

“A Pandemic on a Pandemic”: Tanure Ojaide's Poetry, Racism and Corona Virus-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Cato Laurencin and Joanne M. Walter (2021) opine that Racism and Covid-19 represent “a Pandemic on a Pandemic for Blacks.” This assertion is most apt for Tanure Ojaide's vision of racism in Corona Virus period in *Narrow Escapes: A Poetic Diary of the Coronavirus Pandemic* (2021). This paper uses the Critical analytical approach in investigating Ojaide's repugnance against and response to racism during corona virus pandemic period in *Narrow Escapes*. It posits that Ojaide envisions racism as more rabid than corona virus pandemic in his poetry. This vision is demonstrable in six sub-themes; namely i) George Floyd's killing and centuries-long global racism, ii) Racism virus more rabid than corona virus pandemic; iii) Colourless protest against racism; iv) Africa, corona virus pandemic and racist stereotyping; v) Global police brutality; vi) White's individual freedom and the Others in Covid 19 Period. It concludes that though the health and social crises of the corona virus pandemic impacted deep physical and psychological scars, Ojaide's poems on racism are leveraged from descent into emotionalism through apt use of poetic devices of metaphor, simile, allusion, satire etc to convey meaning, and repetition, parallelism, contrast, refrain etc, for poetic structure and rhythm.

Key Words: *Corona Virus, Literature, Pandemic, Racism*

Introduction: Corona Virus 19 Pandemic and Literature

Literature is the representation of man's social, economic, political existential struggles for survival. Writers' response to these struggles of a certain magnitude, usually produce the literature of the respective epoch or age. So did the post World War 11 human conditions which elicited rebellion by existential writers and philosophers against earlier assumptions midwife the 19th century Literature of the Absurd. So was the English writers' social response to the adverse effects of the industrial revolution of 1786-1830 handmaidens for the eighteenth century Romantic poetry. So did the Nigerian Civil Crisis of 1967-1970 body forth the Nigerian Civil War Literature, etc.

One of man's more recent global social existential struggles that elicited physical and psychological trauma on almost all continents of the world was the ravages of the novel corona virus-19 pandemic, which devastated far away Wuhan, China to Europe, especially Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom through New York State to the gradual infection of other States in the United States and other countries such as Brazil, Ecuador, India, South Africa and Russia (Ojaide, 2021).

As a global health crisis of the 21st century and the greatest challenge the world has experienced since the World War 11, since its emergence in far away Wuhan in Asia late in 2019, the corona virus pandemic had spread to every continent except Antarctica assuming dimensions beyond a health crisis to an unprecedented social, economic, political and psychological vagaries that has left deep and longstanding scars. Such health crisis of this proportion was bound to elicit writers' response and to produce its own literature: The literature of corona virus 19 pandemic.

Among the expected literary staples from the devastating corona virus 19 pandemic experiences is Tanure Ojaide's *Narrow Escapes: A Poetic Diary of the Coronavirus Pandemic* (2021). In a poetic postulation of the constituents of “The literature of Covid 19,” Ojaide writes:

In Literature Covid-19 is only a trope – what you prepare for isn't what you always get; the knotty question that deprives a student of a perfect score, the lacking conscience that prevents the doctor from being God.

The whole thing is a pot pourri of systems being tested – the imperfections now beautiful, the social realism of underlying factors affecting success or failure rates. There's the context of content with the counter-discourse.

Literature defines all happenings existentially – the comedy or tragedy on the stage; good and bad. Don't blame it on literature that got it right – so ironical; Covid 19 is only a trope for life: good and bad things happen. (P. 63).

In the above poem, “Covid-19” as “only a trope for life”, metaphorically refers to the unpredictability of the twists and turns of life during the lived corona virus 19 pandemic experience. The binary of life in corona virus period is Good or Bad. Foremost of the bad experiences was racism in the midst of raging corona virus pandemic.

Of the two hundred and thirty eight (238) poems in *Narrow Escapes*, spanning variegated themes on human conditions in corona virus period, not less than 13.02% (31 poems) constitute Ojaide's response to the scourge of racism in the period of raging corona virus pandemic. Listed chronologically and written within the space of eight months (16 March, 2020 to October 31, 2020), the poems on racism during corona virus pandemic not only span between April and September 2020 in the poetic diary, but are also progressively seethed with varying degrees of physical, emotional and psychological intensity as they were intermittently inspired by the poet's muse, Aridon, the Urhobo culture god of memory and poetic imagination

Racism

Oxford Dictionary of Languages views Racism as the prejudice, discrimination or antagonism by an individual, community or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular or racial or ethnic group, typically and that is a minority or marginalized; the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities or qualities, especially, that distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another.

Racism has different origins in different societies. In Germany, following Germany's defeat in World War I, that country's deeply engraved anti-Semitism was successfully exploited by the Nazi Party, which seized power in 1933 and implemented policies of systemic discrimination, persecution, and eventual killing of members of Jews in Germany and in territories occupied by the country during World War II.

In North America and Apartheid -era in South Africa, racism dictated that different races (chiefly blacks and whites) should be segregated from their own distinct communities and developed their own institutions such as churches, schools, and hospitals, and that it was unnatural for members of different races to marry.

Racism was at the heart of Northern American slavery and the colonialism and empire building activities of western Europeans, especially in the 18th century. The idea of race was invented to magnify the differences between people of European origin and those of African descent whose ancestors had been involuntarily enslaved and transported to the Americas. By characterizing Africans and their African American descendants as lesser human beings, the proponents of slavery attempted to justify and maintain the system of exploitation while portraying the United States as a bastion and Champions of human

freedom, with human rights, democratic institutions, unlimited opportunities and equality, the contraction between slavery and the ideology of human.

Racism and Corona virus -19 as “A Pandemic on a Pandemic”

Writing on the topic, “Pandemic on a Pandemic: Racism and Covid-19 in Blacks,” Cato T. Laurencin and Joanne M. Walter (2021) opine that Racism and Covid-19 represent a pandemic on a pandemic on Blacks and that the pandemics find themselves synergized to the detriment of Blacks, their health and survival. In the study, they discovered that the complexity of the combination of these pandemics are two folds. First is in the examination of the interplay between racist policing practices and the health of the Blacks. Law enforcement killings of unarmed Blacks are manifestations of racism and are implicit signals of the lower value placed on Black lives by legal institutions and by society. Law enforcement targets people of colour for detentions, interrogations and searches without evidence of criminal activity, causing communities to lose trust in law enforcement and hindering community policing efforts. Negative police interactions have been associated with worse mental health among Black men in turn causing community members to fear and mistrust other important authority figures such as doctors and healthcare institutions. Mistrust of medical authority figures can cause devastating outcomes at times such as the covid-19 pandemic.

The second complexity of the combination of these pandemics is that racist police brutality has produced more fatalities in the past centuries than the fatalities of Covid -19 pandemic. It is in these first and second contexts that “a pandemic on a pandemic” is used in this research to investigate Tanure Ojaide's repugnance against and response to racism during the corona virus pandemic season in *Narrow Escapes*. It posits that Ojaide envisions racism as more rabid than corona virus-19 pandemic in *Narrow Escapes*. *This vision is demonstrable* in six sub-themes, namely, i) George Floyd's killing epitome of centuries-long global racism, ii) Racism virus more rabid than Corona virus pandemic, iii) Colourless protest against racism, iv) Africa, corona virus and racist stereotyping, v) Global police brutality and vi) White's individual freedom and the Others in Covid-19 pandemic period. It also concludes that though the health and social crises of the corona virus pandemic impacted deep physical and psychological scars, Ojaide's poetry on racism and corona virus pandemic in *Narrow Escapes* is leveraged from descent into share emotionalism through apt deployment of metaphor, simile, allusion, satire etc. to convey meaning and repetition, parallelism, contrast and refrain, for poetic structure and rhythm.

George Floyd's killing epitome of Centuries-long Global Racism

As earlier observed, the vile of racism has doted global history, from the 18th century. In the light of this, Ojaide in his poem, “History as a Hobbyhorse” opines that racism has led to millions of black fatalities all over the globe. He thus questions the inventor of colour codes, the discrimination and prejudice based on skin colour:

History has ridden a hobbyhorse:

of colours for centuries
and so performs lies as true:
pink, white, brown, black, off
brown, yellow, and even red,
who invented the colour codes
built the hobby horse with which

Millions have been crushed.
 in the time of the coronavirus,
 who can be silent as masses
 assault the lies and injustice
 of history's hateful hobbyhorse? (p. 179).

In the United States of America, two examples of acts of racism during Covid 19 are indicative of lasting and pervasive prominence and institutionalization of racism by law enforcement agents. First, George Floyd, a Black, 46 years old male was unarmed and handcuffed by White Minneapolis police officers, died after the police officer knelt on his neck for nine minutes making it impossible for him to breathe. Second, Ahmaud Arbery, a 25 year old Black male was jogging in a neighbourhood in Georgia on February 23, 2020 when ex-police officer Gregory McMichael and his son Travis both of whom are Whites murdered him in a racially motivated hate crime. Similarly, in Far away China in April 2020, Chinese authorities in the southern city of Guangzhou, Guangdong province, which has China's largest African community, began a campaign to forcibly test Africans for corona virus, and ordered them to self-isolate or quarantine in designated hotels. Land lords then evicted African residents, forcing many to sleep on the street and hotels, shops, and restaurants, refused African customers. The online mobilization against this did not only generate a tremendous outcry across Africa and global community to hold China accountable, it also formed the racialized experiences of black migrants to the world and produced simultaneous global response to their lived reality in China under Covid -19.

The twin US Georgia and Minneapolis racist murders of Blacks and the Chinese Guangzhou racist incidents elicited in Ojaide during “self-isolation,” in “At the Confluence of History”(p.166), “a journey in words” to reminisce *about* the centuries–long menace of racism which he compares in fatalities to COVID 19 pandemic. That the racist murders and prejudice are rooted in America and China, both countries which vaunt themselves as world's greatest democracies, makes mockery of the concept of democracy itself. Ojaide presents the protestation against the twin incidents:

While the coronavirus redirects history's path
 to where nobody's score of what will stand or fall,
 another story, George Floyd's fatal choking, enters
 and there are more fires in four days, across the land
 from protesters against racism than world burn from
 American arsenals chopped in a premeditated war.

Two stories at the confluence of history –
 one originating from China, duplicating trade rival;
 the other in Minneapolis, new epicenter of police murder,
 the apoplexy of slavery and racism in a democracy.
 At the confluence of these two stories, politics as
 expected fuels both sides raising the toll of casualties
 and gets the human conscience that should liberate all.
 One murder challenges Covid 19 for the same place in history.

Black Americans are believed to constitute greater bulk of American's Covid-19 fatalities. This is believed to be partly associated with medical effects of policing, medical mistrust associated with negative police interaction and medical bias in the US healthcare institutions (Laurencin C.T; Walter J.M.2021). In “images,” Ojaide juxtaposes the high

Covid 19 US fatalities comprising mainly Black Americans consigned for mass burial with the Minneapolis and Georgia police racist murders of Blacks of African descent. Ojaide, seethed with repugnance, frowns at the psychological trauma elicited by the juxtaposed black Covid 19 fatalities and the centuries-long racist police **B**lack murders:

There are some things whose graphics freeze in the mind –
New York bodies garnered into freezing trucks and dumped
into mass graves that continue to haunt with their grimness.
Now a Minneapolis police with his known pinning a black man
by the neck to the ground despite his gasping “can't breathe!”
with three accomplices watching and pleading public nearby.

These images mark these moments indelible – the mass graves
and the infernos in American streets and worldwide protests;
the fear of who next call for the ambulance and now I ask,
“will I be the next black man killed by the police or who?”

Both scenarios reminding me of the ancestral journey of no-return (p.168).
Amidst the fear and uncertainty about which black man would be the next victim of racist
police murder, is the buoyed mind of would-be victims by the joy that contemporary racist
police murder, unlike those of centuries – long history records, are replete with individual
and public witnesses as:

Protesters wield cameras in self-defense to record and bear witnesses.
The images recall human history; we no longer need armchair historians
or witness as these pictures freeze in our psyches for asking as we live.
Fortunately, we see for ourselves the unfolding history
in which we participate and bear individual and public witness (p.168).

In “Caught in the Act in a Period of the Coronavirus,” Ojaide further juxtaposes the
twin scenarios of the grim fatalities of the novel corona virus pandemic and those of
centuries-long racism epitomized in the open brutal police murder of George Floyd and
Ahmaud Arbery, Ojaide, while celebrating the spontaneous global protestation that trailed
Floyds gruesome murder and open exposure of erstwhile centuries-old veiled bestialities,
mocks at America's vaunted status as superpower nation and upholder of justice and
fundamental human rights. The mockery is drawn home by the shear fact that the killing of
the unarmed and poor blacks by “those entrusted to be guardian of justice” can by no means
be a show of power and strength, but rather a sign of weakness, what with the ravages caused
by a tiny virus. Witness the grim mockery:

What can be said of power and wealth that the virus
was mocked with its fierce forays and diminished?
The strength to slaughter the demons of raging racism
and not parade the unending litany of rabid killers
of innocent and unarmed but because of their colour,
Nine minutes in the act of killing, days of fiery protests
show they are weak and poor the so-called powerful –

it cannot be strength to kill the innocent and unarmed;

it cannot be strength to kill under cover of a uniform.
And so no efforts to conceal the brazen murder, and he's
caught in the act in a period of the raging coronavirus (p.162).

The irony and mockery of America as the “rich and super power” lies in the fact adumbrated in the parallel lines:

it cannot be strength to kill the innocent and unarmed
It cannot be strength to kill under cover of a uniform

In the early sections of *Narrow Escapes*, Ojaide had in “The Invisible One at Large” (p. 49) envisioned Covid 19 as a divine “macabre warfare to cleanse the earth” and in “They prepared the Earth for its coming” (p. 50), Covid 19 is “a world-changing crisis fulfilling its secret mission” of cleaning the world of all human pervasions and atrocities. In no other poem is Ojaide more emphatic about Covid-19 as divine cleansing agency than in “The likes of the coronavirus”:

There will always be a time for the likes of the coronavirus
to call the bluff of demi-gods hoping to be Gods on earth
and incapacitate them to the extent of making them laughing stocks
of generations of history only they once wrote and in their favour.
There will always be unarmed liberators to dethrone tyrants
who promulgated decrees of lifetime presidency of their misrule.
Interestingly, the likes of the coronavirus will cleanse the globe
to rearrange everybody and nation in a changed configuration (159).

In the lines above, America is among the powerful and exploitative nations who the poet thought Covid 19 as a leveler well bring at par with poor and weak nations. But with the sudden resurgence of racism in the midst of raging Covid 19 pandemic, Ojaide is to have a rethink in the “Day's Report” (p. 87) as he discovers racism to be “more rabid” than Covid 19 to be cleansed by the former. He suddenly realizes: “but a virus cannot cleanse the world of the wrongs for which prejudice/and exploitation had left their victims scarred for centuries”. He laments the incapacity of the world/America/other European exploitative nations, like the leopard, to cleanse its spot even in times of raging global pandemic:
The world has not moved the dual from antiquated biases –

racism more rabid, tales from Guangzhou* chill every African
to rethink about those who enjoy hospitality in their home land,
those who carry the cross on their forehead a heartless bunch,
and those that history disabled still unable to stand on the fact. (p. 87).

In “Join Me in looking at Them,” the evil of racism, the White's hate towards the Black race is depicted as endemic in the American system for which the “lockdown” during Covid 19 is no cleansing balm:

Another black man* can't breathe
 police-choked and dies; protests follow
 and life continues till yet another victim.

They lifted the lockdown,
 unlocked the ferocity of bears
 that bare their fangs in the street.

They have started shooting again,
 they reopened crimes against humanity;
 they uplifted the lockdown on hate
 Straights are taunting gays out of closets;
 innocent ones convicted for crimes they didn't
 commit and sentenced to life without parole.

They are expelling poison from their guts;
 they lifted the lockdown precipitately
 when humans have not shed their viral evils

Don't hurry to incriminate the innocent,
 don't hurry to rob the poor;
 don't hurry to crush the conscience of the world

before totally lifting the lockdown,
 before pouring hate into the street, let there be
 progress first on human treatment of other humans!(p. 157).

In the above poem, Ojaide's outcry and repugnance against racism in America, his call for equal treatment for all races and respect for fundamental rights of the common humanity are obvious, with parallelism providing the basic musical and structural pattern.

Racist Virus More is Rabid than Corona virus Pandemic

A good number of Ojaide's poetry on racism envisions racism to be more rabid than corona virus pandemic. In "Racism is worse than Covid 19", Ojaide gives a catalogue of the characteristics of racist virus that make it more rabid than Covid 19 pandemic; namely: it's centuries' old pandemic dating back since decoders of colours, it's the epicenter of the USA, it carriers see themselves as superior over and above other races; they uphold injustice, they lack conscience; corona virus kills a very low percentage and leaves, not so racist virus; carriers of racist virus discriminate, torment, and kill more than corona virus; one can learn to live with corona virus, but no one human can accept racist virus.

In a six line, three stanza poem titled "Coronavirus Pales Before Racism," structured upon parallel refrain, with variant and invariant sections providing the major rhythmic cadence, Ojaide views racist police killings as "ethnic cleansing" superseding anything the virus has done in the land". In the last two stanzas, different races dare lesser killer corona virus in mass protest against racism, "the killer of centuries:"

Today the virus is not only at the margin
 but shored to a blind spot amidst outrage.

Racism is a most cruel and lethal disease –
the raging coronavirus subsumed in fire
of race protests will further fuel things for
a toll of not only blacks but everybody too.

The coronavirus pales before the killer of centuries
that racism has done to slaves and buffalo men.
Folks no longer fear viral infection and march out
defiant of protocol, defiant of further police murders
to throw Molotov cocktails at racist property
Today the coronavirus pales before systemic racism (p. 165).

In Ojaide's poems on racism, "Some Police are Crueler than the Coronavirus," for instance, the white policeman is synonymous with racism, and racism is a pandemic that America with her vaunted super power status, "should fight with all its resources to eliminate". Ojaide through apt use of contrast and comparism, distinguishes between the coronavirus and the White police as the latter is ironically, content with snuffing life out of unarmed innocent blacks, the likes of "George, Boreonna, Ahmaud, etc:

A white policeman with hands in his pocket
as if trained for gruesome murder all his life
knelt on a neck and despite "I can't breathe!"
said over and over again pressed life out of him.
This vile act makes coronavirus preferable
to the existential foe nurtured with bestiality
that seeks black lives cheaper than a dog's or
cat's he seeks to validate a depraved manhood
The coronavirus takes the old to the ancestors
But the police wipes out a black from growing.
And think of it, a white boy officer of the type
Could halt and handcuff me outside for no reason
And perforate me as George, Breonna, Ahmaud, etc.
Despite the intolerable losses to the coronavirus,

The racism of many policemen is a worse pandemic (p. 161).

Further contrasting between corona virus and white police virus in the latter's mistreatment of blacks without a cause, he concludes that, "racism of many policemen is a worse pandemic" (p. 161)

In the few uneven stanza poem with the parallel refrain providing the basic rhythm titled "Nobody is fooled", Ojaide responds to the racist propaganda against global protest over racist murder of George Floyd which was viewed by racist Whites as likely to escalate corona virus fatalities. Ojaide prioritizes the fight against systemic racism that devastates the conscience of nations for centuries-long, over and above corona virus which vaccine is in the offing:

Nobody's fooled
that the mad mass response
to a systemic race murder pattern
there for centuries of a nation's history

also eliminates the novel virus
 mapping its own movement and where
 next to peak or start its second wave
 Nobody's fooled
 that first thing first. Racism, American Cancer
 has to go; better burn down the nation to rebuild
 to remove the centuries – old malignancy
 than put time to the Wuhan flu for which vaccine is in the offing
 Racism has no vaccine and devastates the conscience of nation
 Nobody should ever be fooled
 that the masses in the street against murderous racism
 don't fear the flu, the new disease on the block
 but first things first: expunge the centuries—old cancer. (P. 169).

In “Why should I Not?,” Ojaide deploys rhetorical questions as major device for adumbrating his prioritization of the mass protest against systemic racism over and above the fight against the raging corona virus pandemic. With the parallel rhetorical refrains, “Why should I not take risk...?,” “ why should I not risk...?” and “why not allow me choose...?” in stanzas 1, 4, and 5, with obvious emotional and physical personal involvement in mass protest, Ojaide throws caution to the wind and prefers to break the rules of isolation to join open mass protest against systemic racism. At this point Ojaide's poems on racism gradually transcends the level of protest onto practical open social activism:

Why should I not take risk with Covid – 19;
 Why not join protest against police murder of Floyd
 to register my conscience against the evil of racism
 despite the raging novel coronavirus...?

Why should I not risk a season's pandemic
 to wipe out racism, the endemic epidemic;
 why should I not settle the perennial problem
 before the season's bother over health and jobs

If both the coronavirus and racism bring death;
 why not allow me choose what to die for –
 be a hero forever by stamping out racism, or
 defying what has only 2% chance of killing me? (p.167).

This new found social activism equally shows how Ojaide's repugnance against systemic racism changes his erstwhile attitude towards individuals and organizations that dared corona virus and opted for lifting of ban on lockdown. In earlier poems like “Fools” (p.69), “The Daring Game” (p. 55) “As I see Things” (p. 92) “Flow” (p.119), “I Sing to Myself” (p. 185). “We are Back Again” (p. 187) “Their Interpretation of Freedom” (P. 207), “The Limits of Freedom” p. (208) “Fireworks”, (p. 212) etc, Ojaide either mocks, taunts or indicts those who seek freedom during lockdown or fail to wear face masks, or is happy in isolation than risk life in pre-mature lifting of ban on “lockdown”. In “As I See Things,” in particular, Ojaide preferring starvation to daring Covid-19 declares:

But hard as it is, I will prefer hunger
 For several more weeks than
 accept hazards pay in a time of Covid-19

But in his new mould of social activism, in “Positive or Negative for Racism,” Ojaide all out war against racism recommends the testing of all cops to see who is negative or positive of racism, as solution to curbing systemic racism:

This contagion is so rampant
 It's high time they tested each cop's
 status for positive or negative in racism
 before letting any of them out to their beat.
 The casualties of racism are uncountable.
 Every cop should be tested, those already
 rabid should be sedated and sent to sleep.
 Positives should have their contacts traced
 and only through tough measures will killers
 in police uniform be eliminated from the land
 because the deadlier contagion is racism
 with a million fatalities over centuries; not
 the virus with over one hundred thousand
 it's high time they tested every corp
 because racism is such a vicious contagion. (p. 165).

Colourless Protest Against Racism

Ojaide defining literature of Covid-19 had said, that “Covid-19 is only a trope for life: good and bad things happen”. In other words, Covid-19 literature portrays the binaries of existence – good and bad, life and death, lies and truth etc. Hitherto, Blacks' murders were a recurrent impunity committed under skin colour without query or justice for centuries and taken for granted as though they never existed. In “Truth and Lies Inc” and “The Truth is Colourless,” Ojaide envisions the greatest gains of Covid-19 to be that of bringing centuries-long systemic racism and police murders of Blacks to limelight through multi-racial mass protest which the murder of George Floyd and the Chinese Guangzhou Black racist discrimination elicited. Since centuries-long history of Whites-Blacks race relations were written by white historians, frequent incidents of Blacks murders did not feature, but did not mean they were not perpetuated. Corona virus pandemic has brought the truth and their perpetuation to the fore, through mass protest, camera pictures and video records. In “Truth & Lies Inc,” Ojaide thus declares:

If you see the truth and the lies embedded in the coronavirus,
 You will also see why history can no longer be only written
 by conquerors validating their conquest and empire of wealth
 but now a chorus of tormented souls can be heard across borders
 with the invisible one dethroning mastodons of politics and purchase
 and leaving thrones throes infested with programmed killing bees,
 humans have carried more than the godheads of beasts and wants
 to relish their bestiality but cannot cast off what's the second nature. (P. 163).

As in his earlier vision of Covid-19 as divine means of cleansing the world, Ojaide in “Truth & Lies Inc”, wonders why the Biblical Noah's ark during God's destruction of the world through the flood did not leave behind the (white racist) beast defiling/humanity. “Unlike centuries past, racist murder of blacks cannot be off history records” because in

corona virus time "Cameras catch them in the act and during protest":

The virus validates those against it with values but not morals; hence the racists still rabid are killing in the streets in daylight now without guns but suffocating victims and cameras catch them.

If you see the truth and lies embedded in the coronavirus,
you worry why the ark cannot leave behind the beasts defiling humanity with beastly acts
and brazen murder under skin cover.

Truth and lies remain strategically embedded in the coronavirus
and we see for ourselves the future of the world and its past. (p. 163).

In the latter poem, "Truth is Colorless," the spontaneity and unanimity of races in the protestation against racism in the US and China are proofs that neither truth nor lies, nor the conscience of those fighting racial virus has any specific colour. Rather the armour against racial virus is "clean, all round sanitized" convenience irrespective of colour:

There they stand: black, white and brown
carrying posters against racism and murder.
They express the conscience of a proud nation
and in unison affirm what's true has no colour
as what's a lie also has no specific colour.
There are good and bad folks of every colour
and the conscience of those fighting a virus
has no colour as an armour against infection;
it only has to be clean, all round sanitized
irrespective of white, black, or brown
like those marching there carrying posters (P.170).

In "Rainbow Waves" a variant of the corona virus used as metaphor for the new and sudden awakening of a consciousness of common humanity amongst different races that dissolves erstwhile "us" and "them", "we" and "they" amongst folks, manifest in the spontaneity and unanimity in the protestation against racism in China and racist murder of Black in the US. This new awakening which Ojaide attributes to the three months experience of a common fatal corona virus pandemic restores hope in the fact of a world of justice without discrimination:

it must be the three months of the pandemic
sensitizing all humans to the rude awakening
of everybody's mortality before the virus and
youth massing out with one song on their lips
that give me hope as never before in this land.
Those filling the streets with their presence raise
My hope that now there's neither we nor they;
the classification that for centuries divided folks
For once every race is aggrieved by callous murder;
none can bear anymore unequal treatment of others,
hence youths of all races march in solidarity for justice.... (p. 171).

In "What It All Means" (p.177) which is a response to the call by the Australian Prime Minister and the British Home Secretary, to the protesters to go home and use other

In “Tall Expectations”, Ojaide further expresses disappointment that Covid-19 has failed to re-orient western world of all racial encrustations:

but despite the consuming rage
it has not yet devoured racism but magnified it
not only in the colour codes of lopsided casualties
and the colonialist thought of testing vaccine among
those who suffered the least toll of the pandemic
but also the heinous insult of whose soil bread the virus
assaulting African in their midst for excuses....

In “State of the World,” Ojaide uses the proverbial saying that it is only “God that drives flies away from a cow's tail,” as mockry and sarcasm to give the lie to earlier western predictions that Africa in her backwardness in science and technology coupled with her assumed unpreparedness, would be the hardest hit by the corona virus pandemic. It is also used to ridicule advance nations that ‘China's bats, not Africa's rats’ were the source or origin of Covid 19 pandemic:

Empire builders of the past hit the hardest.
Italy, Spain, France and others count their losses in bones;
everyone to one's government. Live or die a citizen!
Britain nearly tipped over a precipice but for luck.
America falls from first to last in preparedness,
nobody now looks up to New York or Hollywood.
Africa again suffering from Europe's greed -
infected by foreign airlines to prop their markets.
Only God drives flies away from a tailless cow.
China's bats, not Africa's rats, the source of trouble
as the anthill proves a rabid racist all through.
Ecuador exposes South America to shocking disorder
as Brazil braces for the morbid consequences of denial.

The afflicted and casualties are numbered by nationality.
No superpower, rich or poor nation, spared the challenge... (p.83)

Ojaide through refrain, repetition, sarcasm and parallelism in “I hold my Breath” bursts into mirthful ecstasy that Western predictions that Africa would be the hardest hit by corona virus pandemic or that Africa would be its last settlement disappointingly did not come to pass. Rather First World countries in contrast, were the hardest hit:

I hold my breath
Amidst predictions of doom for my homeland
In the midst of gains in protests
With acknowledgement that black lives matter
And colonial status toppling in European cities
I hold my breath
I hold my breath
Amidst predictions of doom again

As if Africa has not had a surfeit of it
 If the coronavirus so far has only smacked
 Africa so lightly and no close to Italy or America,
 Why those predictions of being its last settlement
 Where doomsday will foist fatality flag
 Overflow – income ones barely hanging to life?
 I hold my breath
 Can force once doubters be proved wrong
 And Africa's sun triumphs over obsidian cloud?
 It's not a matter of dodging the bullet
 Can the strike be so degraded on impact?
 That Africa remains standing and shaking it off?
 I am waiting to exhale (p.186)

Ojaide in 'The Day's Report,' again restates his change of earlier opinion of Covid 19 corona virus as world cleanser from stereotypical opinion about Africa:

Yes, there's self-isolation, a journey in words, but a virus
 cannot cleanse the world of the wrongs for which prejudice
 and exploitation had left their victims scared for centuries.
 Today, several hectic months into the raging world war III, more facilities in the
 opulent half of the world, the rest unsure.
 One would want cheerfulness to report as affliction rages on (p. 87).

Global Police Brutality at Corona virus period

In "Fresh Casualties", and "For the Record," Tanure Ojaide uses racist police killings as a point of departure to spotlight non-racial global police brutality during corona virus pandemic typified in Nigeria and Kenya. Whether racial or non-racial police killings, Ojaide is of the opinion that fatalities by police murders are more than fatalities by corona virus pandemic. In "Fresh casualties," Ojaide upon watching news of police shooting in Nigeria to enforce the lockdown to curb the spread of covid-19; draws the grim irony of government's ineptitude and failed promise to provide palliatives and the cruel police shooting of hungry citizens who broke out to quench their hunger:

the police kill more than coronavirus;
 More die from robbers in their homes than viral infections;
 the bureaucrats in front seats hoard rice and flour
 their government promised the people to stay indoors,
 the citizens are dying, the deaf president is snoring.

hunger is mauling those locked down; casualties
 from virus still not visible in their midst,
 who blames them for wanting to break out
 to confront a lethal enemy to fend for themselves
 Those who rule them hate them worse than any virus.
 The people are resistance fighters, falling, rising, falling

and hoping someday to overcome not only coronavirus
and hunger but also the monsters called leaders.(p.75)

The Ibibio of Nigeria proverbially allude to one surviving the bullet but dying of gun powder. This is apt for police killing in far away Nairobi in Kenya, where the overzealous police in "For the Record" killed Yasin Moyo, a thirteen year old school boy at the parents' veranda and perforated his neck and heart while enforcing the curfew to curb the spread of corona virus-19 pandemic. Like in "Why should I Not?" Yasin Moyo in "For the Record" had "less than 0.25 percentage chance of dying from the virus", but he ironically died of police straying bullets in attempt to enforce lockdown:

The police in uniform professional killer
Murdered the thirteen year old who had less
than 0.25 percentage chance of dying from the virus.
It was the police in Yasin's neighbourhood
that killed and brutalized folks not the coronavirus.
And this testimony for the record to memorialize Yasin-
a thirteen year-old schoolboy killed by police bullets
in the parents' verandah in Nairobi's neighbourhood.(215)

In the United States of America where police brutality and murder are tied to racism, the poet opines that it is no accident that Floyd's murder enraged the entire world and stirred up protest not only in America, but in Britain, Australia, and elsewhere North and South. Floyd's murder is a murder too many. He sees the wide spread protest as a huge success as it stirs up a new force of conscience":

It's the season of the coronavirus and history's getting re-written
not by those who conquered others but a new force of conscience
that sees the atrocities earlier committed pale before the pandemic.

In "On the Cusp of Down" the poet celebrates the unprecedented unanimity and spontaneity in global protestation and legislation against racism and police murder across nations occasioned by police mindless murder of Floyd. This he believes marks a new dawn of post pandemic world:

Come flares of incandescence in rainbow waves never seen –
protesters crying "I can't breathe" swarm cities, statutes of
slavers toppling; the conscience of the world taking a knee
and legislations at different levels against dehumanization.

Something we have never seen before has started at last;
in place of a post pandemic life of things turned upside down,
It's not for covers or social distancing but normalizing
because there's never really been white, black, yellow or red
folks anywhere, a new normal in behavior as never predicted
A chorus drowns the pandemic in the cusp of dawn. (182)

In "Season of Reckoning" Ojaide in the same vein, views the mass protestation as a

mark of worldwide rejection of racism and slavery practised by powerful nations over the centuries:

It's also the vociferous season of mass outcry against racism
That's the fabric of rich and powerful nations for centuries
the falling of statutes of slave owners and traders that breathed
freely in the open where innocent ones couldn't breathe;
the catching of callous police in their events of serial murders.

White Individual Freedom and the Others in Corona Virus Period

Ojaide expresses great consternation at the interpretation of white freedom in relation to the freedom of Others in the United States of America. This is particularly in their exercise of the three types of freedom, namely, a freedom from the constraints of society, a freedom to do what we want to do, and a freedom to be who we were meant to be. The fragrant disregard that individuals must exercise their freedom in a manner that does not breach other people's freedom particularly surprises Ojaide in “Their Interpretation of Freedom”:

The interpretation of freedom frightens me
Their constitution granted them freedom;
hence they disinherited and enslaved others -
that was a license to turn virtues upside down.
They say their God gave them freedom and that
meant arming to shoot at will those of other races;
sitting on the downtrodden for centuries of freedom.
Their devil would do the same under the circumstances.

Ojaide goes further to highlight the discriminatory, irrational, unregulated and unprogressive exercise of the freedom entrenched in the American constitution:

There's freedom to put into a rack those different.
Their freedom to misbehave frightens me
as they carry guns to protest against lockdown –
they don't ask themselves why they are so behind
the rest of the world; so free and rich and yet so poor.
...to take cover at home from those who cannot
wear face cover to save others, those who claim
freedom to go against the grain of responsibility
and care not if the rest of the world perishes
in the freedom they want to exercise blindly.
Their unregulated freedom frightens me. (P. 207).

In “The Limits of Freedom,” Ojaide derides the self centeredness of the whites in their arbitrary exercise of the freedom to disobey the Covid 19 pandemic restrictions and the wearing of face covers, thereby engendering the lives of other races. Through apt use of rhetorical question, he queries which right was paramount: personal rights or majority human rights?:

...that those taking advantage of their skin

to espouse personal freedom they deny others
 and cause mayhem to many –
 the old, vulnerable and helpless
 are so self centered in exercising rights
 that privileged them in the uneven society
 they have worked to create on earth
 they trample the human rights of others.
 Which is a stronger right, a personal desire
 to be a nuisance factor spreading infections
 or the majority's human rights to live healthy? (p.285)

In ‘Hypocrites By Another Name’ Ojaide further derides the hypocrisy or double standard of white champions of personal freedom over and above majority freedom. While they suffocated the “Occupy Movement” and thus stifle and frustrate the mass protest against racism, the same leaders inflame marches for freedom in Hong Kong, promising protesters refuge, citizenship and personal freedom.

... those leaders who tried to pour cold water
 to stop unending protests against all forms of racism
 that they would spread coronavirus
 and so should instead of massing out
 go home and look for other ways of protest

are new global champions whose rhetoric
 inflames marches for freedom in Hong Kong!
 The same leaders promise protesters refuge
 and citizenship to have their personal freedom.
 One pumps up supremacist rallies with tweets.

Remember they suffocated the occupy movement
 who stifle cries against racism, a pandemic
 of historic proportion, and praise freedom to hurt
 have a name in the language of which they are
 spokesman. Hypocrites fuel every pandemic. (p. 209).

Despite Ojaide's fascination over worldwide protestations against racism at coronavirus period, the poet is however pessimistic in “The Future of the Two Streets” that the White and Black races will live in peace or that they would be an end to “fires, fumes, police and gang shootings” of the Black race because of inequality and racial discrimination:

Even when the vaccine comes
 to raise stocks to the dream heights of investors

The two streets of America won't be at peace with each other one healthy and happy; the other sick and morose
 as fires, fumes, police and gang shootings won't
 stop cadavers from skyrocketing and demoralizing (p. 230).

Conclusion

Tunare Ojaide's repugnance against and response to centuries-long racism during Corona virus pandemic have so far been aptly discussed in six sub-sections; namely; i) George Floyd's Killing and Centuries-long Global Racism; ii) Racism Virus more Rabid than Corona Virus Pandemic; iii) Colourless Protest against Racism; iv) Africa, Corona Virus pandemic and Racist Stereotyping; v) Global Police Brutality and vi) White Individual Freedom and the Others in Corona Virus Period.

Though Corona Virus Pandemic as a lived experience impacted grave physical, emotional and psychological trauma on the poet, as with the rest of humanity, Ojaide's Corona Virus Pandemic poetry is leveraged from descent into emotionalism through dexterous use of poetic devices of metaphor, simile, allusion, proverb and satire, to convey themes. Repetition, refrain, contrast and parallelism of both variant and invariant sections, besides enhancing poetic structure and rhythm, assist in distinguishing between the US centuries-long police murders and Corona Virus Pandemic, in contagion and fatalities, the former ironically being content with snuffing life out of unarmed innocent Blacks. the likes of George, Boreonna and Ahmaud etc.

Perhaps the greatness of Ojaide's corona virus pandemic poetry lies in the manner in which grave vagaries of human experience are laced with irony, humour, sarcasm proverbial saying, to cushion the effect. It is through these devices that Ojaide gives a lie to earlier western predictions that Africa, in her assumed scientific and technological backwardness, would be the hardest hit by Corona Virus Pandemic, in terms of equally assumed unpreparedness and fatality rate. Ojaide does not only remind the advanced world of the US, United Kingdom, Brazil, Italy etc that it was “China's bat, not African rat” that originated Covid 19 Pandemic, but also humours them that in spite of their prejudiced predictions that Africa will be corona virus pandemic “last settlement/where doomsday will foist fatality flags”, Africa ironically “remains standing and shaking it off”.

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