SOCIO-POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN SELECTED POEMS OF ODIA OFEIMUN

Idaevbor Bello
Department of English and Literature
University of Benin, Benin City
(idaevbor.bello@uniben.edu)
08023344695

Abstract

This study interrogates selected poems from three of Odia Ofeimun's poetry collections, namely *The Poet Lied, A Handle for the Flutist*, and *London Letters*, and argues that the socio-political conditions of the Nigerian state as represented in the poetry is ignoble and anathema to positive societal development. It is in this regard that it is posited in the study that the poet unmistakably establishes for his readers the condition of the socio-political landscape of his country that serves as the canvass of his poetry. The study argues that the poet, being a student of his society and a committed poet who belongs to a generation of writers that believe literature should serve as a means to raise a people's consciousness, the working people that is, to their place in society, unequivocally exposes the rottenness in the land. It is equally established that the poet makes it manifestly clear that the ruling class shows little or no pity for the toiling masses; the working people are treated poorly and given scant attention in the society as their interests are peripheral in the consideration of the ruling class. It is the conclusion in the paper that the poet's objective of writing the way he does is to mobilize the people to rise up in their own defense in the face of their dehumanizing treatment. The essay adopts the Marxist theory in its investigation of its objective.

Introduction

Odia Ofeimun is a prominent voice in Nigeria's literary evolution. The publication of his first collection of poems entitled *The Poet Lied* in 1980 marks the take off point of a new generation of poets whose focus in their poetry is the graphic representation of the

human condition in the Nigerian society. Of the emergence of this group of poets and their effects on poetry thereafter, a Nigerian critic has observed as follows: "Beginning from 1980 when Odia Ofeimun published *The Poet Lied*, Nigerian poetry has grown in tandem with the socio-historical events that inspired it" (Awhefeada, 2010, p.1). This group of writers is referred to in literary discourse today as the second generation writers. The poetry of these writers, clearly, draws attention to the dislocations that occur in the Nigerian society and the pain of the ordinary working people.

An aspect of all the various forms of the literary production of this period and onward is the faithful representation of the social milieu created by the ruling class. For the artist, there is a general decay in the political and social landscapes that reflects the mindset and the commitment of the country's leadership to the affairs of state; and this is not endearing. In essence, the outward condition, it would appear the writers of the generation believe, is a reflection of the approach to governance by the political leadership in Nigeria and the African continent as a whole. In the novel, *The Contract*, for instance, the novelist presents a milieu that is completely anathema to social progress. As he observes of the streets of Benin, the physical setting of the novel,

> [t]hey are littered with all kinds of refuse - corn leaves, plantain peelings, bottles, cans and sewage. Gigantic heaps of dirt were left at the roadsides. And then there was the sand-sand which was washed unto the roads from the sandy fronts of the houses, or deposited on the roads by the house builders, sand which came from the open gutters that were themselves full of sand and refuse and dirt. Each squalid house vomited rubbish from its entrance which then overflowed into the road. Everywhere there was dirt and filth and chaos. (Iyayi, 1982, p.7)

This is a clear indication of the abandonment of the polity and the people by those saddled with the responsibility of managing

societal affairs. The images in Iyayi extract are vivid and sordid, tactile and scatological; they are an eyesore.

What one sees on the streets is a reflection of the society as a whole; the way the people live and the kind of attention they pay to public property and the raw and brutal manner in which the people are treated and dehumanized by those entrusted with state power. The decay reflected, therefore, is both physical and psychological. And this social degeneration and moral regression run through the entire novel. As a foremost Nigerian literary scholar has observed, "The artist is a member of society, and the content and style of his work are affected by social reality" (Egudu, 1978, p.2). In other words, Egudu believes rightly that the literary artist, and especially in this context, the poet, constructs his work from the social realities that confront his people.

It is no surprise, therefore, that this sordid situation is what the reader finds reflected in the poetry of Ofeimun. As a poet, Ofeimun does not shy away from a faithful representation of the Nigerian situation. In his art, the poet focuses on the ordinary people and their travails in the hands of their rulers. And assessing the poet and his contribution to modern Nigerian poetry as reflected in *The Poet Lied*, Amuta (1989, p.193) says:

> we get … what amounts to the most engagingly direct and accomplished patriotic verse in Nigeria to date, taking as its object the various aspects of the Nigerian experience in neo-colonialism. Just as the civil war provides its launching pad, the post-war society with all its aberrations – the squandered oil boom, the scandalous social inequalities, the ethical morass and tyranny form the crux of Ofeimun's agenda. For Ofeimun, these conjunctures dictate an uncompromising commitment.

This is a very apt assessment of the poetry of Ofeimun from the very beginning, and he has not deviated from that path up to the present moment; in essence he has remained faithful in his poetry to that engagement with the people's plight.

In a study on the poetry of Ofeimun, Aiyejina (1983, p.34) observed that the poetry is the product of his personal experience

in his growing up years with parents who could virtually not pay for his education:

> Any cursory acquaintance with Ofeimun's poetry will immediately reveal that his chequered life has left a bold imprint on the content of, and the vision that informs his work. The masses of people to whom he has been inevitably drawn in the course of moving from one job to another, occupy the centre-stage of his poetry. Because he brings his life experiences to bear on his writing, he emerges as a socially committed poet.

The observation that Ofeimun's preoccupation in his poetry derives from his personal deprivation, as real as it is, is only partly true. His response to a question on the issue posed by this writer in an interview with him is worth quoting at some length:

> That would be correct; but it would be more correct to say that the poets I had read influenced me in the direction I had to go. … Once I started reading the poets, it was no longer a question of whether I had to write poetry, it had become a part of me. I knew I would write poetry; the question was how to do it. … I found that there was always this competition between my interest in being a poet and a writer and my interest in politics. You didn't want to write poetry just about how people are suffering and how things were never working; you were also interested in recreating or creating a new way of life for people. And this is where the involvement in political practice of one kind or another – It begins from knowing that whichever the circumstance you could find yourself you are a contributor to how people organize their lives; and that what you contribute in small moments actually can determine the big issues. So for me literature was more an engagement with larger issues. (Ofeimun, 2013)

It is right, therefore, to conclude that the poet's personal experience of the 'hard life', so to speak, is only partly responsible for his preoccupation in his poetry; another major influence in deciding his poetic direction derives from his reading the poetry of

older writers who envision a new order of progress and show empathy for the working people in their art.

In another study, Aiyejina (1988, 122) has noted that Ofeimun's poetry expresses "…his anger at and …impatience with opportunistic artists, public morality, cultural inadequacies, [and] economic mismanagement …." The identified anger which Aiyejina refers to derives from the failure of leadership in the Nigerian landscape to fulfill the promise of independence half a century after. The poet, it can be assumed, rightly believes, therefore, that his art would be meaningless if it turns a blind eye to the social and political realities that the people contend with.

A contemporary of Ofeimun and a committed poet himself, Ojaide (2012, p.11), has provided an insight into the artistic vision and mission of the poet when he states as follows:

> … early life experiences, the socio-political condition and intellectual climate of his youth and adult life, and national and other historical circumstances appear to have not only prepared him for, but also goaded him into an activist poet's career. He ranges on the side of the common people and is at the vanguard of forces struggling against tyranny, dictatorship, oppression, injustice, and other socio-political vices so as to establish humane and democratic values.
>
> Ojaide's position, clearly for any reader of Ofeimun's poetry, spells out plainly where the poet's interest lies as an artist. He writes with the urge, as he has told us, "to nudge and awaken them that/sleep/among my people" (Ofeimun, 2008 p.1). It is safe, therefore, to posit that the first objective of Ofeimun in his poetry is to educate and mobilize his people to be their own rescuers from the parlous state that the ruling class has pushed them into.

In the light of the above, this study is anchored on the Marxist theory of literary interpretation. The deployment of a theoretical framework for the study arises, for example, from the position of Nwahunanya (2010, p.3) "… that for any results to be

expected from literary study, it must be systematized into a coherent theory." Our objective, therefore, is to make clearer, as much as possible, that Ofeimun, in his poetry, presents the social and political realities of the Nigerian landscape in his poetry with a view to draw the attention of the people to their precarious existence in their country in the hope to awaken them to rise up in unison to work for a saner country.

The Marxist theory apprehends literary discourse from the perspective of how it engages the socio-political disparities within a society. There exists two ideological classes in society as identified by the progenitors of Marxism, namely the oppression class known as the bourgeoisie and the working class commonly referred to as the proletariat. These two classes are in constant conflict with a view to protecting the interests of one against the other. It is the reason of this antagonism between the classes that Marxist literary theorists investigate in literature the place of the proletariat as represented by the writer.

Arvon in *Marxist Esthetics* posited that a Marxist interpretation of a literary production should focus on the interests of a

> … class within a totality made up of its past, present, and future experiences, this esthetics leads to a Socialist humanism whose supreme rules are the passionate search for the very essence of humanity and the defense of human wholeness against all the dislocations and all the pitfalls of history. (1973, p.39)

It is thus clear from the above that in its investigation of meaning in a text, the Marxist theorist must focus on all aspects of the experiences of the members of the class that is its focus, usually the exploited class, as represented in the text in order to be in a position to fully explore their experiences and thereby uphold them as humans who fully deserve their place in society. In that regard, it would be correct to deduce that Marxism seeks to humanize all members of society and argues that all should have equal access to the common good.

In his engagement of Marxism as a literary theory for the exemplification of meaning in African literature, Biakolo (2000,

p.136) is of the opinion that it has the "goal of mobilizing art in support of the radical socialist transformation of African society." In this instance, it would be right to argue that it can move the people to an awareness of their place in the social order of things within their society; a reason that Eagleton (2000, p.361) has talked of "integration of art and society;" and this would aid in mobilizing the people to seek their own redemption. This is especially so as a core aspect of the Marxian philosophy is the deployment of communal action in the service of all

Thus, for the Marxist critic, it can be surmised that the objective of literature is to raise the people's consciousness to their socio-political situation with the aim of moving them to action in their own liberation. This is the usefulness of the application of the theory in this study. The study examines poems selected from three of Ofeimun's collections, namely *The Poet Lied* (2008), *A Handle for the Flutist and other Poems* (2010), and *London Letter and other Poems* (2010), hereinafter referred to as *The Poet*, *A Handle*, and *London Letter* respectively. And the objective is to show that as a poet of combat, Ofeimun portrays the ruling class as largely composed of a mindless lot who continually treat the working people with disdain, and that he does this with the objective to mobilize the people to resist their common oppression.

The Socio-Political Landscape of Ofeimun's Poetry

In his poetry, the social landscape that Ofeimun presents is that in which progress, any form of progress, is stifled. For instance, in "How can I sing" (2008, p.2), the persona observes as follows:

> I cannot blind myself to putrefying carcasses in the market place pulling giant vultures from the sky[.]

The picture the persona presents in this extract is that of decay. The entire landscape is filled with mind boggling decay; the images are not only putrid they are also tactile. The persona presents a picture of a society where nobody cares for public health. This is depicted by the fact that everywhere he turns to, the persona does not just see dirt, there are littered all around carcasses of animals, and may be human beings, left to rot in the public space without anyone bothering about the health implications. Just

as the "market place" is filled with decaying "carcasses" so is the entire body-politic of the state in deplorable condition. Therefore, the entire strata of society are in need of urgent cleansing if there must be positive and enduring growth. The persona goes further in the poem to ask:

> how can I escape these mind-ripping scorpion-tails
> deployed in the dark with ignominious license
> by those who should buttress faith in living, faith in lamplight?

The landscape presented in the lines is hostile. The persona is pained by the fact that the common people cannot express themselves without being endangered. There are impediments put in their way as represented by the "mind-ripping scorpion-tails" that are "deployed in the dark" in readiness for those who will fall out of line. These "mind-ripping scorpion-tails" symbolize those who visit pain on the people "with ignominious license" from the powers that be. In essence, therefore, they are representative symbols of the various security personnel who have visited untold hardship and pain on the people over the years with impunity.

The metaphor of the "mind-ripping scorpion-tails" is striking. Just like the scorpion's sting is devastating, so does the mindless brutality of the people by security agents dehumanizes the victims. It is even more painful as the perpetrators of such crimes are honoured by the state instead of getting sanctioned. Even though "… they stuff cobwebs" in his mouth to prevent him from singing; from exposing the pain and decay the people suffer, the persona declares: "I cannot blunt my feelers/to cheapen my ingrained sorrow." Put differently, the persona will stop at nothing in bringing to the fore the decay that is threatening to consume his society. He shows that the decay in the system is both visual, as shown in the littering of "putrefying carcases in the market place", and psychological, as shown by the deployment of "mind-ripping scorpion-tails" to constantly remind the people that they cannot do anything about the situation; that they are not free as they are constantly being watched.

The persona's response to this systemic and moral decay is not to accept the situation in helpless depression, like the

oppressors would want him to, but to raise his own and the people's consciousness and then respond by weaving "A garland of subversive litanies" that would "answer these morbid landscapes". The mortuary image here is striking. The landscape is morbid because of the aridity; the decay in the entire system, shown earlier, in the physical environment, and the decay through the dehumanization of the human person by those who hold political power and believe that invests them with the power of life and death over the people.

In "The New Brooms" (2008, p.6), the decay is also physical and dehumanizing. The images the reader is confronted with in the poem are scatological; and all around the people is the presence of a putrid environment. The poem opens with the information:

> The streets were clogged with garbage
> the rank smell of swollen gutters
> claimed the peace of our lives
> The streets were blessed with molehills
> of unwanted odds and bits[.]

We are confronted with total decay in this extract. The dirt and the garbage on the streets reflect the attitude of those who lead to matters of state. They obviously do not care about the fact that everywhere we turn to on the streets, the decay stares us in the face. As observed earlier, the garbage and the decay on the streets are a reflection of the mindset of those who lead us, as to how they perceive the affairs of state. They do not seem to understand that what we present on the outside gives a clue to who we are inside. This is the attitude of people who seek power not for its responsibility but for the glamour and pecks associated with it. Such people can as such not be bothered by the monumental decay the society has become.

Ordinarily brooms are meant to keep an environment clean. We would, therefore, have expected that the "brooms" of the poem, being new, they would be more effective in sweeping away the dirt around us. Unfortunately, this is not the case; therein lies

the irony in the poem. These "new brooms" are stunted and blunt. Soon we are drawn into the world of the persona because the "new brooms" have come with "… bayonets/to define the horizons of our days." In other words, these "new brooms" are here to intimidate us into silence with their bayonets; they are not to help in cleaning up the debris from the body-politic. And we must believe what they tell us.

To buttress the fact that the "new brooms" do not allow us the luxury of knowing, the persona says that

> … today
> if you ask why the waste-bins are empty
> why refuse gluts the public places un-swept
> they will enjoin you to HOLD IT:
> to have new brooms, that's something.

This only goes to show that the "new brooms" are even weaker than the old ones. Their response to the persona's queries has a note of finality to it; it is an order, an instruction which they do not expect to be violated hence the upper case in which it is given. The "waste-bins are empty" whereas "refuse gluts the public places un-swept". This underscores the dirt that has permeated the society and, therefrom, the body-politic; it portrays the general decay which must not be sustained if the society must grow. As Garuba has observed, "[t]he entire corpus of Ofeimun's poetry never moves far away from this intense awareness of decadence and a seething animal passion defines his commitment to eradicating this" (1988, p.271). Herein lies the humanism in the poetry of Odia Ofeimun. His commitment to the public good and the fact that those who lead must be accountable to the led are the anchor of his poetry. If this does not happen, the people would have no other choice but to take their destiny in their hands and confront their political leaders who are responsible for the aridity in the system.

Rather than sweep the Augean stable clean of the malfeasance that has become the lot of the society, the "new brooms" enjoin us to believe in "… their well-made timetable" that is not based on any definite time frame. The clearance of night-soil

has indeterminate time frame, as such the circle endures. We need something drastic; something more committed to cleaning the dirt that surrounds us if we must truly effect a change in the system and have a new lease of life. The people cannot continue in the physical and psychological filth that has become their lot. As the persona observes,

> … if you want to know why
> the streets grunt now
> under rank garbage
> under the weight of decay, of night-soil
> more than ever before
> they will point triumphantly,
> very triumphantly
> at their well-made timetable:
> 'We shall get there soonest;
> night-soil clearance is next on the list'

The hollowness of the response to the question is deafening. It shows that the "new brooms" have no clue as to how to deal with the problems that stare the people in the face. They are clearly oblivious of the fact that the streets are grunting under the weight of the "rank garbage" that is clogging the wheel of progress of the entire society. The persona seems to be insinuating that if the people want the streets cleared, they must look beyond the "new brooms;" the current leaders, because they have become largely effete, and take their destiny in their own hands. In fact the "new brooms" have become part of the garbage that must be cleared for a new vision to emerge.

In "The drought and us" (2010a p.33), the poet-persona further presents to the reader the decay and destruction that abound in the society. Everywhere one turns to there is aridity, stench and decay. There is an ominous sign of death that stares the people in the face as "Vultures alone hover where/sweet birdsong/should tell the tale of the mornings". Rather than enjoy the sonorous songs of the early morning bird that should herald them into a beautiful new day, the people are presented with the ominous hovering of the

vulture. The vulture hovers only where there is a carcass. It can, therefore, be safely inferred that the presence of the hovering vulture is a sign that the situation is near hopeless. But as the reader is soon made aware, this can only be if the people allow the situation to continue unchecked.

The greenness that should ordinarily surround us has withered and has turned yellow because we have left undone those things that should raise our song; the things that should regenerate us as a people with a common destiny and a common goal. As the persona observes, the society is now in a situation where

> The green grows not.
> burst-pipes from sick drains
> defame our paths
> with yellow weed

This is indeed a sorry situation! The situation is such that grass can no longer grow where it ordinarily should because we have neglected to preserve the moisture of the land. All around us is a sickening sight. Our paths are full of human waste that comes from "burst-pipes" because we have neglected to mend them. The drains are "sick" because over time those entrusted with their care have abandoned them since nobody holds them to account.

We are truly under a desperate situation as painted in the poem; and under such a situation the people must seek desperate solutions if they are not to be totally eclipsed by the decay that surrounds them. A situation that has arisen because the people are living under oppressive conditions as shown by the refusal of the "new brooms" to let the people raise germane queries about their situation. And as Nelson (1968, p.31) has observed "… all government is a construct, and if it gives no rights, or even diminished rights, you owe it no duties." What Truman means is that government being a vehicle through which the leaders demonstrate their responsibilities to the led, the led must be in a position to interact with the leaders on the direction that society should go; if this does not happen, then the social contract that exists between them is invariably abrogated.

The most striking thing about the situation presented in the extract is the visual presentation of the sordid decay that appalls the persona and those who think right. We do not just feel the situation, we can see and even touch the decay because the images are tactile; they are visual images. The persona does seem to believe that this situation should mobilize the people into action against those who have created this condition. It is this appalling situation that makes "…the millions cry/as we move back again in time/back to the bestiary and the forests."

The cry of "the millions" is a sign of a total rejection of the condition under which they live. They cannot accept that rather than move forward, they are being taken back to those better forgotten years when the people lived in the backwaters of existence. A time when the people preyed on one another; and as Diop would say, it was the time "[w]hen civilization kicked us in the face" (1967, p.110). An acceptance of the situation would mean that the people have not learnt any lesson from their interactions with the world. That is why "the millions" cannot accept to go "back to the bestiary and the forests". It is all of these that the acceptance of the extant condition the persona presents represents.

The sense of neglect and filth continues in *London Letters.* We find this in the opening poem of the collection entitled "Lagoon" (2010b, p.2). In it the persona informs that the lagoon is infested with "water hyacinth/waste and nightsoil…" This clearly underscores the negligence that has become a part of our national life. As a result of the lack of proper public facilities such as toilets and the likes to cater for the people's convenience, they have turned to the lagoon as an alternative. As a result of this assault on it, the lagoon has become an abode for all kinds of waste. This is a result of the general neglect of the public space by the powers that be.

This sense of the lagoon as a gift of nature that has become decrepit as a result of man's negligence and abuse is further advanced when the poet-persona observes that it has become "the

lordly garbage of our alleys/after the rains/have registered their pity." In essence, the lagoon has become the garbage bin of the people in the sense that the rains wash the garbage and the general waste into it. It is sadder still because this shows the level of neglect in the society. The rains have been personified through the artistic ingenuity of the poet to be the garbage collector in the streets as there is no one to clear the streets of the waste that is generated on a daily basis.

In "EKO - my city by the lagoon" (2010b, pp.8-10), the poet-persona carries the argument further to underscore the point that the society and the people have been abused socially. The persona in the poem says that the abode of the common people is full of "the anopheles" and at the same time it is "malarious mangrooves" (sic) and "she curses the floods and her muddy fate" (p.8). The improvement of the areas where the ordinary people live in is of little or no concern to the powers that be, as a result of which they get no consideration in the scheme of things. The common people live in "malarious mangrooves", in other words, their homes are mosquito-infested as a result of the neglect that is their lot. The people suffer from malaria on a regular basis because of the poor hygiene of their environment. They do not only contend with malaria and the attendant consequences, they contend also with flooding. Mud has become a part of their fate. In very simple terms, the masses have become just an appendage to existence.

The pun on mangroves in the extract is instructive as the persona conjoins man and groove to form the word, "mangroove," through the process of neologism. The word, in the context of the poem, translates to the groove of man, something akin to a temporary abode that has become permanent and so escapes the attention of the powers that be thereby facing absolute neglect of the inhabitants and the environment, thus putting them on the fringe of existence. This kind of situation, in the assessment of the persona, can only create tension between such abandoned citizens,

the proletariat, and the power holders, the bourgeoisie. It is for reasons such as this that Marx and Engels observed as follows:

> The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (1985, p.79)

In other words, tension arises in human society when conditions of existence are unequal and those who occupy the fringes of existence begin to question their lot which arises not because they have not made enough contribution to human advancement but because the greed of some has made it impossible for them to receive adequate recompense for their toil.

The persona aptly captures for the readers the state of the sections of the city where the ordinary people live as

> … nameless waters and cement jungles
> and pot-holed streets weighted with garbage
> and the sinuous haggle of daily marketeers,
> hawkers baking prices over festering gutters
> among scuffling *bukaterias* and doddering *brazils*
> and zinc shack kingdoms in joyless dancing… (2010b, p.9).

In straight terms, the homes of the people are water-logged and their section of the city is unplanned hence they are "nameless waters and cement jungles". The streets are infested with pot holes and garbage. In fact the garbage is so much that it weighs down the streets; and in the midst of this decay and eyesore the haggling of "daily marketeers" must continue for daily survival. The homes in which the people live are nothing but "zinc shack kingdoms in joyless dancing". This is because of the terrible sound the zinc shacks make under intense breeze. It reminds one of

> … the sheet

Of twisted tin shack
Grating in the wind
In a shrill sad protest

of the poem entitled "I am the tree" (Brutus, 1963 p.106). Just like the "twisted tin shack" grate in "protest" so are the "zinc shack kingdoms in joyless [dance]." The personification in both extracts is striking: in both cases, the zinc homes that the people are forced to live in have assumed the lives of the inhabitants, the occupiers, and are protesting the squalor they constitute a part of.

The irony in all of this is that in the midst of this unplanned living quarters and pain and squalor that are the lot of the people, there is a glaring contrast in comparison to where the affluent, the bourgeoisie, live in. These "joyless" "zinc shacks" are "angling for" a place "in the hugging spaces/under hooves of marching skyscrapers". The metaphor in the last part of the extract cannot be missed. The skyscrapers, homes of the rich and the powerful, are like soldiers on horse backs marching with the intention of trampling on the hapless proletariat, or confiscating even the slums that the people call their own. The case of the people of Maroko and their experience in the hands of the Nigerian rich readily comes to mind here. The persona, in presenting this contrast in the conditions of the rich and the poor, expects that the people must work to bring a change in their fortunes.

Conclusion

It has been shown in this study that in his poetry selected for the study, Ofeimun exposes the social and political conditions extant in the Nigerian state. It is established that what he presented is a society where the public good is undermined and scant attention is paid by the ruling class to true societal growth. It was equally shown that just as the streets and the entire social landscape are neglected and everywhere is blighted, so the people are abandoned and their interests totally neglected. In essence it was established that in the poetry, the persona presents a landscape where the common people have been abandoned to their fate; and where

there is some seeming action taken at all, it does not address the plight of the people fundamentally. And pointedly, it was shown that the poet connected the decay that pervades in the society's landscape with the social and political decadence that the people experience.

In spite of the sordid situation that the poet captures for his readers and the near helpless situation of the people that the persona painted in the poetry, he does not encourage them to give in to despair. Therein lies the humanism in the poetry. He nudged them to rise up in unison against their common oppression. It is this unity that the persona has preached to the people in the poetry that their redemption would come from. In essence, their freedom and liberation would not come from deferring in their actions as they respond to the decimating activities of members of the ruling class, but in standing up to them and asserting their own personhood, even if violently. After all, as a foremost African novelist and essayist has rightly argued that, "Violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man." (wa Thiong'o, 1972, p.30). The society, especially the Nigerian society, indeed needs such purification and the humanization of all.

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