

## AFRICAN AESTHETICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY IN TANUREOJAIDE'S POEMS

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### Abstract

*Critics such as Charles Nnolim have contended that defining African aesthetics is problematic because African literature is perceived by the world as new and still developing. Nevertheless, Achebe and others insist on African literature as art that is meant to correct the misrepresentation of Africans by Europeans and the rest of the world. It is against this backdrop that this study examines African aesthetics in Tanure Ojaide's poems. Foregrounding of the meaning of African aesthetics, this study demonstrates Ojaide's use of poetic justice to portray African art as a utilitarian tool. In this study, we find that African aesthetics such as the worship of gods, the condemnation of bad governance and warnings of environmental degradation of the Niger-Delta area features prominently in the folklores and poems by Ojaide. As a result, Ojaide's use of traditional African aesthetics in his poems draws the world's attention to the deplorable situation of the Niger-Delta as he further advocates for justice on behalf of his people.*

**Keywords:** *Aesthetics, African Literature, Folklores, Environment advocacy and Niger-Delta.*

### Introduction

Aesthetics comes from the Greek word for "Sense of perception" and can be defined within particular cultural systems. Cultural insiders must be consulted to ascertain how and why aesthetic concepts come to hold value. Aesthetics as a broad field has two major areas that critics and researchers

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alike can study. The first is the regional perspective which may encompass studying aesthetics from areas such as African, European, Indian, Islamic or Asian aesthetics. However, the second perspective of aesthetic study looks at temporal perspective; i.e. Ancient, Medieval, Modern or Post-Modern aesthetics.

For most literary critics, aesthetics has been argued as far back as the late 17th century to the early 20th century and soon afterwards, aesthetics underwent a slow revolution into what is called "modernism." But in recent times, beauty (or aesthetics) is emphasised as a key ingredient of artistic production and aesthetic experience, hence for many, art is meant to emphasise absolute beauty. Friedrich Schiller (free encyclopedia) therefore sees aesthetic appreciation of beauty as the most perfect reconciliation of the sensual and the rational parts of human nature. This pre-supposes that man (specifically the artist) created beauty to be sensually appreciated and reasonably applied and interpreted for human edification.

Aesthetic appreciation of beauty satisfies an innate urge in man to behold what is beautiful or admirable in nature. Schiller went further to state that art should be geared towards functional realisation. Arthur Schopenhauer on his part views aesthetic contemplation of beauty as the freest form of pure intellectual concept that produce from the dictates of will. This perception goes a long way to allow critics to contemplate the perfection of form without any kind of worldly agenda and thus any intrusion of utility or politics would ruin the point of beauty.

Again, Oscar Wilde (1993) emphasises aesthetics as "the contemplation of beauty for beauty's sake." The contemplation of beauty, it is argued, requires total conformity or acceptability of standards which are not defined by functional relevance. Scholars therefore generally see aesthetics as central or synonymous with the philosophy of artistic creation. Aesthetic judgment is not, however, limited to only artistic creations as it applies to objects generally. Artistic judgment refers specifically to the appreciation and criticism of artistic works.

Since artistic creations are located within the domain of the senses just as the aesthetic experience, art as Hegel argues, is a sense of perception of objective rather than subjective revelation of beauty and thus art, like aesthetics, is as such free of moral or political purposes. Art, therefore, does not connote or imply functionality of an artistic object but simply serves the conveyance or communication of an idea which must be done in an aesthetically pleasant manner. Art is thus assumed to aim at beauty over and

above functional value so anything that precludes beauty cannot be said to be art.

What we recognise as central to artistic creation and by implication aesthetic appreciation as identified by Denis Dutton (2009) is that aesthetics implies or contains six ingredients central to its realisation. These include: Display of perfection or expertise inherent in artistic skills; Offer or display of non-utilitarian pleasure; Achievement of stylistic excellence i.e. that artistic objects and performances must satisfy rules of composition placing them in recognizable style; Criticism or critical reflection. i.e. that artistic objects must yield to judgment, appreciation and interpretation; Imitation i.e. that artistic objects or creations must stimulate experiences of the world except they be abstract art; Special focus, that is, art must be set aside from ordinary life and made a dramatic focus of experience. If therefore, art is set aside as a special focus of life and made a dramatic focus of experience, then one can comprehend the centrality of aesthetics in the configuration of literary products or the literary experience as an articulation of societal life and even ideology itself.

### **Defining African Aesthetics in Literature**

Charles Nnolim in his book titled *Issues in African Literature* attests that defining aesthetics in African literature was a difficult task for critics because of the fact that there has not (previously) been any "systematic attention paid to it by any great critic" [African literature] (2009: 85). The reason, according to Nnolim, is that African literature is "new". Looking at Greek art, Nnolim categorised the study of African aesthetics into the following: Oral literature and the folk tradition; Cultural nationalism and the negritude movement; Ancestor worship; Literature of colonial experience; Politically committed literature; The literature of Apartheid; The problem of language in African literature(87).

Traditional African art as against European "egoistic and individualistic art" is communal, functional and serves both religious and social purposes. However, Nnolim did admit that "some old African art did aspire to the beautiful. Art for art's sake (a phrase that seems to frighten certain African aesthetes, Chinweizu et al...) does not necessarily mean extreme individualism...it rather implies...me in relation to my community not me divorced from my society" (2009: 89). According to Osundare (1987: 140), "nobody says a certain thing in a certain way without a certain reason. A careful explication of purpose is crucial to the study of literature as a social

product, and literary communication and style as social acts." Furthermore, Adejare (1992: 12-13) has pointed out that "only mad men engage in a linguistic activity without a purpose... the function of form in a text is to transmit that message." This view is a rejection of art for art's sake philosophy.

This rejection of art for art's sake is what Nnolim (2009) also uses to acknowledge the fact that the African oral tradition deals with man's "dilemma" in his "essential being" as can be read in Tutuola's *A Palm Wine Drinkard*. Explaining further, Nnolim proposes that folkways were actually stories/art works that elicit the utilitarian value of instructing, amusing and to warn future generations on how to solve life's problems and this can be done through "songs, song-tales, riddles, beast fables, parables, riddles, jokes, proverbs, anecdotes, legends, fables, epics, myths, folktales, and short stories" (90). And as they are performed, all these genres are geared towards imprinting on the minds of the audience the benefits of living a moral life in one's community/society. Again, Nnolim says that the relationship between the living and the dead in African traditions/literature is part of the African aesthetic. This type of African art he said, is called ancestor worship and it is found in Diop's poem "Souffles" and equally in Tutuola's *A Palm Wine Drunkard*, where the hero goes in search of his own palm wine tapper in the land of the dead. Other literary works in which ancestor relationship are exonerated are; Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Camara Leye's *Dark Child*.

Also, according to Lekan Oyegoke (2006 :17), the progression of the aesthetics of African writing should be from an initial position of alienation through partial recovery to full recovery of a sense of identity and Africanity in which self-expression, and creativity take place in the indigenous language. Oyegoke goes on to say that no full aesthetics of African writing is recoverable or possible in the erstwhile language of colonialism. Historically, African writing has moved from the cultural misperceptions of the likes of Joyce Cary and Sir H. Rider Haggard to the confident creativity of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Festus Iyayi, Isidore Okpewho, Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Sam Adewoye, Bayo Adebawale, Benson Okoji, Ben Okri and several others. At the indigenous language level, with perhaps the exception of writers such as Akinwumi Ishola, Kola Akinlade, Oladejo Okediji, Tunji Opatotun, and later, the likes of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, African writing seems locked to some

extent in a time-warp of the medieval romance of older African writers like D. O. Fagunwa and his Yoruba English version of Amos Tutuola.

Also, in Chinua Achebe's account in his 1965 essay, "English and the African Writer", he insists that African literature should not be limited and in his exact words here stated, Chinua Achebe pointed out the difficulty of limiting African literature:

I could not help being amused by the curious circumstances in which Conrad, a Pole, writing in English produced African literature! On the other hand, if Peter Abrahams were to write a good novel based on his experiences in the West Indies it would not be accepted as African literature. (18)

To put it another way, is the African novel an extension of the African writer who is situated anywhere in the world no matter the setting and content? Or is it the setting alone that matters? This definition of African literature that could allow for the inclusion of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as an African text, while a novel by an African writer set outside the continent could not, led Achebe to conclude that: "...you cannot cram African literature into a small, neat definition. I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units-in fact the sum total of all the national and ethnic literatures of Africa." (18)

National literature for Achebe was "literature written in English; and the ethnic literatures are in Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Effik, Edo, ijaw, etc" (27). But critics disagree with Achebe's claims opining that by raising writing in English to national and major literature, and relegating African languages to producing ethnic literature, Achebe contributed to a language hierarchy that still undergirds and inform African literature today. But language hierarchy notwithstanding, for Achebe, the term African literature can carry within it an immediately assumed diversity.

### **Oral Traditions and Folklores as Aesthetic Tools of Poetic Justice in Ojaide's Poems**

Many African scholars have critiqued the place of orality in African writings with emphasis on the aesthetic value of orality and folklore in African poetry; African scholars such as (Mapanje 1974, Anyidoho 1993, Ngugi 1993, Nwachukwu-Agbada 1993, Ojaide 1996, Biakolo 1999, Bodunde, 2001,

Gyamfi, 2002) have taken a stance on the fact that African literature (in this case poetry) cannot be divorced from African traditions such as folklores and orality. Existing research on the transfer of oral elements to the written form of African poetry is largely interpreted as a response to the perceived hegemony of Africans by Europeans. But this is not always the case, reading African writing as a literature of reaction does not necessarily give considerable attention to either the aesthetic element of the oral forms, their functions, and folkloric manifestations of African art aesthetics yet with the inquest into oral and folkloric aesthetics of African poetry, there is an acknowledgement of the poets' recognition of the aesthetic functions of the oral forms.

Ojaide particularly strikes readers and critics alike as one of the emergent poets in Nigeria whose poems often involve the use of orality and folklore as useful aesthetic communication. Critics such as Orheyo Mathias (2017) insist that Ojaide's poetry is influenced more by oral aesthetics and especially by Urhobo folklore and Udje aesthetics. With his identification "as an Urhobo man" (Poetic imagination: 121) Ojaide writes his poems from a background of his Urhobo culture. Tayo Olafioye (2000) holds that: "An individual is sometimes best defined by the cultural personality he or she wears, more importantly so, a writer whose works wear such cultural outfits. This is the portrait that imprints itself on the creative landscape of Tanure Ojaide ..." (1). In *SongsofMyself* (which is a collection of ninety-one poems), the oral tradition is profound. With the combination of Pidgin, English and Urhobo language, the poem tries to reach all categories of Nigerians especially people in the Niger-Delta in order to expose the abandonment of the people of Niger- Delta, their culture and the exploits of oil corporations as well as the Nigerian government, without compensation to the people.

In the poem "We dey chop akara dey go" Ojaide employed a lyrical means of highlighting the exploitation of Deltians by capitalist profit oil companies who are unsympathetic to the environmental degradation they cause to the land as can be perceived in the following:

We dey chop akara dey go / if moin-moin no dey We ask  
for resource control, / Gov'ment give us NDDC... In place  
of clean rivers, /Shell dey build boreholes. We dey chop  
akara dey go /if moin-moin no dey (133)

With the use of pidgin, Ojaide brings to fore the suffering of the indigent citizens and criticises the State and Shell company for ignoring the plight of a people whose environment is exploited for the country's economic sustenance. The repetition of 'We dey chop akara dey go / if moin-moin no dey' after every couplet, counterpoints the dialectics of exploitation and also enforces a rhythmic call of the world to the continued oppression of the people of Niger-Delta. The poet's use of Pidgin captures readers' sensibility to an oral condemnation of the vices of oil corporations.

Another repetition of a term is also seen in his poem, "Gently". Here there is an 'onomatopoeic expression of 'Dede-e dede-e' in Urhobo language' (*Songs of Myself* :15) which enforces communal involvement in the invocation and performance of the song. Furthermore, The poem features the riverine locale of the Urhobo people and how this environment yields rich flora and fauna such as the Iroko tree, the cotton tree and palm trees as exceptional imageries. These trees have both mystical and spiritual connotations in Urhobo worldview. And not surprisingly, Ojaide symbolises the plight of the Urhobo and other minority tribes of the Niger Delta region as the cotton tree which struggles to cover/garb the entire nation in its richness and wealth. Despite the outstanding usefulness of the cotton tree, its importance goes unnoticed against forest giants like the Iroko and palm trees – the major tribes. Just as is prevalent in folklores, the author engages with familiar nature tropes of the region and draws his metaphor, anecdotes and imagery from them as can be pictured in the following lines:

Dede-e dede-e  
The cotton tree stands unnoticed amidst iroko and palm trees  
but its soft sheets of fabric cover the entire world's  
nakedness...  
Dede-e dede-e  
It's not the hulk that gives one power, boasts the black ant  
after  
stabbing the elephant's butt and downing the giant of the  
jungle  
Dede-e dede-e (14)

In another instance, the poem "Mami Wata" which is the pidgin variation of sea goddess shows that Ojaide uses the traditional pidgin English to emphasise the Nigerian cultural aesthetic of orality. Femi O. Ade (1984) contends that a sustained scholarly preoccupation of colour and

culture in literature is necessary for the construction of black literary tradition. According to Nwagbara U, (2010:35) Ojaide is a functional, realist artist – not given to the Orwellian art for art's sake thesis. He considers his literary trend as refractive of the conjunctures in his milieu:

Contemporary trends are enlarging the African literary canon. African writers have been responding to the impact of migration and globalisation on their people and continent. Ecological and environmental matters, sometimes arising from the actions of the multinational companies, are at the core of ... Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and *The Tale of the Harmattan* on the environmental degradation of the oil-rich Niger delta area of Nigeria. (Ojaide, 2009:15)

A close reading of Ojaide's poetry therefore reveals a number of symbols, metaphors and themes drawn from Urhobo mythology to exemplify the aesthetics of folklore in Urhobo culture. One of the mythical character which can be found in the bulk of Ojaide's poetry is *Ogiso*. The *Ogiso* are a dynasty of kings in ancient Benin known as *Igodomigodo* (Otite, "A Peep": 13). Urhobo people are believed to have left Benin (*Aka*) during the reign of the tyrannical *Ogisos* and migrated, in various waves, to their current abodes. Urhobo folktales are therefore replete with references to the *Ogiso* as evil, unjust and tyrannical leaders who had no respect for their subjects. Thus, for the Urhobo, *Ogiso* represents tyranny, evil and injustice. Ojaide adopts this metaphor of *Ogiso* to portray themes that border on political injustice, oppression, and imperialism. In his poem "For the sake of freedom," the *Ogiso* myth is called upon and used as a metaphor for oppression.

The poet vehemently speaks out on salient societal issues using the subtext of *Ogiso* mythology. The poet expresses the following, revealing his anger at the refusal to create jobs for the poor in the community which results to jobless youths becoming 'area boys': "they starve youths jobless in the streets/the occupation forced on the able-bodied/pilfering—Abuja is full of them/Lagos is full of them Area Boys". (*House of Words*: 62). Ojaide likens the social malaise faced by the people to that which the Urhobo people faced in the hands of the *Ogiso* when he says "it's no longer myth that *Ogiso*'s burning days are back" (62). This allusion to Urhobo mythology is an aspect



of the infusion of Urhobo folklore in order to thematise corruption, bad leadership and injustice. Again, the poem "On my birthday" exemplifies the Urhobo myth of *Ogiso* as a metaphor for bad leadership. In this poem, he satirises corrupt leaders and their praise singers. The praise singers are described as "those scholars arguing in defence of Aa Ba Cha, the half-literate butcher of Abuja" (*Songs of Myself*: 26). He likens the praise singers to the griots in Urhobo folklore who sang praises to *Ogiso* even in the midst of tyranny by saying "those griots kissing *Ogiso*'s fungoid feet/and stoking fires of torture in Aso Rock" (26). This allusion is used to attack the negligence and blindness of those who have the ability to change things in the society but have been blinded by greed or avarice.

Another form of Urhobo folklore adapted by Ojaide is the reference to the Urhobo pantheon of gods. In Urhobo folklore, there are several gods that perform specific actions and are known for certain attributes. These gods are called upon by their adherents at moments of need. Some of the gods are community gods. Others are peculiar with certain ailments, art forms, and other attributes. Ochuko Tonukari notes that there are about 1,260 deities in Urhobo culture ("Aziza": 1). Ojaide calls upon these gods to represent the traditional aesthetics of the worship of African gods and the appreciation of their spiritual powers as presented in his poems. One of the commonly known (and favourite) Urhobo gods that Ojaide calls upon in his poetry is *Aridon*. *Aridon* and *Uhaghwa* are regarded as gods of memory in Urhobo land and that poets, singers, and those in similar vocations must call upon these gods for inspiration (Ojaide, *Poetic Imagination*, :122). Ojaide (1994) unpacks the essentialism of encapsulating the magnitude of childhood memory of the reverence of *Aridon* such that it becomes an important force; Memory is very important to the poet. "Among my Urhobo people, poets and singers worship *Aridon*, god of memory...*Aridon* is represented by a thread which is meant to take one back to the source of past experiences". (15-21). In "Questing" (*Songs*: 20), Ojaide presents his search and desire to 'Evwerhe Amre', deity of seeking and finding, success and greatness thereby asking for a metaphysical intervention:

I seek the Iroko king of trees to proliferate  
But the entire species barely survives poachers;  
I seek a land swept clean of kleptomaniac leaders  
But the population has become a thieving army (20)

In this poem, Ojaide considers the deforestation and diverse forms of ecocide in the region which is irrevocable and beyond human capability to restore, thereby he calls for supernatural intervention. The intervention of the gods is also elicited in the will to be rid of corrupt leaders and citizens in the country.

Equally too, the poem "No hunger" stimulates a reaffirmation by the poet to the god *Aridon*, a favourite god and one who suffers no hunger-The minstrel suffers no hunger/in the famine of songs' (160). Ojaide identifies the dispossession and alienation of the people from their culture and land, noting that 'The god of songs suffers no hunger/in the famine of ardent worshippers'.

It is worthy to note that Ojaide draws from Urhobo folklore and becomes the continuum of the Urhobo griots of old. Abdul- Rasheed N'Allah (2009) observes that Ojaide embraces the tradition of Urhobo oral poets "as he does his muse and the Urhobo god of memory, *Aridon*" (*African Discourse*: 74). Re-echoing his identification with *Aridon*, the poem "A trip to a traditional library" climaxes the invocation of *Aridon* for inspirational prowess. This poem thematises minstrelsy by an invocation of *Aridon* thus: "O Aridon, memory lives long" (*House of Words*:28). The poem is a nostalgic poem and a celebration of the days of minstrelsy and especially acknowledging the vibrancy of Urhobo oral poetry. The poet says, "Ogbariemu remembers days of his wrinkled/great-grandfather, carries photos of centuries/in a frame that mocks the fifty-year-old minstrel's". (p. 28). Ojaide further expresses his angst at the uncelebrated Urhobo's "traditional library": "The minstrel arrives at the ancestral homecoming/without the ghostly livery borne by meteors or/slipping through unguarded frontiers to spy on spirits" (28). This shows the value he places upon Urhobo poets who work under *Aridon's* influence. *Aridon*, thus, becomes the symbol of a muse, a divine afflatus for Ojaide.

Also, "Visiting Mathias at Lapo village" apostrophises *Aridon* in a rhetorical question. He quizzes "O *Aridon*, what metaphor to capture the other's pain?" (*House of Words*: 47). In this instance, *Aridon* is invoked as an opener, a muse for the lines to come. It is not uncommon among Urhobo poets and singers for *Aridon* to be invoked as an opener in a composition. Drawing from this, Ojaide invokes *Aridon* to inspire him to write about the pains of Mathias, a patient with Elephantiasis. *Aridon's* prowess as an inventor or creator is called upon when the poet asserts "O Aridon, reinvent another world hospitable to Mathias" (47). Ojaide brings readers' attention

to the metaphor of *Aridon* from Urhobo folklore to thematise succour at this point. *Aridon*, thus, becomes a metaphor for ameliorating the plight of Mathias, who is in pains. *Aridon's* role as a muse to Ojaide is also shown in "No hunger." In this poem, the poet thematises inspiration and creativity. Like the griots of the old, *Aridon* gives Ojaide ample inspiration so much that he says "Aridon's favourite suffers no hunger/in the famine of songs" (*Songs of Myself*: 16).

It is apt to know that Ojaide's love of tradition and his mastery of folkloric aesthetics enables him the freedom to write poems that feature other deities such as Ogun and Idoto. Ojaide satirises communal ills in line with the Udje tradition of criticising flaws or enforcing morals. In "To the new wordsmiths" (78) new writers are cautioned to have a severe look at their works before they are published. He then goes on to say that new writers should study ancient traditions as a way of learning from tradition here stated:

they stump their hairless chests as new wordsmiths, and  
they must be enjoying the cyber-world of tweets. the  
child calls himself a man to gain applause but ask a  
bearded one to crack the walnut for him and see children  
pass Ogun, Idoto, and Tamara without pause in a  
journey without destination; hey laugh at me for  
prostrating before elders whose paths brought me so far  
before clearing mine (78).

Ojaide references Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo respectively when he calls on the gods of Ogun and Idoto rebuking writers who fail to learn from tradition and "elders" or masters in traditional poetry rendition. Ojaide however authenticates the truism that *Aridon* is a metaphor for inspiration. This is an example of the use of Urhobo folklore in poetic artistry. Apart from *Aridon*, Ojaide also incorporates other gods from the Urhobo pantheon in his poetry as can be deduced in the poem "Meeting". Here, the poet invokes *Ivwri* (also spelt as *Iphri*), the Urhobo god of war, restitution and vengeance. *Ivwri* is usually associated with inter-tribal wars, hunting, masculinity, oratorical prowess and aggression. Ojaide's "Meeting" is written against the background of the *Ivwri* juju. The poem can be said to be a religious and invocatory traditional poem. It is a prayer and at the same time a salutation to the god *Ivwri*. It opens with the lines: "Today fantasy lifts its cloak of mist/and I embrace the warrior in person" (*House of Words*:14).

The poet describes *Ivwri* as a 'warrior', the main attribute for which the Urhobo god is revered. Some of *Ivwri*'s attributes are extolled as praises are rendered to *Ivwri*: "he who loses no contest/and overwhelms with heat." *Ivwri* is further beseeched by the poet to bring fire to "consume adversities" (15). He invokes *Ivwri* directly by saying "*Ivwri*, let malefactors fail-/destined hand, protect me" (15). This invocatory poem is replete with the traditions and language of the Urhobo people. And hence *Ivwri* is used as a metaphor for strength which the poet needs to fight the ills of his society. The poet seeks to be like *Ivwri*, thus he extols *Ivwri*'s attributes as a means of acquiring *Ivwri*'s powers. The poet is spiritually transformed and he becomes a vanguard of his community, appreciates the aesthetic values of his culture and as such, the poet is empowered to stand for fairness, justice and equity. Ojaide does not only incorporate the contents from Urhobo folklore; but he uses his poetic license to create a continuum in the priestly praise and worship of this revered Urhobo god.

Ojaide's "Questing" is also a poem based on the worship of the Urhobo pantheon. In this poem, *Evwerhe Amre*, the god of seeking and finding, is invoked by Ojaide. This deity is housed in a shrine at Orhoakpor, in the Agbon Kingdom of Urhobo land. The poet, in the same tradition as the priests of old, calls on the god and extols its qualities. The poem opens in the pattern of a traditional prayer: "I come to you, *Evwerhe Amre*, far sighted deity, /you who lead the quester to find what he seeks" (*Songs of Myself*: 20). The poem uses the language of supplication to heighten its religious effect. As a poet-priest, he beseeches *Evwerhe Amre* to help him attain the desires that he seeks. One of these is that he wishes "a land swept clean of kleptomaniac leaders" (20). The poet, thus, uses the *Evwerhe Amre* as a metaphor of change in contemporary society. By so doing, the poet merges the local folkloric materials with his poetic vision, making both converge at an inseparable layer of meaning.

*Egba*, the god of war, is also adapted by Ojaide in "Effurun market". This deity is housed in a shrine at the popular Effurun market. The poet's fascination and reverence for this god is clearly articulated in the lines: "By the dreaded Egba Shrine we dared not get close to, /by the space ceded to powers alive and dead and feared" (*Songs of Myself*: 51). This deity is the guardian of the market and its presence adds solemnity to market days which cannot be "rescheduled for another day/no calamity postpones the market, the day of no burials." All market goers become devotees of *Egba* who is thrilled by crowds. The god "guards those doing transactions,

bartering off/what's not dear to them but pricing it as if so invaluable" (51). The poet attempts to capture the psychic atmosphere of the Effurun market under the protection of Egba. This usage of Urhobo folkloric material thematises the power of the gods. The poet believes that it is Egba's powers that protect the market just as the Urhobo folklore confirms.

With most of his poems presented as invocatory poems, Ojaide continue to illustrate his avowal of tradition and the Udje aesthetics in his work emphasising on his 'god given task' to promote the difficult nature of writing oral literature as a symbol of African uniqueness. This difficult task can be deciphered in the poem, "Wandering Sovereign". In this poem, Ojaide declares that he is anointed by Aridon to carry out the mission of being a faithful servant as well as also being a sacred chosen priest of the god, Aridon illustrated thus:

until there is only one heartbeat that proves every race  
everywhere until there is only one human right for ants  
and elephants, barons and beggars until there is only  
one refuge under the sun for the deadly armed and the  
unshielded until there is only one democracy for the  
many and the minority one circle of communion  
expands to accommodate all as one only one just one  
one body of many human (15-16).

Stating his mission, Ojaide clearly shows as an anointed priest of Aridon that he (Ojaide) is an instrument for the establishment of a universal brotherhood. As a vanguard of mankind, he is in the forefront of eradicating injustices, inequalities, unfairness and brutalities in all ramifications. He also makes sure that a suitable ecosystem is maintained. He unleashes a war of words on the deprivations of the political rights of Nigerians which by implication exposes the Nigerian leadership as one which has brought a lot of tragedies, triumphs and dilemmas to Nigerians.

### **Conclusion**

Having studied Ojaide's adoption of oral and folkloric form of writing as a means of representing his people, culture, the malaise they face, abandonment from the government of Nigeria and Shell company and the gods of the land, this study believes that Ojaide is a cultural hybrid who builds on the duality of his experiences (oral and folklore) to create a unique art that promotes African aesthetics that is functional and purposeful. The

West's postulation of "Art for art sake" does not in any way describe Ojaide's poetry, rather, Ojaide's work debunks the fact that art is made only to be appreciated for its beauty. As discussed earlier, Oral tradition is the bedrock of Ojaide's poetics as he uses this genre to inform, influences, educated and fight societal ills in three of his collection of poems entitled *Songs of Myself*, *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* and *In the House of Words* studied. Urhobo songs and folklore takes primary position in his melodious and rhythmic collections as if written for oral performance. Ojaide's poetics embody a communal ethos that extends to other tribes of the Niger Delta region and dexterously plays with the diverse oral techniques. He especially uses traditional Udje songs and dance etched in the Urhobo culture as important Nigerian aesthetic tool for satire.

In Ojaide's zeal to draw the attention of the world to the maladies of oil exploitation and corrupt governmental practices, he uses the Udje oral traditions as an instrument of correcting the evils of the land. Ensclosed in Urhobo oral tradition, Ojaide's authenticity lies in his framing of contemporary realities affecting his people in their cultural aesthetics thereby enforcing Elliot's (1932) stance that "this historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time, what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity". Being both traditional and contemporary, Ojaide merges oral traditions and folklore with environmental advocacy to birth a spectacular form of poetry to criticise, educate and raise objections against environmental degradation. He particularly condemns the violation of the people of the Niger Delta, who are killed, mimed or displaced for their zeal to protect their lands and self-respect. In so doing, he does not only identify with his people's traditional beliefs, Ojaide carves a niche for himself in promoting African aesthetics that debunks Western critical thoughts of African literary works as being established on unsettling aesthetical values.

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