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**PATRIARCHY IN OYINKAN BRAITHWAITE'S *MY  
SISTER ; THE SERIAL KILLER:*  
A PSYCHOLOGICAL READING.**

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## **Dedication**

First of all, I thank Allah for the help he has offered me to compose this humble work.

I would like to dedicate this work proudly to my beloved parents, for their unconditional love and support.

I would like to thank all my brothers, and a special thanks goes to my sisters whom I love so much (Adba, Khadidja, Jojo ,Hafssa and Habiba ), my lovely angels Ritadj, Razane Amine, and Israa.....).

The best classmates I have ever met in my learning career. I thank them for the support and the love they overwhelmed me with ( Islam, Bouthaina, Faiza, Nadjat, Rekia, Nawal, Khadidja, Rachida ..... all of you mates I love you, and I thank you ).

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## **Abstract**

The marginalization of women in literature reflects their marginalization in society as well. African male authors depicted women as passive and naïve characters, believing that women did not have a story to be praised. African feminist writers refused to bear this ill-treatment. So they decided to revolt against these misrepresentations, they make a space for themselves in literature by exhibiting strong female characters, and their works are acknowledged and appreciated on both scales, national and international. Oyinkan Braithwaite, as an African female writer used her creative talent to improve women's position. In her novel *My Sister; the Serial Killer* (2018), she sheds light on a serious social issue represented in family abuse, and the oppression that women suffer from in their patriarchal societies, and also how it affects their psyches. This research aims to analyze how this writer tackles the subject of feminism, psychoanalysis, and women's oppression by the patriarchy. Consequently, this research aims to examine the portrayal of women in the above-mentioned novel, and to investigate how this African writer succeeded in presenting powerful and independent female characters.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Patriarchy, the portrayal of women, women oppression, family abuse, Psychoanalysis.

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### **General Introduction**

The influence of Literature in the contemporary world is undeniable. It acts as a form of expression for every individual author. Literature reflects society and permits us to better understand to the world we live in. C. S. Lewis said that: "Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become"( Holmer 28). Readers are effectively associated with the mind and the psyche of authors through their works. Nonetheless, literature additionally reiterates the need to comprehend our modern-day issues like human conflict and so forth. Albert Camus expresses that "a novel is never anything but a philosophy expressed in images. And in a good novel, the philosophy has disappeared into the images" (Sherman 02). Kevin Nawn emphasizes that "literature's role is to provides us with the necessary knowledge for a deep understanding of any problem, she said that "In an era of modern media, such as television and movies, people are misled into thinking that every question or problem has its quick answer or solution," she said. "However, literature confirms the real complexity of human experience" (G.Kondala and Vijaya 239). Literature permits individuals to assemble a better comprehension of culture and have more appreciation for them. This is the power that words have. They can spark a meaning, start a movement, change a country and make developments while being everlasting.

African literature is laden with works that demonstrate male dominance, and constantly articulate African woman in stereotyped inferior characterization. In the early beginnings of African works of literature most male writers encouraged the marginalization of women. As a result, female characters are made peripheral in literature, while only a few arise as powerful and credible protagonists. The ideal female character created by male writers often acts within the structure of her customary roles as wife and mother...etc. Although some modern African female writers seek to subvert the classical male writing, where the female characters are often relegated to the margins of the culture. But, still,

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it is minimum. Also, it is interesting that in the flood of literature on women in Nigeria, there are a few works that specifically address the issue of family abuse and women oppression in the patriarchal societies including the Nigerian society.

Feminists such as Luce Irigaray say that women have to create a space for themselves in language, and use literature as a means to revolt on the patriarchy that dominates both society and literature, and forces women to keep submissive, marginal and unequal with their male counterpart, otherwise women will remain subordinate to men “ In order to create a space for women, one must assume the feminine role deliberately”(Rivkin and Ryan 795). Irigaray is saying that a women should learn how men dominated language subordinates the female. Through mimicry, the woman starts to write in a designated role and by doing it, works from the inside out to disrupt the old system. One example of this type of writing can be noticed in a short story titled “The Bloody Chamber” by Angela Carter for example. The story doesn’t end with the female character being saved from her captor by a man hero, but instead she's saved by her mother. Carter basically “jammed” the machinery of what was presumed to take place in the narrative by making the female the prevailing power, to feature a feminist perspective.

Braithwaite Oyinkan in her novel *My sister; the Serial Killer* employs a powerful female character in order to rebel against the conventional poor portrayals of female characters as being powerless and substandard compared to men. She mentioned in her interview “My Sister, the Serial Killer by Oyinkan Braithwaite- BBC Africa Book Club ” on a YouTube channel named BBC News Africa that: “people used to see stories about social crimes stories about man killing numerous women.....it was nice to see a woman having that power and using it in the same sort of reckless way”( BBC News Africa). She emphasizes her intention to present a strong female character. She presented a strong female character who rejected tyranny, and subverted the old inferior stereotypical characterization of a female character in literature.



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*My sister; the serial killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite is one of the rare novels where a female writer didn't fail to portray women's oppression by the patriarchy inside the Nigerian society. Oyinkan Braithwaite is a Nigerian-UK writer and novelist. She was born in Lagos in 1988. Her family moved to Southgate in north London UK where she spent most of her childhood. She returned to Lagos in 2001. Then she studied law and creative writing at Surrey University and Kingston University. Later she moved back to Lagos in 2012. Her debut novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* is a darkly comedic story. The book was praised by The New York Times, The Washington Post, Marie Claire, and authors such as Ayobami Adebayo and Edgar Cantero. It has been longlisted for the Booker Prize in 2019. Also, it was considered for a movie by the producers of *Baby Driver*. It was the second-highest best-selling title on the list of July 2019, with 13,052 units sold according to Nielsen BookScan.

*My Sister, The Serial Killer* is a dark fiction comedy. Its events took place in modern day Lagos, Nigeria. It tells the story of a gorgeous serial killer Ayoola, through her protective older sister point of view. Korede, the narrator, and The protagonist is a Nigerian woman. She works in a local hospital as a nurse. Korede's younger sister Ayoola had a pathological desire for killing her boyfriends. Korede bound by a natural sense of familial bond, has consistently helped Ayoola dispose of the bodies and cover-up on her crimes. Through flashbacks, the story reveals that Korede and Ayoola's father was quite abusive. The narrative even implies that Ayoola and/or Korede may have secretly killed him. Korede decides never to be disloyal to her sister, and so she will keep helping to cover up Ayoola's crimes. The story has more than a touch of an old dark tale that might the straightforward plot the title indicate.

The novel discusses the obscure complexity of sibling bonds. Ayoola and Korede are allies and codependents sisters!, in the strife to survive in their patriarchal corrupt city, that strives to suffocate women at every turn. In this work the writer revolts against the traditional way of writing, and

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represents women as a strong character, superior to men after being a victim under the patriarch oppression. Review by Nilanjana Roy titled “My Sister, The Serial Killer by Oyinkan Braithwaite — blood bonds” presents a brief analysis of the main characters, and describes also the twisted knot of family bonds, legacies and blood ties, and how the main character Korede struggles with sibling loyalty. Also, it was noted in a review by a New York Times article titled “In This Novel, One Sister Is a Nurse. The Other Is a Murderer” by Fiammetta Rocco that the article focuses more on the style of writing the author uses, and gives a brief summary of the story. It focuses on the theme of killing and referred to the story as a less a murder mystery, and that it focuses more on the weapon Ayoola uses, and how it contributes in her criminal behavior, rather on why Ayoola is killing her boyfriends. Another article in the New York Times titled “Helping Out Family Is Taken to Extremes in ‘My Sister, the Serial Killer’” presents a brief analysis of the main characters, the style the author uses and the main themes in the story.

Another interesting article titled “Siblinghood and the Psychology of Trauma: Oyinkan Braithwaite’s *My Sister, the Serial Killer*” by Lanre Apata, talks about the importance of companionship, therapy, and confiding, how trauma shapes people, and the ruinous implications of male’s tyranny. It also talks about patriarchy and family bond in the novel.

The articles mentioned above and others have mentioned the strong relationship between the two sisters, love and loyalty that bonds them, and how they revolt against the oppression of the corrupted patriarchal society they lived in. However, a detailed Feminist analysis and psychoanalysis of the text isn’t tackled yet. Therefore, our purpose of this study is to make a feminist and psychoanalytic interpretation of this interesting story. Also, we tried to explain why would the author exhibit strong female character in her novel.

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### **1. Statement of the Problem**

For a long time, African society has repressed and persecuted women through the patriarchal beliefs and old norms. Therefore, African women agitated to release themselves from this ill-treatment. They started to fight marginalization and created a place in society and literature. Feminism was the spark that ignited women's fight for equality. The mottos of this movement inspired several African authors. They took on the challenge of freeing women from the shackles of slavery in both literature and culture. Literary works such as Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister; the Serial Killer* challenged all fixed assumptions about women's role, prompting us to conduct this humble work.

### **2-Goals of the Research:**

This paper attempts to examine mainly the dimensions of women abuse, violence and discrimination towards women at family level in Nigeria, the oppression of the patriarchy, and how women revolted against it through language in literature (feminism writings). Specifically through feminism analysis of the novel of *My sister; the serial killer*, by Oyinkan Braithwaite and through detailed psychoanalysis of the main characters in the novel. For a better understanding of this work, the historical approaches of Feminism and psychoanalysis will be employed. In addition to an attempt to make a literary Feminist and psychoanalytic criticism understanding of the text, an examination of the portrayal of women in this work, and an investigation of how this African writer succeeded in presenting powerful and independent female characters that could challenge the prejudiced practices of the Nigerian Patriarchal society.

### **3- Significance of the Study**

This work will be of great importance at many levels. First, it might be considered as a source for subsequent colleagues or researchers, those who are interested in studying the feminists studies or other related fields of studies, especially those who are concerned with women in general or with women struggle for recognition or feminist psychology. Also, it might be considered as a model study for African women who refuse to stay under the oppression of men. Moreover, this study inspects issues and daily life problems, among which is female abuse by the Patriarch in society, and other issues in society such as violence and corruption, to be recognized and to be addressed by local authorities or International organizations, so they find solutions to limiting such serious abuses, generally in Africa and the world, and specifically in Nigeria. Furthermore, it is a right, a duty and a commitment for me as women to contribute to this field and enlighten people, particularly men, about the significant role of women in societies.

### **4. Method**

In this research, we tried to make a feminist and psychoanalytic study of *My Sister; the Serial Killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite, and we made an attempt to answer some of our main questions regarding this work, mainly why would Oyinkan Braithwaite in her debut novel *My Sister; the Serial Killer* portray women as strong characters that defeated and killed men?, How did the oppression of the patriarchy affected the psyche of the main characters?, and how did the main characters in the story revolt against the oppression of patriarchy? To answer those questions, we adopt the qualitative research method to answer the how and whys.

### **5. The Structure of the Work**

The study is an examination of an African novel. Thereby, the work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter gives a general idea or a theoretical background, it discusses women as a central interest of feminist studies, a brief history of feminism and African feminism. Furthermore, a special attention is given to patriarchy and its origins in African literature and society. In addition, This chapter sheds light on the existence of patriarchy as an oppressive system in this African novel.

The second chapter is devoted to the feminist study of Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister; the Serial Killer*. It deals with the treatment of patriarchy and feminism dimension in the novel. Moreover, it discusses the techniques and the style used by the author in her novel. Finally, the last chapter gives a psychoanalytic study of the text, it emphasizes the impact of patriarchy and oppression on the psyche and the behavior of the main characters in the novel.

# CHAPTER ONE

*The Theoretical Background.*

**1.1.Introduction**

It is very reasonable to say that literature is a witness to women's evolution through time. The changing role of women in literature from the past to the present, indicates the progress of women status and women empowerment.

Once women are mentioned, what comes to our mind can be their beautiful appearances and their engagement in heavy housework or as someone's girl, wife or mother. These stereotyped secondary images of women prevailed for centuries, and totally indicate the limitation and the marginalization of women in society and literature through time. However, in reading *My Sister; the Serial Killer* by Oyianka Braithwaite, as a reader you will notice what is not the norm.

Women, and how they are portrayed in literature is the main focus of feminist literary criticism. In this chapter, we are going to apprehend what is feminism as a literary movement, a brief history about the theory and how it manifested in Africa. Furthermore, we will discuss how the above-mentioned book reflects the purposes and the concepts of this movement. Also, we will discourse the institution of patriarchy and how it emerged in Africa in the first place, how patriarchy affected the status and the value of women in such societies, how patriarchy dominated literature, how it marginalized women, and how this system shapes the formulation of the female characters in the story.

## 1.2. Women as a Main Theme in Feminist Writings

Feminist writings are characterized by their emphasis on sharing and valuing women's perspectives on their own lives. However, in the past men were the ones who wrote about women from their own perspective. During the 1960s and 1970s, feminist critics shifted from the political to the literary sphere, observing that the classical literary canon<sup>1</sup> is dominated by males “feminist scholars realized that the "canon" taught in schools was overwhelmingly male” (Rivkin and Ryan 766). They discovered abundant evidence of male dominance, and prejudice that strengthened Beauvoir's claim that males considered the female "the Other"(Bressler104).

Women have been stereotyped and often misrepresented in literature and culture. With comments from authors, theologians, and other global figures such as Aristotle and Charles Darwin undermining and degrading women, and declaring that women were lesser beings. *Ecclesiasticus*, a book from the biblical apocrypha says “All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman”(25:19 KJV). Even the Book of *Genesis* considers Eve responsible for the loss of paradise. Later generations of influential authors have been similarly ungenerous in their portrayals of women's nature. Alexander Pope (1688–1744) declared, “Most women have no character at all”, and John Keats (1795–1821) explained : “The opinion I have of the generality of women—who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a sugar plum than my time—forms a barrier against matrimony which I rejoice in”(Dobie 103). This glorification of men, and the underestimation of women by some ancient European authors and intellectuals caused the emergence of the system of patriarchy, which is considered as a main source of women oppression, as it is explained in a book titled *Encyclopedia of Black studies* :

The paradigm that underlies the modern assumptions of patriarchy may have emerged from the insight of specific European authors drawing on the patriarchal basis of Greek and

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<sup>1</sup> canon is the works of literature that any educated person should be familiar with.



Roman philosophies. These authors saw matriarchy, and the matrilineal system of the ancient southern societies, as barbaric and sexually promiscuous. This pervasive notion on which patriarchy has based its assumption of superiority has left an undeniable curse on women and it has always been and still is the ultimate reason for the oppression of women in society ( Asante and Mazama 395).

Not only ancient western cultures regarded women as a lesser beings. Women around the world were under discrimination, including Africa. In perusing early literature, feminist critics and scholars remark that it neither expresses nor legitimates women's experiences, and in reading it women have to think as men, identify with male viewpoints, accept male values and interests, and endure mistreatment and oppression. Feminist theorists argue that women have literature of their own, possessing its own images, themes, characters, forms, styles, and canons. In *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1978) Judith Fetterley insists in the book's introduction that women read differently than men. She examines classical American fiction from Irving and Hawthorne to Hemingway and Norman Mailer. She criticized the misrepresentation of women in those works that regarded as "the canon", and she affirms that it is not "universal" but masculine literature, that forces female readers to identify against themselves. Under such circumstances, women must become "resisting readers" rather than assenting ones (Fetterley).

Feminism emphasizes the imperative that women must break free from this oppression, and define themselves as an independent human beings who can express their feelings and thoughts freely by themselves. The subordination, oppression, discrimination and the marginalization of women in comparison to men in the society provoked women, and have attracted the attention of scholars, activists, feminists and development workers around the world including Nigeria Feminist critics and writers, to show humankind the errors of such a way of reasoning. They defend on women and they declare that they are humans with their own rights, they are not incomplete or inferior to men. As it is stated in the *Literary Criticism* book :

Feminism's goal is to change this degrading view of women so that all women will realize that they are not a "nonsignificant Other," but that instead each woman is a valuable person possessing the same privileges and rights as every man. Women, feminists declare, must define themselves and assert their own voices in the arenas of politics, society, education, and the arts. By personally committing themselves to fostering such change, feminists hope to create a society in which the female voice is valued equally with the male (Bressler 103).

In her book *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*, Weedon Chris defines feminism as politics that might change the balance of power in the advantage of woman.

It is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become (Weedon 01).

Earlier, women were neglected in all domains of society. They were confined to the domestic sphere, while public life preserved to men. They didn't have the right to work, vote or educate. As a result works of literature were written by male writers to male readers. But with the advance of modern life and after a massive struggle through time, women gained more rights. Women started learning, reading and creating literature. The interest of feminist writing is to have women in the position of authority about their own lives and experiences, to express, hear and believe women's voices from women point of view.

### **1.2.1 Feminism in African Literature.**

Feminism originated from the Western cultures but it is manifested today all around the world. It is represented by several institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. Feminism, as it is defined in *The feminism book*, is a movement that aimed to achieve legal, economic, and social equality between the sexes, and to end sexism and the oppression of women by

men (Kramer et al. 11). Western feminist activists contend that all movements that work to obtain women's rights should be considered affiliated with the feminist movements, even when they did not (or do not) apply the term to themselves.

Women have so far functioned in subordinate, and for the most part negative role within the works of male African writers. The African literature has been considered as a fictitious patriarchal world because male writers presented their female characters as oppressed and subjugated women who have no effort to change their destiny. They are also portrayed as “sex objects, prostitute, indolent, pleasure seekers” (Oso 1-2). There is an indication that the status of women is now in constant change. As more African writers become more conscious of the condition of women in society, female characters will assume a more assertive stance, and play a more positive role in African literature. But one must emphasize that this development will be influenced in no small measure by the changing status of women in society, which is something that is to a large extent determined by the determination and effort of women themselves. Because in the final analysis, any oppressed group is its own principal liberator.

African feminism believes that if the relationship is equal not patriarchal, then men and women can establish a relationship of mutual benefit, change and progress in both the public and private spheres.

### **1.2.2. Feminism in “*My Sister; the Serial Killer*”**

Braithwaite aimed through her novel to convey a message to the world. Although she didn't refer to it explicitly. By telling a story of a female character, she makes us as readers aware of the dark side of the daily woman experience in our modern life, and how the patriarchal society affected them negatively. The personal life of the author remains private, and we don't know much to make a clear connection between her personal life and the novel. But, we could make a strong link between the story and the society the author lived in.

*My Sister; the Serial Killer* is crime thriller. It tells a story of two Nigerian sisters Korede and Ayoola, and the strong loyalty and family bond that binds them. The relation between the two sisters reminds us as readers of the second wave feminism slogan "Sisterhood Is Powerful" 1968 by Kathie Sarachild. The two sisters are powerful in that they are united in order to revolt against the oppression of the patriarchal society. Braithwaite mentioned in an article titled "How to Write a Female Serial Killer" that she is not writing crime in the traditional sense. It wasn't important to her to explore the murders or to explore the victims so much as it was to explore this dynamic between the two sisters. Both Ayoola and Korede are victims of their circumstance (Braithwaite). In most of her interviews on YouTube channels, Braithwaite mentioned that she was inspired by the black widow spider, and that she finds it is interesting that the female would eat the males if she was hungry. She said that :

The creature, the black widow spider, was the first inspiration. I found this idea that the female would eat the males if she was hungry and they happened to be close to be quite funny. It was funny because the males weren't supposed to be prey. The fact that nature had this dynamic was interesting and so the concept stuck with me (BBC News Africa).

Braithwaite wanted to write mainly about woman killing man. Her insistence on writing about a strong woman that kills men, and to exhibit a crime novel that reverses the usual male predator female victim roles, were confirmed by her own words. In an interview on a YouTube channel named BBC News Africa, she said that "people used to see stories about social crimes stories about man killing numerous women.....it was nice to see a woman having that power and using it in the same sort of reckless way"( BBC News Africa). Her comments proved our hypothesis, that Braithwaite wanted to present a work that symbolizes the revolt against the patriarchal corrupted society and the conventional inferior representation of the female character. Although, the language the author uses might sound exasperating. That is because the issue talked itself is abstruse and

profound. That reminds us of this quote from the book-length essay *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Not long ago, I wrote an article about being young and female in Lagos. And an acquaintance told me that it was an angry article, and I should not have made it so angry. But I was unapologetic. Of course it was angry. Gender as it functions today is a grave injustice. I am angry. We should all be angry. Anger has a long history of bringing about positive change (Adichie 10).

In an article titled “How to Write a Female Serial Killer”. Braithwaite said that she is not sure if there’s something inherently feminist about a female serial killer. However, she believes strongly in a woman’s ability to do whatever she chooses to do, and that the characters in the story are strong women, maybe stronger even than the men. It’s important for women to know the power that they have. She doesn’t mean necessarily the power based on the fact that they’re women, just that they have it(Braithwaite).

Braithwaite employs a female protagonist, and also the other main character is a female. As the novel tells a story of two sisters. The story opposed the accustomed inferior depiction of the female character as inferior, male reliance character that we are used to in the most famous works of literature. The story tells a daily social life of a female character from a female narrator point of view which fosters the message of the story. Her novel presents an image of a suffering woman preoccupied with her inner world and her sulking frustration on. The protagonist Korede looks after her younger sister who has criminal tendencies. Ayoola kills her boyfriends and her older sister covers on her crimes, and cleans up all the evidence from crime scenes.

The story reveals that the girl’s father abused them and their mother when they were younger. Also the story reveals that they probably have killed him. In the story, the main character is forced into a difficult situation, and she is forced to choose a side, whether to do what is legally correct, that is to confess her sister’s crimes or to keep the secret and continue helping in cleaning up after her sister.

Korede chooses the second. She even regrets her attempt to warn Tade that her sister might murder him as she does with her previous lovers “She did this for me and ended up hurt because I betrayed her. I feel dizzy. I don’t want to admit that I chose a man’s welfare over hers” (Braithwaite 148). “I don’t know...it’s his word against yours. Against ours, Korede. It’s his word against ours” (Braithwaite 149). “She was right. You have to choose a side, and my lot was cast long ago. She will always have me and I will always have her; no one else matters”(Braithwaite 154). Aristotle in his book *Politics* mentioned that “Character is that which reveals choice, shows what sort of thing a man chooses or avoids in circumstances where the choice is not obvious”(Gordon 93). We can perceive that the character’s choice to upholding her sister is feminist choice. The two sisters’ union resembles feminists unification against oppression and patriarchy.

### **1.3.Patriarchy in Africa:**

An article titled “The Nigerian Patriarchy: When and How” states that African society specifically Nigeria is patriarchal in nature. It is also known for unequal gender relations which cast women in a subordinate position (Dogo). The concept of patriarchy has been defined and recreated by feminists in the past two decades in order to analyze the origins and the conditions of men’s oppression of women (Kamarae and Spender 397). *Encyclopedia of Black studies*(2005) describes patriarchy as a system that is both oppressive and discriminatory. Patriarchy is oppressive in all areas of society, including social, economic, political and cultural. discriminatory in its control of access to power, management of resources and benefits, and in manipulation of public and private power structures (Asante and Mazama 395).

Aristotle classified males as active and females as passive. According to him a female was a “mutilated male”, with no soul. He also mentioned that the biological inferiority of woman makes her inferior also in her capabilities, her ability to reason and therefore, her ability to make decisions. Because of his superiority and woman inferiority. Man is meant to rule and woman to be ruled. In

his work *Politics*(1254b13–14). Aristotle states that "as regards the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject" (Nicholas 467).

However, African scholars argued that African society was not always patriarchal, but it became patriarchal as a result of the introduction of external factors like the religions of Islam and Christianity, colonialism, education, Capitalism and others (Dogo 263). Alexander and Barbara Taylor (1980) stated that, patriarchy is an unequal social structure, that is a product of capitalism and of a system of sexual division(Kamarae and Spender 399). They argue that most African society, including Nigeria, was matriarchal in nature. African scholars among them is The famous Senegalese scholar and the most influential scholar on the Black world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Cheikh Anta Diop did the most detailed work on the question of matriarchy in Africa that has ever been produced *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*. He proved that many of the Eurocentric scholars and scientists had some wrong perceptions of African history in many of their theories. He demonstrated the generally higher status of women in ancient and later pre-colonial Africa in contrast to Europe and Asia during the same period. As we mentioned earlier, patriarchy boosted by other factors including capitalism. Marxist theory of class oppression explains in details how women became a reserve labor force for capitalism, and that women's generally piddling salaries provide extra overflow to a capitalist male employer (Rivkin and Ryan 792), and that women serve the ends of capitalist consumerism in their roles as administrators of family consumption (Rivkin and Ryan 903).

Africa doesn't differ from any other continents in the world, where whatever privileges the society offers the individual, it is less if one is a female. Women were marginalized in political and social affairs in Nigeria. Also, literature is dominated by Patriarchy. Nigerian women often found themselves in harsh restless world dominated by men. It is demonstrated in the literature that the establishment and the practice of male dominance over women and children is a historic process, that is formed by men and women, and that the patriarchal family constitute the basic unit of the whole

system (Asiyanbola 03). The African culture failed to consider the creativity of women or their roles outside homes, because women's role was restricted to merely be a mother and an obedient wife. This ideology was inherited in the mindset of the African people for years. In an article written by Minna Salami titled in "Feminism in Nigeria- by and for who? ". She argues that the authorities and society in Nigeria intentionally aimed to ignore women in all different domains, including literature. Women are marginalized by their male counterparts, and their works either remain unacknowledged or kept nominal by literary critics. Rather they emphasize more on promoting to historical male figures. Salami said that:

Already as a child, I took notice and issue, that men had all the so-called "head" positions in our society; they were heads of state, heads of companies, heads of the army and heads of families. In school when we learnt about Nigerian history, we did not learn about notable people such as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, Charlotte Obasa, Oyinkan Abayomi or Queen Amina of Zazzau, or the many notable Nigerian women who played vital roles in shaping our nation. We learnt about great men like Herbert Macauley and Sir Tafawa Balewa. We also learnt about westerners ( Salami).

Also Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her book *We Should All Be Feminists* addresses some Nigerian facts about women daily abuse and discrimination from her personal experience as a female citizen in the Nigerian society, which considers women as a second class citizen, saying that people do a great disservice to both men and women by teaching them to adhere to strict gender roles.

men rule the world. This made sense – a thousand years ago. Because human beings lived then in a world in which physical strength was the most important attribute for survival; the physically stronger person was more likely to lead. And men in general are physically stronger. (There are of course many exceptions.) Today, we live in a vastly different world. The person more qualified to lead is not the physically stronger person. It is the more intelligent, the more knowledgeable, the more creative, more innovative. And there are no hormones for those attributes. A man is as likely as a woman to be intelligent, innovative, creative. We have evolved. But our ideas of gender have not evolved very much (Adiche 09).



African feminist writers strive to be heard, recognized and to share or celebrate a story of women from women point of view. By using feminism criticism as one way both to challenge male dominance and the institution of patriarchy that dominates literature, and to alter society. For centuries, African women were abused, victimized, and oppressed to a great extent, under the label of tradition, norms and culture. They had no place to express their feelings and to repulse the despotic practices imposed on them. Their voices and thoughts were prohibited to be heard or expressed publicly in society. Despite this ill-treatment and persecution, many prominent feminists have emerged and militated to put an end to women suffering. They are praised among women folks and the world, and they are awarded by global prizes. African feminism aims to illuminate that in order to develop African countries and create a better society, we need to create social institutions that will resist foreign hegemony over African people. A society that encourages engaged thinking and that appreciates its inhabitants on an equally focused footing, according to their creativity and their contributions, not according to their gender.

### **1.3.1 Patriarchy in the Setting of the Novel: Nigeria**

The novel indicates through flashbacks that the sister's father was violent. He emotionally and physically abused his wife and his daughters. The novel's events take place in Lagos, Nigeria. With this specific setting, the novel aims to examine patriarchal social structures that often characterize Nigerian culture, as well as other cultures. For example, the many abuses committed by Korede and Ayoola's father were protected and authorized by the iniquitous patriarchal privileges granted to him in society.

When she was asked in an interview titled "Oyinkan Braithwaite, "My Sister the Serial Killer," on a YouTube channel named "Politics and Prose" about the settings, and why she used Lagos. Braithwaite said that Lagos is integral to the plot and that it's a character, and that setting in Nigeria made it very easy for her in terms of that she has not to worry about the crime scene investigation

stuff. She included that if you want to commit a crime, Nigeria is the right place, and that Nigerian society is suitable to corruption and bribery (Politics and Prose). Braithwaite in her novel discusses social issues in a form of commentary about the government and public life in Nigeria. She forces a reflection on the problems of the family, and how families can distort people's lives.

From a broader context, law enforcement agencies in Nigeria do not take family abuse seriously. Thus, when they are 'provoked', men can easily attack their spouse and get away with it. Women are more at risk from violence than men. When government fails to prohibit such abuse or routinely fails to respond to acts of violence against women it alludes that such attacks are justified or at least will go unpunished. Violence at the family level is the most difficult type of violence, and getting justice for women who are abused at the family level is most of the times difficult and wrongly treated by law. It is considered to be private matters and best kept silent at, leaving the victim dejected, rejected and dehumanized (Bazza 175). Shija 2004 had reported that :

In Nigeria, an average of 300–350 women are killed every year by their husbands, former partners, boyfriends, or male relations. Most times the incidences are considered family feuds, which should be treated within the family. Most police refuse to intervene and advise the victims to go back home and settle "family matters" (Bazza 176).

Although the degree differs from society to society, studies have shown that domestic violence or family abuse accounts for nearly one-quarter of all recorded crimes (Bazza 1). The World Health Organization (WHO) did a multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence. It indicates that: "in some parts of the world as many as one-half of women have experienced domestic violence" (Bazza 176). Domestic violence against women defined by the United Nations Commissions Draft Declaration of 1992 on the status of women as: "Any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of

such acts, like coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life” (United Nations Commissions Draft Declaration 2).

The environment in which the female writer lives, and the daily life issues affects her writings in a way or another and shapes her identity. The events took place in a patriarchal corrupted society where women suffer to survive. But, the way it was described, Lagos could have been any city in the world, though there were occasional references to Nigerian customs. The novel draws a picture of over active city of Lagos, and overcrowded streets full of corrupt police officers, of traditional Nigerian patriarchal and hypocritical society, consumed with keeping up appearances and colorism. Violence and oppression on women by the patriarch in society might be regarded as the main issue in the novel, and the moving engine of the story.

# CHAPTER TWO

*A Feminist Reading of the Novel.*

**2.1.Introduction**

In order to have an accurate conception of the narrative, we have to unlock the hidden meanings housed in symbols throughout the story, and arrive at an accurate interpretation of the text through the analysis of literary devices that Braithwaite made use of. Throughout the novel, Oyinkan Braithwaite succeeded in presenting the dimensions of feminism and psychoanalysis, by including some sensitive themes related to African women condition. These dimensions include: corruption, patriarchy and male oppression, revolt against that oppressive institution, and women portrayal.....etc.

Therefore, we are going to devote this chapter to analyze some of the literary devices used by the author, and we will discuss the reason behind each choice.

## **2.2.The Use of Literary Techniques and Their Contribution in the Feminist Reading of the Text**

Braithwaite's style is original, subtly funny. She gives us enough access to the protagonist's thoughts to help us understand the reason behind her actions, and you might nod along even if you don't agree with them. *My Sister, The Serial Killer* makes you see things from an unusual perspective, and let you question yourself what would you do in a similar situation. It directs our attention to certain issues that don't receive enough attention in the real life, and creates an interesting atmosphere with multi-layered characters that keep you hooked. Braithwaite's is a language that softens crime, and focus more on a daily social issues such as family abuse, that women from different ages and races through the world are subjected to, as a result causes them trauma and psychological disorders.

The writing style the author uses is sharp and incisive, laced throughout with biting humor. The book is easy to read, and the chapters are short a page or two long. With titles like "Father," "Sister," "Stain,". The narration is clean and efficient. The language used is easy and direct. The reader immediately finds himself attracted to this work starting from its title. Although her book is a dark comedy, Braithwaite in her interviews on YouTube said that she didn't set out to write a humorous book (Politics and Prose). She uses the present tense which makes the reader feels that he or she involves in the story events.

Braithwaite relies on First-person central. In which the narrator is also the protagonist. Ayoola, the storyteller is the "eye" through which the writer tells the story. The First-person point of view grants us an intimate view of the characters, and a front row seat to the action.

Also, the author made use of flashbacks to recall events that have already occurred in the past, to give us more background information and details about the characters past life and traumas, and how those events helped in shaping their personality and behavior later on.

Besides, the author made use of symbolism as a literary device to convey a deeper meaning beyond the literal one. For example, in literature violence often has a profound meaning. Violence and its victims is considered as a metaphor for something greater. In the story violence had two shapes, the first was the one that committed by the girl's father, it resembles the oppression of women in the Patriarchal society. While the second is represented in The murders committed by Ayoola. It might symbolize women's revolt against the oppression of the patriarchy or any other power that tyrannize them or divest them from their rights as a human beings.

Violence against women might cause them a destructive consequence, including psychological, physical, emotional, and social disorders. Women in the novel took justice to themselves, because they live in a patriarchal society that didn't guarantee their rights as human beings and consider violence against them as "a family matters" and better not intervene to stop it. The crimes committed by Ayoola are the result of the violence she suffered from on the part of her father which caused her long term psychological problems.

Also, the knife in the story might symbolize the violence that is inherited by the patriarchy or it might regard as a way to revolt against oppression. Ayoola used a knife that she inherited from their father after he passed away " and by "inherited" I mean she took it from his possessions before his body was cold in the ground... It made sense that she would take it, it was the thing he was most proud of"(Braithwaite 32). The Knife meant a lot to their father. He even appreciated it and cared about more than he cared about his daughters. Ayoola used that particular knife to stab

and kill her boyfriends. Korede wonders if the knife could be blamed for the killing. She says in one desperate moment:

I cannot imagine her resorting to stabbing if that particular knife were not in her hand; almost as if it were the knife and not her that was doing the killing. But then, is that so hard to believe? Who is to say that an object does not come with its own agenda? Or that the collective agenda of its previous owners does not direct its purpose still? (Braithwaite 31).

In her article “How to Write a Female Serial Killer”, Braithwaite emphasizes that she picked a knife as a weapon for Ayoola, and that it is fantastical as the story is, and that she tried to keep it a little grounded. She added that guns aren’t as easy for people to get in Nigeria. But, knives no one is really keeping an eye on them. She wanted the knife to be intricate and pretty. “It’s not a kitchen knife. It’s something you’d pick up and look at and admire. She included that she wanted to give it a history and its own personality to some extent”(Braithwaite).

In addition, Braithwaite uses irony to express the daily oppression the women in Nigeria and in the world suffers from. Irony is associated with both tragedy and humors. For example, when the boys in Secondary school bullied on Korede and other girls “When they drew me, it was with lips that could belong to a gorilla and eyes that seemed to push every other feature out of the way”(Braithwaite 44), that shows the emotional abuse of women in the novel.

Secondary school can be cruel. The boys would write lists of those who had a figure eight—like a Coca-Cola bottle—and those who had a figure one—like a stick. They would draw pictures of girls and exaggerate their best or worst features and tack them on the school notice board for the world to see—at least until the teachers took the pictures down (Braithwaite 44).

Also, when korede tried to put on makeup in order to attract her coworker Tade’s attention. But,



she realizes that it is pointless “There never seemed to be much point in masking my imperfections. It’s as futile as using air freshener when you leave the toilet”(Braithwaite53). The author also makes use of dramatic irony, when Tade was attracted to Ayoola so he confesses his emotions while she considers him no different from the other men she knew “he isn’t all that different from the rest of them” (Braithwaite 52). So she will end up killing him as she did to the others.

In many books, the setting is often as real as the characters. But interestingly, in this book, we as readers don’t get much sense of place, and we can imagine the events took place anywhere. However, Braithwaite confesses that her choice to set the story events in Lagos was intentional. As we mentioned earlier, she said that sitting in Nigeria, made it is easy for Ayoola to commit her crimes without being caught. Lagos as it is described in the novel is a corrupted patriarchal city which suffocates women, so they strive to live in.

Finally, it’s evident that the author makes an intense use of imagery in the language, so that she creates images in the mind of the reader. Braithwaite uses imagery in describing the appearance of the characters “Ayoola looks like a Bratz doll and I resemble a voodoo figurine”(Braithwaite 42), “Ayoola’s skin is a color that sits comfortably between cream and caramel and I am the color of a Brazil nut, before it is peeled; she is made wholly of curves and I am composed only of hard edges” (Braithwaite 49 ). Also, Braithwaite used imagery and shapes it with sense of humor in order to soften crime, so she focuses more on what causes them rather on the action itself “Third, they turn him into a mummy” (Braithwaite 14), “the more he talks, the more I realize that I am a maga—a fool who has been taken advantage of” (Braithwaite I80). Also, to emphasize the cruelty of the patriarch and how their father treated them “He was the law in our home” (Braithwaite 128).

### **2.3.Patriarchy in the Novel**

The sisters' depraved father is the center of Braithwaite's psychological implications of abuse. The father is the source of Ayoola's insecurity and criminal tendencies towards the other men in the story especially her boyfriends.

The novel indicates that the two sisters and their mother were under the oppression of their aggressive father, who used to beat them. They even didn't call him Daddy, "No, sir." We didn't call him Daddy. We never had. He was not a daddy, at least not in the way the word "daddy" denotes. One could hardly consider him a father. He was the law in our home" (Braithwaite 128). Korede says that the only time she sensed tenderness from him was when he cleans his knife "When the guests were gone he would polish the knife meticulously with a rag and a small bottle of rotor .....This was the only time I ever witnessed tenderness from him"(Braithwaite 32). The story reveals that Ayoola and Korede's father had a violent manner at home, whereas outside the house he behaves in a socially appropriate manner "Let us close our eyes and remember this man, because the years he spent with us were a gift from God." The voice of the priest is low, solemn. It is easy for him to say these things because he did not know the man. No one really knew him"(Braithwaite 77).

He was a fraudulent businessman. He gained success from passing off refurbished cars as brand new. He used to have an affairs with girls and he cheated on his wife over and over "She starts to whisper: "Your father was a great man. He would always call me to check up on me and he helped with my school funds... I am tempted to inform her that he had several girlfriends in various universities across Lagos. We had long since lost count"(Braithwaite 77). He even brought his mistress once home and when his wife protested he beat her badly. Moreover, he wanted to offer

his youngest daughter Ayoola as a commodity to a chief in order to make a business deal as he did earlier with Korede.

The father inflicts both physical and mental abuse on his wife and daughters. Ayoola and Korede share in this struggle in a traumatic past. But because Braithwaite invests the characters in dark humor, they do not wallow in their struggles.

Not only the sister's father or the LATSMA (Traffic police ) who were abusive towards the women in the story, but the other men generally in the novel were oppressive if not physically then it's emotionally including Ayoola's boy friends who used to see her as a beauty face, and they loved her only for her appearance. Korede was attracted to a coworker named Tade. He is a very kind and attractive guy as she describes him. She never confesses her feelings towards him. Korede describes herself as plain in contrast of her gorgeous younger sister Ayoola in terms of physical appearance "Ayoola looks like a Bratz doll and I resemble a voodoo figurine. Yinka, who is arguably the most attractive employee at St. Peter's, with her cherub nose and wide lips, pales to the point of insignificance beside Ayoola"(Braithwaite 42). When Tade met Ayoola he immediately fell into her love. Ayoola wanted to prove to her sister that Tade doesn't differ from the other men and he doesn't deserve her appreciation, and that he is superficial and all what matters for him like any other guy is beauty and appearances.

Besides, he isn't all that different from the rest of them, you know." "What are you talking about?" He is different. He is kind and sensitive. He sings to children. "He isn't deep. All he wants is a pretty face. That's all they ever want." "You don't know him!" My voice is higher than I expect it to be. "He is kind and sensitive and he—" "Do you want me to prove it to you? (Braithwaite 52).

Women as it was demonstrated in the novel, were subjected to oppression and abuse in their society. A society that doesn't regard women as an equal citizen or human being to men, and they have no rights or freedom to decide or make decisions.

Your daughter is very beautiful.” “Really,” my father replied, cocking his head. “Very, very lovely.” He moistened his lips. I grabbed Ayoola’s hand and pulled her a couple of steps backward. The man looked like a chief, and when we went to the village for Christmas our maternal grandparents always kept us away from chiefs. Apparently, if a chief saw a girl he liked, he would reach out and touch her with his bejeweled cane and she would become his bride, no matter how many wives the man already had; no matter if the girl in question wanted to be his wife or not (Braithwaite 122-123).

The men in the story regard women as a commodity. They valued them according to their appearances only, and they treated them as a sex objects. That is a serious and real issue that maintains women in a state of fear and insecurity in their daily life. For example, when the father wanted to offer his daughter to a chief so he make a business deal. Ayoola recalled when her maternal grandparents warned her when she was younger to stay away from chiefs. Apparently, if a chief saw a girl he liked, she would become his bride, no matter how many wives the man already had, and no matter if the girl in question wanted to be his wife or not.

### **2.3.1. Patriarchy and Corruption**

Corruption in the story is diffuse all over the city. Korede used to carry a “rape whistle” in her bag as an essential element, which indicates that women are subjected and threatened with rape every day in their Nigerian society “The things that will go into my handbag are laid out on my dressing table. Two packets of pocket,..... one rape whistle. Basically, the essentials for every woman” (Braithwaite 53). At a traffic stop, a policeman coaxes a bribe out of Korede. The incident seems usual and endured many times “Lagos police are not even half that efficient. The

ones tasked with keeping our streets safe spend most of their time ferreting out money from the general public to bolster their meager salary” (Braithwaite 25). She had to pay him in order to avoid a worse problem “Educated women anger men of his ilk, and so I try to adopt broken English “(Braithwaite 26). In addition to the oppression of the father and how it was enabled due to the patriarchal privileges guaranteed to him as a male citizen in Nigeria.

As we explained earlier in chapter one, patriarchy is an institution that allows unequal rights and opportunities for men and women according to their gender, and by that guarantees an inferior secondary position for women. Patriarchal societies such as Nigeria gives the absolute priority to men, and to some extent limits women’s rights as a human being. Most of the time men use this privileges against women.

### **2.3.2 Women’s Reaction Against Patriarchy in the Novel**

Women in the story of *My Sister, The Serial Killer* are unique. It’s delightful to read a Novel that makes you feel that all the old characterization of the female character in male and some female author’s works of literature are boring and stereotyped. This African author introduces interesting and autonomous female characters that could challenge the biased acts of the Nigerian patriarchal society (Although the way the female characters revolted against the patriarch is a center of debate. BUT, that’s is not our main focus in this paper, and the way they revolted it might be a symbolism only, and we shouldn’t take it literally).

The novel in General tells the story of women oppression by the patriarchy, and how women revolted against it. In one of her interviews titled “Braithwaite, Oyinkan. “*My Sister the Serial Killer*” on a YouTube channel named Politics and Prose, Braithwaite said that the novel is a magical realism (Politics and Prose). Magical realism is genre that depicts fantasy events in a

realistic tone.<sup>2</sup> It presents stories, myths...etc into an up to date social relevance. The fantasy traits given to the characters help incorporate a very sensitive modern political issues. In other words, we might say that Oyinkan Braithwaite uses this story to draw attention to a dilemma of women abuse at the family level in the patriarchal societies such as Nigeria. This issue needs more and more attention from local and global authorities and organizations. Women need more protection from such unjust arbitrary practices that the local authorities regard as “family matters”, so they do not interfere with them.

The novel presents the power of female bonding, which enables women to defeat the cruelty of traditions and society. This relationship is demonstrated throughout the book works as a tool for ending the patriarchal system, which is understood as a danger to women’s solidarity. *My; Sister the Serial Killer* apparently considers this relationship as a way of unifying women to endure male prejudice. This sisterhood does not only suggest a blood connection between females but also shows women view towards a common case. The novel embodies the perfect and even the strong relationship that unites Ayoola and Korede. It allows them to go beyond the boundary of gender discrimination and inspires African women to revolt against female subjugation.

Finally, we might conclude that the author applies the concepts and beliefs of Radical feminism<sup>3</sup>, as it seeks to abolish patriarchy, struggle to free all people from the unjust society, and challenge existing oppressive social norms and institutions. The struggle includes combating the sexual objectification of women, raising public awareness of issues such as rape and violence against women, and questioning and challenging the concept of gender roles.

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<sup>2</sup> More about magical Realism read :Bower, Maggie,Anne. *Magic(a)l Realism*. Routledge.2004,pp.20.

<sup>3</sup> For further information about Radical feminism consider Willis, Ellen. “Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism”. Duke University Press. 1984 , pp. 91-118. [www.jstor.org/stable/466537](http://www.jstor.org/stable/466537) .

# CHAPTER THREE

*A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of the Main Characters.*

**3.1.Introduction**

Adopting a psychoanalytic reading to the novel can unravel many of the ambiguities regarding the violence exerted by the protagonist against male characters in particular. Psychoanalytic criticism explains the hows and the whys of human actions, so it might exist side by side with any other critical method of interpretation, for example Feminism can utilize psychoanalytic method in their interpretations without violating its own hermeneutic (Bressler 88-89). The text mirrors the unconscious mind of the author (Ogden B. and T. 06). In this respect, we are going to use psychoanalytic theory hand in hand with the feminist theory in order to answer some of our main questions to prove our hypothesis in this work. Mainly how the patriarchy and the family abuse that the female characters experienced in their past affected their personality and their behavior.

In this chapter, we will discuss the unconscious mind, and we will observe how it affects behavior. Moreover, we are going to employ Sigmund Freud's "Theory of Personality" for a better psychoanalytic of the main characters' psyche and behavior. Besides, we will prove that patriarchy caused trauma for Ayoola and Korede, and its effects their personality in a negative way, so they behave the way they do.



### **3.2. A Psychoanalytical Reading of the Novel**

Throughout the novel, it is evident that the protagonist Korede and her sister Ayoola have witnessed and suffered violence in their life at the hands of their father and other male characters in their society. The oppression of patriarchy affected the main characters and shapes their personality. Also the author's conscious or unconscious conflicts and life experiences are manifested in her work. As psychoanalytic criticism argues that literary texts like dreams, express the author unconscious desires and secret anxieties, and it insists that literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses. The reader or the critic can make psychoanalysis of a particular character within a work of literature. Usually, it is assumed that all such characters are droppings of the author's psyche. Psychoanalytic criticism advocates the significance of literature, since it built on a literary key for the decoding. Freud wrote that :

The dream-thoughts which we first come across as we proceed with our analysis often strike us by the unusual form in which they are expressed; they are not clothed in the prosaic language usually employed by our thoughts, but are on the contrary represented symbolically by means of similes and metaphors, in images resembling those of poetic speech.(Harrison and Wood 26).

Psychoanalytic literary criticism as psychoanalysis itself, investigates psychological conflicts, trauma, guilt, and unresolved emotions....etc. The author's own childhood traumas, family life, fixations or sexual conflicts will be traceable in the behavior of the characters in the text. Psychological element will be expressed indirectly, disguised, or encoded as in dreams through elements in the language such as symbolism, condensation, and displacement (Delahoyde).

Psychoanalytic criticism focuses more on explaining what the author never intended or what is not explicitly stated in the text. Rather than on what the author intended.

### **3.3.The Unconscious and it's Reflection on Shaping the Main Characters' Behavior**

Once we understand the unconscious, how it functions, and its influence on behavior, we might have an elaborated understanding of the main characters' behavior in the novel. The controversial thinker, the founding father of psychology, and one of the developers of Psychoanalysis literary criticism, Sigmund Freud introduces in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) a discovery that becomes later on the centerpiece of a new discipline called psychoanalysis. His discovery mainly was that human mind consists of a part that is hidden from conscious, and that we might be aware of it only through dreams and their interpretations, and through other neurotic symptoms. The "unconscious" as he had defined it, is a store of repressed desires, feelings, memories, and instinctual drives, that it might have to do with sexuality and violence (Rivkin and Ryan 389). In his book *An outline of psychoanalysis*, he had distinguished the conscious from the unconscious. According to him the conscious mind is what you are aware of at any moment. It consists of our present perceptions, thoughts, memories, fantasies.... (Freud 31-32). Also, he had stated that the conscious is anything that can easily made conscious e.g. the memories you are not thinking about at that instant, but can easily bring to mind, are the smallest parts of the psyche. He maintained that the largest part of the psyche is the unconscious. The unconscious includes everything that is not easily available to awareness, including many things that have their origins in the unconscious itself, such as our drives and instincts (Freud 14).

For Freud, the unresolved inner conflicts that cause neurosis in the person's mind might constitute the work of literature. He had confirmed that a work of literature is a form of expression of the author's unconscious mind. Therefore, the work must be addressed like a dream, applying psychoanalytic techniques to the text to expose the author's hidden motivations, repressed desires, and wishes(Bressler 91-92). Also, in his *literary and Cultural representation* ,Hall mentions that “the

psychology of authors has impact on literary and other forms of cultural representation” (Hall 108). Back to this idea, we can say that the environment and the culture where the author is raised or lived affected his work of literature in a way or another, and by that it expresses his conscious or his unconscious behavior. As a result we can understand the hidden anxieties of the author or it’s character through their language or behavior “it is the unconscious, Freud believed, that evidences itself through slips of the tongue, dreams, art, and irrational behavior that motivates most of our actions”(Bressler 89).

an author's chief motivation for writing any story is to gratify some secret desire, some forbidden wish that probably developed during the author's infancy and was immediately suppressed and dumped in the unconscious. The outward manifestation of this suppressed wish becomes the literary work itself (Bressler94).

Sigmund Freud explained that human mind contains unconscious part that must be analyzed in order to understand human behavior. The unconscious forms the biggest part of our mind. It might resembles an iceberg. The small part of ice above the water that we can see and we are aware of represents the conscious mind. Whereas the enormous amount of ice that is hidden below the water represents the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind is reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges and memories that we are not aware of, and that most of these contents are considered unacceptable or unpleasant such as feelings of pain, anxiety or conflict .....etc. The unconscious interacts with the conscious part, influences our behavior and shapes our identity even though people are unaware of these underlying influences.

Hidden from the workings from workings of the conscious mind, the unconscious, he believed, plays a large part in how we act, think, and feel. The best avenue for discovering some of the content and activity of the unconscious, he declared, is through our dreams. But according to Freud, it is the interaction of the conscious and the unconscious, and not either one working in isolation, by which we shape ourselves and our world (Bressler 88).

The unconscious mind of the author, her inner conflicts, past traumas, and memories affected her work. It's our role as readers to analyze and interpret it through the analysis of the characters and the language she uses. As we mentioned earlier, the author's personal life remains private so we can't make a strong connection between her personal life and her novel. But, we can make relevance to the society where the author lives and its contribution to the overall work.

### **3.4. Trauma and its Effects on the Main Characters' Behavior in the Story**

As we discussed earlier, the two girls went through a harsh childhood experience on the part of those closest to them. The "father", who is supposed to be the source of safety and happiness in their lives. But unfortunately he was the most violent person they had ever known.

In an article on The Conversation titled "How domestic violence affects women's mental health", it was stated that One in three women has suffered from physical violence since the age of 15. In most cases (92% of the time) it's by a man she knows, and that women and children who have experienced abuse and violence at family level are at a higher risk of incur a series of mental health disorders including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety...etc.

Women who have experienced domestic violence or abuse are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing a range of mental health conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and thoughts of suicide (The Conversation).

In an article titled "How to Write a Female Serial Killer", Braithwaite said that she likes the idea of looking at two women who have experienced the same sort of trauma, but they've responded to it differently. She added " Let's not just assume that a woman isn't capable of doing certain things, because perhaps she is, and perhaps we should watch out for her" (Braithwaite). As we are going to see in the psychoanalysis of the main characters later on, Ayoola and Korede experienced

the same sort of trauma that represented in the violence their oppressive father directed towards them. The World Health Organization stressed that “Violence against women has a far deeper impact than the immediate harm caused. It has devastating consequences for the women who experience it, and a traumatic effect on those who witness it, particularly children”(Moreno et al 4).

### **3.5.Applying Sigmund Freud’s “Theory of Personality” to Korede’s and Ayoola’s Psyche**

Although the main characters in the novel were subjected to the same sort of trauma. Yet, they responded to it differently due to their distinct personalities, which make each character unique. Therefore, we need to understand their personality, so we can understand their behavior. Sigmund Freud’s “Theory of Personality” equips us with the necessary knowledge to understand how personality functions. An article titled “Id, Ego, and Superego” by Saul McLeod explains that in his famous psychoanalytic theory “Theory of Personality” (1923) stated that Freud analyzes the human psyche in terms of three elements that influences behavior (tripartite), the Id, Ego, and Super. They altogether participate in ways that have a powerful influence on an individual. Each element of personality unfolds itself at different points in life(McLeod). In order to obtain an understanding as to why humans behave as they do it is necessary to examine all three elements. If we understand those three elements of personality, then we might understand the psyche of the main characters in the novel.

First, the Id or the pleasure principle is the part of the mind that contains sexual and hidden memories and aggressive drives. It’s primitive and instinctual. According to Snowden the Id is the fulfillment of pleasure principle (desire) and the avoidance of tense and unpleasant situation. The id is unconscious whereas the ego is consciousness. The ego is that which knows and that which can be known (Freud17–18 ).

The second part of Freud's system is the Super-Ego or the moral principle. It is conscious and it operates as a moral conscience. It concerns itself with what is socially appropriate, and it aims for perfection. It contradicts the Id because it's rational and not instinctual. In an article titled "The Formation and Structure of the Human Psyche :Id, Ego, and Super-Ego – The Dynamic (Libidinal) and Static Unconsciousness, Sublimation, and the Social Dimension of Identity Formation" by William Siegfried, it was mentioned that:

The Super-Ego reflects the internalization of cultural rules, mainly taught by parents applying their guidance and influence. For Freud the Super-Ego can be described as a successful instance of identification with the parental agency. The Super-Ego aims for perfection. It is made up of the organized part of the personality structure, which includes the individual's Ego ideals, spiritual goals, and one's conscience. It is a psychic agency that criticizes and prohibits one's drives, fantasies, feelings, and actions. The Super-Ego works in contradiction to the Id because it strives to act in a manner that is socially appropriate. As a consequence of the Super-Ego conflicting with the demands of the Id (Siegfried 02).

The third element is the Ego or the reality principle. It is the realistic part that mediates between the desires of the id and the super-ego. In his book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, Freud said that "The ego. It is, so to speak, the medium through which we try to get a picture of the other two institutions" (Freud13). The existence of the Igo assist the human fulfill his/her desire in a rational way. In her book *Sigmund Frued*, Pamela Thurschwell states that :

This fear of the father's power becomes the baby's super-ego, the internal voice which stops the child from doing things he shouldn't do, or makes him feel guilty for having done things he shouldn't have done when he does do them (Thurschwell 48).

### **3.6.The Psychoanalytical Interpretation of the Main Characters “Ayoola” and “Korede”**

#### **3.6.1.Ayoola**

The picture we get of Ayoola is of a self-centered, egotistical, selfish, reckless and manipulative woman, without empathy. In other words a psychopath “Ayoola is inconsiderate and selfish and reckless, but her welfare is and always has been my responsibility”(Braithwaite 88). Ayoola suffers from a strong Id that tells her to do whatever gives her pleasure without distinguishing between what’s wrong and what’s right. She even didn’t care about the consequences of her actions “Days ago, we gave a man to the sea, but here she is, dancing”(Braithwaite30). Her pleasure was in killing her ex.’s. Somehow she wanted to fulfill her desire, and takes revenge of men. Especially those who cared only about her beauty and appearance. As it appears at the novel’s open end she is not going to stop her crimes. She even considers herself a victim, and she was upset from her older sister when she suspects on her crimes’ motives “These days, you look at me like I’m a monster.” Her voice is so low, I can barely hear her. “I don’t think you’re—” “This is victim shaming, you know” (Braithwaite 23).

The trauma Ayoola experienced from her abusive father affected her psyche more than it affected her older sister. Obviously, she suffers an imbalance in her behavior. Also, her beautiful appearance intensified her misery and suffering. As her father wanted to offer her as a commodity to a chief in order to make profit. He beat her when a boy come to their house once to show his admiration to her.

In an article titled “How to Write a Female Serial Killer”, Braithwaite exhibited her admiration to Ayoola when she said That’s something she loves about Ayoola that her actions are not always because of pain or revenge or self-protection. Sometimes, she just does this because she can. There is some liberation regarding that. She’s not this broken female who’s behaving out of pain. She has no remorse, no sense of consequence, and no sympathy for her victims. Furthermore, She just does what

she wants to do when she wants to do it. Braithwaite added “ Out of every character in the novel, she’s the one having the best time” (Braithwaite).

### **3.6.2.Korede**

Korede on the other hand suffers from a higher Super Ego (morality principle). She is the older responsible sister. She is sociopathic and she behaves in a socially appropriate manner, she always does what she thinks it’s correct for her (as a bigger sister is her duty to look after her younger sister). “Great,” I say, because that is what he’d expect me to say” (Braithwaite 38). Korede didn’t confess her feelings to Tade her coworker, and covered on her sister’s crimes because she thinks that was the correct thing to do in her society (as a big sister and as a woman). She cleans up after her messy sister and her irrational deeds. Although, she believed at first that her sister was a victim, and her crimes were a form of self-defense, but later on she starts questioning if her sister killed in order to defend herself! Or she killed because she is a psychopath “I want to believe her. I want to believe it was self-defense...I mean the first time, I was furious. I was convinced Somto deserved it. And he had been so... slimy....”(Braithwaite 66), “Is it mere coincidence that Ayoola has never had a mark on her, from any of these incidents with these men; not even a bruise?”(Braithwaite 23).

Korede struggles with the decision of warning Tade that her sister might murder him as she did to the other men. Eventually she did, but he didn’t believe her. He even accused her of being jealous of her sister. Also, she kept lecturing her sister how to behave in a way that kept her away from suspicion. She prevents her from posting happy stuff on social media and so forth “Could she really be uploading videos to Snapchat? Then I shake myself out of the trance. I grab the phone from her and hit delete, staining the screen with the oil on my hands. “Hey!” “Too soon, Ayoola. Way too soon”(Braithwaite36). Korede is laden by moral responsibility. She struggles between family bonds and social dilemmas.



The Psychoanalytic reading of Oyinkan Braithwaite's novel *My Sister; the Serial Killer* reveals the destructive power of the unconscious mind of the main characters in the story. Many authors of African literary text employ psychological dimension in their novels and in their character's portrayal whether consciously or unconsciously. It is the task of the critic or the reader to unravel these unconscious hidden forces in the characters through the language the author uses. This paper portrayed psychoanalysis as an important and illuminating approach to African literary texts.

Braithwaite renders the subject of psychology through which she provides an exposition on patriarchy and a reflection of the psychological implications of abuse on the character's behavior. Also she draws attention to a very important topic which is psychotherapy. Braithwaite reaffirms the importance of human psychology and mental health. Especially the important role of therapy and psychotherapists for people who have experienced trauma. For instance, Korede who strives to cover up on her sister's crimes struggles with guilt, fear and the need to speak to someone. However, she confides to a comatose patient named Muhtar, in room 313 of the hospital where she works. Muhtar is Korede's therapy, confiding him gave her a sense of relief. He is the only witness of the complex world of Korede. He plays the role of a concerned friend and a great listener "Until then, he plays the role of a great listener and a concerned friend" (Braithwaite 19), "There will never be another Muhtar, I know this. There will never be another opportunity to confess my sins or another chance to absolve myself of the crimes of the past...or the future"(Braithwaite 155).

I need to talk to someone, anyone; someone besides Muhtar. I considered therapy once, but Hollywood has revealed that therapists have a duty to break confidence if the life of the patient or someone else is at stake. I have a feeling that if I were to talk about Ayoola, that confidence would be broken in five minutes. Isn't there an option where no one dies and Ayoola doesn't have to be incarcerated? Perhaps I could see a therapist and just leave the murders out of it. I could fill plenty of sessions just talking about Tade and Ayoola and how seeing them together turns me inside out.(Braithwaite95-96).

Braithwaite's choice of an unconscious witness has some credibility in psychoanalysis. Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, argued that “in the field of the unconscious, the ears are the only orifice that cannot be closed” (Davis 96). when Muhtar is recovered with a compilation of Korede's confessions, it is confirmed by Lacan's theory.

### General Conclusion

The research aimed to examine the dimensions of women abuse, violence, and discrimination of women in literature and society in Nigeria. Additionally, it tackled the oppression of the patriarchy, and how women revolted against it through language in literature. Our objective was to make a detailed analysis of both the novel *My sister; the serial killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite and the main characters in the novel as a case study. We also attempted to make a literary feminist and psychoanalytic criticism to the text. Furthermore, we intended to examine the portrayal of women in the above-mentioned book, and an investigation of how this African writer succeeds in presenting a powerful and independent female character that challenged the prejudiced practices of the Nigerian Patriarchal society and the conventional inferior characterization of the female character in literature .

Literature is a witness to women's evolution through time. Most of the acknowledged writers were men until recent times. Therefore, the portrayal of women was without a doubt biased. Women's roles and portrayal in literature reflects the historical evolution for women's position and rights in their societies. The oppression and the insignificance of women before the mid-19th century is associated with their inferior roles in literature. As women achieved more equality, the heroine continued to changes. Simultaneously the heroines transform into new and more superior figures that women aimed to represent. For instance, that is manifested in the novel *My sister; the serial killer* where the author intended to represent a strong female character as a main character to convey a message to the world that women are powerful and that they can challenge the subordination of the oppression of the patriarchy.

## General Conclusion.

In this work we tried to apply Elaine Showalter's "gynocriticism" that associated with the study of women as writers. It provides us with four models concerning the nature of women's writing that help answer some of our main concerns of feminist criticism. Primarily, the biological model, emphasizes the way the female body marks itself upon the text by providing a host of literary images and a personal intimate tone. Secondly, the linguistic model showcases the differences between women's and men's use of language and the question of whether women can and do create a language peculiar to their gender and utilize such a language in their writings. Third, the psychoanalytic model is based on an analysis of the female psyche and how such an analysis affects the writing process, finally the cultural model, investigating how the society in which female authors work and function shapes women's objectives, reactions, and perspectives ( Bressler 105-106). We used in this research a compensation of those models to study the novel of Oyinkan Braithwaite *My Sister ;the Serial Killer*.

African female experiences, problems, and yearnings that are examined through the female character in the selected literary text, The textual analysis, and the psychoanalysis of the main characters Ayoola and Korede revealed that the girls' father was oppressive and violent towards them, so they probably have killed him. We tried to prove that the trauma of family abuse affected the psyche of the girls destructively. Furthermore, the series of crimes that were committed by Ayoola towards her boyfriends was a form of rebellion against oppression, because they regarded her as a beautiful face without seeing her for what she really is. The men in the story were represented as a source of pain and oppression if not physically then it's emotionally. Ayoola killed her boyfriends and her sister cleaned and covered her crimes so they embody the women's unity and solidarity against tyranny.

The story also sheds light on a very serious dilemma represented in family abuse which doesn't receive enough attention. As it was stated in an article titled "Theses on the Feminist Novel" by Roxane Gay that feminist literature does not deal with women's stories and lives only. It is also a

## General Conclusion.

work that illuminates some aspects of the female conditions and offers some sort of imperative for reform. It makes an enterprising political statement in the best interests of women. Feminism concerns the equality of women. They aim to change the world in which they live. A world that they maintain needs to be changed and must be changed. If all individuals, all cultures, all subcultures, and both sexes are to be valued as creative, rational individuals who can contribute to their societies and their world. Women should be capable of moving through the world with the same ease and privileges guaranteed to men, and to be able to live in a society where their bodies are not legislated. They should be able to live without the threat of family abuse and sexual violence.

*My sister; the Serial Killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite is a rich text. It could be interpreted in different ways. As it has been proven in this research, the selected literary work represents women's revolution against tyranny and oppression of the patriarchy that dominates Nigerian society and literature. However, there is a problem that arises and that might open room for further researches, it is represented mainly in the author's selection for killing as a form of revolution against males' oppression.

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