

State Induced Insanity: A Psychoanalytical Study of Yerima's *The Asylum*

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Abstract: One of the modern extra-linguistic theories of literature is the Psychoanalytical Criticism. The relationship of psychoanalysis to literature has undergone many changes from Freud to modern psychoanalysts like Norman Holland and Jacques Lacan. This paper looks at the application of psychoanalysis to *The Asylum* by Ahmed Parker Yerima, a playwright who was a former Director of the Nigerian National Troupe and one of the second generations of Nigerian playwrights. The paper starts by taking an exploration into the application of psychoanalysis from the time of Freud to the modern psychoanalysts. Next, the paper looks at the theme of detention and its effects on detainees as well as the author. The paper then concludes that the play is a study in psychoanalysis as Yerima's condemnation of the penchant for unjust detention in many African states, especially Nigeria, is a means of externalizing his innermost feelings. This lends credence to the psychoanalytical belief that the creative work is the author's dream while the author is the main character.

Keywords: Psychoanalytical Study, Nigerian National Troupe, Yerima's *The Asylum*.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the modern extra-linguistic theories of literature is the Psychoanalytical Criticism. The relationship of psychoanalysis to literature has undergone many changes over the years. According to Wright (1985: 115),

The critical focus has shifted from the psychology of the author – or his stand-in, the character to that of the reader and further to author, reader.

Psychoanalysis is a philosophical, psychotherapeutic and philosophical theory which has its roots in the ideas of the Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud. The term Psychoanalysis was first coined by Sigmund Freud in 1896 for his treatment which aimed at uncovering repression. Freud's application of psychoanalysis to literature can be seen in his 1919 essay titled "The Uncanny". In it, he sees literature as a representation of fantasy and hence should be tested as the symptom of a particular writer. Freud's postulation can be better understood with his theory of psychoanalysis in which he divided the human mind into three parts: the *id*, the *ego* and the *super ego*. The *id* is the *unconscious* and the *ego* is the *conscious* while the *super ego* is the *conscience*. Freud postulates that many times, the *ego* and the *super ego* often repress the manifestation of the *id* hence dreams find expression in a displaced form. By this, Freud makes us believe that dreams are simply the manifestation of wishes relegated to the background by the *ego* and the *super ego*.

Wright explains that the term unconscious here does not mean what is not present in the field of consciousness but "where the unconscious is seen as a dynamic sub-system, a region or stratum of the mind which is part of a larger system of conflicting forces" (Jefferson & Robey 1985:114). Also, (Afolayan 2008: 174) asserts that "Wishes only express themselves when the *conscious* has lost the grip of the personality". This belief that dream has to do with fulfillment of wishes is what Freud transfers into Literature. According to Manhein and Manhein (1966: 4),

The literary critic who uses psychoanalysis is primarily and at all times a student of literature as art form, only secondarily in the craft of psychology in any of the branches.

Holland also explains that,

Psychoanalysis, like any psychology, deals not with literature as such but with minds and there is absolutely no justification for bringing psychoanalysis into literary criticism at all except to relate the work of literature to somebody's mind (*Hudson Review*, Vol.5, 1966, p. 218.).

Thus, what should be of interest to a literary critic is to avail himself of Freud's theory of dream interpretation in carrying out his task. Marie Bonaparte, a friend and disciple of Freud applied Freud's prognosis to the work of Allan Poe. Bonaparte takes the characters in Poe's stories as '*imagos*', that is, as internalized images, which are the result of past experiences which have made their way from Poe's unconscious into his tales.

Modern psychoanalysts have developed further on Freud's postulation. Norman Holland, in 1968, takes up the question of what goes on between the reader and the text. According to Holland, the source of the pleasure we get from literature lies in the transformation of our unconscious wishes and fears into culturally acceptable meanings. Like Bonaparte, Holland sees literary texts as concealments, coded systems that act as a disguise. But unlike Bonaparte, who viewed the text as evidence of the author's psychology, Holland sees it as the "scene of collusion between text and reader, upon which he founded aesthetics of response" (Wright, 1985: 115). Holland's position is an attempt to redress the balance between the reader and the text. His focus has shifted from seeing the organizing principles in the text to seeing it in the reader, who gets to work on the text with his own identity theme. Reading, he sees, first and foremost a re-creation of identity.

Jacque Lacan, a French, also led others in a shift from orthodox psychoanalysis to structural psychoanalysis, which exhibits some post-Saussureian echoes. Lacan asserts that the unconscious is structured like a language and it involves an extension of the linguistic paradigm into the realms of psychoanalysis. Goring, et al (2001:362) describe that Lacan's work is essentially a development of Sigmund Freud's theory that there is a radical split between consciousness and the unconscious (the *ego* and the *id*).

This paper is out to explore the application of psychoanalysis to Yerima's *The Asylum*.

2. STATE INDUCED INSANITY IN *THE ASYLUM*

Ahmed Parker Yerima's *The Asylum* deals with unjust incarceration of many radicals and human right activists by successive governments in many parts of the African continent, especially in Nigeria. In his prefatory note, Yerima confesses that what spurred him into writing the play is that he has spent most of his time "thinking of those all over Africa in asylums" (9). To him, "*The Asylum* is a process" which has been producing many detainees who are pronounced mad by the authorities, for daring to have views different from that of those in government. The African continent has been replete with different cases of political detention and imprisonments such as that of Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Late Chief Gani Fawehinmi, Late Steve Biko, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and a host of others. Yerima brings this to the fore through experimentation with the theatre of the absurd. Absurdism believes that man's life is hopeless, anguished and absurd. Referring to this theatre, Dasylya (1997: 45) asserts that, "It is the theatre of disillusionment. It is generally informed by the post-world wars' philosophy of Existentialism, which is foreground by despair, cruelty and absurdity".

Yerima's *Asylum* is made up of characters that are forced into the asylum by the governments in power for one reason or the other. For each of the characters, the government has to fake one mental problem or the other as the reason behind their stay in the mental institution. As for Professor, one of the patients, he reads from the card on his bed and muses:

The simpletons. How they lie. This is mistreatment.

I complained of headache and there it is boldly written, brain damage, no cure. Chronic Patient (13).

Journalist, another in-mate, adds to Professor's comment that the asylum is "the confused mental home. Wrong treatment for wrong patients" (13). He gives an insight into how all the patients are brought into the mental home. He says they are usually brought by soldiers in a bus at top speed with the accompaniment of the full blast of the siren. On getting to the asylum, the doctor there would ask the 'patients' what was wrong with them but the soldiers will not allow them to talk. Instead, the soldier escorts will be their mouth-piece and they might tell the doctor that a patient is "reported to be sick of infrastructural mentalism" (13). The doctor, faced with threat from

the soldiers, forgets his Hippocratic Oath and succumbs to the wishes of those in power. According to Undertaker, “a one time first class citizen is reduced to a patient in a mental home” (13).

Any doctor who comes into the asylum to make a change usually meets with untimely death hence the ‘patients’ fear for the newly posted doctor who seems to be interested in revolutionizing the place. The fate of the former doctor makes Undertaker to state a truism that:

Poor unlucky soul. I think I am better than he is. Though in solitary confinement, I still breath, I still hear changes. I am alive (16).

A part of the revolution the new doctor plans for the asylum is to expose what goes on in the place to the public hence he has invited people (the audience) to come and see the inmates. The inmates choose Cleaner as the spokesperson who will talk to the invited audience on their behalf, as he is the only inmate who does not wear pyjamas, the official uniform of the asylum. In his welcome speech, Cleaner says:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This evening with deepest gratitude, the National Mental Home, financed and kept not by your tax but the government’s purse, presents a piece of the Asylum. The piece is a short one and to be honest I do not like saying things I do not know, but the new doctor is a wonderful man. He changes. He has no diary. No schedules. No month planner. Therefore, he acts on the spur of his instincts (18).

Cleaner later goes on to introduce the inmates and why they are brought to the asylum. First, he introduces Journalist:

In this room are four patients: Mr. Journalist who suffered a shaven hair when he forgot that the press was not free at an opening ceremony by an honourable military governor. To shut his mouth up from talking at the court, he was hit on the centre of the outside right brain.

(Goes to the JOURNALIST’s bedside and picks up his card).

Today, he suffers from mental setfronts, incurable in this mental home. And this shuts him off for good. Poor soul. A body of the press caged up. A writer’s life is work, work and in confusion stay (18).

The journalist in question might be an allusion to Aminaso Amakiri, the Nigerian journalist whose head was shaved with broken bottles and thrown into detention by Commander Dielt Spiff, the then military governor of River States, Nigeria, in the early nineteen seventies. Amakiri’s offence was daring to ask questions on some fraud allegations against the governor. This is Yerima’s way of commenting on the hazards journalists face in the course of performing their duties as watch dogs of the society.

The next in line to be introduced is Professor. According to Cleaner:

That is the case of this Professor, accused of being a mercenary in a civil war against a Royal Ass-hole. From this card he read a B.Sc. in Biology and Philosophy, teaches Chemical Engineering. Yet, he is a famous poet. In this Asylum, he is having a research grant on a project of what comparative French does in solitary life (18 – 19).

Professor might be an allusion to Professor Wole Soyinka who was detained by the Gowon regime during the civil war period in Nigeria for going to the secessionist Biafran enclave to meet with the Biafran leader, Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, on ways to end the war. The next to be introduced is Politician. According to Cleaner:

And here is the ex-politician. Unfortunate! With might but no name. Patients! Spent all his life’s savings in depositing for a post. Lost his deposit, and fell into a shock. A chronic one. To remain here until the next campaign year. Heaven knows when (19).

Politician might be a veiled reference to the Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Chief Awolowo and some of his lieutenants were arrested and jailed after the crisis that followed the 1964 general elections. Soyinka (1995:324) describes Awolowo’s experience thus:

...tried on a charge of treasonable felony, Awolowo’s men had received lengthy gaol sentences. It was a curious trial, and Awolowo’s guilt was made quite plausible by the prosecution’s portrayal of an obsessively ambitious man, who had become frustrated by his electoral failure at the Centre, believed himself to have been cheated, and took to violent preparations to seize power.

Cleaner also introduces Undertaker thus:

...and finally here. A famous undertaker. He has a record of having prepared corpses of important dignitaries, ranging from imperial African Lords to a T. Can-Can hotel maid. He now believes that he is a private guest and sends out rounds of passion (19).

Cleaner later introduces himself. He says:

And me? To be modest. Was a patient of this place. Graduated, so we say here, last year. Before then, I was a radio broadcaster. Accused of helping a radical in connection with some tapes. Lord, bless our souls. I relent. Each time I said I was not involved, the more I was held here. The crime I was said to have confessed. I was allowed to go. But where to? So I stayed to clean this place. It is so full of tapes. In fact, everywhere here. So many tapes. So many confessions ... so many forced confessions (19).

The incident referred to in Cleaner's case might be an allusion to the alleged tape-snatching incident by Professor Wole Soyinka from the studios of the Western arm of the Nigeria Broadcasting service in 1964. The incident is narrated in Soyinka (1995:356-362).

Cleaner also introduces the Nurse who comes in at that point in time. Nurse informs the inmates that there is a new doctor "who believes in his work" and that if the inmates behave properly, he might recommend their freedom. The pessimism of the inmates that they see no freedom in sight can be seen in Politician's view that "impossible. No one can free us" (21). The truth that the government perpetually likes to keep detainees in chains can be seen in Nurse's speech that the doctor "hopes we are sane and the government hopes we are insane. And that leaves us forever as patients (21)".

Through a phantom telephone call to the outside world, Yerima introduces one of the political problems in Africa – coup detats. According to Adekoya (2005: 293), "the prevalence of coup attempts in Africa is incontrovertible proof of instability of the political systems operated on the continent and the reality of the unsettled values after European colonization". From the phantom phone call, Journalist learns from his wife that there is a bloodless coup and that a new government is in place. Undertaker is not happy that the coup is bloodless as he wants their oppressors who "get men like them mad" to kill themselves as "only the guns are their master" (22). Professor poetically describes African leaders as monsters who have hindered the development of the continent. He calls them 'Calibans', an allusion to the savage monster in Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

Yerima draws attention to the issue of rigged elections which is one of the sad commentaries on the political life of many African countries, especially Nigeria, when Nurse tells Politician that he might be 'pregnant'. Politician replies:

Not me, but those who rigged the election. How dare they? Me, lose in my state of origin! It was rigging. All of them pregnant with ballot papers. Pregnant? Not me (23 – 24).

The inability of Nigerians to choose their leaders through a free and fair electoral process has always been agitating the minds of several well-meaning Nigerians. One of such is Rtd. Col. Gabriel Ajayi who laments in an interview that, "The ability of a people to freely choose their own rulers remains the root of freedom. Denying people this fundamental freedom, you have inadvertently created room for agitation and growth of freedom fighters" (*Tell Magazine*, June 28, 2010, p.60).

Professor continues his comment on politics and politicians. He says that when politicians are in the soap box campaigning, one feels entranced with their speeches. But when they die, especially when they are assassinated, with bullet holes all over their body, they do not deserve pity as they would have messed up the polity.

Cleaner sums up the dilemma of political prisoners who are sane but are labeled mad by the state when he tells the audience:

So, my ladies and gentlemen
You have seen what pains our hearts
We are normal in our world
But must prove we are innocent
But they say we are mad.
And we remain here (27).

The injustice that is perpetrated by the state in her effort to keep some radicals and “those who know too much” to be allowed to live in society can be seen when Nurse starts introducing the inmates to the new doctor. She starts with Professor. The doctor says that Professor’s secret code card says he is suffering from chronic incurable syphilis. Professor denies these lies which were manufactured in order to incarcerate him. The doctor hints that the public does not believe what the press has been writing on the Professor’s unjust detention. Professor explains that the reason for his detention is that he “was given a board” to find what the country could do with excess oil in store hence he asked for a probe into the specific amount gotten from oil in the past three years and the next thing was that he was given a research grant and brought into the asylum. From the doctor’s sarcastic comment on Professor’s speech that: “Nonsense! What you did was unfair. Asking the government to declare lost assets, that was bad” (28), Yerima brings out one of the problems of most African leaders who detest probity and accountability. They treat the country’s resources like their own hence they do not like to be held accountable by anyone, especially the press. Hence they curtail press freedom.

Journalist also recounts the reason behind his detention. He tells the doctor:

Yes, Sir. Went to cover a ceremonial tour by the governor. And a touch on the little scandal and there I was taken, beaten, shaven and thrown in here. An exemplary example for the press (29).

Lamenting on the Nigerians’ disdain for free speech, Akinlotan writes:

Of all the salient problems dogging Nigeria, none seems to have been as grossly underestimated as the constriction of free speech. We have often focused excessively on hard politics, especially that which concerns democracy (as we vaguely understand it), rigging of elections and the attendant dislocations they bring, incompetent or irresolute leadership at state and national levels, monolithic parties and mega parties. But because we have an incomplete understanding of free speech, or worse, because we have no idea of the central role it plays in our lives, we either completely ignore it or pay lip service to it. The sad consequence of this national remissness toward free speech is that in all sectors ranging from public to private, family to society, and religion to ideology, there is a conscious and eager encouragement of the crude throttling of free speech and an orchestration of the wholesale abridgement of civil liberties. The Federal Government does not know what free speech is all about and hence cannot train its agencies to recognize and promote it (*The Nation on Sunday*, May 17, 2009, p. 56).

After hearing the various experiences of the inmates, the doctor promises to write a report to the authority as well as the press that the inmates are sane human beings and not as mad as the state had labeled them. With the report, he hopes the inmates would be set free. This assurance makes Cleaner to lament on how political prisoners are usually locked away under one pretence or the other. He says:

. . . It is a shame though to be locked up without a cause and the world be told the opposite. But we are here and that is the way life goes. At least our kind of life. So, ladies and gentlemen, just pray that the authorities accept we are normal (33).

The conditions under which the detainees live erode their sense of humanity. In order not to snap under the yoke of their incarceration, some of the detainees sometimes fall into trances. This can be seen in the case of Undertaker who falls into a trance. In his trance, he describes the government as murderers who kill the citizens they are expected to serve. Journalist calls on Professor who is the most learned of the inmates to do something in stopping Undertaker from his trance so that he does not go insane. Journalist even wants to wake Undertaker from his trance with the news that his wife and children are around to see him. Professor condemns this approach as it is one of the ways of government propaganda. The government always tells the family of detainees, “Your father is fine, your father is okay” (37) whereas the same government make the detainees undergo tortuous interrogation with bottles used to scrape their head until they are forced to admit to crimes they did not commit. Professor advises that they should leave the man alone because if one is not to snap in detention, there should always be some escape into a world of fantasy.

In order for an improvement in the food they are given, Professor suggests that they should embark on a hunger strike until there is an improvement. With this, he hopes that those in authority will still have a bit of conscience to accede to their wishes, but the Nurse’s answer that she doubts if those in power have any conscience left, puts Professor off from the thought of a hunger strike. Nurse later comes in with a newspaper in which the doctor’s report is published. She gives the newspaper to Professor to read out to others:

PROFESSOR: (*Clears his voice*) I will take the last sentences

“With self-indulgence and low taped rules, I have found with the support of medical literature that all the patients in the Asylum are well. Injustice on the part of the government for making them suffer from hypochondriac, which is psychological

“I therefore write this petition to say, Your Excellency, that these people are wrongly held. They should be released for humanity’s sake” (39 – 40).

Journalist hopes the head of government will stop traveling for peace summits and have time to read the recommendations of the doctor. Through this, Yerima exposes part of the hypocrisy associated with leaders in most African states. They junket round the world, going to one peace meeting or the other whereas their various countries are bedeviled with various upheavals.

With the hopes that the prisoners would soon be released, Politician calls on Professor to give them a poem. Professor obliges his request and starts a poem. In the poem, Professor expresses the mind of the inmates that they do not want to be called wise men or martyrs because of their struggle for the good of the country. He adds that the people must pause to have a re-think and fight against injustice as tomorrow; it might be the turn of anyone who has a different view from those in power to be locked away.

Yerima also brings out the greatest evil bedeviling the Nigerian nation – the problem of corrupt practices by government officials– with the introduction of Barber, a government official. Odunnuga says much about corruption in Nigeria when he writes:

Unless we want to deceive ourselves, there is nothing new to write about graft in Nigeria except for the fact that the scale of blind looting of the public till is now in billions. And the reason for this is obvious – the psychopaths and *kleptopaths* we have as leaders have developed a voracious appetite that is far bigger than their petite intellect (that is even if we can call it that). Perhaps it is this bewildering commitment to Kleptomania that defines the personae of the average Nigerian. Here’s a truth that a lot of Nigerians might not like: looting is essentially not the preserve of government businesses even if it is corrosively rampant there.

What is annoying is the deceit and, if you like, the pretence put on display by those who rape us blind. As things stand today, each day that passes is a harvest of scam and monumental sleaze. There appears to be no end to what has become the vocation of many a big man in our society... Perhaps confounded by the humongous material evidence she peruses through daily at her Abuja office, the Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Mrs. Farida Waziri, was compelled to paint a scenario that tends to portray our leaders as items fit for a thorough drilling by a gathering of psychiatrists. Read her: “If you are stealing what you don’t need, then something is wrong with you...” I am thrilled by Farida’s psychoanalytical portraiture of the looter as a demented kleptomaniac. The way we loot in this country is beyond comprehension. And it is not as if there anything to justify this madness in a society where teachers are down on their knees, asking that pittance be added to their labourer’s salaries, in a country where the poor can hardly afford one good meal; and where living is excruciatingly tough...The sickening part is that nothing has been learned (sic). The crazy looting continues unabated. Anyone that is somebody in position of authority today is in a hurry to hit the billion naira mark. The nation sinks deeper into corruption while its youths have abandoned the classrooms to sell sachet water and hawk *boli*; government agencies pay billions of naira as “protection fee” to militants in the creeks of the Delta while they expect teachers to wait for their reward in heaven – or hell as the case may be...(The Nation, Saturday, July 26, 2008, p. 10) .

Also on this issue of corruption in Nigeria, Emenanjo writes:

If Nigeria does not kill corruption, corruption will kill Nigeria. Corruption has taken over the commanding heights of Nigerian society. It is without doubt, the Grand Commander of the Federal Republic (GCFR). Like a frightfully

aggressive cancer, it has metastasized to the vital cells of our body politic and the debilitating symptoms are everywhere: perverted moral values, a rig-prone electoral arrangement designed to throw up criminals in place of leaders, fraud choked banking and finance system, irregular power supply, dry water-tap, death-trap roads, death dispensing hospitals, a progressively illiterate education system, global notoriety...(Tell Magazine, May 27, 2013,p. 60).

Yerima also harps on the docility of the masses in their lukewarm attitude towards protest against some ills in the Nigerian society, especially corruption. Speaking on the docility of the masses in Nigeria to the looting of the country's resources, the former Chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Justice Emmanuel Ayoola, laments:

Today, sadly, we have a timid and indifferent citizenry. When it comes to the fight against corruption, we are contented to accept to be victims of corruption. In our nation today, the public has not been playing its role sufficiently in the fight against corruption (*Tell Magazine*, March 29, 2010, p.57).

Reverend Jasper Peter Akinola, the Primate of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, also comments on this docility during a sermon at the thanksgiving service marking the 80th birthday of Oba Okunade Sijuade, the late Ooni of Ife, a first-class king in Nigeria. He laments:

My dear people of God, God has been so kind and faithful to all of us as a people, as a nation. He has done so much for us and yet there are those who do not wish Nigeria well. You know our national budget was put at 40 dollars a barrel of oil and we are selling at nearly 80. In other words, all the money Nigeria needs to finance its budget is guaranteed. How about the excess? Media men, lawyers, accountants, you are all there and you engage in this act of conspiracy. You are not asking, where is Nigeria's money, where is it? Nigerians are going to the market to buy so called tokunbo clothes, tokunbo shirts, tokunbo brassieres, tokunbo pants. When we have so much money. Oh, Nigeria, oh wicked generation!(*Tell Magazine*, January 18, 2010, p. 61).

Yerima points out in the play that each new government, especially the military ones, starts another round of repression on people whose views are different from theirs, especially the human right activists and other radicals. Yerima introduces this with *"a loud noise back – stage – as that of resisting soldiers shouting: "All of you line up", "Up off the lights", "Soldiers, you man this gate", "Bring him in for questioning" etc.* A soldier, with the insignia of a sergeant comes in to announce to the inmates that:

. . . There has been a change of government. Since you are no threats to the new regime, you will please oblige us, and walk out (45).

The inmates are released but in their place, new detainees are brought in, including the doctor who recommended the release of the detainees. The doctor's protest that he is not mad and was only doing his job meets with a brick wall. Sergeant tells Nurse that the doctor is suffering from syphilis. This makes Professor to muse that, "So he is now the threat to the new regime and he is labeled sick for good? (45). As the inmates go out, leaving the doctor, Cleaner describes how detention has turned to a state ideology and an apparatus by successive governments in Nigeria and many African countries to cower the people:

CLEANER: So the process continues; with every government in search of radicals for this Asylum. What injustice? I do not know. But at least you have seen it all. I hope they hear his plea. So he has to wait for a new government and who knows, it may be your turn. The contract is ended and it is a pity I still have not found my tapes. But all the same, goodnight (46).

In the closing part of the play, Yerima seeks for a compromise so that things may become orderly as strikes, riot, political detention will never solve the problem of society. Cleaner later comes on stage to give his closing speech. He says:

So, ladies and gentlemen, the play has ended. Yet as I speak and you sit, there is someone, somewhere, off to an Asylum. Lord bless their holy souls. What help can we render? Don't ask me. Just think of how to help us settle down to life now that we are free again. Thank you for coming. Goodnight (51).

Thus the problem of unjust detention continues in the African society with Yerima seeing no end in sight.

3. THE ASYLUM AS A STUDY IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

In the play, Yerima expresses his disgust at what he sees as the ills in his society. In the prefatory note to the play, he says he wrote the play because of some provocative experiences in his society. This, we believe is in tandem with the recommendation of Palmer (1969: 6) that

if we are to display clear and genuine quality of a work, then our criticism should be descriptive, analytical and evaluative. In order to ensure that, one must pay attention to the meaning, the author's intention, the subject matter and the relevance of the work for its immediate community and for humanity as a whole.

In the play, most of the characters are victim of state oppression for daring to envision a better life for their society. Professor is dumped in the asylum for daring to ask for a probe into the specific amount government got from crude oil in the past three years. Journalist is in the asylum for daring to ask a military governor of a state to respond to some allegations of corruption against him. For this he is brutalized and to shut his mouth from talking at the courts, soldiers hit him at the centre of his head and his head is shaven. He is later taken to the asylum and labeled as suffering from "mental setfront" (10). Politician is tagged as suffering from chronic shock and kept in the asylum for protesting against election rigging, which has been an albatross to the survival of democracy in many African states, especially Nigeria. Cleaner, a radio broadcaster is in the asylum on allegations of helping a radical in connection with some tapes containing a discussion on sleaze between the head of government and a contractor. The Student Activist is detained because he and his colleagues are protesting against the new military government. Even the doctor who recommends that there is nothing wrong with the inmates and that they should be released is later brought into the asylum and labeled as suffering from syphilis.

Yerima, through the characters, show the pains of victims of unjust detention as they are subjected to various inhuman treatments. They are usually dehumanised physically and emotionally and forced to confess to sins they did not commit. In order not to snap in detention, many detainees have to resort to escaping into worlds of fantasy. One feature of most of these characters is that they have set a standard for the society which has not been met hence they crave for a better one. By showing the pains of the detainees, Yerima's gives vent to Brooks's position that

part of the attraction of psychoanalytic criticism has always been its promise of a movement beyond formalism to the desired place where literature and life converge and where literary criticism becomes the discourse of something anthropologically important (Critical Enquiry, Vol. 13, No 2, Winter 1987. p. 337).

Yerima's condemnation of the penchant for unjust detention in many African states is a means of externalizing his innermost feelings. This lends credence to the psychoanalytical belief that the creative work is the author's dream while the author is the main character.

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