

Of Jeremiahs and Jeremiads: Protest, and Hope in Tanure Ojaide's *The Endless Song*

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Abstract

This paper examines protest and hope in Ojaide's *The Endless Song*. Tanure Ojaide's stature as an accomplished and canonical African poet is incontrovertible. However, the critics of Ojaide have mostly quarried his poetry vis-à-vis his Niger Delta connectedness ignoring other larger spectrums embodied by his poetry. This article, seeking to cover this gap, contends that Ojaide's poetry transcends such territorial confinement to a broader engagement with the dynamics and convoluting pulse of his society. Published in 1989, *The Endless Song* inaugurates Ojaide as a patriotic poet charged with the responsibility of re-directing his society through his satirical verses. Deploying sociological theory as a theoretical anchor via a textual analysis of the primary text, the study foregrounds Ojaide as an 'angry poet', whose poetry is emblematic of protest, jeremiads, and revolutionary calls to save the soul of a nation going awry. Further, against this backdrop, the paper conjectures that Ojaide's protest and revolutionary poetry engenders a sense of hope and optimism crucial to nation building. The study places Ojaide in the proper mapping as a national poet whose poetry transcends beyond Niger-Delta tirades to offers perspectives that challenge the perpetuation of the ethics of national disintegration and engender viable togetherness in Nigeria.

Keywords: Protest, prophecy, revolution, jeremiads, nationhood, hope, society

Introduction

Poetry from its origin has been an act of social instruction that beams unflinching cursory eyes on societal mores and values. Poetry is tied to life and the emotions of the human soul and in tandem with this interconnectedness that Fidelis Okoro contends that there is a natural opposition between life and poetry. Poetry, he argues, is the search for the missing electrons in the atom of the soul. Poetry is logic; the world is illogical. Poetry is imaginative reasoning; irrationality rules the world. Poetry is the search for order; the world [for the poet] swims in the ocean of

disorderliness, socially, politically, morally, and economically (xii). Poetry, like a force, besieges the mind, takes hold of the senses, and controls the writer's thoughts and emotions, and such a writer is only freed after he must have purged out his innermost feelings with fine blended poetic lines that unravel the turmoil in his soul. Poetry, therefore, has remained a tool for societal reformation, re-education, and re-orientation needed to guarantee progress, socio-political stability, economic expansion, and peaceful coexistence that are hallmarks of an ideal and viable society. Okoro further conjectures that:

The poet, a sharp knife in one hand, a microscope in the other, is granted his inalienable right to cut portions of life for scrutiny. It is still abominable in most parts of the earth to beat a child and tell him not to cry. Poetry is a kind of crying, mostly public pain in the poet's shoes. Poetry is that loud mouth in the wilderness crying "they have beaten me again". It is the cry of the wounded soul looking for solace in the face of the few dimples and the many pimples of life. The human condition is both a friend and a foe to the poet... Painful beauty, that's what poetry is (xi).

This simply translates that poets will continue to occupy the enviable position in societies as town criers, seers, diviners, social crusaders, and patriots, who must at all times, even against their collective wishes and freedom, pay the ultimate poetic prices for a better and harmonious society. A poet, who abandons this noble cause is akin to the proverbial foolish man who abandons a title-taking ceremony to keep a date in some exorcist's shrine and such a poet deserves to resign his position or risk the humiliating encounter of being stripped of his poetic mantles.

Tanure Ojaide ranks among the celebrated Nigerian poets whose numerous poetic offerings, in the form of collections have earned them a place in the hall of fame of African literature. Ojaide is popular as a poet-activist on Niger Delta and little wonder the larger chunk of scholarship available on his poetry quarry on Niger Delta concerns and protest. Onwuka, Ubah, and Isaiah affirm that: 'in contemporary criticism on Nigerian literature, Ojaide is often categorized as a Niger Delta poet and activist in the mold of Ken Saro-Wiwa, and his poetry [is] nearly always appraised from the perspective of his advocacy for the Niger Delta struggle and social reforms in society at large. Consequently, critics have praised his vocalization of the tension engendered by the exploitation and neglect of his immediate Niger Delta community and commended his poetry for its capacity to gauge the pulse of the region and that of Nigerians altogether' (1). Understandably, the Delta is Ojaide's root, which he admits to being the very essence of his being and it is only natural that much of his poetic tears flow from the Delta he loves. Tayo Olafioye captures Ojaide's strong affinity and bond thus:

My roots thus run deep into the delta area. Its traditions, folklore, fauna, and flora ... This area of constant rains, where we children thought we saw fish fall from the sky in hurricanes, did not remain the same ... my Delta years have become the touchstone with which I measure the rest of my life. The streams, the fauna, and the flora.... Even when I wander outside to many places I have experienced, the land of streams, the iroko tree, antelopes, anthills, and so much life remains indelible in my memory ... Home remains for me the Delta, where I continue to anchor myself. (3)

The concern for the Niger Delta environment is of great importance to Ojaide, and his numerous poetry collections exist to bear testimony to this fact. There is a plethora of unavoidable images of “Delta” and “Iroko” accompanied by a pictorial rendition of the rest of the flora and fauna of his region under constant abuse and pillage by the oil merchants and invaders who did not only destroy his peace but altered the future of his people. Abiola Ireere attests that “judging from the distinctive tone of his poetry, and from the resourceful use of imagery drawn from his background, Tanure Ojaide can be considered one of the finest poets in Nigeria at the moment” (blurb).

Endless Song ranks among Ojaide's popular poetry collections. Published in 1989, it is not surprising that the poetic thoughts of the poet are still valid over three decades of publication. Sad enough, the economic cum political gimmicks and the myriads of socio-political issues that bothered the poet and provoked his 'tearful songs' in the collection are far from being over, thus, a clear justification of its relevance is explored in this paper.

Sociological Theory: A Theoretical Justification

This study adopts sociological literary theory as theoretical anchor for the study. Sociological theory is concerned with the relevance of literary works to mirroring and engaging societal issues and problems, with the aim of proffering valid solutions to them. The theory is rooted in the idea that literature is a product of the society. It looks at literature from the point of view of social issues and its relevance to society. Sociological theory sees a literary work as nothing but a product of several real aspects of the society of a writer. The experience a writer writes about is the experience of the society. In the views of Kofi Agyekum “Sociological Critics argue strongly that literary works and social context are inseparable. The social milieu is embedded in the works of artists. In effect, it is the social context that serves as the raw material for the production of literary works. The social setups and the institutions in the society at any point in time combine to exert some major influence

in the works of the artists. Sociological critics focus on the values of society and how those values are reflected in the literary works. Sociological critic study the economic, political and cultural issues expressed in literary works because they reflect the true picture of what exists in the society. (129) In the opinion of Oguntuase, Adefemi, Obura, Oluoch and Amateshe, Kisa, “literature of any kind is expected to mirror and refract society so that corrections and adjustments can be made to social and communal lives where and when necessary” (54). Abram Anders submits that the work of art is to be situated as a response to a situation that is essentially social; literature serves a therapeutic role in so far as it diagnoses and dissolves maladaptive social categories and orientations (20). Affirming the validity of the theory to the present study, Oguntuase, Adefemi, Obura, Oluoch and Amateshe, Kisa, conclude that “protest literature, the kind in which Tanure Ojaide engages, is intended to react to real socio-political and economic issues confronting society. This sort of literature goes a notch higher by proffering solutions to the problems identified, thus serving a therapeutic role. (54). The theory, therefore, is concerned with the way and manner the writer responded to the social issues around him at whatever point in the history of society he writes about. This approach shares a lot in common with the Marxist theory of Karl Marx and Engels though there are peculiar core areas of concentration in the two approaches. The theory is valid in our interrogation of protest and hope in Ojaide's poetry, *The Endless Song*.

Protest and Hope in Ojaide's *The Endless Song*

In Tanure Ojaide's collection entitled *The Endless Song*, we witness a radical departure from the usual environmental concerns that had been the bane of Ojaide's poetry to a robust engagement with the dynamics and nuances of the polity of the nation. Akin to the dispositions of Prophet Jeremiah, Ojaide assumes the role of a prophet and crusader, wielding the poetic sword, to preach to his generation. In an angry pose, the poems are laced with indicting words directed both at the inefficacious leaders and the entire populace whose chain of reactionary actions galvanizes the cyclic pendulum of doom. Many of the poems in the collection attack the very institutions of society and decry the decays that remain a clog in the wheel of our desired development, even as he leaves a warning on the impending doom accruing from our negligence and inhumanity.

In one of the poems from the collection titled “In the Beginning,” Ojaide, in a sort of nostalgic evocation, attempts to recreate the faded pictures of the past, as it were, before bizarre sequences of events thwarted the dream of a nation. The poet regurgitates a sad reality and opens a wound in the hearts of the citizenry by reechoing the awareness that right from her conception, the country is gifted with

abundant human and natural resources enough to raise a contented generation and lift her from the ashes of a third-world country. The country was destined to assume, not in mere speculations, but in reality, the giant of Africa. The poet recalls:

In the beginning /the land bloomed with bounties, so much
to make a contented heritage: /rivers to swim in a drought-prone world,
a landmass of comfort to our number, /forests to provide our daily needs.
We had the luck of the sow in fertility, /the immunity of the chameleon
in our lives;
our men possessed the energy of the bull
and our women the sleek beauty to the antelope;
we were like the iroko tree, tall and erect (14).

In a manner reminiscent of David Diop's "Losers of Everything", the poet recalls the good old days, the days of fruitful harvests when the land bloomed with bounties, rivers flourished, forests fertile and agile and our men and women were what we have always desired they be. These imageries can be juxtaposed with the memorable images of Diop's poetry—'a laughing sun, the women that were lovely and lissom, the children that glided over the mighty rivers and the motherly moon that accompanied the dances with the frantic rhythm of the tomtom of joy and carefree life amid fires of liberty.' Both are evocative imageries of loss as evident in Diop and Ojaide's poems. While colonial hegemony robbed Diop of his peace and provoked his satirical poem, Ojaide's "In the Beginning" signposts the affliction orchestrated by individuals, government and establishment who are destroying what they ought to protect. A surface reading of Ojaide's lines suggests some romantic viewpoint, but a critical quarry reveals a glaring truth that points to the very tangent the ugly rain started beating us, the unfortunate historical disconnect that thwarted our destiny as a nation and saw our lofty dreams, hopes, and destinies obliterating:

Later the rivers washed away our charm,
the land of our birth wounded us with its size,
the forests haunted our lives with demons;
we trampled upon each other in assemblies,
and our height blinded us to the earth/we ought to libate with sweat.

There is something Yeatsian about Ojaide's poetry and typical of Yeats' "Adam's Curse", the poem exudes a sense of guilt and suffering symbolically of the biblical fate of Adam and Eve after their disobedience which led to the loss of the Garden of Eden, the paradise, and marked the beginning of the sufferings of mankind on earth. Like Milton's "Paradise Lost", the title, "In the Beginning" affirms a deeper sense of loss accruing from sin: disobedience, greed, avarice, and over-ambition that cost

Adam and Eve the paradise with exacerbated generational consequences. And just like it was pronounced on Adam to suffer and tilt the ground with sweat for his daily bread, so also were the consequences of our past errors which condemned our generation to 'libate with sweat.' Ojaide unconsciously alludes to this biblical fall of man as expressive of the fall and failure of Nigeria as a nation. Just as the fall of Adam brought pain, suffering, and death to man, so do our actions usher in great pain and torture to the citizenry as 'the land of our birth wounded us' and 'the forests haunted our lives with demons'. In the scene of disorder and chaos that ensued, 'we trampled upon each other in assemblies.'

While Diop blames colonialism for the loss of true African heritage and destiny in his "Losers of Everything", Ojaide in "In the Beginning" casts aspersions on our actions and inactions that over time degenerated and condemned us to a comatose state. As a result of leadership failure over time, which culminated in our failure to manage our surplus resources, the resources soon grew thin and lean. In the face of the rat race for survival and the entire paraphernalia of our present-day society—the height that blinded us to the earth' obviously conspired together to deepen our present woes as a nation. In this regard, the poet believes that as we ponder on our travails, cry for our hard times, 'hear old songs, 'see marks of a departed wake that flourished in the same land that can barely hold us' and 'wonder why the season should treat us as some despot his subject, mindless,' we should always recall our collective errors for: 'Those who see the *oghriki* tree in the rain forest' know and perhaps remember, 'that there was once the center of a town given up by men who failed their praise-names' (14). The poem leaves a lesson that though we cannot undo the past, we can only look forward to possible remedies in the present.

In the poem titled "No Prescription Cures a Country Nobody Loves", the poet traces the core problem of the nation to lack of love and our sheer pretense in that regard. One recalls that one of the greatest commandments of Jesus Christ as explicit in the Book of Matthew 22: 39, emphasizes that we should love our neighbours as ourselves. In 1 Corinthians 13:13, Saint Paul writes: "...And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." It is this love that the poet locates as fundamental to our numerous problems as a nation. Since we do not love the country, it becomes problematic to continue to prescribe doses to cure the nation's ailment as the poet declares that 'no prescription cures a country nobody loves.' The poet recalls an emotional and heart-warming encounter he had that was to him the very definition of pure love:

Years back I saw a nameless schoolgirl from Ojojo, Warri,
surrender her recess-rice coin to a beggar, one

smeared with a biting indifference of passers-by
even the ant knows the other's stronger need
and bring the millennium closer to a spiteful lot (8)

The driver, who just rescued his van from some treacherous touts, stops to plant a red flag and finds what the poet describes as 'a fellowship that deserves universal membership.' Ojaide's poetic outbursts easily find striking balance and allusion to some biblical illustrations. Two biblical allusions readily come to mind: the woman that gave her widow's mite as presented in the synoptic gospels of Mark 12: 41-44 and Luke 21: 1-4 and the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37, as gleaned from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. As the gospel of Mark specifies, the two mites, which the widow cast in the offertory box are the Greek lepta and together they are worth a quadrans which is the smallest Roman coin. The widow's mite, a small bronze coin from ancient Judea, minted during the Hasmonean dynasty of 140-37 BC, which was worth 1/64 of a denarius in Roman time and about 1/8 of a cent in contemporary time, is very insignificant, yet in the context and the manner, it was offered, made it worth even above thousands of Euros in modern times. In Ojaide's poem, the gift of this nameless schoolgirl as the poet describes, reflects, and is tantamount to a small contribution which one willingly gives but by and large is all one could afford. The poor schoolgirl in the poem, without any supervision or cajoling, surrenders her recess-coin to a beggar who the poet laments that he has been 'smeared with the biting indifference of passers-by.' This is where the parable of the Good Samaritan becomes apt in explaining this rare show of a schoolgirl. While different calibers of people from all walks of life may have passed the beggar, the schoolgirl stopped by to offer her 'widow's mite', her recess-coin which invariably suggests she would go all day hungry. This show of unpretentious and unrequited love catches a spot in the heart of the poet as he explains that 'this rarity gladdens the heart.' The poet goes further to lament thus:

And these do not make history or network news,
these do not earn national award,
these are not sermonizers behind glided lecterns;
they do not crow on rooftops. (8)

This poem satirizes the rest of us—the rich, the politicians, and the well-to-do even the clergy among us. There is a sense of hypocrisy and sheer pretense in our daily lives. The social media space is agog with pictures and videos of politicians and wealthy people giving their support and alms to the poor. It oftentimes makes headlines in the network news. Even religious men and women, who should know better, join in this

bandwagon of vain praise. In recent times, when the nation and the world are tormented by the deadly coronavirus pandemic, it is all in the social media space, news of people giving out palliatives to the less privileged in society. This is outside the orbit of those who received the palliatives and later used them to advance some selfish political goals. Some of the palliatives were locked up in the warehouses and others were sold in the market to the poor people for whom the palliatives were meant to cushion the effect of the suffering during the heat of the pandemic. It is against this prevalent trend and background that the enormity of the schoolgirl's hallowed act, which won the heart of the poet, wounds our conscience and seeks to engineer us to a change of attitude and conform to the way we ought to live. The poet avers that:

Their gestures are magical in their silence
the ant builds monument without fanfare
the very ant that knows the other stronger need. (8)

Ojaide's poem speaks directly to our souls and the truism of it all stares mockingly in our faces. We do not love the country for if we do, we could have demonstrated it in the little areas, places, and positions we are fortunate to be in. None of us is willing to make the required sacrifice to save the soul of a dying nation. The poet questions:

Has it ever happened here that the priest offered his blood
to stave off the vesuvial scourge he foresaw,
has it happened here before that the sharer forgot himself
to raise the spirit of the eighty per cent lowlies?

Sad enough, the cycle of oppression, exploitation, looting, crime, corruption, mismanagement, rape, and abuse of all manner of evil, defines our nation and the reason is not far-fetched: 'No prescription cures a sick country nobody loves.'

In "Beyond this Day" Ojaide depicts the scene of disorder, chaos, and near anarchy that characterize our modern-day society and warns of the far-reaching consequences of our actions for our future and that of the generations yet unborn. The poem, characteristic of Yeats' "Second Coming" in style, and theme, echoes the very pessimistic tone that characterized Yeats' poetry and defines modern poetry at large:

O the shadows of the tyrants we raise in our blood
jostle us in daily walks out of our senses. And
we move into the cult-house to invoke the god
of our desired mountains, lose ourselves
in the dance at the sight of one possessed;
we are in service of brute for livelihood,
damned with inordinate desires (10).

In Ojaide's "Beyond this Day", our modern woes compound as our secret indulges, inordinate desires, brute means of livelihood, and our mad pursuit of vanity and survival taint our world and worry the poet deeply. Reflective on Wordsworth's "The World is Too Much with Us", the dangers of a materialistic world make the future look gloomy and predictable. There is a building sense of pessimism, a prevailing sense of unseen danger, and greater anarchy that looms over the earth. Just like in Yeats' "Second Coming"—we turn and turn in the widening gyre, the falcon unable to hear the falconer; things falling apart and the center unable to hold, culminating to mere anarchy loosed upon the world, and the vast image of Spiritus Mundi slouching towards Bethlehem to be born, all characteristic of the pessimistic and the ironical conceit of modern poetry—so we witness in Ojaide's "Beyond this Day" a replicable show of shame and disorder: 'So many stand on tiptoe on stools mounted on tiled egos/ without getting to the peephole of fresh insights.' And 'there are no dreams of a different world to change lives/deeply rooted in the thirsty genes of nomads.' In the condescending disharmonious manner, 'so many lose sight of the clearing beyond hilltop/ in the debilitating despondence after the mirage. (10) In the same sense of slow but progressive ascension of pessimism and uncertainties witnessed in Yeats' "Second Coming", Ojaide's "Beyond this Day" progressed to unveil in full glare, the pessimistic dispositions and struggles in the innermost turmoil of the poet as he rhetorically ponders:

Who knows if we are so near, in the dark,
in our outskirts of a misted destination?...
Lord, are we worthy? We are not worthy of our blood,
not worthy of an hour's grace, already sentenced.
And these inquirers incarcerate us in easy fashions (10)

Interestingly too, just like Yeats ends with a degree of pessimism and inevitable chaotic future mired with the symbolic birth of the Anti-Christ, 'the vast image out of Spiritus Mundi' (Second Coming line 12) Ojaide ends with deep-rooted pessimism and an apocalyptic vision of his society whose future is beyond mortal knowledge if we do not remedy our ways:

Only the God we do not know knows what lies in wait
if there is no cushioning from the karmic rocks;
the crows will spot us in their patrols before
before the police arrives with warrants to bury the dead.
When will the cramping lots of our hearts be emptied
of their garbage to be free of that life that ends
with cars, mansions, and bodies dressed for consumption? (10)

The poet ends with a sense of irony familiar in modern poetry, as he emphasizes that 'only the God we do not know knows what lies next.' It is sheer irony, cynicism, and anti-climax, that in our present-day society we constructed more churches than industries, yet are filled with hypocrisy, immorality, and inhumanity. Nigeria, like many other African countries, has a very peculiar case in this regard, as we have hijacked the practice of religion and tend to be holier than the Western world that brought us Christianity. Christianity, though it has permeated a greater portion of our society, the true Christ-like nature is still alien in our daily profession of Christianity. The poem also tilts towards an absurdist view of life with a reinforced vision of vanity which is the end product of all men's aspirations and toils as echoed in the book of Ecclesiastes 1:2 that 'vanities of vanities; all is vanity'.

In "The Vision" Ojaide's revolutionary and protest became more vociferous, as we hear a clarion call for war and violence in response to the prolonged oppression and exploitation that militate against the desired peace and progress of our nation. The poet expresses a belief that we will not always continue like this and the poem foretells the imminent end of our oppression and with it our oppressors:

The leopard that haunts us will die,
maybe in our lifetime, maybe not;
time plies the ambush with an invisible hand (3).

Ojaide subtly echoes that belief and willpower alone cannot end oppression and calls for revolution as the inevitable pathway to freedom. The poet believes that the peace, freedom, and the prosperous society we seek, can only be won through violence and reprisal attack:

We have to incur debts to buy new weapons
or mend our broken ones,
then go to the bush to prove our mettle (3).

This struggle, the poet believes, will be worth every of its salt for no 'wanderer complains that the road to his love/is not wide enough for his restless feet.' With a series of rhetorical questions, his poetic thoughts are made manifest: 'What giant says the earth is not hard enough/for his soles to support him/yes, what head is too small for desires?' The poet urges that we should not be carried away with any present comfort we muster since 'It is not the habit of the hunter/ to blind himself with drinks.' And 'like the prepared hunter who toils in silence after its prey,' we must

have a clear vision of our dreams, the future we desire and pursue it with our blood and ends with his unwavering belief that: 'As for the leopard that haunts us, it will surely die, the ambush taut. (3) This study argues that in these lines are enshrined

the subtle hope for the future if only we could be honest and patriotic enough to determine the kind of society and future we desire and have the nerves to pay the ultimate sacrifice to achieve that.

In “We Keep Watch Over Them” which is the last of the poem we shall consider here that reinforced Ojaide's protest pose and revolutionary tirades, we see the torture and oppression we have been subjected to in various ways but with a sense of stoicism, resistance, and heroism and it's this near-martyr attributes that endear the poem and engraves the message in our hearts:

From the scaffold of pain we keep watch over them,
from the perilous precipice of misery we keep watch over them
from the exposed post of lowliness, cold and clammy,
from the slums of existence we keep watch over them (5).

There is a realization that we are not a bunch of ignorant and docile fellows and the poet appeals to the courageous side of our existence, that rebellious spirit ready to fight for justice, fairness, and lasting peace and prosperity. The poet engineers us for the spirit of oneness and solidarity:

When they savage us, we withdraw to cabal;
our experience over the ages help us through
our women know how to march naked at twilight
and rid the land of tormentors,
our men know how to bury despots with their paraphernalia;
we always regroup in the shadows of our fallen warriors (5).

The poet foresees the emergence of a class of selfless and patriotic men and women armed with the weapon of truth and justice and the unquenchable will, unbreakable resolve to act right, to fight and defend for the sake of the future, posterity, and the generation yet unborn. Ojaide depicts these new heroes with 'metals in their will', heroes, who when they meet hardships, do not breakdown before their torturers, patriots, who do not groan despite their daily stabs of hunger and refuse to give in to those who live on the blood of the poor and the sweat of the strong (5). The poet, therefore, urges the people to identify on that side of the revolution, aware that it is time to stand together, tall, strong and firm, and fight against oppression, exploitation, looting, dehumanization, and injustice. Ojaide engineers the masses to pick up arms and engage in some protest and revolutionary measures to fight their poverty, desolation, frustration, suffering, backwardness, and perpetual loss, to salvage and free their nation heading to dock safely at the harbours of a failed state. He reechoes that:

The matchet is fan, /the rifle our swagger-stick in the dark;

we know what distance to go in silence/ before unleashing thunder,
we know how to lead our prosecutors away/ in the night of their power.
Our will has become our god, and/ from the iroko tree aloft our hearts
we keep strict watch over them. (5)

Amidst this debacle of failure and chaos, Ojaide ends his poetic offerings with a sense of hope and optimism. The poet is optimistic that the masses will someday rise to reclaim their country. The masses, armed with only their will, a will that 'is like the iroko tree rooted in our hearts,' a will that 'survives whatever storm ravages us' will take back their land and determine their future for themselves. The poet ends that on that day after the fight has been fought and won:

we can hold to ourselves
and laugh cynically at our tormentors;
we know more than the beasts terrorizing us
that they will fall into a deep hole
as they cavort in our streets. (5)

In the Book of Jeremiah 29:11, the prophet Jeremiah left a message of hope that has inspired generations of Christians, a message that beams as the hallmark of his prophetic utterances. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" Like the prophet Jeremiah, who, despite his message of woes, left a beacon of hope, so did the poet-prophet, Ojaide. Allyssa Roat notes that: "...Jeremiah's most lasting legacy may be one of hope. One of the most oft-quoted verses in the Bible, Jeremiah 29:11, has offered hope to believers for centuries... Jeremiah preached a lot of doom and punishment. However, his message was ultimately one of repentance and restoration. God was quick to remind his people that although there would be consequences for their sin, He still had a plan" (1). Similarly, Ojaide, amidst his tirades and jeremiads, inspires hope for a new nation. It is the hope that the nation shall someday rise from the ashes of exploitation, corruption, and oppression to embrace a call for a collective struggle towards the liberation of the dying soul of a nation.

Conclusion

It is no longer in doubt that Nigeria, as a nation, is crumbling with visible signs of impending demise. Ojaide emerges, from the enclaves of the oppressed region of the Niger Delta, to wield the sword of poetry with which he condemns and sermonizes to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel'. Ojaide may not have been a prophet in the religious sense of the word; yet, the paper argues that his poetry exudes certain

prophetic dispositions and remarkably pairs him, in some striking resemblances with Prophet Jeremiah in the Bible. Described as an angry and weeping poet, Jeremiah, in a similar manner is known as the 'Weeping Prophet'. Jeremiah, a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah in the Old Testament, right before Judah ultimately fell to Babylon and was led away into captivity, was sent by God to a crumbling nation to warn of their impending demise – a warning they didn't heed. (AllyssaRoat 1) A fearless poet, Ojaide's poetry has continued to serve as a protest and revolutionary tool to engineer the masses for a positive change, even as it inspires hope, confidence, and a patriotic spirit needed for new nationhood.

Three decades after publication, the protest and revolutionary visions of Ojaide in *The Endless Song* seem most relevant and apt in our present-day society as the socio-political, economic, religious, and even academic and ethno-cultural spheres of the nation, appear more worrisome and worthy of more engaging discourses than ever. The nation is comatose as untold hardship, hunger, inflation, and the rising cost of living leave economists with gloomy faces on the grim future of the nation. Insecurity, Fulani herdsmen menace, banditry, kidnapping, ethnic tensions, and sentiments, unjust killing, and religious violence, all seem to have reared their ugly heads more determined than ever. The socio-political and economic situation of Nigeria is increasingly worrisome and at no time in history have Nigerians wished to emigrate from the country and denounce their citizenship more than now. Daily, corruption, and unemployment curves rise. The EndSars protest of the recent time is only a demonstration of that long-awaited march and revolution chanted by many poets and patriots alike. In all, a more organized revolution is inevitable in this country and it is at this point that the poetic visions of Ojaide, his jeremiads make meaning and significant sense.

The revolutionary poetry of Ojaide, against all encumbrances, sustains a dying hope and optimism in a new nation. This frail hope is masked in his lamentations and jeremiads. It is this hope that inspires the dreams of tomorrow's survival, but this is not without a price tag—the masses will need to come together, their broken spirits glued together by hope, and walk on that long-enduring but inevitable path of protest and revolution, that seemed the only pathway to their promised land, a march Ojaide believes is long overdue.

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