

## ABSURDISTOR SCHIZOPHRENIC REALISM IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE MAD MAN

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### Abstract

This paper examined how real Nollywood filmmakers portray language absurdity of persons experiencing psychosis in their films. Since the beginning of recorded time, abnormal behaviours (psychosis) have been part of the human experience and these behaviours are represented in the cinema using language. Schizophrenic characters in films are convincingly created with speeches similar to real human personalities. This means that language is crucial in signaling the film's character experiencing psychosis. This paper uses the concept of absurd and identity to examine how real Kenneth Okonkwo used language to identify Nwabueze, the madman in his film, *Village Destroyer*. From the evaluation of the film, the researcher find that language was used correctly to distinguish Nwabueze, the mentally ill character, from other sane characters in the film. Nwabueze, in the movie, though possessed psychosis, is a realistic character in his true form who represented a community of the mentally ill within the society. Okonkwo also used the character of Nwabueze to teach his audience the absurdist nature of mad persons since he presented language as one of the first visible identities in the development of psychosis. Like Okonkwo, this study recommends that other Nigerian film writers and directors (filmmakers) should investigate the real-life situation of people in order to create characters who are real, natural, and believable.

**Keywords:** Absurd, Characterisation, Identity, Language, Mental Illness, Nollywood, schizophrenia, Realism, *Village Destroyer*

### Introduction

Many Nigerian home video films attempt to describe human behaviour and surroundings or represent figures and objects exactly as they act or appear in life. They crack a replicate of believable everyday reality. The characters' actions and dialogue try to be naturalistic, and the themes are recognizable, dealing with family relationships and social issues, the things that affect many people in real life. Whatever social problems people face in Nigeria are replicated in the film using characters. This applies to the representation of characters with serious mental illness (SMI) or schizophrenia. This paper, looked at the language of the character Nwabueze in the film *Village Destroyer* and explored how realistic his language matches with reality-representing the community of schizophrenic persons in Nigeria. It examined Nwabueze's language in a way that no longer carries its conventional purpose of conveying something meaningful and located the language's ambiguity, unclearness, senselessness, meaninglessness, and many repetitions. To put the discussion in its proper perspective, the paper briefly examined the causes of madness related to the manifestation of the disease in Nigeria. Mainly, it evaluated the deviants in the main character's personality from the normal to the abnormal, especially around action and language.

### Conceptual Term(s)

#### Mental illness (Schizophrenia)

Serious Mental Illness (SMI) or mental disorder (psychosis) is a significant dysfunction in a person's thinking, emotional control, and behaviour. The condition often disrupts a person's ability to relate to others and deal with the demands of life. These dysfunctions are sometimes called "mad



behaviours" (Adjeketa132). The history and beliefs in the causes of mental ill-health-psychosis date back to antiquity. For example, in 425 B.C., Euripides says: whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes mad. This indicates that the concept of causes of madness and the persons experiencing insanity have intrigued scholars almost from the beginning of recorded times. Undoubtedly, severe mental illness is a disturbing subject to Nigerians and human society. One whose mysteries puzzle everyone. The loss of reason, the sense of alienation from the common-sense world the rest of us imagine we inhabit, and the shattering emotional turmoil that seizes hold of some and will not let go are a part of the shared human experience (of madness) down through the centuries and in every culture. These abstract behaviours are "not new, nor are they newly discovered in Africa and in Nigeria precisely. They have been part of the human experience" (Introduction 3). Across the nation, these conditions haunt people's imagination. It fascinates and frightens all. However, while few are immune to its terrors, the thought of the ailment alone still challenges their sense of the very limits of being human.

For many years, the bulk of people within the human (Nigerian) community has noticed that some fractions of their members behave, think, and show emotions in ways that differ markedly from the rest of the group- ways that are odd or maladaptive (Debashis NP). In extreme cases, it is dangerous to the welfare of the persons experiencing the condition and other people around them. These experiences are abstract conditions that are difficult to explain by relatives and friends of people living with Schizophrenia. Although, the condition (Schizophrenia) can mean different things to different people. While it is abstract to some, most people refer to the condition as madness. For the Psychiatrist, it will mean behaving roughly in thought/feeling/behaviour markedly different from the statistical norm of the community. Such behaviours as mentioned by the psychiatrists are with the capacity and intensity to disrupt the individual's expected functioning and wish. The behaviour also frequently results in distress not only to the individual experiencing the illness but to the people around him or her (Debashis NP). Also, the Psychiatrist uses the word mental illness to apply to people not following group norms for whatever reason, people who may be overly emotional about certain things like religion, politics, sports, etc.

Furthermore, medical practitioners believe that both environmental factors and genetics can cause Schizophrenic conditions or mental illness. They believe that mental illness can be inherited. And that inherited mental illness is more common among people whose blood relatives also have a mental illness. Medical experts also said that before birth, exposure to environmental stressors, inflammatory conditions, toxins, alcohol, or drugs while in the womb can sometimes be linked to the cause of serious mental illness. Adding to those assertions, Neil, says that there are two possible ways to explain deviant behaviours or SMI. He refers to them as "biomedical and traditional" (177). While the biomedical is underscored by medical interference, the traditional views it, as caused by gods, curses, and evil spirits. Mental illness caused by traditional or cultural factors must be subject to cultural values and views (Ampadu31, 32). However, believers in the biological cause of mental illness hope that orthodox treatment can do justice by providing a cure. Traditional or cultural believers assume that traditional or spiritual healers can only cure mental illness through prayer, exorcism, or sacrifices to the gods. However, one important thing to note is that psychosis, caused by medical interference or culture (traditional), is the same in manifestation.

### **Absurdity**

The term nonsensical or absurd means out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, and illogical. It is that which is devoid of purpose. A state in which man is cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots. An absurd character is lost; all his actions are senseless and useless (Jiang463). Absurdity is also a condition in which a character exists in an irrational and meaningless universe where his life has no ultimate meaning

(HaseenandAsadullah72). This, therefore, is a state of derailment in deeds, behaviours, and living from the normal to the abnormal. A state of emptiness and irrationality in life.

Since filmmaking started in Nigeria, language has been a pivotal mode of communication. Its denotative, literary, and symbolic functions remain largely accountable for ascertaining meaning in communication. Underscoring the significance of language in indigenous films, Oteiwyl7). Although language is a means of identifying a culture in which a film is set when the character is not understood, communication is lost; when communication is lost, language becomes nonsensical, and its purpose is lost.

In characterization, the social status of a character influences or governs his linguistic structure and/or conduct. For example, a young child speaks differently from older children, and in turn, children speak differently from mature adults. The varieties of language actors use to reflect their age, regional, social, or ethnic origin, and possibly even their gender. A character's manner or way of speaking, choice of words, and even rules for conversing may highly be determined by certain social requirements. Therefore, when there is a shift from normal conduct to the abnormal, in words and action, a character, thereof is considered absurdist. Like every non-absurdist character, absurd characters are identified by their actions, dressing, what they say, the way they say it both to themselves and other characters, their reaction toward other characters, and the feeling and reaction of other characters toward them. Again, language becomes the most defining medium in characterizing persons who behave absurdly or schizophrenic in film. Characterizing absurd or schizophrenic characters using language is what Hem refers to as a "metaphor of meaninglessness." (139)

Schizophrenic characters use absurd language which rejects the language of realism. They use language which seems to challenge and defy reality. A language that deconstructs reality by consistent use of nonsense and absurd thought, which fits the all-prevailing atmosphere of irrational reasoning that, underlies the whole arrangement of plot and film scenario (Filomena443). A schizophrenic character uses absurd language to explain the hopeless sense of loss and pain in the world around him. Therefore, film writers creating dialogues for schizophrenic characters use extremely grotesque language in form and content, revealing the conditions and existence of the character(s) in the world around them. Balkaya (1) further corroborates that film writer who crafts (schizophrenic) absurd characters must give them a corrupted language full of puns, repetitions, and irrelevant speeches. Schizophrenic characters must therefore use informal language when communicating. Filomena refers to absurd (Schizophrenic) characters as anti-characters because they go against the normal way of behaviour identified with other characters. Therefore, filmmakers must create the character to fit into the anti-character situation. Filomena further emphasizes that absurd (Schizophrenic) characters must be created with curious and grotesque personalities from the beginning to the end of a film piece. The sense of absurdity or hopelessness must shape the characters in life and society. Their language must show that they are lost and floating in an incomprehensible universe (Filomena1461). Thus, unlike normal characters whose languages and behaviours are reasonable and easy to understand, anti-characters or schizophrenic must be created to abandon the normal sense of themselves and the world around them.

### Identity

Generally, identity questions and discussions have gained momentum in educational discourse. Scholars working in a remarkable array of social science and humanities disciplines have taken an intense interest in questions concerning identity. Within political science, for example, the concept of "identity" is at the centre of lively debates in every of its major subfield (Fearon1). Nigerian playwrights and film writers have extensively written and produced films built around identity issues. Themes hanging on economic identity, religious identity, historical identity, and language



identity are seen in some of their works. Benebai, for example, extensively discourses language identity as the most prominent element of a people. He explains that language, especially, is a cardinal weapon of identity that is communicated orally or symbolically and must be understood by the individual members of the group (Benebai25). This also applies to film characters who must communicate verbally or metaphorically. Whichever way they communicate; the goal is to advance the film story.

Film (Nollywood characters) characters are created to imitate real human actions convincingly using language. Each character has a function or a need. A character without function is not valued in the film's story. Therefore, every character can be analysed for its communicative function in terms of the film's parts. Characters in Nollywood help to further the plot, express an idea, and contribute to the overall film spectacle. These they can achieve with their mode of communication. Thoughts, language (words), and actions of a character present the character's identity better than any other mode or medium of communication (Vidhya and Arjunan 76). This, therefore, means that the query of language identity is important in characterization's discourse. Identity, whether in actions, appearance, or words, is important because they function as a medium of characterisation. Relatedly, film analysts can use a character's identity to refer to his characteristics or attributes that can or cannot naturally be expressed in terms of a social or educational category. This means that character identity is not only known through physical, social, or educational context but, sometimes, in the background of the language.

Fearon explains another concept of character identity. He calls the idea "role and types identity" (Fearon15). He uses role identity to refer to characters who are expected or obligated to perform certain actions, behaviours, routines, or functions in particular situations. He then uses the type identities to denote labels applied to persons who share or are thought to share some characteristic in appearance, behavioural traits, beliefs, attitudes, values, skills, knowledge, opinions, experience, and historical commonalities like region or place of birth. Whether role or type identity, language is a determining factor that regulates the film's characterization world. Its significance provides the foundation of culture, activities, and relations in film. Language, among the other fundamentals, identifies each actor as belonging to a particular social and religious group. It is a sort of heritage for the character and the people he represents (Oteiwyl1). From another dimension, language in films (Nollywood) can be oral testimony in the form of sagas, folktales, songs, rituals, and proverbs (Importance 12, 16). When this is the case, language becomes the primary and most important means of communication among characters. It also becomes the primary means of character identification.

Language in Nollywood is also used to represent the repository of the history of the society which the character represents. Through language, the audiences acquire self-awareness about who a character is and who the group he represents is. Therefore, language in the film is crucial in the development of the individual character because it further functions to express his(her) feelings, moods, ideas, information, and experience. As a feature and identifying mark of every culture presented in the film, language becomes a viable representation mechanism. A medium with which pride and cultural heritage are refurbished in film.

### **Character and Language Absurdity (Schizophrenia)/ Identity in *Village Destroyer***

Produced by Kenneth Okonkwo in 2006 and directed by Ugo Ugbor, the film, *Village Destroyer* is set in a traditional Nigerian society. *Village Destroyer* is the story of Nwabueze, a man in his late 40s who is married for Seven (7) years before having a daughter. He is cursed with psychosis by Ekene for not supporting him in a land case he has with Ikemba. Nwabueze was cursed the day his wife gave birth to a baby girl. After many years, he recovered from his insanity. However, his recovery happened after the cleansing of the community and the death of Ekene.

Before his wife gave birth to his daughter, Wabugo, Nwabueze's actions, and language were coherent, just like every other character in the film. He married a beautiful wife Nkechi and worked hard to feed her through farming. He desires to give birth like every other man around him. But on the day he welcomes his child Wabugo, his actions and language shift from reality to the absurd. Displaying psychosis, Nwabueze pauses, laughs scornfully, bends to the ground like a dog, and dances, singing, using his name repeatedly. This abstract presentation of action is a social deviation from the reality of life to the absurdity- a schizophrenic display. His sudden change prompted other characters like Nne (Nwabueze family relation) to say that he should be gotten held off and taken to Mazi Ogwomu's (herbal doctor) place for an herbal treatment. Before they could do so, Nwabueze threatens a fight and ran away from their grip. His actions were unusual for him, he is therefore termed "mad" by Nne and other friends and family members.

As mentioned earlier, unlike other characters, Nwabueze's language is informal, corrupted, full of puns and repetitions, and irrelevant. The most common phrase he uses to end almost every statement throughout his madness in the film is:

**Nwabueze:** *Nwabueze the father of one.*

The moment the insanity came upon him, he sings using his name repeatedly:

**Nwabueze:** *Nwabueze, Nwabueze, Nwabuezeni.*

He is also seen repeating words consistently. An example is when he encounters the injured Wabugo (his daughter). As he tries to assist her to apply herbs to her wound, he said:

**Nwabueze:** *Don'teee... Sorry o. Ebezinanow. Sorryo. Is it painful? Ok. I am going to take you home. But don't cry o. I have heard now, ebezina now, anugomu now. Sorry now, doooh now.*

Nwabueze also plays with words like 'wicked' and 'O'. In the same instance of helping Wabugo, he expresses fear:

**Nwabueze:** *This village is wicked; everybody here is wicked even the birds teuteureutueeee wicked.*

After he rendered help to the injured Wabugo, he brought her to her mother, carrying her on his back. His message to her mother was,

**Nwabueze:** *she has wound o, she has wound o. The village is wicked o.*

Nwabueze's language deconstructs reality through the consistent use of nonsense and absurd thought. To Nkechuku and Nne he said,

**Nwabueze:** *what are you children doing here now. Won't you go home and do something for your parent...go home? Go home and do something.*

Here, Nwabueze refers to two grown-up people (adults- a man and a woman) as children whose parent needed their help at home. This language deconstructs reality, and it is nonsensical to viewers and listeners. Further, Nwabueze uses language that differs from his action. To Ikuku the medicine man through whom Ekene made Nwabueze mad through mystic means, he said:

**Nwabueze:** *Ikuku, the only man that can turn light to darkness. The only man that can turn water into blood. The greatest evil man. I would command God to make you eat the fruit of your handwork.*

After making such a serious allegation against Ikuku, he ended up prostrating in worship to Ikuku. This was a schizophrenic representation. An absurdity. A shift from what is acceptable and obtainable within the Nigerian community to non-normal. The action and language lack harmony. They are not only disjointed but schizophrenic.

Wabugo's mother's place is where he usually goes to request food. In one instance, he said to the old woman (Wabugo's grandmother):



**Nwabueze:** *I came to know if you have finished cooking?*

**Grandmother:** *Is this your house? Can't you go to other people's houses and ask them whether they have finished cooking?*

He replied to her, saying:

**Nwabueze:** *I have a house o. I have a beautiful daughter o. Nwabueze is the father of one. I will gooo. I am about to gooo.*

Nwabueze's response is far different from what Wabugo's mother expected. His concerns were his house and beautiful daughter, and those were what he expresses instead of giving a direct answer to the question raised about food. Notice that after saying:

**Nwabueze:** *I will gooo, I am about to gooo,*

he located a comfortable place around and sat down waiting for him to be served food. This action here portrays psychosis because his language does not correspond with his actions.

More of Nwabueze's schizophrenic speeches that do not follow an accepted line of thought are found in his dialogue with the young man he meets on his way to Wabugo's grandmother's place. To the young man, he said in Nigerian pidgin:

**Nwabueze:** *Wetin come put you for this kind behaviour? Do you want to marry my daughter? My daughter is beautiful o.*

Nwabueze's language here differs from the line of thought of the young man whose aim is to assist him financially. On several occasions, he is spotted Soliloquizing. For example, before Nwabueze rendered help to the injured Wabugo, he told himself

**Nwabueze:** *this village is wicked. Everybody here is wicked. Even the birds, teuteureutueee, wicked. But I saw something. Blood. Blood is thicker than water.*

Nwabueze's senseless referral to birds who were as wicked as the people of Ugbaka land further placed him as a true Schizophrenic character. When he got to the stream, soliloquized further

**Nwabueze:** *People now come here to steal my water. The water has reduced. Thieves! I am going to watch out for the next person, and I would deal with that person.*

The community owns the stream and so, therefore, the stream is meant for everybody and every family. His aggravation toward those who come to fetch water from the stream made no sense.

There are differences between the anti-character (Nwabueze) and other characters' personalities and peculiarities in the film. Unlike other characters like Nne, Ekene, and Ada, the anti-character, Nwabueze, always uses inconstant words, and engages in capricious behaviour and odd ideas. His behaviour and mind-set differ from those of other characters, and they are revealed in his absurdist speech and actions. The characteristics which identifies him as a schizophrenic character are those that make him soliloquize continually and repeatedly. Unlike other characters, his sentences are interrupted or disordered without cogent reasons. This is because his character is created not to follow any regular rules in his speech. These bizarre or absurd features, especially his choice of words, make it difficult for some other characters to understand and follow his line of thought, reason, and behaviour (Filomena1462). Unlike other characters like Wabugo's grandmother who ask questions and wait for other symbols to respond or give an answer, whether correct or not, the anti-character's (Nwabueze) words have no fixed or settled form and regularities. Sometimes, the reply he gives does not correspond to what is expected of him. When a normal character asks something, he ends up replying with unrelated (disjointed) words that may be irrelevant to the current line of thought, thereby causing a communication breakdown among the characters in the film. Nwabueze's language falls into a state where semantics have no orderliness to infer or obey- a language that is not clear for understanding or words that do not make any sense. Therefore, his language reflects reality's darkness in the innermost thought of the character. These absurdist features which the filmmaker used send a signal to the film audience that the character of Nwabueze is schizophrenic. A diabolically/mystically caused schizophrenic state Nwabueze could do nothing about.

## Conclusion

So far, from the analysis of the film, *Village Destroyer*, no doubt, Kenneth Okonkwo made a remarkable effort in portraying the absurdity of action and language of the madman in its true form. Okonkwo used the character of Nwabueze to remind scholars of the character of Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Becket. Characters are created to engage in capricious behaviour, whose ideas are sometimes odd, and who talk continually and repeatedly to themselves. Most importantly, Okonkwo presented Nwabueze as a schizophrenic personality using the right choices of language. The madman's language fittingly identified and distinguished him (Nwabueze) from other characters in the film. With a proper shift of words (language) from the real to the absurd, viewers could no doubt identify Nwabueze as someone who has psychosis.

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