

THE HOMELAND AS A LOST PARADISE: POSTCOLONIAL ASPECTS IN SELECTED POEMS BY TANURE OJAIDE

Sayed Sadek, PhD, Assistant Prof.

English Literature Department of English, Faculty of Arts,
Port Said University, Egypt
Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Arts,
Taif University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This paper deals with some of the most notable postcolonial, neocolonial, and ecological features that characterize the works of the Nigerian poet Tanure Ojaide who is best known for his cultural assertion and seriousness of attitude. It employs the theories of such leading critics as Fanon, Nkrumah, Ngugi, and others. The paper shows the poet's deep concern regarding the demise of the homeland from a utopia to a dystopia under the neo-colonial leaders. Ojaide's anti-neo-colonial project tends to restore connections with the homeland so as to maintain a larger collective national identity. It seeks to create a sense of belonging and identity out of the feeling of displacement. The paper also examines Ojaide's resistance mechanisms based on lecturing people on how to face such neo-colonial violations and to restore the golden heritage.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, neo-colonialism, ecological imperialism, Tanure Ojaide, exile, African poetry

The poet-scholar Tanure Ojaide was born in the oil-rich Niger Delta area of Nigeria. He has fifteen collections of poetry to his name in addition to a memoir, a short story collection, two novels, and five books of literary criticism. He has read from his poetry in many parts of the world. His poetry has been translated into Chinese, Dutch, French, and Spanish. He is usually praised as a poet who combines a profound poetic vision with his well-known simplicity of style. Ojaide is in patriotic love with his homeland that represents his indispensable source of inspiration.

The problem of the Niger Delta resulted mainly from the discovery of oil but was further complicated by the economic conspiracy of the waning Nigerian regimes in collaboration with the various exploiting multinational

oil companies. The environmental devastation was so unbearable that Amnesty International (2009:21) expressed its concern and complained that “pollution and environmental degradation reached a level humanly unacceptable” to the extent that it “has made living in Ogoni land a nightmare” (qtd in Ikeke, 127).

The aim of this paper is to explore some of the postcolonial features as portrayed in selected poems from different collections by Tanure Ojaide. In fact, Ojaide’s works are dialectical; they flow into each other in a manner that focuses one major issue, the limitless dangers caused by man’s activities on the environment. The paper attempts to make use of a selection of post colonial and neo-colonial theories especially by such critics as Nkrumah, Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiongo, and others in order to show how these theories are reflected in a number of poems by Ojaide. It also treats in detail the ecological imperialism resulting from the devastation of native natural resources. Ojaide’s deep concern about the betrayal of independence movement by those who were its authors and how this intensifies the sufferings of the Niger Delta people in particular is also dealt with.

One of the major features of post-colonial literature is the concern with place and displacement. “It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (Ashcroft et al, 8). Exile and displacement represent central tropes in Ojaide’s works. The theme of exile is “in some sense present in all such writing since it is one manifestation of the ubiquitous concern with place and displacement” (Ashcroft et al, 28).

Exile is not only a political condition signifying one’s being forced away from one’s homeland, but it also implies psychological displacement. Salman Rushdie describes exile as “dreams of glorious return. [...] It is an endless paradox: looking forward by always looking back” (212). Exile demonstrates “the sense of disorientation, displacement and misplacement, loss, loneliness and nostalgia for the homeland” (Bodunde, 229). Thus the exile is, by definition, a displaced person.

All these deplorable aspects of exile are experienced by Ojaide. Having read “No Longer our Country,” Onookome Okome observed that exile seems “a permanent option for Tanure Ojaide in his quest to overcome the anguish and despair that befell postcolonial Nigeria” (15). The opening lines of the poem read:

We have lost it,
the country we were born into.
We can now sing dirges of that commonwealth of yesterday—
we live in a country
that is no longer our own. (*The Blood of Peace* 8)

The poet somberly takes stock of what obtained in Edenic Delta. "The loss of his country\ land leads to one of Ojaide's popular themes of the exile" (Alu 134). To employ postcolonial terminology, this feeling of the poet is referred to by Bhabha as unhomeliness. "To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home even in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee" (Tyson 421). The exile is haunted by a sense of loss and a longing for home. Andrew Gurr argues that "the great strength of modern writing in English lies much more in its exiles than in its metropolitan writers [...] the reason lies partly in the stronger sense of home which the exile has, and in the clearer sense of his identity which his home gives him"(9). The mere contemplation of exile necessarily suggests "alienation from home and the concomitant sense of loss and displacement that follows, triggering off the longing for an 'ideal' place called home" (Tsaaior 108). The poet believes that his homeland has been transformed altogether:

we were born into another country,
a world that has gone
with a big boom.

We now know what it is to lose our home,

What it is to lose a hospitable place for this exile. (*The Blood of Peace* 9)

Reading the poem, one feels that the state of things began to deteriorate more and more rapidly, and ceased to be at all like it was in the olden days. The country began to assume a ghostly shape that was unknown to its very people, and one of the things that caused the most serious trouble was the way in which they began to have their lands taken away from them in order for the multinational oil companies to pursue their anti-environmental activities:

Our own country was a dream
So beautiful while it lasted,

And now we are exiles in a country that was once ours- (*The Blood of Peace* 8)

Also related to displacement and exile are nostalgia and memory. Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as a "longing for a home that no longer exists. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement" (1). With nostalgia, Ojaide describes the Delta past as a landscape of peace and hospitality, an enviable evergreen. But, unfortunately, this idyllic landscape crumbles under the devastating exploitation of profit-driven oil prospectors. In "No Longer Our Country" we have a series of questions that express the poet's sense of loss: "Where are the tall trees?.../Where are those warriors?.../Where are the healers? (*The Blood of Peace* 8)

Displacement is characterized by longing and memory. It suggests uprootedness, so a displaced person is deprived of place. Memory is a prevalent focus of Ojaide's work, which can be attributed to the need to find or remember one's roots. The recording of his existence serves to counter the psychological stripping of identity caused by exile as he tries tirelessly to look for his roots and restore his sense of belonging. Ojaide's recollection, "with its inscription of the contrast between the idyllic past and the violated present, captures the shared memory that is given expression in various ways in the works of the poet (Okunoye 415-416).

The colonizers employ a number of wicked strategies to keep the colonized under control and prolong the exploitation of their resources. According to Tyson:

Colonialist psychology depends heavily on racism and classism, two very successful forms of othering. This kind of psychology consists of the attitudes and behaviours by which a culturally privileged group others a culturally subordinate group, that is, by which the culturally privileged distance themselves emotionally from the populations over whom they want to gain or maintain control. The primary psychological motive for othering seems to be the need to feel powerful, in control, and superior. (434)

Both othering and classism are reflected in many of Ojaide's poems, where the colonizers' practices are typically imitated by their local watchdogs or neocolonizers. In "No Longer Our Country," for example, we read that:

Our sacred trees have been cut down
To make armchairs for the rich and titled.

Where are the tall trees
that shielded us from the sun's spears,
where are they now that hot winds
blow parching sands and bury us in dunes? (*The Blood of Peace* 8)

The neo-colonizer ogres would amass the fortunes and power that formerly used to go to the pockets of the colonizers. Thus, we have two parties; one that never cares a penny about the homeland, and the other which tries to keep the pride and the honor of the country:

our flag ripped off by uncaring hands.
Counting the obscenities from every mouth,
the stupor, the deep wounds in our souls,
you can tell that we live in a country
that is no longer our own. (*The Blood of Peace* 8)

The types of exploiter and victim constitute the most important binary opposites in Ojaide's postcolonial poems. While the exploiter

embodies the values of the comprador class and capitalism, the victim type, by contrast, represents the values of the downtrodden:

And he says

We are born to be beneficiaries

Or victim- -"you cannot be head

And tail, one or the other." (*The Fate of Vultures* 18)

The term "Subaltern" signifies "those who are not part of ruling group [...] those who are subordinated by the dominant class" (Innes 11). This privileged class of the elite tries to convince the "subaltern" people that a person is born into his/her class. They mean that it is impossible for the people at the bottom to ever achieve any sort of progress or make their way to the top.

The colonizers saw themselves as the centre of the world and the colonized as the margins. They believed they are "the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper "self"; native peoples were considered "other," different, and therefore inferior to the point of being less than fully human. This practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human is called othering" (Tyson 419-420). In Africa in particular, the same notorious practices of the colonizers are inherited by the neocolonizers. Fanon's fear and concern that "the anti-colonialist revolution would be undermined by a national bourgeoisie which would assume the mantle of the colonizers" (90) is quite justified.

The colonizers and their neocolonial successors tend to divide the world hierarchically into centre and periphery, where they systematically insist on "robbing the periphery of its natural wealth and exploiting ecological resources" (Foster and Clark 189). After the fake independence of African countries, the centre is replaced by the elite or loyalists while the periphery is represented by the oppressed nationalists. The neocolonial brutal attacks against the environment are so severe that:

The doors of the forest are closed. Forever -

Closed by poachers, government-salaried guards,

Humans, shut out, smart from the climate change.

The doors of the forest are closed to peace and joy

By the poaching perpetrated in the silence of lust. (*The Beauty I Have Seen* 72)

All kinds of joy have disappeared to please the colonizers and their clients who disregard and violate the environmental rights of the homeland.

The theme of neo-colonial imperialism is at the centre of African post-colonial literature. It is worth noting that though "the white man was replaced by black leaders, he succeeded in finding new ways of maintaining the black continent under his yoke"(Diaw 3). Thus, though officially

decolonized, some countries are "still subject to updated colonial mechanisms" (Shankar 139). Describing it as "the worst form of imperialism" (x) and "imperialism in its most dangerous stage," (1) Kwami Nkrumah believes that "the essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (ix). In other words, it is felt that "a hidden hand was at work, which controlled the fate of the former colonies in spite of their being politically independent" (Rothermund 273).

Frantz Fanon was shocked that "the *apotheosis* of independence becomes the *curse* of independence" (54). The same surprise is expressed in one of Ojaide's poems where we read:

When we wrote our adopted name
In one flag
We least expected a charger
To grow into a monster
With voracious years
And occupy the landmass-
There's hardly space to breathe. (*The Fate of Vultures* 69)

To the poet's disappointment, the guardians and custodians of the land turn its very destroyers as agents of the western conspiracies. It is "more tragic and more degrading that the ruling class expected to defend the rights of its subjects is instead responsible for their wretchedness and misery. Such a gang of parasites "are only servicing their class interests as well as those of neo-imperialism" (Biney 133). Ojaide refers to those traitors who work hand in hand with the brutal and corrupt regime to protect their exploitation:

Our totem eagle, that bird of great heights,
Has been shot at by thoughtless guardians.
Our flag ripped off by uncaring hands (*The Blood of Peace* 8)

In a fit of rage, the poet wages a war against the keepers of the country who sold themselves to the devil and broke the sacred oath they took to keep the land:

Do not tell me
Guardians were dazed
By the demonic flash of cash
And couldn't see treasures carted away
Despite sunlight for a stealth-free watch. (*The Fate of Vultures* 70-71)

Thus, those shameless guardians practice their notorious corruption in broad daylight. Exporting the treasures of the homeland takes place under the full supervision of those traitors.

In *Writing Against Neocolonialism*, Ngugi deplores the misconception and the implied hope of the vast majority of African writers

that “the incoming black man by virtue of his blackness would right the wrongs and heal the wounds of centuries of slavery and colonialism” (159). However, unfortunately to the dismay of the African masses, they are ruled by brutal monsters and unscrupulous leaders whose only objective is to remain in power forever:

What does not know of their ritual murders;
Who does not know that they fortify themselves
With vicious charms
To live beyond their tenure? (*The Fate of Vultures* 13)

The tragedy is that despite the fact that "those at the top of the mountain have climbed on the backs of millions at the bottom; they seem and act as if it was their unique genius that put them there" (Ngugi, *The Blackness of the Black* 20). The westernized African elite are "manufactured by the Europeans, and form a class of persons, African in blood and color, but European in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. [...] That is why they share the same contempt, lack of concern about the poor masses"(Diaw 30).

African writers and people discovered only too late that “The ruling elite was more interested in considering its own dominance, and in monopolizing the continent’s natural resources than in improving the abject condition of the common people” (Ogungbesan, vi). In “When Tomorrow is too long,” Ojaide satirizes politicians and at the same time warns his beloved people of their deceptions:

And if a juggler ever arrives in town
with an eagle in a glittering cage,
beware of the season beware
of twilight and worse. (*The Fate of Vultures* 18)

The poet seems to caution good-natured people and to remind them that not all that glitters is gold. False promises by loyalists should carefully be watched by the people because as Nkrumah warns "imperialism switches tactics and devises innumerable ways to accomplish objectives formerly achieved by naked colonialism"(Nkrumah x). Although naturally this juggler would draw attention since he is a spectacle himself, no one should fall for his tricks. Ojaide clearly recognizes the skill of the juggler and concedes it:

His closed fist presses
a honeyed cake into an ashen loaf.
With his gap-toothed shine for a wand
he throws out one thing
with one hand
and with the same five
he takes in more than seven.” (*The Fate of Vultures* 18)

Recognizing that the juggler never moves alone and that he is usually surrounded by a train of sycophants who employ their sugar-coated speech to deceive their people and follow the juggler wherever he goes:

His attendants, poster-pasters,

Frolic in the loot of a flood;

The rest of the world

Live in a drought of denials! (*The Fate of Vultures* 18)

The juggler, it goes without saying, refers to the ruler "who seeks to perpetuate himself in power by being the beneficiary of a democracy which he ostensibly seeks to bring to the people" (Adagbonyin 6). The people are exploited by false promises that have never been actualized. The homeland may thus be regarded as "a country of "petro-thieves" and legislators who are "legislotters" (Alu 134).

Themes of corruption and greed, thoughtlessness and selfishness by African leadership echo throughout Ojaide's poetry. Such leaders act against the oppressed masses who are denied the most basic essentials because of the gluttony of the ruling handful of elites who insist on maximizing their profits while pauperizing the people. We are told that such rulers have no mercy even for the most impoverished and helpless people. They are "seizing from the blind light to recover their rights/denying the crippled space to exercise humanity." (*The Beauty I Have Seen* 123) The multiple tricks played by the neo-colonizers are vividly portrayed in "Compatriots," where they are described as "my worst enemies"- devilish exploiters who would easily sacrifice the honor and pride of their country, represented by the land and the national anthem, for their own interests:

They cashed on the absence of stars

To supplant the land of its proud name;

They cashed on the eclipse of the sun

To change the love anthem into a rampage drum. (*The Fate of Vultures* 13)

Those villains can only pursue their evil practices in the dark. The African bourgeoisie remains "a largely comprador class, sharing in some of the profits which imperialism drains from Africa" (Biney 133). They are described as "My worst enemies are gathering strength./Priest without a creed." (*The Fate of Vultures* 13) Though they assume the mantle of preachers, they have not got the least sense of moral commitment towards the homeland and its poor people as they have betrayed the holy cause of independence:

As soon as they had their hold on the land,

They upset the customs of truth.

Now they have blunted the sacred sword

How will justice be excuted

When the metal is no longer a blade
And the beast escapes communal rage?

My worst enemies, my compatriots! (*The Fate of Vultures* 13-14)

Manipulating the helpless people with a multiplicity of their artful strategies as well as the conspiracies they engineer in collaboration with the colonizers or their agents, the elite would violate all social values and would only care about milking the treasures of the homeland.

One of the most important virtues in traditional African society was the common ownership of the land which was worked by all for the common good. After all, land provides the African with a spiritual link to his ancestors. On the African concept of land, it is "sacred and dedicated to the ancestors" (Ojaide, *Examining Canonisation* 7). It is "an important gift from a deity, the eternal mother. It is a spiritual gift that should be protected" (Alu, 133). This natural process of land acquisition, through a filial bond with the spiritual guardians of the land, is one form of creating a communal identity. Fanon believes that "For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land" (9).

As a result of colonization, The African land was subjected to ecological imperialism embodied by the plunder of the riches and resources. Regarded as "one of the ugly faces of global capitalism," ecological imperialism can be defined as "the systematic and strategic re-shaping, exploitation, and destruction of the local ecosystems of the peripheral worlds for the economic, political, cultural and ideological benefit of the centre" (Nwagbara 30). This is a vicious strategy based on "the exploitation of ecological vulnerabilities of societies to promote imperialist control" (Foster and Clark 201). The broken-hearted poet describes the absence of contact between himself and his beloved homeland caused by the unprecedented attack against the hospitable elements of nature. This causes him a feeling of despair as an internal exile who may be regarded as a psychological refugee:

More and more the land mocks my heart.

Where are the evergreens of my palm;

Why is the sun of salvation eclipsed

By coups and intolerable riots?

Wherever I pass, mockery of the land;

Naked trees flaunt sterile bodies at me-

Every step I take on the land

Is fraught with torments. (*The Fate of Vultures* 41)

The deep psychological anguish of the poet as a result of remembering the golden days of the past is intensified by the recurrent images of darkness and sterility throughout the poem. He is looking forward to restoring the liveliness of his land:

I need the entirety of my land.

The song needs the soil
For deep roots and fresh notes;
The land needs the song
To revive its strength
And raise itself. (*The Fate of Vultures* 41)

Black aesthetics involves a heightened awareness of the greatness of the African past and African traditional culture as it developed in protest against the colonial influence. It is also "based on the African metaphysics of the relation between the dead and the living and art as being a communal and socially functional activity" (Brar and Singh 471). Boniface Abanuka, for instance, has argued that "ancestors form a central part of an African life by forming the basis for morality and providing the means for asking questions about ultimate reality" (qtd in Irele and Menkiti 19). Many a time Ojaide refers to the high status occupied by the ancestors in the hearts of his people. In "Elegy for Nostalgia," he seems unable to believe that the community can do without the reverend ancestors:

How will the ancestral population replenish-
Itself with the present crop of living folks
If history were to die from our hands or in our keep,
What life would be left without chroniclers?
Wish I could engrave more faces on coins or notes, but
It is a tall order to find them to fill the vacancies ahead.
I seek resuscitation of the dying breed of the earth

To sing of ancestors, heroes, gods, and chroniclers. (*The Beauty I Have Seen* 124) The ancestors are the first mentors and historians on the land. The poet is trying to keep history, to inject a new life in the dead bodies of the dying ancient keepers of the universe in order to restore the lost balance to life once more. It is an attempt to respect and honor the ancestors who gave their lands to the present folk and to renovate the glory and honor of the golden days of the past. Having been betrayed by the new leaders, the need is urgent for the lost spirits of the ancients to bring the lost respect back to these lands. "No Longer Our Country" weeps the loss of heritage as the real guardians of the lands who used to be the paragons of honesty and good manners have gone. Medicine men, the ancestors who used to treat people are no longer there:

Where are those warriors
careful not to break taboos
who kept us from savage violations,
now that we face death?

Where are the healers who offering themselves as ritual beasts saved their neighbours from scourges? (*The Blood of Peace* 9)

In many African cultures, there is "a widespread belief in intimate ontological relationships between humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects" (Vest 20). It is a kind of affinity or mystical link between people and certain elements of nature. That is why Ojaide connects the devastation of the environment represented by such elements to the loss of the homeland. This is reflected in Ojaide's continual references to the iroko tree and the totem eagle. The iroko, for example, is the plant that appears most frequently in Ojaide's work. It serves as a symbolic image of solidity and rootedness in sacred tradition. It is believed that any man who cuts down any iroko tree causes devastating misfortune on himself and the whole community as the iroko is regarded as a symbol of new growth, strength and stability because of its deep roots.

The eagle is known as the king of birds in many cultures, a symbol of power. The bird is significant in Ojaide's poetry and society as it stands for freedom worldwide. This is why the poet refers to this bird now and again in his poetry:

Once
A flag
And an eagle
Meant everything proud
From health to wealth,
The land's salvation. (*The Fate of Vultures* 69)

Thus the existence of this bird of pride provides the land with health and wealth. It is symbolic of the land's independence after long years of slavery. Moreover, the absence of this particular bird, along with the iroko trees, means a total physical and spiritual devastation of the land:

There have been luckless years
And self inflicted tears
With neither eagles nor irokos,
Pillars of faith, in sight. (*The Fate of Vultures* 70)

Both bird and plant represent good omens and their disappearance indicates the loss of spiritual links. This poem celebrates the spiritual value of these creatures and weeps their loss.

Again, a vivid description of the homeland's enemies regards their hostility towards the eagle and iroko as criminal acts committed by those who insist on destroying the very identity of the homeland by targeting these symbols directly and hence cutting all kinds of spiritual ties between the community and these mythological creatures:

My worst enemies are gathering strength.
They not only brought down the eagle
But felled irokos on sight, incapacitated
The saviour- totem and razed its winghold. (*The Fate of Vultures* 13)

Ojaide speaks powerfully against the “senseless destruction of our original neighbours, the trees and animals” (*Poetic Imagination* 16). The cutting of trees is regarded as a massacre and a "holocaust" that kills and burns the helpless plants that give the land its beauty, leaving behind a "bloodbath" as the forests have been destroyed. Land without trees is described as "woodless silence." (*The Beauty I Have Seen* 71-72)

The African definition of literature is traditionally much wider than usual as it involves medicine and divination. African philosophy has included spirituality and cultural tradition. This is also echoed in Ojaide's poems as he believes that these deep-rooted trees function as healers since they keep people safe from infectious diseases:

Imagine the loss in capital and heritage of the nobility – of the iroko, mahogany, obeche, and the lineage of heights! All the shields against fearsome diseases trampled to dust. Once the giants got decapitated, the undergrowths wiped out, all other species of glamour ground into interminable sand. (*The Beauty I Have Seen* 72)

A prominent feature of Ojaide's poetry is the communal voice that is "carefully crafted and maintained in the frequent use of the first person plural “we” indicative of pluralism" and "togetherness" (Alu 30). Thus, in his works, "the personal becomes a metaphor for the communal" (Okunoye 416). In scores of poems, we are reminded with the lost collective identity of African people. Hord and Lee suggest that the African identity "is constructed by a set of shared beliefs, patterns of behavior, and expectations. In place of Descartes's “I think; therefore I am,” we find in this black tradition, “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (Hord and Lee 143). Likewise, Kortenaar (228) and Aijaz (101) assert that third world texts are national allegories where there is no room for private dramas.

Ojaide's poems echo these African values par excellence. For instance, he refers to the Nigerian flag as "A flag is fertile ground/To plant a common fate" and "we wrote our adopted name/in one flag." (*The Fate of Vultures* 69) Moreover, what saddens the poet most is the replacement of permanent collective traditional African songs by the Christian solo performances: the choir out-sang symphonies, vocals of every caliber—soloists, duets, and ensembles pouring out melodies. The bush was a countryside fair of a thousand voices that rang from pre-dawn through wakeful hours. (*The Beauty I Have Seen* 71)

In "No Longer Our Country," the poet laments the loss of "that commonwealth of yesterday" and keeps using the collective plural pronouns "We" and "our" all through the poem to indicate the communal identity that represents one of the unique aspects of African life and literature.

Finally, one of the major elements that characterize post-colonial literature is resistance. According to the notable Nigerian poet Niyi Osundare, the mission of the African writer is "to create songs which jolt the slumbering, give hope to the despondent, open up the eyes of the blind.[...] It is to show my people that the rich were not born so, and the poor need not die so. It is to stress the inevitability of change and the triumph of justice" (12). Ojaide seems to have a strong commitment to the cause of liberating the masses of the people from injustice and political bondage as "it forms the architectonics of resistance and protest we find in his poetry"(Adagbonyin 2).

Ojaide affirms that change is not possible until it is worked for. He therefore "uses curses, damnations and uncompromising, combatant, linguistic weapons to assail social nemesis" (Olafioye 96-97). In order to fight such hard-hearted rulers, Ngugi believes that "our pens should be used to murder their sleep making them know that they are being seen" (*Barrel* 69). This is exactly what Ojaide does in "Elegy For Nostalgia," where he launches a harsh attack on what **Tyson** describes as "puppet regimes –local rulers paid by a corporation to support its interests" (425). He keeps lampooning those new rulers who think highly of themselves:

Where will the league of heroes come from
 With the takeover of the nation by thieves?
 Who will transform into gods to be worshipped
 With no respect for followers beneath or behind;
 With leaders soiling themselves with scandals,
 Selling their allegiance to their people's robbers. (*The Beauty I Have Seen* 123)

Ojaide's poems navigate the miserable Nigerian condition notorious for shameless thievery, and unrestrained dictatorship. "Corruption has become one of the major antinomies that create a deepening crisis of kleptocracy; it engenders a scandalous wealth among the ruling class with growing poverty, misery and degradation among the masses" (Ayinde 103). That is why Ojaide passionately continues the rhetoric of resistance that is characteristic of a Fanonist third phase, when "the native turns himself into an awakener of the people" (Fanon 179), and begins to resist unjust order. "When tomorrow is too long" is full of images of systematic looting. Ojaide is requesting all to be cautious of the deception and shrewdness of the politicians. His skillful employment of words as weapons of battle and resistance of the rulers and their schemes is depicted in the poem where he lectures people on how to behave when a juggler arrives in town, loaded with a bag of histrionics:

And if a juggler ever arrives in town
 with an eagle in a glittering cage,

shun all the trappings of democracy,
do not allow him perform;
he is bound to be the beneficiary
of all accounts and you the victim
of that gap-toothed shine of a wand. (*The Fate of Vultures* 18)

He likens a politician to a juggler in a circus who disappears soon after performing his act, only to reappear when there is another show to be performed. Similarly, during election campaigns, candidates toy with the emotions of the masses with a view to persuade them to vote for them. After winning the elections, they vanish only to show up during another campaign (read performance).

The use of the image of the eagle in a glittering cage in the poem serves the fraudulent politician's activities as the symbolic bird will attract people's attention and nationalist feelings. On the other hand, an eagle in the cage symbolizes the loss of freedom. Only experienced people will understand the intention of the poet who wants to tell them that in the nearest future, all of them will be enslaved like the totemic bird.

The final stanza emphasizes the theme of resistance in the poem. Ojaide calls on his addressees not to allow the deceitful juggler to perform. People are given instructions and are advised to:

Shun all the trappings of democracy
Do to him what you'll do
To a cobra in your doorstep
Let tomorrow be too long. (*The Fate of Vultures* 18)

This means you should be attentive to the scheming man and when he comes to you to ask if he may make a democratic nation out of you, never give him a chance. Ojaide's poems of resistance can be regarded as verbal rockets intended for targeting the political despots who caused the distress of the people and the homeland. The poet raises awareness about the state of depression in his society, exposes the vultures and equips the masses of the people with the necessary weapons- both physical and spiritual- to fight these vultures, snakes, and ogres.

This enthusiastic resistance spirit of the poet himself is portrayed in other poems, where he tells us that he has a long history of struggle against these notoriously corrupt regimes:

I have sat through harsh winds
And alternating hot and cold seasons
But have not lost my skin;
My nerves are better guards than ever. (*The Fate of Vultures* 41- 42)

He has not lost his identity as loyalists and compradors but is still a bona fida nationalist whose major concern is the enhancement and reform of his society. In fact, it seems that one of the most painful consequences of

colonialism is that it has bequeathed to the African peoples some of the elites who have blindly accepted the Western views and hence care only for assuming top positions and acquiring wealth. They “use the powerful instruments of economic control inherited from colonial regimes to serve the interest of their fellow elites and themselves” (Okolo 141). It is ironic that such parasites would rob the land of its riches in order to satisfy their hunger for power and wealth. As a nationalist poet, Ojaide promises to fight corruption wherever it is and will at least separate himself from those who deceived their very people: "Let their bells ring dumb in my ears;/I'll not share in their communion." (*The Fate of Vultures* 13) For Ojaide, the land should be cleansed of the clan of parasites who reap where they have not sown. They should be replaced with the producers who sacrifice their lives for the homeland.

To sum up, Tanure Ojaide's main concern is the well-being of the Niger Delta people and heritage as a key issue in his anti-neo-colonial project. Though Ojaide's poetry seems simple at first sight, each line is pregnant with meanings and testifies to the contemplating nature of a remarkable poet. Ojaide's works represent a thoroughgoing satire of the neocolonialists who betrayed their homeland and allied themselves with the foreign colonizers. He satirizes the incestuous relationship between compradors and colonizers. In order to correct the wrongs done to the people and the environment, the African middle class must give up the looting mentality inherited from the colonial era. The aesthetics of Ojaide's poetry also centers upon his attempts to re-create African traditional heritage, culture and environmental philosophy, regardless of the forces of evil represented by the imperialists and their agents. Only by restoring the lost collective feelings can the Africans be liberated from the shackles of neo-colonialism.

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