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Endogenous and exogenous factors in national development: inferences from the metaphor of witchcraft (*Àjẹ́*) in Ọlátúbọ̀sún Ọládàpọ̀'s poetry.

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This work engages political commentary in the work of Ọlátúbọ̀sún Ọládàpọ̀, a Yorùbá poet. Its focus is on the way that political ideas and values that are rooted in Nigerian culture can inspire development. The study is an exegesis of a poem entitled *Emi lo ó máa fàjẹ́ẹ̀ rẹ ṣe?* ("What will you do with your own witchcraft?). The reading explores the multilayered paradoxes and metaphors of witchcraft in the poem, concluding that the God-given abilities and capabilities possessed by Nigerians should be the bases for solving their national problems as the nation needs leaders of a vision and mission. The poet maintains that the Nigerian political leaders have a critical role to play in changing the fortune of the nation by leading by example. In addition, the poet opines that the single factor that explains the national economic stagnation is the lack of integrity and public spiritedness among the political leaders, illustrated through his metaphor of witchcraft. **Key words:** Metaphor; Ọlátúbọ̀sún Ọládàpọ̀ (b. 1943); Yorùbá poetry; Yorùbá witchcraft (*Àjẹ́*).

Olátúbòsún Oládàpò

Olatunde Olatunji (1982: 19) was the first to note Oládàpò's inventiveness, saying "Ọlátúbọ̀sún Ọládàpọ̀ […] is […] innovative in that he can work within the tradition of Yorùbá poetry without being blindly imitative." Born in September 1943, Ọlátúbọ̀sún Ọládàpọ̀, also known as *Odídẹ́ré Ayékòótó* (after the loquacious parrot), is a folk poet who writes and chants on record plates in Yorùbá to his audience, who are mainly the people of South-western Nigeria. He was educated in Ibadan (St. Luke's College) and Lagos before working as a reporter with *Daily Sketch* and *Gbohungbohun,* and as a producer in Western Nigerian Broadcasting Service (WNBS). His potential for chanting Yorùbá poems became a public show in 1965, during an interhouse festival of arts at St. Luke's College when he was asked to chant *Ìjálá*. People from diverse radio stations saw his performance where he was adjudged the winner at the competition. They were highly impressed. The media people who came that day encouraged him and that enhanced his interest in the Yorùbá indigenous language. He completed the Teacher's Training Programme in 1967 and was posted to St. Davids

School, Kudeti, Ibadan, as a class teacher. While teaching he was still going to the WNTS to chant *Ìjálá* on the radio. He was eventually employed in 1970 at the then WNBS/WNTV to anchor Yorùbá programmes on Radio and Television and to translate and read the Yoruba news. He resigned from the WNBC/WNTV in 1977 to establish Olatunbosun Records Company. By 2010 he had produced about 42 albums for himself and had also produced well over 200 other indigenous artistes spread across Yorùbá land. He is the author of such collections of poetry as *Àròyé Akéwì* (I and II) (1973, 1975) and *Àròfọ̀ Àwọn Ọmọdé* (1975).

Introduction

Literary works invariably respond to the political occurrences of their age. The increasing interest of African language literatures in politics testifies to a growing desire on the part of cultural producers in Africa in general to respond meaningfully to the challenges of development. The recourse to the political may also be an attempt on the part of writers and artists to promote their perception of political power and influence. This is consistent with Karin Barber's position that popular culture be read not simply for its sociological and historic detail, but that they should be investigated as "expressive acts" (1987: 2). The issues of responsibility and political dedication in literature, which were of direct political significance during the 1960s in Nigeria, also carried within them the seed of theoretical linguistic and literary expression as depicted by particular authors. And as Wellek and Warren (1949: 112) say, "the value for the exegesis of a poetic text of knowledge of the history of philosophy and of general thought can scarcely be overrated." Ọládàpọ̀ engages with the political history of twentieth century Nigeria in *Emi lo máa fàjẹ́ ẹ̀ rẹ sẹ?* The views and opinions of the writer apparently colour the poem in the figurative language of a political type, while the personages and events in it are of a radical type.

The *Àjẹ́* phenomenon is multi-dimensional and the *Àjẹ́* discourse has attracted the attention of many scholars (for further discussion see Omosade 1979; Hallen and Olubi 1997; Washington 2005). *Àjẹ́* is synonymous with *Ẹlẹyẹ* (the owner of birds) in Yorùbá cosmology and there are various birds associated with this cosmological force. These include *kannakánná*, *òwìwí* (owls), and any other bird with strange tendencies. In *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts,* Teresa Washington (2005: 14) argues that:

> Women of Àjẹ́ have many significant attributes and roles in society. They are bestowed with spiritual vision, divine authority, power of the word, and àsẹ, the power to bring desires and ideas into being […] Most important, *Àwọn Ìyá Wa* are teachers whose gifts, lessons, trials and punishments compel their communities to seek higher levels of spiritual evolution and redirect misguided destiny, direction and power.

In order to illuminate its workings, the witch-hunt must be examined in the context of culture change theory in line with the revitalization theory of Wallace (1956, 1970), in which a model of culture change is attractive because it analyzes cultural as well as individual levels, while also dealing with social conflict. Wallace (1956: 265) considers two types of culture change: classical models of gradual change via chain reaction (known collectively as *moving equilibrium processes*), and *revitalization*, an abrupt change owing to "a deliberate, organized conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture". Schoeneman, (1975: 530) while referring to Wallace (1956: 266–67; 1970: 15–20), maintains that:

> There must be intercommunication and cooperation within and among the levels of a cultural organism in order to preserve its integrity and to combat stressful threats to its existence. This is accomplished through the *mazeway*: a mental image of self, environment, and culture, of their dynamics and interrelationships, and of ways to manipulate them to attain goals and avoid pitfalls. A *mazeway* is maintained by all members of the culture and is necessary for stress reduction on all levels of the system.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 235): "Metaphor is not merely a matter of language. It is a matter of conceptual structure. And conceptual structure is not merely a matter of the intellect – it involves all the natural dimensions of our experience, including aspects of our sense experiences: color, shape, texture, sound, etc." Ọládàpọ̀'s rhetorical deployment of *Àjẹ́* as a metaphor in his poem shows the centrality of this force to Yorùbá ethos of the postcolonial milieu, although he maintains the popular notion about *Àjẹ́* in Yorúbá cosmology. To the Yorùbá, *Àjẹ́* manifests both negative and positive traits, depending on the situation. Therefore, Ọládàpọ̀ sees the need for Nigerians to appropriate the positive traits of the popular *Àjẹ́* in order to create an ideal society. To him, *Àjẹ́* constitutes an unconquerable force or power, one that transcends human knowledge and ability. It also connotes special natural ability that can be used either to develop or stagnate society. More important is the fact that Ọlátúbọ̀sún metaphorically conceives of this force as representing political will in diverse forms that leaders can deploy for the progress of society. This is in line with the thinking of Lévi-Strauss (1963: 201–03) who maintains that metaphor "can change the world". He opens this poem with the assertion that everybody and everything in the universe is endowed with the *Àjẹ́* force. In other words, every entity manifests the ability and potential to bear positive fruits and also influence others in the community:

> Nightingales are possessed by rhetorical power
> Spiders are possessed by the power to spin wool
> Woodpeckers are possessed by the power to peck wood
> Wisdom is the witchcraft of Ifá[1]
> Counsel is the witchcraft of *Ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀*[2]

The various creatures mentioned above represent various countries of the world that are deploying their resources for the progress of their people. Ọládàpọ̀ blurs the distinction between fact and fiction as he seeks to disclose and also challenge the hegemony of institutionalized discursive practices of the political elite. The progress of an overlying political ideology seems to take up most of the narrative. The path to the main political ideology he is canvassing emerges from his rhetorical question, "what will you do with your witchcraft?"

Now, Ọlátúbọ̀sún
The-one-who talks-like-a-parrot
If you incidentally receive the calabash of witchcraft
After you have received the power of witchcraft
What will you do with your witchcraft?
Let us discuss an important matter
Let us abandon the joke and humour[3]

He returns to the same style of metonymy by referring to various creatures and the innate abilities that they draw on to vitalise their existence in depicting countries of the world that are progressive. The "wisdom" he refers to in the excerpt below hints at the potential, wisdom, knowledge and influences possessed by these creatures that typify developed countries:

Termites are wise
They use their wisdom to build their house
Snakes are wise for using their wisdom to harm human beings
Bees are also wise
Bees are using their wisdom to gather honey[4]

and

Witchcraft is the knowledge of human beings
As long as it is used appropriately
There is none without the power of witchcraft
The way each person uses his/her witchcraft is different.[5]

Ọlátúbọ̀sún's metaphorical turn of mind can be very challenging and his metaphors are at once apt and very unconventional. For instance, his *Àjẹ́* is not typical. Rather he presents him or her as a citizen on the verge of becoming a mystic by being initiated as an *Àjẹ́*. And the trope of mysticism enables him to fall back on Yorùbá cosmology and to convey his message across to his audience with the obliqueness of the initiated. This confirms the observation of Wellek and Warren (1949: 94) that:

> The poet himself is a member of society, possessed of a specific social status: he receives some degree of social recognition and reward; he addresses an audience,

however hypothetical. Indeed, literature has usually arisen in close connexion with particular social institutions; and in primitive society we may even be unable to distinguish poetry from ritual, magic, work, or play.

Through this dominant inferential system of sending across his message, he maintains that each Nigerian has something to contribute to the development of the nation and that it will be wrong to look elsewhere for solutions to the challenges of the nation. He takes the commitment of the Western world to making life better through their inventions as a challenge to the rest of the world and suggests that everyone is capable of deploying their God-given abilities in the direction they choose. The invention of aircraft and electricity is among those cited as remarkable events that have impacted positively on humanity:

There is somebody over there who received his calabash of witchcraft
and invented electricity –
the-one-that-is-turned-on-and-off-with-finger-nails
Another person received his witchcraft
He invented a mysterious car
which makes people dive in the sky like a hawk
Certain people received witchcraft's calabash
and used it to kill other people's children
Their witchcraft is to suck blood
It is used to kill their own children
There are still people that received the calabash of witch
They are using it to raise children successfully[6]

Ọládàpọ̀ has identified the inability to use their accumulated capital for positive developmental purposes as a serious problem of the Nigerian bourgeoisie. This is consistent with what Fanon (1967: 141) says about the bourgeoisie:

A bourgeoisie similar to that which developed in Europe is able to elaborate an ideology and at the same time strengthen its own power. Such a bourgeoisie, dynamic, educated and secular, has fully succeeded in its undertaking of the accumulation of capital and has given to the nation a minimum of prosperity. In underdeveloped countries, we have seen that no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This get-rich quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or of inventiveness.

Poetry, like its kindred art form, music, is not just socially structured; its activity comprises the important public domain in which a worldview is made patent in a multilayered and powerful form (Turino 1989: 29).

In a bid to stress the primary concern of the poem, the poet restates the main rhetorical question; acknowledging a few political figures who employed their political powers or witchcraft (*Àjẹ́*) to improve the lot of their people:

Now, Ọlátúbọ̀sún
The-one-who talks-like-a-parrot
If you receive the calabash of witchcraft
What will you do with it?
Let us discuss an important matter
Let us abandon the joke and the humour
Ọlátúbọ̀sún has paid homage to Èsù
and Sàngó before he left home
I pay homage to all sages
I pay homage to all *Ẹlẹyẹ* of the whole world
And all technocrats who are endowed with wisdom
And they are using their wisdom for the benefit of the people.[7]

He decries the negative use of political powers (*oselu Àjẹ́*) and pronounces judgment on those who use their powers to harm others and the society at large (lines 46–60), maintaining that such undesirable elements are not only harming the society but also mortgaging the future of their own children. There are basically two types of authoritarian regimes – the development-oriented political elite or benevolent autocrats, and the kleptocrats. The former – the ideal type of autocrats – will seek to maximise society's wealth and catalyse development, while the latter type of autocrats will be concerned only with their own riches (and be development- oriented only to the extent that it serves their own interests) (Coolidge and Rose-Ackerman 2000: 58–59). The poet sees an equivalent of this idea in the Yorùbá belief in the existence of bad and good witches. The assumption is that the bad ones end up wearing rags while the good ones excel in their chosen career and have positive influence on their communities and society at large:

I will not receive the calabash of a wretched witch
The one who wears rags around the community
I will not receive the calabash of a witch
That makes use of the calabash of his children's head (skull) to drink water
I cannot become a fearful *Kannakánná* bird
The bird that uses human blood for ritual at *Àwè*
If a wizard kills his children
He will not live in the world forever
The witch that used the elders' *àṣẹ* to kill a stranger
Will sooner or later
suffer the repercussions in the end

Any stream that carries a lump of wood in a bending position
cannot flow easily
The day that *sìgìdì* swims in a river
That day marks the end of its life
After I have received the calabash of the witches of the world
I have seen what I will use my witchcraft for
The witch who will be nursing children, the witch who saves[8]

Again, he presents another character (*Ajésùnmíbọ̀*) who has a bad notion about her society. This character represents another category of politicians in the nation:

When I asked Ajésùnmíbọ̀ what she would use her witchcraft for
Listen to what she said
Come and hear what the lover wants to be using her witchcraft for
The witch who loses, the witch never wins a game
We play *ayò* game weekly and she has never won
We play *ayò* game weekly and she has never won.[9]

Poets are not merely reflections of a pre-existing sensibility analogically represented; they are positive agents in the creation and maintenance of such a sensibility (Geertz 1973: 451). Irvine and Sapir (1976: 81) also suggest that the relationship between artists and the social structure of a community is not just an abstract tautology but that their productions and the social structure are related to a set of interactional opportunities and expectations that underlie them. Ọládàpọ̀'s interest in the oddities in his society operates within a growing concern with social challenges in African writing. Eustace Palmer has equally remarked that "novelists [indeed artists generally] are becoming less preoccupied with cultural and sociological matters and more concerned about exposing the corruption and incompetence which are so widespread in African political and government circles" (cited in Onoge 1983: 54). Canvassing for exogenous support as part of the solution to the national problems of Nigeria, Ọládàpọ̀ says:

It would be better for us to appeal to the elders
Let all gamblers donate money
Let us use a lot of money to appease the witches
After you have donated the money
Bring all the money to me
After I have become an omniscient witch
I will fly away to the western world
I love to be playing a draw game with the westerners[10]

From the above, the poet regards all corrupt and incompetent politicians as gamblers and wasters. Therefore, he appeals that instead of wasting the national resources on projects that they cannot effectively execute they should seek foreign intervention (lines 76–78). It is the belief of this poet that his audience will pick up the main messages in the poem because it discusses topical issues that they are familiar with. As Leach (1976: 41) argues, "the participants in a ritual share communicative experiences through many different sensory channels simultaneously […] when we take part in such a ritual we pick up all these messages at the same time and condense them into a single experience". Furthermore as Hope (2000: 19) notes widespread corruption remains the bane of failed states, and so emblematic of the failure of ethical leadership, democracy and good governance.

Thus Ọládàpọ̀ presents a character that is corrupt (*Àtàndá Amúlùúdùn*, lines 74–87), who typifies the corrupt Nigerian leadership so as to satirise official corruption. The poet specifically refers to the embezzlement of the nation's oil wealth, the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. The fact that what should have been used for the benefit all Nigerians has been illegally appropriated by political leaders and kept in foreign banks is a proof that Nigerian leaders have demonstrated exceptional capacity for impoverishing their people by embezzling what should have been used for the common good. The arrest and trial of many Nigerian politicians for money-laundering and related offences in recent times confirm this:

> What about *Àtàndá Amúlùúdùn* the one who was extorting before he died
> Listen to what he said, come and hear what he said
> I heard a rumour
> That the oil money, and money from peoples' sweat
> That all poor people (masses) are dying for
> Many important dignitaries of this country
> Are keeping big amount of money in banks abroad
> Money is breathing in Switzerland
> Money is breathing in Geneva[11]

The author understands that while the local political elite contributes to the social and political problems of developing nations, there are other forces, such as imperialism and the international economic order, which play a major role in destabilising developing countries politically and economically (see Ngara 1990: 66). Many western countries facilitate the corrupt practices of African leaders.

Another solution to the Nigerian problem contained in Ọládàpọ̀'s poetry dating back to 1975 – when this poem was published – is the idea of a Sovereign National Conference which will offer Nigerians an opportunity to discuss the future of their country. This is implied in the first two lines (89–90) below. What Ọládàpọ̀ canvassed was only realised in 2005 when the Nigerian President at the time, Chief Olusegun

Obasanjo, opened a national conference to discuss constitutional reforms. Topics such as changing electoral rules, increasing women's representation in government, redefining citizenship within states, and equitable allocation of oil wealth, were among issues discussed (Menezes 2005). Ọládàpọ̀ makes a case for the primacy of locally-sourced factors in solving the country's problems by appealing to political leaders to borrow from the examples of many developed countries of the world:

> It is necessary for us to meet,
> It is necessary for us to rob minds together as witches
> It is necessary for us to concertedly sacrifice to the witches
> So that all witches in this land
> Will begin to fly abroad
> So that they can bring back our money
> That was looted by sneaky money launderers
> Money realised from locust beans, money from pepper
> Money that was collected from extortion
> Money that was collected illegally[12]

To fully decode the context of the poet's referent in the last five lines in the above excerpt, one needs to understand that the poem was published in 1975, fifteen years after Nigeria's independence. This excerpt decries money-laundering by various political leaders of Nigeria even at the time. His presentation of this social vice shows that, "the past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses a simple, factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (Hall 1994: 395). The only thing is that, "treasures of the past are most valuable when they are pawned for more pressing needs of the present" (Chow 1993: 147). The point being made here is that the poet as a social commentator and a critic of socio-political misdemeanours uses his experiences of the past and his foresight to warn leaders at all levels to put an end to all practices that are inimical to national progress and development. Okogbule (2007: 156) identifies money laundering as a serious problem of the political oligarchy, saying: "One of the most pervasive economic crimes in Nigeria today is Money Laundering. Although relatively unknown in the country until the late 1980s, it is now a veritable companion of the corruption virus which has permeated every segment of the Nigerian society." In addressing the looting of the nation's resources, Ọládàpọ̀ delves into Nigerian history:

> Many past politicians
> They had buried our money and can no longer dig them out
> May be the person who had looted the money is dead
> And it may be that they are not free
> That is why people have built houses on the buried money[13]

Ọládàpọ̀'s contention is that individual citizens should make it an obligation to use their talents, influences and power to develop the country. His argument is that only a patriotic citizenry can guarantee the growth of Nigeria. He equally suggests that the people should use their associations with the outside world to restore the lost glory and honour of the land:

> All the poor people's monies that have been buried
> I want to go and retrieve them all
> After I have received the calabash of the witches
> Bring out all our monies that you have looted
> That is what I will use my witchcraft for
> *Àtàndá Aláyà, Afipọ́njúkóléonílé*
> Your witchcraft will go a long way in solving the problems.[14]

Ọládàpọ̀'s vision in this poem is mainly humanistic and political in disposition. He tries to build morality into the texture of his poem.

The writer maintains that the natural resources that Nigeria is endowed with are being mismanaged. And he uses another fictional character (*Adéòtí*) to depict the mind of people in the Nigerian nation towards national development:

> When I asked Adéòtí
> Come and hear what he wants to use his witchcraft for
> Nigeria is a land flowing with oil and riches
> Although it is flowing with milk and fertilizers
> All commodities are scarce as gold
> It is better for us to appease the elders
> Let us appeal to the witches of the whole world
> On the day when the crude oil we have has become very expensive
> So that they can have an ocean of crude oil
> So that they can become invisible smugglers
> So that we can import goods
> So that the masses will live in abundance[15]

The poet maintains that one of the qualities that can help in the development of Nigeria is the individual's assumption of a positive mindset towards national development. He therefore resorts to canvassing "invisible smuggling" as seen in the last three lines (121–23) above as a metaphor for tapping wisdom from the developed countries of the world. I find this portion of Ọládàpọ̀'s poem particularly relevant in confronting the political and historical realities that provided the impetus for the writing of the poem. The sense of aloofness and defiance with which the characters such as *Ajésùnmíbọ̀, Àtàndá Amúlùúdùn, Àtàndá Aláyà* and *Adéòtí* responded to the questions by an omnipresent questioner (the poet) is a metaphorical reflection of

many political leaders', and even other Nigerians' indifference to the problems of society clearly mentioned in the poem. The poet proves that there is little or no sense of accountability on the part of Nigerian political leaders.

Using another character, a sage who is also a retired civil servant, the poet presents the agony of a dedicated civil servant who never made enough money in his career. One of the expectations of Ọládàpọ̀ as a poet and a social critic with regard to the Nigerian polity and governance is seen from the response of this sage to his question in the following lines of the poem:

A servant somewhere
who served the government until his old age
And was unable to build his personal house was another person that I asked
I asked, Elder statesman
After you have received the calabash of the witches that I am talking about
What will you do with your witchcraft?
Let us abandon the joke and humour
He replied that the witches kill small children and adults
I also heard that
The witches can pervert peoples' destinies
Ram's intestine can get to lizard's stomach in the night
If I become a witch that has the power of transformation [*àsẹ àyídá*]
I want to turn all poor people in this land [nation]
To become rich people
And I want to turn all rich people
To become poor
I will make all big bosses
To become servants again
So that all messengers
Will hold political power
May be if the bosses wear shoes with thorns
They will know where thorns are entering poor people's feet[16]

From the above, the poet used his sage character that has the understanding of various areas where witchcraft could be used to propound an ideal government for Nigeria. The ideal government he is canvassing is a government that promotes egalitarianism. It is possible to infer from the attributes of this character that political leaders should aim at serving the masses without giving any thought to self-enrichment, and what has come to be known as "the national cake" should be equally distributed to develop the nation at large. The poet maintains that political leaders should aim at raising the standard of living of the masses (lines 135–45), and that they should not close their ears to the suffering of the masses.

The poet's understanding of problems associated with inaccurate census figures is also highlighted in his poetry. He believes that the inability to have a successful census will hinder planning for development:

> The annulled census
> The disrupted census of the past
> Do not mince words for the masses any longer
> Stop deceiving the masses
> If my mothers [*Ìyá mi*] turn into birds in the midnight[17]
> They will tell us the number of people existing without a single mistake
> Stop wasting our money on census
> Let us give our money to the witches
> Let them execute the census for us[18]

Censuses are vital to national development given that citizens use public services at various times such as schools, health services, roads and libraries, etc. These services need to be planned, and in such a way that they keep pace with the changing patterns of modern life. Yet it is impossible to plan services for 'invisible' people. Hence, accurate information is needed on the number of people, where they live and what their needs are to enhance effective planning. The writer is conversant with Nigerian history. The first attempt at a nationwide census was between 1952–53 and it has usually been considered an undercount for a number of reasons: apprehension that the census was related to tax collection; logistics difficulties in reaching many remote areas; and inadequate training of enumerators. There was another census in mid-1962 and it was eventually cancelled after much controversy and allegations of overcounting. This was followed by another attempt in 1963, which was officially accepted, although also encumbered with charges of inaccuracy and manipulation for regional and local political purposes. After the civil war that lasted between 1967 and 1970, an attempt was made to hold a census in 1973, but the results were cancelled due to the controversy that surrounded it (Chapin Metz 1991). The poet's reference to *Ìyá mi*, the witch, in the above excerpt (lines 150–54) is a metaphor for those who are skilful, truthful, patriotic and non-partisan enough who will carry out a reliable census. The witches in Yorùbá cosmology are believed to be possessed with the power of second sight, which enables them to know everything. The poet incorporates this trait to depict expertise as one of the qualities needed for national development. In this light, the poet's expectation is expressed thus:

> After I have received the power of witches
> I will use my power
> To sanitize the nation[19]

This poet presents his political ideology of sanitising the nation. Sanitising in this manner connotes wiping off the enemies of progress in the nation by unseating them. This kind of truth is hard and difficult for some people to express but the poet's patriotism and personal courage enable him to advance his political opinion. This is in line with the view of Denys (1978: 206) that the writer should not take a particular stand but that if he does, the quality and nature of his commitment matter so far as he imaginatively interprets the existing crisis, as a servant of the society to dispense the truth. The naïve expressions of a deteriorating political history and national development provide a thematic background for the purposes and motivations of Ọládàpọ̀'s poem, especially where he says:

Let us abandon the joke and humour
Why?
We made fire our husband
We got burnt
We made rain our mistress
We caught cold
We then made harmattan our confidant
It bends us like roasted *akika*
Craze for money has turned the world into a paradox
There is nobody to decode its paradox
There are certain elders
When they want to collect the calabash of the witches
They will not punish those that embezzled public funds
There are deceitful people in the land
They did not suck those people's blood
There are past disgruntled politicians
And they were spared
After they had received witchcraft
They use it to kill their blood children
It is better if we receive the witchcraft of convenience
That we can use to organise this land [nation] from the top
Without mincing words
This issue should be of concern to everybody
You have seen what every individual wants to use his or her witchcraft for
And you know the issue of witchcraft I have been discussing with you
My dear friend, if you receive the calabash of elderly witches
After you have become *Ẹlẹyẹ*, and you have become owner of the world
What will you do with your witchcraft?
This matter concerns the initiates
It also concerns non-initiates[20]

In expressing the feelings of the masses about the political instability arising from bad governance in Nigeria, the poet draws attention to various vices that pervade the society: killings, assaults and cheating among others. These are all expressions of disappointment about the past regimes, especially military regimes. The poet exploits the past to form part of the discourse of resistance in the present to effect a change. "The past is merged with the present in such a way as to keep us firmly focussed on the present as history." (Green 1997: 24). The poet articulates the outlook of the masses on the political leaders and their many disappointments. This is a way of creating the impression that an urgent change is needed. Nigeria gained independence on 1 October 1960 and, "the social and economic problems and the political cross-currents that arose from mass-unemployment of the youths were far-reaching as they became ready tools in the hands of politicians and thus became pawns in the game of chess of the volatile political situation" (Adesina and Olorunfemi 1998: 133–34). Between 1966 and 1979 the nation witnessed persistent civil unrest, economic crisis and political misconduct with the military regime. Describing this, Adesina and Olorunfemi (1998: 135) say:

> Following accusation of maladministration and mismanagement, the first military government of General Yakubu Gowon was toppled on the 29th of July 1975. A new military administration headed by Muritala Mohammed and later on (from February 1976) by Olusegun Obasanjo stepped into the saddle of power. The new regime sought to correct the ills bedevilling the society.

The poet finally reiterated his position that all and sundry in Nigeria have to meaningfully contribute to desirable changes that will move the nation forward through their influences and power (*Àjẹ́*). In essence, he clamours for true democracy where there will be rule of law, separation of powers, cooperation, oneness and patriotism.

Conclusion

The foregoing will suggest that a poet is not only influenced by his society; he also influences it. Ọládàpọ̀'s poem, *Emi lo máa fàjẹ́ ẹ̀ rẹ sẹ*, is politically and philosophically informed. The poem draws heavily on the nature of Nigerian politics. In other words, the content shows the author's attempt to expound his idea of responsible governance. While specific historical events play a role in the development of the poem, they seem less important to him than the human elements of political inundation. A sense of history allows Ọládàpọ̀ further room to manoeuvre within the world of his fictionalized characters in projecting his political ideas. Certain political and developmental principles can be conveyed and social reform accomplished by invoking what has been called the "moral imagination". This is when authors, by use of their works in any form, tap into the moral imagination of their readers. They are not only addressing their readers' intellect, but their emotions as well. The poet makes

a case for cultural resources for political transformation and resistance to injustice and inequalities through thoughtful and critical citizenship. He dialectically maintains that Nigerians need more of endogenous than exogenous initiatives in developing the nation. The metaphorical representation of traditional values (*Àjẹ́*) and social perception in his poetry helps to reveal a profound political, social and economic transformation needed for national development in Nigeria.

Notes

1. *Ifá* and *Òpèlè* are used synonymously. Ifá is the Yorùbá god of wisdom, knowledge and prognostication. People seek divine information from this deity through the adherents (*Babaláwo*) of the religion.
2. This and all subsequent translations from the original are mine. *Àwòko ti dàjé èdè / Ònràn wú ti dàjé òwú / Àkókó ti dàjé àwùjọ sọgisọgi / Ọgbọ́n n làjé Ifá / Ìmọ̀ràn n làjé òpèlè.*
3. *Njé Ọlátúbọ̀sún / A-sàròyé-bí-ẹyẹ-ibáákà / Bí o bá sèèsì donígbá àjé / Bó o bá daláyé ẹlẹyẹ tán / Emi lo ó máa fàjéè rẹ ṣe o?* [10] / *Ká sọ̀rọ̀ àtàtà / Ká peré tì, ká pàwàdà tì.*
4. *Ikán lógbọ́n / Ikán ñ fọgbọ́n ọn tiwọn ọ́n mọlé / Ejò lógbọ́n / Ejò ñ fọgbọ́n ọn tirẹ̀ sèkà / Oyin sì lógbọ́n / Oyin ñ fọgbọ́n ọn tirẹ́ é kádùn jọ.*
5. *Àjé nimọ̀ ọmọníyàn / Bó bá ti ń jé fúnni bí idán, bí idán* [20] / *Kò kúkú séni tí ò niwọ̀n eyẹ tiwọn / Ọ̀nà ájéẹ kálukú ñ gbà ló sọ̀tọ̀tọ̀.*
6. *Ẹnikan ókè ọ̀hún gbagbá àjé tiẹ / Ó séná ògiri / Afèèkánná-pa-afèèkánná-jí / Ọ̀kan gbàjé tán. / Ó sèmọ̀ ọkọ̀ áràmọ̀ndá / Tí ñ gbéni rà lójúu sànmà bí àwòdì / Àwọn ẹnikan gbagbá àjé / Wọ́n ñ pọmọ ẹlòmìi jẹ / Omilẹgbẹ ló gbeyẹ tiwọn* [30] / *Wọ́n fi ñ pọmọ bíbí inú wọn ọ́n jẹ / Ọ̀pọ̀ ló sì ñ gbagbá àjé / Wọ́n fi ñ bímọ àbíyè.*
7. *Njé Ọlátúbọ̀sún / Aròyé-bí-ẹyẹ-ibáákà / Bó o bá gbagbá àjé tán ṣé / Emi lo ó má fàjéè rẹ ṣe o? / Ká peré tì, ká pàwàdà tì / Ọlátúbọ̀sún ṣèbà Èṣù* [40] / *Ó ti ríbàa Ṣàngó ó tó wá nílé / Mo ríbá lọ́wọ́ àwọn àgbàagbà / Mo ríbà lọ́wọ́ àwọn ẹlẹyẹ ayé gbogbo / Àti gbogbo ọmọ̀ràn tó lógbọ́n / Tí wọ́n ñ fọgbọ́n oríí wúlò fèèyàn.*
8. *Èmi ò ni gbagbá àjé òtòsì / Tí ó máa làkìsà jíní káyé / Èmi ó lè gbagbá ẹyẹ / Tí i figbá orí ọmọ̀ tiwọn ọ́n mumi / Èmi ó lè ṣeyẹ kannakánná èrùjẹjẹ* [50] / *Eyẹ afẹ̀jẹ́ énìyàn ṣorò l'Áwẹ / Torí bọ́ṣó ilé bá pọmọ rẹ̀ / Òun ó ni gbénú ayé rà sí / Àjé tó fàṣẹ àgbà pọmọ àjèjì / Ó pé ni, ó yá ni / Olúwa rẹ̀ á ráhùn gbẹ̀hìn / Odò tó bá ṣèèsì gbégi nibùú ò / Ara rere kó ní ó fi lọ / Ọjọ́ sìgìdì bá wẹmi lódò / Ni ò tún rílé ayé mọ́* [60] / *Bí mo bá gbagbá àjé ayé tán / Mo róhun tí n bá máa fàjéẹ̀ mi ṣe o / Àjé arẹmọ, Àjé ọ̀gbàgbà.*
9. *Ìgbà tí mo bẹ̀ẹrè lọ́wọ́ Ajésùnmíbọ̀ / Ẹ wá gbóhun tó wí / Ẹ wá gbóhun tólùfẹ́ fẹ́ẹ́ máa fàjé è ṣe o / Àjé olódo, àjé ọ̀mí / Ọ̀ṣọ̀ọ̀ṣẹ̀ là ñ tayò tí ò jẹ / Ọ̀ṣọ̀ọ̀ṣẹ̀ là ñ ta báñkà tí ò dọ̀mì* [70].
10. *Ẹ bá kúkú jẹ á ṣèbẹ̀ àgbà / Kátatẹ́tẹ́ ó dáwó jọ / Ká fowó ñlá bàwọn àjé ninú / Bé ẹ bá dáwó jọ tán / Ẹ máa kówó gbogbo bọ̀ lọ́dọ̀ mi / Bí mo bá darímúróde àgbà àjé tán / Ìlú Òyìnbó ni ñ ó máa fàjéẹ fò rakin rakin lọ / Ìlú Òyìnbó ni mo tí fẹ́ẹ́ máa lọ rèé gbáyò ọ̀mì.*
11. *Àtàndá Amúlùúdùn tó ñ fipá jalè, kó tóó kú / Ẹ wá gbóhun tó wí, Ẹ wá gbóhun tó sọ.* [80] / *Èmi ñ gbọ́ finfin / Pówó epo, owó òógùn / Tí gbogbo mẹ̀kúnnù ñ kú lé lórí / Ogunlọ́gọ̀ èníyàn ñlá Orílẹ̀-èdè yìí / Ló ti ñ ḍ́gbọ́n owó rabamú sẹ̀hìn odi / Owó ñ gbin ni Swissa Òyìnbó / Owó ñ gbin ní Gènèfà.*
12. *Ó wá yẹ ká péjú / Ó yẹ ká forikorí bẹlẹyẹ / Ó yẹ ká sowópò sèbẹ̀ àjé / Kélẹyẹ tí ñ bẹ nílẹ̀ yìí pátá* [90] / *Ó dẹyẹ fò séyìn odi / Kí wọ́n ó bá wa kówóo wa / Tájẹni bí emírin bá ti kó lọ. / Owó irú, owó ata / Owó àfìjìbìtì gbà / Owó àfi-hàrámù gbà.*
13. *Ọ̀pọ̀ òṣèlú àtẹ̀hìnwá / Ló ti bowó o wa mọ̀lẹ̀ / Tí wọn ò leè wú mọ́ / Bóyá ẹni kówó o wa pamọ́ ti kú* [100] / *Bóyá wọn ò sì sí lómìnira ni / Táyé fì kólé léri owó o wa.*
14. *Gbogbo àbòmọ́ owó òtòsì pátá / Ni mo fẹ́ lọ rèé wú nílẹ̀ / Bí mo bá gbagbá àjé tán / Ẹ kówó o wa tẹ́ ẹ ti kó ná wá / Ni n ó máa fàjé mi ṣe o / Àtàndá Alàyà, Afipọ́njúkóléonílé / Àjé rẹ ó ṣe dìẹ nibẹ̀.* [110].
15. *Ìgbà tí mo bẹ̀ẹrè lọ́wọ́ Adéòtí / Ẹ wá gbóhun tó túnwí, tó fẹ́ẹ́ máa fàjéẹ è ṣe / Ilẹ̀ tó lépo tó lọ́rọ̀ ni Nàìjíríà wa / Bó ti ñ sàn fún wàrà àtọ̀rá tó / Gbogbo ọjà ló wọ́n tó ju góòlù / Ẹ bá jẹ á tètè sèbẹ̀ àgbà / Kẹ́ ẹ jẹ á bàwọn àjé ayé pátá / Lọ́jọ́ epo tá a ní bá tún dimi eégún / Kí wọn ó máa lébú epo kiri* [120] / *Kí wọn ó ṣe fàyàwọ́ àìrí / Kójà ó wọ́lú wá / Kó wá dẹ gbogbo ilẹ̀ yìí lọ́rùn.*
16. *Ìrántẹ́ kan òkè ọ̀hún / Tó jíṣẹ́ ọba tó fi ñ tèpá rìn / Tí ò rówó fi kólé ni mo tún bí lẹ́jọ́ / Mo ní bàbá àgbá Òjíṣẹ́ / Bó o bá gbagbá àjé tí mò ñ wí tán / Emi lo ó máa fàjé rẹ ṣe o? / Ká peré tì, ká pàwàdà tì* [130] / *Ó ní Àjé ñ pọmọ ó jẹ Àjé ñ pàgbàagbà / Mo tún ti gbó wí pé / Àjé ayé ñ panidà sáidaa / Ifun àgúntàn a máa dénú alángbá láàjìn / Bí mo bá dẹlẹyẹ tó láṣẹ àyídá lọ́wọ́ / Mo fẹ́ mú gbogbo òtòsì tó ñ bẹ nílẹ̀ yìí / Kí wọn ó di baba ọrọ̀ tó lọ́rọ̀ ni / Mo sì fẹ́ mú gbogbo èèyàn tó bá lówó / Kí wọn ó padà tún wá dòtòsì / Mo wá fẹ́ mú gbogbo ọ̀gá àgbà pátá* [140] / *Kí wọn ó padà wá dìránṣẹ́ / Kí gbogbo ẹni tí a ñ rán níṣẹ́ / Ó wá gorí àga Ìjọba / Bóyá bọ́gáá bá wọ bàtá ẹgún / Wọn á mọbí tó ñ gún gbogbo tálítà lẹ́ṣẹ̀.*

17. *'Ìyá mi'* literally, my mother, is a form of synecdoche for the witches. It is one of their appellations to show their roles in procreation according to a Yorùbá myth.
18. *Ọ̀rọ̀ ikànìyàn ti ò kò / Ọ̀rọ̀ àtikànìyàn ti ò tilẹ̀ lójú nijósí / È bá má wulè fọ̀fún pópárà / Kẹ́ ẹ má kogbè nínú òfún mọ́ / Báwọn ìyá mi bá dẹyẹ lọ́gànjó* [150] */ Wọn a sọye tá a jé láláikẹnìkanoso / Ẹ má fowó ṣètò ikànìyàn mọ́ / Ẹ jé á kówó bẹ gbogbo àjé / Kó wá sètò ikànìyàn.*
19. *Bí mo bá gbagbá àjé tán / Fọ̀lúmọ́-fọ̀lúmọ́ / Ni ń ó máa fàjé mi ṣe o.*
20. *Ká peré tì, ká pàwàdà tì / Nítorí kínni ń kó? / Afínná sọkọ* [160] */ Iná ń jóni láṣọ / Afòjò ṣàlè / Òjó ń múni bí ótútù / A tún ní á foyé ṣonítijú / Oyẹ́ ń kání in kò bí èyan akika / Owó ṣayé dàdiitú / A á rééyàn wá bá ni járọ̀ọ rẹ̀. / Àwọn àgbà kan àgbà kàn / Bí wọ́n bá fẹ́ gbàjọ àjé / Ẹni ń kówó ayé ná ń bẹ nílẹ̀ wọn ò pa* [170] */ Alujíbití wàyó ń bẹ nílẹ̀ / Wọn ò le mùjèẹ rẹ̀ / Asíwájú ṣèbàjé ń bẹ nílẹ̀ / Wọn ò séjú ayé sí / Bí wọ́n bá gbẹyẹ tán / Ọmọ ọ tíwọn ni wón fi í pa jẹ / Ẹ bá jé á jọ gbàjé ìrọ̀rùn / Tó le tolẹ̀ yìí látòkè. / Kí ń má wulẹ̀ sọ̀rọ̀ jìnnà / Ọ̀rọ̀ yìí kìí ṣehun tẹ́nikọ̀ọ̀kan wa ò ní dá sí* [180] */ Ẹ kúkú ti mohun tí kálukú fẹ́ fẹyẹ tíwọn ṣe / Ẹ sì mọ̀rọ̀ àjé tí a ti ń sọ ọ́ bọ̀ látẹ̀hìn / Ọ̀rẹ́, bó o bá gbagbá àjé àgbà / Bó o bá dẹlẹyẹ, tó o daláyé tán / Emi lo ó máa fàjé ẹ̀ rẹ ṣe o / Ọ̀rọ̀ yìí kawo / Ọ̀rọ̀ yìí kọgbẹ̀rì.*

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