

Oral Artistry and Ojaide's *Requiem for Looters: a Reading of the Fate of Vultures*

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ABSTRACT

Writers often seize on different styles to put across their messages in their artistic productions. Poets are no exception to this mode. This paper dissects Ojaide's *The Fate of Vultures* as a poetic collection that focuses on the gluttony of the emergent leaders of the post-colonial African states. In this work, the poet employs satire in addressing social vices prevalent in society by castigating the perpetrators of these evil practices. It x-rays the impact of art to illuminate on the poetic tirade inherent in Ojaide's collection and submits that satiric poems are genuine and potent approach to redressing and eradicating social vices prevalent in the socio-political arena of Nigeria and African countries by lampooning the offenders.

INTRODUCTION

With Ojaide, poetry is a potent medium through which the happenings in society could be x-rayed and commented on. Presenting his vision for his society in his poetic volume, *The Fate of Vultures*, he explores the oral resources which he adapted for meaning-making. To Ojaide, there is a symbiotic relationship between oral resources and the written medium. That is though a number of modern poets in Africa have their poetry in written form their dependence on or borrowing from the oral traditions is prominent.

In *The Fate of Vultures*, Ojaide deploys biting satiric refrain resplendent of oral art to expose and condemn the socio-political and economic malaise plaguing his nativity. In achieving this thematic engagement, he uses the oral artistic forms through adaptation to launch a scathing attack on the perceived desecrators and plunderers of the land as well as their cohorts. These few but powerful individuals are found within and outside the government as team up to form a powerful cabal that presides over a monumental looting of the independent but economically weak African nations.

Satirical poetry or song is meant to ridicule a person or group whether high or low perceived or caught to be perpetrating acts capable of defiling or disorganising the moral standard of society. It is usually borne out of the response of the people to the bad or atrocious activities of a person or group of people in the society. Ojaide's effective use or deployment of satiric song in his poetic song in his poetic volume is not unconnected with his upbringing in his

traditional background having immersed himself in the art of satiric songs in Udje community. He comments on the appropriateness of the medium further:

"I think I like oral literature generally and I grew up in the Udje environment. These are mainly satirical songs, also of lamentation, once in a while, a few praises. When you have that type of corpus with what has been happening in Nigeria for the past 30 years there is a lot one could use to criticize either government or the establishment. So I think Udje, being satirical, as traditional society, there is no praise sing. One of the forms of control to make people fall within the norms is to sing about them, satirize them". (cited in Bodunde's interview with Tanure Ojaide, 1999).

Thus, justifying his medium and relevance of the satiric refrain, Ojaide says it is an artistic weapon in the hand of a poet of his calling in a society like ours. To this end, he specifically declares without mincing word, his ultimate vision of exorcism embedded in the volume which his adoption of oral tradition has enabled him. "And one of the ways of approaching what has been going on especially in Nigeria and many other African countries, I think is to use this medium to bring out their weakness, expose them, many people would not know and sensitize people. And I feel that by exposing the wrong they are doing, embarrass them and make them leave what they are doing. So Udje comes close as an appropriate medium for the type of period we are going through."

Indeed, in both content and form, Ojaide's refrain in **The Fate of Vultures** are 'fine - filed machetes in the hands of the threatened hurled in all directions at robbers and jungle mortars'(pp.1-2). The jungle mortars and robbers are those pretentious leaders of men in neo-colonial cloak whose sole aim is to corruptly enrich themselves through the apparatus of government.

Satire, Theory and Udje Dance Song Tradition

The essence of satirical songs is hinged on the sociological imperative of art as emanating from the manifestation or perpetration and detestation of social vices in society. This position springs up from the theoretical framework of literary sociology which foregrounds the role of art in societal edification and growth. The theory locates the interdisciplinary relationship between literature and sociology which are two distinct fields or superstructures united at the altar of social discourse. Satire is a subgenre of literature which ridicules social vices in society. The aim of satire is to eradicate misdemeanour through castigation, condemnation, ridicule and exposition for the purpose of exposing, correcting, educating and changing the mind-set of the perpetrators. Its ultimate goal is to court the censorious reaction of the public.

Literature is dual in nature-entertaining and probing in the process of stifling the good, the bad, the ugly and the beautiful. Ogunsin (297-310) justifies

the imperative of the theoretical framework that the kernel of literary sociology is its reflection and affection of society as writers do not only respond but react to socio-political and economic occurrences of their time. Thus literature and society are relational with one a subset of the other or one reflecting the other as the genesis and receiver and encoder and propeller. Adeyemi (98) adds an opinion to emphasise the symbiosis of art and society.

"Literature reacts on society. It plays an important part in shaping or crystalizing the views of the members of society, views about the world, about men and society. It crystalizes the view of society on every aspect of life"

Emphasizing the radical role interms of offering social change, Bodunde comments that "... the strength of literature lies not just in its capacity to stir us into reflection and refraction but that it urges us to accept or rejects social and political values which have become dominant over the years."(19) Satire is a poetic tool in the hand of a writer often deployed to ridicule, condemn, expose and correct social ills in society with the aim of cleansing the dirty stable. As earlier noted, satirical songs are composed in response to proliferation of criminal acts. Collier's Encyclopaedia(437) defines crime as "any act of commission or omission believed to be socially harmful to a group and thus forbidden by the designated authority of that group under threat of punishment". This is the manifestation of all forms of social vices such as corruption, nepotism, teenage pregnancy, abortion, murder, armed robbery, theft, rape, intoxication, power rage, witchcraft among others.

In reacting to the prevalence of social vices in society, especially at the top, the corridor of power in the independent African nation states and around the world, Ojaide deploys satire as embedded in his Urhobo traditional entertaining repertoire.

Oral tradition remains the aesthetic forte from which generational poets of African descent draw artistic materials for their vision as such artistic patterns and content are transposed or adopted into their writing. In Tanure Ojaide's poetic collections, Udje songs tradition of his Urhobo background is one most singular oral aesthetic form which has largely influenced his writings transposed or adopted in terms of structure and themes as embedded in the Urhobo traditions. Udje traditions and traditional songs remain largely oral aesthetic materials which have been with the people of Urhobo of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria before the contact with the colonial administrators. Udje traditional songs were preserved and performed until late eighteenth century before the European colonial exploration dealt a great blow to the culture.

In his article entitled "Poetry, Performance, and Art; Udje Dance Songs of Urhobo People", published in *Research in African Literature* 2001, Ojaide embarks on a literary treatise cum historical account of Udje tradition. He traces in-depth the Urhobo social, political and religio-cultural background. Thus the

ultimate aim of theorizing on Udje dance songs of the Urhobo ethnic group as Ojaide puts it is to rescue the genre from dying and possible total extinction from the poetic stable of Africa. But much more significant than a mere retrieval, preservation and study is to expose one of the most poetic of Africa's indigenous oral forms to the literary and creative world especially its oral existence and traditional artistic form in its multi-dimensional and rich forms. Ojaide is equally concerned with the transposition, adoption, transfer and adaptation of his Urhobo people's cultural heritage whose socio-political situation has attracted worldwide attention, pity or sympathy and widest reactions from across the globe due to unpalatable condition of the people as precipitated by the exploration of oil.

Udje songs is a satire composed by rival sections of Urhobo community and sung to expose and condemn social vices and crimes which may have been committed or perpetrated by any member of society in Urhobo land. Ojaide emphasizes the import of Udje dance songs as constituting a valuable means of social and ethnographic understanding of the Urhobo people who produce and perform them. Taking us on excursion of the Urhobo world, Ojaide provides an insightful explanation of the socio-political and cultural background of the Urhobo ethnic group.

The Udje dance songs truly reflect the Urhobo behavioural tendencies and social traits, civic duties and religious practices. It captures the totality of their socio-economic and politico-cultural life. In the words of Ojaide, "Urhobo people are very republican in character, a euphemism for their individualism which even today makes them rebel against autocracy". The Urhobo world is divided into two yet unified in a complex one. There are physical which is the natural world and the metaphysical invisible world which harbours ancestors, spirits, gods, witches and wizards. The two worlds in Urhobo ethnic group's view contrast and are parallel to each other and yet they are interwoven as their activities correlate. In finding explanations to ailments, behavioural tendencies and happenings, spiritual consultations are made as spiritual explanation is always given to a death or misfortune. For this reason, Ojaide contends

"People therefore try their best to live spiritually clean lives since spiritual transgression have their karmic repercussions. A woman who flirted would confess her "stepping outside" of her matrimonial home or, according to popular belief, she would die from delivery. Sometimes in Urhobo belief the sins of the mother are visited on her children who can become sick or even die. Witches who do evil somehow suffer the repercussion of their acts. People therefore join religious sects like Igbe or do protective medicines to cater for their physical and spiritual salvation. Clans have festival of health and prosperity".

There is a strong belief in reincarnation, fate, justice, repercussion, reward, prosperity, long life, celebration of death in form of elaborate burials etc. Aridon, the Urhobo god of memory and inspiration typifies the spiritual sphere upon which the performance of Udje traditional songs revolves. Ojaide severally makes references or direct invocation to the memory god-Aridon and Ughawa in his poetic lines of several collections acknowledging their looming presence and effigy. Who knows if Tanure Ojaide is not an incarnate of Aridon engaging in the modern day singing mode as a literate poet and Urhobo warrior-poet and activist? Udje traditional songs are multi-dimensional in nature reflecting the socio-cultural milieu and traits of the Urhobo ethnic group as highlighted above. It is both for performance and traditional songs encapsulating a traditional performance. The written song is performed to entertain the people and satirize vices. The performance period is usually during the harvesting period when all tedious farm works have been completed. The performance often takes place at the hall of chiefs, at the shrine and market square in sequence and stages laced with practical, spiritual and social undertone and themes. The performers usually

Dressed in wrappers in a special way with bells, the body was left bare-the performers wore charms so that they would not be tired from dancing. Some parts of the ribs could hurt with vigorous dance, hence medicine was procured to prevent the dancer from getting tired. At Otughievwe up to three groups could dance simultaneously in different sections of town and the crowd of spectators would drift to the most interesting. It was because of this rivalry that each group prepared charm to outshine its fellow competitors. There were instances, from my Iwhrekan informant, when two groups were dancing and there would be rain to disperse one side to the advantage of the other side where it would still be sunning.

The formalistic patterns as well as thematic engagement of Udje dance songs of the Urhobo people are imperative and instructive to poetic forms and implication of Ojaide's collections whether devoted to the Niger Delta issue or socio-political concern affecting the world. Udje dance songs reflect a social reality bordering on several issues, development and philosophical sayings, economic and political issues, social vices and spiritual implications. In terms of content and form, the songs are recursive, creatively composed and adaptable, referential and relational in nature. For instance, Udje songs have historical echoes with references to Nana's war supporting the British against the Oba of Benin in 1897; the influence of 1916, taxation crisis and resistance in 1927 with a mention of names of colonial officers such as Mr. D. Pender; World War I and II, colonial objects like Koko, a colonial Khaki hat Zaqzone, a colonial fashionable shoe popular in 30's and 40's, Bur Dillon, an appellation for the first colonial governor of western Nigeria. Ojaide's words poignantly capture the very kernel and essence of the Udje dance songs.

"The Udje dance songs were some of the means of maintaining law and order. The songs reined in arrogance, greed, and other excesses that are destructive to a communal spirit. Each song tends to focus on one bad feature of a person, quarter, or town Character traits that go against the norm of communal ethos are seriously attacked".

Other traits sang about or satirized include sexual misbehaviour, prostitution, poverty, idleness, indebtedness, folly and stupidity; cowardice, murder. But Udje is not all satire as certain acts are praised. Such include strength and manliness, honesty, industry and respect for elder and obedience. Ojaide says appreciation of the poetic form and techniques of Udje dance songs should be done against the backdrop of the performers' aims and objectives. In all, Udje songs are entertaining and for entertainment purposes. Such has been the evocative lyrics, imagistic pattern, symbolic elements as well as senses in Ojaide's array of poetic collections written and published so far.

As a modern author, Udje Dance Song has had a great influence on his works. What the poet has been doing is the transposition or adoption of the tenets of the practices and the performance modes inherent in the traditional songs. The manner of reproach and criticism of social vices in the traditional background of the poet's place of birth are being reflected in his writings as he adopts the singing mode of his ancestors.

Tone, Invocation and Audience

Like a bard in wailing tone, Ojaide opens his volume on a note of lamentation. He laments the wasted years of nationhood that most independent countries in the third world experience and these seemingly intractable and dangerously slippery political root of a people which Nigeria typifies. In spite of the long years of colonial disengagement, these nation-states still walk lame in socio-political and economic spheres. Of particular reference is Nigeria reputed to be the most populous black nation in the world, the poet, measuring his nation's age, a metaphor for the nation's independence status, at forty, the proverbial age of maturity, it is still the music of pain.

Listen

A fortyish man does not cry in vain

Listen to my song

The music of communal pain. (p.3)

Cast in the garb of a griot archetype, the poet persona tone and language reveal the enormity and seriousness of his avowed vocation. On one hand, his tone is fiery and harsh as he hints his audience of his preparedness to fight a battle of words through sensitization and incitement of his oppressed fellows. He poses as their spokesmen who sings out their varied concerns, their pains with the intention of exposing the baleful conditions imposed on them by 'chiefs of self-rule'. These songs, he declares are not just 'a chorus of resistant cries' / 'to

excoriate the land's scurvy conscience' but 'land's infantry' / 'drawing into its veins' / 'the strength of millions'. The song 'took the cause of the country into its expanding heart' (p.12).

On the other hand, the poet is unhappy as he mourns the palpable dilapidation on the monumental wall of the heritage. He is enraged at those perpetrating the wrongs and their dehumanizing tendencies. The dilapidation is a national eye sore conveying the visual image of rottenness, decay and stagnation. It is a national malaise. It is the poet's desire to arrest the doldrums that he sings out his heart to register his displeasure and sadness. Thus Ojaide finds himself in a mood that is far from ecstatic but sad and gloomy.

*"My blood is no longer mine, it is boiling with anger and
hunger of the land.*

I am no longer just a man, I am human

I am a devotee of the faith of justice,

I wave the borderless flag of unity

I enlist in the army of instant recovery". (p.20)

It is against these baleful socio-political aura and those perpetrating it that the poet invokes the spirit of his ancestors to come to the aid of his people and energize him as he sings to exorcise the land. Invocation is an aesthetic device which Ojaide has borrowed from the oral art with which he opens his song. By invoking the spirit of his ancestral bards, the poet – persona announces his arrival at the public arena thus imitating the usual aesthetic practice by oral artist stepping out to performance. The oral artist usually begins his performance by saluting and paying homage to ancestral bards, older and contemporary artists alive and even the younger or upcoming ones. In this connection, Ojaide, reinvesting himself with the sensibilities of the oral poet, hints his audience of his observance of the rule as a true artist – initiate. He also registers he has not failed to salute and pay homage to whom it is due, especially the ancestral Aridon.

"I invoked Aridon for trails

Of victories against warlords

Who clamped reins upon jaw bones

Of upright words". (p.2)

The aesthetic implication of Ojaide's invocation goes beyond mere homage. Aridon is the god of memory, the offspring and probably the incarnate of whom the poet is. Of Aridon, Olafioye(.4-5) comments on the imperativeness of Ojaide invoking the god's spirit.

In his cultural habitat of Urhobo land, traditional poets and minstrels worship the god of memory....The god of memory needs be assuaged and invoked to grant retention, delivery and invocation. Aridon is a god of memory, an object of worship and an agent of mental or poetic activities who needs to instruct the world on African happenings.

The image of Aridon looms large in the poet's heart from whom he garners strength, inspiration and spiritual support. Aridon is the ancestral fountain, the mythical cauldron and spiritual repertoire of knowledge to whom reverence and obeisance must be given. For all this, Aridon remains the performer's anchor upon whom he leans for guidance in his communal service. And once his performance is approved by Aridon, the poet has conquered fear; either fear of running dry, lacking in wit to spice up his performance at crucial moment or fear of his adversaries. The poet hints at this in the subtitle "The patience of memory".

*"Memory is the god of future
And Aridon tests devotees with patience
Whatever is lost to the future
Will see light".(p.92)*

And going extra-terrestrial by invoking the cosmic forces, Ojaide, in a rather incantatory tone, invokes the spirit of Aridon against plunderers and desecrators of the land in order to rid the country of corruption and decadence.

O Aridon, bring back my wealth
From rogue – vaults;
Legendary witness to comings and goings
Memory god, my mentor. (p.11)

Aridon, mythical and potent, Ojaide besieges the god against corrupt leaders to 'Blaze an ash-trail to the hands\ 'That buried mountains in their bowels\ 'Lifted crates of cash into their closet.' (p.11).

Ojaide's arsenal is his poetry, the efficacy and potency which emboldens him. The poet's strength and bravery reside in flaming words, 'the bite of the desperate ones'. Reverencing Christopher Okigbo, a fiery poet, Ojaide says such is the songs by Okigbo which he imitates. The poetry is sacrosanct as riddled with 'sneer oozing from the face of the slit-drums'. Okigbo is mythical too and so is his service from whom Ojaide draws vitality and inspiration as well. They both dedicate their service to humanity and as such, poetic vocation establishes the link between the duo. They as well dig deeper into oral forms with which they lace their songs and establish the vision.

*"The call of diviners
is first heard in a dream
There no charlatan to confuse
the truth of god's with men's
Certain things to remain the same
To work magic
But that dream is soon forgotten
For a vision of dance
to the rhythm of our songs".(p.53)*

To Ojaide, his songs are not just 'howls of patients'/ 'his lore's of salvation', but that the ultimate end of his performance resides in the manure metaphor for the over tilled, plundered and desecrated land and vice versa. The song in this instance is the healing substance, jabbing at the ears of desecrators and chorusing into their conscience. The first stage is proclamation of their sins and invitation of the public to behold the spoils through biting lyrics and sonorous satire.

*"The song needs the soil
for deep roots and notes:
the land needs the song
to revive its strength
and raise itself
and what celebrated union isn't beset
By one trouble or another?" (p.41)*

Ojaide, with his *algeita*, the town-crier gong addresses his song to two main categories of audience. In this kind of performance, audience in their varied groups is very significant in terms of reception, promotion or criticism of the art. In satiric performance, the particular audience to whom the satire is aimed is usually termed or regarded unseen while he too, the satirized audience is an unwilling receiver of such poetry.

In the title "What poets do our leaders read?" Ojaide admits that these 'rulers' would not prefer to hear him. This is because his type of song is 'a rib-relaxing sigh or 'a grief dispelling chant which when heard makes them 'kick the air; that they become enraged '(demon possessed)', 'needing blood to still their spasm'(p.6.). Buttressing the above categorization of his songs, Ojaide allays our fear that the poor reception of his songs by those supposedly intended does not diminish the potency and the reach of his vision. The poet sees these leaders as

*"Perjurers of the word,
Drummers of bloated drums
Carrier of offensive sacrifice
Fanners of vanities
And their own doubles, the likes
Sellers of tatters". (p.70)*

The second category of audience to whom Ojaide's poetry is addressed are the oppressed, the downtrodden on whose behalf the poet undertakes the voyage. These are the people at the receiving end of the baleful aura pervading the socio-political life of their native land. Ojaide's art is a solidarity with this audience. The poet does not only identify with them, he is empathetic with their situation seeing himself as one of them. Of these audience, Ojaide rededicates his art in the title "My next step".

*"Out of this life, let me fashion strength
to recover the losses of the virtuous heritage*

*Out of my days, let me give birth to new warriors
who will love the abused land with their bodies
with my breath; let me forge a metal shield
from the common will to overcome
whom do we wait for from the chorus of today's
patients
whom do we wait for from the void of tomorrow?"/(pp. 20-21)*

Icons, Images and the fated life of Vultures

Name calling and personality labelling for descriptive purpose and concrete reference is an aesthetic device in oral performance. Usually, images, icons, allegory, anecdotes, wits and fable are employed in satiric songs to veil or achieve indirect referencing; these are often used by the oral artist in heaping abuses, curses and attack on his targets for wrong doing in the society. In the like manner, *The Fate of Vultures* is invested with icons and images with which the poet characterizes his performance as aesthetic pivot for his socio-political vision. Political commitment, no doubt is an embellishing thematic engagement in the volume. The titles as they run into one another capture the misrule, socio-political malady and pervasive corrupt tendencies of the leaders. In his poignant painting of this nauseating socio-political scenario, Ojaide deploys icons and images to give concrete and mental picture of the leaders responsible for the unpleasant development, 'the cabal sharing the booties at the corridors of power'. But first of all, the poets distinguish himself from them as their role in the society are anti-thetical. To this set of leaders Ojaide vows:

*"I would not follow the hurricane
nor would I the whirlwind
in their brazen sweep-away
they leave misery in their wake".(p.11)*

Using animal imagery and allegory, Ojaide calls these 'rulers' the descendants or icons of Ogiso, the Urhobo accursed legendary despot, the plagued dynasty of beasts. He likens them to the carnivorous vultures that gluttonously feed on carcass and corpses, the metaphor for the despoliation and decadence of socio-economic life of the nation. He calls them names which portray them as irresponsible, unreal and gluttonous in their approach to nation's wealth and leadership. The 'chief and his council a flock of flukes,' 'gambolling in the veins of fortune range chickens,' 'they consume and scatter...'

The list is endless as the poet employs several images and symbols and metaphorical names in describing the character and attitude of these leaders to power and wealth. Blood spillage, life snuffing, gluttony, the poet says are the emblem of the 'diplomat soldiers', 'the hyena with blood-tinted teeth; 'bedbug or smug cannibal who doesn't care for the rank smell of blood'; 'the lions and elephants roaming the jungle, 'the image of visionless leaders parading

themselves at the corridor of power'. Sarcastically, Ojaide labels them as 'compatriots' as he asks rhetorically

*"Who does not know of their ritual murders?
Who does not know they fortify themselves
with vicious charms
to live beyond their tenure?
As soon as they had their hold on the land
They upset the custom of truth".(p.13)*

Outlining their antics in power, the poet says the 'warriors have blunted the sacred sword'. Using the metal metaphor, the law is no longer a blade, he says as justice can no longer be dispensed in the land. Thus in perpetrating maladministration, Ojaide declares these rulers are jungle lords who specialize in perfecting their nefarious deeds through their agents. And that the deadly cover-up is symptomatic of the class of rulers, the diplomat soldiers of our land.

*"You will never see the leopard's fangs in the dark
You will never trace the rain-flushed blood trail to a den
You will never catch the slayer by his invisible hand
Rhetoric out shoots cracking guns
Detours lead to no fields of defeat
there's great skill in the craft!" (p.4)*

This is the leadership style often adopted by fascist, autocratic and feudalistic government who subsume under military or totalitarian rulership. That is they are mindful of the public outcry and lamentation and so they try as much as possible to cover up their heinous and corrupt practices. But Ojaide would spare neither the sinners nor their sins. Lamprooning these 'rulers' in the titles 'Players' and 'Where Everybody is King' the poet captures the image of the born-actor on the theatrical stage of absurdity. These rulers Ojaide says are like inhabitants of Agbarha

*"Where everybody is king
And nobody bows to the other
who cares to acknowledge age, since
power doesn't come from wisdom?"*

*Of course, rivalry
has smacked the town
with a bloody face
no king is safe" .(p.58)*

Just as Udje song is not totally satiric it praises good habit, honesty, display of strength and prowess towards societal progress, Ojaide's song is not altogether a satire. The poet recognizes the heroic works of some people even across the continent. His epithets are reserved for this kind of people, heroes, nationalists and singers of freedom, and of exorcism like him. There are patriots

he teams up with to fight the pigs hibernating on the land. They are late Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso whom the poet describes as 'the favourite son, the hope and redeeming gift of the generation'. Or the late Christopher Okigbo who 'has ear for passionate music in the cosmic realm'. Others are Jack Mapanje, Dele Akogun, Silas, the poet's revered student and Mohammed Garbar. Thus in the title 'The Northern Star', Ojaide declares of his songs as

*"Not for Maitashine zealots
... who cannot capture headlines with blood?
Not for the rumoured uranium mushrooming beneath the soil.
... who does not know the eternal myth in geopolitics.
Only for "Gardi"
Who tore down the frontier walls around him
Only for the distant traveller come home
With songs of a new faith
Only for the Northern Star
That absolves the abused land from blindness"* (pp. 46-47)

Bodunde draws a distinction between these two classes of heroes and villains.

The contradiction has always been there, contradiction between the physical man, the man of war, the warrior, and then the man of the intellect, the intellectual. A controversy is always there. The poet belongs to the intellectual class; he is creative, he is not disruptive, his responsibility is to mould, to shape society and to mediate at the front of politics and social forms round. (Charles Bodunde's interview with Tanure Ojaide, 1999)

On these physical man of war, in the title, "The arrow-flight" the 'warrior' in the corridor of power Ojaide places a curse to register his anger further. What the poet goes on to say shows that he is far from being happy or tolerable in his assessment of the unpatriotic activities of these leaders who are symbolized by their war attire and draconian, retroactive laws and fiat orders.

*"May this arrow flight pick wing from the angry wing and pluck
Spider in the centre of his web
The tortoise in his moving fortress
The hyena in his bone-furnished den ...".* (p.16)

Justifying his virulent attack on the selfish heads, Ojaide showcases the end-result of their reign. The poet as well invites us to behold the ill-fated life of the vulture as he predicts their likely end. The purpose is to make others, the rest of us learn from the pit-fall and fatal ends of the bad ones. The poet as well invites us to behold the ill-fated life of the vultures as he predicts their likely end.

*"Pity the fate of flash millionaires
If they are not hurled into jail, they live*

*in the prison houses of their crimes and wives
and when they die, of course, only their kind
Shower praises on vultures.”(p.12)*

The point here is that when their cup is full, the public will rise against them in a popular protest against injustice, corruption and autocracy.

Images of Defiled Landscape and Tattered Monuments

Ojaide holds for his audience the apparition and ghost image of national monuments and depleted natural resources. The poet says the eagle and the flag ‘the banner of the future’ bearing green emblem were once symbols of health and wealth; of fertile ground and common faith in which ‘our adopted name’ resides.

*“Once
a flag
and an eagle
meant everything proud
from health to wealth
the land’s salvation” (p.69).*

Forty years into the existence of the nation, Ojaide says the nation’s monument is ‘a termite / gazing / at a hole in the horizon ...the colluded time scope’. The apparition of the eagle, symbolizing the image of the nation, ‘...known by its perch / a sky thrust of eyes’, is now ‘a gasping eagle/shorn of its proud feathers’. These symbols have become tattered and desecrated beyond our imagination.

*“We least expected the charger
to grow into a monster
within the voracious years
there have been luckless years, years of
self-inflicted tears.
with neither eagles nor Irokos,
pillars of faith
in sight.” (Pp.69-70)*

If Aridon represents the spiritual fortress of Urhobo people, Ojaide hints us of his physical background which is as well mythical. To this land, his fatherland he has demonstrated love by exposing and condemning the socio-political disorder pervading it. This physical environment is divided into two parts: first, there is the delta home of Ojaide, a waterlogged area which invariably is symbolic of his birthplace, cultural and physical upbringing. Of the birthplace, the poet confesses

*My root thus runs deep into the delta area, its traditions, folklore, fauna,
and flora no doubt enriched my (poetry). This area of constant rains where
we children thought we saw fish fall from the sky in hurricanes did not
remain the same My Delta years have become the touchstone with*

which I measure the rest of my life.... Home remains for me the Delta,
where I continue to anchor myself. (1994)

The title 'the praise name' conveys the poet's emotional attachment to this home, his root. The reference to water gives the physical image of the Delta home of the poet. It as well conveys the poet's physiological and nostalgic impulse in which he immerses where ever he sees water. The Delta is as well spiritually involving as the poet and his kinsmen are usually allergic to the sight of water wherever they see the mass flowing. It is a totem for the riverine children of the delta home of the poet.

*"Water". That was my Grandpa's Praise name
water, I am sometimes called...
and as he recedes into
the darkening shadows of the other world
I invoke his name 'Ame' whenever
I see stretches of water, the root
and strength of my blood. (p.34)*

His second home, the bigger enclave is symbolised here by river Benue. But the poet cannot invoke the water here because of its lifeless, lamentable and polluted stretches. It is a conduit pipe of illegal siphoning of cash. Thus 'the bed of Benue, Disrobed of green, robbed of Immeasurable sheets of water' and now 'A sore spectacle,' 'Preyed upon by contractor-masons The ...robbed of its heritage, 'Unable to flow'

Sadly, this land the poet says is inhabited by the 'hyena with blood-tinted teeth; vultures/shylock, a dim star in their galaxy of blood / the Ogiso, a plagued dynasty of beasts'. By their gluttonous and nefarious deeds the once prosperous land now wallops in recession. To this land, all the same the poet has dedicated his service. Pledging his loyalty, he engages in performance of cleansing. Ojaide further demonstrates his patriotic zeal as a poet-activist and nationalist writer whose service is forever committed to the fatherland and humanity.

*"Let this be yours
a simple gift
bigger than public words can buy
wrapped tenderly
with the sweat of care
It is for your patience
that shames your torturers"(p.32)*

Thus with poetry the land could be rescued from all forms of pollution and the inhabitants triumph over all forms of tyranny.

CONCLUSION

The volume is divided into four parts and made up of 51 poems. The poems are structurally linked. **The Fate of Vultures** is a compendium of intricately

woven themes of lamentation, anguish and of anger; theme of love and so on. It exemplifies genuine aesthetic transfer by the poet from oral artistic forms in its build-up. In spite of its biting satire, sarcasm, anger or anguish against desecrators of the beloved nativity, Ojaide imbues the volume with music of hope and salvation as the poet promises that he would not abandon his road of honour as "my stars of faith show flowers to burn out dark clouds"(p.92). Thus, employing imagery, metaphors and rhetorical devices in his lyrical satire, Ojaide reiterates his socio-political commitment. He protests against the doldrums, degradation and misrule pervading the land.

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