

Social Ineptitude as the Core of Politics in Nigeria: A Reading from Adamu Kyuka Usman's *Hope in Anarchy*

Ishima, Jighjigh Leo Justus

Department of Languages and Linguistics,
Benue State University, Makurdi

&

Chris K. Ukande

Department of English,
Benue State University, Makurdi – Nigeria

Abstract

The 21st century Nigeria still retains all the nefarious activities that have characterised the previous administrations even though it has clocked 60 years of independence. No doubt, Nigeria has proven and still proves that the nomenclature that it has earned for itself as “Giant of Africa”, is true not only in its size as a country but also in its draconian, unscrupulous and incongruous disposition. Adamu Kyuka Usman in his *Hope in Anarchy* unveils such ills. This paper therefore, examines social ineptitude as the core of politics in Nigeria. The paper adopts the qualitative research methodology using primary and secondary sources in carrying out this task. The study identifies that the positive dreams of Nigerians that led them to vote the present administration into power, have been kept in limbo due to malfunction. The study depicts in totality, the dastardly acts of political gladiators and at the same time, showcases the sort of debased and dehumanised life being experienced by the downtrodden of the Nigerian society. The paper concludes that unless the ordinary Nigerians are given the opportunity by the ruling class, to really show that blood flows in their veins because they are humans, there is just no way that there would be peace, tranquility and progress, hence, Nigeria retaining its status of political waste land.

Key words: Social ineptitude, Politics, Hope in Anarchy.

Introduction

Going down memory lane, our Nigerian history has it that due to the sort of unscrupulous treatment that Nigeria underwent in the hands of colonial government, it became apparently imperative for Nigerians to seek for a means through which they could handle their affairs themselves. With this mission in mind, our politicians of the 40s and 50s, who were and still are the pathfinders of Nigerian politics, the likes of Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo to mention but a few, took it upon themselves to fight for independence. Thus, by 1st October, 1960, Nigeria got her independence. At this time, there was great jubilation from Nigerians, as the general feeling then was that with the new dawn, the evil of colonial mentality will be put to rest if not die completely. Little did they know that the monster will take another form.

With many decades gone as an independent nation therefore, her journey through life as an independent nation, still does not take her to the promised land that is filled with milk and honey. This is due largely to the fact that Nigeria as a country for years now, her sovereign status notwithstanding, is still not able to have a Moses who would deliver her from the hands of Pharaoh, and then possibly take her to the much desired Promised Land. This is indeed ridiculous! One thing must be made very clear here. Since all along, in all these years of independence, Nigeria is blessed only with leaders who are more of misers than humanists, it has become difficult if not impossible for them not to be egocentric in their attitudes, hence, the common goal of catering for the needs of the people in general and the poor in particular, remains abysmal adinfinitum.

It is therefore common knowledge that

here in Nigeria, after politicians must have won elections, the promises they make to the people during electioneering campaigns, are kept in limbo. This is intentionally done to allow the masses to keep wallowing in perpetual and abject poverty. As a consequence to the dastardly actions of these politicians, the electorates are left to be filled with a daunting spirit when it comes to matters of politics and elections in Nigeria. Nigeria being what it is in terms of her corruptible nature, the politicians deal with the masses with much impunity. Thus, the politicians should not, mistakenly be seen by anyone, as a charitable group unto the people and especially the poor of the society.

Theoretical Conceptualisation of the Study

Being that every study must necessarily be built on the foundation of a theory, the paper adopts the Reader-Response Criticism. In a discourse that dwells on the Reader-Response theory, Monisha Dhawan has it that, “to simplify, a reader brings certain assumptions to a text based on the interpretive strategies he/she has learned in a particular interpretive community” (128).

In another discourse that concerns Reader-Response Theory, Paul Goring, Jeremy Hawthorn and Domhnall Mitchell have segmented the theory into three main categories of Inscribed Reader, Symptomatic Reading and The Optimal/Ideal Reader. For inscribed reader, they submit that, “that is, the reader whose characteristics are actually there to be discovered in the text itself, waiting for the actual reader to ship on it like a suit of clothes” (160). As for symptomatic reading, they state that:

If we define a symptom as a non-intentional SIGN then it follows that a symptomatic reading treats a work much as a doctor examines a patient for symptoms. The doctor (in the exemplary situation) does not ask the patient what is wrong with him or her, but looks for clues which the patient is unable to recognise or interpret. A symptomatic reading, then, seeks to use such clues in a work as a way into the secrets of the AUTHOR, or of his or her society or CULTURE or whatever. (161)

For Optimal/Ideal Reader, they aver that, “the Optimal/Ideal Reader is a term used to refer to that collection of abilities, attitudes, experience and knowledge which will allow a reader to extract the maximum value from the reading of a particular text” (161). Again, Kundan Bharwaj, another exponent of this theory writes of it that:

In Reader-Response Criticism, a work of literature is not considered to have an inherent meaning in itself. Instead, the meaning is seen as a product of each individual’s reading and interpretation of the work, so that no one reading negates or invalidates. Reader-Response critics argue that the work is not fully created until the reader enters into a dynamic transaction with the text, processes what he or she reads and comes to understand it in light of his or her experiences. Because this kind of criticism is open, it allows readers to respond very personally to works of literature, but also to change and modify their responses as they develop their skills as readers. (45)

For proper articulation and analysis of the text under study, the paper makes use of all the three categories in accordance with the explanations that have been variously given by the exponents of the theory.

Synopsis of *Hope in Anarchy*

The story in the novel weaves around the life of Ahoka and his father, Solo, who is an ex-service man who works in Okime’s house as a gateman in Beku Island. They both live a life of penury at Asabeni bridge located between Desowa and Beku Island. Ahoka is being sent away from the school due to the fact that he could not pay his school fees though a brilliant student. At school, he befriends Sindra, the daughter of the great Lafimo.

There is a dangerous twist for Ahoka when his father suddenly disappears from Okime’s house. It takes several weeks of search before Ahoka finally discovers that his father joins the revolutionists of tomorrow’s kingdom that is being led by Jukolo, whose headquarter is in the mermaid shell. Ahoka himself is eventually accused of

“sniffing and trafficking in hard drugs and narcotics” (129), by the police who steal the money paid to him by Madam Narosi for finding her missing ring and then throws him in jail.

While he serves the unjust prison term, certain events take place that make him find himself in a confused state of mind. He hears of his father’s death in mermaid shell “because he became too popular a knight for his comfort” (194). He also comes to know of the deaths of many rich citizens of Obodo republic, including the great Lafimo and his wife. Sindra too, becomes a member of tomorrow’s kingdom. In spite of all these happenings, he comes to know that Sindra’s love is still strong for him, which is shown by her consoling visit to him in Jaruwa prison. Finally, there is chaos as Jukolo is shot and killed. The death of his father registers a permanent psychological trauma in his sub-consciousness.

Polemic Analysis of the Text

Adamu Kyuka Usman in his literary prowess, tries as much as possible, to hammer on those issues that have caused Nigerians great nightmare. Usman’s *Hope in Anarchy* to a greater extent, examines the poverty-stricken situation of the Nigerian populace, using the family of Ahoka as a representation of what happens to the generality of Nigerians. To this, one’s attention is drawn to the sort of penurious life that Ahoka and his father are subjected to, due largely to the insensitive posture of the powers that be in Nigeria. Of this, Usman writes that:

Ahoka stretched, turned and gradually sat up under the bridge ... Asabeni bridge located between Desowa and Beku Island had become his only home since the day he and his father were thrown out of their one-room apartment in Desowa because they could not pay the three thousand rida monthly rent demanded by their landlord. (1)

The above is a clear picture of the sort of life that is visited upon the poor and the downtrodden of the society, whose scarce resources can barely take care of their daily needs, including rent. Solo as a retiree, suffers great hardship as though he is destined to experience poverty perpetually in his life. This type of life is occasioned by the fact that,

the army could not, or better still, refuses to pay him his retirement benefits which results in his going to live in Desowa, a place of abode meant for the less privileged of the society. Of this situation, Usman writes that: “For three years, he had gone to the army legion office in Beku almost begging that he be paid his gratuity of four hundred thousand rida. But he always returned home with a baleful story of a corrupt bureaucratic bottle neck that was denying him his gratuity” (12). The above picture is a complete representation of what happens to Nigerian retirees, who despite service to their fatherland, are denied their retirement benefits by unscrupulous, greedy and non-chalant Nigerian politicians and government.

The theme of perversion of justice rears its ugly head in the text. The country’s judicial system is one that is characterised by a perversion of justice. Therefore, justice is no longer meant to set the people free from socio-economic and political quagmire. But to the chagrin of many, this is not the case. It is common knowledge that in Nigeria, justice is meant for those who can afford it, thus making the judiciary to be the watchdog of a select few, that is, the rich of the society. Ahoka who has a case of being robbed, is instead falsely being accused by the police who are responsible for his robbery. In this wise, Usman makes a case against the judiciary as he writes:

When he was still in school, his teacher Mr. Binda Kiama, once told him that all the judges of the republic were merchandise for money and fear and they gave their judgment as they were persuaded by either or both. The government dangled the fear of compulsory retirement or continuous lack of promotion over their heads while the rich enticed them with money. (31)

Usman also vents his anger on the issue of class segregation in the text. Here, the extremity of social class segregation is carefully captured as the rich are being referred to as the sharks of the society who are seen “shining like a chip of diamond in the sun” (31), while majority of the people live under the bridge “with a slanting floor” (8), where they serve as mosquito’s meal, particularly at night. At each contact between the poor and the rich in the novel, there is always a

hidden crisis which can be described or seen as “class war”. Usman states this in the text through Ahoka’s experience thus: “The rich living in these areas saw any poor man that moved close to their houses as a thief and they did not hide their suspicion and anger. The hostile expressions on their faces and the growing dogs that lurked behind their fences always made his hair stand on end...” (7).

The dichotomy between the rich and the poor is one that is occasioned by the corrupt state of mind of the former. So long as this dichotomy continues to exist, the fight against corruption will keep being a mirage. This accounts for why President Muhammadu Buhari, despite his campaign against corrupt practices, cannot do away with it. As it is common knowledge, this same government that has the agendum of fighting corruption as its core mandate is involved in sweeping under the carpet several corruption cases. Hear Iorkegh Denen-Ter Donatus as he complains: “Another corruption case that the administration treated with kid gloves was that which involved the former secretary to the government of the federation, Mr. Babachir Lawal, who allegedly cleared bush in IDPs camps to the tune of 200million” (44). It will not be totally out of place to say that anybody, we mean any Nigerian who is saddled with the responsibility of leading the people must in one way or the other, develop a corrupt mind for personal gains. This is caused by the greedy nature of the Nigerian society. Of this sort of scenario, Simeon Chibiko Nwakaudu writes:

Each time he embarked on his frequent walks around Omaka village, it was for a definite reason; to determine the land, wife or property that he would grab from a helpless villager. He would stroll near farmlands, looking closely at them with his experienced eyes to determine their fertility. If he was convinced that a portion of land was fertile, that was the beginning of the end of the ownership of that piece of land by its original owner. (12)

Usman focuses his literary searchlight on the issue of social exploitation of the working class by the

powers that be, that is, the sharks as they are being referred to in the text. Due to social exploitation, a relationship that is more of a social malady than charitable, and that is based on a fundamental asymmetry of power, is created. Angered by this sort of relationship, Ahoka rebukes his father, Solo, thus: “Papa you no be watchman again?” (966). His father retorts, “make you no talkam my pikin. Na me be watchman and na me be cook. And all dis for six thousand rida” (966). The above is a clear indication that we are living in a Nigerian society where the poor work for the rich, doing different jobs simultaneously only for them to be paid paltry sums of money. Being that they lack what to do in order to put food on their table, they continue with this attitude even though pained about it. This kind of happening goes beyond the domestic sphere as those who work under governmental organisations and who are more like nonentities, experience the same thing if not worse.

Another phenomenon that has come to live and stay with Nigerians is destitution. Many Nigerians live a life of destitute due to the fact that poverty, which results to destitution is prevalent in our everyday life in Nigeria. Only a few homes can boast of not being part of this unholy phenomenon. Usman, again uses the experience of Solo in the text, to discuss this. When Solo takes his wife to the hospital for delivery, pangs of destitution stare him in the face, as the hospital cannot accept to admit his wife except, he pays 8000 rida. His new employer, Mr. Okime, in whose house he is a gateman will not grant him any loan of any sort as he tells Solo that, “the only money I would have given you, Bemí my first daughter has already requested for her trip to the states” (40). Solo goes in search of money but before he returns to the hospital, “his wife was dead from severe bleeding” (42).

Even in death, Mrs. Solo’s corpse suffers great discrimination due to her husband’s destitution. The cemetery where he would have loved that his wife be buried is for the rich members of a certain church, which makes it practically impossible for him to have access to such a cemetery. In the end, Ahoka’s mother is buried “in the bush between Beku and Tiruku” (43).

As for Ahoka, nothing paints his state of destitution better than his constant visit to refuse dumps in continuous search for bottles and plastic cans. He would leave his bridge residence after a generous bite by mosquitoes the night before, and head straight for Beku Island, Voro and Sefawa dumps. Here, he would pick up from these dumps sites “empty bottles, plastic cans and rusty iron bars for sale to bottling companies and steel rolling mills” (6). There is also the fact that he is yet to be educated, and has no hope ad infinitum of doing so.

Usman also uses his text, *Hope in Anarchy* to comment on the fact that man cannot divorce from his fate and destiny in life. From Solo’s experience, it is clear that hard work, intelligence and diligence fail to extricate him from the fangs of poverty and destitution. His poverty level would have been ameliorated with the payment of his gratuity at last by the government. But as fate would have it, the very day he is paid and brings home the money, perhaps, the highest in his entire life, armed robbers attack and cart off the money. This is the same fate that Ahoka suffers after bringing home 300,000 rida, a reward sum given to him for recovering Mrs. Narosi’s wedding ring; that same afternoon thieves followed him to his bridge home and at gunpoint, collect the entire amount from him without remorse.

The above two events in the text depict the fact that life is more like a farmer who plants his crops, hopes to harvest at some point, but only for him to wake up one day, and having visited his farm, discovers that his farmland has been taken over by locusts. The locusts are the thieves of this life who harvest where they have not sowed. It is this type of situation too that Usman hammers on, in his *The Unknown Vulture*. Thieves are locusts because “locusts come to steel and plunder. I suspect when locusts attack, they create a thieving tendency in the people they leave behind. The people begin to behave like the locusts. Locusts like barbarians leave behind a culture of looting” (63).

Again, Usman shows in this novel that a man who has been battered by poverty and left destitute can be violent in nature. In doing this, he uses some characters in the text for purposes of illustration. A man challenges Solo for pushing a

wheelbarrow of load in the wee-hours of the night, and immediately he (Solo) “came up with an uppercut that shattered the mans’ lower jaw” (26). Berijo, a man who is as poor as Solo, is a gateman. And because Solo wakes him up from a dreamy sleep while he is on duty, Berijo takes “a careless swing at Ahoka’s father” (35). From the text, it is glaring also that Solo “parried his blow and landed two quick solid punches on the man’s belly”, and immediately, Berijo “spread out on the ground groaning in pain” (35). When Bem, Okime’s daughter insults him, we are told that, “he stood looking at her trembling with rage” (4). The same goes for Ahoka. When asked by Jenks as to how a small boy like him gets money with which he buys some tom-tom, the narrator remarks that, “a fierce anger gripped Ahoka making him tremble” (50).

The need to exorcise the rich of the society becomes quite imperative. This is the more reason why Usman incorporates in this literary piece, the proponents of tomorrow’s kingdom whose major preoccupation is to terminate the rich. The rich have overtime, created a gulf that separates the poor from them, hence, the poor being downgraded in their relationship with them.

From the events in the text, it is crystal clear that before the outright confrontation between the sharks and the exorcists, a ‘war’ between the two had always raged. Very early in the novel, Solo explains to his son, Ahoka that the rich are only concerned about “how to protect dem lives and dem pikins” (4). He further informs him that the thinking of the rich is that God created the poor man to serve and to protect the rich while the rich are to think of themselves only. At each point of contact between these two sets of people, there is always a hidden crisis. For instance, the personae in the text makes us to understand that the rich living in Voro as Beku Island, “saw any poor man that moved close to their houses as a thief and they did not hide their suspicion and anger” (7).

This accounts for why when Ahoka goes about searching for bottles and plastic cans in Voro, he is insulted by one of the rich men. He regards Ahoka as a fly when he barks at him thus, “I mean there are too many flies around here without you adding to them” (7). When he notices that Ahoka is sluggish in leaving his surrounding,

he screams at him: “if I come out and find you still standing there, you will have to explain to my dog what you are nosing around for” (8).

Worthy of note in the novel also, is a depiction of the decadent nature of the Nigerian society. A good example of this is the unscrupulous behaviour of nurses at the hospital and the heartless charges at such hospital. Hospital care-givers and doctors are by their profession, supposed to be humane in their disposition, when it comes to attending to their patients. In most Nigerian hospitals, what we see is a reversal of this expected disposition. It is due to this that during Ahoka’s mother’s labour pains in Beku-City General Hospital, the nurse on duty looks at her sprawled body on the bench and then looks away without saying anything. But she becomes keener in announcing “the new rate for taking a bed” (39).

In a decadent society, integrity is thrown away by the ruling, influential and power drunk class. A case in question is Madam Narosi’s failure to keep to the terms of the reward promised anyone who finds her golden wedding ring that is missing. At the beginning, she promises to give to anyone who finds the ring a whooping sum of a million rida, but when Ahoka eventually finds the ring, she ends up giving him only 300,000 rida.

There is a saying that, “love is blind”. Usman shows that love is a powerful weapon that can bring together, people of different socio-cultural, economic and political backgrounds. This is depicted by the love escapades between people of two different classes, that is, Ahoka from the poor class and Sindra from the rich class. Despite that Sindra is the daughter of “the Great Lafimo” who is widely known by many as an influential and affluent member of the society, she humbles herself and makes Ahoka her love partner. Their love is neither based on lust nor material benefits. This makes Ahoka to ask her why she likes him,

and in response, she says, “because I just love you” (47). In other words, she accepts Ahoka the way he is. And in acknowledgement of her love for him, Ahoka in his poverty state says, “unfortunately, I am born of poor parents. What can I do for you Sindra?” (54). Sindra as a reasonable girl replies: “thank you for telling me the truth. I am still your friend; it is not your making to be living under a bridge. It is because your father has no money” (54). She then dares those who do not like their relationship: “let the person who doesn’t like our friendship continue to have bad dreams. Forever, we will be David and Jonathan” (55).

Conclusion

From the foregoing in this discourse, we can say that the social ills that characterise our Nigerian society have compelled the researchers to give an exposition of their feeling towards such. In all honesty, Adamu bares his mind as he takes a position in his literary piece that makes him to identify himself with the poor of the society in all ramifications. From Ahoka’s resilience, the author shows that the youths, especially should not give up in their life’s pursuit as persistence in whatever they do to survive, will surely yield a positive result. It can be unequivocally concluded also that the author calls for a revolution. Thus, what Nigerians need is a revolution. But as Julius Lester puts it, “we must not think of revolution as fighting at the barricades, as hundreds of thousands marching down the streets waving huge flags, as going to the hills with a small band of armed guerrillas, as hiding arms under the floorboards of our bedrooms...” (22). But instead, “it is the natural result of the revolution that takes place inside people when they stand up and shout “No!” when they stand up and say “ENOUGH!”, thus, it is a “Revolution that the ultimate cry of humanity that humanises those who before were dehumanised” (22).

Works Cited

- Bhardwaj, Kundan. *New Trends of Contemporary Literature*. New Delhi: Sonali Publications, 2012. Print.
Dhwan, Monisha. *Post-Colonial Theory in Literature*. New Delhi: Sonali Publications, 2011. Print.
Donatus, Denen-Ter Iorkegh. *Nigeria and the Dynamics of Change: A Myth or Reality?* Makurdi: Bookworks Publishers, 2018. Print.
Goring Paul, Hawthorn Jeremy and Mitchell. *Studying Literature* (Second Edition) USA: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010. Print.
Lester, Julius. *Revolutionary Notes*. New York: Groove Press INC., 1969. Print.

Nwakaudu, Chibiko Simeon. *The Stainless Governor*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2009. Print.

Usman, Kyuka Adamu. *Hope in Anarchy*. Zaria: Printers International, 2011. Print.

- - -. *The Unknown Vulture*. Ibadan: Evans, 2009. Print.