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Poetics of Disadvantage and Dissent: Representations of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry

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Abstract

Nigerian poetry has consistently engaged issues affecting disadvantaged individuals and groups, shedding light on their impoverished conditions, which the ruling class often ignores. This paper explores the interplay between poverty and social exclusion in contemporary Nigerian poetry, examining how poets deploy figurative language, imagery, and motifs to depict the manifestations of these issues and suggest ways to combat the scourge. The paper focuses on the poems of six Nigerian poets drawn from an anthology entitled *25 New Nigerian Poets*. They include Kabura Zakama, Segun Akinlolu, Toyin Adewale, Sunday Ayewanu, Unoma Nguemo Azuah, and LOC Anene. The methodology adopted is textual analysis which emphasises poetic devices, imagery and figurative language as means of representing the disadvantaged persons in the poems. Drawing on post-colonial otherness theory, this research analyses the ways in which Nigerian poetry portrays the experiences of disadvantaged groups, including the deprived, destitutes, the starved and the servile. Through analysis of the poems, this paper reveals poverty as a key driver of social exclusion. It discovers that in depicting the predicament of the poor, the poets unwittingly dwell on the socio-economic conditions that set social exclusion in motion. Through a critical analysis of Nigerian poetry, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between poverty and social exclusion,

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and artistic expression, highlighting the power of poetry to challenge dominant discourses and promote social change. The paper concludes that poverty and social exclusion manifest through deprivation, destitution, starvation, and servitude, and suggests that these can be combated when the poor embark on protest and use physical violence to dislodge the hegemonic system which impoverishes and excludes them.

Keywords: Nigerian poetry, poverty, social exclusion, post-colonial otherness theory, protest, physical violence

Introduction

Poverty and social exclusion are endemic issues in Nigeria, with millions of people struggling to access basic needs like food, water, shelter, and healthcare. These issues are deeply entrenched in the country's social, economic, and political fabric, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage and inequality. Nigerian poetry has long been a powerful medium for expressing the experiences and emotions of those affected by poverty and social exclusion. Despite its prevalence, poverty and social exclusion remain inadequately addressed. The country's literary landscape, including poetry has only begun to scratch the surface of these issues. Furthermore, existing research has largely focused on the socio-economic and political aspects of poverty and social exclusion, neglecting the cultural and artistic expressions that can provide unique insights into these issues.

The concept of poverty and social exclusion permeates contemporary Nigerian poetry and social discourse. Although both are separate experiences, yet they are inextricably related. Both terms defy any specific definitions due to their multi-disciplinary approaches and usage. Many studies have established the link between poverty and social exclusion that one cannot speak of the one without implying the other, because they construct the idea of social precarity (Dai 1-23; Warren 1-16; Dawaki). Thus, social exclusion in the view of Panda et al., "entails a group of people or a community who are excluded from everyday activities" (3). This definition draws attention to some sort of inhibition or hindrance. Esther Dermott renders it better when they explain that it involves exclusion from "mainstream society" and causes "a loss of economic and social potential" (10). Dermott draws attention to the disadvantage that those excluded suffer. Social exclusion refers to "a process that deprives household or individuals of resources like income and social relationships with the wider society or community" (Bhattacharyya 1). The implication of this definition is that those considered excluded are cut off from others, especially members

of their society on account of poor financial or economic fortunes. The various views on social exclusion are insightful and helpful. However, the term is employed to mean, among others, the condition of helplessness, absence of financial provision, the entrenchment of starvation, material deprivation and destitution. All these construct the predicament of the poor in Nigeria.

This paper adopts post-colonial otherness theory. Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak are the proponents of this theory. They employ it to explain the relationship between the colonial overlords and the colonised people. In the words of Spivak, otherness refers to "a process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes" (171). Otherness constructs the idea of marginalization, exclusion and even colonisation of the people. Therefore, the "other" refers to the colonized people or those excluded from freedom and privileges.

Nyongesa et al., have examined otherness as a term associated with "the political and racial marginalization of groups" (1). They add that "otherness focuses on any placement of groups at the margins without emphasis on the political and racial elements" (6). What this assertion means is that two key factors shape the thought of otherness. They are political might and racial superiority. The super power lords it over the perceived weaker power. This generates a widening divide between the enslaver and the enslaved.

Anita Dimitrijovska-Jankulovska and Milica Denkovska explain that: "Otherness has been concerned for those who occupy the subordinate position in society, which have been presented as inferior in terms of knowledge, and abilities" (47). The term otherness describes the representation of the subordinate or those perceived as inferior or even weak. Otherness is all about socio-political and economic perception of people. When perceived as inferior, then the said other is treated inferior. Certain parameters are used for this categorisation. They include knowledge and ability. Based on these two, the other category is adjudged less capable, educated, advanced, civilized and merciful.

Salma Ahmed Abdulmagied provides a deeper perspective when the scholar explains that "othering creates social barriers between a person or a group of people and society" (112). It is a known fact that otherness bifurcates society into two groups: The first is the dominant and the second is the dominated. Through this social demarcation, the pertinent qualities of the group can be predicted. Additionally, Abdulmagied explains that "The other is not someone that is not part of us but is

someone or a group of people that are intentionally being situated outside the society" (113). This fact draws attention to the deliberate nature of those who exclude a section of the society for whatever reason.

Marja-Liisa Wallenius considers the concept of otherness as: "This idea outlines the relationship different groups have with each other. One's 'self' is defined and strengthened as it is compared to the 'other' who is considered an outsider or different. The 'other' is whatever the 'self' is not" (1).

Running through Wallenius' position, like several others already reviewed, is the idea of social exclusivity. This presupposes that two groups exist, the self and the other. As Wallenius has conveyed in the statement above, the self is often the dominant group while the other is the dominated one. Also, the other is the unaccepted or excluded from the self.

Nell Irvin Painter defines the social dichotomy between the self and the other through pronominal representations: "Most commonly, pronouns convey the boundaries between 'we' and 'them' through the use of first and third-person plurals. 'We' belong, 'they' is the other and cannot belong" (7). The most considered tools for expressing otherness are the pronouns. They are the "we" and "them" pronouns. The "we" are the preferred and the acceptable form. The "them" are the unacceptable and rejected group. But the "we" refers to the self and it is the accepted group.

Contemporary Nigerian poetry has evolved from merely representing society, culture and tradition to interrogating issues that confront the people. It has further shown evidence of breaking away from the cycle of lamentation and disillusionment to entrenching the culture of activism as indexed in essays by Lizzy-Jane Onyebuchukwu Egbumien (119-127) and Godday Eronmonsele Ehimen (250-261). Given the nature of contemporary Nigerian poetry, it is unthinkable for poets to ignore the pain and predicament of the poor, because the poems are people-driven or "Marxist oriented" (163) as Josephat Adoga Odey and Patrick Odey Ogar have posited. The Nigerian social environment plays a key role in shaping contemporary Nigerian poems. Mathias Iroro Orhero, appears to share this view quoting Aboh, who writes that the poet focuses on socio-economic issues and strives to improve the condition of the poor by drawing attention to "the gap between the extremely rich and the extremely poor" (34).

Having explored the otherness theory, it is instructive to add that otherness presupposes the dual construct involving the dominant and accepted group and the

less dominant or powerful group. In depicting poverty and social exclusion, it is important that we construct their identity in response to the notions of the self and the other. In this study therefore, the self refers to the rich and the leaders, while the poor are the other. This paper, therefore, demonstrates that poverty and social exclusion manifest in deprivation, destitution, starvation and servitude and suggests protest and physical violence as ways of combating the scourge.

Manifestations of Poverty and Social Exclusion

Poverty and social exclusion manifest in contemporary Nigerian poetry in various forms, including deprivation, destitution, starvation, and servitude. Zakama's poetic works exemplify the deleterious effects of poverty and social exclusion, with deprivation serving as a stark and recurring motif. Zakama's poem, entitled "My Generation" is built on the theme of deprivation especially of the poor. It opens with a stark reality of deprivation: "Here I am denuded of plumage / My virility, a few years stolen by mean dreams, / A few years left to tease my fate" (lines 1-3). Implied in the words, "denuded of plumage", is the image of a bird completely stripped of its feathers. In the speaker's reasoning, the plumage is a symbol of covering or it represents some form of comfort and security. In fact, it connotes that which gives meaning, beauty and colour. This bird represents the poor or the other in the above context. Hence, the word "denuded" conveys the sense of deprivation. Also, the speaker extends the semantic field of "denuded" to include to be "stolen". For this reason, deprivation is not just to be denuded, it also means to be stolen from. Although the speaker is specifically concerned about stolen virility, the idea of other material support being stolen is hinted at when the rest of the poem is considered.

The above idea is further presented in the context: "Of my generation I am the crystal image / Sapped skeletons hugging tattered hopes" (Zakama 4-5). The poem vividly portrays the theme of deprivation, which is deeply intertwined with the concept of "otherness". The speaker's community is depicted as being deprived of basic necessities, hopes, and dignity. The image of "Sapped skeletons" and "tattered hopes" conveys a sense of extreme deprivation, where the community is stripped of its vitality, resources, and aspirations. This deprivation is not only economic but also emotional, psychological, and social. The speaker's description of themselves as the "crystal image" of their generation serves as a testament to the pervasive nature of deprivation, which affects entire communities and generations. The theme of deprivation is closely tied to the concept of "otherness", as it highlights the ways in which marginalised communities are denied access to resources, opportunities, and

basic human rights. This denial perpetuates the "otherness" of these communities, reinforcing their marginalisation and exclusion.

Flowing from the pictures painted of the poor above, their social condition is bound to be terrible. The post-colonial otherness dialectics emphasises the antipathy between the "self" and the "other" or as seen in the above: "we" versus "them". The speaker in the above context stands on behalf of the poor. They are the ones being "compelled", by their deprived condition, to "survive" or adjust to the reality without the slightest inclination to "thrive" or succeed. The speaker therefore draws the reader's attention to the source of the deprivation. They are the leaders in power whose only purpose is to "maintain their fat selves" ("My Generation" 7). Hence, these people have a selfish interest. The welfare of the poor does not feature in their plans. To further aggravate the situation, the said leaders have begun to even preserve the crumbs of the national cake, which ordinarily used to be given to the poor, "for their kids and brats after their kind ("My Generation" 9)." The artistic quality which sustains this poem is contrast. There is the contrast between skeletons of the poor and the fat selves of the leaders and the rich. The reason that can be adduced for their sapped physical shape is that they are being fed from the crumbs of the national cake. Both crumbs and the cake are metaphorical evocation of the national wealth. That there is a deliberate act of deprivation that suggests the power of social exclusion.

To further represent the deprivation of the poor, the speaker uses another couplet that runs thus: "Of my generation we are the pillaged victims/ Sappled skeletons watched by insatiate vultures" ("My Generation"10-11). The speaker represents the looting of the national treasury as an act of pillage. The direct victims of the public theft are the poor. They are the "Sapped skeletons" but the rulers who superintend this stealing are metaphorically equated to "insatiate vultures" ("My Generation" 11). Therefore, under the watch of these vultures, the poor continue to suffer deprivation. The image of vultures is apt to emphasise their ravenous propensity. They steal without conscience or thought for the poor. Also, they are never satisfied in their penchant and greed for more. The poet ends the poem "My Generation" with a perplexing paradox:

> Born equal but bred as carriers of wood
> We drown noiselessly in committees and commissions.
> And when we die as we surely shall die,
> We are denied graves even at dumping sites. ("My Generation" 12-15)

The paradox is noted in the equality of birth. Both the rich and the poor are born the same way. The difference is in how they are bred. While the poor are "bred as carriers of wood" ("My Generation" 12), the rich do not need to work hard to enjoy the basic luxury of life. There is, in this poem, the post-colonial otherness that continues to draw attention to the rich self and the poor other. It is disheartening to note that the downtrodden other "drown" without attracting attention to themselves as they work in committees and commissions: to the extent that when they die, they are "denied graves", not even in "dumping sites". There is a ring of paradox in the last line. At death the poor continue to suffer deprivation. Their death sums up the sense of deprivation which underscores poverty and social exclusion.

Another manifestation of poverty and social exclusion is destitution. This refers to a condition of extreme poverty in which one is unable to provide basic necessities. This is the main thrust of Akinlolu's poem, "Can't You See?" The speaker in the poem presents an impecunious condition of his immediate family. The poem opens with ironic tone, in which there is a deliberate attempt to arouse laughter and the sense of contradiction, for being happy despite having no food to eat, "For three weeks and a night" ("Can't You See" 3). To compound this state of destitution, the speaker explains that he has seven sons who live with him in their "marbled mansion" ("Can't You See" 6). In Akinlolu's poems, the alliteration in the words: "seven sons" and "Marbled mansion", intensifies the irony as well as projects the thematic focus. For example, "seven sons" is a good example of an alliteration, which effectively draws attention to the irony of the reader's poor condition. It exposes the speaker's recklessness as one who ought to practise family planning. In the second example, the alliteration "marbled mansion" effectively exposes the irony. The "marbled mansion" is a space "under a bridge in Falomo" (Can't You See" 7) area in Lagos State, Nigeria. Thus, the speaker is a destitute who is unable to afford a decent accommodation.

As it is with destitutes, their poor condition makes them live in isolation. Akinlolu's poem is remarkable for its ironical and sarcastic statements. Throughout the poem we encounter incongruities associated with what the speaker says and what is actually meant. The intention is to arouse laughter and force the reader to think. For example, the speaker says that he feels so "secure" living under the bridge. This statement is an irony. What he actually intends to say is that he does not feel safe living exposed to the vagaries of the weather, thieves and cruel men. Next, he goes sarcastic. He talks about having friends in "high places". The said high places are, in fact, "heaven" and "hell". They are friends who have died just as they lived. The

entire purpose is to satirise the way they have been treated. They are said to have led a life in which they were "despised" and alienated to the extent that they led a "lonely" lifestyle. Even in death, they too are despised as they are lonely. This is the fate of destitutes in our society. They seldom have friends neither do they feel secure in society. Thus, they are socially emasculated or excluded because of poverty.

The most depressing aspect of destitution is that even in death they receive no decent burial:

> What more can a man ask for
> Than to have his body claimed
> By the Task Force on pollution
> And be given a state burial? ("Can't You See" 21-24)

The above stanza is structured through the use of a rhetorical question but energised by irony and sarcasm with the aim of exposing the depth of destitution which the speaker suffers. Although the stanza is expressed in the form of a question, it functions as a statement in which the speaker affirms the social rejection of the poor. For this reason, the speaker prefers his dead body to be claimed by the Task Force on pollution than his uncaring family members. The said state burial is an ironical phrase. It is the disposal of his dead body by state Task Force on pollution. Since he is buried by them, this to him, is a state burial. The poet introduces the reader to the harsh realities which the poor face on daily basis. This situation is affirmed through consistent use of present tense as the following verbs show: "kick", "grapple", "kill", "huddle" and "bend". Each verb indicates an experience which the poor indulge in to survive the world of destitution. Firstly, they "kick", "grapple" and "kill" to eke out a living. This presupposes descending into violence and crime to succeed under the bridge. Secondly, at night, they "crouch", "huddle" and "bend" in their crowded little space they call home. Through repetition the speaker emphasises the lonely world of destitutes who paradoxically when they die, they die abandoned. This is the fate of destitutes. The rhetorical question introduces the reader to the underlying irony: we know the poor need people to help them and by asking, the speaker harps at the relevance of people and underscores the scourge of social exclusion.

Poverty and social exclusion also manifest in the starvation of the poor. This runs through the poem of Adewale, entitled, "Explorer of Aromas". The poem is structured in an unrhymed couplet. The speaker makes some startling revelations. The first two successive lines are examples of parallelism through which the poet

persona recounts the daily condition of the poor. For them, hunger is a constant phenomenon. To convey the bitter taste of hunger, the speaker resorts to the use of gustatory imagery. Hunger for them is a bitter experience. The outcome of this is the death that follows it. The speaker has experienced how many poor people die from hunger. Hence, it is "the triumph of dust". This is a euphemism for death. Its significance is in the affirmation of the power of hunger as a fall out from economic emasculation. In the second unrhymed couplet, the poet persona employs contrast to present two different personalities: "the sun" which represents the powerful, and "rats" which stands for the poor. As explained in the poem, the sun sneers with arrogance at the pitiable condition of the poor who experience death and their swollen bodies ("carcasses") litter the place.

In the subsequent stanzas, the speaker provides more details on the impecunious condition of the downtrodden. The opening line of the first couplet arrests our attention through the apt use of alliteration. The words "dined", "dried" and "dogs" have similar initial consonant sounds. The aim is to shock the reader with the pitiable condition of the poor which the speaker represents in the context of the poor. Two incongruous items are locked together. They are the delicacy of dried dog meat and a glass of flavoured acrid urine. Again, the use of gustatory imagery indicates that the meal is unpalatable hiding behind the veil of irony. By this imagery, the speaker is able to show that the drink is bitterly pungent. That the poor had to consume the food in order to show that the hungry will eat anything to survive. Similarly, the poor are said to feast on the remnants of the rich which they discard in their refuse dump. In such places the poor find chicken thighs in excess because the rich are satisfied and abandon the left over.

The poor are described as "explorers of aromas" in the image of smell that is palpable in the stanzas. The point being made is that the poor rely on aromas from refuse heaps to find food left by the rich. The trash of the rich affords the poor a guarantee of food. There is a paradoxical pun in the word "refuse" in the poem. What the rich have refused to eat is thrown in the refuse. The poor people's existence is therefore sustained by the refuse can or trash. Paradoxically, the trash of the rich is the treasure of the poor. It is hunger that drives a human being to feed from a refuse can. The poet employs this poem to criticise the affluent so that they can improve the economic condition of the poor among them.

Poverty and social exclusion can lead to servitude. By servitude we mean slavery or bondage of any kind. The poor in the poem of Ayewanu, entitled "God's Voice", are victims of bondage or slavery because they cannot help themselves. As a result,

they are in economic bondage. The poem begins with master-servant relationship as a way of introducing the two characters in the story. The shock expressed by the servant at the sight of the master who stares at him conveys several meanings. Firstly, it suggests that the servant is uncomfortable in the presence of the master. Secondly, it demonstrates the sense of bondage into which he finds himself. The poet-persona presents this scene as suspense to tease the reader into getting to read the entire poem.

Quite clearly, the servant has left his work undone. He is supposed to be cleaning the rooms of his master. Also, he is expected to dust his tables and wash his ruined clothes. The fact remains that the clothes are soiled owing to "the spoils of high society" ("God's Voice" 9), a metaphor for partying and enjoyment which characterises the affluent people. The servant works slavishly in the service of his master. As the next stanza reveals, the servant has no life of his own. The master does not allow the servant to even have time for personal devotion and freedom of worship. All he expects from the servant is work and more work. The colloquy that ensues is quiet revealing when the master demands to know from where he has brought the servant.

In the following lines, the servant provides details of his background. The tension in the voice of the servant goes to show that he does not want to go back to the streets. The streets evoke a picture of pain, poverty and threat to life. The biblical allusion to Psalm 23, in which the servant describes himself as one who "walked through the valley of the shadow of death" (God's Voice" 17-18), extends the picture of helplessness and vulnerability. As a result, the servant idolises the master for rescuing him from poverty. For the speaker, therefore, he does not mind being treated as a slave. The concluding stanza captures the theme quite well:

> Who then is your God?"
> The servant fell on his knees
> raising his hands as if (in) supplication (sic)
> blurting
> You are my God; for you provide me shelter
> and give me my daily bread. ("God's Voice" 23-38)

This stanza reveals the essential fact that controls the thought of the poor. They see anyone who provides shelter and food as their God. Therefore, the rich are the God of the poor, especially the magnanimously rich among them. For this reason,

the poor are eternally in servitude to their masters. The poor are also prepared to worship the rich because they provide material support for them. The master in this poem does not tolerate any form of devotion to any God or the practice of religious faith because this will set the servant free from worshiping and being grateful to him. The aim of the rich, therefore, is to keep the poor in servitude and guarantee strict obedience and loyalty to them. The poor in this context are economically emasculated by the rich so that they can remain in bondage.

Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

The preceding section has examined the manifestations of poverty and social exclusion in contemporary Nigerian poetry. This one intends to explore the various strategies suggested by poets such as Azuah and Anene respectively for combating poverty and social exclusion. It shall focus on two strategies: protest and physical violence. This paper relies on Ahmed Sa'adi's definition of protest which states that "public protest is by definition a non-institutional means of attempting to influence the authorities" (1). All protests therefore aim to actualise social change. This is the idea undergirding the poem "Frame of fear" by Azuah. The brilliant use of language to express the poet persona's desire for protest is commendable. Azuah's language choice encompasses both the literal and figurative power of evocation. His vocabulary is pushed to the extreme in order to convey the need for some fundamental change. This is often found in his reliance on animal and auditory imagery. The title of the poem is a useful guide on how to unpack the meaning. The poem teaches how to deal with fear, which is one of the restraining factors against protest. The speaker wakes up with an uncomfortable rapid heartbeat. He decides to react by tugging at the thread connecting him to his heart beat. The heart beat is a euphemism for fear. Instead of allowing fear to enslave him, he decides to confront his fear by screaming into the "sting of wet scorpions" ("Frame of Fear" 7). The "scream" is a metaphor for protest against the inanities and oppression which "wet scorpions" represent in the poem.

Azuah's poem is remarkable for its images as well as for its music. Throughout the poem, we encounter objects, animals and human body parts which have extra-textual meaning and convey certain meanings. For example, the words, "sound" and "sense" refer to the scream in the first stanza. After screaming, the sound and sense of it merge at a pitch to convey meaning. The point being made is that for freedom to be achieved, the sound of protest must be heard by those in authority for them to decipher the sense behind it. Until this happens, there will be no hope for

societal change. The consequence of the protest is conveyed in the subsequent line: "Fear escapes through a narrow corridor" ("Frame of Fear" 10). Fear in this poem represents obstacles to protest. The shape of the poem is highly informative. The poem is arranged in disorderly manner to suggest that society will remain in chaos unless the people rise up in protest to make things right. The tone of defiance exposes more obviously in the facile attack of those who restrain the lives of the poor. The "scorpions" are the enemies of the people who oppress and demean their existence with obnoxious plans and policies.

Also in another poem, "Forbidden", Azuah suggests protest through defiant rhetoric. Before advocating defiance, the speaker recalls the oppression of the poor in the following way:

> My hair is a palm tree
> Where birds build their nests
> But hatch their eggs and fly
> I droop, heavy with their excreta. ("Forbidden" 1-4)

The most commendable aspect of Azuah's artistry is noted in his firm control of language. His depiction of pain of the poor is defined, to a degree, by his use of figurative and lyrical virtuosity. Also worthy of note is that Azuah's gifts are evident particularly in his evocation of the predicament of the poor especially his skill in tracing the curve of delicate human suffering. The above stanza reels with paradoxical evocation of the suffering of the poor. They are evoked as people who bear the brunt of society's excrement but the eggs of comfort and treasure find their way into the abode of the privileged few. This situation has prompted the speaker to recommend protest as a way of ending the oppressive predicament of the poor.

In three other subsequent stanzas of this poem, Azuah employs very striking images to present the predicament of the poor. According to the speaker, "my head is a mortar/where you pound pain / and gaze into my hollow" ("Forbidden" 5-7). The image of pounding is employed to express the brutal pain unleashed on the poor as they eke out their living. The speaker also recounts that: "my face is a landscape / Festered with uprooted trees / where owls hoot their dirge" ("Forbidden" 8-10). Still depicting the poor at the receiving end of social rejection, the speaker evokes the sense of owls hooting the dirge of the poor. This means the transaction between the rich and the poor always ends in the death of the latter. The speaker relies on the technique of a riddle to advance his argument. He compares his body to a bin, definitely a refuse bin, where the rich "dump" their "crumbs" and set it ablaze in

order to disperse the ashes to the wind. The entire riddle affirms the desire of the rich, not only to use the poor, but also to eventually get rid of them. By burning them, they intend to incinerate their memory.

Consequently, the speaker defies their oppressor through the tone of defiance. The daring attitude of the speaker connotes his readiness to withstand fire in the face of threat. The speaker has refused to change his stand as the bearer of truth. Rather than acquiesce in mendacity, the speaker advocates resolute defiance of the threat. The speaker is determined to go through the worse grinding on the largest slab, but he will remain a taboo, that means, a forbidden candidate for defeat.

The speaker has assessed the strength of the opposition and the ferocity of the threat and decides to respond in a courageous manner. The poor are ready, as we glean from the voice of the speaker, to endure the wind and rain of suffering and defy the rage of affliction which will be thrown at them. The image of erosion is effectively employed to express the sense of denudation which socio-economic conditions have on the poor. The situations in the country wear the people out hence they have grown resistant and will no longer be eroded. They are determined to defy, through protest any significant threat levelled against the poor.

It will have become apparent that one of the strategies for combating poverty and social exclusion is protest. Another strategy that runs through the poems of Anene is physical violence. The poem, entitled "Democracy", illustrates the truth of this assertion. It begins with the sense of urgency. The subject of the above poem, as the title suggests, is democracy. The speaker begins the poem by inviting democracy into the country. The poet persona personifies "Democracy" having real existence and worthy of being invited. The repetition of the word, "come", is to intensify the invitation of democracy. The speaker urges democracy to, not only arrive the country, but also to come in a new way. This presupposes that all is not well with the kind of democracy being practised in Nigeria. Anene's poem may not overtly employ melancholic tone to criticise the Nigerian brand of democracy, but a great deal of the poem expresses great intensity and passion for national rebirth.

Democracy
Come now
a ram-in-rage
Dash aside
the lock and gate ("Democracy" 4-8)

The means by which the new democracy will usher change is by physical violence. The poet indirectly urges the electorate to be vigilant as to destroy all barriers to free elections. The urgency and sense of anticipation that is noticed in the opening stanza is also found in the second stanza of this poem. The metaphoric expression of the new democratic culture is one expected to behave like a ram in full rage. Consequently, it is expected to "Dash aside", that is, destroy (and break down) "the lock and gate" which are metaphors for obstacles and restrictions limiting the dividends of democracy from reaching the poor.

The words convey almost precise ideas regarding physical violence. The economy of words above better exposes the sudden visual impact which is the true quality of effective use of language. There is a neologism in the use of "democrash". Two morphological events are involved here. Firstly, "demo" is derived from democracy. Secondly, "crash" is a violent word associated with demolition. Putting the two together, the speaker imaginatively calls for a kind of democracy that will "crash" whatever that resists the emergence and development of a better democratic experience. The image of storm is employed in the poem and it acquires for him, and ideally for the reader, associations of a redemptive praxis. The "storm" is expected to release torrents of water that will "burst", "flush" and "flood" the earth and bring about restorative change. Each of the above words expresses the poet persona's desire for physical violence.

In Anene's poem, "D-Hour", the poet also suggests physical violence as a weapon for combating the predicament of the poor. The speaker berates the poor for remaining silent when their socio-economic conditions deteriorate irretrievably. Here the speaker represents the entire group of poor people. Hence, the poet persona uses the plural personal pronoun "we". The post-colonial otherness motif functions as indicator of two groups. The self and the other, are evidently represented by the watchers and the thieves. The poor are the watching other while the thieves are the self. That the thieves are "masked" goes to suggest their deliberate acts of deception.

To actualise freedom, the speaker suggests physical violence. Anene's poem works through subtlety to overt verbal statement as a means of igniting action. Every line makes imperceptible revelations. For example, the speaker is angry that for so long the poor have endured their predicament without action. The silence has become a kind of tyranny in which the distressed among the people have begun to call for action against the wickedness of the rich. The overriding focus of this section is the suggestion of physical violence as a way of combating poverty and social

exclusion. The two strategies include protest and physical violence and that unless the poor resist the rich and those who enslave them, there will be no freedom.

Conclusion

This paper has explored poverty and social exclusion in contemporary Nigerian Poetry. The poets present the poor as suffering from deprivation and destitution. Using satire as weapon, the poets show how the rich make the poor go through hell. The poor are depicted as having no home to live as they are comfortable living under the bridge in Lagos State. Through irony and several other literary devices, the poets are able to make far-reaching statements. Also explored in this paper is the depiction of the poor as victims of starvation and servitude. The poems studied show quite clearly the pain of living without food which the poet personae present one after the other. The poets suggest protest and physical violence on the part of the poor as strategies they can employ to improve their predicament. All these ideas are effectively conveyed through adroit handling of poetic techniques, language and situations to canvass the need to improve the socio-economic conditions of the poor. The argument thus far made is that poverty triggers social exclusion but the poor have a big role to play in ending the scourge of poverty and social exclusion, noting that freedom has no nationality neither does it have gender and class.

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