

***My Dialogue in a Multiple Sea of Ideas and Themes:
Fete of Letters in Honour of Tyotom Kegnku***

Joshua Agbo

Introduction

Here, my job as the reviewer of this book is to offer a brief or, perhaps, a clear-cut description, a critical evaluation of the meaning, importance, and quality of the work—not a retelling of the story (or stories) per se. Also, it is not, essentially, going to be a commentary, report or summary, but a reactionary work done in terms of the assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the book.

However, this review allows me to enter into a dialogue and discussion with the book and its creators. I said creators, because the book has multiple authors, as well as multiple themes, and I am just right a lone voice, entering into this dialogue in a multiple sea of ideas—created by many voices. And because it is a daunting task to have this kind of discussion done all alone, I invite other audiences, through this review, to join the multiple voices and make the conversation more multiple than the creators have made it seem. This invite is to avoid the looming danger of being drowned alone in the deep sea (or the cross-current) of ideas. So, now, let us swim together as I take you through the content of the book.

From Speeches, Poems, Essays to Short stories

Fete of Letters in Honour of Tyotom Kegnku, edited by Maria Ajima, Tartule Tijah, Charles Iornumbe and Paul Ugah, and published by Chapuga Publishers, Makurdi, 2021, is a book put together by writers across the country. From the first word in the title of the book, which is "Fete", the reader immediately understands that it is a book of celebration, not just an ordinary celebration of ideas, but a large feast of humanity in honour of a man who has a deep penchant for literature. It is one feast that is hard to resist, and Armstrong Matiu Adejo acknowledges his inability to resist the all-important nature of this occasion. He says: "I am really glad to be here. I struggled to attend today's event because of the significance of the occasion and the chief celebrant, Dr. Tyotom Kegnku" (14). This, Charles Iornumbe firmly justifies as he writes, "The gesture is not only to promote literary creativity, and celebrate the persons [sic] in question; it is also to make a statement that people must read to get better informed about the happenings around them..." (2). Raymond Tarvershima Anumve, unlike Iornumbe, in his essay, focuses more directly on the celebrant—and in the opening paragraph of his work, he remarks that: "Many nations of the world have their own share of great people. They

Joshua Agbo

Department of Languages
and Linguistics
Benue State University,
Makurdi

Correspondence to
Joshua Agbo
joshuaagbo@gmail.com

also have a tradition of those rare men, who through their lives, work, and selfless services to humanity have towered above others of their own age, and have played commendable roles and contributed effectively to social development" (6).

The above are some of the evidences/examples of what makes the celebration a feast of humanity; the all-involving nature of it, which is celebrated well beyond the figure of the celebrant who is the centripetal focus of this book. Nevertheless, it is an affirmation of a man, whose humanity shines out of its own peculiarity.

About the book, its structure is neatly divided into four parts, with each part taking a different genre-form—but in the collective, it embodies a genre-bending body of knowledge. In it, there are ten speeches, forty-six poems, five essays, and two short stories, resulting in the total number of 118 pages. It has an overlay of different narrative structures, themes, plots, and subject matters. An example of the multi-layered nature of the book's themes is Idris Amali's poem, "Hail the Jailed", which typifies the brand of corruption in our country. In mockery of the societal behaviour, the poem reads: /In this land of brave looters/Where brigandage looting delivers/The most valued rewards delivered/Like a baby nursed in most exotic cot/A merit award for brave looters/ (19). But, here, the case of Tyotom Kechku is different in a society where people are routinely celebrated for being the wrong things.

Amali sarcastically paints a gloomy picture of an open wound of a nation which

refuses to heal as a result of greed. In the projection of the same trajectory, Gift Ademola's "Breaking Out", confirms the endemic nature of individual greed, as she narrates: /They call me when they need me, /They talk to me when they are lonely/ (23). In the same way, the valorization of human greed drives Halima Amali to write out of frustration in her "I Wish to be a Thief". It reads: /I wish to be a thief/In this great land/Where stealing is dressed in pride/For the one at the top/And importantly is shield/ (56)—all because a thief has honour in our land. To perspectivise this poem in a more defiant way, even though it is a mere wish, it makes the world harder for us to live in—or, to survive in a world already drooling for human suffering.

But in all of this, there is a dissident voice in "I Will Not Join Them" (A [R]ejoinder to Halima Amali's I Want to Join Them), by Paul Ugah, as he resistingly puts it: /Same shameless politicians/Are here/With an old song/In a new tone/I will not join them/In their dance of shame/We shall reject them/With a stroke of ink/ (25). Realising that the struggle of life is not easy, Maria Ajima, in her poem, "Baby", speaking to her baby, sharply, by extension, makes a general observation of our world, as, /Baby,/The world's full of nasty bugs,/And they're there waiting,/To touch their claws on you,/Baby, don't fear/ (34). This suggests that we should be bold in confronting our own fears. In it, the poet says a lot—and more powerfully on behalf of weak/vulnerable people—though it is not about gaining and flexing power, but it is about finding freedom to bloom—despite.

Critique of the Book

Beyond everything else, one of my critical observations of the book is on the title itself. The audience might wonder what is actually wrong with it as, Fete of Letters in Honour of Tyotom Kehghku? Here is what might be wrong with the title: but, first, it might sound humorous. The major problem for the local audience—I suppose, is the word “fete”, which means, a public function typically held or organised outdoors to raise funds for a charity, and this also includes entertainment, the sale of goods, and the serving of refreshments. The problem is not in the semantics, but in the phonetics of the word.

Now, what if a reader chose to pronounce the word in terms of its phonetic transcription as, /fəti/ instead of /feit/? Or, /fitə/ instead of /feit/? Or, /fətə/ instead of /feit/? I possibly think there would be an alteration in the meaning of the word. To suggest otherwise, though not to be over simplistic, is to say, “A Celebration of...” instead of “Fete of...” It is, however, a mild suggestion, not necessarily to change or remove it.

Again, there are typos here and there, and I think the “editorial” can be thoroughly improved upon in subsequent

editions. But because this book is stark invite to all of us to participate in this great feast of humanity; an all-involving feast in which each and every one of us has something to contribute, I would like other invitees to get their copies and savour the sweetness of this book—richly prepared by experienced writers from different walks of life. To be a participant in this feast of humanity is to participate far beyond the reach of the ordinary world. Beyond our ordinary world is the deepest of all places, of all human communities, where we come together, both

