

RECLAIMING HOPE IN GEOPOLITICAL DYSTOPIA: A RE-READING OF UZODINMA IWEALA'S *BEASTS OF NO NATION*

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Abstract

*Contemporary times have become remarkably marked by fear. World events like the proliferation of terrorism, banditry, the outbreak of killer-diseases, juvenile crimes, and political tensions have initiated a crippling sense of threat to the emotional and physical equilibrium of people. World media have not helped matters either; in their bid to report events as objectively as could be, they have reinforced the movement of "fear" across borders and established it as a social and collective experience. "Fear" rules across the world and is not restrained by political borders. In Africa, "fear" can be said to have begun with the slave trade expedition and colonial conquest. National independences, which were once beacons of hope against a backdrop of colonial rule, brought bitter disillusionments and despair in the face of increasing mal-governance and sectarian wars. This article, therefore, shall undertake an investigation of "fear" as a nexus between geopolitical dystopia and material risks. It shall also engage Uzodinma Iweala's debut novel, *Beasts of No Nation*, to argue that the prominence of fear is first, traumatic to the individual, and second, a portrait of illness behaviours. Finally, the study shall attempt to map out practical ways to practise hope in the face of crippling fear and uncertainties.*

Keywords: fear, geopolitical, dystopia, trauma, illness behaviours

Introduction

Fear is a common human experience that influences human condition. It is an emotional confrontation, an inner pressure that 'wakes up' humans to realities and spurs them on to action. Whether we choose to accept it or not, we are governed by individual fears – the fear of failure, the fear of lack, the fear of disaster, the fear of death, etc. Beyond imprisoning us in our comfort zones, fear can equally push us out of our comfort zones and keep us on our toes, focused, in pursuit of our personal utopias. The world as we know it today would never have come this far without the impulse of fear – the fear of failure pushes individuals to seek the best in their personal endeavours, the great advancements in scientific endeavours were spurred on by discontent with the present and the fears of getting stuck in time and primitivism; the attempts of governments to build complex weapons of mass destruction are also goaded by the fear of national insecurity and conquest. Geopolitically, the fear of marginality leads to insurrections and ethno-sectarian wars; fear also forces many warring parties to surrender.

Although considered as a natural, rational, and moral emotion, fear was taught and bred by formal, cultural, and religious institutions. According to the English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, fear was once a tool employed to elicit compliance from people. It was weaved into the curriculum of many religious groups and universities. Many religious groups

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use dogma to elicit fear and sustain adherence. Universities, on the other hand, taught fear as a rational emotion because it was construed as a reaction to danger. Fears could also easily force individuals into inaction! It could also spur them on to negative choices. Young scholars were thus taught to familiarise with their fears and wield them positively for the good of society.

The politics of every sovereign nation is, of course, nurtured by these individuals. As such, equilibrium and disequilibrium arise from the actions and inactions of people within the political borders. Notably, some of these actions and inactions were induced by fear, which has become part of their social consciousness. This could explain the prevalence of political instability in many African nation-states, where political breaking points and susceptibilities are made visible. The prevalence of political dystopia has an effect on the psychosomatics of the governed and the authorities. It shapes the spiritual, political, and economic disposition of people. In such political space, individual and communal susceptibilities, breaking points, and restorative needs are made visible.

Fear, which sometimes can manifest as bravery, has spurred, sustained, and shaped the African creative imagination. Owing to the 'success' of colonialism and its exploitation of the continent's resources, there began to appear a subtle trope of assertion in many creative works of art, one that was steeped in the fear of losing ancestral identities to colonialism. This trope was 'reactionary' by nature as it employed history to assert African dignity and intelligibility, protest and debunk the many savagery arguments and conclusions about the continent, and then to fight for political liberation. In the essay, "Politics and the African Writer: The Example of Achebe", David Ker argues that the African writer belongs to the political elite of his home state; hence his writings are politically motivated. He cites the 1969 interview at the University of Texas, Austin, where Achebe was interviewed over the social function of African writers and of their creative works. At the interview, Achebe submits that his writings are protest in nature:

I believe that it is impossible to write anything in Africa without some kind of message, some kind of protest...in fact, I should say that all our writers whether they are aware of it or not, are committed writers. The whole pattern of life demands that you should protest, that you should put in a word for your history, your tradition, your religion, and so on. (87)

When Achebe speaks in such a manner about African writers being politically committed to their home states, he is simply raising the argument that writers are susceptible to fear – politically motivated fear, to be precise. As such, as many African writers employed their creative works to campaign against the exploitation of colonialism and the cultural displacements which it brought to the average African, they are unconsciously responding to the impulse of fear in a way.

It is in the wake of Africa's post-colonial era that the dynamics of political fear comes into glaring observation. Political fear can be construed under Corey Robin's thought as "people's felt apprehension of some harm to their collective well-being" (2); as a tool of manoeuvring, manipulating, and forcefully violating the freedom and security of people's lives. Given that it is associated with government acts and control, political fear can also be construed as a collective experience since it does not only undermine individual liberty but also arrests the collective dignity and socio-political equilibrium. During the late twentieth century,

many African nation-states had gained independence from their former colonial masters and were already self-governed. The political temperaments of such nations were fraught with utopian hopes and visions. Unfortunately, corruption, mal-governance, hedonism, wars, to mention a few, ravished collective utopian prospects of self-rule and ushered in a political space that was fraught with disillusion and shattered hopes. Writers like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka of Nigeria, AyiKwei Armah of Ghana, Ngugi WaThiong'O of Kenya, among others, continued to react to such reality as they committed their works to lament the failed independence of their nation-states. For instance, AyiKwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* laments the corruption prevalent in newly independent Ghana; Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* captures the terror and oppression of military dictatorship; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* brings to light once more, the suffering and futility of wartime.

These works and many others not mentioned are sometimes spurred, shaped, and sustained by the palpable political fear prevalent in many African societies. They are tools which are intentionally fashioned to prompt a general awakening of an evolutionary sort, one that tends to awake the average African to his role in, and the risks associated with national and cultural business. Notwithstanding, creative works of art sublimely patronises and privileges the movement of fear, not only because such works could be inspired by fear, but because in an attempt to label and elaborate spatial threats, fear is all the more being disseminated. Pain and Smith (2008) argue, just like pathogens cause disease, fear can be induced by material risks. It is both lived and made. Works of art could create fear by awakening the public to environmental risks as writers employ the thematic issues of their works to warn the public and the government of the implications of certain realities. In Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, governments and the public are warned, given the proliferation of insurgencies, of the danger of conscripting children into fighting squads.

Spatial fears, whether collective or personal, are sustained in the emotions and have an ability to induce a traumatic response. The global rise of terrorism was once a far-flung occurrence which intrigued many Africans who observed from the safety of their homelands which were spaces of security. Today, however, the story has assumed a different shape. Terrorism has invaded 'homeland' security with such horror that people's everyday lives are fraught with a dread for known spaces of insecurity and a conscious quest for security. The failure of many African governments to tackle insurgencies and their unhindered terrorist agenda with confidence have exalted these groups to a mysterious and maleficent status and in effect, have also whipped up moral panic in the emotions of people. For example, the people of North Eastern Nigeria, a region that has suffered the unbridled wrath of the Boko Haram insurgent group, have, for roughly half of a decade, lived with constant moral panic over the imminence of bloodbath, destruction of property, and gruesome death. For many survivors, the loss of loved ones and its attendant loneliness could be very traumatic and could induce illness. Currently, banditry in many parts of Nigeria has made fear a part of people's consciousness.

Portraits of Illness Behaviours and the Prominence of Fear in *Beasts of No Nation*

There are two broad models that govern the perception and understanding of illness – medical imagination and sociological imagination. The first is more concerned with an objective vision of the human body as an object, a system that must be scientifically observed and ordered. The second imagination, on the other hand, is saddled with the vision of culturally perceiving and interpreting the human body. In *The Sociology of Health, Illness, and Health Care: A Critical Approach*, Weitz submits that medical imagination considers illness as an objective label of any physiological and biological disequilibrium which must be scientifically observed and cured. In medical imagination, an illness which is remotely caused by diseases is devoid of moral labelling and as such, requires the services of trained doctors. Conversely, sociological imagination believes illness to be a social label that is laden with cultural implications. Several scholars have averred that the sociological model considers illness as a subjective label that is heavily influenced by social and personal ideas about what is deviant, or by a departure from given norms, where normality is a social consensus and differs across cultures (Lupton 2003, Weitz 2007, Warwick-Booth, Cross, and Lowcock 2012). Its vision of illness involves deviation from social expectations. In “Negotiating Illness Behaviours as Prototype of Dystopian Societies in Selected African Novels”, Agu argues that sociological imagination seeks to wrest the knowledge and cultural control of the body from the medical profession through challenging the scientific conception of the human body and resisting what is perceived to be medicine’s ‘dehumanisation’, reduction, and undermining of the human body. Issues of medical dominance, the vulnerability of patients, and illness experience occupy the ‘knowledge and cultural control’ trajectory of the body.

The sociological imagination of illness has been heavily shaped by functionalism. Functionalists are medical sociologists who attempt to understand and dismantle the power wielded by the medical profession and her practitioners. They argue that social health care settings are institutions of a harmonised political system; they are products of social consensus and as such, the power they wield is not exclusively theirs but inclusive of the system that supports them. Emile Durkheim, the lead thinker of Functionalism was especially concerned with a smooth social order that was marked by social cohesion and neat, non-conflicting demarcations.

Functionalist theorists consider illness as a potential deviance from societal expectations and norms and a threat to a harmonised social system. While medical imagination of illness rests on the clinical observation and scientific classification of diseases based on symptoms, sociological imagination stresses the interpretation of illness – bodily signs and its implications on the emotional, spiritual, and cultural life of the patient. Theorists subscribed to the sociological imagination argue that illness can be construed beyond the fundamental borders of anatomical and biological disequilibrium; it can be understood within broader social and cultural contexts since it invades socialised bodies that have been acculturated. In *Medicine as Culture*, Deborah Lupton provides a neat distinction between disease and illness. She submits that:

It has been argued by some sociologists that the state of *illness* is fundamentally different from that of *disease* ... Illness refers to the social, lived experience of symptoms and suffering which is innately human. It includes recognizing that bodily processes are malfunctioning and taking steps to rectify the situation, such as seeking treatment. Disease, on the other hand, is not limited to humans: animals or plants can

be diseased. Indeed, to describe someone as 'diseased' implies a lack of humanity (Turner, 1996). In contrast to illness, the term 'disease' is defined as denoting a technical malfunction or deviation from the biological norm which is 'scientifically' diagnosed. (93-4)

Thus, issues of stigma, suffering, vulnerability and their implications for a harmonised social order form the discourse and the experience of illness.

In *The Social System*, Talcott Parsons discusses illness as a social deviation and its implications for the social system. He argues that every individual, by reason of his citizenship, is an actor in a complex social system and his action has dual interpretations. The first is a positional action – the status or place which the citizen occupies in the social strata; the second is the processional action – this is the role which the citizen plays in a given social system. Individuals who fall ill have their behaviours and roles unconsciously altered. They enter into what Parsons calls the "sick role". Consequently, such individuals are therefore unable to hold their positions and perform their roles in the social system. This situation, what Parson labels as "deviance", adversely affects the stability of the social system. He defines "deviance" as the "...tendency to result either in change in the state of the interactive system or in re-equilibration by counteracting forces, the latter being the mechanisms of social control" (170). Parsons goes further to proffer four implications of the sick roles in patient-physician relationships – the sick role demands that the ill who have sought help from doctors be exempt from their social obligations; that the ill should be blame-free for his illness experience; that the ill must seek help from medical professionals; and finally, that the ill must be willing to be healed of his illness experience. As Parsons insists, the medical profession is an institution of social control order than an institution of healing given that it is created by societal consensus. As such, individuals who experience illness ought to seek help from trained professionals.

The behaviours which patients exhibit during their illness experiences are regarded as "illness behaviours". In "Illness Behaviour", van de Lisdonk construes illness behaviours as the totality of an individual's response to illness. It includes how illness is perceived, how symptoms are evaluated, and the various ways in which healing is sought by different persons (98). Responses to illness are inspired by fear – the fear of death, of loss, of stigma, to mention a few. The commencement of illness experience, for instance, robs victims of the power which they wield over their bodies and makes them vulnerable. They are forced to seek help from medical professionals where they enter into a patient-physician encounter that renders them powerless over their desires, reduces them, especially to the mercy of physicians who take for granted the ethics of their profession, and then elevates physicians to positions of power.

The sick role, which of course, carries all the experiences of and responses to illness, is an embodiment of illness behaviours. This is largely influenced by socio-cultural realities than biological permutations. Values, socialisation processes, spiritual inclinations, social status, among other factors, govern illness behaviours. As Melmed rightly stresses, "...illness behaviour is fashioned by the individual's broader cultural context, social network, personality, and life experience, as well as by response of the individual's response to symptoms" (12). Given these realities, it is safe to conclude that people bring several, if not all the aspects of their lives into their illness experience. Illness can thus be considered as the totality of a person's response to his bodily transpositions.

It is debatable that physical illness can be induced by other factors than biological disequilibrium. History is fraught with age-long beliefs about the causation of illness. During the middle Ages when Europe was mercilessly ravished by diseases, illness was believed to be caused by supernatural forces. It was believed that individuals who became ill had been either justly or unjustly punished by demons or spirits. It was also believed that illness could be caused by environmental factors and moral attitudes. As such, individuals strove to keep their environment tidy, maintain a sound eating habit, keep their passions under check, and exercise regularly. This spurred the proliferation of secular and religious healing centres. At the dawn of the nineteenth century when medicine became scientific, illness was construed as a biological dysfunction. This led to the rise of hospitals and laboratories. This medical tradition has grown more powerful by each century that it is almost unbelievable that illness could be caused by other factors apart from biological break-down.

One of the often neglected and potential causes of illness is political factors. Given political realities could rub off, positively or negatively, on the emotions of the people. Political dystopia influences the psychological balance of people since it aids the knowledge, placement, and the movement of fear. Considering Africa's experiences for example, the instabilities, disillusion, and traumas which wars, failed independences, and military dictatorships bring are powerful enough to weigh down and even shatter the psyches of people. It is within this prism that a fraction of this study is pitched: the investigation of the responses of people to traumatic experiences, where the experience of trauma is socio-politically induced and leads to a deviation from the norm.

Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* pays particular attention to the foregoing claim. Iweala employs child narration to tell of the harrowing and traumatic experiences of a young boy, Agu, who is a helpless victim of an uprising against a government of an unnamed African country. Agu watches the brutal killing of his father and many of the men he knew as a young boy. After he is discovered by a rebel combatant, a boy younger than him, and with no one family member left alive, Agu is forced to join the rebel group to save his life. Already conscripted into the rebel group, he begins his transmogrification from an innocent child into a brutal psychopath. This process is the concern of this study since it reveals the dynamics of political fear in the lives of individuals and the behavioural tendencies of such individuals.

The political environment in which Agu is located is a dystopian one that is fraught with lawlessness, instability and the predominance of crippling fear. Although the author provides no reason for the insurrection in the unnamed African country, it can be said that the present geopolitics of the country has a global reach because, as the narrator tells, the UN is present to evacuate women and children. This event leads to a belief that the insurrection is not a spontaneous one – it must have enjoyed national and global media hype and failed negotiations between conflicting parties. The product of these actions is the creation, consolidation, and a continuation of paralysing fear. Like a diseased body, the unnamed African country is bankrupt of the temperament to contain political discontents that give way for war just as it is incapable of protecting its citizens from the terrors of fear and wanton bloodshed. There is no fear in concluding therefore that the country is a politically diseased one. Treading the dynamics of diseases in the human body, the deadly conflict is not concentrated at a particular place as the rebel group attempt to expand their geography of control by attacking peaceful settlements. Violence and fear characterise the rebel's modus

operandi. In "Why Do Children Fight? Motivation and Modes of Recruitment", Scotts Gates categorically submits that "With regard to children, intimidation and force play a significant role in the recruitment of children. Many groups, indeed, abduct or depend on fear and intimidation as the principal means of recruitment" (36). As such, it is not long before they attack Agu's town and kill all the men who attempt to defend the town, including Agu's father, that Agu is dragged into the conflict. Having witnessed, first-hand, the brutal death of his father and his kinsmen, Agu, out of terror, succumbs to recruitment. His resignation to fate is captured in his own words, "what am I supposed to be doing? So I am joining. Just like that. I am a soldier" (13).

Unable to escape rebel life and already a pawn of the rebel leader, Commandant, Agu begins to witness the brutal realities of war. He enters into a militarised socialisation process, one that is fraught with habituation to violence, de-individuation, and dehumanisation of victimised groups. These programmes invoke a strong culture of fear and are aimed at his re-birth and retention as a loyal combatant. First, Agu is brain-washed by the rebel group into believing that the enemy is the government and that it is the government that kills his father and his kinsmen. Then he begins his indoctrination to violence. The indoctrination of child combatants into violence is manifested through brutal and mindless killings. As Gates submits, these killings are carried out along three neat stages: authorisation, routinisation, and dehumanisation.

Authorisation involves the encouragement or outright command to kill. This event initiates a psychological crisis in the child. Agu's first socialisation process is an encouragement to kill. In his narration, adult rebel fighters advise him on the modalities of killing:

"Luftenant is saying don't think. Just let it happen. He is saying that the second you are stopping to think about it, your head is turning to the inside of rotten fruit. Commandant is saying it is like falling in love. You cannot be thinking about it. You are just having to do it, he is saying. And I am believing him. What else can I be doing? They are all saying, stop worrying. Stop worrying. Soon it will be your own turn and then you will know what it is feeling like to be killing somebody. Then they are laughing at me and spitting on the ground near my feet". (15)

Herein is what one might consider the first example of a deviant behaviour – a collective and mindful attempt at desensitising the mind from the horrors of violence and bloodshed. However, it is obvious that the human mind, in its normal state, cannot adapt to violence without reaction. The adult combatants that advise Agu on the strategies of violence still have traits of humanity on their minds. This is exemplified in Agu's observation of their "...laughing at me and spitting on the ground near my feet."

Agu's habituation to violence begins with Commandant authorising him to kill an enemy that has been already tortured by the group. Spurred by the fear of death at the hands of the Commandant, Agu, with tears and trembling hands hacks the enemy to death. The effect of this action on Agu is enormous; he narrates: "...I am feeling like electricity is running through my whole body (25)." The killing immediately induces a biological instability on Agu: "...I am vomiting everywhere. I cannot be stopping myself...I am feeling hammer knocking in my head and chest. My nose and my mouth is itching" (26). This event not only batters Agu's psychological balance, it also plunges him into a re-negotiation of his humanity. He begins to

assure himself of his sanity; that his morality is still intact and has not evaporated from him. His actions are not his intentions, they are largely and inspired by fear – the fear of defying Commandant whom Agu has taken as a father, the fear of contravening the group's culture of violence, the fear of appearing 'unsoldierlike'. Fear could either cripple or wake up its victim. Either way, it forces victims into unpredictable roles. Treading the path of illness where the fears of death, stigma, and social segregation force individuals to defy their prestige and social status and seek help, so does fear manipulate its victims. Victims of fear would do anything to stay alive and retain hope. Agu continues to assure himself of his morals; he clutches tightly to hope, to his mother's promise that God would always help His children.

Fear continues to pitch Agu against himself as he progresses through the socialisation process. He joins the group on a raid of a village. The entire members of the group are made to inhale gun power for desensitisation of their minds from the horrors of violence. Agu recounts that "everybody is wanting gun juice because it is drug and making life easy easy...stronger and braver..." (54). In the absence of food, gun power is greedily consumed by the soldiers. Its effect is instantaneous – a sublime desensitisation of the minds of the soldiers to unpremeditated actions. Agu narrates that "...I am feeling like an animal going back to his home...Everybody is looking like one kind of animal, no more human. Everything is looking like one kind of animal and smelling like chicken or goat or cow" (56). The altered state of mind which Agu experiences leads him into the next stage of his militarised socialisation process: mass dehumanisation.

Several studies on the effect of war on the child have confirmed that the use of drugs as a mental and emotional inducement for mass dehumanisation is a prevalent one (Rosen, 2005; Denov, 2010; Gates, 2011; Peters, 2011). For instance, in *Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, Myria Denov cites her interview with a former RUF commander who confirmed the 'traditional' use of drugs on children. Further proof is tendered in Peters' "Group Cohesion and Coercive Recruitment: Young Combatants and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone". According to Peters, the notoriety of the RUF for the dehumanisation of their victims by limb amputation is an attestation to the prevalent use of drugs for torture and combat purposes. Denov submits that over 10,000 people were amputated during the decade-long Sierra Leonean civil war (193). Moreover, given that the group was roughly constituted of 30-50 percent of "young and ultra-young" (77) soldiers and 70 per cent of young people under 25 years (80) further validate the claims that there was, indeed, a robust culture of drug employment in the procedures of habituation to violence. Drugs like gun powder, alcohol, cocaine, among many other traditional herbs are infamous for their abilities to force individuals into deviant roles and ease the mind from the pressures and traumas of such actions. Under the influence of gun powder, Agu and the rest of the fighting squad proceed to attack a settlement where they find a woman and her daughter hiding. First Strika, a younger child soldier to Agu, rapes the woman. Second, both soldiers dehumanise the mother and daughter by hacking them to death and enjoy the discriminate splash of their victims' blood. War continues to be one powerful harbinger of illness behaviours. The political events that govern the behaviours of Agu, Strika, Commandant, and the rest of the rebel militia give rise to cognitive and behavioural deviations from the norm. There are several other political tensions within sovereign states which are principally fraught with fear, then distress, and moral panic. These emotions are powerful enough to alter the psyches and cognitive stabilities of people

and then induce a plethora of behavioural and irrational deviations as a response to intense political fear.

Procuring Hope from a Plethora of Fears

Somewhere along the tracks of the militarised socialisation process of rebel squads, many child soldiers lose their humanities to either the trauma of being trapped in a politically dystopian environment or to the disillusionment of finding no trace to political stability. These emotional dispositions – trauma and disillusion – are first manipulations before they become manifestations of fear. Through the narration of young Agu, the reader is acquainted with the subtle trope of fear – the news of an impending attack grips the entire village with panic; the UN, fearing the death of women and children rises to their aid by evacuating them; young Agu himself succumbs to rebel conscription out of fear and so it is for Strika; it is out of fear that Agu kills his first victim, that he and Strika submit their bodies to the painful and brutal sexual assault at the hands of Commandant. These realities form the militarised socialisation process that seeks to indoctrinate child soldiers into the culture of violence until they are ‘reborn’ as persons of untold violence, and aliens to civility.

In “Posttraumatic Resilience in Former Ugandan Child Soldiers”, Klasen et al., submit that the exposure of children to extreme stressors of war force them into three behavioural trajectories, what they term as a “...frightening fight, flight, or freeze...” stimulus. Sadly, the child soldier goes through these behaviours “...without being able to learn from the experience...” because the events of war mar his psyche and numb his cognition (1098). The consequence is that such children, after their disarmament and demobilisation, are unable to blend into the relationships of civil life.

Unlike many child soldiers, Agu treads the path of habituation to violence with the mind of an adult; he refuses to break as he consciously resists losing his humanity to the permutations of violence, drugs, and sexual assault. Remarkably, Agu dissociates his cognition from the prevalent fears and dystopian crises. He finds redemption in his cognition which is constantly kept in resilient ties with the ‘good’ past and the promise of the future. Prior and after every raid and violent behaviour, Agu carefully seeks to redeem his emotions from the trauma of impounding guilt by reminding himself of his innocence, of the brief prevalence of his altered behaviour, and the imminence of freedom. With this, he is able to navigate his way safely through harrowing emotional activities. The careful reader is able to glean some tactics of dealing with personal disenchantments that arise from distressing political realities: a skilful re-affirmation of one’s humanity and a re-negotiation of hope in the future.

Several studies on the effect of wars on child combatants suggest that many under-aged soldiers step into the violence of wars with no hope of redemption (Gates, 2011; Denov, 2010 & 2011; Ozerdem and Podder, 2011; McBride, 2014). Given that most of them have lost their families and are conscripted into the militia at gun point, they resign themselves to the mercies of the brutalities of war. Strika is a striking example. Having lost his parents to rebel attack and consequently conscripted into the rebel militia, Strika is severely traumatised. His cognition and emotions, to employ the term of Klasen et al., “freeze” as the effect of the fear he experiences numbs his cognitive processes. The physical consequence of his traumatic experience is rather dramatic: Strika is unable to speak. Every attempt to rouse him into a

conversation fails and both friends – Agu and Strika – are only able to communicate with their eyes. His trauma is captured in the following words:

I am finding him sitting under tree far away from the other men, holding stick and scratching picture into the dry ground. Over and over again he is drawing the same picture of man and woman with no head because their head is rolling away on the ground. Strika, I am calling to him, and he is looking up at me. No noise from him. He is not saying anything, I am telling myself. Since I am becoming a soldier, I am never hearing the sound of his voice, but now, I am knowing now what is his problem. His picture is telling me that he is not making one noise since they are killing his parent. I am not believing him the first time he is telling me this, and every time I am trying to get him to say something or at least be making one sound from his mouth ...Strika is punching the air above his head. We are not wanting to fight. We are tired of fighting. (46-7)

Strika helplessly allowed his humanity to evaporate from his grasp. Pain, hungry, neglect and suffering force him to succumb to all the dehumanisations of the war without any form of resistance. Unlike Agu, he is unable to rake through his past for a hopeful future. Uzodinma Iweala uses him to paint a portrait of the self-decimation which many child combatants go through. Just like Strika is unable to survive the war because he has lost the will and tenacity to live, so many child combatants end up as helpless victims of wartime and violence.

Cognitive negotiation of hope is the first and most effective strategy of surviving socio-political dystopia. Geo-political dystopia is not obtainable only in war times, but also in politically chaotic and repressive times. Many African states are fraught with geo-political instabilities that hold out no hope to the disillusioned. From the unfortunate incursion of imperial nations on indigenous geo-political spaces to the contemporary disasters of indigenous governance, many innocent people fall prey, and in many cases, are unable to navigate the crises of living in a dystopian state. Several African prose fictions subscribe to the foregoing claim. For instance, in Ngugi waThiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*, the author explores the social-political 'pulse' of the sovereign state of Aburiria and the implications for the ordinary citizens. The terrors and traumas associated with such dystopian realities like military dictatorship, corruption, extra-judicial killings, absences, etc., force many into physical and psychosomatic illness. Yet, there are others like Kamiti and Nyawira who refuse to succumb to the depressing political realities; they resort to skilful and subtle resistance instead. Owing to their conscious negotiations of hope, Kamiti and Nyawira are able to survive the brutalities of a dystopian economy without the cultural scars and the hunting stigmas which are associated with illness.

How wise would it be to glean from the survival strategy of young Agu! Skilful negotiation of hope is a leeway to triumphing resistance as well as an effective counter strategy against the crushing effects which the silence of resignation and the pretence of allegiance wield on the self-esteem. In the prevalence of dystopian realities, one has the duty to protect his emotions and psyche just as he would protect his body from harmful pathogens that cause bodily disequilibrium. Of course, it must be stressed here that the first and major target of all dystopian realities is the causation of geo-political and private disequilibrium. The

pretence of allegiance, although a vital and prudent way to stay alive the wake of dystopian crises, is detrimental to one's self-esteem because it batters the self-esteem and induces a feeling of hopelessness. This is where Strika fails and Agu triumphs. Given these realities, the victim has to consciously battle to engage his self-esteem in a constant permutation of hope.

Conclusion

There have appeared several scholarly enquiries into the causation and prevalence of the socio-political dystopia that has characterised many African states. Corruption and hedonist tendencies have appeared to be the drivers of a long trail of influences. The effects of these social problems are not known to spare the political, economic, and cultural fabrics of society. They also saturate the political climate with fear and disillusion. This study has attempted to prove that geopolitics has an effect on everyday life and on the mind-body stability of individuals. The prevalence of natural and political disasters, the multiplicity of material risks, and the near-absence of fortressing strategies over the globe have patronised personal disillusion and promoted fear on a global scale. As matters stand in contemporary times, fear can, indeed, be considered as a human condition. In an era where governments are increasingly betraying the trust of the governed, where insurgencies, civil wars, socio-political chaos are everyday realities, the individual has a duty to fashion out his own style of survival. Private anxieties must never be trivially managed with hopeless resignation; rather, they should be skilfully nurtured because as previously argued, dystopian politics is not bereft of mind-body implications. To resign to the prevalent chaos is to shun hope and resilience.

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