervous system, are the victims of unconscious forces which cause them to do abnormal things which they might be helped to do normally. In a sense, Freud postulated that we bear a form of 'otherness' within ourselves. We cannot claim to fully comprehend even ourselves; why we act as we do as to why we make certain moral and political decisions and why we harbour given religious dispositions and intellectual orientations. Even when we think we are acting from a given motive, we may be deluding ourselves, and most of our thoughts and actions are not freely determined by us but driven by unconscious forces which we can barely fathom (Tyson, 1999).

Statement of the Research Problem

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 reflected in many African literary dispositions. Many Nigerian prose literature have proven that women are relegated to the background through, poverty, illiteracy, political, religious and cultural prejudices by Emechetta (1971; 1977; 1980), Saadawi (1975), Ba (1980). Essentially, Nigerian prose literature has proven further that male chauvinistic tendencies manifested in diverse patrilineal and patriarchal practices against women (Ogundipe- Leslie,(1994), Ezeigbo (1990), Kolawole (1997), Jegede (1998), Ogundipe Leslie (2007), Sotunsa (2009), but less work has been done in the aspect of temper and assertion of will as it reflects the psychology of the female character. Literary critics have not given enough attention to the reactions and psychological conditions of the oppressed/angry women, particularly in Nigerian dramatic works. Instead, assumptions on female reactions are made and wrongly interpreted as rebellion against the natural order of authority. These reactions result to an abnormal behavior in the oppressed women. This study, therefore, fills the gap by examining the unconscious and conscious realities that influence the behavioural pattern of the empowered female characters in Ahmed Yerima's *The Sisters* and Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives have gone Mad Again* as a reactionary force against women's oppression. In this regard, the current study intends to subject the sociopathic behaviours of the empowered female characters in the selected texts to critical analyses.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore the representations of empowered and sociopathic women, with a view to ascertaining how they organise their internal and external realities in the selected plays. The specific objective of the study is to examine their verbal and non-verbal expressions in their interactions with others, with a view to discussing their offensive and defensive actions. The study further evaluates their behaviour as it is presented by male and female Nigerian dramatists, in order to compare their representations of the characters.

Scope of the Study

This study is limited to two plays by two Nigerian playwrights; Ahmed Yerimah, a male and Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh, a female. Two of their plays: *The Sisters* (2009) by Ahmed Yerima

and Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* (2001) are purposively selected because of their relevance to this study, as they portray sociopathic and empowered women. The selection also covers male and female playwrights because of our intention to compare how differently and similarly male and female writers portray sociopathic women.

Significance of the Study

Critical studies of sociopathic and empowered women and their portrait in plays are very important not only because they discuss women's subjectivity through the critical use of gender as a category of analysis, they are equally important because they unveil the multiple roles which women assume in society, including the multiple experiences of women and their assertiveness as an affirmative mode of communication which is often linked with self-esteem, in the realm of specific sexual politics and the politics of representation. Thus, this study, which pays attention to one of such specific sexual politics should be deemed significant indeed. The significance of the work lies primarily in the new direction which it charts for the comprehension of dramatic texts on women.

Methodology

The data in this work are drawn from two drama texts namely, *The Sisters* (Ahmed Yerima, 2009) and *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* (Tracie Chima Utoh – Ezeajogh, 2001). These plays were selected through the purposive sampling method which enables us to carry out an analysis of contemporary Nigeria plays. To carry out the analysis, character portrayal in the selected plays is isolated for analysis.

Theoretical Framework

In analysing the selected texts, the study leans on psychoanalytic feminist 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). Psychoanalytic Feminist 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). The method of doing this in literary analysis is to examine the repressed fears and conflicts which are causing problems among the characters.

This study pays close attention to the unconscious motives and feelings of selected empowered female characters who exhibit symptoms of sociopaths in the process of asserting their will and exhibiting different attributes 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 sociopathic.

Notions on Sociopathy and Empowerment

The term psychopath was used in the early 20th century by some western researchers and authors to describe individuals who appeared extremely deficient in conscience and who presented a fairly serious threat to the social order. The concept of psychopathy was first introduced by Hervey Cleckley an American researcher, in his book *The Mask of Sanity* (1988) where he referred to some individuals who are marked by a remarkable lack of the qualities that make us human, namely the capacity for conscience and emotional bond or feeling of connectedness to others of our species. He regarded their false self-presentation to be so extreme that it bordered on the insane. Robert Hare who is also a prolific writer, notes in *Without Conscience* (1999) that the psychopath's callousness, senseless and remorseless use and abuse of others is rooted in their lack of empathy and absence of conscience. These characteristics emanate from the women's possession of power. Later, and more recently the term sociopath began to be used more frequently to describe this type of personality as attention moves away from descriptions rooted in psychoanalytic explanations of its causes to descriptions of its impact on society. Among the few scholars who have written about the sociopathic character is Martha Stout an American author; she 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 characters in African drama is what the current study sets out to do. In the selected texts, empowerment comes through attainment of education, possession of financial wherewithal and occupation of political posts. When female characters are so empowered, they engage in anti-social behaviours such as aggression, self-centredness, and egoism.

(Dis) Empowered and Sociopathic characters in *Our Wives have gone Mad Again* and *The Sisters*

Synoptic Analysis

The Sisters and *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* dramatize rich and random realities. Both plays empower women and ‘disempower’ men. The male characters in *The Sisters* have military power but are disempowered through death which is a form of permanent absence. They all die before the play commences. We only know about them through flashbacks. So, the measure of power they enjoyed while alive is narrated. Through this method, they are rendered helpless and completely powerless. Whereas, in *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* the male characters 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 that are portrayed in the two plays include barrenness, marital infidelity, corruption, death and excesses of women in politics. These are previously unexpressed effects of patriarchy. In contrast, both plays recreate educated and empowered women who are bonded by blood and politics. In *The Sisters*, the caste is made of four women who are blood sisters, and who are either unmarried, like Nana, divorced like Toun or widowed like Taiwo and Funmi. They are all well-educated and well placed: first lady, lawyer, poet etc. The women in *Our Wives* are also educated and well positioned. They use their resources to entice younger, low level, sexually virile men, into marrying them. However, the men are mere sex objects. They are treated like trash and used for the benefits of 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 dangerous .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-centism. 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 Taiwo and Funmi in Ahmed Yerima's *The Sisters* and Ene, Irene, Funmi, Mairo and Ifeoma in Utoh –Ezeajugh's *Our Wives* . In *The Sisters*, Taiwo, the younger sister of Funmi, who is the First Lady of the country, feels that Dipo, the President, did not help to save her husband's life when a coup happened ten years back . Dipo is now dead and Taiwo is being "whisked" to the Presidential Palace to come and mourn her brother in law. Taiwo demonstrates the greatest level of hatred for the President and her sister. In the article titled "Sociopaths: Symptoms and Traits", Thomas C. Weiss (2014) argues that sociopaths tend to resort to aggression, threats and verbal abuse:

As soon as Taiwo arrives, she says:

leave! I do not want to be here! (9)

Get me out of here. I must

what to do. Dead husband or no

... no one is going to tell me

dead husband(10)...I did not suffocate Mr President to death

in his sleep. Did I? If anyone is guilty, it will be his lovely

wife, now presently widowed.... I have come against my wish,

after I swore never to step into this house. Ten years.... Get me

out of here. (13).

Drawing from popular opinion about sociopaths as people who experience anti-social personality disorder characterized by lack of empathy towards others, coupled with displays of abnormal

moral conduct and an inability to conform to the norms of their societies Weiss argues further that no person is born with this disorder. Rather, it manifests from persistent anti-social behavior resulting from environmental factors which include, abandonment, deprivation, sexual, physical and emotional abuse among others. A sociopath appears to be wicked and selfish, while he attempts to defend his interest. Invariably, an anti-social behaviour becomes a defensive tool in the hands of a sociopath. Taiwo's show of hatred emanates from the neglect she suffers in her moment of need. She was abandoned by her sister when she needed help. This factor can lead to the victim's emotional breakdown. She begins to react aggressively to situations and behave in a hostile manner to people, especially those closest to her. She is not as dangerous as a psychopath who derives pleasure in causing pain, tragic events and sometimes death. Irene, in Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* causes the death of four political rivals. She is a liar, cheat and deceiver. She is therefore a replica of male politicians who kill others so as to get to positions. The dramatist therefore portrays the fact that the act of wickedness is not limited to a 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. They 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 still in charge. One begins to wonder what the unconscious feelings and motives of these women are. We share Lacan's position that the unconscious expresses itself in language. This is part of Lacan's claim that the unconscious is structured like language.

Portraiture of Men

All through both plays, men are portrayed in unpleasant images and described in negative terms. In *Our Wives*, 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: Necessary or not, evil is evil and **I**, Ene will not put up with it any longer. 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:
you have come ... (22)

(straightens up) What? Madam Ene

.... Sorry, madam.

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: 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. (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)

In *The Sisters* men are distrustful and deceptive, among others. Toun and Taiwo's imagistic description further reinforces this:

... Men, you never really know them. Often
they remind me of a juicy beautifully green
water-melon. It looks great on the outside,
but no one knows if it will be sweet or sour,
until you taste it. And by that time it is too late

Who could have ever guessed that our saint was busy making children outside ... And all he was, was a bloody no good, two-bit politician. He was not even smart at law school. I hated him... He was never good enough for you. I suppose love must really be blind (21-2).

These descriptions reveal what constitute the basic problems for the empowered, sociopathic women- the disappointment they received from men in heterosexual relationships. When Funmi is confronted with the news of her husband's and then, her father's infidelity, she exclaims: "Oh my god, my saint had a child outside wedlock too? The two men I ever trusted fail me in one evening" (41).

Funmi begins to care less for the marriage she had once cherished for thirty years and its memories she would wish to delete and pretend never to have been involved. She decides not to fight her claim as the only legal wife of the deceased but, allows his ‘bastard’ children the dust to dust rites while she prepares for herself, a more quiet life.

(Social) Castration and Discoveries as Repressed Memories

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. Other forms of discoveries in the plays are motivated by Nana’s denial of her identity as a blood relation of the girls. Gilbert and Guber (1979) describe this as a process of social castration. Though she is very close to Funmi, she conceals her identity as their step sister until the end of the play when the moment of revelation is created. Nana’s identity is discovered and concealed. Her growth to womanhood records a process of self- denial through castration She adopts a double character without intending to deceive anyone. Their father’s will is concealed for three years. When it is eventually read they discover that their father has a child out of wedlock. Ironically, the same child that had been closest to the family and who is described as a blood relation is the one. In *Our Wives*, Ene refers to her husband as a eunuch; this is a form of physical castration. In *The Sisters*, Funmi the First Lady suffers from social castration. After she discovers that Dipo has five children out of wedlock, she reports to Pa Isaac, the family head and he replies that: “it is the woman with the child that he knows” (24). These painful repressed memories are presented through repetitions, substitution, images of enclosure and doubles as dream mechanisms (condensation and displacement).

Basic Dream Mechanisms in the Plays

Dream work is the process by which real events are transformed into dream images. It is a means by which characters and motivations are represented in literary ways. The process includes displacement, substitution and condensation of people and ideas. Freud describes a dream as an escape route for repressed memory.

Taiwo's Dream in *The Sisters*

For instance, in *The Sisters*, there is a failed military coup and Joe, Taiwo's husband is one of the coup plotters. A trial is conducted and the soldiers are to be executed the same day. Joe is followed to his house and shot at by the young officer who follows him into his room. Taiwo tries to shield him without knowing that Joe had pulled out his gun. The young officer shot at him but the bullet goes straight into Taiwo's pelvis. She loses her two month pregnancy. She becomes unconscious and is rushed to the hospital. She is sedated and sleeps all night. She then has a terrible dream. She sees her husband and herself checking into a hotel. Her husband lies on the bed but as he does that it turns into a coffin. Then, Taiwo's dead father and mother come into the room and without a word, Joe rises and follows them. The reality of the emotion of death is already censored by Taiwo's conscious mind. Nobody around her is willing to tell her the truth because of her state of health. So it has to enter her dream the way it does. Taiwo is directly connected with the subject of the dream by marriage.

Death, which is an abstract idea is represented in the dream as a symbol and an embodiment-the coffin (symbol) and the presence of Taiwo's dead parents (embodiment) and Joe's decision to follow them (choice). Through this process, the abstract idea is translated into a concrete form. So Joe is linked with the coffin and Taiwo's parents through symbolic substitution and association. The coffin and Taiwo's parents are linked to death in real life. According to Peter Barry, the two dream work mechanisms identified by Freud are also found in the play. condensation and displacement.

Repetition and Substitution

The dramatic process centres on repetition and substitution. The President's death is a repetition of the death of all male characters and a replacement of Joe's death in particular.

Defence Mechanisms and Psychic Procedures for avoiding painful admissions

Projection

The characters refuse to accept negative aspects of their personalities; rather, they attribute this to other people. Taiwo in *The Sisters* describes the First Lady as the worst the country ever had:

Funmi: You see, we were planning the programme for the next elections, and he had the future ahead of him.

Taiwo: What future? The man had ruled this country

for twenty years. Four terms four rotten terms and he was still looking ahead to the future? What future? Whose future? I always wonder why you people never learn. The people were praying for you to leave, and you had the grand illusion that we loved you... Did you have no eyes? Were you so much in love with power that you became blind? ... her story is choking me already(19)

... you were a terrible First Lady, Funmi.

You spent most of the time distributing useless gifts and attending stupid state functions. Nothing, nothing, nothing

(Funmi stares at her throughout the speech. Her tea cup drops) (25).

Taiwo is a selfish and ego-centric character. She blames Funmi for not sparing her husband but Funmi's husband would have died if the coup had been successful. She is the terrible individual, not Funmi. Further, when Irene in *Our Wives* is accused of being behind the mysterious death of her political opponents she says she claims that she is innocent but her enemies are at work. But she is the enemy of the common man:

Policeman: *(rushing unto the stage 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).

Egocentricism in Female Characters through:

Language and Characterization

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" that is used in the play shows the nature 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. Taiwo in *The Sisters* for instance detests being told what to do, she does not admit her errors. She would instead protest against or ignores the corrections given to her from the first lady or even the most revered sister, Nana:

Taiwo: ... **I** did not ask to come, and no one is going to tell me what to do. Dead husband or no dead husband. (10)

Funmi: ... Please not here Taitai, not now. The president sleeps...

Nana: I told her.

Taiwo: Oh yes she told me, but **I** didn't ... but never mind.

Funmi: Oh what a nice dress you have on. But don't you thin black would have been appropriate. In the circumstance I mean.

Nana: I told her.

Taiwo: Oh yes, again, she did. May **I** smoke now?

Funmi: No, my God no!

Taiwo: Then may **I** go home. (11)

Also in *Our Wives* 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**. Show the world how we live in this house. It is no 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. Answer back, we are now equals. After all, we sleep on the same bed. (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. If you like, enter the town from there. **I** will be waiting for you when you come back. (Inyang begins to go towards the exit).

Ene: ... By the way, Inyang **come back here**. Where is **my** change?

Inyang: Sorry, Madam Ene. I noticed that many things have finished in this house and you need to see how the price of food things are just going up.

Ene: Spending **my** money! That is the only thing you are good at. You enjoy 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).

Inyang: Madam Ene, I do not throw away money.

Ene: (cuts in) **Get out of my sight!**

Transference

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 in *Our Wives* talk to 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.

while Taiwo’s reaction causes Funmi more pain, to realise that the poem she hated the most was composed by her own blood sister. A poem widely accepted and recited as a proclamation of victory over her late husband, (president turned dictator), since he had refused to hand over the government to others after ruling the nation for twenty years before his demise. Despite the shortcomings from her late husband, Funmi could not read between the lines that the people were demanding for a new president.

Funmi: It revealed to me how so intently, the people my husband had labored for and served all his life, hated him. The whole nation celebrated the words of the poem. Children, I heard learnt it by heart. (Breaks down) He loved this country ... but did the country love him? And besides. It hurts more now to know that it was written by my own flesh and blood. (She sobs. Taiwo is not moved, instead she opens her bag, takes out another cigarette, and lights it up...) (12)

She thought they had the future ahead of them until his sudden death.

Taiwo: What future? The man had ruled this country for twenty years. Four terms, four rotten terms, and he was still looking ahead to the future? What future? Whose future? ... The people were waiting for you people to leave, and you had the grand illusion that we loved you and wanted you to stay for another term? Did you have no eyes? Were you so much in love with power that you became blind? Was my Joe’s death in vain? Oh please sisters I need a smoke, her story is choking me already. (19)

Taiwo: You stayed there so long but spent your time living it all up. You threw the biggest parties. Dressed so well, had the biggest jewelry box, and said nothing, did nothing, and now it is all over, you have nothing but five bastard children to show for it. You spent most of the tie distributing useless gifts, and attending stupid state functions. Nothing, nothing, nothing. (25)

Taiwo, is a victim of political conflict, a conflict between the ruling government and the military which has resulted to her paralysis, the loss of her husband and her unborn child. She has had an emotional shut down for ten years since the traumatic occurrence and is blaming everyone for her condition. She refuses to show sympathy to her widowed sister, the first lady of the federal republic and would instead blame the deceased for bad governance. She would laugh when others are mourning, she is comfortable, and smoking cigarette were it is most uncondusive.

She behaves as if nothing serious has happened while every other person mourns the death of Mr. President (her late sister's husband), and responds to Nana's caution with sarcasm.

Nana: As a mark of respect to the dead ... Even if you must disrespect him with your red dress ... at least put off your cigarette. You behave as if nothing serious has happened.

Taiwo: Something serious? The dead? (Chuckles) oh I am sorry ... (10)

Taiwo rejoices over the death of her brother-in-law. While her widowed sister mourns.

Taiwo's response to Nana's caution is sarcastic. The sudden death of her sister's husband does not affect her in any way, as she continues to smoke her cigarette despite Nana's continuous plea and caution, an attempt to make her see reasons for the expected sober reflections from her and other members of the family.

Taiwo: Something serious? The dead? (Chuckles) oh I am sorry. (She takes a long puff, and blows out the smoke) It is wrong to smoke near the dead, is it?

Nana: Taitai ... your sister's husband lies only two doors away ... he hated any form of smoke remember? Please put out your cigarette ... please!

Taiwo: (Does not mind her instead, she pulls at her cigarette) Why must we always do what they want? He hated any form of smoke did he? I did not ask to come, and no one is going to tell me what to do. Dead husband or no dead husband.

Nana: Taitai!

Taiwo: Do not call me. (Begins to sing and hum.)

Nobody knows the troubles I have seen,

Nobody know but Jesus,

Nobody knows the troubles I have seen,

Glory hallelujah!

Taiwo ignores to console her widowed sister in her moment of loss, she instead recalls her experience and declares her sister's moment of loss as her own moment of glory.

Taiwo: I am sorry again. Besides, I did not want anyone to share in my supreme moment of glory. God had handed over the moment to me, and in triumph, I scribbled ... death ... oh dead ... which breaks through the mighty walls ... of Egypt. Treks down the well-paved road to Jericho only to snap the neck of the all mighty. I received public acclaim for that one. (11-12)

Ifeoma, one of the female characters in *Our Wives* 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 ill-treatment of regular beating and neglect from her spouse. She takes to her friend's counsel to fight back and regain her authorial position in the home, as the one privileged with economic power, in page (32).

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: (brashly) Get him thrown out of his job first. Then take proper charge of the situation. The key to peace is in your hands. (pg 31).

Ifeoma: How? (31)

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.

Mairo: Ify, you have been too soft with that man show him the stuff you are made of. He will begin to respect you with fear and trembling.

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 pg 36 narrate the story of a woman who cut off her husband's private part.

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.

Odera: And the woman who committed this heinous crime?

Inyang: 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.

Reversal of roles

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 Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh's 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) on 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. Women eat the food cooked by their husbands.

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.

Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh's satirically ridicules greedy young men who marry older and more privileged women because they think that these women will cater for their lack and elate them economically, unknowing to them that they were in for their worst night mere. Inyang, on getting to know the fate of his murdered friend, Zeus, hysterically flees his marriage with Ene.

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

Conclusion

Ahmed Yerima, former General Manager, National Theatre of Nigeria and Artistic Director, National Troupe of Nigeria and a professor at Redeemer's University Ede, is one of the few male playwrights who have shown great interest in the female question in contemporary Nigerian society. His female protagonists in *The Sisters* 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. His approach to feminism is different when compared to his counterparts. He believes in representing his female characters to suit or perfectly fit into the reality of the Nigerian society from which they are created. He prefers to make his characters interesting lively and naturalistic enough in such a way that the audience

could recognise each character in reality. A female sociopath can live next door to a neighbour in a perhaps strange and uncomfortable family situation that is ultimately harmless. They may show a number of traits that make them unpleasant to be around, such as; lack of empathy, and overwhelming selfishness. They are more emotionally hostile and destructive than physical. Taiwo, for example, as portrayed, the most brilliant among the four sisters, the most resolute and the strongest willed character in the family, cracked. According to Ahmed Yerima in an interview conducted by Julius Adeoye, 2009:

I purposely put her on a wheel chair, because I gave her too many strong lines so her mouth was going to be stronger than the legs. She was the one embodied and endowed with the pen, she could write poetry, she could appreciate lines and yet when it came to being strong enough to take the challenges of life she took everybody as an enemy.

The women in *The Sisters*, are not shallow minded, but no matter how empowered they might become, when it comes to matters of the heart, when it comes to sustainability of temper, of mood and of manner they, crack. Utoh-Ezeajugh's 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.

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