

Family Pressures, the Uncomfortable Truths and Mental Health in Damilare Kuku's *Nearly All Men in Lagos Are Mad*

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ABSTRACT

Family is conventionally regarded as a source of love, protection, and guidance. However, unmet expectations within the family often generate emotional distress, frustration, anxiety, and psychological pressure, particularly for women who are married or considered marriageable. Such pressures, rooted in cultural traditions, patriarchal values, and familial expectations, can negatively affect women's self-esteem, emotional well-being, and personal choices. This study examines the manifestations and effects of family pressure on women as portrayed in selected stories from Damilare Kuku's *Nearly All Men in Lagos Are Mad*. It investigates the psychological consequences of these pressures and the coping mechanisms women adopt to navigate challenging circumstances. The study further interrogates the figurative notion of "madness" in male-female relationships and its implications for women's mental health and agency. Anchored on psychoanalytic theory and adopting a qualitative textual approach, the study analyses selected stories to uncover the underlying psychological and social dynamics which shape female experiences. Findings reveal that family and societal pressures often compel women to suppress their desires, endure emotional trauma, and negotiate identity crises in order to conform to patriarchal expectations. It also finds that self-awareness, resilience, and resistance to oppressive norms enable women to reclaim their agency. The study concludes that addressing relational dysfunction requires honesty, emotional accountability, and a critical re-evaluation of harmful cultural expectations. Both men and women must confront uncomfortable truths to foster healthier relationships and promote emotional well-being.

Keywords: madness, the unconscious, the uncomfortable truth, mental health.

INTRODUCTION

Damilare Kuku's 2021 collection of short stories entitled, *Nearly All Men in Lagos Are Mad*, features twelve engaging, thought-provoking, romantic, chaotic and didactic stories. Deploying a variety of narrative technique—from the first person to the omniscient voice of women grappling with what Niyi Osundare describes as, *male-facient slavery* ("They Too Are the Earth") or male-induced troubles ranging from rape, cheating, the objectification of women, toxic relationships and an array of unreliable men scattered across various spheres of human experiences. *Nearly All Men in Lagos Are Mad*, dramatizes these anti-social conducts and submits that the male characters are at the centre of these and many more.

Kuku craftly paints a bleak and disturbing picture with an unwritten inscription that women are constantly bearing the brunt and are regular victims of mental tortures and a wide range of risks perpetuated by men. More worrisome is that fact that women are compelled to make outrageous sacrifices and sometimes cover up for their erring husbands. Some of these stories are laced in wit, sarcasm---exploring such issues that have featured prominently in many African women's writings---- works that are not just written by women, but are monumental and significant in their investigations into the lived experiences of the African woman in their respective societies. Notable among these female writers are Buchi Emecheta, Nawal El Saadawi, Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, Mariama Ba, Amma Darko, Bessie Head, Akachi Ezeigbo and others.

Nearly All Men in Lagos Are Mad, is not just about "madness" in the loose or literal sense of the word. It is an exploration of mental health, trauma, insecurity, infertility, shame, hypocrisy, living a lie, sexual trauma, violence

and some other psychological issues and how they affect individual characters in the development of each story. Her use of the expression, “madness” is essentially not for fun; rather “madness” is used metaphorically to convey the chaotic, often toxic dating, marriage and family life experiences in Lagos. A situation where men demonstrate various forms of behavioural recklessness and walk away—other disappear completely, while women are left to navigate the outcome. By describing these actions as “madness”, Kuku captures both the city’s frantic energy and the emotional turbulence it creates for women. This metaphor also lets her critique some societal impression and assumption, some of which excuse the misconduct of some men. Thus, underscoring how “madness” has become a cultural norm, and no more a social nuisance. The title is already a disturbing statement, and the stories say it all. You will read about men who lie, cheat, manipulate, and, in some cases, are just unserious; men who are always bent on having it their way, even when it must not be so---men who are exhausting. Although the collection centres around the “mad” men; yet, there are women in the story, who aid and abet this madness---until it gets the best of their mental health. The collection is peopled with characters who are truly mad; there yet others who are just trying to survive the madness, but many of them are complicit. It is quite necessary to underscore the fact that the "madness" depicted in the collection is largely metaphorical, representing toxic masculinity, emotional irresponsibility, infidelity, manipulation, and other dysfunctional behaviours that undermine women's self-worth and psychological stability.

Following the above, while the writer is not making a direct reference to insanity or madness in a clinical sense; but a reference to the irrational, shocking, and toxic behaviors of some male characters which are more like recurring motif across the twelve stories. Hence, “madness” correctly expresses the mess, emotional pain, shock, and frustration. It is quite instructive to state that for the purpose of this study with the title, “Family Pressures, the Uncomfortable Truths and Mental Health in Damilare Kuku’s *Nearly All Men in Lagos Are Mad*”, we have chosen three stories out of Kuku’s collection. The three stories are, “International Relations”, “A Lover’s Vendetta” and “Independence Day”. These stories, do not just dwell on damage; they also tell of healing, self-worth, the uncomfortable truth, reclamation and more. These three stories dramatize the experience of women who are navigating pressure from the workplace, pressure from the home front; women who cope in spite of stress, anxiety and other mental health related issues.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on psychoanalytic theory as seen through the lens of Sigmund Freud. The psychoanalytic theory holds that human personality, behavior, and mental illness are primarily shaped by unconscious motives, childhood experiences, and interpersonal struggles. The psychoanalytic theory as advanced by Sigmund Freud teaches that there are levels of consciousness in human social behaviour. This consciousness is likened to an iceberg. They are:

- the conscious: these are thoughts that humans are currently aware of.
- Preconscious: these are memories that humans can easily retrieved.
- Unconscious: this is a reservoir of repressed feelings, urges, and memories that heavily influence behavior.

Beyond the levels of consciousness, psychoanalytic theorists, talk about the structure of personality. Here we have the Id, Ego and the Superego.

- Id: This is present from birth, operates on the "pleasure principle," seeking immediate gratification of primal, unconscious desires.
- Ego: This develops in infancy to balance the id with reality, acting as the rational "executive" of personality.
- Superego: This develops around age 5, representing internalized moral standards and the "conscience".

Psychoanalyst also talk about the concept of defense mechanisms---the ego uses these, such as repression, denial, projection, and displacement, to protect the mind against anxiety caused by conflicts between the id and superego. However, for the purpose of this study, we shall restrict ourselves to the levels of consciousness, specifically, the

Unconscious. This is because this essay is not designed to undertake an exhaustive study on Sigmund Freud and all the aspects of the psychoanalytic theory.

For psychoanalytic theorists, the Unconscious mind is a vast, hidden reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories outside of conscious awareness. It is primarily shaped by early childhood experiences and repression---this part of the psyche contains unacceptable, painful, or traumatic content. It continuously influences behavior, driving irrational actions and emotional responses. The Unconscious is the largest, deepest part of the mind, often visualized as the submerged part of an iceberg, with the conscious and preconscious above the water. It houses repressed memories, forbidden desires, and fears. Despite being inaccessible to voluntary introspection, it actively shapes personality, behaviors, and emotions.

According to Charles Bressler: “Sigmund Freud, while working with patients whom he diagnosed as hysteria, theorized that the root of their problems was psychological, not physical. His patients, he believed had suppressed incestuous desires with which they had unconsciously refused to deal” (149). Psychoanalysts place central importance to the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious mind. They associate the literary work’s ‘overt’ content with the former, and the ‘covert’ content with the latter, privileging the latter as being what the work is really about, and aiming to disentangle the two. For Freud, the unresolved conflict that give rise to any neurosis are the stuff of literature. A work of literature, he believes, is the external expression of the author’s unconscious mind. Accordingly, the literary work must be treated like a dream, applying psychoanalytic techniques to the text in order to uncover the author’s hidden motivation and repressed desires (Bressler, 153).

The above agrees with Peter Barry’s assertion concerning psychoanalysis and a literary work, where he hinted:

Psychoanalytic critics pay close attention to unconscious motives and feelings, whether these be those of the author, or those of the characters depicted in the work. In other words, they show the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious; they uncover the unconscious motives of characters and identify in a given literary work an embodiment of classic psychoanalytic (105-106).

Following the above, the unconscious which is a reservoir of repressed feelings, urges and memories that heavily influence behaviour, is evidently at work in each of the three stories we have selected for this study, namely: “International Relations”, “A Lover’s Vendetta”, and “Independence Day”.

In “International Relations,” the protagonist—Miss Shike Macaulay, after all she suffered in her quest to get a man to marry her in the city of Lagos State---men like Nonso, Olujimi, Uwe and the Ukrainian—Mr. Zherdev (a.k.a Pastor), arrived at this sad conclusion: “Looking back though, sometimes, I wonder if there is peculiar madness that possess men once they are in Lagos? Are all men in Lagos mad or is it me? In the end, I’m back where I started---still tired of Lagos men. Nearly all of them are mad. Awon weyrey!” (*Nearly All Men*...82).

● “International Relations”

“International Relations” is the fourth among the twelve stories in Kuku’s collection. It is common knowledge that the short story genre consists of one or two events, with a small number of characters. It also encourages the preservation of the setting, concise narrative and does not allow for a complex plot. These characteristics manifest fully in “International Relations,” a story which explores romantic relationships, gender politics and urban survival in Lagos. Although the title reminds us of diplomacy or ties among nations; it is however a clever deployment of this idea as a metaphor for romantic negotiations beyond one’s nationality, international dating and emotional diplomacy. Rather than focusing on global affairs, the story frames love, sex and the desire for marriage as though they were diplomatic affairs between two countries. As Ohagwam wrote concerning the short story, “the short story genre uses limited number of environments, and just one sequence of events. Density, concentration, and precision are essential elements of good short story writing (“Fiction: Definition, Nature and Types” 223).

In *Nearly All the Men in Lagos Are Mad* by Damilare Kuku, the story “International Relations” follows the first-person point of view of the character, Shike Macaulay, a woman who becomes disillusioned with dating Lagos

men and decides to pursue relationships with foreign (oyibo) men as an alternative. The story does not explicitly state Shike Macaulay's canonical or biological age; some reviewers and summaries however, describe her as a mature, financially stable woman who has had several relationships and is over thirty by the time of this story. Just as countries negotiate power, Shike is poised to strategically negotiate a relationship that would ultimately lead to marriage, but with a clause or condition---it must be with a foreigner. She makes it explicit:

I am tired of Lagos men. Nearly all of them are mad. Awon werey! The standard Lagos---package comes with lying, cheating, and occasional scamming; alongside stylish kaftans, splashes of sauvage or Ouda, and fake accents. See, they've shown me so much pepper in this my short life, I've finally seen the light---it's bright, and so white. By white, I mean oyibo. Yes, I'm going international and not looking back. I swear, the next man I date in this Lagos will be an oyibe: so, help me God (*Nearly All Men*...63).

Following this, we can apprehend the motivation behind her choice and why her search is and must be white. This decision is obviously born out of experience and awareness. So, while men are having a field day asserting their masculine control through such acts as emotional inconsistency, a tendency to avoid accountability and other conducts that are inimical to a healthy male---female relationship; women are now increasing their awareness, making informed choices and managing their mental health rather than grieve under any ugly fate.

"International Relations" exposes the imbalance in expectations placed on the female, particularly in romantic relationships, and how she handles the pressure which accompanies these expectations. Through satire, irony, humour, the narrative critiques modern dating culture, power imbalance, and emotional manipulation. As Shike grapples with the pressure of finding a suitable spouse and her ordeal with the ones she had dated before and after making the decision of "...going international and not looking back." (*Nearly All Men*...63): Mr. Nonso, Mr. Olujimi, Mr. Uwe, Mr. Zherdev (a.k.a Apostol) and her schoolmate---Mr. Kwesi; the argument crystallises that finding a husband in contemporary Nigeria, can sometimes be challenging for many women. Some of the reasons which sponsor this difficulty are:

- a complex mix of economic pressures.
- family pressure.
- societal expectations.
- shifting gender roles.
- financial instability
- mismatch in what men and women are looking for in a spouse.

Consequently, Kuku's "International Relations" metaphorically contemporary love affairs, often operate like international politics---it is self-serving, strategic and not always straightforward. Although Miss Shike did not find a suitable partner---whether locally or internationally, yet she took the burden off her shoulders and subscribed for the stability of her mental health as against the troubles of finding a man. She resolves:

See eh, in this life, you need to know yourself, I know myself. I like too joke and talk nonsense, but I will disgrace myself and my Iya Agba kpata kpata, if I allow one more man stand on-top my head in this Lagos...Get the fuck out of my house, Mr. Zherdev. I caught a glimpse of a smile on Kwesi face, and I turned to him: "And you, you and I will never be together. I need you as my friend, so respect that and keep the needed boundaries (*Nearly All Men*...81).

As Shike emancipates herself from emotional agony and the psychological trauma of finding and keeping men who are unwilling to be accountable, responsible and emotionally stable; it becomes arguably true that to love someone who does not love you too, is like shaking the great iroko, and hoping that tiny dew would drop. Furthermore, she aligns herself with the uncomfortable truth that marriage is not for everyone, and that if an individual cannot find a spouse, then that individual should secure mental health. This resonates with the thoughts of philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard with respect to relationship. He observed that "If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry, you will also regret it; marry or do not marry, you will regret both" (*Either/Or* 24).

Damilare Kuku's "A Lover's Vendetta"

"Love is wicked" was an expression used in the lyrics of Jamaican--American dancehall musical duo—comprising two sisters, Nyanda and Nailah Thorbourne. Their stage name, *Brick and Lace*, reflects the rough and soft sides of feminism. Semantically, "Love is wicked" is a metaphor which points to the painful, addictive, and chaotic nature of a dysfunctional relationship, where intense passion meets with heartbreak and manipulation. The above is the classic and vivid description we can give to explain and summarise the story, "A Lover's Vendetta" in Damilare Kuku's *Nearly All in Lagos Are Mad*.

"A Lover's Vendetta" is the story about the emotional and psychological journey of love, betrayal and manipulation suffered by the protagonist---Orode. As a twenty-five-year-old lady, passionate about her cleaning job at the General Hospital, Sabo, Orode innocently falls in love with Dele, a man who is skilled in lying, bribery and manipulation. Dele's conduct directly and convincingly left Orode to literally accept that "love is wicked". Dele's personality, is a confluence of deceit and manipulation. He lied his way into getting married to Orode and kept on lying to her, while she sincerely anticipates the joy of motherhood---which never came. Sadly, For psychoanalysts, lying is not merely a conscious deceptive act, but primarily an unconscious mechanism used to cope with anxiety, defend the ego, and repress unwanted thoughts or memories. Invariably, lying arises from the tension between primal, selfish desires (Id) and social/moral constraints (Superego), allowing the individual to appear perfect or meet social expectations (Cherry, "Sigmund Freud" 13).

In the book, *Biography of Friedrich Nietzsche* (2023), we understand that the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, expressed a complex and paradoxical view of love and relationship. For him, friendship should be prioritized or built first, before love. He puts it in these words: "...a lack of friendship—not a lack of passion---makes relationships fail. Love is 'madness' and people are caught in the trap of over-interpreting feelings; which often leads to deep hurt, sacrifice, and disappointment" (16). Nietzsche emphasized that erotic love has in it a desire to dominate, possess, and assimilate the other; turning the other into an object. To better apprehend the above position, it is pertinent to closely examine the life and time of Orode, with emphasis from the first day she met Dele to the climax of the heartbreak orchestrated by the same man she has been in love and in marriage with. Following this, Orode becomes a ready example of the objectification of women. Like a blind woman, she loses all being led as a sheep to the slaughter. For Nietzsche, love is a state of "madness" where one sees things as they are not. Love, often blinds a person to the faults of the beloved. This brings us to the uncomfortable truth in "A Lover's Vendetta", which is this: love is a beautiful thing when an individual meets the right person; otherwise, love is wicked.

Significantly, the characters---Dele and Orode find themselves in love; but when the chips are down, it became obvious that what they were in, was "madness" as Nietzsche puts it. And this madness took a better part of Orode:

Orode, I can't father a child...Don't blame yourself, this new doctor will---"They lied. They all lied because I paid them to lie. Orode, I'm infertile. I have known since I was a teenager, but I didn't want to lose you, so I didn't tell you." The world tilted. It was at that moment that I understood that a person can suddenly run mad (*Nearly All Men*... 118--119).

Noticeably, "madness" has become a dominant imagery in the text, and specifically, in the story in review. Therefore, we can submit that the imagery of "madness" in literature, specifically, in African literature, acts as a powerful, shifting lens through which writers explore the boundaries of identity and social order. Often, this is to show a decline into chaos; these portrayals frequently begin with intense emotions---obsession, vengeance, grief, or desire—which drives a character beyond the constraints of the ordinary mind.

For psychoanalyst, "madness" often manifests as the "beast within", an uncontrolled, instinctual entity which possesses the character; a "beast" that takes over when sanity fails. (Cherry, *Everything*, 23). This is what Damilare Kuku reveals in "A Lover's Vendetta".

Damilare Kuku's "Independence Day"

Independence Day, according to simple dictionary definition, is a national holiday commemorating a country's freedom from colonial rule or sovereignty, most notably celebrated in Nigeria on October 1st and the United

States on July 4th. Damilare Kuku's short story with the title, "Independence Day" centres around emotional freedom, personal freedom, and self-respect

It was Amartya Sen—an Indian economist and philosopher who defined "freedom" as "the expansion of the human capabilities—the real opportunity to lead a life one values." (16). He further argued in his book entitled, *Development as Freedom* (1998), that freedom entails a combination of agency (ability to act) and empowerment. He further conceptualised *freedom* as:

- Capabilities approach: freedom is conceived or seen as what individuals are actually able to do and be, not just their resources or income.
- Means and End: freedom is both the primary goal (end) and the main engine (means) of development.
- Agency: freedom entails that individuals should be active agents of change, not just passive recipients of aid.
- Removal of Unfreedom: development requires removing obstacles like poverty, tyranny, poor health and lack of education.

Following this, we can apprehend Amartya Sen's idea of development as the expansion of human capabilities and freedom rather than increasing GDP or income.

Osarieme or Mrs. Osa Akindele—the protagonist in "Independence Day" is poised to get an all-inclusive freedom regardless of whose ox is gored. Through flashback, she recalled how as a young girl of seventeen years old, she was drugged and raped by Charles—a three hundred level male student at the University of Ibadan. Although sixteen years have come and gone from when this ugly incident occurred to a time when both Osarieme and Charles had individually become married to their separate spouses and have had a son each; yet, Osarieme still ruminates in the trauma and the horrors of silence. To make matters worse, the memory of her loss of innocence and virginity, got triggered on October 01, being Nigeria's Independence Day. This day, coincides with the ugly event of sixteen years ago—the rape.

The cruel coincidence was, Charles raped you on October 1st, sixteen years ago. You were stunned when you recognized Charles with Funke and their son, Jayden, in the school's courtyard just before the start of the Cultural Day. Funke smiled and waved at you, as she usually did, and you would have returned the greeting or even exchanged brief hugs. But Charles was there. And your world had suddenly been upended. And time had stopped (*Nearly All Men* 228).

Arguably, we can estimate that this act of coincidence—of meeting Charles again, sixteen years after, at the Cultural Day of her child—October 01, was a day, and an event characterized by "unfreedom" to borrow the language of Amartya Sen. As we read further, we can see Osarieme soaked in tears—tears of hurtful memories.

From the furtive look in his eyes, you knew Charles had recognized you. You wanted to scream, and pull your hair, then lunge at Charles. You wished Lekan was here with you... You barely managed to control yourself enough to look Charles in the eye and say a cold hello to Funke without breaking eye contact with him. He looked away. Lekan Jr. wriggled and shook his hand in discomfort, and you realised that you'd been squeezing his hand too tightly. Funke's eyes widened and her brows were raised in puzzled look. You mumbled a hasty goodbye and walk pass them, tugging Lekan Jr. into the school area. Your heart beat so violently, it felt like it was about to tear out of your chest. You took a deep breath to hold back the sudden tears— (*Nearly All Men* 229).

But what must she do? is there a more decent and sane approach to clean up the dirty memory? Can she turn back the hands of time sixteen years backwards? Interestingly, she got an idea, and wasted no time to execute it—she decided against using her freedom to lose freedom, or what Northrop Frye calls, *proairesis* (qtd in Nnolim 191). Put in other words, although she is now married to a renowned cardiovascular surgeon by the name—Lekan and has a son named, Lekan Jr., yet, Osarieme, now Mrs. Osarieme Lekan Akindele, still feels much more obligated to fully assert her freedom or independence, as a person who is "condemned to be free" (to use the expression of

Jean Paul Satre). But the questions begging for answers include: what memories were piqued the day she met the man who raped her sixteen years earlier at her child's school? How does she intend to assert her freedom? In other words, what does she intend doing in order to be freely free?

The above reminds us of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), where she estimated that "those who have witnessed horrific violence or attacks could not forget the indelible memory that is accompanied by fear, helplessness or horror" (29). So, for Osarieme, her silence must end on this Independence Day and her voice and her pain must be made public to the world in order to be freely free. Also, the event of the Independence/Cultural Day in her child's school was strategic, timely and the most appropriate platform for her self-liberation. Since the man who raped her and wreaked her mental health was physically present at the Independence/Cultural Day event, there could be no other better time than now.

"Speaking of stories, I have one to tell. I apologize in advance because ideally, I shouldn't tell you all this. But by a twist of fate, I find myself in an extraordinary situation, where, God help me, I have to speak." Sixteen years ago, a man drugged, beat, and raped me. I couldn't talk about it for a long time, but I just saw him here, and ah, Osanubua, I must talk (*Nearly All Men* 243).

From the above extract, Osarieme decides to effectively engages the action of speaking. Notice her use of "speaking" "speak" and "talk". This, can be viewed as a motif, which underscores the silencing of the female and her desire to correct that inhibition and effectively engage her voice for social change. It is worthy of note that one key function of motif in literature, is to act as a structural thread---drawing reader's attention to the theme, as well as strengthen characterization and mood.

The motif of speaking, speak, and talk, highlight one of the core objectives of feminism in African women's writings, which is "righting the images against women, giving them a voice and redistributing political power in a way to make the woman speak and act as a subject of action (Udumukwu, "Feminist Criticism" 307). Thus, the uncomfortable truth contrasts with society's tendency to ignore or minimize the trauma of rape victims---often pressuring victims to keep mute, while perpetrators continue their lives normally. If you do not speak out against social ills and any other form of evil, no one will do it for you and evil will continue to thrive. That is the uncomfortable truth. So, Osarieme's real independence comes when she finally speaks out about being drugged and raped by Charles.

Mental Health

In his essay entitled, "The Novelist as Teacher" Chinua Achebe argues that writers, especially those from Africa, must use their art to actively educate their society, helping readers reclaim their dignity, self-respect and cultural history. Specifically, we are concerned with how Damilare Kuku engages her art to promote the mental health of her characters and by extension, her readers. Through the twelve stories in *Nearly All Men in Lagos Are Made*, and specifically, from the three stories selected for this study, we can ascertain that her plot structure, character development, and the chain of dialogue are carefully put together to foster self-compassion, the principle of setting firm boundaries, and taking active ownership of one's decision and choices amongst others.

But what exactly is *mental health*? According to the World Health Organisation, mental health is a state of mental well-being which enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well, work well, and contribute to their community. It has intrinsic and instrumental value. A person or a group may protect, promote or even undermine the mental health of self or others. Basically, several factors influence mental health; they include: self, family, community, financial status, and life experiences. Individuals hit by poverty, discrimination, chronic health challenges, exposure to stressful environments, violence or trauma. While there are persons or group who struggle under the weight of these conditions, others have learned to manage them with the right support.

Literature is a core art form which inherently helps to shape perspective and contributes to the lived experiences of people; and getting soaked in literature facilitates the expansion of several perspectives and knowledge. Through her literature, Damilare Kuku explores the emotional and psychological experiences of women who are navigating relationships in Lagos. Rather than presenting mental health in a clinical way, Kuku weaves it into the

characters' everyday lives, relationships, and inner thoughts. She is careful in her depiction of the mental health of her characters and audience through a number of approaches or technique, which include:

- showing emotional strain through the lens of relationships, through the use of humor and satire, through interior monologues.
- portraying trauma and emotional consequences, realistic urban pressure.
- female bonding and self-awareness, emotional resilience.
- learning from toxic situations and prioritizing self-worth.

Summarily, while Kuku did not undertake a clinical rendering of mental health, she uses her stories, technique and literary imagination to advance the truth that, a positive mental health improves a person's overall well-being, boosts emotional resilience, fosters healthier relationships, enhances productivity, and promotes a positive self-image

CONCLUSION

Damilare Kuku's *Nearly All Men in Lagos Are Mad* offers a compelling exploration of the psychological and emotional realities that shape women's lives within contemporary society. Through humor, realism, irony, and introspection, the author weaves mental health concerns into everyday experiences, revealing how toxic relationships, betrayal, gender inequality, and societal expectations affect women's emotional wellbeing. The collection demonstrates that psychological distress is often rooted not only in individual experiences but also in broader social structures that perpetuate unequal power relations.

This perspective resonates with feminist arguments such as those advanced by Catherine MacKinnon, who contends that patriarchal systems are sustained through structures of male dominance and female subordination. Such power imbalances continue to influence social interactions, relationships, and cultural perceptions of gender. Consequently, many African women writers have used literature as a platform to challenge stereotypical representations of women and to expose the subtle and overt mechanisms through which patriarchal authority is maintained.

In *Nearly All Men in Lagos Are Mad*, Kuku critiques these oppressive structures by portraying the diverse struggles women face in their pursuit of dignity, autonomy, love, and self-worth. The "madness" referenced in the title extends beyond individual male behaviour to encompass the broader social attitudes, gendered expectations, and relational dysfunctions that undermine women's wellbeing. Ultimately, the collection serves as both a literary reflection on contemporary gender relations and a powerful call for greater empathy, equality, and psychological awareness in society.

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