

The Role of Ambivalent Sexism in African Society: A Critical Study of Alain Mabanckou's Novel *African Psycho* in Feministic Perspective

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Abstract

The subject gender disproportion is one of the out spoken issues in the current scenario. There are plenty of female writers and critics, contributed their views on the portrayal of women in literature and integrate the feministic theory to uplift the status of women in the society. Ambivalent Sexism is one among the feminist theories, argues the portrayal of women. This paper analyzes the female characters and how they are depicted in the novel *African Psycho* by Alain Mabanckou. The incorporation of the theory Ambivalent Sexism is accounted into this paper to unambiguous the status of African women. This theory has two sub categories: the benevolent sexism and hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism covenants with the optimistic characteristics of female whereas hostile sexism focuses the pessimistic. This paper attempts to establish that both sub feministic approaches are simply focused to demoralized status of the women in the society. It enlightens the views of profession and practice of women and how they absorb the status in the society by their own act.

The first phase of this paper enlightens the elucidation of feministic theoretical approach in the African Literature and how it distinguishes the gender inequity located. The biographical sketch of Mabanckou is conferred along with his own experience of his real life women characters. Further the novel *African Psycho* is cited in a general view and its introduction is given. The second phase of this paper establishes the theoretical approach of Ambivalent Sexism and its sub sorts: benevolent and hostile sexism. Further the application of these theories is accounted into the women characters of the chosen novel *African Psycho*. The detailed study part and citation of the novel along with the chosen theories are accounted in third phase. The selective women characters and their role in the novel are explained in detail to prove the notion of Mabanckou on women characters. The final part deals with findings and it attempts to prove the aim of this research paper. The aim the research paper is that the women in Africa are still under the dominant power of male society. They are exposed as the stereotypical image and held back for the desire of male.

Keywords: Feministic Theory, Ambivalent Sexism, Benevolent Sexism and Hostile Sexism.

Gender disproportion centers that men and women are not equivalent and that gender exploits the living experiences of individuals. The division in this platform is associated with the distinction of biology, psychology and culture. Some of these peculiarities are factually positioned while others seem to be socially formed. There are good number of studies, made on this area, which expose the different lived experience of genders across many domains inclusive of education, life expectancy, personality, interests, family life, careers and political associations. Cecilia L. Ridgeway has defined the gender inequality in her work *How the Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World* as:

Gender is at root a status inequality—that is, a system of inequality that is founded on cultural beliefs about status differences between types of people—

men and women. Yet recall that, to persist over time, the shared cultural beliefs that confer greater status on one category of people than on another must be supported by average differences between these types of people in the material resources and power that they command. (156)

She tries to prove the concept that gender inequality is constructed only because of the cultural beliefs. It is where all the female genders are anticipated to go behind the allocated role by society whereas males are solicited to overrule them. It is acknowledged differently across different culture.

Gender discrimination in Africa mostly derives from the socio cultural factors, resulting from patriarchal socio cultural factors. It was considered in two different perspectives in two periods. Gender discrimination was not existed in pre colonial Africa, where females were politically alive and elder women had the rights to decide or find resolution in the family issues and political issues too. Some literary pieces showed that how women were respected through the production of food. The significant notion is that they never used the rights to dominate male society or children whereas they controlled the children to direct them in a proper way. Postcolonial Africa mirrors the happening of 20th century, in which, women entirely were not allowed to take forth their suggestion because colonialism and patriarchy modified the gender relation utterly. Since the male chiefs agreed the British powers in the perspective of taxes and governance, but female chiefs opposed entirely the rule and tax of British people. This cause made the women to withdraw from their positions, additionally European Style education system in post colonial Africa preferred boys rather girls.

This paper studies the novel *African Psycho* by Mabanckou and translated into English by Christine Schwartz Hartley. Mabanckou is a francophone writer and one of the important contemporary writers in African literature. He is presently working as a professor of French Literature in University of California, Los Angeles. He has authored so far twelve novels, six poems, eight essays and three illustrated novels. All his novels are considered as the semi autobiographical because the protagonist and the major characters of the novels are simply the reflection of his own real life characteristics. The women characters are taken into an account to have a detailed study with feministic theories such as ambivalent sexism and its sub types: benevolent and hostile sexism. Ambivalent Sexism is theoretical frame work, which offers a multidimensional reconceptualization of the traditional view of sexism. It focuses explicitly negative valuation and stereotypes about gender. Its significant notion is that women are incompetent, brainless, sexually manipulative and inferior to men. The social psychologists Peter Glick and Susan Fiske have improved this theory to the next level. Nathaniel Berman defines this theory ambivalence as:

I would argue that this ambivalence may be the defining feature of this form of the exercise of power—indeed, that this ambivalence may be viewed as partly shaping the forms taken by such power, that ambivalence may itself come to be a technology of power.(414)

He strongly believes that theory is strongly associated with the people who are authorized with power and the role of ambivalence is shaped by those authorities and there is a chance of

incorporating the power of this theory in the technology, these ideas are clearly portrayed in the book *Passion and Ambivalence: Colonialism, Nationalism, and International Law*.

The second key term, used in this paper is benevolent sexism, as discussed above and this theoretical approach is the one of the sub sorts of Ambivalent Sexism. This theoretical notion elucidates the view that women are in the position to be cared and protected. They are considered as stereotyped in the perspective of emotion, affection, delicate and sensitive. This key term seems to be portraying the optimistic side of women but the actual fact is that it makes the women as stereotyped and weaker sex through the way of portraying their optimistic side. This is a kind of technique: through which male dominate the female community without getting any opposition and it is the evidence of the interpersonal relationship between men and women. Good numbers benevolent sexist, who have come out with a lot of notion and description on this theory.

Hostile sexism is another sub feminist theoretical approach, which has been accounted in this paper to prove the aim of this paper. This theory encompasses the pessimistic equivalent on each dimension such as dominative paternalism, derogatory beliefs, and heterosexual hostility. The hostile sexist attempt to evaluate men over the women and this approach is considered as attitudes that are antagonistic towards women.

The novel *African Psycho* has many women characters but only the selected women characters are taken into an account. This study attempts to prove that as per the view of Mabanckou African women are not even considered as living creature because they are depicted as the living creature who is ready to do anything to sustain for their life. As per the socio

political aspects of Africa, authorities are only in the position to prescribe the role of African women. The acceptance of their characteristics depends upon the mood of male dominant society, which is the exact definition of ambivalent sexism. Power can decide and modify anything as per its own wish. The character Germaine is the first one who meets the oppression and subjugation of the male society. The novel commences with the following lines:

I have decided to kill Germaine on December 29, I have been thinking about this for weeks – whatever one may say about it, killing someone requires both psychological and logistical preparedness. I believe I have now reached the necessary state of mind, even if I have yet to choose the means by which I will do the deed. (1)

As per the quote given above, the narrator Gregoire Nakobomayo is ready to kill his companion by no means. He does not portray any cause to murder the woman character in the beginning of the novel. He reveals the real cause only at the end of the novel which is not even satisfactory up to the mind state of the readers. When the thorough study is made on this woman character, she wishes to live in the society as per her own wish but which is not accepted by the African society. Mabanckou portrays the character Germaine, who leads her role as per her own wish and she never bothers about the society and its regulations. This act results Nakobomayo to pledge on his idol Angoulima to kill her since she practices prostitution. The portrayal of this character is not allowed to stay with the man, whom she loves blindly. The ambivalent sexism approach is completely suitable to execute on the character of Germaine.

Germaine is the character who practices prostitution for her survival. Though she is introduced in the beginning of the novel, her actual role takes place only in the second chapter. She is revealed in the second chapter as a prostitute, who waits by wearing beautiful white dress for customer at the night. The narrator's approach is declined by her so he decides to enforce her by doing anything means. His cruel deed against her wish is detailed by Mabanckou as per the followings lines:

She didn't realize at what moment her feet left the ground and found herself to figure out how to immobilize her before she pulled herself back together. I grabbed a piece of dead wood that was lying on the ground. Oh shit. I gave a sharp blow to the nape of her neck and saw her eyes roll back into their sockets. She passed out completely, legs and arms wide apart, calling her mother for help.

(83)

The above quotation states clearly the mind set of man over woman. Germaine does not show any differentiation among her customers. She declines his offer only because he is drunk entirely. Her refusal makes him furious and it tempts him to execute the brutal deed on her by blowing her neck with the wooden piece. He attempts to rape her by making her naked but he escapes from the place when he realizes the arrival of another taxi. The brutal execution of man towards the woman happens to get him satisfied. Mabanckou's portrayal proves that the whores are not even left out for the desire of men and women are considered as the sexual object and they are depicted as incapable and worthless in the society. Their role is determined only by the desire of the men.

Since, Germaine is a whore, she happens to meet the narrator another time. The ambiance permits them to live together and he accepts her with condition that she must continue her night whoring business even after residing with Nakobomayo. The whole novel presents the aim of the narrator to become a familiar figure as his idol Angoualima. In order to attain his aim, he plans to kill her and makes all the arrangements in the shed. She is above to be called to the house to get murdered, but unfortunately he sleeps on the sofa. But his intention of killing her is not left out because he dreams the execution of murder in a much planned way. Finally his intention and aim gets failed since she is murdered by railroad workers. The truth about the murderer is revealed by the voice Angoualima from the graveyard. Her identity is disclosed by Mabanckou in the last page of this novel as:

Germaine was not any old girl. She was a fighter. She ran a small prostitution network, and she never told you. She concealed her game by playing the enticer at the Open Air restaurant. That was so she could keep better watch over the girls in her network, with the restaurant proprietress working as an accomplice and keeping an account of the take the whores would bring in very morning. Germaine told you that everything had been stolen, her stuff, her money? It's true, but it wasn't her girlfriends who stole everything from her, it was this fake railroad worker, her murderer (158)

She resides with him by giving fake information about her bag loss and she does not reveal to him the real person who steals the money and purse from her. The voice of Angoualima from graveyard discloses her identity that she has a prostitute network with few other girls.

Mabanckou presents this woman character as the major one among rest but still she is subjugated, since she survives by doing prostitution, the narrator decides to kill her. The original fact is not like he wishes to kill her not because of her profession whereas he wishes to become familiar face like his idol. The railroad worker kills her in order to steal her money. Women already meet a lot of complicated situation to survive in this world, though the men say that they play safe guard role to them. As per the view of Mabanckou, the ideology gets entirely different. Germaine is a character who loses not only her rights whereas her life for the satisfaction of men. The dominant role of men continues in the novel *African Psycho*. It proves that the notion of Ambivalent Sexism.

There is a concept “Picked –up Children” in this novel. The narrator Nakobomayo also belongs to this category. At the time of his birth, there were plenty of unwanted pregnancy and it made so many mothers to reside at the same place until they delivered a baby. They simply escaped from the task of caring their children. This attitude of the women made the cause to have a lot picked up children or make children to stand in the street. This is the state of unscrupulousness of the women characters, portrayed by Mabanckou. The mothers are simply depicted as the carefree beings, who become the reason to make the society filled with orphans. The hostile sexism is analyzed in detail since it conveys the meaning of supremacy of male over female. The following quote shows the real anger of the narrator since he is affected due to the crime committed by his own mother.

I have always imagined the woman who brought me into the world running in a loincloth saturated with an amniotic fluid. I don't know why I hang on this

morbid image, but if I could kill all the women on Earth, I would begin with my mother – if only someone would show her to me, even now. I would pull out her heart of stone, cook it in my fingers, the rest of her body rotting away in front of me..... (16)

The above quoted lines are the best example of the women who exploit the society by declining her role allocated by the society. Mabanckou elucidates that when a woman commits mistake sexually, it does not distress her alone and it has the prime connection with the society also. The narrator of this novel is even ready to kill his mother because the pain he undergoes as an orphan is immeasurable. It makes him to destroy the main reason through which he comes to this world. Mother is a role, acknowledged by the society as equal to God or considered as the second God. The illustration of mother in this novel is entirely different by Mabanckou through the character of narrator. Hostile sexism again dominates in this place in the perspective of dominant society, because the man who is the cause for delivering the child is not at all spoken anywhere else whereas mothers are cursed and worthy to be murdered brutally. Though male and female fall into sexual encounter, the society curses only female not the male. The application of hostile sexism rules over in this particular area of the novel.

The wife of Ted Louko is another victim of the hostile sexism because Mabanckou has given a very short role to the character wife of Ted Louko. He presents that the sexual suspicion is alone enough to murder the wife, it is not necessary to prove the crime. In the novel, Ted Louko is an ordinary poor work man and he has a work shop. Once he suspects that his wife has an affair with one of his apprentices. This act results him to murder his wife by the electric screw

driver. This cruel murder execution takes over place on a woman who is not proved as the crime partner. Mabanckou elucidates this particular incident as “Because Ted Louko suspected his wife to be the love of one of his apprentices, he lost his head and did the deed at five in the morning while his spouse was asleep, a victim of the sleeping pill the cuckolded workman had slipped in her beer” (38). These lines portray the injustice action done for the woman whose mistake is not acknowledged with evidence. The women characters are not even preferred as the living creatures which share the life of man. Mabanckou presents the wife character as the victim in the beginning and she becomes prey for the suspicion of her husband. The domination of male goes up to the extreme of murdering the female to sustain their name in the society. It is acknowledged that if the mistake is indeed committed by woman, the man does not have any right to kill the woman, because it is considered as the extreme level of the subjugation. The Portrayal of women characters by Mabanckou attempts to prove that the hostile sexism rules throughout the novel, wherever the female characters are depicted.

This paper analyzes three women character namely Germaine, Mother of Nakobomayo and the wife of Ted Louko in detail. These three characters are studied with the help of selected theories to prove the aim of this paper. As per the benevolent sexism, women are sometimes praised with the intention of making them to fall down and they are portrayed with the stereotypical image in the society. Through above said women characters, it is strongly proven that the hostile sexism is still existed in the African society and male domination is still existed. The most significant problem faced by African women is sexual harassment, though they make

their profession as prostitutes. It attempts to prove that they have no choice, no liberation and subjugated objects in the male dominated society.

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