



POWER, PRACTICE AND PROBLEMS OF LEADERSHIP IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *MADMEN AND SPECIALISTS*

Dr. FERDINAND MBAH
Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State.



ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to interrogate the motives of power as sought by the principal characters in Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists*, using psychoanalytic critical tools. Soyinka's play highlights the challenges inherent in a system made dysfunctional by misguided leadership. The protagonist, Bero, appears to hanker after inordinate desires of power and omnipotence, and in the process orchestrates disruptive processes within the polity. So strange and inexplicable are his actions that they invite comparison to Freud's idea of Oedipus complex, an unnatural phenomenon of predilection for domestic sexual crises and homicide. The renowned French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, has extended the Freudian examination of this tendency to the wider spheres of social and political life, which helps to provide insight into Soyinka's Faustian protagonist. By analyzing Dr Bero's enigmatic behavior in the play as an Oedipal phenomenon, it is possible to make some sense out of what ordinarily is a confounding character. Moreover, it also helps to clarify the vexed question of leadership and power that so often recurs in Soyinka's oeuvre.

Key terms: Power, Practice, Leadership, Oedipus complex, psychoanalysis.

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INTRODUCTION

In many ways, Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* lends itself to discussions of power and leadership. Central to the plot of the play is the crucial question as to what power means to the individual, how s/he seeks it, why s/he desires it, and having, or not having, acquired it, how s/he dispenses it. The play in different ways objectifies that human hunger for power, for ascendancy, and for domination that springs from the unconscious and accounts, in most parts, for many of the socio-economic problems of the human community. Power and leadership coexist almost inseparably, leadership necessarily involving the possession and exercise of power one way or another (Andrew

McFarland, *Power and Leadership*, xii-xiii). In a sense power and leadership are an integral part of every social organization involving humans. People who aspire to positions of leadership do so for a variety of reasons some of which are constructive, and others, quite the opposite. Generally however, psychologists postulate that all power motivations have subconscious origins, a view rooted in Sigmund Freud's seminal treatise on the workings of the human mind.

Psychoanalytic theory is a field of study pioneered by Freud. Central to this theory is the phenomenon known as Oedipus complex. A group of largely unconscious (dynamically repressed) ideas and feelings, Oedipus complex centres on the desire

to possess the parent of the opposite sex and eliminate the parent of the same sex. Named after the Greek mythical character Oedipus, who (albeit unknowingly) kills his father and marries his mother, the Oedipus complex, according to Sigmund Freud, is a universal phenomenon. A phylogenetically built-in trait, it is responsible for much of men's unconscious guilt. For Freud, Oedipus represents the universal psychological state of the human person because as Freud puts it,

His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours – because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that this is so. (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 296)

Within the family circle, Freud suggests, conflicts of interest often play a divisive role that can sometimes strain harmonious family relations. Curiously, love is implicated in this unhealthy situation in which family members antagonize one another. In this context however, love is actually to be understood as a desire, akin to the will-to-power that Nietzsche attributes to all humans. In Freudian terms, the tussle between the male child and the father for the love of the woman between them is one that can be interpreted in terms of power struggle. What this actually suggests is that at the heart of every human action is an impulse to 'love' or 'desire' power in all its forms: power for political, as much as for economic or other social and emotional reasons. The endemic nature of this phenomenon had led Freud to reinterpret a myth with which to explain it. He suggests that the relationship between the head of the primeval family of Homo sapiens and his male offspring is one built on mutual distrust and antagonism. The father, intent on protecting his wives, drives his grown-up sons away. The sons respond by plotting the death of their father (Money-Kyrle, 1930). Father killing thus becomes the taboo of social living that in the wider social context translates into power contests of diverse kinds. Within families and societies conflicts based on contestations of space in politics,

economics, religion, family possessions, inheritance, and other social issues are a common occurrence that highlights the centrality of power in all human affairs. The literary field helps to deepen understanding of this fascinating phenomenon as Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* illustrates.

Always coexistent with power, and in tandem with it, is the idea of leadership. Leadership is seen as a function of the application of a combination of personal traits and acquired skills in one's interaction with others for the purpose of accomplishing a common goal. Social theorists such as Chemers M., in *An Integrative Theory of Leadership*, (1967) and Forsyth D. R., in *Group Dynamics* (2009), among others, have advanced the so-called traits and situational theories to suggest that both innate attributes and learned behavior combine to equip an individual with the necessary acumen of leadership. A discussion of leadership is *ipso facto* a discussion of power as leadership necessarily invests the individual with power. The words of Tzu Sun, concatenating a host of attributes presumably indispensable in leadership situations, more than reiterate the inseparable confluence of power and leadership. According to the Chinese soldier and philosopher, as quoted in *The 100 Greatest Leadership Principles of All Time*, edited by Leslie Pockell:

Leadership is a matter of intelligence, trustworthiness, humaneness, courage, and discipline ... Reliance on intelligence alone results in rebelliousness. Exercise of humaneness alone results in weakness. Fixation on trust results in folly. Dependence on the strength of courage results in violence. Excessive discipline and sternness in command result in cruelty. When one has all five virtues together, each appropriate to its function, then one can be a leader

There is no doubt that Soyinka's protagonist in this play as in his other works, falls far short of the Sunnean ideals of leadership. The playwright's apparent obsession with power and leadership, it is fair to imagine, might be the result of his persistently futile search for that dream leader who can exercise power guided by the principles of Tzu

Sun. And if it is accepted that innate acumen plays a significant role in the exercise of leadership and power, it would sound quite logical to adopt a mode of enquiry that focuses on the interior make-up of the personality of the individual while attempting to analyze fictional characters in positions of leadership. This explains why psychoanalysis seems quite germane to the present discourse. .

Dr. Bero, the central character of this enigmatic play, provides all the key Oedipal indices and features of power that make him such a fascinating psychological personality. More importantly, the play highlights the dangerous and destructive dimension that love of power can assume if not moderated, For example, the inexplicable behavioural tendencies of the play's protagonist, Bero appear to stem from his unconscious sense of deprivation that is fuelled by his lack of maternal ardour in a family run by an extremely dominant father. Old Man's magisterial stature is clearly too disconcerting for a son whose dream is to overshadow everyone else, a situation that possibly also helps to exacerbate the Oedipal conflict that under-girds the volatile father-son relationship. With his attitude towards his father being defined by envy, dread, and mistrust, it is hardly surprising that Bero would eventually murder his father in order to usurp his place. The play, a product of Soyinka's experience and interpretation of the Nigerian Civil War, expounds the fratricidal nature of the conflict that engulfed the author's native land from 1967 to 1970. Indeed, it is the domestic nature of this conflict that is emblemized by the fractious father-son relationship portrayed in the play.

Bero clearly exhibits the 'parent-killing' impulses espoused by Freud as a kind of power-envy. Such impulses are expressions of power craving that take their roots from the domestic domain either as parent-child or inter-sibling squabbles. In *Madmen*, Bero is driven by strong needs that speak to his deep sense of deprivation in a family that he unconsciously holds responsible for his predicament. At the core of this interior tumult is Old Man, the protagonist's father whose very existence is an unpleasant reminder of his loss.

Unconscious drives such as Bero's can be explained psychoanalytically.

This paper argues that certain power-seeking tendencies exhibited by the protagonist of *Madmen* suggest that he is a victim of psychological influences whose roots lie in his family history. This history is in the form of a missing key family member, which constitutes a 'Lack', in the Lacanian sense of the term, a lack or absence that may have negatively impacted the protagonist's psyche. The absence of a mother in the life of Dr Bero appears to create a void in his life that is evident in his eccentric behaviour. All this is because, as psychologists have cautioned, the role of parents in the formation of the selfhood of the individual person cannot be overstated.

As such, parental upbringing is a critical shaper of the personality of the individual. There is also the belief that the boy child typically gravitates emotionally towards the mother, as the reverse is the case with the girl child who tends to bond more with the father than the mother. Although different terminologies are normally applied to these two distinct tendencies in men and women – Oedipus complex and Electra complex respectively – for the purposes of this discussion however, the masculine terminology shall serve as a catch-all phrase for the phenomenon in both sexes - as Freud himself had done. (Freud, *Outline*, 193-194)

The conflicts that the play has to deal with are primarily centered on dysfunctional application of power by a leader. In psychoanalysis, dysfunction is used to designate abnormal behaviour in subjects that deviates from the norm in a given milieu. Typically, the term would apply to those individuals that Freud regards as being either mother or father "fixated", that is individuals who fail to resolve their innate Oedipal crisis (*Outline* 189-192). One person may be able to respond in ways considered by his society to be less damaging than the other person may be able to do. Bero clearly exemplifies the more threatening variant.

In its dysfunctional form the power impulse appears in disguises/defenses for which psychologists have a host of terms, such as 'selective perception', 'selective memory', 'avoidance', 'denial', 'displacement' or 'projection', among

others (Lois Tyson 18). The power drive is a function of the inherent Oedipal crisis that people have to deal with in their lives. Thus, this natural impulse of the psyche (or, if you prefer, crisis of love) reflects all struggles that in the view of the French thinker, Michel Foucault are expressions of power or projections of the instinctive love of power. Every struggle, it must be stated with the Foucault of *Discipline & Punish* (1977) in mind, is an expression of power, power to control others.

Just for the thrill, the domination and possibly the knowledge that he hopes to gain, Dr. Bero in *Madmen and Specialists*, commits himself to a life of unrelenting abuse of humanity. Bero's shooting of his father symptomizes the extremity of his oedipal crisis. In this sense, he fits into Lacan's notion of Desire, an alternate term adopted by the French psychoanalyst to refer to power rather than just emotional feelings.

According to Jacques Lacan, dysfunctional behaviour is a consequence of the repressive forces that the individual has to contend with in a social community that abominates certain acts. These taboos which in themselves constitute a register of language of their own in the unconscious, suggests Lacan, create, when they erupt on the conscious stage, disquiet because they conflict with the culture of the society. This is Lacan's "Name-of-the-Father" at work, the law that is superimposed on Desire (nature) (40). Bero's parricide exemplifies a subconsciously-motivated act that affronts the culture of the society of *Madmen*. His actions reflect the idea that human beings are culturally determined and their actions culturally orchestrated. As what is repressed is taboo, what is taboo is culturally formulated, and the forces of repression are invariably entrenched in culture (law).

Jacques Lacan actually shares Freud's view that the psyche is driven essentially by power impulses. However, Lacan prefers to stretch this tendency beyond its Freudian biological frame of reference. Instead of love Lacan uses the term Desire, which to him has a wider social implication/application for power. As Dino Felluga explains, Lacan's Desire overlooks the physical activity of sex. Instead, it focuses on the social

implications of the changes in the psychological development of the subject instigated by his/her entrance into the realm of language that Lacan refers to as the symbolic order (Felluga, "Modules on Lacan"). The subject's desires spring from his/her sense of lack, Lacan suggests. Being a misrecognition of fullness, the subject's object of desire is merely a narcissistic attempt to project or reflect the ego ("Modules on Lacan").

Through their actions (speeches, in particular) people reveal themselves, their motives, and intents. Thus, by analyzing characters' words and actions (including inactions, because what is omitted may sometimes serve to reveal actual intent) a critic may arrive at (or at the very least, guess at) underlying motives for action. The actions and utterances of the protagonist of the play in focus provide a veritable clue to the source as well as nature of the psychological problems that account for his desires and actions. More than anything else, Bero's unrestrained onslaught against his father points to the possibility of underlying oedipal causality. His desire to topple his father rudely affronts the communal ethos of his milieu that demands that children honour their parents.

By virtue therefore of this inescapable immersion in the discourse of language as entrenched in the repression of taboos, the subject's selfhood is fractured and caught in an eternal impasse involving the two selves: the conscious and the unconscious. Always a victim of repression, the unconscious reveals its traces of dysfunction through dreams, jokes, puns, slips of the tongue, gaffes, and the like, symptoms the critic must interpret in order to get to the root of the subject's psychological affliction.

As already noted above, unconscious wounds have their roots in the family as incidents of developmental experience of the individual. In Soyinka's play, evidence of this is to be found in the characters, who as plausible representations of human persons in society, are driven in remarkable ways unknown to them by domestic experiences that have left lasting impressions on them. In *Madmen*, there is a strong suspicion of a disturbing unconscious streak masking itself in the eccentric behaviour of the protagonist. The Oedipal trajectory

of the motives evident in the parent-child confrontation sits at the core of the plot of *Madmen*. In a word, the abnormalities observed in Bero's unrelenting quest for transcendental knowledge is driven by a current of unconscious impulses aimed at gaining control or power over his father, Old Man, the emblematic representation of the play's social sphere.

These oedipal conflicts are also symptomatic of the protagonist's power impulses that stretch beyond the domestic realm. At issue is the way in which these domestic parent-child clashes reflect, in metonymic terms, the wider question of power, motivations for power, and leadership, and how the nature of these motivations help to define not just interpersonal relationships but also the personalities of the characters involved as well as the social conditions of the community.

That the dominant psychology in *Madmen* is that of usurpation of power can be clearly seen in the protagonist's inexplicable obsession with toppling his father, Old Man. Bero's father killing impulses express themselves in a recognizable pattern of disruptive and destructive behaviour involving the central character all through the play. The patterns reveal a single dominant motive, consisting of the inordinate dream to eliminate his father and take his place as the overall supremo of the realm. Mindful of the abominable nature of this aspiration, and the inevitability of disapprobation, Bero must have resolved that only by employing equally abominable means could he attain his goal. Whether the tactic deployed entails sequestering the old man, spying on him, unjustly certifying him mad, physically abusing him or even taking his life, counts for nothing as far as Bero is concerned. Not even cannibalism, with all its goriness, is considered too immoral a strategy to power, nor is 'AS', Bero's veritable ideological power blueprint. Traditional institutions and sacred subjects are not spared Bero's wanton irreverence either. For instance, Iya Agba and Iya Mate, the revered custodians of the community's ancestral values, command no respect from the protagonist. Instead, he regards them as an obstacle to his goal that must be eliminated at all costs.

The trajectory of significant actions in the play points to only one destination - the elimination of Old Man - and thus logically makes a psychological examination of the family history imperative. This would reveal the unconscious drives that inform the behaviour of Bero.

Mindful of the execrable nature of his actions in the cultural and moral scheme of things in his community, Bero is hard put to justifying his treatment of his father. According to him, Old Man is guilty of transgressing the junta's epistemological code, which prohibits a downward transfer of knowledge. As he explains to Si Bero, his sister, mentoring the socially inferior Mendicants is a violation of this unwritten code.

Father's assignment was to help the wounded readjust to the pieces and remnants of their bodies. Physically. Teach them to make baskets if they still had fingers. To use their mouths to ply needles if they had one, or use it to sing if their vocal chords had not been shot away. Teach them to amuse themselves, make something of themselves. Instead he began to teach them to think, think, THINK! Can you picture a more treacherous deed than to place a working mind in a mangled body? (242)

This shows first of all that the son acknowledges that his father is a custodian of knowledge. Ability to think is an unmistakable quality of leadership and a preserve of a leader. More significantly, knowledge is a key instrument of power, the possession of which, according to Bero's thinking, is the exclusive sphere of a select group, a group well above the station of the Mendicants. Ironically, Bero's aggressive search for knowledge or intelligence betrays his own inadequacies in a key area of leadership question. His preferred method to assuaging this is to try to as it were, heist someone else's original invention. At issue therefore are the following: first is what can be termed knowledge envy, second, a protectionist impulse toward a conservation of power, and third, an exclusivization of the domain of knowledge. The second implication of Bero's objection to Old Man's intellectual liaison with the Mendicants is located in his fear that a free

dissemination of knowledge would cost him the monopoly of knowledge he craves, which in effect would result in a demystification of his power. In a sense, Bero's exclusivist notion of power subsists in possession of absolute knowledge to the exclusion of every one else. Coveted solely for its mystique, Old Man's arcane knowledge acquired in combination with his medical and military powers would virtually invest Bero with the aura of a deity. Such power would be all the more enchanting in the absence of Old Man – the one man capable of rivalling him - hence the need to eliminate him.

Another significant aspect of the protagonist's dysfunctional psychology can be seen in his predilection for cannibalism. His role in the cannibalistic feast set for him and his cohorts in the junta by Old Man betrays a personality fed on an unhealthy subconscious cuisine. Tricked along with his associates into eating human flesh by Old Man, only Bero, when the trick is discovered, is seen to accept the meal without offence.

What is one flesh from another? So I tried it again, just to be sure of myself. It was the first step to power you understand. Power in its purest sense. The end of inhibitions. The conquest of the weakness of your too too human flesh with all its sentiment. So again, all to myself I said Amen to his grace (241).

If by self admission the meal suits Bero's idea of power, it is clearly illogical to include the incident in his list of Old Man's ideological infractions. Keeping his father in private custody, Bero claims, is the son's way of keeping the old man out of harm's way, especially from an inevitable death that awaits him, should he be caught by the outraged members of the junta he had tricked into consuming human flesh (245). If this were the case, it might be asked, why then does Bero himself mastermind the old man's torture and abuse in detention, even when he is out of the reach of his so-called pursuers? One possible explanation for this is that smuggling Old Man out of the reach of the junta serves to provide Bero exclusive access to his captive, the prized victim of the captor's obsessive power drive and a potential source of his hoped-for omniscience.

Bero gives the impression that but for his merciful intervention, Old Man's fate might have been worse than mere incarceration. However, this flies in the face of clear evidence of cruelty and dehumanization meted out to him by Bero himself. If Bero's motive were as noble as he claims, why does Bero himself have to be the one to execute his own father?

Bero's cannibalistic tendencies perhaps, more than any of his many other weird traits, epitomize his unqualified love of power of the destructive hue. Nothing foregrounds Bero's inhumanity and therefore his lack of leadership stature, any clearer than his professed predilection for cannibalism. The import of Bero's interest in cannibalism is not necessarily located in his bizarre appetite for human flesh. Cannibalism, more significantly, expresses his absolute contempt for humanity, his wish to annihilate humanity, his goal to dissolve his own humanity and turn himself into something supra-human, and finally his unconscionable denial of his own humanity that is so coldly expressed in the murder of his own father. Transcending humanity by his passion for the taboo and the unspeakable is Bero's grotesque idea of quintessential power.

No one knows better than the father that his own life has become an obstacle to his son's delusional pursuit of power. "I am the last proof of the human in you." The old man declares. "The last shadow. Shadows are tough things to be rid of. How does one prove he was never born of man?" (253). How the son's insistence on getting rid of the father can enhance his power is a puzzle that the old man is at odds to come to terms with. Bero's dishonouring of his father is emblematic of the desecration of the exalted office of leadership to which a person may be entrusted in any sphere of life. Old Man's poignant remarks below do more than merely deride the son. More importantly, they highlight his own superior understanding of what true power entails as against the son's fuzzy idea of power:

Shall I teach you what to say? Choice!
Particularity! What redundant self-
deceptive notions! More? More?
Insistence on a floppy old coat, a rickety old

chair, a moth-eaten hat which no certified lunatic would ever consider wearing, a car which breaks down twenty times in twenty minutes, an old idea riddled with the pellets of incidence ... A perfect waterproof coat is rejected for a patched-up heirloom that gives the silly wearer rheumatism (252).

Having neglected more civilized approaches to the acquisition of power and leadership in preference for brigandage, coup plotting, murder, deception, corruption, and embezzlement of public wealth, the protagonist has clearly chosen the path of destruction.

Bero's motivation for murder in the name of power is evident in the letter he wrote to his father from the war front. That letter, written ostensibly to brief the old man about happenings in the war, was actually intended to lure the man to his death. Bent on destroying his father, Bero has to deploy every conceivable scheme to get at his target's Achilles heel. For example, knowing his father to be a man of considerable sensitivity, Bero intentionally in the letter provides details he believes could provoke Old Man into predictable outrage. Unsurprisingly, it would seem, Old Man's immediate reaction to the correspondence is to rush to the war front to register his objection to the inhumanity of the war. By so doing, he plays into the son's hands, exactly as intended by the letter. His physical appearance presents Bero the opportunity to unleash directly all the punitive rage he has unconsciously stored up for his father. But it is also a visit that provides the old man the chance to make his most telling pro-life statement ironically by hosting his antagonists to a bizarre banquet of human flesh.

Bero's abandonment of his medical profession is another of his ploys to rankle the father. Knowing his old man would not approve might have in some way encouraged him to switch from his medical trade to secret service. For a man of such intense pro-life disposition, the son's substitution of his humane medical profession for one that is obviously almost its antithesis, must be a big disappointment. It can only be assumed that the old man may have invested a lot of resources in

getting his offspring into the medical profession. Add to this the labour and time, at least, put into stacking the surgery with potent herbs. It is, in his view, a wrong choice that exposes the foolishness of his son, alluded to in the old man's imagery of the waterproof coat quoted above. On his part however, Bero thinks that his switch is to a higher gear of power, more so when, as he tells Si Bero, he hopes to still retain some of his former trade. This time however, the objective would no longer be to heal, but to destroy.

Practice? Yes, I intend to maintain that side of my practice. A laboratory is important. Everything helps. Control, sister, control. Power comes from bending Nature to your will. The specialist they called me, and a specialist is-well- a specialist. Your analyze, you diagnose, you- prescribe (237).

The obsessive manner in which Bero haunts his father for the AS ideology leaves little doubt that the protagonist of *Madmen* is propelled by destructive influences. AS is the irreligious ideology invented by Old Man to highlight and at the same time, ridicule the inhumanity of the regime with which his son is associated. Unfortunately, what was intended to be a sardonic representation of a flawed leadership paradigm is mischievously misconstrued by the son as an inspired enunciation of the ultimate power ideology. So unrelenting is Bero's pursuit of this utopian metaphysical essence that is the AS credo that the son has to kill the father in frustration after failing to wrest it from the old man. AS is the ideological expression of Bero's notion of power – power that is absolute and infinite, much like the power of the Christian God, yet power that is shorn of all humane considerations. Bero wants to live in transcendence, exercise power with impunity, and exert control with limitless abandon.

By contrast, Old Man's personal idea of power is the exact opposite. AS is only his philosophical denunciation of all forms of delusions of absolutism and omniscience of social power. His is a restraining intervention in the face of his son's maniacal reading of the power script.

Bero's envy of his father's intellectual prowess is self-evident. Coexistent with this envy is the son's tendency to copy nearly everything

initiated by the father: his ideology, his ideas, his intellect, his position, his powers. Bero's lack of originality in fact makes his father's superiority more apparent, accounting for why, at the conscious level both men are in conflict. Old Man is aware of the son's envy of his superiority: "You want to borrow my magic key", taunts the old Man. "Yours opens only one door at a time" (263). Bero's lack of originality is also a sign of his poor leadership credentials.

Bero's power by comparison is inferior because it is limited to the use of coercive state apparatuses directed only toward destructive ends. Although he has his medical training, Bero is no longer inclined to use it to promote life. Instead, he intends to convert the potent instruments of that trade to tools of destruction. On the other hand, Old Man possesses an assortment of material as well as non-material resources that he could deploy in a wide range of constructive ends that include assisting underprivileged ones like the Mendicants. His pro-life ideals can be seen in his objection to wars and the needless loss of lives that is the consequence. It is these values that are negated by Bero's desire to supplant the father as the dominant force of the prevailing order.

The extraordinary intensity of the conflict between father and son evokes a foreboding of impending disaster. In this inexplicable power tussle neither party is prepared to make any concessions and so, invariably, tragedy beckons. The son's desire to destroy the father is so strong that even a meaningless pursuit of the abstraction named AS assumes an ominous stature of a veritable foundering rock against which to smash blood ties. Bero insists on obtaining from the father the master key of power that he believes the latter has locked in his nihilistic AS ideology. In his desperate bid to break into this ideology - in a sense, an inordinate bid to topple traditional (constituted) authority of which Old Man is the custodian - Bero subjects his father to torture and denials in captivity. Kept in seclusion and denied access to society and loved ones, Old Man is battered and abused even by his pupils (the Mendicants) who are detailed to supervise him. But when neither entreaty nor cajoling, nor force can compel Old Man to surrender

his arsenal of (knowledge) power, Bero in frustration shoots his father. However, Old Man's physical demise is only an objectification of a tragic fate for which he seems inescapably destined, being by fate a Lacanian object of desire. As Lacan suggests, every desire seeks the liquidation of another desire: "Man's desire is the desire of the Other"? (Seminar XI, p.235). Bero's desire for the father's knowledge presupposes the ultimate destruction, symbolically, of his father, the source of that knowledge power in question.

But the question again returns: "why does Bero choose his own father for destruction for love of power?" This choice is by no means a coincidence, because events suggest that he was destined to cross paths with Bero. Being in possession of the knowledge after which the son hankers, Old Man becomes a premeditated target, or at the very least, an unconscious one. The unconscious link is evident in the recurrent nature of the protagonist's strange behaviour, the pattern of which discourse thus far has attempted to delineate.

What singles Old Man out as the target of the son's attack, the physical projection of his object of desire, lies in his symbolic role as the traditional authority figure. This is the role prefigured in his Oedipal role as the castrating sire who threatens the male offspring with castration for his sexual desire of the mother during the pre symbolic stage of the child's development. In essence the power that the father has over the son as established by tradition is being repudiated in the wider context of the social life of the play. Thus, the conflict between Bero and the father has its roots in the oedipal relationship they share as father and son. It is driven by unconscious forces that neither of them probably can explain. It is a factor, Freud explains, that circumscribes all human behavior, albeit in all kinds of way and manner. Any system becomes therefore a kind of 'oedipal' arena in which to experience the power impulses that shape ascendancy within it. These conflicts reflect the endless desire-on-desire confrontations that characterize the human psyche, that is the quest to liquidate the Other in order to assume an-Otherness. The oedipal dimension is especially manifest in situations whereby persons otherwise ineligible for particular positions attempt

to force the hand of tradition by seeking to upturn it to suit their design in a futile attempt to actualize their fantasies of power or success..

As has been suggested, what lends credence to the oedipal nature of the conflict is the inexplicable intensity of the ruthlessness that characterizes the treatment that Bero metes out to his father. In a normal relationship a child would not dare abuse the father. Perhaps love and respect and culture would restrain an offspring from waging war against a parent. But a relationship that has a strong current of unconscious motivations may not always conform to this norm. Such is the nature of Bero's relationship with his family, a family into which he has imported his military powers (his revolutionary deviancy, his uncontrollable Desire of the 'Other') and is using them to terrorize its members. Cripple seems to ask the question on everyone's mind. In his bafflement he wonders: "Why is he [Bero] doing it? His own family too, what's he up to?" (222). It is akin to the question asked of the subject in the Lacanian inquiry: 'What does he want?' As Lacan suggests, the subject's needs or desires can be enigmatic. What the child demands of the (m)Other is difficult to determine, prompting her to inquire of the child, 'what do you want?' Lacan's rather quaint prose on the subject matter in the paper titled "The Subversion of the Subject" is instructive:

This is why the Other's question [la question de l'Autre] – that comes back to the as 'Che vuoi?', 'What do you want?', is the question that best leads the subject to the path of his own desire, assuming that, thanks to the know-how of a partner known as a psychoanalyst, he takes up that question, even without knowing it, in the following form: 'What does he want from me?' (*Ecrits*)

No one actually knows what Bero wants. The most plausible answer to this puzzle is that Dr. Bero is being driven by a current of repressed feelings of which he is probably unaware. His father is a stand-in upon which he is letting out the frustrations of his oedipal lack of maternal ardour, and doing so in a dysfunctional way.

Although no explicit textual evidence points to such a conclusion, it is not improbable that this oedipal crisis may have its roots in Bero's unconscious sense of maternal deprivation, caused possibly by death or marital crisis involving both parents. Old Man's parental role as father had placed him, from the start, at the strategic junction in the formation of the subjectivity of his son. In ensuring that the son's libidinal drives are properly channelled, psychoanalysts instruct, the father is forced to interpose himself between mother and her son. The loss of the mother's breast becomes a symbolic loss of power, the child's first experience of lack that would remain buried in his unconscious all through life. Bero's experience of this loss, coupled with the probable absence of the personal involvement of a mother in his mature development may have further widened the gulf between him and his father.

In psychoanalysis, the role of the mother in the formation of the child's subjectivity is central. For Lacan, this role has both psychosexual and cultural significance. The loss of the mother's breast, voice and gaze symbolizes a primordial life-long phallic deprivation, which will reflect unconsciously on the child's response later in life to the self and the society around him. Significantly, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, the father is the symbol of that severance suffered by the child as well as a symbol of cultural laws or taboo. Moreover, the absence of a mother in the house – whether on account of death or marital crisis – is something for which the son might unconsciously hold the father accountable. The absence of the stabilizing role of the mother may therefore account not just for the loveless relationship between Bero and his father, but it might as well explain, at least in part, Bero's eccentric behaviour in adulthood. Had he had a mother around him, it is possible that Bero might have attained a greater emotional stability. In fact, growing up under a father with such strong intellectual stature may have exacerbated Bero's sense of alienation and antipathy toward his father, which he feels can only be assuaged by getting rid of him and assuming his place.

In contrast to the loveless father-son relationship, it is instructive to notice the remarkable sibling ardour that seems to radiate

between Bero and his sister, Si Bero. She thus stands in for the absent mother, one that affords Bero a semblance of the breast power that he lost in his mother. At least up until Bero's unexpected metamorphosis, Si Bero had played the role of surrogate or substitute mother to her brother. "I have the power of a mother with him", Si Bero tells the Earth mothers, anxious at a critical moment in the play for her brother's safety in the hands of the women whom he has offended. During Bero's absence from home on war duties, Si Bero had quite dutifully devoted herself to replenishing her brother's stock of herbs. She even engaged the priceless assistance of the mothers in this regard, as well as obtained their occultic intervention to preserve his life at the war front, pledging by proxy his loyalty and gratitude. Her manifest joy upon Bero's safe return from the war, coupled with her enthusiastic desire to perform on his behalf the traditional ritual of purification, to ward off possible harmful forces trailing him home, is further evidence of Si Bero's love for her brother.

Thus, it is a profoundly alarmed woman who helplessly demands to know what has become of her once humane brother: "What are you trying to be, Bero – evil?" (241). By this unexpected transformation, Bero breaches the power pact between him and his sister as well as that between him and the Earth mothers. This pact appears to be based on respect for human life and dignity through a humane use of the herbal powers that they shared. Instead of respecting this pact, Bero turns against his allies seeking to subordinate them and subvert the very terms of the agreement that brought them together.

In some sense, Bero does somewhat convey the impression that his desire to orchestrate his father's elimination is almost an obsession in nearly equal degree to his quest for celestial omnipotence. As a result, Bero sometimes deliberately exaggerates his abnormality to a degree in which it becomes frightening to people around him. In this way, he is able to grind his anti-paternal agenda through in a community whose rigid moral code he realizes well enough could constitute a hindrance to his aspiration. Only by acting weird, in the fashion of Hamlet, can Bero hope to browbeat

the community into submission. For a while, his strategy appears to work. Rather than try to restrain him, most members of the community, the priest and Si Bero, for instance, are scared of him. The mad man thus appears to enjoy a free reign of terror, at least until he is finally checked by the Mothers. The idea, it must be stressed, is not to deny, or even to underplay the deranged state of Bero's mind, but to point out what appears to be his strategic ploy to make the most of that condition

Furthermore, though his language and appearance are consistent with the classic image of the mad, evidence of contrivance in Bero's mannerism is not entirely remote. His over-elaborate military gear (unusual for a secret agent), his propensity to wield his gun at the slightest ruffle (even at feeble old women), and his violent assaults on the Mendicants, all portray Bero as someone who is willfully inclined to over play his power. Add to this the protagonist's penchant for violent and morbid imagery in his speech. He describes his patients as 'corpses' (234); his father "does not exist" (256); he speaks of 'something more potent than' wine (234) (blood, presumably); he glorifies cannibalism; proscribes and banishes (260). Bero's conversation with the priest as well as his choice of words in dialogues involving him and Si Bero, shows a calculated intent to shock, but they are also symptomatic of his unsettled personality as well as his dysfunctional leadership style.

Note for instance the callous way in which Bero on two separate occasions sets out to shock the sister and over awe her with his strange behaviour and words. First, he uses the Mendicants to mesmerize Si Bero just to convince her of their father's alleged insanity. This gambit works because it achieves its design to cause Si Bero to flee, even forgoing her wish to see the father in his cell (245). On the second occasion, Bero alarms the sister with news of his abandonment of his medical profession, words that make her really scared of her brother. (237).

Perhaps more than any other symptom so far highlighted, it is Bero's obsession with cannibalism and AS that seems to confirm his dysfunctional understanding of power as well as authenticates the unconscious origins of his

paterphobia. Both cannibalism and AS are simply Old Man's cynical attempt to protest what he sees around him as a growing propensity to devalue human life. The cannibalistic feast with the junta objectifies this tendency, while AS is the intellectual expression of it. It is indeed a measure both of Bero's insanity and his malicious design against his father that Bero opts to adopt both ideas against the original purpose intended by their author. In a word, by turning his father's inventions against him, Bero aims to further his war on his father and thus further complicate their relationship. Eating human flesh becomes another counter-ideology to the dominant ideology with which Old Man is associated.

If the oedipal configuration is widened to include the larger community of the play, it is possible to see how other minor characters in the play fit into the pattern of eccentric behaviour that runs through the play. Besides Dr. Bero, the play harbours other characters whose mannerisms can also be rightly described as puzzling. The most outstanding of such characters are Old Man and the duo of Iya Agba and Iya Mate, otherwise called the Earth Mothers. Old Man shares many of his son's eccentricities, as Moody has rightly suggested in his "Tick of a Heretic". But it is doubtful as to whether Old Man is responsible as Moody proposes, for the son's excesses. What is beyond question though is that Old Man represents a counterpoint, in terms of rhetoric, to the son's more practical abnormal deeds.

But he is not just 'such an argumentative man', as the priest characterizes him, but also someone with a remarkable penchant for impulsive behaviour. His sudden decision to join the army, prompted by the contents of a letter from his son, is consistent with his volatile temperament.

Similarly, Old Man's pet ideas of cannibalism and AS are as enigmatic as his personality. As counter ideologies to the dominant ideology within his community, these ideas prove somewhat in the end over determined. They not only simply end up dwarfing the prevailing ideology; they precipitate very sinister and odious alternatives thereafter, having been seized upon by unscrupulous minds like Bero. Yet, this reality is a

dialectical distortion of what the old man had actually intended. Such is the irony of which Old Man's personality is the perfect example. His obsession for Swiftian satire tends to be counter-productive, it seems, at least from the standpoint of a reformist that he arguably is. Proposing the Swiftian logic that wastefulness is incongruous with intelligence, he cynically urges that people should kill only for food. And as a practical joke he tricks some military officers into consuming the flesh of some of their victims at war. Ironically, the joke misfires, and ends up instituting itself both literally and symbolically as reality in the consciousness of the same people it was intended to deter. Thus is objectified the cannibalistic dimension expressed in AS. Nevertheless, Old Man remains faithful to his Freudian role as guardian of culture.

As his pupils, the Mendicants reflect Old Man and his ideas in a thoroughly exemplary manner. The once docile street beggars are so totally radicalized and transformed that they become the very embodiment of Old Man's heresy. Even the Mendicants themselves are no longer certain as to their own sanity: "Lord, he mixed us up", laments Aafaa at a point. However, the Mendicants represent in their social transformation as knowledgeable beings an antithesis, thanks to Old Man, to the ignorant mass of bodies the regime would want the citizens to be. Moreover, though lowly positioned in relation to other characters, the Mendicants too do have their own aspirations. They dream of a circus tour with Old Man as a way by which to obtain economic power and escape their present precarious condition.

Finally, the Mothers too are located within the vengeful pattern of the plot of *Madmen*, especially as seen in their relationship with Bero. Indeed, for a society such as the one inhabited by Bero, and one that is steadily losing its touch with humanity, thanks to Bero, the mothers' intervention couldn't have been timelier. Otherwise good-natured and richly endowed with wisdom, these elderly matriarchs are however more than able to exact pain if provoked. The intractable intransigence and impunity displayed by the misguided protagonist proves to be enough justification for the Mother's vengeance.

Always on the side of humanity, being by both personal inclination and duty attached to the earth, the Earth Mothers have a leadership propensity to side only with persons or forces similarly inclined. This explains why Si Bero appears to catch their eye. In the absence of her brother, Si Bero has elected to devote herself to replenishing the brother's surgery in the hope of preserving his healing trade. In doing so, she is motivated primarily, as the mothers would testify, by a concern for humanity. As Iya Agba remarks,

She proved herself, there's no denying it. She proved herself. If she'd wanted it easy or simply out of greed I would have guided her feet into quick sands and left her there (236).

For this reason alone has she been considered worthy to be admitted into the mothers' tutelage in the mysteries of herbal healing over which the mothers preside.

It is thus understandable why these women regard whoever contradicts the values (charity, service and regeneration) of the land they preserve as enemy. On the basis therefore of their zero tolerance for anti-human tendencies, the mothers justifiably see Dr. Bero as foe deserving no pity. Demands Iya Agba, rather rhetorically, "Abuse! Abuse! What do we do? Close our eyes and see nothing?" (267)

Being by orientation averse to the negation of values of charity and humanity, Iya Agba, again, speaking on behalf of her partner, Iya Mate, declares:

I'll not be a tool in their hands [evil ones like Bero, that is], not in this ripe state - No! Too much has fallen in their hands already; it's time to take it back. They spat on my hands when I held them out bearing gifts (267).

From the Earth Mother's standpoint, human life is so sacrosanct that the only recompense for its violation is the life of the offender. This explains why Si Bero must pledge her own life or that of a dear one, in exchange for her induction into the fold (as an 'aje') whose members are vested with the power of life and death over others. "I warned you", Iya Agba reminds Si Bero, "when we took you in the

fold... I said this gift is not one you gather in one hand. If your other hand is fouled the first withers also" (274). So dire must be the consequence of violation of humanity by those entrusted with leadership and power, in the estimation of these guardians of Earth, that it is understandable, given the gravity of his transgressions, why Bero's punishment has to be absolute.

Consider for example the following list of chilling deeds perpetrated by the morbid-minded Bero: the inhumanities in his torture chambers, his parricide, his cannibalistic tendencies, his vile celestial ambition, his penchant for exclusive knowledge and non-inclusive leadership style, and above all, his malevolent ideology of As. Hence, he must pay with "everything" including his very life and his surgery with all its potent herbs, which potentially he could equally abuse. Fortunately, in part for being herself a victim of Bero's resentment and also on account of her own individual merit, Si Bero is spared the fury of the avenging matriarchs: "I think only of her", declares Iya Mate, and Iya Agba concurs to their pupil's exemplary character: "she's a good woman and her heart is strong. And it is that kind who tire suddenly in their sleep and pass on to join their ancestors" (268). In the chaos brought about by Bero, a man, Si Bero, a woman, stands as reprieve. Significantly, Soyinka is positioning women as liberators of a world devastated by men. Leadership, Soyinka appears to be saying, is not the exclusive preserve of men. Indeed, Si Bero and the Earth mothers point towards a women-driven charge for a new breed of leadership that thrives on respect for the human person.

In fact, the mothers are characterized as the avenging karmic spirit of providence. "We put back what we take, in one form or another ... or more than we take. It's the only law" (260). According to Ogunba, the mothers appear to parallel in their role a category of women in Yoruba tradition referred to as 'aje',

Who are acknowledged to be close to the ultimate source of human life and can influence individual lives for good or ill (qtd. In Maduako 233).

It is instructive to indicate the nature of vice to which and why, the mothers must respond as ruthlessly as they do in the play. As has been noted,

they are first of all up against the evil so ogre-like personified by Bero. Secondly, they see it as their providential duty to counter evil. Thirdly, they accept this role in the interest of humanity in danger of annihilating itself in the absence of a restraining superior force. Finally, the mothers also have the task to preserve nature through an unhindered circulation of healthy knowledge of its powers and potentialities, all for the good of human kind.

Importantly, though conscious of their uncommon powers, the mothers nevertheless remain equally conscious of a humanity to which they know they must, for the good of humankind and selves, submit rather than seek to transcend. It is especially in this light that the mothers are sharply contrasted with Bero who not only abhors humanity, but seeks to transcend it, who seeks power, but lacks the requisite discipline to manage it, and who craves leadership, but is too alienated to attain its consummation. .

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