

THE MOTIF OF LAMENTATION AND ANGER IN SELECTED AFRICAN POEMS

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Abstract

This study focuses on the motif of lamentation and anger in selected African poems. It has been observed that African poets use personas as representatives of their poetic voices to lament and express vexations about the situations they have encountered in their physical, social, and political spaces. Therefore, this study focuses on Syl Cheney-Coker's "Peasants", Oswald Mtshali's "Nightfall in Soweto", Kofi Awonoor's "Songs of Sorrow I and II", Niyi Osundare's "A Song for Ajegunle and "Our Earth Will Not Die" and Tanure Ojaide's "In the Land of Anger" as data for the study. In a detailed discussion of the selected poems to uncover the thematic reflections of the poets, the study adopts the Sociological approach to literature as its theoretical underpinning. This theory is relevant since the concepts of anger and lamentation stem from socio-political and economic problems in the domains of the personas. The study concludes that the poet uses the motifs of lamentation and enrage to discuss the prevailing social and political issues in their various nations.

Keywords: Lamentation, Motif, Anger, Vexation, African Poems

Introduction

African poetry shares affinities with other genres of African Literature. Poetry like other branches of literary art derives its subject matters from the events taking place in the environment of the poets. African literature as a composite entity has been influenced by various historical and modern-day realities. The influencers of this distinct brand of literature, mostly written in the languages of the colonial masters include the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial events that have shaped the societies of the writers' nations. Also, the thematic interests of African Literature have benefited from the socio-cultural climates prevalent in the continent which include political crises, social and economic injustices, feminism, and diasporic issues. This study focuses on selected poems in which the poets of African descent address different woes and experiences of the continent as first-hand witnesses in their societies.

John Cuddon holds the opinion that a poem is "A composition, a work of verse, which may be in rhyme or maybe a blank verse or a combination of the two..." (542). Therefore, a poem is an imaginative work of literature that employs a combination of words in a verse form to convey the thoughts and feelings of the poet. In the literary text, what differentiates poetry from the other genres is that it possesses a uniqueness:

which lies in the way the words lean upon each other, are linked and interlocked in sense and rhythm, and thus elicit from each other's syllables a kind of tone whose beat and melody

varies subtly and which is different from that of prose... (Cuddon, 542).

Poetry as a genre of literature for Cuddon “is a comprehensive term which can be taken to cover any kind of metrical composition” (546). Joseph Kennedy and Diana Giola align their views on poetry with Robert Frost who defines poetry as those issues of interest to the poets (656). Niyi Osundare the renowned African poet in his poetry collection titled *Songs of the Market Place* proffers his view of what poetry is. In the poem titled “Poetry Is”, the poet links poetry with various human activities and natural attributes thus:

Poetry is
the hawker’s ditty
the eloquence of the gong
the lyric of the market place
the luminous ray
on the grass’s morning dew (3).

In this stanza, the poet sees poetry as epitomizing some of those discernable features in the physical existence of humans. To lay credence to this, Osundare concludes with the following stanza:

Poetry
is
man
meaning
to
man (4)

Osundare sees poetry as the totality of the individual. According to Ezenwa-Ohaeto, “The indication in that extract is that poetry is not abstract but a form of creativity which aids man in the understanding of his fellow man” (270).

The term “lamentation” has the same meaning and connotation as wailing, grief, and prolonged crying. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze some selected poems written by poets from two regions of the African continent that belong to different generations. The diverse selection of poems from these parts of the the continent highlights the fact that the poetic muse has no ethnic or cultural barrier; and that the poets, as representatives of their societies, use poetry to ventilate the woes of their fellow citizens and the socio-political realities prevalent in their environments. Our data consists of selected poems from the continent whose thematic interests touch on lamentation, prolonged crying, or display of anger. According to Eustace Palmer, a literary theory “can help bring out the concerns, the relevance and therefore even the quality of a particular work” (3). These assumptions are valid. In line with this, the Sociological Literary Theory is adopted as our theoretical approach in this study.

It is Mao Tse-tung cited by Omafume Onoge who states that amongst several things: “There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake” (465). It is in line with this that the Sociological Literary theory is chosen as our framework. This choice is also in line with the opinion of the Chicago School of Critics as cited by Charles Nnolim:

There are many critical approaches to literature... the only rational ground for adhering to a particular interpretation rather than others in a given literary work is that particular interpretation's superior capacity to give us the special kind of insight into the understanding of that work (8).

This literary theory, also referred to as sociological criticism, takes a look at literary texts within the context of the society in which it was written. In this theory, history, political events, social considerations, culture, and class, play prominent roles in the interpretation of literary works. It is the socio-cultural and political thematic interests of the poets in this study that have influenced this choice. Karl Marx, Louis Althusser, and Emile Durkheim are among the famous scholars of this theory.

Evidence of Anger and Lamentation in the Selected Poems

The analysis of the selected poems that constitute the content of this study begins with the poem by the Sierra-Leonean poet and literary scholar, Syl Cheney-Coker. In his poem titled "Peasants" (Senanu and Vincent, 283), the first line "The agony: I say their agony" without any disguise, establishes the tone of the poem:

the agony imagining their squalor but never
knowing it
the agony of cramping them in roach-infected
shacks

the agony of treating them like chattel slaves
the agony of feeding them abstract theories they
do not understand
the agony of their lugubrious eyes and bartered
souls
the agony of giving them melliferous words but
mildewed bread

Using simple diction, the poet details the various types of ill-treatments that ordinary people go through at the hands of their leaders even in contemporary times. The refrain “the agony” begins every line of the poem as a reinforcement of the poet’s aversion to the injustices inflicted on the poor by the rich and influential. Cheney-Coker uses metaphors like “squalor”, “roach-infested shacks”, “chattel slaves”, “lugubrious eyes and bartered souls”, “thatched houses” and many more to draw attention to the miserable physical living conditions of the ordinary people of his nation. Using the run-on-line poetic device, the poet fails to apply any punctuation marks from the beginning of the poem to the end. This poetic device reinforces the unequal relationships that exist between the poor and the rich. The poet uses various negative metaphors to bring out the pitiable situations of the individuals who constitute the oppressed. These people experience “maliferous words but wildewed bread”, “naked feet on the hot burning tarmac”, “their children (having) projectile bellies”, “their thatched houses with too many holes” etc. The frequent use of contrasting words and expressions underscores the anger and lamentation of the poet who in the last three lines expands

the scope of his anger and warning to the leaders of the continent of Africa:

the agony of it all I say the agony of it all
but above all the damn agony of appealing to
their patience
Africans beware: their patience is running out.

It is at this point of finality that, the poet draws the curtain of this twenty-two-line poem to a close. This poem seems to have its origin from the perceived sufferings of the peasants (the poor) and there's evidence of this in the poet's use of a combination of long and short verses to express the agony of the people in the hands of their rulers. Through the use of complex imagery, Cheney-Coker provokes feelings of outrage in the poem. His anger becomes more obvious when he describes the hypocrisy and cynicism of those in power in the following lines:

the agony of marshalling them on election day
but never on banquet nights
the agony of giving them melliferous words
but mildewed bread.

Following the tone established by Cheney-Coker, Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali, a black South African poet whose first poetry collection titled *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* was published in 1971, laments the detestable treatments the blacks received in the hands of the whites in South Africa during the period of apartheid. His poem "Nightfall in Soweto" (Senanu and Vincent, 257) becomes his most combative poetic response to the miserable existence of

the native blacks of his homestead. He uses SOWETO (South West Town) in Johannesburg as a symbolic representation of the setting of his poem. Soweto during the period of apartheid was the worst assembly of depressed and dehumanized humans in the continent of Africa. Therefore, the poet's choice of nightfall in this horrible society is deliberate; it is within the hours of the night that the fundamental human rights of the people are mostly trampled upon:

Nightfall comes like
A dreaded disease
Seeping through the pores
Of a healthy body
And ravaging it beyond repair

This is a period of anger and lamentation on the part of the blacks who are being brutalized by the oppressive apartheid regime. The comparison of a typical nightfall in SOWETO to a dreaded disease signifies the atrocious activities associated with this period of seeming rest after a hard day's work. He laments that it is during this period that "A murder's hand lurking in the shadows, clasp[ing] the dagger..." threatening to kill the innocent and helpless blacks. In the third stanza, Mtshali through the persona personalizes the physical and psychological agonies in the poem:

I am the victim
I am slaughtered
every night in the street
I am cornered by the fear
gnawing at my timid heart;

In my helplessness, I languish

He subsequently employs the use of rhetorical questions to prolong his grief which is mixed with anguish:

Where is my refuge?
Where am I safe?

From stanza to stanza, Mtshali escalates his sorrow and anger. He, at a point, identifies himself as a sufferer of the tortuous experiences of the black people in Soweto:

I am the prey
I am the quarry to be run down
by the marauding beast

In the last stanza of the poem, he brings to an end his lamentation which is mingled with fear:

Nightfall Nightfall
you are my mortal enemy
but why were you ever created?

By so doing, Mtshali sustains the grievous tone that he begins the poem with. This poem captures the lamentation of an angry persona whose horrific experiences have left permanent scars on his psyche.

Mtshali's poem shares similarities with Niyi Osundare's "A Song for Ajegunle" (Senanu and Vincent, 311). Ajegunle as presented in this poem is a suburb of human squalor in Lagos, Nigeria, where poverty and misery reign supreme. Due to the features of the landscape

and experiences of the persona, Ajegunle is a human settlement that is slightly different from SOWETO in the poem of Mtshali. In SOWETO racial discrimination combines with poverty and squalor to create an atmosphere of oppression but in Ajegunle it is the twin experiences of poverty and squalor that oppress the citizens. From the first stanza of this poem of forty-nine lines, Osundare begins with the metaphorical expressions of hardship and poverty. He describes this place in words that depict the miserable existence of the inhabitants who possess “calloused hands” and “weed-infested smiles”. The poet brings out the wretchedness of Ajegunle by contrasting its “empty bag on the threshold” with the “bursting barns” of the Ikoyi - an abode in Lagos for the very rich and influential. In the subsequent stanzas, the poet laments the physical depravity of Ajegunle with expressions like: “roads porthole by callous rain”, “gutters heavy with burdens of cholera bowels” and “feverish orchestra of milling mosquitoes”. The environment wears the picture of “squalor” like the damp of appreciative painter”. The poet bewails without relenting:

The toothless swagger of beer parlours
the battery clamour of weeping wives
the satanic rumble of supperless stomachs.
The salaaming clarion of manacled mosquitoes

The metaphor of poverty is what Osundare attributes to the activities in the night:

The shadow thunder of hurrying feet
The hooded stench of night soil pails

The sweaty stupor of crowded mats.

The sunlight of the morning hours that should rekindle hope for the people offers them discomfort. The day begins in Ajegunle with:

A crow without a cock
taps without water
tables without bread
children without schools...

The concluding stanza like most poems of this kind brings the agony of the narrative to an end. He sees Ajegunle as:

Dreg of our foaming wine
Graveyard of our truant conscience
Cesspool of brewing rage

Of note in this poem is the refrain “I saw you sprawled out” which the poet uses severally to personify Ajegunle as a human being who is helpless; the hapless state and deplorable condition of the environment and the people. In each instance, Osundare draws a parallel between the indigent situations of the ghetto with images of impoverishment like: “A sheath with an absent cutlass”, “a stream without a bed, “a cat with hidden claws” and “a wounded snake”. In doing this, the poet compares Ajegunle with metaphors of want and deprivation.

Osundare, in another poetic endeavour titled “Out Earth Will Not Die” in his collection of poems titled: *The Eyes of the Earth* (Osundare, 50), presents a poem that he insists should be accompanied by “a solemn, almost

elegiac tune.” In a regrettable tone, the poet describes physical landscapes with mournful connotations attached to them. In the first stanza, it is the “lynched” lakes, “slaughtered” seas, and “mauled” mountains that catch the fancy of the persona. Despite all of these undesirable comments, there is a ray of hope that “... our earth will not die”. In the next stanza, Osundare follows the tone of melancholy. In the environment, what is available is “a lake ... killed by the arsenic urine from the bladder of profit factories”, “a poisoned stream (that) staggers down the hills coughing chaos in the sickly sea” or “the wailing whale, belly up like a frying fish, crests the chilling swansong of parting waters”. The poet’s sorrowful mood does not stop here. He laments that the acidic rainfall has destroyed the vegetation of the environment. The results of these are:

Fishes have died in the waters. Fishes
Birds have died in the trees. Birds
Rabbits have died in their barrows. Rabbits

After the poet’s catalogue of calamitous events, he devotes the last stanza to moments of hope and happiness. To him,

Our earth will see again
This earth, OUR EARTH

Throughout the poem, amid the lamentation of the persona, there is a refrain that connotes hope; “But our earth will not die”. This refrain which comes at the end of every stanza in the first section of the poem serves as a reminder that despite all the dastard assaults on the earth,

moments of respite exist. The poet after using sorrowful tones in the first section devotes the second part to pleasant moments expected of the earth. According to Ezenwa Ohaeto, “Contemporary Nigerian poetry derives much strength and vitality from Africa’s oral tradition” (49). This applies to the poems of Osundare. Samson Dare concurs with him. He believes that Osundare’s poetry has benefited and continues to benefit directly from the Yoruba language and culture, particularly the oral tradition...” (283). He is of the view that *The Eye of the Earth* by the poet “exhibits themes and lyricism whose features are traceable to the Yoruba cosmology” (283).

George Awoonor- Williams who is popularly known as Kofi Awoonor has benefited from being an African of multiple ancestry. He was born in the Volta Region of Ghana to a Togolese mother and a Sierra Leonean father. In the poem “Songs of Sorrow I and II” (Donatus Nwoga, 73- 75). He identifies closely with the oral tradition of the Ewe-speaking people of Benin Republic, Togo, and Ghana. According to Ezenwa Ohaeto, “Awoonor is positively influenced by the two traditions of Ewe poetry, the dirge...” (109). In this poem, it is the mournful tone of the dirge that he expounds greatly. This poem is generally classified as a dirge that contains profound elements of wailing on the part of the persona who is angry with his ancestors for failing in their duties to protect and provide for the offspring they left behind. This poem leans heavily on the African mythology of the presence of the ancestors to continually cater to the wellbeing of their descendants. As Andrew Nwagbara observes “Kofi Awonoor in this poem has used to the fullest the ethos of the Ewe dirge folklore to lash at the

dead who he believes should watch over the living and help them achieve success and prosperity” (Nwagbara,91). This assertion is correct within the context of his poem “Songs of Sorrow I & II”. The poet deliberately divides this poem into two sections for clarity; the first provides the preliminary melancholic tone which he exacerbates in the sound part. The tones of sorrow and melancholy are present in the two parts, with the climax of these attained in the second part.

From the beginning of the first stanza, the persona does not attempt to pretend; he accuses his ancestors of abandonment while lamenting the difficulties that life has shown him: “Dzogbese Lisa has treated me thus/it has led me among the sharps of the forest”. In the next stanza, he prolongs his lamentation by describing his pitiable situation in his community: “I am on the world’s extreme corner / I am not sitting in the row with the eminent”. He sees himself as being “on the world’s extreme corner”, signifying occupying the lowest position in his society. This same expression is repeated for emphasis in the same stanza. He removes any vestige of fear; “I can only go beyond and forget.” He sees the grave as a permanent place of rest. His wailing continues in the next stanza. It becomes more aggravated at this point “If I turn here, the rain beats me / if I turn there the sun burns me/”. He paints the picture of a man “who wears hardship as a piece of cloth”. He gives up. “The world is not good for anybody / But you are so happy with your fate”. The concluding two lines in the first section of the poem are subject to diverse interpretations thus; “Alas! The travellers are back / All covered with debt”. Who are these individuals who travelled and have returned with liabilities rather than

assets? Perhaps, they are the persona's relatives whose return from their sojourns, has worsened their sufferings. In the second part, the lamentation of the persona becomes heightened:

Something has happened to me
The things so great that I cannot weep
I have no sons to fire the gun when I die
And no daughters to wail when I close my mouth

He accuses his forbearers of abdicating their roles of shielding their descendants from hardship to the extent that: I have no kin and no brother / Death has made war upon our house. The resultant effect of this is that his ancestor's "great household is no more / only the broken fence stands". These are symbols of abject poverty. The combined effects of these two have resulted in "...those who dared not look in his face / Have come out as men". The pronoun "his" refers to his ancestor Kpeti. The persona in his lamentation becomes combative. "Let those gone before take note / They have treated their offspring badly/". In the last stanza, he sends through Agosu (The latest member of the class of ancestors) a teasing message to his docile forebears:

That they have done us evil
Tell them their house is falling
And the trees in the fence
Have been eaten by termites
That the martels curse them.

At this point, the persona's sorrow becomes uncontrollable. He demands to have answers to various questions that agitate his broken mind:

Ask them why they idle there
while we suffer and eat sand
And the crow and the vulture
Hover always above our broken fences
And strangers walk over our portion.

It is at this note of heightened lamentation and anger that the speaker explains their abandonments by their dead relations who have rendered their offspring weak to the point that they have all died remaining himself who lives in the inherited compound of his ancestors that showcases poverty. The speaker as an only survivor cannot stop strangers from taking the properties left behind by his ancestors.

Tanure Ojaide's "In the Land of Anger" as contained in his poetry collection, *History and Its True Colors*, begins with an accusation against a group of predators he refers to as "they" who have selfishly plundered their land and environment. He further introduces in the beginning a language of pain. The fact that "they throw flames at each other" indicates an internal conflict raging amongst themselves. The tangible and intangible items of destruction are the cherished values of the nation's past and positive traditions that have been inherited by the present citizens of the nation which are expected to be passed on to the next generation. The result of this calamity is that "we are left without a proud item to bequeath to the young. In

the second stanza of the first part of the poem, the poet extends his anger to those who the people have given the mantle of leadership and who have suddenly turned themselves into corrupt individuals who have been “empowered to slash and burn the commonwealth”. These buccaneers are those that the persona refers to as “fireball throwers”. The consequence of their looting of the patrimony of the state is their “indulgence in luxuries amid multitudes of barebones”. These criminals steal what belongs to all thereby leaving behind fellow citizens who are living corpses. Ojaide continues with the fire metaphor when he avers “Everything is catching fire in our hands” and the hard work of decades has been destroyed leaving nothing to mitigate the current famine in the land. The poet laments that the positive political gains of independence from colonial rule have been wasted due to “the arbitrary inconclusive INEC television results”. It is the electoral umpire, INEC, which has provided the corrupt leaders the leeway to succeed with the manipulation of election results. In the entire first section of the poem, Ojaide uses flame and fire as metaphorical representations of the destruction of the resources and the rich heritage of the Nigerian nation. The expression “INEC” gives away the Nigerian setting of the poem.

In section two, the speaker extends his anger to include events and human activities in the nation. Even in human relationships, there is a display of anger as “when you greet someone, expect insults in return for your civility” The poet holds the view that boisterous human activities do not indicate any form of humaneness. For most persons “...have become hollow

men and woman; we make noise but lack what it takes to thrive as humans”. The next stanza continues with the tone of lamentation:

Compliments are rare commodities; struck with a staple of insults.

We want to wound, scald and kill others to reap benefits.

I am angry with others who are angry with me and everything. What’s left of us, if we lose control of ourselves, lose our cool?

The social interactions associated with compliments are difficult to come by and where such exists, they are mingled with fowl words. The primitive nature of human existence in this land is such that people want to injure, burn, and kill others to achieve success. The level of antagonism in the land is taken to a new dimension thus:

The land fuels a vast bonfire so intense its extravagance smothers.

Now robbers, prostitutes, pastors and politicians gather

to strengthen their partnership and fan the flames, devour

the country and trash what is left of candour, courage and integrity.

The hostility in the land triggers extreme dislike and its intense prodigality suffocates the people. The people of this land assemble to accentuate their evil collaborations that are aimed at destroying the remnant positive values

of the nation. They have mastered the shortchanging craft of diabolic tricksters and they are mortgaging their lives to blow the world to ashes to prove their prayers and policies can punish disbelievers trying to stop them and the soporific flames from engulfing the nation.

In the above stanza the pronoun ‘They’ emerges for the second time in this poem and there is a connotative similarity in the use of the word in the two situations. These corrupt persons in this stanza have become gurus in all that are despicable and demonic. The interpretation of the second line in this stanza attracts the question, why? What this metaphorical expression means is that the lives of the poor people are being traded for that which is destructive and not beneficial to them. These characters have possibly provided adequate security for themselves while destroying the nation. This is a way of justifying that their “policies can punish disbelievers” who are against their looting of the resources of the nation. The poet employs alliteration in the third line of the above stanza. In the third part of the poem, the poet begins the first line of the first stanza with the word “Anger” for emphasis:

Anger has pitched a vast tent over the land
after breaking loose the bile reservoir of the
national dam
that now floods everywhere and half-drowns all.

In the first line of the above stanza, the magnitude of provocation in the land is described as a “vast tent”. It is anger that has exacerbated the entire nation, threatening

to consume the citizens. In the next stanza, Ojaide continues along this path:

Every word from every mouth provokes outbursts
of curses.
Everybody is angry with me however civil I
behave.
I am angry with everything and it is telling on
everybody.

In the above stanza, the mere utterances of words from individuals lead to “outbursts of curses”. Even acts of civilized behaviours attract the same reactions. Ojaide uses the pronoun ‘I’ in this stanza to make it obvious that it is the poet speaking through the persona in the poem. The persona is enraged by everything in his environment and it robs off on everybody:

The pastor annoys the congregation by talking
only about tithes;
not a minute on good neighborliness or helping
tithes;
folks are looting coffers to sow seeds for the
pastor to smile.

Above, the poet-persona subsequently targets the infuriation of the people emanating from the clergymen’s demand for tithes from the Christian worshippers. Men should be teaching them the ethics of good moral conduct. The poet becomes more intense in his display of anger:

I walk into the street or market and I am angry at
humanimals who do not mind living lavishly on
dirt and condemning others into the pitfalls of
their negligence. Thieves fill market and church
with weddings and funerals businesses rife with
flamboyance.

There is swearing for robbers who laugh off
other's loses.

The few good roads are bedevilled by brainless
drivers.

In the first line above, the reader is fascinated with the poet's coinage of the word "humanimals" which is a combination of human and animal. This represents the depth of his anger at these individuals who are seen on the streets and markets living obnoxious habits. The poet-persona further expounds that it is the despicable characters like robbers and the "brainless drivers" who dominate the human and physical landscapes of the nation.

Every police, soldier, and civil servant rotten-angry
with their state; and the people are angry with them
and the state; They are headaches to themselves, to the
government, and to the people.

Even the corrupt security agents, law enforcement
officers, and the government officials are angry with the
nation. In turn, the citizenry is angry with these officials
and the nation. The speaker in the next stanza continues
with his angry cadence:

The baby in the womb is angry at the lack of health
insurance.

Bride and groom are angry; though together they
are doomed for break up.
Young and old are angry at each other and at life
that denies them their dues.

The vexation in this land extends to the unborn children
who from the spirit realm envisage the absence of a
health insurance scheme for them. Also, the expectation
of failure in marriage is sufficient to make a couple
angry. The rage of the young and old in this society stems
from the fact that life has denied them their dues:

I rage against the hand that fails its people and at
people who fail their land.
I rage against a nation without any notion of
nationhood; I rage against a land that depresses its
sons and daughters.

In the above stanza, the word “rage” is repeated in every
line to expose the heightened level of the poet persona’s
disgust. He is infuriated that this nation has failed its
citizens while they in turn have disappointed their
country. He is angry with a nation that has no atom of
nationhood. Ojaide concludes the third section of the
poem on a note of melancholy:

There is venom everywhere; no safety in the land;
The leaders’ misappropriate the abundance of the
land.
How will the people not be angry and curse even in
their sleep?

Ojaide sees a fouled mood everywhere in this land of vexation; this is a land of no safety. He concludes with a rhetorical question that is pregnant with multiple meanings:

The land is angry
with a topsoil of vomit and subsoil of poison
and not feeling the warm soles of men and women---
today is so far away from the past
when there was conviviality of all beings.

The above extract heralds the last section of this poem. The language of the first line is emphatic. "The land is angry". The poet-persona juxtaposes agricultural elements like "topsoil" and "subsoil" with imageries of putrefaction and venom. These odious imageries make it impossible for the soil (land) to feel the positive impacts of "men and women". Ojaide at this point draws an analogy between the past and the present; the past was filled with camaraderie amongst all humans while the present relationship is a far cry from the past. The next stanza reveals more of the poet's exasperation:

The waters are angry
with waterscapes of other beings reclaimed into land
because humans are multiplying, their desires
bloating.
The fish population dwindling from avid
malpractices
by those who care not if they kill themselves to get
rich.
The waters miss the company of their residents;

The fishers can no longer wait for the fishing season
because life is hard for them without criminal acts.
Today is so far from those days
when each acknowledged the sanctity of the other.

In the lines above, the speaker is annoyed with the waters (river): “The waters are angry”. The reason for this vexation is that the aquatic architecture of the riverine environment has been infiltrated with all kinds of human activities that arise from the increase in the population of the people. It is the greed of these people that has led to a reduction in the presence of fish in the rivers. The illegal practices of the fishermen and their collaborators make their survival without “criminal acts” difficult. Ojaide again dwells on the comparison between the present and the past: “Today is so far from those days / when each acknowledges the sanctity of the other”. In these lines, he pays tribute to the days of yore when each person recognized the inviolability of his/her neighbour. Ojaide’s furiousness is subsequently targeted at the flora and fauna:

The plants and their dependents are angry
at the harvests of their still green fruits
to market away their virtue; nobody
waits to give trees respite to thrive
and the harmonic orchestra of the residents of the
forest
fall silent from the insane assault of men
who reduce the forests to a sand fill; a burial ground.
Today is so far from yester years
When we were so contented with simple needs.

In the above extract which is the last, the poet-persona identifies the vegetation as being angry. Why are they angry? There are multiple reasons for their vexation. The plants and their associates in the forests have suffered due to the harmful activities of the people. The “insane assault of men” on the plants has turned the forest into a wasteland and burial site. The concluding two lines remind one of the lost glorious yesteryears: “when we were so contented with simple needs”. In particular, Ojaide in the last line, emphasizes the frequently agonized experiences of the people; the experiences of the past being more pleasurable than that of the present in Nigeria.

The structural formation of the poem is such that it contains four lines in each stanza in parts one and two. In the third section, the poet employs three lines in each stanza, and in the final part; there is no uniformity in the number of lines in each stanza. The effect of this style is that it gives the poet a kind of flexibility in the choice and multiplicity of issues that form the content of the poem. There is an effective use of the poetic technique of enjambment in the poem which creates a racy impact. Finally, the poet touches on several societal issues and natural phenomena in one poetic onslaught.

Conclusion

Like satire, lamentation and anger have been used as poetic motifs in African poetry. Vexation and wailing have been employed by the poets in this study to address issues of corruption and injustice. Syl Cheney-Coker discusses these twin maladies as being present in his

country in the past and by extension, the present. The metaphors of poverty and misery in his poem are not limited to his homestead, but the entire African continent. Oswald Mtshali in “Nightfall in Soweto” paints the picture of horror, man’s inhumanity to man, and the racial injustices that were prevalent in South Africa before 1994. The poet, like his contemporaries in various genres of literature during the colonial era of apartheid, discusses the emotions of his audience with pictures of pain and agony. Osundare in “A Song for Ajegunle” and his definition of poetry consistently deploys the Yoruba oral tradition. In “A Song for Ajegunle” he examines the squalor, misery, and poverty that are associated with Ajegunle. Ajegunle symbolizes all human settlements where the people live amid crass poverty. In “Our Earth Will Not Die”, he paints a physical landscape that has been destroyed by human economic activities. The destruction of the ecosystem by these factors is a problem for all including other inhabitants of the earth. Kofi Awonoor in “Songs of Sorrow” concerns himself with the traditional African belief system of the presence of the ancestors in the lives of the Africans. His lamentation and wailing in this poem are anchored on these. Finally, the poets in this study have exploited the themes of lamentation and anger creditably in their poems to drive home their thematic interests.

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