

The Sociological Imagination of Impunity in Remi Raji's Poetry of Social Relevance

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Abstract

The pivot of sociological imagination is that it prioritizes social context, rethinks social problems in the light of broader perspectives, interrogates the relationship between a specific problem and the larger society as well as establishes patterns of the phenomena. By deploying the sociological imagination as a theoretical approach, it exposes the reader to diverse shades of interpretation of what constitutes impunity. This paper examines *Remi Raji's* poetry of social relevance, but exploring the various patterns that emerge in the poems in order to present pictures of impunity as necessary steps to revamping society of its rot, tyranny and untoward social relations. Impunity is conceived in this paper as the breeding ground for lawlessness. Thus, the paper focuses on the Nigerian socio-political context as site for impunity. Through textual analytical interpretation of the poems in two of Raji's collections, such as *Gather My Blood Rivers of Song* and *Webs of Remembrance* (henceforth abbreviated GBR and WOR), the paper reveals the poet's fictionalization of impunity and the dimensions while identifying steps to be taken to end the practice. The following findings are identified and they include the propagation of two main pictures of impunity as well as proposition of four main strategies for fighting impunity. The paper concludes that Raji presents impunity through evocation of violence and public theft and proposes revolt, denunciation, resistance and physical violence as methods for putting an end to impunity in Nigeria.

Keywords: Impunity, Revolt, Denunciation, Sociological, Imagination, Public, Theft, Poetry

Introduction

The bond between literature and society is to be found in the way one shapes and influences the other. This explains, in part, why writers who are conscious of this handle the task of writing with utmost sense of

responsibility. For this reason, it is imperative that literary writings demonstrate a bent for social relevance. They must focus on a noble cause of improving society. Poetry, by its nature, offers the reader the unique opportunity to examine its content as a reflection of the society, especially the untoward behaviour of those who do not only aspire to positions of leadership but also those who occupy such positions. It is against this backdrop that recent Nigerian poetry continues to engage society by exposing political leaders who violate their oaths of office. This they do, among others, by presenting pictures of impunity in the public space by public officials. Through satirical acumen, these new writers expose very serious crimes which stare the citizens in the face and urge the people to rise up and fight the perpetrators. One such poet is Remi Raji who through poetry demonstrates the need to combat impunity in government and society.

This paper reads the poems of Raji by applying the sociological imagination to interpreting the manifestation of impunity and the poet's recommendations on how to combat the syndrome. Roland Ewubare, concerning impunity, remarks that "The word "impunity" derives from the Latin word *impunitas*. means "without punishment", No sanction for bad behaviour. No punishment for misdeed" (13). The central position of Ewubare dwells on the fact that offenders of the law go scot free. This situation sets a bad precedence because it gives the impression that one can get away with whatever crime. Thus, this exacerbates the culture of impunity and crime. Bad behaviour and misdeeds it is believed thrive because the law is not obeyed neither is it empowered to fulfill its statutory role.

Also, Dayo Sobawale posits that:

The resultant consequences of people acting without fear of being punished had made impunity a norm or culture which has produced such strange bed fellows as torture, arson, murder, embezzlement, assassination, corruption, greed, thuggery and so on. (49)

Sobowale examines acts of impunity and from two categories are discernible, namely: money-induced impunity such as embezzlement, greed and corruption as well as violence-related impunity which includes murder, torture, arson, assassination and thuggery. The entrenchment of these acts weakens the capacity of the state to fight perpetrators of impunity. Also, it denies the 'victims' access to justice and fairness.

This explains why Sobowale writes that:

The implications of these for the state make the state a weak entity and one that cannot uphold the tenet of justice and fairness and other ideals that the state is known for (49).

No matter the type of impunity, the fact remains, it does not portend well for the society. Hence, it is important to enthrone accountability of actions at all time in order to stem the ugly tide of impunity in society. Contributing to the concept of impunity, Owasanoye *et al* agree that:

Impunity emanates from the failure of the legal framework of states, discriminatory laws and policies, where rights of citizens are violated without proper system of redress has become the norm in most states (8).

Their understanding of the cause of impunity is drawn from the legal deficiency. As long as discriminatory laws exist, there will be impunity. Also, when rights of citizens cannot be protected as well as access to justice is hindered, impunity will always persist. These are the reasons for the continuing scale of impunity.

The sociological Imagination as conceived and espoused by the legendary Charles Wright Mills, opens up the study of social phenomena to wider social perspectives. Jenny Justice, quoting Mills, defines the sociological imagination as “the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history of self and the world”(4). The key word in Mills' explanation is “grasp” put differently, means to understand and appreciate. The critic of social phenomena is expected to possess the mind that is capable of understanding the way society influences individual predicament. It further posits that such a mind should be able to locate the self in the scheme of things in the world. Thus, it is important for the sociological imagination to explore the historical context in which a particular problem is located for it to be adequately and clearly understood.

Justice further points out that the sociological imagination entails “the ability to see the social patterns that influence individuals, families, groups and organizations” (5). The overriding importance of the definition is that it helps the critic to explore the various patterns that undergird several events in the society. Thus, it emphasizes the patterns over specific events which when properly observed is implicated within the effect of the society on the specific event.

In prioritizing the importance of contexts, Melissa Brinks writes that the sociological imagination is “a method of thinking about both individuals and society by considering a variety of sociological contexts” (1). The beauty of applying the sociological imagination to reading a phenomenon is to be seen in the exploration of several contexts that influence the appreciation and evaluation of a specific social problem. Contextual interpretations contribute to the understanding of societal issues. Therefore, contexts are keys to the interpretation of social problems.

The need to take a new critical view of social problem is advanced by Ashley Crossman thus: “The sociological imagination is the practice of being able to “think ourselves away” from the familiar routines of our daily lives to look at them with fresh, critical eyes”(1). The crux of Crossman's reasoning is that to understand a particular phenomenon, it is important to take a break from the usual angle from which a problem is often considered to examine it from a new perspective in order to have a deeper sense of the issue. The importance of this theoretical model is that it inspires the desire for change and the need to turn a social situation into a solution. On the whole, the sociological imagination equips its possessor with unique prospect of finding solutions to problems faced by a given society.

Raji's poetry has attracted critical comments and researches and some of them are reviewed in this section. Solomon O. Olaniyan examines laughter and anguish in Raji's poems noting that the poems “affirm the therapeutic force of laughter” (113). The relevance of this laughter can only be appreciated when viewed against the target and purpose of the poems. In another essay, Olaniyan examines Raji's imagining of society by presenting “the images of society” and using “poetry to comment on multifarious social ills with a view to correcting them” (1).

Isidore Diala explores bayonets and the carnage of tongues as manifestation of the contemporary poet speaking truth to power. Diala writes that Raji's poems articulate the pathology of his generation with an insider's depth” (11). Critical responses to Raji's poems have so far explored several other issues without

paying concentrated attention to the cases of impunity as they are presented in the poems, neither do they concern themselves with recommending strategies of combating impunity. The paper employs the sociological imagination as a theoretical framework in reading Raji's presentation of impunity in poems depicting social relevance. Thus, Raji focuses on violence and public theft as two manifestations of impunity and suggests revolt, denunciation, resistance and physical violence as ways the people could use to combat impunity.

Patterns of Violence-Induced Impunity

The overriding quality of the sociological imagination is the ability to recognize the social patterns of impunity so as to convey the overall picture of the problem being faced by the people. In Raji's poems, there abound some patterns of violence-induced impunity conveyed through apt images. A clear example is found in the poem entitled, "A song for bandits". The poem begins thus:

And the fathers of secrets cast a spell into future's eyes
All they see is Deceit, sister of lies

When the hour of hunger descends on the homestead
Then the farmers talk of rains long expected

When the hour of hunger descends on the homestead
Then the hunters dream and sing of fertile traps

(Then) the king's men mumble an abundance of promise
When famished children howl through empty nights

Planter of laughter, singer of dawn, I watch some tragic air training on my stubborn cheeks
(WOR, 49)

Running through this stanza is the poet's vision of impunity cleverly embedded in a welter of images. The poet's evocation of fortune tellers' clairvoyance is presented with vivid imagination. The aim is to cast the future in the mould of bold-faced deceit and lies. The people are presented as openly indulging in deceit and lying. The repetition of hunger is meant to articulate the unimaginable scale of starvation in the country. Hunger is pictured as being responsible for the escalation of falsehood and deceit. The responses of farmers and hunters to the hunger further heighten the magnitude of deceit and lies. Additionally, the "king's men" are not spared from the list of those who with impunity engage in deceit. These men make promises they cannot keep. The essence of this is that the economy is in such a shambolic proportion that the leaders resort to deceit and lies so as to assuage the anger and hunger of the people. Equally palpable in this poem is the impunity in which hunger wreaks its havoc on "the homestead". Hunger is presented as a personality which looms larger than life and possesses real presence. Hunger is seen as propelling the course of action in the human world. Everyone seems to act in response to hunger.

This fact is self-evident in the subsequent stanza:

I have seen the indelible marks of rogues
And rapists on the lonely maps of virgin roads

I have heard the windy complaints of barns
left in the bloody mercy of pleasant bandits (49)

The poet persona paints the picture of “rogues” operating with impunity. They are said to inflict “indelible marks” on the people. Also clearly presented are the vicious marks of “rapists” who operate with impunity visiting violence on hapless victims. The “barns” are said to complain about the invasion of bandits in the land. The image of banditry is meant to suggest that these people steal and destroy everything of worth and escape punishment.

In the last stanza, the poet depicts the reign of impunity thus:

“What does it (all) count for, this wastefulness
This mural of bones in eh (decaying) museums of memory?
What does it all count...
A gallery of goons
A clan of clowns
A circus of seasoned cannibals?” (WOR, 50)

The picture of violence is cleverly couched through the image of cannibalism. A cannibal is a person who feeds on human flesh. There is the deliberate presentation of a picture of human bones (“Mural of bones”) which is meant to emphasize death and destruction of human lives. Thus, the speaker decries the impunity with which “this wastefulness” is carried out. The said, “mural of bones”, is the handiwork of “A gallery of goons”. The “goons” refers to thugs employed to carry out violent killings. The poet denounces their continued reign of impunity calling it “A circus” to depict the mindlessness with which the said goons operate on behalf of their sponsors. Also these “goons” are described as “seasoned cannibals” to heighten the sense of impunity as men who have carried on without being arrested. The point is that these killers are often backed by powerful men in positions of authority.

The essential argument of Raji's poetry is that violence is one of the pictures of impunity and that it is perpetrated by vile men who are sponsored to kill. As long as these killers are aided by powerful individuals, there is no end in sight for violence-induced impunity.

Raji in another poem entitled “farewell to myth 1” presents a picture of impunity which is inspired by violence. The opening stanza is a clear case:

Where are you, oh Olokun
They rape you and raid your children
They march on your fertile brows
And rig rods of crude pain in your veins. (WOR, 36)

The poet evokes the earth as a woman presenting her as a victim of “rape” and “raid”. The whole stanza breathes the sense of violence and impunity. This is achieved through language rich in metaphorical quality. For example, the words, “rape”, and “raid” function on a connotative level. The way a woman is raided and raped is compared to the way the Niger Delta landmass is being destroyed through oil exploration. The painful aspect of this is that those who carry out the savage act do so without being arrested or punished.

The persona continues to present the picture of environmental violence thus:

Where are you, Olokun

What them shell and loot the gold in the swamp
Merchants & mechanics of thorns
Watch them burn the helpless air.

Is this your promise to kill Despair
To save your own from them whose boots
are well-worn, whose hands are heavy
with the blood of innocent protests? (36)

These two stanzas are suffused with images of violence. Words like “shell”, “loot”, “burn”, and “killer” are used to capture the scale of violence. There is the sense of helplessness as the speaker calls on the divine essence, “Olokun” to witness the scale of violence. The call should be seen in the context of demonstrating the brazen nature of impunity perpetrated by arsonists who “burn the helpless air”. Apparently, perpetrators of eco-violence go scot-free. This poem should be seen in the light of protest against environmental degradation because such acts invariably affect humanity.

Raji understands the power of words and if there is any remarkable quality of his poetry, it is the poet's cleverness and depth of imagination as expressed through the choice of words. There is subtle hint at violence. For example, the expression, “save your own from them whose boots/are well-worn”, conveys the sense that agents of violence have long years of carrying out their trade without arrest and punishment. This fact is justified by the “boots” which are weapons of oppression and violence. These boots are said to be well-worn because of their many years of use.

The tone of despair echoes through the next stanza as the persona presents the picture of violence still:

Where then is your face
The Beautiful one who slakes streams
With a flood of million dreams
See the squad maiming, raping, looting...? (36)

The persona appears here to mourn the loss of many lives and their dreams when “the squad” of rapists and looters descend on the people. The despondence of the speaker is felt more through the apt use of rhetorical question to lament the orgy of violence and the utter impunity at which these violent crimes are committed.

In the poem “Animus 1” Raji presents the impunity with which religious zealots execute violence against those they consider as infidels. The opening stanza adequately conveys this fact:

I see now we embrace bitterness
like the pill
we spit
and spite
we greet
and gripe about
in the empty mill
we smile in malice
the new lovely things (GBR, 22)

The image of the pill is used to describe the grave animosity that has engulfed the country. The poet then turns over to show that religious adherents degenerate to practice malice (“spite”) as they annoy and provoke one another. As this situation continues, it has become a norm to see them “smile in malice”, a paradoxical irony which exposes the hypocrisy of the religious practitioners.

The poet continues thus:

Against this pestle, this pestilence
Of violence and doom...
Here we mould fresh mortars
Of harsh priesthood...
And I hear beastly noises in the houses of God

Two images are deployed here. They are “pestle” and “pestilence”. The former is employed to convey the sense of destruction which the two religions: Islam and Christianity have become. They are like the pestle used for pounding the mortar. In the context of this poem, those pounded are Nigerians considered heathens or infidels. There is the sense of impunity which defines the absurdist manner in which lives are destroyed in the name of religions. Also violence is portrayed as pestilence. This is meant to draw attention to the harm and threat to lives which religion poses to the nation. The priests are said to be “harsh” as they speak in their cantankerous manner which further aggravates the spate of violence. Thus, when the supposed men of God preach to their converts, it is the “beastly noises” that are heard in “the houses of God”. The aim of the beast image is to depict the impunity with which violence is encouraged by men who ought to preach peace. The poem ends on the note of violence:

I see and scream, behold
an inflexible tremor
of civilized heathens
mouthing mantras of war... (23)

Images of violence and impunity continue to dominate the poem. The language itself conveys the belligerence of the society. The fervor of the animosity is captured in the word “tremor”. The entire country is perceived as vibrating with violence and the people shaking in fear. The stanza displays sufficient interdependence of language and meaning. Irony predominates in this poem because its frequent deployment jars the reader into fuller sense of awareness and expresses the incongruous nature of religion and violence. Thus, the expression “civilized heathens” who are “mouthing mantras of war” is an excellent example of irony. Civilization is the highest form of human decorum and good conduct. That they are civilized ought to show in their abhorrence of war instead they openly call for it. This seems to be the position of the poet that violence is promoted with impunity and without regard to god and good conscience.

Also, in “Animus II”, Raji continues to dwell on violence-induced impunity from the angel of religious animosity:

they say this is how great nations are born
on the animal blood
of dissenting brothers
we must first go up
or go down in flames
like the phoenix

that's how real nations rise they say (GBR, 24)

The poem opens on the note of fallacy. Violence and bloodshed cannot explain how great nations rise. The mention of “animal blood” is meant to describe the degeneration to the extent that human blood is equated to that of animals. There is absolutely no regard for human lives. This image of bloodletting is meant to express the impunity of violence. Also the image of flames further provides the picture of impunity and thus, revealing the animosity that has engulfed the country.

The speaker adds:

bones must break
empires must vanish
death must be shared only
like the morning grave
and life has meaning only
in mass coffins and the mourners' grimace...
bones must break (24)

Almost every stanza is committed to exposing violence and the impunity associated with the way such is perpetrated in the country. According to the poet, “bones must break” and “death” must be recorded as well as life's meaning can only be appreciated “in mass coffin”. Raji is thus, expressing the large number of lives lost during religious violence in Nigeria. The stanza has varied degrees of heightening, moving from physical destruction of lives to emotional torture which mourners go through. The world presented in Raji's poetry is one gone awry. This is further buttressed by mindless brutality and the unacceptable loss of lives presenting a grave picture of impunity.

The poetry of Raji is one replete with images of violence which aggregate to present a picture of impunity. The poems convey cases of lives destroyed and the numerous cases of instability whether social, physical and emotional. They add up to present a picture at once scary and bloody. The aim of this picture is to show the rate at which humanity has degenerated and the poet indirectly calls on those who preach to re-tone and refine their messages. Violence cannot be the central piece of any true religion. Peaceful co-existence is threatened by violence.

Patterns of Public-Theft Impurity

Another important social pattern of impunity that resonates in Raji's poetic world has to do with impunity relating to public theft. The pivot of the sociological imagination is the ability to contextualize the relationship between the individual and the larger society where the acts of impunity tend to flourish. In the poem, “This land tickles me”, a clear picture of official stealing is articulated through the evocation of poetic pictures:

This land tickles...	without end
Naked gods roll	on parade
	On grounds
On rot and starved rust	where men wear
Bravery	on tattered stripes
This land tickles me	brimming in wisdom
	And woe (WOR, 17)

This stanza derides public servants describing them as “gods” whose excesses cannot be checked, as they conduct themselves with impunity. These public servants continue to steal from public treasury and yet they “roll” without fear of being arrested. Hence, they “parade” their wealth and show it off to the chagrin of the people. The “rot” they create has led the country on a downward spiral. As the country festers with “rot” and “rust”, men of “Bravery” lack the impetus to call these public thieves to account for their financial misdemeanor. Thus, the land “tickles” the persona. He is unable to understand the “wisdom” of the so-called brave men who shun the “woe” the public criminals wreak on them.

The poet continues with the image of buffoonery:

This land strikes me like the shooting range
When the priest prays for a column of criminals

Absentminded and dead
Before the Decalogue of guns
A new violence of thieves begins in the market place (17)

Apparently, the picture of impunity is presented with a grim reality. There is an irony in the fact presented. The stanza opens with the public execution of criminals only for “thieves” in government to emerge unabated. These new criminals operate without restriction as their deepest effects are felt in the “market place”. It seems Raji's preoccupation with public stealing is meant to show why the nation has not progressed. The image of a priest praying for criminals juxtaposes the indifference of the public to what is going on as a counterpoint to instigating public criminality. As long as priests pray for thieves and the society keeps mute, they indirectly pray for public looters to fester.

The resort to honoring public rogues receives adequate attention in Raji's “Notes of an exiled poet”. This is the theme of the stanza below:

There's a requiem in the anthem
Only Truth can heal
as compatriots die like rebels
heroes hounded like villains
and thieving necks
now wear garlands of gold. (WOR, 20)

The sense of perversion of the natural order dominates in this poem. The nation is presented as a place where the reverse of the order is the norm. Here, thieves are celebrated while hard working individuals are “hounded” and even killed. The expression “garlands of gold” upholds the power and honour associated with material successes. The alliterative quality is astounding and it testifies to Raji's appetite for sound and sense. The two mix in one to convey the perverted sensibility of those who run the system. The expression also possesses metaphorical ebullience in its orientation. We are aware of garlands of flowers which suggest ephemerality. The ones of gold make a hint at the duality of the material gold as indicator of affluence and honour, respectability and durability. The sense in all these is that Raji criticizes the impunity in which corrupt public officers are honored while honest hardworking individuals are targeted for destruction. This is the vilest picture of impunity.

Apart from public office holders who steal public funds, Raji also presents pictures of top religious leaders

stealing church monies and this demonstrates their appetite for cash. This is presented in the poem, “Out for worship II”.

It is Sunday
the sky swarms with thousand faiths
there's a trickling flight
from the streets of sins
from Sodom smell of things
immaculate the songs
from dirty minds
it is Sunday. (WOR, 53)

The impression conveyed in this poem is that the church has become worse than the land of Sodom. The biblical allusion is strong here because it emphasizes the rot and sinfulness of modern church in Nigeria. This is to justify the fact that church leaders do not really care about the spiritual condition of their church members hence, the church “swarms with thousand faiths”. There is subtle hint at the sneer of the poet at the church service generally. That “immaculate” songs are sung “from dirty minds” goes to explain their priority.

The picture of brazen and naked craze for money manifests thus:

Every shack becomes the synagogue
every synagogue spill with miracles
every miracle is an advert... (53)

To show that churches have become like businesses, the poet points out the impunity in how many of the churches spring up like business centres. Today, “every shack” has become “the synagogue” (places of worship). These churches experience false “miracles” which have become advertisement to pull gullible members of the society to their trap for financial extortion. Raji's poems are remarkable for their parallelism and insinuation. Throughout them we encounter repetition of “Every Shack”, “Every Synagogue” and “Every Miracle” to emphasize the unequivocal sincerity of the observation that no church is an exception to the rule. Also, there is a kind of concatenation in the order of presentation to show the downward spiral of things and to draw attention to the rot in the church and money consciousness of its leadership.

Uneven offertories
Flood the vicar's forehead
his foresight is drowned
by the smell of infested monies
the suns of heavenly tongues
never set till lunchtime... (53)

Raji's imagination is suffused with the littlest detail and every line runs with the image of the priest as a money seeker or grabber. The vicar's thought is said to “flood” with “uneven offertories”. His “foresight” is said to be “drowned” by “the smell of infested monies”. These vicars operate without fear of God in their quest for money and material gain. Sunday services always represent harvest for the priests as many church members come to church with the expectation of making generous donations. The hearts of these priests are filled with the profits they expect to make. Impunity is not limited to the political class. We have also seen it displayed among religious leaders. This attests to the proportion of impunity in the the Nigerian society.

Preoccupation with impunity regarding the way public officers misbehave on account of money receives Raji's attention in the poem, "Ode to torch bearers". In this poem, the poet exposes the boldness and the arrogance of the Nigerian law enforcement agents at roadblocks especially at night in this fashion:

Where two or three or more drums stand solitary
Where darkness is frightened by elfish lamps at junctions
There's a torch-bearing man in uniform,
the sin-sick sower and reaper of bribes... (GBR, 45)

The picture of the police presented above is a familiar one. At night they wield torch flashing it in the direction of motorists. Their job is to seek bribes under the protective cover of darkness. They position themselves at strategic "junctions" using the "uniform" to legitimize their impunity as they subject every motorist to the indignity of paying them for doing their duties. The height of this shameful act is that they often victimize the innocent and let off the hook, criminals who can pay their price. The image of sowing and reaping is employed to present the force men as investors who having sown time and effort to stand and wait for their unsuspecting victims end up reaping so much bribes:

When next my daughter wonders
Why your pocket bursts with your victim's swear

I will tell her the tale of torch bearers
who only have darkness to share (45)

The persona's reference to his "daughter" is meant to show the sense of wonder and innocence and gives him the opportunity to vilify the police. The child is surprised to see the bulging pockets of the officer but she is unable to understand it. The persona tells the child that the "pocket bursts" out of the oppression the police perpetrate on fellow citizens who in turn swear for them. The metaphor represented by the "bursts" emphasizes the volume of cash the officers are making. The fact that this kind of nefarious business goes on without any one being arrested and prosecuted show the magnitude of public theft and the impunity with which this sham is conducted. It seems that Raji understands the enormity of public trust and how these officers so brazenly abuse it in the discharge of their duties. Whether it is done by political actors, religious leaders or officers of the law, there appears to be no difference. Impunity has assumed a frightening proportion in our nation. All hands must be on deck to root it out.

Fighting Impunity

It will have become evident that the two previous sections focus on depicting patterns of impunity namely: violence-induced impunity and public-theft-related impunity. This section proposes to expose the various ways the poet has responded in fighting impunity through poetry. The power of the sociological imagination cannot be ignored as it helps individuals to interrogate impunity and seek to change society rather than just accepting the status quo. By employing the sociological imagination, the speakers in Raji's poems are able to think themselves away from the familiar response of resignation to social contestation and radical engagement with the culture of impunity.

Raji suggests revolt against those who entrench violence-induced impunity and public-theft-related impunity in Nigeria. This is captured in the poem, "The sentence not spoken". This poem expresses revolt through the tone of defiance which pervades the poem:

And though I dissolve into your gallows' resolve
I shall walk but not crawl into the heaviness
of shocks, nails, acid, blade or bullets
one day, my word will surprise
the syntax of padlocks
and bone by bone,
block by block
a whisper shall take flesh... and rise... (GBR, 58)

Despite the reign of violence and opposition visited on the people, the persona is defiant and ready to oppose the tormentors. There is a clear difference between “walk” and “crawl”. The former carries with it, the sense of triumph and victory over the affliction and bondage. The latter suggests defeat and surrender. To understand the socio-political context of this poem, let us pay attention to the words in the third line. These are evidence of oppressive weapons. The people are presented as fighting against the use of “shocks” whether electric or political or weaken their resolve and break their defenses. Also the oppressors employ “nails” to inflict bodily harm and torture the people. There is also evidence of “acid” being used to carry out enhanced interrogation. The people have also been victims to “blade or bullets”. Despite these debilitating weapons, the persona is ready to “walk” over these and not cower at the deployment of these weapons of violence. Indirectly, the poet calls on the people not to give up the struggle against impunity and its associated oppression and violence deployed to keep the people in subjugation.

Having established the people's readiness to defy the oppressors, the speaker moves on to express the belief that “one day” all instruments of oppression and impunity will be destroyed (“padlocks”) and that every structure of impunity whether human (“bone by one”) or physical (“block by block”) will be demolished because the “word”, a symbol of verbal revolt and protest will “take flesh and rise”. What is remarkable in this stanza is the use of auditory imagery to convey the revolt of the people. According to the speaker, his “whisper” will take the flesh of human beings and “rise” up against agents and sponsors of impunity.

Another method employed in fighting impunity is through denunciation. This is what the poem, “Toast” is all about. A toast is a word of praise and celebration but in this poem, the poet employs it ironically as a way of denigrating and denouncing acts of impunity:

Here's a toast
To vultures in the house of death
Here's a toast
to slugs, to snails in the war of bones
Here's a toast
to clenched fists without rhythms
Here's a toast
to the fate of the hungry without end (GBR, 59)

This poem contains several images which evoke pictures of impunity to which the persona tactically repudiates. For example, “vultures” represents agents of impunity who venture into “the house of death”. The question that needs to be asked is who are the occupants of this house of death? It refers to the people. They are the recipients of violence and death. The toast functions as a weapon to expose and denounce

perpetrators of impunity. Equally denounced are those who unleash “clenched fists” without provocation (“rhythms”). These ones operate above the law and the “fists” is the poet's imaginative representation of violence. To raise a toast to injustice and oppression is to denounce it. Finally, the persona makes a toast to “the fate of the hungry without end”, as a way of telling them that their fate is unacceptable in a country blessed with so much abundance. Several other lines in the poem offer toasts to ignoble and despicable experiences. For example, the persona raises a toast to “more bleeding in the streets” which tends to suggest approval of violence but on a deeper examination shows that the poet is actually angry and expresses disapproval and urgently wishes that the bleeding be stopped. Satire and sarcasm are used to upbraid impunity and make the case for proper conduct and respect of human rights and dignity.

Raji also calls for resistance to acts of impunity as a way of fighting it. This is expressed in the poem “Beyond the blues”. The poem is built on conditional clauses with which the persona advances the need for resistance:

If I don't sing of pain like titled mourners do
If I do not sing of pain at life's simple wounds

It's because I cast this heart into stone
Against infections of bilious blood (GBR, 100).

The poet has resolved to resist acts of impunity rather than bow and mourn the pain. Ordinarily, the poet will sing of pain inflicted by perpetrators of impunity but here the speaker has resolved not to sing about it. The reason is that he has come to understand how to fight impunity. This is by withstanding and resisting perpetrators of impunity. The “heart” must become “stone” which emphasizes the need to move from sentiments or emotion to insensitivity or where they can no longer feel the pain. By this, they can resist “infections of bilious blood”. The entire country is imagined as one pervaded by anger and one way to overcome the season of rage is by becoming “stone” that is, instrument through which impunity can be defeated

Raji ends the poem on the note of hope that impunity will be defeated in the future. This is expressed in the motif of a dream:

I dream
of tomorrow's rainbow's call
when leopards will leap
in the sun of spotless laughers.

I dream
Until this eclipse dies
To the rays of a new anthem. (GBR 100)

The poem is filled with hope and this is rekindled by the poet's belief that after the resistance, “leopards will leap” in time of peace and candour (“spotless laughers”). The “laughters” represents freedom from impunity. This image is supported by the image of “a new anthem” which represents a new social order to replace the era of pain and violence. The stanza demonstrates unity of sound and sense. The use of auditory imagery as represented by the sound of “laughter” and “anthem” shows that the poet is already seeing celebration ahead. This also confirms victory and freedom from tyranny and impunity. The word “eclipse”

refers to darkness which impunity conveys to the people. This is repudiated by the luminal power of “rays” to emphasize freedom.

The next method of fighting impunity as canvassed through Raji's poetry is by physical violence. This is expressed in the poem with the title, “scent”. The poem presents the impunity with which election riggers take to make mess of the electioneering:

the sea whispers you into my presence
and all I hear is the relentless rite of riggers
fondling and fencing with words which will soon be bloody. (GBR, 106)

The speaker conjures a picture of intervention by nature and presents the situation as one which nature itself has approved noting that the time for ending electoral impunity is long beyond expectation. The sea is perceived as a natural essence imbued with power and ability to bring into the memory of the speaker. The beauty of this stanza is sustained by the personification of the sea as it “whispers” and it immediately changes into a sound exposing the unwholesome activities of “riggers” who are busy “fondling” and “fencing” with the electoral process. The speaker believes that this interruption process “will soon be bloody” because the people are now battle ready to defend their votes. This indirect anticipation of violence is matched with another picture which is presented thus:

We have survived too long like phantoms
We shall not live or die by fast slogans alone
and all I want is the scent of surprise in the groove. (106)

The opening line compares the people to phantoms. It draws attention to the past where conditions for living were terrible thus giving impetus for the people to demand change. The persona is no longer content just existing or speaking and denouncing the oppressors. This time is different. The speaker wants some action and this time, physical violent action in order to create the change. Thus the poet wants the people to “surprise” their leaders by rising up in action and expressing their frustration. They are not to just dwell in resignation to their fate rather to express their fury:

We shall cast our votes by stones
Some borne by the flood, some by tire
and all that is rust, and rotten shall be revived. (106)

The tone of collective resolve to cast their vote and deploy “stones” which conveys violence is meant to express the fact that it is violence that will help in reclaiming the society from the moral slum of moral degeneration. Thus, every “rust” and “rotten” systems which represent corruption and socio-political abnormality “shall be revived”. This poem reveals that physical violence is necessary in the battle to reform the electoral system and, by extension, for curbing the spate of impunity in society. This essay has examined the various strategies which Raji has identified as necessary for combating impunity. These include revolt, denunciation, then resistance and finally, physical violence. These four strategies have been suggested though through indirection, suggestion, imagery and hints presented through the maze of verbal subtlety.

Conclusion

Raji's poetry exhibits extraordinary precocity and great vision. The poet's essential distinction is to be noticed in the far-reaching and in-depth understanding of impunity. Raji is passionate about improving the

social condition and alleviating society of its social predicament. In Raji's poetry, it is difficult to ignore the carefully laid images to depict the cases of impunity. This paper has demonstrated at great length Raji's concern with exposing acts of impunity and methods of fighting it. In contextualizing impunity and their manifestations, the sociological imagination has helped in providing the context and patterns by which impunity is better presented to the readers. It is the opinion of the writer that fighting impunity will help improve social relations and establish the culture of accountability which appears to be lacking in contemporary Nigeria.

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