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■ Article ■

Armed Conflict, Political Violence, and Poetic Language in Tanure Ojaide's *The Questioner and Other Poems*

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Abstract

Given the tapestry of the history and the polygonal dimension of armed conflict and political violence in Africa, the continent's civilization becomes questionable when one considers the despoliation and decimation of lives through armed conflict and religious violence. Literary studies show that ethno-regional protests and agitation for change in the power structure were responsible for the spike in cases of political violence and insurgent groups. Drawing on enemy system theory, and a close reading of Tanure Ojaide's *The Questioner: New Poems*, this paper describes the nature of this conflict in Nigeria. Specifically, this study attempts to explore the poetic representation of armed conflict and political violence, and how the phenomenon of perceived enemies may have contributed to the increase in such occurrences. A critical analysis of sections of the poem, shows that the metaphors deployed by this poet suggest that armed conflict and political violence in the country are born the psychological need to have enemies and allies. The paper argues that until and unless external power points and various internal dynamics are addressed, the growing tension within the states and regions may continue unabated.

■ **Keywords** : Armed Violence, Insurgency, Political Violence, Poetic Language, Tanure Ojaide

Introduction

In the last decade, there have been many studies have shown that civil wars and political violence in West Africa have gradually become a thing of the past compared with other countries of the world. (Kuerschner, 2013; Marc, Verje, and Mogaka, 2015). Conversely, Marc and colleagues

noted that Nigeria has the highest number of events involving violent Muslim-identified militias in Africa. The statistics of Alexander, Neelam & Stephen (2015) and the increase in political violence and Fulani herdsman militancy show the prevalence of violence in the region. Nigeria thus is well suited to determining the dynamics that violent conflicts have taken in recent times. The severity of these conflicts, the sophistication of weapons deployed by the militants, the manner of guerilla attacks, and the impunity with which these dastardly acts are perpetuated strongly raise security in West Africa. Thus, while arguing that political instability in the region may owe much of its cause to internal factors, Ongayo (2008) “observes that ‘the interpenetration of internal and external factors, especially geopolitical, and economic interests of the international community constantly play a significant role in undermining the very processes and institutions that are expected to nurture democracy and to instill a sense of stability for societal development in Africa’ (2). In addition, Ongayo considers that “political mechanizations, and the predatory nature of African elites, working in cohorts with external interests are major factors undermining stability in Africa” (Ongayo, 2008, p. 3).

Similarly, the emergence of intra-state armed conflicts, communal violence, religious extremism, terrorism, banditry, farmer-herder violence, violent youth gangs, and insurgent groups have been a major source of concern to policymakers. The manifestation of these realities in the sub-region, coupled with the continent's flawed political system, has aggravated the level of armed conflict and political violence in the region. Hence, the death toll in the number of armed conflicts reveals that there is a need to urgently identify the causes of violence to foster peace and economic growth and development.

While the major concern of state and non-state actors has been the need to find a solution to the proliferation of arms in West Africa, it is important to note that the creation of Jihadist groups and the movement of dangerous weapons across the Sub-Sahara through dangerous cartels and porous borders indicate the existence of mechanisms within and between border states catalyze continuing violence within the region.

Regarding the reasons for the collapse of security in Africa, Brechenmacher (2019) avers that the disintegration of Libya after Muammar Gaddafi's death in 2011, the large spread in the quantities of arms and trained fighters across the broader Sahel region, and the gradual toll of desertification have exerted severe pressure on traditional herder/farmer relationships in places like Sudan and Nigeria. Most importantly, he observes that the proliferation of local ISIS and the operation of Al Qaeda franchises in remote and under-governed spaces are reasons for the rise in armed conflict and political violence recorded in the region. Thus, there is no doubt that the activities of religious fundamentalists under the guise of Islamizing the region have spurred the proliferation of arms across the border.

At this juncture, we can consider the proliferation of arms to be a major reason that armed conflict and political violence within the region had continued unabated. On this basis, Obasanjo points out that:

The availability and wide circulation of small arms and light weapons pose the greatest danger to peace and security, especially in our region. These weapons have helped to prolong conflicts, undermined stability, social peace, and security, and have wrought devastation on the economies of affected states (Olusegun Obasanjo ; Jonathan 2018, p. 21)

Additionally, he further observes that the existence of transnational actors and macro-economic elements has invested fundamentalists with invisible powers to carry out guerrilla attacks with impunity which, has frustrated every effort at nipping the activities of armed militants in the bud. Similarly, taking a cue from Chinua Achebe's masterpiece, *An Image of Africa* (1983), political oppression seems to arise from "the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership" (Achebe, 1983, p. 22). It would not be far from the truth to argue that the Nigerian political cycle is subject to the whims and caprices of op-

pressive and vicious political leaders who find it almost impossible to divorce themselves from colonial indoctrination.

Commenting on the oppression of the political group, Flood (2002) believes that the Nigerian democracy “system seems to thrive on systematic disinformation, distortion and historical manipulation.” (p. 50). Thus, one might argue that in Nigeria, politics is always intended to influence beliefs and actions while allowing for self-delusion by the political class and thus, that the lack of true leadership, and the refusal to accept responsibility for failing to secure the lives and property of the electorate is proof that democracy is nothing but a faade. The sharp increase in the number of insurgent groups, violent crimes, and terrorism indicate the need to identify and explore the mechanisms fueling armed conflict and political violence in Africa. Therefore, while there is a need to address the subject of global terrorism in the world at large and the menace of armed conflict and political violence in affected nations, political stakeholders must above all identify the factors responsible for adversity among various groups while searching for lasting peace.

To this end, endemic natures of armed conflict and insurgency as well as political violence have provided an avenue for critically evaluating self-governance. Therefore, this study probes two cardinal questions. First, why have these different forms of armed conflict and political violence persisted in West Africa? Second, what might be explained from the recent dimension of violence in 21st century Africa, particularly the surge in insurgency? Taken together, these questions a different perspectives from which the discourse of conflicts in the sub-region can be explored.

Literature Review

Armed conflict and political violence can be construed in a diagonal term. While one presupposes a group of militias taking up arms against a group of people in a part of the state or the state in its entirety, political violence on the other hand is often fuelled by egocentric zealots who

sponsor violence either to become despots or feed the interest of the Western world. Theophilus Adenyi (2016) aptly captures the premise this research will be built. He views armed conflict as “combat between forces both possessing weapons of war” (Adenyi, 2016, p. 94). Elaborating further, he views armed conflict “as `hostilities of a kind which breach, or threaten to breach international peace and security such as invasions, interventions, border clashes and incursion; and civil strife with some external dimension most commonly with support from external patrons”. Enemy system theory constitutes the basis of this study. It is a behavioral theory that explains the attitudes that result in conflict within a society. Specifically, it focuses on the reasons a group of people take up arms against another, premised on the assumption that human beings have an inherent psychological need to create a dichotomy of either “enemies” versus “allies”. The enemy system theory model explains the complexities of building cordial or antagonistic relationships with different groups. Volkan (1990) explains this as follows:

The enemy theory offers a penetrating examination of how the human mind is reflected in the process of decision making by a large group. It explores the following phenomenon: the psychological need to have enemies and allies: the intertwining of the individual’s sense of self and that of the group’s identity and the concepts of ethnicity and nationality (Volkan, 1990, p. 28).

The theory is premised on group identity and ethnic nationalism in intrapersonal relationship as well as the interaction of individuals with external groups. An individual’s identity and sense of worth are mostly created through the psychological workings of the unconscious. Therefore, group identity can be based on dichotomies created along the perimeters of a tribe, religion, economic class, or party affiliation. This subconscious division of mutually exclusive groups within a country’s population has become a paradigm for building negative stereotypes.

Consequently, an insecure group may likely adopt maladaptive means such as terrorism and banditry to boost their narcissistic injuries and low self-esteem. Volkan's central arguments, are astute and remain relevant, and thus, his theoretical framework, then, is the starting point for my overview of the critical thinking on political violence. Political violence, then, can be explained in terms of the relationship between elected public office holders and their electorates. Here, the hegemonic identity of the ruling group coupled with economic oppression by international community can be considered a form of political violence against Africa's democratic process. In the specific case of Nigeria, group oppression is premised on identity stereotypes of Fulani herdsmen marauding as terrorists and bandits who perceive farmers from the Middle Belt and South West as enemies. Similarly, the insecurity of the feuding parties and the inclination to ensure the survival of the oppressive group naturally entrench the psychological mechanism that allows people to become aggressive and kill another. The significance of the enemy system theory, can thus be discerned in the group oppression and threats of the Hausa Fulani nomads against other ethnic groups in Nigeria. At the core of this argument are the itinerant nomads' victimization of individuals from the "outgroup" and the attendant insecurity caused by their violence. Moreover, their growing aggression and search for legitimate access to all arable lands as grazing lands, I would claim has imposed a form of "ethnic victimization". In Nigeria specifically, ethnic victimization has been a major cause of the protracted problem of armed conflict. Ethnic victimization, according to Montville (1990) is a psychological mechanism that enables a group to become aggressive towards the other in an effort to annihilate them. This perspective provides a trajectory and logic for addressing the reinforced perception of the superiority of an ethnic group over the others.

On the nature of political oppression in Nigeria, Ongayo (2008) believes that political instability in the region may owe much to internal and external conditions. He observes that "the interpenetration of internal and external factors especially geopolitical and economic interests of the

international community constantly play a significant role in undermining the very processes and institutions that are expected to nurture democracy and to instill a sense of stability for societal development in Africa” (Ongayo, 2008, p. 2). He argues further that the “political mechanizations and predatory nature of African elites working in cohorts with external interests also contribute further to the undermining of (security) stability in Africa” (Ongayo, 2008, p. 3). Political leaders become manipulative tools in connivance with foreign interest because they ride on the cocktails of the powers of international powers to gain power.

Kuerschner (2013) posited that the wave of democracy that swept through Africa and the Post-Cold War period left the continent with a seemingly penetrable economy. However, what is crucial to young minds is the unprecedented shift from the initial phase of colonialism to neo-colonialism through subtle means of economic and political control and an “enticing but dubious banquet of foreign aid” (Soyinka, 2012, ix). According to Soyinka, this “chameleonic” assistance has made the African continent maintain a space of possibilities to Europeans and Asians who often operate in mutually exclusive positions disguising themselves as investors, humanists, and technocrats while African political leaders acquiesce with foreign policies without a deep understanding of what is beneath these Greek gifts.

The dominant influence of secular and rational thinking has focused the deliberate and propagandistic manipulation of political happenings in this milieu. At the other extreme, many proponents have been associated with varying degrees of irrationality and the collective self-delusion of adherents of democratic government. Pejorative connotation, and ethnocentric assumptions have often made international bodies question the viability of African countries as being able to have a government of their own when everyday events call into question the rationality behind Africans craving for independence.

The long-standing debate on the sources of conflict in Nigeria is a case in point. The central question is whether there were more conflicts during the military era or under self-ruled government. Marc and col-

leagues (2015) and Adenyi (2016), for instance, list the sources of armed conflict in Nigeria as including: ethno-religious clashes, political violence, the secession of the Igbos, Niger-Delta militancy, “dark swoops” of the military era, Boko Haram insurgency and Fulani herdsman militancy and banditry. Under the afore-mentioned summation, the criteria to adjudge the level of violent conflict and political violence in Nigeria can be defined as the anomie prevalent in all the geographical zones in the country; the unabated kidnapping in every state of the nation; faceless Fulani herdsman terrorizing farmers in the Middle belt and South West; and the Boko Haram insurgent groups. A central concern to be addressed in the context of the enemy system model, then, is the intertwining individual’s self-worth and complexity which determines the cordiality of our relationships with those we perceive as belonging to our “ingroups” and the antagonistic stance we have towards those viewed as belonging to our “outgroup” The dichotomous identity may obstruct national unity, and peaceful integration among all tribes in the country.

At heart, the armed conflict reflects the actions of Northerners in worsening the violent clashes that have bedeviled the nation. In the first instance, could the wave of terror attacks of the Boko Haram insurgent group, and the destruction wrecked by armed conflicts between Fulani herdsman, and farmers across the nation be perceived as the deliberate annihilation or ethnic cleansing of other smaller minorities?

Is there a possibility of religious oppression to the Islamization agenda of the Northern ruling political class? At the horizon of the religious politics of modern Nigeria is a complex interspersed rivalry between Christian and Muslim groups. In this sense the phenomenon of enmity emerges with the killings of specific ethnic groups who are believed able to hinder the capacity itinerant cattle farming. In other words, ethnic cleansing becomes an instrument of the state when militia attacks are targeted toward a particular ethnic group with the sole aim of wiping them out and taking over their farmlands for grazing purposes.

In the context of political violence, Max Siollun claims that the “group’s” challenge of the Nigerian state and demand for major alter-

ations to its structure' (Siollun, p. 232) have been a significant element in the unending armed conflicts, terrorism, and political violence since independence. This, in a way, has engineered a radical shift in the paradigm of the post-independent Nigerians who have been perceived as esoteric and self-delusional. The diverse representation of armed conflict, and political violence mentioned by Tanure, I would suggest, includes a re-examination, and reinvention of contemporary issues while reflecting the African global experience. The respectful engagement with the phenomenon of dichotomization of groups within the nation-state will demand nuanced attention to Western preconceptions and their interference with economic and political issues within the continent.

Armed Conflict, Political Violence, and Tanures Poetic Language (Discussion)

The function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it's about. (Sartre, 1976, p. 14)

Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics? (Ngugi, 1981, Preface)

In poetry, as in other genres of literature, the dynamics of a process of transition rely heavily on historicizing the past with the present and making an appreciable effort to construct a utopian society. The agonizing voice of the embittered poet projects traumatic pains that democracy has birthed in post-independent Nigeria resonating in such works as "Okigbo Listens to New Poets" "When Cheers of Revolution" is sweeping Season of Small Victories. Within the African continent, for instance, contemporary African poets such as Harry Garuba, Niran Okewale, Tanure Ojaide, Safia Elhillo, Tsitsi Jaji, and Jjawangwa Dema have a dis-

tinguished ingenuity underlining their works. In a way, they offer philosophically diverse approaches to addressing the endemic that has beleaguered the continent. Interestingly, it is important to note that the style and aesthetics of African tonality and cultural value is evident in these angry voices. Niyi Osundare notes that one of the defining elements of contemporary Nigerian poets is “(an) incitement to revolt, to disrupt the deathly equilibrium (and) the mendacious peace of a truly violent system”. (Osundare, 2007). In this case, a violent system encourages an ethnic group the presumptive right to convert all available land into grazing fields seeking to turn the geographical entity called Nigeria into “cowntry” where our leaders place more value on a cow’s life than the electorates who voted the politicians into power.

Subsequently, Nigerian poets have not only displayed aesthetic ingenuity in their works but have revealed ‘the stark realities of their chequered experience as a nation’ (Mabawonku & Udoiwang 2016). Therefore, it is instructive to note that Nigerian poetry has assumed a liberal order as a result of colonial and postcolonial conditions. Nigerian poetry has also chosen to look at contemporary events while reinvoking a form of national consciousness, and social re-awakening. These contemporary poets, apart from celebrating the new sense of democratic freedom have berated our leaders for their inadequacies in quenching the flame that is engulfing the entire nation. Invariably, contemporary Nigerian poets are now saddled with the responsibility of constructing poetic rendition toward “Re-invoking the “Warrior Spirit” in every citizen.

Tanure Ojaide’s consciousness of socio-political realities explained the protracted problems of armed conflict in the country. This explains why Awuzie (2017) believes that Tanure’s poetry can best be understood from the psychoanalytic perspective of the poet’s conscious and unconscious psychic realms. A careful investigation of Tanure’s verse forms reveals his “resistance poetics” as stated by Nwagbara (2010) Therefore, we are not surprised that he un.masks contemporary African experiences and social realities in his poetry. The sublimity of Ojaide’s images reveals his polemicist position and the need to reposition the nation’s se-

curity system while embracing an aggressive system of combating violence.

These summations above explain why Bodunde (2002) affirms that in Ojaide's poetry "images are deployed to emphasize the idea that human rights struggle is imperative in seeking to restore the people's well-being" (Bodunde, 2002, p. 24). Confirming Bodunde's position on the nature of Tanure's poetry, Tanure posits in his essay "New Trends in Modern African Poetry" that the generality of the populace has become economically and politically marginalized (Ojaide, 1995). To this end, Ojaide's poetry reflect not only his ecological consciousness but also his sustained frustration. We locate the poet's exasperation in the deftness of his language, his deployment of symbols and, images, and the caustic poignancy of his message.

Conversely, Osundare submits that Tanure is "confident of the place of art as a weapon in the revolutionary struggle (in) confronting social issues with rare single-mindedness" (Osundare, 2007) and, like Odia Ofeimum, nudges and awakens those who slumber while affirming that the return to democracy is something that must be held in veneration in the light of the countless innocent lives that were lost. The annulment of the June 12 election and the upheaval that engulfed the whole nation was an unprecedented event that should not be allowed to pass in vain. However, one fact that we must grapple with is the incompetence of those elected into a position of authority as they continually oil the wheels of imperialism thereby making the entire continent a subject of ridicule.

Tanure, it would seem, continues to be energized by his need to reflect the nature of his society where the challenges posed by the democratic order such as armed conflict, the proliferation of arms, banditry, terrorism, and kidnapping call for political change. Under the military junta, Tanure had published a provocative poetry collection "*The Fate of Vulture*" - as well as an engaging angry poetry collection such as "Labyrinths of the Delta", "The Blood of Peace", "*Invoking the Warrior Spirit*". For instance, where, in *The Fate of Vultures and Other Poems* (1990), Tanure seems to simply emphasize the vicious destruction of our

economy through massive looting by those in the corridors of power, in *The Questioner: New Poems* (2018), he succeeds in presenting the more concrete problem of Nigerian's quest for change from the charade of political deception. According to him, this change should transcend initiated poverty alleviation programs that pretend to bring an end to the array of our country's economic challenges through the political charade that the country is transitioning to the next level.

Tanure's recognition of the genesis of the crises plaguing the nation is unambiguous. The poet chooses the Questioner is indicative of his awareness of the dichotomy existing between different groups in the country. These mutually exclusive and contradictory entities have to a large extent been responsible for armed conflicts across the country's geopolitical zones. In this respect, relative activism must be recognized as a necessary move for Nigerians to enjoy security which should be a fundamental human right of every individual in a nation. Of course, the sustained denigration, and decimation of human lives due to marauding herdsmen and kidnappers could provoke the wrath of twenty-first-century poets as they urge the citizens to make meaning out of this chaotic situation. According to Montville (1990), the passivity of the oppressed ethnic group ensured the continuation of victimization. In *The Questioner*, Tanure reiterates that bringing an end to terrorism, banditry, and ethnic group oppression transcends the mere political promise of a spirited individual. He seems to suggest that there is a need to deconstruct the notion of the perceived hegemony of a particular ethnic group over another if the country wants to achieve a lasting resolution to the violent conflicts sweeping the nation's geopolitical zones.

Equally significant is Tanure's sublime projection of the country's political leader attempts to wipe out specific ethnic minorities. Any visitor to the North East and North Central would observe "river(s) of blood with tributaries" that these marauders have inflicted upon these once peaceful sites. It is not therefore not wrong to conclude that the "forceful amalgamation of unequal bedfellows" has led to the concession of vast tracts of land to the Jihadists, who are predominantly nomadic,

the right to dwell in the reserve of farmers. Hence, the quest is to forcefully seize lands as grazing reserves for cows. While exploring the trail of bloodshed and agony; there is conjecture of the psychological and physical agony that people suffer as a result of the incessant deaths the citizens have to deal with as they are massacred on every side and their land left desolate. The poet persona intones: “God bless them all who do not need to enable / the genocide of other beings; /Let (us) decimate the growing population of despoilers of the land frittering away the land’s wealth of myriad resources; / their supremacy in the House or Rock endangers all. /Let’s fish out the vultures and incinerate the contagion threatening human existence” (*Questioner*, p. 224).

The poet reminisces,
.the butcher herdsmen have
raised blood to drown my home
My mother calls her dutiful son
that herdsmen are shooting, slaughtering,
And burning homes and folks.
One flock of herdsmen and politicians;
The nation watches blood flow
from men and women in bed and not cows;
Fire roasts not suya but my townfolks
Goya.Boko Haram. Herdsmen
A river of a thousand tributaries Mocks Delta’s millennial
creeks
Once fish havens decimated by oil
and now blood of beef-eaters
the cattle herders slaughter
To give cows grazing rights
in farmlands that sustains others
My tearful mother calls about
herdsmen on a killing mission
and I mutter curses at them

who claim our land as theirs. (*Questioner*, pp. 154-155)

Where the Herdsmen have provoked world leaders and international organizations is their abduction of innocent girls, the complete indoctrination of young men and women to take up arms and end up as suicide bombers, and their desire to Islamize Nigeria revealing man's inhumanity to man or indeed reiterate that former colonial nations' bid to expropriate land is a tool for continuing imperialism. The operating mechanism of the Fulani militants represents a 'mangy catechism of impunity' (Soyinka, 2012, p. 75). such that a democratically elected ruler exultantly elevates a singular ethnic group through the principle of an open grazing system, while armed bandits overrun settlements, pulverise villages, rape women, and destroy crops, while the entire world literarily observes in horror the confidence that these faceless killers exude.

It is therefore not surprising that the poet in angst decries the pain in the nation as "copious tears douse the raucous laughter. on the side of the countless casualties in cities, regions, and nations of other beings". (p. 202). In Tanure's *Questioner*, political oppression in Nigeria's democratic dispensation presents a sameness of social depression and deprivation easily recognized in formerly colonized nations, Kenya, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, and Burkina Faso. Political violence and armed conflict incite the wrath of the twenty-first-century citizens desperate to assert their awareness of ethnonationalism in African nations. In this respect, among the litanies of woes of elected political office holders in the continent is their inability to pay government workers, the lack of or poor entitlements granted to retirees, insecurity, unemployment, and the quest to hold on to power. Of course, the sustained evocation of the poet's anger becomes a necessary condition to re-invoke the warrior spirit of "proud warriors in the ancestral savannahs" against "vultures (who) stank of the same deadly habits" (*Questioner*, p. 178).

The Questioner documents the gradual decimation of human lives not only through suicide, but also by the sponsoring faceless killers to wipe out minor ethnic groups and drive them from their ancestral homes.

To a large extent, this has led to the near extinction of a populace whose survival is dependent solely on agriculture. Could Tanure simply have relied on his muse or art for art 's sake to project an aesthetic statement capable of awakening the consciousness of an entire citizenry on the dichotomy in the nation along with the praxis of ethnicity, politics, and religion? Of course not, it is only through criticism that he can unveil the idiosyncrasies of our political leaders and their abysmal failure in combating the socio-economic issues that the citizens have been grappling with.

Tanure's five- part *The Questioner: New Poems* clearly present what could be viewed as the most visible problems in democratic Nigeria. For this poet, these serious socio-economic challenges have prompted Nigerians to commit suicide. As already noted, Tanure operates from his consciousness as a social crusader. Juxtaposing his role as a poet and critic, the poet asserts, "They pass to me their voices to raise my songs. They pass to me their voices in shouts of desperation that massive waves want to stifle in relentless lashes" (Questioner, p. 36). As a statement for micro-dynamics of armed conflict and political violence in post-independent Africa, it is not unexpected that Tanure would jolt us to the reality of economic oppression as he explores the hypocrisy of the Western world especially the monies rolled out by the International Monetary Fund under the guise of helping developing African nations. Tanure succinctly points out that:

They will continue to mock me till I die:
Those who treat themselves with my abundance
While they keep theirs to see them through famine
The trader that regularly sells me into its iron cage
The spare parts man that sells me Taiwan stuff for original
The monkey that tricks me into its iron cage
And jumps from one tall tree branch to another
They will continue to mock me till I die

Who sets me a fish free in a bowl of water and
Knows there is not far I can go to escape capture

Who robs me of my treasures in the dark and by
Day comes in as a friend to commiserate with me.
(*Questioner*, p. 27)

The above lines seem directed at the economic oppression perpetuated by First World countries who despite promising independence to their former colonies, have continued to maintain a grip on them. All the instances recounted in Walter Rodney's masterpiece *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* have continued to play themselves out. Therefore, the poet's criticism of the economic oppression of developed nations re-directs our attention to how Nigeria's political leaders have connived with powers from the Western World and members of their "ingroup" to bleed both human and natural resources of the continent. The groundnut pyramid and the cocoa export and the explorations of oil and natural minerals have caused countries continue to grapple with the problems of economic recession, poverty, and subsequent civil wars.

For Tanure, it would seem that economic oppression by developed nations springs from the Greek gifts given by the West to African nations to ameliorate the suffering of the citizenry. The poet proclaims:

Shine your eyes omnivores solicitors of ship and plane loads
of imports;
shine your eyes omnivores of what is laid out there to seduce
you to gorge
shine your eyes solicitors scramblers everywhere there is a
mountain of work
sliding to bury alive the remnant humanity of my people already
stuck in desires.

(*Questioner*, pp. 196-197)

The constant idolization of the developed nations of the world through a cavalier display of cheap imported goods and visa permits for African citizens are mere tools for pawning cheap labourers to further develop the First nations of the world. Tanure 's concretization of transnational human labor across Africa is a deliberate attempt to present an oppressive system by seriously interrogating the colonized hegemony of the former colonies. In this case, Tanure is challenging oppressive imperialism, in which an insatiable appetite for cheap imports from Africa has further created economic oppression. Thus, if Tanure seeks to envision an ideal Nigeria where economic imperialism has not crippled our nation because we have "incurred more debts than our huge income" (p. 219), then, it seems logical to say that this poet feels that we have been short-changed and oppressed by the hypocrisy of our leaders. Consequently, contemporary poets urge all sane minds to rebel against the systemic injustice of the power structure in the country, while enshrining in our consciousness the need for unity of purpose so that all Nigerians can attain the dream country they envisioned in the wake of democracy.

In "Party Affiliations" the sense of national pride is dissipated as the citizens struggle to become part of the "ingroup" in every new dispensation. Political violence in our contemporary society seems to have taken a centre stage as we "hurl stones" and "fire shots at each other"/ because we are vanguards of our respective parties my love and I can stab or shoot the other on orders/. We are ready to die for the status quo of ours/rather than be saved by the other a change!" (*Questioner*, p. 78). If the predominance of party affiliations supersedes working toward the desired change, then the pendulum of political conflict, banditry, a proliferation of arms, and death may continue to swing freely.

Since political violence breeds insecurity, the citizens lose their self-worth as the destruction of lives and properties becomes a new normal. Individuals belonging to the outgroup oscillate between sanity

and mental imbalance, as they struggle with the fear of not knowing what the next minute holds. The fear is externalized as “I live like a thief in my own house/enter silently and operate as a spirit./I pace the compound measuring a hundred yards / of field exercise to keep my blood pressure in check./I live in a deep hole a stirring crowd/ a poor nation awash with all kinds of daydreamers”. (*Questioner*, p. 105). These factors unarguably act against the imagined freedom the citizens had expected on a return to democracy. Hence, they project the need to stir their consciousness and simultaneously break free from the stark social realities they are confronted with. As a social crusader and activist, it is not unexpected that Tanure would urge well-meaning Nigerians, seeking to nudge our consciousness and stir us from our deep slumber. We are told:

Many in despair are jumping from the bridge to the deep waters;
Others shamed for failing their families struggle themselves or
take an overdose of the drug to die in sleep rather than be laugh-
ed at.

These are workers not demanding their pay for fear of one bul-
let; pensioners wilting rather than demand payment for fear of
reprisal and those with nothing to live for and yet fearing a
shot into the air.

The police do not bring down herdsmen and cows devastating
farms; the army does not fire at kidnappers and robbers infesting
the land.

A fatal stampede always follows when the police upholster guns
Mothers at their doorsteps pick up the wail that rends the thick
air: ‘I don't want my children to die for nothing; they are all
I have.’

And yet so many already die from diseases and unemployment.
Those inevitably dying of hunger run away from rubber bullets,
those dying from every denial refuse to go through fire to live;
all are scared by the bullet that tears the arm and not the soul.

(*Questioner*, p. 217)

We observe, here that fear has not only prevented the citizenry from taking decisive steps but has also repressed their desires to be treated as human beings and not slaves. Hence, it is only natural that only a clarion call could awaken the people see the need to work together to fight against a common foe - our democratically elected leaders. Such an instigation is vital to salvage the nation, since the leaders are uninterested in salvaging the country from the doldrums of poverty, insecurity, and leadership inertia.

“The Bridge and the Lagoon” is concretized so that the poet’s profundity and aesthetic creativity make the rest of the world uncomfortable. Like the questioner, he himself questions the sensibilities of the rest of the world. He irks us and challenges our imagination as he shows us that:

Cadavers of suicides litter the lagoon; folks Seeking everlasting
refuge from their world;
There is scam in the land with so much outside beauty
For the eye to fall for but inside a worrisome sore
The lagoon invites the discontented for a plague;
It swallows so fast only to throw up cadavers.
There is no refuge on land, none in water; only to
deep water do the desperate bring their fears
(*Questioner*, pp. 160-161)

While it is known that violent conflict has shaken the foundation of the country’s unity, increases in the number of deaths arising from suicide has raised fears about the psychological and emotional stability of citizens. Economic recession and poverty have maintained a downward trend since the country returned to democracy in 1998. Consequently, there is an unmistakable sense of agony in the poetry. The poet seems to suggest that not only do citizens commit suicide because their dreams

have been aborted, but that those who are still alive have also receded into nothingness through the spate of catastrophes roiling the country. Tanure seems to suggest that the superficial offerings of the Western World to their former colonies allow them retain their hegemonic position and dominance. This inability of politicians to surmount the challenges to the country's security challenge portrays them as lacking the intellectual capability to shepherd the nation to attains relative peace, stability, and growth.

Micro Dynamics, Violent Conflicts: Conclusion

It is the thrust of this discussion that poetry, like every other genre of literature, is capable of sparking a fire that could illuminate the paths to change. Nigerian poetry after the military junta is fundamentally a narrative of abysmal leadership failure and socioeconomic malaise that has bedeviled the nation. According to Chinua Achebe, the "African writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. He should march right in front" (Achebe, 1975). Thus, the task of awakening people's consciousness to new security dilemmas reiterates Ngugi wa Thiongo's position that "the writer should not only explain the world; he should change it" (Ngugi, 1981). Hence, re-education, and the inclination to change the psyche of the citizenry recur perpetually in the works of contemporary Nigerian poets. The principal finding is that the nature of violence within nation's territorial and geographical space has changed from its earliest known forms. Thus, for Tanure, such a task is necessary if we must have the country of our dream. Therefore, the political, religious, and economic dichotomies shape a dynamics for understanding the complexities of a heterogeneous entity called Nigeria where one group sees the others as "inferior".

Finally, Goodluck Jonathan (2018), observed that "most of the intractable problems which bedevil governance in Nigeria proved endemic and enduring, not because they could not be easily solved or that the capacity to resolve them was absent, but because these problems were

instituted and defended for tribal sentiments which address power points preferences” (Jonathan, 2018). This implies that the challenges in the nation can be surmounted if the people address the inherent psychological need to perceive those belonging to another ethnic, religious, and party affiliation as enemies. In addition, failure to do so will cause these will make the violent clashes in different parts of the country to continue unabated. We can at this juncture safely conclude the cliché art for art’s sake has no bearing in Ojaide’s work as his works not only speak of a particular place but evolved out of the necessities of the present to project the aspirations of the people. Thus, as a panacea for the lingering violence and insurgency in the country, there is a need to address the injustices, and marginalization and violence so as to ameliorate the risks of these extremist groups taking deeper root and plunging the nation into a protracted period of violence.

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