Homosexual Tendencies and Unconscious Determinants: A Lacanian Reading of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy: Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*

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Abstract

Homosexuality has always been a controversial issue. To writers, critics, and psychologists alike, there is no consensus as to whether it is a normal behavioural trait or not. While some psychologists contend that homosexuality is a psychological problem, others think that it evinces the highest form of intellectuality in man. In fact, Jacques Lacan contends that homosexuality is perverse only in so far as all manifestations of love are perverse. He believes along with some other theorists and writers that it even stimulates creative genius in individuals as in fictive characters. Nevertheless, some members of various societies are disturbed by the presence of homosexuality in their systems. And the truth also is that homosexuality has to do with contrariness with natural tendencies, which frustrates the natural use of the human organ. Using the Lacanian psychoanalytic postulations, this paper examines the issue of homosexuality with the view to identifying its different manifestations in the major characters of Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy: Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint. The paper examines the inherent contradictions in the nature of man that results in such seemingly perverse behaviour and identifies the unconscious determinants the behavioural trait identified as homosexuality.

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Introduction and Background

Prior to Sigmund Freud's discovery of the 'new science,'[1] biology was accepted to be the root of all human relations. The explanation of human sexuality was anchored on this understanding. As a result, the object of sexuality was always a member of the opposite sex, because sexuality is supposedly an instinct with a predetermined aim or object. And the sole function of sex is production or reproduction. Therefore, any sexual behaviour not aimed at reproduction is considered as perverse. However, through Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis has helped to undo some of these narrow and ungrounded assumptions. In his "*Three Essays on Sexuality*", Freud tries to correct the errors, clarify the inaccuracies and rethink those hasty conclusions that constitute what he calls "false picture" of the old theories. For instance, he discovers that what is constant in all sexual relationships is not reproduction but the function of satisfaction. (http://courses.nus.edu.sg.courses/elljwp/lacan.htm).

This explains why Freud is regarded as having influenced or changed sexual orientation or behaviour by his new thoughts on sex and sexuality. Sexual behavioural traits, which hitherto were reproved by societies, began to get newer attention by different societies. Homosexuality as a form of sexual orientation and reasons for engaging in it for instance began to agitate the minds of critics and behavioural psychologists alike. Why do people engage in homosexual relations? Is it a normal human relationship? This paper attempts to address these posers and investigate in Ama Ata Adoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* the possible unconscious determinants of this behavioural trait. This we will do from Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective.

Before we proceed, what do we mean by homosexuality? *Homosexuality* describes a sexual orientation characterized by lasting aesthetic attraction, romantic love, or sexual desire exclusively for others of the same sex or gender. It extends beyond sexual relationship to behaviour between two people of the same gender. Homosexuality is often contrasted with heterosexuality and bisexuality. While the term gay is used to describe the male homosexuals, lesbian is gender specific for

female homosexuals. The adjective homosexual may also apply to sexual relations between persons of same sex who are neither gay nor lesbian.

Some cultures are known to have endorsed homosexuality up to the late 20th century. According to Murray and Roscoe (anthropologists), in Lesotho (Africa), some women in the 19th century are known to have engaged in socially sanctioned "long term, erotic relationships" known as *Motsoalle.* Also in Northern Congo according to E.E.Evans-Pritchard, as late as early 20th century, the male *Azande* warriors routinely married male youths as temporary wives[2]. Other examples exist in North America, Europe, and East Asia. In fact, female homosexuality known as lesbianism derives from the Aegean Island of Lesbos where the poetess Sappho was both sexually attracted to a Nubian woman, and was also a leader of a group of women. Lois Tyson adds that in ancient Athens, a male member of the Athenian class could have legitimate sexual relations with anyone beneath him in social rank: "women and girls of any class or age, boys of his own class who were past puberty but had not yet attained the age of manhood, and all slaves and foreigners" (118).

On the other hand, Jeffrey Meyers reveals that homosexuality in some other societies is "considered both as a disease and a crime…." (4) As a result, "anal intercourse was punishable by death in England until 1828, and sentences were carried out as late as 1811" (4). In some cases, homosexuality is even associated with creativity. As Meyers continues to expose: "Homosexuality, like tuberculosis, seems to stimulate creative genius, for the constant anxiety, fear and sense of doom intensifies isolation and introspection, heightens the intellectual defiance of the social outcast who is forced to question and challenge conventional ideas about morality and art, and encourages him to control the potentially dangerous element in his character, through the order and form of art" (10). The above simply establishes the fact that there are differences in the reception and perception of homosexuality in different societies.

Homosexuality and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

Our Sister Killjoy is a good example of a novel in which homosexuality contributes very strongly as a plot device and as a reference point that helps to reveal its general thematic concerns and larger narrative strategy. In the first place, in the novel, there is a deep gulf between what many theorists and critics consider as the implication of homosexuality (lesbianism) and how Freud, and particularly Jacques Lacan view homosexuality (lesbianism). But before we delve into these implications referred to above, we must first explain why we consider the protagonists of *Our Sister Killjoy* to be homosexuals or lesbians, or why we think they have the tendencies in them.

Many critics of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* have given serious thoughts on the presence of homosexuality in the novel, but not many have tried to investigate the psychological or unconscious motivations of this behavioral trait in the protagonists of this novel. There are evident homosexual tendencies in the protagonists of this novel. In this novel, Ama Ata Aidoo uses the epistolary form of narration to address the issue of neo-colonialism in Africa. It is not controvertible however that only very few critics have identified the lesbian tendencies in Sissie, the main protagonist of *Our Sister Killjoy* from whom we are informed of her reflections. The rest of the critics identify only the German woman, Marija as the one who has uncontrollable urge to have sexual relation with Sissie. Femi Ojo-Ade for instance notes that when Marija kisses Sissie flush on the mouth: "one might have expected her to slap, scream, spit; to curse, scratch, scurry out of the room. She doesn't do any of those things…" (168). Instead, Sissie is presented as she empathizes with the white woman. This is certainly not the picture of a disinterested person in the matter. James Booth confirms the above when he adds: "When the crisis arrives and Marija seeks to express her love physically, Sissie does not respond with the defensiveness of one threatened with perversion…" (92). In the same vein, once or twice, Sissie since the beginning of the relationship between the two women, always fantasizes about what a delicious love affair she and Marija would have had if she Sissie had been a man. Therefore:

"in her imagination, she was one of these black boys in one of those involvements with white girls in Europe" (OSK, 61)

The implication of dreaming of offering a male consolation to Marija's desires or tears does not lie only: "with her post-colonial enjoyment of this unsought power over a white woman" (91) as Booth contends, but because Sissie has a problem of accepting her womanhood. In other words, the lesbian bug that is eating up the white woman is also biting Sissie. She even agrees with Marija to put back the time of their meeting to a couple of hours later in the night, to avoid the stare of gossips, which not only indicates her complicity in the lesbian arrangement, but proves her tacit endorsement of the relationship. Her eventual refusal to the physical consummation of the affair does not invalidate her unexpressed and unconscious desires to have the other woman. Chioma Opara also describes Sissie as a "cardinal oppositionist to men…" (143), who sometimes wishes to be a man as she: "looked at the other women and wished again that at least, she was a boy, a man" (OSK 67).

It is instructive that Sissie's lesbian tendencies begin to manifest even in the reader's first encounter with her. In the reception organized in readiness for her travel to Europe, it is evident from the way she loathes Sammy, a young man who probably may have been "invited to the dinner just to sing the wonders of Europe?" that Sissie will find heterosexual relationship difficult. This speculation is given credence by the manner in which "saliva rose into her mouth every time her eyes fell on her countryman's face." And "more saliva rushed into her mouth every time he spoke" (9).

It's not only because the young man spoke their language so well and sang so much of the wonders of Europe, but because Sissie's relationship with the opposite sex is somewhat distorted because of her internal conflict. Since the other two men during the meeting had their wives with them, there is no doubt that the young man had been brought in as Sissie's companion. But Sissie's reaction is only explainable by her unconscious lesbian tendencies. Chioma Opara wonders if Sissie is suffering from:

> an identity crisis generated by her gender, or whether, in the vein of Virginia Woolf's postulates, she is aspiring towards androgynous selfhood which would not be an interchangeable male/female but rather a fused male-female symbolizing the author's concept of synthesis. (144)

Towards the end of Sissie's journey, she writes a confrontational "love letter" to an imaginary male partner. In this letter she suggests a way out of the social and political problems of Africa. She suggests a communication between the African man and woman. But this letter is never sent because unconsciously, Sissie's lesbian inclinations prevent her from the working relationship between man and woman which she proposes at the conscious level. In this letter, the nameless lover has apparently lost patience with Sissie's 'negativism' and has decided to end the relationship. But it is also true that Sissie's lack of interest in the relationship informs the reason behind not sending the letter. This is why according to Lyn Innes and Caroline Rooney, Sissie "abandons the love letter she has been writing to the man she left behind, to address instead her expression of love to Africa…" (205). Sissie's man in the novel claims that she lacks 'feminine instincts' simply because she finds it difficult to pretend. "She is a rare woman embarrassing to the chauvinistic man" (Femi Ojo-Ade 172). She is: "a concerned type, with some radical political ideas…, with lots of naïve enthusiasm" (OSK 127). She worries a great deal and carries "Africa's problems on her shoulders as though they have paid her to do it" (118). The problem is not in whether she has been paid to do it or not, but the fact that she is undertaking the supposed responsibilities of men.

Throughout the narrative, Sissie finds herself in eternal conflicts with men, who she accuses of attempting to silence her. She cannot be silenced because she does not see herself as female – docile, subservient, effeminate and submissive - to be bossed around by men. She no longer wishes she were a man, she sees herself as one and goes ahead to appropriate the sex

roles of the male. All her life, she has always felt at home and comfortable only in the company of fellow females, starting with her mother. Is this possibly an indication that there is an arrest in her psychosexual development? She realizes this fact at the time of crisis when she feels Marija's cold fingers on her breast. She remembers:

> …when she was a child in the village. Of how she always liked to be sleeping in the bedchamber when it rained, her body completely-wrapped-up in one of her mother's akatado-cloths…Oo, to be wrapped in mother's cloth while it rained; (OSK 64)

In a similar vein, Sissie's reaction to Marija's sexual advance may also be interpreted from a racial perspective. Because of her reaction generally to everything Western, and the European African historical relations, Sissie will seize every opportunity at her disposal to get back at any European, whether man or woman.

On the other hand, Marija's lesbian tendencies are so clearly manifested that almost every critical opinion on *Our Sister Killjoy* acknowledges Marija as about one of the most outrageous, willful and uncompromising homosexuals in African narrative literature. Lyn Innes and Caroline Rooney describe Marija's gesture towards Sissie as "over-friendly, gestures…" (203). In a similar manner, Ranu Samantrai refers to both women's relationship as: "… rather awkward acquaintance" (143). Marija's response to Sissie's refusal of her sexual advance indicates that lesbianism has become a sexual life style to which she has some sort of obsession. Marija 'dies a little' when she realizes that her advance is not reciprocated:

> Marija's voice came from far away, thin, tremulous and full of old tears (64)
> Marija was crying silently. There was a tear streaming out of one of her eye. The tear was

> coming out of her left eye only. The right eye was completely dry… (65)

The woman is devastated probably not because the refusal is humiliating to her, but because her primary goal as a sexual predator is to prey on the other woman sexually and since the satisfaction of that desire is threatened, she becomes disillusioned. In character with sexual predators, she is egocentric and puts up only a pretended show of friendliness. The refusal is thus more hurtful than a thing to be shameful about, especially considering that the individual involved is a black, who ordinarily she probably considers beneath her in status.

Our Sister Killjoy, Unconscious Determinants and the Lacanian Perspective

We have used the analyses of aspects of the novel above to establish the presence of lesbian tendencies in the two protagonists of *Our Sister Killjoy.* At this point, our interest is with the unconscious determinants of these women's homosexual behavioural traits, using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective. Jacques Lacan we must observe sees homosexuality as perverse only in the sense that all manifestations of love are perverse. Nevertheless, some members of various societies are disturbed by the presence of homosexuality in their systems. And the truth also is that homosexuality has to do with contrariness with natural tendencies and is a frustration of natural use of the human organ as directed by nature. On the above basis therefore, we identify the unconscious determinants of the women's behaviour as follows:

Expropriation of the Phallus

The first factor, which we will identify as responsible for these women's homosexual behaviour is what we have termed "*Expropriation of the Phallus*." This simply means that Sissie in *Our Sister Killjoy*, is overwhelmed by the unconscious desire to possess the Other (Phallus), which is the signifier of the

metonymic chain of signifiers, which is without meaning and stability.

For Lacan, the unconscious is structured like language, and he borrows from linguistics in his re-reading of Sigmund Freud's theories. For instance, for Lacan metaphor and metonymy are linguistic formulations of what Freud discerned in condensation and displacement. In describing how the unconscious operates, Lacan argues that the "unconscious desire can mistake one appearance for another *similar to it* and be led to substitute one signifier for another; or it can shift from one thing to another *found* with *it,* discerned as being more significant for desire, so producing a metonym. So, in examining *Our Sister Killjoy* we are interested in how meaning is generated not by the normal meaning of a word but by the place a word has in a signifying chain. And the chain of signifiers is constantly sliding and shifting and circulating without an anchor or stabilizer to give meaning to the whole system.

Nevertheless, Jacques Lacan views homosexuality and perversion of lesbian nature as the purest embodiment of the universal structure of personality, which embodies the highest level of intellectuality. He also thinks that it is based on an "inexhaustible appropriation of the desire for the other"[3]. In this regard, the protagonist of *Our Sister Killjoy*, Sissie, fits into Lacan's category of homosexuals by her quest for the ideal both for her sex and for her race. She is also an unusual and strange woman because of the exceptional intellectuality she displays and exudes in her relationship with others in the novel.

In the same way, Jacques Lacan regards the homosexual as an example of sublime perversion in civilization. Marija in this sense represents the convoluted and perverse nature of western civilization as well as the meaninglessness of a culture that presents a picture of satiety, while in reality is enmeshed in psychological crises and distortions of different nature. This situation equally corresponds with the signifying chain that leads to nowhere in any quest for meaning. Kwaku Larbi Korang avers that "we are encouraged to read in Marija's desperation and loneliness the ironic possibility that western culture is dysfunctional…" (58) So, in both female protagonists in *Our*

Sister Killjoy, we have individuals who fit into Jacques Lacan's proto-types of homosexuals (lesbians).

Hildegard Hoeller considers both protagonists of *Our Sister Killjoy* to be involved in a kind of journey, and in their travels, "both protagonists are drawn toward a world of transgression and sexuality from which they ultimately refrain…Sissie from the German woman, Marija's lesbian desire for her" (133). Hoeller's observation encapsulates very well the journey motif and quest for meaning in which both women are involved. This quest we would regard as the quest for wholeness. But how is this 'wholeness' achievable in the novel?

Several terms or phrases may be used to describe or as synonyms to 'wholeness'. Some of these terms or phrases include 'self-awareness', 'meaning', 'mother', selfhood', 'Other', 'Phallus', 'centre of the system', 'centre of the symbolic' 'ideal', completeness' and so on. Lacan is of the view that the unconscious manifests itself by the way it insists on filling the 'gap' that has been left by the very thing the subject feels is lacking in him or her - that is the unconscious. Unfortunately however, we never CAN really achieve 'self-awareness' or selfhood or wholeness, or satisfy our desires, looking to language or signifiers, as one signifier slips under 'us' only to bring us to some other signifier.

Sissie's quest for 'wholeness' or 'Other' or 'phallus' takes her first to the German embassy where a reception is organized in her honour. From there she travels to Germany and to London. In all these travels, it is observed that at the conscious level Sissie seems to be uncomfortable with men, irrespective of their colour. Femi Ojo-Ade remarks that Sissie with her "big mouth and foul temper... seizes every possible occasion to sneer at men" (169). Her entire reflections in this novel are dedicated to portraying the male species as having failed not only in Africa, but also in the entire universe. She does not only berate the black man for his innumerable low qualities, she also sees beyond Marija, "a sick, white Europe for which the African feels pity" (OSK 66). Why is this so?

Sissie's search for meaning or for wholeness in the novel is a clear unconscious manifestation of her appropriation of the

desire for the Other. She desires the Other, which she believes, will make her whole. Another name for the Other is the PHALLUS. Even though the notion of Lacanian phallus makes it difficult for any of the sexes to claim or appropriate it, the female species still encounters more difficulty with it. The phallus in *Our Sister Killjoy* is of course the idea of the Father. It is the patriarchal order of culture and above all the position, which rules everything in the world. For Lacan, the role of the phallus and castration is at work in every love relations securing the possibility of that relationship. Sissie's unconscious desire for this phallus is the driving force behind her repudiation of everything associated with male. As she moves on in her search and comes to greater realization of the enormous power exercised by the phallus, she even severs completely any other ties she may have had with the male species in the past. This is the implication of the letter that she writes and is never sent to its supposed recipient. Sissie's letter becomes the signifier of the lack; non-being and meaninglessness of the perfect society which she advocates in her letter.

Her advocacy towards the end of the novel is one of the ways through which the unconscious manages to hide its real intentions or desires. There is an indirect approval in the novel of the kind of female solidarity that favours lesbianism. But the more serious fact is that appropriating the Other would afford Sissie all the privileges associated with the phallus, and she will no longer be the oppressed or marginalized, but rather become the oppressor as she realizes in the moment of crisis that "there is pleasure in hurting" (OSK 77). Even God the patriarch, it seems to her has "given men all the advantages, even the enjoyment of inflicting pain. This her quasi-male role has confirmed for her" (James Booth 92). She therefore scornfully refers to her exploited and intimidated sex: "and woman the eternal cook is never so pleased as seeing a man enjoying what she has cooked" (77).

In all the societies Sissie visits in the novel, there are signifiers of the domination of the Other. This Other which has been located within the phallus seems to be within the grasp of the male species. This is why she sees her sex all over Africa and

civilized Europe as acted upon by the forces of the Other. Sissie undertakes the journey to find ways of satisfying this desire to appropriate the phallus. In fact, it is the illusion that this desire may be satisfied that underlies the journey in the novel. But she realizes that her species irrespective of their numerical strength are regarded as the minority who should be contemplated in the sense of "Dominated, Disadvantaged, Exploited, Excluded."[4]

Sissie is also bothered about language which is another tool of domination by the Other. She considers the English language as a borrowed language "that enslaved me and therefore, the messengers of my mind always come shackled" (OSK 112). Sissie craves for a new language with which "we shall make love with words and not fear of being overheard" (OSK 116). We easily discern that Sissie, representing the female point of view, expresses her disapproval against sexism, racism and neo-colonialism and more importantly reveals how the language of the 'colonizer' does not serve positive purposes for her sex and race. According to Chioma Opara: "...the whole novel can be said to present her attack on racism, neo-colonialism. The reader becomes aware of the world-wide oppression of women, situated in its Ghanaian context by an author, writing towards an ideal of women's autonomy." (138-39)

In the section of the novel titled *A Love Letter* Sissie's lesbian tendency reveals itself in an indirect way. Lacan has argued that the subject does not necessarily refuse a sexual instinct that will manifest into a homosexual form. The subject rather represses the speech where homosexuality has the role of a signifier. Therefore, what is repressed is a discourse already articulated, already formulated in a language. Sissie uses language in such a way that her true lesbian desires are hidden from the conscious level. Because of her unconscious desire, she takes the phallus almost like a compass. She refers regularly to the supposed recipient of her 'love letter' as, 'My Precious Something', Dear Lord', My Darling', 'My Dear', 'My Love', My Precious', 'Dear Heart', 'My Beloved' and so on. The issue is that she has identified with 'man' not because she loves him, but as the bearer of the phallus, in his lack in the Other.

Therefore, even when Sissie claims to her lover that; “I would feel a warmness creeping around my neck at your appreciation of me” (113), she also, “would be aware of certain anxiety...referring to many areas of our lives where we are unable to operate meaningfully...” (113). Sissie is of the view that the language of love does not have to be audible. However “if I was not articulate enough in that area, then the fault must lie somewhere else” (113).

The many areas where they are unable to ‘operate meaningfully’ as well as where the faults of inarticulate expression lie, are manifestations of repression of speech where her lesbian desires play the role of signifiers. So, Sissie says that she keeps “reminding myself that I love you – whatever that means - ... (114). Sissie repeats this phrase ‘whatever that means’ (four times), which introduces some doubts as to the meaning she attaches to it. She talks repeatedly of lovemaking and the potent forces of the dominant race, with the privilege of ‘hurting’ others, in a manner that suggests Sissie’s desire to appropriate this power and the privileges that make this ‘hurting’ possible. Kwaku Larbi Korang sees Sissie as projecting a self-constituting Other, away from the stifling centre. Her eccentric speech therefore “becomes a tactical, deliberated manoeuvre; one which, ultimately sustains a powerful normative function” (54).

In conclusion, Sissie in *Our Sister Killjoy* is a lesbian par excellence, desiring the Phallus, the Other that will confer on her the powers and privileges connected with dominance. This is her search for wholeness and meaning to her identity problem. This is the unconscious motivation for her lesbian tendencies, which she represses by her idealistic pursuit for women’s autonomy and Africa’s psychological liberation. Her rejection of physical sexual relations with Marija is not because she despises homosexuality, but according to Lyn Innes and Caroline Rooney “to interrogate her African brothers’ inability to break with Europe in order to re-orientate these men towards the problems and crises besetting African countries” (204). She sees lesbianism as a possibility, if for no other reason, as a threat to the figure of the authoritarian Father, and as a tool for negotiation, because, “there are some matters which must be

discussed with words. Definitely. At least by those of us who still have our tongues in our mouths....” (OSK113)

Re-Appropriating the Imaginary

The second major factor, which is responsible for the homosexual tendency in one of the female protagonists in *Our Sister Killjoy*, is “Re-appropriating the imaginary.” This is clearly discernible in the character or psyche of Marija. This factor suggests that homosexuality is an example of sublime perversion in civilization. The externalization of the perversion characterizes modern civilization as internalized by the female victims of distorted and convoluted cultures. Innes and Rooney identify Marija as simply one of these victims and they describe her as “marked by her gendered inferiority within her own culture” (205). Chimalum Nwankwo equally suggests that Marija accepts “a subservient role in her society” (Ogunyemi 157). But the truth is that the status of Marija’s gender or sex in her culture constitutes the crisis that propels her psychological behaviour which culminates in lesbianism. The origin of this problem is traceable to her desire to re-appropriate ‘the imaginary’ in line with Jacques Lacan's postulations on the development of subjectivity.

K.K. Ruthven points out that no matter how much we try to tame it: “sexuality remains one of the demonic forces in human consciousness” (87). Sexual behavioral traits therefore sometimes are indirect attempts to exorcise some of these demonic forces in human consciousness. It manifests itself in various forms and ways, which in most cases go against ‘normative culture’. Lacan links homosexuality to perversion and considers female homosexuality more ‘hysterical’ than male homosexuality. This, therefore, results from the cultural trend in most societies where differences between the sexes are suppressed. The implication thereof is that the male homosexuals with their “phallus fetishism” find the practice as a refuge, while the female homosexuals also emphasizing their femininity use homosexual practice as a protest against the male-centered societies, which involve segregation and degradation for women. The segregatory and or derogatory status/es of women

perpetrated by most societies trigger off the unconscious materials that await crisis moments in some of the women. In Marija's case, these unconscious elements have to do with her regression back to the imaginary, where she now desires a reunion with the mother she lost at the 'mirror stage'.

The 'mirror stage' is for Lacan the stage when and where the narcissistic process of construction of self begins through the 'other' which is not really the 'other', but the reflection of the 'self'. Before the mirror stage is the imaginary order, which can be likened to the 'state of nature' in the sense of a child's inability to identify that an object (like its mother's breast or body) is part of another individual. In the imaginary order, "we are joyfully as one with our mother, receiving our food, our care, and all comfort from her" (Bressler 156-57). This state of NEED for the child is soon lost when the child moves on to the mirror stage and realizes the difference between it and the object that meets its needs. From the state of loss therefore the child's process of 'individuation' begins. With the awareness of the existence of the 'other', the child enters the realm of the symbolic, which is the realm of language and narrative. In other words, the price for becoming a 'civilized' adult entails the loss of an "original unity, a non-differentiation, a merging with others" (particularly the mother). Here, there is no absence or loss or lack. It's all fullness and completeness where every need is satisfied. There's also no language because there's no lack, no absence and no loss. This realm, Marija in *Our Sister Killjoy* desires to return, after having experienced the absence and loss attached to acquisition of language at the symbolic order. Maud Elmann contends that the imaginary "arises in the mirror stage, but this is not a 'stage' in the developmental sense, which the ego might outgrow and leave behind, but a state in a spatial sense, a *stade* or stadium, in which the ego constantly identifies itself with new personae in the effort to evade division, distance, difference, deferral, death." (18). But as Terry Eagleton informs us, "it is the original lost object – the mother's body – which drives forward the narrative of our lives, impelling us to pursue substitutes for this paradise lost in the endless metonymic movement of desire." (185)

The first section of *Our Sister Killjoy* is entitled *Into a Bad Dream.* The protagonist is described as biased against Europe because of the historical relationship between that continent and Africa. She sees Europe as "sick, white Europe for which the African feels pity" (OSK 66). It is also an inhuman continent when we consider the setting of the second section, *plums.* The choice of a place close to the Bavarian chemical plant, which was used to experiment on human beings during the Nazi regime, establishes this inhumanity. It is instructive that to Lacan the child's environment is reflected in the mirror before it and this provides a redoubled sense of perspective. Its relationship to and with people, objects and itself is then installed in the realm of the specularity, because as a boy it wants to be the desiring specular subject, while as a girl, it wants to be desired. The issue that takes centre stage in the novel is man's inhumanity to woman, and this is observable in Marija's status in her society where Sissie encounters her. Kwaku Korang encourages us to read in Marija's desperation and loneliness the ironic possibility that Western culture is dysfunctional, a dead-end which cannot provide the terms for viable definition of African selfhood (58).

All these point to the perverse nature of the civilization, which Marija finds herself and the perversion inherent in the society invariably finds expression in her sexuality. Her regressive movement to the imaginary therefore is a defense mechanism by the ego to defend itself from possible damage from failing to conform to social ideals, having built for itself an artificially unified sense of self. She realizes that her environment is male-driven where the phallus reigns supreme, and since she lacks the phallus, she should find succour where she would experience no lack. In his *Signification of the Phallus,* Lacan makes a brief comment on homosexuality. He views lesbianism as always playing out the drama of phallic lack, which creates in all women "a disappointment that reinforces the side of the demand for love" (290). In this regard, there is 'misrecognition' of gender role by Marija, which implies an underlying recognition and submission, a "captation of the subject of the situation", which according to Michaela Grey

(2002) “is the foundation of paranoia, neuroses and socio-political crises for Lacan”.

Through her encounter with Marija, Sissie comes to the full realization of how women are undervalued the world over. But she realizes also that African women have more honour and greater dignity that the white woman, whom she calls “dolls” and Marija is a perfect example of the white woman. Sissie becomes aware of this difference “not by recognizing her own ‘blackness’, but by noticing the oddity of ‘whiteness’” (Samantrai 142). The manner Marija adores her boy-child reveals the enormity and demonstration of the power of the phallus.

> She was very happy he was a boy/ Any good woman/
> In her senses/ Wth her choices/ Would say the/Same
> In Asia / Europe/Anywhere / For/Here under the sun,
> Being a woman/Has not/ Cannot/ Never will be
> A Child’s game... (OSK 51)

Bressler argues that while we are passing through the imaginary order, one great consuming passion dominates our existence: “the desire for our mother” (157). The mother which is the first love object as she is to Marija represents security, protection, where there is no lack, where there is only fulfillment. But because Marija must enter the symbolic order and language, she must experience the loss of the mother. Marija’s problem is that the symbolic order denies her the ‘motherly’ protection of the imaginary or the real. As Marija takes position in the symbolic order, she realizes that she has entered the symbolic through a gender-marked doorway, and more disastrously to her psyche, she realizes that the chains of signifiers in the symbolic do no longer circulate and slide endlessly as in the unconscious because a powerful force is now limiting the play. And this powerful force is the Phallus, which has been referred to as the ‘transcendental signifier’, and which though is not the same as the penis, governs human existence. Marija’s husband is not always at home to carry out his nuptial responsibilities, thereby exposing her to loneliness as he ”would

come home certainly, but late, very late, and so tired he would not eat" (38).

Marija also expresses so much enthusiasm about the younger Adolf being a boy, because of her realization of the place of females in her society, which to her is far from desirable. She expresses surprise at what she thinks is Sissie's lack of patriotism, when the later expresses her mind and tells some truth about her country. This implies that Marija is not even free to express herself freely about her society if such opinions would be disreputable to the patriarchal order.

Marija becomes an adult and realizes that her sex seems to exercise no powers at all, and she begins to regress to that imaginary, hoping to repossess that realm where she will enjoy her mother's security, love and fullness. Unfortunately, innocence once lost can never be regained. Marija's lesbian tendencies therefore results from finding a substitute or surrogate mother to satisfy her fantasy for the desire for the REAL- the El Dorado, perfect phase that everyone desires but can never get to. Her fantasies invariably become a defense against the perverted civilization that has turned her into an abandoned object. This civilization is one in which the phallus is the idea of the Father and the patriarchal order of culture, in which her place is not dignified. She craves for the REAL which is maternal rather than the SYMBOLIC which is paternal or phallic or patriarchal. And by desiring Sissie who is and should be a 'sister', Marija in Lacanian terms 'overthrows the nomenclature' in dark mixture of unnameable things, and in a "monstrous commingling of ...wives" (Maud Ellmann 16). A monstrous commingling of the sisters is invariably reflected in the monstrous commingling of meanings in the text too.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the lesbian tendencies of both Sissie and Marija in *Our Sister Killjoy* are results of their perceived loss in the power play of the sexes. Sissie desires the phallus thereby rejecting her sexual role in the context of her culture, while Marija embarks on a re-identification with the symbiotic relationship lost on the point of entry into the male-

dominated symbolic order. These separate situations affect the sexuality of both women, and they express themselves on the surface through a somewhat distorted relationship, according to patriarchal order.

Endnotes

1. 'New science' was used to describe psychoanalysis at its inception because of the methods adopted by Freud in the interpretation of the unconscious that was thought to be scientific
2. Azande warriors routinely married male youths as temporary wives. This anomaly had the endorsement of the culture only as it affected the particular people allowed to engage in such relationships. Homosexual relations were therefore frowned at among other members of the society.
3. See Jacques Lacan's Ecrits: A Selection (Trans. Alan Sheridan 1989)
4. Dominated, Disadvantaged, Exploited and Excluded have been used in postcolonial and feminist discourse to describe the helpless class, women and the 'other'.

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