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Place and the Dynamics of Dissent: Tanure Ojaide's *Invoking The Warrior Spirit: New and Selected Poems*

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Abstract

The poet traces the attitude of the government towards the country (place) and the development of its citizenry. The Nigerian political system, right from the military regime of Gowon to the political regime of Shagari seems to thrive on corruption and neglect of the Niger Delta region which is the source of wealth for the nation. The study identifies the dynamics of dissent in the text and the factors which determine the dissent. The paper in essence discusses what the poet sees as political mismanagement in government using the images drawn from The Niger-Delta environment. Also is the traditional or cultural place (Urhobo) that illuminates the poems in the text. He uses these images to highlight the consciousness of poverty of his people and about political events in Nigeria and the world at large. He displays a familiarity of the Niger-Delta terrain. Oil which should be a source of wealth has become a source of travail. He is angry because of physical and human degradation and he sees himself as a 'warrior agent'. He also draws from Urhobo myths, tales, legends, proverbs as agents of his dissent. Aridon helps his memory of these elements of folklore. .

Introduction

In a sense, modern African poetry is a political term that connotes a departure from the old. This suggests newer era of poetry succeeding previous one with new thrusts, writers and styles targeted at addressing contemporary issues and meeting current taste and needs.

Against a backdrop of poetry's intricate nexus with African culture, the desire to express aesthetic and realities of Africa and its people in modern times find poetry instrumental. This desire also impacts upon the form which finds its nourishment in conflicts, political schisms and general experience of Africans. Modern African poets have expanded the domain and efficacy of poetry, through interpretations of life and character in poems of enduring quality and have also raised intriguing questions about class, leadership, gender, environment, poverty and conflict. Its thematic concerns cut across colonialism, military rule and despotic leadership, moral and social decadence, acculturation and corruption. The poets have leveraged poetry to inform, re-orientate, disabuse the people, call authorities and institutions to order and engage germane problems headlong. This is intended at raising awareness for the continent, stimulating cultural identity and consciousness and contributing towards continental growth and development. The poet's vision is borne of a sense of belonging in the society. To Eruvbetine (2002:17) all poets in their works depict experiential realities that uncover, explore and interpret salient truths...these truths synchronize the inherent contraries that define man, his endeavours and the world. Ojaide (1998:135) validates this:

In Africa, a poet is not only a specially gifted person but his gauge of a society's conditions more perceptive than the man of common disposition he sees through the surface of things, through what appears to the rest of the society as opaque.

It is against this background that we identify the 'realities' and 'truths' filtered into the poetic thrust of Tanure Ojaide's *Invoking the Warrior Spirit*. These include the unwholesome post colonialism challenges of corruption, political violence, tyranny, bribery, poor infrastructure, moribund social system and environmental degradation in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. Ojaide is a witness of the anomalies he writes about. This reverberates through Charles Wanjala (1983:28) that:

The poet is a student of his society in that he recognizes the myths, hopes and aspirations of his

people and strives to recreate them imaginatively to reflect the inner meanings of the society about which and for whom he speaks.

George Luckacs(1972:9) recognises politics as one of the major influence of writers:

It is not that every human action represented in art is political. It is rather that the individual is bound by the life and struggles of his community, that is with politics whether the individual is conscious of it or not.

As a result of the committed nature of Ojaide's poetry he influences our vision of the world which the poems represent. He portrays inspiring positive military political heroes like Muritala and Idiagbon by projecting their achievements and set standards for emulation. Literature as an art in effect not only portrays social reality but also attempts to persuade the recipient to adopt a certain attitude towards that reality. This is especially so in such cases such as societies where the citizens are grappling with colonialism or neo-colonialism or other forces of injustice. Ojaide's poems make us understand the economic, political and social anomalies that plague the Nigerian society in order that they will do something positive to ameliorate the situation. Gogol in (Andrew 1980:88) asserts that art should show us all our heroic national qualities and attributes' To Gogol, art should strive to save the individual, the nation and the universe as a whole from all forms of injustice. Land is a very important factor in the life of the Niger-Delta people of Nigeria. Obiechina (1975:43) describes the connection between native/rural peoples and their land for subsistence and more. He states that 'in rural West Africa, one is acutely aware how closely human life is integrated with physical nature. The people are farmers, constantly in contact with the earth'. In a similar vein Ngugi (1964:19) explains the essence of land in his popular novel *Weep Not Child* which is also applicable to the Niger Delta situation:

...he felt the loss of the land even more keenly than Boro, for him it was a spiritual loss. When a man is

severed from the land of his ancestors where would he sacrifice to his creators? How can he come in contact with the founder of the tribe Gikuyu and Mumbi?

Ojaide sees the Delta through the filter of human and environmental degradation. The political circumstances that brought some of the poems into being have passed yet they retain at least some of their protest. To this effect he writes simultaneously about a political matter and a personal one. He takes a swipe at the Nigerian situation and attempts to conceive of its present crop of leaders as not any different, if not worse than the colonialists who had administered Africans. He pursues social justice. Egudu (1978:89) posits that social justice has always been a primary concern of African writings hence African writers are contented with depicting and satirising misdeeds and actions that offend the notions of social injustice. Pertaining to the need for poets to be political and relentless, Ngugi in Olaniyan and Quayson(2007:477) argues that:

The relationship between the poet and politician or between writers and politics is particularly important in our situation where our cultures, our literature, music, songs, dances-are developing under the strangulating embrace of western industrial and finance and the fierce struggle of our people merely to breathe. The embrace of western imperialism is total...and our struggle against it must be total. Literature and writers cannot be exempted from the battle field.

Ojaide understands his socio-political milieu and identifies with the needs and aspirations of his people. In relation to this category of poets, Dasylyva (2005:140) says

:...the modern Nigerian poets have imbibed his traditional role as cultural standard bearer, a culturalist nationalist who exhibits a peculiar sense of mission...Okigbo sought inspiration from mother Idoto and Ojaide relies on Uhaghwa, the Urhobo

god of songs. They see themselves as people who are fortunate enough to speak for people who have a traditional and ancient culture.

With reference to a similar issue on Ojaide, Eghagha(2003:47) is of the opinion that :

He paints the picture of the life created by bad or dictatorial leadership. Ojaide is a second generation poet. The group that came in the wake of Soyinka's generation...their writing are usually combative and socially relevant...these poets have concerned themselves with social and political realities of life under military dictatorship. The reason for this is obvious. These poets wrote at a time when soldiers seized power and tramped on the rights and entitlements of the citizenry. He has drawn his themes and style broadly both from Urhobo (Udje) poetry which is often satirical and pungent and the general thematic concerns and stylistic patterns of African poetry.

Commenting on the intricate tie between literature and society, Ngugi(1981:5-6) states:

...literature as the product of men's intellectual and imaginative activity embodies in words and images, the tensions and conflicts at the heart of a community's wrestling with its total environment to produce the basic means of life, food, clothing, shelter and in process creating and recreating itself in history'

On the geographical space of the Niger Delta, Ushie (2006:3) states is the 'area covered by the six states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers. It stretches over a continuous rainforest characterised by a beautiful pattern of creeks, streams and rivers'. A reading of the works of the poets from the Niger Delta depicts consciousness of a shared geographical space. These include

poems of Gabriel Okara, J.P Clark, Hope Eghagha and Tanure Ojaide. The latter projects the collective memory of the people by stressing the loss of the natural environment that once existed. His voice of dissent is echoed by Darah (2009:12)

The poetry of Tanure Ojaide...fits into the tradition of outrage against political injustice, exploitation and environmental disasters. On the basis of sheer output, Ojaide is the most prolific in the Niger Delta region. From his titles one can discern an abiding concern with the fate of the Niger delta people...Many of the poems in these collections are verbal missiles directed at political despots whose rule has brought misery and distress to the region.

Socio-Political Concerns

Ojaide's poetry shows his awareness of socio-political realities of Nigeria. To Ojaide (1998:42)

Literature has to draw attention to the increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots. Literature has become a weapon against the denial of basic human rights...It is understandable why the African artist is utilitarian.

In 'Message of Lust' the poet highlights what can prevent sleep. It is impossible to sleep in face of dangers and insecurity as. 'grave problems drive sleep away.' There is a paradox in human existence. What constitutes sadness for some is a source of joy to others. Lack of sales to a coffin seller is cause for sadness. A market is supposed to be full of dirty waste that vultures can feed on but here 'when the vulture came to the market/there was no food'. Things are not what they should be. The fortunes made from legitimate business cannot reach home due to activities of armed robbers. Whenever war is fought it is the lower ranking men that lose their lives, however, the glory goes to the commanding officers who may not be on the ground to fight other than issuing commands from safe places.

Those who are in positions to decide for war do not personally loose much. In most cases they live in comfort. 'Diplomats don't know the bed bug, Doesn't care for the taste of your blood'.

Police brutality is his butt of criticism in 'February 1st Offering' while he makes an observation about the poor in 'What I carry Along' where the poor is likened to a soldier ant unlike the indolent rich. Masters are enriched through the labour of poor people and wars are fought only for high-ranking officers to take the glory for the victory in wars. 'In a war to enrich masters/recruits die for majors to be promoted. The sarcasm in the poem 'The curse' indicates criticism of academics who use their privileged positions to do unethical things. To the poet, it is only a person operating under a curse who would take a young girl to bed in exchange for examination questions. This exposition takes the place of a dowry which should be a lawful payment for a wife. In addition undeserved marks are awarded as gratification for such illicit relationships. The academic fraud extends to plagiarism of research papers presented at conferences with smiles. The weight of such offences is such that it would incur the wrath of the gods.

'Death of the Warrior' laments the brutal killing of Murtala Mohammed. He was cut short in his prime with all he planned to do for the nation and its citizens. His fight against corruption and economic sabotage was brought to an abrupt end as a result of his tragic death. 'The son who gave us direction/is forever gone/' Despite the fact that his regime was brief, he left his marks in the sands of time. In 'I am going to be rich' the poet castigates the rich that the society tolerates despite the wrong means by which such wealth has been acquired. Once a poor person becomes rich, his excesses are not denounced but explained away and the person is regarded as 'an instant star' however, the poet prefers a wealth of ideas. In 'We Keep watch over them' we are presented with the ruled who keep watch over rulers who treat them so badly. From their positions of pain and misery they look on helplessly yet are resilient like the iroko tree which survives rages of any storm. Rather than succumb to their suffering they would 'laugh cynically at our tormentors'.

In 'No prescription cures a country nobody loves' the poet depicts unpatriotic leadership. It is the nameless and unsung citizens who should be regarded as heroes because of their patriotic deeds and sensitivity to the needs of others. A nameless school girl 'surrender her recess coin to a beggar' and a patriotic driver 'rescues his van from a treacherous/puddle/then stops to plant there a red flag'. These kind gestures are done without acknowledgement just as 'the ant builds a monument without fanfare'. For a country to be progressive, its citizens have to be patriotic.

The poet criticizes undue publicity given public projects in 'Launching our community development fund'. The reason for the launch is usually specified but such projects are hardly completed due to embezzlement of funds by individuals for personal use. 'the budget allocation went with the civic reception/there was no attempt to build what would outlive/the builders'. The religious tenets of concentrating more on divine benefits are not important to rulers. The invited people are flattered only for them to make false pledges which are never redeemed.

The poet recognises the dignity of labour in 'I be somebody'. In any economy there is division of labour. Every honest labourer is important and makes contributions to developments in one way or another. Those engaged in menial jobs are as important as directors who are in offices doing administrative jobs. In the chain of labour one cannot do without certain classes of people including the cleaner, the shoe shiner, the load carriers and those who help to push or repair broken down vehicles. To the poet, the poor man is like the salt of humanity because of the nature of his kindness and the type of help he renders in time of need. The so called big man has no milk of human kindness. He sees nothing wrong in oppressing the down trodden symbolized here by the splash of dirty muddy water 'poto-poto'.

Western powers are likened to the hawk in 'The hawk prays for peace'. They sue for peace after desecrating less powerful nations and satisfying their needs. The satisfaction comes from being 'acknowledged as superior and 'the sole proprietor of the world'.

Similarly in the 'The fate of vultures', corrupt political leaders are described as vultures. *Aridon* a memory god is sought for to help recover stolen national wealth. Rulers are like 'Players' who come on stage to put up a show for entertainers and at the end of the show they are applauded. They love adulation while they mete out acts of barbarism to the masses who voted them into power. On getting to power a leader takes an oath to be of good service to his people and his nation but the oath turns out to be just lip service 'to fulfil inauguration ritual'.

Some leaders cannot be trusted in 'When Tomorrow is too Long'. Allusion is made to a gap toothed one who should be treated like a cobra because his policies emit stings or venom the way a cobra would do. The leader is deceptive, says one thing but means another. His policies on the surface appears nice but in the long run lead to suffering. The rulers tell us we are beneficiaries of austerity measures but we turn out to be victims of bad policies.

In 'Song for my land' Ojaide poet laments the effects of coups. The land has been made sterile because of improper use. Progress is eclipsed by intolerable riots. Discrimination abounds as a result of the region one comes from but a person should be treated as a national subject regardless where he comes from. The claims to kingship stalls progress as indicated in 'Where everybody is king'. Nobody is interested in menial jobs and the claim to kingship also fuels laziness and stunts economic progress since 'nobody ever climbs the oil-palm/nor taps the rubber tree'. The vanity of title acquisition breeds poverty as people who should engage in economic pursuits do not deem it fit to do so as tradition forbids a king from doing menial jobs. Survival depends on a lot of these menial jobs. Kingship tussle also creates rivalry and mutual distrust with its attendant negative effects 'And they try their diabolic charms/on each other, dying like outcasts'. Rather than royal opulence poverty is rampant. Many children of so-called kings turn out malnourished 'Are you surprised?/at kwashiorkor princes and princesses/prostitute queens and beggar kings?'

In 'The daydream of ants' the small creatures are able to build hills that are good sight to behold unlike human beings who are bigger and more knowledgeable. The poet castigates unnatural prettiness in 'Beauty Pageant' and denounces the sense in conducting beauty contests. Most of the contestants are products of artificial beauty 'the beautician fills cracks/with flesh scraped off/the fat dunes of the cheeks'. People subject themselves to all sorts of hardships in order to appear beautiful. The body may be mutilated to satisfy beauty judges and the winner comes on top through 'triumph of modern magic'. Modern beauty therapy turns an ugly duckling into a beautiful princess 'rejuvenated with exercises/does of lean meals/and vege fruits/beauty glistens' The art of artificial beauty has been so perfected that at the end of the therapy the person becomes more beautiful than a goddess.

As depicted 'On the World Summit for Children at the UN, 1990' the preservation of the flora and fauna and agitation for the rights and wellbeing of humans are part of the poet's humanist ideals. The effects of war can be devastating and one of its effects is the creation of 'colonies of orphans'. Those engaged in war cannot be said to win rather what we have is gross human waste. Various talks could be held while a war is going on. To the warriors it is like a game when 'legion of summiteers' meet to deliberate on war matters but the resultant effect of their discussion is that 'children do not smile/ they dehydrate in the heat of war games'. Western powers lend money to poor nations and dictate the terms of payment. Stiff conditions are attached to such loans and repayment is almost an impossible task. As a result citizens are denied basic necessities of life. The western powers have unity of purpose in G8 or G5 or G7. Their alliance is not for the good of the poor countries, rather it is to exploit them and impoverish its citizens. Politicians tell lies to the populace about intended programs of development, but the 'politricksters' are never the victims of their bad policies. The poet has no kind word for them, he calls them 'masked beasts/tearing your own brood'. Fancy titles are given to rulers who do not mean well for the masses. They are called elders of state but their deeds are ironic and the poet calls them 'double-dealer', and 'cult of masqueraders'. Often these oppressors meet in comfort in far away venues from where the

suffering actually takes place. A meeting in New-York to decide the fate of starving children in Africa is bound to be ignorant of the desperation of its poor citizens.

The ironic rule of the military is shown in 'State Executive'. Coups are staged and a pledge is made to solve the problems of the nation. Soon after announcement for peace and progress is made, a far reaching and gruelling of citizens begin. The state executive becomes a state executor. A lot of secret killings go on and tools of progress become devices for the extermination of critics and innocent citizens 'wherever we dug for safety, we dug into corpses'. People go into hiding and many are hounded into exile. People who profess the Muslim and Christian faith which is against the killing of innocents are used as assassins. In spite of an array of advisers a lot of things go wrong and 'everyone yawns from the blood-laden air'.

The poet's dislike for military rule is not total as he expresses likeness for some military rulers like Idiagbon and Mohammed who made indelible prints wherever they trod. These military leaders made personal sacrifices instead of amassing public wealth for themselves.

Ojaide prays to aridon the god of memory in 'Sankofa' to act as a pathfinder to him. Things have been muddled up and the unusual now happens 'now that the iroko we used to lean on/has suddenly grown poisonous thorns'. The western powers are all controlling. They determine prices for products that are imported and decide the amount of oil that each nation should explore. The independence in practise is not at all. Destructive goods manufactured by western nations are used as medium of exchange for goods that will destroy the poor nations while the ones exported to them lead to the growth of their industries and economy. There is unrest indirectly created by developed nations and kwame Nkrumah's dream of brotherhood is non-existent. This world is not ideal because of its vicissitudes as presented in 'Waiting for the next world'. Ojaide regrets the energy he dissipated on unprofitable ventures in place of rigorous academic studies which would have bettered his lot. 'If I throw the same stamina as I did/ upon the oil palm press upon books/I would today

be a director-general/signing out bounties to my praise-singers!' Time that would have been spent on learning was used for 'covered remote farms on jigger-pillaged sole' Wrong eating habits of time past brings about ill-health of today. Ojaide proves that the degeneracy which Nigeria is experiencing can be turned around for the better through dreams, supplication, prayers, invocations, moral fortitude and hope.

The poet reckons that in spite of hard work, life will still remain meaningless to some people because some people are more favoured by the authorities than others. He continues to condemn those in position who are not only corrupt but live in affluence while the country degenerates economically and extends to the larger populace who live below poverty line. He calls for moderation in the administration of the country as the present trend may result in unhealthy situations. In 'Witness the fire: three pieces' The poet satirises the vanity of humans who do outrageous things such as building a hundred-room mansion. Such vain acts become meaningless at death. Ojaide poses 'Three Questions'. He wants to know why some do not mourn in the house of mourning, why some receive awards for inflicting sorrow on others and while some situations are horrible for some while others feel comfortable with it 'you say fish loves water/but does it/ when the water's boiling?'

The Niger-Delta and Environmental Degradation

Omoweh (2005:130) writing on the Niger Delta defines its environment as 'the entire environmental resources of the Niger delta, including the culture of the people and other natural things attached to it'. Nwachukwu (2005:16) is of the opinion that 'nowadays, nature and environment are used as tools to express nostalgia about how things have changed from the good old days to these bad days...the idyllic life of the old days seems lost and the writers are trying to reclaim it in their imagination'. 'The Battle' presents the Niger Delta region with its flora and fauna. The battle for self protection makes humans, plants and animals develop all kinds of defence mechanisms for survival. The *oghighie* plant covers itself with thorns to protect its soft trunk. It is also for protection that

the tortoise would withdraw into its hard shell and the snake would shed its old skin for survival. In 'Naked Gods' the poet chastises foreign nations which are at the forefront of technology transfer. To the poet whatever is being offered has strings attached. He counsels we do not have to change our ways because of foreigners and 'if outsiders understand us/let them imbibe our wisdom and secrets' we do not have to learn from teachers who lack understanding of our ways rather we should look inwards and speak the truth about ourselves 'let us not learn from teachers/who have no love for our land'.

Ojaide recognises starvation in 'Rites of Increase'. The solution to it is for more food to be provided by cultivating arable lands. Farmers should be proud of the role they are playing in the nation 'let the plough and the harvester be proud' It is only food that can 'choke the monsters of hunger plundering the/sahel'

When development takes place, it also takes its toll on human beings who become victims as depicted in 'The power of victims'. In a bid to stretch technology to the moon people become victims of experiment. Some of the scientific discoveries and experiments have consequences on humans that can be devastating. It may take the form of epidemics and various afflictions and diseases. Some natural disasters occur when we tamper with the natural order of things.

The tragic process of exploitation has become a curse in 'Delta blues'. What is supposed to be a source of wealth has become a source of sorrow. Environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration has become the bane of many communities in the Niger Delta 'i stew in the womb of fortune/I live in deathbed/ prepared by a cabal of brokers'. Gas flaring has tampered with the flora and fauna making 'their sacred soil's debauched/ by prospectors, money-mongers?' those who stand to gain from oil exploration are different from indigenes of the Niger-Delta.

Ojaide speaks of the tranquillity that truncated the coast and the inter-land of the delta of his childhood. He speaks of the beautiful landscape, the connecting rivers and how the people traded, how

they went about their peaceful business of farming and fishing. To him delta of that period was a place of pride and envy, 'This share of paradise, the delta of my birth'. Unfortunately the 'paradise' became an object of depreciation where naturally endowed minority group are not only deprived but their natural habitat and ecosystem have been disorganized by the politics of oil exploration. According to Olafioye (2005) it is only the oppressed minority that can truly appreciate the 'bitter feeling of the blatant' theft of their wealth and the political oppression imposed on them. Ojaide is disillusioned, because the majority in power exploit the wealth of the minority group to develop their states or the centres (Abuja) in the name of federalism. These majorities who indulge in these practices are not only insensitive to the agonizing condition of the Deltans (minorities) but also do not have any meaningful or sincere effort and legislation to alleviate the social conditions of the minorities. He states further:

My nativity gives immortal pains
masked in barrels of oil
I stew in the womb of fortune.
I live in deathbed
prepared by a cabal brokers
breaking the peace of centuries
who counts the aborigines killed
as their sacred soil's debauched
by prospectors money-mongers? (159)

Environmental degradation has killed many and when the people agitate they are 'called to banquet' by the exploiters, 'baron robbers' and are given piece meal (cake) to sell their birth right, and when they refused through the singular effort of the Ogoni nine, they were murdered.

To this end, Ojaide pays tribute to the ogoni nine in 'Elegy for nine warriors'. The hanging of Saro-Wiwa and other ogoni activists elicited widespread condemnation globally inspiring the poet to lament the dehumanising circumstances of their trial, death and burial. He indicates that the dead, irrespective of the controversies

trailing their murder, have already become heroes among their people. He denounces:

The butcher of Abuja

Dances with skulls

Ogiso's grandchild by incest

Digs his macabre steps in the womb of aso rock (162)

'The butcher of Abuja' is reflective of a tyrannical leader who is dictatorial and despotic.

Ojaide also attacks those who are supposed to join in the struggle but choose to be conspirators with the tyrant. This class are the educated elite who he calls 'my fellow singer'. Some of these people are well placed in the cabinet of the tyrant and enjoying the benefits of tyrannical office.

The Past As The Present; Memory and Change

Ojaide is nostalgic in 'Children of iroko'. We visualise the acolyte in his regalia of white calico with red beads in addition to 'a feather-hat from forest birds. This acolyte is akin to most ones from the riverine areas of the Niger Delta. Some are marine worshippers who perform sacrifices on behalf of other worshippers with several items such as 'baked serrated chalk/A white cock without a crow/three lobed kolanuts/seven halfpennies.' These items are put on a white plate and are taken to a shrine for supplication to the marine goddess. After the sacrifice of a cow, it is expected that all will be well in the community but this is not to be as 'women have groaned, not for grief/But in begetting more sons'. The sacrifices performed are supposed to be 'protective prayers' to herald a new year that may not bring in the people's expectations. The poet writes 'A Verdict of Stone' to commemorate the demise of his maternal grandmother who brought him up. Allusion is made to Ayayughe of the tales. She is a selfless mother who in Urhobo folklore denies herself food and other necessities in order for her children to be filled. He likens the grandmother's care to Ayayughe and at her death, the homestead is devoid of its previous warmth. The only evidence left is the grave where the poet could pour libation from a bottle of gin brought from

his travels. In 'Labyrinths of the Delta', images are drawn from Urhobo tradition. There is Aridon for memory and Uhaghwa the muse for songs. The iguana is a totem symbol for some Urhobo people. The coming of the colonial masters brought division and confusion to serene communities. Allusion is made to chief Essi of Igbudu who was famed for using his machete on strangers who visited during festive periods. To the poet such machetes should be raised against domestic enemies like robbers instead of against neighbours. Allusion is also made to Okitiakpe of Ekakpamre who was known as obule of Ekakpamre for creating many philosophical songs in that community.

'Today's Pain' draws our attention to the ungratefulness of most modern young people who often rebuff correction from parents. They want to do what they please undermining the consequences. In order to drive home the point that children can never repay the debt they owe their parents, the mother of the girl 'handed her a calabash/fill it with the milk/you took from my breast.

The poet reminisces in 'Consolation' by the fact that his father was considerate in spite of his poverty, makes no demands of him. The father would rather have his son save his money in order to give him a befitting burial when he passes away. To the father, children who are civil servants do not have the wherewithal to give their deceased parents a befitting farewell. The father advises him of the need to prepare in case of death since his health was beginning to become troublesome as a result of 'unending fevers'. Ironically, there is the possibility that the money not spent on parents is spent on personal indulgence.

In 'Future Gods', allusion is made to Ogidigbo, an Urhobo warrior who terrorized the Ijo people. He was famed to have shaken mighty trees and the poet wants the future Ogidigbo to solve human problems. Various mythical figures are told to rise to counter the sufferings of the modern man. The past exploits in Africa by these human legends can also be repeated but only for the purpose of solving modern human problems. The myth of Ogiso 'who conjured a stream to flow in his backyard' can be repeated, but this time the

water should be channelled into the irrigation of crops in desert regions and farming areas where there is drought. The strength exhibited in terrorizing neighbours should be channelled into development for the modern man. The legendary Shaka is told to resurrect 'to eliminate usurpers of our birthrights' and 'wrest from our destiny our hidden blessing'.

Ojaide calls to mind activities of his grandfather in 'The praisename' especially when the poet sees stretches of water. Water as his grandfather's praise name connotes many things. Water literally is of use in many households. None can do without it. There was a fisherman who used to make good catches and he was also blessed in many other areas such as 'a clan of children' and 'boundless barns'. Also 'At the Aerobic class' the poet bore in mind his father's poverty depicted in his use of 'rusty bike'. He had to ride the bike through unmotorable road with so much energy dissipated in order to visit an in-law. The visit costs him 'a day's sweat'. The old granny had to trek 'accelerating her footroen'.

The poet ironically titles the poem 'aerobic' because this exercise is forced on the individuals by conditions of living and by need to keep fit. Those who do a lot of strenuous physical exercise have no remain for fat and the granny is likened to 'a grub jerkin/trunk and limb' in the daily dance for survival and the poet looks back to his childhood and remembers that no very active ant was obese in the process of 'hauling day and night'. He also talks nostalgically about his traditional dish of 'cowpeas and starch'. The meal makes him heavy, the heaviness of an overfed 'ogbo'. In the olden days people led very active lives and kept away many non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension, stroke and heart attack. The pleasure of indulging in fatty and starchy foods without burning them off is the order of modern living. These precipitate diseases that were unheard of in the era of the poet's father and granny. To him modern technology and style of living have brought about many losses 'I have lost my legs/to Toyota'.

The poet dedicates 'To Aridon' a god of memory to traditional songsters such as Okitiakpe. Omokomoko and Ogute who sang

philosophical songs among the Urhobo people. The poet acknowledges their pioneering efforts at singing and says 'I will follow the sure lane of your thread/to cultivate correspondence'. In 'Enter my dream' he imagines a world where the old and the young, the strong and the weak can co-habit. As in 'Aftermath' he invokes the traditional warrior spirit *ivwri* for protection from life's dangers but modernity and its harshness render *ivwri* effect less.

In 'Mornings' he remembers the granny as soothsayer as her experiences are relived. She was hard working and the poet could not keep up with her pace of hard work Her good counsel has helped the poet 'waif not to be drenched before covering with an umbrella/fall when getting up will not be a battle for life/ dive when a dip in the cold water does no damage'.

'Amulets' states that traditional defence consists of various effects used to fortify the body from harm 'incisions to imbibe invincibility/frothing baths not to be seen by evil eyes/ a cowrie necklace to be favourite of gods' however, the poet prefers academics since he could not sustain farm work. The granny taught him the act of self denial that brings about discipline. Memories of his school days and various shades of fun he indulged in flood the poet's mind. He remembers his hunting skills as a child and tales told him by the mother. People in the Delta region also use various amulets against adversities; the marine world is used in initiation into various cults like cult of Abadi.

Conclusion

Wastberg (1967:11) states that 'the traditional role of the African poet is ...to celebrate and not subvert society'. This assertion is only partially true of the poetry of Ojaide. The latter's social-political consciousness cannot be termed 'subverting society'. What he celebrates are the positive aspects of society and he denounces the negative aspects especially those rooted in corruption and Western European influence. His poetry draws attention to the imperfect nature of the Federal arrangement and the fears, anxieties and sense of insecurity. He has drawn attention to the visionless leadership of

the country that breeds injustice and inequity. He has surveyed issues related to the causes, consequences and scope of corruption, and possible corrective actions. Eco awareness is now the subject of a lot of writings and Ojaide has presented a historical reflection of the vaporisation of the Niger Delta's environmental endowments and ecosystem by oil companies. To him, ecological degradation has given rise to underdevelopment and pauperisation of the indigenes and the nation by extension. He invokes the idyllic environment nostalgically and strives to be a 'righter' of wrongs and a defender of truth.

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