

The Unconscious and Socio-Political Implications on Contemporary African States: Satiric Reflections from Two African Plays

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ABSTRACT

Some playwrights have shown affection to the use of the unconscious in their plays throughout the ages to explicate the phenomenon and nature of collective unconsciousness in dramatic literature in order to show the interface between human psyches and realities. However, existing critical studies on the unconscious and dramas have focused on the investigation of characters' unconscious motives and conflicts, sometimes ignoring the employment of the unconscious as a technique for satiric reflections. This paper, therefore, examines the unconscious as a technique for interrogating the characters' psychic contexts in order to highlight their predicaments and the attendant socio-political imbroglios in their society. The study adopts Sigmund Freud's model of psychoanalysis as the theoretical framework which allows for the investigation into characters' psyches and behaviours and appraisal of the link between the characters' motives and the realities in their society. Two African plays were purposively selected: *No Pennies for Mama* and *Tuti*, they are subjected to critical textual analysis. It is discovered that the patterns of the unconscious that provide the psychic context for the plays are dream and hallucination. They serve as signifiers of the characters' traumas, which are precipitated by their naïve behaviours on the one hand and revelations of their family and societal realities on the other. Dream and hallucination have been used not only as mere patterns of the unconscious but also as a technique to engage satiric reflections and realities.

Keywords: Cultural Dream, Hallucination, The unconscious, Satire, Socio-political realities

INTRODUCTION

The literary world contains countless references to the unconscious, it pays special attention to unconscious states of human minds in general. Subtle differences exist in the treatment of the unconscious and their various patterns in dramatic literature from author to author and society to society. Literary works not only show a continuing fascination with collective unconsciousness and their prototypes like dream, hallucination, fantasies, etc. throughout the ages, but also display shifts in people's belief about the nature and process of the patterns of the unconscious. This study shall dwell on two patterns of the unconscious which are dream and hallucination.

Dreams are successions of images, ideas, emotions and sensations that occur involuntarily in the mind during stages of sleep (Grunebaum, 2000). In the same vein, Adeboye (2010) defines

dreams as a series of mental images and emotions occurring during sleep that are likely to dictate the dreamer's life. From Grunebaum's and Adeboye's views, dreams appear to be caused by external powers of the supernatural since they occur when man is asleep and unconscious.

Sigmund Freud writes extensively about dream theories and interpretations. He explains dreams as manifestations of deepest desires and anxieties. He sees dreams as symbolic creations in the minds of the dreamers. He (Freud) calls dreams "royal road to the unconscious" (1949,44). This shows that the context of dreams reflects dreamers unconscious mind. Jung expands on Freud's idea, he describes dreams as messages to the dreamer and argues that dreamers should pay attention for their own good. He believes that dreams present the dreamers with symbolic creations and revelations that can uncover and help resolve

The Unconscious and Socio-Political Implications on Contemporary African States: Satiric Reflections from Two African Plays

emotional, cultural or religious problems and fears (1964,21). Barret (2007) corroborates the subjective approach of Jung to dream as she believes dream serve some adaptive functions for survival. She suggests that dreams serve the purpose of allowing the rehearsal of threatening scenarios in order to better prepare an individual for real-life threats. Weldhorn (1988) focuses on the supernatural and phenomenal nature of dream and sleep and the shifts in beliefs about their natures in Western tradition

Hallucination is a typical example of unconscious state of the mind when a person sees or hears things that are not physically seen or heard by others around him (Sharf, 2008). Ffytche (2012) sees hallucination as illusory symbolic creation or perception in human psyche. Thompson (2006) further classifies hallucination into visual and auditory hallucinations. In addition to Thompson's classification is command hallucination, Beck-Sander, Birchwood and Chadwick (1997) describe command hallucination as a tool of defence of a crime and as a proclamation of victory. According to them, it is essentially a voice one hears and it tells one what to do.

The existing scholarly engagements on the use of the unconscious in dramatic literature have focused extensively on variety of human behavioural orientations that refer to the idea that feelings and drives unconsciously influence characters' behavior more than the contextual content (Leiper & Maltby, 2004 and Robbins, 1989). Gabbard (2004) sees the involvement of the unconscious as an attempt to provide psychotherapy to both physical and psychological conflicts of the characters and the attendant societal predicaments. However, this study rethinks these positions and argues that the existing critical studies tend towards the phenomenal and conceptual colourations of the unconscious in literary appraisals with little or no consideration for the use of the unconscious as a device for satiric reflections to sift out socio-political failings in human society. This paper, therefore, examines some patterns of the unconscious as a technique for unfolding socio-political realities in contemporary African states.

Two African plays by Ahmed Yerima are purposively selected: *No Pennies for Mama* and *Tuti*. The analysis of the patterns of the unconscious to interrogate socio-political realities and failings in the primary texts will be influenced by psychoanalysis particularly

Sigmund Freud's dream theory as theoretical framework, the essence of psychoanalysis is to privilege the psychic context of the primary texts above their contents, it is also to investigate the characters' motives and the collective archetypes which manifest in form of dream and hallucination. The texts will be subjected to critical textual analysis in both content and form while the research instrument shall be the library, both the conventional and the internet. Contextually, in the selected primary texts, the playwright dwells on two independent African state. *No Pennies for Mama* has its setting in Ghanaian society while *Tuti* has Nigerian society as its locale.

No Pennies for Mama comments on the suffering masses that are deprived of basic amenities because of the unscrupulous politicians in Ghana who are indifferent to their plight. It reveals the unpalatable friendship or relationship between the masses and the political leaders, which only occurs when the political leaders are seeking their (masses) votes when elections are at hand. Yerima, through *No Pennies for Mama*, exposes how the political leaders use the masses' money and resources from tax payers to lobotomise the tax payers (masses) because of high level of poverty that has ravaged the masses brutally. On the other hand, the play reveals the density of the ignorance on the part of the masses. The masses are ignorant of their political and fundamental rights. They praise the hypocritical and infinitesimal efforts of the political leaders which are strategically meant to cajole and deceive them. Yerima ridicules the political naivety of the masses and lambasts the elected leaders whose conscience has been marred and blurred by corruption and hypocrisy.

As a play that re-enacts the socio-political happenings in the society, it underscores the need why literary engagements should identify with the masses in a way that their piteous plight can be changed for a better livelihood. This can only be achieved, as we have in this play, through poignant attacks on the failures and mistakes of the political class and through public sensitisation and enlightenment of the masses so that they can wake up from their socio-political slumber. Again, Yerima pitches his tent with the masses and, structurally, he explores the hilarity and invective associated with Horatian and Juvenalian satires. Though he artistically portrays highly humorous scenes but his emphasis, structurally, is on pitiable characters

The Unconscious and Socio-Political Implications on Contemporary African States: Satiric Reflections from Two African Plays

that are paupers and live in squalors. Yet, they succumb to the whims and caprices of the political leaders ignorantly. The play serves as a prompter for the masses to fight the forces and powers that have impoverished them.

The synopsis of the plot reveals Katuma who lives in a slum, a mother of six children who were notorious and wayward. In this unpleasant condition she pleads on behalf of the children not to be reprimanded and punished by unwholesomely resigning to fate. Surprisingly, Katuma is also a mother of a Local Government Chairman and a senator. Her son, the chairman, denies her financial assistance because she feels the notorious children will benefit from the money. This is where the title emerges, "No pennies for Mama". Her children, who are members of the political class, are indifferent to her social state and poverty but they are concerned with petty projects that are white elephants to cajole the people of their constituencies because elections are at hand. They (political leaders) are doling out money in cash to their loyalists whereas the members of their family like Katuma, her children, and neighbours are walloping in abject penury. When Katuma is about to die of starvation when her unidentified or abandoned son, Fibula, who is not a politician appears from a protracted search for his mother and he rescues her from ignominious condition of living and this puts an end to her dolorous existence.

Again, our focus is on the stylistic appraisal of the play with copious reference to the psychoanalytic elements the playwright employs to artistically penetrate the society. The penetration is by linking the social realities of the Nigerian political class with the masses in a way to ameliorate the ills in the society. The playwright, as it has been observed previously, also presents the psychic context of the characters to develop the plot structure, to shape the character, to develop their characterisation and to peep into the social and political upheavals in the society. Notably, the author makes use of dream with special leaning on hallucination.

The protagonist, Katuma, after her physical and social suffering (as a result of thorough beating she received from her younger children including the cursed twins) becomes sapped and dissipated. Surprisingly, she pretends to be undisturbed and pleads that the notorious and cursed children should not be scolded and

punished by their elder brother, Magai, the political leader. This infuriates Magai and he decides that there will not be a penny for her again. (13). It is with this psychological trauma that Katuma sleeps and she has a dream:

I had a dream. I saw Fibula. I saw him. He had a beard. No taller than his father. My skin. No smiles for Mama. I was naked, cold and dying. And they were pulling down this house. The only property I have left on earth. Stone by stone. I stood helpless, screaming, crying, shouting for help. But Magai....just looked through me...my cursed twins Sidila and Sidira were laughing counting money....and Fibula my last hope turned his back on me. (*sobs*) This broke my heart to a thousand pieces. On my knees, I crawled to him and pulled his black jacket. He did not turn. Instead in a cold stern voice he asked why I abandoned him. Why I hated him so much? To all two questions, I had no answer. Not a word. He accused me of giving him away as a child so that I could have a good time. Me? A good time? I lived through hell without him! My conscience heavier than the Kilimanjaro. Packing the dung of Satan himself. If only he knew....if only Fibula knew....if only he saw how people took me like an orange, sucked all my juicy part and threw me into sewage of life. (46)

The physical trauma and distresses Katuma undergoes metamorphosed into symbolic creations as dream in her sleep. Katuma's dream is generated internally rather than by external powers of the supernatural. It represents the waking thoughts and concerns of her world. Yerima artistically portrays the traumatic psyche of Katuma to achieve three remarkable things in the play. Firstly, it reveals the callous and nonchalant attitudes of the political class to the members of their family, like mother, brother and sister, to the members of their constituency and the masses generally. In this dream, Magai, the son of Katuma and the chairman of a Local Council just ignores his mother in her piteous plight. This shows the level of egoism and indifference of the political leader. Secondly, the author uses the nightmarish dream to reveal the past of Katuma as somebody who has suffered from inhuman treatment from men. It reveals her as a woman who has experienced a high degree of energy and deprivation from circumstances that are beyond her control. Thirdly, the dream is used as part of the plot structure. Structurally, it heightens both the psychological and physical conflicts of the heroine. He uses it stylistically to

The Unconscious and Socio-Political Implications on Contemporary African States: Satiric Reflections from Two African Plays

represent the climax of the plot because prior to the dream Magai, has declared ‘no more pennies’ to her (13), meaning she will remain in abject penury. With this, she becomes a person without support and a woman that is surrounded by cursed children. This is unbearable for her and she anticipates suicide. Psychologically, she is having glimpses of sudden appearance of Fibula who may come to rescue her from her worrisome plight. Unfortunately, Fibula appears in her dream and attacks her instead of providing succour for her. The author uses the nightmarish dream to unfold the dichotomy between the rich and the poor in the society. Yerima makes the plight of the masses and the extent of the lackadaisical altitude of the leaders and their shameful affluence occasioned by their wholesome avarice and egocentrism known to the audience. Thus, through Katuma’s dream, there is the eruption of social realities in contemporary African state.

Another device employed in the play is hallucination. There are two stages of hallucination. As a result of the nightmarish dream and the prevailing social, political and economic realities in the conscious life of Katuma, she contemplates suicide as the only remedy for her. Like someone in a trance, while narrating her piteous plight and dream to her neighbours, she hallucinates:

What are these before me? Angels to take me away?..... their wings flutter and there are feathers everywhere. Lord I am grateful for the time I have been given....but you know my one single prayer to see Fibula before I die. Oh, the pain increases. (50)

The artistic significance of this hallucination is that it is suggestive of denouement or resolution of the plot structure, that is, the plight of the masses may not have a panacea except there is a metaphysical twist or change. The hallucination reveals that only death can bring enviable lifestyle and grandeur to the suffering masses. No wonder, Katuma, the victim of hallucination gives thanks to God to show her appreciation that her death is imminent. For her, this means an end to poverty, lack of comfort, distressing experiences and physical and mental torture from her own children. The hallucination also suggests a ray of hope to Katuma’s plight. That is the reason she pleads for the possibility of seeing Fibula who may be different from her other children.

Thematically, Yerima is telling his audience that a change from socio-political turbulence to

enviable and ideal social and political pleasure is achievable if the society can retrace its traduced past and learn. This is symbolised by the pleas of Katuma to be allowed to see her unknown son, Fibula. Yerima is advocating for a rejuvenation of the past and its reconciliation with the present as the needed solace to African social and political hullabalos. This hallucination is aesthetically used as an instrument of foreshadow or prophecy because there is a force like a *deus ex machina* that resolves all Katuma’s psychological and physical longings. Fibula symbolises the sudden emergence or materialisation of long awaited hope. Thus, Yerima has concentrated on human psychic context to solve the problems of the physical. The resolution of the plot is clearly revealed in the second hallucination experienced by Katuma:

Haa....that voice. It comes from my past. Come. (She traces Fibula’s face with her hands. Her eyes closed, still hallucinating). The face, this nose.... the smell, oh the pain.... I know this face. It once smelt of starch and khaki white, the steward’s top, stole my heart. Fibula, my lover, you return from the past ask for my hand properly. So you were the one chosen to take me through the gates of the world? (50-51).

There is an ironic scenario that Yerima is attempting to create with this hallucination. The hope and succour the rich but egoistic political leader cannot provide for his mother is provided by an unknown and abandoned child who is not a member of the political class. It is then succinct to say that Yerima uses dream and hallucination ironically to ridicule the hollowness, indifference and the altitude of lackadaisical attitude of the political class.

Similarly, Yerima is thematically appealing to mothers and other female members of the society to desist and abstain from the social vice of abandoning children in order to seek greener pasture elsewhere because the pasture is not greener anywhere else. It is perseverance, patience and hard work that can make one succeed and excel in life. Katuma’s original belief about her life is that the cursed children and Magai will take her to her ideal world but all this has been dashed, with prevailing realities in her world. At the dawn of her predicament, she makes a recourse to the child she had once abandoned and neglected. At the end of the play, it is revealed that Fibula is a medical doctor who is searching earnestly for his mother. The

The Unconscious and Socio-Political Implications on Contemporary African States: Satiric Reflections from Two African Plays

reunion of Fibula and her mother complements the resolution of the plot structure as well as the thematic message to women, to be a caring mother in all situations. In the character of Katuma, she becomes a fulfilled woman with a redeemed hope, as she exclaims:

Shattered dreams..... woes. Fibula, to tell you the truth, God forgive me, for now, I have no other child or sons. Just you, son. Take me away from here. Far, far away from here, the filth of this part of the world kills me slowly....(52).

The resolution of the plot structure is made glaring from the submission of Katuma to Fibula. It means that she represents an independent personality who has freed herself from the disillusion that will set in or befall anyone who is beclouded by the hollow and shallow promises of the political class, especially during electioneering campaigns. Yerima has made the heroine to re-enact her ugly past in order to expunge the elements that cannot make her to forge ahead and she embraces it with pragmatic enthusiasm the need to take the bull by the horns to ensure that she liberates herself from the fetters of shame of the past. She, therefore, reneges on her over-reliance and dependence on her son, Magai, the Honourable Chairman of Local Government Council. As a social and political satire, Yerima is appealing to the masses to brace up and fight the forces that impoverish them.

Artistically, he uses the collective memories of unconscious minds to drive home his thematic message, to develop his fictional characters to become metaphors for social and political predicaments and happenings at the cosmic scale. In a simpler language, Yerima is telling his audience or intending audience that man is the only creature that can liberate himself in his challenges. At the moment a man discovers himself and stops leaning on human creatures as solution, that man is bound to make a success.

In *Tuti*, Yerima beams his artistic search light on the elites in the society. He directs his focus to the mode of life and shortcomings prevalent among the elites in his society. He dwells artistically on the state of social life style of the educated elites, using satire to comment on the intolerance that characterises Nigerian society, especially the issue of civil liberties and human rights. The play presents the socio-psychological nature of the educated elites in order to mock prominent individuals and institution. The institutions Yerima aims to scorn and improve

are family, marriage and religion. The satiric impulse and its ritualised expressions in the play are succinctly carried out to perform the function of resolving the social and religious tensions in the play.

The characters like Father, Tuti, a lawyer and the only daughter of Father and Ayo, Tuti's husband in the play are satirically portrayed as social failures with antisocial tendencies. They are considered social failures because they are haunted especially Father and Tuti, by their past collective memories and imaginations. In the play, Yerima adopts absurdist approach of satire because he combines the attributes of absurdism, comedy of manners or satire of manners to criticise the modes of life of both the common people and the elite. He aims at ridiculing senility, errors or mistakes, self-judgement and religious impropriety that are common among the elitist class in African society.

As it is our major concern to examine the stylistic elements or devices Yerima employs in fastening history or social realities with dramatic talents to produce a social and satirical play. As usual, he (Yerima) delves into the realm of the human psyche to explore the plot structure, to create and develop characters and to portray his thematic concerns. The play presents a happy, peaceful and highly educated family. Father, who is the head of the family is obsessed with Western values, which he inappropriately spends the money belonging to his church on to satisfy his desires. Being the treasurer of the church, he spends the money belonging to the church to send his wife and only daughter to acquire Ph.D in London, to also acquire a building in London. He has it at the back of his mind that he will repay the money, like a loan. Unfortunately, he is unable to redeem the so-called loan. His wife and daughter, the beneficiaries of the so called loan, are unhappy with insult from the Reverend Father of the church. As a result of this, they abandon Father, as he is called at home. Eventually, the wife dies with the wrong feeling that her husband had spent the church money to raise another family elsewhere. So, she dies tragically and in solitude. The death of his wife also causes mental and emotional instability to the Father, but he reveals the truth of the matter to Tuti, his daughter, but it is too late because the father has also been caught with the icy fingers of death.

This is the elitist reality that Yerima brings artistically to the fore through the engagement of

The Unconscious and Socio-Political Implications on Contemporary African States: Satiric Reflections from Two African Plays

hallucination. Father, the protagonist and hero, is introduced in the beginning as a man that is revived from a coma caused by chronic asthmatic attack by his daughter, Tuti. He narrates his experience and hallucination when he was terribly unconscious because of the asthmatic attack:

Oh you stopped me. I almost saw the face of God. He was beginning to stretch his finger to touch my forehead, and you as always....you stopped me..... Why? Who are you? A ghost? Or an angel of death? (10)

This hallucination tells the audience many things about the man. Firstly, it presents him as somebody who has been expecting the cold icy hands of death. Seeing the face of God and smiling at him in the hallucination are pointers that the mindset of the hallucinated Father is fixed on death as the only source of joy and comfort to his life. Another thing the hallucination does is that it reveals the psychological state of Father as a man that is haunted by the mistakes of the past and who has been attempting fruitlessly to leave behind the unpleasant memories of the past. The hallucination further registers his annoyance that his daughter prevents him from transition to the other world, as he explains further that "I am born again. I swear by the angels, I am. I can even hear them sing. I am renewed". (11).

Yerima plays aesthetically with the mental faculty of his character through the hallucination to expose or introduce the conflict of the plot. Father says, "I am renewed" (11). It means there is a lingering of chaos, conflict, tension and unhealthy occurrence of events that make the hallucinated to see internal renewal of life in death. As such, the worries in his mind, which are social, physical and familial issues, are indirectly imagined and they serve as the conflict in his life and, by extension, the conflict of the play. Having seen the exposition of conflict in the play, which has to do with Father's psychological and social problems though not explicitly stated, one now wonders about what the problems are and the ways out of them. Is it through death as Father anticipated or through life as the daughter Tuti envisages?

To answer this question or to clear the cloud, Yerima again peeps into the psyche of his fictional character with a frightful dream, which is suggesting that death is the only option that

provides eternal rest from this world's quagmires. Father narrates another pattern of his unconscious recollection:

Death was always close by. Always one step behind. Like a very loyal shadow. (Tries to brighten up) I had the same dream I had before your mother and my parents died, this morning. When I woke up, I wanted to run to you to tell you that my time approaches, and that you should prepare but then my strength failed me. I returned here to sit, pray and wait for you. (29).

Intrinsically, the frightful dream that is not explicitly narrated here gives the audience the glimpse of the source of Father's psychological unrest and that of his failing health. It is succinctly connected with the death of his wife. Both the father and the daughter are connected with the circumstances that surround the death of Father's wife, as this is unveiled later in the complication of the plot structure. Father hides how he spends the church money from his wife and his wife thinks the money was spent on another woman and perhaps also on the children of the imagined strange woman. The truth which he conceals is that he spends money to upgrade his wife and child so that they can conform to Western high standard of living and a befitting elitist life. Tuti, the only daughter, connives with her mother in the false allegation and the mother and daughter feel dejected and relegated by their loved ones. Therefore, dream, as a stylistic device in the play, has enriched the plot configuration and the characters' formation and roles.

The entire make up of the play is built on collective unconscious. The playwright presents his characters in the play from the perspective of the past memories. The two major characters, Father and Tuti are haunted by the past. The haunting from the past makes Father, a man well above seventy five, to become senile. The author satirically portrays senility as an antisocial stage in the life of man. His senility in the play irritates his daughter, Tuti, She condemns her father with emphasis on the emotional arousal of the evil of the past:

Oh, age, how we change places just to play memories (she shouts, at her father) scrub your teeth, and no water on the floor. (she goes to her mother's photograph) oh, Mama, your little girl is now a woman. But it so difficult being a woman. But he is trying to teach me how to be

The Unconscious and Socio-Political Implications on Contemporary African States: Satiric Reflections from Two African Plays

happy again. I...we love you, Mama. Papa is now a child. Please forgive him, Mama... Forgive him. (31)

The memory of the past here is suggestive of the fact that there has been peaceful harmony and unity between father, mother and daughter in the past, which becomes soured as a result of a misdeed or mistake from the father. The misdeed or mistake causes disintegration. The assumed mistake or misdeed causes the death of wife and mother. This is the reminiscence of the past that brings out the author's existentialist and absurdist style in the play. It is an application of the sense of human purposelessness in a universe without meaning or value. The author uses the bitter memory of the lost peace and harmony in Tuti's family to raise up the impossibility or inability of the Father in the play to try the purposeful action of telling how he spends the church money which later causes the paralysis of his aspiration to raise a high and standard westernised family.

Structurally, hallucination and dream show that the hero and heroine are haunted by bitter memories of the past. It is pertinent to know that Yerima reveals the knotty predicament of the play, which centres on the psychological mindsets of the major characters, Father and Tuti. Through dream motif in the play, the essence of the penetration into the psychic content of the characters has shown that it is only man that can solve his own personal problem. Father realises at the end of the play that his inability to confront or tell the truth on how he spends the money has led to the untimely death of his wife and the total breakdown of peace and love in his family.

CONCLUSION

Artistically, the playwright uses the collective memories of unconscious minds to drive home his thematic message, to develop his fictional characters to become metaphors for social and political predicaments and happenings at the cosmic scale. In a simpler language, Yerima is telling his audience or intending audience that man is the only creature that can liberate himself in his challenges. At the moment a man discovers himself and stops leaning on human creatures as solution, that man is bound to make a success.

This study has explored Yerima's eclecticism and multiculturalism in form and content respectively. We have seen areas of his adherence to Horatian and Juvenalian satires and his areas of artistic departures from the traditional forms and nature of satires, which have really proven his dramatic uniqueness and idiosyncrasy. His artistic talent in the plays examined in this work lies largely in the penetration into human psyche through the unconscious to show the distinction between socio-political realities and illusions. The exploration of the unconscious as device has afforded Yerima the opportunity to use them to unfold the realistic events in the various cultures, tribes and societies in Ghana and Nigeria.

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The Unconscious and Socio-Political Implications on Contemporary African States: Satiric Reflections from Two African Plays

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