

COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT THEMES IN THE SONG-POEMS OF OGUTE OTTAN

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Abstract

The Counter-Enlightenment was an ideological movement that developed in Europe in the 17th and 18th Centuries. It challenged some of the assumptions of what is popularly described as the Enlightenment or Modern Age. The Enlightenment age lasted effectively from about the 1600s to the 1900s in Europe. It prioritized individualism, autonomy, freedom, and independence. It was the ideological inspiration behind capitalism in economics, and, liberal democracy in politics. But counter-enlightenment thinkers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1733-1803) reacted against the Enlightenment, holding that it came with huge moral deficits manifested in excessive materialism, consumerism, disdain for traditional values, and loss of ethnic and cultural affinities. For these counter-enlightenment thinkers, the pre-modern values of social cohesiveness, historicity, cultural purity and communitarianism were better to be desired than those that modernity promoted. Interestingly, we find such counter-enlightenment views in the song-poems of Ogute Ottan (1929-1999), a prominent Urhobo song-poet of the 20th century. This point is significant in view of the fact that Ogute's works were produced independently of those of the European thinkers, whose works he had no access to. In a world which continues to thrive on Eurocentric dispositions, expressed in form of high prejudice for any positive contribution from non-European societies, it is heartwarming to identify ideological profundity in the literary work of an 'obscure' 20th century poet/philosopher among the Urhobo-speaking people of Nigeria, West Africa. This paper, therefore, draws attention to the ideas of Ogute Ottan because they resonate with the thoughts of the most important counter-Enlightenment philosophers from Europe. It strengthens the argument, first, for the existence of philosophy in Africa, and second, for similarity in philosophic profundity in Africa as elsewhere in the world.

Key words: capitalism, consumerism, cultural purity, individualism, Modern Age, Urhobo

The Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment

The Enlightenment dates from between the 1600s to the 1900s. It celebrated the dignity of the human being in his individuality and independence. It advanced beliefs in the rationality, and thus, equality, of all humans. It also defended the principles of liberal democracy and secularisation of society. As a temperament and worldview, the Enlightenment was characterized by a new emphasis on the ratiocinative capacity of the human being for unlimited access to the underlying principles regulating the operations of the universe. Immanuel Kant's definition of the Enlightenment is pertinent:

Enlightenment is mankind's leaving behind its self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to employ one's own intelligence without being directed by someone else. This immaturity is self-imposed if it results not from lack of intellect but from lack of willingness and courage to use it without another's guidance. (Kant, 1999:11-12)

Kant's conception of the Enlightenment explains its tendency towards individualism, self-rule, atomism, ahistoricity and freedom. It was thought that the justification for any action and acceptance of any situation was no longer to derive from making recourse to historical figures or sacred books, but from the uncoerced judgment of the individual. Men, by virtue of their possession of the rational faculty, were considered, not only as self-owners, but as also capable of informed judgments, and therefore equal, irrespective of their social status – whether they were peasants or lords – and that in every matter where the individual, directly or indirectly was implicated, her rational choice alone was sufficient to serve as the ultimate court of appeal.

The implication of this new way of thinking for humanity and society in general was wide and far-reaching. In the political sphere, it led to the institution of representative government through the liberal democratic ideology; in the social sphere, it introduced the notion of individualism, subjectivism and atomism; while in the economic sphere, it birthed the capitalist ideology through the writings and influence of John Locke, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill.

But just as the Enlightenment ideals were being advocated, there were thinkers who showed conservative dispositions and reluctance about them. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788) is the most prominent of the lot; a list which also includes J.G. Herder (1733-1803), Edmund Burke (1729-1797), and Frederick Nietzsche (1844-1900). In his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1750), Rousseau argued that society has become such that no emphasis is put on the importance of virtue and morality. Citing the examples of ancient Egypt and Greece, he held that it was after science and the arts flourished in these societies that they fell. The Enlightenment idea of progress being connected with flourishing in the sciences and arts, was baseless according to Rousseau. The sciences and arts for him, debase morality, traditional values, and heroic virtues.

According to Hicks (2004), Rousseau saw civilization as thoroughly corrupting – “not only the oppressive feudal system of eighteenth-century France with its decadent and parasitical aristocracy, but also its Enlightenment alternative with the exaltation of reason, property, the arts and sciences”. Rousseau argued that civilization was achieved at the expense of morality. He conceded that men in the state of nature were not without reason; however, they possessed only a degree of reason adequate to satisfy their wants by gathering and hunting from their immediate environment. But once reason was awakened towards Enlightenment, it led to dissatisfaction, amidst innumerable inventions and human creations. While these advanced society considerably, it brought with it diverse challenges. Economically, mechanized agriculture and technology led to surplus wealth which led to the need for property rights, and a gulf between the haves and have-nots, resulting in competition, envy and enmity. In the same vein, with increased comforts and luxury came unbridled consumption which resulted in ill-health. Tools and technologies led to less dependence on human ingenuity, and, invariably, brain decay and laziness. Civilization was for Rousseau, therefore, a zero-sum game along many social, cultural and moral dimensions.

Johann Gottfried Herder's counter-Enlightenment argument was targeted at the Cartesian-inspired instrumental rationalism which believed in the possibility of disembodied reason. Such a disposition, he argued, debases history, culture, language, traditional values and communal bonds that hold people firmly together. He also argued against imperialist tendencies that lead to the imposition of foreign cultures on other peoples which rob them of their authenticity and lead, irreversibly, to the loss of their valued

civilization and heritages which had taken millennia to develop. A fatherland therefore, according to Herder, must be patriotically protected and its values jealously guarded in order to perpetuate and pass them to future generations. (Herder, 2002:385)

Ogute Ottan's thinking is strikingly similar to those of Rousseau and Herder above. In his own evaluation, Enlightenment, which he translates to *arọ-erhie* in Urhobo language, comes with a huge moral deficit and endangers cultural heritages and traditions. In the discourse that follow, I make reference to several song-poems of Ogute Ottan where he provides frank assessment of the consequences of the Enlightenment on the Urhobo society. His range is wide, including threat to the autochthonous language, immodesty in dressing, erosion of cultural practices, etc.

Ogute Ottan : Brief History

Ogute Ottan (1922-1999) was famous for his song poetry which he rendered in Urhobo language. He was born in the eastern (Igbo speaking) part of Nigeria, in Oguta in present Imo State. He may have been named 'Ogute ' after that town of his birth. He later moved to Orhunwhorun, his hometown, in the Udu subculture of Urhobo where his skills in the *udje* and *adjuyasong* poetry traditions of the Ughievwen and Udu sub-cultural groups of Urhobo made him popular. In his mid-age in the 1960s, he migrated to Ibadan, then capital of Western Nigeria of which Urhobo territory was a part at the time. As a cosmopolitan city hosting several migrants in various professions, Ogute developed his music genre *ile ejiri* (praise songs) in Ibadan.

According to Darah, (2005:96), *ile ejiri* is a panegyric variant which developed out of *udje* in the late 1960s. In contrast to its *udje* progenitor which was restricted to performance at annual festivals, and which had to be performed under the watch of live spectators, the *ile ejiri* music developed to satisfy the artistic appetite of migrating Urhobo people “resident in urban areas where facilities existed for the mass enjoyment and distribution of the products” (*ibid*). As Darah explains it, “the new colonial system of government and incidence of western education had encouraged the influx of the Urhobo into Warri, Effurun, Sapele, Ughelli, Port Harcourt, Benin-city and Lagos after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) shifted the bulk of the audience to the cities. (*Ibid.*, 97). The aesthetic features of the *ile-ejiri* were tailored to “suit the listening convenience of the private consumer as a response to the mechanics of

propagation of the new form which has dispensed performance before a crowded arena” (*ibid*).

Ogute’s song-poems can be described as a complex intermix of historical narrations and dirges adequately garnished with ideological sayings, meaning-laden proverbs, poetic pronouncements, and metaphors. The musical beats and sonorous voices provided the aesthetic attractiveness of the songs.

This paper advances the argument that a close study of the ideological temperament and poetic messages in Ogute’s songs reveals traces of counter-enlightenment and postmodern philosophical outlook. Ogute refers to the enlightenment as *akpo aruerhie*(enlightenment/modern era) while his preferred counter-enlightenment reference is *akpo ahwaren*(ancient times).

Africa and the Enlightenment

The late 19th Century onwards marked the initial periods of contact between Africans and imperial Europe for the latter’s colonizing mission. In the course of this encounter, European Enlightenment values were introduced to the continent. Just as happened in Europe, the African began to be oriented towards such values as the rejection of paternalism and adoption of individualist, atomist, ahistorical and cosmopolitan tendencies. Understandably, educated Africans who were the first privileged group to receive western education became the first champions of this attitudinal paradigm shift in the African continent, until it gradually burrowed its way into the larger society. Change of names, dress code, eating style and manner of speaking were the first character disposition of the new “enlightened” breed in the continent. Reactions, however, soon began to be advanced in form of resistance from cultural enthusiasts, who rated the cost of the cultural alienation highly and decided to mount a counter attack. Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) and Leopold Sedar Senghor’s *Negritude* (1967) played crucial roles in this respect. In Nigeria, Mazi Ojike Mbonu’s movement of “Boycott the boycottables” encapsulated the spirit of this resistance.

The poet/philosopher whose thought is the centre of this discourse, Ogute Ottan, was also a foremost champion of this resistance. In numerous poetic songs, he queried enlightenment attitudes that undermined traditional values, and created self-contained, self-centered African individuals who cared little about the welfare of their communities; and

who dressed and spoke in languages that reflected European rather than African culture.

Ogute Otan grew up in the early period of the 20th century, a period that witnessed drastic changes in the native pristine Urhobo society, arising from the contacts with European colonisers and its over-sweeping influence on the ways of life of the people. This rapid transformation generated tensions and created a basis for comparison between what the peoples termed *akpo-ahwareṅ* (olden times) and *akpo-okena* (present times). *Akpo-ahwareṅ* referred to the pristine, uncontaminated world of African (Urhobo) society innocent of European colonisation and influences; while *akpo-okena* represented the new experiences, and the accompanying struggles by the natives to adapt to their discomfiting realities.

These transformations were in diverse forms, and no part of the society was insulated from their effects. Age-long cultural practices were questioned and dismissed as barbaric; the new language of the white man competed and challenged the autochthonous one, and there was pressure to learn the new one to show conformity with the vogue; new dress forms challenged old ones; the new religion of Christianity competed with the tested and trusted traditional one; and democratic governance system sought to displace the accustomed gerontocratic system which had served the society previously.

Granted that there were justified reasons for thinking the white man's new ways as somewhat superior, for instance, by reason of their more sophisticated technological products and weapons of war, which had given them the advantage to “conquer” the natives; there was the equally pressing conviction that giving up everything for the white man's ways was not only foolhardy but a poor judgment. This was based on the realization that the white man, for all his manifest superiority, had his flaws and points of weaknesses, and in such areas, the African culture was superior.

Counter-Enlightenment Themes in Selected works of Ogute Otan

Ogute's descriptive term for the Enlightenment is *akpo aroerhie* (literally era of Enlightenment), which he contrasts with its Counter-Enlightenment variant *akpo ahwareṅ* (literally, olden times). The synonym for *akpo aroerhie*, as Ekeh (2008:3) expresses it is *Akpo r'Oyibo*

(literally, Whiteman's world). In his various contrasts between the two, Ogute expresses his preference for *akpo ahwaren* over *akpo arqerhie*. He condemns the alienation, dismemberment and atrophy which characterise the *akpo arqerhie* epoch. Ekeh's analysis of the two epochs is significant:

Such a transformation in the relationships between the peoples of Western Niger Delta and the Europeans at the turn of the nineteenth century caused upheavals in the region. These changes were not limited to commercial matters. They were deep-seated so much so that they even affected the all-important matter of how children were raised. The religion and culture of the Urhobo people were also challenged. In fact, these changes reached deep into most sectors of life in Urhobo society and culture. This is why Urhobo called it a new era, the world of the Europeans, *Akpo r'Oyibo*. It contrasted sharply in its uncertainties with the assured ways of the Olden World that elderly Urhobo fondly called *Akpo r'Awaren*. (*ibid*).

One of the weapons of Enlightenment's subjugation of other peoples was the impression that there were specific human languages fitted to knowledge of science and civilization, and were to be used in the approximation of Truth. The Counter-Enlightenment thinkers reacted against this myth. J.G.Herder was poignant on the significance of autochthonous language in nation advancement:

If then each original language which is the native growth of a country develops in accordance with its climate and region, if each national language forms itself in accordance with the ethics and manner of thought of its people, then conversely, a country's literature which is original and national must form itself in accordance with such a nation's original native language in such a way that the two run together. The literature grew up in the language, and the language in the literature; unfortunate is the hand that wants to tear the two apart, deceptive the eye that wants to see the one without the other. He is the

greatest philologist of the Orient who understands the nature of the Eastern sciences, the character of the native language, like an Easterner. He is an original and national Greek whose sense and tongue have been, so to speak, formed under the Greek sky; whoever sees with foreign eyes and wants to talk about Greek holy places with a barbarian tongue, him Pallas does not regard, he is an unconsecrated person in the temple of Apollo (Herder, 2002:50)

Ogute agrees with Herder on this point when he notes in his song “Kalegha”:

Ọghẹnẹ r' Urhobo kẹ Agbarhọ o nyo
Ihwo r' ishoshi r' Udu vẹ r' Ughievwen
Ayen che sẹ ẹrhonvwon re k' Agbarhọ ayen ghie
Ona jivwi wayo Urhobo

Translation

The God of Urhobo appears to understand only the Agbarho dialect
During prayers among Christians from Udu and Ughievwen,
They revert to the Agbarho dialect
This is a trick Urhobo people should beware of

To understand this statement, a little background clarification is necessary. The Urhobo nationality is a relatively large linguistic group in the Western Niger Delta of Nigeria. They are a republican people rather than a centralised monarchical grouping. They are organised within 24 semi-autonomous socio-cultural polities. There are several mutually intelligible dialects of the Urhobo language including Agbon, Ughelli, Arhavwarien, Udu, Eghwu, Ughievwen, Uvwie, Okpe, Abraka, and Olomu. The variations in these dialects also imply historical, cultural and ideological diversities of some sort that aggregate into the complexity of the Urhobo culture. Given these slight diversities, there are observed traces of competition, though healthy, among the groups over which dialect dominates the others in terms of usage. One of the ways in which this tendency manifests is through preachments of singularity for one of the linguistic forms to be raised to the status of official language of business and medium of instruction in schools. In this regard, the Agbarho dialect has been favourably considered as the most fit for the purpose. The propriety or otherwise of such action is not the focus of this presentation.

It suffices to state that several thinkers, among them the poet philosopher Oguṭe Ottan, see the danger at such attempts at homogenization. Usually, the death of a language, or a dialect within a language, invariably kills with it cultural heritages, useful histories, and unique identities. A people's historical, cultural, and social memories are irreversibly formatted when a language is allowed to fallow and go extinct. And there is no quicker way to language extinction than its dismissal as unfit for written and official purposes. A people are therefore better off when their dialectic diversities within a linguistic framework are allowed to flourish together.

This appears to be Oguṭe's thinking in his sarcastic allusion to the God of Urhobo only understanding the Agbarho dialect. Oguṭe's counter-enlightenment instinct, therefore, is towards the preservation of the rich diversities of Urhobo linguistic dialects in order to maintain the sophistication and complexity which defines the Urhobo culture.

But beyond this immediate import, Oguṭe uses this statement to draw attention to the calamitous consequence of the abandonment of the native tongue altogether for foreign ones. In pre-colonial Urhobo universe of being innocent of any contact with imperial English men, the Urhobo language proved itself sufficient for communication purposes and for the expression of thoughts. There was a native word for every experience, for the most abstract descriptions, and for every object, feeling and event; (trees, fishes, animals and plants of every sort had their unique names). The language had, and still has complete parts and figures of speech, grammar and all necessary connectives required for an adequate communication tool. And new vocabularies were invented as the need arose. Children were given meaning-laden names; and folklores, norms, mores, education, transactions, etc. were all conveyed through the autochthonous language. Then colonialism happened, and, in Achebe's terms, "Things fell apart"!

There came a growing disdain for everything local, and an unusual enthusiasm for all that was foreign. Among the casualties of this craze for the foreign was the native language, religion, food, dressing and so on. Indeed, as Ekeh notes, some of such practices were imposed rather than freely chosen by the people. He describes this cultural transformation thus:

But the new colonial world of *Akpọ r'Oyibo* added its own complications to Urhobo naming practices. First, most missionary schools rejected Urhobo native names given by parents of children on the grounds that they were not proper ones for registration in their schools. Upon appearing in school for registration for the first time, young children were given new Western names which were considered more suitable as first names in their schools. Parents of these children were usually not consulted for their opinions before these Western names were given, in large part because this was not an area of their expertise. Thenceforth, these colonial Western names would displace the native names as first names of their bearers. (Ekeh, 2008:6).

Like J.G. Herder, Ogute expressed counter-enlightenment temperaments in lamenting this costly phenomenon and the urge for authenticity through revitalising the abandoned linguistic tongue and cultural practices. In the song-poem “Aghogho”, he says:

Urhobo v' Isoko a vwan kare ho
Ejaje r'ohwo i vwo je eghwro
Ete ere cheremu r' e se ikoli
Arọ erhie na ke ikishini e se
Avwin ihwo r' Udu v' erẹ Ughiewwen 5
Ete eyene udju avwin se
Orherie phiare k' latiri
Emọ r'ise inene bi buen akpona-a
Mama, mummy ke ayen rien
Arọ erhie na je dje baba yaran 10
Evw'iroro-o, ede obarọ ughe
Ete a yanhọ kpe bafurumu,
Arọ erhie na ghw'emu yan ado
Ihwo r'Urhobo evo vwe itanshipi na
Ayen gbe obọ nyẹ odẹ r'Urhobo 15
K'edẹ r'iyibo a yen selkrun r'ayen ye phren obẹ Urhobo rhe
Eya vwode r'Urhobo guol'aye
A be mra ye-e

Translation

Urhobo and Isoko people should be vigilant
So that our language does not go into extinction
We use to call the cooking place *ikoli*
With enlightenment, it is now called kitchen
We, Udu and Ughievwen natives 5
Call the restroom *udju*
It has now been renamed “latrine”
The number of children who use the term *nene* has greatly reduced
Mama and mummy are what they are now familiar with
The enlightenment has also chased the name *baba* away10
If we are not cautious, the future will be calamitous
The place where people bathe is now called bathroom
The enlightenment will certainly cause havoc
Some of our citizens living in the township
Have abandoned their native names 15
For foreign names of the white man
When their relatives come from the villages
Using their native names to search for them
It becomes impossible to identify them

One of the fallouts of this dialectical tension between *akpo ahwareṅ* and *akpo okena* on the people, was a confusion as to which of the sides to give one's loyalty; and, following this, a despondent attitude that resulted in indecisiveness. This was manifested mostly in religion. Ogute himself conceded that he was neither a Christian nor a traditional worshipper as he had got dissatisfied with both. In earlier times, the Urhobo country, being polytheistic, had a plurality of gods and deities the people worshipped. Most families had their own deities, besides the general community deity, and perhaps a higher one worshipped by a group of communities belonging to a lineage or sub-culture. With colonial contact, the monotheistic Christian religion dismissed all these worship systems as barbaric and devilish, urging for a turn to Christian worship, which was presented as more dignified. Yet, certain practices within the church left most of the people who had got converted disappointed. Traces of corruption, extortions, envy, prejudice, immodesty etc. contradicted the values of love, equality and purity that the missionaries had painted of the new faith.

The resultant effect was that of despondence, a do-neither attitude that left many abandoning the traditional worship system while not also patronizing the new Christian one. The poet Ogotę expressed it copiously in one of his songs “Aghoḡo Club”:

Ko hwo ko hwo wa fuevu yenṛe akpo
Me ruḡ edjo -o, mi ji kpḡ ishḡshi-i
E kpḡ ishḡshi ke arḡ a rho ma mrḡ
E be a yen ruḡ, o bi je vwe-e

Everybody should just live in purity of heart
I will neither join deity worship, nor become a Christian
One goes to church only to notice fortune telling as the order of the day
I dislike what they do there

The new faith was also presented as more powerful, perhaps invincible and omnipotent. There was an assurance that as soon any native abandoned the traditional religion for the new one, all her problems would be over, since the Christian God was presented as superior. Yet, certain experiences of the people did not adequately match this nirvanic picture painted of the faith. Challenges still confronted the church and its converts, just as much as happened with the traditional deities and their patriotic subscribers. Ogotę expressed this contradiction in a song on “Mariere”:

Ekuaka r'akpo na, nabḡ dje vwe ofu,
Se edjo me ḡo me be riḡ-ḡ
Uwovwi r'ishḡshi r'ye se ḡrhovwon
I Sapele agbranra shere
Ugo ke edjo rode akpo mrḡ vughe
Ti kpa agba e be vu hwere
Si mi ye ror'ena, kimi mu cheria
Obḡden r'orua ḡe etogbe-e
Edjo v'ishḡshi na, eki a vwan yen cho
Ughwu r'ḡga me hwan vughe

Translation

The happenings in this world have left me despondent
I no longer know if idol worship is the best choice for me
A church building in Sapele where prayer is said

Thunder smashed it to shreds
Ugo is a well renown shrine of worship
But it was brought to ruin beyond recognition
When I ponder over all this,
I just choose to sit on the fence
There is no perfect family on earth
The traditional worship and Christian religion
Are all commercial ventures
I discovered this through the manner our boss died

In the above song-poem, Ogute shows the powerlessness of both the Christian and traditional religions to the overarching dictates of natural forces. A church building where prayer is constantly offered to God is razed down by thunder! A shrine of note, with global reckoning for its powers, is burnt by fire. The poetic statement, “there is no perfect family on earth” shows the weaknesses and gaps in all human institutions, religion inclusive.

The effect of the Enlightenment on Urhobo was also felt in the nature of jobs people engaged in. In earlier times, agriculture was the main occupation which guaranteed cheap and affordable food in the society. The upbringing and training of the young was geared towards making them effective players in the agricultural industry. Male children learnt to work in rubber and palm plantations, from which they extracted latex and oil. The women combined home keeping with farm work. But with Enlightenment came western education and a new enthusiasm to belong to the advantaged group of salary earners in white collar jobs. Unfortunately, only an infinitesimal number of the people went the stretch to acquire the qualification to attain the lucrative positions. The larger number could only settle for menial jobs such as security (night watchmen) and cement and concrete workers at building sites. These jobs, though poor in remuneration, were considered more “dignified” and in tune with the times, than agriculture which the new society associated with illiteracy and primitivism. Unfortunately, with the abandonment of agriculture came food shortage and increase in prices of food stuffs, which the income from the poor-paying casual jobs could not afford. Ogute laments this tragedy and urged for a return to agriculture in the song-poem “Edafe na”.

Ọke r'ahwawen, iruo aghwa e ne ruẹ
Ọke ye bi rhie rhe
Ajẹ gbeje oze, kọ yan kpẹ aghwa
Ọshare gbe jẹ efi, ọyan kpẹ okpa
Ka na mrej emu r'ophẹ ria 5
Ohwenvwen te ma na-a
Ovwo tẹ akpọ r'uvwremu na
Eshare gbobọ nyẹ okpa
Kẹ iruo r'oyibo a yen ruẹ
Ka guole ete a yan rheroto 10
Jẹ ajẹ kpẹ iruo r'konkre
Ko no ruẹ eraka a vwọ riẹ igari?
Urhobo avwan rheriẹ obọ
E re ruẹ iruo rẹ aghwa
Avwọ mrej emu r'ophẹ rẹ 15
Ohwenvwen vwo jẹ ohwo ehwe.

Translation

In olden times, our people were mostly agriculturalist
At dawn, a wife carried her basin and headed to the farm
While her husband picked his climbing rope
And headed for the plantation to extract palm oil
We then had cheap and surplus food 5
When we got to contemporary times
The men abandoned agriculture
For white collar jobs
They began hunting for security jobs
While their wives worked at building sites 10
Mixing cement and concrete
Who will now till cassava for producing garri?
Urhobo let us have an attitudinal change
And go back to the farms
So that we can have cheap and surplus food 15
To avoid starvation

Another point connected to this was the gradual loss of indigenous knowledge and creativity which the native African developed to cope with his environment, including the ability to maximize the opportunities in the natural environment. The creative ingenuity in the climbing of tall palm trees to produce oil, palm wine tapping, soap making and diverse

kinds of material cultural products were some of the products of this creativity and inventiveness. The native African had neither the need nor the means for importation of any of his products. Necessity compelled all manners of invention. But with modernity came the possibility to import needs, including those which we had the capacity and raw material endowment to create. This led to knowledge loss, unemployment, freezing of creative capacities and ultimately backwardness and underdevelopment. The poet expresses this point in his song “Aghoghò Club”

Ona r'ihwo r'Urhobo r'ahwarẹn
Ọ da vwarọ vrẹ ọ ri hwo r'ọkena
We rhen ona ayen vwo se ruẹ evwri phia
Ihwo r'ọkena, i se ruẹ ọna-a

Translation

The creative and technical skills of Urhobo people of the past
Are more valuable than those of the present generation
Imagine the technology involved in the extraction of palm oil
The present generation cannot do that

Another crucial element of the Enlightenment ideal is the quest for the emancipation of women from erstwhile bondage and oppression from their male folks. This feminist liberation movement was crucial in the new equal attention given to the girl child *vis a vis* her male counterpart. It led to the education of the girl child which has made a huge difference in the world and indeed the African society. But this new orientation also brought with it a few new challenges. It greatly affected the marriage institution itself, as the new generation of career women and entrepreneurs found it difficult investing valuable time in the proper training and care of their children and husbands. Just as it happened in Europe, the Enlightenment threatened the core of the marriage institution in Africa, and is responsible, in part, for the emergence of the poorly trained, culturally-alienated and shallow-rooted generation of African children of the present generation. The number of failed marriages, in Africa, just as much as in Europe has shot up since the Enlightenment and since the women liberation campaigns became popular. The urge is not a return to the old ways but to ensure a balance that would not entirely obliterate the traditional values the African society so highly cherished in the past.

In his song-poem, *Arọ-erhie che miovwakpọ*, (*Enlightenment would ruin the world*)

Ogutẹ says:

Arọ-erhie che miovwakpọ
Osharẹ hẹ uwevwın jẹ ajẹ hẹ cotonu
Arọ-erhie che miovwakpọ
Eyana vwıę emọ phrun, ayen vwe evien ranyẹ-ẹn
Arọ-erhie che miavwakpọ 5
Ighọ ẹguọlọ r'eyana
Ugborhen royen kọ cha garhon
Ojevwe-e me vwọ ta na
Orọvwẹn tẹ iruo vwọn r'ajẹ
Emwa rẹ osharẹ gbe wọ cha forhen 10
Emọ wo vwıę je riemu-u
Ọna iruo avwan ji ruẹ
Ighọ ẹguọlọ miovwınron
Sẹ avwan riẹn ebe re sorọ?
Iroro ide ye ghw'aye cha 15
Eya ben uwevwın bunre
Sẹ uwovwın onye ya yonrẹ emọ...
Eya ahwarẹn me je vwe...

Translation

Enlightenment will ruin the world
A husband is home while his wife is in Cotonou
Enlightenment will ruin the world
Women now give birth and are not there to breastfeed them 5
Enlightenment will ruin the world
The desperation to be rich among the women folk
Is getting out of hand...
I don't like it that's why am protesting
Marriage is enough duty for a wife
Your husband's clothes are there to be washed 10
Your children are hungry waiting to be fed
These are duties to engage a wife
The pursuit of wealth has ruined all these ...
Do you know why this is happening?
It is the untamed ambition to become rich 15

They argue that many women now own houses
Why should they remain tied to home keeping? ...
I prefer women of the past...

In the song-poem above, Oguṭẹ laments the waning culture of commitment to the home front by married women in Africa. Due to the Enlightenment-driven feminist pressure to aspire and match their colleagues in terms of material possessions, married women then abandoned their primary commitments of caring for their husbands and children, and would rather suggest the husbands employed the services of house-helpers to fill those roles, while they travel round the world for business engagements. According to Oguṭẹ, they claim that married women now run large business empires and own choice houses; why then should they be restricted to housekeeping and so-called family commitments? In his verdict, Oguṭẹ says he prefers *eya ahwaren*, (women of the past), who stayed committed to their family responsibilities. Such women invested quality time in the training of their children, especially in developing character and discipline. Such children turned out as thorough-bred responsible adults who maintained family values instilled in them during their formative years. Such women were also committed to ensuring all round comfort for their husbands in terms of emotional and psychological support which aided their husbands' successes in their careers. Oguṭẹ also mentions that such women were free from the temptation of extra-marital affairs which appear rampant in our age.

A major aspect of influence of the liberal ideology imported through the Enlightenment was in dress style. The skimpy and revealing dresses of the Enlightenment, especially by the women folks, is in stark contrast to the modesty and conservatism that characterized the dress sense of the traditional African. These modern fashion styles exposed sensitive areas of the body, which is strange and offensive to traditional morality. Oguṭẹ expressed his disgust, not at the entire project of the Enlightenment itself, which he concedes to have some positive consequences, but in its negative aspects which the African was more disposed to appropriating. He wondered why the African has not been able to reproduce the wonders of technological inventions which the Enlightenment brought about, but has been desperate to walk half-naked in the name of being in tune with the vogue. In his song-poetry titled "Ule r' Kresimisi" (Christmas Song), he says:

I Naijiria, a vwan vwerhen-ẹn Emetena che rhiarọ ban phiho Akpo r' deṅvure, e ke igani k'o nabo shetoto O vwo takpo re arọ-erhie, e ke igani ke eshovwin o dan muẹ	5
Ayen ya chobo rhuẹn, obuko ke orohwofa Arọ-erhie na ghwe emuhian bun Idrossi r' aje r'kuho Ofẹ obo r' mre obẹ uphenphen-ẹn Ayen ve emesharena ya ghwe oyan ho	10
Itrosa r' emeshare gbule oto J'orhurhe esabato vwe ob'awo Je igani r' omote da muẹ obenu Wo ya chobo vwe aye Ne ona aro-erhie r'iyibo	15
Erovwon r' Iyibo vwon tuẹn aro-erhie ho Avwan rue yi na-a Okọ a na vwe urhen bie Oyibo rherie oranyen vwo kpe ijini Je avwan vwe urhen bie urhen	20
Imoto dje oto, arọpleni e yen dan ubeshovwin Eyen ekuakua r'aro-erhie Avwan rue eyena-a O r'vwana o ne ugbeje aro-erhie Riemerha avwan be brarọ-o	25
Ja vwan rhie-arọ rere ado	

Translation

Nigeria arise from your slumber
The ladies will go naked in the name of modernity
In the days of yore, women's gowns extended to the feet
When we got to the modern era, women's gowns now hang at the top. 5
If they get to bend over, the backside becomes a scene for someone else's
consumption
This Enlightenment will bring a lot of issues with it
A woman's underwear
Is not supposed to be an object for public view
When the females walk with their male counterparts 10
The trousers of the male fall to the ground, covering their feet
While the gowns of the females hang at the top
If you draw their attention to it

They tell you it's the white man's fashion 15
The things that characterized the white man's civilization
You people do not do those
The boat that used to be driven by a paddle
The White man converted to engine
Whereas you people continue to propel a wooden vessel with wood
(paddle) 20
Vehicles running on land, planes flying in the sky
These are the products of Enlightenment
You people do not do these
Yours must be a wrong kind of Enlightenment
Soon, you will stop blinking 25
Then, you would have attained perfect 'eye opening'

Another fallout of the Enlightenment which Rousseau also highlighted in his own evaluation of the movement was a new lifestyle that bordered on abuse of technological products, which resulted, unfortunately, in new diseases, ill-health and high mortality rate. Obesity, high blood pressure, and cancer are such ailments that emerged with the Enlightenment and jeopardized human health. Ogute was not unaware of this effect. He made a comparison between life in the Urhobo past and the present, and in his verdict preferred the former. People of the past, in the absence of Enlightenment technological products, he says, adopted measures, and observed simple health tips that guaranteed excellent health and longevity. In his song on “Udu Bridge”, Ogute Observes:

Ihwo r' ahwarẹn tọ vrẹ erọkena
E be re sorọ, sẹ avwan rien rẹn?
Iwho r' ahwarẹn, ayen ye phrẹn aghwa rẹ
K' amẹ ọtuatuabọ ayen be vwọ họ
Ọke yebishe ason, kẹ ete erharẹn 5
Ayen yenrhe rhonke
Ọbara r' oma ranye kọ ghran,
Bẹsien ọkẹ wvo rhie, oma pharhẹ re
Aro-erhie r'ihwo r'ọkena
K'amẹ idjidjiro ayen be vwọ họ 10
A ke be dame r'ifriji
Idi r'achada bọ, jẹ iri grogro
Ugbe je ọga ọvo ọrhire
Ọke urinrin, jẹ avwẹ ifani djuẹ ohwo

Ọbara burhọn hwe ihwo r'ọkena 15
Sẹ oji hwe ihwo r'ahwaren
K'ona ofeṅe r' ihwo r'ahwaren
Ovọ r'ọke na na.

Translation

The people of olden times
Lived longer than those of present times
Do you know the reason for this?
When the people of the past came from the farm
They bathed with warm water 5
At night, they slept in a warm place by the fire
The blood in their veins then melted and flowed freely
By morning they were as strong as ever
The Enlightenment of the present age
Now makes them bathe with cold water 10
And take in chilled water from the fridge
And thereafter gulp cold drinks
Before long, an incurable disease visits
Even at harmattan period, the electric fan blows on them
High blood pressure kills too many in this generation 15
It was never so in the past

There were also traditional defence institutions such as “*iphri*” (the god of war) among some sub-cultural group of Urhobo which acted like the “Ark of the Covenant” in Israel, ensuring victories in battles over rivals in war times. There were also specific prohibitions in the traditions of the people that boosted personal immune systems, and ensured protection from offensive spiritual missiles and terminal diseases. The Christian religion encouraged the abandonment of these practices. Enlightenment came with pressures to convert to the Whiteman's religion which relegated these institutions and practices. But the paradox in it, as Oguṭe noted, was that the same Whitemen came and purchased the gods (visual images) which the Africans had abandoned, to their countries. Oguṭe's conclusion is that the Enlightenment turned out to be a smokescreen for deceiving Africans and underdeveloping their societies. In his song on “Udu Bridge”, he says:

Ishoshi rhie akpo negbobọ nyẹ edjo
Iyibo ghwe ishoshi rhe
Ihwo ibiebi mre ọna eghogho
Ka vwe kpare edjo kufia
Erhan r' ofovwin r' avwen ikpore 5
Egha r' ahwarẹn, a be gha ye-ẹ
Ishoshi chere emu, k'eyen aria
Urhirhi ya so hwo, ke wa vwu ghwu
Ihwo r' ahwarẹn, e rie otiona-a
Ka vwe kpare edjo kufia
Iyibo efa rhoma phren inoko rhe 10
Ke edjo r'avwarẹn na, ayen bedekpo
Iyibo phien avwen phere odavwe.

Translation

The Church came to the world and urged abandonment of idol worship
It was the Whiteman who introduced these churches
Black men saw this and jumped in excitement
We then threw away our gods
And abandoned our traditional defence mechanisms 5
We desecrated taboos and prohibitions of the past
The church now prepares the food that we eat
When an ant stings someone now, he dies
The people of the past were not this vulnerable
Haven abandoned our gods
Other Whitemen came from foreign lands 10
Only to purchase the same gods we abandoned
It is a pity we allowed ourselves to be deceived by the Whiteman

Conclusion

Viewed from the perspective of ideological profundity, the song-poems of Oguṭe Ọttan provide a rich corpus to mine philosophic, scientific and moral information depicting Urhobo worldview. This paper has concentrated on his counter-Enlightenment ideals. The songs selected and examined depict the poet's patriotic concern at the erosion of Urhobo culture and values to the high influence of European Enlightenment values, and the urge to be cautious, so that the society does not completely lose her identity and most cherished values and heritage. It is noteworthy that the poet was not unaware of the positive aspects of the Enlightenment, which he encouraged the people to emulate, such as devising scientific tools. In the same vein, he pointed out the calamitous consequences of a full-blown abandonment of markers of Urhobo cultural identity and values for foreign ones. In this way, Oguṭe provided ideological basis for effective resistance against unhelpful foreign influences on Urhobo culture and society for present and future generations.

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