

“The Wall is Still Tumbling Down”: Revisiting Dialectics of Dysfunctional Society in New Nigerian Poetry

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Abstract

Nigerian poetry, from the early beginning till date, is predicated on its strong connection with societal happenings within the ambits of its production, reception and criticism. Those happenings which bedeviled and still bedevil the Nigerian society with its ugly impacts on the wellbeing of the people as a result of oppressive political system are succinctly captured in the works of her pioneer poets and recently by the new poets, in lending their proactive voices against what seems to be recurring inhuman existence in the present-day society. It is in this light of situating such decaying society in Nigerian poetry, that this paper explores recurring socio-political happenings in dysfunctional Nigerian society in the poetry of three new Nigerian poets—Dami Ajayi’s *Clinical Blues*, Servio Gbadamosi’s *A Tributary in Servitude* and Su’eddie Vershima Agema’s *Home Equals Holes: Tale of an Exile*. This paper adopts Marxist oriented literary criticism with special bias on Georg Lukacs’ theory of socialist realism in analyzing four poems each, purposively selected from the aforementioned collections. The findings of this paper, revealed that the experiences of the hapless masses in Nigerian society are the main focus through which the poets draw their inspirations from, as new poetic voices. It equally shows unfortunate dispositions of the political class in deepening the plight of the masses. The paper concludes that the trio-poets, through judicious deployment of imagery, share similar interest of exposing evils against the downtrodden by the political structures in Nigerian society as found in their respective poetic expressions.

Keywords: Nigerian society, Dysfunction, Poetry, Ajayi, Gbadamosi, Agema

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Introduction

The unprecedented deteriorating condition of the socio-political sphere in Nigeria was and still is, the backbone that birthed committed poetic preoccupations that surfaced in the oeuvres of her pioneer poets and later manifested as basic engagement among succeeding new poets. Those new poets, in no small measure, consolidate on the tireless efforts of the old generation of Nigerian poets through the use of their creative crafts in bringing to the fore various ills militating against the progress of their society. On a serious note, writers especially poets, do use social parameters as vantage points in their creative outputs irrespective of time and space. This conscious use of social lens tends to illuminate on various happenings which revolve around diverse spheres of human existence and survival in a particular society. There seems to be truism in the fact that works of art do not exist outside the confines of human consciousness and most significantly, its connection to society from where it is produced. Little wonder, that “art is itself a social reality” (Fischer, 1963:47). Since the artist exists in society, he tends not to act blindly on realistic issues that bother him as regards the condition of people in his environment. It is evident that Nigeria, since her independence from the colonial masters has been on the thresholds of many challenges ranging from political, economic, ethnical to religious standpoints. It is worthy to note that significant issues of post-independence disillusionment, military incursion, civil war and its aftermath which resulted to acrimony, poverty, retrogressive living among the populace in Nigeria were points of attraction in Nigerian literary landscape. These ugly situations, undoubtedly spurred Nigerian writers especially poets, to recount them in their poetry as a channel of righting the wrongs which rampaged and still rampage in their present-day society. Thiong’o is very apt in this regard in his seminal claim that “a writer responds with his total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time and being a sensitive needle, he registers with varying degrees of accuracy on the conflicts and tensions in his changing society” (1972:47).

The fraternity that exists between literature and society is endearingly symbiotic. On this nexus, representation of societal concerns in poetic praxis is significantly, one of the basic parameters that underscores the relevance and functionalities of literature. Literature pictures intricacies of human life, consciousness and expression of emotions and these serve as influences towards its conception, production and criticism among readers. Nnolim (2012:7) agrees that every work of art has a thing or two to say about life, has a moral view of life it enunciates and also a philosophy of life it imparts. This opinion consolidates the position of Ker (2004:26), that “if literature is relevant at all, it is because we can obtain some picture of society and of life from it....” Poets are like cameramen thriving in both individual and collective imaginative platforms. They draw their eyes closely

to the camera and capture various images of their society which most times are full of oppression and decadence with culminating pitiable experiences on the people. This manner of articulating societal experiences as ably represented in the literary and creative outputs of poets supports the affirmation of Amuta (1986) that “as a refraction of social experience through the prism of human imagination, the ontological essence of literature is to be located in terms of the extent to which it recycles experience and transforms it into an aesthetic proposition” (38). There is evidence of this potent utilization of literature in recycling experiences of people who are disadvantaged in a socio-political decadent society which abound in Nigeria literature especially in the corpus of her poetry.

Over the years, Nigerian poetry has grown and keeps growing from terrains of engaging discourse of many horrible experiences emanating from the dwindling and socially decaying condition of the country. We find such experiences in the pioneer poetry of Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, JP Clark, Gabriel Okara, Tanure Ojaide, Oda Ofemuim, Niyi Osundare, Ossie Eneke, Harry Garuba, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Remi Raji among others. The above-listed poets and their contemporaries use robust and daring approach in lending their voices against the deplorable condition of the country, all in a bid to better the life of the citizenry. Their works exude in a special way, divergent issues of socio-political interests. Strikingly, the same socio-political thematic preoccupations become central focus of new Nigerian poets with their magnified poetic postures. This resemblance of focus between the old and new generation of Nigerian poets is as a result of reoccurrence of same issues of oppression, conflicts and other inhuman situations based on maladministration by the political class in the present-day Nigerian society. Suffice it to say that the intricate nature of new Nigerian poetry which forms interest of this paper is geared towards exposing evils of bad governance as well as raising consciousness among readers to placating the plights of the masses and to finding lasting solutions for better society. Jegede (1997) contends that “modern Nigerian poetry shows ideological commitment to prevailing sociopolitical and economic changes in the country” (140). It is evident that the masses are always at the receiving end of oppressive mechanisms being unleashed through bad leadership by the political elites who are ought to be responsible for providing basic social amenities and security for the people. On this negligible circumstance, poets become socially committed through their arts for what Agbasiere (2000) expresses is geared “to the realization of society’s aspirations and to the solution of societal problems” (70). Indeed, poets are instruments of social change mostly in time of social degeneration which is obvious especially in the present-day Nigeria. They use their poetry as a clarion call to redirect the vision of the society for the interest of the defenseless people. Obiechina (1988:8), agrees that every Nigerian writer or poet should have special allegiance to the downtrodden in the Nigerian society...to all those who are not able to fight their own battles. He further admonishes that the writer in Nigeria today has to take his position against the oppression of the people, all forms of brutalities and of unwarranted violence against the masses. In cognizance of such precarious condition, the Nigerian writers or poets fit the job specifications of “...interpreters of our culture, the enemy of sinister forces in society, the conserver of our values and the terror of bad [Nigerian] governments” Nnolim (2009:255). Nevertheless, writers/poets ought to see themselves not only as producers of good poetic lyrics but also as tailors and seamstresses in the enterprise of weaving the torn fabrics of any evolving society irrespective of interest, locality and nationality. This new role description of writers and poets per se, energizes their undeterred prodigious postures which in the words of Ogungbesan (1978) rests on “...acceptance of the full implications of being writers” (11). It is only when a writer accepts and understands his or her crucial position of extra-dignified stance that he or she can be viewed from the angle of ideological pedestal, flowing from the spring of revolution for the emergence of new thoughts and living in any society. In this regard, Osundare (2007), affirms that such revolutionary focus of the writer for his society “...enables him[the poet] to chart the terrain of the future with a compass, sensitive to both present reality and the [society’s] past antecedents, a future of possibilities and alternatives” (12).

In view of the foregoing, the chief interest of this paper is to explore the dialectics of dysfunctional society which dominate as recurring motif in the body of new Nigerian poetry. To this end, three new Nigerian poets and their poetry— Dami Ajayi’s *Clinical Blues*, Servio Gbadamosi’s *A Tributary in Servitude* and Su’eddie Vershima Agema’s *Home Equals Holes: Tale of an Exile* which are characterized with dearth of in-depth studies aside this present one, are of special focus in this paper. The justification for the selected poets is anchored on the relevance of their poetry in recreating existing horrible conditions in Nigerian society and fate of the downtrodden in their poems as new poetic voices. In analyzing the poems of the aforementioned poets, this paper shall adopt Marxist oriented literary criticism drawing robust strength from George Lukacs’ theory of socialist realism which beams its torchlight on the reflection of social struggles and contradictions existing in real society. This paper, however, argues that the three new poets illustrate distinctively the dynamics of socio-political decadence in Nigerian society as the basic trigger of catastrophic living among the masses in their poetry.

“The Wall is Still Tumbling Down”: Situating Nigerian Society in New Troika’s Poetry

Ajayi, Gbadamosi and Agema have distinctively distinguished themselves as new breed of Nigerian poets with remarkable resemblance of socio-political nuances and solidarity towards the wellbeing of masses and Nigerian

society in their respective works. The troika not only share same thematic focus of society hooked in decayed condition like their pioneer counterparts, they display profoundly, stylistic grandeur coated with striking imagery in projecting aspirations of the masses on continual retrogression. This condition, in no doubt, emanates from the whims and caprices of bad leaders whose ways of governance are anti-masses. Nothing is more alluring than the unflinching vibes of these emerging poets with their unique voices of redemption for hapless people in tumbling society. Their poems are full of images and by omission or commission, point to the clashing existence between the led and the leaders in Nigeria. Of great importance is the interplay of overt representation of typical Nigerian society and outpouring of shattered emotions exhibited in poetic frameworks of the three poets in their individual poetry collections. In order to fulfill the fundamental aim of this paper which is to explore the evident manifestation of Nigerian society on the state of socio-political decadence, selected poems from the collections of the studied poets shall be used for textual analysis.

Ajayi as a medical practitioner, in his debut poetry collection *Clinical Blues*, explores life in transit from terrains of love, medical exposure, to socially alienated reflections which bring to limelight the ugly state of Nigerian society. There is evident imagery in the collected poems which are full of rage, despondence, and failed expectations in society of the persona. Nigerian society is x-rayed in different dimensions by the poet in exposing the condition of the neglected masses. Those dimensions of societal deformation are clearly shown in some of the poems in the collection. In “Symphonies of a Major City,” resonating outcry of unattainable goals and visions of people in a deformed society becomes the interest of the poet. The persona bitterly complains thus:

In this city,
I stand tall
Short of words,
My face etched with
An expression
My expressions are of
Faded skies and postcards. (1-7)

The excerpt above exposes the high level of disillusionment which bedevils the persona in his city of abode. There is much anticipation of making ends meet especially in a city which is believed to have the tendency of offering great opportunities to the incomers or dwellers. Nigeria is a mixture of both rural and urban dwellers with diverse drive for survivals. As a result of seeking greener pastures, people do migrate from local areas to the cities amidst terrible challenges. Such unfortunate situation breeds disappointment among the masses who anticipate better life in the city. The images of “faded skies and postcards” depict how hopes and aspiration of the people have been shattered by the wind of misfortunes and in the words of the persona, “my suburban appendage snatched fate.../ as providence.../ cuffed my thoughts/ in impeccable arrest” (9-13). People are thrown into a precarious situation due to failed system which limits any form of progress in the city. It becomes obvious that, “men’s miens recede/ into shells/ personalities are buried/ in the earth of anonymity/ shallow unmarked graves” (15-19). There is less or no way of avoiding inflicted dreaded uncertainties by the persona. People’s hopes of better living are dashed and such ignites unwholesome dispositions and vices in society. To this end, “wives are concubines/ husbands are paramours” (21-22). In other words, the nature of happenings in the city is also captured thus, “spivs who live off innocent fantasies/ are also victims/ Dog eats Dog” (27-29)). These spivs who unleash illicit activities in society are the unfortunate masses who have been degraded mentally and otherwise. This situation can be likened to lack of social amenities and opportunities in their immediate society possibly by the government. In such condition, masses seek to make use of any available dubious means in order to survive amidst hopelessness. The persona further captures the horrible situation of his city which gives rise to limitation of chances of survival among the people below:

In this city
Dreams are truncated
Wishes desiccated
Aspirations desecrated
Piled into bleak baskets
And hurled off to wastelands. (30-35)

In “Rain Comes Home,” the persona also recounts that “thunder clapped/ before skies rendered diarrhea/ on hapless citizens who surrendered/ to cosmic beatings in July” (1-4). The existence of citizens in the above context, is on the whims and caprices of the monstrous powers and are being subjected to all manner of humiliation and oppression. The imagery of thunder which sparks off the imminent disease of diarrhea implies that the masses receive bulk of suffering in such a decay society. There is a picture of citizens grudging on the ceaseless beatings of rainfall of the month of July which is full of destruction. This is evident as the persona avers, “Nepa seized power/ morose cries ran across the streets/ while unattended kids drifted out to/ welcome the deluge, willing victims” (5-8). This instance, shows imminent doom among the people. There is an utter disappointment from the ‘willing victims’ of the catastrophe emanating from the mercies of bad leaders who under their watch, “rain is an

amusing detail of the third world order” (13). The politicians become enemy of progress in society due to their failed promises to better the life of the people. In this regard, the persona expresses that:

The politicians are not ready with
Their promised umbrellas or brooms
To sweep the rain’s telltale. Sadly
The urban legend of how the masses
Subvert rain has not been told. (22-26)

The poet, in the excerpt above, makes reference to the two major political parties in Nigeria through their respective symbols. These include; the people’s Democratic Party (PDP) being represented with her symbol ‘umbrellas’ and All Progressive Congress (APC) with ‘brooms’. The duo is unable to salvage the unfortunate situation of hapless citizens through their unfulfilled promises. Without mincing words, citizens despite the socio-political condition in the country survive which remains mystery to all especially those callous leaders and politicians. Also in “Golgotha,” there are echoes of derailment which dashes aspirations of the people in a declined country. The persona cries out:

There is also a tourist
Attraction domiciled
In my homeland called
Golgotha...
Indeed any place
Will suffice
In so far it lies
Within the confines of
Flora’s christening. (1-15)

There is a biblical allusion in the excerpt above. ‘Golgotha’ is a land in the bible where Jesus Christ was crucified. It is known as a land of sorrow. The poet uses such place and likens it to Nigeria to show how sorrowful his country have been thrown to due to bad leadership. Nigeria which was christened by the wife of the first British colonial governor-general of Nigeria, Flora Lugard, seems to be thriving on difficulties which have made her turned to tourist attraction of pitiable experience to all and sundry. Such circumstances, no doubt, cast the image of the country in negative light before the international community. The persona confirms thus, “and our brochure/ is replete with captions/ culled from foreign dailies/ garnished with garish images” (16-19). The poet goes ahead to narrate clear evidence of harsh situations of the masses in the country. The poem reads, “indeed our brochure is/ nothing like firsthand experience/ have your pale buttocks been scorched before? / have you ever been in a soup/ seething with quotidian savagery? / have you committed larceny/ with or without a PhD” (23-29). One can imagine the level of discomfort among the citizens in their homeland irrespective of one’s level of education and exposure. The poet poses rhetorical questions about the ugly state of living in his society. This becomes obvious through images of ‘pale buttocks been scorched before’, ‘been in a soup’, ‘quotidian savagery’ and ‘committed larceny’. The entire country and her citizens are thrown into turmoil with no hope of survival in sight. The poem further reads:

In Golgotha
Survival descends upon you
Like a dove
With Avian Flu
And you transfigure into
A famished swine
Gorging on a plateau of garbage. (39-44)

The excerpt above depicts an illusion of survival of people in the country. There is a metaphorical undertone in the deployment of imagery which suggests chances of better living being infested with endemic disease of ‘avian Flu’. Instead of eking out a good standard of living, efforts of the masses are turned into nothingness and unmitigated depression. In “Diagnosis,” there is an emotional outburst by the poet as regards unachievable dreams in deranged society due to hostile influence of a failed system. The persona asks:

So tell me of a tomorrow
Different from today
Of facilities lurking in
The eaves of midnight
Of flurry and encomium
Poured from gourds of integrity
Into paper cups for the masses
Tell me of yesterday

Of barns of history
Looted like our heritage
And stowed away into a global show glass
As collector's items. (1-12)

The poet writes concerning the impossibility of having better days in future since the present has been marred with strained memories and punctured experiences in his society. There is much display of ignorance on the fate of the masses among proud leaders which are meant to salvage the plights of the former. Of great interest is the recurring issue of lowly people being short-changed in the scheme of things in Nigerian society, such issue are being misrepresented by the machinery of the oppressive government outside the boundaries of the country thereby making the masses to suffer unabatedly. This condition of the masses finds obvious expression on the words of the persona:

Tell me of today
The cost of being human
When inflation meagres wage
And joblessness is cosmic employ
Tell me of hopes dashed and
Dreams held hostage in the house of stunt
Expectations aborted in their first trimester. (17-23)

The above instance, shows the true state of disillusioned society where hardship keeps knocking on the doors of hapless masses. Economic downturn as well as joblessness becomes the order of the day with hopes, dreams and expectations shrinking to extinction. These ugly incidents are as a result of bad governance and legislation which is bedeviled with bribery and corruption as the persona puts it, "tell me of hollow wallets and/ *Ghana-must-go* brimming with *amala* treasures/ tell me of propagandas and agendas/and wars fought with chairs over bills" (25-28).

In the same light, Gbadamosi's *A Tributary in Servitude* espouses the decadence which traverses the soul of an individual and that of his society on brink of diverse puzzling subjugation. It combines nuances of human struggles and suppressive forces that make life suffocate in the world of meaningless. The poems in the collection are imbued with images of lachrymal and protest. The poet displays in an astonishing way, uncommon mastery of the art of poetry through judicious use of lachrymal imagery in his poems. It is clear that the situation of the Nigerian society in which he exists, is one full of despair and cry as replicated in some of his poems. "Irritations in the Oyster," reveals the magnitude of social-political danger in Nigerian society. The persona complains that, "the water tumble on/ into the heart of coal" (1-2). The image of water tumbling in the heart of coal shows rash condition in the country which the persona lives that is uncontrollable. He further accounts that, "my country wobbles/ fumbles, tumbles, crumbles/ my country rumbles and my waters tumble on" (6-9). The catastrophic situation of the poet's country whose aftermath affects the unfortunate individuals or citizens is brought to the fore. It is pertinent to state that decline in any sphere of economy, most times has significant impacts on the inhabitants of the country. Nevertheless, this gives rise to unrelenting demonstration of hopes against all odds by the citizens in restoring the lost glory of the country which is believed to have fall "into the waiting moulds of ruin/ in the woods" (10-11). The persona captures thus:

Into the waiting moulds of ruin
in the woods
finally, the egg hits the rock;
I have danced to man-made tunes
slowly my feet withdraw. (29-32)

The excerpt above shows the unbearable extent to which social abnormalities in the society of poet cannot be tolerated. The persona understands that his predicament is attributed to inadequacies of reckless elites at the helm of affairs. Under such condition, he sees the need to agitate for freedom among the masses as presented thus, "a force, magnetic and fanatic, invites/ free hands to freedom" (42-43). The poet also admonishes that the affected citizens should take the bull by the horn. He says, "unsheathe your sword for sharpening/ for your mission" (57-58). The essence of this clarion call from the poet to the masses is to put hands together in order to offstage their common oppressors and enemies towards a better standard of living. The poem reads further, "your wears shall be lion-skin/ your food, wild-honey/ and out of every eater that dares to roar/ shall you make a meal of red-fresh meat" (59-62). No doubt, the poet raises consciousness among the people to be stern in their revolutionary stances against bad leaders and their government. Those crops of bad leaders, most times, initiate policies and laws that are not favourable to the masses. In spite of such unfavourable moments, the masses always devise means of survival. It is against this backdrop that the persona, voices that, "there are many motions in the parliament of termites/ but none shall be law unto thine stone..." (68-69).

In "Sorrow, Tears and Blood (v)," the poet also brings to limelight a war-torn society existing on the guise of democracy and its consequent impacts on hapless citizens. The persona accounts such warring experience:

And the rumble of war is ceasing
leaving rubbles of war everywhere
a new god to which we all assemble
her flag flying at the shrine
Annually we celebrate empire day
we laugh happily with our sad mouths,
annually we march heartily,
relieving the beginning of our woes. (1-8)

There have been issues of political, religious and ethnic wars in Nigeria. Such crisis-ridden condition portrays a country in dysfunctional existence. Enmity becomes the order of the day as people now see themselves as birds to devour due to their divergent conflicting affiliations. Despite this level of distorted unity, celebration of the real 'freedom' of nationhood becomes a mirage because it seems that each day begets another moment or memories of crisis. To that effect, the persona complains, "our eyes are wrinkled riverbeds/ where harmattan fires reign.../ a cry that has refused to die" (9-11). The poet creates the imagery of agony where eyes are being wrinkled, harmattan fires burning which oftentimes defile control as well as undying cry among the masses. Some citizens become unfortunate in striving for survival in the country owing to large scale of calamities that rampage them. The poet writes:

A land of sorrow, tears and blood
of hundreds of thousands dropping,
dropping under the weight of ivories
on the seaward march. (20-23)

The images created in the above instance, show the amount of death toll in dysfunctional society. Some of the citizens become victims of violence. One begins to question the leverage of self- rule on the betterment of the masses since the latter only enjoy ill-fated freedom. The persona accounts that, "our blood was the brilliant rum/ that lifted our spirits a little above freezing point" (46-47). Nigeria as a democratic entity, to some reasonable extent, seems to have failed in terms of good governance. People are being killed without recourse to the sanctity and sacrosanct of human life. In this regard, the poem reads that, "the banner of democracy is an emblem of death/ borne by the master purveyor of /violence worldwide..." (60-62). Suffice it to say that people are subjected to utter psychological alienation amidst the fluctuating current of democracy. The peoples' dreams and aspirations are shattered through the hidden destructive element of democracy in Nigeria as portrayed in the poem. Also in "Black Orchestra (I)," the persona expresses the ugly experiences of masses living in degrading Nigerian society:

The traces of last season's holocaust
have been swept into galleries,
fed into museums
The umbilical cord is broken
the foetus mourns indecipherably
to the walking carcass for salvation. (1-6)

This unbearable existence of the masses has become a monumental and destructive legacy in the country and such brings about bad reputation to the leaders and governmental institutions. This also amounts to disunity among the people either on religious or ethnic viewpoints. One begins to imagine the fate of a country and her citizens in a condition as 'walking carcass for salvation'. No doubt, the entire country, in such condition, definitely dwindles to utter doom including her citizens. The persona accounts that, "a grenade spits in the face of/ the cannon, the cannon/ responds with a massive blow/ a bird, metallic/ rises and showers abuses/ on the somnolent walkers" (13-18). The citizens are at the receiving end of the 'grenade spits' from bad leadership. Furthermore, the poet presents the unruly dispositions of some politicians in the country in the light of socio-political decadence. During electioneering campaign, they lure voters to their favour with a lot of unending and unfulfilled promises. In other words, conflicts abound among political parties towards political attainment which affect the general welfare of the land. The persona accounts that, "after each campaign/ the triumphant ones harass/ the air with belches and farts" (22-24). The aftermath of political struggles always throw the country into turmoil. The masses in the land are subjected to state of gradual extinction through deadly instrumentality of some politicians and leaders at the helm of affairs. The persona outcries the condition of his society in sorrowful situation below:

The land still wears a
mask of boots and the morbid
footprints of a splintered fraternity
The land, my land is wet with mourning
the stench of death imprinted on her
breast with each passing foot. (25-30)

In "Thunder among the Hills (VII)," there is also evident of tumbling society with a lot of negative effects in the life of the masses. The poet shows various activities thriving in his society. Those activities echo in the voice

of the persona thus, “burnings and lootings/ lying and shootings/ down the precipice/ vain clamour ushers us into/ another reign of mortars, of thunder” (1-5). This excerpt, shows a typical Nigerian society where mayhem and corruption have eaten deep into her fabric of existence. In fact, such society according to the persona is made up, “of festivals of anarchy/ and indoctrination of evil” (14-15). The poet is much concern of his society which is in a total shamble. Furthermore, the persona bitterly cries out, “elegy in which I, myself/ shall spill my blood/ await my resurrection/ from the land of stones” (21-24). The state of the persona’s society is captured thus:

The rain dangles on thread
in between the hills
stones lookup to stones
hills behold hills
and war is born
and hell is born
the dragons unleashed.... (27-33)

The above lines, succinctly present intricate apocalyptic existence of the poet and hapless masses in Nigerian society where “rain dangles on thread”, “stones lookup to stones”, “hills behold hills”, “war is born”, “hell is born” and “the dragons unleashed”. These unfortunate happenings thrive unabatedly thereby making the country not safe for her citizens and foreign visitors.

It is interesting to note that Agema is one of the outstanding voices in new Nigerian poetry. He is a poet with dignified exilic imagery with simplistic command of poetic language. Without mincing words, such masterly endowments are evident in his collection *Home Equals Holes: Tales of an Exile*. This collection explores trajectory of dislocation of a poet from a homely existence in a country full of alienated relationship between an oppressive system and her citizenry. In “The rights,” the poet exposes the evils in society where man’s fundamental right to life is being denied due to crisis in Jos which is one of the mega cities located in the North-central part of Nigeria. The poet sees himself in a society where lives of the masses are short-lived due to negligence of the government in protecting the former. In this regard, the persona asks:

The rights?
Yes, you killed them in the fights.
Oh! There was no fight?
Oh! Yes, you simply smashed us with your might
The child sucking at a breast
had his soul fiercely laid to rest,
milk all he sought
a bullet was what he got. (1-8)

The excerpt above depicts the state of the persona where people’s rights are tempered as a result of crisis that besieges his society. The image of suckling child whose ‘soul fiercely laid to rest’ suffices in this regard. Not only is the child’s experience in such crisis-ridden situation wrongly shaped, he is also cut short in his prime. This circumstance is attributed to the negligence and incompetence of the government in power to trace the sources of the crisis in order to curb its reoccurrence. The persona echoes:

But forget the rhymes
of red that kills our total green. Punish the crimes
of the elephants and cattle trampling on us
destroy this flowing evil at its source! (9-12)

In this excerpt, there is an outcry for the punishment of bad leaders being represented with ‘elephants’ and ‘cattle’ who are frustrating the life of the masses amidst crisis. It is believed that serious tackling of such bad leaders, will lead to end of turmoil in poet’s society and if successfully done, in the words of the person, “we shall rise, never to fall/ and once more be the peace...” (15-16). In “Turn times,” the persona recaptures the exilic experience of hapless masses in Nigerian society. Some people become despondent in their own country. In his desolate state, the persona says:

What movement steals your thoughts?
There goes a hand with a firebrand
set for your heart
watch it come
listen to the cardiac codes racing from
the sound of beats that drummed off our peace. (1-6)

The persona poses questions and interrogates with supernatural forces over the situation that has dampened his spirit in his society. He is psychologically deranged which prompts the decline of his humane thoughts that vanishes ‘from the sound of beats’. This, therefore, costs him peaceful mind alongside his contemporaries in such society. The poem also captures the irony of existing in accidental affluence among people in Nigerian society. It reads, “in the turmoil of home’s paradox/ pulsating poverty where wealth wears locks” (7-8). The persona beckons

on the people to revitalize their zeal to face the challenges of exilic mindset which they have been exposed to in their very country as shown below:

Now, let the marks burn you
drained fish in oiled waters!
Let the time growl, let it howl
pounce, defeat and eat you evil exile
even as desolate developments
continue to bite your very being! (9-14)

Also in "Patriot song," the poet explores the uncertainty of hope amidst unwavering love for one's own country. The poem opens thus, "astride a lengthening ill/ I sit, a patriot divided/ lost in the love of a home/ stifled to rubbles/ a nation stifled to the ground" (1-5). The persona in the excerpt above is subjected to state of difficulties even on the verge of displaying his undying love for his country. The scourge of difficulties which manifest in his society is 'stifled to rubbles' and by extension limits the expectations of the citizens. The persona recounts his experience which he believes, "brings fresh memories/ wrapped in green plantain leaves/ growing yellow/ and withering again/ to dust" (12-16). There are images of recurring of lost hope and degradation as good memories of better living in once pristine society void of despondence keeps 'withering again to dust'. The persona further expresses:

A patriot
I sit watching
Loving anew
My country who killed my country
In forced contentment
Smiling bitterly at a unity
I wish not now
One I wish had been mercifully
Spared but which was
Paid for in full
In the currency of souls
Never to be recovered again
Lost in dreams never to be realized. (20-32)

There is a restoration of hope in the persona's tone towards upholding the spirit of patriotism. He loves his country not minding the current rash experiences. This shows that despite the ugly state of the poet's country, he is left with no option than to love his country. It is evident that the unity of the country is in total jeopardy owing to the abnormalities thriving among the class of people which is made up of the oppressors and the oppressed. This, in no doubt, brings about total bitterness and acrimony in the country. The persona, most time, not only wishes he is never part and parcel of such distorted history of a country existing on the brink of disintegration among her people, he sees himself as a beacon of hope of such country where he 'in the currency of souls/ never to be recovered again/ lost in dreams never to be realized'. He solemnly takes the message of redemption with hope to his fellow citizens facing such horrible condition in the country. The poet writes, "a patriot/ I smiled to my brethren.../ but to content to 'enjoy'/ accompanying tones/ orchestrated by a history/ that leaves a permanent hand/ on the chin of my mind..." (33-44). Based on the above lines, it clearly shows the message of the poet concerning Nigerian society and her citizens thriving in great difficulties for survival.

Furthermore, in "Memories started never die," the poet echoes pitifully concerning bad experiences in Nigerian society which never, "vanished before the clock's tock/ a baptism to end sufferings/ establishes testimonials/ in statues and memories" (3-6). The persona exposes thus:

The best gets the worst
the blazing furnace of inspired honour
freezes to a slow dishonour
where poverty kisses honesty
Tributes are poured like libations
taken to a shrine
where the best are sacrificed
on the altar of greed
fat wads clearing what conscience
time might have built. (7-16)

The high level of moral degradation in the poet's society is shown in the above lines. There is a gap between the struggles of better living through various approaches in his society. While the best brains suffer to maintain integrity, the 'never-do-wells' take all the honour, thereby encouraging mediocrity in the country. It is really regrettable that sincere and best people 'freezes to a slow dishonor/ where poverty kisses honesty'. It becomes a

normal routine where tireless efforts of some of the best citizens are also not well appreciated due to greediness and decay that have overwhelmed the entire structured pattern of corrupt people living in the country. Bribery and corruption is the watchword. The 'haves' use 'fat wads' to buy over their way in order to acquire anything of their choice at the expense of the downtrodden even when the latter are at their best capacities and abilities. In the same vein, the persona expresses that, "as fine men fall like grains/ through the sift of the sand glass/ time comes to wash off corrupt thoughts" (17-19). As good people keep being shortchanged in the poet's society at the whims and caprices of the corrupt political elites, it becomes a source of reflection on the realistic existence of humans in an unfair socio-political entity. This reinforces the insight of the poet in recollection of his defaulted memory of an ill-fated society as he writes:

We live on the foundations
of their memories
whose essence built our lands
the grave would call
and memories would be all we have
hopefully enough to save our land and save us all. (23-28)

The persona in the above lines, understands the true essence of pitching one's tent on the foundation of endearing citizens with moral uprightness towards surviving in a harsh Nigerian society. Such category of people and their great memories keep reinvigorating the hope of the country and her disadvantaged citizens. There is no gainsaying the fact that such memories of people of sound and reserved character do re-engineer the spirits and consciousness of the masses towards freeing themselves from all manner of oppression and subjugation emanating from inordinate dispositions of the political elites in Nigerian society as captured in the poem.

Conclusion

The main thrust of this paper has been on the exploration of poetic praxis of three new promising poets—Ajayi, Gbadamosi and Agema in the league of Nigerian poetry towards establishing the interface of resurgent socio-political decadence and Nigerian society in their respective poetry collections. Like the pioneer poets and their poetry, the trio in their poetic messages, successfully brings to limelight those recurring and trivial dysfunctional issues bedeviling their society. This paper anchors its strength on Marxist theory from the standpoint of George Lukacs' socialist realism in carrying out the analysis of the selected poems. Based on close analysis of the selected poems, it is evident that the experiences of the hapless masses in Nigerian society are the main lens through which the poets derive their inspirations from, as new voices. The findings of this paper, succinctly revealed unwholesome dispositions of bad leaders and political elites towards the plight of the masses. In other words, there is a revitalization of hope in their messages in similar manner, for the restoration of deformed society from the hands of its oppressors. The poets judiciously employ various figurative expressions in creating images which are oppressive and hope-resurrecting in nature. Significantly, this paper provides room for continuous interrogation among poets and critics as regards the condition of the downtrodden or oppressed people in dysfunctional society which is evident in Nigeria and other parts of the world today.

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