



Bullying as Trope in Adekunle Mamudu's *The Beauty of Madness and Other Stories*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the theme of bullying as a literary trope in Adekunle Mamudu's collection of short stories, "The Beauty of Madness and Other Stories." Utilizing a qualitative research method and employing the Postcolonial Otherness Theory for critical interpretation, the study focuses on three specific stories: "The Hostile Care-taker," "The Hired Husband," and "The Beauty of Madness." The findings reveal that bullying manifests in various forms, including verbal, psychological, and physical, with characters experiencing abuse, threats, and intimidation. The paper contends that frustration, anger, and jealousy serve as contributing factors to the prevalence of bullying within the narratives. The analysis emphasizes the need to address and combat the scourge of bullying in society, emphasizing its detrimental impact on individuals and communities. The work contributes to the broader discourse on bullying literature and its socio-psychological implications.

Keywords: Adekunle Mamudu, bullying, literary trope, short stories, Postcolonial Otherness Theory, frustration, anger, jealousy.

1.1 Purpose of Study

This paper examines bullying as trope in Nigeria short stories in order to show the various types as well as acts of bullying manifested in the selected stories.

1.2 Scope of Study

Adekunle Mamudu has several fictional works to his credit. He is the author of *The Beauty of Madness and other Stories*, *Blind Search*, and joint editor of *Parables of Power*. However, this essay is restricted to *The Beauty of Madness and other Stories* because the phenomenon of bullying predominates in the stories.

1.3 Research Methodology

The paper employs qualitative research methodology, which entails the deployment of the following methods. Firstly, it adopts random sampling method to select the stories to be studied. Also, the stories are selected based on their thematic relationship and connection. Secondly, the stories are classified into different chapters as they are related by similarity of ideas. Thirdly, the stories are closely read to underscore their dominant thematic ideas.

1.4 Theoretical Background

The paper adopts Postcolonial Otherness Theory as its theoretical framework. Postcolonial Otherness Theory examines how colonized cultures and individuals are perceived as "other" by colonizers. This often leads to marginalization and the construction of stereotypes. It critically examine power dynamics, identity formation, and the impact of colonial histories on the representation of non-Western cultures.

Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak are the proponents of this theory. They employ it to explain the relation between the colonial overlords and the colonized people. In the words of Spivak, otherness refers to "a process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonized, excludes and marginalized" (171). From the view above, otherness constructs the idea of marginalization, execution and even colonization of the people or those excluded in the society.

Nyongasa et al have examined otherness as a term associated with "the political and racial marginalization of groups" (1). They add that "otherness focuses on any placement of groups at the margins without emphasis on the political and racial elements" (6). This assertion means that two

key factors shape the thought of otherness. They are political might and racial superiority. The super power lords it over the perceived weaker power. This generates a widening divide of the enslaver and the enslaved.

Anita Dimitrivska-Jankulowska and Milica Denkovska observe that "Otherness has been concerned for those who occupy the subordinate position in society" (47). The term describes the representation of the subordinate or those perceived as inferior or even weak. Otherness is all about socio-political and economic perception of people. When perceived as inferior, then the said other is treated inferior.

Certain parameters are used to categorize them. They include knowledge, education, advancement and civilization. Salma Ahmed Abdulmagied provides a deeper perspective when the scholar describes otherness as the "phenomenon" which "creates social barriers between a person or a group of people and society" (112). Otherness bifurcates society into two groups: the dominant and the dominated. Abdulmagied explains further that "the other" is someone who is "situated outside the society" (113). Marja-liisa Wallenius considers otherness as involving two groups: the self and the other (1). The self is often the dominated one.

Having explored the otherness theory, it is instructive to conclude that otherness presupposes the dual construct involving the dominant and the accepted group. In exploring bullying as trope, it is important to construct the identity of those who bully other characters in the stories. In this paper, therefore, the Self refers to those who bully others while the Other involves those bullied.

1.5 Review of Literature

Numerous scholars have delved into the multifaceted issue of bullying, each shedding light on different aspects of this pervasive phenomenon. For instance, Kaela et al. conducted a study that delves into the intricate interplay between sadness, hopelessness, and suicide attempts resulting from bullying. In their exploration, they identified various forms of bullying, including physical, social, identity, and cyberbullying, as recurring issues that often serve as triggers for suicidal tendencies (Kaela et al., 8).

Esperanza et al. contributed to the discourse by examining the efficacy of educational interventions in mitigating bullying. Their research highlights the importance of addressing online bullying cautiously and emphasizes the need to avoid the company of those who have been victimized (Esperanza et al., 133). Furthermore, they advocate for the establishment of support centers as a proactive measure to effectively address bullying issues.

In a complementary vein, Martinez et al. focused on the pivotal role of parenting in safeguarding children from the deleterious effects of bullying (Martinez et al., 87). Their study underscores the significance of a nurturing parental environment in preventing and addressing bullying instances.

Together, these studies contribute valuable insights into the diverse dimensions of bullying, ranging from its psychological effects to the effectiveness of interventions and the crucial role of parenting. The findings collectively underscore the complexity of the issue and the necessity for multifaceted approaches to address and prevent bullying.

1.6 Thesis Statement

In Adekunke Mamudu's *The Beauty of Madness and Other Stories*, frustrated characters use abusive language, angry characters employ threat and intimidation while jealous characters utilize physical violence to bully other characters.

2.1 Abusive Language

One of the ways bullying is expressed is through the use of abusive language. This is evident in Mamudu's short story entitled "The Hostile Care-Taker". The story centres round an ex-footballer who has become a shadow of himself. He has recently lost his employment as a footballer and this situation compounds his financial condition leading to the inability to pay his rent. Thus the story opens with Austilo's impecunious condition which has given rise to frustration.

Austilo soon becomes a temporal caretaker in an apartment. The sudden appearance of another character, Steven, a struggling business man fuels Austilo's frustration his reactions to Steven and his wife is conveyed through verbal bullying. Austilo does not spare the couple: "Often times, Austilo was in confrontation with Steven and his wife: he threw tantrums at them at will" (Beauty, 43). Austilo perhaps reads his failure as a man in the seeming success of Steven and directs his trade at Steven's wife thus:

What type of wife is this? She cannot even sweep. She should sweep the entire compound every morning. (43)

Austilo's verbal bullying of Steven's wife underscores the power reception between the two parties. Austilo is the powerful self who is set up against the antagonized other. He hides under the assumed power to express his frustration against the restrained other. This shows that Austine is verbally abusive and unrelented.

When it comes to Steven, Austilo always reminds him that he too is someone with importance:

What are you doing out this late Steven? Even myself, the popular football start does not stay out late. (44).

He does not fail to reprimand Steven at the slightest provocation. He frowns at Steven's late coming to the house. He downgrades him in what appears to be show of ego. He rebukes him for taking liberties when in his own estimation should be the one coming home late and not Steven being a football star.

There is the experience in which Steven has visitor one weekend. Austilo switches off the electric power and water supply to the house. When Steven interrogates him for cutting off power and water supply, Austilo retorts:

"You are questioning me? This is my sister's house and whatever belongs to my sister belongs to me, you see? Can you question madam? You cannot even face her. You pass through me, see? I am the way and only my story is the truth to her, see? Both ways you lose" (Beauty, 47).

The resort to abusive language is due to Austilo's sense of frustration. He feels threatened by Steven's financial superiority. The only way Austilo can convince himself of self-importance and power is to bully Steven and his wife into submission to his assumed self-importance and power. What this means is that frustrated character like Austilo bullied other character like Steven and his wife to assert his own authority and power.

2.2 Threat and Intimidation

Another way bullying is expressed is through the use of threat and intimidation. This is evident in the story, "The Beauty of Madness". The story is built round the character of Oki, who has just recovered from a mental illness. This story shows that angry characters often bully other characters through the use of threat and intimidation.

In this story, Oki and his driver come face-to-face with officers of environmental sanitations. These angry characters begin by asking Oki and the driver, "Are you on essential duty?" (55) When they are unable to answer the question conveniently, the officer tells them:

You are hereby arrested for flouting the state edict on environmental sanitation. This vehicle is impounded forthwith until you pay a fine of one thousand naira with receipt or three hundred without receipt. (Beauty. 55-56).

Here, the law is used to bully citizens of the state. The environmental sanitation officer employs the knowledge of the law to threaten and intimidate the driver into paying a bribe. It is imperative to mention that those who wish to collect receipt will have to pay one thousand naira, whereas those who do not need receipt are expected to pay three hundred naira. The driver in the above context decides to pay three hundred naira to escape from oppressive legal power deployed by state officials.

Similarly, the tax collectors employ threat and intimidation to obtain a bribe from the driver. The tax-collectors hesitate and then move over to Maliki, threatening to deflate his tyres. Maliki reaches for his piggy bank, pulls out ten naira and passes it to them (57). What one can infer from this story is that the government officials (the environmental sanitation officer and the tax collectors) are poorly paid and that anger is carried into their job which they express in the form of bullying. They demand and collect bribes from members of the public. They employ uncivil and indecent means to fleece the people. Maliki is a symbol of the Nigerian people while the tax collectors represent the pauperized government officials who use their jobs as avenue to bully and enrich themselves. Maliki has to comply in order to avoid the threat and intimidation unleashed on him by these uncouth government officials.

Also, aggrieved members of the public during protest over the June 12 annulment, employ threat and intimidation to bully other members of the society into participating in the protest. An excellent example is culled from the text thus:

The journey appeared to be hitch-free until the duo entered another town, where they were accosted by a crowd of demonstrators. They held boughs of leaved and chanted slogans: "All we are saying, we are hungry", "Get up, stand up for your rights, June 12 is our right", "No to tyranny, to oppression". (57)

The above excerpt is couched in irony. The protesters are fighting against oppression but they too are using bullying to oppress other members of the public to join them. They unleash unprovoked attacks on those who refuse to join their civil unrest:

The protesters look wild. They are shabbily dressed and they destroy property at will. They beat up whosoever refuses to join them in what Oki calls insanity (57). Running through this story is the motif of bullying manifesting in several guises.

One point is certain: the perpetrators of this act are influenced by their deep sense of anger against the system. Resentment and repressed anger often have prompted bullying of other characters in the story. The protesters are angry with the government that annulled June 12 Presidential election of 1993. The demonstrators resort to bullying other motorists to join the protest march.

The last set of angry characters is the gang of armed robbers. These ones have lost hope in their country and in their anger take to armed robbery as protest against the state. The armed robbers "pulled out locally made guns and ordered that the car be stopped. They robbed Oki and Maliki, cleaning out their innermost pockets threadbare" (59). This use of guns to bully Oki and Maliki to part with their hard-earned money and car shows the way the oppressive and powerful self-bullies the oppressed and dispossessed others. Here, the armed robbers are representative of the Self while Oki and Maliki as the Other. The Self bully the Other because they wield the symbol of power (the gun).

2.3 Physical Violence

This section explores bullying through physical violence as trope in "Hired Husband". It further argues that at the root of bullying through physical violence are jealous and ego-centric characters. The story is centered on Chief Ayinke's bloated ego and obsessive jealousy which compel him to engage

the services of hired assassins to kill Osaro. The technician Chief and Mrs. Ayinke have been married for years and owing to Chief Ayinke's impotency, he and his wife decide to engage the services of Osaro to help them father their three children which resulted from the arrangement. Soon, Chief Ayinke grows jealous and feels hurt because of his condition. He secretly employs three young men to assassinate Osaro. In Chief Ayinke's blind obsession, he unleashes his killers and they miss their target and end up killing Nosa, Osaro's brother. Mamudu narrates thus:

Nosa laid there dead, in front of his house, a victim of mistaken identity. A woman who witnessed the murder agreed to seeing three masked fellows standing across the road and pointing the nozzles of their guns to the house. (Beauty, 62)

This incident prompts Osaro to be extra vigilant as he contemplates what could have prompted the killers of Nosa to end his life. His life from then onward is harried by the fear of physical violence. It is instructive to note that the story begins with violence. This helps to create suspense and foregrounds the conflict. The three killers function as agents of physical bullying. Chief Ayinke provides the reason for his action in the following words: He agreed to having contracted the murder job to be stake" (69). And later the speaker explains that "he confessed that he feared that soon, the truth might be revealed and that he would be ridiculed before the eyes of the entire world" (Beauty, 69).

As explained earlier, Chief Ayinke cuts the figure of an ego-centric and a jealous character. His fear about his impotence being exposed and the presupposed blight on his reputation is too much for him to bear. Hence he resorts to bullying through physical violence. Of the three levels of bullying, physical violence is the most gruesome as it often culminates in death of its victims.

3.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, Adekunle Mamudu's *The Beauty of Madness and Other Stories* serves as a compelling exploration of bullying as a pervasive and recurring theme within the narratives. Through the lens of qualitative research and the application of Postcolonial Otherness Theory, this paper dissected the dynamics of bullying manifested in various forms, including abusive language, threat and intimidation, and physical violence. The characters in Mamudu's stories, driven by frustration, anger, and jealousy, become both victims and perpetrators of bullying. The analysis underscores the urgent need for society to confront and combat the scourge of bullying. It recognizes it as a pernicious force that thrives in permissive environments. The implications extend beyond the confines of literature, prompting a reflection on the broader socio-psychological impact of bullying on individuals and communities. By examining characters' motivations and actions, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on bullying literature and emphasizes the importance of fostering environments that promote empathy, understanding, and resilience. We are reminded of the societal imperative to address the root causes of bullying and provide support structures and interventions to mitigate its damaging effects. By acknowledging the role of frustration, anger, and jealousy in fueling bullying behaviors, we open avenues for proactive measures aimed at fostering a more compassionate and inclusive society. Through continued exploration and analysis of literary works like Mamudu's, we gain valuable insights that can inform real-world efforts to combat and eradicate bullying, fostering environments where individuals can thrive without fear of victimization. In essence, this paper invites readers, scholars, and policymakers alike to engage with the narratives presented by Mamudu critically and to consider the broader implications for creating a world where bullying is not merely a literary trope but a societal ill that is actively confronted and dismantled.

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