

Instinct of Murder in Oinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, The Serial Killer*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to understand how Freud expresses the traumatic and unconsciousness in character of Ayoola and how it also led to the serial killing of her boyfriends. This study is an exploration of Braithwaite's narration of moral choices and change. Korede is seen as an equal victim of Ayoola's acts, life style and behavioural pattern. Ayoola, a typical example of *Gen-Z* generation is an instagram influencer who spends considerable amount of time with the ring light on the social media, she is a serial killer who kills at whim. The paper also explores the author's expertise in storytelling and weaving by portraying the reader's vignettes. The psychoanalytic theory is adopted with the view of understanding actions that lead to the nature of killing of Ayoola's victims in the novel. The id represents the most primitive part of the personality, operating entirely within the unconscious and driven by the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification of desires without concern for consequences. The methodological approach adopted is textual analysis and interpretation of the novel using Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's theories of sexuality. The paper concludes that, the behavioural pattern of the major characters; Korede and Ayoola are responses influenced by unconscious desires, unresolved conflicts and traumatic experiences rooted in psychosexual development. The interplay between the unconscious mind, sexuality, and the instinct of murder sheds light on the intricate psychological makeup of the sisters, offering a framework to understand their behaviors in the novel under study.

Key Words: Instinct, Murder, Unconscious, Sexuality and Repressed emotions.

Introduction

Modern African fiction written by women indicates a shift in terms of relegation of power and authority. This is because most of the literary novels in the past indicate that the men have been in the forefront given the key roles to play as head either as warriors or leaders. The women writers of Africa are the other voice, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the field of writing. The number of women writing in Africa has always been small in size compare to the men. Also in contemporary works over the years, women are portrayed as peripheral and marginalized characters. Moreover, female characters were usually portrayed with typical social roles, sex role and gender roles primarily as obedient wives and dutiful mothers. They were oppressed for years and were denied the right to express themselves and to engage in original writing, under the pretext that they were weak and incapable of contributing anything to literature.

Many women poets, including young women still at the beginning of their literary careers, have produced texts of considerable originality through which they were able to present a reliable picture of many of the injustices to which women are exposed to in their society. This indicates that women did not enjoy comparable education opportunity and at someplace not given the privilege to take decision on their own due to the stereotype system in Africa. (Brown 5). In the late 20th Century, female authorship comes to the fore with exceptional authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, Lola Shoneyin and Oyinkan Braithwaite among others to show that women aside from domestic role, she also has a role to play in literary works of arts and also contribute to the society at large.

Africa has a rich tapestry of female writers who've delved into themes surrounding patriarchy. Writers like Buchi

Emecheta from Nigeria, Sofi Atta, Tsitsi Dangarembga from Zimbabwe, and Nawal El Saadawi from Egypt are renowned for exploring patriarchy's impact on society, women's experiences, and the struggle for equality. Their works often depict the complexities and challenges faced by women within patriarchal systems in African societies, offering insightful perspectives and narratives. Contemporary female writers now give the women superior power especially in their literal works. Oyinkan Braithwaite's, Asabe Kabir, Adiche and many others.

In the vast expanse of human psychology, the complex threads of sexuality and the instinct of murder texture a compelling narrative of human behavior. The legacy of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, stemming from works like "The Interpretation of Dreams" and "Three Essay on the Theory of Sexuality", has laid the foundation for delving into the complexities of the human mind, unveiling the hidden desire, impulse, and conflict. At the heart of Freud's conceptual framework lies the id an entity residing in the deepest realms of the unconscious, propelled by instinctual impulses and the relentless pursuit of pleasure. This primal force not only shapes our understanding of human sexuality, reaching beyond the confines of mere physical acts, but also intersects with the disturbing undercurrents of the instinct of murder the darkest manifestation of aggression and destructive impulses within the human psyche. His perspective on early trauma involves examining the complex interplay between childhood experiences, sexuality, and aggressive instinct.

Freud believes that our formative years and the development of our sexual and aggressive drives profoundly shape our personalities, influencing how we navigate relationships and our understanding of the world. By exploring the connections between these primal instincts and the impact

of early traumatic events, we gain insights into how they might shape an individual's psychological landscape (Charles 35).

Conceptual Framework

The subject "sexuality" is a complex and multifaceted topic that needs to be thoroughly discussed especially in the area of literature using psychoanalytic scholars who have discussed the subject matter extensively. For us to begin with, we must understand what sex is before delving into the term "sexuality", which is our area of concentration. Sex, according Michael (23) refers to whether or not a person is male or female, whether a person has a penis or vagina. Sex, in other words is also commonly used as an abbreviation to refer to sexual intercourse.

Sexuality, as opine by Diane et al (59), refers to the total expression of who you are as human being, your femaleness or your maleness. Our sexuality begins at birth and ends at death. Everyone is a sexual being. Your sexuality is an interplay among body image, gender identity, gender role, sexual orientation, eroticism, genitals, intimacy, relationships, and love and affection. How people express their sexuality is influenced by their families, culture, society, faith and beliefs. Shija (103) asserts that Psychoanalysis is therefore a form of literary criticism that uses the techniques of psychoanalysis to interpret works of literature. This practice is based upon specific theories of how the mind, the instincts and sexuality develop and function in the life of an individual from the cradle to the grave.

Rubin (52) asserts that the policing of people's sexuality is likely to produce various forms of oppression that are considered social ills, like sexism and racism. Sexuality deserves special and not marginal attention. She states that sex is completely a natural thing and independent social and

historical institutions. Society also creates the meaning individuals attach to sex including what is thought as natural or unnatural.

Like gender, sexuality is political. It is organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities. While punishing and suppressing others like the capitalist organization of labour and its distribution of rewards and powers, the modern sexual system has been the object of political struggle since it emerged and as it evolved. But if the disputes between labour and capital are mystified, sexual conflicts are completely camouflaged (Rubin 171).

These theories of sexuality were developed by both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan and others. Freud believes that the unconscious houses humanity's two basic instincts: eros, or the sexual instinct and still later in life, kissing. Ironically, sexuality emanates from childhoods especially when the child passes out stool through the anus which becomes the object of pleasure and simultaneously, realise that they are independent persons who are separate from their mothers.

According to Lacan (127), he asserts that what we are is biologically determined, but our gender or our sexuality is culturally created. Society decrees, for example, that a little boy should play with cars and a little girl with dolls. Both sexes come to understand their own sexuality by observing what they are not and what they are. This also affect their rational and irrational part of them. This irrational part of our psyche, the unconscious receives and stores our hidden desires, ambitions, fears, passions and irrational thoughts.

Freud in his three essays on the theory of sexuality he advances his theory especially as regards to childhood. His book covers three main areas he identifies as sexual perversions, childhood sexuality and puberty. He, however, elaborates that each gender is given separate power in the society using the symbolic order of illustration where a boy knows that he is a boy because he has a penis while a girl knows that she is a girl because she has a virgina.

Michael (56) defines sexuality as sexual difference between gender and how an individual perceives the society he lives in, irrespective of his gender. According to him, sexuality goes beyond the physical aspects of our body; it covers our sexual desires, sexual identity, emotional and physical sexual health. It also impacts our relationships with our own bodies as well as our relationships with other people. This involves our thoughts, desires and experiences. Our understanding of sexuality is based on culture; religion, family and media.

The instinct of murder in Ayoola emerge as a result of unresolved conflicts during her psychosexual development particularly the phallic stage, might have intensified her aggressive instincts. Though, Freudian theory suggests that individuals might have unconscious desires or emotions that are not fully aware of. Ayoola's actions of murder could be as a repressed emotions and unresolved conflicts or desires linked to her past experience surfacing in a manner through aggressive behavior. The dogmatic approach of the father towards the mother could be link to her repressed behavior.

Korede One day he was towering over me, spitting pure hell, he reached for his cane and then he...slumped, hitting his head against the glass coffee table as he fell to the floor. His blood was brighter than the dark colour we saw on TV. I got up warily and Ayoola came out

from behind the couch, where she'd been taking cover. We stood over him. For the first time, we were taller. We watched the life seep out of him. Eventually, I woke my mother up from her Ambien induced sleep and told her it was over (80).

Also in the subsequent chapter of the book we could trace her experience which was as a result of harsh treatment to the mother (107). On this account, Ayoola stores all the events in her mind and as she grows up, she displaces it to any man that she falls in love with having in mind that all men are the same. She feels the men are only after her beauty and not real love.

According to Freud, unconscious desires or repressed emotions could manifest in behavior without the individual fully understanding their motivations. Ayoola's repeated pattern of entering relationships that end tragically might be indicative of unconscious desires or unresolved emotions tied to her psychosexual development. The text hints at past traumatic experiences within the family, which could have significantly impacted Ayoola's psychological landscape.

Conscious and unconsciousness

Man naturally has an initial history where he stores his repressed pains and joy especially in the unconscious (cataleptic) mind which later reflect on his character either it turns out to be positive or negative as the case may be (Charles 128). Freud in his dynamic model, asserts that our minds are a dichotomy consisting of the conscious (the rational) and the unconscious (the irrational). According to him, the conscious perceives and records external reality and is the reasoning part of the mind. Every individual is not whole but rather fragmented and such fragmentation could be as a result of trauma which could be caused by any event in the society.

Ayoola and Korede's early experience in school as young as they were caused pains to their lives. However, such pains or experiences have been stored and suppressed in their unconscious mind and the only way they can displace their anger is on the men counterpart.

Korede: Secondary school can be cruel. The boys would write lists of those who had a figure eight like a Coca-Cola bottle and those who had figure one like stick. I told myself that boys were immature and dumb. Two years in, I was hardened and ready to protect my sister, who I was sure would receive the same treatment that I had. May be hers would be even worse. She would come to me each day weeping and I would wrap my arms around her to soothe her to. It would be us against the world (55-56).

The experience they both had from school at the tender age which was stored in the unconscious, grows to maturity in the adolescent stage and manifested in the act of destruction which led to the serial killing of men as we can see in the character of Ayoola.

Furthermore, Freud believes that sexuality does have its roots in childhood. He suggests that the way individuals develop and express their sexuality as adults is influenced by experiences, conflicts, and resolutions during childhood stages. The interactions and conflicts at each stage, such as the oral, anal, and phallic phases, play a role in shaping a person's attitudes, desires, and behaviours related to sexuality later in life. Freud believed that childhood experiences significantly impacted the formation of an individual's adult sexual identity (Foucault 98).

Oyinkan Braithwaite in her text understudy might have utilized Freudian theory to explore characters' motivations

related to psychoanalysis. By this, she could involve examining characters' behaviours, motivations or conflicts through a Freudian lens, such as exploring unconscious desires, unresolved childhood issues, or complex relationships. For instance, the text might delve into characters' relationships, conflicts, or their development in a way that reflect Freud's theories on the unconscious mind, defense mechanisms or psychosexual development. However, Freud went into details as in how child development can cause his later action especially the stages of development which is the transition of every individual. He moves further to explain the stages as follows: The oral stage from (0-1 year) pleasure centers on the mouth. Activities such as sucking, biting and tasting are vital for gratification. Unresolved conflicts during this phase, such as issues with feeding or weaning, might lead to oral fixation example is smoking and overeating. The next stage is from the age of 1-3 years: pleasure shifts to bowel and bladder control; toilet training becomes crucial. Also the Phallic Stage (3-6 years), focus moves to the genitals. Freud introduced the Oedipus and Electra complexes during this phase. Boys experience the Oedipus complex, desiring their mothers and feeling rivalry with their fathers, while girls experience the Electra complex, desiring their fathers and feeling rivalry with their mothers.

In addition, the next is the Latency Stage (6-puberty): Sexual desires are repressed, and children focus on social and cognitive development. By this, this phase is characterized by the consolidation of earlier learning. Freud believes that unresolved conflicts or fixations at any of these stages could lead to psychological issues later in life. He proposes that successful navigation through these stages is crucial for healthy personality development, and disruptions or traumas during these phases could manifest in various psychological or

behavioral problems. At this stage, he asserts that, it is a critical phase as it lays the groundwork for the development of a child's gender identity, social understanding, and the internalization of societal norms and values through the resolution of these conflicts and desires.

In *My Sister The Serial Killer*, Ayoola and Korede's characters could also be understood through Freud's stages. Ayoola might represent the phallic stage. Her beauty, charm, and alluring nature could symbolize her power over men, paralleling Freud's idea of the phallic stage where a child's focus is on their genitalia which is also where their gender is differentiated and the development of attraction and charm. Korede, in contrast, could be associated with the latency stage. This stage, occurring roughly between age 3-6yrs to puberty, is characterized by the suppression of sexual impulses and the focus on other activities. Korede's meticulous and controlled nature to lean up after Ayoola's murder might reflect a suppression of personal desires or impulses for the sake of maintaining order and control, similar to the latency stage where sexual urges are suppressed. More so, regarding murder or instinct of murder, Freud's theory of the death instinct could be applied to Ayoola's behavior. Her repetitive pattern of killing her boyfriends could potentially be analysed as an expression of an unconscious, and aggressive instinct within her. Instinct of murder in the character of Ayoola has been what has been suppressed from her early age which she could not express it at that point due to fear but as she grows up. Although according to (Shija 102) he assert that there are two fundamental ideas at work as opined by Freud when individuals relate to the society they live in; these are the pleasure and the reality principle. He believes that man is inherently a fun-seeking creature who indulges in just anything that gives him pleasure particularly sexuality. He believes that

sexual desires are instinctual and that they come to us right as infants and are nurtured as we grow into adulthood. The pleasure principle tells us to do whatever needs to be done to express ourselves sexually or seek other pleasurable fulfillments. In the reality principle, the society checks our excesses in this regard through ethics, religion, education, the law and civilization generally.

A brief overview of Oyinkan Braithwaite *My Sister the Serial Killer*

My Sister the Serial Killer is essentially a character study of its narrator, Korede, a Nigerian woman attempting to simultaneously protect her sister, and protect the world from the sister. The sibling's complicated relationship gradually unfolds over the course of the novel in flashbacks, and a sinister family history is alluded to in a piece of deft symbolism. Korede notes that there is a painting in her home that her father commissions depicting their house, and she recalls:

As a child I would go stand before it and wish myself inside. I imagined that our alternates were living within its watercolor walls. I dreamt that laughter and love lay beyond the green lawn, inside the white columns and the heavy oak door (67).

Ayoola the beautiful younger sister has just killed for the third time, each victim a romantic partner. As the elder sister, Korede feels she is responsible for taking care of Ayoola, and thus keeps her secrets and helps dispose of the bodies. However, when Ayoola sets her sights on Tade, a handsome doctor at the hospital where Korede works, Korede is thrown into a spiral of confused loyalties. Not only is Tade a great doctor and a good person, Korede has feelings for him as

well. How can she dissuade Tade from dating Ayoola without giving away Ayoola's secret? How can she convince her selfish, spoiled sister to find a new boyfriend? The tension escalates as Ayoola and Tade grow closer and Korede tactics continually fall to derail the inevitable collision.

My Sister the Serial killer is also about sibling rivalry between Korede and Ayoola. As the older sister constantly cleaning up her younger, prettier sister's (literal) messes, Korede feels like one of the most aggrieved characters in all of literature. Her feelings of inferiority are often played for comedic effect, as when she declares, 'Ayoola looks like a Bratz doll and I resemble a voodoo figurine' but there is a profound sadness and vulnerability at Korede's core that is highlighted just often enough to be deeply affecting. One of these moments occurs as Korede remembers being teased by boys in high school. Korede's loyalty and morality are put to the ultimate test. The narrators prove in her story line the psychological intrigue with just enough dark humor to break the tension. Ayoola's repetitive pattern of killing her boyfriends might stem from her id, where immediate desires, impulses, or even unresolved psychological conflicts reside in her unconscious mind. Her actions might be driven by an unconscious compulsion or impulse without much conscious consideration of the consequences. Additionally, the unconscious, according to Freud, holds repressed memories, desires, and unresolved conflicts. Ayoola's behavior could stem from repressed emotions, traumas, or unresolved issues from her past that manifest in her seemingly impulsive and repetitive actions, her relationships and subsequent actions might serve as a way for the unconscious to express or resolve these hidden conflicts. Korede's role in covering up Ayoola's actions. Her loyalty and protective nature towards her sister might be driven by unconscious motivations, such as

unresolved family dynamics, guilt or even a form of the Electra complex (in Freudian terms, a daughter's unconscious desire for her father and rivalry with her mother), influencing her actions without her full conscious awareness. Exploring Ayoola's actions and Korede's response through Freud's concepts of the unconscious and the id can provide insight into the deeper motivations, conflicts, and psychological underpinnings that drive their behaviours in the novel under study.

Theoretical Framework

Sigmund Freud provide the foundation for psychoanalysis he believes the root of every problems was psychological not physical. He believed his patience had suppressed incestuous desires that they had unconsciously refused to confront. He came up with three models of the human psyche which became the changing bases of his psychoanalytic theory. Freud dynamic mode asserting that our minds consist of the conscious and the unconscious. In addition, he asserts that the passage into manhood or womanhood may be successful, every adult has stored many painful memories or repressed sexual desires, anger, rage, and guilt in his or her unconscious. Because the conscious and the unconscious are part of the same psych, the unconscious with its hidden desires and repressed wishes continues to affect the conscious in the form of inferiority feelings, guilt, irrational thoughts and feelings, and dreams and nightmares. The psyche may create window to the id in a variety of ways through the process of displacement.

Freud, explores human sexuality through his theory of psychosexual development. He proposes that individuals go through various stages of development, where their libido (sexual energy) is focused on different erogenous zones. As for

the instinct of murder, Freud discussed aggressive and destructive tendencies as part of the human psyche. He believed that these instincts, often termed as the death drive or Thanatos, exist alongside the life preserving instincts, Eros. Also psychosexual development posits that individuals progress through stages, each marked by the dominant erogenous zone where their libido is focused. The stages are oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital. According to Freud, unresolved conflicts or experiences during these stages could influence an individual's adult personality and behavior, including their attitudes towards sexuality. For instance, issues unresolved during the phallic stage, such as the Oedipus and Electra complexes, might influence a person's attitudes and behaviours regarding relationships and sexuality later in life.

Sexuality and the Instinct of Murder

Lacan (135) asserts that our sexuality is culturally created by the society and this gives the individual the ability to take responsibility of his action either consciously or unconsciously. Murder doesn't work in a vacuum rather it involves an actor who psychologically, emotionally is involved in the act of the activity. The individual might be nursing the ill treatment and also suppress the pain for some duration of time before committing the act.

Korede: on their one-month anniversary, she stabbed him in the bathroom of his apartment. She didn't mean to, of course. But why was she carrying a knife? (6).

Ayoola might be nursing the act of murder and as such, such act is instigated by the anger she has over men especially her early trauma where the father maltreats her mum. Ever since then,

she fails that men only love her because of her beauty (69).

The instinct of murder also can be seen from the psychological perspective which has its origin from the unconscious part of man. Freud asserts that the unconscious part of our mind is govern by the pleasure principle and stores the painful part of us which is display in the consciousness. Although the unconscious part of us is regulated by the id. The id which is the inner part of us operates on impulse wanting immediate satisfaction for all its instinctual desire. In the case of nature of murder, a drive whose aim is the reduction of psychical tension to the lowest possible point, that is, death. It is first directed inward as a self-destructive tendency and is later turned outward in the form of the aggressive instinct. According to him he believes that people typically channel this death drive outward, which manifests as aggression toward others. Although, people also can direct this drive inward, however, which can result in self-harm or suicide.

Empirically, Ouled did a Patriarchal study of *My sister the serial killer* and opine that women in a patriarchy society ought to have been given power to rule in the men's world as well and also he move further to look at the trauma affecting the women if maginalise or alienated. Although in this paper, the traumatic and the unconsciousness of the characters matters and also the writer went through the mind of her character to see how the character have repressed certain pains right from childhood to manifest in the adulthood. For her character Ayoola, she feels a woman is not safe under the care of a man and so the desire of intimacy with the other sex is not guarantee. Therefore, Ayoola having suppressed the pains, fear and trauma and her early experience, she was left with no other option than to nurse the feeling of destroying any man that comes her way.

Dannille did a study on Stabbing Patriarchy and Unreliable Memories in *My Sister the Serial Killer* looking at patriarchy, memory and sexuality in the novel. Korede stood up to the patriarchal violence to shield Ayoola from the wrath of the dubious men. Also in novel Ayoola uses her the power of her beauty to deal with the men putting aside the cultural norms that gives men the power to exercise their position as the head and hero.

Conclusion

Both Ayoola and Korede exhibit behaviors and responses influenced by unconscious desires, unresolved conflicts, and potentially traumatic experiences rooted in their past. Ayoola's pattern of murder and Korede's protective instincts might be manifestations of unresolved conflicts or traumas buried in their unconscious minds, shaping their actions without full conscious awareness.

Freud's theories regarding the psychosexual stages illuminate potential influences on the sisters' relationships and behaviours. The phallic stage, in particular, might have influenced their understanding of relationships, desires, and rivalry, contributing to their interactions and actions in the present. However, Ayoola's instinct of murder could be viewed as a distorted expression of unresolved conflicts, intensified aggressive instincts or repressed emotions rooted in her psychosexual development and traumatic experiences. Korede's protective nature might also be linked to unconscious desires or conflicts related to their familial dynamics and past experiences, influencing her actions regarding Ayoola's actions. The interplay between the unconscious mind, sexuality, and the instinct of murder sheds light on the intricate psychological makeup of the sisters, offering a framework to understand their behaviors in the novel under study.

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