

**POETRY AS A MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: EXAMPLES FROM  
ADEBAYO LAMIKANRA'S *HEART SOUNDS* AND MUSA IDRIS  
OKPANACHI'S *MUSIC OF THE DEAD***

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**BENIN CITY**

**APRIL, 2024**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
LITERATURE, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN IN PARTIAL  
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**CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this project entitled; “Poetry as a Medium for Social Change: Examples from Adebayo Lamikanra’s *Heart Sounds* and Musa Idris Okpanachi’s *Music of The Dead*” was carried out by **Matilda Bola (Miss) ART1900417** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

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**DR. BELLO IDAEVOR**  
**(Project Supervisor)**

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project first to God for giving me the knowledge and endurance to start and complete this work. This work is also dedicated to all my loved ones who have being a huge support to the success of this work. And lastly, this is to everyone out there who have gone through several terrible experiences due to the poor state of our country. All is not lost, the change we desire will soon become our reality.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study explores how poetry can be used to inspire societal change, using Adebayo Lamikanra's Heart Sounds and Musa Idris Okpanachi's Music of the Dead as sources of inspiration. The study examines how poets use language and poetic devices to subvert social conventions, elicit thoughts and motivate actions through an analysis of several poems. By exploring the themes of social injustice, political corruption and oppression presented in these poems, we may reveal poetry's innate ability to raise consciousness and spark social justice movement. The study encourages readers to appreciate poetry as not only an art form but also a potent tool for effecting positive societal change.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which poetry can be used as a medium for social change, how poetry can be used to actively promote the end of sociopolitical injustice and corruption in Nigeria by exploring some selected poems from Adebayo Lamikanra's and Musa Idris Okpanachi.

#### 1.1 Scope of Study

The research focuses on some of the poems of Lamikanra's *Heart sounds* and Okpanachi's *Music of the Dead* and how they use their poems to create awareness on the social dislocations as reflected on the poems studied.

#### 1.2 Background of Poets

The poets under concern in this study are Adebayo Lamikanra and Musa Idris Okpanachi. A brief information about them follows

According to a biographical note in Lamikanra's *All in the Family*, Adebayo Lamikanra was born in 1949. He is an alumnus of Igbobi College, Yaba, University of Ife- B.Pharm, and the University of Manchester – PhD. He became a Graduate Assistant in the University of Ife (Now, Obafemi Awolowo University) in 1972, and a Professor in same

university in 1988. Books written by him include *Essential Microbiology*, now in the third edition. *Lean Years* (poetry), *Wake Me Up* (2000), *Under the Almond Tree* (collection of essays), *A Round Half Dozen* (short stories), *Heart Sounds* (poetry), *Igbobi Boy* (A biography) and he co-authored *From Classroom to Boardroom and Beyond* with Abiodun Lamikanra. He is a regular contributor to the Op-ed page of The Guardian Newspaper since 1990. Adebayo Lamikanra sponsors the Ife Poetry Festival, now Poetry House Party, which is held every year since 1998. Lamikanra enjoys playing sports – He played cricket at Igbobi and Ife and He loves reading and of course, writing.

According to a biographical note in Okpanachi's *Music of the Dead*, Musa Idris Okpanachi, an Associate Professor of English at Federal University in Dutse, Jigawa state, is the author of three poetry collections: *The Eaters of the Living* (2007), *From the Margins of Paradise* (2012), and *Music of the Dead* (2016). His poetry have been published in *Presence Africaine* (Paris), *Kunapipi* (Denmark), and the *Iraq Literary Review*. His poem "Silence of Time" was broadcast on the BBC's Arts and Africa series in 1995. His short stories have also appeared in the Malaysian journal *Gombak Review*. His first poetry collection, *The Eaters of the Living*, earned the 2008 Association of Nigerian Authors/Cadbury Prize for Poetry and was a finalist for the \$100,000 NLNG Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2009. His second collection, *From the Margin of Paradise* was shortlisted in the association Nigeria Authors Poetry Prize in 2013.

### **1.3 Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research method. Busetto et al. says “Qualitative research is defined as the study of the nature of phenomena, including their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear or the perspectives from which they can be perceived but excluding their range, frequency and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect.” (p. 1). It is concerned with spoken or textual evidence not numerical data. This research falls under the qualitative research method because it looks at textual materials to get evidence on the topic that is discussed. In the course of this research, content analysis would be used as the data would be validated using Marxist theory. Other sources consulted are textbooks, handbooks and the internet.

### **1.4 Theoretical Background**

The theoretical approach to this study is Marxism. This theory was propounded by Karl Marx(1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels. Marxism is concerned with putting a stop to the unending tension between social class by controlling the means of production in the society.

According to Emile Burns. Quote:

Marxism approaches the study of history in order to trace the natural laws which run through all history and for this purpose, it looks at not at individuals but at peoples. And when it looks at peoples (after the stage of

primitive society) it finds that there are different sections of the people, some pulling one way and some another, not as individuals but as classes.(p. 8)

This quote contains the Marxist perception on history, which emphasizes the role of socioeconomic forces and class struggle. Marxism views history as a series of conflicts between different social classes, rather than actions that are driven solely by the actions of individuals. Burn suggests that throughout history, various classes within societies have different interests and goals, leading to tensions and conflicts. “The Marxist approach to history sees the struggle between contending classes as the principal driving force in the development of human society. But along with the struggle of class goes also the growth of science of man’s power over nature, man’s power to produce the things he needs for life.” (p. 12)

Burns also posits that over time, the struggle between contending social class has been the number one driving force when it comes to the development of the human society. But even with this class struggles, humans have still been able to manipulate and shape the natural world for it’s needs.

Karl Marx says:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society comes into conflict with the existing relations of production or

with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begin an era of social revolution.  
(Ch. 32)

In the capitalist system, the struggle for freedom materialized through class conflict. Between the minority and the majority. The minority are also called the bourgeoisie. The ruling class. They are usually in charge or owners of production houses, exploiting the majority for their own personal profit. While the majority is the proletariat, also known as the working class. They slave their lives away under the manipulation and control of the bourgeoisie.

Emile Burns. Quotes:

... most ideas, especially those connected with the organization of society are class ideas , the ideas of the dominant class in the society, which imposes them on the rest of the society through it's ownership of the machinery of propaganda, it's control of education and its power to punish contrary ideas through the law courts, through dismissals and similar measures.(p. 14)

Christian Fuchs. Quote;“He points out that his work is not just an analysis of how capitalism works and of its objective contradictions, but also a revolutionary theory that

sides with the interests of the working class and wants to provide intellectual means of class struggle against capitalism.” (p. 7). Marx is concerned with how the proletariats can break away from the chokehold capitalism has on them. This theory sides with the working class, instead of them to be alienated from wealth, Marx argues that they should be allowed to own a significant amount of wealth.

Marxism believes that since capitalism oppresses and exploits the proletariats, the capitalist system will ultimately lead to working class revolution. An end of capitalism will bring about socialism, a system where all forms of production will be owned and controlled by the society as a whole. The sole aim of production in a socialist system will no longer be for private profit but for satisfying human needs.

This study adopts a Marxist approach to uncover, criticize and challenge the power dynamics of our political and economical sectors in Nigeria present in the texts for this study in order to attain social change.

### **1.5 Review of Literature**

This study has been explored by scholars in various fields. Their main goal is to explore the style of the poets, how they use their work to shed light on societal challenges and the effects their poem has on encouraging social development.

“The black lives matter movement has sparked a powerful resurgence of poetic expression, as poets of all backgrounds use their words to shed light on the racial

injustice in America.” Napilay, Joshua. (The Black Lives Matter...) this writer examines the issue of racial discrimination and the works of various poets that used their words to support the fight against racism in America. Some of their works explores the lived experiences of the black Americans including “police brutality, mass incarceration, housing discrimination and economic inequality”. Napilay posits that even though one cannot really measure the impact of these poets works, it is clear that their words have powerful effect on the minds of the readers. “For instance, Claudia Rankine’s “Citizen: An American Lyric” became a bestseller after its release and received widespread acclaim for exploring race and identity in America. The book was even adopted as a required text in some college courses, further amplifying its message to broader audience. Napilay.” (The Black Lives Matter...).

Terkaa and Francis have discussed the use of poetic approaches in implementing school curriculum for social change in Nigeria, with a focus on the poetry of Oswald MbuyiseniMtshali and Niyi Osundare. Terkaa and Francis concerns themselves with how secondary school students can be taught poetic approach to social changes to avoid dogmatic acceptance of issues.

The question for implementation of school curriculum to meet contemporary societal challenges has called for a holistic approach and didactic effort from all academic endeavor. Poetic approaches are one of the strategies that have been on the forefront adopted by scholars to

address issues that will make school curriculum relevant to societal development. (P. 71).

Terka and Francis posit that for the society to achieve societal development, secondary schools students must be taught the workings of the society through literature in the curriculum. It can be through any of the major genres: prose, poetry and drama. By understanding the harsh reality of life in the society, the students are more liable to make decisions without putting their selfish interests into consideration.

Furthermore, Ifejirika, Echezona E., observes that a writer is the eye, ears and mouth of the people in a society who acts as the “uncommissioned town crier” who awakes the consciousness of the people through his/her works to be aware and resist against several cases of greed, injustice, poverty, oppression and many other ills they would have still been ignorant about. He believes, it should be in the mind of any literary writer to assist in the task of educating, re-informing, re-directing and regenerating the minds of his people, by awaking their usually dull and complacent conscience for a positive action.

Just like most study under this topic goes, Ifejirika examines some of Ezenwa Ohaeto’s poems, and through the rigorous study of these poems, he comes to the conclusion that most poets uses their works to portray the negative aspect of life in the society with the intent of condemning them and thereby directly or indirectly recommending the possible aspects. He says: “In the poem, the poet’s diction indicates the diverse ways Nigerians of all ages, places and walks of life undergo suffering and hardship. The words that show

the suffering include: moaning, yawning, yokes, buries, bitterness, weeps, weary, screams and disasters.” (p. 162).

Overall, these studies demonstrate the potential of poetry as a medium for social change, highlighting the role of poetry in reflecting and critiquing social and political issues and inspiring change.

### **1.6 Thesis Statement**

This study examines the social dislocations as reflected in the poems studied; injustice, corruption and oppression and how Lamikanra and Okpanachi use these poems to create awareness of these problems. The study also provides possible resolutions to these issues in order to achieve societal change.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ELUCIDATION OF SOCIAL ISSUES

#### 2.0 Introduction

Rebecca M. Kulik defines social issues as “... a state of affairs that negatively affects the personal or social lives of individuals or the well-being of communities or larger groups within a society and about which there is usually public disagreement as to its nature, causes or solution.” Britannica. These issues may have a broad impact on individuals, communities, and institutions, and can be rooted in social, economic, political, or cultural factors. According to S. Asim, no problem can be solved unless it is identified properly. So for us to even begin the journey of changing our society, we must bring to light these problems we wish to eradicate. Some of the common societal issues we seek to put a stop to in Nigeria includes poverty, inequality, oppression, injustice, discrimination, environmental degradation, political corruption, and access to healthcare and education.

An important aspect of societal issues is that they are like a chain. One untreated problem can result in several others arising. For example, political corruption can be seen as the root of the majority of the problems in our society including poverty, injustice, terrorism and oppression. Similarly, continuous problems of unemployment can lead to poverty, robbery, kidnapping and theft. So, it is a chain of event where one problem yields another. Until the root problem is eliminated, the society will continue to struggle. Addressing

societal issues often requires a combination of policy changes, social interventions, public awareness campaigns, and community-based initiatives. It also requires an understanding of the root causes of these issues, as well as a commitment to addressing structural and systemic barriers to equality and justice.

As interesting as it would have been to cover all the social dislocations in Nigeria, time limitation will not allow. So, our focus will be mainly on injustice, corruption and oppression, and we are going to examine these vices using some poems from “Heart Sounds” and “Music of the Dead”.

## **2.1. Social Injustice**

Case studies:

*Heart Sounds* “Strike ‘94” and “Change of Guard.”

*Music of the Dead* “Scoundrels” and “New Set.”

According to Nwokike et al, “social injustice encompasses the unjust and inequitable allocation of advantages and disadvantages that emerges from the interactions and collaborations within a society. It pertains to situations where certain groups or individuals experience unfair treatment, discrimination, or disadvantage while others enjoy disproportionate benefits and privileges.” (p. 3). The issue of social injustice is so complex that it does not just affects individuals but the world in its entirety. It is the unfair and unequal treatment of individuals or groups in a society based on factors such

as race, socio-economic status, gender, religion, political affiliation and more. In Nigeria, these factors have contributed to widespread inequalities and disparities among its population, making it difficult for many to access basic resources and opportunities.

According to Akinrinde that social injustice is a situation when some unfair practices are being carried out in the society. There are some areas where government policy gives rise to inequality and social injustice and these includes resource distribution, workers rights, healthcare and others. This leads to widespread poverty and inequality in the country as resource that should have been used for the benefit of the people were consumed by a selected few. This poverty is further exacerbated by the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, which means that some groups do not have the same access to education, healthcare and employment as others. Nwokike“ this stark economic disparity has given rise to widespread social discontent as the vast majority grapple with the harsh realities of their disadvantaged circumstance.” (p. 6)

Other forms of social injustice includes police brutality, unlawful search, miscarriage of justice and corruption. Our justice system in Nigeria is not doing what it ought to do because those responsible for attending to the interest of the citizens are busy feeding their greed. The people no longer feel safe under the security of the police because time and time again, they've proven to be unreliable and selfish. There are several cases where people have reported harassment from the police in guise of ridding the country of scammers. They sometimes even go as far as beating anyone who they feel does not

respond to them the way they please. And also, our judicial system has severely failed we the people. The courtroom is no longer a place where the truth prevails; it is now a place where the innocent gets convicted and the guilty walks free. Until we the people, take a proper stand against injustice, Nigeria will continue to be an uncomfortable country for the financially crippled.

According to Okpanachi in his interview with Uche Peter Umez, he explains that he is a committed poet who hates any form of injustice. This is evident in his poems “Scoundrels” from his Music of the Dead Where he criticizes individuals in positions of authority who abuse their position and the power that comes with it by torturing the innocent and defenseless in society. “Scoundrels” exposes the injustice in our society, the depravity of our superiors, and their dominance over the defenseless, who kill them like ants and want to be recognized for their impressive deeds. Because our country’s justice system favors the wealthy, they continue to do whatever they want without fear of repercussions.

“You decree that the mountains

Bow to your feats over the ants

Stamping your feet as the seal

Killing ants under your shoes

As a show of force” (p. 20)

Okpanachi mocks them in the lines above, in line four, he uses vivid imagery to create a clear picture of the scene, such as “killing ants under your shoes” evoking a sense of brutality. The ant symbolizes the smaller and weaker people in the society who are being dominated by those in power.

“You decorate robbers

In national colors indicting

Simple men as criminals (p. 20)

Okpanachi employs irony in the following lines above to describe the contrast between the patriotic symbolism of national colors and the negative association with criminality. National colors symbolizes patriotism while the act of indicting simple men symbolizes unfair scapegoating or discrimination. This is to show how these so called leaders celebrate the real criminals who they are in cohorts with while accusing and condemning the innocents who has committed no criminal offense. As we have seen time and time again in Nigeria and other countries, people who ought to be in prison serving a long time for the numerous and horrible crimes they have committed are walking free in the streets and living their lives to the fullest, but then those who are innocents and defenseless are thrown into prison to rot and suffer. Okpanachi is highly determined to expose the sick and twisted ways of our “great” leader in “Scoundrels”.

Similarly, Lamikanra uses the poems “Strike ‘94” and “Change of Guard” to create awareness to the injustice prevalent in our beloved country. “Change of Guard” is about the irony that after our fore fathers were finally liberated from the brutal and oppressive hands of our colonizers, their hope for a better life tarnished because we unpredictably ended up finding ourselves under the same old life our fathers fought against. But the irony is that this time, our oppressors are our very own natives. The poem speaks great volume on how we were never free, we just had a change of master. And it also educates us on the fact that being together does not always mean we are one, just like how even though it seemed that all our people of the time during slavery were victims, it was not so because there were still greedy people amongst us then who were working hand in hand with the whites. And after the colonizers left, it was them who stood up and took the role of the oppressor. This is illustrated in the lines below.

“Then

Mighty winds of change

Swept through our land

And we rejoiced

Thinking that

Our discomfiture was ended

But

Our joys were stillborn

We have woken from our reverie

To find a new set of masters

Making the same old demands

Even though

Like us

They have skin (p. 72)

Lamikanra's adopts metaphor in the first and second line / the mighty winds of change/ to represent significant societal or political shifts. There's irony in the initial rejoicing followed by the disappointment of realizing that the new masters are no different from the old ones. His disappointment over the turn of event is right because liberation from the colonial masters ought to have brought growth in every aspect of the country. But sadly, power hungry people allow greed to control their actions, leading the people back to the life they suffered and fought against. Through the poet's lens, we understand the severity of the situation the country is at. How the rich and powerful remain on top by working the poor down to the bones, while they themselves remain in their lofty mansions enjoying the fruits they did not take part in sowing. Lamikanra believes that we

may appear to be free from the European's rule, the truth is that we are still slaves but to our own people. Through this poem, Lamikanra creates awareness to the injustice that is repeatedly dragging the country down.

While "Strike '94" is about the strike of the Nigerian oil workers in July 1994 to protest against the military government's effort to suppress the establishment of a democratically selected government. Isaac "the strike was a courageous act in the midst of harsh repression, including violence against strikers and imprisonment of labor leaders. The military government has managed by ever-more brutal methods to hold on to power in the year since the strike." Even through their efforts to bring democracy in a military controlled system, the government turned a deaf ear to their prepositions and urges them to "die" if they want.

"Die

Our leaders screamed

Their faces ablaze with the lights

Of indignation

Unrighteous and deadly

Die

For us to bury you all

Die

For us to replace you all

With a new breed of sheep” (p. 67)

Through the lines above, Lamikanra presents the imagery of leaders with faces ablaze with lights of indignation, this shows a vivid picture of anger and determination. He uses it to expose Abacha’s hardheartedness and his lack of care for the public interest. He made it known that he would not yield to the demand of the people and that he was going to do anything possible to remain in power. /a new breed of sheep metaphorically represents a compliant or easily controlled populace, contrasting with the current populace who are perceived as unrighteous and deadly. This is a total representation of Abacha’s regime. He worked quickly to subdue the strike by removing the democratically elected leadership of NUPENG, PENGASSAN and the NLC while appointing military administration to run the unions, (Isaac, 1995).

“We attacked

Anxious to break

Our bonds of servitude

We attacked and attacked

In vain.” (p. 68)

Lamikanra repetition present in the fourth line /we attacked and attacked/ expresses that even with their resistance to Abacha's military regime that lead to the strike, it was all fruitless. General Abacha emerged on top in the following years after the strike while he ordered the social democratic party candidate, Moshood Abiola to be thrown in jail. This is to show that resistance against injustice or corruption often leads to series of unpleasant situations in the lives of the resistant. And this is so because the highest body of authority who should be responsible for fighting against all this vices are usually the ones behind it.

Social injustice will always be a bone we have to swallow in this country until we make a unified effort to fight against it. Otherwise, we are going to keep experiencing issues of corruption, inequality, poverty and many other problems in our country.

## **2.2. Political Corruption**

Case studies:

*Heart Sounds* "These Days."

*Music of the Dead* "You the People's Choice" and "New Set"

"Political corruption is when political decision makers use the political power they are armed with, to sustain their power, status and wealth." Amundsen (p. 3). Political corruption has severely destroyed the foundation of our country. When the very people that ought to be in control of the country are corrupt, the system of affairs becomes unstable which can lead to rise of several social problems including robbery, terrorism,

poverty, and many more. Political corruption is a widespread problem in Nigeria that has plagued the country for decades and adversely affected its development and democratic process. A Transparency International report ranked Nigeria 146<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in its 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index, underscoring the extent of the problem. This problem manifests itself in various aspects of Nigerian society, from misuse of public funds to bribery and nepotism in political institutions.

One of the main causes of political corruption in Nigeria is the lack of accountability and transparency in government and political institutions. . The lack of effective checks and balances allows politicians and officials to engage in corrupt activities with impunity. This is made worse by a culture of impunity, where corrupt individuals are not often held accountable for their actions. Continuous stealing from the country's purse has driven the Nigeria into terrible situation where we are battling bad roads, lack of stable power supply, poor security and a high rate of unemployment.

Another contributing factor to political corruption in Nigeria is the country's high levels of poverty and inequality. Many politicians take advantage of the financial difficulties of the citizens for their own benefit and divert public funds intended for development projects into their own pockets. This not only perpetuates poverty and inequality, but also reduces citizens' trust in government.

Furthermore, vote buying and electoral fraud increases political corruption in Nigeria. Politicians often use money and resources to sway voters in their favor, threatening the

integrity of the electoral process and further aggravating corruption in the political system. Nigeria has tried to deal with political corruption, as countermeasures. Anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Crimes Commission (ICPC).

However, these institutions have been criticized for their lack of independence and effectiveness in prosecuting corrupt individuals, leading to slow progress in the fight against corruption. Nigeria needs a comprehensive approach to fight political corruption, which includes strengthening institutions. , enforce anti-corruption laws and promote government transparency and accountability. In addition, increased efforts are needed to change the culture of impunity and hold corrupt individuals accountable for their actions.

As an advocate for justice in Nigeria, Lamikanra's "These Days" centers on exposing the effects corruption has in our very own country. Political corruption brings about poverty, oppression, injustice, extortion. The poet highlights some of these vices in the poem in order to create awareness and awaken the minds of the people to resist against it.

"All around us

Our children

Born into a world blessed with

Abundant goodness are

Each and everyday

Slipping away

Their bodies riddled through

With seeds of manufactured

Poverty (p. 73)

The imagery of children slipping away with their bodies riddled through with seeds of manufactured poverty paints a clear picture of the impact of social injustice on the younger generation. The phrase /bodies riddled through with seeds of manufactured poverty/ metaphorically represents the systemic and deeply ingrained nature of poverty, as if it were a physical affliction. Lamikanra exposes how the insatiable greed of our leaders drives them to continuously extort from the country's economy, leaving the people to survive from mere scraps. The notion of children born into a world blessed with abundant goodness symbolizes hope and potential , contrasting sharply with the reality of poverty and its effects which includes lack of proper healthcare and good source of income.

“In the name of the people

Champions of the people have

Had their necks broken

And their bodies dissolved

In fiery liquids

Liquefied for daring

To revive spirits held in thrall

By powers that arrogate to themselves

All right

To decide what is right” (p. 73)

Furthermore, their corruption does not just end at extortion, they go as far as killing or ruining the lives of anyone who chooses to stand and fight with the people. Several citizens of this great country has lost their lives in the course of fighting for our right and if this case of corruption is not properly addressed, many more are still yet to lose.

Similarly, Okpanachi also uses his poems “You the People’s Choice” and “New Set” to criticize the corrupt and destructive nature of those in authority. “New Set” rages on about the corruption and injustice prevalent in our country.

“They enact mercy killings

Outing everyone on death roll

By clowns of attorneys

Sentencing millions to death

By hanging the same day” (p. 100)

The lines above encompasses how corrupt our justice system have become. The phrase “mercy killings” metaphorically represents executions carried out under the guise of mercy, highlighting the irony and brutality of the act. Attorneys are personified as clowns emphasizing their perceived incompetence or lack of empathy in the legal process. They are clowns because they appear to stand for what is right but their actions prove otherwise. Several innocent citizens have been sent to prison just because of their economic statuses. This poem proves to lay emphasis on the cruelty of our justice system in Nigeria.

In “You the People’s Choice” the poet condemns the manipulative nature of these leaders. They worm their way into the hearts and mind of the people by professing promises they have no intention of fulfilling, and later they turn their backs on the citizens after they have elected them into power.

“Now that you stride across

The land like a foolish giant

Swaying like a drunken dog

Weed them

Kill them

Who stand in your way” (p. 85)

In the lines above, the speaker compares our leaders to that of a “foolish gaint” and a “drunken dog” using similes to emphasize clumsiness or lack of control. Okpanachi describes their attitude toward the people after achieving their goal. The phrase “ foolish giant” metaphorically represents our leaders imposing presence but lack of wisdom or discernment. Because of this, they get drunk and obsessed with the wealth and power the position brings them and are willing to kill anyone who proves to be against their authority. This is why we have numerous amount of dead activists, the usual outcome of resistance in our country.

“Now that you are pharaoh

Burn them as incense

To your thousand idols

Silence their voices

And hang their shadows” (p. 86)

Okpanachi makes a biblical allusion by addressing our leaders as pharaoh. Through this reference, the poet suggests that these powerful people should better yet behave like pharaoh in the bible by killing and sacrificing the citizens in to the evil in them that

demands destruction. He says with these, after they are done killing everyone, there would not be anyone left to resist or protest against their act.

### 2.3. Oppression

Case Studies:

*Music of the Dead* “Dogs and Angel 1”, “Forunner” and “The Noose is Always Loose”

Morton Duetsch defines oppression as “the experience of repeated, widespread, systemic injustice” Beyond Intractability. According to his definition, oppression refers to the repeated and pervasive mistreatment, subjugation and unjust exercise of power against individuals or groups. It involves the use of authority, social structures or institutional practices to limit the freedom, rights and opportunities of those targeted. Oppression can manifest in different form, including discrimination, marginalization and violence and it often perpetuates cycles of inequality and injustice.

In Nigeria, oppression has manifested in several ways, a country that has historically struggled with issues of social, political and economic oppression. From colonial rule to contemporary issues of inequality and justice, oppression takes on many different forms.

One way oppression manifests in Nigeria is through the unequal distribution of resources such as oil and inequality based on socioeconomic status. This leads to a large percentage of the population to live in poverty. This disparity is largely due to corruption

and mismanagement of resources by the government, which often leads to a small elite class benefiting at the expense of the majority of the population.

Another form is through the restriction of political freedom. The country has a history of military rule and political instability, which has led to the suppression of dissent and opposing voices. Journalist activist and political opponents are often harassed, arrested or even killed for speaking out against the government.

In addition, religious and ethnic oppression are also prevalent in Nigeria, with tensions between different religious and ethnic groups often leading to violence and discrimination.

The other minority ethnic groups in Nigeria are so helpless and powerless to resist the domination. In so called unity (federal) schools, the three languages Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are made compulsory and imposed on other students from minority groups. The systemic oppression goes unabated and challenged. This is because these oppressive forces are so deep-sated and pervasive that the oppressed believe it is part of their everyday and therefore normative and normal. Earnest O.Ugiagbe. (p. 525).

The government has often failed to address these issues effectively, leading to further marginalization and oppression of minority groups.

The oppressive nature of our leaders in Nigeria is highly reflective in Okpanachi's "Dogs and Angels 1" "Forerunner" and "The Noose is Always Loose". "Dogs and Angels 1" revolves around the abuse of authority and the suffering it causes, likening the perpetrators to butchers and executioners. Okpanachi uses the poem as a kind of reflection on the abuse of power in the context of either political or social injustice. The poem portrays a sense of despair and helplessness in face of oppression, as well as a call for resistance against tyranny.

"Bathe your brows with my tears

Spatter the wall with my blood

As mural court painting

You repaint people

With acid to cleanse them

Playing the game of butchers

To give them new complexion" (p. 9)

Okpanachi employs irony in the stanza above to criticize the oppressing nature of these tyrants. To cleanse people with acid is ironical because acid on humans can lead to severe injuries or even death. These irony exposes how these leaders pretentiously send quite a number of the masses to their end. The poet makes use of explicit language to create a

visual imagery on the message he is trying to pass across. Words like “tears” “spatter” “ blood” “war” “death” that are used in the poem are all attached to pain and sadness.

Similarly, “Forerunner” and “The Noose is Always Loose” covers the abuse of power by an oppressive ruler. The central idea of these poems revolves around the ways in which powerful figures perverts the world, causing suffering and injustice. In the stanza below from forerunner, the Okpanachi criticizes the ways these leaders exercises their power over the people. They mold the world into the way that will be conducive for the by using both bribe and force to ensure that they remain in the position of authority. As in Nigeria, where policemen turn their eyes away from crimes committed by “top dogs” because of the little token they are bribed with and any policeman who refuses to accept bribe will either lose his/her job or life.

“You pervert the world

Changing the course of rivers

Turning the world on its head

Where we eat sands from

The hooves of your horses” (p. 18)

The phrase “changing the course of rivers” metaphorically represents our leaders significant impact and influence on the world, implying a disruption of natural orders or

societal norms. All their efforts to succeed is placed on a stand still, the poor remain poor and the rich gets richer. The imagery of eating sands from the hooves of horses paints a vivid picture of subservience and degradation, emphasizing the power dynamic between our leaders and the people.

Also “The Noose is Always Loose” delves into the oppression and violence against Individuals who are targeted and prosecuted by those in power. Okpanachi highlights the experience of being constantly threatened and hunted by forces that seek to extinguish ones existence.

“When they tie the noose  
On your neck and it comes off  
They put death in the hairs  
Of women and in the eyes of the sky  
They set you as a target  
The shooting range behind you  
They must kill you soaking  
The sands with your blood  
Dripping from their hands” (p. 85)

The title of the poem itself symbolizes execution or punishment, while the shooting range symbolizes the intention to kill or harm. These symbols reinforce the themes of violence and oppression present in the poem. Okpanachi exposes how the oppressed never seem to be free from the threat of death. This is so because; these powerful people use these threats to get the citizens to submit to their power. For instance, in the End SARS protest, the government used violence to disband the protesters. Their action led to the death of some citizens. With the fear of possible reoccurrence, the protesters ended the protest. This is to prove how unfazed these leaders are about the numerous murders they are responsible for and how they are willing to go extra lengths to remain on top.

In conclusion, due to the numerous social vices in our country, Okpanachi and Lamikanra display their stand against corruption, injustice and oppression by creating awareness of these problems by using their poems. Their target is to awaken the minds of the people to stand up and fight against a powerful and oppressive governance in Nigeria.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESOLUTION OF SOCIETAL ISSUES

#### 3.0 Introduction

Some of the ways to solve these social problems in Nigeria includes awareness and education, grassroots activism and movement, legal actions and community building. These are further elaborated on below.

#### 3.1. Awareness

The citizens should make great effort in creating awareness of the social problems prevalent in the country. This can enable the people to become conscious of the human rights that are constantly violated and to help them develop the mindset to resist against it. One of the best ways to create awareness of social issues is through literature.

**Literature:** Literature is a great way to create awareness of the social issues in Nigeria. Most writers do not only use their works for entertainment purposes, but also as a means to highlight the reality of living in Nigeria as a lower class citizen. By highlighting these issues, they do not only entertain, but also inform the people of the problems in the country which can help create a mindset of resistance against oppression and injustice. Some of the literary devices employed by these writers to expose and criticize the corrupt practices of our leaders are irony and satire, metaphors, simile and imagery. With these devices, writers are able to criticize the practices of our leaders without coming of as

directly offensive. There are several prolific writers who have used their works as a means to create awareness, some of them are Wole Soyinka, Niyi Osundare, Adebayo Lamikanra, David Diop and Musa Idris Okpanachi. But our focus will be on Okpanachi and how he uses these poems “The Gog and The Magog” and “The Millennial Anger” to expose and Criticize the unjust practices of o leaders. Okpanachi employs irony in “The Millennial Anger” to mock the destructive ways of our leaders. How they always prefer to use violence to respond to the peoples demand. He says.

Let us celebrate longetivity, With guns and sacrificed, Prayers to our patron god of fury/  
(p. 35). The lines above is ironical, because one certainly can not celebrate long life with violence and sacrifice as reflected above. In that light, the poet seeks to expose vile and selfish actions of the government who should be responsible for protecting us but end up doing every thing other than that.

“Bureacrats madly

Edit the treasury books

In anger of greed

To make our lives better

Bless them” (p. 35)

Okpanachi also adopts irony in the lines above to expose our leaders steal our country's funds and act as though they are doing something that will be beneficial to we the citizens. Time and time again, leaders come with promises of great leadership while in their hearts they are only concerned with stealing what the country has to offer.

Similarly, "The Gog and The Magog" is also used by Okpanachi to expose how almost every new leader that comes to lead the country often leaves the country in a worse state than it was.

"They live for a minute of history

Everything ends with them

Everyone dies of them

The new viruses of politics and economy" (p. 80)

Okpanachi employs metaphor in the first two lines of the poem to describe how evil our very leaders are. /Their paunches are the mass grave of the people/ it is comparing the paunches of our leaders to a mass grave, suggesting that their excessive consumption or greed is like a burial ground for the people they exploit and harm.

With these poems above, and the many more others like this written by poets who seeks to make the people in the society aware of the numerous social issues experienced by the

people, ignorant people who have no idea just how backward and terrible these country is will become aware and will be inclined to join the side of those willing to fight against it.

### **3.2. Education**

Education is also crucial in addressing societal issues in the country. According to Terka and Francis, for the society to achieve development, students should be taught the workings of the society through literature in the curriculum. By understanding the harsh realities of life from an early age, they may have a better chance at making decisions as an adult that can better the society and also avoid dogmatic acceptance of issues.

Through their paper, it made clear the importance of education when fighting for societal development. Without educating the people from a tender age, they will become ignorant of the ways the government are exploiting them for their own private gain. So, for us to have more enlightened individuals in our society, we must put in that effort while they are still young and tender by showing them materials that depicts the reality of life in Nigeria, and by explaining to them how the bad decision of our leaders negatively impact our lives in the society. There are several materials that can be used to educated the students and others among us.

An example is “Shattered Lives” by Lamikanra. Lamikanra use the poem to expose and criticize the negative effects of war in the society. The “shattered lives” are the lives that are ruined from war. Some survive the brutality of war with an injury or head trauma,

while others do not come out of war alive. The casualties of war certainly shadows the benefits. Can it be said to be a win when lives have been lost? When young men who have so much life ahead of the loose their lives brutally on war grounds.

“This is a time for war

Grim

Fierce and pitiless

A brutal assault on humanity

A pressing danger to life and limb

This is war

And the young will pay a bitter price

For the privilege of living

Suffering

And dying in the heat of battle” (p. 34)

A poem like this can be used to educate the people about the negative effects of war and to warn the about the dangers of participating in it. With this, people can make a conscious effort to avoid violence and unwarranted deaths.

### 3.3. Grassroot Activism and Movement

“Grassroot activism is when ordinary people take collective action to spark change” Amnesty International. For change to be a thing of reality in Nigeria, joint effort is needed. So for our voices to be heard, we need to work together to create an unstoppable force that the government will have no other choice than to adhere to our demands. Activism should not only involve the victims, even some of us who have been on the safe side of these social issues in the country should be sympathetic enough to want to stand and fight for these disadvantaged people. Group movements and activism can help fight issues of poverty, job employment, inflation, oppression and many others. As seen repeatedly in Nigeria, sometimes, activism does not always seem to yield positive results due to the extent our leaders go to satisfy their greed thereby neglecting our basic requests. But we cannot give up due to this fact because that will require us to continue living this life of oppression, were we continue to strive for a better life without and end it sight. So, it is better we fight for our rights now, to create a better world for our future generations to come.

Okpanachi is a prolific writer who has often used his poem to antagonize the government and our corrupt leaders. What is the better way to fight against oppressive power than with ones voice. The poet has written many poems to call out or corrupt leaders and how they manipulate the country to their benefits. And example is his poem “Spider”. The

poem criticize those in power and how they take great effort in instilling fear in the people.

“You the master craft of fear

You ask paupers to count

Their hunger as wealth in dreams

You transform like magic

Your swagger stick turns to snake

Loaves becomes guns

Milk turns to blood in your hands” (p. 22)

Okpanachi employs imagery in the second and third lines. /You ask paupers to count their hunger as wealth in dreams/it creates vivid mental imagery of impoverished individuals asked to see their hunger and poverty as a form of richness. It exposes how these leaders go to great lengths to manipulate and distort the reality for this people.

These poet and many others have and are still using their pen as a weapon to fight against the crippling oppression and injustice in Nigeria calling out the incompetent leaders in our country. Some like Wole Soyinka have been thrown in jail for speaking out and standing up for our right. But that did not still stop them from exposing and criticizing our poor government. So, this is a call out to everyone willing to see change in Nigeria to

keep on striving, fighting , because one day, the change we want will become a reality for us.

### **3.4. Legal Actions**

For the country to be a safe place for all civilians, laws that will promote human rights and equality in opportunities must be enacted and enforced to fight against oppression in the country. The country has become a toxic place to be in, really even worse for the underprivileged. There are a lot of people that have been harassed and wrongfully acquitted over crimes they were not guilty of. And due to their lack of connection, they end up in jail. Others lose their property and belongings to people of higher caliber because their voices will be silenced if they make the mistake of exposing these people and their corrupt ways. Opportunities that are meant for the citizens are gobbled up by these so-called leaders who claim to have the interests of the masses at heart. So if laws to promote human rights are not put in place, the citizens will continue to live their lives in oppression. Another important thing is that, these corrupt political leaders have repeatedly been committing crimes with impunity because the laws have been manipulated to favor them.

This is reflective in Okpanachi's "New Set" where he bashes our oppressive leaders and their penchant for injustice.

“They enact mercy killings

Putting everyone on death row

By clowns of attorneys

Sentencing millions to death

By hanging the same day”

The poem criticizes how these leaders have control over every sector in the country. Throwing innocent people into prison and hanging them just to protect the power they have stolen. Even those in the justice system that should be responsible for sending criminals to jail have become useless in their desire to become rich. They no longer care to do the right thing because it would not be beneficial to them. Due to this many guilty people go unpunished.

For this issue, legal frameworks should be put in place to prevent them from having that advantage. The moment they start getting punishments and jail time for their criminal activities, the rate of corruption in our political and legal system will drop substantially.

### **3.5. Community Building**

Community building is essential for combating injustice and corruption in the country. By building strong communities, it can foster a sense of unity and solidarity for the marginalized and oppressed groups in our society. To achieve this, we have to work

together, come together as one to help build the society into a better place for everyone. This is reflected in Lamikanra's "Dawn", where he urges people to work together and grow as one instead of individually.

“Let us take to the road

On the wings of our imagination

Knocking down all boundaries

Breaking down all barriers

Searching everywhere for our beings

But part of a unity

Shared out of forged humanity” (p. 49)

Lamikanra suggests that we should through life together, because we are all humans. This can foster a sense of solidarity among the people. We can achieve this by creating foundations for the unemployed, the homeless and the underprivileged. These foundations can help uplift these people, giving them a chance to start and experience a new and better life.

These foundations can be organized by the people in the country who are doing well financially and who are also interested in the cause of helping lives. Some of the foundations that are already in place are Helpers Social Development (HSD). Their goal

is to eradicate the root cause of poverty in Nigeria. Others include, Sparkle foundation, Help Line foundation and many others.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

This study has examined the ways poetry serves as a medium for social change. First, some of the societal issues that seem to be greatly affecting the country were elucidated, and also how some of the poems of Adebayo Lamikanra and Musa Idris Okpanachi reflect the corruption, injustice and oppression in Nigeria. An in-depth analysis was made on how these poems portray the realities of living in Nigeria under the rule of greedy and selfish leaders. Through the lens of Marxism, it is observed that those in power take great effort in retaining this position by suppressing and oppressing citizens who they ought to be responsible for as portrayed in the poems for this study. The rich gets richer by controlling the means of production and other sectors in the country while the poor continue to be victims of exploitation and oppression.

Furthermore, after highlighting and expatiating on these issues, possible resolutions of these problems were presented. These includes, raising awareness and educating the people of issues plaguing the society and the dangers of not resisting to oppressive governance. By using literature or any means of spreading information that can target a wide range of people, we can inform and educate the masses on how to fight against such problems. And for those who are willing to fight for our right, grassroots activism or movement will be carried out to help make their voice heard. Rallies, protests and riots can enable them send a message across. And lastly, for those who are unable to help

themselves, legal actions, and community building can help the disadvantaged to get a better life.

For Nigeria as a country to undergo social change in all aspects of the country's affairs, we the citizens are responsible to make it a reality. We have to strive to achieve our goals, make a lot of sacrifices and make sure our voices are heard no matter how hard the government tries to silence our voices. Let us all work towards attaining a better life for us and the generations to come.

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