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Clement C. Idogwu Ph.D.
10/05/2021

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Man and his Quest: A Study of Sam Ukala's *Akpakaland* and *Break a Boil*

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Abstract

This article attempts to explicate the need for self-discipline in one's thoughts and actions because ones' fulfillment in life and the beauty of healthy living depend on it. It has been observed that human desires and the quests for the realisation of such are done without restrains. This paper, therefore, explores the danger of unrestrained desires with a view to calling the people to order and making them see the need to make integrity their watch word. This change in human consciousness will do the nation great good. This concept is explored using Sam Ukala's Akpaka land and Break a Boil.

Keywords: Self-discipline, healthy living, unrestrained desires and integrity.

Introduction

Human history is replete with incidents that demonstrate how people destroy one another due to unrestrained desires. In various walks of life, stories abound on how unreasonable desires rule the world, creating pains and sorrows within families and those in government circles. Writers all over the world preoccupy themselves with the task of how to make people see the need to be contended in order to create an ideal society. Ngugi wa Thiong'o as cited by Uwasomba Chijioke (2007) expounds this postulation about art by stating that:

The arts...are a form of knowledge about reality acquired through a pile of images. But these images are not neutral. The images given us by the arts try to make us not only see and understand the world of men and nature, apprehend it,

but to see and understand it in a certain way, or from the angle of vision of the artist. (58).

Mongane as cited by Akporokah Harrison Alierie (2017) corroborates Ngugi's stand stating that "literature is part of the structure of the society; it may simply record the kind of society the writer knows - its values, problems, structure, events etc. (209). He further stresses that literature does this "or it may attack this very society and its present evils. Literature more often embodies the writer's evaluation of his world or illuminates its possibilities" (209).

The essence of the images given by the literary artist to explain the kind of society the writer knows is succinctly explained. The images are mediated reflections of life, the ideology which the writer wants the readers to adopt or reject in order to actualise the purpose of creation. More often than not, these ideologies are to help re-order the society and make it more habitable than ever before. In any society where people are immoderate, writers' thematic constructs are within the realm of the need for contentment. This is to ensure that things are done reasonably. Here, literature plays an interventionist role. The writers' aim is to provoke the reader to critical self-evaluation which will help individuals purge themselves of social ills such as mentioned above. It is also to make readers appreciate the term contentment and the need to live it.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of this discourse is based on sociological criticism. It is the theory that explores the social context of a work of art and the role of the audience in shaping literature. Alierie Akporokah Harrison and Monday O. Akpoyisheri (2017) explain that sociological criticism is "directed at the understanding or placing of literature in a larger context. Sociological criticism analyses how a society functions in literature and how literature works in a society." (154). The major characters in the two primary texts for this analysis are good examples of how human beings achieve their desires through unreasonable means thereby making the society very unhealthy.

This paper, therefore, is an attempt to demonstrate that when people pursue their quests in a manner that disregards to universally accepted standard of morality, they destroy themselves as well as people around them.

Man and his Quest

In every age and society, efforts are put in place to create an ideal world. An art work maintains its stands in its quest for a decent society. Wole Soyinka, in his prefatory notes to *Opera Wonyosi* as cited by Rasaki Ojo Bakare (2007), states that "arts should expose, reflect indeed, magnify the decadent, rotted underbelly

of a society that has lost its direction." Femi Osofisan (2001:45) talking about the relevance of art stresses that it "reflects the agonies of the time, the hopes of the time, shouts a way out of all the problems and condemns negative forces." This is indeed the beauty of arts. It is a part of a continuous process to make life worth living in Nigeria. It involves the production of an alternative idea for the desired overall social change. George D. Nyamndi (2006) corroborates the above postulation by explicating that:

The writer is therefore, not only a teacher in retrospective sense of the word; he is also especially a social seer who identifies and highlights the weakness of present day society. He is someone who rips open the fetid boil of mismanagement and misdirection in today's Africa and causes the future to veer into sight on a cleansed pedestals. (571).

Literature truly reflects and deliberately exposes society's contentions and mismatches or inconsistencies which daily impair members from realising their potentials. Such exposures give the reader the insights to self-realisation. It is this power of discernment that enables the individual to make the right choice in life. This indeed is Sam Ukala's main thrust in *Akpakaland* and *Break a Boil*: his exposition of man's unreasonable quest for influence and affluence and the resultant effects on the society. In *Akpaland*, Ukala's first primary text for this analyses, the reader is exposed to the politics of the family unit.

Enwe: What's the matter between you and Unata, anyway?

Fulama: Nothing to talk about really

Enwe: I know!

Fulama: (eyes dilate) You do?

Enwe: What else could it be?

One of you must have been pilfering more than her fair share of your husband's bed-time treasures ... You know what I mean. (laughs) I have wives and I know what women can do. But that should really be nothing to squabble about. When a man abandons melon soup and begins to eat okro daily, chances are that the okro will clog in his mouth and he might return to the melon soup he had earlier abandoned.

Fulama: Perhaps, it's true.

Enwe: It is not "perhaps," my sister. All men, know it. Yet we tend to plant in the home the way we do in the farms. If a man has four farmlands he cultivates one effectively per year. A man who has four wives cultivates one effectively at any given season. So it is my sister. Go reconcile with Unata. After all, with only one child to your credit so far, you still have a lot of the smell and heat of youth left. (26-27).

The above dialogue between Fulama, a mischief maker, the senior wife of Akpaka and the equally self-centred Enwe, the community's medicine man shows that the crux of the matter is man's unreasonable desire which makes men do evil. *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (2007) describe the adjective *unreasonable* as "not influenced by, based on or in accordance with reason or good sense; immoderate, beyond what is reasonable or fair" (1556). The definitions above succinctly explain that Fulama is angry with Unata simply because their husband is favourably disposed to her which is unfounded. Researchers have shown that people who are unreasonable are prone to doing evil in their quest for the actualization of their dreams. The truth in this statement could be seen the moment Fulama leaves Enwe for the narrator explicates it thus:

NAR: Our story flies, it flies. It perches on Akpaka and his minister. Akpaka told them of allegation that one or two of his wives had a tail. That shocked them. But it shocked them more to hear of the impending public strip tease of the president's wives," It is unprecedented, it is scandalous" they cried. "It is an abomination." But Akpaka couldn't be stopped. So it was agreed by the ministers, except Aseki, that the president's wives will walk naked on Sunday. Everyone sharpened his eyes against that day.

M.O.A. Hm! They'll see pictures. I swear!

NAR: In fact, the guards in the state house had already begun to see pictures. After having their bath every morning, Fulama, Yeiye and Seotu walked about in towels tied in such a way that, well, one would almost see pictures. (27-28).

The above dialogue clearly explains that people can do unimaginable things to achieve their desires. That Fulama could convince the king's other wives to walk naked simply because she hates Unata for being the king's favourite and wants to destroy the bond is unnecessary. The playwright in explicating the social reality of the people goes further to state that "the exhibition disgusted Iyebi, and

remained tethered to her tail" (12). This is disgusting and falls short of the way a king should be addressed in public whether by members of his immediate family or not.

Wale Okederim (1990:3) corroborates the above argument stressing that: "initially, *Akpakaland* seems to have highlighted the usual problem in a polygamous family. However, a deeper look reveals that the play is also a documentation of a class war between the rich and the poor, and between the ruler and the ruled". This paper agrees with Okederim's postulation above that the usual problem in polygamy is emphasised, but moves further to state the politics of polygamy in traditional and modern African setting is highly foregrounded. The combatants in Akpaka's household employed various strategies at their disposal. It is also necessary to stress that the class structure between Akpaka's wives goes beyond the rich and the poor. It talks about their sexual prowess. The fact that by their order of hierarchy: Fulama is the most senior, Yeize, Seout, Unata, and Iyebi are Akpaka's wives, and Unata who is neither the most senior nor the youngest was able to hold sway for a very long time shows her level of endowment and Prowers.

Her endowment goes beyond the attractiveness of her anatomy as a woman. She must have added to her being a good bedmate, a caring and lovely heart. Unata's inestimable beauty which endears her to the king could be seen when the king's wives "danced naked" apology to Fred Agbeyegbe, for Akpaka's emotional display towards her testifies of his love for her. When Unata danced naked and no tail was found on her, the king did not hide his love for her: "Unata I'm happy for you" (50) the king shouted. That was how the king demonstrates his affection for her.

That is a beautiful way for Ukala to demonstrate the role of the theatre artist. This is the playwright way of pricking the peoples' conscience, in order to bring about the desired change. Ukala's intention in the play is in tune with Leo Tolstoy's disposition as cited by Mallam U. A. C. Aliu and Queen O. Esene 2020. According to Tolstoy:

Art is like a speech, which is a means of communication and therefore of progress, that is of the movement of humanity forward towards perfection. Speech renders accessible to men of the latest generations all the knowledge discovered by the experience and reflection both of preceding generations and of the best and foremost men of their times; art renders accessible to men of the latest generations all the

feelings experienced by their predecessors and also those felt by their best and foremost contemporaries (179).

The artist intends to create a perfect society by exposing the ills of the society wanting men to avoid them. The playwright tries to sensitise the readers and the society in general that there is need to appreciate, and learn from those who are better than one rather than plotting against them. The portrayal of this social ill is a call to better living. The unreasonable pursuit to achieve ones desires which leads human beings to evil acts done with in *Akpakaland*, it is expedient to explain same in *Break a Boil*. In *Break a Boil*, Ukala explicates how GIDI, the king of Gidiland makes Uwa mad in order to become king, and the treachery in polygamy as personified by ISON, Gidi's senior wife who plots against Uki, her mate in order to remain Gidi's favourite. The play begins with the exposure of Gidi's atrocities:

I guess that the Oba doesn't know how vengeful this his brother is. The man means to kill him quietly. ... kill him with pollution and elephantiasis so he can regain his throne! But what is there in kingship that a brother should kill a brother for? But it was the Oba himself who secretly hit his elder brother first. And he thinks the man doesn't know. (69 - 70).

The crux of the matter is aptly explained: regaining a throne, he was denied of. According to Nkanka, "it was the Oba himself who secretly hit his elder brother first" (70). Right from the beginning of the play, the readers are inundated with the criminality of king Gidi, who made his elder half-brother mad in order to deny him of his kingship. Gidi in threatening to destroy UKI, his second wife later in the play opens a can of worms when he admits making his elder brother mad.

Gidi: The evil snake!

Uki: I, my lord!

Gidi: Yes! You are the evil snake, deceiving and destroying whoever you pretend to love. But it's Uwa you'll suck up, not Gidi, and his kingdom. And I will make him more palatable to you. I will. For **I have the key to his sanity** and will lock it up again. So, he can roam the streets again, wild and naked, while you crawl after him, sucking him up at every stop. I have the key and will turn it again (moves inward) (114 - 115).

It is indeed disheartening to hear a man admit making his elder half-brother mad in order to prevent him from his right: being king; and vowing to make him roam the streets again if he dares challenges him. Ideavbor Bello (2013:122) posits that "Gidi is a character the audience denounces for his treachery against his elder half-brother ... Like Odosun in Fred Agbeyegbe's *The King Must Dance Naked*, who sets out to destroy her step son and disguises her daughter for the throne, Gidi's mother connives with her son to make Uwa mad so Gidi can ascend the throne." The crux of the matter in *Break a Boil* is the degree of evil people commit in order to actualise their desires. The following dialogue further advances this postulation:

- UWA:** You hurt me, my brother.
GIDI: Hurt! Like the bare bottom hurts the stinging ant that sits on! Will you never forgive me for being king instead of you? Did I ask madness to prevent you from being crowned.
UWA: Now don't remind me?
GIDI: Why not? I know what it cost me to cure you after I became King. Yet you seize the slightest opportunity to be disloyal to me just because you're older than ... (82).

The playwright explicates how man in his quest for power, wealth and pleasure usurps political power even within the family circle. He explains that human beings degenerate, vowing to commit more crime instead of repenting of their crimes. Gidi apart from making Uwa mad, vows to lock his sanity as much as he pleases: "I have the key to his insanity and will lock it again" (115). He equally expects Uwa to be loyal to him in his subjugation. Gidi also forcefully takes Uki, the wife of the king of Ugbon. He did this with impunity. Even when Osahon, one of the elders in council fearlessly admonishes him: "the way some of us are created, we do not take by force what does not belong to us, ... Ugbon has been a good neighbor, It may be tiny and weak but that should be no justification to spit in its face" (75 - 76), he shows no remorse. Instead of repenting, he replied " I know, Gidi is the only thief among you" (75). In a state like this, the playwright explicates the consequences of such action. Bello (2003:122), commenting on Gidi's character states that "he does not have control over his libido, he snatches the wife of his fellow traditional ruler, the king of Ugbon. This is what leads to his doom". One of the functions of literature is to inform writers to write to inform and educate members of their society. Hence the thematic construct of their literary inputs either appreciates the people actions or condemns them depending on whether they are good or bad. Ukala in the two texts for this analysis calls for desires that are glorious, and the pursuant of such desires

should be done to the glory of God. This is in tune with African writers utmost desire for according to Adjioboye Gabriel Ajadi as cited by Carmel A. Igba-Luga² and Chris K. Ukande² (2020) stresses that “African writers ... whether at home or in the diaspora, creates consciousness, a functional aesthetic which reduces the concept of “art for art’s sake” (203). They further state that “African writers see art as an instrument of justice in whatever forms it may be produced” (203).

The Gidi’s monarchy smells. The boil seems to have been broken, and there is need to either dispel the air or make someone whose stench could hold sway to be around in order to prevent the people from seeing and perceiving the decadent nature of the monarch and society. This could be seen by the argument put forward by Gidi when Uwa tells, Nkanka, “away from this palace, my Lord, send him away. Doesn’t his stench stab your nose?” (83). Though Uwa tries to use that as a cover up for his adulterous act with Uki, Gidi’s reply is very relevant to this study. ‘I’m surprised that it’s beginning to stab your nose afresh. I thought all the noses that frequently visit the palace had made friends with it. Nkanka and his stench are part of this palace. He serves a purpose here” (83).

Summing up this section of the discourse, it is important to stress that it is very disheartening that human beings can do very incredible things such as destroying their brothers, relatives, communities and themselves in order to realise their selfish desires the temporary pleasures of sins. These destructions and the collective effects on the psychic of an individual, and community shall be my next anchor.

Man’s Quests And it’s Effects

When an individual goes into all forms of criminal activities to appropriate that which does not belong to him such a person is asking to be damned. In other words the individual becomes an accursed, and pays very dearly for it. This is Ukala’s main thrust in *Akpakaland* and *Break a Boil*. In *Akpakaland*.

AFIANMO (pulls his pistol from his pocket and orders) young man! Let go or I shoot! One! ... (swings the pistol to the centre, raises it up, brings it down and fires at YOUNG MAN’S chest. But YOUNG MAN has thrown FULAMA forward and ducked to the side. The bullet hits FULAMA and she slums ... From behind, a citizen sweeps AFIANMO off his feet and slams him on the ground. As OGUNPA rushes to his rescue, another citizen picks AFIANMO’s pistol, which had fallen off his hand ... the CITIZEN WITH THE GUN aims in quick succession, at OGUNPA, IYA FULAMA, UMAL, SEOTU, YEIYE, GUARDS and finally AKPAKA. Each knees and hands up (57).

The play ends with Akpaka, the president, UGUNDA a minister in the Kingdom, UMAL, the prime Minister of Akpakaland, IYA FULAMA and a host of others on their knees, and FULAMA dead. Fulama's sentence to "a three months house arrest with her tail" (56) and Enwe being "summoned to remove the tail after she would have served the sentence," (56), and her death when "the bullets hits" her "and she slumps" (57), are ways of paying the price for plotting to kill Unata by public execution simply because she desires her state of life. The facts that the king and the principal officers of his kingdom are on their knees as a result of their perverting justice just for personal reasons shows how the quest for pleasure and power at all cost can lead to the wastage of lives and the destruction of the nation. This is why this paper calls for self discipline in human quest for position, power and wealth among other things. Harry S. Truman as cited by Brian Tracy (2010) stresses the point thus: "in reading the lives of great men, I found that the first victory they won was over themselves; self discipline with all of them came first" (177). If Gidi, Fulama, and Uwa and others in the primary texts for this analysis and people in real life see the need to employ self discipline as a parameter for healthy living, things would have been better.

Harry Browne as cited by Brian Tracy (2010) warns that "everything you want in life has a price connected to it. There is a price to pay if you want to make things better, a price to pay for leaving things as they are, a price for anything" (273). It is an indisputable fact that our happiness as human beings and as a community is dependent on our happy relationship with others around us just as our unhappiness is also a product of our association with others, and our destinies are greatly determined by our "interaction with others and theirs with us," (274) as Tracy sums it up. This fact accounts for Ukala's thematic construct for according to Asika, I. E. and Nwangwu, E (2019) the writer is "a person of science, a patriotic member of his society and by nature of his calling, ought not to stand aloof as society and humanity burn" (204). Chukwueloka (2019) succinctly corroborates Asika and Nwangwu (2019) stating that writers in "their works of art keep their readers alive of the social happenings and developments. They reflect and refract the happenings in their society" (197).

Ngugu (1981) articulates this position arguing that "the extent to which the writer can and will help in not only explaining the world but in changing it will depend on his appreciation of the classes and values that are struggling for a new order, a new society, a more human future," (75). He further argues that this depends on "which classes and values are hindering the birth of the new and hopeful. And of course it depends on which side he is in this class struggle of his time" (75). The relevance of Ngugi's postulation is that a critical analysis of the way *Akpakaland* ends, portends a high level of uncertainty. Though FULAMA is dead, the existence of other ignoble characters, however, on their knees demonstrates victory for justice to an extent. Ukala is an

interview with Asomwan S. Adagbonyin (1999) further stresses his pessimism when he states that: "as for my vision for the country, it will continue to be what it is, because I think that for a very long time to come, we'd still have this problem ... I do not see us coming out of the wood in the near future" (221).

Ukala's pessimism is understandable but the fact that the artist is a visionary who constantly makes articulate analysis of the various situations in his society engineers the people to a stage where the quest for a positive change becomes inevitable. This arises from the fact that literature remains an indisputable guide to any society. Mongane as cited by Akporokah Harrison Alerie (2017) argues that: "Literature is part of the structure of the society, it may simply record the kind of society the writer knows - its values, problems, structure, events e.t.c. or it may attack this very society and its present evil. Literature more often embodies the writer's evaluation of his world or illuminates its possibilities" (209).

Anthony Caputi cited (1969:3) also corroborates Mongane by positing that: "the real guide, whenever he finds a person going astray, leads him back to the right, instead of leaving him with a scornful laugh or insult". The artists' education of the masses exposes them to the implications and consequences of their actions and inactions. It prepares them for the psychological warfare that the power that be can inflict on them for wanting to break the yoke of servitude.

Having done with the effects of man and his quest on the society, in *Akpakaland*, it is imperative to analyse Ukala's continuation of the thematic construct in *Break a Boil*.

Gidi at the end of play got dethroned lost Uki, whom he forcefully took from the king of Ugbon. Ison, Gidi's senior wife who sets Nkanka to spy on Uki and Uwa due to selfish desire lost the beauty of her marriage. Amen Uhunmwangho's commenting on the situation argues that "by inflicting madness on Uwa, his elder half-brother, in order to gain the throne, Gidi presents before us the picture of a despicable villan. In Uwa's response to villanity, we see him in surreptitious relationship with the younger queen, the very symbol of the King's metamorphosis" (31) He further states that "Between Uki and Uwa the plan is to desecrate the throne which will result in King's eventual death by elephantiasis, Uki, therefore, becomes the instrument first for bringing the king to disrepute and then for cleansing the entire rotten system." (31). Uhunmwangho's argument above that Uki becomes an instrument for bringing the king to disrepute is debatable. The king desecrates the throne and brings himself to disrepute the very day he decides to make Uwa mad in order to become king,

and also take Uki, forcefully from her rightful husband. The price he pays at the end of the play is his due for his mischiefs.

Nkanka and Eirinma are both men whose main pursuit in life is their stomach infrastructure and whatever they can make from every situation. ERIRINMA'S argument when he "impales UWA to the ground, and "pulls up the spear, dripping with blood, and approaches the audience menacingly" (16), that he kill Uwa *'for being a running colour in the same wash as the king, for the king was not a white cloth, but for killing the truth: (116), and NKANKA's posits "No, I must go tell the king! I am a man of integrity inspite of my yaws. My body may be rugged but my conscience is not" (81), "let us light the oil-lamp of truth and rend it. The guilty ought to be punished. If we do nothing now, the innocent will be punished, the guilty rewarded. And evil will continue to triumph in this kingdom" (85), are pronouncements from the womb of a boil which when broken will pollute the universe. Eirinma is consciously aware that the king is not a white cloth just as Nkanka knows that the king is evil personified for if he had not betrayed Uwa, his elder half-brother and became the king, his selfish desires and lack of self discipline, none of the evils in the kingdom would have ever occurred. So, their arguments are baseless and should be disregarded. It is also important to disregard Bello's argument that Nkanka "sacrifice his life for truth" (122). If Nkanka and Eirinma had questioned GIDI for his atrocities when he made Uwa mad and took Uki for a wife, and probably die in the process, there and then, it would have been appropriate to see them as standing for truth and this they did not do. This is why Wale Awosika's (1999) posits "destitute as he is, Nkanka is actually nobody's fool. He is very well aware of the subtle immoral sexual intrigues at court and has the moral strength to pass the right judgment ..." (78) is also not tenable. If Nkanka, who is all wisdom at the beginning of the play could argue that "if everyone who witnesses a crime against the state waits to be a witness, who would persecute?" fails to persecute Gidi simply because he feeds from his court, only to persecute what threatens the existence of his benefactor, his daily meal, cannot claim to be wise.*

From the discourse so far, it is very instructive to stress that man in his quest to satisfy his unguided desires due to lack of self-discipline destroys himself and those around him. This is why every society must have a way of ensuring that the right thing is done. Philip G. Zimbardo (2004) explains why people need to speak out against every form of evil. Zimbardo argues that:

Our usual take on evil focuses on violent, destructive actions, but non-action can also become a form of evil, when helping, dissent and disobedience are called for. Social psychologist headed the alarm when the infamous kitty Genovese case made national headlines. As she was being

stalked, stabbed and eventually murdered, 39 people in a house complex heard her screams and did nothing to help. It seemed obvious that this was a prime example of the callousness of New Yorkers as many media accounts reported. (P14).

Zimbado's postulation of the callousness of the New Yorker as depicted above has a great similitude to the occurrences in Ukala's *Akpaka Land* and *Break a Boil* where people keep silence in the face of evil. Imagine where Kitty Genovese was being staked, stabbed and eventually murdered and the 39 people in the housing complex where all these took place pretended not to hear her screams. It was indeed a prime example of the callousness of the member of that society, our society.

In *Akpakaland*, Fulama's plot to kill Unata, the King's decree, the action UMAL and AFIANMO, the Prime Ministers of war and the IYA FULAMA among others are akin to that of the New Yorkers in Zimbado's testament. We find same in *Break a Boil* where Gidi, the king makes his elder half-brother mad in order to become the king, and forcefully takes the wife of the aging king of Ugbon. Nkanka, a young man suffering from jaw's and Erinrima see nothing wrong in the king's action because of their selfish quest for stomach infrastructure. It was only when their benefactor's life - Gidi and their interest and positions in the King's court were threatened that they see the need to "light the oil-lamp of truth and tend it" (85) as Nkanka puts it. While Nkanka was killed by Uwa, the betrayed, Erinrima's coronation was incomplete because "cursed Gidi, passed by again and littered evil everywhere" (127).

Conclusion

Ukala in *Apakaland* and *Break a Boil* demonstrates that when men in their thoughts and actions ignore the need for self discipline, things go wrong and society suffers. He calls for moderation in human engagements by exposing the consequences of being immoderate presupposing the need for contentment. He argues that human beings should be reasonable in all they do rather than see the attainments of their desires a matter of life and death.

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