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A Configuration of Socio-Political Dialectics in Nigerian Pidgin English: Trends in Peter Onwudijo's Poetry

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Abstract

Peter Onwundijo's poetry collection, De Wahala for Wazobia (2007), comments on contemporary Nigeria's pitiable social problems. The poet employs Nigerian Pidgin English, not only as a dialectal tool to examine the issue of Nigeria's amalgamation but also as a lingua franca, which aptly describes the polity of multilingual Nigeria. It addresses the myriad hydra-headed issues like corruption, educational decay, election malpractices, neocolonialism, and insecurity among other forms of vices plaguing the nation which continue to militate against her development. The poems were analysed using sociolinguistics and semiotic theories as frameworks. The result of the analyses showed that the poet's ability to effectively use Nigerian Pidgin English to address such important issues does not make the language inferior when compared to the other established languages of the world. Rather, it should be seen as a language (second) that reflects creativity, productivity, simplicity, acceptability and understanding among Nigerians. Indeed, it makes for a wider understanding of the poet's major concern, as the pidgin, in Nigeria, is often described as "the language of the people" The study appraised the collection as an attempt at demystifying the Nigerian Pidgin English as well as evaluating its relevance for modern Nigerian poetry in its quest to radicalize the political and economic situation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Pidgin, *De Wahala for Wazobia,* Sociopolitical challenges, lingua franca, acceptability.

Trends in Nigerian Pidgin English: an overview of concepts

The origin of Pidgin English in Nigeria has been stated in pioneering studies as essentially a product of the process of urbanisation, while its origins lie historically in the early contacts between Africans and Europeans. According to Illah, colonization is a key historical factor responsible for the emergence of Nigerian Pidgin English (Illah, 2001). He traces the origin of NPE to the trade contact between the British and local Africans in the seventeenth century. He believes that NPE developed from the negative attitude of the European colonialist who felt they could not allow the colonized (Nigerians) to speak the same language as them. In other words, NPE is a product of the inferior attitude the colonizers had toward the colonized. Similarly, Elugbe and Omamor confirm that it:

> arose from the urgent communication needs of the contact between the visiting Europeans (in the end the English) and their multi-lingual Nigerian hosts. Stabilisation of this contact led to the stabilisation and expansion of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) (Elugbe & Omamor, 2002).

Hence, the incursion of the visiting Europeans led to the Nigerian Amalgamation of the protectorates in 1914, a move that Fabiyi (2014) believe gave rise to the need for a simplified lingual Franca which encouraged the NPE to flourish. Hence, colonization is central to the foundation and development of NPE.

The origin of NPE is also traced to the communicative need arising from the linguistic ecology of Nigeria (Ayo Banjo, 1990; Jowitt, 1991; Akindele and Adegbite, 1999; Elugbe and Omamor, 2002; Ekpenyong, 2010; Akande and Salami, 2010). Nigeria is a highly multilingual and multi-ethnic setting with over 500 ancestral languages. As a result, there is a great need for a common form of communication across ethnic groups. First, only three out of these languages are recognized as major languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, while the rest are regarded as minor languages (for example, Igede, Egun, Angas, Kamuku, etc.). Also, the classification of Nigerian languages into major and minor is based on factors including, politics, geographical spread and numerical strength. Based on numerical strength and geographical spread, each of the major languages is spoken by well over 18 million people in the country and is spoken in at least five states of the federation (Akande and Salami, 2010). But for the minor languages, none has such numerical strength or geographical spread. Therefore, the Nigerian linguistic reality is such that the majority of speakers of minor languages tend to learn one of the major languages (sometimes in addition to English), especially the language that is dominant where they live or work. For the majority of those who speak any (or all) of the major languages as their native language, also acquire English, NPE, or another language of the country (Akande and Salami, 2010). Therefore, the vast majority of Nigerians are bilingual (Akindele and Adegbite, 1999), and for many of these bilinguals, NPE is one of their languages. It is a language that cuts across different ethnic and regional boundaries; it is not native but a language that emerged as a consequence of the necessity of inter-intra-ethnic and regional communications. However, despite the assumptions surrounding the origin of NPE, the above assertions emphasize the prevalent view discernible in the definition of Pidgin

as a "communication system that develops among people who do not share a common language" (Todd, 1984). Thus, it is a language of necessity.

Yet, despite the versatility and uniqueness of Pidgin English, it does not enjoy the social prestige enjoyed by the likes of British and American English and to some extent Nigerian English because it is believed to be spoken by the uneducated and barely educated Nigerians. John Holm (1987) notes that "this contempt often stemmed in part from the feeling that pidgins and Creoles were corruptions of higher, usually European languages, [by people] who were often perceived as semisavages whose partial acquisition of civilised habits was somehow an affront". This feeling of contempt was originally informed by a false sense of racial superiority, which has now been replaced by a misdirected sense of elitist superiority. A position explained by Egbokhare, who believes that, "the fortunes of a language are inextricably tied to the fortunes of its speakers" (Egbokhare, 2001). He sees the low position given to Nigerian Pidgin as a consequence of the low position of the speakers who are considered the minority ethnic groups of Nigeria. He looks at its origin, identity, spread and changing profiles and summed it up in the context of the "dynamics of socio-political change" in the Nigerian state. Hence, he ascribes the negative attitude toward NPE to the weak power position of its native speakers. Consequently, Pidgin is not seen in tandem with other standard varieties of the English language in the world.

However, over the years, Pidgin English in Nigeria has made a noticeable linguistic advancement in spite of the stigma that has often been attached to its use, especially in the elitist world. For instance, in the media cycle, news broadcasts, current affairs, discussions, programmes, news bulletins are some of the programmes that tend to favour NPE as the language of the masses in certain states such as Rivers, Delta and Cross River, etc. Gani-Ikhilama recognizes the fact that NPE has become so widespread in Nigeria that it is practically the mother tongue or Lingua Franca of some Nigerians notably in the South-South geopolitical zone (Ikhilama, 1990). In addition, studies point out that advertising agencies use Nigerian Pidgin more than native or English language in advertisements (Omonzejele, 1998; Oribhabor, 2010; Mensah & Ndimele, 2013; Balogun, 2013). They believe that advertising in NPE commands enormous public appeal because of its spread, flexibility and the creative possibilities it allows. Advertising communication presents yet another platform to further deepen the social utility and functional relevance of NPE in the public space in spite of the widespread and age-long misconceptions and prejudices against it.

Similarly, the introduction of the first pidgin radio station (Wazobia FM) has been a success since 2011. The radio station DJ, Diplomatic OPJ during an interview with Shyamantha Asokan, reveals that "Nigerians have found a station that goes down well with them ... in a language they understand," (Asokan, 2011:1). He adds that the station now has regional wings in Abuja, Kano and Port Harcourt. He continues, "With pidgin, our listeners feel free. We can't make mistakes when we talk pidgin, because it's a language that has no dictionary…So we get everyone calling in; market traders, street hawkers, people who are illiterate." (1). OPJ further restates that pidgin has catapulted his career to new heights. He spent 16 years speaking the Queen's English at state-owned radio stations and gained

relatively little fame. He recalls that, "Every day at my old station, after my broadcast, they would play the tapes back and my boss would say: "You misused this adjective, your pronunciation was wrong. It was called 'radio cleaning'... but, in just 18 months at Wazobia, I've become more popular and famous than during my 16 years elsewhere" (1).

In addition, Nigerian Pidgin has been popularized by its usage as a language of religious slogans, praise and worship as noted in the following excerpts:

If god be for mi…dis god na helele
Jesus na mai papa.
Na so so wonder Jesus dey do o.

In English translation:

A supporting God is a great God
Jesus is my father
Jesus does wonderful things

In the entertainment industry, pidgin also permeates the deeper feelings and emotions of fans when used for comedy, drama and films, music and concerts as sensitive issues of national and international interest are carefully and jocularly passed across to people using this medium. For instance, it has been observed in the music of artists such as Peter Torsh, Bob Marley, Raskimono, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Femi Kuti and contemporary musicians like D'banj, Tuface Idibia, Wizkid, Flavour, Wande Coal etc. Nigerian comedians such as I Go Die, Basketmouth, Gordons, and Julius Agwu, etc. overtly use pidgin as the medium of their profession to satirize the social, political, economic and religious situation in the country. In Nigerian soap operas, Pidgin is also adopted to portray issues in society. Notable among such operas are 'Hotel de Jordan,' 'Village Headmaster,' 'Koko-Close,' 'Why Worry,' 'Inside Out,' 'Masquerade,' 'Papa Ajasco,' and a host of others.

Hence, the existence and development of NPE are the results of its own internal dynamics which have also been aided by the production of works of literature in Pidgin and also by the arguments of critics who have found either merit in such works or possibilities in the language. Examples of such works are written entirely or to a great extent in Pidgin. They are Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985), Segun Oyekunle's *Katakata for Sufferhead* (1983) and Tunde Fatunde's *No Food No Country* (1985), *Water No Get Enemy* (1989), and *Oga na Tief-Man* (1986). More recently, there has been the production of literary works such as Edwin Eriata Oribhabor's *Abuja na Kpangba* and *Oda Puem-Dem* (2011), Chidi Anthony Opara's *State of Di Nation and Other Poem Dem* (2012), Fidelis Okoro's *Pimples and Dimples* (2012) etc. These works portray the varied dimensions in the use of Pidgin to enhance Nigerian literature. However, it is in poetry that this language has been most effectively employed to create a bridge of orality, especially in the attempt to domesticate, develop, and exploit its artistic resources.

Demystification of Pidgin English in Nigerian Poetry

The development and utilization of Pidgin as a language medium in Nigerian poetry owes its manifestation to the production of works such as Frank Aig-Imoukhuede*'S Pidgin stew and suffered* (1982), Mamman Vatsa*'S Tori for Geti Bowleg* (1998), Ezenwa-Ohaeto'S *I wan bi president* (1998), *If to say I be soja* (1998), Ken Saro Wiwa'S *Dis Nigeria self* (1985), etc. Recently, New Nigerian writers such as Akachi Adimora, Ezigbo, Pita Okute, Ajakaiye, A. Ogunkwo, Erapi, Udenwa, Osita Ike, Chidi Anthony Opara, Fidelis Okoro and Peter Onwudinjo have contributed to its development through their creative works. In support of the decision of the writers to write in pidgin, Emeka Okeke-Ezigbo opines that Pidgin is a:

> Practical, viable, flexible language distilled in the alembic of our native sensibility and human experience. This lusty language, which transcends our geographical and political boundaries grows daily before our eyes. It is our natural, unifying weapon against the divisive forces of English. **(**Okeke-Ezigbo, 1982)

He believes that, "the adoption of Pidgin will automatically make the writer national by domesticating his outlook and sensibility", and concludes that, "On adopting Pidgin and becoming a real nationalist the Nigerian writer can now speak with the knowledge of an insider" (1982). Though, Osofisan (1982) takes exception to the generalization of Okeke-Ezigb'os postulations when he argues that "the use of Pidgin cannot automatically make any writer patriotic or progressive that will depend finally on other factors, such as the consciousness and purpose of the particular artist". However, he agrees that Pidgin is a viable language and capable of sustaining works of literature. Hence, writing in pidgin is an attempt to decolonize Nigerian literature, by removing in them all the nuances of cultural imperialism and European influences, and it is expected that poets should embrace Africa and her true *Africaness* in their writings. Just the way our patriots strove to achieve independence for many African states so several critics believe we have to continually struggle to free our literature from the grasp of the Europeans that once colonized us and brought us literacy. This is the task before any African writer as Chinweizu et al opine:

> In addition to capturing in the African the narrative devices of African languages, there is the task of appropriately employing the various types of English that are spoken by Africans e.g., pidgin, Creole, the English of secondary school leavers... the task of capturing the flavour of African life in the African life in the African would be sadly incomplete if these were left out and if the King's and Queen's English were insisted upon in all contexts (Chinweizu et al, 1980:263).

Therefore, just like the proverbial saying of using the firewood in the farmland to cook for the people that cultivate the farm, so should African writers and poets strive to feed the imaginative domains of the Africans with ideas and imageries easily appreciated and understood by them. With the use of the Pidgin language, our poets will create poetry very familiar to the woman in the market, a palm-wine tapper on a tree, a fisherman in a boat and a weary tout smoking under the mango tree on a

hot dizzy day. The Pidgin language speaks to their people and speaks for them too since poets write for the people and their conditions. Peter Onwudinjo avers:

> Pidgin springs from the template of the grammar, syntax, idioms and semantics of African languages, especially West African. As such, it is naturally suited to nourish and express the African thought patterns without adulteration. It is best suited to retain the open-mouthed laughter, the throbbing drums, the alluring dances, the proverbs, the ancestral spirits, the folktales, the smells of the urban poor, the boulevards of the urban rich, their fast cars, the rolling plains. Indeed all the natural and social forces that enabled Africa to survive the pressures under which some races crumbled and disappeared (Onwudinjo, 2007: vii).

It is clearly this capability of Pidgin to command enormous public appeal because of its spread, flexibility and creative possibilities, which have made it yield creative possibilities for the Nigerian poet. Hence, it is an idea that tends toward Nigeria's national literature as explained by Onwudinjo during an interview with Gloria M.T. Emezue;

> Nigerian national literature is that which articulates the state of the nation, is aware of the economic, political and psychological problems of the polity. And then, not only the problems, but also the prospects of nationhood. In fact all these put together form Nigeria's national poetry and Nigeria's national literature. It is similar to what W.B. Yeats did for the Irish people by creating, for the first time, what could be called Irish literature. (Emezue, 2009)

He states that *De Wahala for Wazobia* is an example of such work that reflects the Nigerian national spirit. From the foregoing it is obvious that a new era of poetry is at hand, something beautiful, so passionate, alluring and pleasurable to the minds of the Nigerian readers for whom the poetry is written and that is the New Nigerian Voices or 'Alter-native' poets. It is in line with this call that some African critics clamour for the decolonization of several western influences in the poetry of African poets, thus informing the background of our study.

Peter Onwudinjo and the New Nigerian Voices

The emergence of a younger school of poetry with distinguishing temperaments from the new Nigerian counterparts was a welcome development for Nigerian writing G.M.T. Emezue (2009). These poets occupy the rank of third-generation poets. The more notable ones are, Niyi Osundare, Femi Fatoba, Tanure Ojaide, Osmand Enekwe, Obiora Udechukwu, Odia Ofeimun, Harry Garuba, Funso Aiyejina, Ada Ugah, Catherine Acholonu, Chinweizu, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Tess Onwueme, Kemi Alanda-Ilori, E. B Asibong, Silas Obidiah, Idi Bukar, Deanja Abdullahi, Uduma Kalu, Olu Obafemi, Nnimmo Bassey, Akachi Adimora Eziegbo, J. O. J. Nwachukwu Agbada, Fidelis Okoro, Chidi Opara, Peter Onwudinjo among others. They fall within the school of committed poets whose objective is to communicate directly with the common people using plain language, local expressions and settings and down to earth subjects. The philosophy of these poets aligns with that of William Wordsworth, who

puts it succinctly that poetry is the man talking to men (Wordsworth, 1976:30). Dennis Brutus earlier projected the view of the Alter-native poets in an interview with Bernth Lindfors:

> You ought to write for the ordinary person, for the man who drives the bus, or the man who carries the baggage at the airport, and the woman who clears the ashtrays in the restaurant. If you can write poetry, which makes sense to those people, then there is some justification for writing poetry. Otherwise, you have no business writing poetry. And therefore, there should be no ornament because ornament gets in the way (Lindfors, 1972:26).

Oswald Mtshali, the South African poet also concedes:

> The English we use in our poetry is not the Queen's language as written by say Wordsworth and Coleridge. It is the language of urgency which we use because we have got an urgent message to deliver to anyone who cares to listen to it. We have not got the time to embellish this urgent message with unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments like rhyme, iambic pentameter, abstract figures of speech, and an ornate and lofty style. We will indulge in these luxuries which we can ill-afford at the moment when we are free people. Not the harsh realities that in part and parcel of the black man's life (Mtshali, 1976:35).

Apart from the need to decolonized Nigerian poetry, Emezue notes that the poets must also "come down among the spectators absorbed in the throwing of fists at the antics of those on the other side pushing to the front" (Emezue, 2000). This is the foundation of the New Nigerian poets, to create poetry that will achieve purposeful social changes; poetry gleaned from the day-to-day experiences of the Nigerian and African people; poetry that speaks to the common man and advocate his freedom and betterment in the oppressed world of wickedness, cultural imperialism, political instability, social decay, cultural dislocation and economic quagmire.

Interestingly, Peter Onwudinjo belongs to this younger school of poets that uses the medium of poetry to comment on the prevailing socio-economic and political situations in Nigeria. Onwudinjo treats thematic issues with an alluring difference. In some of his works, for example, *Women of Biafra and Other Poems* (2000), *Songs of the Fireplace* (2006), *Because I'm Woman* (2006), *Songs of Wazobia* (2006), *De Wahala for Wazobia* (2007), *Camp Fire Songs* (2007). etc., we see a true blend of poetry and the indigenous NPE, artistic style of proverbs and aphorisms, as well as thematic preoccupations with poverty, exploitation, and corruption as social concerns that affect people individually and collectively.

Theoretical framework

This section explores relevant theories that are critical to the major concerns of this study. One of the theoretical frameworks which underpin this paper is the sociolinguistics approach. Sociolinguistics can be defined as the study of the relationship between language and society (Hudson 1990, Holmes,

2001 Adeyanju, 2007). This implies that Sociolinguistics tries to answer the question that when two people from different societies meet and try to communicate, what should they do? (Stockwell, 2002) state that where two or more speech communities come in contact, a lingua franca or common language of communication emerges. The emergent language can serve as a substrate or an auxiliary to the main or superstrate one(s) or serve as just a means of business transaction or even rise to become an international language. This is the situation in the Nigerian linguistic cline where the English language (superstrate) which was introduced had been altered, while the original language (native language); (substrate) is still transforming/reconstructing. These reconstructions encourage the expansion of NPE which is widely used today in every sector of Nigeria. A Nigerian pidgin language is thus a creative language of imminent needs.

Therefore, NPE is relevant as a language of literary ingenuity in Nigeria because culture is better understood and promoted through its language since language serves as a mirror to a society and its cultural practices. Brooks (1964) observes that:

> It is through the magic of language that man comes eventually to understand to an impressive degree the environment to which he lives and, still more surprising, gains an insight into his own nature and his own condition. (Brooks, 1964)

In addition, Muhlhausler argues that, "the principal criteria of whether a word (language) is good or bad are whether it contributes to social harmony and if it is understood by a reasonable proportion of the speech community" (Muhlhausler, 1997:173). Peter Onwudijo is aware of this position and he constantly refers to the significance of pidgin in his immediate environment in his poems.
Saussure's theory of semiology is also relevant to this paper. The questionable position of pidgin in Nigeria can be explained by Saussure's idea of the signifiers and signified. While the signifier is more stable, the signified varies between people and contexts, an idea that suggests that signifying systems are socially or historically inconsistent. Therefore, no object, word or sound image (signifier) in English has a stable meaning (signified) attached to it. For instance, the object 'cup' has varying names in different cultures. Also, the word 'furar fila' means 'to jump the queue' in Brazilian Portuguese while it means 'to cut the line' in Portugal Portuguese. As a result, signifiers shift from position to position which encourages a lack of fixation on English and this developed PE which leads to multiplicities of meanings bearing Nigerian cultural idiosyncrasies.

PETER ONWUDINJO'S *DE WAHALA FOR WAZOBIA* (2007)

Peter Onwudinjo's *De Wahala for Wazobia* is a poetry collection that draws on the palatable and pitiable state of affairs in Nigeria. The title 'De Wahala for Wazobia' means "The Trouble with Nigeria" in Standard English and also equates Chinua Achebe's similar title in English, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983*)* where he discussed several problems posing threats to the nation. The title "wazobia" is a tripodal name that reflects the tripodal structure of Nigeria created by the British colonialists. "Wazobia" is a coinage from three major indigenous languages for "come." Yoruba say

"wa," Hausa say "zo," while Igbo say "bia"— "Wazobia." This tripod structure which also connotes the country, Nigeria, is as a result of the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 by Lord Lugard which made possible the coagulation of people from various ethnic, social, languages, cultural and religious groups. Hence, the collection bothers on the issue of amalgamation and the socio-economic, political and religious problems facing Nigeria since then. Among those issues and problems are language and cultural clash, religious violence, ethnicity and nepotism, corruption, election malpractices, neocolonialism and insecurity etc. These among other forms of vices have eaten deep into the fabric of the nation which continues to militate against its development of the country. The poet expresses that:

> De Wahala for Wazobia is a sustained evocation of the landscape of dilemma in the socio-economic condition of the Nigerian nation. De Wahala sails close to facts, closely hugging the reefs of reality in Nigerian society (Onwudinjo, 2007: vii).

The collection opens with an assessment of the contrast between European and African languages and ethos. In his opinion, he believes that the African mentality and European mindset cannot be one and so are their languages and manner of expression. In the title "Turn Water no De Full Pot" the poet sings:

> … make I tell you/
> de two no dey gree at all at all,
> Afrikaman mind and oyibo mind dey/
> different, different,
> dem no dey rhyme at all;
> I dey way wey Afrikanman de see im world
> as e make sense make meaning to am/
> no be so for Oyibo man- o
> de two no dey rhyme … (lines 6-11)

It is in this use of contrasts, both in terms of "Afrikaman mind and oyibo mind" (line 8) and in terms of the familiarity of the Afrikaman world contrasted by the oddity of the other, that Onwudinjo stresses the importance of Pidgin, for it is described as "na we flesh and blood" (line 13). Here, the image of flesh and blood, body substances, becomes a metaphor for the value of Pidgin. He further personifies and humanizes pidgin as he avers;

> she be our *ara na oma*,
> she been grow up here/
> she be one of us/
> she understand our ways
> na im make e no de make mistake/
> wen she dey speak our tongue;
> e no surprise me sef/
> how daughter no go fit speak/
> im mother tongue?
> If she no fit na who go? (3)
> Na only pidgin be de lingo wey de fit/
> carry Afrikanman thought reach Nglisi stand chim chim no shaking/

like concrete column, na im make I de sing my song/for pidgin (lines 14-26).

Historically, African prominent poets, such as Leopord Senghor and Birango Diop have ascribed feminist attributes to the decipherment and glorification of the continent by referring to her as 'mother Africa'. The use of the pronoun 'she' in the above lines equally parallels the same adulation given to Africa. Hence, the same way that the Negritude poets appreciate Africa is similar to Onwudijo's recognition of Pidgin English as our, "mother tongue" (line 22).

The poet moves on to appreciate pidgin's ability to relate comfortably with the peasants, the downtrodden and the lower. For instance, in the poem "I Go De Sing my Song for Pidgin", the poet defends the choice of pidgin language by recognizing his people's inability to understand the previous poetry he had written in the English language. He believes that by writing in Pidgin, his people will easily understand his message because the English language cannot solve their problems:

… But wen I come yarn finish/
one woman wey dey my front there
whisper to her neighbour say/
Nwoke ahu oshi ini?/
Wetin de man talk?
Na dat one clear my eye well well say/
Oyibo gramatika no de work
for hungry wazobia/ (lines 5-12)

By writing in the pidgin language, Onwudijo can draw attention to his own conflicting circumstances and the plight of his people. In the poem, he gets taunted by his people for initially using "Oyibo gramatika" (line 11), when "one woman wey dey my front there whisper to her neighbour say…Wetin de man talk?" (Lines 6-7) The poet indicates that "De wretched of wazobia" (line 14) encounters enormous problems; they "no de hear oyibo gramatika" (line 15) because "de hand wey de rule wazobia no care wether wazobia children go school/or no go school" (lines 17-18). The aspect of this hopeless situation that the poet most detests is the government's negligence to the plight of the masses. The poet, therefore, laments the effective use of "Oyibo gramatika" (line 11) to keep the "hungry wazobia" (line 12) in poverty. The emphatic note on which the poem ends reiterates in subsequent lines that the consequence:

na im make ignorance full everywhere,/
na im make poverty full everywhere,
na im make hunger full everywhere … (lines 19-21).

The issue of language development through the absorption of elements from other languages is also noticeable in the poem, concerning words such as *ara na oma, Nwoke ahu oshi ini* and *umuahia*. This adds yet another dimension to Pidgin's poetry since his work is the product of cultural experience from the eastern region of Nigeria. From the poem, it is obvious that average members of the society will

find it hard to understand poetry communicated in condensed English which the poet says is the lingua franca of the country. Consequently, the inability to understand such poetry adversely negates any idea of revolution as citizens are unfamiliar with the messages in such poetry. The poet not only laments about his people's inability to comprehend English-laden poetry, but he is disgruntled about their persistent pitiable conditions worsened by the insensitive attitude of the leaders. As a result, the poet resolves to educate his people through pidgin:

> Na im make I come swear say/
> I no go blow oyibo gramatika again,
> from now de go/
> I go begin de slaughter my ram/
> for de other side of im throat where my dagger no go jam bone/
> for dis time de go,
> I go de sing my song for pidgin (lines 22-28).

The poet moves to unveil several vices and problems bedeviling society in subsequent poems. First, in the poem "Things Wey Get K-Leg", the poet addresses the issue of "head count" (line 2) which he argues, "na to get owonga subsidy/ for rogue politicians to share" (lines 3-4). The poet's concern is not on the figure as he heartily expressed but on the greediness and dishonesty of the politicians. He feels that the "rogue politicians" use the counting exercise too, "get owonga subsidy" which is done by ridiculous and superfluous counting. He satirizes this excessive acquisitive mentality, as he admonishes politicians' covetousness as they count "sand we dey Sahel" (line 6), "cassava stick" (line 7) and even "water hyacinth wey de float for water" (line 9) as part of the counting exercise. Thus the issue of corruption here is comprehensive, and it is explored with a peculiar wit associated with the language. The poet utilizes earthy imagery, the type that recalls to the mind familiar objects but in a manner that is both fresh and original. Consequently, he warns the leaders with a prophetic note on the calamity that awaits them:

> As for corrupt politicians/
> and de greedy wazobians wey de urge them on,
> don't worry/when time reach/
> person wey take hunger swallow razor
> go pay with a bloody nyash (lines 12-16).

Here, the issue becomes critical as the poet employs disarming humour and exaggerated imagery such as "razor" (line 15) and "bloody nyash" (16) in order to prod the reader into a realization of the enormity of the political abnormalities in society. Still, on the issue of abnormalities, the poet goes on to condemn the exponential rise in the unemployment curve in Nigeria which he thinks is caused by nepotism and favoritism. In the poem "As Man Know Man", he thinks nepotism and favoritism are killing the political and economic growth of the country because, "to get job, na as man know the man; to get promotion/na as man know man/ to pass jamb/na as man know man, even to get chance for interview…na as man know man for wazo" (lines 3-6). The system hardly encourages merit and the

poet laments that such practices should not be allowed to germinate in a society that have potential visions and plans for a more befitting tomorrow.

In a generation where the reading culture is almost dead and where not many read for enjoyment and learning purposes, the poet in the poem "Dem sow Corruption like Mellon seeds" decries the country's degenerating educational system. He is unhappy with students because "buy book na lie/borrow the book for library na lie" (lines 4-5). The poet remembers with special fondness when academics still had some prestige. It was a period when books were available and when students were yearning to read and learn, but the such era is long gone as "de few books wey remain at all na de grandpapa books wey Lord Lugard/and Lander Brothers been read for school" (lines 7-9). The allusion to Lord Lugard and Landers Brothers evokes the days when education was bright in Nigeria and not now when "na just to come, class, come…de plan to do way for the exam when the time to write am reach na im some guys and babes sabi" (lines 11-13). Students of today are no more willing to read and academics is fast losing its taste. The situation is even worsened by institutions management who select student representatives, in an unethical manner that goes even to the level of national politics.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that this collection illustrates the blend of serious issues and language experimentation which contradicts some of the recent prevalent views that Pidgin is suited for only comic situations. The poems may appear humorous in some sections, but it captures with telling accuracy the post-colonial problems in Nigeria. The lyric quality of the poems and the use of pidgin, orality, metaphor, and allusions combine to produce an innovative critique of the country's socio-political and economic problems. Hence, Onwudinjo and other Pidgin poets have established a viable poetic tradition, and in their achievement, they have bridged the gap between oral communication and the written medium. Therefore, Pidgin's poetry is strongly becoming part of the poetic traditions that coalesce to make modern Nigerian poetry worthy of critical attention.

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