

**EXPLORING MADNESS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
"XALA" BY OUSMANE SEMBÉNE AND "FRAGMENTS" BY
AYI KWEI ARMAH**

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ABSTRACT

Madness in Ousmane Sembéne's *Xala* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragment* is examined and analyzed through desperations and roles of the minds of characters in these books. A critical attention was been paid to how the human mind is fractured as we walk to and fro even without signs of madness yet within, there is a part of us that exhibit an amount of psychological defect. The paper brings to light Sigmond Freud's psycho analytic theory on concepts of trauma of colonial madness and mental slavery and psychological implications of some themes in the various books and among us Africans. This paper employed the mental states of El-Hadji's frustration in *Xala* and Onipa Baako's rejection in *fragment*. Also, polygamy in Africa and its complexities in individual characters cognitive domain was looked at. The paper ends by examining the fact that mental disorder in a man starts from birth, when man has to think by agreeing or disagreeing with elements of creation as a child till, he grows. Either by accepting who he is as a 'black' or a 'white'. But one thing remains a fact...All are intelligent and that all are MAD.

Keywords: *Madness, Psychoanalysis, Neurosis, Trauma, Inferiority Complex*

INTRODUCTION

Sembéne Ousmane's novel *Xala* was published in French in 1924. It portrays African culture in diverse ways where he made use of characters like El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye a narcissist. He always thinks high of himself by adopting foreign lifestyle. El Hadji's role placed him in psychological disorder in that, his super ego lands him in situations that makes him "Mad". Also, in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragment*, one cannot make out who exactly is fractured just as the title of the book is FRAGMENTED. Onipa Baako a 'been -to' exhibits some level of neurosis as he goes through a lot for people to refer to him as being mad. Madness is defined as the state of having a mental illness. Micheal Foucault's central ideas in his book *madness and civilization* insists that 'madness is not a natural, unchanging thing but rather depends on the society in which it exists. It is in a certain cultural 'space' within society, the shape of the space and its effects on the madness'. It can also be termed as psychosis, depression, insanity, craziness and is how man can lose his freedom. Also, the 'mad' are strangers and are rejected and put aside. Meanwhile one thing is for sure in this human society that once you are conceived, your brain develops its potentialities at the fifth week after conception hence the needs of the id are met with the ego and super ego deals with conscience.

The phenomenon of madness, which is a multifaceted and captivating facet of the human mind, has been a topic of great interest and investigation in the annals of literature. The depiction of mental health in literature frequently functions as a representation of how society perceives, interprets, and comprehends the human condition. The literary works of Ousmane Sembéne and Ayi Kwei Armah are significant contributions to African literature, as they offer insightful narratives that explore the complexities of madness. These works delve into the psychological traumas, cultural contexts, and sociopolitical implications that underlie this elusive concept (Sembéne, 1973; Armah, 1974). The objective of this scholarly article is to conduct a comparative examination of two influential African literary works: "Xala" authored by Ousmane Sembéne and "Fragments" written by Ayi Kwei Armah. The aforementioned literary works offer intricate and contemplative storylines that vividly portray individuals struggling with insanity. Through an analysis of the intricate psychological dimensions, cultural subtleties, and thematic depictions present in African literary works, our aim is to elucidate the import and ramifications of insanity in this genre.

The literary work "Xala," penned by Ousmane Sembéne, a Senegalese author, delves into the narrative of El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, a prosperous entrepreneur who falls victim to an enigmatic curse, resulting in his inability to perform sexually on the day of his nuptials to his third spouse. Throughout the course of the narrative, Sembéne adeptly constructs a story that explores both individual and collective decay, utilizing the literary devices of satire and irony to underscore the pervasive corruption that characterizes Senegal in the aftermath of colonialism. In this particular context, the concept of madness functions as a metaphorical tool that enables an examination of the psychological conditions of the characters as well as the societal distress (Sembéne, 1973).

Ayi Kwei Armah's "Fragments" explores the psychological distress encountered by Baako, a youthful Ghanaian male who returns to his native land after an extended period of studying overseas, in contrast. The internal conflicts, hallucinations, and distorted perception of reality experienced by Baako serve as a representation of the vulnerable mental state of a post-colonial individual who is struggling with issues of identity, disillusionment, and societal pressures. Armah's literary analysis of insanity is a poignant reflection of the wider themes of cultural disintegration, the quest for individual identity, and the influence of colonialism on African civilization (Armah, 1974).

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research design. In this research, the idea of lunacy is examined and analyzed in the books "Xala" by Ousmane Sembéne and "Fragments" by Ayi Kwei Armah. It investigates the characters' psychological makeup, trauma, and complexity. The paper examines themes and implications in the literature as well as African society, including psychoanalytic theories along the way. This implies a qualitative approach that entails a thorough examination, interpretation, and comprehension of the individual experiences and significances of madness within the setting of the novels. Renew your effort.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Colonial Madness and Mental Slavery

Baako Onipa in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* is the protagonist who returns from US after staying there for five years. He represents a character of a Ghanaian who has been to America and has return to his family and is expected to return wealthy and incredibly generous. So, he is referred to as a "been-to". Baako's malady was when he was in US and we learnt of his illness from Efua, his mother who is waiting for his return to Ghana. Efua reveals this when

she meets Juana, a woman she comes into contact with at the beach. Efua says to her, “This has been confusing. They say there was nothing wrong with his body. The prophet says it was a sickness of the soul” but to me, Baako’s trauma started when he returns home to receive betrayal from family and the society expecting him to come with material things like, car, television, radio, etc. Baako exhibits post-traumatic stress disorder coursed by shock and anxiety.

The term trauma is understood by psychoanalytic authors from Sigmund Freud to Cathy Caruth as ‘wound’ (Caruth 3). However, “the wound of the mind” is not like the wound of the body, a simple or healable events, but rather an event that is experienced too soon too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is not therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth 4). Thus, trauma can be seen as both an immediate experience, a wounding and the severe effects of that wound. Baako feels traumatized at the level of his personal life his society and that of his nation. He quits his job, tears up his manuscript with titles ‘Slavery’, “The Brand” and “Survival”, and immediately falls seriously ill.

The ‘been-to’ spends three days in bed too ill and too weak to get up when he wanted to; and the sheet under him felt wet and clammy from his sweat (pg.155). He admits that a “whirling torture” has “filled his mind” (pg.131) and that he finds no way to get away from mixed uncertainty (pg.155). Baako’s eyes hurt his head likewise his whole body. These are psychological traumatic symptoms and potential traumatic events that are powerful and upsetting psychological threats that are caused by a singular occasion or from ongoing relentless stresses. Cognitively, its symptoms are confusion, nightmares, loss of memory and mood swings.

Physically, its symptoms are sexual dysfunction as seen in (pg. 169). “When he felt wetness and came into her, his movement was diffident, and almost immediately, he shook so that she was afraid he had already come”, vague complaints of aches and body pains and emotionally or psychologically by having constant anxieties, shame, depression, guilt. Baako is constantly questioned as to when his car will arrive. Listen to his mother “When is yours coming, Baako? What? He asked surprised. Yours, your car so my old bones can also rest” (pg. 101). This pressure mounted on Baako from his family and that of his society leads him into a state of mental disorder. Baako suffers the fate of all these traumatic events. Baako’s illness repeatedly points to his feelings of impotence in his inability to provide materially for his family and his

rebel or repulsion against the corrupt, money-obsessed elite class. Indeed, Baako's home sickness can be attributed to the society's demand and love for material things.

Also, as Baako suffers his memories in bed, he has the desire to write to himself in (pg. 226) and his writing takes the form of a fractured or fragmented play that talks about the effects of slavery on Ghanaian culture. This trade involves commodification of human life and his family's attempts to make him the deliverer of consumable and usable 'cargo.' The cargo is connected and depicts the relationship between the so-called Cargo of Malenesia by Europeans. When these Malanesians saw the wealth that the colonist thus the Europeans brought with them, they were entitled to these goods and with the hope that the ships will bring to the shore's riches. Malanesians then await a savior "been-to' (Baako) who will bring them goods (cars, television etc.) that will usher them into modernity and superior status.

Baako suffers the fear of being the savior to return home with western goods so long denied the people of Africa. The pain of remembering that people or human beings were exchanged for that cargo lingers in Baako's head. The Ghanaian culture is close to Melanesians (West pAfrica) cargo worship. This commitment to material wealth in Ghanaian culture is depicted as a human sacrifice which reflects in the story when his niece dies in the story as a result of his family's extraordinary greed and cargo mentality. They out doored a five days' baby without waiting for the eight day all in exchange for lavishing items. Here, in Armah's estimation, Africans are still hunted by a fate of enslavement even two hundred years later as they act out the love for sacrifice of human life are all characteristics of slavery. My question is, aren't we mad or psychologically traumatized at the decision to sacrifice for money? In recent times, we hear of instances and situations where people engage in "sakawa" money in quest for material things like cars, expensive phones, flashy houses etc. This generation is gradually waking up in the next future to see humans going insane as "normal".

Baako was later expelled violently by his family. The community's refusal to comprehend Baako's narrative leads to tragic results. Just as he recovers from his illness and his revelation regarding the cargo mentality of Ghanaian society, his uncle and other family members find their way and take him to the insane asylum without explanation. There, the members at the pose shout "Stay far from him, His bite will make you also maad! (pg.243). To this another, closer voice added in sage, quiet tones" the same thing happens, if he should scratch you".

Instead of attempting to hear Baako's message, the community makes him an object. When a bystander asks what happened to Baako that he needs to put down in this way, the response is "it was books, they say" (171).

His community fails to assess the narrative that he writes and this leads them to exile Baako to the depths of an insane asylum. Who then is insane? Baako or his family or his community?

Ousmane Sembéne's *Xala* characterizes the satirical tale of a man who suffers the fate of impotence (*Xala*). El Hadji is a man who in the wake of Senegal's independence, assumes a political role in the Chamber of Commerce. El Hadji suffers inferiority complex in 'Xala' by worshipping goods from outside just like in the case of Baako Onipa's family in fragments by Armah; who equally exhibits high level of cargo mentality. Frantz Fanon in his book *Black skin white Mask* posits that "all colonized people in other words people in whom inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave-position themselves in relation to the civilizing language that is, the metropolitan culture.

The more the colonized has assimilated the culture values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush. The more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become." "The colonial Army, and particularly in the regiments of Senegalese soldiers, the 'native' officers are mainly interpreters. They serve to convey to their fellow soldiers the master's order and they themselves enjoy a certain status." Ousmane Sembéne's *Xala* depicts how El Hadji made use of the white man's language throughout in communication with his family and community. He abandons his culture and embrace the life style of the Europeans. His dressing is more of European, his food and even the water he drinks (pg.16). Here, El Hadji drinks only mineral water. El Hadji also never speaks 'wolof' his native language. El Hadji's cargo mentality can be seen in how he amasses wealth in using latest car and building a villa for all his wives. He even buys a car for his third wife, N'Gone.

El Hadji's mind is colonized as he agrees to adopt a language different from that of the community in which he was born. Professor Westermann writes in "The African Today" that the feeling of inferiority by Blacks is especially evident in educated black man who is constantly trying to overcome it. The method used, Westermann adds, is often naïve. 'The wearing of Europeans clothes whether rags or the most up to date styles using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse adorning the native language with European Expressions; using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a European language all these contribute to the feeling of equality with European and his achievements. In recent times, we

change our identity in embrace for western things. Our Eurocentric nature makes us take up from the whites. The use of Brazilian hairs, bleaching creams just to tone our beautiful black color, wearing of makeups, anglicizing our names and the likes make us inferior. We all in one way or the other exhibit inferiority complex as Africans by changing our identity and hybridizing our minds. We are enslaved and colonized causing psychological disorder and mental health conditions such as insecurity and low self-esteem often feeling down on one self.

Lost Frustration and Rejection

Ousmane Sembéne's *Xala* depicts the frustration of El Hadji the protagonist, who fails to consummate his marriage after the marriage ceremony of his third wife, N'Gone. The title of the book *Xala* means 'impotence'. Which in every ear sounds devastating; already. The sight of seeing how desperate a man can be in trying to find solution to his *Xala* alone can cause a mental disorder and this can be revealed in El Hadji's desperation to get his masculinity restored. In *Xala*, El Hadji has built his life resisting African ways of life thus he does not conform to the belief systems of his own culture but falls a victim to what he hates.

El Hadji seeks for the solution to his "Xala" by visiting one ritualist to the other at the expense of his reputation, each of whom charged him exorbitant amounts which he never hesitates in paying. He goes through frustration and rejection which can be related to abandonment neurosis. Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skin white mask* use the phrase "the other" to refer to situations when one feels in an uncomfortable position, to be on one's guard to be prepared to be rejected and unconsciously to do everything that's needed to bring about the anticipated catastrophe. El Hadji is rejected by his community and his friends. The intense pains that accompanies his "Xala" makes him desperate and frustrated. In similar case, El Hadji's neurosis can be related to Jean Veneuse where his form of neurosis is based upon the anxiety aroused by any form of abandonment the aggressivity to which it gives rise and the resultant devaluation of self (Germaine Gueu's book *La Nevrose d'abandon*, pg.16).

Neurosis has symptoms like excessive worry and guilt, depression, an interpretation of everyday situations threatening, irritability and anger etc. El Hadji suffers all these symptoms especially when he could not stand the gossip of the public. His condition is publicly discussed to the extent that, his first wife Adja Awa hears about it. In addition to that, Adja Awa Astou's father on the Island of Goree and Pathee (pg.50) who dates his daughter Rama hears the rumor what a trauma? This trauma and disorder make him neglect his businesses in order to get back to his society.

Adja Awa equally faced a similar situation when she was helpless in her marriage; and needed someone to talk to. She feels rejected by her husband and tries to speak with their daughter Rama “Adja Awa had no friends. She was lonely, very lonely. If she wanted to confide in someone or pour out her troubles, there was not a soul to whine she could turn.... She returned to her villa and told her eldest daughter Rama”(pg.45-46.). This is a mental health situation called rejection sensitive dysphoria (RSD). One experiences the feeling of shame, sadness or grief, of not accepted by others. Also, El Hadji does not consult her before going for second and third wives. In relation to Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Anowa*, Kofi Ako faces a similar fate as El Hadji. Kofi’s impotence is revealed and he had to kill himself at the end. One effect of RSD is intense emotional and physical distress. El Hadji could have preferred to die rather than going through all the shame to get cured because of his status.

Armah’s *Fragments* brings to light the rejection Baako faces at the workplace he sends his application to. He is asked to come tomorrow anytime he makes follow-up. He is being tossed up and down which makes him feel rejected. He meets the Junior Assistant to the Secretary of the civil service commission and this is what he had to say “You will have to come tomorrow”. This is the fifth time you are telling me that. Then the man repeated, come tomorrow” (pg.110).

Naana’s voice was equally not welcomed in any decision made in the house. Araba and Efoa reject Naana’s voice and went ahead to outdoor a five days old nephew of Baako which leads to the death of the baby. “And the child that came so briefly has gone back where he came from : driven away, but whol will be here to tell me this truth? The child was thrown out into the world in hast, like forced seed. He was not pulled back underground by jealous bother spirit; that is only what Efoa and her daughter Araba have been saying to hide their crime, after they have smothered another human soul in their heavy dreams of things” (Pg. 278). This causes Naana to complain bitter within herself and sometimes talks to herself in the air all alone. This can be seen at the end of the novel (pg. 278 -287). Rejection according to Fanon produces Psychopathologies called inferiority complex.

Alienation

Sembéne Ousmane’s *Xala* is written on a theme of Alienation experienced by different characters. To start with, El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye is the main character who lives in Daka, the capital of Senegal. El Hadji exhibits culture alienation and notable among them is his language. He overtly scolds his daughter Rama each time he speaks French and she replies in their indigenous language. “pourquoui quand jete parle en francais, tu me responds en wolof?

El Hadji, sees wolof as barbaric. Apart from his linguistic slavery, he refuses to sit on a mortar and strangle the pestle on the night of his third wedding as a traditional cleansing to prevent him from acquiring Xala (impotence). Unfortunately, what he was preventing happens to him and he is psychologically alienated from his society. As a result of his status, he tries to alienate himself from his wives, friends and the community in search for solutions to cure his Xala. Despite his political power, he forgets his pride and strips himself naked while the beggars spit on him. El Hadji exhibits high level of anxiety disorder. El Hadji suffers political alienation from his friends and the president (page). He goes through emotional trauma seeing that everything has turn against him. Even the banks rejected his offer except his first wife Awa who stands with him.

Polygamy versus Monogamy

Sembéne Ousmane's novel Xala, examines islam's religion in marriage. El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye is a member of coalism of Senegalese businessmen. Despite his strong economic aspirations, his Muslim faith lures him into the belief that, marrying more than one wife makes a man rich. His first wife Adja Awa is morally stable and humble in nature as she habours pain even though her husband does not consult her in deciding to marry another woman. El Hadji's second wife Oumi N'Doye is persuasive and not submissive as she always gives mental torture to El Hadji whenever she wants something from her husband. El Hadji is manipulated by Yay Bineta, a headstrong eloquent woman into accepting a third wife without consulting his two wives. However, El Hadji's affluence and Muslim fate on which he built his life makes him a polygamous man by accepting to marry the third and this eventually results in his woes.

El Hadji only plays economic support for his wives and eleven children without enjoying the love and affection. At the end he loses everything and wives along except his first wife. He was busy amassing wealth for his wives without thinking about himself. This is where his weakness is revealed in his polygamous nature. He is awoken by his chauffeur Modu who asked which villa he would like to return to after he is temporarily healed of the "Xala." The question has taken him by surprise, interrupts the warm flow of his inner excitement, in effect, he had three villas and three wives but where was his real home? (pgs. 77&76). Hyperarousal Trauma awaits him in all his wives' villa. He is therefore alienated through his polygamous nature and suffers projection in defense of virility. According to psychoanalyst (Tyson 1999) one ascribes fear, problem or guilt to someone else and condemning them for it in order to deny that they have done it themselves. Which of his wives had planned this? (pg. 28&29).

Monogamy

One may think that, there is peace in monogamy but this is not the case in Ousmane's Xala. N'Gone's aunt, Yay Bineta tells her brother, Babaccar that he was afraid of women and that is why his wife, Mam Fatou makes the decisions and wears the trousers in his home. Old Babaccar admits that his wife authority was limitless.

In Ayi Kwei Armah's Fragments, Kwesi was confused as to whether to agree to the decision of his wife to name or outdoor their five days old baby. Araba tells Baako that the baby will be named after him but Baako objects to the idea yet Araba says nothing prevents a woman from making a good decision. I agree with Araba but not when she proudly says men think they rule the world. (pg.122). Men don't rule the world but wives need a level of submission to give their husbands in marriage. Kwesi is troubled about his wife. He says to Baako "Things are so difficult.....so confusing..... you know what she wants. (p.131)

In our African society, one question lingers in my mind. What therefore is the key to happy marriage? Is it a monogamous home or a polygamous home? With reference to 'Not Without Flowers' by Armah, Darko, Idan and Aggie who practiced monogamous marriage are both infected with HIV. This brings emotional trauma to Aggie. Equally Pesewa and his five wives face problems as Pesewa a wealthy man contracts HIV. He is faithful but for the unfaithfulness of one of his wives cost him his life. The time spent with each of the wives reduces as he adds on making one of his wives go out to have an affair. El Hadji suffers the same trauma when his second wife threatens to go out if his Xala is not resolved. She even leaves him after El Hadji lost everything. In all, a happy marriage life is just enjoyed by grace, not the effort of party.

CONCLUSION

The above write-up analyzes the mental positions of some characters in Ousmane Sembéne's Xala and Ayi Kwei Armah's Fragments. It reflects on the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud and relates the words to the current states of Africans mind in diverse ways.

As one grows in an environment, and comes to terms with it, problems emanate with behaviors that are destructive accompanying it, making us believe that, none of us is completely free of psychological problems (Tyson, 1999). In this paper, it has been observed that the state of madness in Ousmane Sembéne' Xala and Ayi Kwei Armah's Fragments is not just about going naked on streets but goes further to elaborate the types or forms of mental disorders that everyone experiences at a certain point in their lives.

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