


Issues of ideal national identities in Tanure Ojaide's *The Questioner*: A psychoanalytic approach

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Received: 12 August 2022 | Accepted: 18 August 2022 | Published: 12 October 2022

Abstract: Environmental degradation has been a major topic of concern all over the world, especially because lands exploited for mining mineral resources such as crude oil become contaminated to such an extent that the natural ecosystems of many communities in the world are destroyed. Nigeria is not exempted from this problem and in particular, the Niger-Delta area has for decades suffered great deterioration due to the exploration and exploitation of oil. This situation may have instigated Tanure Ojaide to write poems that bring to the fore the psychological disposition of a people plagued with environmental degradation in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria to call the world's attention to the deterioration of life in the Niger-Delta. It is against this backdrop that this study understudies *The Questioner*, a collection of poems in order to further encapsulate the gory picture of environmental depreciation, neglect, corruption and unconcern for the people of the Niger-Delta. With the application of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical discourse, this study identifies the formation or adoption of questionable identities by individuals who are bedeviled with problems associated with environmental degradation. Hence, by the end of this research, it is observed that the personae in the poems studied, were embroiled in psychological conflicts that caused the fragmentation of their identities as a result of the devastating effects of environmental degradation.

Keywords: Environmental degradation, Fragmentation, Identities, Nationality, Psychological conflicts, Sigmund Freud

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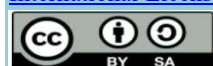
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1. Introduction

Psychoanalytical theorists believe that identification is a discernable term that can be explained through psychological enquiry. In their book entitled *The social construction of reality*, the duo of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann insists that the 'reality of individuals is always socially defined' (1966: 134) and so, identity can be defined as the ability of an individual to conceive himself as a projection of an external world from where he can fit into a reality that suits his universal space (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 122). Simply put, Berger and Luckmann summarises identity as an individual's conscious effort to overcome a collective subjective conception of his or her personality. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 133-134). Again, Fearon (1999: 4) quotes Hogg and Abrams (1988: 2) to state that "Identity is people's concepts of who they are, what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others." Thus, to have an identity is to be an entity that the society accepts his/her individuality based on the moral standard of the society.

To have a definite identity therefore, a person is also expected to carry him or herself with the utmost confidence that has been formed by the inculcation of accepted societal values and good parentage that influence his/her

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recognition to able to identify changes like, dominating or self-gratifying indices that could be linked to the formation of identities that could be either aggressive or fearful (Velleman, 2006: 347). Yet, while it has been widely discussed and analysed, by various scholars/critics like Freud (1923), Adler (1927), Foucault (1978), Lacan (1978), Elliot (2015) and several others, the study of identity still remains a highly philosophically terrain that still needs to be explored.

Indeed, some philosophers, psychologists, sociologists and other experts in related disciplines have done a lot of research on the strengths and weakness of developing concrete identities. Stocker and Hegeman (1996: 307) for instance, explain identity as a confusing state that is explicated by social, psychological and other related disciplines that have studied the conceptualisation of identity. Again, Velleman (2006: 215) contends that identity is not just to be ordinarily explained as such because it is a complex state that needs thorough investigation by juxtaposing different ideologies of identity side by side, in order to objectively accept the identification of a person that has been proposed by philosophers like Frankfurt who situates the concept of identity as 'shaping' philosophers' intuitions or that put forward by Freud who postulated identity as the careful articulation of self (Freud, 1914: 67).

According to Ryckman (2004), to have an identity is to undergo a process of transformation whereby a person consciously engages in the will to be different from the next person in such ways that he doesn't demean him/herself but instead exfoliates his/her personality in such ways that he/she positively affects the life of people around him at all the stages of his/her personal development. To put it in a different light, Ryckman (2004: 182) submits that an independent and un-fragmented identity is built from an individual's will to define him/herself away from other parameters of the existing psychosocial order of life in his/her immediate environment that have in one way or another help to build up his ego personality. Explaining further, what Ryckman (2004) means is that the experiences of an individual include amongst others repressed identifications, recently developed identifications and that which is envisaged in the future as learnt over time as a result of their interactions with various systems of people within a nomenclature such as family, schools and peers. In fact, this conscious need to belong to a group of people may affect the unconscious image of self by an individual to such an extent that that individual may want to imbibe the qualities or characters of other members of the groups he/her may have interacted with as his/her own. Nevertheless, some behaviourists' aggressively encourage an individual's formation of the ideal self by the conscientious will to interact intimately with other members of society at a very early stage of his/her life.

Another psychoanalytical theorist, Alder (1927) further explored the differences in individuals that are formed as a result of a collective lifestyle and he opines that people's characters are constructed from the many relationships that they have with other individuals. Situations like tightly knit family associations can be the building blocks that a growing child uses to develop his/her own personality (Alder, 1927). Thus, the identity of an individual, within an ethnic formation can be of major interest to studies in various fields of inquiry such as the humanities, cognitive science, psychology, and psychoanalysis. This, therefore, enables researchers in all these fields of inquiry to conceive identity as a cognate of past oeuvres of trials, tests, and joyful associations as well as present inclinations with a view on the manifestations of identity indentures with future contrapositions. (Horowitz, 2012: 12). Hence, Freud's discourse on the development of identity is greatly based on the formation of an un-fragmented psyche which is built by incorporating all the life experiences of that particular individual. In fact, all the repressed memories of the individual from childhood through to adulthood is brought to the fore when the said individual's psyche is being shaped and so, the individual may be inclined to the exigencies of past trials/trauma that could be recalled to strengthened the self (Elliott 1998). It is against the backdrop of knowing or finding one's self that this paper will attempt to critique Ojaide's *The Questioner* as a work of poetry that precisely questions the identity of persons irrespective of his/her good or bad experiences.

2. Literature review

It is no longer uncommon to read about the devastating effects of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria. According to Jane Frances (2015: 1-2) "...oil spills, the contamination of the waters and lands to pipeline vandalism, kidnapping, killing, thuggery, gunrunning and a life of poverty" seems to be a normal way of life in this part of Nigeria. The deplorable way in which people live in the Niger-Delta and other humiliating problems tied to environmental issues has elicited writers like Clark (1965), Ojaide (1998), Saro-Wiwa (1996), Bassey (2000), and several others to write about the disadvantages of having crude oil in their community and Ojaide stands out as one of the prominent writers that has consistently written about the deplorable plight of the Niger-Delta.

According to Orhero (2017: 7 & 2), Ojaide infuses Urhobo folklore and philosophy as a means of presenting the worldview of the Urhobo people to the world and at the same time, he calls the attention of the world to the deplorable conditions of his people as a result of environmental degradation. In line with this view, Orhero goes on to quote Alu and Suwa (2012) to support his claims on Ojaide's constant presentation of environmental related themes here stated: "Nester Alu and Vashti Suwa assert that Ojaide 'advances concern for the environment and the consequences of such unfortunate predicaments [environmental pollution] of his people'" (Orhero, 2017: 2). Osborne (2012) reiterates the views of scholars earlier mentioned but adds that despite the continuous degradation of the Niger-Delta areas, the people of the Niger Delta are deeply tied to their lands.

Furthermore, Sadek (2013: 90) contends that the displacement of indigenous Niger-Deltans from their homes; the loss of land for economic gains and the loss of traditional identities are all directly connected to the after effects of colonial control of Nigeria by former British colonialists, thus with the exploitation of the lands in the Niger Delta, people from that area are displaced, alienated and strip bear of their inheritance. Eventually, the indigenous people of the Niger-Delta live as exiles on polluted lands that was once sacred. Okunoye (2004: 772) explains Ojaide's art as a

form of “Afrocentrism” which he [Ojaide] employs as his poetic license to proliferate African cultural heritage while Okome and Gomba (2019: 8) argue that Ojaide’s poems encapsulates a people’s resolve to overcome pains as a result of oil politics of neglect in order to resist the hegemonic policies of postcolonial dialectics which is a modern day extension of colonialist control.

In reading Ojaide’s work via the psychoanalytical framework there have been several studies which include amongst others, research such as Awuzie (2017), Mustafa (2019), Orhero & Udo (2019), Kalejaiye (2022) and others. While Awuzie (2017: 85-86) in a psychoanalytic study of Ojaide’s works asserts that Ojaide’s poetry evokes archetypal images and themes in the mind of his personae as a means of illustrating the pains, worries and joys that the people of the Niger-Delta go through on daily basis, Orhero and Udo (2019: 74) and Mustafa (2019: 137) on the other hand, all argue that the need to establish an identity irrespective of the trauma and disillusionment the people of the Niger-delta experience in recent times exceeds the shame, disgust and disappointment they experience due to environmental degradation.

Having looked at other scholars’ critic of Ojaide’s poems, it is this study’s observation that almost all the earlier mentioned scholars interrogate Ojaide’s poetry through African aesthetics, folklores and folktales, Marxism, orality, ecocritism and even via the psychoanalytical theory. However, the difference between this study and the previous ones is that Ojaide’s poetry as analysed in this essay, can be conceived as an adjunct for understanding the formation of identities of people who are subjected to conflictual existence as a result of the degradation and exploitation of their environment by a set of greedy, exploitative and oppressive individuals and organisations. It is thus the objective of this essay to understudy more closely the result of developing identities that are tied to conflicts, devastation, poverty and the absence of a sense of being in a place that has lost its homeliness.

3. Theoretical framework

According to Elliott (2014) identity cannot be spoken of without acknowledging Freud’s immense contribution to psychoanalytical studies. In his exact words Elliot (2015: 7) posits that “Freudianism has changed our culture’s understanding of the very emotional coordinates of identity, twinning sexuality and repression at the very heart of the human subject”. Elliot went on to argue that in psychoanalysis, Freud developed views that suggest that the mind is always contending with traumatic pasts and failed needs, hence the mind which is explained to be composed of the ego, superego and id, tries to align the self in between denials and restraint on one hand and the subconscious’ desire to align itself with intense sexual pleasure on the other hand with the superego as a major driving force of conflict in the formation of an independent psyche (Elliot, 1998).

To Foucault (1978) identity is not easily discernable as it entails a closely knit system of power and domination that is permissible to an individual who wants to be a member of a certain society. Foucault argues that while scholarly studies are mostly channeled towards uncovering the truth about crime, insanity or sex, these studies are actually carried out in order to intensify the control of persons. Foucault’s studies focuses hugely on the ability to attain power and get more information that provides the channels for easier connections. He also states that scholarly explorations are put forward to help mold a society bearing in mind the cultural principles that may be favourable or disapproving; the recognition of an authoritative voice who is acknowledged and allowed freely to interact under certain formal functions. The production of discourses, texts and knowledge in line with the development of an unscathed psyche is thus deeply intertwined with the formation of identity. Furthermore, Foucault notes that an individual may be studied in the early stage of his career, as the outcome of a significant digressive entity that is fixed on a certain behavioural pattern. Hence the identities of a person are always dominated by new modes of power and manipulations such that Foucault (Elliott, 2014: 12) calls this ever-changing situation a disciplined society that moves from stage to stage.

According to Freud (1923: 1-66), the basis of mental cognitive configuration is the presence of a libidinal pleasure drive which provides the driving force for later development of mental abilities. However, this movement by the mental cognizance of a person can meet impediments that are unrealistic and resistant to analytic solutions (Freud, 1914). Frequent changes of a person’s sexual urge that is pitched against his conflict with the principles of reality may elicit a more subjugated conception of the self in relation to external objects which can totally affect one’s own relation to the world such that that individual may develop narcissistic identity (Schwartz, 1990). What is therefore important is that the development of an individual’s sub-consciousness which may not be linked to his/her needs, is therefore created such that it is tied to the needs of an individual which are subsequently reflected as changes in other relatable desires. In Freud’s *On Narcissism* (1914), Freud explains the state of condition whereby the developing psyche attempts to recollect its unlimited power and ability to present an ideal image or situation that is more acceptable to the ego. Yet, it is not surprising that the seemingly all-powerful identity that the psyche wishes to achieve is most often not attainable. This affects the ego and makes it comes out more forceful and the ego emerges in an attempt to substitute its failed self-love in the urgency of transferring the self-love unto another far more egotistical absorption of self in order to create other identities that are more appealing to the individual in relation to the accepted social behaviours that supports his/her identity.

Afterwards, an individual may take up a particular individuality that he/she could appropriate to give him/her an expected identity. This identity is known as the ego-ideal or an impressed form of mental representation of the self (Carr & Lapp, 2005). Lagache (1961: 5-54) discusses the two term at length and also notes that there are disparities that separate the “ideal ego” and the “ego-ideal” which are summarised thus: “The former is an attempt to regain an indefinable narcissistic omnipotence, often by irrationally idealising eminent others” but the ego-ideal usually becomes bolder when it succumbs to powerful compulsion which the said individual uses to assume an identity that is conceived as a support for the appropriation of an independent state of being as observed by Mijolla-Mellor (Mijolla-Mellor, 2005). From superlative pictures of perfection that the ego-ideal seems to present, the ego-ideal can be explained as an

optimist projection of definite and independent characterisation of (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1985: 29) individuals who embark on autonomous aspirations (Blos, 1985: 38).

Moreover, the power of the self and its ability to be gratified by adopting already well-defined sociable models, can also constitute the implementation of the rules and tenets of submission to authority which is then joined with the norms of identity. The result according to Freud (1933) is the manifestation of tentative features that are necessary in the formation of self which can also include self-loathing and labourious organisation of the super-ego. In understanding this situation, the ego-ideal and the super-ego can engage in identifying cognitive activities that are joined to the ambitions and self-love in respect of the impression of a personalised improvement. Still, the ego-ideal and the super-ego can be channeled towards adopting contrasting views relating to the pursuit of personal improvement. Critics like Freud (1914) have analysed the ego-ideal as a self-building mechanism which constructs the total behavioural features that an individual may develop. Thus, most individuals usually adopt a conscientious cognition that allows the individual the power to appropriate nostalgic old experiences, in order to build an ideal image of the self so as to allow this image of self the leverage of securing repressed or lost enjoyment. Invariably, the ego-ideal denotes admirable temperance for a person who wants to achieve a standard of living that he thinks is appreciable. The super-ego, on the other hand is an internalised picture of power impressed on it by an authority that influences the individual who in turn imbibes the standard of morals accepted by his/her community. It is according to the findings of psychoanalysts that the super ego is built based on the Oedipal complex which is paramount to identity formation in which the subject that is undergoing identity change is cornered to align his/her personal conceptions against a paternal authority figure (Schwartz, 2002). In recognising a father figure, that individual therefore consciously enforces the Oedipal context to be resolved which Freud (1933) went on to state that a person can also subconsciously appropriate paternal explicacies as normative acceptable behaviours.

Freud (1923b: 17-18) enthused that the functions of the super-ego differ greatly from the ego, yet, they both complement each other in respect to ensuring that an individual's desires and goals are met. In fact, Freud (1939: 116-117) contends that while the super-ego appears, to be morally sound, it intentionally abstained from making sure that a person's goals are achieved. It is in fact the representation of those drives which produce an internalised picture that makes more prominent, the importance of paternal influence with the aim of asserting the presence of the father figure in the life of an individual. A person actually acculturates all the image of authority that ensures that the demands of the libido is rechanneled back to the individual to provide the continued supply of moral behaviour. Hence, the ego-ideal and the super ego would seek to isolate and alienate the psyche of a person who is struggling with identity issues through an existing gaze, the fixed and intense look of the ego-ideal is basically goal oriented and the super-ego a self-denying entity. The crucial thing to note here is the fact that the basic notion of the ideal ego, ego-ideal and super-ego is that they are both important elements of the individual's principles, thus they identify various aspects of the psyche's resolve to enforce his/her own conception of identity, thus invalidating theories that discuss the formation of identity based on unitary quantifiers. Indeed, venturing into the territory of identity formation, there is the representation of various situations by subjects that lends a helping hand to the construction of their identities in their subconscious efforts to exist in an uncompromising world. The ideal ego therefore mirrors a person's wish in his will to have a unified coexistence with a known primary object. Freud (1905) notes that this known and familiar object is the maternal object (Freud, 1905). This situation of bonding with a familiar object ensures that the ego-ideal remodels the desired identities of the subject which have been built subconsciously in order to reach the "ideal" stage of identity. So, the super-ego ensures the subjection of authority interactions in order to inflict punishments on him/herself for his/her inability to accomplish this unconceivable errand.

In much recent works on identity, Elliot (2015: 19) believes that identity "is viewed not as an outcome of external linguistic or symbolic systems, but as an open-ended and reflexive process of self-formation". Giddens, in *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991) similarly posits that identity is "reflexive" therefore, self-identity is cast as the formation of an ideal psyche through an articulated effort to engage the psychological and social make-up of an individual during his/her lifetime. Therefore, the mirroring of modern social structures is what Giddens (1991: 38) refers to as the efficacy to "affirm the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character"

Foucault (1972: 131) uses his findings on genealogic studies to state that sexually active people can be studied as probing cases for scientific results in order to show how people can be dominated. This has led to the establishment of certain standards of "norm by which people are judged" (Hewett, 2004: 7) in their societies. Hewett (2004: 7) goes on to surmise that the established norms which can be observed in a place over a number of years, becomes tool of power relationships that enables an individual to get, use and transfer knowledge to such an extent that a person's identity can be controlled and redefined. The proliferation of academic studies on power is intricately connected with the formation of the identity of a person. The individual who wants to have a definite identity is conceived by Foucault as someone who is intimately tied to the knowledge of him/herself and also open to any forms of control that would enable him/her the ability to mould his/her identity. This situation of moulding and solidifying one's identity is usually achievable during the early stages of his/her life (Elliott, 2014: 12).

According to Freud (1923: 1-66), the fundamentals of intellectual systems is a libidinous power for satisfaction that offers the purpose of cohesiveness in the development of intellectual systems. This pressure, however, unavoidably meets resistance from a truth which no longer delivers a concise manner to an instant decision (Freud, 1914). The vicissitudes of the libido within the warfare with this truth precept, supplies an upward push to notions of the self, and represents one's relation to the sector via approaches of narcissistic self-improvement (Schwartz, 1990). Importantly, the cognitive systems so constituted, supposing they no longer appear as goals, are fashioned with regards to preferences, and replicate modifications of choices.

In *On Narcissism* (Freud, 1914), Freud affords the dilemma of the growing psyche because as its effort to get well in order to feel a misplaced all-powerful cohesion with the sector, a utopian view known as the correct ego but this totality proves not possible to attain and the ego emerges to try to update this lost number one narcissistic item in a secondary narcissism, organizing alternative identities that the subject unearths comfortably in social roles and self-identities. Sonner or later, the concerned persons assumes an identity and strives closer to reaching this identification called the ego-ideal, which is a form of mental version of the self (Carr & Lapp, 2005). Lagache (1961) sums up the distinction among the ideal ego and the ego-ideal as “The former is an attempt to regain an indefinable narcissistic omnipotence, often by irrationally idealizing eminent others”, while on the other hand, the latter arises when the narcissistic impulse leads the subject to undertake self-identities that appear to ensure the fulfillment of this omnipotence (Mijolla-Mellor, 2005). The ego-best has for this reason been defined as a wish and an undertaking (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1985: 29) that the character undertakes in a spirit of self-reliance (Blos, 1985: 38).

Interestingly, this situation of independence and self-declaration by an individual makes him/her to unearths numerous gratifications via pre-established social links, and it also entails injunctions and the needs to obey certain identification norms. Thus, the normative details concerned with the prompted challenge of the self, also engages a self-loathing and arduous feature by the super-ego (Freud, 1933). Each of the ego-ideal and the super-ego describes mental intellectual systems related to the expected behaviour and self-esteem that closely fits the picture of a person’s preconceived thoughts on his/her ability to live well. But, these two mental state of existence are exclusively distinct standpoints with regards to a person’s personal travails. The ego-ideal looks inwards as it also presents an embodiment of the values and features that a person believes to be the best for him/her. Hence, the person may carry on to maintain an awareness of his/her ego via a nostalgic longing for obsolete gratification (Freud, 1914), and in so doing he or she may engage his/her perfect conception of the self whose actualisation could comfortably be in a state of supercilious existence. Basically, then, the ego-ideal (or perfect ego) can bring forward the image of excellence to highlight the efficacy of an individual so that s/he may choose a well laid out plan for a good life irrespective of whatever challenges him[her] may go through. The super-ego can be explained to be an incorporated view of an authority figure (for example, the parental figure) from which the person receives relatively intense push to be morally upright. Schwartz (2009: 445) encapsulates the super ego as coming out of the Oedipal complex whose existence comes to the fore because of an identity changing occurrence that aids the making of a person’s personality that has been mostly affected by an assertive father figure. Explaining the interaction of the super-ego with the Oedipal complex, Freud (1923b: 1-66) is of the opinion that in the event of a subject identifying with a father or powerful figure, that person may be influenced to personalise the characteristics of the paternal figure of interest as his/her own as a means of obtaining the moral values as accepted by his/her community.

Again, Schwartz (1990) opines that the super-ego is an important means of the formation of identity for an individual who is close to his/her parents, but the super-ego is not easily understood because it can obey rules but at the same time create problems. In fact, while the super-ego can stay subdued and conserved it can actually perform internally suppressed behaviours that can be linked to the father figure. Furthermore, Freud (1933a: 64-65) submits that the ego-ideal and the super ego can cause the feeling of externalisation in an individual by holding sternly a disciplined gaze and initiate an internal urge to give identity to an individual through the ego-ideal which can be said to be totally based on that individual’s needs and perception. On the other hand, the super-ego continues to reprimand and punish the psyche of the individual. The lesson to learn at this point, is that the ideal-ego, ego-ideal and super-ego are all different characteristics of the individual’s self-law. The previously mentioned entities of character formation can be deduced by psychoanalytical theorists as the various phases through which an individual must go through, so as to negotiate their relationship with an inflexible world. So, to understand the importance of the ideal ego, Freud (1905) holds the notion that the ideal-ego mirrors an individual’s wish for a consistent interaction with a familiar primary object which according to him (Freud), is the maternal object. The ego-ideal therefore illuminates the desired identities that the individual self-consciously acquires with the hope of reaching his/her ideal identity thus leaving the super-ego with the task of reprimanding him/herself for the failure of not attaining the ideal identity.

In much recent works on identity, Elliot (2015: 19) believes that identity “is viewed not as an outcome of external linguistic or symbolic systems, but as an open-ended and reflexive process of self-formation”. Giddens, in *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991) similarly posits that identity is “reflexive” therefore, self-identity is cast as a self-defining procedure which hinges on the careful observation of the psychological and social make-up that individual during his/her lifetime. Therefore, the mirroring of modern social structures is what Giddens (1991: 38) refers to as the efficacy to “affirm the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character”.

4. Research methodology

This research is a qualitative study of Tanure Ojaide’s Collection of poems entitled *The Questioner*. Literary discourse on psychoanalytical readings of literary texts was juxtaposed side by side in order to align this study with the psychoanalytical tool for an analytical discourse on the formation of questionable identities as a result of environmental devastation in Ojaide’s *The Questioner*.

5. Findings and discussions

5.1. The national questionable identities in Ojaide’s *The Questioner*

The poem “Kingdoms of immortality” introduces personae that are Narcissists in nature. They express the ego-ideal of a self-image that vividly demonstrates their traits and values as independent identities as noted here:

We set up palaces, customized kingdoms,
To reign over realities of night and day.
...We achieve feats of giants despite our puny size;
Admirals of a fleet berthed in a backyard creek. (*The Questioner*: 44)

The expression and realisation of their power boosts further their unquestionable personalities. But this indestructible personality is scrutinised as their seemingly omnipotent power chokes them:

...We are kings in our separate distressed domains
Suffering migraines from wearing leaden crowns-
We cannot breathe but we rejoice for the kinship;
We cannot move but we celebrate elevation. (*The Questioner*: 44)

This stifling power reveals more about the identities of the personae as persons unable to discover themselves. Like Foucault (1978) summarises, identity cannot be fully developed without instituting the systems of power as allowed by the culture of a people. Ojaide's "Kingdoms of immortality" draw readers' attention to the irreversible problems of not legally identifying with a positive national identity. Autocracy, chaos, oppression, subjugation and humiliation become tools of effecting a totalitarian identity that was pre-existent in a culturally moral community now adulterated by "despotic maniacs". This is demonstrated as the personae finally concede to their state of confusion and final loss of direction as observed in the following:

I believe in rites, rights of the ruler and not the ruled-
In front of folks I set up my throne to wave misery;
A place to sit and get my needs without asking for them.
We have our visionary kingdoms of immortality
Where the king eliminates his irritants forever,
Takes their daughters and wives as consorts
And builds arches of ivory to beautify the capital. (*The Questioner*: 45)

From the preceding excerpt, this study observes that the personae are confused as they amass power. From claiming that they are men from reputable kingdoms, they transcend to men of lustful living, accumulating greedily, ill-gotten wealth and in the process they lose their African communal identity.

Ojaide seems to further question the identity of Nigerians in "My Island". The poem's tone is characterised by a gloomy and depressed one as the persona expresses his travails of being different from others. Elliott (1998) surmises that the Freudian position of identity formation that he puts forward from the study of the psyche's interaction with several experiences and particularly that which has been lost from one's memory during childhood, leads to repetitions of the self and repression can be said to be the case in "My Island". The poem starts on a note of depression giving a sense of an undefined persona. In the following lines, the depression he feels makes the persona to struggle with what he is and what he is expected to be identified as:

My island is a world away from others
But I cannot sleep in the night of my comfort
...At daytime my boats fill with fighters and prayers
That I am sending to distant islands without quays;
Locked mansions without keys to enjoy affluence.
I cannot have peace when others are facing riots
For doing the right things prescribed in the books (*The Questioner*: 207)

The persona does not only struggle with trying to establish an identity that others will reckon with, he condemns himself for rupturing the identities of others by being indirectly involved in supporting revolutionaries who are bent on destroying permanently the peace of the nation of Nigeria. Feeling guilty, he goes ahead to lament how distractors of peace avoid taking the blame: "...Nobody wants to condemn himself to depression"/ "If he can avoid complaining without being heard;" (*The Questioner*: 207).

It is even much more frustrating when the persona ends up not having anywhere to go as a result of unrest. Giddens (1991: 38) explains this situation by stating thus: "...social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character". Therefore, the persona who is pictured in the poem, "My Island" weighs his personality with that which is also obtainable in his immediate society. This affect his "struggle" to keep intact his own identity while trying to equally alter his identity to suit that which is expected by his community:

My island is a world away from others but I struggle
to keep from drowning in the tsunami of their cries;
I hold to anything in the hysteria that has gripped me.
My island runs the risk of evaporating if the world
I don't see as the same as mine weighs it down to save
Itself from going under as everyone presses others down. (*The Questioner*: 207)

According to Hume (2003: 251) an individual cannot be said to have an unshakable identity without first locating accumulated trials, feelings and knowledge of his/her being and transposing the paths of his personal journeys to his/her wellbeing because he/she cannot consciously and unconsciously be at the same level of his/her cognitive understanding of self all through his/her life time which is "supposed to exist after that [the] manner [of recognition]". The persona in Ojaide's poem titled "Social being" is undecided about whom he wants to be. He wants to conform to several societal dictates while at the same time he wants to be alone; his identity therefore lingers on his indecisiveness and this stifles his self-perception as can be deduced from the following excerpts:

I want to be part of the dancing, laughing, or
Groaning not be singled out as out of order.
Should I dance alone, I will be the only happy one that
The world will brand insensitive to the suffering masses,
And should I laugh a lone on Sunday, the gossip will fly
Through the week of my derangement among sane folks. (*The Questioner*: 32)

Right from the title of the poem, readers get to imagine a person who conforms to the standards of his community despite trying to get the community to agree with his idea to “wipe out generations of sluggers”. His image of himself as a person born to rid the society of “slackers” pitches him between being good and going along with his people of his community who disregard the sufferings of the masses:

The rest will not see me as a social being
Knowing I want to wipe out generations of sluggers;
The world needs to rid itself of slackers
To grow endangered species into a new strong breed. (*The Questioner*: 32).

From his society’s rejection of his selfless sacrifices, the persona questions his communal (national) identity. To him going with the crowd goes against his conscience of traumatising people, hence he is juxtaposed between doing the right thing or adhering to the power that be; but the force to be like all the others eventually overcome his self-impression of being the vanguard of his people. Ryckman (2004: 182) presents the persona in “Social Being” as having the ability to develop his identity as a result of his interaction with a variety of psychosocial experiences that eventually alter his ego and his character which makes him finally adopts the national identity of socially neglecting the responsibility of being his brothers’ keeper. This transformation is reflected in the stanza below:

I am separated from a crowd that knows not
I am one of them; stripped of the flashy livery
And yet I cannot be as different as I want to be. (*The Questioner*: 33).

Furthermore, this study agrees with Barry Stroud’s (2005) position on self-perception which gives this study a mirror view into the understanding of Ojaide’s thoughts in *The Questioner*. According to Stroud “...it is possible for a perception to exist independently of any mind and therefore exist unperceived”. (2005: 107). A mind existing independently runs through the poem titled “I Choose”. The poem expresses Ojaide’s confident will not to be identified with trauma of disappointments, failures, deaths, deserters and chaotic happenings in the land from the beginning of the poem, as stated:

So that the tears of those I hurt
Wouldn’t drown me in their floods
I choose not to sell who gave me a back stab that I survived;
I cover the sandals of those who made me a celebrity
laughingstock. (*The Questioner*: 116)

Ojaide goes on to portray the image of a man who is resolute to follow the cause of justice by acting against the predetermined evil practices of his community thus exerting his independent identity of a forthright man at the expense of losing all his wealth and probably his life:

I refuse to fire at the buffalo
Devastating thee barrier I planted against hunger;
The harvested yams would forgive the beetles
Despite puncturing their growth.
So that the profuse sweat of the labourer
Doesn’t stigmatize my fortune. (*The Questioner*: 116)

Taylor (2017) affirmed that an individual holds the ability to understand the self through a personal knowledge of all that is required to be human. According to Taylor (2017: 45), humans are “self-interpreting animals”. This self-knowledge can be deduced further down the poem “I Choose”. Knowing who he is, the persona fights against the communal identity of theft and victimisation of the poor in his community. The persona identifies with the poor defying at the cost of his life, the national identity of a corrupt nation as can be observed in the following lines:

I choose not to steal from the lord of the poor
Who had made me his slave without qualms.
If I steal from my thief; I will be his thief;
If I murder the murderer, his blood taints me. (*The Questioner*: 116)

The persona is cautious to not confuse his community about who he really is, hence he makes sure he disabuses himself from causing harm to the less powerful and in the process freeing himself from regrets and pain:

Call it reprisal, attrition, or whatever,
A victim does not triumph by victimizing,
And so that the tears of anyone I hurt
Be it ant, bird, or fellow human
Don’t drown me in wails of pain (*The Questioner*: 116)

Discussing further on the subject of identity, Pedro Tiago (2016) argues that “memory is fundamental for the discovery of identity”. The poem “My Father’s Words” presents a persona who depends on his memory of his father to locate himself:

My father’s words still ring loud in my head:
“I fear for his life,” he told the veteran healer.

My terracotta father bit Galleon cigarette-brown
Teeth and waited for a response from the oracle; (*The Questioner*: 48)

Sick and almost dying, the persona remembers how his father had to quickly take him to the oracle for a cure. Growing up, the memory of his father living in constant fear of losing his child rubs him off an identity that does not cringe on pessimisms hence the persona builds up a pessimist personality who is afraid of “spiritual attacks” that may come in all forms of sicknesses. He therefore lives in fear, having a consciousness of a feeble someone who cannot escape a sorcerer’s spell:

...I live daily through constant fear for my life.
Earlier it was my father. Now I fear for myself.
The crocodile still lays its eggs in a hole and
they will hatch into crocodiles; the same kind-
there is no safety for the fish population that forgets
fear; wishing age will eliminate its existential foe. (*The Questioner*: 48)

Locke argued that the identity of a person is based on the individual's experience of him/herself. This is corroborated by John L. Mackie when he states that the knowledge of self is a "remembering from the inside". (1976: 186). The persona’s “experience of self” does not go beyond his father’s words. He is constrained by his remembering of fatal encounters as a result of diabolic attacks. His personality/identity therefore cowers under the societal accepted norm of witchcrafts, diabolic attacks and other unexplained spiritual occurrences:

...My father feared for me as a helpless child
with those unrelenting bouts of convulsion-
you never can tell what will happen to a fearless
one from a targeted simple but strange attack.
And there are human and nonhuman forces out
There to test their power on anyone on two legs. (*The Questioner*: 49)

Towards the end of the poem, Ojaide seems to disprove a community held back by superstitious beliefs. Ojaide further clearly illustrates that one who accepts wholeheartedly a communal identity based on rituals, witchcrafts, deities, superstitions, sorcery etc. may be doomed all through his life. A person must choose an identity based on positivity (the principles of doing the right thing) and not choosing or adopting an identity that is wholly accepted by a society even though it is bad. Thus in the poem “My Father’s Words” the persona’s choice of wanting to live in fear just like his father and likely all the others in the community questions the authenticity of the people’s ideals and their identity.

6. Conclusion

Finally, this paper has attempted to understudy the identities of personae in respect to whether or not individual identities conform to nationally recognised or accepted identities. In the course of the study, the paper argues that Ojaide’s personae questions their identities irrespective of the fact that they are shaped by the society’s standard of identity alignment. The collection of poems analysed, the personae struggle with their true identities (being themselves) over being what the society wants them to be (communal identities). This friction therefore constitutes a fragmentation of personalities such that the personae are either lonely, fearful, repressed, violent or all together indecisive. The concept of self, contrast their “communal self” hence the question of what is an ideal national identity of an average Nigerian seems to be the unconscious question that Ojaide asks his readers. Yet, Ojaide answers this question in all the poems analysed through the careful illustrations of the adverse effects of accepting without reserve, Narcissists identities that fragments and torment the security of a sovereign country like Nigeria.

7. Funding

This research paper received no internal or external funding.

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