# NIYI OSUNDARE AND THE TRADITION OF MODERN NIGERIAN POETRY: ANALYSIS OF *SONGS OF THE MARKET PLACE, VILLAGE VOICES, THE EYE OF THE EARTH* AND *WAITING LAUGHTERS*.


***BY***

**CARMEL ASEER IGBA LUGA**


**Thesis submitted to the Post Graduate School, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Arts in English (Literature).**


**Department of English**
**Faculty of Arts**
**Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.**


**SEPTEMBER 2004.**

## CERTIFICATION

This thesis, entitled "Niyi Osundare and the tradition of Modern Nigerian Poetry: An analysis of *Songs of the MarketPlace*, *Village Voices*, *The Eye of the Earth* and *Waiting Laughters*," submitted by Igba Luga, Carmel Aseer, meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Master of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge.

**Dr. (Mrs) O.O. Omokore** ----------
***Major Supervisor*** Date

**Dr. Ahmed Babajo** ----------
***Minor Supervisor*** Date

**Dr. A.A. Joshua** ----------
***Head of Department*** Date

***Dean, Post Graduate School*** ----------
***Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria*** Date

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are specifically acknowledged by means of references.

Igba Luga, Carmel Aseer

Sign _____

Date _____

## DEDICATION

To the beloved memory of Prof. Aderemi James Bamikunle.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express gratitude to Almighty God; maker of heaven and earth, who considered me worthy to be counted among the living. I am most grateful to my major supervisor; Prof. A. Bamikunle of blessed memory, a father, a friend from whose intellectual mind I learnt greatly. His wealth of literary collection was put at my disposal and his home was always open to me. I am also thankful to my minor supervisor, Dr. (Mrs). O.O. Omokore, to who my weak points were inescapable, her sharp insights made my dissertation better.

I acknowledge the support and understanding of my family: my husband whose love for education forgave me in those times when I neglected my wifely duties and led him to deny himself so that I do not lack resources for my work.

My son, who sometimes did not get the motherly attention he deserves from me, Shimi who diligently learnt to care for the home and ably stood in for me when I could not be there and other distant family members who supported me with their time.

I am sincerely thankful to Sev Amoor, my spiritual director, who desires to replace his own faith with mine that is less than that of a mustard seed. He cared for my soul by caring about my work.

I will not fail to mention my friends Dr and Mrs Lushaikya Allam who encouraged me, never to give up hope with their Abraham Lincoln stories. It is not possible to forget Barr. Amogu Udonsi who showed concern by making sure that I never bought writing materials.

I also appreciate Judith and Ngukposu who patiently typed my difficult and illegible handwriting. They patiently kept their cool when I repeatedly made alterations. I say thank you for enduring me.

I acknowledge my classmates and friends Shade Fashakin, Bello Usman, Sharu Mohammed, Livinus Audu, Mrs. Diji, Mrs. Markus and Beatrice Ibiloye who did not fail to encourage me to swim above the tide when they were also caught up against it.

It is impossible to mention everyone who contributed to the completion of this work but I express my sincere thanks to all of them and pray that God will reward them abundantly.

**ABSTRACT**

Niyi Osundare is one of Nigeria's most prolific poets whose works have contributed significantly to the growth of a Nigerian poetic tradition. His appearance on the literary scene has brought a new direction to the development of poetic activity. This is seen in his radical approach to social, political and economic themes and in his indepth exploration of oral tradition with the aim of stamping an indigenous identity on African poetry by deliberately writing poetry that carries less western influences. It is of note that Osundare is able to make his contribution to Nigerian poetry because the tradition of poetry existed before he wrote.

The tradition of Nigerian poetry owes its evolution to certain significant factors, these are the historical events of Africa's contact with colonialism and the neo-colonial apparatus, the culture of criticism that literary output depends on to thrive and the African tradition, that rich reservoir of verbal and non-verbal art forms in the form of tales, proverbs, images, myths, legends, music, mime and gestures.

The research explores significant manifestations of Osundare's poetry and how these have contributed to the growth of modern Nigerian poetry. The first chapter undertakes a survey of Nigerian poetry by establishing the pioneering voices of Osadebey and Okara. It highlights the poetic voices of Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark whose works have built up the tradition of Nigerian poetry and also influenced the direction of Osundare's poetry.

The second chapter analyses Osundare's concept of commitment as closely linked to his radical ideological leaning that views literary activity as serving a political purpose.

The third chapter analyses Osundare's use of the oral artistic technique. It highlights his celebration of the traditional ethos and his use of traditional idioms as framework upon which the poems are built.

The fourth chapter analyses the poet's distinctive use of nature in poetry. The chapter brings out the various ways Osundare has used nature imagery in his poetry.

The findings of the research presented in the fifth chapter are that Osundare redefines the concept of commitment as carrying a deeper meaning, also his celebration of traditional art forms is unrivalled yet in modern Nigerian poetry even though he faces the limitations of mediating the essential oral using the written form, his use of nature imagery in poetry is a breakthrough. The research concludes by emphasising that the presence of Osundare on the poetic scene has enriched the body of poetry and also shaped the development of modern Nigerian poetry.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Cover Page

Certification ……..…….……....i

Declaration……..…….……ii

Dedication ……..……...iii

Acknowledgements ……..…….……...iv

Abstract…….……vi

Table of contents……..viii

**CHAPTER ONE**

Introduction …… 1

The Concept of Tradition …… 2

The Emergence of a Nigerian Literary Tradition …… 3

A Survey of Modern Nigerian Poetry …… 5

Literature Review …… 16

**CHAPTER TWO**

Commitment in Poetry …… 20

Language Use in Osundare's Poetry ……... 36

**CHAPTER THREE**

Artistic use of the Oral Tradition ……..45

**CHAPTER FOUR**

Nature in Osundare's Poetry ……63

**CHAPTER FIVE**

Emerging Trends in Nigerian Poetry ..... 78

Conclusion..... 83

Bibliography ..... 89

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The tradition of poetry in Africa did not commence with the colonial presence but as in other parts of the world, poetry in Africa is as old as society itself. African languages, through the oral culture, as well as writing which began in North Africa; Egypt in about 1250 B C (1993-2003 Microsoft Corporation) established a long tradition of poetry. This was not the situation in other parts of Africa. Beginning from South of the Sahara to the Southern part of Africa, the tradition of written poetry began as a result of colonial influence on African societies. Works of art find material in the historico-social realities in society, thus the tradition of literary activity reflects the historical trends of Western Africa's contact with the West. Oral poetry exists alongside the written one and indeed influences the literary output. The colonial experience produced poetry that was different from what obtained in the traditional African setting. Modern Nigerian Poetry, as in all of Africa, became an integration of the oral resources from traditional life and the western influences of language and literary techniques (Jones 1992).

The pioneer poets as represented by Osadebey and Okara addressed the cultural identity problems that the educated Africans who underwent colonial education faced. Okara in *The Fisherman's Invocation* (1978) sees the cultural crises in clearer terms than Osadebey. Okigbo and Echeruo who belong to a later generation also shared the theme of culture conflict. Okigbo alongside Soyinka and Clark commented on the political, economic and social problems that engulfed the nation soon after independence and have hardly met with a resolution even in present times.

The post independent Nigerian poets condemned the social injustices of their time and drew tremendously from traditional lore, this is evident in Okigbo's *Labyrinths with Path of Thunder* (1971) and Soyinka's *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967). Yet the private nature of Echeruo and Okigbo's early collections before *Path of Thunder* and their use of foreign images and allusions to Western and European mythologies made the poems sound more like western modernist poems. This kind of poetry elicited a response from the new generation of poets of the 1970s and 80s in the voices of Niyi Osundare, (1983) and his comrades like Ofeimum, *The Poet Lied* (1983) and Chinweizu, (1986) Ojaide, (1988). These poets wrote with revolutionary zeal by redefining the role of poetry as capable of bringing about change in society through awakening in the masses the potential for revolutionary action. Osundare, the champion of revolutionary poetry, opines that poetry must adopt the specific commitment of celebrating the masses by speaking for and sometimes through them. Therefore, the concern with the suffering of the underprivileged people in society who are the most affected by economic realities dominates Osundare's poetry and that of his "literary comrades" (Bamikunle 1997:23).

**THE CONCEPT OF TRADITION**

The tradition of literary activity goes way back into the history of Africa as a pre-colonial entity. *The Longman Dictionary of English Language, 4th Edition* (1995:1714) defines tradition as

> The handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another. (It is) an inherited pattern of thought or action (eg. Religious practice or social custom). A convention or a set of conventions associated with or representative of an individual, group or period.

Certain key words stand out in the above definition; these are "beliefs" "conventions" "pattern of thought" which are sustained by transmission over a period of time. Another important factor of tradition is the element of practice that ensures its sustenance. Tradition therefore is the sum total of a people's way of life.

This broad concept of tradition also applies to an English language literature situation, here collected works of Eliot (1951) Bennett (1979) establish that tradition is not just a slavish imitation of the past, but it is influenced by changes especially as new practices arise. At the same time, the writer acknowledges in a historical sense, his ties with past poets, "because a writer is influenced by the time and society in which he finds himself" (Eliot 1951:15). This concept of tradition portrays literary activity as having a long history dating back to about 1957 to the early 1960s with the appearance of *Black Orpheus*; An African Journal that brought to limelight the works of poets like J.P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, Awoonor Williams, Lenrie Peters and others. This makes it pertinent to discuss how a literary tradition has evolved.

**THE EMERGENCE OF A NIGERIAN LITERARY TRADITION**

In an English language literature situation the emergence of tradition is influenced by historical factors, criticism of literary works and the oral tradition. Many African writers and critics have observed that there is a close relationship between literature and history. For example, in Osadebey's and Okara's poetry, we notice the need to accommodate the European culture that encroached on the African one. While still following historical trends in Osundare's poetry, there is a radical attempt to rescue the decaying social values that have become a feature of politically independent African states. Literature relates to history in the sense that historical events provide the raw

material for the fictional artistic creation of literature and the artist has an important role to play in this process. Very early in the development of African literature, Achebe (1965) spelt out that the artist's obligation to his society is to enlighten. Others like Ngugi and Osundare have seen in the artist the deeper calling of not just educating but of also awakening the consciences of the people through revolutionary literature. The various stages of Africans' contact with Europe from slavery to the Postcolonial era has therefore produced literatures that reflect the particular historical epochs. Bamikunle (1991:73) sums up the relationship between literature and history by reestablishing that:

> Art… depends on historical realities for … all its constituents elements: from the subject matter (mankind) to the language (medium of expression) to the artistic traditions that provide the author with form and other modes of expression, to the critic and reading public that literature needs to survive.

The power of criticism to shape literary development was recognized by African writers and critics who rejected the use of western standards as yardstick for assessing African literature. Literary output depends largely on the work of criticism for establishing its importance in the literary tradition. Criticism can also discover new meanings and "thus give the work a new form and a new importance" (Izebaye 1971:21) elevating it to a height above what the author originally thought it would attain.

Another contributory factor to the emergence of a literary tradition is the oral tradition. Various elements of the oral tradition in the form of tales, riddles, proverbs, images, myths, legends and the creative arts generally exert a tremendous influence on African writing. This attachment of the literary texts to the African cosmic setting has been described by Kunene (1980:200) as "the primary basis of all literatures". Apart from

contributing to the emergence of a literary tradition, the oral tradition through its oral artistic technique forms the very foundation of the literary tradition having existed before literacy in Africa.

A literary tradition is a broad field that comprises of the genres of literature: prose, poetry and drama. Within this broad generalization is found for instance the tradition of the novel within the genre of prose. Even within the sub-genre of the novel we can again isolate the tradition of satire, comedy, tragedy, etcetera. It is impossible to write about everything in a literary tradition. Therefore tradition in this research is looked at in terms of a particular practice within a larger set up. The emphasis is narrowed down to the tradition of poetry and in a still narrower sense the tradition of modern Nigerian poetry in English.

**A SURVEY OF MODERN NIGERIAN POETRY**

Modern Nigerian, indeed modern African, poetry as Nwoga (1979) observes refers to works written in the language(s) derived from the colonial experience. The colonial administrative policy made available western education that created a highly educated class of Nigerians among whom emerged pioneer Nigerian poets, Dennis Osadebey and Gabriel Okara. Following upon these very early poets were the prominent voices of J.P Clark, Michael Echeruo, Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo. In examining the entrenchment of a poetic tradition, so many poets abound within the historical epoch of Nigeria's poetic history, but it is not possible to write on all the poets that came before Niyi Osundare. The focus of the research is on significant poems that have built a poetic tradition and also influenced Osundare's works. The research also highlights Osundare's contribution to the tradition of Nigerian poetry.

Okigbo, Soyinka, Echeruo and Clark are the most influenced by the western literary techniques of the twentieth century known as modernism. In spite of some differences in technique, Okigbo like Okara, addressed the issues of culture conflict and the crises of identity that the educated African faced. Okigbo, writing from an autobiographical point of view, structures 'Heavensgate' into movements to represent the stages of crises in the hero's life; a prodigal who left his home religion for a foreign one; Christianity, and at the point of maturity returns to plead for mercy and acceptance from the religion he abandoned. The state of submission is captured in the opening appeal to the water goddess, Idoto, at the beginning of 'passage', 'Heavensgate' (p.3)

Before you mother Idoto
Naked I stand
Before your watery presence

In 'Limits' (v – xii), 'fragments out of the deluge' (p.28-35) Okigbo attacks with scathing criticism the western religion that destroyed the traditional one without a worthy replacement in Christianity.

Okigbo does not only address the issues of culture but he is also preoccupied with the quest for creative intuition and growth. In 'limits ii', there is the image of gigantic trees preventing the undergrowth from getting light and rain for effective growth. 'Limits iii' continues with the theme of obstacles to the poet where there are

Banks of reed
Mountains of broken bottles. (p.25)

The theme of creativity also appears in Osundare's poetry but for him attention is shifted from the poet as existing above his society to the generality of the people whom he views as repositories of the creative genius and emphasises that poetry is a communal activity in which the audience and the performer participate actively. *Village Voices* 1984.

Technically, western literary influences appeared in the works of early Nigerian poets through the echoes of Hopkins, Eliot, Yeats, Pounds and others who were at the vanguard of modernism. The influence from the modernist literary techniques of the twentieth century is part of the historical events of colonial contact with the west that have contributed to what exists today as the tradition of modern Nigerian poetry. In Soyinka and Okigbo's poetry more than in Clark's is the dense use of foreign images and symbols like the exploration of the alliterative and assonance qualities of English to produce sound. This experimentation with modernist literary techniques created a difficult language that obscures meaning. This kind of poetry, has been condemned by Chinweizu et al (1985) as unAfrican.

The most prominent and controversial influence of western culture upon African poets is the medium of communication. African writers and critics like Okara (1964), Achebe, (1965), Emenyonu (1991) and others have decried the dilemma of the African writer who protests the cultural values of Europe but has to use the same European language of English, French or Portuguese to express his views. The call by writers like Ngugi to write in African indigenous languages is problematic because as Mphahele and Achebe observe these languages have remained the lingua franca of most African nations. Emenyonu (1991:3) builds on Achebe's proposal that what the African writer can do is "to take a European language and alter it to suit the African surrounding". For example, Uka (1978:26-27) observes that in Achebe's works, there is a subtle bilingualism where Igbo syntax and ideas are blended with the formal framework of English language. On the other hand, Okara's attempt at transliteration in *The Voice* (1964) creates a confrontation of Ijaw syntax and English forms. In Soyinka's works,

sometimes, actual speeches and songs are reproduced in vernacular. This is an influence on Osundare who incorporates Yoruba words, songs, and ideas in his volumes of poetry whose meanings would otherwise be lost by translation, by doing this he claims that he writes in two languages; English and Yoruba.

In an interview and in the introduction to *Labyrinths* (1971 xii - xiv) Okigbo admits the influences of French symbolists, Debussy, Cesar Frank and Ravel. He defines the quality of their music as affecting the quality of his poetry. He admits that: "The silent sisters" are sometimes like the drowning transition nuns of Hopkins' 'The wreck of the Deutschland' and sometimes like the "Sireness" of Debussy 'noctures'. He sees poetry as a tight organisation of symbols, sometimes a poetic sentence even a stanza is a juxtaposing of symbols so that words, phases and sentences are arranged in a deliberate manner as to disobey normal syntactic, grammatical and punctuation arrangements. Sometimes there is no structural connection of articles, conjunctions and prepositions between words that would give clues to the writer's attitude. Sentences also exist without verbal connections between subject and object. Below is a typical example:

> Silent faces at crossroads.
> Festivity in black…
>
> Faces of black like long blacks
> Columns of ants
> Behind the bell tower
> Into the hot garden
> Where all roads meet
> Festivity in black… (P.5)

Even where a statement is grammatically correct, its meaning may be beyond comprehension for example:

The only way to go
Though the marble arch way
To the catatonic ping pong
Of the evanescent halo 'Distances' iv, (p. 57).

Echeruo's singular collection *Mortality* (1968) also contributes to the poetic tradition. His poems were written away from the realities of Africa but he shares themes and personal style with Okigbo in *Labyrinths*. *Mortality*, through the motif of a journey takes us through the high parts of the Western cultural value system using the poet's personal experiences. Echeruo, like Okigbo and Soyinka, moved poetry away from direct lyrical statements by producing abstract poetry whose meaning depends on an organised system of symbols that often involves textual references to writers of western civilization and allusions to the bible, Catholic dogma as well as other Christian festivals and activities.

This indulgence and "imitation" of western and modernist literary techniques has led to accusations of obscurantism by Chinweizu et al (1985:165) who argue that:

> The older Nigeria poets write with old fashioned, craggy, unmusical language; a plethora of imported images; a divorce from African and oral poetic tradition.

Chinweizu et al dismisses the use of the oral tradition by these older Nigerian poets as "lifeless attempts at revivalism". Soyinka (1975:68), one of the poets criticized, wrote a rejoinder and accused Chinweizu and his colleagues of asking for:

> The poetics of death and mummification,
> Not of life, renewal and continuity.

The view that the trio propound coincides with the independent views of emerging poets like Osundare, Ofeimum, Ojaide and others who are indeed cultivating the recommended creative strategies of a return to oral poetics. Indeed Osundare

(1988:97) in an interview asserts "it is the duty of the new generation of Nigerian poets to bring poetry back to the people" and back to African culture which is "lyrical and musical".

Clark who was less influenced by twentieth century European poets still acknowledges the double currents of African and western culture and how they have thematically and stylistically influenced his poetry with, his famous proverb "two hands has a man" in the introduction to *A Reed in the Tide* (1965). Clark explores many aspects of traditional life in 'Abiku' and 'night rain'. These cultural themes are in line with the argument that Africans had a belief system and an organised way of life before the advent of colonialism. In 'Abiku' the fluid relationship between the world of the living, the unborn and the dead is portrayed. Also highlighted is the emotional state of a mother who suffers as her body is wasted by the evil child who dies only to be reborn but refuses to break the vicious circle in spite of the traditional rites performed to make him stay as the poet acknowledges:

> We know the knife scars serrating down your back and front
> and both your ears notched as
> A bondsman to this house.
>
> *A Reed in the Tide* (p.5)

In his American poems, 'Three Princeton Moods,' 'service', 'Two views of Marilyn Monroe' and 'Care Call,' Clark expresses disgust at the dehumanisation of machine controlled technological life. These poems create a subtle contrast to the traditional life that he finds fascinating. Clark also assumes a philosophical outlook in 'Horoscope' (p.17) by portraying how the moon and other celestial bodies affect man and his environment. He adopts the dramatic form where one personae is a cynic and the other is convinced that:

Our individual flux between joy
And disasters
Is that interlocking of our souls with stars. (p.17)

The implication is those forces outside of himself that he has no control over and it is within this framework that he acts out good or evil condition the individual's action.

Literature generally follows historical trends therefore the thematic concern with culture began to give way to the issues of leadership, economic and social problems with the attainment of independence. The poetry of this period criticized the political inadequacies of the leaders and highlighted the social problems that became a feature of the life of the generality of people. Bamikunle (1989:187) observes "poetry moved away from the private self to focus on socio-political problems. The language used became more familiar than the esoteric type of the 1960s". This is true of Okigbo who had written essentially private poetry but in *Path of Thunder* (1971) adopted public themes.

The *Path of Thunder* collection comments on the unstable political situation in Nigeria that culminated in the civil war. In 'Hurray for thunder,' Okigbo uses the elephant as a symbol for the Federal Government and illustrates its brute force with the image of pulling four trees to the ground that represents the four regions that made up Nigeria. Images of violence, war, and the use of proverbs, dirges and elegies pervade the collection. Okigbo laments the betrayal of the dreams of independence by the political leadership and the debasement of values of the Nigerian nation.

Soyinka who was not concerned with the issues of cultural conflict even though he wrote during the colonial era, became an active condemnatory poetic voice in his collection *Idanre and Other Poems*, *Poems From Prison* and *A Shuttle in the Crypt*. Through the use of mythologies, difficult language, images of destruction and oppression

he portrays the theme of social dislocation and goes on to state in his polemical work, 'The Artist in a modern African state' (1968) that:

> The artist has functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of vision in his own time. (p.21)

Soyinka examines the painful realities of contemporary Africa through various forms of death and decay that is material and spiritual as made visible by the day to day living. In 'Death at Dawn' *Idanre and Other Poems* (pp 10-11), using the symbol of the road, he explores man's life and his quest for meaning. There is the element of futility as man is unable to completely master his destiny, in the opening lines of the poem the traveller who sets forth at dawn is unsuspecting of the danger of the road which lies in wait like a beast of prey so that even the mother's prayer.

> Child
> May you never walk
> When the road waits famished, (p.10)

remain unanswered. In 'Idanre' he uses the Ogun myth to restate that violence is part of man, created by him and for which he is still paying the debt.

Soyinka's other collections, *Poems from Prison* and *A Shuttle in the Crypt* are the result of his experiences of war. Through the deployment of gory images, the poet has been able to distance these experiences from him and situate his poetry within his general concern of man's destructive nature. 'Wailing wall', *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (pp. 34-35) describes a priest-vulture that presides over a funeral service.

> Crow in white collar, legs
> Of tooth pick dearth plunged
> Deep in a salvaged morsel. (p.34)

At the end of the poem it is not just human corpses that lie buried in a mass grave even

Hope is dead and
Buried in soil of darkness. (p.35)

This kind of cynicism seems to be a general feature of the poetry of the period of the Nigerian political crises. But even in Chimalum Nwankwo's *Feet of the Limping Dancers* published in (1987), the tone of despair and cynicism pervades especially in the war poems. This shows marked influences of the western writers who regard the modern world as:

> A world of fragmented values… as the molten memory of traditions which have vanished from the world.
> (Spender 1963:14).

This attitude to life in the poetry of Nwankwo contrasts with the revolutionary and optimistic poems of Niyi Osundare and Odia Ofeimum, the difficult language and elusiveness of his meaning indicate influences of Soyinka and Okigbo.

The Nigerian civil war is an important historical period. War poems illustrate an essentially tragic view of life. In Achebe's collection *Beware Soul Brother,* we come face to face with the unfortunate situation of life among Biafran refugees. In 'refugee mother and child', the picture of emaciated children is grim in a physical way as Jones (1973:181) observes of the poem:

> It is the fruitlessness of a mother's
> Loving care which burns deep into our consciousness.

Pol Ndu's collection, *Songs for Seers* (1974) also written as a response to the war situation, is replete with images of violence and destruction. This is seen in 'evacuation,' 'burning booty', and in the 'reburial of the dead' Ndu declares.

Post home those heads severed in seven nights
On seven stones.
They are my heads awaiting the planting
Season
Resting on seven palms

And here
Where crying roses stark
Crowned with daggers of diggers.

Where courage
Brim-filled
Shoots of spade-fuls of sal vitae
To quicken the rot
Of the many dead. (p.24)

Ndu's mood of sarcasm and cynicism is similar to Soyinka's in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* but in language he is much closer to the familiar usage than the esoteric type of the 1960s. Ndu plays with words, by transforming their original meanings, for poetic effect, in 'July 1960', mankind becomes 'apeking'. He does this to bring out the bestiality in man's nature.

A radical generation of Nigerian poets emerged after the civil war era in the voices of Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Odia Ofeimum and others. These sought a departure from the influences of the older generation whom they accused of lack of commitment, to the cause of the suffering masses, heavy borrowing from Western literary techniques and difficult language. Garuba (1995:12) remarks that this trend of poems raging against poems has created the awareness that poems are not:

> Singular entities inscribed in closed texts but verbal acts to which there could be rejoinders in an infinite continuum.

Osundare dramatises this conflict between the people's poet and those who write for the elite, in 'A dialogue of drums', in the collection, *Village Voices* (1984).

The poetry of the 1980s and onwards calls for a new kind of commitment. The call to commitment is not a new phenomenon brought into being by the younger generation of Nigerian poets. Okigbo's *Path of Thunder* and Soyinka in a polemical work 'The writer in a modern African state' had set the tone of what politically committed poetry should be. But for the younger generation, commitment must be vigorous, through a radical condemnation and comprehensive portrayal of the dilemma which is defined by our socio-political and economic structures, they also advocate that writers must not only represent these but also point the way out of the social malaise.

Unlike the early Nigerian poets, Osundare, who is foremost at the vanguard of this new poetry, centralises the people as a major historical and social force against the oppression and exploitation of the leadership. Bamikunle (1989:189) refers to Osundare's poetry as "the most revolutionary poetic form in Nigerian poetry". The image of Nigeria that emerges in the poems of this period is that of social decadence and continuing degeneration that is evident in the political life of the nation. It becomes more interesting to examine the attitude of the poets to the possibility of altering the existing status quo for an alternative one.

In terms of technique therefore, what poetry should be or not be is spelt out in Osundare's *Songs of the Marketplace.* In the opening poem, 'poetry is' (p.3) he advocates that poetry must adopt the simple common form of communication to reach the people who are the vehicle for revolutionary change. Indeed revolutionary poetry must also seek to awaken in the people their consciousness and desire for change. Even aesthetics must serve clear purpose as a persuasive stimulant for mobilizing the people. In this lies the challenge to write without the influences of the early writers. A review of his early

poems; *Songs of the Marketplace*, *A Nib in the Pond* and *Village Voices*, yield language that contrasts with the obscurantism of the older generation but his latter works like *Moonsongs* and *Waiting Laughters* are filled with obscure images and difficult expressions like those that feature in the works of his immediate predecessors.

Osundare's collections of *Songs of the Marketplace*, *Village Voices*, *The Eye of the Earth* and *Waiting Laughters* will therefore be examined in terms of how the poetic tradition has influenced him, how he has tried to forge a distinctive poetic voice and his achievements which form his contribution to Nigerian poetry.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Various writers and critics have commented on the nature of Osundare's poetry, which is revolutionary in nature and advocates a return to traditional African oral poetics. Afam Ebeogu (1985) commenting on the radical tradition in Nigerian poetry observes that these writers call for a "nationalist literature" by insisting that literature must be free from colonial complexes. He views this new literature as different from what obtained in the earlier works because the writers attempt to establish new perspectives of looking at reality.

Maiwada (1993:36) also situates Osundare's work within this context and asserts that his literary intervention involves his perception of the old aesthetics of the poetic generation of the 1960s to the 1970s and their inability to centralize the masses as the concern of poetry and by challenging these he:

> Insists that poetry should be a social force for the radical transformation of the oppressed.

Osundare's poetry yields other meanings apart from his revolutionary ambition, therefore Jeyifo (1988:135) observes that there is the desire to transcend the ties to European traditions and forge a distinctive voice rooted in our realities and experiences as Africans, *Village Voices* is a dedication to this mission. He notes that *Village Voices* is comprised of a variety of subjects, levels of understanding and moods that celebrate the rural folk as sturdy producers, politically aware and satiric. Bamikunle also comments that dominating the collection is the communal poetic voice of the rural people.

While Maiwada (1994:148) highlights the ideological stance of *Village Voices* as regards the dialetics of materialism, he critiques Osundare's use of the rural communal voice as politically aware and capable of high intellectual analysis by arguing that there "… is indeed an intervening consciousness (voice) not just the pure voice of the villagers…". This is true to some extent, because the oral performance that the poet seeks to recreate has been mediated by the written form, but to carry the argument far is to deny the villagers analytical powers and wisdom which has been documented as existing in African traditional societies in pre-colonial times.

In *The Eye of the Earth* Bamikunle (1995) agrees with Osundare (1986:x) who admits in the preface to the collection that he seeks to recapture "echoes of an Eden long departed" through the nostalgic portrayal of the earth. The Earth, Jeyifo highlights has been dislocated by "predatory capitalist plunder and despoliation".

Bamikunle (1995:123) remarks of *The Eye of the Earth* that it is in some ways similar to *Village Voices* because it celebrates "the rural life and ethos in its purity" before the destructive effects of colonialism, but a notable difference is that this time the communal voice is not heard, the poet has become the "observer celebrant".

Aiyejina (1988:112-128) agrees with Bamikunle (1995) that *The Eye of the Earth* has an autobiographical nature. But Aiyejina is quick to point out that the poems are written in such a manner that autobiographical perspective is "communal rather than personal".

Aiyejina (1988:124) also argues that the poet in *The Eye of the Earth* has subtly handled political themes through nature metaphors, images and lyricism. This collection he insists is more politically committed than his earlier explicit political poems. A reading of the earlier collections like *Songs of the Marketplace*, *A Nib in the Pond* and *Village Voices* would lend proof to the fact that Aiyejina has made wild claims on the political nature of *The Eye of the Earth*.

Maiwada (1993:97) who in his thesis continues with the exploration of materialist dialectics argues that in *The Eye of the Earth* as in *Moonsong*, the poet's vision widens to assess the whole of humanity, using the African environment. In this assessment he asserts that the earth like the moon in *Moonsongs* is a recurrent image as "nature… the generous provider" and as man "the destructive irrational consumer".

Bamikunle (1995:135) observes of *Waiting Laughters* that while the collection is similar in themes to Osundare's other works, stylistically, Osundare creates an organized body of poems which are held together by the recurrent motifs, images and symbols of "waiting" and "laughter". Bamikunle notes still that this form allows the poet to comment on various situations under the umbrella of one long song.

Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1996:70-82) provides another dimension to the motifs of "waiting" and "laughter" by arguing that they provide a thematic focus on hope in the midst of despair. He emphasises the orality in *Waiting Laughters* by asserting that

Osundare has subjected the oral tradition to varied new and interesting poetic forms by refining and weaving the ideas into the poem rather than leave them in their bare form as found in *Village Voices*. Both Bamikunle and Ezenwa-Ohaeto emphasise Osundare's view of poetry as song through the use of musical accompaniment, repetitions and parallelism.

Most of the literature has not acknowledged the echoes of pioneer poets in the works of Osundare especially in his use of myths in *Village Voices*. Osundare's use of abstract images as in *Moonsongs* and his allusions to other cultures especially the Christian religion in *Waiting Laughters,* has not been acknowledged by critics. By and large, critics are of the consensus that Osundare's poetic form has revolutionized Nigerian poetry.

## CHAPTER TWO

## COMMITMENT IN POETRY

Discussions about the African writer and commitment have always dominated African literature; writers and critics are of the general consensus that African literature must be politically committed. The writer as a member of his society has his sensibility conditioned by the social and political happenings around him. The works of early Nigerian writers demonstrated a concern with the historical and political realities of the times. The nature of the artist's response to the happenings around him is also a matter of great concern. Commitment is not a new coinage but its meaning keeps shifting. Very early in African literature, Wole Soyinka in a polemical work had indicted the African writer of lacking vision:

> When the writer in his society can no longer function as conscience he must recognise that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler and postmortem surgeon. (1968:21)

Soyinka and his cohorts were later to face the same accusation of lack of commitment because of the pervading presence of foreign images and obscurity in their works. Mazrui (1967) and Nwoga (1973) establish that the inability of the early poets to communicate meaning amounts to lack of commitment even if the themes they treat are public. Another contributory remark by (Ngugi 1983:55-11) concerning what commitment entails is that it must go beyond mere presentation of issues to portray "a vision of life" that the poet believes in. what this means is that the poet must not only speak about injustice, he must adopt an ideological leaning that he lives by and propagates.

Niyi Osundare and other members of his generation reacted against the poetic practices of their predecessors in the generation of Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark and redefined commitment as the exposition of societal ills and an absolute solidarity with the oppressed people by conscientizing and awakening in them the will to bring about social change by revolutionary action. The language that demonstrates commitment is also redefined as one that is marked by "unpretentious and simple expression with a syntax that is close to prose" (Bamikunle 1997:117) as opposed to the allusiveness in the diction of older Nigerian poets. While these objectives are worthy and noble, it is observed in the latter works of Osundare and Ojaide that they do not consistently adopt the use of simple syntax and are sometimes influenced by the use of complex and foreign images; a feature in the works of preceding Nigerian poets.

Commitment as expressed in the works of Osundare and those of members of his generation is the deep concern the artist shows for the predicament of the ordinary Nigerian and a dedication to re-direct the present socio-political order of injustice towards the humanitarian values of social justice and equity through revolutionary literature. The writers of this school are highly ideological with a socialist-Marxist orientation, this Osundare acknowledges in an interview, *Okike* (No, 34, 6).

The Marxist-Leninist tenets of revolution which Osundare projects in his earlier works entail a transition from one socio-economic formation to another, in this case a shift from capitalism to socialism. Revolution is therefore "a change which breaks the old order to its very foundation" (Lenin 1973:10) and replaces it with a new one and a revolutionary is one who is "concerned with total change in society's institutions" (Lester

1969: ix-x) because he is dissatisfied with an existing social-political order. Otite et al (1979:387-388) explain further that,

> Revolution therefore brings about social change, this entails a change in the social structure of society … the social structure consists of those institutions, values and attitudes upon which relations between men are built.

It is an attempt to resolve social conflicts either by revolutionary action or negotiation that leads to social change.

Osundare's Marxist/socialist ideology culminates in his writing of revolutionary poetry that is, poetry that has social relevance because it educates the people and also moves them to bring about social change in society by radical action. He adopts the words of the Chinese revolutionary Mao – Tse Tung, that:

> Revolutionary literature and art should help the masses to propel history forward.
>
> *A Nib in the Pond* (1983:7).

The poet argues that because the writer must be politically committed, poetry cannot be separated from politics in the manner that Okigbo in his early poetry did, by relating historical experiences in the garb of private themes. He emphasises that "there is no … choice for the African poet ... but to be political". (Osundare 1988:97).

Osundare rejects the idea of the role of the writer as an abstract entity as perpetrated by early Nigerian poets. Okigbo (1971:25) projects that artistic creativity is "a solitary experience of self-examination". Soyinka's image of the artist is that of one who suffers persecution for his humanitarian embrace of the cause of humanity, this leads to his alienation and he becomes suspicious of the society for which he suffers. Osundare's concept of the poet is that of one who puts his poetry at the service of the

people as their voice and lives a life of sacrifice for the purpose of liberating the poor. He declares in *Songs of the Marketplace* (1984:1)

> I made an unbreakable pledge to myself.
> That the people would find their voices In my
> Song.

He is committed to the common people that have been neglected in Nigerian poetry. He indicts Soyinka's preoccupation with members of the middle class to the neglect of farmers, tailors, traders, house girls and other menial workers who constitute the majority of the people in society.

The poet shows concern for the suffering masses in 'Excursions' (pp. 7-15) that undertakes a journey that traverses the village to the city. This movement between two social axes allows us to experience Osundare's representation of the Nigerian context. He exposes the plight of the ordinary Nigerian by a graphic portrayal of the depravity of their lives

> We meet eyes in sunken sockets
> Teeth beref of gum
>
> Skins scaly like iguana's
> …
>
> We meet babies with chronic hydrocephalus
> Squeezing spongy breasts
>
> We see village boys' kwashiorkor bellies
> Hairless heads impaled on pin necks. (p.7)

Osundare uses imagery to convey the value of hunger and want, Udumukwu (2003:83) observes that these images are "demonic" aimed at representing a world that is insensitive and has indeed created the situation of starvation and disease.

The poet lays bare poverty and want in the images of the poor women folk who go about scavenging for leftovers of decayed good. At the village level the earth upon which the farmer depends for his sustenance remains infertile, this completes the picture of perpetual hunger. In addition, the people live in squalid and unhygienic environment, neglected by those in government whose responsibility it is to ensure their wellbeing. He indicts the callous indifference of government officials by this sarcastic remark that

"poverty is an invisible thing". (p 9)

The social neglect of beggars and others who are victims of war does not escape the poet who is committed to exposing injustice, corruption and other ills existing in society. These people that are treated as social misfits are a reflection of a society that is abnormal. Osundare beams his searchlight on the religious leaders who use religion for their selfish ends by feeding fat on the already impoverished masses.

Hymning and psalming are the diet
of the soul in bodies ravaged by hunger. (p.9)

He contrasts this image of malnourished bodies that invest all they have for spiritual rewards in heaven with the overfed plump preacher whose life style is maintained by the people.

In 'canto III' the poet exposes the corruption that has eaten deep in the fibre of the people. Starting from the lowest rung of the social ladder touts do not spare their fellow poor people. In the civil service, the messenger, like the unserious civil servant, remains unpatriotic through acts of misdemeanour and bureaucratic bottlenecks. In the lvory

towers, the desire for wealth has taken over academic excellence so that university lecturers have fallen:

> … into glamorised mediocrity.
> Breeding flat minds. (p.13)

The generation gap between the young and the old also comes in for indictment as a contributory factor to social disharmony. In the cities, the market people complain bitterly about those who have turned themselves into kings, bureaucrats, bourgeois and middlemen who pawn away the nation's wealth and resources to multinational corporations. Inspite of this chaotic situation, the poem ends on an optimistic note that the people will destroy "oppression's cloud". Osundare demonstrates commitment to the issues that affect the ordinary man by focusing on every facet of society. He does not merely point at the rotten world around him, he also proffers radical solutions to the social decay.

Osundare in his continuing concern to expose societal ills brings in for special attack members of his own class; the intelligentsia, in 'Publish or Perish' (pp. 25-27) and 'At the university con-gre-gation' (pp. 28-29). This class of people is supposed to mobilise the people and provide the leadership for radical action against the forces of oppression but they have remained armchair critiques and they are sometimes out rightly unconcerned with the problems of the larger society. 'Publish or perish' telescopes the academic environment as guilty of influences of foreign writing practices which are the standards upon which papers are judged for instance, the interjection of latin words to demonstrate how widely read the writer is and to excommunicate those who are not learned in the language. The poem also criticizes the colonial mentality that influences the curriculum of English departments where the beginning of English literary studies are

stuck on Chaucer or Shakespeare to the neglect of Soyinka or Amadi; pioneer writers of African literature:

The culture of self-gratification is spurred on, by the Appointments and Promotion Committee; the sole determining body of the lecturers' academic progress, that measures achievement by the number of papers published. The poet satirically remarks at what he terms a myopic judge of academic excellence.

> This paper chase
> Is our swiftest contribution
> To knowledge
> Hall mark of true scholarship
> Fastest mark of progress. (p.25)

The poem exposes an inherent corrupt practice that publication may not be a matter of merit but of sycophancy.

> Grovel before editor
> And dust his shoes… (p.25)

Through his enduring technique of sarcasm Osundare ridicules the maddening call for papers by the AP & C not minding whether they are "Syndicated", "duplicated", "pirated", "plagiarized" or written in ungrammatical language that is attributed to the typist error or indeed in an environment where the library lacks the necessary materials. The result of the emphasis on paper publication to the exclusion of other academic exercises will lead to a lowering of academic standards.

Osundare's commitment to exposing and condemning the forces of repression assumes a universal outlook. 'Namibia talks' (pp. 49-51) expresses anger at the inertia of regional organizations like the United Nations, The Organization of African Unity that have entrenched in their constitutions the principles of fundamental human rights but do not work at actually implementing these rights to the benefit of the majority of people

who suffer. The poet expresses disappointment and describes these Organizations as leopards to whom sheep has been entrusted. Osundare calls for positive action on the part of the people to take their destiny into their own hands and fight to live:

> Time to stop shooting words
> At those who dialogue
> With rockets and mortars. (p.50)

While 'Namibia talks' conscientises the people to realise how greatly they have been wronged, and urges them to radical action, 'Zimbabwe' (pp. 52-54) illustrate, the benefit of confronting the enemy with armed struggle. The poem is a dedication to the guerrilla fighters who stood against the white minority regime and turned "Rhodesia to Zimbabwe". The poet chronicles the hard road to freedom by pointing out that victory is not without casualties but is characterized by

> … jungles of blood
> … countless treacheries. (p.52)

All these give testimony to the fact that liberty is won at a cost, but children have not been orphaned or wives made widows in vain, even the ruined landscape will rise again in the symbol of liberty. The poem expresses optimism that the struggle for liberation generates a chain reaction in other parts of Africa:

> Yet another mile post
> On the sizzling roads
> From Cairo to cape. (p.53)

This indicates that the African continent from the North represented by Cairo to the South represented by the Cape coast will be liberated.

Osundare also acknowledges and honours others of the same ideological leaning as himself, apostles in the fight against injustices and oppression who courageously call

for change in the existing status quo in 'prisoners of conscience' (pp. 59-61) dedicated to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and in an elegy 'for Bob Marley' (pp. 57-58). Osundare honours Bob Marley… by re-enacting the song titles of his music; 'Get up stand up,' 'positive vibration', 'I shot the sheriff'', 'Zion Train' in poetic lines. His music was the medium through which he sang against racial and other forms of discrimination and subjugation' in Okigbo's words Osundare laments: "The Songbird has fallen". The occasion of the elegy is used to vent anger through biting criticism on the network of tyranny that had sought to silence Bob Marley but now pretends to grief at his death

Let them weep
Their crocodile tears …
Who chased you
Through wood and grass
But now die to frame you up
In mute Marble. (p.58)

Their hypocrisy is exposed because as a statue Bob Marley no longer presents a threat to the oppressors who now take the glory of immortalizing him.

'Mindscope' (p.62) like 'I sing of change' (pp. 89-90) the poem that closes *Songs of the Marketplace* portrays a positive side and hope in the mist of diminishing values be they academic or moral. Osundare is deeply bothered about the socio-economic contradictions that exist in society, as such, he desires to see a world without institutionalized oppression. There is a call for the political and geographical reshaping of a world.

With no
Sharp north
Or deep south
Without blind curtains
Or iron walls. (p.89)

The poet advocates a world free of the destructive elements of war. There is the desire to see harmony prevail through the use of symbolic nature images "of deserts treeing and fruiting" and the sun "radiating ignorance" not scorching viciously. The poem restates Osundare's daunting task of awakening the people and pricking the conscience of those in power and authority to reshape the world by rendering it free of injustices and unfairness.

In *Village Voices* (1984) Osundare's preoccupation with the role of art in society and the artist's obligation is dramatised in 'A dialogue of the drums' (pp. 5-8). Using the technique of a dialogue he highlights the conflict between the palace and the peoples' poet in what Maiwada (1993:71) calls "banter". The first protagonist (a palace poet) provokes the second (the peoples' poet and) as such he comes under attack:

> You singer of royal songs
> Your drum, dumb in the market place
> Only talks in the palace of gold
> Your song extols those whose words
> Behead the world (p.7).

The picture painted of the palace poet is that of one who is attracted by wealth and authority. His art does not serve communal purpose. He hails from a line of drummers but he beats only 'Bata' 'Omele' and 'Gangan' and shies away from 'Reso' 'Ogbele' and 'Odan', drums that symbolise communal living in the welcoming of a new born child, mourning the dead and condemning unacceptable social behaviour like stealing. Indeed the palace poet chooses to have nothing to do with the people and refers to the communal poet's association with the community ethos in derogatory terms as extracting:

> Paltry pennies
> From squalid lanes
> Frequenting miserable ceremonies (p.7)

In a counter attack, the communal poet debases his opponent by referring to him as an accolade whose drum has become a:

> Eunuch drum, a dumb still
> For harem buttocks. (p.7)

He caps up the humiliation by warning him in a prophetic manner of the approaching day of doom for those who betray the people:

> When your drum will be mute
> Like a Royal statute. (p.8)

In 'A villager's protest' (p.7) Osundare let the peasants speak for themselves concerning the political mal-administration, economic injustices meted out to those whose labour uphold the economy. The protagonist demonstrates awareness of the politicians' false promises at electioneering time, when they declare:

> … And turn all night into day
> We'll turn every footpath into
> A motor way
> And fashion out a city
> From every hamlet
> We'll give the farmer
> The best for his sweat
> And make poverty.
> A thing of the past (p. 47).

He criticises the "man of power" who forgets the promises he made, lives in affluence and remains insensitive to the plight of the people. 'The politicians' two mouths' (p. 57) like 'A villager's protest' focuses on the political machination by which the under-privileged groups are denied their rights. The protagonist expresses hope in 'A villager's protest' that the political situation will not remain the same:

Another rain will fall
(its cloud already gathering) (p. 48)

'The new farmer's Bank' (pp. 49-50) exposes the government's hypocrisy of building a farmer's bank as a way to alleviate the farmer's financial hardship. The bank becomes another avenue of exploiting the farmers who must give their land as "kolateras" in order to get loans from the government. 'A farmer on seeing cocoa house' (pp. 51-52) also dwells on the hypocrisy of governance and economic exploitation.

Osundare's concern assumes another dimension as he turns his searchlight on the elite who profess to be on the side of the poor but do not demonstrate sincerity, rather they are fired by their own ambition for power. In 'Feigning Rebel' (p.20) he asks the question repeatedly:

Are you real revolutionaries
Or feigning kings
Waiting for crowns. (p.20)

This is because these revolutionaries who gave the people hope turned out to be sycophants to those in power:

Tip toeing back to murmur
'good evening'
Where once they shouted
'good night' (p.21)

The framework of *The Eye of the Earth* is that of a poetic journey that takes the poet into the past and back to the present for comparison and looks into the future with hope. In this book, the poet persistently condemns pre-colonial plunder, the activities of multi-national corporations and their local stooges. One begins to notice the less militant tone with which the poet addresses issues. His commitment comes through as a lamentation for the damage that colonialism and the neo-colonial systems have done to

agrarian life in Africa. The poet explains his role as the people's historian who chronicles their past and compares it with the present and tries to redirect a future.

> For in the intricate dialectics of human
> Living looking back is looking forward; the
> Visionary artist is not only a rememberer
> He is also a reminder. (Osundare 1986:x)

The essence of recalling the Eden-like nature of society is to create in the mind a desire for a return to egalitarian society and thus ignite a fire in the minds of the people to confront the forces of deprivation.

The poet reminds his people of the communal life that is destroyed by colonialism with its attendant education and exploitation that changed the agrarian life of the people by shifting emphasis from the cultivation of yams to the production of cash crops; cocoa, coffee and cashew. The money economy; the result of western commodity cash crops has ironically created hunger and poverty in African because the people abandoned the cultivation of crops that satisfied their needs.

The poet's tone in *The Eye of the Earth* is less political when compared with *Songs of the Marketplace* and *Village Voices* but Osundare's concern with the fate of "the wretched of the earth" Bamikunle (1995:129) in 'They too are the earth' (p.45) draws attention to the sub-human level of life of the poor, who suffer oppression 'under snake skin shoes and mercedes tyres'. The poet laments:

> They too are the earth
> The sweat and grime of
> Millions hewing wood and hurling water. (p.45)

In this poem he also addresses another form of oppression that is gender-based by noting that:

They are the earth
Women battling centuries of
Maleficent slavery. (p.45)

Osundare tirelessly condemns oppression in whatever guise and makes no pretences that change is desirable.

'What the earth said' (pp.46-47) is also a testimony to the deprivation that the oppressed suffer at the hands of their tormentors whether they are:

"foremen soulless like their whistling whips"
… native executhieves (who) hold forth for alien wolves
(or) factorylords (rolling) in slothful excess. (p.46)

In spite of the overwhelming nature of tyranny the poem expresses optimism in the personified image of the earth that this testimony of sacrifices will give rise to "daring struggle" by future generations who will "kill the killer pests".

In the opening page of *Waiting Laughters* (1990) the poet establishes his role as spokesperson of his society by stating that his words are "ripe like a pendulous pledge" (p.2). Here too, Osundare lives through his ideals of poetry as committed to social change. He views poetry as affecting the lives of people:

My song is the root
Touching other roots…
(Again) my song is the embryo of the day (p.25)

Osundare's concept of art is that, it is more powerful than the forces of tyranny:

The sword… is not mightier than the pen
The sword is the pen running red rubrics
On the fragile page of cardboard memories. (p.53)

In this volume Osundare like Odia Ofeimum in *The poet Lied* (1983) indicts artists who failed the people at a time when they cry for help. Those poets have become:

Praise-singers who borrow the larynx
Of eunuch thunders. (p.46)

Art has lost its potency and the forces of oppression take absolute control as they crowd in on the people from all angles:

The desert marches in from the north
The sea sneaks in from the south
(with) manacles… recently oiled
With barrels of ancient treason (p.46)

It is this lack of commitment on the part of the elite artist that has made art loses its potency. Here Osundare is also indicting those artists who adopt the concept of art for its sake. He calls on the artist to show greater concern to the issues that affect the masses by asserting that the artist has the most powerful weapon because:

The pen… is mightier than the sword.
The sword is the pen running red rubrics
on the fragile page of cardboard memories (p.53).

Socialist revolutions occur on the basis that mankind makes history by controlling his destiny but in later collections like *Moonsongs* and *Waiting Laughters* the radical zeal is disappearing. Mankind has to await the convenience of time for circumstances to change, thus the inability to sometimes predict history presents a contradiction to revolutionary ideals. Osundare tries to accommodate his non-radical ideas, within a view of history that projects that positive change may take place even if it does not occur by the will and determination of revolutionaries.

He demonstrates commitment by pitching his tent on the side of the suffering people through exposing the tyrannical nature of leadership in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large and the corruption in government circles, the gloom and despair of the suffering people.

The poet captures oppressive rule using the biblical allusions of "fat cows" swallowing "lean ones" and the "pharaoh" who okays such actions is guilty of the same wrong doing. Osundare indicts successive military governments who claim to be the "messiahs" that will provide essential commodities by making the people:

> (stretch) skeletally out
> In rice queues, bread queues
> Salt queues, water queues (p.56)

Without satisfying their "political hunger" but peep at them "from the paradise/of a mercedesed distance".

Osundare captures the reoccurring theme of corruption as exemplified in the incidents at the visa office. The customs officer in the guise of performing his official duty:

> (prospects) for quiet little banks in the empire
>
> Of my bag (p.13)

He violates the poet's sanctity by rattling "the sacred shrub" among other forms of maltreatment (pp.11-13). *Waiting Laughters* also provides records of the forbearance and patience that the masses are capable of but the poet makes the point that the peoples capacity to endure could prevent the realisation of their aspiration by asking the rhetorical question:

> What happens to the tendril which waits
> Too long
> In the fullness of the sun
> What happens to the prayer which waits

Too long.
Without an amen. (p.94)

While Osundare is no longer certain that radical change will occur he still believes that the people can liberate themselves by taking advantage of a weak tyrannical order as:

New chicks breaking the fragile tyranny
of hallowed shells.

A million fists, up
in the glaring face of complacent skies (p.67)

Through the consistent refrain of "Waiting" and "Laughter", he expresses the hope that "time it may take", the people will surmount their obstacles like "the stammerer will one day call his Fa-fa-fa-ther-ther's na-na-name" (p.77). And laughter, the relief of anxiety "will surely come back to" "the paradise of our lips". *Waiting Laughters* (p.87).

Osundare shares with the older generation of Nigerian poets the condemnation of injustices in society. The radical wing of the post-war generation of Nigerian poets prescribes renewed dedication to the cause of the people not only in condemning injustices in society but also by proffering solutions to the social and political problems that have engulfed the country and continent as a whole.

**LANGUAGE USE IN OSUNDARE'S POETRY**

One of the central issues of contention in modern Nigerian poetry is the communication of meaning through the vehicle of language. Generally, the language practices of the new generation of Nigerian poets contrasts with the diction of the pre-war generation of poets especially Soyinka, Okigbo and Echeruo. The older poets deployed difficult diction and allusive images but these new poets have simplified the language of poetry in order to reach the majority of people in society. This demystified language of

poetry as critics have referred to it becomes the vehicle through which the socially committed artist educates, conscientises and mobilizes the people. He does this by communicating in simple diction the injustices that the masses suffer and calls for radical action on their part. Thus the ability to communicate meaning is a test of the artist's level of commitment to the cause of the suffering people.

Osundare and his comrades are committed to communicating meaning through accessible diction. This is true of his early works; *A Nib in the Pond, Songs of the Marketplace* and *Village Voices*. In his later works his language use has not conformed to the ideals of simple language usage. His collections reveal fresh experiments with language. He consistently plays on words to yield new meanings; his indulgence with images and symbols that are found in traditional lore creates poetry that most people can identify with. He also depends a lot on irony and sarcasm as tools for satirising the failed Nigerian leadership and social injustice.

The poet, views language as an active expressive tool, capable of communicating meaning, serving the political purpose of conscientising people while retaining aesthetic appeal. In the opening stanza of 'poetry is' (pp. 3-4), he lays down in clear terms what poetry is not and should be. He attacks the excluding diction and use of foreign images in Nigerian poetry. He says that poetry is:

> Not the esoteric whisper
> Of an excluding tongue
> Not a claptrap
> For a wondering audience
> Not a learned quiz
> Entombed in Grecoroman lore. (p.3)

The poem also highlights the political purpose that poetry serves; its ability to educate the mind and also move people to act:

Harbinger of action
The more minds it stirs. (p.3)

Poetry carries the task of conscientising the common people therefore it should be written in-accessible diction; it is:

The hawker's ditty
The eloquence of the gong
The lyric of the market. (p.3)

This kind of poetry cannot be the private property of the poet, because it is communally owned.

Osundare also projects the aesthetic appeal that is derived from poetry through the use of contrasting images and symbols "the soft wind and the dancing leaf", "the sole and the dusty path", "the bee and the alluring nectar". These images awaken the power of imagination in the reader. This first poem appropriately titled 'poetry is' stipulates that these two aspects of literary expression; technique and substance, must be fused in poetic expression. He also advocates that the appropriate language of revolutionary poetry is that which seeks to communicate "meaning to man" .

A common feature of Osundare's language use is the conversational nature of the poems. In 'publish or perish' (p. 24) one feels the presence of a colleague being addressed in a manner that reminds one of academics discussing paper publication and the fears that are expressed:

Tell me
Do you think they will accept this
The A & P
Do you think they will. (p.24)

This style of writing is aimed at involving the reader so that he sees himself as part of the ideas expressed.

Osundare depends a lot on irony, sarcasm and the graphic representation of issues. Gentle sarcasm is put to work in the description of the operations of the Nigerian railway corporation in 'The Nigerian Railway' (p.30). Words are deliberately fractured to illustrate the rhythm of arduous movement that symbolizes the inefficiency and lifeless performance of this government corporation:

Dark Sna
ky str
uctures
Tortuous
milli
Pede on
legs
of iron
crawl ing
wear ily
fromswamptosavannah. (p.30)

The metaphor of a millipede that crawls with effort ready to fold up at the slightest obstacle paints a graphic picture of a system that is unable to function efficiently.

The poet opens *Village Voices*, 'I wake up this morning' (p.1) by using language to make an impression on the people. He employs a vibrant voice, which carries "melodic rhythm" (Isanga 2003:132) in the image of the "mellowing flourish/of the coasting stream" and a clear "vision" of the issues he addresses. The voice and clarity of vision combine to form powerful words that affect the targeted people thus, he believes in the power of his words to stir the people to revolutionary action:

(They) will not lie like a eunuch wind
Fluttering leaves in a barren forest
My words will climb the tree of wisdom
Feed multitudes with fruits of thought
And plant the earth with potent seeds. (p2)

The poems of *The Eye of the Earth* are rich in imagery but the density does not result in the alienating language of the older generation of Nigerian poets. In this collection Osundare indulges in animating every aspect of nature in what Bamikunle (1995:123) calls "a perfect system of personification. In 'Earth', (p.1). The Earth is "spouse of the roving sky". Again in 'Forest Echoes', (pp 3-12) he animates every element of nature. In this pursuit, every noun has a qualifying adjective and every action of plants, birds, animals, rocks, seasons et cetera are described in terms of human activities. For instance, the sky and the earth are described as engaged in a love relationship in which the rain is the offspring:

The rains have their time this year
(The earth (finally) won the love of the sky). (p.3)

In this sense the reader's imagination is centred on the process of a relationship that is characterised by refusal and finally, acceptance.

Osundare uses pun to yield contrasting meaning in one breath, for example:

A forest of a million trees, this
a forest of milling trees (p.5)

by the act of capitalist plunder. Osundare undertakes what he calls "a linguistic adventure" by sometimes recreating words to suit his purpose. In 'They too are the Earth' (p.45) he coins another term for partriachial domination as "maleficient slavery" Osundare makes profound use of verbal icons in his presentation of ironic situations.

Commenting on *Waiting Laughters*, Ajayi (1990:10) observes that Osundare demonstrates the ability to establish a relationship between "semantic(s) and the collocation of words and man, nature and animals". He does this effectively through brilliant handling of contrasting ideas. For instance, "truth" becomes a symbol of these variously contrasted situations:

> Truth of the valley
> Truth of the mountain …
>
> Truth of the ash
> Truth of the flame
>
> Truth of the sun
> Truth of the moon. (p.3)

Contrast here is used to express situations of despair, hope, resistance and triumph in different circumstances.

He acknowledges the difficulty in the clash of the English and African indeed Yoruba cultures by confessing that he tries to accommodate one culture in the rhythm of another culture and language. In *Waiting Laughters*, part II (p.40) he refers to the English language as "a borrowed tongue" and the parts of speech; the verb, noun and proverbs as symbolic icons of memories of colonialism that capture the dilemma of the African elite who speaks:

> A white white tongue
> in a black black mouth. (p.40)

There is the conflict of reasoning in the African sense and relating it in English words: "Thoughts draw battle lines with words". The language dilemma also created pidginization that still has different dialects even within the same country, the poet describes this, using biblical allusions:

The deafening tower
of pidgin babels. (p.40)

Osundare attempts to overcome the language crisis by writing in two languages. He does this by inserting Yoruba words whose direct English equivalents cannot be found and strives to avoid excluding the reader who are the vehicles of social change by translating the meanings of the words in footnotes. He does this not verbatim but finds equivalent meanings or concept of the English words. For example, 'alápándàgi' (p. 58) is a fish of the tilapia family while 'oremodo' is translated as a mythical fish (p. 73) that is extraordinarily active and fertile. His translations are as accurate as can be by distinguishing the different fish(es) and more importantly the different metaphoric uses to which they are put. These instances of bilingualism that appear in all his collections serve the purpose of connecting the poems to the poet's cultural background. A reading of Osundare's works yield differences in language use beginning *from Songs of the Marketplace* to *Village Voices* where Osundare's language is imbued with wise sayings, proverbs and transliteration. The immediacy and frankness of his words still exist in these collections; his experimentation with language in *The Eye of the Earth* uses every opportunity to load his lines with images both from nature and human activities. Critics as poetically rich in imagery have described *The Eye of the Earth*.

In his early poetic career Osundare kept to the ideals of communication and accessibility in poetry but the fascination with words that were kept under control and made to serve the end of communication in the latter collections came to take primary place. In *Moonsongs* and *Waiting Laughters* this indulgence obscures his message. Osundare inherits some garb of obscurity of the older Nigerian poets. The use of indirect statements, dense syntactic structures, complex imagery, allusions to other cultures and

symbolism have contributed to the elusiveness of meaning in some sections of *Waiting Laughters*. For instance:

> 'I am Croesus' quoth he, …
> Beyond reason, beyond necessity
> Beyond distribution which tames the excess
> Of uneven mountains
> Beyond virtue, beyond need
> Beyond truth which straightens the serpent
> Of slammering jungles
> Croesus wears a glittering crown
> His neck shortening like a senile cricket... (p.20)

Osundare's experimentation is still distinctive despite the language influences of his predecessors. In *Waiting Laughters* his play with words to raise new possibilities of meaning is still a feature:

> The multitudes
> All ways waiting
> In the corridors of hungry shadows (p.53).

"All ways" yields a double meaning that the people wait every time in all situations. He attracts self-consciousness to language and meaning by disobeying syntactic rules. For example, "fourhundredseason" (p.37) is written as one word. This Osundare refers to as "graphological pun" (2003:2) with the intent to illuminate content. The poet takes this experiment further by illustrating the criss-crossing of the rails as:



(p.32)

The essence in terms of semantic meaning is to illustrate the crisis in the Nigerian railway system that, though long established, has failed to function properly.

Brown (2003) credits Osundare with artfully using the English language by "breaking and remaking" it for his own ends and "capitalising on the tension set up by the confrontation of language and culture". He upholds that Osundare has used the English language in a manner that no English poet can do.

## CHAPTER THREE

## ARTISTIC USE OF THE ORAL TRADITION

The oral tradition is the sum total of a people's heritage; a process whereby cultural practices are sustained by word of mouth, through contact between individuals depending largely on memory, habits and actions. Adedeji (1979), Bamikunle and Conteh-Morgan (1992) agree that these practices are made up of various forms of oral narratives; tales, legends, myths, rituals, songs, proverbs, riddles and non-verbal attributes like musical accompaniment and gestures. It is in these traditional elements that the oral artistic technique has its basis and these idioms have featured in the works of modern Nigerian and African writers.

Ogunba (1978) argues that most African writers attach importance to traditional arts more for their artistic value than for their social and religious views. This is not entirely true. Soyinka (1967:57-86), dose not only adapt the story line of myths and the dramatic idiom to interpret contemporary life but also makes a social comment on the negative nature of Nigerian and African political leadership. In *Labyrinths* (1971) Okigbo laments the alienation of the educated African by the western religion and its value system and returns to seek entrance in traditional African religion.

It is important to note that very early in modern African literature, writers have used the whole gamut of the oral tradition and creatively integrated it with influences from western cultures. Therefore the oral artistic forms are not just assuming relevance with the emergence of the new generation of African writers as Okpewho (1988)and Ojaide (1989) claim. There is an abundant use of the oral tradition in the works of Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark but the fusion of traditional elements with western literary

techniques stripped their works of their Africanness and made them sound like western poems. The differentiating factor between the 'old' and 'new' poets is that the new generation of Nigerian poets has moved relatively closer to African tradition in their use of "imagery…. Form and prosody", (Bamikunle 1992:51). Osundare's poetry manifests this remarkable use of the oral tradition. He strives to produce poetry that is close to African tradition with a strong consideration for communal audience. His use of orality began very early in *Songs of the Marketplace* (1984). In 'poetry is' (p.3) he describes poetry as "the hawker's ditty", "the eloquence of the gong" and "the lyric of the market place". The gong is a representation of a traditional context of communally based artistic performance. In this volume, traditional idioms in the form of proverbs, feature as framework upon which the poems are built. In 'ignorance' (p.33), the poet uses a popular Yoruba proverb to illustrate the foolishness of contemporary social practice:

The cow is dying
For a trip to London
Let it go
It will come back
As corned beef. (p.33)

Again he uses an archetypal character, Madaru in Yoruba myth to illustrate the proverb on ignorance. Madaru personifies confusion and he delights in scattering: (Bamikunle 1992:53)

Madaru buys a crown
And becomes a king

And you ask
How sheep all agree
To give their crown to a wolf? (p.34)

This is an appropriate image of a man who paradoxically is the architect of his doom.

'Udoji' (pp.35-36) and 'reflections' (pp.37-38) are filled with the proverb form that Osundare consistently uses to juxtapose traditional wisdom side by side the injudicious actions of political and administrative leaders who fail to see the negative consequences of their actions on the generality of the people. In 'Udoji' the foolishness and lack of foresight of those who approved the 'Udoji Awards' is brought out first in the proverb of the step mother who:

> feeds her stepson
> till he constipates
> (and the braggart who kills lame ones) to prove his valiance. (p.35)

Also, in the reality of the economic situation of inflation:

> Pockets burst with arrears
> But market stalls are empty. (p.35)

The poet uses proverbial wisdom in the form of irony and sarcasm to ridicule the inefficient Nigerian leadership that has failed to meet the essential needs of the people. In 'reflections', like in 'Udoji', wise sayings are placed side by side the corrupt and destructive practices of the leaders who live for 'today' without caring about the future:

> The babalawo charms off the clouds
> But marvels at a scorched land
> The lizard feeds on its own brood
> And wonders why they say it buries
> Its future in its guts. (p.37)

In this poem 'on seeing a Benin mask in A British Museum' (pp. 39-40) Osundare decries the undignified manner with which cherished African gods are treated by aliens.

> Here stilted on plastic
> A god deshrined

This amounts to desecration of the god "in a strange land". This poem makes a statement on the damaging effects of colonialism on African traditional religion. It is also an echo

of Okigbo's cry over the destruction of the twin gods of Irkalla 'Limits' X (p.33). Here Okigbo's more angry tone refers to the destroyers of African gods as "beasts". The use of the traditional lore in the form of proverbs and local words encapsulates the disgrace of African gods as sacrilege especially when viewed within the psyche of traditional African thought.

Although Osundare's use of the proverbial lore is a dominant feature of *Songs of the Marketplace*, his experimentation with this traditional art form appears in its rudimentary state in the sense that, he frequently provided explanations to throw more light on the proverbs. The flashes of experimentation with traditional art forms that began in *Songs of the Marketplace* became a dominant style in *Village Voices*. In *Village Voices* Osundare upholds the socio-political values of traditional life above the urbane society which is built upon a system of exploiting the resources of those who till the land, he does this by exploring the rich store of rural life as material for poetic technique.

In 'I wake up this morning' (pp. 1-2) and 'A dialogue of the drums' (pp.5-8). Osundare, like Okigbo in 'Hurray for thunder' (p.67), views the artist as a "towncrier". But Osundare does not express the fear the town crier has in Okigbo's poetry:

If I don't learn to shut up my mouth I soon go to hell
'Hurray for thunder' (p. 67)

rather he wears:

Courage like a shield
Telling kings their fart
Chokes the village nose
'I wake up this morning' (p.1).

again the town crier in *Village Voices* is not a lone voice who fights injustices alone but carries along with him other members of the community. In this is realised the concept of art as communal property. Here the poetic voice is subsumed in the communal voice of

the people who adopt various forms of traditional art to denounce the injustices that exist in society. For instance in several instances the poems have a persona or communal voice through whom the poet speaks. A prominent traditional art form that appears in Osundare's works is the tradition of panegyric and abuse poetry as exemplified by 'A Dialogue of the Drums' (pp.5-8) and 'not in my season of songs' (pp.9-10). In 'A Dialogue of the Drums', the protagonist praises his art as superior to that of his opponent:

> I owner of the throat for pleasing songs
> And hands sculptured
> For the talkative face of the drum. (p.5)

In the manner of the oral artist, he provokes his unseen opponent and elongates the exchange to his advantage by providing his opponent's response in a way that serves to spur him on. The praise form technically leads to the lampoon in 'Not in my season of songs'. Here, the attacking poet initially feigns a lack of interest in the exchange but at the same time goes out to heap invectives on his victim:

> Sigidi thirsty for a dance of shame
> Craves a festival in the rain.(p.9)

Stylistically the abuse form of oral poetry pretends restraint but at the same time reels from one derogatory remark to another. Osundare adopts this as he moves from stanza to stanza using as refrain the conditional clause "I would have told you" as the rider upon which his invectives are conveyed, not only on his victim but also on members of his family; "the elephant legs of (his) mother", "(his) father, the D O's shit-carrier" and his "uncle the produce buyer…fattened on ugly money". This torrent of abuse is therefore reminiscent of oral poetry crafted sometimes for political use where two or three generations are affected.

The poet uses the prosodic rhythm of oral poetry to adopt and translate some Yoruba songs into English, as in the first stanza of 'the prisoner's song: (p. 24).

> The warder's wife never bears a proper baby
> the warder's wife never does
> if she doesn't give birth to a truncheon
> she delivers a lunatic
> The warder's wife never has a proper child. (p.24)

This poem uses "moralistic lines from Yoruba Ewi; a form of poetic tradition" Akuso (2003:169). Osundare stylistically uses this song as an opening to satirise those rural stooges who the government uses to unjustly curtail the freedom of rural agrarian people. The protagonist ridicules the warder by reminding him:

> we are prisoners both
> In this graveyard of freedom. (p.24)

At a metaphoric level, this poem tells a universal story of generations of oppressors and highlight the dominant role of local African stooges who have sold out their heritage.

Other examples of Yoruba translated songs are a whole rendering of marriage songs as found in 'The bride's song' (p.41). This translation in poetic form celebrates the village values of conjugal relations as opposed to the immorality that is a by product of modernity. The poet upholds the traditional value of chastity. The bride announces with pride:

> I will take a full throated cock
> When the first night's sheet glows
> With the virtue of many years. (p.42)

There is also a celebration of fertility as opposed to the urban values of contraception. This is however not mentioned in the poem it is implied. The moon as symbol of fertility is called upon to bless the marriage. The tune of the song is that of a proud virgin-bride who marries into a family where fertility abounds.

One of the problematic areas of the English language experience for the African writer lies in the attempts to translate his indigenous cultural experiences into the English language. While Osundare's translations into the English language make for wider readership, the translation may not retain their original Yoruba semantic cum cultural values.

Osundare makes use of the tradition of the dirge form. Dirges are songs or lamentations rendered at occasions of death in memory of the dead. African dirges are rendered in the form of songs and have predictable patterns that are formulaic in nature. Osundare has adopted the dirge form with modifications which border on influences from English literary traditions. While the English forms of elegy make references and establish a relationship between the mourner and the dead they may not be essentially rendered in song form (Stanford 1975). The structure of 'The pillar has fallen' (p.37) reflects elements of English elegy fused with African traditions of mourning. Here the poet has not adopted the African dirge form in its strictly traditional nature. This goes to show his inability to reproduce the oral art form in the mediated form of the text. In this poem the protagonist laments the loss of a loved one with an absence of the song nature that is typical of traditional dirge forms. Through the use of nature images the poem captures the bitter lament of the mourner:

> The sun I so busily put
> In my sky at dawn
> Has disappeared before noon. (p.37)

The third stanza gives us clue that the loss is that of a child or close relative by describing reminiscences of a traditional African relationship that exists between a father and his young child, especially a son:

Who will carry my umbrella to the gathering
Unroll my raffia mat
And keep my company when we will unravel
The mystery of words? (p.37)

The aged man views a future that holds no prospect for him and he reacts to his loss by resolving to give up on life:

Better to leave now
…
than face an empty evening
in the company of begging bowls. (p.37)

The technique of the dirge also appears in 'the cock's comb of fire' (pp.39-40). This time, the lamentation is not that of loss of a child but of youthful days. The persona who has lost his virility recounts through memory; the youthful days of his sexual prowess:

I have climbed mountains
descended valleys
and knelt before moistening caves
supplicant like a priest
before a grove (p.40).

In a way, he still tries to hold on to the days of his youth by describing his declining virility as the "cock's… comb of fire"

Osundare celebrates the traditional vision of life that emphasises the utilization of scarce resources for the communal good as opposed to the individual accumulation and greed that has become a feature of modern Nigerian society. In this dialogue in 'eating tomorrow's yams' (p.16) communal wisdom triumphs against the prodigal's who insists that tomorrow's yams be eaten "today"

They cut the yam into seedlings
and plant tomorrow's harvest
It is meet to live on herbs and grains
if that ensures tomorrow's yams today. (p.16)

The qualities of agrarian life, social equality and contentment with little, are expressed in 'eating with all the fingers' (p.18) and 'cradling hands' (p.38). These poems celebrate the fact that the rural community delights in what it produces and lives by it. Agrarian toil is rewarded as:

Hands
which toiled in thunderstorms
… eat
with the softening rains.
'Cradling hands' (p 38)

Maiwada (1994:145) notes, that Osundare uses the tradition of proverbs, maxims and wise sayings with "profound philosophical insight" in order to highlight the contradictions and tensions that exist in society. In 'The Search for a wife' (p.18). The woman in an ironic twist, confirms her unacceptable behaviour to her son:

Whoever says I am a curser
may he see his own ears
without a mirror, may sopanna
turn his house into a furnace
may sango… (p.18)

These torrents of insults are characteristics of rural anger and bitterness. The "curser" invokes the powers of the gods of lightning and thunder.

'Advice' (p.19) though short, examines through sarcasm the outcome of deliberate falsehood which is in essence deceit of oneself:

To yourself
Friend be true
You farm a hundred yams
And tell us it is two hundred
Alright.
After eating a hundred yams
you will eat a hundred lies. (p.19)

This wise saying represents the values of honesty and morality and the wisdom in these values lies in living a happy and contented life.

Osundare also uses the proverbs and maxims that are found in oral narratives as analogies for social truths in 'chicken story' (p.14) ironic situations of appearance and reality are presented:

> (The chicken) eats pebbles
> and swallows sand
> yet complains of toothlessness. (p.14)

and 'the politician's two mouths' (p.57) the politician's double nature is exposed:

> The politician's mouth has two edges
> Like Esimuda's sword
> It is murder both ways. (p.57)

He is again described in the image of a "lying wolf" whose inside cannot be seen because a thin membrane covers it. This image reveals the trickery of the Nigerian politician. When Osundare uses wise sayings he adopts the prosodic form as well as the content of the moral or social insight the proverb contains so as to ridicule or judge the social malaise he condemns. The poet also uses the rhetorical device of proverbs, this is the writer's creative manner of adapting the proverbs to suit his content while retaining its proverbial form for example:

> Is it not the politician
> Who sees a snake
> And hails an earthworm? (p.57)

The poetic effect is to create a more insightful view of the politician that he has already established. In this sense, proverbs are traditional wisdom used to make precise universal social comments.

The poet also adopts his people's myth to effectively illustrate the viciousness of the politicians by comparing the politicians' double nature to Esimuda's sword. Esimuda is described as an Ikere warrior with an extraordinarily large and sharp sword. The use of this myth occurs in 'land of unease' (pp.45-46) as a worthy analogy to the greed and wickedness of the politicians who convert the nation's resources to use for their selfish ends as a result the majority of the people suffer. Osundare through the graphic use of imagery and a strident tone condemns the gross inequality that exists in society through this rhetorical question:

> Why have a few chosen to be thumbs
> And the many others 'omodindinrin'
> Clinging precariously
> To the periphery of the palm (p.46).

In *Village Voices* the musical forms of traditional art also find expression. It has been observed by critics that the concentrated use of traditional images, metaphor and symbols places *Village Voices* alongside Anyidoho *Earthchild* and Okot P' Bitek's *Song of Lawino* as one of the most impressive celebrations of rural culture in African literature. Osundare's worthy attempts at recreating communal poetry as exists in the oral tradition faces a major limitation of the mediated form of the written text. It is difficult for the gamut of the verbal artistic and non-verbal gestures that exist in the oral tradition to retain their original form once it has been mediated by the written form. Osundare realizes the disadvantage of the written text and tries to overcome it by resorting to performance poetry.

The celebration of the traditional ethos is carried on into *The Eye of the Earth* but here Osundare assumes his poetic voice as what Bamikunle (1995:132) calls the "observer-celebrant". The rallying factor for Osundare is the mental revisiting of the

scenes of the rural landscape of his childhood, that was unspoiled before the emergence of money economy. Okigbo too in 'Heavensgate' had returned as a prodigal to his traditional religion, thus both poets share in the use of autobiographical material in this exploration of the traditional lore.

In the opening pages, Osundare shows a sacred respect for the earth. In traditional African societies, everything in life and death depends on the earth.. The poet demonstrates this in his description of the earth as the place where life begins and ends by the juxtaposition of opposites:

> Temporary basement
> And lasting roof
>
> First clayey coyness
> And last alluvial joy
>
> Breadbasket
> And compost bed. 'Earth' (p.1)

The rural man's love for labour is also celebrated. In 'Farmer born', (p. 43-44). Osundare remembers the pleasant memories of his rural childhood:

> Farmer-born peasant-bred
> I have frolicked from furrow to furrow
> Sounded kicking tubers in the womb
> Of quickening earth
> And fondled the melon breasts
> Of succulent ridges. (p.43)

It has been observed that the images used in this poem to describe the closeness between traditional man and the earth suggest something akin to a conjugal union and the produce of the earth is the result of such a relationship. In an ironic turn of the refrain "farmer-born peasant-bred", the poet satirises the western culinary values that he has acquired by being:

Classroom-bled
I have thrown open my kitchen doors
And asked hunger to take a seat
My stomach a howling dump
For Carolina rice. (p.44)

Feeding on western food is equivalent to being perpetually hungry, the implication is that he upholds the superiority of the African diet.

Every volume of Osundare's poetry is experimentation with form and technique. In *The Eye of the Earth* he employs another device from the oral tradition that is absent in *Village Voices*; that is the prescription of musical accompaniment to the poems. 'Forest Echoes' (pp. 3-13) is to be accompanied with 'flute and heavy drums" 'the rocks rose to meet me' (pp. 13-17) to be chanted with agba drum throbbing in the background. 'Harvest call' (pp. 18-21) to be chanted to lively 'bata' music. In 'Our Earth will not Die' (pp. 50-51) the poet recommends a solemn almost elegiac tune at the beginning of the poem to lament the despoliation of the Earth but in the last stanza, music turns festive and louder signalling the triumph of the Earth over forces of destruction. The inclusion of musical accompaniment is an indication of Osundare's desire to move closer to performance poetry in a manner that is reminiscent of oral poetry where audience and poet alike engaged in a fluid dynamic relationship. There are still certain obstacles to this because in traditional oral poetic performance the artist and audience share the same cultural artefacts of language, setting and an understanding of certain norms, practices and gestures. This does not necessarily exist in a semi-urban or urban metropolis that houses a conglomeration of people with diverse cultural biases.

In *Waiting Laughters,* Osundare exploits his concept of poetry as song. He has abandoned the style of individual lyrics for a form whereby whole body of poems are

organised around one or two motifs and the poems evolve as stages of a single poem, propelled by the consistent refrain "waiting" and "laughter". The motifs provide continuity and connectivity between the various sub-themes the poet explores. Osundare (1990:4) significantly tags the volume "a long song in many voices". He highlights that everything in our culture is "lyrical and musical". This musicality is enforced by the use of sound techniques; alliteration, rhythm and rhyme. For example:

> The rain is onibanbantiba.
> The rain is onibanbantiba. (p.4)

has no specific semantic meaning but is effective for use as a "tonal counter point" (Osundare 1990:4).

Osundare opens the volume of poems in the tone of the traditional narrator of tales:

> I pluck these murmurs
> from the laughter of the wind
> the shrub's tangled tale. (P.2)

Like the traditional poet he provides an opening and carries the people along in this communal activity by adopting a basic feature of oral poetics, repetition, the essence is to entrench the communality and dynamism that is a feature of traditional oral artistry and as Chukwuma (1976:16) observes repetition "entails not only the structure but (also) the words and the stanza…". This technique is a general feature of Osundare's works:

> Teach us the patience of the sand
> Which rocks the cradle of the river
> …
> Teach us the patience of the rain
> Which eats the rock in toothless silence
> …
> Teach us teach us teach us. (p.7)

This contrasting set of repetition using different situations emphasises the virtue of patience that brings things to pass in time.

He relies heavily on Yoruba oral poetry for repetition, parallelism and paradox. Repetition imprints on the memory the intended message, it also provides rhythmic unity to lyricism. While satirising military dictatorship the poet repeats the phase " I proscribe" (p.50) and ridicules the manner in which tyrannical leadership seeks to eliminate everything including "history". The use of various forms of parallelism, also reinforce the lyrical nature of the poems. He balances opposites within the lines and uses them as points of view to condemn oppressive rulers and reduce them from their high and mighty status to debasement:

> The king's brave legs are bone and flesh …
> The castle is a house of mortar and stone …
> A chair is a wood which becomes a throne …
> (and) the crown is only a cap (p.22)

In *Waiting Laughters* as in the other collections, Osundare uses proverbs and wise sayings with regularity. This chain of proverbs on (p70) portray the value of caution in dealing with the forces of tyranny:

> My tongue has not stumbled
> Upon the outcrop of hidden words …
> I have not shouted "Nine"
> In the backyard of the one with a missing finger …
> I have never asked the toad
> Any story about missing tails. (p.70)

As earlier observed, Chukwuma (1976:17) remarks "proverbs are used to express an idea (thus, they can be) modified and adapted". Adaptation may take the form of adding a few words or by contrasting the proverbial while retaining the essential image necessary for its identification. This feature appears in the poet's works; he subjects the proverbial lore to diverse interpretation to suit the circumstances. In one instance, Osundare refines and

weaves the associated ideas into the poem as he addresses the limitations of writing African experiences in a "borrowed tongue". Here the proverb is dressed thus:

> History's stammerer
> when will your memory master
> the vowels of your father's name (p.41).

In another instance, the proverb:

> The stammerer will one day call his
> Fa-Fa-fa ther ther's na-na-na-name (p74)

is used to give hope to the suffering masses. The last line of the proverb as punctuated by 'the dash' also aims at reproducing oral speech.

The orality of Osundare's poetry illustrates what Nwachukwu (1993:85) identifies when he says:

> Proverbs, tongue-twisters, riddles communal traditions… folktales In snippety forms are built into poetic lines with the intention of Africanizing poetic meditation.

Osundare experiments with oral artistic forms in ways that can accommodate them into the written form. He adopts the tradition of folktales by using the basic structure or famous tales and creatively enriching them with his ideas. His style goes a long way to highlight a dominant feature of the oral art form that is, the ability of the artist to catch the attention of the audience by his ingenuity and dexterity. The example of the tale of the Hyena and Lambs illustrates this; the hyena decides to drop his characteristic manner of cunningly catching the lambs and appoints his victims who will come "freely to (his) den". This part of the poem is a dedication to the "NLC '88 and the Generals". The social value of the tale describes the tyrannical relationship that exists between military rulers and the labour union.

He also uses the tradition of the folktale to illustrate that only courage and wisdom can defeat implacable foes as illustrated by the tale of the toad (p.63) that turns out smarter than the snake. Osundare twists the traditional structure of the tale here, "the toad turns into a rock" and the snake swallows something "too hard for the mill of the stomach". He also experiments with traditional idioms by expanding aphoristic ideas into wider context so that they become framework for making social comments:

A baby antelope
Once asked her pensive mother:

Tell me mother
How does one count the teeth
Of a laughing lion? (p.72)

In this aphorism, the lion opens its mouth so as to fool the baby antelope that unlike its mother cannot differentiate a "guffaw" (p.96) that is evil from true laughter that expresses friendliness.

The poet finds in Yoruba, indeed African tradition, rich reservoir of materials for his artistic exercise. Mythic elements in *Village Voices* like in *Waiting Laughters* are used to pass political judgements. In *Waiting Laughters* songs and myth are combined to criticize and condemn rulers who misuse power:

Òrògòdodo Òrògòdo. (p.22)

Translates in the notes that a king who dances with a dizzy swing goes to Òrògòdo; a remote place of banishment for dishonourable rulers. (Osundare 1990:22). He also uses cultural associations that are derived from value-loaded words as forms of exclamations to express surprise and triumph:

Ah! àràmònda (wonders of wonders)
The mouth has swallowed something
too hard for the mill of the stomach. (p.64)

Announces the triumph of the oppressed over their oppressors. The experimentation with musical accompaniment that began in *The Eye of the Earth* continues in *Waiting Laughters.* In all four parts of the volume the poet recommends the use of specific drums in varying tunes.

The exploration of the oral artistic technique that began early in *Songs of the Marketplace* attained its height in *Village Voices* and underwent transformation in *The Eye of the Earth* and *Waiting Laughters*. This has made Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1996:70) to remark that Osundare has subjected the oral tradition "through an individual creative forge into varied new and interesting forms". This is because he has sometimes adapted the oral forms to suite his social and political purposes. The use of the traditional artistic technique faces certain limitations, but still Osundare's extensive use of the oral tradition has produced poetry that is more African than that of his predecessors. This is essentially because he had made deliberate attempts to move away from the influences of western literary techniques.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## NATURE IN OSUNDARE'S POETRY

Society does not merely represent the totality of people living on a given piece of land separate from the physical environment. Engels published in (1974:70) observes that everything in the universe, that is all material existence from stars to atoms, form "an interconnected totality". Therefore nature and society constitute a single whole. Marx and Engels views published in (1976) also expound that the history of nature and the history of man are dependent on each other so long as man exists.

This importance of the interelatedness between man and nature finds expression in poetry as exemplified by the pioneering voices of Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark. Early in Nigerian poetry, Wole Soyinka (1967:9-13) made attempts at making nature the concern of poetry. Soyinka explores the diurnal cycle in *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967). 'Dawn' (p.9) the very opening poem of the collection predicts a foreboding of evil:

> breaking upon the earth
> … piercing high hairs of the wind
> blood drips in the air above

This ill breaking of the day manifests in catastrophic destruction of life in 'Death at dawn' (p.10).

In another poem, 'Luo plains' (p.13) Soyinka portrays nature as harboring nothing but life-threatening attributes:

> plague
> on her shapeless, dugs parched
> …
> her eyes… tipped with sunset spears

His portrayal of nature as embodying violence and evil is viewed within his general outlook of society as embodying the destructive force.

Osundare's preoccupation with nature surpasses that of any Nigerian poet at present. His is not a feeble attempt at nature poetry; he explores the whole philosophy of the cyclical nature of existence as conditioned by natural phenomenon in the image of all the seasons; dry, rainy and autumn et cetera and the diurnal cycles (dawn, noon and dusk). His exploration of nature sometimes yields "unrevolutionary philosophic statements" (Bamikunle 1995:122) which view human existence as depending on the cycles in nature that are beyond human control. This is contrary to his early revolutionary belief that man controls the affairs of his life.

Osundare's preoccupation with nature runs through his collections of poetry. The poems that demonstrate a concern with nature in *Songs of the Marketplace* (1984) are collected under the subtitle 'Songs of dawn and seasons' (pp.71-90). In these poems, the seasons represent cycles of time that mankinds material existence is subject to with or without his will. 'Unfolding season' (p.71) introduces the beginning of an annual cycle; the dry season which witnesses the Harmattan. The poem recounts the signs and activities that indicate the dry season is come: when the "forest head" is draped "in silk" and grasshoppers diet "on scanty green". The dry season is also characterized by the burning of bush to hunt:

> antelopes and grasscutters
> scuttling out of the flames (p.71)

The images paint a picture of the season of the drought and prepares the mind that it will indeed be a long season:

We shall lie locked
In the pod
Of an unfolding season. (p. 72)

'Cloudwatch' (p.74) witnesses the season of drought take its toll on life.

The shepherd is out in the field
Weathered like a staff. (p. 74)

Drought persists amidst great expectation of rain:

Sand storms come and go
But the sky declines to spit. (p. 74)

The shepherd like the farmer in 'dry season' (p.73) is worried but has no control over the forces of nature that affect the sale of his stock which has been starved of food as a result of drought. There is no doubt that the financial position of the shepherd will take a downturn, as "the market" will reject "these skeletons in hairless membranes".

In 'the Eclipse' (p.76), the phenomenon of the eclipse sometimes defies meteorological forecast, the poet laments:

We've never seen the rain wash out
The haze of December
Or the sun trespass
The serenity of the night. (p. 76)

The eclipse illustrates the unpredictability of the activities of nature as it assumes complete authority and reduces man to a begging position:

You shouldn't have come today
With a dark film across the sky …
We do not want to sleep at noon

These words decry the distortion of ordered life by the very intrusion of natural phenomenon. Osundare also uses the occasion of an eclipse; the "scuffle of the sun and moon" to make a comment on the boundary disputes that occur between communities.

Osundare descends from the wider realm of the seasons to explore the diurnal cycles. These cycles project the inescapable factor of time in the unfolding of human destiny. In 'Dawn'(1) (p.78) the poet views the beginning of another day as bringing radiance.

Fresh
like godwine
descending from palmtops.

Dawn also brings with it comfort, health of mind and pleasurable feelings of a sexual nature:

The secreting
Of early juice in
The pistil of my knowing.

In 'sundown' (p. 82) Osundare makes available in diary form the activities of a typical evening during the Ramadan (Ramadan is a period during which Muslims observe a thirty-day fast from dawn to sundown). The poem chronicles the activities of the elemental bodies (the sun, stars and moon) and the undertakings of man and animals.

This poem brings out the fact that certain things in nature and by extension the activities that depend on them are set. Man takes advantage of this natural fixation and makes maximum use of time. The evening period provides reduced visibility during which the moon as queen of the night beams, giving out faint light to hide the activities of lovers, a resting time when elders reminisce through their accumulated years of experience, a time when the clubs and churches are attended by their usual callers. A time when:

Ikoyi (is) glowing
Ajegunle (is) smogging

as two separate worlds made so by the clean divide between the 'have' and 'haves not' as symbolised by these two areas found within the same society 'Sundown' is the ordering of man's life in consent with nature.

In *Village Voices* the activities of nature and how they affect human life on a daily basis are not just explored but nature sometimes assumes symbolic use when infused with images, carrying a tendency to passing social comments. 'To a passing year' (pp. 33-34) acknowledges the year just gone by as it welcomes with hope the New Year that the poets describes as "a new dawn". But soon after the year has begun it also falls into the pattern of the former year as it is on its way to ending fast.

> One more wrinkle in the oblong face of time
> one more inch off the dimple
> of its elusive cheek
> leaves have begun the thirsty retreat
> to the back of the tree's head
> the grass is dead now
> awaiting the brittle birth of April. (p. 33)

In this transferred epitaph:

> The years' aging
> once… king of the wardrobe
> now a wrapper
> for the upstart garment. (p. 34)

The poem through the use of imagery expresses surprise at how quickly time passes and in a corresponding manner man's subordination to the ravages of time, thus, the stages of man's life are determined by the inescapable factor; time. In a twist, Osundare quickly makes a social comment using the baobab tree as symbol for the nation's resources that are increasingly going beyond the reach of the poor with the passage of the years. The end of the poem is an admonition to avoid the pitfalls of the past years by planting "new vows". In this poem, Osundare seems to be taking a philosophical look at the cyclical

pattern of nature while in the same breath addressing social concerns of hunger and indicting decision makers.

Following 'To a passing year' is 'The stars sob' (pp. 35-36). The stars here are representative of death. Death as represented in the stars comes to the young and rich alike. In the second stanza the poem addresses one ramification of death by making suggestions to the 'Abiku' myth (In Yoruba culture and in some southern parts of Nigeria a child who dies only to be born again is referred to as Abiku. Soyinka 1967).

> You pour ashes on the mat we spread
> For your calling feet
> And cold water on our humming hearth
> Another painful absence
> Announces your presence
> In this house of few heads. (p.35)

The refrain "the stars sob" signifies the killing sting of death. Death, the natural end of all living things cannot be appeased, it sets no particular time for its coming. Indeed, it is as old as creation:

> We whimper
> Deer caught in sorrow's trap
> But our tears only water your farm
> Your barns a seasonless array
> Of unripe dreams
> Wrinkles bead your hunter's brow. (p.35)

Plants are also not spared the menace of death as:

> Forests drop their gift of green
> Vegetables go pale
> On the market stall. (p.36)

Man becomes a wimp in the thrashing hands of this all-powerful natural element. Death Kills the "physician" who is supposed to save life, shoots "the shooter" and renders his weapon useless.

Osundare in 'A grass in the meadow' (p.62) finds in the rich reservoir of nature, material for expressing his disdain for oppression, injustice and inequality. Nature images of injustice abound in the metaphor of the domineering status of the Iroko in a forest "monopolizing the sun" as the "towering mountain" which surpasses the valleys and creates a difficult environment for streams and birds. The persona asserts that it is more comforting to be:

A grass in the meadow
Matching heads with others
To repel oppressive storms
With stalks steeled by shared resolve. (p.62)

Osundare's ideological stance is stated using the dialectical relationship that exists in nature as a mirror for human behaviour.

"The stars did it" (p. 63) examines the various forms through which nature is blamed for man's misfortune. In some instances the "stars"/ nature is truly responsible like in:

The year we longed for big yams
To fatten our famished hopes
And put the lustre back
In sunken sockets
The sky went dry
The earth a cauldron of broiling hunger. (p.63)

In most other instances man takes advantage of nature by holding it responsible for man-made circumstances. The poem satirises the view that blames the widening gap between the rich and poor on the stars.

The poem ends on a sarcastic militant tone, to turn the supposedly natural law on its head:

We shall rip down the stars today
And give them a second eye
We will then hold them in
Our own hands
And make them shine our will. (p.64)

It is actually an assertion that man can change his destiny using the example of Akilapa who broke free from his poor family background:

(He) left the village one year
Coming back the next
With a glittering Mercedes
And city women with buttocks
Like galloping mountains. (p.64)

*The Eye of the Earth* more than any of Osundare's collection has dwelt extensively on nature and nature imagery. The collection addresses comprehensive concerns about the earth in its idyllic state. Its socio-economic relations and the ecological problems that she faces by animating every element of nature so that, every action of plants, birds, animals, rocks and factories; are described in terms of human activities. The poet in 'Forest Echoes' (pp. 3-12) vividly recaptures nature in its idyllic state before the forces of industrialization distorted it. This feat has been accomplished through what Maiwada (1994:110) describes as a "sharp memory and luxuriant imagination". The poet is able to recapture colours, peculiar smells, activities of birds and different animals in fascinating details and to bring them back to life.

A green desire, perfumed memories
A leafy longing…
To this forest of a thousand wonders. (p.3)

The opening of the poem prepares the mind for the exploration of the natural environment. It has been observed that in recollecting the past, childhood memories are recounted through the intervening consciousness of a critical adult mind. Osundare's

(1986:x) attempts to recapture nature in its idyllic state "becomes one of the weapons against a looming monster" that seeks to destroy the Earth.

He explores first the flora then the fauna of his cultural environment. He appreciates the majesty of the 'Iroko' as king of the forest that forces the machete to beat a hasty retreat back to the "whetting stone". 'Aganwo' is endowed with height but lacks the majesty of the 'Iroko'. 'Agunre' gives way easily and becomes the "clown of the fire place". The poet upholds the palm tree above all trees because it is the "evergreen conqueror of rainless seasons". It nurtures nuts and bears wine to sustain life. The poet encounters the fauna:

> A bevy of birds, a barrack of beasts
> A school of truant antelopes. (p.7)

'Forest Echoes' does not explore nature for its sake, it is an occasion for making statements on the reality of life. The attributes of the chameleon; its aura as it "dazzles the forest" by ever changing colours, its apparent harmlessness like that of the praying mantis:

> Wringing green hands before
> An absent god (p.9)

is contrasted with the destructive flora and fauna like

> The Iroko which swallows the shrub
> The hyena which harries the hare
> The elephant which tramples the grass. (p.10)

Further lessons of life are drawn from the social system of the termite world living through a ceaseless circle of hierarchical authority. The social stratification that exists in the termite kingdom is a replica of the human environment.

'In Harvest call' (pp. 18-21) the poet still on his memory trip celebrates fruitfulness, man's labour is rewarded by nature's benevolence when "Earth was ours and we Earth's" (Osundare 1986:ix). Bountiful harvest is evident "valiant heaps" can no longer hold the unquenchable zeal of fattening yams". The poet uses the movement as technical markers to structure the annual agricultural cycle. The yams are first crowned as king of the crops. The season for corn cobs is celebrated with the movement to June and the harvesting of cotton is made possible "by December's sun". Every season comes with a particular agricultural produce:

> And earth's is wardrobe lent a garb
> To every season. (p.20)

This is nature's way of ensuring that man does not suffer starvation yet she meets with little success as the last movement of the poem that returns us to the present situation portrays:

> Uncountable seeds lie sleeping
> In the womb of the Earth …
> Awaiting the quickening tap
> Of our waking finger. (p.20)

An unnatural scarcity has enveloped the Earth, even though it (land) is still fertile. Maiwada (1994:110) observes that although there is no suggestion as to what is responsible for the mood of lamentation in the last movement, it is related to the influences of colonialism in the areas of education and cash crop production.

The poems collected under the section 'rain songs' (pp. 27-37) celebrate rain as "the giver and sustainer of life. As agent between plenty and famine, life and death, the rain occupied a god-like place in the consciousness of Ikere agrarian people". (Osundare 1986:xi). 'Rain songs' emphasize the importance of rain by painting a picture of the

months before the rain in "Let Earth's pain be soothed" (pp. 27-28). The poet captures the arid and parched environment with this graphic illustration of:

> Dust
> Dust in the brewing kitchens
> Dust in the eating halls
> Dust in the busy bedrooms
> Dust in the scheming board rooms
> Dust in retrenching factories
> Dust in power brothels. (p.28)

and if one may add, dust everywhere.

In 'Rain-coming' (pp 30-31) the "earth springs green and washes the earth of the brown of dry months. The coming of the rain opens the planting season, the result of the "cosmic marriage" (Ngumoha 2003:38) between heaven and earth is fertility, a bumper harvest.

> Bursting famine yawns
> Into barns of lilting yams
> Plums and pumpkins
> Dense with drink and daring
> Roll juicily from furrow to furrow.(p.30)

'But sometimes when it rains' (pp. 36-37) captures the peak of the rainy season normally within the months of July/August. This poem contrasts with 'Let Earth's pain be soothed' (pp. 27-28) to present the extreme situations of want and plenty that nature can create. The same rain that is welcomed with the life-reviving symbols of "green" and "wetness" comes with:

> An angry thunder…
> (And hands of fire). (p.36)

The rain that occasions a bountiful harvest becomes the farmer's demise by drowning the "fields and tender tubers".

Sometimes when it rains
You wonder who sent the skies weeping. (p.36)

This certainly indicates that nature's plenty is sometimes undesirable. The poem also comments on man's ambiguous nature, which complains when he lacks or has too much to satisfy his needs. By and large, Osundare's dedication to rain is a worthy one because as one of the essential elements of our existence, rainwater plays an important role in sustaining and enriching our lives.

The poet shifts his attention again to the diurnal cycle in *The Eye of the Earth* with this singular poem 'Dawn call' (pp. 39-40). It recounts the early activities of elemental bodies like the sky and moon. It also explores the animal world. By the dominant use of personification the poet fuses the world of nature with that of mankind. Typical instances of this fusion are:

Eyelids laden with dew, the grass cannot see the lines
On its palm; puking like a baby, darkling, Earth
Cannot count the fingers on her drowsy hand. (p.39)

Dawn assumes philosophical significance for examining the state of the Earth.

Earth is timeless
…(it is) swarmed by minds and matters, monsters and manikins.(p.39)

A framework of symbols is used to describe the complex nature of the earth. The complex use of symbolism witnessed in this poem is carried to indulgent levels in *Moonsongs* (1988) in which the moon as a central symbol is subject to various interpretations. The moon as a symbol is used by the poet to portray different situations of affluence and want. Like Soyinka, Osundare has explored various faces of life at dawn. It is at once bloody, hopeful and complex as portrayed in *Idanre and other poems* (1967) *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983) and *The Eye of the Earth* (1986).

'Our Earth will not die' (pp. 50-51) examines in detail the ecological problems that the earth faces. The "rainfall" is not one that regenerates the earth.

> The rain falls acid, on balding forest
> Their branches amputated by the septic daggers
> Of tainted clouds. (p.51)

Acid rain destroys the natural habitat killing "fishes" "birds" and "rabbits". The poet is also concerned with the dangers posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the "arsenic rain" from the "bladder of profit factories" that killed the lake.

The Earth faces opposition from many quarters and human existence is threatened. The poet who is known as an incurable optimist ends the poem on a note of confidence. Hope is expressed in the elemental images of sun, water, wind and Earth; components of all existence:

> Our Earth will see again
> Eyes washed by a new rain
> The westering sun will rise again
> Resplendent like a new coin
> The wind unwound, will play its tune
> Trees twittering, grasses dancing…(p.51)

The vision of this piece according to Osundare (1986:xii) has been influenced by:

> The green peace, operation stop the desert and such
> Like movements that are urging us to give the human
> Race priority over the arms race.

The expansive form of *Waiting Laughters* (1990) allows the writer to move freely in between different subjects connected by the consistent motifs of "waiting" and "laughter". It is during one of these movement that nature is explored. Nature elements provide material for a complex weaving of images and metaphor that provide cover for the writer to condemn colonialism and oppressive leadership. It is in this haze of opaque images that the poet's message is contained. The sea is used as a metaphor for the

African situation. This is deduced from references to African's history involving her contact with colonialism.

The poet predicts the end of neo-colonialism and oppressive rule through the biblical allusions to the fate of Egyptian oppressors. "… another sea, red with the cemetery of galloping Pharaohs" (p. 80). The image of the sea as silent waters is deceptive. Ironically:

> The sea is silent. But silence is not the sea
> … so wild with whiskers of buried Jaws
> worsted galleons, stigma of manacled crossing. (p.80)

One is led to conclude that the terrain of the African continent looked harmless on the outside but was a deathtrap for European nationals who embarked on the 'civilizing mission'.

The activities of the elemental bodies (the sun, sky, clouds) are an allegory for the relationship that exist between the rulers and the ruled and also for portraying the uncertain situations of living under oppressive rulers:

> Sometimes
> The early sun lies limbless
> In the ambush of unkindly cloud
> An opening day meets waking moments
> With a Calvary of iron groans. *Waiting Laughters*( p. 86.)

In another instance, the resolve of the masses is portrayed thus:

> But the sun strides through the clouds …
> Strong untrappably wiser; (p.86)

In this collection the rain is also used as a symbol for its fertilizing, cleansing and re-generative qualities. The rain is a fertilizing agent and its intercourse with earth results in "seminal seasons". As a cleansing agent the rain rids:

Earth's brow
Of the debris of sweltering season. (p.88)

The rain regenerates:

…. Seedlings dream truant tendrils
The timber is one patience away. (p.88)

The poet's consistent use of imagery and metaphor is to serve as a mirror for the struggle of the masses in their attempt to overcome the forces that oppress them. The poem expresses the life of triumph for the people when the debris of corruption, poverty and hunger will be washed. However he reiterates that regeneration is not attained immediately but through patience and endurance.

Osundare has explored nature in its various forms. He has also examined how nature affects man and man affects nature. His poetic concern demonstrates that nature and man must co-exist in an integrated symbolic relationship for the overall good of the world.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## EMERGING TRENDS IN NIGERIAN POETRY

The evolution of modern Nigerian poetry is influenced by three major factors: The Historical events of Africa's contact with the Western world from the colonial period to the neo-colonial era. Contact brought about literacy in the western, eastern and southern parts of Africa. Literary output depends on the culture of criticism in order to thrive. It has also developed alongside literary activity and shaped its development. The oral tradition in the form of tales, riddles, proverbs, myths, legends et cetera and non-verbal forms of expression like gestures, music and dance has also formed the bedrock of a literary tradition. The oral artistry has provided a rich reservoir of material for African writers to draw from. The very early writers like Osadebey and Okara drew artistic material and also had their works gain acceptance and recognition from the above existing factors. Their works began what was later to crystallise as the tradition of modern Nigerian poetry in English. The significant voices of Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark consolidated that tradition and provided a body of poetic activity that influenced the poetry of Niyi Osundare.

The generation of Soyinka and his cohorts borrowed heavily from western modernist techniques through the works of Eliot, Hopkins, Yeats Pound and others. This integration of oral artistic elements with western models robbed the early poems of Soyinka and Okigbo before *Path of Thunder* of their Africanness. These poetic elements existing in Nigerian poetry attracted criticism from the voices that arose from the late 1970s in the works of Osundare, Ojaide, Ofeimum, Ezenwa - Ohaeto and a host of others.

The poetic practices of these new poets reacted against the form and technique of the older generation whose verse they accused of heavy reliance on western literary techniques to the neglect of the concerns of the masses who are most affected by the harsh socio-economic realities that have become a feature of national life. Osundare stands out as a prominent voice of his generation. His significance on the Nigerian poetic scene lies in his ceaseless and passionate engagement with his craft; this is reflected in his writing of poetry that addresses the socio-political problems that the majority of the disadvantaged people face, also in his personal style and technique which borders on experimentation with language, the oral art and nature. These qualities are sometimes lacking even among members of his own generation. It is this tireless commitment that has produced significant contributions to the growth of a literary tradition.

Discussions about the African writer and commitment have dominated African literature; writers and critics are of the general consensus that African literature must be politically committed because the writer as a member of his society has his sensibility conditioned by the social and political happenings around him. Commitment is not a new coinage and its meaning keeps shifting. Critics like Ngugi (1973) persistently argued that the African writer must be politically committed and his vision must begin with reconstructing African culture that faced the threat of destruction by the encroaching Western civilisation. The African writer, according to Ngugi must also condemn colonial presence in Africa and other parts of the world. European presence in the continent literary critics argue, contributed to the collapse of human values that in Nigeria culminated in the civil war of the late 1960's to the early 1970's.

Osundare and other members of his generation have reacted against the poetic practices of the generation of Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark, by adopting the line of a ceaseless condemnation of societal ills and conscentising and awakening in the masses their potential which can bring about revolutionary change in society. In his early collections of *Songs of the Marketplace* and *Village Voices*, the poetic voice condemns injustice in an outright sarcastic manner and also expresses strong confidence in the power of revolutionary literature to awaken the social consciousness of the people to occasion radical changes in society's socio economic institutions.

Osundare is the champion of art for social commitment therefore he views the artist's role as that of one who must consistently be in solidarity with the people against those who oppress them. The language of poetry must also be demystified with the aim of reaching the target population; the masses. His works also encounter a difficulty even with the simplified language of his early collections. The people he hopes to reach are far removed from the academic environment where Osundare's works are mostly read. The poet does not only indict pioneer artists of the older generation he also expresses his disappointment at the attitude of members of his class, the elite/academic who have failed to provide the revolution impetus of leading the people to rise up against forces of oppression. His universal solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world finds expression in his poems that recount socialist struggle in countries like Namibia, South Africa, Angola and Zimbabwe and the worthy tribute to apostles of revolutionary struggles like Mandela, Bob Marley, Balarabe Musa and others. In *Village Voices* Osundare devotes special attention to the rural producers, and uses the experience of his peasant origins to portray the conditions that affect rural life. He demonstrates

commitment by subsuming his voice in those of the villagers' collective or individual voices. Through them he comments on the failed Nigerian leadership and the injustices that the ordinary Nigerian suffers. All these are transmuted through the verbal and non-verbal art forms of songs, proverbs, drama, festivals et cetera.

Osundare continues to show commitment to his art in *The Eye of the Earth* by condemning man's violation of human values through his treatment of his fellowmen and the environment through the ecological problems that economic exploitation has caused. Although the poems do not carry the radical tone of the earlier ones, they express optimism and hope that future generations will attain liberty. *Waiting Laughters* like *The Eye of the Earth* has lost the revolutionary stance but it is no less committed in terms of condemning insensitive leadership, corruption and social injustice.

Central to the issue of committed poetry is the communication of meaning. Generally, the poetic language of the new generation of Nigerian poets contrasts with the obscure language practices of the older generation of Nigerian poets. Critics have referred to the practices of the new poets as the process of "demystifying" the language of poetry in order to make it accessible to the ordinary man to whom poetry is directed. While most of the poets of this new school have adopted the diction of ordinary speech, Osundare's language stands out as he consistently stretches the semantic range of words to yield fresh meaning. His indulgence with images and symbols that are found in the traditional lore and nature creates poetry that most people can identify with. He also depends a lot on irony and sarcasm as tools for statirising the Nigerian leadership and social situation of corruption and inequality.

The poet views language as an active expressive tool capable of communicating meaning and serving the political purpose of conscientising while retaining aesthetic appeal as set out in 'Poetry is' (p.3) *Songs of the Market Place*. Osundare experiments with graphic representation of words to drive home meaning in what he calls "graphological pun". He also attracts self-consciousness to language and meaning by disobeying syntactic rules.

Osundare's contribution to the tradition of Nigerian poetry in the use of the oral tradition surpasses that of Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark. The latter fused traditional elements with western literary forms but Osundare consistently celebrates the oral artistic forms by adopting traditional idioms in the form of proverbs, songs, anecdotes as the framework upon which the poems are built. This began early in *Songs of the Market Place* and was carried to experimental levels in *Waiting Laughters*. Osundare's celebration of the rural ethos is marched only by Okot P. Bitek's *Song of Lawino*. In some instances, the poet's voice is that of an observer-celebrant when he celebrates the unity between the earth and rural man's labour that comes through as something of a cosmic union and the agricultural produce becomes the result of such a relationship.

The indulgence with oral tradition reaches experimental levels in *Waiting Laughters* with the proverbial lore subjected to diverse interpretations to suit the prevailing circumstances. In this collection, consistently proverbs, aphorisms, tongue-twisters, riddles and folktales are fused with the poet's ideas with the intention of producing poetry that is very close to its oral resources.

The attempts by early Nigerian poets as exemplified by Soyinka's *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967:9-13) at incorporating nature in poetry have been carried to greater

heights by Osundare. He explores the cyclical nature of existence as conditioned by natural phenomenon in the image of all the seasons (dry, rainy, Autumn) et cetera and the diurnal cycles (dawn, noon and dusk). This exploration of nature sometimes yields "unrevolutionary philosophical statements" (Bamikunle 1995:122) which view human existence as depending on the cycles in nature beyond his control. For instance 'unfolding seasons' (p.71) 'cloud watch' (p.74) and 'the eclipse' (p.76) *Songs of the Marketplace* represent cycles of time that mankind's material existence is subject to.

Osundare also adopts nature imagery as the framework upon which the poems are built and uses these images and symbols to pass social comments as is evident in 'the stars sob' (pp. 35-36) 'A grass in the meadow' (p. 62) *Village voices*. In *The Eye of the Earth* the poet also animates nature imagery by describing every action of plants, birds, animals, rocks, factories in terms of human activities. The ecological problems that the earth faces are also addressed. 'Our earth will not die' (pp. 50-51) expresses hope that the earth will live above the forces that seek to destroy her.

The use of nature images finds a place in *Waiting Laughters* although not as extensively as in the other collections but here too nature elements of the sun, moon, sky, and clouds are used as material for complex images. The poet mounts up images upon images and uses them as cover to condemn colonialism and oppressive leadership. Osundare has explored nature in its various forms and has demonstrated through his poetic concern that nature and man co-exist in an integrated relationship.

**CONCLUSION**

Osundare's contribution to the tradition of Nigerian poetry must be appreciated against the background of an existing tradition of Nigerian poetry. Osundare shows

himself to be part of some pioneer poets; this is evident from the influences of older writers on him. It is within this context that commitment is a fluid term without fixed meaning because predecessors like Soyinka and Okigbo, whose works the new generation of Nigerian poets have accused of lacking political commitment, actually addressed the socio-political issues of their time. Again commitment as Osundare views it has come under question by critics like Uka Kalu (1978:21) who prescribes that: "if a writer must be committed he must fit into some kind of practical programme of action". Osundare falls short of Kalu's prescription which expects a writer to be involved not just through his poetry but also by organizing some sort of political awareness programme. It is clear from the foregoing that at any historical epoch, writers have been politically committed to their craft but there are differences in the tugging issues addressed and the manner of addressing such issues.

Osundare has succeeded in creating a poetic revolution as a result of his experimentation with language. He fills his language use with so much meaning by experimenting with semantics (Jeyifo, 1988). Neutral units of speech act like the noun, verb, adverbs et cetera assume figurative essences in the attempts to comprehend social reality. Osundare's obsessive play with words through the use of pun, cumulative images, contrasts and contradictions sometimes become difficult for the poet to handle leading to inaccessible language as in *Moonsongs* and *Waiting Laughters.* Here, dense images and symbols lead to difficult interpretation of meaning. By this, he inherits some garb of obscurity of the older Nigerian poets and shares with them the writing of difficult poetry. Like Soyinka, he relies heavily on Yoruba cosmology and oral poetry. His attempt to fuse Yoruba and English words also indicate influences of Soyinka. Okigbo wrote highly

musical poetry, this is a quality that persists in Osundare's poetry. Indeed his poems have a lyricism that helps to propel them along as such he refers to his volumes of poetry as essentially songs.

The militant poetic voice begins to wane in *The Eye of the Earth* and in later collections like *Moonsongs* and *Waiting Laughters* the poet's voice no longer expresses sureness in the revolutionary will of the people to bring about radical social change. A major threat to the poet's radical outlook is found in his exploration of nature. Here nature, as a determining factor in man's material existence stands in opposition to the revolution that the poet had envisaged. Critics have observed that Osundare's exploration of nature is negritudinal and it kills the revolutionary ethos. The language of his later collections also suit the poet's new stance by being less radical and immediate, filled with nature images and assuming a philosophic tone.

Marxism-Leninsm in the works of Lenin (1982:213-14) prescribe certain conditions under which a revolution can occur as: The crisis in the ruling class which is unable to retain its rule by old methods. The extreme situations of want and misery among the oppressed class and a considerable interest of activity on the part of the masses who refuses to tolerate bondage. Two of the above conditions have existed for a long time in Nigeria but the third situation has existed sometimes as pockets of resistance not carrying along mass action that can bring about change. Therefore nature and history influence his view of the revolutionary potential of the masses but Osundare continues to express hope that the people will triumph over the forces of oppression, a consistent feature that runs through all his volumes of poetry.

The expression of hope and triumph gradually wanes. The poet's language becomes one of patience, endurance and perseverance. In a new book; *The Word is Egg* 'ode to anger' (2000), Osundare's tone is bitter and angry. Like Soyinka's in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), he uses images of the vulture; a predator to describe those who carry out injustices on the underprivileged. One begins to notice that as the poet's revolutionary ideals are failing he is settling down to just speaking against the evils that exist in unjust societies in stinging tones "like the scorpion (that) carries a burning tale"

'Ode to anger'
http://www.poetrysociety.org
.uk/review/pr92-2/brown.htm

Osundare's attempt at celebrating the communal verbal art tradition is a worthy contribution to the tradition of Nigerian poetry. He strives to produce poetry that has a strong consideration for communal audience by declaring the people as the creative genius. Thus the poet's voice is subsumed in that of the peasants who speak for themselves in the idiom that they developed and understand. It has been observed that in *Village Voices* the consciousness of the people has been mediated by the poetic voice. Again the desire to recreate an artist-audience engagement that is reminiscent of oral poetry is cut short by the limitation of the mediated form of the text because the gamut of the oral tradition cannot retain its original form of the essentially oral. Perhaps it is in a bid to address this limitation of the text as a means for conscientising the people that Osundare is moving towards the direction of performance poetry in addition to writing.

A major limitation of the written art lies in its inability to affect the majority of people in such a manner as to move them to occasion immediate social change in society. Therefore the immediacy that the dramatic art attains cannot happen in poetry and this is

because, the enclosed form of the written text limits poetry. As books, the works of Osundare encounter a major limitation of reaching the majority of the masses who may not be literate enough to comprehend issues in written form. The value of his poetry lies in the gradual awakening of the consciousness of the people especially the elite intellectual who is engaged with poetry as a tool for education. Osundare's efforts at reaching the people through revolutionary poetry, may have failed because the majority of these may not be literate enough to comprehend issues in the written form. Osundare's move towards performance poetry attempts to bridge the gap that the written text creates between the writer and his audience.

Osundare explores nature in its various forms as affecting life on earth. He brings in for special attention the role rain plays in the sustenance of human life. He also draws images from nature as material for making social comments. In the spirit of the Green Peace Movement, the poet demonstrates a concern with the ecological problems that the earth faces which are due to man's exploitative and destructive nature.

The poet's use of seasonal and diurnal cycles as metaphoric framework for making philosophical statements is something that occurs in Soyinka's poetry. His exploration of nature has sometimes lead to the Eden-like idyllic portrayal of nature in pre-colonial Africa as a result running the risk of idealising African cultural setting which nature is part of. This indulgence just might fall into the category of what Soyinka condemned as lack of commitment in the works of some African writers and notably those of the Negritude movement.

Poetry has witnessed remarkable transformation since the emergence of Niyi Osundare on the Nigerian poetic scene. It is no longer viewed as the private possession of

the poet but a medium that can be used to awaken the socio-political awareness of the masses in order to move them to carry out social change. Thus Osundare's poetry carries a tone of optimism. His romantic indulgence in African oral tradition demonstrates a conscious effort to promote the artistic values of African culture. The poet's pre-occupation with nature emphasises man's integratedness with his natural environment. By attempting to fashion out ways that poetry can serve humanity better. Osundare's poetry has contributed immensely to the growth of a poetic tradition. The growth of the poetic tradition that has been made possible by Osundare's poetry is an onward movement that will expand with further research.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

Osundare, N. (1984) *Songs of the MarketPlace.* Ibadan: New Horn.

Osundare, N. (1984) *Village Voice.* Ibadan: Evans Brothers.

Osundare, N. (1986) *The Eye of the Earth.* Ibadan: Heinemann.

Osundare, N. (1988) *MoonSongs.* Ibadan: Spectrum.

Osundare, N. (1990) *Waiting Laughters.* Lagos: Malthouse.

Osundare, N. (2000) *The Word is an Egg.* Ibadan: Kraftsgriots.

### SECONDARY SOURCES

#### Text Books

Achebe, C (1976) *Morning Yet on Creation Day.* London: Heinemann.

Akuso, E.S. (2003) 'Style and Meaning in *Village Voices.'* In Ngumoha, E (ed) *Poetry and Poetics of Niyi Osundare.* Enugu: Jemezie Associates. PP. 167-177.

Bamikunle, A (1989) 'Nigerian Poetry since Independence: Origins and Developments.' In Ekeh, I & Ashiwaju, G (eds) *Nigeria since Independence.* Vol vii Ibadan: Heinemann. PP. 174-196.

Bamikunle, A (1991) 'Literature as a Historical Process: A Study of Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta.'* In Ikonne, C. Oko, E & Onwudinjo, P. (eds) *African Literature and African Historical Experiences.* Ibadan: Heinemann. PP. 73-81.

Bennett, T (1979) *Formalism and Marxism.* London: Methuen.

Bitek, O. P (1966) *Song of Lawino*. Nairobi: East African Publishers.

Clark, J.P (1966) *A Reed in the Tide*. London: Longman.

Clark, J.P. (1968) *Casualties.* London: Longman.

Chiweizu et al (1980) *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature.* Enugu: Fourth Dimension.

Echeruo, M (1968) *Mortality.* London: Longman.

Eliot, T.S. (1951) 'Tradition and the Individual Talent.' In *The Sacred Wood.* London: Faber. PP. 47-59.

Emenyonu, E.N (1991) 'African Literature Revisited'. In Emenyonu (ed) *Studies in the Nigerian Novel.* Ibadan: Heinemann. PP. 1-11.

Engels, F (1974) *Dialectics of Nature.* Moscow: Progress.

Finnegan, R (1970) *Oral Literature in African.* London: OUP.

Fraser, R (1986) *West African Poetry.* London: Cambridge.

Heywood, E (ed) (1971) *Perspective on African Literature*. Ibadan: Heinemann.

Ikonne, C. Oko, E. & Unwudinjo, P. (eds) (1991) *African Literature and African Historical Experiences*. Ibadan: Heinemann.

Jeyifo, (1988) 'Niyi Osundare' in Ogunbiyi, (ed) *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature 1700 to the Present* 2 Vols, Lagos: Guardian Books. PP. 314-326.

Jones, E.D (1973) *The Writings of Wole Soyinka,* London: Heinemann.

Kalu, U. (1978) 'From Commitment to Essence.' In Nwoga, D.I. (ed) *Literature and Modern West African Culture*. Benin: Ethiope PP. 19-31.

Killiam, G.D. (ed) (1993) *African Writers on African Writing.* London: Heinemann.

Lester, J (1969) *Revolutionary Notes.* New York: Grove Press.

Lindfors, B (ed) (1976) *Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Literature.* Washington D.C: Three Continents Press.

Marx, K & Engels, F (1976) *The German Ideology*. Moscow: Progress.

Ndu, P (1974) *Songs for Seers.* New York: Nok Publishers.

Ngumoha, E (2003) 'The Poet as Rain-maker: Fertility and Pluvian Aesthetics in Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth.'* In Ngumoha, E (ed) *The Poetry and Poetics of Niyi Osundare*, Enugu: Jemezie Associates. PP.36-48.

Nketia, J.H, (1953) *Funeral Dirges of the Akan People.* Achimuta, James: Townsend and Sons.

Nkosi, L (1981) *Tasks and Masks.* London: Longman.

Ofeimun, O (1983) *The Poet Lied.* London: Longman.

Ogunba et al (ed) (1978) *Theatre in Africa*. Ibadan: University Press.

Ogunbiyi (ed) (1988) *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature* 1700 to the Present 2 Vols, Lagos: Guardian Books.

Okara, G, (1978) *The Fisherman's Invocation*. Benin: Ethiope Publishing.

Okigbo, C (1978) *Labyrinths With Path of Thunder.* London: Heinemann.

Osadebey, D (1951) *Young Africa Sings.* In Fraser, R. *West African Poetry*. London: Cambridge. 1986:116-117.

Otite, & Ogionwo, W (1979) *An Introduction to Sociological Studies.* Ibadan: Heinemann.

Owomoyela, O. (1979) *African Literature: An Introduction.* London: Crossroads Press.

Sean, L (1960) *T.S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition*. London: Cohen and West.

Soyinka, W (1972) *A Shuttle in the Crypt.* London: Rex Collins.

Soyinka, W (1976) *Idanre and Other Poems.* London: Methuen.

Spender, S (1963) *The Struggle of the Modern*. London: Harmish Hamilton.

Thiong, O, N,W (1983) *Barrel of the Pen.* London: New Beacon.

Wright, E (ed) (1973) *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature.* London: Heinemann.

**Journals & Papers**

Adedeji, J (1979)'Oral tradition and the contemporary theatre in Nigeria.' In Irele, A (ed) *Research in African Literatures.* Vol. 2 No. 2 PP. 130-134.

Amuta, C (1985) 'Literature of the Nigerian Civil War' in *The Guardian.* Scrapbook on *Arts and Culture,* Kashim Ibrahim Library. April 20 P. 9.

Bamikunle, A (1992) 'Osundare's Poetry and the Yoruba Oral Artistic Tradition.' In Jones, E.D. Palmer, E & Jones, M.(eds) *African Literature Today* 18. London: African World Press PP. 49-69.

Bamikunle, A (1995) 'The Development of Niyi Osundare's Poetry: A Survey of Themes and Technique.' In Irele A (ed) *Research in African Literatures.* 1995 Vol. 2. No. 1. Indiana: University, Press PP.

Bamikunle, A (1997-1999) 'The Stable and the Changing: Ojaide's Search for a Poetic Voice.' In Kafewo, S (ed) *Work in Progress.* Nos. 9 & 10. Journal of the Department of English. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. PP. 98-119.

Berger, R. (1990) 'Contemporary Anglophone Literary Theory: The Return of Fanon.' In Irele, A (ed) *Research in African Literatures* 21.1 Indiana: University Press. PP. 141-151.

Bodunde, C.A. (1992) 'Oral Traditions and Modern Poetry: Okot P' Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and Okigbo's *Labyrinths.* In Jones, E.D. Palmer, E. & Jones, M (eds) *African Literature Today* 18, London: James Currey. PP. 24-33.

Brown, S. (2003) 'The Pleaded Grace of Song-Wole Soyinka and Nigerian Poetry.' *http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/review/prq2-2/brown.htm*.

Chukwuma, H (1976) 'The Oral Nature of Traditional Poetry and Language.' In *Journal of the Nigerian English Studies*, 8,1 May PP.12-21.

Ebeogu, A (1983) The 'Poetry of Odia Ofeimum: An example of Nigerian Avant-Garde Literature' In Achebe, C. *Okike*. No. 23. Enugu.

Egudu, R. (1973) 'Defence of Culture in the Poetry of Christopher Okigbo.' In Jones, E.D (ed) *African Literature Today* 6 London: Heinemann. PP. 14-25.

Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1996) 'Survival Strategies and the New Life of Orality in Nigerian and Ghanian Poetry: Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* and Anyidoho's *Earthchild.*' In Irele, A. (ed) *Research in African Literatures*. Vol 27 No.2 Indiana: University Press. PP. 70-82.

Garuba, H (1995) 'Re-figuring Nigerian Poetry.' In *AM News*. PP. 20-22.

Jones, E.D (1992) *African Literature Today 18,* London: Heinemann.

Jones, E.D (ed) (1973) *African Literature Today 6,* London: Heinemann.

Jones, E.D (ed) (1979) *African Literature Today 10,* London: Heinemann.

Jones, E.D (ed) (1980) *African Literature Today 11,* London: Heinemann.

Kunene, M. (1980) 'The Relevance of African Cosmological Systems to African Literature.' In Jones, E.D (ed) *African Literature Today* 11. London: Heinemann. PP. 190-205.

Maiwada, M (1989-1994) 'The Structure of Ideology in Osundare's *Village Voices.'* In Maiwada, M. Frank, F & Buratai, U. *Saiwa* Nos. 6 & 7 A Journal of Communication. Department of English, Ahmadu Bello University. PP. 140-151

Mazrui, A. (1967) 'Abstract Verse and African Tradition.' In Ngugi, J. & Kariaria, J. *Zuka* No 1 September PP. 47-49.

Nwan Chika (1990) 'The Oral Foundations of Nigerian Written Poetry.' In Emenyonu, E. (ed) *Literature and Black Aesthetics*. Calabar Studies Series: Heinemann Educational Books. PP. 315-327.

Nwoga, D.I. (1973) 'Obscurity and Commitment in Modern African Poetry.' In Jones, E.D. *African Literature Today* 6. London: Heinemann. PP. 26-53.

Nwoga, D.I. (1979) 'Modern African Poetry: The Domestication of a Tradition.' In Jones, E.D. *African Literature Today* 10. London: Heinemann. PP. 32-53.

Ojaide, T. (1989) 'The Changing Voice of History: Contemporary African Poetry.' In *Geneva-Africa* Vol xxviii 27, 1. PP. 107-122.

Okonkwo, J.I. (1979) 'The Missing Link in African Literature.' In Jones E.D (ed) *African Literature Today* 10. London: Heinemann. PP. 86-103.

Okpewho, I. (1988) 'African Poetry: The Modern Writer and the Oral Tradition.' In Jones E.D. (ed) *African Literature Today* 16. PP. 75-90.

Soyinka, W (1968) 'The Writer in a Modern African State.' In Per Wastberg (ed), *The Writer in Modern Africa*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies,

Soyinka, W. (1975) 'Aesthetics Illusions Prescriptions.' In *The Third Press Preview* 1.1 PP. 65-70.

Stanford, A (1975) 'The Elegy of Mourning in Modern American and English Poetry.' In *The Southern Review* April Vol xi No. 2. PP. 49-60.

**Dissertations & Interviews**

Bamikunle, (1989) *The Eye of the Earth*, A Review, Department of English. Seminar Series.

Maiwada, M (1993) *The Deployment of Ideology in the Poetry of Niyi Osundare.* Unpublished MA English, Dissertation 1993.

Meijer, M. 'Interview with Niyi Osundare' *http://www.poetry.international.org/cwolk/view/18118*.

Ogoanah, N.F. "I am a Humanist", Niyi Osundare on the Poetry of Niyi Osundare. (An Interview).*http://www.westafricareview.com/war/vol14/Ogoanah-Osundare*. html.