

**MODERN NIGERIAN POETRY AND THE QUEST FOR
DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF TANURE OJAIDE'S *IN THE
HOUSE OF WORDS* AND EMMAN USMAN SHEHU'S *OPEN
SESAME***

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled Modern Nigerian Poetry and The Quest for Development: A Study of TanureOjaide's *In the House of Words* and EmmanUsmanShehu's *Open Sesame* is written by me and that it is an account of my own research. No part of it has been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree in any university. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are well acknowledged by means of references.

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Signature

Date

CERTIFICATION

This thesis entitled “Modern Nigerian Poetry and The Quest for Development: A Study of TanureOjaide’s *In the House of Words* and EmmanUsmanShehu’s *Open Sesame* by Mohammed Ibrahim meets the requirements governing the Award of Master of Arts in Literature from the School of Postgraduate Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. It is therefore approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is sincerely dedicated to God almighty for his divine favor throughout my life.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of poetry and poets in highlighting the predicaments of the oppressed in the society. The poetry collections under study, TanureOjaide's *In the House of Words* and EmmanUsmanShehu's *Open Sesame* are located within post modernist Nigeria and are seen as a direct response to the socio-political and economic quagmire of Nigerian society, which serves as a watershed from which the poets draw their inspirations. As such, the study uses Socialist Realism as the theoretical frame-work in order to show the basis for the interpretations of the selected texts which further explain the concerns of the new generation writers as opposed to the earlier writers. The concept itself is based on the Marxist philosophical standpoint of dialectical materialism which abhors any form of mystifications such as religion and 'arts for arts 'sake'. Socialist Realism further subjects literature to the struggle for the communist reorganization of society. Consequently, the works of both TanureOjaide's *In the House of Words* and EmmanUsmanShehu's *Open Sesame* as defined by this concept are profound attack on all forms of oppressions and exploitations that is the trademark of our modern Nigerian society today. Considering the fact that the works are not mere political pamphlets but creative works of art, the study examines the artistic methods used by the poets to validate the statement made therein. In this way, the study posits that poetry is a reservoir of a coherent system of ideas, relying upon several basic assumptions about reality that may serve as the seed around which further thoughts grow. According to these perspectives, poetic's proposed ideologies are neither right nor wrong, but only a relativistic intellectual strategy for categorizing the world and forming a positive and constructive opinion about it which will help to produce positive ideology for progress and development. The above contentions thus form the platform upon which this thesis explores adequately the thrust of modern Nigerian poetry in relation to its place, status and functions as a vehicle of social awareness and development. The aim is to investigate how the poets under study undertake to expose the ills as well as the obstacles militating against progress and development in the post independence Nigerian society. The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter foregrounds the thrust of the study as well as explores the theoretical framework of the study which is Socialist Realism which advocates for an art that is clearly understandable to the masses, dedicated to objective truth and clearly depicts socio-economic reality in society. Chapter two is the literature review. Chapter three and four contain the in-depth analysis of TanureOjaide's *In the House of words* and EmmanUsmanShehu's *Open Sesame* respectively. While chapter five is the conclusion of the study.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The affinity of poetry to development occupies a central position in the discourse on literature and its functions in the society. As (Ngugi, 1972:34) noted, “literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum, it is given impetus, shape, direction and area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society”. Thus, poetry reflects society since it is given impetus by its forces. The power of poetry, therefore, arises from its ability to entertain and educate. It functions as a medium for social awareness which leads to socio-political and economic development. It serves as a reservoir of ideas from which people draw inspirations in order to positively structure their socio-political and economic existence. Thus, the impact of poetry here lies in its ability to arouse the consciousness of the readers and provide them with positive ideology for progress and development. It has been contended that arts and society are perhaps two sides of the same coin. In his *Art and Society*, Sanchez is of the opinion that society and art are intricately linked. He says:

Every society gets the art it deserves, both because of the Art it favors or tolerates and because artists as a member of society, creates in accordance with particular type of relation they have with that society

(Sanchez, 1973:112)

The relationship between art and society has been a major preoccupation of art practitioners across cultural, political, literary and social divides for ages. From varied points of view there seems to be a consensus that art influences society, which in turn informs the type and form of art that emerges from the society. While this interrelationship may be seen from different perspectives, either as beneficial or inimical to the society as the case may be, this study argues for the place and functions of poetry in social development, in terms of its potential in reflecting experiences and history on one hand and conscientizing the society for change and development on the other hand.

From the above standpoint, therefore, being a poet, whether in the early traditional society or in the modern/present time meant playing a prominent and public

role. More so, that a new literary orientation exists in contemporary Nigeria and by extension African literature cannot be doubted. This is informed by the changing nature and dynamism of the society. Nigerian poetry has undergone series of changes in both form and content. These changes reflect the historical experiences of the people ranging from economic, cultural, political and social issues that have occurred and still reoccurring in the Nigerian society. The concern of the contemporary poets in the society is the issues of class struggle. The social vision in both Tanure Ojaide's *In the House of Words* and Emman Usman Shehu's *Open Sesame* have shown these poets' concern and commitment to a society solely ruled and controlled by capitalism. These contemporary Nigerian poets attempt to attack the socio-political and economic forces that have subjected the masses to untold hardship and poverty. Through the use of literary devices such as metaphor, contrast, simile, allusion, satire imagery, symbolism and others, they lampooned and ridicule the elite class of the Nigerian society. To achieve this, their collections *In the House of Words* and *Open Sesame* respectively are embedded with various symbols and imagery especially that of animals like vulture, hyena, leopard, cobra and snakes all to show and highlight the ugly attitudes and the destructive tendencies of the ruling class who are the oppressors. Ingeniously and creatively they do that to expose the indifferences and insensitivity of the elite class toward their subjects. As (Soyinka, 1995:26) states:

The writer in contemporary terms must be socially
Committed and involved and must be prepared to
expose his society's shortcomings and suggest alternative value

Unlike the earlier/older generation of Nigerian writers, the new generation of Nigerian writers concerned themselves with themes such as exploitation and suppression, inequality and insensitivity of the elite class, dilemma and despair, turbulence and chaos arising from socio-religious and economic crisis in Nigeria. In their use of history in search of values through creative ingenuity to redeem their society of its malaise, take off from the present to the past and express optimism and hope for a meaningful future.

Over the years, the concept of development has defied and continued to defy a single and widely accepted definition, and it is pertinent to understand what it means before one can meaningfully talk about the Modern Nigerian Poetry and the quest for

social development. According to (Estera, 1981:3) “the concept has occupied the center of an incredibly powerful semantic constellation”. However, (Rodney, 1981:62) sees development as a many-sided process in human history, which at the level of the individual implies increased skills discipline, responsibility and material well-being. (Estera, 1981:8) further argues that “the concept of development could be said to describe a process through which the potentialities of an object or organism are released until it reaches its natural complete full-fledged form”. In essence, the position or perspective of development which this study subscribes to is that in which development is regarded as multi-dimensional process involving the totality of man in his political, economic, socio-cultural and psychological relation. It implies the fundamental values, which presupposes a concept of man in the process of sustaining life in his environment. Hence, the sharpening of human abilities and the productive organization of a nation’s mentality is of the utmost importance to the development of every human society. Indeed, in the words of (Sen., 1976:68), “development...is a matter of organic growth in essence, the process of allowing and encouraging people to meet their own aspirations. It covers the entire spectrum of a nation’s life and moves around a central pivot which is the natural will”. From the above perspective, therefore, development could be said to be a complex process through which a nation may attain growth and change in all spheres of existence, a process of the emancipation of man from poverty, fear and exploitation. From the ongoing, however, a pertinent question that emerges is that, how much of the burden of development can poetry, (as a medium of development), really bear? This, to an extent, inevitably brings us to the current debate on the duty or responsibility of a writer (poet) to his society. Essentially, the role of a writer (poet) in this kind of society is to, according to Soyinka, “function as the recorder of mores and experience of his society and as the voice of vision of his own time” (Bannered, 1971:56). He further argues that “literature must serve the cause of the people, to inform the struggle of the people and their liberation”.

To achieve the above set objectives, this study begins by pointing out the relationship between poetry and society, with the intention of showing how poetry can assist in social development within the context of the present socio-political and economic underdevelopment. Fundamentally, in the emerging information age,

knowledge rather than assets or resources hold the key to our socio-economic and political development. The cultural and scientific transformation of society implies that the writer (poet) now finds himself entangled within a new set of problems of identity and solidarity, and of defining the position he or she is occupying within the new society. Thus, thematically and creatively, the more the poet felt his or her relevance and sense of importance in the new social and political configuration, the more his product (poetry) becomes a relevant tool for socio-economic and political development.

Essentially, poetry is an imaginative activity which aims to awaken in the listener or reader emotions and impulses to action or opposition. However, unlike other works of art such as drama which has a direct message to its audience, poetry has no such far ranging power. The poet can only reach the willing readers. After all, “a poem is an inert object, it leaps to life when read and only then does the readers’ dialogue between and the poet begins. Only when he is read does the communication begins, because he can only directly influence those who read him. This demonstrates that the poet’s strategy is a slow and painstaking process of appeal and persuasion to or on the consciousness of the individual reader” (Osundare, 1980:2). To achieve this, the artist, through the beauty of his art, often creates an aesthetic form which appeals to the consciousness of the reader. However, the aesthetic form is the result of the transformation of a given content (actual or historical, personal or social fact) into an aesthetic proposition such as a poem, a play or a novel. According to (Herbert Marcuse, 1978:8). “the aesthetic transformation is achieved through a reshaping of language, imagery and symbolism which align to perception and understanding so that they reveal the essence of reality, which is the repressed potentiality of man and nature. The work of art thus represents reality while accusing it”. Invariably, the critical function of poetry and its contribution to social development resides in the aesthetic transformation of both form and content. The political potential of poetry lies only in its aesthetic. This is why to ascribe to poetry the function of directly changing the world could only be fulfilled in the medium of theory. Poetry cannot change the society but it can contribute to the changing of the consciousness and drive of the men and women who could change the society (Marcus , 1978:8 *ibid*). Thus, the task, duty or responsibility of the poet is to first and foremost appreciate the imitation of his genre or medium as he seeks to highlight and bring to the

fore the problems and contradictions confronting him, either as an individual or as it affects the generality of his society.

However, it is demonstrated in the study that the social vision of these poets Tanure Ojaide and Emman Usman Shehu can be best understood in the Marxist context of the theory of revolutionary art which stipulates that art must not only be real but “should reflect a progressive world outlook, be permeated with progressive ideas and deal with truly topical problems” (Marx, 1976:25). In the same perspective, Socialist Realism is used in this study to explain the works of the poet selected. From this standpoint the collections are interpreted to be primarily concerned with sharpening the social awareness of the people through a conscious ideological commitment aimed at presenting recipes for revolutionary social change. As works of art, the basic aesthetic requirements through which these socio-historical crises are stated are given critical attention. However, the aesthetic aspect is not pursuit as an overriding concern but serves as the medium through which the overriding concern on the socio-political and economic progress and development can be revealed.

The above contentions thus form the platform upon which this thesis explores adequately the thrust of modern Nigerian poetry in relation to its place, status and functions as a vehicle of social awareness and development. The aim is to investigate how the poets under study undertake to expose the ills as well as the obstacles militating against progress and development in the post independence Nigerian society, especially the emergence of the socio-political ills as a result of the structural dislocations and social disequilibrium. These problems as explored within the context of the poems traced their origin to the activities of the colonial masters in the continent. The attainment of independence by most African countries in the 1960s was viewed to have marked a significant period in the anal of African history. On the contrary, the problems of social inequality, unemployment, crime, corruption, disunity, insecurity, poverty, disillusionment on the part of the ordinary citizens, the betrayal of the ideals of independence caused by the political elites, among several others, became the order of the day.

In this sense, both Tanure Ojaide and Emma Usman Shehu’s ideological vision, represented in their anthologies *In the House of Words* and *Open Sesame* respectively, are

informed of material, cultural and ideological instruments of dehumanization and a corresponding concern for humanity. Their personal experiences with the strangulation of their people's economy through exploitations, embezzlements and mismanagements and the political inaptitude of their leaders, socio-economic and moral devaluation of their societies, remain the fundamental motivation behind their poetics.

According to the blurb of the collection Tanure Ojaide's *In the House of Words*, the poems evoke nostalgia in their exploration of the dehumanization of the Nigerian people, society, politics and the pop culture of the time. But rather than make the collection an essentially local one, rather than focus on the Nigerian society alone, Tanure Ojaide also captures the mood and experiences of other locals in Nigeria and even abroad, as well as national consciousness, particularly the period of the 2003 "electioneering campaign and voting "farce" in Nigeria. He also captures the experience of the Nigerian living in the poverty stricken northern parts of the country which has largely not been the subject of many writers outside the area. Thus, it is possible to assume that Tanure Ojaide's vision is a broad and encapsulating one, as he spreads his poetic eyes over a wide spectrum of Nigerian society and concerns.

Similarly, Emman Usman Shehu in *Open Sesame* has also demonstrated similar perspective in his commitment. To these poets, the function of poetry is utilitarian and in essence, the mainstream vision that Nigerian contemporary poets pursue in their enterprise is captured above. And because they are burdened with this social commitment and have had to address their poetry to the masses in whose sympathy they write, their language is devoid of density of metaphors and imageries and becomes as clear and as culture-dependant as the language of the second generation of Nigerian writers such as Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun and Olu Obafemi, who have had social commitment as their perspective. Consequently, such endeavor remains their principle with which one can conveniently analyze the poems of these contemporary poets. Their works are concerned with the contemporary social problems in Nigeria, with the aim of raising mass awareness of positive revolutionary alternatives to the present quagmire. Thus, the style and language of their poetry reflect the utilitarian value of poetry which, in Nigerian literature, means reducing the language of poetry to simple and masses appealing. As

(Marx, 1976:23) posits that "...artistic creation is one of the ways of reflecting reality and at the same time of perceiving and influencing the spiritual development of humanity".

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In a society that seeks to silence the artist and his ideals, he may choose to risk imprisonment, exile and even death by insisting on expressing his right as a writer. And in a bid to avoid censorship or the preying eye of the forces of subjugation and suppression, the artist utilizes a number of writing styles which not only represent aesthetic value but also artistically conveys the artist's critique of the society. On the basis of the above, while the first generation of the Nigerian writers (poets) focused majorly on cultural nationalism, revivalism and criticism against British colonialism and the emergence of alien culture, with the modern Nigerian poets, the focus is far from cultural nationalism and revivalism, to that of scathing attack and criticism of the current socio-economic and political predicament of the country. Their concern is about how and why the society is replete with so much mass exploitation, violence on the part of the peasant and the general social unrest. To these poets, as Marx and Engel posit "...artistic creation is one of the ways of reflecting reality and at the same time of perceiving and influencing the spiritual development of humanity" (Marx, 1976:23). However, such prevailing issues, especially the experience of the Nigerian living in the poverty stricken Northern part of the country, which has largely not been the subject of many writers outside the region, have not been adequately explored by most writers. Even when such issues are explored it is often sketchy and thus not adequately addressed. The research thus contends that:

1. There is a paradigm shift in the nature of poetic expressions between the first generation of poets and the contemporary Nigerian poets. This study is therefore anchored on the need to portray in clear terms this shift and changes both in form and content vis -a-vis the new generation of poets.

2. Most of the studies carried out on the contemporary Nigerian poet are merely content analysis. As such, this study would provide the blend of both content and poetic form and reveal how aesthetics reveal content and meaning.

3. Literature is a veritable outlet which can change the consciousness of people and provide them with reservoir of ideas for change.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study is to discuss the development of poetry in terms of its form and content, accounting for the shift and changes between the earlier Nigerian poets and the contemporary poets and to also demonstrate the potential of art in general and its contribution to social development. In the words of (David Singer, 1961:15) “the objective of any research is the acquisition and coalition of knowledge whether to aid in solving human problems or to satisfy intellectual or aesthetic objectives of the research”..

Based on the foregoing, the objectives of this research are:

1. To highlight the motivating factors and challenges the selected works try to portray and address in the society.
2. To demonstrate the efficacy of poetry as a viable medium used by poets to enunciate their discontentment with the present state of affairs and contribute to the ongoing discourse about the development and underdevelopment of Nigeria.
3. To contend that the impetus for development, modernization and national integration, therefore, formed the nucleus of Nigerian poetry after independence

1.4 Significance of the Study

The fact that literature is functional and capable of contributing to the progress and development of society underscores the significance of this study. In this context, this

study is based on the argument that literature (poetry) is an important tool of creating social awareness and as such should be given due attention so as to function more effectively in the society. This becomes necessary considering the centrality of literature and its response to the socio-political and economic quagmire of modern Nigerian society, which serve as a watershed from which the poets draw their inspirations.

In response to the above, the study, therefore, sets to show the interface between the above mentioned socially created problems and literary production. Hence, the exploration will help to reveal and highlight the ideological stands of the modern Nigerian poets from which belong Tanure Ojaide and Emman Usman Shehu, thereby removing misconceptions about modern Nigerian poetry. Such adventure thus, will give a better picture of literature (poetry) as not a mere means of recreation but as an effective tool for social change through enlightenment and conscientization for progress and development

1.5 Scope and Delimitation

This study is limited to the analysis of selected poems of Tanure Ojaide *In the House of Words* and Usman Emma Shehu's *Open sesame*. The aim is to specifically focus on how the poets under study have used the medium of poetry to capture the day to day experiences and problems bedeviling their society. The expectation is that such exploration, to a large extent, will reveal the causes: how and why our society is replete with such social inequality and injustice. Fundamentally, the selection of these poets is to validate the supposition that their works are representation of the diverse and the complex nature of the modern Nigerian society. This selection is carefully motivated considering the facts that other committed writers and poets exist. The basis for their selection is contextual relativity in the way and manner the poets present the socio-political and economic decadence of their society.

1.6 Methodology

This research analyzes the selected poems of Tanure Ojaide *In the House of* concern of the contemporary poets as opposed to the earlier Nigerian poets. Consequently, the study deploys the argument to demonstrate that interpretation of texts is based on sound intellectual capacity and skills to arrive at well grounded meaning. In order to achieve this, resources from a variety of scholarly fields were consulted, *Words* and Emma Usman Shehu *Open Sesame* so as to see how poetry can contribute to social change and development. Therefore, the study uses Socialist Realism as the theoretical framework to show the basis for the interpretation of the selected poems, which further explain the ranging from books, magazines, articles, journals, unpublished dissertations and internet materials.

1.7 Origin, Nature and Scope of Modern Nigerian Poetry

In the beginning, Nigerian poetry unarguably traces its origin to the chronicles of colonialism and subsequently to the introduction of western education, coupled with the activities of the missionaries who encouraged the literacy among Nigerians. Prior to these phenomena, however, the activity of poetry in Africa in general was purely oral, in which events were recorded through songs, proverbs, incantations etc. Fundamentally, prior to the incursion of Africa by the western colonialist, poetry represented an integral aspect of African oral tradition. It is first and foremost, as oral art, viewed as songs and associated with dance and music. From this perspective it can be said to be “man’s verbal utterances when he is emotionally excited” (Maduakor, 1991:2). Oral poetry is an integral part of African heritage. It functions within the oral tradition contributing to the ceremonial and festival occasions and dealing with varying degree of seriousness or humor, with the failure and success of society and private or public individual and expressing in general term the deepest belief of the society. Nwoga substantiates this position thus:

Poetry has always been a major component of African imaginative activity...the occasion for poetry extends from pure entertainment through the expression of emotion about the various universally

shared aspect of life... to ritual incantation made to bring about changes in life or changes in the relationship between the living and the dead or between man and the supernatural.

(Nwoga, 1979:62)

It is important to note that the aforementioned activities have a common denomination; that is, the factor of poetry being a communal event, something performed before an audience, aimed at persuading, entertaining, and educating the people who are within the poet's immediate environment and reacting to his words and general performance. As a result of this the oral poet has to be conscious of his audience, being sure he followed laid down procedures in the tradition to which his audience belong. This is what one would consider the basic oral or "African poetry",

However, over the years there have been intense debates about the independent existence of the aforementioned African oral tradition, especially in relation to the European idea of literature. Because Africans did not record events that took place during antiquity in written form, the European strongly rejected the existence of African oral tradition (poetry) as a reservoir of people's experience and general world view. It is used to be strongly believed by some of the highly placed intellectuals in the western world, that Africa had no history until the coming of Europeans into the continent. Emenyonu observes that: "the assertion went further to state that African history was simply the history of European presence in Africa. This assertion bluntly maintained that until the coming of the white people to the African continent there was no activity that was worth writing about. A professor of modern history at Oxford University once asserts:

Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach but at present there is none; there is only the history of the European in Africa. The rest is darkness and darkness is not a subject of history.

(J.D. Fage, 1981:231)

Obviously, his argument, therefore, posits that since we study history in order to discover how we have come to be where we are and that the present day world is so dominated by the western European ideas, techniques and values, in so far as the history of the world has any significance, it is only European history that counts. On this basis, therefore, the coming of Europeans to the African continent around the fifteenth century was perceived by the Europeans as the beginning of African history and civilization

A.F.C. Ryder. (1980:236). These Europeans, moreover, strongly argued that there was nothing called African literature that was autonomous and independent of the western literature. Emenyonu states that:

Some that concede independent existence of African literature Assigned the post second world war era as its date of Emergence. For the generality of western scholars, African Literature as an intellectual discipline was at best an underdeveloped off-shoot of European literature and at worst an unclassified literature of former colonial people.

(Emenyonu, 1991:53)

For African literature, however, all the aforementioned assertions were baseless and completely without proof. This is because poetry as an oral means of expression existed in every societies of the world regardless of their technological advancement. According to Okechukwu Mezu:

What the literary historian has so far overlooked is the fact that there existed a literature in Africa even before the arrival of European. A literature of the oral tradition flourished and was widely read and sung in village elementary schools...

(Mezu, 1992:22)

This assertion, therefore, confirms that prior to the advent of colonialism there existed a vast reservoir of oral expressions in Africa. Through this oral means of expression people's value, culture, tradition and general worldview are stored and passed from one generation to another. In West Africa in particular, poetry in its oral form has always occupied a central position in the lives of the people where it is often recited, chanted and sung on a particular occasion. In fact, it is the store house of people's culture and tradition. In its oral form, poetry provides a special medium of inculcating values, morality and wisdom to the younger generation. Poetry is also a form of entertainment often recited at a time of pleasure.

Although oral poetry is a vigorous art form in Africa, it has gradually been relegated to the background in favor of the written. This relegation was, however, as a result of the invasion of Africa by the colonial masters and missionaries who introduced western education into the continent, thereby, making the young Africans to see their oral poetry and indigenous art with disdain. Africans who were opportune to travel outside the

continents to Europe acquired the skills of writing in English language and on arriving into their countries began to translate their oral songs and poetry into written ones. The activities of missionaries in the continent have also encouraged the spread of this new mode of communication by assisting the indigenous Africans to read and write in English language. Though, before the inception of this new mode of communication in English language, Islamic dominance has brought about the existence of Arabic orthography (Ajami) in Northern and Islamized areas of Africa, the inception of colonialism brought about the English tradition of writing which marked a sharp break from the oral tradition. Obviously, the impact of this European invasion is seen not in how they displaced African indigenous oral tradition of poetry but in how they replaced it with their own in order to facilitate their invasion. According to Obinochie;

This was a part of British general plan...in order to facilitate their missionary works the Christians provided schools in addition to churches where the children, youth and adult converts were taught. This Christian-oriented education came to be a ticket to a well paid position in government, churches and industries.

(Emenyonu, 1991:61).

In the process, the Africans become even more removed from their ancestral root. As Ngugi observes; the acceptance of Christian oriented values meant the outright rejection of all the African customs and tradition. He states that;

The coming of colonialism set in motion a process of social change, involving a rapid disintegration of the tribal set up and the framework of social norms and values by which people had formally ordered their lives and their relationship to others.

(Ngugi, 1972:32),

This disintegration has affected the oral tradition of the people by which formally they express themselves and their general world views. Before this rapid disintegration, however, poetry in Africa has always been a major component of the African imaginative activity. The occasion for poetry extends from pure entertainment to the expression of emotion about the various universal shared aspects of life; sickness, marriage, love, death to the ritual incantation in order to bring about a harmonious coexistence between man and his environment.

Despite the initial sharp break, however, marked by the introduction of written verse over the oral verse, with the second generation poets came a sort of harmonious

reconciliation between the two. It is, therefore, a history of quick and hasty disintegration followed by a reasonable and considerable reintegration. According to (Donatus S.T Nwoga, 1967:21) the first generation of the West African poets were termed “the pioneer poets”, who belong to a special period in the history of west Africa and this is highly reflected in their poetry. These pioneers were relatively united because they had a common enemy to fight; colonialism and the poor opinion that the rest of the world appeared to have of the ability of the black man. According to Okechuku Mezu:

Literature flourished as a result of conflict on cultural
Interaction in contact with the European civilization.
The Francophone for, example, felt compelled to express
Their views of their culture and their idealization of African
Civilization.

(Mezu, 1972:61);

The pioneer poets took seriously the idea of a poet as a preserver of people’s values, culture and tradition. In this way they were continuing the tradition of their oral literature in which stories and songs, in addition to entertainment, advice, correct and generally help to form a proper social attitude in their societies. At the level of preoccupation and techniques, most of the literary works produced were imitative of the dominant English values, both in thematic thrust and in the styles used in communicating them. But this tendency lasted only for a while. According to Ogunbesan:

This mood remained tenable only as long as Africa continues
to be a colony of Europe. Soon after political independence
was won, African writing entered a new phase, its mood becomes
totally different from and in some instances was diametrically
opposed to the pre -independence mood of affirmation. Disillusion
quickly set in when the writers discovered that the ruling class
was more interested in conservating its own dominance and in
monopolizing the continent’s natural resources than improving the
abject living condition of the common people.

(Ogunbesan, 1979:23)

Thus, the pervading atmosphere above necessitated the search for a new technique of expression and this was as a result of developments in two areas; in techniques of poetic expression and the sources of the poetic material. This has, however, led to the adaptation of experimentation with the new form of language to achieve greater meaning.

The turning point of the development of West African poetry, however, came in the 1940s and 1960s respectively. The year 1960 can be used as a significant period marker for the development of a new type of poetry in Africa. More accurate detail would be 1957 when a publishing venture prominently known as Black Orpheus first appeared in Ibadan with the poetry of Gabriel Okara. But that first whisper of modernity did not become a loud statement till the appearance of the various publications that Mbari brought out between 1962 and 1964 (Elder D.J, 1979:62). Some of the publications made by Mbari club at this period were the works of famous African writers from West to Southern Africa. Some of these writers are; Christopher Okigbo (Nigeria), J.P Clark (Nigeria), Okogbule Glory Nwanda (Nigeria), Gorge Awoonor Williams (Ghana), Lenre peters (Gambia) and Dennis Brutus (South Africa). These groups of poets were intellectually famous poets who studied in different universities abroad and who also were influenced by different Modern English poets. The result is that under the influence of Modern English poets, they write poetry of greater complexities than those of the pioneers. Nwoga, therefore, argued that:

The beginning of Modern African poetry then produced poetry of individual search, mingled with political or public statements. The resultn of this kind of intensive search through the labyrinth of public experience could be poetry of terrible complexity, terrible privacy and near meaningless to an audience that had not sheared experience of the poets.

(Elder D.J, 1979:89).

These tendencies were obviously as a result of European influence on these writers, as David Rubadri confessed that; “the echoes of African tradition come to me sub-consciously. I hear them; perhaps that is the only African part”.(ibid). There were of course varieties of these kinds of search for the meanings of self and life in the writings of these categories of poets. The individual, depending upon his experience, sought the meaning of life in his reaction to environment, his reaction to political events and his reaction to human relationships. According to Aiyejina:

Nigerian poetry in English before (1967-1970) was marked by an excessive preoccupation with the poet’s private grief and emotions over and above social tragedies and triumphs. It was also poetry

distinguished by an undue euro centrism, deprivationism, obscurantism and private esoterism.

(Aiyejina, 1988:112)

In essence, the motivating factor behind the modern Nigerian poetry is the rejection of the traditionally accepted or sanctioned forms of art, with the accompanying emphasis on individual freedom to experiment with new artistic materials to evolve an unprecedented artistic form. This followed wide spread feelings among artists and intellectuals that a new cultural change has emerged and which changed, entirely the focus and content of the Nigerian poetry. However, this sudden change has been attributed to the new emerging consciousness which requires a different artistic response. This new artistic response is to the dilemma of the post independence disillusionment. The attainment of independence brought a crop of leaders whose conscience and mentality are not different from that of the erstwhile colonial masters. They reveal in every aspects of the society, corruption, violence, negligence of duty and general mismanagement of offices. These unfortunate attitudes, however, brought about the inevitable intervention of the military who also thought they could handle the situation effectively. Unfortunately, violence, insecurity and general violation of human rights became their trademark. As a result, coup and counter coup and general social unrest foreshadowed the whole atmosphere of the country. With these and many other problems, the country continued to stagger in its state of confusion with hardly any hope for a brighter future. Therefore to respond to such contradiction a new form of art, with a different content from that of the cultural assertion has to be employed.

As such, the new emergent writers (poets) redefined the concept of poetry both in style and in content. These generation of writers opted for what they literarily termed as the alternative literature or literature of commitment in order to represent their present day reality. Their works focused also on the dilemma and despair arising from the socio-economic and political turbulence bedeviling their societies. Rather than concentrating on the cultural self assertion and nationalism of their predecessors, this group of poets focused mostly on the activities of the post-independence disillusionment, political instability and general social unrest of their respective countries. As a result, their poetry assumed a different dimension from the mere assertion to poetry of commitment

preoccupied with not only provincial concern but with the entire fate of the continent as a whole. This is because, according to James:

Our literature must be seen as part of the struggle for liberation of Africa, politically and morally. It must reflect a full respect for the values of human life, our aspiration and that of humanity in general. Any creative writing by an African where the writer is motivated not by the desire to speak his mind about the African dilemma but by a desire to please a foreign audience, deserves not to be classified as African literature.

(Adeola, 1969:82)

Therefore, the second generation poets explore the theme of political corruption, social injustice, poor leadership, economic mismanagement and deprivation of the masses in their works and blamed the political elites of strangulation of the nation. Their poetry thus, generated revulsion for the privileged exploiters. In this context, there is a generation away from speculative abstraction as in the works of early poets. It is on this basis, therefore, that the post independence generation of African writers resorted to the poetry of commitment as the guiding principle of their writings. Commitment and service to the society to these poets is the function of poetry. Poetry they expect, should give an in-depth exploration of the predicament of the society. It must be able to address, to highlight the socio-political and economic problems of the society and to also suggest a proper solution for a meaningful progress and development.

Taken overall, we can argue therefore, that whatever discussion would be made on Nigerian poetry, it must trace its development from the vigorous oral means of expression of the indigenous African society. This is because prior to the coming of Europeans to the African continent, oral poetry was the most vibrant means of expression of people's value, culture, tradition and their general world view. On the other hand, the inception of written verse was also as a result of the presence of the Europeans in the continent. Also the demarcation between the pioneer and the later generation of writers was seen in their styles and general thematic preoccupation. Whatever, may, therefore, be said about these writers, both the pioneer and the second generation writers, have provided an ultimate platform and created a notable poetic voice that has contributed largely to the development of modern Nigerian poetry in the language of the erstwhile colonial masters.

1.8 Socialist Realism as Analytical Framework

The idea of theory in itself is a recent invention that denotes certain principle of conventions of looking at issues critically and particularly in literary study. It offers itself to appraise and reappraise certain conventions as “natural or common sense” associated with humanist view. This is not to say that literary theory like other related theories is easy to define or has the capacity to distinctively provide straight jacket explanation of literature as a field of study. In essence and as a result of theory, literature becomes problematic and “heterogeneous area” which gives credence to the fact that literature needs to be constantly reassessed. Certain theories based their assumptions and judgments on historical events; others use the cultural dimension, yet centered on self consciousness as advocated by (Webster, 1996:5).

Fundamentally, literary theory differs from literary criticism, though the two interrelate substantially. While the latter involves the reading analysis, explication and interrelation of texts designated as literary, the former is used to identify the set of criteria, methods and procedures of studying literature as well as interrogating the text and way in which we read and interpret it. Cognizance of this fact, Socialist Realism theory shall be employed as a tool for the reading and interpretation of the texts selected for this study.

The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Marxism, Socialism and Communism defines Socialist Realism as “the officially accepted major artistic movement pioneered in the USSR and to varying degree supported in other countries as well” (Kurien,1978:398). According to the Dictionary, Socialist Realism emphasizes the recreation or interpretation of all real life problems in society, comprehensible and meaningful to the masses in literature, theater, cinema, painting, music, sculpture and engineering. Socialist Realism is regarded as reflection of reality in its revolutionary development both as an expression and instrument of the ideological and cultural transformation of society on the road to communism. It is opposed to abstract art, formalism and “arts for art’s sake” all of which are considered to be bourgeois and decadent. The concept is based on the Marxist philosophical conviction that existence does not consist in subjective ideas (idealism) but in objective reality, assuming reality exist independently of the action. Consequently,

artistic representations should reflect real life of the common people. The artist should go further not only to interpret the real world, but also endeavor to change it by moralizing it.

The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was the period when Capitalism, as Lenin demonstrated, enter the last and highest phases of its development, the stage of “moribund Capitalism”, the stage of Imperialism. In the various capitalist countries of Europe the further concentration of Capitalism took place. As a result, the proletariat also become concentrated and grew ever larger; their struggle became more organized, more conscious, more on a mass scale. The antagonistic contradiction between capital and labor, between the exploiting and the exploited classes became ever sharper and deeper. The proletariats came finally unto the arena of history as the most powerful class, the vanguard class of society, the class which will deprive the bourgeoisie not only of its economic rights, but also of its political rights. This new class, now equipped with a new political way of thinking, and this powerful revolutionary movement, could not but exert an influence also in the field of literature. In various countries of the world works began to appear which attempted to reflect the life and historic role of the working class. But at the same time the degeneration of the capitalist system found expression in literature through a series of literary works and thus, the birth of “Socialist Realism”, (a Marxist-inspired artistic and literary theory or doctrine that calls on art and literature to promote the socialist cause and sees the artist, writer, etc as a servant of the state or, in the word of Stalin, “the engineer of human soul” (Collins, 2003:62)

The term “Socialist Realism” first appeared in an unsigned article in the soviet literary Gazette by V. Kirpotin in May 1932 and constitute of an exceedingly rich imaginative representation of the real world. In speaking of the “Socialist Realism” Brook Jeffrey explains it as a “teleological oriented style of realistic art which has as its purpose the furtherance of the goals of the Socialism” (Wikipedia, 2006). According to the dictionary of literary terms (1994), Socialist Realism is described “as an artistic composition dedicated to the depiction of the struggle of the working class for power understood in a Marxist view of history”. It also emphasizes the recreation or interpretation of real life problems in society, comprehensive and meaningful to the masses.

Fundamentally, Socialist Realism was based on the Marxist- Leninist world view, which gives writer and artist the understanding in depth and clarity the law of the development of society, of penetrating to the core of events and of people's character, which armed them with a correct and functional ideological worldview. It inherited and developed the main principle of the 19th century Realism: true, faithful reflection of life. The concept of Socialist Realism was developed and put into practice by Sholin, Mayokovsky and Sholokov. It was adopted as an artistic method during the first congress Soviet Writers in 1934 and its concept was explicitly described in the congress as;

The basic method of soviet literature and literary criticism demands of the artist truthful, historically concrete representation, of reality in its revolutionary development. at the same time, truthfulness and historical correctness of artistic representation of reality must be combined with the task of ideological remolding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism.

(Swayze, 1962:113)

The depiction of reality based on truth and of direct relation to “the working people” or underprivileged, thus, is the thrust of Socialist Realism. The theory demands that all art must depict some aspects of man's struggle towards socialist progress for a better life. It stresses the need for the creative artist to serve the needs of the proletariat by being realistic, visionary and optimistic.

Socialist Realism had its origin in neoclassicism and tradition of Realism of Russian literature of the 19th century that described the life of simple people. It is exemplified by the aesthetic philosophy of Maxim Gorky. His novel *Mother* is usually considered to have been the first work of Socialist Realism. In fact, Gorky is often considered the father of Socialist Realism, according to (Ovcharenko, 1978:119) “because he made the greatest contribution to the new art both as an artist and as a thinker”. Ovcharenko argues that Gorky is able to “fuse the proletarian liberation movement with revolutionary social thought in Russia or in the language of aesthetics, the new reality”. Gorky defended and enumerated the basic characteristics of Socialist Realism. According to him, Socialist Realism is a programmatic, collectivistic, optimistic and didactic. It is “to emancipate toilers all over the world from the power of capitalism with its distortion of man (Katzner, 1973:264). For Gorky, Realism is primarily Socialist.

It is socialist because what is depicted should have a definite and meaningful influence on the underprivileged. He observed that the central element that gave rise to Socialist Realism is “deep commitment to communist ideas and party spirit (Ovcharenko, 1978:117). This sense of commitment calls artist to use his art to changed the society for the better. The artist thus needs to be selective in the choice of preoccupation and also by dynamic in his artistic presentation. Gorky pointed to what can create useful material for the artist when he argues thus:

The broader a writer’s social experience, the higher his point of view; the broader his intellectual horizons, the the more obvious to him what borders what on earth and what the mutual influence are of these convergences and contiguities.

(Ovchanrenko, 1978:117)

The Socialist Realist insight thus enables him to reflect on what is happening in the society since he is also part of it. He is therefore to recreate events not as they are, but as might have been. Gorky further fore grounded the need for artists to be forward looking in their depiction of reality. Speaking on the ideal purpose of literature, he noted:

I want literature to rise above reality, and look down on reality from above, because literature has a far greater purpose than merely to reflect reality. It is not enough to depict already existing things – we must also bear in mind the things we desire and the things which are possible to achievement.

(Lavrin, 1973:198)

According to Hopking, (1980:20) “Socialist Realism presents “a hollow frame” of ideas which the writer fills with the product of his imagination, existing things as well as an ideal state of things”. Gorky aptly referred to this peering into the future when he describes Socialist Realism as an art that shows “reality not in a static, immobile state, but in development, in the process of a continues transformation of the present into the future” Ovcharenko, (1978:51). The Socialist Realist artist is thus required to tailor his art to the ever changing circumstances in the society.

One writer who also subscribe to the Gorkian concept of Socialist Realism is Bertolt Bretch. He saw realism as the truthful representation of life made useful and

suggestive to the people. The literature that he advocates is a populist one which is made for the underprivileged who are makers of history and agents of change in the society. His idea of reality is about the writer being:

Intelligible to the broad underprivileged, taking over their own forms of expression and enriching them by adopting and consolidating their standpoint; presenting the most progressive section of the people in such a way that it can take over leadership

(Willet,1964:108)

Thus, Brecht advocates simplicity as a means whereby the artist can reach the minds of the underprivileged. It is through such a process that Socialist Realism, according to Brecht can “promote insight into society’s mechanisms and stimulate socialist impulse”. (Willet,1964:269). He therefore, saw Socialist Realism as “part of the working class struggle for authentic solutions to social problems” (ibid:267). The depiction of the struggle of the working class is a noble theme for artistic works. It is when this is done that such an artistic work can be seen as realistic from the Socialist standpoint. But such depiction of reality, according to Brecht, requires that the artist finds new means of representation. This involves drawing from available artistic methods to create a living reality to the people. Brecht in this aspect of borrowing from other aesthetic forms was different from Gorky who saw nothing to borrow from bourgeoisie’s culture. His own notion of socialist realism can be summed up as the artist:

Laying bare society’s causal network, showing up the dominant view point of the dominators, writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solution for the most pressing problems affecting human society, emphasizing the dynamic of development...

(Willet, 1964:109)

The focus of the literary artist on the most pressing problems affecting human society makes such a literary piece to be realistic in the estimation of Brecht. Indeed, since such “pressing problems” changes with time, the socialist realist artist will have to evolve new aesthetics to capture new prevailing circumstances in presenting such social predicament.

In addition, the Hungarian critic and influential figure Gorge Lukas has a different perspective of Socialist Realism. He initially supported the aesthetic doctrine of the Socialist Realism but later criticizes its rigidity and subsequently proposed his own concept of “Critical Realism” as an alternative. This was because according to him:

In the writing of Stalinist period, however, the real problems were overlooked and as with economic subjectivism the correctness of particular solution became a matter for dogmatism. Literature ceased to reflect the dynamic contradictions of social life, it became the illustration of an abstract “truth”. The aesthetic consequences of such an approach are all too evident. Even where this “truth” was in fact true and not, as so often, a lie or a half true, the notion of literature as illustrated was extremely detrimental to good writing

(Wikipedia, 2008)

Opting for “Critical Realism”, Gorge Lukas believes that art should be realistic and should not be separated from a class perspective. Therefore, Critical Realism as an artistic style sought to understand social reality critically with a limited scope of artistic vision open to various artistic methods of the past.

Similarly, in the introduction to Sinyavsky on “Socialist Realism” Czeslaw Milosz describes the product of Socialist Realism as “inferior”, ascribing this as necessarily proceeding from the limited view of reality permitted to creative artist Wikipedia: (2008:). For other critics, Socialist Realism has a political undertone than it claims literarily. It is viewed by some as “form of persuasive commercial art designed to sell an ideology which otherwise would not be bought”. While some view socialist realism as an artistic “straight jacket”, narrow, and schematic prescriptive method that paralyses truly creative art, thus an ossified doctrine (Wikipedia,2008)

Leon Trosky was another Marxist critic whose view on art shades light on Socialist Realism. Like Lukas, he believes in the social dependence of art. Thus, he caution against its falsification. To him, it is only art that can aspire to revolutionary reconstruction of the society. As he puts it “art can become a strong ally of revolution only in so far it remains faithful to itself” Siegel (1970:114) Trotsky elaborated how true art can be a “strong ally of revolution” when he noted that:

From the point of view of an objective historical process,
art is always a social servant and historically utilitarian...
It enriches the spiritual experience of the individual and
of the community... it educates the individual, the social
group, the class and the nation...

(Siegel, 1970:30)

Since the social and historical are mediated in art, it is able to “educate the individual and the nation” of the need for meaningful change and development. Trotsky was quick to point out that the fact that art is a “social servant” does not make it to be subject to state decrees. He decried such subjugation of the art by the state. According to him:

Our Marxist conception of the objective of social
dependence and social utility of art, when translated into
the language of politics does not all mean a desire to
dominate by means of decrees and orders... of course,
the new art cannot but place the struggle of the proletariat
In the center of its attention

(Siegel, 1970:30)

The preoccupation of art with “the struggle of the proletariat” which is the crux of Socialist Realism was the standpoint of Trotsky.

In essence, it is crucial to note that the artistic culture of Socialist Realism has a rich culture to draw on. It investigates the content and features of artistic culture, its wealth and diversity and the pattern of its development. Socialist Realism also represents a significant factor in the cultural life of a society, affecting as it does the creative process, and enhancing the social as well as the moral function of socialist art, the aesthetic perspectives in the people: in short it has a role to play in the solution of a large scale social problems of modern age (Markov, 1984:190). From the above perspectives, therefore, the artistic creation of the writer or poet’s vision, his creative imagination, his preoccupation with one set of problem, his discovery of new human character, conflict, artistic truthfulness and the uninterrupted sequence of creative exploration are the core philosophy of Socialist Realism

However, the choice of Socialist Realism as analytical framework of the study is anchored on the conviction that it gives a clear and vivid depiction of the socio-economic and political reality in the society, which the research sets out to address. The portrayal of artistic truth and historical concreteness which Socialist Realism recommends necessitate

its choice for the study. As Marx and Engel posit "...artistic creation is one of the ways of reflecting reality and at the same time of perceiving and influencing the spiritual development of humanity. In response to such commitment both Tanure Ojaide and Emman Usman Shehu as poets have, through their thematic preoccupation, depicted the existing experience not of their immediate society alone but of Africa as whole. Their preoccupation with socio-political and economic contradictions of their society clearly identified them as dedicated literary representatives of their generation. Hence, in the face of betrayal by the ruling elites, the corruption that bedeviled the society, the poets under study as socialist realist, make central the portrayal of the basic issues and problems affecting their society. From the standpoint of Socialist Realism, the poems in Tanure Ojaide's *In the House of Words* and Emma Usman Shehu's *Open Sesame* are principally concerned with creating social awareness through a conscious ideological commitment for social progress and development.

Taken overall, the above standpoint reiterates the necessity to interpret both Tanure Ojaide's *In the House of Words* and Emman Usman Shehu's *Open Sesame* in the light of their ideological design and revolutionary theoretical complexity. It further affirm the fact that the collections *In the House of Words* and *Open Sesame* must be seen primarily as studies in revolutionary aesthetics which insist on valid political statement and valid art. In the end the collections are seen to be collectively and severally representatives of the various stages toward Socialist revolution. The issues of literature as an agent of social change are used to round off the discussion. In this sense, both Tanure Ojaide and Emma Usman Shehu's ideological vision, represented in the anthologies are informed of material, cultural and ideological instruments of dehumanization and a corresponding concern for humanity. Their personal experiences with the strangulation of their people's economy, political inaptitude of their leaders, socio-economic and moral devaluation of their societies, remain the fundamental motivation behind their poetics. According to the blurb of the collection *In the House of Words*, the poems evoke nostalgia in their exploration of the dehumanization of the Nigerian people, society, politics and the pop culture of the time. But rather than make the collection an essentially local one, rather than focus on the Nigerian society alone,

Tanure Ojaide also captures the mood and experiences of other locals in Nigeria and even abroad, as well as national consciousness, particularly the period of the 2003 “electioneering campaign and voting “farce” in Nigeria. He also captures the experience of the Nigerian living in the poverty sticking northern parts of the country which has largely not been the subject of many writers outside the area. Thus, it is possible to assume that Ojaide’s vision is a broad and encapsulating one, as he spread his poetic eyes over a wide spectrum of Nigerian society and concern.

Similarly, Emman Usman Shehu also has demonstrated similar perspective in his commitment. To these poets the function of poetry is utilitarian as Remi Raji, whose poetry embodies strong and scathing images of the oppressors, has once pointed out in a public lecture, that as a poet writing today, he strives;

to engage in intimate dialogues and interrogation of years and decades of despondency, to confront the outrage of tyranny, to plant hope where none is, to imagine, to explode the myth of silence and give voices to the speechless...and to be active child of optimism in the midst of pessimism.

(Raji, 2003:65)

In essence, the mainstream vision that Nigerian contemporary poets pursue in their enterprises is captured above. And because they are burdened with this social commitment and have had to address their poetry to the masses in whose sympathy they write, their language is devoid of density of metaphors and becomes as clear and as culture-dependant as the language of the second generation Nigerian writers such as Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun and Olu Obafemi, who have had social commitment as their perspective. Consequently, such endeavor remains their principle with which one can conveniently analyze the poems of these contemporary poets. Their works are concerned with the contemporary social problems in Nigeria, with the aim of raising mass awareness of positive revolutionary alternatives to the present quagmire. Thus, the style and language of their poetry reflect the utilitarian value of poetry which, in Nigerian literature, means reducing the language of poetry to simple and masses appealing. Taken overall, the artistic visions of the poets under study are pointers to the essence of artistic commitment in the articulation of social reality.

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CHAPTER TWO

2.0

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the emerging information age, knowledge rather than assets or resources holds the key to economic and social development. The cultural and scientific transformation of a society imply that the writer (poet) now found himself entangled within a new sets of challenges of enlightenment and conscientization of the general public. The poet's writing style, ideological principles and general world view are thus required to respond to this transformation. Only then can a poet boast of commitment and responsibility to society, which gives the artist the impetus to write.

Over the years, literary and non literary writers alike have expressed great interest in the study of poetry and its relationship to social development. However, the concept of development has defied and has continued to defy a neat and widely accepted definition, and it is pertinent to understand the different perspectives of development before a meaningful discourse on poetry and social development begins. The question of development, according to (M.O Odey, 2007) in a paper titled; "The socio-Economic Implication of ill Health and Poverty Trap on the Human Development (HDI) in Africa";

Hinges on several things-either social (human beings) or physical elements. But each time development expert use the word, they usually imply the welfare of human beings to be at the center of the idea. Without human being and good health, life ceases to be and all other development effort becomes irrelevant.

He further quoted a United Nation Development Program concept of development (UNDP) (1996:30) as "about human beings who need water, food, health, education, peace and order". In essence, (Charles Eliot, 1971: 20), in the development debate shows that there is no agreement on what exactly development is. This is because the concept, according to Estera, "has occupied the center of an incredibly powerful semantic constellation". (Estera, 1981: 3). In The words of (Sen, 1976: 68), "development is not just statistical concept of inputs or outputs, or a mechanical process which has only to be put in motion. It is a matter of growth in essence, the process of allowing and

encouraging people to meet their own aspirations. It covers the entire spectrum of a nation's life and moves around a central pivot which is the natural will".

Similarly, (Mansell and Wean, 1988:62) state that development has been understood since the Second World War, "to involve economic growth, increase in per capita income and attainment of a standard of living equivalent to that of the industrialized countries". In this context therefore, development is viewed as an index of the industrial world, the industrialized world become the yardstick of measuring development. According to (W.W Rostow, 1960:53), as quoted in Odey, and other economics:

Growth and development as a unidirectional or linear process from traditional agricultural societies, with primitive communal modes of production, to another stage that is clearly defined with technological capacities and ready for take-off into a high level of development, exemplified by Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. then comes the stage of rapid maturity when a particular economy is looked up with the rest of the world in international trade and finally the stage of the high mass consumption when the welfare of the people becomes the overriding interest.

International institutions like the World Bank have also come up with what constitute development. (Joseph Sliglitz, 1991:43) of the World Bank views development as a, "transformation of society, a movement from traditional relations and traditional ways of thinking and traditional methods of production to more modern ways. He argues that a characteristic of traditional societies is the acceptance of the world as it is". However, it must be stated that national development should not be subscribed to economic sense alone. Development also includes how and to what extent the human resources in the society are mobilized for active participation in the process of nation building. For (Aron, 1967:71), an Orthodox development economist, development involves "the transfer of man power from primary to the secondary and tertiary sectors. The primary sector consists of agriculture and mining, the secondary consists of manufacturing and the tertiary of trade, public services, art, leisure pursuits and

education". Liberal economists on the other hand regard National Development as a combination of growth and change. According to (Meier, 1976:41), a liberal economist:

The World Bank now emphasizes that the failure to achieve minimum level of income above "poverty line" have kept some 40% of the peoples in less developed countries in the condition of absolute poverty, a condition of life so degraded by diseases, illiteracy, malnutrition and squalor as to deny its victims basic human necessities

In the light of the above, (Dudley, 2007) subscribes to the contention that:

When poverty, unemployment and inequality plummet, then one will be right to think that development is taking place. But if these problems are becoming worse, even if per capita income more than double, it would be wrong to say there was development.

In his view, therefore, development is best conceived from the shock of underdevelopment which prevails mostly in the "culture of poverty", and in the face of disease and death. (Edger Owen, 1981), captures the essence of development by warning that people should discard the idea of how productive society are and think more about the quality of the societies which are supposed to be more productive, that is the development of people not the development of things. Accordingly, on development, (Welter Rodney, 1976:81), sees development as a many-sided process of both human beings and their societies. He says:

Development in human society is many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increase skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. Some of these are virtually moral categories and are difficult to evaluate as they depend on the age in which one lives, one's class origin and one's personal code of what is right and what is wrong.

Rodney however, explains that what is undisputable is that the achievement of any of these aspects of personal development is very much tied to the state of the society as a whole. More often than not, the term "development" is used in an exclusive economic sense- the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of

other features. This view is, however, inadequate in view of (E. F Schumacher, 1975), he warns that: development is not a task only for the economics; rather, a developing nation should avoid a technology which dehumanizes gulps and scarce irreplaceable resources and pollutes the ecology. He recommends a technology with a human face, a development strategy which considers the quality of life as its supreme goal. To him, development is not money, profits, number of industries and such. Rather, the quality of the environment, the health of the nation, the type of education, the discipline of the citizenry and the quality of administration or organization are the essential ingredients or constituent of development goal. He advises the “third world” countries to see the connection between evolution and development, the three ingredients for development namely; education, organization and discipline, most gradually evolve to fit changing circumstances. Thus, he argues:

The foremost task of development policy must be to speed up this evolution. All three must become the property not merely of a tiny minority but of a whole society

(Schumacher, 1975:75)

The above mentioned position or perspective of development is the one which this research subscribed to, because it entails a human perspective in which development is seen as a multi-dimensional process involving the totality of man in his political, economic, socio-cultural and psychological relations among others. It implies a fundamental value which presupposes a concept of man in the process of sustaining in life in his environment. Hence, the sharpening of human ability and the productive organization of a nation’s mentality are of the utmost importance of development, because the agent and beneficiaries of development are humans of a particular society.

However, illuminating as the views of these liberal and orthodox economist and historians are, the task of nation building does not lie in the hands of economist and industrialist alone, but also the literary artist inclusive. Thus, every writer is conscious of the efficacy of art as a transformational tool. Among contemporary writers, Chinua Achebe himself, in *The Novelist as a Teacher* states that the role of the writer is to help to create awareness as a first step of society’s understanding and reshaping its life. In this regard, literature becomes an important tool for political engineering. The importance of

literature lies in its ability to awaken the people from ignorance to realities facing them. It is in this regard that (Adeyanju, 1996: 7) relates the place of literature to the process of decolonization when he states:

Of all works of art, it is literature that contributes most effectively to hasten awareness among black Africans of their rights to independence and the need to extirpate European domination. Literature was used as a verbal weapon in the struggle against colonial domination.

On the contrary, the post de-colonization period also witnessed a catalogue of misfortunes for the masses at the hands of their black leaders: a set of reckless leaders who have no vision for progress and development. As such, a new system of social order emerge, in which inequality, injustice and corruption were the order of the day. The place of literature in affording a vision for the teeming population in this kind of society, as (Ngugi, 1981:60) asserts lies in the fact that:

Literature cannot escape from the class power structure that shapes our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reject on or more aspect of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggle in a society. What he chooses is one or the other side of these social forces and classes that try to keep the people down . What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral.

Hence, neutrality and lack of commitment come to matter no more, with the modern Nigerian poets, especially with the poetry of Tanure Ojaide and Emma Usman Shehu respectively. Concern with the suffering of the underprivileged who are hit hardest by the economic realities came to dominate the poetries of modern Nigerian writers like Tanure Ojaide and his literary comrades. Like many others, his poetry came to be marked by a mood and tone of solidarity with the poor and the exploited. Although he continues to write about the situation of black in the Diaspora and the exploitation even of the other races, the focus of his poetry is largely the politics of maladministration, corruption, oppression and exploitation in Nigeria.

According to (Aiyejina, 1988:112) Tanure Ojaide caricatures members of our ruling class while providing very sympathetic views of the masses whose fates are determined by the policies and antics of our selfish leaders. To further emphasize this point, Tanure Ojaide maintains that African and modern Nigerian poets need to be political in their enterprises. Because:

You cannot keep quiet about the situation in the kind of countries we find ourselves. When you wake up and there is no running water, when you have a massive power outage for days and ...when the image of the ruler everywhere is that of dictator with a gun in his hand, then there is no other way than to write about this in an attempt to change the situation for the better

(Wikipedia,2006)

To this end, a new level of social commitment means new perception of his roles as an artist which also implies a continues re-examination of his artistic medium for more effectiveness, especially in relation to what has emerged as clearly defined audience's consciousness in the poet. The audience is no longer the "coteries" of professional critics but a much wider reading public that need to be kept socially aware in preparation for a possible social revolution. These concerns have a direct bearing on the nature of his poetic language, for accessibility of language is necessary for conscientising the general public. They also have a direct bearing on the poet's understanding of his art and of his poetic vocation and vision. Thus, one is not surprised that unlike in his previous works, among one of two dominant themes in Tanure Ojaide's definition of his art is his social role, especially in relation to changing the society. The other dominant theme is the social condition of the poor which often necessitates a social revolution. Together these led to new development in which his poetry becomes more rhetorical and declamatory, its form usually a lyrical address to someone who is listening. His verse form has dispensed of the witty structures that often created problems for the interpreters. His language is more accessible: even where he uses images and symbols which are allusion to literary, historical and cultural events and figures of other lands, the meaning of the poems are no longer unnecessary obscured by the symbolic significance of such allusion. The language has become so accessible that sometimes it is dangerously prosaic, save from being prose by deft control of rhythm. The cynical attitude to life and history predominantly common

in his previous works has given way to a “guarded optimism” admitting of the possibility of a social change in *In the House of Words*. All these are dictated by Tanure Ojaide’s understanding of his new role as a revolutionary writer.

Fundamentally, Tanure Ojaide’s literary vision represented in *In the House of Words* is informed by material, cultural and ideological dimensions of dehumanization and a corresponding concern for humanity. His personal experience with the strangulation of his place, the Niger Delta, political inaptitude and socio-economic and moral devaluation of his society, remain the fundamental motivations behind his writings. Tanure Ojaide is a notable African poet, whom along with Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan and Odia Ofeimun, are explicitly concerned with the political and socio-economic dilemma of Nigerian society. Therefore, his venture into the poetry genre both highlights his versatility as a writer and the immediacy with which he desires his countries problems addressed and to ensure a rapid development of his society. Commenting on his poetic vocation, (Aderemi Bamikunle, 1995:110) remarks of Taure Ojaide:

Like many others, his poetry came to be marked by a mood and tone of solidarity with the poor and the exploited. The focus of his poetry is largely the politics of maladministration, corruption oppression and exploitation in Nigeria. The audience is no longer a “coterie” of professional critics but a much reading public that needs to be kept socially aware in a preparation for a possible social revolution. These concerns have a direct bearing on the poet’s understanding of his art and of his poetic vocation and vision.

In essence, Tanure Ojaide has demonstrated in *In the House of Words* his concern with and commitment towards social development. The collection reveals a tense poetic rendition of varied length and themes. It is a satirical commentary of the Nigerian society from established institution to the “cultural foibles” and individual idiosyncrasies of an average Nigerian”. Tanure Ojaide’s concept of national development is the one encapsulated in a classless community. The Nigerian society is a multi-religious society. These elements are further complicated by the existence of socio-economic inequality, the rich and the affluent amidst poverty and want of the masses. The essence of his development is to remove the impediments to socio-economic inequalities in the society.

Thus, in the poem “Two Locations”, Tanure Ojaide takes a swipe at the Nigerian social formation in which the poor were perpetually designated to be at the mercy of their oppressors, the rich. Juxtaposing the beauty and exquisiteness of Abuja as the capital territory with the economic condition and squalor of the less privileged in the other part of the country, Tanure Ojaide deeply expresses his dissatisfaction with the statuesque and calls for an immediate response. In this juxtaposition, Tanure Ojaide exposes the foibles of the entire ruling elites who are the architect behind such social inequality. Without apology, Tanure Ojaide exposes the kleptomaniac mental psyche of the ruling class and the condescending attitudes of the civilian towards these hypocrites ruling class who are ingratiated by superiority complex, and thus arrogate so much importance and authority to themselves. Throughout the collection, Tanure Ojaide portrays these sorts of leaders as liars, dishonorable men of oaths, soldiers who like giants, march through farmland destroying cassava crops that provides the people staples and sustenance. Ode S. Ogede concourse:

Ojaide uses other animal images to reinforce his pictures of African leaders as glutton, ‘tigers’, ‘vultures’, ‘armed robbers’, ‘fowls’, are terms that connotes the barbarity of those who should direct the affairs of their nations with human feelings but have turned out to be the gravest threats to peace in the land. Referring specifically to Nigeria, he characterizes a situation where soldiers are firing bullets into the crowd: they will boast of those they have killed/the pay and records boys are riding Yamaha/they are paying and wrecking Nigeria

The above excerpt serves a useful political purpose to force the attention of all civilized people to the inherent bloodbaths that follow successive military establishment in Nigeria. The fact that even those in the lowest cadre of the administration of the army are living in great affluence (the pay and record boys... riding Yamaha) highlights the degree of the corruption of the military. The paradox implicit in the image of Yamaha—the symbol of affluence among soldiers is that it is an imported product which is actually the source of impoverishment of the nation’s wealth. The poem is a trenchant indictment of Africa’s new military messiahs whose anti-social habits their Nigerian representatives exemplify. (New Trends: African Literature Today. 68). As such, Tanure Ojaide declares:

For the poet to be silent constitute a grave mistake, no matter how grim or invincible the power of authority might appear to be. If silent, the enemy speaks, he sets the agenda of the debates. The national condition will thus get worse. That is why the poet must “over turn plots of plunders” which is power- dispensation craft in Cloakrooms. (Tafioye,2000:166)

Tanure Ojaide vividly criticizes the Nigerian leaders in the collection *In the House of Words* and calls for a social reformation for progress and development. He portrays the ruling class as living for their own selfish interest; hence Tanure Ojaide’s mockery of them causes ripples in the pond of pleasure surrounding these highly placed political elites. The poet’s political and social criticism radiates from poems like “The community Development Officer”, “Favoritism”, “Late Morning in Early September”, “Independence Day, 2002”, “Visiting Mathias at Lapo Village”, “Shuwa Couple”, “Mararaba, Abuja Nearby”, “Two Locations”, “For the Sake of Freedom”, “They Step Over the Threshold”, “Do Something”, “A Half-million Troop”. Using these poems, Tanure Ojaide affects contemporary realism and experience which he draws from every section of life. Tanure Ojaide’s poems therefore, are important for the ratification of the deviance in the society. Often the case, Tanure Ojaide is said to reflect the dark reality of the society. According to Femi Shaka, Tanure Ojaide’s poetic rendition presents an overwhelming gloomy scene of Nigeria and states that:

Along suspected trend in contemporary African poetry is towards the employment of images that grant little room for optimism in the ever increasing voices of lettered men...a surfeit of gloomy imagery, and a bloodied language was first noticed in a recent collection of young Nigerian poets... with the publication of “The Fate of Vulture”. (Tanure Ojaide, 1995:6)

The prevailing attitude of trying to communicate ideas and feelings clearly disheartening is due to many factors. Poets address public themes like corruption, frustration, suppression and exploitation of the masses. Their mission is to challenge the statuesque and create awareness among the masses against such decadence. Hence, Tanure Ojaide portrays these dishonorable exploiters:

as glutton, ‘tigers’, ‘vultures’, ‘fowls’...this connotes the barbarity of those who should direct the affairs of their nations with human

feelings but have turned out to be the greatest threat to peace in the land (Tafioye,2000:49)

Furthermore, a critic Stewart Brown states that “ Tanure Ojaide’s poetry are mostly loud with blunt messages from the front, imagistically flat and loaded with rhetorical outrage and ... clichéd language of protest undermines the forces of his poems”. Responding to that Ojaide declares:

I am a Nigerian, an African and a human being. I want to reach Nigerians and all humanity, my images, symbols and references drawn from urhobo folklore give a distinctive tone to my poetry. Thus, though I write in English, I try to infuse my verse with fresh nuances and rhythms that I carry from the urhobo language. I may be writing in English, but it’s not quite the same as the British or the Americans... I have Africanized the language to serve my ends, (Tafioye, 2000:7-8).

Another critic Ode S. Ogede laments and complains about Tanure Ojaide’s apprenticeship and imperfection in handling his themes. He declares that:

The dominant mood of his poems is one of saturated indignation at the injustice, oppression and inhumanity of the oppressors. This contention registers the tone of much of this period. But it lacks the sense of the cadence, musical rhythm and profound structural and technical terseness of much of an Osundare or an Osofisan. Then too the imagery is disappointingly predictable. Although Ojaide manage to envision the birth of a future Nigeria where “only love can give peace a chance, he fails to elaborate vividly on the dream content in such a manner as to create the impact of a classic vision akin to that which places the work of one of his own contemporaries, Femi Osofisan, in the tested tradition of Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo. (African literature today, 64-65).

In an online literary chart Chin Ce, a critic and social commentator remarks that when you look at Tanure Ojaide’s poems especially *The Fate of Vulture* and other poems

I don’t think that many of the poems here are successful as some contained in his earlier collections. But these are all touted as accomplishments in craft (Africansearch.org:2009).

Nonetheless, irrespective of impetuous criticism, the creativity of a poet is not all about conventions. It is about the poet's ability to communicate succinctly and effectively which gives a work of art its distinctive features. As Ezenwa argues;

...poems in the collection portrays him as a poet whose vision is all encompassing and the title of the collection metaphorically captures the width and breath of Ojaide's experiences. Although the preoccupation of Ojaide is with the instances of injustice, deceits and overwhelming immorality in life, he manages to add variety to the poem through the portrayal of different personae and the use of succinct imagery. He, thus, creates poems that are neither boring nor monotonous despite his focus on social issues and human vices.

As such, Tanure Ojaide could be described as an example of a modern poet who believes in the efficacy of poetry which widens to embrace every aspect of man's life: religions, politics, culture, progress, technology and traditions. It is Tanure Ojaide's conviction that modern poetry has a social conscience and content. The poet must see himself or herself as an individual, as well as a member of the collective whole. Hence, the metaphor alludes that the writer is no unattached airplane, dangling loosely without root. He must have root, cleavage and a sense of belonging. He must connect himself to events, especially politics that affects the lives of his people. He must participate, however tangentially in the social retrieval, even if only with ideas when society goes wrong. If he does so, only then the poet affects contemporary realism and experience with the passion for and commitment to social progress and development. As observed Ezenwa Ohaeto in "Rage and Reason: Moral Education in the Poetry of Tanure Ojaide and Udechukwu," published in *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies*: "...these Nigerian poets have always channeled their works towards highlighting the essential moral issues of their time. These poets also demonstrate awareness that poetry could be used for systematic training and instruction in order to illustrate the privilege of right and wrong in terms of standard of behavior which is the essence of moral education.

Similarly, Emma Usman Shehu is another modern Nigerian poet with a deep concern and commitment to his society's progress and development. He, like his contemporaries is also aware that Nigerian society is gradually slipping toward social and

spiritual decay as well as economic and political deterioration. These are due to the gross abuse of human right by the political rulers, especially the military. In essence, the phenomenon of oppression, whether physical or spiritual, whether external or internal, has come to be a source of themes for Nigerian poets writing in this generation who, as Unoma Azuah has said, “Have had to deal with disillusionment in every aspect of the Nigerian state, especially political” (Azuah, 2005:63). The poetic expressions of Emman Usman Shehu are hinged on the portrayal of act of cruelty and inhumanity perpetrated by the successive military and civilian administration that held Nigeria gripped from 1980s to date. Belonging to this generation of writers and versifying from an experience well lived; Emma Usman Shehu in his recent collection of poems *Open Sesame* exposes acts of oppression and the helplessness of the oppressed. It will be seen that Emman Usman Shehu strives to be a public poet by not only engaging in social commitment, but by rooting his poetry in the culture of the people he, as a poet, fights for.

Ever since Chinua Achebe asserted that “It is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up completely irrelevant”, poet thus, ought to be imbued with social commitment and this is what exactly Emman Usman Shehu has done in this collection *Open Sesame*. Fundamentally, the experience acquired from the socio-political happening, within and outside his society come to matter to his poetry. For (Nduka,1989:61) “A poet does not write out of nothingness. If he does, his lines will be lame and will evaporate out of his reader’s consciousness in no time like foul air. Emman Usman Shehu and other poets of this generation have always written out of the experience they acquire from what goes on in their society. And they do that with intent which (Nesther Alu, 2001:75) has pointed out here:

The poet’s duty is further broaden by his honest desire to detach himself and his speechless brothers from the viperous hands of the African dictators and the tightening grip of neocolonialism.

Thus, the poets of today in Nigerian literature are poets with duties, in whatever complexion, to stand against oppression the masses of Nigeria have suffered from. Remi

Raji, whose poetry embodies strong and scathing images of the oppressors, has once pointed out in a public lecture that as a poet writing today, he strives to:

engage in intimate dialogues and interrogation of years and decades of despondency, to confront the outrage of tyranny, to plant hop where non is imagine, to explore the myth of silence and give voice to the speechless, to pluck laughter from the howling winds,...and to be active child of optimism in the midst of dire pessimism.

This assertion encapsulates the mainstream vision that the contemporary Nigerian poets pursue in their endeavor. The poet does not only criticize the oppressors for ravaging their fertile land but also goes further to present optimism and hop to the oppressed masses. And because he is burdened with this obvious social commitment and have had to address his poetry to the masses in whose sympathy he writes, his language is devoid of density of metaphors and becomes as clear and as culture-dependent as the language of the second generation writers such as Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun and Tanure Ojaide, who have had Marxism as their perspective. Consequently, Socialist Realism remains the theory with which a critic can conveniently analyze the poetry of these contemporary writers. Their works are concerned “with contemporary social problems with the aim of raising mass awareness of a positive revolutionary alternative to the present decadence”. Thus, the style and language of their poetry reflect the Socialist Realist poetics which, in Nigerian literature, means reducing the language of poetry to simple, masses-appealing symphonies. About this, Dul Johnson says:

What the present generation of poets have done is to reduce the poetry into simple question (sometimes without the question mark) put in relatively simple language – in fact, into language of song – drawing upon familiar symbol and images with the intent to drive home the message without the tedium that attended the poetry of older generation or of other lands.

As we shall see in Emman Usman Shehu’s poems, these poets are only interested in crafting poetry that is close to the people, which people will understand and respond to. In line with that, Harry Garuba points out that “Emman Usman Shehu’s poetry foregrounds the texts and styles of popular culture. The poetic style favors the simple

rhyme, or even the cliché that matches the movement and clichés the pattern of the dance steps...the words strive to imitate the musicality of the song-lyric and the rhythm of the dance- movement”.

Technically and thematically, Emman Usman Shehu's *Open sesame* has demonstrated that he is a political poet whose love for his nation is profound. Johnson corroborates this fact when he says, Emman Usman Shehu is a “poet very much obsessed with national issues and, in particular, with the question of national unity”. But beyond his love for his country as one nation, Emman Usman Shehu ”significantly stands as the masses’ poet in a society ravaged by thoughtless leaders. In a poem titled “Welcome to the Nightmare”, an elaborate poem, Emman Usman Shehu presents Nigeria as a nightmare under oppression. The first line reads, “Welcome to Nightmare”. Night here is a metaphor of the doom the land is thrown into. He thus, sees the colonial period as the genesis of the oppression when he says:

From colonial yoke/ to brother's choke/truth's noble yardstick/
trampled underfoot / for falsehood's glitter./ welcome to the
nightmare/ of tale-guided dismissal/ trump card execution and
parcel bombing shattering dreams of truth-seers. (Shehu,2005)

The point here is that the land has been surviving on falsehood. Lies are woven and told to pave way for the oppressors. The people are frightened from speaking the truth (“you cannot dare/ to speak the truth”), by the incessant acts of cruelty unleashed on them. Yet the poor suffer, cruelly maligned and maltreated. The elite may be rich and comfortable, but they lie a moral failure. They have benefited only themselves with their enlightenment and expertise. For the poor, life flows sluggishly, quietly and disturbingly to the dreary end.

On the whole, both Tanure Ojaide and Emma Usman Shehu have demonstrated their concern and commitments to their respective society. Undoubtedly, their poetry demonstrated that there are remarkable differences between the older generation of the Nigerian poets and the new generation. These are to be found in the area of language use, the choice of the subject and attitude to the society's problems. While the first generation of Nigerian writers were merely imitative of the erstwhile colonial master's style and virtually preoccupied with cultural revivalism, generally, accessibility of language

distinguishes the new Nigerian poets from the old. Their public concern, the emphasis on the socio-political and economic problems, the faith in the ability of the poet to lead a social revolution springing from his solidarity with the oppressed, all these too show new poetry as different from the old generation. Consequently, Emma Usman Shehu's *Open Sesame* reflects the political ills that have trailed the Nigerian ruling class since the post independence and the oil boom era. In this way, Emman Usman Shehu's poetry chronicles the socio-political and economic redefinition of identity to the modern system of underdevelopment and exploitation of resources in Nigeria and other African countries by politically and ideologically bankrupt leaders. The collection of poems *Open Sesame* depicts the sickening political events and the debilitating social order of the modern day Nigerian society. Hence, (George, 1946:65) asserts that "a poet does not speak not for himself only, but his fellow men. His cry is their cry which only he can utter, that is what gives it its depth. But if he is to speak for them, he must suffer with them, rejoice with them and fight with them. In this context, (Garuba, 1995:16) posits that the younger generation use poetry to give a comprehensive mimesis of the political life and landscape of the country. For them, the shape of our socio-political and economic dilemma is defined by our socio-political and economic structures and the business of poetry is to represent these and point the way out for progress and development.

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CHAPTER THREE:

3.0 The Quest for Social Development in Tanure Ojaide's *In the House of Words*

Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. Some of these are virtually moral categories and are difficult to evaluate depending as they do on the age in which one lives, one's class origins and one's personal code of what is right and what is wrong. However, when poverty, unemployment and inequality plummet, then one will be right to think that development is taking place. But if these problems are becoming worse, even if per capita income more than doubled, it would be wrong to say there was development. (Rodney,1973:86)

For a long time, the concept of development has become the central issue in most discourse on the Nigerian literature. As implies above, the concept is a many-sided process and it often looks at such factors as poverty, unemployment, violence, inequality and general social unrest as the real forces behind the underdevelopment of every society. As Welter Rodney often implies, "underdevelopment is not an absence of development, because every people have developed in one way or another and to a greater or lesser extent" (Ibid 1973). He contends that underdevelopment only makes sense as a means of comparing levels of development. It is very much tied to the fact that human social development has been uneven and from a strictly economic point of view, some human beings have advanced further by producing more and becoming wealthier and prosperous. Rodney advances the reasons that the moment one group appears to be wealthier than the other, some inquiries and criticisms are bound to take place by every socialist critic. It is well however, to consider some of the statistical and conceptual difficulties of using a specific criterion to mark what are development and underdevelopment, before analyzing the causes of underdevelopment. Fundamentally, there is no universally accepted criterion for measuring what development and underdevelopment are; neither is there one of what constitutes the process of socio-political and economic development of a country. However, developed and developing countries are usually categorized by their socio-political and economic standard as these

achieve a relatively high level of stability. Over the years, so many development scholars have argued on the underdevelopment of Africa and Nigeria in particular from different perspectives. While some of them look at it from the perspective of external factors such as imperialism and colonialism, others look at it from the perspective of internal factors such as war, conflict, socio-political instability, endemic corruption and mismanagement of resources. In essence, from the perspective of those who look at the underdevelopment of Africa, Nigeria in particular, from the external factors, colonialism was the ultimate factor responsible for such an underdevelopment. In their own view, as (Ngugi,1972:76) observes;

The coming of colonialism has set in motion a process of social change, involving a rapid disintegration of the tribal set up and the framework of social norms and values by which people had formally ordered their lives and their relationship to others.

Obviously, this social change, “involving a rapid disintegration of the tribal set up”, brought nothing but the retrogression and dissemination of the norms and values of the people, which are the sources of their inspiration. In fact, the destructive impact of the colonial invasion of Africa cannot be overemphasized. Not only the destruction stopped at the social norms and values, hardly one can recognize any framework or system; be it socio-political, religious or economic, that has not been bedeviled by such incursion. On the contrary however, from the perspectives of those who view the underdevelopment of Africa from the internal factor, colonialism cannot longer be considered the factor responsible for such underdevelopment. One of those development scholars and critics is Tanuri Ojaide and strongly reflected in his anthology *In the House of Words* is the stalemate of African progress and development engineered by the Africans, represented strongly in the social system of injustice, political corruption and mismanagements of our home made representatives.

Examining the issues from the perspective of internal realities of the post-colonial Nigerian situation, Tanure Ojaide counters the argument most strongly viewed by African development scholars, “that colonialism was responsible for our underdevelopment”, and urge them to “think twice so as to squarely face the reality of our condition as far as development is concerned and take step to strategize so as to adequately achieve higher

level of ‘development’ for the people” (Thandika, 2005:22). Thus, Ojaide opines that for those who argue that European colonialism is still responsible for the African underdevelopment crisis should remember that if European colonialism is a matter of racial colour, then, white colonialism is long dead and neo-colonialism is black colonialism. In the preface to his book *How Africans Underdeveloped Africa: A forgotten Truth in History*, Joshua Agbo supports the idea that “Africa is not well. Africa is not well not because of the Europeans any more but because of Africans themselves” (Joshua, 2010:162). In this sense, Tanure Ojaide believes that it is a clapped-out idea drawing from the perspectives of contemporary Nigeria problems and indeed, an excuse to say that colonialism was an overriding factor responsible for our socio-economic and political underdevelopment. In his opinion, it is rather sad to see that the state of modern Nigerian society in the post-colonial or imperial period is absolutely poverty-stricken. And it is a fact that poverty is an obvious whetstone for civil and structural violence, economic crisis as well as political instability. Arguably, this state of affairs of the post-colonial Nigerian society almost made the sense of the Nigerian independence worthless. Thus, (Senanu, 1979:232) contends that “Neo-colonialism bruised the image of Africans, spiritually destroyed their self pride and dignity and installed in them a sense of hopelessness and insecurity which they have had to fight in order to ensure their recognition in the world’s stage”. Obviously, Tanure Ojaide’s quest is to challenge the indolent Nigerian leaders and prove to them that if they want to change their dire economic, social, political and cultural position in the world, they need to look deeply within themselves for the causes. The issue is however complicated by the fact that Nigerian leaders, because of the history of colonialism and neo-colonialism have internalized the erudite view of their former masters. This failure to replicate the ideals of the independence and a practical blueprint for socio-economic and political transformation is what Tanure Ojaide set to achieve, with the conviction that such exposition will serve as a challenge to those in position of authority, to not only listen but to act.

Creatively, Tanure Ojaide subconsciously utilizes the concept of form and content to explore the ills of the society that captured his attention. The collection is written in four suites with each suites progressing and deepening the message. The title of each suite decides the attention of the poet. “The Savannah suites” and “the Delta suite” pay

close attention to the Niger Delta and the Nigerian environment in general. It also captures the experiences and the interaction with nature. While the “Home Boy Suite” and the “Moon Suite” are mostly the poet’s personal recollections of his experiences both in Nigeria and America. Thus, the collection is embedded with autobiographical undertones as he recounts his own experiences. In his own words, “these poems could be seen as a diary and a canvas form on which the reader can glean the home boy’s mind set and his people’s plight.

In the House of Words is a critical satire where the poet responds to the socio-economic bigotry, decadence and corruption, post-colonial disillusionment and contradictions, materialism, social class struggle and self-reassessments all in a society that is suitable for his craft. The poet often adopted the first person and third person point of view in his poem mostly through the use of the pronoun “I” and “she” or through referring to other people’s experiences in the collection. The use of irony, metaphor, sarcasm, imagery and symbolism provides the poet a forum where he can curve his poem to achieve both aesthetic and thematic value. There is the use of simple language and everyday imagery and symbolism to sketch his commitment to the proletariat class. The projection of social class struggle and the critique of the upper class present Tanure Ojaide as Marxist Socialist Realism writer. There is the realistic projection of the alternating land and ecosystem in the oil turbulence, plight and crisis that is addressed in the Nigerian society. Tanure Ojaide attempt to conscientize, address and propel the masses toward revolution. The poetry collection is a deliberate satire and response as the poet uses simple caustic diction to comment on the socio-economic crisis of the modern day Nigerian society. It is therefore the duty of every writer as a vanguard for positive change to not only highlight the problems but to also suggest a practical solution for the betterment of the situation. In this sense, (Soyinka, 1979:96) posits that;

It is not enough for the African artist standing aloof, to view society and highlights its weakness. He must try to go beyond this to seek out the source, the causes and trend of revolutionary struggle which has already destroyed the traditional power map drawn by the colonialists nation.

If the writer feels committed or involved and feels the compulsion within him to write the truth, then he must be willing to state it objectively. For “It is not enough for

the African artist standing aloof, to view society and highlights its weakness". It implies here that the writer must engage in a direct political action rather than merely providing an ideological vision in a work of art. Thus, in the poem titled "An Old Yearning Grips Me" Tanure Ojaide posits that the poet must not and cannot "watch the skulls of ordinary citizens" (plebeians) being perfunctorily cracked without complaining. The poet must use silent creativity to "speak volumes of reasonable noises", to "defeat the misguided blueprint of governance", and of course;

I must speak to wield my arms against robber politicians
to invigorate the warrior spirits we need for our wellbeing.
I must speak to wield my arms to invading vultures
to chase out Shell- BP from dispossessing villagers
pg.9

Thus, the poet dares any consequences that might come his way and fearlessly speaks his mind, "I must speak to wield my arms against robber politicians" and of course to the "invading vulture", the inglorious politicians who are obviously the continent's biggest problems. To "invigorate the warrior spirits we need for our well-being". The poet contends that our voice must fearlessly echo so as to tremor-riddles the disguise of the exploiters (vultures) and the enclaves of convenience (Shell-BP), where they profligate their loots of the national treasure. Rhetorically, the poet asks "what is the poet doing in the corridor of power: nodding to the kill-some lies of reptiles of state". The poets act as the oppressed voice of national conscience and a sledge-hammer against corruption. For the poet, to be silent constitutes a grave mistake, no matter how grim or unspeakable the national condition or invincible the power of authority might appear to be. In the poet's opinion, "if silent, the enemy speaks; he sets the agenda of the debate. The national condition will thus get worse". Because the "society is in rot; the governing body defecates it with corruption, dishonesty and injustices". The poet warns the oppressors thus;

Though they purge themselves against feast of rot
Their attempt of self ritualistic ablution is belated.
The fury of recriminatory steps whirl- wind against
the vultures, the predators of social good.
Pg.9

Despite the atrocities and corruption carried out by these oppressors as “they purge themselves against feast of rot” (revel in corruption), the poet warns that they cannot escape their ultimate punishment, since “their attempt of self ritualistic ablution (their tricks) is belated”. And “the fury of recriminatory steps (the anger of the oppressed) whirl-wind against the vulture, the predators of social good”. As such, the poet heaps a curse on the evil authorities: “But grief shall be the only testimonial for their greed” and believes that the poet must have the courage to speak the truth, to “overturn plots of plunders” which is what power –dispensation crafts in cloak-rooms. Furthermore, in the poem titled “A Half Million Troops” Tanure Ojaide observes that the real cause of the present predicament is the betrayal of the ideal of our independence by the ruling class. The poet compares the disappointing present marked by deceit, corruption and injustices of the new leaders, with the glorious and purposeful beginning of the struggle for independence, marked by one voice and one promise of our great comrades of independence, who stood even when;

The leveling hurricane came they stood their ground
 men, women, young and old, their strength gathered into one fist
 the dark storm bent them, they didn't break
 they stood upright, power from within
 they stood their ground and wouldn't flee.
 A half-million troops stood bonded in one voice.
 Even when they groaned they reorganized
 Men who new the secret of salvation handed down from the
 generation of unending quest. Pg.123

As observed above, the people's selfless sacrifice, as when “hurricane came they stood their ground, men and women”, and commitment to the cause of freedom, “the groan of a half-million troops, bonded in one voice”, made a complete debacle and their ‘unending quest’ becomes a mirage, when suddenly their leaders turned misleaders and oppressors. For shortly after the independence, the leaders started betraying their trust and began to liaise with the former colonial masters for further oppression and exploitation. Observed by the poet, in the poem titled “They Step Over the Threshold”, the poet use the threshold as the metaphor for the masses where the ruling class step upon. The poem satirizes the militia, the robbers, the police men and the tribalist whom the poet labels as the fugitive who exploit the threshold (the masses). Obviously, the poet

observes that lack of political unity and ineffectiveness of both political and religious organizations are obviously the basic factors behind the country's underdevelopment. The various religious and political organizations which could save the country from endemic poverty and foreign exploitation are ineffective. This is true because, first the new emerging leaders discourage all forms of unity, as this will only strengthen the oppressed to challenge their oppressions. Instead, their tactics is to spread disunity among the people and make sure;

They have stepped over the threshold
Into the only refuge in the prevailing storm.
Each imperiled but hostile to others
all the hostile tribes of the federation
They will break and perish in one world pg.119

Secondly, the various tribes of the country, fuelled by religious and tribal acrimony, "each imperiled and hostile to others", are not willing to come together in order to find a practical solutions to their problems, for a meaningful progress and development. As a result, "they break and perish in one world". Obviously, the complete failure of this unity is in the tradition of divide and rule tactics by which the imperialist foster on the continent. Thirdly, the new leaders lack faith in unity, because each wants to be the leader and is not interested in unity based on equality. As a result, "Africa remains a plaything like football, passed on by the white imperialist and then ironically to the black imperialist" (Ogumbesan, 1979:63). In fact, the image of the Nigerian society presented in this poem is that of political disunity, social injustice, corruption, inequality and basic underdevelopment. Painfully, therefore Tanure Ojaide sings a song of sorrow and disappointment, in a poem titled "Do Something", and warns that in a society where the;

The sun has burnt off all the filaments of light
Night is falling fast upon the crowd
The storied house is going under a massive flood
With dearth of jobs suffering needless death
Pg.122

Indeed in a society like this in which "the sun has burnt off all the filaments of light" and "night is falling fast (misery and hopelessness) upon the crowd", the future is

unforeseeable and any idea of progress and development could only be a dream. Not only the oppressors turn their back against the oppressed, to complete the cycle of the domination, they spread disunity among them. Thus, “with the dearth of job suffering needless death”, the oppressed turn themselves against themselves, thereby spreading the disunity and strengthening the grip’s of the oppressors. Therefore, Tanure Ojaide advocates that for a meaningful progress and development, the different Nigerian tribes and religious bodies must learn to work together as an indivisible unit. He sees that “our unity lies in our diversity” and for our progress and development we must be willing to welcome and embrace, from every part of the country, people who bring ideas for our development, irrespective of tribe, political or religious background. That is why Tanure Ojaide strongly asserts that “our development largely depends on our capability and ability to learn from other people and must broaden our souls to embrace all and yet learn from the mistakes of history”.

It is in that sense therefore, that Tanure Ojaide proceeds from mere analysis to a more concrete prescription and believes that the Nigerian masses must duly recognize themselves for what they really are; a being whose souls have been wrecked by the neocolonialist, and the indolent Nigerian leaders, before they can properly redeem themselves. Tanure Ojaide observes that the changes brought to us by the colonialist were completely without effects and unwelcome. This is obviously reflected in every aspect of our lives ranging from politics, education, religion and general human activities. The poet shows his dissatisfaction with the obsession of the western culture and ways of life by the Africans (Nigerians) with a clearly defined contrast, particularly in a poem titled “Night, in Charlotte”. To enunciate his point however, Tanure Ojaide brings the contrast between what he believes to be a model of true African progress with a sense of humanity as against what was obtainable in the western societies. Under “The Homeboy Suit” section of the collection, Tanure Ojaide uses a number of poetic devices to show the differences between his hometown and Charlotte in the United State of America. Among these devices are sarcasm, contrast, use of symbols and alternating between two variables. In the poem titled “Night in Charlotte”, Tanure Ojaide uses contrasts to show what night outside his indigenous home is like. In Charlotte, he says, there are no “masquerades”, “witches”, no “spirit”, no “otie tree”, and no drum. All that are available are;

Night that has sold its priceless gender to robots
night that has lost its black outing suits
night that suffer not from malaria attack
but groan helplessly from chronic fatigue
night that respect not your privacy
night that gives out your shadow for pay. Pg.3

In fact, it was a night full of artificialities, “night that has sold its priceless gender to robots”, created to replace human beings with no sense of morality or decorum. Instead of the vibrancy that is found in the village of the poetic personae, the night in Charlotte “suffers not from malaria attack but groan helplessly from chronic fatigue” and what keeps the night company here are “ambulances, firefighters and policemen”, a clear symbols of social instability. Tanure Ojade alternates between two different variables in trying to bring his theme of cultural differences to the fore. Out there in charlotte, “it was a night with neither masquerades nor witches, flying spacecraft of groundnuts shells”. In fact, “it was a night defaced by neon lights of tailboards, night marooned in the company of depressed souls”. In this way, he also brings up the issue of the effects of technology on the human mind, body and soul. Because life in the United State as with other developed countries is based on technology, the human body, soul and mind suffer. As Tanure Ojaide alternates between one culture and another, it is evident which of the culture he prefers. The morality, warmth and effervescence of African culture/tradition and environment in contrast to the coldness and immorality of the European culture appear not to have gone stale as a theme. Tanure Ojaide thus, vehemently renounces such blind imitation of the western ways as useless and unprogressive. For example, in the poem titled “I grew tired of towers”, the poetic personae, dissatisfied with these European values returns back to his ancestral home only to find an almost worse scenario. All the things he had celebrated earlier have now turned sour as he notes;

Decades of absence have changed faces.
old roads through villages are unaccounted for.
For development the land’s turned upside down
and the people are left behind in a lurch. Pg.5

Unfortunately, these “Decades of absence have changed faces” for the worst. The night clubs he had frowned at in far away Charlotte are now here, “gaudy girls now flood the street”, all in the name of modernization and civilization. And “for development, the land’s turned upside down and the people are left behind in lurch”. The worthlessness of the present situation is obviously reflected here in its ugliness and chaotic nature and that “opulent mansion and housing estates” that housed the politicians is a perfect depiction of the home-made representatives of the former colonial masters who lack any vision of righteousness. However, the images of the groves, wetland, aviaries and gaudy girls, adequately portrayed the worthlessness and senselessness of the present social order and the changes that people are blindly responding to. The essential contrast in this poem is between the richness of what is natural and the emptiness and impotence of what is artificial to the people. It is therefore, the incompatibility of these artificial changes with what is original to the people that are more disturbing to Tanure Ojaide than any other thing. These changes are seen in every aspect of our culture and tradition in which we always struggle to imbibe the western traditions and culture at the detriment of our indigenous culture and civilization. The changes are also reflected in our political system in which its whole structure is like that of the “wide road crisscrossing the land” in the poem. In the end, what is left is what (Kofi Awoonor,(1971:31) calls the “flimsy glories of paved street”. In another poem titled “Independence Day, 2002”, Tanure Ojaide describes the Nigerian independence to be paradoxical from the beginning. On the Independence Day, supposedly the symbol of our freedom;

A woman, sack on the head goes at dawn to her farm
unaware of any official proclamations/ she heads for the bush
tiring kilometer from home on bare feet in cotton wear brown
from age and sweat/ on hand supporting the sagging sack on the
head/ she is dependent on her chapped hands and so early leaves
for her self-allotted patch to exercise them for salvation. Pg.46

The whole atmosphere painted above is that of the hopelessness of the common masses which describes the worthlessness and ineffectiveness of the so called independence, which does not guarantee freedom from poverty and suffering.

Artistically, the use of such words as ‘sagging sacks’, ‘farm’, ‘bush’, ‘bare feet’, ‘sweat’ and ‘cotton’ above, accentuate the emptiness and worthlessness of the independence and its conspicuousness is reflected in the abject living condition of the people that made Tanure Ojaide to ask rhetorically, in frustration;

When will people be satisfied with enough profits
To leave water, trees, birds and butterflies to live
their own lives. It is not only dollars that count
as wealth. Pg.46

What Tanure Ojaide presents here is that the fate of our nation is no longer dependent on its former colonial leaders but our present home-made leaders who are not “satisfied with enough profits to leave water, trees, birds and butterflies to live their own lives” and contends that, whatever tragedy that befalls us now we should blame ourselves rather than attaching it to the erstwhile colonial masters. In his further examination of the root cause of Nigerian underdevelopment, Tanure Ojaide considers the Nigerian politicians as the country’s greatest enemies because of their insincerity, lack of vision and ignorance. In poem after poem we find these unsavory images of these puppet leaders as they revel in corruption and selfish motives. For instance, in a poem titled “The community development officer”, these corrupt leaders are described as highly unscrupulous people. They are viewed as visionless leaders, highly corrupt, with a little or no feeling of righteousness. What is of utmost concern here is for Nigerians to stop all pretension to search for a true and selfless leader with a vision and insight for change, not like the community development officer, a perfect symbol of useless Nigerian politicians or better still colonial puppets. The poet demonstrates his themes of political corruption by hanging exemplary scampy politicians on the poetic scaffold, through a brilliant interplay of words. Sarcastically and alliteratively, the poet paints the image of selfish and autocratic leaders especially when dealing with the helpless masses. Thus;

In the office of the community development officer
they remotely control the people’s lives/ Like the
situation report of colonial days /slave days are not
over with however free my people claim to be with
the independence. Pg.25

As observed from the above excerpts, the people's rights and freedom ushered by the independence achievement is no longer guaranteed. As the oppressors "remotely control the people's live/ like the situation report of colonial days". For at the slightest opportunity the leaders often start to turn the wealth of the public into their personal treasure with impunity. The poet dutifully exposes the emptiness of the independence achievement and thus, concludes that "slave days are not over with however free my people claim to be with the independence". Obviously, their deceitful tricks was to cajole the masses with the ideas of changing the face of the country with industrial development before providing such basic needs as shelter and education for the poor and their children. In the end, the community development officer;

Cut his people to size/ contains their wildest dreams/
In a few bore-holes that are useless without light/
And break down in week after the fanfare of
commissioning. He contains more wishes in cassava
machines to grate tubers into garri and keep our mouth
shut. Pg.25

This is indeed the tragedy that befalls the modern African society in general. Examining the situation thoroughly, Tanure Ojaide contends that the whole cause of the country's structural dislocation is embedded in the social discrimination and the injustice of the new emergent leaders and concludes that only a selfless sacrifice can guarantee the country's progress and development

Moreover, Tanure Ojade, in the same poem further captures the chaotic nature of the modern Nigerian politics and the nonchalant attitudes often display by its leaders at the expense of the masses. The modern Nigerian society is here presented with one main unfortunate problem; the destruction of a sound moral ethics of our traditional society and the elevation of materialism to an unhealthy and unprecedented height. The result of this uncanny attitude has always been the phenomenal increase of people who run after money recklessly; determine to acquire wealth in the shortest possible ways at the detriment of the masses. In the process they display no scruples of conscience and respect

without moral code. As in the office of the community development a symbolic representation of the enclave of the Nigerian society:

When there was a gas explosion, it didn't matter to him/
His people died the death of grasshoppers
It didn't matter to him since death was their portion/
For as long as he sat in a big chair of their air-conditioned
office with a fat salary. Pg.26

Of course, nothing will matter to them as they are self made and immune with the public funds, with impunity. Even when their “people died the death of grasshopper, it didn't matter to them”, for as long as they sit down in a big chair of air-conditioned office, they have no time to address the suffering of the masses. Meanwhile, their children were schooling abroad and growing a “fat neck and bellies”, while they “flaunt at the masses”, evidence of inglorious and ill-gotten wealth and insult them by “seeking a chief's” title to be paid homage to and taking multiple wives to nurse their virility.

Furthermore, in the next section of the collection titled “The savanna suit”, as it is set in the savanna, i.e. the northern part of the country, Tanure Ojaide continues with these themes of injustice and suffering of the masses as the trademark of our retrogression and social underdevelopment. Here the poet describes nature and its effects on humanity. And how nature accentuates the gap between the rich and the poor, with the poor always at the receiving end. In the poem titled “Late morning in early September”, Tanure Ojade describes the effect of a thunderstorm in the savannah. Trees are turn from the ground, roof are snatched off shanty settlements, and of course “only those on bare feet and bikes” suffer this tumult. Unfortunately, still it is this same under-class that have to clean up the mess, the cars of the potbellied and bald elite have to be washed, housekeepers must sweep both inside and outside the houses, “the queen bees look on the workers do their task”, “the big shot sit back and watch the poor helpless people clean up the effects of the storm with natural origin’. And when it is time to count the casualties;

Ten farmers killed by the falling trees/ a passenger electrocuted
while going to buy coke for his boss/ fifty homes in Wulari
collapsed in difference to tyranny/ the list run on every lost on
the side of the underclass. Pg.36

In contrast however, none of those “potbellied or bald elite” has been affected by the high-handed storm. Only the masses, “ten farmers killed by the falling trees and fifty homes collapsed in Wulari”. And days later the governor arrives in a motorcade of Mercedes to inspect and assess the damage, with litters long cleared. Fundamentally, the essential highlight of the poem is the contrast between the dedication and suffering of the masses on one hand and the nonchalant and carefree attitude of the leaders toward their followers in time of distress. Even where promises are made by the government to assist, they are often shallow and even when they take effect are mostly post-mortem in nature, a sort of medicine after death. As such, the poetic personae ends with a bitter rhetorical question that summarizes his thought, “why is the low cast always bearing the brunt/ of sacrifice storm, epidemic and divine strikes?” The tone in the poem is sarcastic and pungent as the poetic personae laments the plight of the ordinary man caught between natural deserters and corrupt greedy politicians. Tanure Ojaide goes on in the entire section to describe the Northerners, their ways of life and customs as seen by a stranger. In another poem titled “Barriers against fire storm, for instance, Tanure Ojaide charts the daily life of a typical Hausa man, his resilient spirit, his faith in his creator and his determination not to give up or admit to being tired. He talks about their habitual prayers, their mode of transportation, and their mode of dress, their thirst for news on their handy radios, their staple foods, and the ailments that plague them, their customary greetings and their resilient spirit in the face of destabilizing natural disaster.

In another poem titled “Mararaba, Abuja Nearby”, Tanure Ojaide makes a strong commentary on the squalor again and the wide gap between the few rich and the majority poor. He notes that, though the poor stink and are generally regarded as an “eyesore”, he prefers them to the rich who own “robbers” mansions and dens/that Abuja capitalizes on a fool’s paradise. He further explores these themes in “Two locations”, where he uses contrast and play on words to show how corrupting and ill-gotten wealth is and how the poor were denied the freedom of movement, modesty and peace. In the same vein, Tanure Ojaide freely attacks politicians and political leaders. He calls them hyenas and vultures, ‘humanimals’ who steal money meant for the commonwealth, who starve youth of good jobs, in the process creating pilferers, area boys and armed robbers. And for the sake of democracy, for the sake of so called freedom, people cry out “leave them alone”,

and the same people who have been 'butted' and 'bled'. And the poetic personae asks rhetorically, "if you turn away from swirling clouds will it avert the storm?" indeed we cannot since;

We are deep to the throat in squalor/ and do not even
know the peril of drowning/ we prepared a patch for
a farm now weed-possessed/how many weeks left for
the season to grow crops? / if you turn away from
swirling clouds will it avert the storm? Pg.61

The poetic persona here is sending a strong message to the general public, the masses especially who suffer all kinds of oppression and yet defend the politicians who are at the root of their suffering. 'we are deep to the throat in squalor/ and do not even know the peril of drowning'. The people are here given an in-depth analysis of the genesis of their predicament and a proper ways towards addressing it i.e. our prayers can only be answered and our action can only be just if;

Multitudes of prayers could rise skyward smoke of incense
but no they come from bellies constipated with forbidden foods.
And if churches and mosques would open to God for fresh air
not for the acrimonies of decades of hate. Pg58

In accordance with the above excerpts, Tanure Ojaide thus, believes that for the dream of our progress and development to be realized, our religious honesty must go hand in hand with our social and economic truthfulness. Accordingly, we cannot pray to God for salvation while desecrating his injunction and committing atrocities. And of course "Multitudes of prayers could rise skyward smoke of incense but no they come from bellies constipated with forbidden foods". At the same time "if churches and mosques would open to God for fresh air not for the acrimonies of decades of hate", which has plunged the entire country headlong into a long time crisis witnessing today.

In all his poems Tanure Ojaide endeavors to throw off the mask with which the African indolent leaders have often camouflaged their true selves so that they could see themselves for what they really are: "the most underdeveloped member of human race" (Rodney, 1973:23) and consequently arouse their conscience from the century of slumber. Thus, Tanure Ojaide insists that, for our progress and development to be

guaranteed, our leaders must wake up from their slumber and see the reality of their situation. As (Nwoga, 1979:72) argues “we must wake up to make for the lost time and design a definite future for our progress and development’. This is indeed Tanure Ojaide’s thought on the Nigerian progress and development and he has given an ample poetic expression to this.

The last section of the collection however, is dedicated to the life in the Niger-Delta areas and their people’s predicament. The first poem “The area boy” epitomizes the typical character of Warri boy, an area boy. The area boy shows strength and cowardice almost in equal proportions. But above all his resilient spirit is evident. He fears no gunshots, laughs in spite of pain, takes insults in good stride, and gives insult back as a kind of self defense mechanism. He is noisy without communicating sense “he yields even as he beats his chest”, he is proud money/material conscious, vulgar in speech, dishonest, kills himself fighting for no just cause, hurries nowhere and creates jam, calls his rat-infested room a castle, prays to his god with a double mind, offer himself out as an assassin. For instance, in the poem titled “The improbable”, Tanure Ojaide uses the tale of a suicide to tell the life of the youth in the land of Effurun. He notes the irony; a young girl taking her life for lack of love when so many other people were dying for making love- illegitimate children, single mothers and unknown fathers and all the diseases that spring from promiscuity. He uses much imagery to comment on the lasciviousness of youth in the Niger-Delta community and their lack of progress and development. For example, underage girls sleep about in a culture that encourages the outings, young boys and girls eagerly rush for “the diet that distends the stomach”, and parks are littered with condoms, cigarettes butts and beer bottles. At the end, the youth do not even care for their own lives. It is the old people, those who knew a modest kind of love, those who ‘saw love in a letter writing”, it is these ones that will bury the corpse, who will know and share in the irony and the remorse. He calls suicide the “taboo that prevents one from becoming an ancestor”.

In essence, the poem is a bold commentary and a condemnation of the immorality that runs rampant in the Niger-Delta environments, particularly among the youth. Thus, the poetic persona who is also the poetic voice of reason laments the corruption that has established such a system of social decadence and immorality. However, the poetic

persona here laments grievously that all these social decadence is as a result of the effect of the activities of the oil companies on the soil and the individual. The poet speaks of restive youth and interdenominational groups, some praying for peace, others demonstrating and some others yet involved in one tryst or the other. The minstrel who is the poetic voice of reason here, decries the situation in the area; youth have no jobs to occupy them and the “outsiders” oil company like “Shell” have “turned the place into hell”. He speaks of the concern friends outside worry who call to ask out how he is faring and what he does to keep himself occupied. And therefore, as a minstrel, he uses this medium to speak of everything he sees and meditate on. As a minstrel he has the eye for detail, a speculative and inquisitive eye that goes beyond the surface to find underlying causes and address them. Tanure Ojaide here contends that whatever material gain or benefit the Nigerian must have realized from such oil companies, it is upset by the suffering and lost of dignity and even of humanity of the people. These massive lost are what should have been recovered by the independence attained from our colonial masters. But as it is very obvious, the truth behind our independence is as painful as that of the colonial experience. Since the new emergent leaders have turned deaf ears to the plight of the people who in actual sense are the true heroes of the independent struggle. These leaders turned complete stooges, puppets and hypocrites in the hands of the former colonial masters and revel in corruption for their selfish interest. In the end, Tanure Ojaide advices that our leaders should do away with their excuses of colonial onslaught as the real cause of our lack of progress and development. To him it should not be a factor indeed because Tanure Ojaide believes that there is no time to west for the crime of yesterday and continuing clinging over the pain it caused us will only distract our attention from the essential search for a new and reliable order of existence. Therefore, he discourages all forms of grief and sentimentality about the past and sing a song of new Nigeria who has wiped her tears and “...offer herself, her love for hate peace for war and dignity for alien savagery to embrace the significance of the new down’ (Emenyonu ,1991:63).

In conclusion, it can now be said that Tanure Ojaide’s vision for social progress and development in the collection *In the House of Words* is at once general and as a collection or anthology, it reads as a unit. His vision spreads across the entire nation

Nigeria and captures the moods and tones and shades of issues that have local, national and international implications. Obviously, Tanure Ojaide's contention is that the unfortunate present despair and lost of hope could be transformed into a meaningful and prosperous future only on the basis of a solid idea to be yielded by ourselves. The emphasis is on our thinking capacity which can produce greater and substantial ideas for progress and development. Taken overall, Tanure Ojaide admonishes that because of the urgent need of our society to reorganize itself and achieve an assured greatness, we must resolve to stop all pretention about revolution and take a practical and pragmatic step. To Tanure Ojade, our prospects are great. What is lacking and must be cultivated is the determination and the will to explore the glorious possibilities by taken the obviously decisive action. In fact, it is only by government walking the straight path of dedication and genuine leadership that Nigeria can achieve the growth and development which its potentials points to.

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CHAPTER FOUR:

4.0 The Quest for Development in Emman Usman Shehu's *Open Sesame*

More often than not, creative writers with an acute sense of happenings around them and a heightened sense of reality find an apt media of representing their views in poetry. In this regard, (Ngugi, 1972:23) notes that: "literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society". Thus, poetry reflects society since it is given its impetus by the activities of the society. The power of poetry, therefore, arises from its ability to entertain and educate. It functions as vehicle for social awareness which will lead to socio-political and economic development. It serves as a reservoir of ideology from which people draw inspiration in order to positively structure their socio-political and economic existence. (Ngugi, 1981:60) further asserts that;

Literature cannot escape from the class power structure that shapes our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspect of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in society. What he chooses is one or the other sides of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral.

Since every writer "is a writer in politics", a writer cannot, therefore, sit on the fence. Even when they write beautiful lines, they are conscious of the socio-political and economic realities of their societies. As (Joseph, 1999:221) notes: "without denying the importance of aesthetics in African literature, we should keep in mind that...African writers use beauty to help communicate important truths and information to society". Modern Nigerian poetry deals with the African predicament and the factors behind Africa's underdevelopment. It deals with the crisis of the past, the present and even the future- the past being hideous, the present confused and harassing and the future uncertain and intriguing. Thus, modern Nigerian poetry is born out of the crisis of the mind and the spirit which is projected into the somewhat ordered of chaos of poetic

artistry. There is no that nervous and tear-furrowed protest which marks most modern south African poetry or the complacent, quite and almost silent poetry from east Africa; rather, modern Nigerian poetry is explosive and uncompromising in its tempo and commitment. Bankole (Timothy, 1969:311) has said that the Nigerian writer has three worlds; “the world of private and hidden self, a world which turns sometimes quietly, sometimes turbulent, within one man, and which might be known only by others after that man has spoken”; “the world of his society,” (African society); and the world of men. He concludes thus;

His responsibilities to that other world, this third world, will be judged not only by the authenticity and power with which his own private world is presented but also by the honesty with which he interprets the world of his social relations-his country for those who have no direct experience of it but are moved by the power of his speech.

It hardly matters from which point of view one looks at the problem-socio-political, economic, as well as religious- the struggle against the forces undermining the achievement of the above-mentioned progress and development, remains the focal point of the modern Nigerian poets. However, the assumption that underlines the works of modern Nigerian poets is that the contemporary Nigerian poetry is a product of the Nigerian society and of specific historical event in the Nigerian history. As such, most of the contemporary poets today, as we will see in the case of Emman Usman Shehu, understand the histories of their time, schooled themselves in the socio-political circumstances they find themselves in and make a bold and uncompromising attempt at salvaging the circumstances.

Given the nature of literary production in Nigeria, it may be safe to generalize that modern Nigerian poetry belongs to “a functional art”. (Chinweizu and et al,1980:8) offer a valid reason for this functionality: because, “in Africa we recognize that art is in the public domain, a sense of social commitment is mandatory upon the artist”. The poets see themselves primarily as the voices of the people. As a result of their self-given duties, modern Nigerian poets examine critically and criticize the ugly realities of their society, often taken a definite ideological stand as writers with vision for social progress and

development. Most of the modern Nigerian poets have witnessed the collapse of the nationhood and the ideals of the independence, overshadowed by the post independence disillusionment. Thus, their reactions have been to probate, with every sense of duty, the socio-political injustice and the economic quagmire that is the trademark of the modern Nigerian society. To these committed writers, therefore, art is no longer for its own sake; it must be functional and must be used to checkmate the existing social order. For this reason, the modern Nigerian poets have had to mortgage pure artistry for patriotic and functional artistry; they see themselves as patriotic writers with social vision for greatness, evolving what (Remi Raji,2001:52) calls “the nationalist imagination”. Nwankwo’s thesis on this is that

The Nigerian writer must, as a matter of historical and social responsibility, consistently subject society to critical evaluation in his writings. His thematic preoccupation must be to rehumanize men through the banishment of inequality and social injustice. The restoration of a just order and a respect for humanity which he seeks to enthrone is an act of patriotism.

This is a moral duty which the Nigerian poets have assumed. And this is what engages the poetry of Emman Usman Shehu and host of recent Nigerian poets such as Remi Raji, Afam Ake, Ismail Garba and many more others. In their desperate voices, these poets are singing a songs to achieve dual aims; first, to pierce the ears of the insensitive leaders as a poignant noises from a conscientious poets; secondly, to sensitize the society about the present social disorder caused by an incompetent leadership and possibly offer a blueprint for a meaningful progress and development.

In line with the above commitment, Emman Usman Shehu’s poetries are characterized by their intent and purposefulness for change and development. And if Emman Usman Shehu is a successful poet, his first collection *The Question for Big Brother*, has demonstrated that as a work of a matured writer with vision for progress and development. It is a collection of poetic rendition, artistically characterized, at least in Nigerian literary scene, by the aesthetics of resistance and rage against the existing failed social order engineered by the inept and selfish leaders who revel in corruption and

injustice. Thus, as it will be seen, the phenomenon of oppression, injustice and inequality, whether physical or spiritual, external or internal, has come to be the sources of theme for Emman Usman Shehu and many other Nigerian poets writing in this generation who, as (Unomah Azuah, 2005) has said, “have had to deal with disillusionment in every aspects of the Nigerian state, especially political”. Their poetic expressions are hinged on the portrayal of acts of injustice, inequality, corruption and the general mismanagement of our inept leaders as the main factor behind our lack of progress and development. Belonging to this generation and versifying from an experience well lived, Emman Usman Shehu in this recent collection *Open Sesame*, exposes the social decadence, the retrogression, corruption, oppression and suppression and the mismanagement that characterizes the modern Nigerian states, as the factors responsible for our lack of progress and development. The expectation is that, such exposition, to a large extent, will serve to warn and pierce the ears of the insensitive leaders as a poignant noise from an uncompromising critic and to sensitize the society about the current anomaly, thereby achieving dual aim. It will, therefore, be seen that Emman Usman Shehu strives to be a public poet and subjects art to its functional use by not only engaging in social commitment, but by rooting his poetry in the culture of the people he, as a poet, fights for. Thus, the artist’s duty and responsibility is to provide the proper guideline and a blueprint for a meaningful progress and development. The artist must also be able to always provide a thorough examination of the prevalent circumstances and the current social order which provides insights to the genesis of the present underdevelopment. As such, Emman Usman Shehu commits his art to social service and at the same time exposing and castigating the prevailing social order of our underdeveloped society. Significantly, Emman Usman Shehu serves as a social commentator and in poem after poem; he demonstrates to us the genesis of our underdevelopment and the blueprint for progress and development, in a society ravaged by corruption, oppression, suppression and general mismanagement. This commitment is seen almost throughout the collection.

Written and published in 2005, *Open Sesame* is Emman Usman Shehus’s Second collection of poem, coming from one of the modern Nigerian poets and which exemplifies the dynamism of modern Nigerian poetry and illustrates its relationship with the society. According to the poet, the collection represents or signals a new quest in the

search for an ideal society using poetry as an agent. *Open sesame*, as the title of the collection, implies an easy way to gain or achieve something that is usually very difficult to achieve, is a topical collection of poems in which the poet focuses his attention on the pressing issues of the day. Its disillusionment with the political system and structure which threaten the stability and the unity of the country. Emman Usman Shehu's poetry relies on or shows a remarkable descriptive power in relation to its evocation of setting, landscape and situations, its use of contrast, concentration of visual images, the reporting of events casually using simple diction and rhetorical question. For instance, the title of the collection *Open Sesame*, which is also the title of an elaborate poem of twelve stanzas demonstrates Emman Usman Shehu's position on the state of affairs of the country; its despairing picture in which the poet rolls out series of failures and suffering that characterizes the nation and the raging outcry of the ordinary peasant. The poet observes that the suffering of these masses is further complicated by the existence of socio-economic inequality which engulfs the entire country. Thus, Emman Usman Shehu took the pen to sing the songs of those suffering through the creative power of insight and appeals for sustenance in the midst of chaos that is his country. This poem is written in a tone of indignation and anger on the present chaos and the unjust suffering of the masses, whom the poet likened to a group of prisoners "Caged Birds", symbolic representation of the oppressed (the masses) to sing the song and;

Shatter the silence, break the somnolence
Excavate bitter memories, stitch new sentences
Craft new sequences; spin tensile harmony
Smash ubiquitous mask and shout open sesame

Pg.74

Here, the poet's message is clear; the oppressed masses must stop all pretention about progress and development and confront their oppression with purposeful intent. In such oppressed society, "silence is a crime", and the oppressed must not forget the bitter memories of their oppression, "excavate the bitter memories", of "yesterday's crime" and "stitch new sentences in an open sesame". To achieve this, thus, the poet urge the oppressed to "shatter the silence", and break 'the somnolence', amidst their oppression. For in a society bedeviled with such degree of injustice, to be silent constitute a crime

and amount to an injustice on its own. Thus, in response to the poet's clearing call and conscientization;

The caged birds sing
Open sesame
The southern caged birds screech
Open sesame
The western caged birds screech
Open sesame
The eastern caged birds screech
Open sesame
The northern caged birds screech
Open sesame
Pg.75

Unfortunately, the crisis is multi-dimensional as it engulf the entire country and the metaphor of the “caged bird”, above symbolizes the hard living condition and the lack of socio-political freedom of the people. However, the placement of the south to north and west and east is a clear indication that no single part of the country is safe. In solidarity, therefore, the entire country shout and sing a song of misery “open sesame” “open sesame”, “open sesame”, screaming and calling for a lasting solution to their quagmire. Suddenly, the people's outcry and rebellion serves their purpose as;

The cave of despotism grumbles and splits
And the feudal walls mumble and crumble,
And the cruel chains hiss and shatter
And the season whips crackle and scatter. Pg.75

Obviously, the poet's mission is to galvanize the oppressed to challenge and reject their oppression and he does that through the creation of an atmosphere to arouse the feeling of sympathy in the reader for the victims and revulsion against the forces that maintains such institution of injustice and oppression. The atmosphere is charged with horror and everyone is trapped in a “cage”, a conventional symbol of confinement and restriction of once freedom and right. And the presence of “lightening”, “storm”, “thunder”, and “brimstone”, only make the atmosphere more agonizing. It is against this atmosphere that we comprehend the poet's resentment and sympathy with the oppressed.

Sadly, Emman Usman Shehu shows in a poem titled “Short Fuses”, that the outcry of these oppressed victim cannot salvage them since;

Every fuse here is short on resistance
limited on endurance, devoid of temperance.
Every fuse in this city is primed to blow
at the least provocation, at the slightest surge
given to the urge of a short-circuit
pg.30

The feeling of resentment could easily be felt and the volatility of the situation cannot be avoided. At a slightest provocation the city is plunged to a crisis since “every fuse in this city is primed to blow, at the least provocation”. In fact, what is more annoying is that, the people themselves lack unity and harmony among themselves. And their society is likened to a jungle “a circuit of lawlessness”, with no moral code as a guiding principle. Here, the rule is simple; eat or be eaten and one’s brother is one’s enemy. Obviously, the division created among the people and the agonizing frustrations in the minds of the ordinary citizens create an atmosphere of stagnation and retrogression, thus disqualifying any idea of progress and development. In the end, the city;

Only thrive on layer upon layer of
endless deception, failing to hold back
a surge of aggression, failing to hold back
erosion of compunction aborting meaningful
harvest with alarming alacrity. Pg.30

Sadly, as the poet observes, there is the lack of a “meaningful harvest” in the land and the path the nation “thrive on layer upon layer of deception”, would spell nothing but doom to the nation. Obviously, the lack of a meaningful and planned system of socio-political and economic development has created a wide division and feeling of resentment among the teeming populous. In the end, the land is cursed, “every fuse here is cursed”, and instead of a meaningful progress and development in the land, what is available is “fist flying in all direction, propelling super-charged vehemence even the lagoon cannot cool”. According to the poet, in such an atmosphere of hatred and raging anger, the idea of progress and development can only be a distant echo and unless we change our attitude

toward ourselves, we can only continue to be classified as the most underdeveloped human races of the universe.

In poem after poem, Emman Usman Shehu continues with his themes of socio-political equality and economic stability as the yardstick of every society's progress and development. Emman Usman Shehu wanders over the fate in us or on our soils that prevent things which work so well elsewhere, dislocate our lives so much, leading to self doubt. In Emman Usman Shehu's view, such a society cannot be a fertile ground for any meaningful development. Development requires a change of attitude so that people can positively contribute towards it or making things work. This view is expressed in his conviction that the Nigerian society is no different from that of other land, thus, things that worked elsewhere should also work in Nigeria if the nation can reassess itself and its perspective towards its society. On the contrary, the present atmosphere of suspicion, "limited on endurance", hatred and socio-economic instability overshadow any progressive ideas for meaningful progress and development. Socio-economically, the rift between the "haves" and the "have not" is unprecedented. This led to the increase in poverty, hunger, psychological and physical violence among the oppressed peasants in the society. In the end, as the poets shows, in a poem titled "The Grass Suffers";

The grass will always suffer for some reason or the other
not only when ego- driven elephants battle minor points.
You don't know what the grass suffers
all through the dry and wet seasons, until you run out
of seasons for being the receiving end of life's
unpleasant attention. Pg.57

It is these kinds of events and injustices that the poet is totally against, wherever such systems of injustice prevail. This leads the poet to a philosophic conclusion about human existence that; unless the oppressed challenge the statuesque by direly confronting their oppressors despite the consequences "the grass,(oppressed) will always suffer in the end", "for some reasons or the other". In essence, the poet's mind is continuously saddened by the pre-occupation with the untold suffering of his fellow countrymen. This pre-occupation along with the possibilities of not being able to salvage the system, proves

more devastating to the poet. Seeing other's suffering, "for being the receiving end of life's unpleasant attention", the poet anticipates his turn, "waiting patiently not knowing my fate", and helplessly accept the situation with rage and murderous anger. The poet observes that, at the socio-political level the masses unavoidably bear its unpleasant end since their vote does not count and often at times the leaders often use them to their advantages. At the economic level also, the gap between the haves and the have not is unimaginable. Regrettably, the irony of this present social malaise lies in the fact that public funds were used to create, develop and erect structures or facilities that have nothing to do with the lives of the generality of the population. In other words, the people were alienated from what truly belongs to them. These forms of deprivation clearly account for the sickness of the country, hence its lack of meaningful progress and development.

Furthermore, Emman Usman Shehu observes that, lack of unity and peaceful co-existence among the various tribes and religious bodies in the country are among the main factors behind the underdevelopment of the country. Unfortunately, the various socio-political and religious bodies which should unite the country as one indivisible entity are ineffective. In fact, they are often accused of fueling and spreading the seed of disunity among their fellows. As a result, violence, destructions of lives and properties, ethnic cleansing and general instability became the order of the day. In a poem titled "The Ploy of Lugard", the poets aptly captures the present chaos and the consequences of such division and mistrust. And the tone of despair in the poem vividly accentuates the underlying bitterness and the seriousness of its theme. The poem is both narrative and dramatic and it's a satire on the country's destructive legacy inherited from the erstwhile colonial masters "the ploy of luggard", who sow the seeds of disunity among the people. According to the poet, as for the erstwhile colonial masters, disunity among their subjects was the major tactics as this allowed them to control and exploit through divide and rule. In the poet's opinion, these divisions, for a long time play a significant role in the country's present national chaos. As such, the poet contends that because we cannot live in harmony;

The ploy of lugard has divided us, ridges of suspicion
The ploy of lugard has sown seeds called distrust

deep down in ethnic hearts and mummified us
The ploy of luard has turn us vanpires instead of brothers
The plot of luard stranded us at crossroads, knowing not
where to go and left us haggard like Biafra babies
pg.38

As can be seen above, the failure of our unity is in the tradition of divide and rule tactics by which the new emerging leaders spread, “has sown the seeds called distrust”, among the populous. And in the process, they have “turned us vampires instead of brothers”, and in the end we became “stranded at crossroads knowing not where to go”. Most often, at the back of this mistrust is the deep feeling of resentment among the various tribes and ethnic group in the country, which hinders any purposeful idea of progress and development. This is due to the fact that the various ethnic classes lack trust in themselves and others and therefore, are not interested in unity in diversity. As a result, the search for the illusionist ideas of progress and development still remain a dream, as further observed in a poem titled “ The Wrong Conclusion”, because;

The merchant of ethnic pride eagerly take us for a ride
reeling myth and scares so acidic in the ears of the gullible.
So we live across a divide ingrained deep in our minds
We judge everything from the distance,
and most times reach the wrong conclusion.

Pg.47

Obviously, the Nigerian society is a multi-religious society, with different and often conflicting view point. However, the elements of the differences and distrust “ridges of suspicion” are further complicated by the existence of the socio-economic inequality, the rich and the haves amidst poverty and wants of the masses. This feeling of frustration and general feeling of mistrust often leads to a physical combat because “we judge everything from the distance and most times reach the wrong conclusion”, claiming lives and properties of the ordinary peasant. As a result, “the ploy of luard succeed and mummified us in a hoodoo of intrigues”, turning us to vampire instead of brothers. As such, Emman Usman Shehu advocates that the creation of a new image of our society is paramount and as such there is no time to waste because the destruction caused is innermost and the little hope of tomorrow is almost like a mirage. It is for this urgency,

therefore, the poet advice for an immediate and proactive measure to salvage the situation otherwise the future will be bleak and catastrophic.

However, in order to find a common solution to the present nightmare and the prevailing social disorder, Emman Usman Shehu's poetry traces the genesis of the present predicament to the colonial activities in the country as the factor responsible for our underdevelopment. In a poem titled "Welcome to the Nightmare", an elaborate poem, Emman Usman Shehu presents Nigeria as a nightmare under oppression. The first line reads "Welcome to the Night". The country here is symbolically represented as a monstrous animal "here is the dark mare scaring every moon of candor", and the shadow of the night suggest an obvious reference to darkness and of course underdevelopment and backwardness. The night here represent the nightmare to which the country is plunged into as against light that stirs the course of progress and development. Although Emman Usman Shehu traces the origin of the present predicament to the colonial activities in the country, however, his main dissatisfaction is with the new homemade leaders, who after the independence suddenly turn misleaders and corrupt representatives. In his view, the present leadership structure of the country is nothing but an extension of the erstwhile colonial rule;

From colonial yoke to brother's choke
Truth's noble yardstick trampled underfoot
for falsehood's glitter. Welcome to where
even if you care you cannot dare to speak the truth
Welcome to where if you cheer the truth-sayer
you'll look bizarre. Welcome to the Nightmare.
Pg.39

The point here is that the land has been surviving on falsehood "welcome to where even if you cheer the truth-sayer, you'll look bizarre". Lies are woven and told to pave way for the oppressors. The people are frightened from speaking the truth "you cannot dare/to speak the truth", by the incessant act of cruelty perpetuated on the ordinary man by their so called leaders.

Politically, the attainment of independence marked a significant achievement in the anal of the country's existence. And the expectation is that, the transition would have ushered in a new set of home-grown leaders armed with the responsibilities of rebuilding

their country in order to achieve a greater height. As indicated in the poem title “New Chapter”, the people expect the new found freedom to be “A new chapter brimming with the plot of hope”. Usually, a new chapter, in the progressive sense of the word, signifies an achievement or a transition more prosperous than the previous. As such, the attainment of the independence should signify such a purposeful transition. Ironically, the new chapter of the independence turn out to be a;

Stale tale. Every character is a hyena
in sheep’s skin. All the show of meekness and
gentleness vanishes at the grasps of the road of power.
people’s patience wears thin waiting for their redeemers
pg.40

However, those “redeemers” suddenly turn to demons in disguise “Every character is a hyena in sheep’s skin”, and for the land they turn it to a “nightmare”, a land cursed by its own people. The addiction does not stop at that. The arbitrary killing of both real and imagined detractors by the ruling class, as they unleashed their anger on whoever criticizes them, is the prevailing atmosphere above. The truth seekers in the country dream dreams that are thwarted by “the red-black ink of tragedy/smearing pages of our history”. In essence, the poet uses the truth here as a therapy the country is in dire need of to pave ways for its progress and development. The truth and its seekers however do not have space in there because the land has turned to be;

A nightmare of tale-guided dismissal
Trump card execution and parcel bombing
shattering dreams of truth-seers.
Welcome to the Nightmare of delayed suspension
forced retirement and retrenchment
clouding the dreams of truth-bidders.
Pg.40

In the end, the truth, instead of saving those who tell it, kills them as “Nightmare of tale-guided dismissal trump card and execution awaits them at their doors”. Throughout the collection, the poet’s ideological viewpoint is clear: dictatorship is an agent of underdevelopment since it does not give room for a leveled playing ground of meaningful and progressive ideology to move the nation forward. As such, any form of thoughtless system of administration is lambasted by the poet as unprogressive and

cannot usher in any meaningful ideas for progress and development. In this sense, Emman Usman Shehu, in poem after poem attempts to x-ray the inappropriateness and the danger of any kind of dictatorial regime, tracing their atrocities to earliest period in the political history of the nation. Without apology, the poet exposes the bullying mental psyche of the emerging African leaders and the condescending attitude of the civilians towards these home-made representatives who arrogate so much importance and authority to themselves. According to the poet, this legacy banqueting to the polity of the nation has come to characterize all the facets of its social life- admission into institution, recruitment, appointment into government parastatals, in fact all kinds of favoritism and nepotism set in. Consequently, Emman Usman Shehu is calling for a development that will ensure an outright overhauling of the present political landscape and the prevailing social order of decadence and general immorality that become the order of the day. With these bold steps, the poet believes that the nation can redeem itself and realize its full potential for a meaningful progress and development.

But instead, the emergence of the military regime further escalated the level of the underdevelopment. Reveling in corruption further, using all kinds of force and intimidation, the military quickly set a new tune of fear and uncertainty. As further observed by the poet, however, the present atmosphere of underdevelopment and such overt display of corruption is not only typical of the military elite but the entire gamut of the society, especially among the affluent who consider people of low income means as subordinate and inferior. Perhaps that is why the level of the underdevelopment is so poignant that hardly one can identify any angle of the society that registered its full potentials. For example, in a poem of four lines stanza titled “The Other Circus”, the poet clearly demonstrated the jubilation of the successful coup plotters and their subsequent empty promises as;

The other circus come to town
parading promises In tent.
The fanfare captures the air,
pauperised people stop and stare
General but leads in uniform
his other circus walks a tight rope,
as he juggles balls of options,

seeding nimbus clouds of false hope.

Pg.42

One will see that Emman Usman Shehu here has fused the realistic event of the Nigerian crisis “the 1966 pogrom”, with event in history “the transition to civilian in administration”, to create a myth about the history-long clash between men of vision and political authorities oppressing and exploiting their subjects. What is even more annoying is the ways and manner in which the ordinary people celebrate their coming in to power with little or no resistance. Although these people could be excused for their abject living condition “pauperized people stop and stare”, compelled them to pay such an allegiance, their ignorance is their weakness, as indicated in the last line. The line gives us the vivid picture of the people that the jubilating coup plotters have come to rule. They are the poor people “pauperized people”, seeking for food to survive amidst the present chaos. It thus becomes convenient for the coup plotters to hoodwink them “seeding nimbus cloud of false hope”, with their false messianic messages. This is indeed what characterizes the nature of the new emerging dictators, full of empty promises. Their tactic is simple; get the oppressed masses to their side with homing persuasion and thereafter abandon them. In the end, the new dictator jubilated, “tumbling rope dancing his cherished chest of ambition of self succession in new mufti”. The masses are thus mercilessly thrashed by their ambition so much so that in order for a common person to survive the hardship in the land, he/she needed to join “the trumpeters of the self succession”. Out of frustration, the poetic personae in a poem titled “Serenade” rhetorically, asks the oppressors an important question;

Sir, are you passing by or this time stopping by
to see the ghetto-hood? Sir, we have no buntings,
or hip-wriggling maidens to line the rut-tarred rout
See our ashen faces, hunger-tightened bellies
and you may understand. Pg.44

Of course the dictator would not understand the pleas of the ordinary people since he hardly stop by to see their condition, let alone to assist. In fact even when they stop, they only do that at the detriment of the ordinary people i.e. to cajole them with empty promises and abandon them thereafter. Unfortunately, even where they stop, the only

people the new dictator care about in the society are the sycophant and the hypocrite who dance to the tune of his ambition. In the end, what people are left with is “the wailing serenade”, of the dictator’s siren to remind the populous of his present and departure. Worst still, these emerging new dictators are above the law, which armored them to intimidate any physical and imagined enemy with impunity. In a poem titled “Piper”, the poet shows the overwhelming influence;

The paid piper plays that intoxicating tune;
same old song, same old melody
The paid piper plays in that deceptive tone;
save a few words turned around, save an
emphasis here and there to suit the occasion.

Pg.55

In playing this “same old song”, the sycophant employs “enchanted key” and “deceptive tone”, to make his master feel good. He is eloquent in praise song and purposeful in his end. Since the oppressors give out only to those who praised him, the paid paper goes deception just to survive in the society. In all his poems Emman Usman Shehu endeavors to throw off the mask with which the Nigerian indolent leaders have often camouflaged their true selves so that they could see themselves for what they really are: “the most underdeveloped member of human race” (Rodney,1973) and consequently arouse their conscience from the century of slumber. Thus, Emman Usman Shehu insists that, for our progress and development to be guaranteed, our leaders must wake up from their slumber and see the reality of their situation. As (Nwoga, 1979:8) argues “we must wake up to make for the lost time and design a definite future for our progress and development’. This is indeed Emman Usman Shehu’s thought on the Nigerian progress and development and his social vision as a poet is clear; to use poetry in expressing the pains of his land, Nigeria. In doing so, he, like most poets of his time, locates the pains in the immense pillage perpetrated by the soldiers who came to power through coup d’ etat . Indeed the consequence of military government in Africa- in Nigeria in particular has been enormous and has engaged the craft of poets to date.

Reflectively, therefore, Emman Usman Shehu believes that the modern Nigerian society is bedeviled by injustice, corruption, oppression, suppression, dehumanization, ethnicity, tribalism, favoritism, nepotism, sectionalism and all forms of corruption that

are slowing the development of the nation . As such, Africa and Nigeria in particular, need to move to a new form or system. He views that no African society can succeed unless all its potential resources are mobilized to support national development. To him, there have been too destructive a competition for political office, too huge a concentration of power in the hands of the few ruling elite, and unhealthy preservation of anti-developmental parties and tribal division. For us to develop, we must attempt to build a new heritage of freedom upon a structure or system that does not bind all too closely the old heritage of slavery and to reverse the order of colonial hegemony-the hegemony that dictate to us what we should or should not do. From the perspective of Socialist Realism, Emman Usman Shehu has successfully attempted to communicate to the masses through the use of simple diction. Most of the words employed are everyday speeches that can be easily understood. Apart from this, the collection *Open Sesame* blends Pidgin English with standard English language in order to reach out to his audience at different levels. The use of language in this manner shows the poet's commitment to the lower class, the oppressed and the underprivileged in the society.

In conclusion, the development that Emman Usman Shehu calls and advocates for is an outright overhauling of the present social order. These concerns demonstrate that as an activity of the imagination, poetry can change, shape and sharpen the consciousness and drive of the men and women who could strive to change their society. The "ruin", the human condition or the problems of mankind in the society is the starting point of any serious thought about literature (poetry) and its place in the society. Literature deals essentially and continuously with the image of man, with the shape and method of human conduct. It embodies essential aspect of human society and to study it is be in touch with the deeper movement or consciousness of the society that is necessary in probing into the causes and the nature of human motivation and action in order to gain a fuller understanding of the human situation and the real world for progress and development.

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CHAPTER FIVE:

5.0

CONCLUSION

This research is premised on the argument that literature is relevant to the need and suitable to the enlightenment and conscientization of people. This study therefore, acknowledges that there exist relationship between literature and society, because literature essentially deals with human life and experience and this expands the horizons of people in the society and enhance their capacity to structure their society for a meaningful progress and development. Over the years, critics, philosophers, writers and indeed anyone who has a voice have argued about the role of literature in the society. Some of these arguments have been fore grounded on the definition of literature “as a reflection of man in his society, his past and present, culture and tradition and his general world view”. Essentially, literature as a repository of ideas can serve as a catalyst for a positive transformation and can change a nation by changing the way its citizens think. This repository of knowledge and positive ideas, whether of our past, present or future, posses the capacity to change our thinking capacity by discovering our capabilities and exploring our potentials.

In line with the above, therefore, the objective of any research is the acquisition and coalition of knowledge, whether to aid in solving human problems or to satisfy intellectual or aesthetic objectives. Based on that, the objectives of this research are: to demonstrate that modern Nigerian poetry is structured on the correspondence between the changing disposition and patterns of elite behavior and underdevelopment in the Nigerian society. Secondly, that poetry is an essential outlet used by poets to enunciate their discontentment with the present state of affairs and contribute to the ongoing discourse about the development and underdevelopment of Nigeria. And also to contend that the impetus for development, modernization and national integration, formed the nucleus of Nigerian poetry after independence. However, the study aims at examining the efficacy of poetry as a vehicle of social awareness for progress and development, with the view to ascertaining its role and function in the society. As such, the research sets out to investigate how the poets under study undertake to expose the ills as well as the obstacles

militating against progress and development in the post independent Nigerian society, especially the emergence of the socio-political ills as a result of the structural dislocation and social disequilibrium.

Thus, in line with the above set objectives, the entire argument of the research is based on the fact that there is a relationship between art and society, in that society forms the background of every literary work and every literary artist create art in line with the ideas and problems which exist in his particular society, thus making it possible for the literary work to have relevance to the society. As such, the research contends that: the quest for progress and development is the cornerstone of modern Nigerian poetry and the poets under study have utilized the efficacy of poetry in combating social evil through enlightenment and conscientization, thus transcending the earlier tradition of cultural assertion by the African poets. And that literature is a veritable outlet which can change the consciousness of people and provide them with reservoir of ideas for change.

Moreover, the justification that literature is functional and capable of contributing to the progress and development of society underscores the significance of this study. In this context, this study is based on the argument that literature (poetry) is an important tool of creating social awareness and as such should be given due attention so as to function more effectively in the society. This becomes necessary considering the centrality of literature and its response to the socio-political and economic quagmire of modern Nigerian society, which serve as a watershed from which the poets draw their inspirations. In that sense, the study, therefore, sets to show the interface between the above mentioned socially created problems and literary production. Hence, the exploration help to reveal and highlight the ideological stands of the modern Nigerian poets from which belong Tanure Ojaide and Usman Emma Shehu, thereby removing misconception about modern Nigerian poetry. Such adventure thus, gives a better picture of literature (poetry) as not a mere means of recreation but as an effective tool for social change through enlightenment and conscientization for progress and development.

However, the scope of the study is limited to the analysis of selected poems of Tanure Ojaide *In the House of Words* and Usman Emma Shehu's *Open sesame*. The aim is to specifically focus on how the poets under study have used the medium of poetry to capture the day to day experiences and problems bedeviling their society. The

expectation is that such exploration, to a large extent, will reveal the causes: how and why our society is replete with such social inequality and injustice.

To this end, the methodology of this research analyzes the selected poems of Tanure Ojaide and Emma Usman Shehu, so as to see how poetry can contribute to social change and development. The study, which involves library based research, adopts the use of textual analysis of the selected poems from specific collections of the two chosen poets. In order to achieve this, resources from a variety of scholarly fields were consulted, ranging from books, magazines, articles, journals, unpublished dissertations and internet materials. This study is limited to the analysis of selected poems of Tanure Ojaide *In the House of Words* and Usman Emma Shehu's *Open sesame*. In the light of the above, both Tanure Ojaide and Emman Usman Shehu have given a purposeful poetic expression to the Nigerian destiny during and after colonialism. Their poetry are very much concern with Africa and Nigeria in particular, its destiny, especially its political, economic, moral and cultural health. On the whole, both Tanure Ojaide and Emma Usman Shehu have demonstrated their concern and commitments to their respective society. Undoubtedly, their poetry demonstrated that there are remarkable differences between the older generation of the Nigerian poets and the new generation. These are to be found in the area of language use, the choice of the subject matter and attitude to the society's problems. While the first generation of Nigerian writers were merely imitative of the erstwhile colonial master's style and virtually preoccupied with cultural revivalism, generally, accessibility of language distinguishes the new Nigerian poets from the old. Their public concern, the emphasis on the socio-political and economic problems, the faith in the ability of the poet to lead a social revolution springing from his solidarity with the oppressed, all these too show the new poetry as different from the old generation.

Consequently, it can now be said that Tanure Ojaide's vision for social progress and development in the collection *In the House of Words* is at once general and as a collection or anthology, it reads as a unit. His vision spreads across the entire nation Nigeria and captures the moods and tones and shades of issues that have local, national and international implications. Obviously, Tanure Ojaide's contention is that the unfortunate present despair and lost of hope could be transformed into a meaningful and prosperous future only on the basis of a solid idea to be yielded by ourselves. The

emphasis is on our thinking capacity which can produce greater and substantial ideas for progress and development. Similarly, Emma Usman Shehu's *Open Sesame* reflects the political ills that have trailed the Nigerian ruling class since the post independence and the oil boom era. In this way, Emman Usman Shehu's poetry chronicles the socio-political and economic redefinition of identity to the modern system of underdevelopment and exploitation of resources in Nigeria and other African countries by politically and ideologically bankrupt leaders. The collection of poems *Open Sesame* depicts the sickening political events and the debilitating social order of the modern day Nigerian society.

In essence, the mainstream vision that Nigerian contemporary poets pursue in their enterprises is captured above. And because they are burden with this social commitment and have had to address their poetry to the masses in whose sympathy they write, their language is devoid of density of metaphors and become as clear and as culture-dependant as the language of the second generation Nigerian writers such as Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimu and Olu Obafemi, who have had social commitment as their perspective. Consequently, such endeavor remains their principle with which one can conveniently analyze the poems of these contemporary poets. Their works are concern with the contemporary social problems in Nigeria, with the aim of raising mass awareness of positive revolutionary alternatives to the present quagmire. Thus, the style and language of their poetry reflect the utilitarian value of poetry which, in Nigerian literature, means reducing the language of poetry to simple and masses appealing. To this end, the artistic visions of the poets under study are pointers to the essence of artistic commitment in the articulation of social reality.

Taken overall, both Tanure Ojaide and Emman Usman Shehu contend that because of the urgent need of our society to reorganize itself and achieve an assured greatness, we must resolve to stop all pretention about revolution and take a practical and pragmatic step. According to these poets, our prospects and potentials are great. What is lacking and must be cultivated are the determination and the will to explore the glorious possibilities, by taken the obviously decisive action. In fact, it is only by government walking the straight path of dedication and genuine leadership that Nigeria can achieve the growth and development which its potentials points to. Therefore, on the basis of the

above findings in the research, this study advocates for a repositioning of the study of literature (poetry) with a purposeful intent, because literature still remains a significant tool not only for restructuring and transformation of a society but for the overall development of the entire citizenry. In this way, the study calls for the development of all embracing ideology that articulates the required blue-print and meaningful guide lines for social progress and development. To a large extent, the research contends that literature (poetry) is a potential force that can aide Nigeria in her development mission, thus noting that far from being a means of entertainment, and temporary escape from boredom, literature, in a social context, is a problem solving tool.

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