

Psychosocial Disorders and Escapism in Nigerian Poetry: A Study of Lara Owoeye's *Time to Sing and Other Poems*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36348/sijll.2024.v07i11.002>

| Received: 07.09.2024 | Accepted: 18.10.2024 | Published: 15.11.2024

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Abstract

Nigerian poetry has consistently responded to issues affecting the country and the people since the pioneer stage to contemporary time. In this instance, the burden of societal failings has propelled the level of social commitment and ideological postures identified in the poetry. However, recent experiences in the socio-political and economic landscape of the Nigerian society seems to have shaped the mentation and emotional condition of contemporary Nigerian poets in a way that calls for a psychological approach to the study of the poets' creative nuances. Therefore, adopting a descriptive research method and employing relevant psychoanalytic theoretical framework, the study explores how Lara Owoeye's collection, *Time to Sing and Other Poems*, represents psychosocial disorders and escapism. Through a close reading of the selected poems from the collection, it is discovered that Owoeye employs the resources of language and music like imagery, metaphor, parody, allusion, enjambment, rhyme, tone and other literary devices vis-à-vis the motif of a distressed singer to convey her psychosocial condition. The study also shows that the psychosocial disorders represented in the collection are triggered by memories of bad leadership and harsh socio-economic conditions. In this instance, the poet finds an escape into the world of imagination and emotional recovery through poetic expression. This way, Owoeye's poetry does not only reflect the cultural, historical, and social contexts of the Nigerian society but also offers an understanding of the complex interplay between psychosocial disorders and poetry as an escape mechanism.

Keywords: Psychosocial disorders, escapism, Nigerian poetry, psychoanalysis.

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INTRODUCTION

Over time, Nigerian poetry has consistently focused on issues affecting the nation. In this instance studies revealed that Nigerian poetry have been perceived as poetry of social commitment and ideological responses to colonialism vis-à-vis neo-colonialism. Annotating the vision and history of the poetry, Gloria Emezue observes that the poetry is "furnished by poverty and political instability resultant from the black man's betrayal of motherland" and "self-inflicted reversals" (38, 40). In this regard, some scholars contend that the poetic ingenuity noticed in Nigerian poetry was born out of "intellectual Marxist combative struggle against the agents of reversed colonialism (neo-colonialism)" (Fashina, 154) vis-à-vis "the plight of the masses" (Dasylya and Jegede, 133) under postcolonial hegemony, while some others consider the posture of the Nigerian poets as typical of the "civil action" (Okunoye, 66) attending the failure of successive Nigerian leaders. Uzoechi Nwagbara buttresses that the poetry has been "a medium of engagement, decrying colonialism, cultural

imperialism, socio-economic oppression and political tyranny" (17).

From these opinions, it is established that there have been attempts by Nigerian poets to root their poetry in the realities and immediate experiences of the country, thereby attesting to the level of the poets' social commitment across various periods in its development of the poetry. This possibly provides reasons for Omolara Kikelomo Owoeye's decisive thought that "the themes of most of these poems (Nigerian poems) are usually home-based (72). However, recent experiences in the socio-political and economic conditions of the Nigerian society seems to have influenced the mentation and emotional state of contemporary Nigerian poets in a way that calls for a psychological approach to the study of the poets' creative nuances. This approach is so considered since the society itself trudges under all sorts of unfavourable socio-economic and political conditions capable of influencing the people's mental health.

In a land characterised by poverty, social injustice, uneven distribution of wealth, collapsed infrastructure, environmental degradation, failed capacity building, apathetic leadership system, ethnic marginalization, corruption, banditry, kidnapping, terrorism and senseless killing; sanity and societal decorum are sure to take a vacation. Under this condition, the people are disillusioned and emotionally troubled by the incessant socio-economic and political conditions of the current Nigerian state. While some retire to fate dying in silence, some take to the power of guns and explosives; some engage in the battle of the mind and pen; some threaten succession; some go on self-exile and some devise a political means to keep themselves perpetually in the corridors of power and siphon the commonwealth of the nation. These reactionary postures seem to cut across all aspects of the people's lives, including Literature. Thus, in furtherance of the social commitment of the contemporary Nigerian poets, it appears the poets do not only observe, mirror and interrogate the socio-political and economic realities of the society but also share in the burden of traumatic imports. Hence, these emotional disturbances seem to have found expression in the works of contemporary Nigerian poets. In this respect, this study explores how Lara Owoeye's *Time to Sing and Other Poems* represents psychosocial disorders and escapism, offering insights into the Nigerian experience through a psychoanalytic reading of the collection.

CONCEPTUALIZING PSYCHOSOCIAL DISORDER IN POETRY

From the perspective of clinical psychology, Resurrecta Agu and colleagues have described psychosocial disorder as "a mental illness induced by life experiences, stress, as well as maladaptive cognitive and behavioural processes" (1). This definition presupposes that psychosocial disorder is a state of emotional imbalance triggered by the dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimension of a person. Olaniyan and Owoeye have clarified in a similar study that "this relationship is an indication that social factors can influence mental health and that.. a state of stable mental condition surfaces when a psychologically harmonious relationship exists between both dimensions" (15). It is also from this understanding that Ntu Nkomo describes this relationship as "social and psychological dysfunctions which affect the mental health condition of humans" (4305). In essence, it is inferred that social conditions have the tendency to influence mental health, thereby resulting in disturbances, emotional stress, or emotional upset.

In specific terms, Nkomo asserts that psychosocial disorders can manifest "in three vital components of individuals' well-being which are mental, emotional, and social component". He provides an illustration of this by saying that the mental aspect is related to a person's "thinking portion," which touches on "one's beliefs and values." The social component covers

the "relationship part of the mental health," whereas the emotional component refers to the "feeling part of psychosocial health," which includes how a person feels and responds to experiences (4305).

Different psychoanalytical schools of thought have advanced reasons for this condition. Behaviourists like Sigmund Freud, Eric Erikson, Alfred Adler and others have identified biological factors expressive in certain instinctual drives and human developmental stages as responsible for psychosocial disorder while dynamists in the likes of Carl Jung and Erich Fromm see it as a condition influenced by a combined result of both biological and sociological factors. According to Schultz and Schultz, the dynamists in this category "challenge Freud's focus on sex and aggression as major motivating forces". They "believe we are shaped more by social experiences than by sexual ones" (80).

For instance, while Freud has argued that 'anxiety' as a form of neurotic condition is a product of "the frustration or incomplete discharge of the sexual orgasm", dynamists like Fromm posit that anxiety grows "out of the need for closeness and approval and the need for independence" – factors that are elements of social interactions (Asch 91, 99). The position of the dynamists, in this instance, aligns with the social psychologists' concern on how individuals affect and are affected by other people and their social and physical environments. In this direction, they explore psychological science to provide understanding on "how we perceive ourselves in relation to the rest of the world and how this perception affects our choices, behaviours and beliefs" (Baron *et al.*, 6).

In line with the shared opinions of the dynamists, Xue Yang and others also buttress that "socio-political circumstances, including security, poverty, national wealth, income inequality, social integration and political conflicts, determine population health" (1). In other words, unsuitable socio-political condition may also constitute adversity to the psychosocial well-being of the people. Therefore, every related mental or behavioural attitude conditioned by the socio-political and economic realities of the society vis-à-vis instinctual catalytic tendencies can be considered a psychosocial disorder.

According to Nkomo, "psychosocial disorders are characterized by disorders that affect one's mental health, emotional wellbeing, social and occupational functioning". Putting Nigeria in perspective, Nkomo asserts that "the prevalence of these disorders include depression, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, substance use disorder, personality disorder and autism spectrum disorders have rapidly increase over the past years in Nigeria with its negative impact on the socioeconomic status, psychological well-being; peaceful coexistence and mental health of the entire society" (1).

Thus, the concept of psychosocial disorder encompasses the representations of such mental, emotional, or behavioral conditions induced by the socio-political and economic realities of the environment and which have found expression in Lara Owoeye's *Time to Sing and Other Poems*.

In its literary application to poetry, psychosocial disorders can be interpreted as such association of disorders that find expressions in poets' mood, thoughts, and behaviour as a result of socio-political and economic adversities. From this conceptualisation of psychosocial disorder, therefore, it is perceived that poetry as a medium of expression of emotion and thoughts has the tendency to symptomatically reveal the psychosocial well-being of Nigerian poets in relations to their societal realities.

ESCAPISM IN POETRY

Escapism has been described as "the concrete desire to dive into the ocean of imaginative entertainment instead of dealing with the stress, boredom and daily trials of worldly affairs" (Scribd, 1). In relation to this description, John Longeway also elucidates that escapist behaviour is "a sort of defensive mechanism, whose primary purpose is to deter negative, unwanted thoughts or emotions e.g., guilt, anxiety, powerlessness or any other state idiosyncratically causing discomfort". A study by Barbara and Musil on the scope of escapism reveals that the concept is a phenomenon that cuts across various fields of human endeavour: sociology, psychology, and philosophy, as well as arts, giving its appearance in literature (280). Swati Chauhan buttresses that "escapist does not feel at ease in the world around him". Hence, "he tries to escape by unrealistic imaginative activity" (4). From its broad relevance, escapism has been perceived as a concept with both negative and positive implications. However, in this study, it is conceived as a phenomenon for literary application, leveraging on Erich Fromm's idea on socio-economic determinism of human behaviour.

A social psychologist and a neo-Freudian, Fromm emphasises the influence of the social world on man's personality formation and desire to escape freedom. He provides a foundation for this belief through a unique blend of Freud's biological determinism and Marx's socio-economic determinism of human behaviour and adds to this mix of two deterministic systems the idea of "freedom". This way, he is renowned "for developing the concept that freedom was a fundamental part of human nature" (Cherry). Freedom within this philosophical mix suggests free will: the ability to exercise liberty and make choices independently.

In his explanation on the human tendency to escape freedom under the modern day capitalist socio-economic reality, Fromm expatiates that capitalism represents the individual as a "commodity, experiences

his life force as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions" (77-78). As a result of this "commodification" vis-à-vis the metaphor of "capitalism as deception", "many contemporary human beings are faced with feelings of isolation, alienation, insecurity and anxiety in their daily life and those who cannot stand these feelings are trying to escape from the freedom which promotes the feelings" (Futoshi Kobayashi 41). Mika Pekkola asserts that "the individual, struggling under the burden of freedom, has in principle (some) possible ways to deal with the existential anxiety arising from the condition". This way, the individual can emotionally shift towards "authoritarianism, destructiveness or automata conformity" (70-97).

As avers by Asch, "society makes man increasingly unhappy". Under such circumstances, the individuals find "various ways of enduring it". For some "superior souls", like the poets, they psychologically shift towards "sublimation" as an escape mechanism. By this means, these individuals are "able to diminish the pressure of the instincts by conversing them into socially acceptable behavior". "Substitute gratifications" like drinking, love, religion or any other form of such behaviour, equally comfort some of these individuals (122). However, poets or writers find "comfort and happiness in their own created world of imagination where they favored escape from the brutal realities of life" (scribd 7).

ANALYSIS OF LARA OWOEYE'S *TIME TO SING AND OTHER POEMS*

Lara Owoeye's *Time to Sing and Other Poems* (2018) featured about two decades into democratic governance in Nigeria to express some of the poets' troubling experiences in the era of civil rule. At this period regarded as the Nigeria's Fourth Republic by political scientists, John Egbe observes that "Nigeria has not improved beyond what existed in the military era". Corroborating this observation, he explains that "leadership in the Nigerian Fourth Republic is not people oriented as their ascension to power is through unethical means" under a non-inclusive federal system (31). As a result of the disorientation in the leadership, Oluwafemi Mimiko observes that "government becomes very far from the people, largely irrelevant to their lives, and is rarely seen as a useful tool for the generation of public good". He laments that, under this condition within the decades of the Fourth Republic, "the Nigerian state has degenerated to the point where it is unable to provide minimal social security for its vulnerable population" (48-49).

This reality in the Nigerian democratic system seems to have gross effects on both the citizens' attitude to the leadership and the socio-economic condition of the country. It is from the above observations that attempt is made to examine the representations of psychosocial disorder and escapism in Owoeye's *Time to Sing and*

Other Poems, focusing on the poetic persona's remembered distressing experiences under the socio-political and economic condition described above and the catalytic import of same on her psychosocial well-being. Through a psychoanalytic interpretation, attempt is made to explore the collections as the poets' dream texts thereby identifying such symptomatic elements, particularly the poetic persona's resources of language, tone and motif, which convey the persona's emotional disturbances and escape instinct.

The expression, "Time to Sing", in Owoye's poetry title figuratively signifies the poet's attempt to break silence over her distressing memories since the country's transition to democratic rule in 1999. According to her, she has experienced "different seasons in societal life attested to by the manifestation of eras of good governance, epochs of mismanagement, embezzlement, bad governance and tyranny" (iv). The disturbing memories of such ignoble seasons under bad leadership seem to have been repressed in the poet's unconscious mind that poetry now becomes an "escape-hatch or safety-valve" through which her repressed psychosocial stress "seek an outlet into the conscious mind" (Barry 99). Attesting to the autism created by the country's socio-political reality on the poet's emotional responses, Olajide, in a foreword to the collection, metaphorically likens the poet's song to a "brooding seething with autistic anger of a boiling pot, straining to say all that has been processed (in the unconscious mind)" (vi). Some of the demeanours that are symptomatic to the persona's anger and other related psychosocial disorders can be felt in the statements, resources of language, emotion and tone of the persona in this literary "manifest content" of the poet's dream, *Time to Sing and Other Poems* (Fancher 9).

The cluster of poems that feature under "Doomsword for the Oppressor", the first movement in the collection, expresses the persona's experience and emotion about political leaders and the failures of the democratic system in her Nigerian home country. The title of this movement is metaphorically suggestive of the persona's emotional burden as an individual in vitriol against oppressive and corrupt leaders. Her declaration of the "Doomsword" on the oppressors set the tone for the psychosocial attitude of a personality who, overwhelmed by the "feeling of powerlessness and isolation", has chosen "destructiveness" as an "escape mechanism" from the grip of such despotic leaders that form the object of her anxiety (Pekkola 75).

In "What's Up?", the persona interrogates the position of leadership in a democratic society like Nigeria. In a democratic setting, leaders are expected to be close to their people and make life meaningful to them through the act of good governance and quality leadership. To drive home this reality, the persona engages the "sky" as well as its benevolent nature to mankind as an "Harbinger of the day/(and) Symbol of

the creator's love" as a metaphor for the ideal nature of leadership in a society (1). The sky is portrayed as the pedestal, Olympian height and lofty space leaders are expected to occupy as an entity trusted with authority to the benefit of others. Unfortunately, the leaders are found to have ironically occupied the space to dominate the people rather than being benevolent to them. Here, the persona's memory of the leaders is that of individuals conversely towering themselves above their subjects and living large on the country's economic resources. Using the "sky" as a trope to measure the socio-economic margin between the leaders and the led, she perceives the leaders as cruel, greedy, selfish and corrupt. The persona foresees their imminent fall in a tone that is emblematic of a mind seeking revenge and in dire need of freedom, hence her statement is coloured with resentment:

The leader is up
High in the sky
Towering above the led
Swallowing his existence
Solely soaring.

Ready for a crash...
A crash made gory
With the rotten helmet
Of deceit and graft
A crash that will
Liberate the led
And clear his vision
Ready now to
Soar in the sky. (2-3)

The persona's psychosocial disposition in the above extract seems to justify Fromm's assertion that "violence and cruelty were the results of isolation, insecurity, and anxiety which are by-products of the renaissance and modern capitalism" (Kobayashi 40-41). This can be inferred from the persona's anxiousness for the brutal end of the irresponsible leaders.

In "My Leader Is A Greater Thug Than Yours", the persona provides the "curriculum vitae" of the crop of leaders in the modern democratic Nigerian state. They are the types who imbibe vote buying, thuggery, political assassination, desecration of the seat of authority, Shintoism, godfatherism, imposition and violence as political culture towards securing and sustaining their positions in the "hallowed corridors of power". The persona's portrayal and comparison of the capacities of these leaders are reddened with poignant sarcasms, as noticed in the title in which it appears the persona ironically takes delight in her leader being a "greater thug" than others in the demented political circle.

Apart from the persona's stylistic recourse to enjambment in creating a thought flow which arouses our anticipation of what becomes of the country and its people under this kind of perverse leadership experience, the persona's sarcastic tone in the poem is suggestive of

a mind that has been emotionally conditioned to derision and blatant hopelessness:

A curriculum vitae
Of brigandage and thuggery
Scores higher marks
And leads to greater ranks
In the political institution
Where votes are snatched, not cast

To pay for votes is less acuity
My leader is smarter than that
He gets without payment
Your leader pays and may not get?
If my leader ever pays, nothing escapes
If the vote does, the life does not.

He is the king of thugs
A host of thugs bow unto him
Yours kills by the hundreds
My kills by the thousands
Yours kills only by proxy
Mine kills directly...

With thuggery they turn
The future bleak
A cloud of unseen woes lieth yonder
Needing no soothsayer
Nor horoscope to predict
Seeds of thuggery
Good trees will never bear
Though hailed by all. (6-8)

In the last stanza of the above poem, the persona outrightly tells of the bleak future the country has been plunged into through the corrupt and violent practices of the leaders. In another poem, "One Bowl, Four Horns", the persona metaphorically recounts her memory of the leaders' novel attitude to power. In a frank tone, the persona paints a picture of the magnitude of power tussle and unabated greed that have characterised the leaders' behaviour in the struggle for the country's economic resource. She illustrates this by borrowing from a Yoruba proverb of the people of Western Nigeria which states that two rams cannot drink from the same bowl at the same time; they will lock horns. While the "bowl" and the "cake" as used in the persona's dream text to represent the country and its resources, the "horns" depict the frenzy and ruthlessness with which the leaders contend for the possession of the resources at the expense of the masses. In this state, the persona discerns that the acceptable norm of "First come first served" has been smartly replaced with the "Survival of the fittest" in the leaders' quest for power (stanza 3, lines 2-4). The introductory comment by Toyin Falola in Femi Osofisan's *The Muse of Anomy*, seems to provide, more explicitly, the reason behind this novel attitude among the leaders when he claims that "people seek power to add to the conditions of anomy, while using that power to accumulate resources and live in style and grandiosity" (xxxvii). The histrionic and frank tone with

which the persona portrays this unethical leadership trait is suggestive of her agitation:

One bowl, one cup
Two connoisseurs
Locking horns
So goes the old saying
I must drink, you should wait
Nay, you must wait, I should drink
For there is one basin
Hence the locking horns

For as we have one basin,
One cake, albeit national
We both tangle
And see who wins the struggle
Of our two horns
For the one cake
In the one basin.
Since I will not wait
In this battle
Of one bowl. (11-12)

In the same way, the persona's tone in "Whitewashed Sepulchre" reveals her vexation against the memory of such leaders' who put up deceptive appearances before the people. In a bitter and biting tone, she figuratively compares them to a "Whitewashed sepulchre" with "outward beauty" and "internal rot". To the persona, the leaders are fake who parade themselves as important personnel when they are utterly "evil shepherd" and "Chaperon of wickedness" in disguise (Stanza 4, lines 1-4). The persona's biting tone is more amplified in her diction in this poem. Borrowing from the Yoruba people's abusive lexicons, she not only calls them names but also gives their kind of leadership such description as "deception in display". We can feel the flow of her vexation in the enjambed lines of the poem:

Shrouded in *agbada*
Flowing *abanriga*
Real *agbaya*
Horror as man

Top in graft
Pilot of vice
Expert in perfidy
Gethsemane betrayal

Deception in display
Such is leadership
A new definition
Amended criteria
Though it will not last. (32-33)

While the persona stresses the ephemerality of the leaders' deceptive identity in the above lines, in "Kapri Karma" and "Tick Tock" she interrogates the volatility of human nature and the role of time as the ultimate end to the leaders' excesses. Playing on the coinage "Kapri Karma" in the first poem, she accentuates the imminent rewards that await every man's exploits.

The persona portrays karma as a residual force from past lives that must take its toll on every evil perpetrated by man. She emphasizes the inevitability of karma by drawing references from cultural allusion, historical allusion, biblical allusion, and archaeological allusion.

Going by the memories garnered by the persona from this array of allusive evidence, karma is not capricious: it is an irresistible retributive force. The refrain “Whatsoever a man sows he will reap” that dots the beginning of each stanza of this poem vis-à-vis the persona’s vindictive tone in the last depicts her frustration and her determined quest for vengeance against bad leadership:

Whatsoever a man sows he will reap
That is logical
Forthright fruits
Will not pop out
Of seeds of corruption
Flowing juice of insecurity
And poverty confirm.

Whatsoever a man sows he will reap
That is historical
Hitler’s ignominious end candidly
Scream to verify.

Is Karma capricious?
Who says Capri Karma thence?
Let her be bound and imprisoned
Though you do so
It will become seedy
And whatsoever a man sows
The same he shall reap. (13 – 15)

Relatedly, in “Tick Tock”, time becomes for the persona an ultimate recorder that brings back the memories of the harsh economic condition that the people are being subjected to under wasteful leaders. The passage of time, in this instance, does not only record the persona’s unsuitable memories but also the attending worries and insomnia. In the speedy tickling of time, she also foresees the looming end awaiting bad leadership after the order of karma. While the persona raises her concerns in a pathetic tone suggestive of her distress, the rhythmic lines and enjambment in which the concerns are expressed transcend musicality to reveal the persona’s irritability, distress and restlessness towards seeing the retributive end of the bad leaders and the freedom of her people from the shackles of their oppression:

Time is tickling
Sleep is missing
Head is aching
Others are snoring
Night is moving

Babies are crying
Men are working
Women are toiling

But pocket is empty
And God is watching

Month is ending
Workers are waiting
Wages are piling
Leaders are spending

Judgement is loading
Karma is waiting
Keys of freedom are rattling
Masses are gloating
And I’m singing
Whistling in victory. (19-20)

Following Fromm’s theory on social economic determinism of human behaviour, the persona’s disturbing memories, allusions and tone vis-à-vis her psychosocial stress in “Kapri Karma” and “Tick Tock” exemplify that of an individual “struggling under the burden of freedom” and who, under this burden, has to devise “ways to deal with the existential anxiety arising from (the) insecure conditions”: in this case, such conditions are represented by the persona’s oppressive socio-political and economic realities (Pekkola 70). By her psychosocial disposition in the poems, therefore, the persona apparently exhibits “destructiveness” as a “character syndrome” or a mechanism of moving against every impediment to her survival (Asch, 58). The emotional disposition and tone of the persona in some of the poems that feature in the second movement of the collection, “Lamentation of the Muse”, generally convey the persona’s grief about the memories of the social-political and economic decadence the country and its people have been plunged into by misrule.

In “Musing”, the persona’s tone oscillates between the emotion of distress and pity. Her mind and thoughts in this poem wonder on the harsh economic condition and issues of insecurity indicated by “price hikes” in virtually every commodity and the disorderliness that have characterised the citizens’ daily social existence as exemplified in sad news across the globe, bomb blast and kidnapping. These memories combine to conjure the muse that inspired the persona’s dream text and trigger the psychosocial condition reflective in her diction, tone and emotion. Her experiences metaphorically awaken the “Milton” and “Don”, two giant English poets renowned for their devotion to humanism:

Musing of the mind
Meditations of the time
For everything so hiked
Makes the mind to pine.

The nation now my muse
Euterpe I need not invoke
Price hikes propel my heart
Life losses trigger my pen.

Kidnaps propelled my hand's rebirth
 Ruminations on my environ
 Brought out the Milton
 Together with the Don
 Sleeping so perfectly inside. (25 – 26)

In the above lines, it is suggestive that the persona's repressed memories were awakened by those other poets referred in such a way that the persona confronts us with her psychosocial disturbances through her distressed tone. Relatedly, her memories of the untold economic hardship that engulfs the nation under bad democratic leadership is brought to consciousness in "Water and Money", another poem in the second movement in which the persona borrows from a number of literary allusions, metaphors and innuendos to illustrate the worrying picture of how the people are impoverished amidst the wealth of the nation. The various allusions, metaphors and innuendos do not only provide understanding for the "manifest content" of the persona's dream text, but also reveal the emotional state of the persona's unconscious mind as dictated by the socio-political and economic realities of her environment. In Freudian Psychoanalytical term, these tropes can be taken as a psychic "displacement": a dream work mechanism which indicates an attempt by the persona to represent her experiences with other events that are related or associated with it in literary history in a way that enables us to understand the memories and fears repressed in the persona's unconscious mind (Barry 98).

Parodying Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous line "Water, water everywhere/And none to drink" in "The Ancient Mariner", the persona depicts how difficult it is for the masses to get money for survival or even get paid for work done despite the "news of billions of naira" being stolen or misappropriated by their leaders. The people live amidst abundant national wealth, yet they are poor. The hopelessness in "Waiting for salary (to be paid) at the end of the month" is so lamentable that the persona perceives it like the mirage of "Waiting for Godot" (Stanza 1, lines 11 and 12). Also, the persona's allusion to George Orwell's dystopia novel, "Nineteen Eighty-Four" (Stanza 2, lines 9 and 10) is indicative of her emotional worry about the state of wretchedness, dehumanisation and anomy that might result from the leaders' unabated misdemeanour as experienced in Orwell's novel:

Water, water everywhere
 And none to drink
 Coleridge thinks.
 News of billions of naira
 Deafen the ear
 All over Nigeria.
 Billions from stolen loot
 Billions from fuel price increase
 Money, money everywhere, and none to
 spend...

The parliament is like the field for
 A *Play of Giants*
 The leader has returned from
 A *Voyage Around the World*
 From where he's been *Holding Talks*
 And acting so awkwardly that
 Some people are thinking
Our Husband Has Gone Mad again
 Hope he doesn't return us to
Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Other events of the year
 May be affected by the trend
 Hope Independence Day Celebrations
 Will not turn to
 A *Dance of the Forests*
 Propelled by *Kongi's Harvest*
 From the look of things
 This year there may not be
 A *Christmas Carol*
 Except there are *Changes*
 In all the scenes
 From this
 Theatre of the Absurd. (34-35)

In the above stanza, it is evident that the reminiscent and dejected tone with which the persona calls up memories of the terrible state of economic hardship reveal her emotional dejection and loss of hope in the redemption of the country. Moreover, in "This Country Makes Me Sick", the subsequent poem in the second movement, the persona's psychosocial distress is heightened by the unpleasant social atmosphere of the home country. The atmosphere throws her into a terrible plague and emotional distress that she finds difficult to fathom and diagnose. Apparently from the title of the poem and the account of her memories in the stanzas, she is nauseated by the absence of governance, disorderliness and lack of decorum metaphorically depicted by the "gory news", the "stench of human waste" and the "potholes" on the highway that she psychologically battles with. The persona's characteristically sombre tone in this poem is suggestive of her dismay, dejection, nervousness and lassitude:

Lingering fever pummelled my shape
 Protracted for weeks
 And taking its toll
 Upon my erstwhile portly frame.
 Gory news it was
 That pounded my head
 Ache that medicine cannot cure
 A rueful blend
 Of body and soul sickness.

My ride through town was bedevilled;
 From the stench of human waste
 That assailed my nostrils on the highway
 To the potholes that drive me
 As I maneuvered my way home
 Thumping in my heart

Ache in my head
 I grope desperately
 For peace
 Some order, some neatness
 A moment of quiet
 Wishing vainly for a relief
 From this throbbing in the head
 This ache in the heart,
 Comes the discovery
 It is this country
 That makes me sick. (30-31)

From the psychoanalytical interpretation of Lara Owoeye's poetry, it is observed that the persona's diction, tonal disposition and emotions are symptomatic to such psychosocial demeanours displayed by the persona which are largely triggered by the burden of her memories of bad leadership in the home country and the instinctual desire for freedom. Bringing these disturbing memories into conscious mind and confronting us with her psychosocial temperaments, the persona equally seems to find emotional relief and escape in poetic melodies going by her evocative and resolute tone in "Time to Sing", the eponymous poem of the collection. The persona's psychological reminiscence and purgation in this eponymous poem seem to align with a patient's "free association" experience under Freudian therapeutic diagnosis in which "repressed fears and conflicts which are causing the problems (i.e. psychological disturbances) are brought into the conscious mind and openly faced, rather than remaining 'buried' in the unconscious" (Barry, 96). In this instance, poetry has not only become for the persona a kind of "catharsis of the residues of painful experiences", but also an escape mechanism, a kind of emotional mechanism that help the persona deal with memories of unsuitable socio-political conditions and the psychosocial disturbances arising from same. "Time to Sing", therefore, offers the troubled persona an elixir and an escape into the literary world of poetry:

Words rush forth
 From the deepest recesses of the heart
 Bringing with it froth
 Though hot, like coals from the hearth

Songs are melodying
 Right in my mind
 Coming as Monody
 Bringing its own rhyme

Scenes from the home rubbles
 Resounding in the heart like ripples
 Acts from Diaspora turn to data
 Navigating the recesses of my oblongata

Turning into words
 Into songs, words, rhyme
 The word is a weapon
 Weapon for victory
 Weapon so powerful

For wordsmithing is my art
 The pen is my anvil
 My world is the ore
 My experience is the mine. (21-22)

It is obvious from the above extract, and particularly, in "Musing" that, while the persona brings her psychosocial stresses to fore through her tones and relevant tropes, her adaptation of the motif of a distressed singer and a classical poet enables her to secure her escape into the world of poetic imagination and emotional recovery. This justifies Chauchan's observation that when it becomes impossible for poets to live amongst "such harsh social conditions, political and economic conditions", they dream of "a beautiful world of love, beauty, peace, freedom and pleasure (Chauhan 53) for escape. Apart from the poetic allusions, metaphors, proverbs and other resources of language which project this motif, the persona is also inspired by other classical poets like John Milton and John Donne whose poetry tilt towards existential concerns.

CONCLUSION

This study explores how Lara Owoeye's poetry represents psychosocial disorders and escapism, offering insights into the Nigerian socio-political experience and its psychological imports on Nigerian poets and other citizens. Through a close reading and psychoanalytic interpretation of the collection, this research reveals how Owoeye employs relevant resources of language and music like imagery, metaphor, parody, allusion, enjambment, rhyme, tone and other literary devices vis-à-vis adopting the motif of a distressed singer to convey her psychosocial condition. The study also identifies such emotional instincts, like anger, vitriol, anxiety, worry, revenge, dejection, plague, resentment, vexation, agitation, derision, nausea, blatant hopelessness, irritability, distress, restlessness, pity, dismay, nervousness and lassitude, as symptomatic to the poet's state of psychosocial disorder which are triggered by memories of bad leadership and harsh socio-economic condition. In this instance, the poet finds an escape into the world of imagination and emotional recovery through poetic expression. In conclusion, Owoeye's poetry not only reflects the cultural, historical, and social contexts of the Nigerian society but also offers an understanding of the complex interplay between psychosocial disorders and poetry as an escape mechanism.

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