

Psychogenesis of Nwibe's Alienation in Chinua Achebe's 'The Madman'

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Abstract : This paper examines the psychogenesis of Nwibe's alienation in Chinua Achebe's 'The Madman.' As a concept in the field of sociology, psychology and philosophy, alienation describes a sense of estrangement or detachment from one's self, society or the environment. The literary representation of psychological disorders has attracted attentions among writers who explore the psychological dimensions that transcend physical and social realms of human existence or experience. Creative writers also provide valuable information, support and guidance in their works, which sometimes facilitate the healing of the mind beyond the realm of aesthetics. Employing the Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Achebe's 'The Madman' portrays alienation with emphases on the impact of societal misconceptions of the protagonist's psychological alteration. The society's perception of madness shapes Nwibe's identity, leading to his objectification for medical experiments based on common judgements. This exploration resonates with broader literary discourse where characters struggle with social expectations, highlighting the relationship between literature, medicine and psychology. This paper argues for a compassionate approach to mental health challenges, advocating increased awareness, education and destigmatisation of individuals battling with psychological disorders. Achebe's narrative is a reminder of the nexus between individual psychology and societal judgment in literature, compelling a re-evaluation of general perceptions and emphasising the crucial role of empathy in fostering a deeper understanding of mental health struggles.

Keywords: Alienation, Identity, Literature, Nwibe, Mental health, Psychogenesis, Psychology, Social expectations

Introduction

From the exploration of human experiences in literature, tracing from Adam and Eve's psychosocial separation to Cain's estrangement as a 'fugitive, the enduring concept of alienation has persisted across time, Generally accepted as a sense of separation, detachment or dissension, alienation finds its roots in the Latin term 'alienare,' meaning 'to estrange.' Scholars across disciplines often employ this concept to examine the sociological, psychological and psychosocial stages of human experience. The sociological stage addresses social situations causing alienation, while the psychological stage focuses on personal behaviours. The psychosocial stage is an interface studying both individual and social behaviours that lead to alienation. As Paul Meadow aptly describes it, alienation is a 'sense of separation from something substantial, a sense of separation that creates concern over that which has been lost' (quoted in Josephine Iwe 45). This aligns with the psychosocial perspective, where psychological estrangement leads to potential social loss. Corroborating this, Abdul Saleem asserts that alienation is the fundamental form of rootlessness, a subject explored in psychological, sociological, literary and philosophical studies (67).

In African Literature, alienation has become a recurrent motif, a lens through which writers explore psychological dimensions that transcend physical and social realms of human existence. This narrative approach allows creative writers to represent the impact of historical and societal changes on individual and collective identities. For instance, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, depicts Okonkwo's alienation, signifying the broader alienation of African communities under colonial rule. The erosion of traditional values and the imposition of foreign ideologies contribute to a sense of loss and disconnection experienced by Okonkwo and the entire Umuofia, and this reflects the fractures within African societies during periods of upheaval. Similarly, Ngugi waThiong'o's *Petals of Blood* portrays shades of economic alienation, exposing the struggles of individuals who are marginalised by unequal economic structures. The characters in the novel battle with the alienating effects of neo-colonialism, economic exploitation and the destruction of their cultural identity. Ngugi's work becomes a commentary on the alienation borne out of economic disparities that continue to shape the African society.

Furthermore, the post-colonial disillusionment occasioned by post-colonial era brings a new dimension to alienation as depicted in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. The protagonist, Tambudzai, wrestles with the alienation stemming from gender roles and cultural expectations. The novel explores how colonial influences intersect with traditional norms which resulted in a sense of alienation for African women in their strive for self-definition and self-actualisation. Also, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* brings out a contemporary exploration of alienation as Ifemelu, the

protagonist, navigates the difficulties of being an African in the diaspora. Her experiences highlight the cultural alienation experienced by those straddling multiple worlds. The exploration of the concept of alienation is also evident in many modern African dramas. Wole Soyinka's play, *Death and the King's Horseman*, dramatises the internal struggles of the protagonist, Elesin, whose tragic fate unfolds against a backdrop of metaphysical alienation and cultural clash. With the play, Soyinka intertwines Yoruba cosmology with colonial influences, hence, depicting a sense of disconnection from spiritual roots.

Literary works, as conduits of societal introspection, sometimes address psychological and mental health issues as in the case of bibliotherapy. This is because as IwabiModahunsi and Emmanuel Omobowale observe, 'literature creates awareness and heals infirmities like medicine' (194). Hence, creative writers provide information, support and guidance in books to facilitate the healing of the mind or body beyond the realm of aesthetics. This therapeutic role of literature has ancient roots as evidenced in the Greek mythology that associated Apollo, the god of music and poetry (art) and healing (medicine). Therefore, the nexus between literature and medicine is longstanding, traced even to the works of Hippocrates, a prominent Greek philosopher, recognised as both a physician and the father of medicine due to his various theoretical contributions in the medical field.

Literature as a subspecialty of the humanities has for long accommodated and interfaced with other fields such as psychology, psychiatry and medicine. This creates a dynamic relationship that captures the attention of writers and critics alike. Literature and psychology, regarded as branches studying the human soul, jointly contribute to the unraveling and explaining of human conditions. While psychology researches human behaviours and their causes, literature depicts human behaviours through fiction (Daniel MengistieYimer 159). Whereas psychology and literature jointly strive to unveil and explain human conditions, their collaboration heightens the understanding of psychological challenges and mental health issues in literary works. This collaborative effort involves creative writers, who may or may not have backgrounds in psychology or medicine, thereby contributing to the exploration of the human psyche and societal wellbeing. For this reason, the literary representation of the psychological or health condition of a society elevates the social relevance of writers, positioning them as, 'the voice of vision of his time,' as Soyinka phrases it (50).

More so, Ochia Ofori emphasises the role of literature in monitoring social events when he says, 'now I think we are in a historical circumstance in which one should expect literature to monitor events as a way of examining the health of the society. It is by such monitoring that you are able to determine what the next direction would or should be. Literature has to follow what is happening in the society in order to be effective in the process of either transformation or conservation of what exists' (quoted in Kenneth Kanu

47-48). In the same vein, Stephen Kekeghe affirms that the redemptive vision of a writer and any good literary work is to reflect the sociological, psychological and the rhetorical dimension of reality (10). This alignment between literature and societal health underscores the link between a writer's job and that of a psychologist or medical practitioner, thereby, echoing Chinua Achebe's assertion that art and society are structurally bound (1).

This paper undertakes an exploration of the psychogenesis of Nwibe's alienation in Achebe's 'The Madman.' Understanding the workings of the human mind necessitates a psychoanalytic literary discourse, considering Freud's revelation that the mind operates at both conscious and unconscious levels (607), hence, what affects the mind affects the whole being and oftentimes, extends to the society. Moreover, Lewis Feur posits that alienation is employed to convey the emotional tone, which accompanies any behaviour in which the person is compelled to act destructively (4); therefore, a socially conscious writer should leave no stone unturned in order to salvage the society from ruin. Emerging from Freud's early school of hypnosis, psychoanalysis as a theory provides a therapeutic lens to comprehend mental health in psychological dimensions. As Peter Berry notes, psychoanalysis serves as a form of therapy aimed at curing mental disorders by investigating the interplay between conscious and unconscious elements of the mind (70). This paper employs psychoanalytic principles of Freud to unravel the psychological causes of Nwibe's alienation in Achebe's narrative, 'The Madman.' Through this exploration, this paper aims to delineate the connection between literature, psychology and societal well-being.

Societal Perception and Nwibe's Psychological Transformation

'The Madman' is the first story in Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War and Other Stories*. Like Achebe's novels, his short stories (which have not really generated much critical attention from literary critics) also offer some extensive artistic treasures that point to the writer's commitment to the art and society. In this story, Achebe portrays instances of mental ill health, which bestows on him the status of a 'psychologist-writer' as he tactically paints a picture of reversal of roles and social status. This role reversal affects the psychological state of his patient-protagonist, Nwibe, which results in his alienation from self and society. This explains that societal expectations and judgements play a role in shaping Nwibe's psychological alteration. Therefore, to point out the psychogenesis of Nwibe's alienation, it is important to understand the various happenings in the story and the relationships that exist, such as the social status of the protagonist, the emotional feeling of the main madman depicted, the social perception of what madness is or the visible and patterned symptoms of madness as perceived by the society. With these, a psychological understanding of the text can be foregrounded.

At the onset of the story, Nwibe is presented as a man of integrity and high social status. The narrator says he 'was rising higher; a man of wealth and integrity. He had just given notice to all the *ozo* men of the town that he proposed to seek admission into their honoured hierarchy in the coming initiation season' (5). These qualities lift him to a focal point in his society where he comes under social surveillance. Therefore, he is expected to consciously and unconsciously guard his personal and interpersonal relationships. This goes in line with the Igbo adage that says that a person who is under watch or used for example is supposed not to misbehave. His society expects so much from a man of his calibre. This is why on the day he goes to the river to bath, out of 'instinctive modesty he turned to face the forest away from the approaches' (7). Therefore, Nwibe's elevated social position invites societal scrutiny and sets the stage for the psychological impact when his role is reversed, and he becomes the subject of social misconception.

It is obvious that the society in the fictive world of the text is the type that highly stigmatises madness and this becomes the driving force behind Nwibe's psychological turmoil. This is seen as the madman watches Nwibe and remembers how he had been mistreated in the past: 'this was the same hefty man who brought three men like him and whipped me out of my hut in the *Afomarket*...this was the same vagabond who descended on me from the lorry in the middle of the highway...the same fellow who set his children to throw stones at me and make remarks about their mother's buttock, not mine' (7-8). With this, it is understood that insanity comes with separation, social and psychological alienation and maltreatment. This has an implication in the life of anyone afflicted with mental illness or had experienced what the society perceived to be madness. Therefore, the madman in the story sees himself as a member of the society who at least expects fair treatment from his society but gets it not. Consequently, the madman in this story experiences disharmony and maladjustment; he is mad and at the same time under social pressures such as the ill-treatments meted out to him daily, and the social denial or deprivation of his human right as a full-fledged member of the human society.

It is evident that what the madman gets from his society drives him into a sense of revenge, which aligns with Sigmund Freud's theory of personality. According to Freud, personality comprises of three major systems: the id, the ego, the superego. These systems, residing within every individual's mind, can sometimes be in conflict with one another. In a mentally healthy person, these systems are harmoniously unified and organised, thereby, facilitating effective interactions with society. Conversely, when these systems are in discord, an individual is considered maladjusted as seen in the madman's vengeful thoughts and actions. Therefore, the mention of revenge implies a connection to the id, which represents primal and instinctual drives in Freud's theory and this highlights the potential conflicts within the madman's psyche, thus, Nwibe becomes his victim; he says to Nwibe, '...I have caught you naked, with your thing dangling about' (8).

Also, the narrative clearly portrays the visible symptoms of mental illness. These symptoms are exhibited both by the madman and Nwibe (the perceived madman) who runs naked into the market place, and this serves as illustrative examples of how societal norms shape the understanding of madness. The similar thematic portrayal of the visible symptoms of madness in Achebe's 'The Madman' (3-4) is also depicted by Dabo in Ken Saro-Wiwa's 'A Family Affair.' Dabo, who had functioned well as a distinguished leader, becomes mad and begins to remove his clothes, walking about naked, singing blissfully and unable to respond to his socio-cultural environment (28). In Achebe's 'The Madman,' Nwibe's role as a noble man in the society is reversed as he exhibits signs of madness such as running around 'stark naked,' shouting and cursing (8-9), and these signs align with the societal assumptions of madness, rather than medical diagnosis. With this, madness could be regarded as whatever the society assumes it to be. This interplay between societal expectations and individual behaviour contributes to Nwibe's psychological disorientation.

Furthermore, Nwibe's emotional, intellectual and social perceptions become perverted by uncontrolled anger, leading to his societal perception as 'mad.' From the story, it is apparent that Nwibe is not mad. He is socially perceived as 'mad' due to his extreme indignation and foolishness, which lead him into psychotic displays. This goes in line with the societal belief that an angry man is a mad man. A psychoanalytic study of Nwibe and his personality reveals that his emotional, intellectual and social perceptions are perverted by uncontrolled anger (Stephen Adebayo Ogunpitan and McNezer Fasehun 123). Now, for a society that is psychologically conditioned into certain patterns and beliefs, any form of aberration from its norms and standard becomes insanity. Being a revered member of the society, Nwibe should not have been unaware of the destructive effect of madness, which consists of deprivation and alienation. However, Nwibe in his anger undermines this social redline. So, the question should be, should the society be blamed for tagging Nwibe a mentally deranged person having seen him manifest the patterned symptoms of insanity?

Illustratively, Nwibe's loss of self-awareness due to anger-induced actions exemplifies how societal expectations can distort an individual's perception. He becomes unconscious of his environment because of his untamed anger and this justifies the disharmony or maladjustment that Sigmund Freud speaks about in his theory of the total personality. His anger blinds him, making him unconscious to sense the arrant disaster his present state could bring to himself and his family. This can be regarded as Nwibe's first alienation; this is so because Nwibe at the beginning becomes mentally disassociated from the norms of his society due to anger; this makes him unconsciously follow the 'clothed madman' to the market place, thereby neglecting himself and his personality, and this underscores the impact of societal judgement on Nwibe's behaviour. When he

cries for help, 'stop the madman...he's got my cloth! Everyone looked at him first in surprise and then less surprise because strange sights are common in a great market. Some of them laughed' (9). This sight alone could be depressive.

In investigating the interaction of the conscious and unconscious elements of the mind, Peter Barry states that the classic method of doing this is to get a (mentally ill) patient to talk freely about his problems in such a way that the repressed fears and conflicts, which are causing the problems are brought into the conscious mind and openly faced, rather than buried in the unconscious (70). However, in Nwibe's case, what he experiences, that is, what he hears people talk about him at the market place becomes contrary to his expectations. To him, the people should at least understand his ordeal, thus, his persistent shouts in defense: 'stop the madman...he's got my cloth!' (9). The disapproving look he gets from passers-by and the actions of his family members put him in a depressive mood that gears him into more alienation. Nwibe faces a psychological disassociation, which is illustrative of the pervasive influence of societal perception on individual actions. The narrative suggests that what Nwibe overhears inhibits his ability to speak freely about his problems, creating a barrier to potential healing of his mental state as outlined by Barry.

Moreover, it is to be identified that what Nwibe dreaded most is what befalls him. This can be explained when at the beginning of the story he finds traces of madness in his junior wife, Udenkwo, when he says, '...if Udenkwo is crazy must everybody else go crazy with her? Is one crazy woman not enough in my compound so early in the day?'(6). So, when he discovers what his actions could be interpreted to be, he cries for help, controlled by the fear of madness, in similar way Okonkwo in *Things for Apart* exhibits terrifying fear of being considered a weak fellow. Bringing into play Freud's 'talk therapy,' which asserts that simply talking about problems, can help alleviate them, the society fails Nwibe; his cry for help and his explanations are neglected by his society. This is Nwibe's second cause of alienation, a social negligence and suppression, which he faces at the market place. After this, he becomes '...deep and tongue-tied' (10). This is in line with Freud's submission that unresolved conflicts and unfulfilled wishes are the motivating factors of psychological disturbance.

Nwibe is seized and forcefully taken to a medicine man against his wish because he is now perceived as a mentally ill patient by the people of Ogbu. He is not given any attention by the first medicine man who after listening to the story of what happened to Nwibe, concludes that his case is beyond what he can handle. All the famous medicine man, 'out of a kind of integrity,' suggests is that, his patient's health defies medical attention; therefore, he says, 'nothing can be done...he is free and yet no power can break his bondage. He is free of men but bonded to a god' (11). Consequently, Nwibe becomes objectified for medical experiment. He is used for experiment by the second village

medicine man whose fame rises, as he is believed to have cured Nwibe (11). But the narrator captures the sore psychosocial state of Nwibe when he says that, 'Nwibe became a quiet, withdrawn man avoiding whenever he could the boisterous side of the life of his people' (11-12). This is a form of psychosocial alienation, which emerges as natural consequences of Nwibe's predicament; he pauses his personal and interpersonal relationship with his people. This explains what Meadow sees as a sense of separation from something substantial, a sense of separation that creates concern over that which has been lost (in Iwe, 45).

It is expected that at the end of the whole scenario, Nwibe's dignity be restored to him. But no, the people of Ogbu hold credence to the saying that once a madman, always a madman, thus, a madman cannot be a noble person in the society of sane people. Nwibe's people totally push him away, a form of social alienation, which could compel Nwibe to act self destructively. This is exemplified when the narrator says, 'two years later, he made a new enquiry about joining the community of titled men in his town. Had they received him, perhaps he might have been restored, but those ozomen, dignified and polite as ever, deftly steered the conversation away to other matters.' (12)

To end it, with the treatment Nwibe receives from his community, he gets lost forever, totally isolating himself from everyone. Breuer and Freud aver that their hysterical patients 'suffer mainly from reminiscences, very often the reminiscences of traumatic events in the past' (58). This is what keeps Nwibe totally withdrawn, a form of psychosocial alienation which springs out of his loss of identity.

The Ozo Men and Institutional Rejection: The Reinforcing of Nwibe's Alienation

In the story, the role played by the esteemed ozo men becomes pivotal in understanding the layers of Nwibe's psychological struggles. The narrative foregrounds Nwibe as a man of high social standing, aspiring to join the revered ranks of ozo men. This would elevate him to a focal point in his community, thus, 'he had just given notice to all the ozo men of the town that he proposed to seek admission into their honoured hierarchy in the coming initiation season' (5). This initial aspiration sets the stage for his psychological transformation as the story unfolds. However, the reversal of roles and societal stigma surrounding madness takes a toll on Nwibe's ambition. Despite being cured by a doctor as it were, his attempt to align himself with the ozo men is met with crude rejection. The narrator says that two years later, anticipating the upcoming initiation season, Nwibe inquires again about joining the community of titled men in his town. However, the ozo men, maintaining their dignified and polite demeanor, skillfully redirect the conversation to other matters, avoiding any discussion about Nwibe's potential admission (12). This is an institutional denial which becomes a significant reinforcement of the societal belief that once labeled as a madman, one remains so forever. The ozo men's rejection of Nwibe

becomes a critical juncture, which intensifies his psychological alienation and portrays the broader societal resistance of altering preconceived notions about mental ill health.

More so, the rejection by the ozo men becomes emblematic of the broader societal attitude towards mental health challenges and crystalises the belief that a person previously considered mad cannot be deemed worthy of noble status. This institutional rejection not only deprives Nwibe of the opportunity for social advancement but also deepens the psychological alienation he experiences. The narrative suggests that the rejection by the ozo men is a form of institutional endorsement of the prevailing misperception, contributing to the complex layers of Nwibe's psychological struggle. Furthermore, Nwibe's persistent desire to be initiated by the local hierarchy, despite the inevitable rejection, adds a layer to his psychological resilience. The narrative implies that even in the face of institutional alienation, Nwibe clings to the remnants of his former self, driven by the determination that transcends a societal judgement (12). This therefore, highlights the internal conflict between his innate resilience and the external forces perpetuating his alienation. The imagery of Nwibe reaching out to the ozo men for acceptance, knowing the inevitable outcome, foregrounds the psychological resilience exhibited in the face of societal misunderstanding. Moreover, the rejection by the ozo men extends beyond loss of social advancement. It signifies the erosion of Nwibe's agency within his community. The psychological weight of this rejection on him, contributes to a sense of powerlessness, which amplifies the alienation he experiences. Nwibe, once a respected figure, now finds himself marginalised not only by the misinformed perception of the masses but also by the very institutions that should uphold fairness and justice. This becomes a critical component of the psychogenesis of Nwibe's alienation, portraying the far-reaching consequences of institutional rejection on individual identity.

Conclusion

Employing the Freudian psychoanalysis in the analysis of Achebe's 'The Madman,' the workings of Nwibe's mind and the psychological roots of his alienation are exposed. The peripeteia he experiences as a nobleman in society is fueled by his uncontrolled anger. This critical turning point highlights the relationship between individual psychology and societal perception. Therefore, Nwibe's journey into madness is not merely a descent into mental instability; it is a manifestation of social expectations and the consequences of ill-managed anger. The society's perception of him as a madman leads to his objectification for medical experiments, reflecting not only a misunderstanding of his true mental state but also the uncertainty prevalent in the traditional medical sector. This implies that Achebe uses this scenario of Nwibe's psychological state to lay bare the blurred lines between societal judgement and medical diagnosis in a traditional setting. Furthermore, the dual form of alienation portrayed— from Nwibe to his society and vice versa—

emphasises the disconnection between an individual and the community. Nwibe, once a respected figure, becomes an alienated patient-protagonist, and subjected to negative societal perceptions. Simultaneously, the society, driven by preconceived unverifiable notions, alienates Nwibe to the point where he is entirely lost to his community. With this, Achebe's narrative invites the reader to empathise with Nwibe's struggle while casting a critical eye on the societal forces that contribute to his isolation irrespective of his flaws.

Reflecting on Nwibe's psychological journey, within the context of the traditional society, it becomes evident that a compassionate and informed communal approach to mental health issues is crucial. The uncertainty depicted in the traditional healing sector highlights the need for more accurate diagnoses and comprehensive mental health care rooted in cultural practices. Recommendations for increased awareness, education and destigmatisation emerge organically from Nwibe's story. By fostering a community that values mental health within the framework of traditional healing practices and dismantling stereotypes, will pave the way for a supportive environment where individuals like Nwibe are not defined solely by societal perceptions. Therefore, Achebe's portrayal of Nwibe's alienation in 'The Madman' serves as a reminder of the relationship between individual psychology and societal judgement. The call for compassion, understanding and a more informed culturally sensitive approach to mental health issues becomes imperative in reshaping the narrative surrounding alienation and fostering a community that embraces the density of the human mind with empathy and openness.

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