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The Emergence of Nigerian Postcolonial Utopian Poetry

Clement Eloghosa Odia

Abstract

The Nigerian poetic tradition has seen many literary seasons and emerged from the culture of despondent literary consciousness to that of hopeful asseveration. Nigerian poetry has grown thematically and evolved stylistically over the past seven decades. This essay examines the emergence of Nigerian postcolonial utopian poetry in order to explore the manifestation of this new poetic phase in Nigerian historiography. It focuses on two Nigerian poets namely, Tony Afejuku and Idris Amali as new voices which epitomize the new poetic tradition. The postcolonial utopianism functions are the theoretical framework from which the poems are critically read to visualize the emerging poetic tradition. The essay conveys the following findings: that Nigerian postcolonial Utopian poetry is the new poetic trend. It affirms that the recurring nature of hope in the poems confirms the essential interest of the poets in the possibility of change and social redirection. Also that even when the poets lament over the poor condition of their country, they are not in despair. They are convinced that change is in the offing. The essay concludes that a better Nigeria is possible, hence, the poets articulate hope for economic and political recovery, which are the fulcra of the emerging Nigerian postcolonial Utopian poetry.

Keywords: Postcolonial Utopianism, Hope, Utopian Poetry, Emergence, Recovery and Poetry

Introduction

Modern Nigerian poetry has passed through several evolutionary phases ranging from the pre-colonial to the colonial and then to the postcolonial, which on its own, has further been experiencing different evolutionary trends. The early manifestation of the postcolonial poetic experience is what Josephat Adoga Odey and Patrick Odey Ogat have tagged "pioneer and second generation of Nigerian poets" (159), otherwise categorized here, as post-independent Nigerian poetry. As time went on, there emerged yet another, this time, the anti-civil war poetry detailing the absurdities and horror of the Nigerian Civil war. Kola Eke (58-68), Mbanefo S. Ogene (66-86) and Florence O. Orabueze (65-84) have also described it as "the Nigerian war Poetry". Notable works that limn the Civil War experience include J. P. Clark's *Casualties: Poems 1966-68* (1970), Wole Soyinka's *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), Chinua Achebe's *Christians in Biafra and other*

Poems (1973), Ossie Enekwe's *Broken Pots* (1977), Peter Onwudinjo's *Women of Biafra and Other Poems* (2000) and Amechi Nicholas Akwanya's *Pilgrim Foot: A Collection of Poems* (2005).As time went on, there emerged yet another, this time, the anti-civil war poetry detailing the absurdities and horror of the Nigerian civil war. Following the end of the war and its effects, poets like Wole Soyinka, Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun and Tanure Ojaide to mention but a few, began to write social critical poetry anchored on satirical valences to interrogate the failure of the emerging political class to better the lot of Nigerians. With the polarization of the country and the neglect of certain regions, there also emerged the poetry of agitation for social and environmental justice. This led to the emergence of the Niger Delta poetry as already indexed in essays by Kazeem Adebiyi-Adelabu and Olalekan Oyetunji (28-39) and Ismail Bala Garba (91-102). Prominent Niger Delta poets include J. P. Clark, Gabriel Okara, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Tanure Ojaide, Onokome Okome, and notable works by Joe Ushie's *A Reign of Locusts* (2004), Barine Saana Ngaage's *Rhythms of Crisis* (2004), Ebi Yeibo's *Maiden Lines,* G'Ebinyo Ogbowei's *Let the Honey Run and Other Poems* (2005), and Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil, but it was Blood* (2002), were significant contributions to the development of that kind of poetry.

After this wave of Poetic eruptions, we have seen the poetry of insurgency as categorized by Abdul-Aziz Bako (87-103). Notable poets in this group include Idris Amali, Abubakar Othman, Nereus Tadi and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. Their collections include Amali's *Tears of Desert War* (2020), Othman's *Blood Streams* (2014), Tadi's *Season of Sounds* (2016) and Adimora-Ozeigbe's *Mixed Legacies* (2019). Much earlier than the Niger Delta and insurgent poetry, we saw the development of the anti-military poems, exposing the pain of military dictatorship. Furthermore, the Nigerian poetic landscape has also enjoyed some ecocritical poetry where poems about environmental despoliation abound. Although, other minor trends have gained acceptance, such as poetry that involves feminist consciousness, queer poetry and several others. What appear to unite all these different poetic traditions (as noted by Charles Nnolim 21) is the tone of lamentation and the sense of nostalgia. In fact, they are poems of disenchantment and disillusionment. Despite these poetic trends, there is strong evidence as can be seen in this essay, the emergence of Nigeria postcolonial utopian poetry which is yet to attract scholarly attention.

Two poets have been selected for this study. They are Tony Afejuku and Idris Amali using the poem collections namely: Afejuku's *An Orchard of Wishes* and *Amali's Back Again at the Foothills of Greed and Efeega: War of Ants* abbreviated as AOOW, BAFG and EWA respectively.

Postcolonial utopianism is anchored on hope for political and economic recovery. The term hope has become so commonly used that one is

often tempted to assume that one knows what it means. K. P. Nunn, for example, views hope as "a general tendency to construct and respond to the perceived future positively" (228). This perspective highlights certain qualities which when examined yields specific meanings. Firstly, hope involves painting a positive picture of the future. Secondly, it includes the sense of anticipation for what is ahead. Thirdly, hope imbues in the ordinary person a forward-looking attitude.

This essay is guided by postcolonialism as a theory. Postcolonialism encapsulates many strands of studies. Some of these strands include: the subaltern, migration, globalization, ecological, feminism and, utopianism. This theory is broad, thus, it is limited to a particular strand. Therefore, the postcolonial utopianism strand is what this essay has adopted. Postcolonialism, the theory and practice of evaluating the colonial heritage and legacy in former colonial countries, is one of the critical approaches to literary criticism. Felicity Hand traces the origin of post-colonialism to Edward Said, Gayatri Spirak and Homi Bhabha and looks at postcolonial theory as the only viable theory in the analysis of texts from the non-western world.

The utopian aspect of postcolonial theory is a recent approach to the study of postcolonialism. Its origin is traceable to Thomas More's literary text, *Utopia* which prescribes certain norms to be adopted in building a better society. However, More's brand of Utopia appears to have some unrealizable aspects as it was later dismissed as a pipe-dream. However, much later, the doctrine of Utopianism has emerged and broadened to suit modern societies.

Lyman Tower Sergeant defines "Utopianism as social dreaming" and that social dreaming itself involves "the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live" (8). Paramount in this definition are the "dreams" which represent the alternative vision of the writers concerning their societies. The aspiration of the writers is to improve their immediate social milieus beyond what they are at present. Consequently, a world of difference exists between the society of the dreamers and the envisioned society. Utopianism, in this connection, refers to the vision of the writer on how to change society and offer relief to the citizens as target of the Utopian change.

Karl Hardy defines Utopianism "as expression of desire for a better way of being, with its own equally distinctive effects in lived experience" (126). In Hardy's opinion, utopianism offers the masses the promise of a better society. It therefore appears that Hardy conceptualises it in terms of desirable social change. In this regard, the writer expresses the need for the masses to yearn for a much improved society which is being presented through the imagery in the poems.

Charles Nnolim introduces the African dimension to Utopianism. According to the scholar, Nigerian literary writing of the 21st century falls generally within the corpus of Utopian literature. Nnolim describes this brand of literature as a product of the 21st century as against the "literature of lamentation" which characterised the 20th century where the writers dedicated much of their literary works to "blaming the African politicians or military leaders for leading us into political and economic quagmire" ("Morning" 21). Consequently, African writers looked back to their glorious past for consolation. Thus, African literature in the 20th century was backward-looking and consequently, it did not envision the possibility of better future. Nnolim further writes that the dawn of the new century, a "forward-looking" literature evolved since "futuristic or utopian literature eluded the African writers in the twentieth century" (21). Thus, African utopianism conceives the future as being better than the past and the present when combined.

The manifestation of postcolonial utopianism in Africa is the persistence of the articulation of hope. According to Bill Ashcroft:

> African utopianism found its most powerful expression in the persistence of hope for freedom from colonial oppression. In most cases the vision was for an independent state, which led to great disillusionment as the post-independent nation simply moved in to occupy the structures of the colonial state (Vision 18)

Although Ashcroft was referring to the early stage of independence, what he has conveyed, in the above, is also true in many cases of utopian aspiration. Hence, the motif of despair preceding hope recurs throughout Africa. Hope and disillusionment are antithetical to each other in African utopian literature. The muse of African utopianism as conveyed in the literature is the overriding presence of hope. During the colonial administration of African states, African people were driven by the hope that once they achieved independence, they would begin to enjoy total freedom from colonial rule. This hope soon diminished and eventually died as disillusionment set in following the emergent political order manifesting all the trappings of colonialism. Ashcroft points out the positive aspect of post-independence "disillusionment the dynamic of hope generated by anti-colonial writers produced the energy for future thinking throughout the subsequent bitter realization of post-independence failure" (18). Ashcroft seems to canvass the idea that it is disillusionment that has inspired or fueled the utopian consciousness of post-independence literature. Aligned to this position is the fact that future thinking or "forward-looking" vision evolved and demonstrated a radical break with the previous perception of utopianism which celebrated the return to the glorious past for utopian energy.

In another essay, Ashcroft argues that "utopia is no longer a place but the spirit of hope itself, the essence of desire for a better world" (Spaces 2). From this statement, it is implied that fundamental to utopian thinking is that "desire" or "hope" particularly that which anticipates that a better society is possible is integral to the writing. Consequently, Ashcroft declares "postcolonial utopian vision takes various forms but it is always hope that transcends the disappointment and entrapment of the nation-state" (Spaces 4). Critical to utopian discourse is the entrenchment of hope and the articulation of that hope by the writers who inspire the sense of assurance in the readers that the future will be better than the present. Ashcroft, again in a different essay, writes that "Hope is the key, for without it there is no road to an alternative way of lite "1). In Ashcroft's opinion, literature plays a crucial role in society by imbuing the readers with hope: "creativity is important to oppressed people because its function is to inspire hope: hope for change, hope for freedom, hope for the future" (Revolution 3). If creative works function exactly as Ashcroft has described them, it therefore means that writers (in the context of this essay, postcolonial utopian Nigerian poets) use their works (poems) to inspire hope in the readers, for without hope there is no zeal to fight for change.

The theoretical foundation of Utopianism precludes several positions and intellectual opinions which have continued to ignore the potentiality of it to imagine a better world. Joe P. L Davidson comments that "Utopianism is known for its imaginative descriptions of social worlds both radically different and substantially better than our own" (18). Davidson's definition points some salient features which underpins this theory. The Utopian theoretical postulation emanates from the mind. There is the need for envisioning and imagining of a better place especially the imaginative recreation of a mentally conceived vision of a better place. The new place so imagined will be radically or totally different and better than from the one which the writer lives. Thus, the entire Utopian writing involves a description of a new world in which the reader aspires to dwell.

Julien Kloeg examines the function of Utopianism and highlights them as follows: "Utopianism can be used to initiate the status quo and activate dynamic duties". (220). This means that to evolve a better society, there is need to study the issues and challenges affecting the society under examination. This is why most Utopian discourses focus on critiquing the status quo. Additionally, Kloeg writes that Utopianism is an important theory because of its "inspirational and motivational significance" (220). The purpose of Utopianism is to inspire change just as it motivates the people to actualize a Utopian society which is ideal and better in reality.

Still on the dynamics of Utopianism, Anna Friberg explains that "Utopian is thus the forward dream of the not-yet that is set in motion by a

Utopian impulse, it is the expression of hope" (12). It is imperative to add that the perception of the "not yet" activates the sense of possibility and the imaginative creation of a better world. Utopianism refers to the perception of a world which is inspiring and imbues the reader to aspire to live in it. Hence, it is a kind of forward dream girded with some anticipating expectations. Utopianism, as Friberg has written, involves the expression of hope for a better place.

In a similar vein, Wanting Li describes utopianism as "any proposal of a utopian future (which) aims to explore what is good for their citizens and how to make them happy (Emphasis added)" (45). Li explores another dimension to utopianism. This involves the projection of utopian ideals as proposals for societal development. Most utopian propositions look beyond the present to focusing on the future and its possibility of improving life. It is the duty of the writer to envision through literature what is attainable and possible for social redirection and growth.

In the view of Suzanna Tornroth and Sarah Mander, Utopianism "offers the opportunity to explore alternative configurations of needs, wants, and satisfactions, as well as the agents of change that can mobilise them" (13). The pivot of utopian vision is the ability to provide alternative means of meeting societal needs. It is a visionary anticipation of the future and of the ability to capture through the mind those whose shoulders the task of rebuilding society lies.

Ilkin Huseynli explains that "without utopia, we cannot depict a better world, a model that we wish to achieve. Utopias are our dream and without them we all are uninteresting creatures in which a change is absent" (15). This view sums up the tenets of postcolonial utopianism. Coming from the background of soio-political dystopianism, the utopian writer utilised the literary craft as a way of relating the dream of a better society. Through this dream, the reader is able to see a clear model of what a true world should be. Hence, the beauty of the world resides in the literature wherein the writer gives hope to the reader that a better and safer world is not only possible but also achievable.

This essay depends on the poetry of Afejuku and Amali for analysis and evaluation. Afejuku's poetry has attracted several critical remarks and in-depth interpretations. For example, Okofu Ubaka describes the poetry as "a medication for the ailing soul" (15) especially when viewed from the Niger Delta predicament. Anote Ajeluorou refers to it as "a revolutionary counterforce to the brigandage of land thieves and the need to chase them away to retrieve lost patrimony" (39). Abdul Yesufu recognises the overwhelming presence of "a deeply philosophic core" (10) on which the poems are anchored. Abiodun Awolaja describes the poems as expressing "the pains of

disjointed nationhood" (34) which continue to inspire the creative community of writers.

On Amali's poetry, Bello D. Baba examines the poet as a social advocate who deplores the poetic weapon to criticise the military class for their "unjust practice against the citizens" (162). In a thematic study of the poems of Amali, Babayo Wakili describes "the military as a "failure to the nation" (237). As for Emmanuel Onun, "Amali speaks like a soldier who has an enemy in front of him" (27). Sule E. Egya explains that "Amali is one of the angry poets" (273) who employ "provocative images" to combat military dictatorship in Nigeria.

By paying attention to postcolonial utopian ideal, encapsulated in the infusion of hope, which from the foregoing reviews has been ignored, this fills the existing void in utopian research. Therefore, this essay departs from what critics have done by focusing on the poets' preoccupation with the infusion of hope in Afejuku and Amali's poetry of postcolonial utopianism. In their quest for a better Nigeria, these two poets articulate hope for economic and political recovery.

Hope for Economic Recovery

A critical study of Afejuku and Amali's poems reveals that these poets infuse hope for economic recovery in their readers through their poems. By economic recovery, one could mean the growth and development of a country's economy as a result of the increase in the production of goods and services, such that hunger, starvation, and hardship are drastically reduced. In short, it connotes a boom in trade and financial stability of a nation.

In "Father's kingdom" (vii), Afejuku envisages economic prosperity for the people of Niger Delta by combining both visual and olfactory imagery to articulate a future devoid of exploitation of the crude oil and other natural resources.

> Our creeks
> Shall know no plundering again
> The nostrils of our creeks
> Shall smell love… inhale love
> That distils
> In orchard harmonies. (AOOW 5)

One cannot help but notice the pervading tone of uncertainty in the speaker's statement. This is borne out of the fact that the Niger Deltan youths, will no longer tolerate all forms of economic exploitation particularly of the economic wealth in the region. The virtuosity of the narration is all the more remarkable when one reflects that the region is home to the economic power of the entire nation coupled with the fact that development has not really taken root in the region. This poem is forward-looking as the poet envisions a situation where

crude oil will no longer be taken without recourse to changing the lives of the host communities.

The image of forceful stealing is used to explain the activities of oil companies supported by government officials operating in the Niger Delta. These collaborators entrenched poverty in the region which ultimately breeds armed resistance and further devastation. Despite this dreadful picture the poet is hopeful that in the future the Niger Delta will be a place where all forms of looting will end and violent agitation shall cease. Relying on personification, the poet portrays the creeks as a human being having nostrils. The olfactory imagery is enhanced by the use of metaphor in which 'nostrils' evoke the sense of smell. The reason is that the creeks have been elevated to the status of a human being exhibiting the capacity to give to its citizen's love and harmony. The point being made is that economic prosperity is the antidote to youth restiveness in the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general. Through the poet persona's tone of hope, there is a flow of economic rejuvenation emanating from the figurative language.

Hope for economic recovery is articulated through ornamental and agricultural images in Afejuku's "Father's Kingdom" (line 2). The speaker tells the people to be expectant and to wait earnestly for economic boom:

Watch daily at the gate...
hourly at the doors...
Treasures shall come...
and multiply
in our orchard. (AOOW 51-52)

The word "Treasures" presupposes precious ornaments like gold, silver and jewelry among others. In this poem, treasures connote finance or economic wealth. The persona is confident that the wealth will multiply and be in abundance in the future. Also, the image of a farm house is used to review the theme of economic well-being in the following lines:

Lord Lord Lord Lord
Multiply this orchard
Multiply whole Lord album our Barn
Multiply
And banish bane
Banish (51-52).

The word "barn" refers to a farm house with storage of food. It conveys the idea of food security and abundance. The poet prays to the almighty God to "multiply" the barn and to eradicate corrupt leaders and their agents who make mockery of the nation's economic prosperity from the country. The point is that economic recovery can only be attained if bad leaders (metaphorically referred to as "bane") are prevented from getting to positions of authority. Afejukun's hope for economic revival is thus, anchored on good governance

and divine blessing. The artistic quality of the poem is enhanced by the use of repetition in words like "Lord", "barn", "banish", "multiply" and "orchard" to capture the speaker's enthusiastic mood and his anticipation of economic boom. Also, there is the use of alliteration. For example, "banish bane/banish" conveys the ... sense of economic blessing which is dependent on the benefit of disengaging corrupt officers from the positions of authority. Afejuku's infusion of hope, in the people of the Niger Delta through ornamental and agricultural images, energizes the people and it is aimed at enthroning utopian change in the Niger Delta region.

Obsessed with giving hope to the masses, Amali in the poem, "The god we made," expresses the desire for economic recovery for all Nigerians. The poem opens with much enthusiasm and optimism:

> We climbed the rostrum of the future.
> Forecasting and procrastinating
> Planting the seeds of the corn
> That we had screened full of hopes (EWA 73)

To improve the economy or make the country economically viable the speaker recommends a future-looking and proactive approach. This idea is conveyed through metaphorical language "the rostrum of the future". The future is compared to a rostrum, "a raised platform". However, in the context of this poem, it refers to the great height which the nation will attain as well as the economic prosperity which is being expected. For this reason, the speaker predicts hope for economic revival as the people engage in farming (by "planting the seeds of the corn").

In the next stanza the same idea is expressed this time, through repetition and agricultural imagery:

> We tended the seedlings
> Nourished is sprouting Life full of hopes
> the seeds of the corn,
> We tended the seedlings
> nourished it's sprouting life full of hopes
> A communal hope of tomorrow born
> As we daily look towards the sun. (73).

There is the motif of planting and caring for the seeds which dominate the poem. The purpose of this is to show the much effort required to build a thriving agricultural sector which is necessary for a buoyant economy. A critical attention to some of the words revealed the need for commitment and dedication to work in order to revive the economy. Words like "tended" and "nourished" are employed to show that hard work is by pivotal to economic growth. It is on the strength of this that the poet persona's "hope of tomorrow (is) born". Also, the poet employs the image of the sun to express the idea of a bright future which the growth in agriculture is expected to produce in the

country. Thus, Amali uses this poem to encourage the people not to lose hope in the economy and the future because it is only "skeptic" who are "downcast" and as such they "look towards the dark horizon". The hopeful ones, "look towards the sun". There is the contrast between the two luminal images as they help to buttress the need for hope in the face of despair.

Amali's concern with giving hope to the people resonates once again in another poem entitled "back again: Lagos" where the speaker articulates hope for economic recovery. The poet employs a speaker who has just returned to Lagos City after several years only to be gripped by the sense of social disparity between inhabitants of affluent areas of Ikeja and Lekki while at the same time exposing the hopeless condition of the poor in Ajegunle and Ojuelegba:

> Of Calabar in season of wetness
> Overseeing the enclaves of the outlet
> Not to Eko meridian Ikeja Airport Hotel
> Nor Lekki City of the wealthy of the Commonwealth
> But into the warm embrace
> Of Ajegunle and Ojuelegba
> To feel the warmth of the oozing stench of the slums. (EWA 54)

The poet presents the speaker as a traveller through whose eyes the reader gets to understand the two separate worlds: news of the world who live on the nation's wealth and those of the poor who are denied the right to enjoy their nation's Commonwealth.

The technique of contrast is used to effectively to emphasise the condition of squalor of the poor. The poet complements the contrast with the use of Olfactory imagery where "the stench of the slums" evokes the sense of poverty and social inequality. Thus, these slum dwellers have no hope as long as their filthy environment is not upgraded.

Leaving the foul odour of Ajegunle and Ojuelegba, in the same poem, the poet focuses on the malnutrition and health hazard that the people in these towns often live with:

> As the lean stomach of:
> Obalende, Ojuelegba and Ajegunle
> Turn into balloons hung
> On lean frames of toddlers in running noses. (54).

This depiction of hardship is meant to spur the masses into social awakening and for them to reject the idea that the suffering is an act of God. They are indirectly being sensitized to look beyond their present predicament and to engage in acts that will bring about utopian change. The picture of over-bloated stomachs, owing to the growing cases of kwashiorkor which afflicts

the children buttresses the fact that people living in the slums have no sense of belonging in their country and neither are they cared for.

As can be seen, this poem satirises the uncaring attitude of the rich and the government to the poor. In the closing stanza, the poet persona reveals what must be done to salvage the poor from their poverty:

> Lagos we are back again
> Not as the eye of the vultures in the air
> But as men
> Of the stubble and defiant lineage
> To pull down the iron wall of Filth and greed
> To reap the Commonwealth. (54).

There is a deliberate attempt to reject the passive attitude often displayed by the people towards getting rid of corruption (symbolically conveyed as "the iron wall of Filth and greed"). The poet is angry and writes that the people are no longer satisfied with watching from a distance how the leaders lead the country into economic recession. The poet conveys this idea through a bird image in which the speaker compares the people's sense of aloofness to vultures in the sky looking down at carcasses. Rather, the poet articulates the desire to combat forces of corruption which has assumed a very high proportion. According to the poet persona, when the people eventually pull down this symbolic wall of corruption, they will then be able to enjoy the nation's Commonwealth. Therefore, Amali inspires the people to achieve Utopian change by projecting hope for economic revival.

The pivot of post-colonial utopianism is the infusion of hope for economic recovery as a fundamental step to resuming society from the brink of economic collapse as well as building a new society where hope continues to endure in the face of the several economic woes.

Hope for Political Recovery

In the preceding section one has demonstrated the recurrence of hope for economic recovery in the poems of Afejuku and Amali. This section will examine the prevalence of hope for political recovery in their poems. Political recovery presupposes the return to civil rule with all its features such as freedom from tyranny, rule of law, and mass participation in elections. In fact, it means the entrenchment of democratic rule.

Afejuku's "Elegy of the butchered", begins with the picture of loss. Firstly, the poet evokes the loss of lives through horticultural imagery. This is followed by the loss of hope and thirdly, the poet conveys the loss of opportunities through evocative imagery.

Later, the speaker reveals the consequences of the losses thus:

Love grow pale
Beauty recedes
Pain grips
Hope groans
Boomland in misery land
Sparkling with smothering stench
Sparkling with depthless decay. (AOOW 8).

Afejuku's use of language is an indication of how poets use words to portray with accuracy the different aspects of life. A critical attention to words like "grows", "recedes", "grips" and "groans" suggest a land where everything has gone bad. For example, "love" is said to grow "pale". To be pale underscores the sense of sickness or unwholesomeness. Also, that beauty recedes, evokes the sense of loss, deprivation and fadedness. Again, that pain is gripping shows the ironical power of Afejuku's language employed to express the savagery of military dictatorship. Consequently, "hope groans" thus conveying the frustration of the people. By personifying "hope", the poet draws attention to the people's dissatisfaction with those in authority.

The succeeding lines of the above stanza reveal the use of antithesis. The aim is to show the change from good to bad. For example, the country's "boomland" in the past has now been reduced to a "misery land" by the soldiers in power. Also, the country which used to be sparkling in integrity and honour has now become a place of "smothering stench", a suggestive reference to corruption. In fact, it is ironical that a country that used to be "sparkling" with the sanctity of human lives is now sparkling with "depthless decay" an indirect suggestion of mass killing and burial.

Despite this picture of perversion, the poet bubbles with hope for political regeneration, thus:

Yet I am no ancestor-saint
Of benign days
Sing of lambency.
I sing a tale6
of beauty and roses
Of our land
In tale
Of roses and beauty
Of our land. (AOOW 8)

These two stanzas are endowed with images of hope. The poet speaks of “benign days” and “lambency”. The word “benign” suggests kindness, benevolence and goodness. Thus, the speaker anticipates a future full of hope. Also, the word, “lambency” is an image of flame, which reveals the sense of resurgence, brilliance (brightness), light and even, hope. The beauty which

had receded is described here as rosy. That the speaker sings of "beauty and roses" suggests also that things will improve.

The poet goes paradoxical to articulate hope for political recovery:

I sing
Song
Of death
Song
Of hope
Song
Of death in hope and hope in death. (AOOW 9).

The expressions: "song/of hope", "song/of death in hope" and "hope in death" are instructive. Afejuku's sense of hope is to be seen in the vision of an enduring and tenacious hope. Firstly, the poet-persona sings of a "song/of death" but at another time, the one of hope is heard. This shows change of situation. Secondly, the tenacity of the poet's hope is to be seen in the readiness to sing a "song of death" but "in hope" that changes will come. Thirdly, the poet is strong in faith that despite death, there is still hope. What this means is that Afejuku advocates hope that does not give up even in the face of death.

Finally, Afejuku writes:

I sing of my people
I sing of my offspring,
I sing of our descendants
Wombs of pain … vanish
Masks of hope … vanish
Dances of death … vanish (AOOW 9-10).

The poet's range of vision is great. The greatness is said to be seen in the anticipation of his "offspring" and "descendants". The poet calls on those in authority to remember that they have a duty to preserve the nation for posterity. This explains why the poet attacks those who have become "wombs of pain", weavers of "masks of hope" and those who engage in "Dances of death" to "vanish" and stay out of the country. For this reason, the country will begin to experience hope of a political recovery. The old order where violent killings hindered political development will be replaced with tolerance, uprightness and forthrightness. These are the ingredients of a thriving political culture which invariably are the fulcra of postcolonial utopianism.

In Amali's poem, "Lineage of silence", shows the poet's preoccupation with hope for political recovery. This is achieved through the use of a speaker who represents the interest of the people. The pronominal form "we", which recurs throughout the poem establishes this fact:

We shall not be cowed into submission
In our orchard and jungles of life

By these soft palms in their cold rooms of rhetoric
While the builders of these edifices of greed languish in monumental legislative neglect!! (BAFG 87).

The voice one hears in the above stanza is one imbued with conviction, determination and hope that the old order can no longer be sustained. The picture of politics and the leaders presented in the above stanza smacks of defective foundations. The legislators depicted seem to have no sense of duty and responsibility to the electorate. The speaker affirms the decision of the people not to be afraid or intimidated by the legislature into "submission". The people are the builders who labour endlessly while legislators enjoy the fruits of their labour. Hence the poet calls for a radical departure from this kind of political wickedness. In fact, Amali is confident that change is on the way. The poet articulates hope for political redirection though subtly suggested from the defiant tone of the speaker. There is the sense of neglect on the part of the legislators who enjoy all the comfort while the people "languish in/monumental legislative neglect".

To reverse the above, the speaker declares enthusiastically:

We shall not be cowed
As silence is no cowardice
We shall never be cowed
We of the lineage of silence. (87).

The appropriateness of the word, "cowed", is to be seen in its indirect emphasis on its opposite, courage. This word is repeated to express the people's readiness to chart a new political direction for themselves, if they do not want the kind of political representation which they have been getting. That is, politicians seek support during election but disappear after winning. The poet is optimistic that the trend can be changed. The speaker explains that "silence" does not mean "cowardice". In fact, this buttresses their readiness to resist selfish political representation. The poet believes that when the people are united to stand in opposition to political wickedness, there will be hope for political recovery. Thus, Amali does not convey vain hope but one which depends on collective effort. Change of political behaviour cannot be wished into existence. It has to be demanded. This is why Amali presents the people's rejection of poor political representation.

The poet persona articulates that hope for recovery is achievable when the people make a demand of the political elite to reform their conduct. As seen in this poem, the people show their lack of fear, which often hinders them from challenging their political leaders to do the right thing. This is the poet's vision for a better society in which the people take responsibility to seek utopian change.

The poem entitled "I will sit here" is an interesting example of Amali's articulation of hope for political recovery. The poem dwells on the role of the writer as a committed reformer who also is an academic:

> I will sit here
> In this little cubicle
> Rejected
> The centre of human wisdom and vision strangled by decades of triggers of greed. (BAFG 75)

The speaker expresses the conviction that change is possible. The speakers buttresses this firm belief by the decision to "sit" there in that small office at the university (symbolically referred to as "the centre of human wisdom and vision"). Although, the government has "rejected" the university, the poet-persona is undaunted and impelled by hope for political redemption employing poetry as a weapon for attaining utopian society.

The poet then conveys the purpose of the unrelenting commitment to writing thus: "To reach the word/send venom and pains/not known in human universe and time". (75) Amali's poetry mobilises and instigates change through depiction of untoward behaviour on the part of the leaders. Also, the purpose of the poem is to employ mobilization of people as a weapon for fighting political corruption. This is expressed in the following lines: "To torment and raze to the bare ground. These edifices of filth/that shield the moon and stars" (75). As part of the new direction, the poet believes that when the people deal with public theft and corruption, there will be hope for political recovery. This involves non-selective fight against corrupt officers. Here, the poet intends to burn to the ground "edifices of filth" which foster corruption in government. Consequently, the poet believes in erecting a society where no one will be above the law. The said "moon and stars" are symbols which represent the high and mighty in the Nigerian society who the powers that be always protect. In the speaker's opinion, in the new society all such public figures will no longer be shielded from prosecution and imprisonment.

Amali's belief in the future of Nigeria accounts for the political redirection and probity which has been articulated in this poem. Amali does not express baseless hope neither can one call this vision of a better society day dreaming. Political recovery is achievable provided there is political will to fight corruption and those who shield them from prosecution. This is the cornerstone of Amali's hope for political recovery.

Hope for political recovery also resonates through the tone of optimism in Amali's "To Our Tormentors". The poem addresses leaders who torment their people to know that the end of their wicked rule is near. This hope for a new phase where political oppression will no longer be experienced is near:

God will
Come down
One of these days
On these hills
To meet all to
See beds. (BAFG 80)

The poet anchors this hope for political redemption on his knowledge of God and of God's intention to wipe out unjust human government and to enthrone righteous government on earth. It is instructive to note that when God comes down, no one will be spared. The image of meeting is employed to amplify the sense of destruction. The poet builds this hope on the fact that without destroying the old, the new cannot be built. The whole argument is built on biblical allusion to the anticipation of the end of the world and of Jesus Christ's inauguration of a new world order on earth. This hope is extended to envision a new Nigeria where political resuscitation will be achieved because of a political messiah whose coming will usher ideal change. Amali understands the enormity of hope for political recovery and that is why it is articulated through appropriate biblical allusion, tone and language which emphasises the utopian vision.

Conclusion

It has been seen that postcolonial Nigerian poets articulate hope for economic and political recovery. This is the common denominator of the poetry of Afejuku and Amali. Their poems are tied together by the quest for utopian change. Although, that is their overall thematic focus, they achieve this through various artistic strategies. What is commendable, however, are the different approaches employed by these poets to infuse hope in the readers. Afejuku, for example, favours good governance and resorts to prayers for divine intervention as ways through which economic prosperity can be attained. On the part of Amal,i boosting the economy will require hardwork, commitment and dedication to one's vocation. The poet encourages Nigerians to get involved in the fight against vices just as the government is counseled to end practices that entrench disparity between the rich and the poor. So far, the strategy deployed by these two poets for infusing hope begins with the establishment of the economic and political predicament in the country perpetrated by the leaders which ultimately culminate in the sense of despair and frustration in the country. The poets, after presenting the facts, argue that

despite Nigeria's current challenges, the people will recover economically and politically and that hope for recovery is a vital instrument for utopian change.

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Clement Eloghosa Odia, Ph.D, lectures at the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City. **E-mail: clement.odia@uniben.edu**