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EDITORIAL NOTE

The Ethiope Journal of English, Literary, and Cultural Studies (ISSN: 0795-5413) is an interdisciplinary journal that explores topical and generative issues in English linguistics and in literary and cultural studies. We recognise that African humanities research is both problem-based and knowledge oriented, and our aim is to provide a platform for scholars to analyse and theorise Africa in a way that is generative, conversational and decolonial. Specifically, the journal focuses on both the analytical and theoretical approaches to knowledge production in the context of Africa and the Global South. We want to curate papers that are hinged on African indigenous paradigms and approaches or that seek to extend, reimagine, or contextualise current theoretical or analytical approaches in English language studies and in literary and cultural studies.

We invite papers that dwell on all aspects of English language studies, including phonetics/phonology, semantics, syntax, discourse analysis, pragmatics, stylistics, ESL, ESP etc. We also welcome papers that theorise literary and cultural texts, including film, still and moving images, music and dance, photographs, cultural objects, spaces and places, society and social formations, and other relevant corpora. While we accept purely analytical essays, we encourage authors to focus on theorising the texts or data they engage with. In particular, we welcome theoretical conversations that implicate postcolonial subjecthood, ecocritical approaches (especially postcolonial ecocriticism), feminism and gender studies, new trends in linguistics, object-oriented criticism and approaches, and other generative approaches to knowledge production. Authors are encouraged to do original theorisation rather than adopt extant theoretical frameworks. They may also extend the scope of extant theories and approaches based on the material they present and discuss.

Furthermore, papers with interdisciplinary approaches are also welcomed. We recognise that knowledge production is an elastic phenomenon, and that bright ideas might implicate various fields. Interesting multi-modal, eclectic, or collaborative research is encouraged in this journal.

JOURNAL POLICY

The Ethiope Journal of English, Literary and Cultural Studies is published biennially by the Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. All papers submitted to this maiden edition of the journal had undergone double-blind peer review and published papers are well researched, original and data-driven.

Contributors are to submit an e-copy of their manuscript for assessment and publication to ethiopejournal@delsu.edu.ng or ethiopejournal@gmail.com. Such manuscripts should be original and not under consideration for publication elsewhere and should not have been published in any other journal.

Submitted manuscript which should not exceed 7000 words should be typeset in MS Word Times New Roman Font 12, with double line spacing. The first page should include the title of the manuscript, name(s), and institutional affiliation/address, abstract (not more than 250 words and with not more than six keywords). Manuscripts should conform to the current APA or MLA style sheet. Author(s) of published papers will derive the benefits from peer-review of contributions by seasoned scholars, global visibility and receipt of hard copies as well as soft copies of their papers.

The twelve papers in this maiden edition of the journal cut across disciplines in cultural, media studies and sub-disciplines in English and literary studies. The contributors include seasoned and renowned scholars of international repute and young astute scholars with burning desire to excel in academics. The first article titled: “Folklore and African Poetry in the Age of Globalization” by Prof Ojaide is on cultural studies. Prof. Ojaide is a renowned poet and professor of international repute from the University of North Carolina, USA. It is pertinent to note that the contributors are from universities across the globe. We believe that the twelve articles will be of immense interest to researchers and students.

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IDEOLOGICAL LEANING AND SOCIAL MEANING IN THE SELECTED POEMS OF TANURE OJAIDE: A CRITICAL STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study analyses Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986) and *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* (1990) with a view to exploring the ideological leaning and social meaning in the representation of time, space and society. Specifically, nine poems from these collections are purposively selected for this study. The justification for this selection is with respect to the linguistic features of the poems and their relatedness to the subject matter. The data for this study are analysed qualitatively from the perspectives of the linguistic framework of critical stylistics, using representing time, space and society as our critical stylistic tool. Results indicate that the concepts of time, space and society are projected by Ojaide using deictic elements. As a result, categories such as person deixis, time deixis, and place deixis which manifest in pronominal, verbal, prepositional, and noun phrases are employed by Ojaide to achieve his ideological quest to liberate his region in particular and Nigeria in general from the grips of oppressive forces. This ideological quest in turn results in his social quest to bring social transformation which produces the social meaning in his poems.

Keywords: Ideological leaning, social meaning, critical stylistics, deictic elements, person deixis, time deixis, place deixis1. Introduction

Introduction

The concept of ideology in texts presupposes that language use is not value neutral. Ideology in language use has engaged the attention of scholars such as Fairclough and van Dijk. The idea can be approached from the two points of views offered by them. In this respect, Fairclough offers a critical and descriptive definition of ideology. On his part, van Dijk explores the notion of ideology from a cognitive, social and linguistic perspective, guided by his multidimensional approach.

From a critical standpoint, ideology is a representation of different parts of the world which combine in establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation. In terms of description, ideology reflects the positions, attitudes, beliefs, value

systems, and the views related to a social group (Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse* 8).

Consequently, ideology can be defined as power representations, attitudes, beliefs and value systems contributing to the process of enacting, forming and sustaining or dictating the social relations of power, domination, and exploitation among a social group.

Van Dijk, from a social and cognitive standpoint, strongly posits that ideologies are the fundamental frameworks used in mobilising the social mental beliefs, opinions and social attitudes guiding members of a social group, an organisation or institution (*Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis*, 17 – 18). This view of ideology projects it as a cognitive system that mobilises group via the complex and long term process of socialisation and other socio-cultural practices. In terms of language, van Dijk believes that ideology is related to language use in terms of how it is expressed and reproduced in the society. In simple terms, ideology as a discursive social practice is conveyed through the instrumentality of concealment, legitimisation, manipulation and other associated concepts that embody language functions in the society (*Ideology: A Multidimensional Approach*, 5 – 6). The cited definitions go to show that ideology, especially in relation to language use, is not value-free, and is related to the concept of power and dominance. As noted by Paul Simpson, since language is not value-free or neutral, ideology reflects the ways in which what we say or think embodies the society, although he argues that the embedded ideology can be dominant (specific to a given powerful group for the maintenance of unequal power relations in a society, portraying language as a particular site of struggle), constructed (language functioning within a social area and can give rise to thinking or developing a given ideology), and neutralised (a condition in which people are no longer conscious of the hierarchies and systems that define their social interaction in a society) (5 – 6). As a result, there is need to pay attention to the properties of language that signpost the opinions, positions and beliefs of a group while analysing the ideologies clearly and indirectly expressed in a text.

Despite the prevalence of ideology in textual production, this area of study has received scant attention, especially with respect to poetic investigation. The available few works on this textual characteristic can be categorised into literary and linguistic studies. Ojaide (1994) suggests new ideological patterns for African eco-critical poetry, while Sallah (1995) pays attention to the activist ideology in Ojaide's poetry. In the linguistic category, Iyabode (2008) focuses on the linguistic features and utility of poetry in class struggle, Aboh (2007) points out the linguistic tools and patterns used as an area of linguistic communication in Nigerian poetry. Olatunji (2019) looks at how linguistic and extra-linguistic codes employed by the Nigerian media in their presentation of herders and farmers' conflict in Nigeria carry ideological effects and meanings, while Ononye and Chiluwa (2023) examine metaphor and Ideology in the Niger Delta poetic discourse. From the reviews, only Ononye and Chiluwa's work share close similarity with the present effort in terms of relating ideology to the genre of poetry. That said, the present study differs from theirs because while their work focus on metaphor and Ideology, looking at Otobotekere's (2010) *My River*, the present study departs from theirs in its stylistic account of ideology and social meaning in Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986) and *The Fate of Vultures and Other Poems* (1990). Ojaide's work is crucial given that it engages the exploitation of Niger Delta and its attendant environmental challenges – a dominant theme of literary works produced by writers from the area. A look at literature from the area reveals that the theme of exploitation and environmental justice predominates. This is in conformity with the two selections for this study.

Niger Delta Literature and its Thematic Concerns

The area of Niger Delta is located in the “South-South” part of Nigeria, with landmass coverage of about 70,000 km (Ononye, 2014: 34; Rowell et al., 2005: 9). The area hosts “... 95% of Nigeria's crude oil and gas resources, accounting for 90% of the country's foreign exchange earnings” (Ogbogbo, 2005: 169, cited in Ononye and Chiluwa, 2023: 4). Despite its small size in comparison with the Nigeria's total landmass, its oil deposits endow it with the status of the custodian of Nigeria's oil wealth. However, the deposit of oil in the area has come with grave environmental devastation, resulting from oil exploration. It is estimated that oil spills in the area have almost completely wiped out fishing and farming activities which, the area being an agrarian community,

constitute the inhabitants major source of livelihood. It is in this connection that Chiluwa (2011) asserts that, “Oil spillage and gas flaring not only destroyed farm lands and rivers; thus, worsening the already high rate of unemployment, they also constituted health hazards.” Kaladumo (1996) points out that some of the gaseous pollutants being emitted into the atmosphere such as carbon dioxide, chlorine, nitrogen oxides and sulphur oxides among others, were said to cause irritation, headache, heart problems and gene or neuron problems. According to Kadafa (2012), the Niger Delta is among the 10 most important wetlands and marine ecosystems in the world, but harmful oil exploration activities have made the Niger Delta area one of the five most extremely polluted and damaged ecosystems in the world, arising from petroleum exploration.

The above environmental reality and the unseriousness of the Nigerian government and the oil companies operating in the area, for instance Shell, have resulted in dissatisfaction and revolt from the inhabitants of the region, especially the youth who often come in collision course with the government over the condition of the region. This has often given rise to tension and proliferation of ethnic militias in the region and manifested in what Chiluwa (2011) calls “Niger Delta crisis” of the early 1990s and mid-2000s. This struggle for environmental justice, championed by Ken Sari Wiwa who led the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), hung in 1995 by the Sani Abacha military government, and his later disciples comprising Niger Delta activists, is categorised into two by Ononye and Osunbade (2015: 18) as ‘intellectual articulation’ and ‘physical conflict.’ They note that the first category is represented by creative writers, musicians and griots, media practitioners, radical religious clerics and politicians who have made demand for environmental justice the thrust of their writings and speeches, expressed through different idioms, metaphors and semiotics. The second category, they further maintain, is peopled by militants who, seeking refuge in the force of arms, express their grievances against perceived government’s neglect and exploitation.

The Niger Delta literature, being part of the creative manifestation of the struggle to liberate the region, has been used to further the quest for environmental justice as an integral part of the intellectual struggle. The literature represented by the various works of the writers from the region is a demonstration of “how literature has become an extension of politics of emancipation and

human rights" (G. G. Darah, 2008). Its thematic thrust is "... advocacy for environmental safety and justice from oil exploration activities and their effect" (Ononye and Chiluwa, 2023: 5) or what Nixon (2011) captures as "environmentally embedded violence that is often difficult... to reverse" (p. 7). Ojaide is undoubtedly a Niger Deltan writer in the sense that, in the words of Ojaide himself, "he has used the resources at his disposal to articulate the spirit and experience of his place from an individual perspective" (Ojaide, 2015a: 142). As Ushie (2005) remarks, environmental issues, socio-political and economic issues affecting his home country, Nigeria, and specifically Niger Delta form his major thematic preoccupation. These observations are evident in the collections *Labyrinth of the Delta* and *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* where the Niger Delta ecology and the socio-political condition in Nigeria are in focus. As a result, the poet interrogates the socio-political concerns in the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general.

Ojaide's poetry has been approached from different stylistic standpoints (see Maledo 2018, 2019 & 2020; Kadiri et al 2022). However, this study is informed by the level of ideological leaning and social meaning as created by Ojaide in the selected collections. Therefore, through this discourse, we investigate how the poet has been able to interrogate the socio-political concerns in the Niger Delta and Nigeria. The study goes further to identify the various categories and linguistic strategies used to express this ideology.

Theoretical Underpinning

In analysing the ideological leaning and social meaning created by Ojaide in the selected collections, the study is predicated on Jeffries critical stylistics. According to Norgaard et al, critical stylistics is a term used to refer to stylistic works investigating the ways in which social meanings are manifested through language" (11). Critical stylistics can also be seen as a discipline that looks at the different ways in which ideologies are contained in the language that we use, e.g., through modality, opposition and transitivity ("Critical Stylistics" Language in conflict).

Critical stylistics attempts to assemble the most general function that a text has in representing realities (Jeffries, Critical Stylistics 14). This, according to Layo Olaluwoye, is based on the fact that ‘there is a level at which texts organise the world we experience and that this is demonstrable in the words and structures of the texts themselves (88). On this, Jeffries asserts that:

language is essentially a fine balanced combination of rules and broken rules, where the fact that there is no one-to-one form-function relationship is the key to many of the most useful and life enhancing aspects of language, such as the writing of poetry and the use of metaphor in daily life, as well as on the negative aspects, such as lying and manipulation (Critical Stylistics 44).

In Critical Stylistics, Jeffries proposes ten analytical tools for textual analysis. These tools are:

Naming and Describing

Representing Actions/Events/States

Equating and Contrasting

Exemplifying and Enumerating

Prioritizing

Implying and Assuming

Negating

Hypothesizing

Presenting Others’ Speech and Thoughts

Representing Time, Space and Society (Critical Stylistics 17).

The outlining of the tools for data analysis gives it a clear edge over critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis in terms of both theory and methodology. Jeffries opines that these tools answer the question of what any text is ‘doing’ and that they function in a similar way to each other (Critical Stylistics 15).

The Concept of Deixis

The term ‘deixis’ is derived from Greek which means ‘pointing’ (Norgaardetal73). It is a linguistic term used to refer to elements of a sentence, speech or utterance whose interpretation depends on the context of their usage.

This is why Jeffries states that “some linguistic items are less fully semantic than others, until they are placed into a context of use” (*Critical Stylistics* 148). Deictic items are mostly based on context for its meaning. Diesel Holger defines it as a “class of linguistic expressions that are used to indicate elements of the discourse situation or discourse context including the speech participants and the time and location of current speech events” (3). It is mostly concerned with speech events especially in time and location. Sara Mills also defines it as “the way the text situates the reader in relation to a textual world through the use of forms such as this/that, here/there and now/then” (52). This is in line with Jeffries terms for proximal and distal pairings (*Critical Stylistics* 149). For Simpson, it is “the ‘orientational’ features of language which function to locate utterances in relation to speakers’ viewpoints” (12).

From the foregoing, we can say that deixis are those linguistic features that create viewpoints in a text through its representation of event in time, place and the participants involved. They apply to time as well as space; the contrast between the adverbs ‘now’ (time close to the speaker) and ‘then’ (time remote from the speaker) will always show. Because deixis is speaker related, it can easily be used to indicate particular and changing viewpoints, thereby influencing the meaning of a text.

Jeffries proposes four groups of deictic items which are closely related to the six deictic shifts proposed by Peter Stockwell. Place concerns “adverbs (here, there), demonstratives (this, these, that, those), adverbial (often prepositional), and structures (on the right, opposite, further up the road)” (*Critical Stylistics* 149). Time relies on “verb tenses, adverbs (then, now), demonstratives (this, these, that, those), time adverbials (later, tomorrow, afterwards, next, soon). Persons are denoted by “personal pronouns (I, me, us, and you)” (*Critical Stylistics* 149). Finally, social is signalled by titles (Mr, Dr, Lord etc.), address forms (first name, nicknames, formal names) (*Critical Stylistics* 149).

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research method for a close and detailed rigorous study of the selected poems. The selected collections are *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986) and *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* (1990).

Five poems have been selected from *Labyrinths of the Delta* henceforth, LOTD and four from *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* henceforth, FOV.

Method of Data Analysis

As stated earlier, the data for this research are analysed from the perspectives of the linguistic framework of critical stylistics. Critical stylistics as propounded by Lesley Jeffries presents ten tools for the analysis of our data. Out of these ten tools, one will be used for the analysis of our data. The tool is representing time, space and society. To achieve this, we will focus on how the poet represents time, space and society through the theoretical model of deixis. For our procedure, the poem is first presented and then followed by the analysis. For the purpose of reference, our data is presented and numbered from Extract I to Extract XIX.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Here focus is on how time, space and society are presented in the data. This is explored by looking at the deictic elements through which the concept of time, space and society are projected by the poet personae in the data. To this end, elements constituting the abovementioned phenomena in the poems for this study are highlighted. Through this medium, the means of arrival at the social and ideological meanings by Ojaide in the chosen poems for this study are revealed. As already pointed out in the methodology for the present study, the linguistic levels will be identified and analysed in the selected poems. The features are then interpreted and related to the socio-situational context of the poems and the messages the poet wants to share with his readers in the extracts below.

Extract I

My worst enemies are gathering strength.
They not only brought down the eagle
but felled irokos on sight, incapacitated
the savior –totem and razed its wing hold.
They discouraged the savage thrust against our bane
and turned the phalanges' lances
into mere wooden paddles “Compatriots”, (FOV 13).

Extract II

As soon as they had their hold on the land,

They upset the custom of truth.

Now they have blunted the sacred sword

how will justice be executed

When the metal is no longer a blade

And the beast escapes communal rage? “Compatriots”, (*FOV* 13-4).

In the two extracts above, the concept of time, space and society are encoded using, first, person deixis such as ‘my’ (first person possessive pronoun), ‘they’ (third person plural pronoun) and ‘our’ (first person possessive plural pronoun). Second, they are encoded in Place deixis (“on the land”), and time deixis such as “are gathering” (present progressive), “brought,” “felled,” “razed,” “discouraged,” “turned,” “had,” ‘blunted’ (indicating past time), “soon,” and “now” (adverbs), and “upset” (present time). Within the context of deployment, the poet personae uses those deictic resources to point out to his readers (addressees) the conspirators against his people as seen in the noun phrase headed by person deixis, “my worst enemies,” “They” as a person deixis is subsequently used to refer to his ‘enemies’ suggesting the person being referred to in the context of utterance. Making use of time deixis reveals the time or period the charges against the poet personae’s “enemies” are committed. On the other hand, place or distal deixis shows the place the listed evils attributed to the enemies are committed. Pragmatically, these deictic elements serve to highlight the person committing the stated acts of harm, those against whom they are committed, the completion of those acts as represented by predominantly past verbs, and the place they are committed; in this case, ‘on the land.’ Following these acts, the poet condemns them and calls on his readers to do likewise.

Extract III

My blood is no longer mine, it is boiling
With the anger and hunger of the land
I am no longer just a man I am human;
I am a devotee of the faith of justice,
I wave the borderless flag of unity,
I enlist in the army of instant recovery “My next step”, (*FOV* 20).

Extract IV

Out of this life, let me fashion strength
to recover the losses of the virtuous heritage:
out of my days, let me give birth to new warriors
who will love the abused land with their bodies
with my breath, let me forge a metal shield
from the common will to overcome
when do we wait for from the chorus of today’s patients
Whom do we wait for from the void of tomorrow? “My next step”, (*FOV* 20-1).

Here the notions of time, space, and society are projected through the person deixis “my”, “mine”, “me” (first person singular object, and possessive pronoun/adjective), ‘I’ (first person singular pronoun), place deixis (noun phrases: “the land,” “the abused land”), time or temporal deixis (present tense verbs such as “is,” “wave,” “enlist,” “will,” “wait”), adjective (“instant”) noun phrase (“my days”) nouns (“today’s, “tomorrow”), distal deixis (“this”). The poet personae makes clear his ideology of initiating a move to correct the numerous injustices committed against his people in his avowed “my next step.” The urgency of this action is reflected in his choice of the present verb ‘is’ and the poet’s repetition of the expression, “let me,” indicating his impatience with the state of affairs.

The adjective “instant” symbolising time also foregrounds the poet personae’s urgency in initiating steps that would tilt the present balance of power in his people’s favour.

In pragmatic context, the deictic elements point out the referents in terms of person, time, and place. As shown by the pronouns “they,” “mine,” “me,” and “I” whose identity is retrievable within the context of utterance, they are used to refer to the poet personae who informs his readers of his resolve to take a step that is intended to be drastic. The notion of time is expressed with elements such as ‘today’s,’ ‘tomorrow,’ ‘instant,’ ‘is,’ among others. These elements highlight the necessity of doing away with delay in carrying out the poet’s sworn action. Finally, expressions such as “the land” and “the abused land” project place, which in the context of the utterance represents the poet’s region, Niger Delta.

Extract V

His closed fist presses
a honeyed cake into an ashen loaf
with his gap-toothed shine for a wand
he throws out one thing
with one hand
and with the same five
takes in more than seven.

I have been a victim of inflation “When tomorrow is too long”, (*FOV* 18).

Extract VI

If there’s ever a juggler in town
With an eagle in glittering cage,
Shun all the trappings of democracy,
Do not allow him perform;
he is bound to be the beneficiary

of all accounts
and you the victim
of that gap-toothed shine of a wand.
Do to him what you'll do
to a cobra in your door step;
let tomorrow be too long “When Tomorrow is too Long”, (*FOV* 18-9).

The extracts reproduced above encode the ideas of time, space and society through the person deixis ‘his’ (third person possessive singular pronoun), ‘he’ (third person singular pronoun), ‘him’ (third person singular pronoun), ‘I’ (first person singular pronoun), ‘you’ (second person pronoun), time deixis (“presses,” “throw,” “takes,” “is” singular present verbs), ‘will’ (future present verb), “tomorrow” (adverb of time), place or distal deixis (“in town” a prepositional phrase symbolising place), “door step” (a noun phrase indicating place).

In the poem “when tomorrow is too long,” the poet personae underscores the necessity of taking urgent action against an exploiter who is deixically presented using varieties of third person singular pronouns (singular) “he,” “him” and “this”. The action of the exploiter is presented using present singular verbs “presses,” “throws,” “takes” and “is.” These indexical markers underscore the continuous effect of the exploiter which is presented as still going on and always. The poet personae’s ideology of liberating his people is conveyed through imperative expressions such as: “shun all the trappings of democracy,” “do not allow him perform,” “Do to him what you’ll do to a cobra in your door step,’ and ‘let tomorrow be too long.’ Through these expressions, the poet charges and rouses his readers to action.

Contextually, the deictic items assist us in retrieving the person to whom these pronominal elements are directed. Through the help of the context, we know who is “he,” “him,” and ‘his.’ Also, we are made aware that the effect of the action of the exploiter is always with the people. The place in question is also disclosed.

Extract VII

I would not follow the hurricane
nor would I the whirlwind
in their brazen sweep-away
they leave misery in their wake
I would not spread my ward's wealth in the open
and stir the assembly to stampede;
I would not smear my staff with the scorn of impotence "The Fate of Vultures", (*FOV* 11).

Extract VIII

O Aridon, bring my wealth
from rogue-vaults;
they had all their free days,
let today be mine.
Cut back pictures of shame
for I know why
the gasping eagle, shorn of proud feathers
sand-ridden, mumbles its own dirge
gazing at the iroko
it can no longer ascend "The Fate of Vultures", (*FOV* 12).

In Extract VII, time, space and society are represented with person deixis "I" first person singular pronoun), "my", (first person possessive singular pronoun), "their" (person possessive pronoun), "they" (third person plural pronoun), "mine" (first person possessive pronoun), "it" (third person singular pronoun), "its" (third person possessive pronoun), time deixis ("would" attitudinal modal denoting resolve), "leave," "know,"(present plural verbs), "can" (present tense modal of ability), "mumbles," (present singular verb), "today" (noun denoting time).

In the instance above, the poet announces his resolution (ideology) “not to follow the hurricane” nor “whirlwind.” The metaphors employed here represent the raiders of his land, who in characteristic manner feast on his land like “Vultures” do to a corpse. The repetition of “I” conveys the poet personae’s determination not to co-operate with forces bent on destroying his home land. These forces, he notes, “leave misery in their wake.” He commands the addressee to bring back the wealth of the region. Before now, the enemies of his people had had a field day. But this field day is over as “today” (this period) represents a time of retrieval of all that have been stolen from his people.

Through the help of the context, deictic markers such as “they,” and “their” refer to the “vultures,” whereas “its” and “it” are recoverable from the context as referents to “the gasping eagle.” Taken in isolation, these elements are difficult, if not impossible to determine the items they refer to. The context also provides us the time “the hurricane” and “whirlwind” wreaks havoc. Meanwhile, the time of the mumbling of its dirge by “the gasping eagle” is revealed. As a result, these deictic resources serve to project the ideas of time, space and society.

Extract IX

To see her dry-skinned when her oil rejuvenates hags
to leave her in darkness when her fuel lights the universe
to starve her despite all her produce
to let her dehydrate before the walls bored into her heart
to have her naked despite her innate industry “Ughelli”, (*LOTD* 74).

Extract X

for the palm’s oil to be called the fig tree’s
for the goddess of wealth not to be complimented for her gifts
but spat upon by raiders of her bosom
for one to earn so much and be denied all except life-
....and for her to be sucked anaemic by an army of leeches “Ughelli”, (*LOTD* 74).

In Extract IX, only the notion of space is overtly expressed, whereas the society is implied. Although no time is provided, its time notion could be said to be timeless since the action depicted still happens till now. Thus, the notion of space is expressed using person deixis “her” (third person singular pronoun). Through the repetition of ‘her,’ the poet stresses the level of exploitation and abuse the object receives in the hands of its violators. Like a woman, “Ughelli” is constantly ravaged and desecrated by the Nigerian State. Yet despite “her oil rejuvenating the hags,” she is left “dry-skinned.” “Her fuel lights the universe,” while she is left in darkness. “Despite her innate industry,” she is left “naked.” Rather than complement this “goddess of wealth,” she is “spat upon by raiders of her bosom.” To worsen “her” state, she is “sucked anaemic by an army of leeches.” These contrasting fortunes irritate the poet who draws the attention of his readers to this pitiable state of “Ughelli.” By so doing, he mobilises them for action.

Taken outside the context, much of what is understood here is lost. Thus, the context provides us the basis for the comprehension of the object to which “her” refers. It is within the context that this deictic item is fully understood. Through the help of the context, we learn that the notion of space is implied in “Ughelli” as it is the location of the place of the victim of the activities of “her leeches.” Likewise, the society implied here as the victim of the activities of leeches is the Niger Delta.

Extract XI

Halfway through, I rage against palms
That are soft like ripe bananas.
Let us be agitators, striking for human conditions;
Let us riot, burn the czars in our obese minds.
Let the sweat and sores of workers earn them sufficiency.
Through the glass windows of department stores
I see clearly where money goes “Working”, (*LOTD* 54).

Extract XI has its concept of time, space and society encoded with person deixis “I” (first person pronoun), “us” (first person plural pronoun), and “them” (third person plural pronoun); time deixis such as “Halfway” (adverb denoting time), “rage”, “are” “see” (present verbs (plural), “goes”

(singular present verb), place deixis “in our obese minds” (prepositional phrase denoting place).

Here, the poet personae highlights the importance of hard work and reaping the benefits that arise therefrom. He condemns “palms” that “are soft like bananas” (a metaphor symbolising lack of hard work). He charges his readers to join him in agitating “for human condition” as seen in the imperatives, “Let us be agitators” and “Let us riot, burn the czars”. Workers, in his opinion, are not getting their due as money meant for their welfare is carted away by politicians. This, which he notifies his readers, is witnessed by him “Through the glass windows of department stores” from where he sees “clearly where money goes.”

Contextually, deictic elements such as “I,” “us” and “our” refer to the speaker who also identifies with his addressees as seen in “us” and “our.” “Them” in the context refers to workers. However, verbs such as “rage,” “are,” “see,” and “go” suggest that the ideas expressed are still obtainable in present times. Consequently, the notions expressed using “them” still happens till now. Through the notion of place, we see where the poet wants the action to take place “in our obese minds,” and where he sees money being carted away “Through the glass windows of department stores.” In view of the foregoing analysis, the concepts of time, space, and society are attained using deictic elements.

Extract XII

And I am the one that must shed the blood
on which the big ones thrive;
they will only accept my blood type
which they say is light and sweet, so digestible
They have grown so fat in the neck, so beastly
they know the forbidden dishes they consume.
They want my blood to keep the country one,
they want my blood to bring peace to the states,
they need my blood to double and redouble their wealth “The cross”, (LOTD 73).

Extract XIII

And I suffer the plight of singleness--
I bleed in my island embargoed.
I bleed, singing my throat sore in the struggle;
I bleed from blows of the brutish majority.
Why my blood must be shed
because of my birthplace.
for nepotic groups to celebrate their mediocrity?
O jewry of my soul, how many bills to freedom? "The cross", (*LOTD* 73).

Like the previous extracts, the idea of place is muted in Extract XII, though it could only be inferred from the context. However, the phenomena of society and time are expressed with person deixis such as "I" (first person singular pronoun), "they" (third person plural pronoun), "my" (first person possessive pronoun), "their" (third person possessive pronoun), and time deixis such as "am" (present first singular of "be") "thrive" (present plural verb), "will" (predictive modal, denoting future time) "is" (present singular verb), "have grown" (perfective verb), "know," "want," "need," "suffer" and "bleed" (present plural verbs).

As the title of the poem clearly shows, "The Cross" is a metaphor for the burden the poet's region (Niger Delta) has had to bear over the years. Along this line, the first person pronoun 'I' reflects a personalisation of this experience, indicating that the region is alone in this sacrifice of self for the well-being of other regions in the country. This sacrifice involves shedding of blood. Here "blood" is a metaphor for the oil deposits in the region, which according to the poet personae, "is light and sweet, so digestible." This oil has made others, especially the exploiters, "grow fat in the neck." It is also needed "to keep the country one," "bring peace to the states," and "double and redouble their wealth." Here deictic markers such as "they" and "their" indicate other parts of the country with which the Niger Delta oil money is used to maintain and sustain. In terms of time, deictic elements (the verbs) such as "am," "thrive," "will," "know," "want," "need," "suffer" and "bleed" reveal the significance of time in this experience as readers are made to know that what is portrayed still happens in the present. "Singleness" still remains the "plight" of the region, and it still bleeds. This has necessitated the poet personae to sing his throat "sore in the struggle." Through this approach, like minds will be mobilised to redeem the region.

With the help of the context, we are made aware of those to whom deictic resources refer. For instance, elements such as “I” and “my” are used to refer to Niger Delta, and they frame the experience portrayed in the poem as personal, whereas items such as “they” and “their” refer to exploiters of the region and other parts of the country with which the Niger Delta oil is serviced. Through the instrumentality of time deixis, the significance of time is revealed as the choice of present verbs clearly demonstrates that in recent times, the experience portrayed in the poem is still obtainable in the region.

Extract XIV

When I contemplate exile
my land wears a monstrous mask--
the fruits lose their cherished taste,
fish desert the waters,
and the earth shudders under human steps.
I begin to see everybody as an agent,
and I care not if we are separated forever "Exile", (*LOTD* 14).

Extract XV

Exile has become my seductress;
I daydream of her fine eyes, hallucinate
over her appeal...
But who will sing savage song
to rid the beautiful land of the monstrous scourge “Exile”, (*LOTD* 14).

In this particular instance, the notion of time, space and society are conveyed with person deixis such as “I” (first person pronoun), “my” (first person possessive pronoun), “their” (third person possessive pronoun), “we” (first person plural pronoun), “her” (third person singular pronoun); time deixis such as “wears,” “shudders,” (present first person singular verbs), “contemplate,” “lose,” “desert,” “are,” “hallucinate,” “begin,” “care,” (present plural verbs), place deixis such as “my land,” “the beautiful land” (noun phrases denoting place).

In Extract XIV, the poet personae recalls his internal struggles when he considers abandoning the struggle for the liberation of his people. Sometimes, going on exile appears like an attractive option to him as he daydreams “of her fine eyes, hallucinate over her appeal...,” yet this thought is blunted when he remembers that someone has to “sing the savage song to rid the beautiful land of the monstrous scourge.”

Using deictic elements, referents are made obvious within the context of utterance. The poet discloses to his readers that he, represented with the first person pronouns, “I,” “my,” and “we,” is the one at the centre of the discourse, while “their” and “her” (third person pronouns) are used to represent his land. Through deictic resources such as “wear,” “lose,” “desert,” “begin,” among others, we are informed that the experiences of “monstrous mask,” “losing cherished taste,” the earth reacting under human steps and many others remain till this day. Finally, place deixis such as “my land” and “the beautiful land” represents the Niger Delta, a place that these tensions take place.

Extract XVI

.....How can we be safe without
Carrying our heads in a strong shell;
How can our fortunes reach home
Without encountering armed robbers “Message of lust”, (*LOTD* 36).

Extract XVII

The fowl is guzzling corn,
It knows not how much it is bought;
The cook is frying eggs,
He feels not the bruise of the hen’s anus;
Solders are firing bullets into the crowd,
They will boast of those they have killed;
The Pay and Records boys are riding Yamaha,
They are paying and wrecking Nigeria “Message of lust”, (*LOTD* 36).

In representing the notion of society, the phenomena of time, place and society are expressed in “Message of lust” using person deixis such as “we,” (first person plural pronoun), “our” (first person plural pronoun), “it” (third person singular pronoun), “He” (third person singular pronoun), and “they” (third person plural pronoun), representing the notion of society. The idea of time, on the other hand, is projected with time deixis such as “is” (present first person singular verb), “knows” (present singular verb), “will” (predictive modal, denoting future time); while the notion of place is expressed using place deixis such as “in a strong shell” and “into the crowd,” (prepositional phrase denoting place)

In this particular poem, the poet personae raises questions on how the region would be safe from the prying eyes of its predators. Like a trader returning from market, how does it get home without being raided on the way? Then he takes a swipe at the forces ravaging his zone. These forces greedily help themselves with the resources of Niger Delta without caring to know its implications for the region. It is highly documented facts that oil exploration has caused environmental degradation in the region, yet those who extract the oil do it without recourse to the consequences their activities pose to the region.

In projecting the above, the poet personae makes resort to deictic elements. For instance, “we” and “our” refer to the people of his region, whereas “they” is used to refer to the profiteers from the resources of the region. “It” is used as a reference for both the metaphor of “The fowl,” representing explorers of the oil of the region, and the “corn” representing the oil deposits of the region which the outsider forces guzzle without heed to the economic and environmental costs to the region. In encoding the idea of time using time deixis, the poet makes use of predominantly present forms of verbs such as “is,” “knows,” “feel,” “are,” “will,” and others, these connote the fact that the impacts of the activities of the exploitation of the region’s resources are lived experiences which continues up to the present time and have not changed. In expressing the notion of place, prepositional phrases such as “in a strong shell” and “into the crowd” are deployed; thereby revealing the location of the manifestation of the impacts of the unlikelihood of the region being free without stopping the economic bleeding of the region.

Extract XVIII

Shot down the sparrow
which dims your light,
shoot down the sparrow
with steel arrows
to save tomorrow
from a sun-eclipse “When tomorrow is too long”, (*FOV* 81).

Extract XIX

But the plague struck, answer

to prayers--

we never knew the desires

that would deal heavy blows

but yet we prayed, cried

as orphans of the world,

needed pity for sustenance;

we prayed to unpredictable lords.

They would give us what we wanted

if only we wanted

what would weaken our subject-resolve--

they wanted obeisance,

they didn't listen to our prayers

but knew we would be satisfied

with any gifts, even if ungodly,

and with novelty, so well packaged

they pulled the plague

from their roomy sleeves "When tomorrow is too long", (*FOV* 84).

In the poem "When tomorrow is too long", the underlying concepts of society and time are overtly asserted, whereas the concept of place is muted, though it could be retrieved from the context of utterance. Thus, the idea of society is marked using person deixis such as "your" (second person possessive pronoun), "we" (first person plural pronoun), "they" (third person plural pronoun), whereas the notion of time is expressed with time deixis such as "dims" (present first person singular verb), "tomorrow" (a noun denoting time), "knew," "would," "prayed," "cried," "needed," "wanted," "satisfied," "pulled" (past perfective verbs) "didn't" (past verb plus a negator "not").

In the above poem, the poet charges his fellow Niger Deltans to shoot down the sparrow. The “sparrow” here is a metaphor for elements that deprive the region of its God-given resources. This “sparrow” is responsible for darkness in the area. Thus, shooting it, the poet reminds his readers, would “save tomorrow” (future generations) from experiencing the sort of experience the present generation is accustomed to. Extract XIX recounts the region’s experience in the hands of its abusers. This encounter is framed as ‘the plague’ by the poet. As it is characteristic of every plague, the outcome is not pleasant. Undoubtedly, “the plague” is a metaphor for oil drilling in the area. As the poet recounts, the visit of this scenario leaves consequences in its wake with the region appealing for mercy in the hands of its tormentors without success.

Depiction of notions of time and society are done using elements with meanings retrievable within the context of utterance. Consequently, the repetition of certain deictic elements emphasises the poet’s assignment of relevance to them, and it projects his philosophy or ideology in the poem. For instance, the repetition of “we” and “they” project the poet’s insistence on collectivity among his people. This signpost that the challenges in the region can only take a collective effort to surmount. On the other hand, “they” shows the tormentors of his people and highlights the impacts of their actions on the region. Contrasting these deictic items shows the divide between the people of the region and their oppressors. In accounting for the notion of time, the predominance of past perfective verbs such as “knew,” “prayed,” “cried,” “needed” among others reveals how the people tussled with their oppressors. However, absence of determined resolution exposes the people to pacifist gestures by their oppressors since they understood that they would accept whatever that was thrown at them. This is further strengthened by their state of helplessness since their struggle did not receive any support from the outside world. As a result, they succumb to the superior oppressive power of their exploiters.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to account for how the concepts of time, space and society are presented in Ojaide’s *Labyrinths of the Delta* and *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems*. This was investigated by looking at the deictic elements through which these notions are projected by the poet. The essence was to arrive at how the poet expresses his ideological predisposition and creates social meaning. The findings show that the poet creates meaning through the stylistic tool of deixis.

The study has established that the categories such as person deixis, time deixis and place deixis, which are contextually recognisable, are employed by the poet to project the socio-political concerns in the poems. It also discovered that the linguistic realisation manifested in pronominal, verbal, prepositional phrases, and noun phrase forms. These elements are used to attain the concepts of time, space and society which in turn result in the poet's ideological subscription of quest to liberate his region in particular from the clutches of oppressive forces as well as Nigeria in general.

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