

The poet as the conscience of his people: A reader response approach to Echezona Ifejirika and Ikechukwu Asika's poetry

Christian C. Chukwueloka & Uche Nnubia

Abstract

This paper explored Ifejirika, Echezona's The Fulani Herdsmen and Other Poems and Asika, Ikechukwu's Operation Python Dance. The study depicted how the poets successfully used their poems to sensitize and inform the society (the South East of Nigeria) on issues of national concerns especially as it concerns leadership. In doing this, emphasis was laid on the relationship between subject and actions in the poems, the leaders and the led, etc. The frame work of Humanism and Marxist theory of exploitation were applied in the study. The selected poems carefully mirrored the happenings in Nigeria as it concerns war, deprivation, marginalization, operation, and segregation. The paper, therefore, suggested that there is an urgent need to incorporate into national discourse issues raised by Ifejirika, Echezona and Asika, Ikechukwu on how to address Nigeria problems.

Key words: Sensitize, Poet, Poetry, Ifejirika, Asika.

Introduction

Fidelis Okoro in *Pimples and Dimples* describes a poet as one who holds a sharp knife in one hand and a microscope in the other and who is given the right to cut portions of life for scrutiny. In accordance with this definition, poets like JP Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Augustino Neto, Leopald Senghor, Dennis

Brutus, Wole Soyinka, Oswald Mitshali, Kunene Mazisi, Tanure Ojaide, among others, in the poems - “The Causalities”, “Come Thunder”, “Night”, “In Memoriam,” “A Common Hate Enrich Our Love and Us”, “Telephone Conversation”, “Nightfall in Soweto”, “Thoughts of June 26”, “The Owls Wake Us” sensitize and inform their brothers on what happens in and around their environments.

This paper looks at the poets as the conscience of their people who tell their immediate community of the impending issues at stake. They are seen as the informants (*nnunu mgbama*) who inform others of what is about to happen. This paper explores how poets provoke the thoughts of their people on happenings around them. Majority of works seen so far anchored more on “Poets as Social Reformers”, “Poets as Unacknowledged Legislators” and none seem to have considered the as the conscience of his people... Poets inspire their readers / audience and through that they induce change and create awareness of the *status quo* in the society.

In examining the poets as the conscience of their people, Ifejirika’s *The Fulani Herdsmen and Other Poems*, and Asika’s *Operation Python Dance* form the basis of the considerations. To accomplish this task successfully, the following poems from the two collections of the poets were used: “The Trouble With Nigeria”, “Fulani Herdsmen”, “You are on Your Own”, “A Sore Reminder”, “Let Us Prove Them Wrong” and “Leave Nnamdi Kanu Alone”.

This paper observed that poets made enough efforts to keep their readers abreast of certain issues in the country, hence they sensitize the masses. The central and heartbreaking issues which Ifejirika and Asika considered in their collections oscillate around the Nigerian problems, herdsmen brutality, predictions of war, the

marginalization of the Igbo nation, etc. For ease of handling and for the avoidance of complications, the discussions below will go in line with the issues raised above.

The Nigerian problems

Horace, in his ‘Art of Poetry’ notes that “poets and painters have always had an equal license in daring inventions” (68). This is because both are at liberty to make choices of colours, shapes, expressions, words and of course, order or structure. This is why he (Horace) believes in *decorum*, a kind of internal order and this could be applied by both painter and poet in their imaginations. Ifejirika, in his collection enriches his readers on what constitute the problems that engulf Nigeria today. In his poem, “The Trouble with Nigeria”, he enumerates the Nigerian problems, bringing these to the knowledge of the masses who are being marginalised politically, religiously and economically by the ruling class. The poet even extends these problems to those unborn asking them to regard Nigeria as a problem nation. In the first line of the poem, he metaphorically sees Nigeria problems as being *hydra-headed*. This word alone informs that there are innumerable problems in the country and as one is solved, the other surfaces. This means that Nigeria as a nation can never be free from difficulties. For the poet, he is of the opinion that every Nigerian constitutes a problem to be solved. He sees Nigeria as:

A country with many youths, called
 Leaders of tomorrow in a hopeless slogan
 A nation with too many rulers who come in,
 subtly as leaders,
 A country with too many mosques
 Without Mohammeds. (5)

Here, the poet wants us to know that the youths in this country who willy nilly are leaders of tomorrow have nothing to portray for what they are; if the youths cannot be guaranteed of their tomorrow, then their future cannot be assured. The poet sees this as catastrophic and riotous. He is highly unequivocal as he tells us that our nation is where every Tom and Dick is a leader even when we all know that too many hands spoil the broth.

Again, he informs us when he mentions “mosques” and ‘Mohammed’ that this is another problem source. Can you imagine that mosque is a place of worship but in this place, the worshippers don’t follow the precepts of what is being taught there and when a person can’t follow the footsteps of whom he believes in, it becomes deceptive and problematic as well. The poet goes further to buttress the problem we have in Nigeria when he says:

A loose federation with so many
Universities, awarding degrees in all The
“ism”, “sions” and “ments” Producing so
many unemployed and Unemployed young
men and woman. (5)

A glance at the lines above summarizes it; consider the phrase “loose federation”. When a nation is loose, it inevitably becomes a breeding ground for evil. The poet makes mention of how universities in Nigeria produce their graduates. Many of these graduates obtain their certificates through illicit means like sorting, sexuality and more. These are sources of trouble for the country either today or in generations to come. Do the graduates pass through universities or do they allow the universities to pass through them? Even if they allowed universities to pass through them, are they employed or unemployed? When a graduate is

unemployed, he is more likely to constitute a problem and this is what the poet informs us. He believes that when there are too many unemployed graduates in a nation, that nation is heading to doom and he wants the society to have a re-think on that:

Ifejirika in his poetry, lampoons the Nigerian businessmen whom he refers to as “businessmen without conscience”. He makes us to know that this set of people are problem to Nigeria because they have in one way or the other sent some of the Nigerian citizens to their early graves by the things they manufacture for people to use. For him (the poet) he is of the opinion that this set of people fills Nigerian markets with substandard goods like drugs, electrical appliances, building materials, motor spare parts and others. These they do in the bid to make money and thereby extorting money from the consumers and making them victims of what they don’t know of. In his disgust of the activities of these business men, the poet sees their actions as the sword of Democles and reminds the readers that they should be called to order to avert further casualties. Further, Ifejirika awakens the reader’s sense of reasoning when he extends his lampoon to today’s politicians whom he describes as amorphous. He succinctly refers to them as: “amorphous conglomeration of babel tongues”,

“unprofessional professional politicians”.

(5)

He highlights that those politicians don't have a distinct structure or mission, that they are confused set of people without ideologies. For him, they are full of deceptions and they flatter. He wants the populace to identify them as the calibre of people whose missions are for their own selfishness. The duty of a poet as the conscience of his people is highly displayed when Ifejirika tells the state of the Nigerian economy as may be caused by these politicians who care for their own pockets alone. He says:

A nation blessed with too much crude oil
 Hijacked by the very few and the
 privileged,
 Who marginalize, oppress, suppress and
 impoverish
 The landlord of the crude (6)

The mainstream of the Nigerian economy is crude oil, the deposit of which is enough to solve the nation's domestic problems but because of its mismanagement by those in power, the masses suffer and this is the cat which the poet tries to let out of the bag. He tells us that the few privileged ones have hijacked the proceeds from the main source of our economy and not only this, they even impoverish the place where this crude oil is derived from - the Niger Delta region. Perhaps this is why their literature is full of lamentations ie lachrymal (Nwahunanya 37). The poet wants us to bring the masses to the knowledge of the fact that these privileged people are part of our problems because they are oppressors; they marginalize and suppress us.

Again, there is the projection of the poet who uses a torch in one hand and a microscope in the other, and with these, he could

read the society and conveniently tell who they are. He says that there are:

So many men of God who were not called
So many public servants who hate the
public
So many civil servants who are not civil
So many old men and women in Public
Service who refused to retire
So many rulers who cannot lead
So many people who cannot follow (6)

From the above excerpt, we are meant to understand that the so-called men of God who parade themselves as God's own, are just hypocrites and that they are not worthy to be known as God's servants, since they are indeed not men of God as they claim. These rather pose problems to the people by confusing them through their amorphous and unwholesome claim.

The poet also draws the readers' attention to Nigerian public servants whom he says are not doing it rightly because they are not civil, especially when it comes to finances and integrity. When the civil servants are due for retirement, they do not because they have altered their birth certificates and this places the output of the labour force at stake. The poet picks his dictions rightly as he sensitizes the readers on how the country is engulfed with many problems as he further states:

The trouble with Nigeria is more in those
who believe in sharing the cake
Instead of baking it
Who believe in ethnicity than Nationality
And who believe in born to rule
Than born to lead and serve (6)

Finally, the poet sensitizes the public as he directs their thoughts to reason with him that “selfishness” and “self aggrandizement” are the evil that have eaten deep into our marrows. These two expressions have torn Nigeria apart and the centre can no more hold. How can a particular set of people believe that mantle of leadership cannot depart from them? In a country this type of notion is heard, that country is doomed because things cannot be moving well. Nigerians believe in looting the treasury and this embezzlement leads to stagnation and when this is seen in a country, the poor masses obviously bear the brunt.

Another problem Nigeria that has is brought to limelight by Asika in his poem “Leave Nnamdi Kanu Alone”. In this poem he illustrates that the problem of Nigeria has nothing to do with Nnamdi Kanu. In his opinion, he highlights that Nnamdi Kanu is fighting a just course; he wants liberation for his people. His ideology is that Igbo people wants liberation from the Nigerian leaders because they are marginalized and he reminds those in authority thus:

Nnamdi Kanu is a man not a god
He has his faults like we all carry ours
round and about
But in his heart burns the fire no water can
extinguish
In his lips flow many truths they are afraid
to admit (32).

The poet draws the attention of our leaders to the fact that Nnamdi Kanu is a mortal, like all of us. He reminds us that we all are bound to make mistakes, so does Nnamdi Kanu. The poet is

of the opinion that Nnamdi Kanu is not a problem but he wants attention to be drawn in order to address a problem.

From the above lines, it is clear that something is amiss. The poet puts it across to the people that Nnamdi Kanu believes that things are not rightfully done and as a man who takes to heart the burden of his people, wants that abnormality to be given attention and that is the reason why he is being sought for to be annihilated. The poet senses the danger and that is why he calls on the people to note that Nnamdi Kanu knows the truth as it concerns what is happening in the country and that truth is what those at the helm of affairs do not want to be told. The poet again, adumbrates the problem that engulfs Nigeria as:

Leave Nnamdi Kanu alone
Address the problem from the roots and
stems
Address the injustices, hatreds and eye-sore
marginalization
Address the denials and favouritism in high
and low places (32).

The above stanza is where the poet hits the nail on the head as he lists the Nigerian problems. He gives the highlights that Nigeria's problem is not Nnamdi Kanu but the cause of this problem the Nigerian government has with Kanu is that his people are hated, deprived and marginalized. As a leader of a group he will not keep mute when he sees that his people are reduced to the slave position. As a leader, he must react and it is this reaction that the government could not condone and so see him as a threat. But this poet wants to put it through to them that it is not true, that they have to firstly address these injustices done to Igbo nation. However, Asika, goes on to inform the populace

on the issue of “restructuring”; he says that if restructuring is done, these problems will be stopped or curbed to some extent. Not only this, he informs that after the restructuring, the leaders will call “the leds” to a round table talk and discuss harmony with them, after this they will call Nnamdi Kanu and he will give them a listening ear. Asika tries to broaden the thoughts of his fellow Nigerians on the problem of Nigeria, he does this just to call them to order so as not to pursue shadows but to pursue substance.

“You are on your own” is another poem in which Ifejirika talks about Nigeria. In this poem he contends that Nigeria is a country that is richly blessed with “Black Gold” and the gold is enough to carter for Nigeria’s problems but it does not.. “You are on your own,” is the poem that lists what makes Nigeria a rich and blessed country but these blessings are used wrongly. The poet says that Nigeria is a blessed country and that her citizens are not supposed to suffer. He states that,

In a country blessed with black gold
You are on your own
Even those sitting and sleeping on the gold,
Are on their own
In a nation with expanse arable land,
You are on your own. (7)

It is categorically stated from the above stanza that Nigerians are the problems of Nigeria. In a place where everybody minds his or her affairs, can that place stand? How can individualism exist in a country? This means that Nigeria is a place where the rich is becoming richer and the poor getting poorer. If this situation is seen in a country, such a country cannot progress because the poor must pose to be thorns in the flesh of the rich. Ifejirika tries to open our eyes on what is going on as it concerns

selfishness; for him, he wants us to see that the people of Nigeria are selfish as far as this “mind your own business” exists.

Again, the poet informs us that even the government who supposes to be helpful to her people, washes her hands off instead. In a country where government cannot help her citizens out of difficulties, that government is a problem to be solved. The poet says:

To educate yourself and children
The business is entirely yours
For the health needs of self and family
The government washes her hands clean (7)

In a country where the government cannot give free education, that government must answer some questions. A government is supposed to offer free medical treatment for her citizens but in Nigeria, the poet tells us that it is far – fetched. Not only free medical treatment but offer jobs to her citizenry who are due for that. In a nutshell, everyone can believe with this poet when he says that the government and the officials are part of the problem we have in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Ifejirika sensitizes the populace concerning the state of social amenities, for him he says that it is “a no go area”; this means that as a country that is richly endowed with black gold and agrarian land, everything is supposed to be available as one needs them but it is not so. He opens the senses of the readers as he says:

For the provision of electricity
For your house and factory
Your generator is your saviour
For the security of life and property
For the supply of water for domestics

And industrial purpose
Your well, pond or borehole
Is your alternative to practical? (9)

The above extract from the poem “You are on your own” summarizes it all. This is where the poet who is given the freedom to be honest or not at all, fails to blink at honesty. In Nigeria the issue of electricity, security and water supply is, ‘to your tents oh Israel’ because the government always says that it is in the pipeline, Nigerians have them in their televisions, radios and magazines. All these things the poet puts across for us to see. He wants us to note that the government is not doing that which is expected of them. For him he relays to his people that the government lags behind in providing security, education, medical treatment, social amenities etc to the people, hence the government is a problem to the citizenry.

Herdsmen brutality

Herdsmen brutality is anchored on Ifejirika’s poem ‘Fulani Herdsmen’. The poem is simply a descriptive one in which the poet carefully observed details that are brought together to evoke our thoughts on the Fulani Herdsmen. The poet gives a description of who a Fulani man is. He says, “they move about with sticks and torches, bows and arrows/they speak to their cows and their cows hear them, understand them” (2). This illustrates that immediately one sees a Fulani cattle rearer, one does not need a soothsayer to tell who he is. This means that originally, the cattle rearers are not problems to be solved but problem solvers, but as time went on, these Fulani herdsmen changed and this turn of events is what this poet tries to publicize. This action is seen in these excerpts:

As part of Islamization agenda
 A group disguised as herdsmen appeared
 They have no cows to attend to
 In place of sticks and longer torches
 They maraud about in the night
 With AK47, invade villages (2).

The above illustration keeps us abreast of the *new* Fulani herdsmen who turn out to be flies in people's ointment; they kill with reckless abandon just in a bid to dominate the country for whatever intention of theirs. They carry out their dreadful affairs in the night. Night in the poem now becomes a symbol of brutality which the blacks experienced in the hands of the white policemen and armies in South Africa during Apartheid.

Oswald Mitshali in "Nightfall in Soweto" describes the agony and the brutality of the Blacks, in the same way Ifejirika describes the type of suffering and fear which most Nigerians experienced at night in the hands of these *new* Fulani herdsmen. Ifejirika says that these Fulani "attack as gorillas", "target men, women and children". These Fulani herdsmen are likened to gorillas because they are wild in their actions, behave like wild monkeys that live in forests. Using this phrase "gorilla", one sense of imagery is evoked and one just imagines the type of violence that is meted out to people by these new sect of herdsmen. Anybody that lives in a forest must be inhuman; their thoughts and actions are socially rated zero. In Nigeria today, some states in the North Central and Middle Belt are nothing to write home about as they appear to be major targets of these Fulani herdsmen. The poet categorically awakens our thoughts when he puts these across to us:

They attack the middle belt
 Devastate the East

And also destroy the North

And devastate the West (2).

It is generally believed that as a farmer toils with soil to have a good proceed, that is how a poet toils with words to make his intentions known. Ifejirika picks his words succinctly by using “devastate”. This word alone gives the picture of these states that are attacked by these “wild beasts” in human guise. This means that they are completely destroyed. This brutality from these Fulani herdsmen has impoverished these states. They cannot go to their offices, farms, schools, hospitals, markets; they can’t even socialize. They are reduced to “non-humans” because their rights to live are striped off them. This poet wants us to reason with him when he says that the Northern part of our Nigeria is destroyed. When the Northern part of this country is destroyed, being an agrarian area, it means that the nation as a whole is in jeopardy and this is what this poet tries to tell his readers. He wants us to reason along with him that Nigeria is brutalized by these “buffoons” called Fulani Herdsmen.

However, this poet informs the populace that these Fulani herdsmen have no reason for their attacks. To the poet, they just do it for the fun of it. They brutalize, kill, maim the infants, the pregnant ones, the feeble, the strong, the aged and the youths. This means that immediately they come to attack, it is just a “clean sweep” or “operation massacre”. The poet sees their attacks as “genocidal”.

Lastly, the poet pin-points the brutality of these Fulani herdsmen when he likens them euphemistically to *book haram* in the Diaspora. This phrase “*book haram*” as it is used in Nigeria defines a group of “Non-Entities” who are equated to illiterates because they didn’t allow themselves to be guided under formal tutelage; they detest anything to be associated with formal

education. They live in forests and are scattered everywhere in the Northern parts of Nigeria. They brutalize the innocents and can make “merriments” with young girls no matter the age involved. These *boko harams* are transmitters of all sorts of diseases and are “usurpers”. From these illustrations, the poet tells us the kind of brutality Nigerians get from these new type of Fulani herdsmen. These people are obviously thorns in the flesh of Nigerians and they pose problems that must be solved and the nations suffer more in future.

Prediction of imminent war

“A Sore Reminder” is a poem which Asika uses to describe who a poet is supposed to be - a “seer”. The poem is likened to Christopher Okigbo’s “Come Thunder” which according to Senanu on “Come Thunder” represents reaction to a very difficult and unpleasant period in Nigeria history. This poem is a prophetic warning to factions who drink on their successful ravages and celebrate in mirth and dance, to be aware of the terrible destructions that will inevitably result, because all the signs are evident. The poet says:

They having started it again
 The khaki boys are on it again
 They are after us again
 Dancing gleefully on our street and homes
 With guns to remind us of their prowess,
 our defeat
 A sore reminder of the memories of 1967
 (5)

This excerpt can be likened to a preacher who is seen doing his early “Morning Cry” telling people about rapture. Instead

things are going in a “zigzag” way today. There is turmoil and uproar everywhere. The poet wants the crooked paths to be strengthened a bit. He is making a clarion call and crying aloud not minding whose ox is gored. He is bringing to the doors of everyone the notice that war is looming. He is sensitizing us that the “khaki boys” are after a tribe in Nigeria. For him, that is how Biafra / Nigeria war started. Just consider this expressing – “dancing gleefully on our streets and homes”. This means that they have stretched it too far, even to the very door steps of the Biafrans. According to the poet, the khaki boys have taken our lands; they have penetrated all our enclaves. The only thing remaining is resistance and this triggers war. Not only that they are dancing gleefully, they are dancing with their guns, brandishing same with reckless abandon. .Imagine a guest going to his host with a gun; such will always call for deep thought and Achebe would always say, one can use ones tongue to count his teeth.

Asika says it all when he selects his dictions thus: “A sore reminder of the memories of 1967”. It is only a deaf, dumb and blind person who had lived in the early1967 that cannot speak of what happened then. That time was the time we had coups and counter coups; we had much deaths and uprising, too much chaos and turmoil that eventually led to the civil war. This is the state of the nation as it concerns Nigeria presently. What happened then is almost replicated in Aba and this is why the poet calls for caution and warns the public to be at alert, be you the leader or the led. Again, Asika wants us to note that these ‘khaki boys’ are sent to our soil by their masters. This means that they are mission oriented and not for any kind of fun. Their mission is to “silence” a race crying for justice. Igbo people, according to the poet, are being marginalized but they want to be heard. Lastly, Asika, as a

seer, in the last two lines of the poem states that “History is about to repeat itself again” and foretells that this time, the outcome may be surprising; tells us here that during the end of Nigerian/Biafran war, the slogan was “No Victor, No Vanquished”, but as the poet puts it, it may not be so, because there must be the victor and the vanquished. In summary, Asika as a poet who holds a sharp knife in one hand, and a microscope in the other, informs that with the happenings around us, war is imminent.

The Igbo nation and the poetry of conscience

Asika’s “Our Daily Desire” is a poem which highlights what the Igbo are yelling for. The poet as the mouthpiece of his people is telling those at the helm of affairs that an Englishman’s home is his castle: this means that the only thing his people want is just autonomy. He informs Nigerian leaders that the Igbo want to trace their root; that they have origin. This is just what Chhunua Achebe tells the Europeans that Igbos have their culture in *Things Fall Apart*. Asika alerts the masses thus: / We only desire to live in peace, in freedom, in our homes / we only wish to go back to our moonlight games and innocence / (8).

This excerpt implies that the things that hold Igbo nation are smeared and so the centre can no more hold and the poet desires that things be reinstated as they were before. For him, the Igbo nation should be allowed to be, an entity of their own, as in the days of old. This means that before the penetration of the leaders, Igbo states have been enjoying their peace and freedom. The desire of his people is to enjoy communal ties which existed before; they want the Igbo nation as it was when the leaders have not polluted it with their civilization – this he puts through as he says: / We only desire to drink clean water from our wells again /

We only desire to use the firewood from our farms / and cook our foods / (8). The poet wants to let the leaders note that his people want to be associated with the norms and values as it concerns the tradition of Igbos. The Igbo nation believed in their ancestors and in the veneration of their guardian gods and spirits. This is likened to Christopher Okigbo's "Idoto" where he as a prodigal son goes back to stand naked before the 'oil bean' in Ojoto, paying obeisance to his ancestral god. The poet highlights the autonomy of the Igbo people when he says: "We desire to eat the evils of our oil and drink the gains of our oil too". Here, the poet wants world to note that Igbo nation is marginalized because they contribute to the mainstream of Nigeria economy by being an oil producing state. For them, the pay back they get is being impoverished and that is what he is emphasizing; that the Igbo people should be left with the evil of oil producing state and the profit that accrues there from. The state of Igbo nation is categorically described for other Nigerians to visualize in their mind's eyes, he ends the poem with a rhetorical question: 'Is that why a gun is pointed to our heart?/ A machete to our loins?' (8) The poet is of the view that his people won't be sent to their early graves just because they are fighting a good fight, or that they want to be out of slavery and hardship. In summary Asika the poet uses "Our Daily Desire" to sensitize his country people that the wrong notion they have for the Igbo should not come to play because the Igbo just want to be given the chance to rule themselves without interference. He wants them not to be "hard on" the Igbo because they are fighting a just course.

Relegation to the background of the Igbo by the Northerners

"Let us prove them wrong" is a denunciatory poem in which Asika, expresses disgust at the way in which the Igbo are

prejudiced. The poet takes it upon himself to let his people know how they are ridiculed by artistically choosing his dictions. The poet's diction, which comes with generous doses of indigenous words and phrases, is simple; his imageries and settings are for the most part rural, drawing freely on traditional proverbs and wisdom. From the beginning of this poem "Let us prove them wrong", the poet makes the Igbo to know that the Hausa call them "thieves and criminals" According to Asika:

They said we are the Igbo from the land of
thieves and criminals

They said we are the Nyamiris, the land of
prostitutes and men of the nights.

They said we are the Igbo who love money
more than their lives

They said we are the conquered race who
will never act as one (20)

The Northerners see the Igbo as people who can do anything to have money and this is what the poet wants his brethren to note. He also brings to limelight what the Northerners take the Igbo for, a race that is in disunity and conquered forever.

Asika embraces the work of a poet (even beyond himself as a budding poet) as one who calls a spade by its name and so beckons on his people to prove these Northerners wrong, noting that they fear our 'warriors – like spirits' but jeer our disunity; he wants his people to be aware of the independent spirit endowed in them by nature. He wants them to remember how they fought during the *war that was* and this is why he refers to his people as having "warrior-like spirit". To the poet, his people must know that the Northerners acknowledge the Igbo as warlords but are in disunity and this disunity is jeered at by the Hausa. This poet in

subsequent lines in this poem tells his people that the Hausa see them as those who can do away with their brothers for a bottle of “Liquor and bush meat / who will give out their women / to hear the sounds of coins in their pockets”. These expressions are derogatory and that is why the poet weeps for his brothers.

Further, Asika informs his people that the disunity encouraged the Hausa to come and ‘dance’ at the very heart of Igbo land; the Hausa give their Igbo friends guns to kill fellow Igbos. He calls on the Igbo people to unite, noting that *gidi gidi bu ugwu eze*, to fight back and prove those that jeer at them wrong. He finally calls the Igbo “*ndi oma eji eme onu*”, to awaken the spirit of brotherhood in them.

Conclusion

In this paper, efforts were made to consider the concept of the poet as the conscience of his people in the poetry collections of Ifejirika and Asika. In these collections, it is vividly seen that a poet can sow his seed in a pile of ice and harvest in a heap of dust. Poetry is the culmination of man’s search for the best of him, man’s quest for that which is missing in all of us. Ifejirika and Asika, through the labyrinths of imagination and following the searchlight of thought, seek meaning in the dark corners of existence; sensitize their people on the happenings around their environment. Using the poems in *Fulani Herdsmen and Other Poems* and *Operation Python Dance*. Ikechukwu Asika and Echezona Ifejirika highlighted the problems in Nigeria for everyone to consider. In the poem “Fulani herdsmen” what a herdsman should be is discussed there, the “Trouble with Nigeria” sensitizes us on Nigerians problems. In the same vein “Let us prove them wrong” highlights the antics of the Hausa on the Igbo while “A Sore Reminder” sensitizes us on what led to

Nigerian Biafra War. The two poets really proved their worth in their bid to keep their readers in the know about the state of Nigeria more than history books can do.

Works cited

- Asika, Ikechukwu, *Operation Python Dance*. Onitsha: First Class Publishers, 2017.
- Chukwueloka, Christian Chukwulo. *Introduction to Poetry*. Enugu: Optimal Computer Solution Ltd, 2013.
- Chuma-Udeh, Ngozi. *Trends and Issues in Nigeria Poetry*. Nkpor Base 5 Press Ltd, 2007.
- Cycle 2, Module 11*, Units 1-9 of NTI N.C.E. Course Book on English Language.
- Cycle 4, Module 3*, Units 1-9 of NTI N.C.E. Course Book on English Language.
- Ifejirika, Echezona. *Fulani Herdsmen and Other Poems*. Onitsha New Crest Publishers, 2017.
- Maduakor, Obi. *Introduction to Poetry*. Nsukka: Nsukka Faladu Publishing Company, 2000.
- Mitshali, Oswald. "Nightfall in Soweto". *Poems From Black Africa* (Ed), Wole Soyinka, Ibadan, Heineman. 1973
- Nwahunanya, Chinyere. "The Lachrymal Consciousness in the Literature of the Niger Delta: Its Implications for Conflict Resolution". *From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Poetry of the Niger Delta.*; Nwahunanya, C.(Ed) Owerri, Springfield Publishers, 2011. (37 - 49)
- Nwoga, Donatus. *West Africa Verse*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2008.
- Okoro, Fidelis. *Pimples and Dimples*: Enugu EL'Demak, 2012.
- — — , *When the Bleeding Heart Breaks.*: Enugu EL'Demak, 2006.

Senanu K., and Vincent. *A Selection of African Poetry*. Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 2001.

Wole Soyinka. *Poems of Black Africa*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1988.

Christian C. Chukwueloka is an associate professor in the Department of English, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State.

Uche Nnubia is a lecturer in Nigeria Science and Technical College, Nnewi, Anambra State.