

PORTRAYAL OF TRADITIONAL PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC CONTEXT IN J. P. CLARK'S *SONG OF A GOAT*

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Abstract

Traditional medicine, in its real context, is the totality of the ancient manner and means of restoring, preserving and protecting health. The objective is to sustain practices that promote the wellbeing of the people particularly, before the advent of modern medicine. The approaches to the sustenance of health as a social welfare package for peoples are adapted from and to traditional, religious beliefs and values of each community, which are generationally transferred. Traditional medicine offers diverse areas of specialisation which include herbal medicine, midwifery, and treatment of infertility, mental healing and somatic therapy. This paper therefore unpacks the traditional psychotherapeutic context portrayed in J.P Clark's *Song of a Goat*. Through descriptive qualitative research design and instrumentalities of combination of both traditional psychotherapy and behaviour therapy, the paper underscores the roles a traditional psychotherapist plays among the Urhobo and Izon peoples of Niger Delta, on family matters and the responses of the clients portrayed under psycho-social and cultural contexts. These foreground existing psychotherapeutic forms, peculiarly the systemic which comprises of: counselling psychology, marriage and family therapy and body psychotherapy: exercise, massage and sexuality. The symptoms portrayed in the cases examined in this study, chiefly on family therapeutic discourse, further reinforce the reality of the diagnosis of disorders; defences and outrage in particular and it's rippling effects.

Keywords: Psychotherapy, Traditional medicine, Body psychotherapy, Outrage.

Introduction

Contemporary research on religions, culture and value consciousness have become crucial in health, psychology and educational systems. Religious sciences along with psychotherapy/counseling and religious psychology have remained in the burner of most discourses in contemporary times. According to [Khalili \(2019\)](#) 'Examples of the claim for religious or spiritual psychology / psychotherapy can be found among many religious or spiritual traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Native American Religions, Hinduism...' among others. This paper focuses on contexts of traditional psychotherapy within traditional medicine in J.P Clark's *Song of a Goat*. The discourse essentially focuses on the interactions with the Masseur and the couple who visit him as his clients as well as the psychotherapeutic responses during counselling and the eventual consequences of not heeding the counsel of the Masseur who plays multiple roles within the society they inhabit. Three characters: Zifa, Ebire and Tonye become victims of the contexts within which they are found. This paper, engages the controversial dimension of Clark's effusion focussing on the psychotherapeutic role the traditional masseur plays.

Psychotherapy has been defined as the treatment of personality problems, emotional problems and disorders through psychological measures. It includes problems classified as emotional in nature by an established trained person who purposively targets existing problems. This may include disturbed patterns of behaviour, prompting client towards personality growth and

development. Psychotherapy is therefore ... 'therapeutic techniques which can be called psychological in the treatment of problems of an emotional or psychological nature.' (Sethi and Chaturvedi 1985), According to J. R. Taplin *et al* (2001) the evolving practice of Psychology includes: helping without harming, designs and decisions, interpretation of ethics, communication, accountability taking the body into consideration, working with small systems couples and family the end result being preventions, a goal achievable through purposive interventions.

Psychotherapy and psychotherapies are also practiced by professionals with a range of specialties, these includes amongst others:

...psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, licensed professional clinical counselors, licensed marriage and family therapists, pastoral counselors and psychiatric nurse practitioners. Of that group, psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers are the most common. All of these professionals are trained to offer psychotherapy, but there are differences in their education and training (APA: 2017).

The diversity of forms of psychotherapy notwithstanding, the practice remains structured meetings between a trained therapist and a client. The theoretical foundation of psychotherapy began in the 19th Century. Early thoughts on the concept taking bearing from psychoanalysis, a thought that snowballed into psychoanalysis as a literary and critical movement, consequent upon which other theories like archetypal criticism and anthropological criticism emerged. Previous studies have handled psychotherapists' experiences and coping strategies with special attention on clinical scenes, with little attention on traditional psychotherapy on family crisis. Honda (2014), for instance, investigates retrospective descriptions of ten seasoned psychotherapists' experience of difficult clinical moments. The study's thematic analysis revealed six themes of experience during a difficult clinical moment such as feeling fear, feeling inadequate, feeling anger, feeling confused, urge to hide feeling and feeling an urge to terminate. These processes are similar to the experience portrayed in the sampled text in the present study. Psychotherapeutic experience is usually complex because of myriad revelatory feelings of anger, anxiety, shock, disgust, guilt, and sorrow shown during encounters (Orlinsky and Ronnestad, 2005).

Theoretical Orientation

This inquiry is hinged on traditional psychotherapy and behaviour therapy as community and cultural agency. Traditional psychotherapy essentially handles the bio-psycho-social aspects of human's well-being. Specifically, it captures contextual affordances that could accommodate biological, psychological and or sociological issues that may be affecting a person's health and relationships. According to Lambo (1974), 'Psychotherapy in Africa, especially in the traditional era, formed part and parcel of the social fabric'... He advances this thought by stating that it is a major constituent of the African social and religious life which takes in to cognisance the reality of ritual and the mythological world that predates the idea of religion. Lambo therefore defines psychotherapy in Africa as:

...*specific* and specialized efforts directed towards, or actions taken for the purpose of, *positively* influencing the human mind, especially his thought, feeling and behaviour with the object of promoting good mental health and

human well-being. Its ultimate objective is to effect a *measurable* change in the personality (Lambo, 1974:311).

In his words, the variety of methods employed include ; magico-religious rites, well-formulated and articulated quasi-mathematical procedures, suggestion and persuasion fanciful, poetic, and most attractive gab, known as *Ifa* , the use of hypnosis, trances, suggestion and persuasion mystic invocations to the spirits(1974:311).

Diagnosis within the African psychotherapeutic context is essentially patient focused. The steps identified in the diagnostic process being:

(1) The immediate cause of the illness; (2) the remote cause, and (3) the form of therapy that should be followed: expiatory sacrifice and/or other psychotherapeutic manoeuvres, usually *involving the practitioner, the patient, his family and the community* (Lambo, 1974:311).

These features are explored *vis-a-vis* the professional conduct of the traditional Psychotherapist and his clients in *Song of a Goat*.

On Behaviour therapy, Eelen (2018) posits that ‘...Behaviour therapy involves the treatment of patients’ (2018). This critical approach and method in treatment of patients was established by exploring conflicting or contrary options to the conventional psychotherapeutic practices which were influenced by the psychoanalytic school of thought. With these seeming unorthodox posture, Behaviour therapists advanced their work and research with an average behaviour therapists focusing more on analysing a patient / situation and action plan on the identified problem that anything else. (2018:190)

For the purpose of this study, attention is given to the traditional therapist’s practice in diagnosing clinical and existentialist family crises. The treatment applied to day to day challenges people face in counselling while other severe or special cases are referred to, interchangeably, as psychotherapy. Within the broad dimensions and scope of psychotherapy, the psychoanalytic practice -which promotes the verbalisation of the patient’s thoughts, dreams, fantasies and fears- is the basis for the analysis of diagnosis and prescription.

Synopsis

Zifa, a young, energetic, dutiful and responsible family man cares greatly for his wife and watches out for his household. His father is ostracised because he becomes leprous and unfortunately dies in that condition. Zifa, who was given specific conditions for the funeral, sought to honour his father and during the process he disobeys the instructions and jeopardises the well-being of his people. The gods, we are told strike Zifa, a father of one, with impotence. Ebiere, his wife who suffers gynecological complications at the birth of their first child Dode. She initially assumes Zifa not performing his conjugal duties was allowing her to recover fully from the complications. Ebiere becomes restless, and dissatisfied as Dode grows and her husband’s posture makes it impossible for them to have sexual relations or more children.

Zifa, who has been searching for cures and the reversal of the curse the gods placed on him decides to send his wife to the Masseur for a birth cure. The Masseur, who is crippled, serves as the community traditional psychotherapist. He functions as a masseur, a gynecologist, a priest and a confessor. He in fact midwifed the birth of Zifa and was his father’s masseur at some point in his life.

The Masseur during the consultation and examination of Ebiere observes that her body especially her womb is famished. He discovers that Zifa has been unable to meet his wife and that the situation would later have hydra headed consequences. As an experienced traditional psychotherapist, he suggests that the families of the couple be immediately informed and for a new transaction which would include a ritual be briskly initiated with the understanding that both families value the existing relationship. Ebiere is enraged by the suggestion, having established that her husband was good to her and that she did not want to hurt him by exposing his weakness to their family members, she made it clear that the Masseur's suggestion that she be involved with her husband's brother was unacceptable. Zifa immediately follows up in another consultation session with the Masseur. The Masseur understands his predicament: impotency and not infertility is the real challenge. He advises Zifa to initiate the sacrifice that would make it possible for his wife be made over to his brother. Zifa is even more outraged at the idea and threatens to strangulate the Masseur for daring to suggest such a thing.

Orukorere is Zifa's aunt. She and Tonye, Zifa's brother, live with Zifa and his family. She possesses the spirit of prophesy though people do not reckon with it. They believe that she has psychological issues that arose from her unwillingness, as a young girl, to be a spokesperson for the gods and her arrogant disposition towards the male suitors that approached her in her youth. When she sees a vision that suggests impending doom about her family, her brother and neighbours assume that she is drunk.

Tonye, Zifa's brother, watches with great dismay as the relationship between his brother and his wife deteriorates. He observes that Ebiere's anger is now directed at Dode and sharply objects when she hits Dode's head. A frustrated Ebiere confrontationally picks up a fight with him and the tussle ends up in a love making session that initiated their incestuous relationship. Zifa, without ado, discovers that he has been cuckolded and vengefully confronts his brother who chooses to commit suicide than face the consequences of his action.

Traditional Psychotherapeutic Context

J.P Clark's *Song of a Goat* portrays the portrait of a traditional psychotherapist and the role he plays in the society under psycho-social context. In this study, psycho-social context relates to certain affordances that connect to healing a person's mind and consequent relationship with others. In this case, Ebon Clark in the introduction to the play sums up the role of the therapist as a confessor and a masseur who renders professional psychotherapeutic and trado-medical services to the community. It is a person, who, in essence, can be classified as one who renders community psychology. Clark describes the Masseur as 'A crippled old man who is to many in the Izon Community, the family doctor, gynaecologist ...and priest (Clark, 2008). His experience is undisputable because he had rendered somatic therapy for Zifa's father. He is portrayed as the masseur among the Izon people. The masseur, among other roles, keeps the body of a pregnant woman in top condition by '...constantly massaging both mother and child until the baby is born'. The play opens with Ebiere in a counselling and therapeutic session with Masseur. Here we are shown a typical consultative session where the traditional psychotherapist engages his client. During the session, the masseur massages her womb, and observes that the womb is intact and ready for conception. Ebiere's, utterances are expressions of that of a sexually dissatisfied wife and mother of one. His interrogations and her simultaneous responses reveal that she is evidently well provided for by her husband whom she assumed had refrained from their marriage bed in cognisance of the severe gynaecological complications she had suffered during the birth of their first child.

To her discomfiture, three years have rolled past and her husband still refrains from the sexual relations which she considers to be the rights and obligations of marriage. Her husband has, instead, sent her to Masseur for Body Psychotherapy. During the session and the counselling that takes place, a lot is revealed to Ebiere. The therapist makes his client to believe that that massage is therapeutic and quite revelatory. The stage instruction gives a clear picture of the examination:

In a half-lit room Ebiere is lying face up on a mat. The Masseur, seated on a stool by her side and with hands arrested on her bare belly, has just made a discovery (2008:3).

In his words, her womb is open, and warm as a room that ought to accommodate many, she indifferently explains that it seems it will remain empty because she keeps it open perpetually for her husband who will not come in. The masseur switches roles by orienting to psycho-social context when he observes that the 'room' is perhaps too open and foresees a danger. He combines therapeutic counselling with priesthood to handle her biological, psychological and social problems, especially the impending consequences if actions are not taken. His probing reveals that the husband has no other interests outside his home that has restrained him from performing his conjugal duties. Ebiere's response and frustration makes - it evident that Zifa, her husband has suffered a physiological challenge, a combination of impotency and infertility, which has invariably become a psychological problem for him, his wife and his family.

Outrage is often a response to psychological issues bordering on conflicts arising from one partner's inability to satisfy the sexual desires of the other partner which includes procreation. In Zifa's case he has been cursed by the gods for disobeying specific instructions on his father's funeral rites. He is unwilling and unable to discuss and disclose this to his wife Ebiere. Antonio Pascual-Leone *et al's* emotion-focused theory describes how emotions such as hate, rage, and destructive anger can exist in the realm of secondary anger. They argue that this state is often as a result of 'reactive feelings' which very often degenerates into domestic violence (2012). The manifestation of this maladaptive and instrumental anger drive the plot of the *Song of a Goat* from the outbursts at the Masseur's place to the progressive domestic violence that destroys Zifa's family. The grave symptoms of depression, disdain, rage and suicide are signs reported to the Masseur by Ebiere, the most reactive character in *Song of a Goat*. Ebiere has a death wish, and she expresses this when the Masseur has full understanding of her predicament. A death wish is a psychological manifestation and an archetypal pattern that occurs when issues that exceed the capabilities of individuals arise.

Oh how I wish I'd die, to end all this shame, all this
showing of neighbours my Fatness when my flesh is
famished! (4)

Ebiere's frustration and despair heightens when Masseur advises her to inform her parents and Zifa's relations of their unfortunate condition. She therefore conforms to cultural the context by being unwilling to hurt her husband, Zifa. She believes making public their predicament may turn him into a laughing stock in the community. Her compassion and love for her husband is revealed in her words 'I do not want to hurt him, he is very good to me ...' (4).

Masseur, understands from diverse perspectives that there will be far reaching consequences based on inaction. With a plan to resolve the impending crises proceeds on orientation within their cultural context, he suggests that there is an immediate cure for the 'ailment' which will keep the interest of both families intact in his words:

‘... a good proposition would be for your husband to make you over to another in his family... He should make you over to his younger brother. That will be a tying of knots not a breaking or loosening of them (Clark, 2008: 4-5)’.

Ebiere has never heard of such an outrageous thing; she decries it as ‘an act of death and what the dead forbid...’ (5). Masseur cautiously tells her that it is permissible within their culture but she may be unaware because of her youthfulness and inexperience. This is portrayed in context one of cultural means of resolving conception or procreation problems in traditional Izon society. It is also seen as a solution to the problems a sexually discontented woman might face. The Masseur advances his therapy and advises that a religious observance be carried out: ‘A ritual will be carried out with the ‘... Blood of goat so large a cowrie may pass thro’ its nose, A big gourd of palm wine and three heads of Kola-nut split before the dead of The land, and the deed is done (5) The sheer thought of the possibility produces a violent and shocking effect to which she violently, physically and verbally reacts:

Leave me, I say,
Take your crooked hands off me. I’ll not
Stay here any longer to hear this kind of talk.
If you see me at your threshold again, call me
A big fool as Zifa who sent me to you for a cure he knew was unnecessary.
Here is your one and six pence. Now let me pass (Clark, 2008:5).

Masseur calls after her as she storms out in indignation to consider his proposition instead of taking offence warning that she might do worse. His warning is precautionary as he understands the context of her reactions and the state of her being.

Zifa, who discreetly hangs around the place of consultation, comes in shortly afterwards to enquire why his wife storms out violently. Masseur carefully engages him in a therapeutic and counselling session and interrogates him, drawing him to the tell-tale signs of a sexually discontented wife and the overall implications if actions were not swiftly taken. He chides him that he should have sought for help in his plight instead of allowing the situation to prevail for years. Zifa confirms that it is an embarrassing situation that was bound to put him to shame. Masseur draws his attention to the fact that the woman suffers neglect and waste. Zifa vehemently insists that the woman must wait for his manhood ‘staff’ to regain its strength ‘pith’.

From the discussion she has waited for three years before the counselling was done and Masseur thinks that hope may no longer hold out. He counsels Zifa to do away with the mask he can no longer wear. Typical of an average man Zifa suddenly becomes agitated, in a bid to veil his predicament he accusingly addresses the Masseur: ‘What have you been telling my wife, man? I sent her to you to rub, not to turn her against her man’ (Clark, 2008:8). Immediately, Masseur loses his conciliatory tone and speaks frankly as a professional and his understanding of ethics and principles:

So you beat your ears young man. If your wife has
Been faithful to the point of folly, that
Is your business and hers. But why must you
Send her on to me to take a birth cure
When the fault is not with her. Others
May have taken your fees and agreed to help
You keep up appearances. I will not be
One of them. What, are people to understand that she failed

To respond to the touch of my fingers? (Clark, 2008:8)

This portrays how traditional most societies commonly assume that infertility in marriages stems from gynaecological challenges of women. Zifa's utterances portrays one who is reluctant to admit that he is the cause of the problem until Masseur changes his tone. Masseur in a conciliatory tone acknowledges the fact that Zifa is a caring husband buying the best of clothes and jewellery for his wife but all these are for the sake of fertility or romance.

Zifa acknowledges this and soberly confides in Masseur that his plight is as a result of the curse of the gods upon him because he brought his father into the community to be buried earlier than the period stipulated by the gods. He earnestly pleads that Masseur should bail him out of his predicament that he describes as '... this burnt patch of earth (Clark, 2008:10).

Masseur informs him that he has made a proposition to his wife which she found appalling. He reassures him of his keen interest in his wellbeing because of his association with his father during his life time asides being a midwife at his birth. Zifa's innermost turmoil is portrayed in his utterances. He, for instance says:

Forgive me, father

It is thought of so many things make

Me mad. I will not be separated from

My wife. She herself will not agree to it (Clark, 2008:11).

It becomes clearer through Zifa's utterances that though he appears outwardly calm he is living with an inward rage caused by his overpowering helplessness. When Masseur asked him if he had considered allowing another man 'till his fertile soil' and 'fling wet mud at him', he is outraged:

You lame thing, you crawling piece

Of withered flesh with the soul of a serpent.

I shall crush you between my palms and wipe

Your face on the ground, you weaker

Than a fowl of the earth that wipes

His beak in dust after meal. Shall I wring

Your neck of fibre?

How dare you suggest

A thing like that to me?

I am strong and alive still and dare you open your filthy

Mouth to suggest I pawn my land? (Clark, 2008:12)

Masseur acknowledges that his rage, though justifiable, is unable to solve his problem. He reiterates that their ancestors resolved similar issues in like manner and candidly advice Zifa and his wife to consider it as a main option in resolving the crisis.

Schröder Thomas and John Davis (2004) engaged a ground breaking work on difficulties in the practice of psychotherapy. They acknowledge the fact that professionalism does not necessarily make the experience easier that:

Working as a psychotherapist has inherent difficulties:

Being with distressed people can be distressing, attending to disturbed people is often disturbing, and the mental pain of others frequently reminds us of our own (2004: 328).

Schröder and Davis identify three categories of difficulties in psychotherapist and client interaction; the Transient Difficulties, Paradigmatic Difficulties and Situational Difficulties. The three types: ‘...transient, based on competency deficits; paradigmatic, based on therapists’ enduring personal characteristics; and situational, based on features of patients or circumstances.’ (Schröder and Davis, 2004:328) play out in diverse ways in the role play in *Song of a Goat*. Some scholars have, in the case of Masseur, held him responsible for planting the idea of Tonye and Ebiere’s affair firmly in her head and think he should be sober for the consequences of his ineptitude which falls in between the Transient Difficulties and Paradigmatic Difficulties a psychotherapist faces in terms of professionalism and sense of judgment. The difficulty masseur apparently initially encounters with either of individuals that make up the couple is situational. He is initially faced with the reality of a husband who is unwilling to own up to his limitation and has sent his wife for a session with the hope that the Masseur will commence a therapy that will distract her attention from his impotency and infertility. The husband as well as the wife rained expletives on him as he provides them with counsel on their predicament.

In his turmoil he says to Zifa:

You are eaten up with anger but although
You crush me, a cripple, between you strong
Hands, it will not solve your problem. What I
Suggest our father did not forbid even in the days
Of old... (Clark, 2008:12)

He muses after Zifa leaves,

Well there goes a man deep and furious as
A river underground.

I hope he keeps the lid down on his wife for I fear she is fretting already. (Clark, 2008:13)

No doubt Masseur as a member of the community would later suffer personal difficulties questioning the value of his intervention in the affairs of his clients.

Two years pass by, Zifa and his wife ignore the counsel of the psychotherapist. Zifa’s household become more symptomatic. Ebiere, his wife, becomes aggressive and cantankerous, smacking her child at will and becomes hostile to her spouse and his brother who cannot help but observe the developments with great alarm and disapproval and he attempts to intervene. He innocently ventures out to put an end to the unpleasant development, details of which were unknown to him, though he having observed the strain in the relationship between the once blissful couple knew something was amiss.

Suffice to say that he unknowingly gets entangled with his sister-in-law while chastising her for hitting her son’s head indiscriminately. Outrage, manifests not only in its raw form but it is often expressed in feelings of justifiable anger, often wild passion, ravishing passion and even violations. These are portrayed in Ebiere’s actions and inactions. Her outrage manifests in an uncontrollably wanton violation of sacred relations by throwing herself at an unsuspecting Tonye who in an attempt to avoid the sky rocketing conflict says he is not her husband. Their subsequent exchange give credence to these claims:

Tonye: I said Ebiere, I am not your husband.

Ebiere: Well, aren’t you? Since you know his duties better

Than he does, why don't you take them up? If you
Don't I should laugh your entire race to scorn.

Tonye : What you want is a good cry. Now will you take your hands off me?

Ebiere: Do it, do it now

And show that you are strong

... No, no show your powers, I say,

Floor me, march on me, and strike me down as you did ... to show

You are the strong man of the family.

Tonye: Why Ebiere, you are mad, so gone far

Leaves-gathering, you are hot all

Over, oh so shuddering, shuddering

So, you want to pull me down which is a thing forbidden,

now take that then, and that- Oh my father!

Ebiere: So I am crazed, completely gone leaves-plucking,

And you? Aren't you shuddering too, oh,

So shuddering in your heat of manhood you

Have thrown me? Now, hold me, do hold on and

Fight for it is a thing not forbidden! (27-28)

This cultural permissive therapy and rituals suggested by Masseur in his counsel to both Zifa and Ebiere are completely ignored by them but his predictions accurately comes to pass. Tonye in the heat of the violent eruption of passion makes love to Ebiere and this initiates the illicit relationship between them. In spite of suggestions from other readings, one cannot categorically asses Ebiere to ascertain that she took the step knowingly or if she did take the step in the heat of unbridled rage. Zifa cannot but note the sudden transformation in his household, his wife is no more tense and the respectful manner in which she now refers to or addresses his brother Tonye who she initially could hardly tolerate. The discovery of the relationship Tonye and Ebiere triggers a new set of emotions and more outrage which culminates in forms of domestic violence. The first being gynaecological complications for Ebiere who is carrying Tonye's child, Tonye's suicide and Zifa bitterly drowning at sea for not being able to avenge Tonye's infidelity with his wife.

Conclusion

This paper has engaged the concept of African Psychotherapy and its significance as a social agency in Africa. The value of psychotherapy within Izon community have been explored in the context created by J.P Clark in his work *Song of a Goat*. Suffice to say that the Masseur, as portrayed in the text combines the role of a masseur, priest, gynaecologist and psychotherapist effectively this portrayal depicts the role of the traditional psychotherapist in early and primitive communities and how the society deferred to their opinions, treatment and counsel as a form of community social service. This also behoves the previous generation to pay more strategic attention to the findings and suggestions of Lambo (1974) which should remain valuable in the theory and practice of psychotherapy, psychoanalysis and behaviour therapy. These are foregrounded in two contexts: psycho-social context and cultural context. Irrespective of the services rendered by these specialists, adherence to or compliance with counsel or treatment is largely the responsibility of the client. The social significance of psychotherapy within

communities cannot be over stated and over emphasised. Contemporary discourse on psychotherapy have advanced greatly engaging systems such as Complex systems theory, Network theory, Dynamical systems, Process-based psychotherapy, Advanced Psychotherapy research among others. This engagement of Community Psychotherapy, a variety of African Psychotherapy, among the Izon is a contribution to the on-going research and developmental process.

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