

**Psychological Disposition of The Betrayed and Self-
realization in Chimnonso Onyekwelu's *the Blissful
Unknown***

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Abstract

Betrayal of trust is a controversial topic that seems unending because humans will keep betraying or getting betrayed whereas others are still searching to find their true self and get to a point of self-realization. The paper explores the Psychological Disposition of the Betrayed in Onyekwelu's *The Blissful Unknown*. Psychoanalytic theory is the theoretical framework in which this study hinges on. Arguments still persist about where the greater pains lie in; is it in betraying or in getting betrayed? In *The Blissful Unknown*, Jane felt betrayed than ever, although her parents felt they did it for her own good. She forgave them later to be free as she realized that she is no longer herself. Aunt Eunice said the truth in order to be free, to be in peace with her soul. The researcher posits that the greater pain lies in betraying a loved one because the

betrayor gets to live with the guilt whereas the betrayed forgives and moves on with life.

Keywords: Betrayal, Trust, Psychoanalysis, Trauma.

Introduction

For several years mankind has struggled with basic questions about who we are, what we are heading for, and of what kind of reality we are part of. The joy of life and meaning of life is increased through self realization. In Fromm's terms, "man can deceive himself about his real self-interest if he is ignorant of his self and its real needs" (32). One reason that a betrayer might experience such difficulty in convincing a partner that he or she is truly sorry is that, along with feeling hurt and rejected, the partner evaluates the offence to mean that the relationship is not important to the betrayer. To get forgiveness then, a betrayer must reassure and comfort his or her partner that the offence was as an inexcusable lapse from him/her reflecting only the betrayer's unworthiness, rather than finding a way to justify himself/herself. In addition, a betrayer must convince his or her partner that their relationship is still very much significant, and that he is ready to do whatever it takes to restore the relationship.

There is an intense pain one feels when one gets betrayed by a loved one. Betrayal can be caused as a result of fear, jealousy, greed and power. These reasons can push people, even family members to betray one another. Due to individual differences, each person has what he considers the ultimate form of betrayal. It could be unfaithfulness, stealing or even lies because when your partner or trusted fellow lies, it creates a sense that you cannot know what the truth is.

Betrayal occurs when people perceive that their expectations are not met, when they feel taken advantage of, when they feel inappropriately excluded from decisions that significantly affect their lives. It can be when their creativity is suppressed under circumstances when the right to be creative is due to them (Reina and Reina, 110). Betrayal comes with several effects which sometimes tend to be psychological; shock, loss and grief, damaged self-esteem, self-doubting and anger. It is painful as it goes beyond feeling hurt, upset to possibly reduce one's ability to trust others. Trust is an important issue in life since it has been observed to be connected with many positive processes and outcomes.

Self-realization involves letting go of many of the things that are associated with individual identity in order to find the true self. Self-realization and self-actualization are two words that are used interchangeably because both refer to the achievement of one's self. People often assume that the two words mean the same thing. Self-realization refers to the achievement of one's personality while self-actualization refers to the achievement of one's potential.

Self-realization can be in varying forms like; trying not to be someone else rather by accepting your authentic self thereby feeling secure and unashamed in who one really is, Being your unique self without any feeling of inferiority, understanding what one need in order to gain a sense of fulfillment and striving to attain that sense of fulfillment, getting enjoyment and satisfaction out of the present moment. Self-realization has been perceived to mean several things like Liberation and Self-knowledge. Thus the purpose of this study is to explore The Psychological Disposition of the Betrayed in Chinonso Onyekwelu's *The Blissful Unknown*. It aims to bring out the tenets of betrayal and self-realization coupled with the

psychological effects that follows a betrayed or self-realized person.

The citizens of Nigeria wail uncontrollably at the hideous activities of men in power, they have failed their citizens, they betrayed the citizens. They make empty promises which are hastily thrown from their agendas once they occupy the governmental position that they were vying for. Good roads, uninterrupted power supply, capable security, employment opportunities, good health care and services, standardized education, good wages or salary, healthy living etc were part of the fallacious statements uttered during their campaigns which never came into reality. They remained abstractions in the minds of the masses.

Being disillusioned coupled with the terrible betrayal from the unrepentant leaders, some Nigerians now have a bad disposition of making money anyhow, and everyone just wants to survive. They steal then go ahead to justify their theft with that of the politicians whom are referred to as “Pen robbers” because of their ceaseless looting of public funds just by signing a signature. Citizens now believe that everyone should find a way to grab his/her share of the national cake. Many Nigerians in a bid to make money taint the image of the country bad. Due to this betrayal, the citizens harbor anger, hatred resulting from pains, anguish against the government making them less patriotic citizens. They do not see the need to stand for a future killing system, the system that killed hopes, dreams and aspirations.

The condition of the nation makes the betrayed (citizens) ashamed to identify that they are from the nation whenever they leave the shores of the country. Some go to extent of migrating as they no longer feel happy in the place

they call home; they do not feel valued even in their own country. Some Nigerians prefer living like second class citizens than to come and suffer as a first class citizen in their country. They do not mind being treated little or less than a human in other country not like they were valued in their country. The psychological disposition depicts inferiority complex which greatly affects the self esteem of the citizens.

Psychological Disposition, Betrayal and Self realization

Disposition is said to mean one's frame of mind. Collins dictionary conceives it as a person's usual mood, temperament, tendency or a habitual inclination. Based on psychological perception, it is a natural or acquired tendency, inclination or habit in a person. Psychological disposition can be referred to as one's attitude and tendency to act in certain ways to varying situations, an individual might react positively or negatively to situations depending on the state of mind or on the condition of the mind build up.

Betrayal is defined as a breach in honoring an expected behaviour or norm associated with trust (Reina and Reina, 108). They described betrayal as "an intentional or unintentional breach of trust or the perception of a breach of trust." They go on further to differentiate intentional betrayal and unintentional betrayal based upon the degree to which there is conscious intent of an individual to perform "a self-serving action that results in people's being hurt, damaged or harmed".

Elangovan Aravind and Debra Shapiro conceive betrayal as a violation of pivotal expectations of a trustor. Many studies documented the fact that betrayal can cause negative emotions. First, an infringement of a psychological contract can be perceived as a form of betrayal because it incorporates both the element of trust and the anticipation that another party will fulfill his or her obligations. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman

have defined trust as a person's willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that such a party will respond according to the former's anticipation.

Boon defined interpersonal trust as "the confident expectation that a partner is intrinsically motivated to take one's own best interests into account when acting - even when incentives might tempt him or her to do otherwise" (p. 88). Boon sees the trust as being so confident about one's partner to the extent that the person believes that the partner would put his best interest at heart in any situation he finds himself in. Not even material things could move such devoted partner.

Robinson and Morrison have discovered that when a person sees that a breach of psychological contract is purposefully done by another party under unfair conditions, he or she will experience strong feelings of violation. In addition, Koehler and Gershoff observed that people reported intense negative feelings toward the manufacturer of a safety product that caused the harm from which it was claimed to protect them. Other studies have also revealed that betrayal is linked to negative emotions. Self-realization is an expression used in psychology, spirituality, and Eastern religions. It is defined as the "fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one's character or personality.

Echezona Ifejirika opines that *The Blissful Unknown* is a complex literary narrative that is thrilling, suspending, revealing and interestingly trepidatious. The author, Chimnonso Onyekwelu dexterously weaved a story that hinged on the fact that truth can be suppressed, hidden, thwarted but cannot be buried forever. Truth is indeed sacred, relieving, healing and consoling.

Joy Eyisi avers that;

The Blissful Unknown is a story of love, loss and fate. The characters are relatable; the plot is thrilling and engaging; and the language simple, yet vivid enough. The novel contains compelling themes, which the readership cannot but get invested in. I commend the young author, Chimnonso Onyekwelu, for this wonderful contribution to the literary world. It is a book for which lovers of literature should be grateful.

Essentially, betrayal means that a person in a relationship acts in a way that favors his or her own interests at the expense of the other person's interests. That is to say that this behavior implies that the betrayer regards his or her needs as more important than the needs of the partner or the relationship. In a deeper sense, however, betrayal sends an ominous signal about how little the betrayer cares about, or values his or her relationship with, the betrayed partner. Shackelford and Buss claimed that to really understand betrayal, it is necessary to consider the relationship context within which it occurs because different kinds of relationships involve different kinds of rules and expectations. **Theoretical Framework**

Psychoanalytic theory is the theory that serves as a basis for this study. It is the application of specific psychological principles to the study of literature. This kind of criticism approaches the analysis of literary works from the working and psychological trauma of the human mind. Sigmund Freud is the proponent of psychoanalysis, he sees it as a form of therapy which can be done by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind.

Psychoanalytic theory is the theory of personality organization and the dynamics of personality development that

guides psychoanalysis. The introduction of psychology to literature and literary criticism pushes one's focus on the mental processes of a creative writer, his psyche, the effects of his literary creation on his readers, including the workings of the mind of his characters and what informed their behaviour, actions, interactions and reactions (Echezona Ifejirika, 218).

Psychoanalytic theory looks at a work of art from the point of view of the various dispositions of human characters. The critic using this theory focuses on the psychological issues in the characters of a work even that of a writer. It is interested in the psychological drives of a character; what motivates a character and what makes a character to act in certain ways (Asika, 308). Psychoanalytic theorists believe that human behaviour is deterministic. It is governed by irrational forces, and the unconscious, as well as instinctual and biological drives. Due to this deterministic nature, they do not believe in free will. The unconscious is the portion of the mind of which a person is not aware. Freud said that it is the unconscious that exposes the true feelings, emotions, and thoughts of the individual.

When analyzing literary texts, the psychoanalytic theory could be utilized to decipher or interpret the concealed meaning within a text, or to better understand the author's intentions. Through the analysis of motives, Freud's theory can be used to help clarify the meaning of the writing as well as the actions of the characters within the text (Friedman & Schustack). Propounders of this theory include Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan.

Psychological Disposition of the Betrayed and Self Realization in Onyekwelu's the *Blissful Unknown*

The Blissful Unknown deals with issues of betrayal of trust, social consciousness, attitudes of parents and self realization. As the basic unit of every society, family plays a significant role in the formation of a child. If the family foundation is faulty then the society will be faulty because society is a reflection of individuals from different families. At every point in time, the care and love given to a child, manifest in his/her behaviour. His/her life reflects the warmth and affection he/she receives, in return, he/she gives back the best to the society where he/she finds himself. Those children, who have no such opportunities, those left to starve without parental guide and love, perish in isolation. Inferior mind is created in such children as they feel not belonging in the society. They were betrayed by their families who left them at the mercy of the society, and by the society with little or no provision for those types of children.

The greater pain of betrayal is that it is done by trusted friends and family members as noted in the case of Jane who felt betrayed by her family members. Jane grew up as the daughter of Jake and Mirabel, all through her life she regards them as her biological parents until the cat was let out of the bag. Psychologically, even before the truth was revealed she had a strange feeling of something being amiss and she knew her parents were hiding something from her as portrayed by her thoughts: "What could have made dad so angry to the point of shouting at mom till she was in tears and yet he did not relent? I thought about this over and over again, but no answer came." The sudden plan for her to relocate to Ghana to further her studies made her more anxious about the whole scenario but there is little or nothing she could do about it. They did not give her an option to agree or refuse, it was an order.

But with this, I needed no telling that the circumstance requiring same was very strange. Something was definitely wrong, something Dad and Mom were either inept at telling me or were purposefully hiding from me. Whatever it was, it surely had successfully eluded me these past few weeks. (44)

She tried so hard to come up with a plausible reason to give her friends on her sudden plan for relocation but could not as she says “but how could I tell them something I myself did not understand? (38).” Even when she was done with her secondary education, she was still pushed to enroll into higher institution there.

She overheard a conversation between her Dad and Mom “Do you think you can hide it forever? Don’t forget that the truth only needs time, and yet you don’t help matters but go about telling people (35).” All these were done in a bid to conceal the truth from her. They tried to hide it from her so as not to hurt her but unfortunately the truth cannot be hidden forever as they wished. At that moment, she knew she had to figure out what prompted her parents to make such hasty decision but how could she?

The revealing of the truth brought an ominous silence in the house more like a time bomb detected but undetonated and likely to blow up any time soon. It had psychological effect on Jane and Kelvin, the emotional raging Jane felt at that moment was not like what she was used to experiencing. She felt like one “hanging at the tip of a long rope with the word doom written all over it (222).” The force of the word hit her leaving her breathless, hurt and disappointed; she rushed to her supposedly mother to ask how she could keep off such info from her. As noted in the discussion of betrayal of trust,

betrayers may believe their intentions were good. They may argue they were doing their victims a favor, or at least, that their betrayals were unintended, excusable, and due to temporary, extenuating, or unstable causes (Baumeister et al).

Aunt Eunice realized that the only way she could get rid of the guilt she felt was to reveal the truth behind Jane's real maternity and just expected she felt a strange happiness like someone relieved of a burden. It can be said to be self-realization as she discovered the only thing (truth) that can help her live well again despite the disproving attacks from Mirabel. She had to accept herself for whom she really is not hiding under the umbrella of Aunt to her own child. After the truth was revealed she felt at ease, a feeling that one gets after having done the thing that her soul yearns for. She felt a big burden leave her. A feeling of peace and a sense of fulfillment enveloped her.

In a study of school-aged children, Darby and Schlenker found out that more genuine apologies result in less apportioning of blame, little or no desire for punishment, more likeness, forgiveness and a stronger belief that the offender was really sorry for his or her offence. Similarly, Ohbuchi, Kameda and Agarie discovered that apologies were helpful in softening negative attitudes toward an offender and in curbing urges to aggressively retaliate. Jane's life became lonelier than ever, Ken kept reminding her that she could get her life (peace and happiness) back by simply forgiving and accepting the truth.

Acknowledging that she needs to forgive them so as to be free especially as they have tried their best to obtain forgiveness from her, she decides to forgive her parents. The moment she forgave them, she felt a deep peace within her soul; like someone whom a burden was lifted off her shoulders, she

felt complete. Knowing that something had to be done concerning Kelvin's whereabouts she took it upon herself as a filial responsibility to find him which was achieved towards the ending of the story.

There is this sense of fulfillment that Jane felt when Kenneth the love of her life proposed. She had been yearning for him since childhood which was the reason why she had not been in any successful relationship. She could not accept Nii's affection regardless of the fact that he is a good man. Realizing that the necklace Kenneth gave her during his departure was the only thing he could use to remember and probably meet him; she kept it safe and wore it at will. Her excitement and fulfillment is evident in this sentence "Sucking in deep breaths, I basked in the contentment that was strictly peculiar to what I felt, for after years of waiting and praying, I have found that which I craved. And that dear friend was all I ever wanted (242)."

Psychological Implications

From the novel *The Blissful Unknwown*, several consequences arising from the incident of betrayal can be identified. Firstly, there was an emotional impact: the person felt hurt and distraught. Secondly, the person questioned her trusting approach and ability to judge people. This experience is akin to a traumatic event, although to a lesser extent.

The shocking truth almost traumatized Jane; she fainted and was hospitalized for two days. As she woke up she jilted back to reality and that was when it dawned on her that the people she had called Mom and Dad were her Aunt and Uncle. The thought set ablaze a part of her heart. The most painful part was that Kelvin whom she loved and cared for as a

brother was her cousin and the fact that her favourite Aunt was her biological mother.

Another emotion that may be experienced in response to betrayal is hatred - an emotion about which psychologists know little, but that is considered by lay people to be a powerful motivator of destructive and vengeful behaviors. Once a breach of trust is done, the next thing that sprouts up is hatred; an emotion of intense dislike so strong that it demands action. Although, after much apologies from the offenders, the hatred tends to subside gradually.

Without doubt, the psychological imbalance sprouting from betrayal of trust can easily fade if the betrayer's goal to repair the relationship is a concessionary one involving apologies and the sincere expression of remorse. But a situation where the betrayer feels less concerned about the whole issue, it will cause the pain to linger in the heart of the betrayed. A wealth of psychological literature attests to the power of the apology in ameliorating relational damage.

Feelings aroused from betrayal normally involve a number of negative emotions. First, when we are betrayed, most of us may feel disappointed or upset because the other party failed to meet our expectations. Secondly, anger is also aroused because of the disappointment due to the unfairness of the act. Thirdly, a person may also encounter shame when betrayed because he or she thinks that his or her trust has been exploited.

Conclusion

Betrayal of Trust is a common occurrence in our everyday society. People get betrayed at all times in their relationships, working places, and churches and in different

spheres of life by mostly family members and loved ones. Self-realization is what many people are still striving to achieve. It can only be achieved if the person finds out what his heart yearns for. Philosophically, one needs to be taught to develop his authentic self and be ready to die for it because life without self-realization is purposeless and worthless. In *The Blissful Unknown*, Jane felt betrayed than ever and this messed her psychological disposition at that moment, she did not even understand what she was feeling. Although, her parents felt they did it for her own good. She forgave them later to be free as she realized that she is no longer herself. Auntie Eunice said the truth in order to be free, to be in peace with her soul.

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