

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

‘Hewmanity’ Versus Humanity: Tension and Social Vision in the Poetry of Joe Ushie and Ogaga Ifowodo

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ABSTRACT

Transcending the representation of social injustice and its myriad forms is the visioning of the future in the works of many Nigerian poets. This essentially gives a defining characteristic to Nigerian poetry by its inherent organicity with the socio-historical, political and material condition of the nation. In the climate of social injustice, corruption, underdevelopment and environmental neglect, the Nigerian writer cannot afford the luxury of disconnecting themselves and their works from these social concerns which have a deleterious impact on the quality of life. The paper interrogates the different modes of representation of social injustice, termed 'hewmanity' and the tension in the poetry of Joe Ushie and Igaga Ifowodo, both Niger Delta committed writers. The injustice and the tension lie in the relationship between those at the core and those at the periphery. The paper reasons that 'hewmanity' is an antithesis to the humanity we all share; thus 'hewmanity' is in this sense a mocking indictment of the failure to respond appropriately to the duty of service to our shared humanity. However, in this satirical representation of the downside of humanity, Ushie and Ifowodo express a strong social vision for the future – justice, harmony, and rationality, which come out of a collective resolve to bring about change. The call to the duty of humanity lies in the understanding that beyond agonizing is the imperative of organizing for the good of tomorrow. This is a strand common to Ushie and Ifowodo's ideology. The paper concludes that the authorial ideology of the writer blends with the form and language to the effect that our imagined future lies in our readiness to act and address today's injustice.

Keywords: Hewmanity, Humanity, Social Vision, Joe Ushie, Ogaga Ifowodo.

INTRODUCTION

In both literary and political circles in Nigeria and beyond, the Niger Delta environmental discourse has gained some traction with increasing urgency to the human crisis the insufferable ecological situation poses. Creative writers of the area have with commitment engaged the problem of the environment of the Niger Delta and its ramifications on human lives. From Gabriel Okara, Clark Bekederemo to Tanure Ojaide, Ogaga Ifowodo, Ibiwari Ikiriko, Joe Ushie, and others, there has been a conscious characterization of the environment in the oeuvres of the writers of this area. This representation has ranged from the idyllic-pastoral sense among the first generation writers to the catastrophe that it now has become, and as presented by the current generation as an ugly scar in the moral conscience of the Nigerian nation. The Niger Delta problems of environmental neglect, poverty and suffering amid abundance can be construed in a historical and political sense, inexorably involving colonization, capitalist exploitation and neo-colonization with its indexing corruption and poor governance. With crude oil buried in the womb of its earth, much of the Niger Delta area lies prostrate with the rivers and ponds poisoned by spilled oil, the once fertile and arable soil turned to a wasteland, without clean water, electricity and job opportunities for the people. The tragic irony of all this is that the area is the milking cow of the Nigerian state, from where the petro-dollar that sustains the country's economy flows. In the Delta, the oil boom simply means oil doom. This is more aptly captured in Ibiwari Ikiriko's widely quoted "Foreline":

Take a look, dear reader, at the map of Nigeria and behold how the giant country sits, suppressing the Delta which serves it the functions of support and sustenance... Pipes criss-cross the sealed piping, not drinkable water to the population, but siphoning oil and gas to enrich other lands and lives. Up country, well away from the smoke and stench of the oil wells, oil concessionaires of all sorts wake up millionaires on a daily basis. Down the Delta, in the fountain of oil and gas, the natives wake up bereft of their traditional means of livelihood... The oil boom in Nigeria has meant a doom for the Niger Delta. The doom is now beginning to burst in blood... (2000, p. 7).

The above lines by Ibiwari Ikiriko encapsulate the monumental injustice of the Niger Delta situation and the fact that it is peopled by minority groups on whom the majority sit on and suppress, as emblematic of the Nigerian map with the region at the narrow bottom. The ethnic, economic and class dimensions of the situation are equally implicated in this representation of the area in Nigeria, described by Chinyere Nwahunanya (2011, p. xiii) as "..... the symbol of the ironic contradictions of the consequences of capitalist exploitation by multinational economic interests teaming up

with the local comprador bourgeois class". Tied to this are the destroyed aquatic life, the flora and fauna and the socio-economic consequences on the human population. It is against this harsh background that the literature produced from this area can be located and analysed while also taking into cognizance the concerns for justice for the marginalized people all over the world. This background also points to the strain of protest in the poetry of the area, both in the social and environmental sense, which poet after poet has engaged in. Literature of the people of Niger Delta, nay the literature of any people would not fail to be influenced by the socio-historical and environmental factors as its response to the human phenomenon, for it is the human phenomenon that is the province of literature. Ngara (1990, p.3) underscores this point from a Marxist prism in his assertion that: "Progressive literature helps us to understand the world we live in: its beauty and ugliness, its predicament as well as its potential". The literary work, he continues, should make clear the ideological struggle between the forces of oppression and the forces of literature and progress to which end the critic should bring out the rhetoric and silences of the text to raise social consciousness (Eyang & Okune, 2004).

It is in this light that the poems of Joe Ushie and Igaga Ifowodo are interrogated. The thrust of the paper is to identify the artistic representation of injustice and the underlying expression of their authorial ideology within the constructs of the core versus the periphery; the powerful versus the powerless. The myriads of injustice meted against the people by way of state-organized violence, corruption, irresponsibility, cruelty and brutality as well as impunity are captured in a portmanteau term, "hewmanity" – a neologism by Joe Ushie. The term is an antithesis to humanity as it suggests 'hew down', 'bring down', destroy, etc. For the task at hand, Joe Ushie's *A Reign of Locusts* (2004) and Ogaga Ifowodo's, *The Oil Lamp* (2005) are the collections for analysis. The social vision espoused by the writers would be identified, analysed in Marxist –historicist prism while also examining how the verbal resources have been put to use and their effect in the poetry.

This paper examines Joe Ushie and Igaga Ifowodo within the same protest tradition but with emphasis on the social vision that the two poets express in their works. As committed writers, they are sensitive to their environment as well as the political, cultural and economic forces that shape it. As literary agitators, they seek to raise social consciousness to the 'faction' of eclipsing humanity on account of state violence, exploitation and corruption. It is pertinent to point out that Ifowodo's Delta State has witnessed greater environmental impact from the exploitation of crude more than Joe Ushie's Cross River State, which accounts for the stronger accentuation of the threnodic and lachrymal in the former's poetry. What is paramount, however, is the depiction of the tension in terms of class struggle with an overarching vision of an



ennobled humanity achievable through justice, good and responsible governance and application of common of commonsense.

In examining the above concern in the poems from these volumes under consideration, what is equally important is the interrogation of the language of the poets and the stylistic or textual strategies adopted to foreground the message. In this vein, attention is paid to the linguistic and extralinguistic, textual and extratextual gestures of the poems.

‘HEWMANITY’, TENSION AND SOCIAL VISION

The authorial ideologies expoused by Niger Delta poets find a confluence in the abiding need for sustained consciousness of the people and a change of course by the leadership and followership for the progress of society. But what does this change of course mean and what are the issues plaguing society at the moment? The protests tone of the two collections of poems in this study suggests the social contradictions and disequilibrium that characterize the subject of their engagement. As G.G. Darah (2011, p. 2) has pointed out, “... all classical traditions of world literature are fostered by environments where there are intensive struggles against great evils for the restoration of humanity”. This applies to the poetry of Joe Ushie and Igaga Ifowodo. The representation of this evil reveals not only the artistry but the writer’s deep commitment to the eternal values of truth, responsibility and duty. Joe Ushie’s collection, *Reign of Locusts* (2004), is in four parts-Toward Canaan, Back to the Hills, Voices and Moods of the Silent Wild and Other Matters and Returns. Spanning 93 pages, it has 53 poems of strong reflections on socio-economic problems, reflections on love and life and the environment. The intertextual reference to Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) in “Toward Canaan” sets the tone for the bitterness, satire and irony that define the poems. It demonstrates the futility of independence, and the continuation of the colonial experience in a much more bitter way because it is internal colonialism, of “Crooks and /thieves and just plain idiots”.

On this neo-colonial footing, ‘Canaan’ can only remain a mirage and an everlasting thirst for the people, the hungry people. From here, Ushie launches into the African tragedy in “The African Bermuda” where dreams are crushed as the people remain stranded in the “triangle of/soldier, politician and technocrat”. These are the three actors that have defined the reality of the post-colonial condition on the continent of Africa and Nigeria in particular. This tragic triangle also characterizes the state of abjection and wasted opportunities that are Nigeria as well as a good number of other countries on the continent of Africa (Eyang 2004). The bestiality gathers greater momentum and is more graphic in the poem that follows “Night, still” where the horrible past of dictatorship and cannibalism and the present eclipsed sky bear a terrible resemblance. The democratic dispensation ushered in 1999, after “eight long



tyrants” (referring to the military Heads of State prior to the time) held but slim hope for the people, the wounds still too fresh from the frightening past and the sky not clear enough. The terror of that present past is vividly captured as: “We wake, now, from that long night/ Of ill omens, of lying on heaps of/ Siblings’ bones, of eight-long tyrants./ Of crocodiles nurtured by hewman flesh/ Of mad dogs out- biting mad dog” (“Night, Still”, *A Reign.....*, p. 11). But in spite of the pain and anguish, the poet still summons the will to call out to his constituency of writers and crusaders, “compagriots”, to be armed with “swords of words” and “poisoned nibs of curses” to confront the brigands and appropriators of the people's commonwealth, reminding them that the long night is not over. What can be seen in this poem is Ushie’s invocation of history and mobilization of the people to muscle up the will to confront tyranny and oppression. The call for resistance is particularly addressed to the writers and singers, who the poet believes can speak truth to power.

The monstrosity of corruption, personal aggrandizement, dictatorship among African leaders are given historical light in “Musa’s legacy” (p.14) in a mock-heroic sense. The plundering of the land the avarice of the historical Mansa Kakan Musa becomes the shorthand hand way of portraying African leaders and their ill-gotten wealth, which they flaunt about without the slightest compunction. Their exploitation of the people, ruining of the economy through outright stealing, ineptitude and sit-tight syndrome are all aspects of the long shadow of the ancient dictator-warrior himself on our present. Mansa Musa does not only belong to the past but dwells in the present through the different forms of malfeasance manifesting in the land today. One of those issues is that of capital flight, captured in the epigrammatic intertextualization of Bassey Ekpenyong’s “Switzerland Connection”: *But how shall it profit a man/ Who denies his kin a morsel of fish/ Only to build a fish pond in a strange land?*

Many an African leader has left their country impoverished, writhing in pain and disease while they maintain fat bank accounts abroad, “today’s toilers’ sweat remains/A topical downpour in wintering climes” (p.16) and “our communal sweat winters/In private coded accounts”. The use of slave labour receives attention in this poem as a strong aspect of the ‘hewman’ phenomenon. Describing them as “dawn-to-dusk diggers” and human rodents” tells it all – the sheer cruelty that could prescribe this condition. Sure that even Musa the poet-addressee would admit the agony of the slave-labourers, the persona asks, “say to me in a whisper/How did they fare...?”.

In “Ladder” and “The termitarium” the poet shows not only the class struggle but the gulf that exists between those who have been placed in positions of responsibility by the people but have turned against the same people. The privileged are the “laddered” while the people are the “dis-laddered”. In bemoaning the insensitivity of the leaders to the plight and yearnings of the people, the poet likens the disconnect between them and the people to that which exists between incarnations,



impregnable and impenetrable. But the warning issued by the reflective persona is quoted instructive as it reminds the leader impervious to their people that death awaits them all despite rank and riches:

But the entrails of the earthworm
Bear the dung-mix of tallest trees
and shortest ones, says the ant.

The cruelty and violence of the oppressors receive the angst of the poet in “The termitarium”, a democracy of termites, even terminates! The organization and inclusiveness of the termites assail the logic of exploitation and exclusion in our society today, such that our human tale, “our tale” makes the animals including plants and the hills, rivers, the environment sad. The poet persona mocks yet laments the failed humanity in the contradiction of the situation whereby those who toil are cut off from the reward of their labour, the way even animals would not contemplate. There is a sense of social predation or cannibalism as a trope in the poem suggested in the banishment of the worker outside the gates of the kingdom. There is a tension between the leaders, capitalist oppressors and the toiling workers mourned as: “We sow the seeds; They reap the fruits; We hunt the game, They eat the meal, Their eyes perched at the dish of our sweat and blood.....” (p. 21). Though the poet persona does not call for action against his dehumanization, the lamentation and the typification of the predatory readiness of the poet-victimizer is so strong that in itself suggests the action to stop the bestiality.

The grisly and beastly are the thrust of “Homo sappers” (as against homo sapiens), a poem that re-enforces the poet persona’s argument that the cruelty humans inflict on each other is alien to the animal kingdom. For this reason, it is ridiculous to describe human wrongs as bestial. It can be inferred that the poet persona reasons that such wrongs or human cruelty to fellow humans should better be tagged ‘unbestial’ since animals do not go so far in inflicting violence against their own kind. In other words, it is inappropriate to append the epithet ‘inhuman’ to describe what is bad, which is committed by man. Man’s wickedness is only peculiar to man in its extremity and severity, hence it becomes appropriate to describe ‘human’ or ‘unbeastly’ what men do. The beasts of prey, the lions and tigers, for instance, cannot afford the extent of cruelty that humans carry out against themselves. ‘Hewmanity’ then becomes the term to describe our ugly human condition that represents the injustice of whatever hue in the society. The mocking tone of the poet is established early in the Bette-Bendi saying that opens the poem:

*If you save a beast,
It goes its way,
If you save a man,
He kills you.*

In this poem, as in several others, Ushie exposes his vision of social inclusiveness, care for one another by a simple logic from the animal kingdom. Those who prey on others are to him sappers of our humanity; they are anti-human, or in his diction, "hewman" as he charges:

*When next in a hewman rage,
Fling at the fiend this sling of words;
"Hewmanity! It's unbestial! It's human"*

The past as a living present is a dynamic in the poet's neo-colonial portrayal of Nigeria. In "A Reign of Locusts" the title poem of the collection under analysis, there is a dominant predatory image, a cloud of horror hanging over a vulnerable nation with its people. The horror encountered in the earlier poem analysed is confronted here as the dictatorship of the past has only yielded a new variety of "homo-sappers", corrupt politicians, who like a swarm of locusts dim the little hope: "...the locust-choked sky/Darkens the infant rays/of our rising sun". The fledgling democracy that has been ushered in Nigeria lies threatened by the avarice of the three neo-colonial actors identified in "African Bermuda"- the soldier, politician and technocrat - engaged in fierce looting and plundering of the commonwealth, "chewing race". In this representation of the prey and predator relationship, the ordinary people are "the wingless" (p.18) facing imminent death, an endless eclipse". With sarcasm, the poet persona calls for caution and prayers and suggests nothing else, to stop the locusts from their descent. This reminisces the corruption during the 2nd republic and its continuation in the successive military administrations in Nigeria. The hope of the promise of the new democratic dispensation has been dampened by the readiness of the major political actors to plough and plunder.

Ushie's solidarity with the ordinary people equals his love for nature and the pastoral. This runs through the entire collection. The solidarity is strongly expressed with pathos in "The Bond" where he describes himself and the destitute as "co-mysteries from a woman's pot of life/irrigated with same riddle/of rivers running in our veins, we are one with these diamonds/wrapped in rags..." Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* (2005) portrays a gory image of a monstrous state against the oil-producing Niger Delta with the consequent dehumanization of the people and devastation of the ecosphere. Intertextualizing Dante's *Inferno*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the collection bemoans broken humanity at the instance of a brutal capitalist state working in collaboration with multinational companies to exploit oil and pay without regard to the needs of the people of the area and the environment. The 'quotes' from *Inferno* and *Midnight's Children* presage, as it were, the horror that is the Niger Delta experience encountered in the poems of fire both in its literal and figurative sense and the violence that comes with the intolerance for dissenting or alternative views. The

monumental tragedy this spells is akin to the afterlife eternal suffering as a divine punishment in hell as fictionally captured by Dante in *Inferno*.

The Oil Lamp is a lamentation of the government's monumental and criminal failure to the people, the futility of Nigeria's independence, the country's long-distance to true nationhood, and the abjection that follows this ugly scenario. The collection is organized in six parts, each of which dwells on a landmark event in the Niger Delta, apart from the "waterscape" that begins the collection. The poem, "Jese" (p. xi) forms part 1 of the text, a gory account of a fuel fire explosion that consumed hundreds of lives in the area. "A waterscape" defines the place and its aquatic splendor, pristine and appealing. The poem locates the place and what naturally characterizes the econiche, harmonious, pastoral and undisturbed. The flora and fauna are described with delight and nostalgia; *And in the mangrove waters, where tides free the creeks of weeds, fishermen glide home to the first meal* (p. xi). In the poem, "Jese," we are first confronted with the failure of the government to provide for the energy needs of its people, which leaves them helplessly desperate: "it was the fourteenth month of the fuel crunch". The length of time of the fuel crisis suggests the level of suffering of the people as background for the tragedy that would unfold later.

With dry stoves and lamps, they have no other choice than fell the wood for their cooking, wood, which in their greenness hold but little promise of fire. And with no electric light, they have few options. The description of the condition clearly shows how dehumanized by suffering and deprivation the people have been subjected to: "They smelt edible death in food cooked /with logs still so alive they hissed/... the women wept into their pots". (p.3). In subsection II of the poem, the poet paints yet another grim image of the absence of electric power in the area, and tragically, another ever-present one, the Cyclop light guarding the wells. The allusion to the classical Cyclop - the one-eyed monster encountered by Odessus - is a grim reminder of the monstrosity of capitalism.

Here electric light is a pun used to signify its absence, yet the danger of its presence (which is only to guard the wells). This metaphor signifies the preeminence of the concern of profit and economism over and above the consideration of the life and basic needs of the people in whose area the oil is being exploited. The oil lamp of the people represents their dimmed hopes and cursed lot and at the same time, the failed promises of the government to the much-needed amenities. To show the government neglect of the area, there is this insight given into the cause of the tragic fuel explosion that roasted hundreds of people:

This was how the damage was done with old pipes corroded and cracked by the heat of their burden – petrol and paraffin piped away from rotting dugouts and thatched huts to float ships and fly planes, to feed factories and the chain of ease to heat stoves and save the



trees to lighthouse and street at break of night to make fortunes for faceless traders in markets without stalls or hand-made goods. A sickened earth rusted the pipes (p. 5).

The above lines expose the evil of rabid capitalism coupled with irresponsibility in the situation of a perpetual robbery that borders on inhumanity and terrible injustice. The irony is precise that the privileges and access given by the proceeds of oil are denied the people while they are left to bear the brunt of the devastated environment. The description of the chance discovery of the leakage of oil in the bush by “rodent hunters” tells the story of abject want and penury in the middle of abundance. The discovery which gathers the village for the free fetch of the spilled oil is ironically a summon for “the hot shower, the ritual bath before sacrifice” (p. 5). Here the poet presents the looming tragedy in a traditional ritualistic sense, making the process itself seem like a long rite of sacrifice of the people culminating in the burning. The agony and suffering, the deprivation and neglect, become in this context, part of that ritual cadence that is the fate of the Niger Delta. So, as the rusty pipes spew their precious content, “a siphoning circus danced to the wild/music of deprivation in the low growth” (p. 6), but it is a dance of death, the dance to the end and the end of the dance.

The life which returns to the community, the stoves and lanterns that burn again, the instantaneous oil market and the scramble all go to re-enforce the desperate needs of the people and the false logic of rabid capitalism. The government’s warning in this subsection is a mockery, which attests to its irresponsibility. For what would people in such penury and want to take words of warning from the government seriously - “A rumour, said the wild music of deprivation/deaf to words unable to light stoves and lamps” (p. 7). Each of the four narrative versions of what caused the fire does not in any way exonerate the government nor attenuate its criminal neglect of the area. Whether it is the shooting by a trigger-happy riot policeman or the oil lamp falling into the pool of oil, or the reckless cigarette smoker or the bush fire blown by harmattan wind, the government is implicated.

The grisly details of the roasting of the victims represent the broken humanity, cast in a sacrificial archetypal mode: “*The smoke rose heavily from the ground bearing to an implacable god its meal a burnt offering of its worshippers*”. The utter destruction in the wake of the fire is so total that the crops, the creeks, ponds and the rivers all appeal for reason. The poet personifies fire, the crops and lakes to make this point more poignant as “The land burned, the trees burned, the rivers burned”. The government’s insensitivity is so boldly dramatized in the attitude to the tragedy as demonstrated in the remarks of the head of state, “we must not encourage thieves and saboteurs” (p. 15).

As the poem ends with the song of lament by the Ninety-year old Madam Edoja in which she bemoans the lost idyllic environment and regrets the curse and doom of

oil, what stands out through the accounts of the fire explosion is the bestiality of government, which becomes by some extension, an unforgiving and implacable god like the fire itself. Thus the poem, as Joe Ushie intuses: “depicts not just the particular incident of the terrible Jese fire incident, but also the failure of the country’s neo-colonialist government to cater to the needs of its own people” (P.544). But what is even more troubling is that the state itself is little prepared to admit nor ready itself for the task of true nationhood through responsible and responsive governance.

In “Odi “, part two of the collection, the bestiality of the Nigerian State, represented by the military, takes a very well-orchestrated form as the bomb-throwing uniform men decimate the town of Odi in Bayelsa to avenge the death of 4 soldiers during a youth revolt in the area: “*A battalion of justice scorched its path to Odi, came to solve by war case of homicide (p .21)*. From this opening, the violence and brutality that follows, the killing of fleeing and defenseless civilians, the destruction of houses, schools, livestock and the environment are all foretold. The summoning of the governor by the president, who himself was a general “false-start general” and the response of the governor urging for the arrest is reminiscent of colonial raids. It also underscores the internal colonization in Nigeria, with the Niger Delta a colony and the people treated as subalterns.

The apocalypse that is the destruction of Odi is conveyed in the unfortunately asymmetrical war and the annihilation of innocent civilians. This is conveyed through metaphorical expressions such as “a hand/too eager for live cremations” (P.22) used to describe the lobbying of bombs, “stripping the mud-/walled classroom blocks”, “homes crumbled and the bush waved in vain/its green scarves for peace” (P.23). The bush here is personified and signifies not just the helplessness of the people but the decidedly evil determination of the attackers who in completing their evil mission live the handwriting in blood on doors and walls:

THIS IS THE END OF ODI

The irony of all this is captured in the musings of Pa Piriye, the old one, in consternation that this level of violence could be wrought by Nigerian people against fellow Nigerians: *When British soldiers looted and burned Benin, we cursed strange men come from beyond the sea, from the land of the dead, so evil they had no skin. But who shall we curse now, who now is the enemy? (p. 31)*. The (re-)colonial condition of the Niger Delta is strongly implicated in this statement and the logical point that the area bears the brunt of double-colonization, with equal intensity in their tragic impact.

“Ogoni” is a poem about the systematic violence carried out in Ogoni in Rivers State by the military to contain the people, break their resolve and claim ownership of the oil in their land. The poet-speaker in the poem Major Kitemo (for Kill-Them-All). The meeting with the people of Ogoni and the dialogue reveals the strong unbroken resolve of the people to their claim of ownership of the land and the resources time

and nature have buried in its womb. The dialogue also reveals the false logic of Nigeria owning the oil as the old man, the woman, and the lad all puncture the reasoning of Major Kitemo who, as he reveals himself, is on a mission and is acting a script to create a pretext for the routing of the people and restore oil exploitation in the land, which has been stopped by the people.

THIS IS WHAT WE DO TO COWARDS

THIS IS JUST A WARNING

NEXT TIME YOU SEE SOJA YOU GO RUN!

As in other poems, the sense of the colony is strong in "Ogoni." The claim by Kitemo that the land belongs to Nigeria seriously conveys this: "By decrees and edicts/duly made, the land is not yours /or all that lies in it. The powers/that rule the country-your colony-.../decree the land and its wealth not yours" (P.40). The script of violence that Kitemo plays out is in the following steps: persuasion and propaganda, divide and rule, and "wasting operations, group infiltration, mass deportation" (P.43), which require creating a pretext.

It is this last one that succeeds for the military-the killing of 4 Chiefs loyal to the government as the basis for the military crackdown and the judicial killing of the activist writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and 8 others in 1995. The support of shell in the crackdown as Kitemo says in the poem signifies the capitalist neo-colonial alliance between the multinational companies and the Nigerian State. This point is reinforced in the "Pipes War" and universality of the poets' concern highlighted in these words: "can anyone think of the Niger Delta/and not feel an ache in his heart?/so inhospitable, it is like all terrains/in the world where oil might be found" (P.52). The inhuman conditions of rusted pipes without pipe-borne water, of Cyclop light guarding the wells of iron-dragon spiting unending fires without electricity for the people, of ancestral lakes and rivers and territories being claimed by Nigeria are all apocalyptic contradictions signifying the inhumanity that is (re-)colonization.

STYLISTIC STRATEGIES

Ushie and Ifowodo adopt various stylistic strategies to highlight the problem of endemic underdevelopment in a neo-colonial state, the internal contradictions that define the state and the bare-faced robbery that is the mindless capitalism and the neglect of the environment. In *A Reign of Locusts*, there is a preponderance of personification, lexical deviations and compounding to represent the insensitivity and irresponsibility of those in positions of leadership. For instance, in "The Termitarium", the human (Nigerian) experience is a tale that makes the hills, winds, seas all sad. This personification seeks to intensify the severity of the human problem of injustice in the collection, which is reinforced by witty and epigrammatic statements about the irrationality of being inhumane. The overriding atmosphere of tension provoked by

leadership aggression and insensitivity has caused James Tar Tsaaio to identify the “Civan” Metaphor of bellicosity in Ushie’s oeuvre. Tsaaio describes this as “a veritable trope which idealizes the overweening gravitation or proclivity to war and conflict in Africa” (2012, p. 29). Ifowodo’s employment of archetypal tropes and agonizing metaphors makes concrete the fact of the (post)colonial abjection, despoliation of the environment and senseless brutalization of the Niger Delta people.

CONCLUSION

The collections analyzed above demonstrate the commitment of the poets to human and environmental concerns implicated in Nigeria’s postcoloniality and the tensions inherent in this condition. In the poetic representations of the searing injustice and inequalities, these writer-advocates express an overarching vision for a society of a possible future of moral responsibility and responsive leadership, the absence of which has stymied Nigeria’s march forward. Achebe’s description of the situation remains timelessly apt: “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership... The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example...” (1983, p.3).

Though the delineation of the extent condition the collections examined in this paper is grim, the poets convey a message that social inclusiveness can still be achieved, and the society can improve when leaders reason above self to provide the inspiration and vision that lift humanity from the low grounds of abjection and misery.

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