

Issues in Tunde Ajiboye's *Le Témoin* : a Marxist Perspective

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ABSTRACT: Literature is a creative art designed to x-ray life, with a view to showcase human experiences, feelings, imagination, observations, predictions and suggestions for realistic purposes. This form of art called literature is one of the major instruments for societal struggles. This paper focuses on societal issues raised in Tunde Ajiboye's *Le Témoin*. Marxist theory of violence is our theoretical framework in evaluating the writer's preoccupations. As its purpose, the paper attempts to enhance the appreciation and understanding of African literature coded in French language. The paper ends by identifying the fundamental systemic challenges, which confront African societies even in the perceived global village. The writer is also seen as one who embraces his environment and time so religiously in his artistic creation. Literature therefore is capable of achieving and promoting the desired developments in human societies.

Keywords: *Literature, conflict, violence, corruption, education, systemic issue, modern society*

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the field of criminology, psychology and other related disciplines, the issue of violence has caused hot debates among experts. Many scholars see violence as a function of nurture while other scholars believe it is a question of nature. The Marxist theory of violence holds that violence is a subject of class struggle. To Marxists, violence is an imperial tool to increase power of the ruling class in order to divide the masses of the world through divide and rule strategy, causing confusion, mistrust and misunderstanding among the innocent less privileged people. To continue in their act and undeserved luxury, the dominant powers often employ descriptive indices like ethnicity, sectionalism, nationalism and religion among other things to prevent any form of anticipated challenge from the common man. Violence is believed to be a function of natural fallouts of the free market and the class system. As a universal systemic problem, it requires a world revolution to make it disappear.

II. INTRODUCTION

It is no more a news that Literature has a link with the society which produces it. Literature therefore cannot be a closed, an independent and a self-sufficient entity. Just like many other arts, literature collects its main motives from the common or popular culture and the life exposure of its creator at a given time, period or era.

We see education as the totality of man's experience from age zero to when he dies, which makes him an acceptable member of his community, an " **omolúúábí**" by contributing meaningfully through the knowledge, training, conceptual skills (in art, communication, science and/or technology), which he has acquired over the years and his undoubted moral uprightness. Hence, education is an essential tool for mature and happy life. It is a man's "third eye", which allows him to develop the expected powers of reasoning and judgment.

In literary compositions, particularly those that are premised on Marxist ideologies, the issue of conflict cannot be treated with a pint of salt. Conflict is "a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument," (Hornby, A. S. 2000). When conflicts are poorly managed, they degenerate into violence and serious chaos. The concept of violence is a complex subject. It may mean the disruption of the peace of any community, as it can be used to maintain peace and security. In the history of human civilization, violence has been a regular feature which lives with man. It reflects in every facet of human relations: intra-personal, national, continental and global.

Violence is "any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment," (Baron,1997). Another view is that violent actions are "actions that inflict, threaten, or cause injury. Actions may be corporal, written or verbal. Injuries may be corporal, psychological, material or social," (Jackman, 2002).

Since there is a serious competition among peoples of the world and nations in modern societies as a result of control over resources or natural endowments and wealth creation and distribution, conflicts or violent aggressions are slimly unavoidable. Population growth, new technology and skills are systemic variables which

call for a more politically organized institution to regulate the affairs of the modern state. It is therefore on this platform that "...it appeared pertinent to bring a political authority or government into force because of the danger that conflicting interests could pose to mankind. Thus, a body of people, to regulate the behavior and activities of people, was set up, in whom the people would surrender their individual power, the government in turn would provide them with public order and security, and make binding decisions (laws) on the people," (Kasali, 2008).

It is believed that there is justification for violence. The aggressor employs it as an instrument to meet his goals. In literature, especially in committed works, the concept of violence is used to press home a point which requires serious attention. It is not at all times that violence needs the use of guns, gun powder, atomic bombs or nuclear weapons.

Corruption has been one of the major causes of poverty which bedevils African societies. Lack of accountability and transparency at both private and public sectors has eaten deep into the polity of nations and states. Misappropriation of funds, embezzlements, inflation of contract funds and reckless spending are the order of the day. The frustration and bitterness caused by corruption have induced more pains and agonies into the lives of ordinary people. To fight for their rights and realize their dreams therefore, the masses at times use violent actions as a platform or a way of escape.

Even though the story is set in an imaginary African society, it reflects present day realities in most African states, if not all. There is in fact, some elements of fact/truth in fiction.

"A selection of events on the basis of chronological sequence, casually and the value of judgments has always been necessary; that is to say information about reality has been presented to and by the human species in the forms of narrative fiction known to us as History, and the statements of politicians and journalists", (Joan Rockwell, 1974). It can be understood from Rockwell position that everything is fiction on one hand and on the other hand, fiction is reality. Consolidating this point of view on fictional entities, one may be free and right to add: Fictional entities are "principally those entities originating in and defined by myths, legends, fairy tales, novels, dramas and other works of fiction," (Peter Lamarque, 2000). Lamarque is of the view that philosophical interest in fictional entities covers a great deal of subject areas like ontology and metaphysics, philosophy of language and aesthetics, epistemology and logic among others.

III. ANALYSIS

The story, *Le Témoin* criticizes the moral decadence in an African society. Joé Damkpa serves as the archetype of a corrupt police officer. Being the hero of the story, his moral inadequacies make him fall from grace to grass as he ends up as a lunatic. As a matter of fact, corruption is one of the major societal issues discussed in Tunde Ajiboye's *Le Témoin*. Apart from Joé, his colleague, Boniface, who initiated him into this illicit act, is described as corruption itself. "Il était la corruption même" (p.30). It was Boniface who introduces Joé to the illegal business of using their uniform to extort money from innocent helpless drivers by mounting unconstitutional check points on the roads around Ibaka, a community where they were posted as police officers to maintain law and order.

It was discovered later that Joé became even more corrupt and reckless than his master, Boniface. « Il devenait de plus en plus insatiable en matière d'argent. Il n'y avait pas un jour sous le soleil où il m'arrachait quelque chose aux chauffeurs, innocents ou coupables » (p.46). [He became more insatiable in matters of money. There was no day you did not see him under the sun where he grabbed something from drivers, innocent citizens or suspects/ offenders]

The writer also lashes the government of the day for corruption and related offences. The author laments the introduction of new tax regime where adequate provision of basic amenities is totally absent. He wonders how and why a sensitive government would like to ask the poor people of Ibaka village to pay the new tax. This issue of new tax policy is an exploitation which will impose more hardship on the public that is already crying of hunger. It is this perceived social injustice in the name of exploitation that makes the villagers to revolt against the government (p. 22).

Education is also seen as a social issue. Of course, it is. The writer demonstrates education being a societal subject through the character traits of the school head teacher and that of Joé. The importance of education and training to the success of an individual and the progress of the society in general is stressed.

The school head master advises Joé's parents on the choice of career of their son. When Joé pulled out of school, he went to the Formation/ Training Centre for his recruitment into the Police Force. The training was for eleven months to enable the trainees acquired skills the work demands. Apart from articulating the significance of education and formal training, the writer is of the opinion that parents should not unduly influence the choice of career, profession or vocation of their children; instead they should provide the much needed guidance for them in the selection of jobs that will allow the children live a matured meaningful life.

As a sociological study of an African society, Ajiboye in his story, *Le Témoin* believes illiteracy is the major cause of poverty. This idea is stressed by the writer looking at the living condition of Koka and Adioja, Joé's parents. They are illiterates and they live in abject poverty. Illiteracy is a systemic problem common to almost all African countries. It is a dreaded disease that needs an urgent attention. Whoever says education is expensive, should try ignorance. In his uncomprising ignorance, Koka would have not allowed Joé to go to school if not for the school head master who advised him. He wants his son to become a cultivator/ peasant farmer just like him. An illiterate population cannot contribute reasonably to the developmental projects of a modern society. These poor illiterate farmers are only predisposed to primitive farming techniques which do not support large-scale food production. Because the people of Ibaka community, the setting of the story, *Le Témoin* are predominantly illiterate farmers, they are not sensitive to societal issues such as socio-economic and political matters around them. "La plupart des homes d'âge mur vivaient de l'agriculture et de l'élevage" (p.32). [Majority of the able men lived through agriculture; crop planting and animal rearing].

Again, since they are not better informed and nurtured, illiterate people react, almost every time violently to even developmental issues which can enhance their social well-being. To further lay emphasis on his position that illiteracy and poverty are strongly connected, Ajiboye makes the drivers in the story, *Le Témoin* daily prey to Boniface and Joé who extort money from them through operating illegal check points. These drivers do not know their rights and they die in silence mainly because they are unlettered.

Polygamy is another social issue x-rayed in Tunde Ajiboye's *Le Témoin*. Obviously, polygamy is an aspect of African culture. However, the most striking fact here is that the writer reveals that it is not only the illiterate people in Africa who practice it but also the so called lettered men. Joé, a policeman who represents the educated class takes a second wife for very weak reasons such as the girl's beauty and social status. One can deduce from Joé's action that even some educated people are at times not rational enough in their decisions. They are controlled by emotion or sentiment. So, they do things with impulse. The attendant consequences of this greedy nature of Joé is that he goes deep neck into illegal mounting of "road blocks"/ check points to collect bribe from motorists before he can meet up with domestic demands from his two wives and perhaps children. A careful look at the issue of polygamy shows that it is a barbaric practice which needs to be dropped. It can make one prone to illicit behavior and criminal tendencies such as corruption as demonstrated in the character traits of Joé, the tragic-hero of Tunde Ajiboye in his literary creation, *Le Témoin*.

In every human society, money is an issue. A school of thought believes money rules the world. But, our popular religions uphold strongly that the love of money is the root of all evils, which may be committed by men and women that inhabit the world. Ajiboye's *Le Témoin*, underscores money in human existence and relationship as a serious societal subject. As a means of exchange, which allows whoever that has it to do whatever he/she likes; no one frowns at money. It attracts attention and love. In *Le Témoin*, the Ibaka people revolt because the government asks them to pay more taxes but to the villagers that would mean parting with their hard earned money. The village people do not see any justification for the said taxes because they do not feel government's presence in their community. This is the practical revelation of situations in most African societies. "It is evident today; the rural communities have been cut off from the urban areas because their roads have become impassable. Most, if not all our communities, are smarting from their rustic eerie darkness. The people of our hinterland are hungry for development, and desirous of the opening up of their villages to beat back the forays of want, deprivation, poverty, primitivism, superstition. Generally, they long for better living conditions and the benefits of science and technology," (Okey, D. Ebele, 1998).

Against this background of breach of social contract between the citizens and the state/government as it were, the citizens can be vindicated for revolting against people that they mortgage/surrender their legitimate individual powers to since their expectations are not in any way met and their hopes are dashed. In other words, there is justification for the common man's aggression against the state/ government. It is a platform to denounce social injustice with the genuine intention to correct the wrong.

Still on money, to stress how important money is to man's existence, Joé's parents and his parents-in-law ask him for money to up-keep themselves (p. 30). Boniface mounts unofficial check points to make money (p. 32) and Joé's second marriage ceremony (p. 37) is described as a success because a lot of money is involved in its execution. It is actually neither here nor there. The love of money can make the greedy ones come to their unexpected Waterloo. For instance, when the fetish lorry driver does not have money to settle Joé and the latter refuses to allow him go, the driver goes home to bring some money. On his arrival, he settles Joé and charms him too. Corporal Joé became mad eventually to prove that love of money can ruin people's life (p. 48).

The writer also examines sorcery, an African science or magical power to make things happen for good or bad. The use of charms; "gris gris", "jùjú", "ògùn" or "voodoo" is an issue in a typical African setting. Most people have stopped visiting their home towns because of sorcery and the thinking that those crude cruel villagers might harm them. In *Le Témoin*, the people of Issele are well-known for the efficacy of their sorcery and the writer demonstrated that by making the fetish lorry driver a man from Issele. Ajiboye, the author of *Le Témoin*, in his wisdom, sees sorcery as a wicked act and that; it is retrogressive in general term. Hence, it should

be stopped. The sad end of Joé is a form of confirmation that the author does not promote sorcery. Joé's potentials are jeopardized because a mad person can no more contribute anything to the development of his/her society. In other words, as Corporal Joé became mad, he was no longer an acceptable member of his society since he could not use his skill, knowledge or training for the development of his community. This is the more reason why his village people mocked him instead.

On the other hand, the violent action of the driver, who charms Corporal Joé can be interpreted as a punitive measure which he intends to use in correcting errant individuals or institutions that are deep neck in the collection of illegal money, freebies or any other form of gifts in the course of carrying out their duties whether as private workers or civil/public servants. As a deterrent measure, the fetish driver is not to blame. Of course, "there is no smoke without fire", says an adage. "... literature itself has its own purpose and determinants... never wholly autonomous, it draws its prime motives from deep within the common culture, the life experience of its producers in their time... but it never speaks for the totality of that culture," (Warner Berthoff, 1981). Hence, literature or any work of art generally is not closed, independent or self-sufficient on its own. There is a connection between literature and the milieu/environment where it is produced.

"The writer has no means of escape, we want him to embrace his time closely, and it is his lot: it is made for him and he is made for it," (Sartre, 1948). It is also clear that literature performs certain functions which include: aesthetic function (delighting and pleasing as it appeals to the sense of beauty), didactic function (to correct man's imperfection as it teaches moral lessons), therapeutic function (healing of emotional, pathological, economic or socially connected illnesses) and linguistic function, which helps in developing the language of both the writer and readers. It is because "... The storyteller takes what he tells from experience; his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to the tale (*or those who read the story and/or view it as the case may be*). The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual," (Benjamin, Walter, 1969). The items in brackets are ours. Our writer, Tunde Ajiboye has reflected well on his society as a storyteller using *Le Témoin* as an example by recounting his experiences and observations.

IV. CONCLUSION

With an episodic story line, flashback and an omniscient narrator, Tunde Ajiboye in his *Le Témoin* has exposed fundamental issues in African societies in this perceived global village. We have navigated the story and we have downloaded certain systemic challenges, which militate against the much awaited development in Africa. These include corruption, illiteracy (the need for education/former training), polygamy, poverty, money and sorcery. For African states to develop and achieve their potentials, all the identified attendant "wahalas" (problems) need to be solved. It is obvious that as a result of social struggles among various players in a class system, there will always be conflicts and/or violent acts until the class less society is achieved. Violence, however, is a subject/function of both nurture and nature because there are some causes of violence which can be traced to the two determinants (nurture and nature).

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