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**PROJECT COORDINATOR***OLOWU, Akinsola**Department of Psychology, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Nigeria.***EDITORS***ADANU, Fatima.**Department of Sociology, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto**AGIOBU-KEMMER, Ibinabo**Department of Psychology, University of Lagos Akoka, Lagos**AKOTIA, Charity**Department of Psychology, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra Ghana.**AMOLE, Dolapo**Department of Architecture, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Nigeria.**BAAH ODOOM, Dinah**School of Public Health, University of Ghana, Legon**BATEYE, Bolaji**Dept of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.**BHOWON, Uma**Dept of Social Studies, University of Mauritius, Reduit, Mauritius.**EPHRAIM OLUWANUGA, Sola**Dept of Psychiatry, National Hospital, Abuja.**EPHE, Chantal**Pan-Atlantic University, Ajah, Lagos..**GUERNINA, Zoubida**33, Beechdale Nottingham Hull, HU11 6 4RH England**IDEHEN, Egbewuare**Department of Psychology, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Nigeria.**ILESANMI, Oluwatoyin**Center for Gender Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.**MADU, Sylvester, N**Department of Psychology, Anambra State University, Igbariam Campus.**MENSAH, Emma**Department of Behavioural Sciences, School of Medical Sciences, Kwame Nnamah University of Science & Technology (KNUST) Kumasi**NAIDOO, Josephine**Department of Psychology Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo Ontario, Canada.**OBAYAN, A.I.**College of Human Development, Covenant University, Kilometre 10, Idiroko Road, Ota, Ogun State.**OLASEINDE-WILLIAMS, Olabisi**Department of Educational Foundations, University of Ilorin.**OSINOWO, Helen**Department of Psychology University of Ibadan, Ibadan.**PATWARDHAN, Vanita**Jnana Prabodhini's Institute of Psychology, Jnana Prabodhini Bhavanani's Bhaskar Street, 4/1A, Pune 411020 India.**PRAH, Mansah,**Department of Sociology, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.**SOETAN, Funmi**Department of Economics, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Nigeria.**SIMPSON, Alaba**Sociology Unit, Covenant University, Kilometre 10, Idiroko Road, Ota, Ogun State.**SUNMOLA, Gbenga,**Department of Psychology University Of Ibadan, Ibadan.**TANYI, Maureen.Ebanga**University of Yaounde, L'Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENC) B.P. 48 Yaounde, Cameroon.**TLAMHYU, Moji**University of Toledo, Ohio 43606-3390**UDEGBE, Bola**Department of Psychology, University Of Ibadan, Ibadan.***SUBSCRIBERS INFORMATION**

# ***GENDER & BEHAVIOUR***

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## **De-masking Institutionalised Mental Disorders in Male/Female Relationship: An Analysis of Some Female Novelists' Works.**

**Siwoku-Awi, Omotayo F.**

The Nigeria French language Village

P.M.B. 1011,

Ajara, Badagry

Lagos State.

E-mail: [awijesus@yahoo.com](mailto:awijesus@yahoo.com)

This article considers that male-female relationship is often the cause of most mental ailments that might be diagnosed in women. Issues of traditions and patriarchal attitudes occasioned by biological differences between men and women have been considered reasons for circumscribing women, so also patrocetric cultures all over the world have tended to consider the man as superior to the woman. Though over the years fights for human and women's rights have improved the status of women, the real grind still remains the intractable patriarchal paradigm that finds expression in religious and traditional beliefs and practices and also in the socio-political fabric of our modern societies. The women novelists cited in this article have drawn on their imagination and of course real life situations to create female characters who provide down-to-earth cases for study.

Determining a major cause of mental illness as the pervasive patriarchal imposition which does not favour women may never attract the vote of practicing psychiatrists, who often times rely on the testimony of members of family of the mentally ill in diagnosis and treatment. This mode of diagnosis appears very unreliable because of its subjectivity, particularly in patriarchal cultures. Patriarchy is the worldwide tradition that gives authority to men and deems them superior to women, hence the latter must be subservient and subordinate to the former. Often carried to atrocious limits, women are discriminated against in some societies, even when they are as qualified as men in occupying job or leadership positions. Until recently, France operated a different salary scale for women, who are paid less than their male counterparts. In virtually every sphere of life man claims superiority while some cultures and religions affirm that the Creator instituted this male hegemony as it could be deduced from the masculine strength and brain power, which research has debunked as reported by Julia Wood.

Social transformation and changes orchestrated by feminist struggle and protests over the years can be observed everywhere today. Nevertheless, while there

may be the big talk and propaganda about change, there are silent sufferers, who the media may get to know only when it has become too late and they have been killed by the powerful male in their lives. Our Daily Newspapers recount woeful and heinous crimes committed by men against women; crimes, which are carried out to convince the perpetrators they are in control or they have supremacy over their victims. Women who do not get killed may become neurotic because of patriarchal impositions as this study sets out to prove from the selected female authors' works. This is a state of mental illness that stem from the inability to cope with the environment as the individual lives at variance with herself and the world. While clinical psychologists and psychiatrists may seek physiological and biological underpinnings to mental and emotional disorders, which may be remedied by orthodox treatment of drug administration, it is often overlooked that social milieu, and cultural and religious practices have direct implications on individual's personal adjustment as behavioral psychologists like Albert Bandura have proffered. It is ironical, therefore, that the very significant persons who have direct bearing on the sick person's unfortunate state are called on by

psychiatric structure to testify to his or her mental state. It is then virtually impossible for a non conformist woman who has been a victim of familial mental torture and cultural imposition of sexism to get emotional support within the same structure that denies her humanity and sanity. I looked at female characters in some novels, who have been victims of cultural practices and beliefs and male oppression that have caused their mental derangement. Needless, to say that behavioral patterns and culture are not mutually exclusive, they have a symbiotic relationship, it then behooves us to abandon cultural practices that destroy the vulnerable in our societies and that do not contribute meaningfully to our national growth and development. In short, the protest is against retrogressive cultures and traditions.

#### *Sexist Tyranny: A Form Institutionalised Psychosis*

Critics of feminism have given various reasons feminists fight for women's rights, one is that they must be old maids or sad women who fail to get a man to love and dote on them. Eva Figes quoted from English Punch Newspaper a poem published in 1870:

The rights of women, who demanded, those women are but few: The greater part had rather stand exactly as they do.

Beauty has claims for which she fights  
At ease with winning arms; The women who  
want women's rights Want mostly, Women's  
charms.

This poem was written over two centuries ago, in the wake of the struggle for women emancipation in the United Kingdom, yet its content holds out as true today. Only few women have fought for a long time for equitable opportunities in the society; the others by their silence and inactivity might prefer the status quo and might not wish to contend with men for positions of authority or they would rather concede to the fact that women who acquire as much education, might not be as equally remunerated or empowered as men.

However the case in point raised by the anonymous poet is that most women activists are not charming and beautiful ladies otherwise they could easily win men by their charms. Quite the contrary, Simone de Beauvoir, one of the precursors of french feminism, was a beautiful woman, who kept a steady relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre until his demise in 1980. But critics must always advance reasons to negate the goodwill motivating such activism. Figes in *Patriarchal Attitudes* states the following on Simone de Beauvoir: In her autobiography Simone de Beauvoir records that when she published *The Second Sex*, among the vituperations heaped upon her head by the Press and private individuals were many suggestions that what was really "wrong" with her was that she had never really been fucked (6).

Sex here becomes a means of dulling the woman's brain and conscience in order to keep her silent and blind to injustice. This is clearly suggesting that there has never been any reason for activism in defence of women's rights and reclamation of her freedom from male subjugation. What both male and female cannot deny, facing the reality of daily existence is that there are patriarchal attitudes that virtually make living unbearable for the woman and could almost obliterate her existence. Historical differences may condition the practices of the white and black cultures in the oppression and discrimination of women, the hazards of slavery and colour differences aggravate the experiences of others, yet the ubiquitous patriarchy and its cultural implications constitute the undercurrent lethal weapon, which all androcentric cultures use in subjugating women and in causing serious mental damage to their victims. Nevertheless, feminist responses have seen to such needs, as experienced by different categories of women. Whatever had been the vituperations against feminism, it is historically a worldwide reaction to the unwholesome women/men relationship, characterised by oppression, mental torture, domestic violence, physical torture, muggings, rape, etc. Marxist socialist theory conceived of the oppression of

women as the rock on which the whole system of capitalism and patriarchy is built. In African patriarchy, it was normal and acceptable that a man beat his wife; it was not considered an act of aggression, but it was punitive and corrective. The wife needed adequate training, which only the husband could provide. This is even more so in a relationship where there exists a wide age gap between the husband and the wife. Buchi Emecheta paints the obnoxious picture of Nnaife, in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994). He has been unemployed for a long time and his wife Nnu Ego has been the support of the family, when eventually he is forcefully enrolled in the British Army to fight against Hitler, he comes back enriched and rather than care about his eight children's education, he takes Okpo, a sixteen-year-old girl as wife in his old age. According to patriarchal tradition such a girl should be trained and corrected by the husband. He has done the same with Nnu Ego, his first wife, whom he beats up when she nags him to take a job. In *Second Class Citizen*, also by Emecheta (1977) despite Adah's hard work and self-sacrifice, she cannot gain her husband's respect, love and confidence. The ungrateful Francis beats his wife until she seeks refuge in the Law. Calixthe Beyala's female characters are actually punch bags for the men in their lives. Ada, in *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* is beaten by Josef, her man friend until she bleeds while he does the same to the little girl, Ateba, who defends her aunt. In *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, by the same author, Tanga's mother is beaten mercilessly by her husband because the latter objects to sharing her matrimonial bed with his mistresses whom he brings home. Aidoo, in *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) describes the male desire to hurt the woman as inhuman and sarcastically calls it God's gift to man:

It hit her like a stone, the knowledge that there is pleasure in hurting. A strong three-dimensional pleasure, an exclusive masculine delight that is exhilarating beyond all measure. And this too is God's gift to man? She wonders (70).

Beyala presents the woman in dualistic personalities of "la femme-fille" (the woman-girl-child), "femme-enfant" (woman-

child) "pute-enfant" (prostitute-child) "enfant-parent" (child-parent) (Nfah-Abbenyi 101-113). These antithetic appellations only accentuate the idea of the woman as stagnated in her capacity to think and act rationally in her given situation of economic and social malaise. The writer does not give a picture of the Cameroonian woman as struggling against patriarchy by rejecting sexual incursion, instead she much more readily gives approval to the institution of prostitution, as an assertion of freedom by the woman, yet paradoxically, it is a state where man still asserts his indisputable dominance. He pays the woman for the patronage and makes infuriating demands, as well, as in the case of Ateba, who is required to put the man's penis in her mouth and swallow his sperm as part of the deal.

Also, Michèle Lacroix tells the story of Sapotille, a Carribean, whose background of racial discrimination in the Girls' Catholic Boarding School at Saint-Denis in the novel, *Sapotille et le serin d'argile* leaves her completely estranged from the world around her. She has got used to being locked up for the most trivial reasons, she is spotted as a bad girl among the other students who are mainly white skinned. Contrary to the expectations of her parents she ends up with a second rate education, which makes her subordinate and vulnerable. She fails to get a marriage proposal from her mulatto boyfriend, Patrick, who delights in arousing her passion only to leave her and go for other girls of superior skin colour. She finally gets married to Benoît, a Black, who seems to be able to provide shelter for her and whose military career gives assurance of a life of ease. Benoît wants to keep her wholly to himself, but she thinks him passionless and overpowering. His brutish and callous ways must have been the result of his experiences, while on training as military officer. He expresses his battered and weak ego by a desire to hurt and make Sapotille cry in order to assert his authority. He keeps her under surveillance in the house to prevent any contact with her old acquaintances, Patrick and Alexandre Nolas, who she prefers to be with. Her marriage to him is a marriage of convenience

and motivated by personal gains, he needs a wife to qualify for accomodation and she needs protection.

Moi, j'avais affirmé que j'étais fiancé dès le jour où j'ai su qu'il y avait un logement disponible: sans quoi, on n'aurait pas tenu compte de ma demande. Dieu ! que j'ai eu peur ! Tu me dois une compensation.

Le bras de Benoît étaient un abri sûr. Je n'aurai plus à craindre, me suis-je dit, en m'appuyant contre sa poitrine.

Les dieux, là-haut, devaient bien rire (188 / 189) !

As for me, I affirmed that I was engaged from the day that I knew that there was a vacant apartment: without which they would not have given my request any consideration. God ! how I was afraid ! You owe me a compensation.

Benoît's arm became a sure shelter. I would have no reason to fear, I told myself, while leaning against his chest.

The gods up there must have laughed. {My translation}

Sapotille suffers from acute depression and anxiety. She ends up seeking love outside the marriage and gets beaten up several times by her husband, who often locks her up in order to teach her a lesson:

Du pain dur. Je me souviens de cette tranche du pain que Benoît m'avait donnée le jour où il m'enferma dans la salle d'eau. "En prison : ça va t'apprendre, Sapotille", disait-il en me délivrant le lendemain. Il ne savait pas que j'avais fait mes classes au cachot du pensionnat ! Il attendait mes larmes, de repentir, ou de révolte: j'affectais d'être impassible. "Tu me rends malade", grondait-il. La ride au coin de sa bouche avouait qu'il se dégoûtait; cette ride me reprochait mon attitude; je me demandais ce que Benoît me voulait ! je sais aujourd'hui qu'il s'inquiétait de savoir si je lui ressemblais, ou si ses réactions, sans conteste insolites, le classaient à part. C'est après les camps allemands qu'il s'était senti un être séparé. Les humiliations réservées aux soldats noirs l'avaient durement marqué. Benoît avouait en avoir pleuré "comme une femmelette" [...] Que ses faits de guerre lui eussent valu deux

décorations ne suffisait pas à son amour-propre. Une cicatrice au front : ce n'était rien; c'était son âme qui avait été blessée, Benoît: un hypersensible qu'on avait trop malmené. Parce qu'il avait pleuré dans un camp, mes larmes le réhabilitaient (47/8).

Dry bread. I remember the piece of bread that Benoît gave me the day he locked me up in the bathroom. "Prison: that will teach you a lesson, Sapotille", he said as he let me out the following day. He did not know that I had taken my lessons in the school cell! He expected my tears; of repentance or of revolt: I was obviously impenetrable. "You make me sick" he stormed. The wrinkle on the side of his mouth showed that he was disgusted; this wrinkle reproached me of my attitude; I asked myself what Benoît wanted from me! I know today that he was worried to know if I was like him, or if his indisputable unusual reactions made him different.

It was after leaving the German camps that he felt alienated. The humiliation black soldiers had to undergo had left their marks on him. Benoît confessed to having wept "like a woman" [...] That his war achievements have earned him two decorations was not sufficient for his self-esteem. A scar on the forehead: that was nothing; it was his *so8ul* that had been hurt. Benoît a hypersensitive that had been mishandled. Because he had cried in the camps, my tears reassured him. {My translation}

She loses her pregnancy after a brutal beating and in fear for her life, having been told by the *quimboiseur* (fortune teller) of impending catastrophe, as symbolised by a knife she sees in a dream, she takes flight to France leaving her homeland Basse-Terre for good. She finds therapy in her flight.

Myriam Warner-Vieyra paints the portrait of Juletane in her eponymous novel. Also a Caribbean, who experiences similar psychological torture that leads to her mental derangement and full-blown mania, Juletane meets and gets married to Mamadou, a Senegalese muslim, who fails to tell her of his previous marriage and family commitment according to the Islamic tradition and that the marriage has already

been blessed with two children. The cat is let out of the bag on their return journey, when another cousin of Mamadou's asks if he has procured gifts for Awa, his first wife. Juletane, a Catholic by birth, thereafter spends the rest of her life in a maze. The illusion of having found a father and a friend in Mamadou, being an orphan and without family is completely dispelled hence she has to share her husband with other women; a strange life for someone brought up in a single wife Christian tradition.

Croyant trouver en Mamadou toute la famille qui me manquait, je ne l'aimais pas seulement comme un amant, un mari. C'était aussi toute cette affection filiale débordante en moi que je reportais sur lui. Une fois de plus je retrouvais mon angoisse d'orpheline. Perdue, seule au monde. Mon désarroi était immense (34).

Believing that I had found in Mamadou the family that I had lost, I did not only love him as a lover, a husband. It was also all the filial affection that overflowed in me that I poured out on him. Once again I rediscovered the anguish of being an orphan. Lost, alone in the world. My dejection was immense. {My translation}

Plunged rudely into a polygamous culture without prior preparation by her husband is humiliating and agonising. She feels neglected and abandoned. The French culture and its Caribbean variant in which she has been brought up excludes husband sharing. She confesses her difficulty in adjusting to the new arrangement.

En un mot, je devais accepter un mari pendant cinq jours, puisqu'Awa consentait à le recevoir durant les week-ends au village. J'avais l'impression d'être arrivée sur une autre planète, car je ne comprenais plus rien de ce qui m'entourait, de ce qui se disait. Pour moi, un mari était par-dessus tous l'être le plus intime, l'autre de soi-même, ce n'était pas une chose qui se prêtait, qui se partageait (48).

In one word, I had to accept a husband for five days a week, since Awa has agreed to receive him at weekends in the village. I got

the impression of arriving on another planet, because I could not understand anymore all that surrounded me, what was said. For me, a husband is above all the most intimate being, the other of one's being, and it is not a thing that is borrowed or shared. {My translation}

The third weekend that Mamadou spends in the village with his senior wife and children ends in a disaster. For Juletane who goes into a delirium:

Le troisième weekend où Mamdou partit rejoindre Awa, son oncle me transporta à l'hôpital. C'est une dépression, une folle véritable, ou des bouffées délirantes selon l'expression du médecin. Je ne sais pas ce qui m'arriva. Je me souviens vaguement d'avoir été prise d'une rage subite de désespoir dans la nuit du dimanche au lundi. Je me mis à tout casser dans la chambre, à me cogner la tête contre les murs, je ne retrouvai pleinement mes esprits que quatre jours plus tard à l'hôpital (51).

The third weekend when Mamadou went to visit Awa, his uncle took me to the hospital. It was depression, real madness, or spates of delirium according to the doctor. I did not know what came over me. I remember vaguely to have been overcome by a sudden rage of despair in the night of Sunday and Monday. I started breaking everything in the room, and to hit my head against the walls.

In the same vein, Figes, a Berlineuse, in *Seven Ages* (1978) raises the issue of brutalisation of women by men. The case of Judith typifies the physical and emotional violence that occurred in traditional setting and that could destroy a promising and brilliant girl. According to local education Judith has been very well introduced to the local use of herbs by her mother. She has learnt the names of the plants by heart. She recognises them like all women of her time, hence she is intelligent. While she runs an errand to get some herbs for her mother, she is raped by a stranger, whom she will never recognise. She gives birth to her first child; thereafter all subsequent

illness is likely a result of gender discrimination and sex role stereotyping. Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994) by Emecheta, considers herself a failure because her boy child dies. She has suffered long standing depression and acute anxiety because of her barrenness. Her first husband, Amatokuwu, kicks her out when his second wife gives birth to a boy making him a true man. Now "posted" to Lagos to Nnaife, a man she has never seen and who penetrates her with an animal like passion, she thanks her chi that she at least has a son. With the baby dead, it is as if she is raving. Barely over with the postpartum depression characteristic of a predisposed woman like Nnu Ego, Emecheta narrates:

Then one morning, one morning when the story started, when Nnu Ego came to put her baby on her back before going to her stall at the railway yard to sell her wares, she saw him, her baby, her baby, Ngozi lying there where she had laid him only a short while before, dead, stone dead. She did not scream; she did not call her husband. She simply left the room, walking gingerly backwards, until she whirled round like a fierce hurricane and ran (54 - 55).

In African society, where the woman's identity is tied to childbirth and the number of children she bears, she is a failure to lose anyone of them. In some societies she could be tagged a witch. The pain and ostracism that accompany barrenness, particularly in Africa, makes living unbearable for the childless woman. The educated African woman is even much more seriously castigated, for a non-conformist stand or failure to adopt the established traditional pattern of giving birth to many children. A deviation from traditions has always been considered madness and her failure to have a child may be attributed to her practice of witchcraft. Esi in *Changes-A love Story* (1977) by Ama Ata Aidoo, is called a witch by her scandalised in-laws, because she is content with her only daughter and does not want more children.

In *La Nègresse rousse*, Dame Maman's lover Pygmée is found dead in Dame

Maman's bed. A medical explanation would just have been acceptable - a cardiac arrest, as the case may be, because he has had a long drawn coition with his mistress. Mégri and her mother are accused of witchcraft and murder; most inexplicable disasters are often attributed to sorcery. The girl is subjected to the most beastly and barbaric punishment. Misconceptions, false accusations, unsympathetic conclusions have always been responsible for psychiatric ailments in women. Madness could also be caused by witchcraft as victims of auditory hallucination report strange voices to which they respond, oblivious of other people. Nnu Ego at the end of the story succumbs to this kind of delusion and is found talking to some imaginary company and she eventually dies by the road side. The woman who has given all her life to the care of her family does not enjoy the comfort of the nearness and attention of her children in her last days, of her hand being held on her deathbed, as modern life has claimed them since they must do oyibo work.

Chesler concludes that when women consciously or unconsciously refuse gender norms, they are often considered mad. In fact, most experiences of mental breakdown or neuroses are identified with conflicts that lead to family disintegration, unsuccessful love relationships or male dominance, where women have refused to be relegated to the background. The unsympathetic male takes advantage of the feeble minded woman, whose aspiration for shelter and protection may have been unmet. Her desire for friendship, is considered an abomination if she gets along with a woman like herself. Of course same sex marriage should be condemned, but a wholesome and sympathetic relationship between females should be encouraged. Ama Ata Aidoo highlights the African position that it is considered abnormal and a deviant attitude for a woman to nurture a sensuous feeling for another woman, so is her effort to please her friend by preparing special meals. When Marija, a German lady, in *Our Sister Killjoy*, invites Sissie, a Ghanaian on a visit to Germany, to eat rabbit prepared in French sauce, the latter declines, stating that traditionally, special

meals are the preserve of men. It is unacceptable that a woman should enjoy cooking for another woman.

Besides, it is not sound that a woman should enjoy cooking for another woman. Not under any circumstances. It is not done. It is not possible. Special meals are for men. They are the only sex to whom the Maker gave a mouth with which to enjoy eating. And woman the eternal cook is never so pleased as seeing a man enjoying what she has cooked; eh, Marija? So give the rabbit to big Adolf and watch him enjoy it (77).

Special meals are meant for husbands, who may not even have contributed a dime to the preparation of the food. This belief, petty as it may sound, has caused disintegration in many a family set up. The fact still remains that where there is mutual love and respect, the woman may provide for the family. However, most cultures and religions recognize the male as the breadwinner. Furthermore, a woman could find emotional support with other female friends without tendency for the prevalent lesbianism. Further analysis shows that Marija who has been neglected by her husband, who gives her minimal attention and is away a lot, nourishes a sensuous lesbian feeling for Sissie the Black woman and tries to play with her breast. This case lends credence to the claim that lesbianism is a psychological problem that may be rooted in male/female abnormal relationship. In cases of illness or handicap, the emotional strain becomes unbearable for both male and female where there has been bitterness and complaint and the affection that is fundamental to acceptance is lacking. Hence, emotional support outside the home becomes an option which often helps to keep the woman's sanity.

Indeed medical science concedes to the fact that the complicated female physiology, the intricacies of menstrual cycle and childbirth, tied inextricably to her psyche, are major reasons for woman's poor physical and mental health. Her several functions and enigmatic sexuality predispose her to many more hazards than the male, particularly extremes of passion that could endanger her mind. Therefore,

men who relate to women, men, who claim to be their husbands or lovers, should of course take these factors into consideration.

#### *The Metaphysical Question*

Since psychosis or any other mental illness is a disease of the mind, it is claimed that metaphysical causes may be directly responsible for this weakness. Youths and adults in quest of absolute truths have dabbled into the occult, magic, spiritualism, witchcraft and Satanism. While some may defend some of these practices as harmless, it must be stated here that they are activities that control the mind. Any form of mind control can lead to mental degeneration. Also, the woman who attempts to break away from long standing traditions or religions that enhance male dominance, and who chooses to assert her rights may be deemed insane by members of her family, who are adherents of those beliefs that she denounces. Like in the cases of conversion from Islam to Christianity, reports have it that converts are ill-treated, confined and brainwashed. This brainwashing may lead to confusion, split personality and other manifestations of manic disorders. I would like to refer to Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*. Akunna, the heroine, knowing quite well that her heart throb, the village teacher, Chike, is the son of an osu, a rich slave, she still goes ahead to love him, give herself to him unreservedly. However, she is haunted by the thought that her bride price is not paid. Her uncle, Okonkwo, who stands in the position of her deceased father, refuses vehemently to accept the bride price on his niece, even though it is offered in triple value of the normal rate. His grouse is that the girl has refused to marry his preferred choice, the lame Okoboshi, Chike being the son of a slave. The fear of what might happen to her at the birth of her first child will actually cause her death eventually. Okonkwo uses juju to torment the girl; he has fabricated her image and as he metes out torture on the wooden doll, the girl experiences the grip of witchcraft as she can hear her name called from afar; the voices mingled with her feeble mind make her cling to Chike's father to act on her

behalf as she does not want to die. While literary critics like Ogunyemi Okonjo claims that the girl must have died not because of the superstition but of the crippling effect of her fear that she might die. We are faced with some big questions at this point and they are: To what extent can modern science cancel the effect of witchcraft on an individual? Can a bewitched person find deliverance from medical science? Of what use are psychotic drugs, if an individual is under the spell of sorcery?

Buchi Emecheta may have written a fiction, but the scenarios and characters are not fairies they are borne out of her personal knowledge of her culture and people. While the doctor who took Akunna's delivery diagnoses anemia and small physique due to long term infantile malnourishment, the reader is left to wonder if it is not the triumph of traditions sustained by witchcraft which is the main focus of the author. As deduced from the female novelists' conjectures it is the tension ensuing from opposing views of traditions, social life and essence that have often caused trauma in women, leading to estrangement and manic depressive disorders.

The claims by many Africans that mental breakdown in whatever form may be caused by witchcraft are founded on experiences as we have cited. Western medicine that originated psychiatry obviously belittles bewitchment and casting of spells, which may have equally existed in their own cultures. After all, we read of sorcerers, secret cults and satanic worship existing all over the world. Their victims could be killed in cold blood if not mentally oppressed through horrific manifestations of the supernatural as seen in some of the horror films peddled globally. Cruelty exists in all cultures and it is expressed in various forms, like killing a victim in direct confrontation, with weapons of any kind, imposing one's views through brainwashing, witchcraft remote manipulation and control, and psychological violence to mention a few. Kimball Young, in *Psychology of Adjustment* underscores the undeniable implication of chemical disorders and neurological factors in nervous disorders as expressed in

various psychotic ailments, nevertheless he emphasizes the preponderant role of culture, which greatly influences the individual adjustment.

#### *Patriarchal Women: Agents of Psychological Alienation.*

The critical look at the works of the female novelists under study and of the cited feminist critics has revealed the fact that there would never have been patriarchy if women did not support the system. It is a social structure built on religious dogmas, taboos and cultural specificity. The success of the system depends on the concerted participation of both genders. It is man who defines what woman's pleasure should be, older women approve and force the younger ones to comply. The African woman is subjected to the brutal experience of circumcision as instituted by the patriarchal system, and the participation of older women is elicited to perpetuate it as it has been cited in the works of the novelists. This insalubrious practice of female genital excision, clitoridectomy and infibulation are reinforced by socio-economic and political reasons. Men use the practice of genital mutilation, termed circumcision, as a political weapon to keep women constantly in a position of subjugation. This is done through older women who become more powerful and influential because they could control the sexuality of younger women through circumcision, taboos, or other cultural beliefs that keep them perpetually subordinate both in the hearth and in public life. Patriarchy celebrates the superiority of the man while circumcision legitimizes male control of female sexuality. Those who carry out the practice hold on to it, because it is also a source of economic gain: they are paid and thereafter, parents are able to attract rich bride prices for their girls, which they eventually appropriate.

It is in this wise, that some unscrupulous parents prostitute their children's bodies. Beyala describes the sordid details of this practice and the resultant psychological reactions of the victims. She tells the story of Tanga, raped and impregnated by her father. Her mother

subjects the girl to sexual manipulation. Her body is dismembered by the traditional act of circumcision. Her mother rejoices while the daughter bears the psychological, physical pain and shame of being mutilated. Tanga's mother typifies the African matriarchy that supports male hegemony and the perpetuation of patriarchy. Tanga's mother states that with the circumcision, Tanga has become a woman and with her buttocks she will retain and service men. Of course, Tanga's mother anticipates the immense economical, social and political power (she speculates on receiving an award from government for having given birth to children) to be derived from such control of her daughter's body. Tanga reflects on her state of numbness at her dismemberment:

La honte me prend le coeur. Elle monte de la gorge, me noue la tête. Jusqu'ici, je n'ai eu qu'une honte, la vieille ma mère. Cette honte est mon souffle non viable. Elle me persécute, me pourchasse, depuis le jour où la vieille ma mère m'a allongée sous le bananier pour que je m'accomplisse sous le geste de l'arracheuse de clitoris. Je la vois encore, la vieille ma mère, éclatante dans son kaba immaculé, un fichu noir dans les cheveux, criant à tous les dieux: "Elle est devenue femme. Avec ça, ajouta-t-elle en tapotant ses fesses, elle gardera tous les hommes". (19-20).

Shame filled my heart. It went up my throat and wound around my head. Until now I only had one shame, my old mother. This shame is not my viable breath. It has persecuted and pursued me, since the day that my old mother laid me under a banana tree so that I could become an accomplished woman under the hand of the cutter of clitoris. I can still see her, my old mother, glowing in her immaculate kaba, a black headscarf in her hair, calling out to all the gods: "She has become a woman, she has become a woman. With that," she added, patting her buttocks, "she will keep all men". {My translation}

Patriarchal tradition considers marriage the best that could happen to a girl at a stage in her development. Mothers insist that their daughters get into sexual

relationship with a man or sometimes men, as it is in the case of Tanga. The anonymous daughter in *Days* (1974) by Eva Figes, a German and naturalised British, tells of what has been drummed into her, all her life "a girl's place, certainly mine, was first and foremost in the house." (Figs 58) This may still be the position of some women in Europe or America or Africa, who hold on to the belief that the woman should stay at home for her husband and children. Of course, in some cases the social welfare makes financial compensation for their maternity and childcare. It is the contrary with African women, who often have to work to make ends meet. The woman who has all the time in her hands and who is not working outside the home may be trailed by other psychological ailments like hysteria or homosexual tendencies to ward off boredom. The saying that an idle hand is the Devil's workshop is an undisputable absolute truth that applies to all ages. If a woman has the good luck of a man who takes charge of all expenses in the home, she should still engage in mind enriching activities to fill her time. I should however add that a woman who is committed to her family and available for her children in their growing up years should reap fulfilling benefits of well-rounded and well-developed children, who may not suffer the throes of psychological impairment. This is not, however, predicated on whether she stays at home or not. Psychology has proved that children of working mothers are more self-reliant and that every individual personality is result of childhood conflict.

For the young girl, the psychological effect of not being prepared for conventional marriage, before plunging into it, is of little consideration to guardians of culture, who must promote traditions and who are mostly scandalised by a deviant behavior of rejecting an arranged spouse and who do not care that a marriage is contracted because the girl wants to escape from home and assert her liberty. In *Days*, the narrator explains her trepidation during preparations for her marriage that finally hits the rocks in the way that her mother and grandmother have experienced.

I did not know how to explain myself: to myself. As far as everybody else was

concerned explanations were not required. I suddenly found myself, for the first and only time in my life, playing the lead. Everybody else played a supporting role, by which I mean, they supported me, handed me down the line like a giant parcel in a game of which I had no previous knowledge. They took charge, propelled me forward. My mother took me to the shops to look at bed linen. I pleaded tiredness but it did not work. Only six weeks to go, she warned, and you can't start life without the basic necessities. What sort of sheets did I want, she asked, standing at the counter, candy stripes or plain white? I shrugged and said: white, I suppose. It was what I had always been used to. She conducted me down to the basement to look at saucepans. You'll need at least two frying-pans, she said. No good starting with less. The girls at the office had clubbed together to buy me a set of tablemats, and my future in-laws had already promised a cutlery service. Now, she said, turning away from the saucepan section, you'll be needing an ironing board. What kind were you thinking of? (Figs 86-87)

Everyone thinks they are doing the girl a lot of good by planning so well for her wedding, unfortunately, within a few months the marriage gets sour and she is out at the door. It is this dismal failure that no one anticipates. It is my opinion that in most traditional cultures the blame is usually put on the woman, who should have been a paragon of virtue and should have kept her husband on the string. There is a lot to say about giving a female child room to choose as she wishes instead of imposing one's opinion on her. The trauma and shame of a break-up may be easier to bear because the decision has been hers. Furthermore, a recurrent experience that might suggest generational trait, could be explained by the family predisposition to reacting to pressures and challenges in similar ways, since there is no rule against imitating a member of one's family and there is ample room for individual choice. Similarity of learned behaviours could be what seems to be hereditary. In addition, pathological explanation of advancement in age and attendant physiological changes might not

explain neuroses and psychoses in the younger generation. The contemporary pressures of sexuality, economic instability, family disintegration, separation, divorce, social insecurity, indiscriminate use of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, barbiturates, extra sensory experiences, psychic, occult, witchcraft control, and transcendental experiences, satanism etc. are important factors in mental well being.

Another major cause of mental disintegration in women is the extremes of passions that they exhibit. Nnu Ego as cited earlier is willing to end her life because she has been barren for a long time and loses her son some months after she delivers the baby. Sometimes this outrage is directed towards others who very often are objects of envy and jealousy. Nnu Ego hates Adaku with passion because she is more enterprising and bent on being successful while rejecting the male control. The latter refuses to confine herself to the marriage bed. She quits when Nnaife their loafer husband cannot provide for the family. When a well-dressed visitor calls on Adaku, Nnu Ego metes out her frustration caused by poverty and stress on the stranger. The patriarchal men in the novel only blame Adaku for being so rich as to have friends who dress provocatively. Nnu Ego's uptightness and passionate outbursts will eventually cause her mental derangement and subsequent death.

Rivalry in the home is often the cause of rash behaviours and violent attacks that may result in death. Mama Segi in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* attempts to kill Bolanle, her husband's new wife because she is educated and has propensity to leak out the secret of the senior wives that their sterile husband is not the father of their children. They have concealed their adultery pretending that they have been impregnated by their husband so that he can care for the horde that constitutes his illegitimate children. Unfortunately, Segi eats the poisoned food meant for Bolanle and she dies. Mama Segi's blind anger and jealousy led to her temporary senselessness and she kills her first daughter.

**Exiting Patriarchy: Which Therapy works?**

The desperate quest to create a female counter-culture by feminists has led to the development of a plethora of theories and attitudes. Western radical feminists have proposed either total annihilation of men or the abolition of heterosexual marriage in order to leave women free of male hegemony and hence create a more peaceful society, since they hold that men are the cause of stress, social and political problems. African feminists also developed conciliatory feminisms, which propose equal participation of men and women in national progress. However, theories cannot solve the inherent problems of incompatibility or cultural practices that cause aggression, violence, prejudice against women and subjugation of women in homes and society.

The novelist, Beyala, seems to provide a way out of the mental torture or insanity that could arise from repression of instinctual drives or unconscious desires by the open and unabashed acquiescence to sexual relationships, the irony however is that her female characters suffer immensely from loss of identity and are stagnated in their daily existence as a result of their choice. I hold the opinion that stepping out of moral restrictions and sexual chastity imposed by the society or religion is not the best way to express one's liberty; such defiant behaviours are indications of maladjustment and abnormal psychology. However, it is pertinent to determine aspects that do not enhance human rights and deal with them. Besides, unbridled sexual desires and expressions are indications of mental illness as in the case of nymphomaniacs. Beyala presents in *Les honneurs perdus* (1990) Saïda Benerafa, who is laughed at and ridiculed for her chastity, which eventually works for her as her "sans domicile" (homeless) white boyfriend Pagnol Marcel Pagnol finally becomes more responsible and ties the knot with her. The sarcasm is heightened by the fact that she has a certificate to prove that she is a virgin. Contemporary medical research and the dread imposed by the deadly HIV/AIDS make abstinence, safe and protected sex compulsory. In which case, psychoanalytic explanation of

sexuality and sexual subjectivity could not be used to justify sexual emancipation that some feminists have advocated. It seems living beyond fantasy and facing reality is an indisputable option in the issues of sexual subjectivity, sexual identities and differentiation.

From Warner-Vieyra's story of Juletane, we learn the importance of accepting situations as they come without losing one's mind in the case of disappointment. Quite often the reason people lose their minds when disappointed is that they expect too much from others. The reality is that things may never work our way. Unfortunately Juletane, the eponymous character in *Juletane* by Miriam Warner-Vieyra succumbs to mania rather than face the challenges of rejection by creating a niche for herself in a hostile and strange society. She confesses to the fact that she cannot overcome her jealousy. She hurts on seeing her husband's happy disposition, Mamadou, who comes back from Awa on Monday and not on Sunday as agreed upon. Though she resolves to divorce him and go back to France, she cannot break away, because Mamadou is all she has in the world, having lost her parents as a child and later her grandmother, who raised her. Perhaps the decision to go back and repair her life would have been the best, at least she could still have kept her sanity. She chooses to depreciate instead:

Toujours tendue crispée, je perdis tout appétit. Le succulent riz au poisson, répété chaque midi, n'avait plus la saveur du premier jour. L'odeur me donnait la nausée. Je maigrissais, mes jupes devenues trop larges me donnaient l'allure d'un épouvantail, aussi j'étais déplorable, physiquement et moralement, quand arriva le premier week-end de Mamadou chez Awa. J'essayai d'accepter, me disant que de toute manière tout était fini entre nous; que dès la première occasion, je retournerais en France. Je divorcerais. Ce fut cependant une épreuve au-dessus de mes forces. Je restai enfermée dans notre chambre, sans boire ni manger. Malgré toutes mes résolutions, je mourais de jalousie; je ne pouvais pas m'empêcher de penser à Mamadou avec une autre femme comme un

sacrilège. Lui ma seule richesse, mon bien le plus précieux (50) !

Always tensed, edgy, I lost weight. The succulent rice with fish served every afternoon no longer had the taste of the first day. The odour nauseated me. I became lean, my skirts became too big for me and they floated around me like a fan while I walked, I was also in a deplorable state, physically and morally, by the first weekend that Mamadou was billed to spend with Awa. I tried to concede by telling myself that all was finished between us; that at the first opportunity, I would return to France. I would divorce. It was a test beyond my power. I stayed locked up in our room without eating or drinking. Despite my resolutions, I was dying of jealousy; I could not help thinking of Mamadou with another woman as sacrilege. Him, my only wealth, my most precious possession. {My translation}

Juletane kills herself by holding tenaciously to what is not hers. She is wrong in making Mamadou her essence and her possession. She does not love Mamadou to release him while she makes her life. This is not exonerating Mamadou, who deceives her without remorse, takes advantage of her naivety and shows his true colour soon after adding her to his harem. From all indications marriage by a single person to a widow or widower may succeed only in very rare circumstances as the shadow of the past might always come in between the new couple, except where genuine love is shared. A similar background of ex-marriages leaves the couple with nothing to lose. It is worse still in a situation where the woman has not prepared herself for a polygamous life. Such is the case with Sapotille, who finds it hard to get rid of Patrick a fair-weather lover. She cannot love her husband, who frightens, threatens and virtually beats her up until she loses her pregnancy. Like Juletane, she is without family but she makes a good decision to start afresh elsewhere. Sapotille's diary constitutes a therapy and while she learns to live again, Juletane pines away.

Nnu Ego is abandoned by her son, who goes to study in America; she ends up with manic depression. African patriarchy offers little protection for the suffering woman, who, according to cultural beliefs might as well be undergoing punishment for her sins. Besides, it is considered that she has little to benefit from the sacrifices she makes for her children because they belong to their father. Adaku the junior wife steps out of a home in which, the husband, Nnaife, cannot feed the family, but she asserts her liberty by prostituting, though a condemnable act, she sends her girls, who by tradition are meant for the home, to school, while Nnu Ego, indigent and deprived barely trains her girls to trade. She does not end up abandoned and deranged like Nnu Ego, who takes much pride in being the senior wife and a mother of boys, who could go to school and America as well. In this wise it is remarkable that a woman will largely determine how she pulls through mentally, by her reactions to provoking situation and by taking good care of her health. It is however pathetic that the victims are usually financially handicapped because they must have used their resources in childcare. In this twenty-first century no African government runs a social welfare system that provides child benefits, therefore, the woman who wishes to raise a family must be willing to provide her children with basic necessities. Why then would a woman trade her mental health for childbearing and a large family that she cannot cope with?

In the quest for therapy, we may want to agree with Okonjo-Ogunyemi that Akunna's fear made her vulnerable to the voices that she heard or the physical manipulations that she felt. The prescribed therapy of the Bible of speaking to one's situation silently in one's mind or audibly may work for some people, if care is taken that one is speaking sense. The Chinese therapy of talking bitterness is expected to let the victim empty himself/herself of negative emotions rather than succumb to stress. The recent development by some Researchers at the King's College of the University of London of the therapy called "Avatar" seems to have helped many schizophrenics, who engage in

direct conversation with the imagined voice. This therapy is done in computerized sessions. The patients are encouraged to consider the voices as friends. Unfortunately, in Akunna's case they are enemies, who are as real as those perceived by the patients studied at the King's College, London. Hence, it should have helped Akunna to develop self-confidence by neglecting the voices and by concentrating on more positive thoughts. For most humans the sense of imminent death can be debilitating, therefore, not knowing what to do.

In addition, beyond their fictions, writers like Beyala and Emecheta have confessed the importance of their creative writing in their personal adjustment in the face of emotional battering in personal relationships and racial discrimination. The fact that penning one's frustrations and bitterness is therapeutic cannot be overlooked as it has been adopted as a procedure by British psychiatrists, who have incorporated creative writing into their schedule and encourage their patients to write. There is much to gain emotionally from one's effort being acknowledged and a sick mind could find consolation from this.

I should like to acknowledge the immense contribution of medical science to good mental health. However, it should be stated that what obtains with women is also applicable to men. Men experience bouts of depression, they engage in delusion and deluded sexual relations, they are prone to mental illness arising from impaired judgment, impaired relationships, paranoia, a loss of drive and energy, and they succumb to indecisiveness, anxiety or obsessive compulsive disorder and aggression arising from anger and a bloated view of their self-importance. Nevertheless, the proposition made in this article is that social orientation and cultural change are needed in our societies as deduced from the literary analysis and character expositions that have been done.

#### *Conclusion*

This article has been confined largely to the study of the selected female novelists representing different cultural views from across the globe; however similarity has

been established in the patterns of male-female relationship. As it is imperative that medical option should give consistent and empirical explanation of psychiatric and psychological ailments diagnosed in women so also are social and cultural conjectures. Going by the social pictures painted by the women novelists, the causes of mental derangement in females are inherent in religious and social practices that give men unlimited powers over women and that justify the torture and dehumanisation of women, whose existence is only meaningful as they fulfil men's desire. Man and woman can enjoy good mental health as they both fight for equal rights. Personal adjustment to changing social trends is quite mandatory, as that also reflects the good self-image, self-esteem or confidence a person exudes in daily contacts. It seems that a woman who has attained maturity by which she perceives of existence in relation to loving and self-less caring for others and not necessarily within marriage should enjoy good mental health. In this wise a positive stance in the face of the odds is characteristic of well-balanced world-view. Men and women who are conscious of human rights and the demands of the law and constitution of their countries and adhere to them would be considered mentally stable. Hence, the person who respects the fundamental human rights of others is deemed enlightened and civilized.

This is purely a literary study and not a religious commentary, nonetheless, the relevance of faith in God to real present day living cannot be overlooked or underrated as it relates to the workings of the mind, and it is the point that I should like to emphasise. I find the God philosophy of Jesus Christ as espoused by a few billion people (who might not all understand His faith and teaching or are not necessarily practicing believers) around the world relevant in cultivating sound mental attitude. Loving your neighbour as yourself might make you instrumental to his/her mental health, keep your mind and save your head too; put in simple terms it is good to ask 'do I do what I want others to do to me?' I wish to conclude that it is good antidote to irate and irrational tendencies.

Jesus' philosophy of human relation is quite thought provoking:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with thy entire mind. This is the First and Great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Matt. 22:37/39).

Perhaps if everybody becomes mindful of this philosophy and chooses to put into practice its essence, they might not make plans or undertake actions that could destroy others who might be unaware of their antagonistic existence. The social comments of women writers have a wide application for our contemporary societies, from the hearth to the State, because they are first and foremost engagé writings that seek to change people and make the world a better place to live in.

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