

THE DEPLOYMENT OF IDEOLOGY IN THE
POETRY OF NIYI OSUNDARE

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INTERNAL EXAMINER

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EXTERNAL EXAMINER

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me and 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 sources of information are specifically acknowledged by means of reference.

Mu'azu Maiwada

Date:-----

CERTIFICATION

This thesis entitled 'The Deployment of Ideology in the poetry of Niyi Osundare' by Mu'azu Maiwada meets the regulations governing the award of degree of Master of Arts in Literature of Ahmadu Bello University and is approved for its original contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DEDICATION

To those who can straddle across polarities
AND SANI.

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ABSTRACT

Critical attention is just beginning to focus on Niyi Osundare.. although he is one of the most prolific Nigerian poets with seven published Volumes to date. Like most educated African writers, he is the product of two cultures, the African and European. Another significant fact is that Osundare¹s poetry puts him in the fore-front of the champions of the art of social commitment. This thesis shows how Osundare deploys ideology in his first five published Volumes. we note that his deployment of ideology gives his style and theme a decidedly revolutionary ring.

For a clearer perspective we looked at the social contexts that brought about the emergence of modern Nigerian poetry. The introductory first chapter is against the background of how past poetic practice might have influenced Osundare^fs practice.

The second chapter looks at Osundare's first published collections. A Nib in the Pond and Songs of the Marketplace. Here, Osundare deploys ideology largely as oppositional systems that embody the class interests of the various segments of the society; particularly the opposed interests of the privileged

against the unprivileged. We also note an avant-garidst tendency as the poet tries to break away from the 'old'.

The third chapter dealing with Village Voices looks at what is clearly a watershed in Osundare's practice. In an aesthetics leaning heavily on oral literary practices, a distinct poetic voice emerges concerned with the plight of a particular social group. the peasantry. Apart from the analysis of the aesthetics and its referent, we can also see the implication of Osundare's practice, partly echoed in the second chapter: The alienation of the text and its intended audience, in the light of the illiteracy of the audience.

In the fourth chapter we see how Osundare tries to capture a changing reality. Language here is highly allusive. Using the metaphor of the 'earth' and the 'moon', the poet deepens our knowledge of ideology by incorporating existential phenomena alongsides ideologies as systematised discources. This new deployment of ideology also incorporates dialectics as we notice the binary fusion of opposites.

The fifth and concluding chapter restates the earlier points and looks al the writer's world and the tools he has fashioned to recreate, represent, remould and generally, interprete reality.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE IDEOLOGICAL STRUCTURATION OF
MODERN NIGERIAN POETRY

I think that it is a lot of nonsense we hear nowadays of men of two worlds. I belong integrally to my own society, as I believe. I belong also integrally to some societies other than my own. The truth of course is that the modern African is no longer a product of an entirely indigenous culture... and I think that anybody who thinks it is possible to express consistently only one line of value, indigenous or exotic, is probably being artificial.¹

This seems a commonsense, honest self appraisal of the modern African intellectual affected by both Western and African influences. This uncomfortable synthesis far from being 'psychological disturbances' are indeed the very quintessence of the reality from which the poet draws inspiration. Ascribing psychological tendencies to the poets' work apart from imposing literary 'god-fathers',² reduces psychology to some ethereal, non-material force acting on the subject (colonised) from without. This gives the impression that the subject is incapable of conscious self-action. While man does not necessarily grasp the full implication of his 'lived' relationship, since there are aspects of ideology that are deeply unconscious, the problem with the purely psychological notion of ideology, is that ideology would lose 'its determination in the specific contradictions of society and become rooted in the

'psychical structure of individuals.'³

From the foregoing then, whatever 'psychological' hue there is in the writings of the emergent Nigerian poets, is the product of the basic material derived from and determined by the social contradictions emanating from a colonial-post-colonial state whose umbilical cord remained tied to the mother. We can also note that most of the poets were coming to maturity at the period in Africa when decolonisation had already reached an advanced state. The nature of Nigeria's independence, a 'peaceful, gentlemanly' agreement between the departing colonial state and the native elite is also a factor. This makes the perspective of social or communal concern in the colonial plunder of Nigerian society rarely the concern of these poets, or when it is, it usually ends up drowned in the personal mythologies of the poet. Osundare has noted this trend in the pioneer poets and his practice is informed by a desire to redress this obscure 'vision' so that the people are placed centrally and are perceived as the genuine makers of the Nigerian society. Of the pioneer poets Okigbo is a notable example of an artist who commutes communal experience or the specificity of colonial subjugation into an abstracted universal phenomena. Since colonialism was a

negation of some of the values central to the being of the African, it would seem fairly obvious that the poet would recognise the implication of that negation; that it was partly responsible for the 'psychical disturbances' the poet feels in trying to reconcile the two opposing cultures rather than simply accepting the eclectic basis of his new consciousness.

Fanon might very well have had Okigbo in mind when he wrote:

The intellectual who is Arab and French, or Nigerian and English, when he comes up against the need to take on two nationalities, chooses if he wants to remain true to himself, the negation of one of these determinations. But most often, since they can not or will not make a choice, such intellectuals gather together all the historical determining factors which have conditioned them to and take up a fundamentally 'universal standpoint.'⁴

In three broad categories Fanon has analysed the various stages the native intellectual might go through. In the first instance the work of the native poet can be traced to the various popular literary movements in Europe. In the second instance, the poet, disturbed by his alienation from his African people, attempts to immerse himself in the communal process and reinterprets his people and events through a 'borrowed aestheticism.' The poet

is still not of and with the people, and the problem is not that of an appropriate proposition either; the poet having drunk deeply from the 'pyrrhean stream.' In the third phase, the poet, after attempting to lose himself in and with the people now shakes the people 'rousing them from their lethargy.' From this context a literature emerges, fiery in tone and revolutionary both in style and social vision.

Of the early modern Nigerian poets only Okigbo comes near to fitting into all these categories. This is an epic commentary on Okigbo's sensibilities and his receptivity to the changing social conditions of the world about him. We can see how Labyrinths begins with the invocatory 'before you mother Idoto' and how subsequently variations of the traditional totem, in the light of the tone of the first two sections ('Heavens-gate' and 'Limits'), got transmuted in the poet's personalised mythologies and quests. We notice the efflux of christian and other 'derived' mythologies in the formation of the poet's consciousness. Generally the language, symbolism, are dense as the poet moulds icons, and colours it in a style that is highly allusive. At this stage of Okigbo's poetry, social concern as an organic aspect of the poet's sensibilities

was not really thematically brought to the fore. Even when a social theme is touched, as in the example of the alienation from traditional religion, it is couched in the private world of the poet as he explores the uncomfortable synthesis of values.

It is for this same reason that Echeruo in Mortality will attempt a 'definition of the experience of one individual human being who is involved in or caught in a crisis of conscience and of identity...'⁵ This 'crisis' has attracted for the poets the criticism of being 'ideologically homeless.'⁶ But those who make those charges perceive ideology from the point of view of a systematised blueprint calculated to guide the individual's or group's existence. True, religion or the western capitalist ethos may be some of the ideologies the pioneer Nigerian poets were reacting to, from the point of view of the structuration of their individual egos. The 'obscurity of ideas and diction' will then be partly the attempt of these poets to arrive at a meaning of their own lives as individuals, and from an abstract universal construct.

Perhaps what the critics wanted was a distinctively politicised consciousness as a vision and as a negation of colonially induced ideologies.

Soyinka, reacting to such generic issues of literature and ideology, would accept a 'social vision' which to him should not be reduced to ideological systems. He perceives literary ideology as the imposition of systematised systems and ideas on literature. Romanticising the African essence, ironically, he quarrels-

The idea of literature as an objective existence in itself is a very European idea, and ideologies are very much systems of thoughts or speculative goals considered desirable for the health of existing institutions (society, ecology, economic life etc.) which are, or have become ends in themselves.⁷

Like the critics of 'ideological homelessness,' Soyinka also perceives ideology as a regulated system, only in his own case, as it affects literature, it is an asphyxiating device. The picture Soyinka presents is at best misty particularly when we scour the notion of 'objective existence'. His perceptiopn of the African society (from the above comment) was also made in relation to its literature thus:

Since we have no experience of such distortions of objective relationships in African Society, it is reasonable to claim that a literary ideology traditionally has had little to do with the actual process of creating that literature.⁸

Discarding Soyinka's narrow definition of ideology to 'System of thoughts' produced by and for institutions, we can see that there is indeed a literary ideology in Africa. There is the example of the individual genius of the traditional artist and communal practises.

And, apart from oral mnemonics, which in itself does not constitute oral literature, there is the fundamental issue of the essence of oral literature which is hinged on context. The context itself is fluid, dynamic, and dialectically affects the realisation of oral literature. Now this is a factor denied written literature even when it is performed.

The other angle of the fallacy of literary ideology in Soyinka's argument assumes that the product of the modern African writer is directly, organically linked with the mass of the African peoples to the extent that the product of the writer is not a 'distortion of objective relations.' Further, there is no way in which literature, African or European, cannot be ideological, produced as it were from the complex of an ensemble of social relations. Admittedly while we could talk of distortions in the attempt of Euro-formalists in insisting on distinctiveness, the objective existence of literature, the modern African

artist can not completely deny his product some degree of distortion. This example of the conditioned 'distortion' of the modern African artist can be seen when we contrast it with the continuum of African literary tradition; the intrinsic cultural fact, and the product of direct, unattenuated social intercourse between the artist and the mass of the people. Osundare understands this distortion and, partly that is why he insists that the writer is an ideologue of sorts.⁹

The product of the modern Nigerian poet is objectively shot through with ideas and sentiments expressive of 'cultural insecurity.' Part of the 'insecurity' could be seen in the poets' attempt to retrieve their damaged gods and traditional truths from the rubble of colonial plunder. The gods come in many guises - Oyin,¹⁰ ignored, thus helpless in stopping the aliens; Idoto,¹¹ ignored at first then recourted to provide the inspiration for the prodigal; Ogun, the benevolent the violent, the creative, the destructive -

It is from this perspective that one can begin to understand the particular role of the individual in artistic practise.

A lot has been said of Clark's helicopter view of his basic raw materials,¹² which give his poems

generally a languid, sometimes tepid energy. The detached form attempts to give a visual picture of reality and on occasions achieve remarkable success as in the example of 'Ibadan' (ARITT, p.12)

..... running splash of rust
and gold- flung and scattered
among seven hills like broken
china in the sun.

The delicate yet vivid imagistic canvas is quite obvious, but its particular genius is the dialectical clash of contradictions - the decay ('rust') existing side by side with brilliance ('gold'); the randomness and confusion ('flung and scattered') contained within an ordered form ('seven hills') and all in a state of dynamic movement ('running splash'). Unfortunately there are few poems in which the 'derived' poetic sensibilities are absent. One of such few is 'Abiku' (ARITT, p.5). The quiet monologual tone is lacquered by a deep-seated lamentation. It explores, as an aspect of the African belief system, the Abiku syndrome. Here we graphically see the fluidity of relationship between the world of the living, the unborn and the dead. In 'Abiku' we witness the suffering of a mother who has been continuously wasted by the evil child. The child perniciously breaks the circle of normal growth to

adulthood and a fairly permanent existence within the family. The living have performed several traditional rites to make the child stay or to identify it when it comes again:

... We know the knife scars
 Serrating down your back and front
 Like the beak of the sword-fish.
 And both your ears notched
 As a bondsman to this house. (ARITT, p.5)

Since nothing would make the abiku stay, the persona appeals to the abiku to remain in the 'boabab tree and be one with 'kindred spirits' there. The general outlook on life that Clark pursues from the belief system is the idea of the multitude of children which will be welcome in an African household 'where many mouths gladden the heart.' Part of the need for plenty of children Clark, says is 'not to tempt fate.'

But the detached style of Clark's poetry is not just the factor of point of view. It could be seen much clearer looking at aspects of his poetry that assume a philosophical tint. There are about those poems an inscrutable mystery in which fate is accepted stoically. The lived relationship of the individual to the world rarely assumes a combative stance. In 'Night Rain' (ARITT, p.2) for example, the irregular metre and rhythm succinctly capture the falling rain. The sense of

mystery is heightened by the seeming absence of physical time:

What time of night it is
I do not know

the awe inspired by the raw display of elemental power:

Droning with insistent ardour upon
our roof thatch and shed.
And thro' sheaves slit open
To lightning and rafters.....

is tempered by the assured presence of the mother figure who could be trusted to make the best of a bad situation:

Mother is busy now deploying.
About our roomlet and floor.
Although it is so dark
I know her practised step.....

Clark accepts the elemental force of nature in itself and as it is expressed in objects or symbols.¹³ It is in the philosophical interpretation of the power of the elements that we glimpse an aspect of the poet's outlook on life. In 'Night Rain', for example, the persona calls for a peaceful acceptance of the status quo:

So let us roll on our back
And again roll to the beat...

But we see a serious contradiction in tone. If as the persona claims-

We have drunk of a spell
Deeper than the owl's or bat's
That wet of wings may not fly

then it may not be possible to-

... settle to our sleep of the innocent and free. While 'innocent' may be tenable, 'free' certainly is not; particularly because of the deep draught of 'spell' everybody seems to have 'drunk'. The elemental force has everybody in its check that under the circumstances freedom can only mean, ironically, the cessation of struggle against these forces. Subsequently the lulling mood which the words at the closing of the poem seek to effect are in stark contradiction to the irregular rhythm of the lines and of the mood of 'insistent ardour' of the drumming.

The poem which amplifies Clark's detached philosophic outlook is 'Horoscope' (ARITT, p.17). The poem explores the effect of the full moon and other celestial bodies on the human personality and on nature. The dramatic form of the poem has two personas one of whom is a cynic - 'so you believe, bastard child.' The other persona attempts a refutation of the cynic's lack of belief:

....man, this clot of clay
Three-quarters diluted in water.

Emphatically the second protagonist persona states his conviction that the human being, his joys and miseries,

the totality of his nature, is affected by the celestial
orbs-

our individual flux between joy and
disasters.
Is that interlocking of our souls with stars

The ideological implication of this concerning the lived relationship of the individual is that the individual's action is immanently propelled by forces from without over whom he has no power. Within this context man can act good or evil. Osundare explores this concept of good and evil in Moonsongs although for him the motive force of the action (good-evil) is the human being himself as 'terra firma.'

In Idanre and other poems¹⁴ (henceforth IAOP) Soyinka explores the nature of violence, a quality which seem to be forever present in the human organism and which mediates his experiences. This gives an overwhelming tone of pessimism to the collection as a whole although there are occasional vistas of respite. The opening poems in the collection are in sharp contrast to Niyi Ogundare's positive portrayal of the aura of dawn in for example, Songs of the Marketplace. In Soyinka's IAOP, the mystical quality of dawn and its ability for regeneration is, antithetically, anchored on a foreboding note. The sun as it shines anew in the

morning assumes a latently violent timbre for Soyinka:

Breaking upon the earth
A spring-haired elbow, line
A palm beyond head-grains, spires
A gourd of prim frongs, piercing
High ears of the wind

.....

Blood -drops in the air, above
The even belt of tassels, above
Coarse leaf teasing on the waist, steals
The lone intruder, tearing wide.

The Chaste hide of the sky (IAOP, p.9)

In 'DEATH IN THE DAWN (IAOP, p.10-11) Soyinka explores the symbol of the 'road' which is a reference to the journey the human being has to undertake through life in search of meaning. There seems to be an element of futility in the search as man remains unable to completely master the 'road'. The poem itself, the poet said was inspired when a cock smashed itself against the windscreen of the car he was driving and a mile further on, the poet 'came across a motor accident and a freshly dead man' The opening lines of the poem is peaceful enough. There is a gentle imperative voice urging the traveller to start off at a most propitious time, dawn:

Traveller, you must set out
At dawn, And wipe your feet upon
The dog-nose wetness of earth

The evocation of the quietitude of the early morning

hour continued up to the third stanza before the ominous signs begin to reveal themselves in the fourth stanza with the death of 'dawn's lone trumpeter.' The death of the cock does not seem enough propitiation for the famished road, it must claim a human wraith:

..... Brother
 silenced in the startled hug of
 your invention.....

Beyond the ironical title of the poem, what further makes it awesome is not so much the death of another human being as the example of that death used as a commentary on life: The death of the white cock earlier, its fate, its wraith of 'white feather-flakes' is compared to a human being. The poet's humanity and the fate he shares with the mangled body of the accident victim evokes a familiar yet strange feeling -/ is this mocked grimace//This closed contortion - I/?. The further irony of fate is that man is annihilated by things he has invented to serve him. The sense of awe of the ironies of life which the poem elicits is emphasised by the overwhelming presence of the 'choric voice' which propels the action of the poem. The choric voice can be seen in stanza 1,2,3 and 4. It is this voice which also gives the poem an orality, particularly the fourth stanza with its aura of local beliefs -

The right foot for joy, the left, dread
 And the mother prayed, child
 May you never walk
 When the road waits famished.

Soyinka's poetry may be more difficult than say, that of Gabriel Okara's. Sometimes the difficulty is intuited to the jumbled syntax or coinages that defy interpretation. The other added difficulty is the philosophical, intellectual systems Soyinka refers to. In this respect, one has to look at his conception of ethereal essences losing their haze and assuming concrete palpitating existence. Take for example the Shango and Ogun essence. Donatus Nwoga¹⁵ has also given some insight into some of the apparent difficulties of Soyinka's poetry. Referring to the ordinary uses of simile and metaphor as means of deepening or heightening experience, he suggests that Soyinka goes beyond the ordinary uses of such poetic implements where:

The dividing line between the image and object is practically undistinguishable. One object, person or situation is illuminated by and becomes part of a range of objects, persons or situations spanning the natural and supernatural cosmos¹⁶

Nowhere is this more evident than in the dense apocalyptic 'Idanre' section. The difficulty of

Soyinka's IAOP owes its origin more to the metaphysicals than the modernists, really. The metaphysicals thrived about the seventeenth century and one of their leading poet was John Donne. The metaphysicals have a penchant for speculating in philosophies. They also use a lot of allegory, hyperbole and have an 'affectation of big words, fustian phrases, jingling terms, strong lines, that like Acastes arrows caught fire as they flew'(sic)¹⁷. What else is striking about Soyinka and the metaphysicals is the deployment of the conceit. In the words of Gardner '(A) conceit is a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness....¹⁸ The conceit, she says further, makes us accept likeness in things that are perfectly unlike each other. What we are forced to agree with in the context in which the conceit occurs is the sense of incongruity. For example, in Soyinka's 'DEATH AT DAWN' the macabre forces its 'beauty' on the reader -

Traveller you must set forth
At dawn
I promise marvels of the holy hour ...
perverse impalement - as who would dare
The wrathful wings of man's progression.....

As a conceit we are forced to accept the inscrutable logic of the perverse looking admirable. The last stanza

of the poem contains another incongruous comparison, the wraith that was the cock impaled on the car of the poet becomes the mangled body of the accident victim which the road claimed as double sacrifice. In 'Idanre' the same theme is enacted in the second movement of the poem as the poet hammers again at the insatiable nature of the road aided this time by Ogun himself:

The weeds grow sinuous through gaunt corrosions
Skeletons of speed, earth mounds raised towards
Their seeming exhumation; growth is greener where
Rich blood has split; brain and marrow make
Fat manure with sheep's excrement
(IAOP, p.65)

This is an enlargement in scope on the theme of the macabre, yet truthful dynamics of human existence by the poet. The earlier 'perverse impalement' and 'Man's progression' assume fresh hues; the latter even more ironic. The vehicle is now 'skeleton(s) of speed' while the 'impaled' fuses with the basic components of primary existence to make the 'grass greener'. The other shocking revelation brought about by the comparison, is where the human 'brain' and marrow joins the 'excreta' of sheep. Death returns man to humbler, less conceited beginnings. The once mighty man is one with the lowly sheep. 'Idanre' is suffused with such conceits. What comes through in Soyinka's exploration of the myth of Ogun

is the cyclical permanence, of creation and destruction although there could be a potential break from the circle in the instance of the rebel Atunda -

Rather, may we celebrate the stray electron, defiant
Of patterns, celebrate the splitting of the gods
Cannonisation of the strong hand of a slave who set
The rock in revolution - and the boulder cannot
Up the hill in time's unwind.

In this may be seen the poet's idea of the rebel, the hero who emerges to save the masses from retrogression. This idea of the individual messiah is common in most of Soyinka's creative work. In *Osundare* however, the individual endowed in whatever form can only serve as part of a larger social movement for change. That is, an individual alone can not 'earth' the energy of the revolution, it is the community moving as a united body that can precipitate and actualise change. Soyinka's exploration of the character of Ogun, revered by other gods, worshipped by man, could be said to be a form of counterpositing to the foreign religion.

The role of gods, African or alien, is a fundamental issue explored by the pioneer Nigerian poets in gauging the texture and nature of their manifold experiences. Those poets have reacted to the various problems of the emergent independent nation in their own peculiar style, a style mainly 'derived.' The 'derived'

nature of the poets' materials could be because of the eclectic nature of their experiences and their fairly wide intellectual explorations. Literacy therefore has contributed to the ideological structuration of these poets; the styles they model and the themes that engage their mind. Nkosi adequately captures this when he said:

.....In Africa.... the development of poetry is closely bound up with the social, economic and political development of society; that even styles and themes of this poetry often reflect upon forces that are thought to be non-literary; but that, in fact careful analysis... will often unmask much that lies hidden behind the tortured obscurities of style and frequent recurrence of theme.¹⁹

A study therefore of the emergence of Nigerian poetry will help us see and be able to contextualise Niyi Osundare's poetry.

From the example of Osadebay, Osundare's poetry also shows that attempt to positively transform society. In Osadebay's instance we notice the need to rise up to the demands of a new world which at the same time echoes the ideology of salvation from the ethos of backwardness associated with the African.

Although Osadebay communicates with an immediacy the poems lack much craftsmanship. Thematically his

poetry marks the beginning of the articulation of the alienation felt in the interplay of Western and African sensibilities. It is this aspect that will be given further relief in the poetry of the students of University College Ibadan. Their own particular instance marked the corporate subjection of these students to an alien syllabus replicating an essentially Western ethos. It is here that a mushrooming of written poetry occurred which is essentially university based. The ambience of the University was to produce poets like J.p.Clark, M. Echeruo, Soyinka, Okigbo and others. They were to go on to lay a concrete ground which made it possible for the exploration of modern Nigerian poetry. The tradition they laid however, is not the product of a total psychological enslavement.

The new African psyche and the poetry which derives therefrom are concrete materials through which the poets work; as Bennett puts it about literary traditions:

A given literary tradition, then is not simply an inheritance, a reflection of things that are and always have been 'similarly placed' but is an active construction of representations 'handed down' from the past.²⁰

So a holistic look at the feature of modern

Nigerian poetry indicates that the earlier poets go beyond the establishment of a 'tradition' from which other poets by negation would come to stake the authenticity of their own practice. More than anything the earlier poets have shown that language is one of the primary ideological indices; the basis for the exploration of the nascent ideological crises wrought by contending western and African ethos. This however, should not suggest a blanket sameness in the individual poet's reaction to their environment and the way they deploy their materials.

The individual in Clark's poetry stoically accepts his conditioning by fate, destiny. In Okigbo the individual undergoes purification in an attempt at realignment with the primeval force. The means to the end is suffused with humility, confusion (whether the idea could be attained or not) doubts and so on. The later part of Okigbo's poetry would ensign an increasing awareness and use of African materials. The ego of the poet became less and less concerned with self reflection for its sake and a clamorous tone sought to communicate with urgency the felt destruction of societal values in post-independence Nigeria.

Osundare takes off from the later examples of

Okigbo. His poetry is enched on more populist ground, a voice - even though 'removed' - for the wretched of the earth.

Soyinka's poetry on the other hand is rooted within the complex myth of Ogun drawing from the rich experience of folk wisdom. His concern with politics is subsumed in the wider complex of the ontology of human suffering. Different from Osundare, Soyinka's idea of a saviour is transmuted within the capacity of an eminently gifted individual who can save the rabble from degeneracy and extinction. In the context of ideological mobilisation it would seem that the overriding influence is the charisma of the leader not so much a comprehensive socially diffused movement. The turgid, sometimes non-referential nature of Soyinka's language has been attacked by many critics, Osundare inclusive. Syntactically Osundare's poetry may be more accessible than Soyinka's. But the later poetry of Osundare has certain elements of Soyinka's style. In particular there seems a greater tendency in Osundare for the deployment of the paradox in a bid to explore the contrary yet truthful basis of phenomena. This occurred at the point in Osundare's development (The Eye of the Earth, Moonsongs) where he was searching for the

function of ideology as a dialectical combination of opposites. Also, his language assumes greater density like that of Soyinka and Okigbo.

Generally, if the being of the poet or the African was the concern of the earlier Nigerian writers, Osundare's collections attempt to move away from this concern to confront the material basis of the disruption of daily and communal life. The point of view attempts to diminish the fancy of the individual ego; the communal ethos more and more tries to supercede and fashion a vision of egalitarianism. Osundare does this by recontextualising the problematic. The masses, who were rejected or held in suspicion, were now the real agents of change. This overwhelming positive vision in the power of mankind, through mass social action to reshape its material cum spiritual life, is the remarkable feature of Osundare's poetry. To fashion out this vision Osundare needed a manifesto of sorts, which is reflected both in his artistic and polemical work. Here, Osundare assumes an avant-gardist posture.

The history of literature has always reflected a battle between the old and the new. The avant-garde as a concept however came to us as a peculiar product of the interplay of historical forces in Europe. The avant-

garde assumes infamy only at the instance when it has had its initial impetus attenuated through the severance of the term from politics to become a watered-down concept of cultural practice devoid of a sociological mooring. The aspect of the avant-garde in Osundare's poetry is not just that attempt to explicitly brake from, sometimes by parodying, past literary practice. The quest for identity by the earlier poets was the result of the trauma of colonial subjugation, so Osundare's choice of theme and style was historically foisted on him by the need to look at the class-basis of the new independent state, the stagnation in society occasioned by a peculiar ruling class and the overall articulation of the economy within the western capitalist system. From this point he would move to confront more universalist issues like the place of mankind, and the earth in the universe. His ideological perspective in treating each of the themes or materials that engage him has had to change subsequently. The subsequent chapters will attempt to show how that change has occurred and the perspective of the change.

CHAPTER I

FOOTNOTES

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4. Frantz Fanon: The Wretched of the Earth, London, Harmondsworth, 1983, p.176.
5. As quoted in Bernth Lindfors' Dem say, Austin, African and Afro American Studies Research center, University of Texas, 1974, p.6.
6. G.G. Darah: 'Ideological orphanage, the intelligentsia and Literary development in colonial Nigeria', Ile-Ife, Department of Literature in English, University of Ife, 1984.
7. Wole Soyinka: Myth, Literature and the African World, London, Cambridge University Press, 1976, P. 62.
8. Ibid, p.62.
9. Niyi Osundare: 'The Writer as a Righter.' Ile-Ife, Department of Litratione in English, University of Ife, 1986.
10. J.P. Clark: A Reed in the Tide, London, Longman, 1976, P. vii.
11. C. Okigbo: Labyrinths, London, Heinemann, 1978.
12. c.f. Odia Ofeimum; The poet lied, Manuscript.
13. J.P Clark: The Example of Shakespear, London, Longman, 1976, p.71

14. W. Soyinka: Idanre and other poems, London, Methuen, 1974.
15. Donatus Nwoga: 'Perception, style and meaning in Soyinka's Poetry' in Vol.1 No.1, Nsukka Studies in African Literature, Nsukka, 1978.
16. Ibid
17. As quoted by Helen Gardner in the introduction to The Metaphysical poets, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961.
18. Ibid
19. Lewis Nkosi: Tasks and Masks, London, Longman, 1981, p. 169.
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CHAPTER TWO

'PEOPLE MAKE HISTORY;' IDEOLOGY AND THE RADICAL POET'

The ideological mobilization of masss...
premises a detraditionalization of society
and of communication¹

2 Chinua Achebe has talked of the 'betrayal' felt by the writer when the political elite baulked the dream of a unified, prosperous and egalitarian post-independent Africa.² Given the nature of Nigeria's independence struggle and the continued destabilising efforts of imperialism, the feeling of betrayal and expectations of independence by the writer would be proverbially naive.

In the face of the betrayal by the political class the writer saw the need to rearm, even if in Achebe (as in the pioneer Nigerian poets), the people remained unlikely agents and producers of any lasting change. Osundare's attempt is to make central the people as the major historical and social force. His attempt in this context is a departure from the trend of earlier Nigerian writers.

In this chapter we shall look at the schism which is manifested in the elite classes and the subsequent splinterings of the modern intelligentsia and, their insertion, in many respects as 'floating ideologues', within the interstices created by the antimonies of principally contending classes; remnants of pre-colonial, traditional feudal authorities and the emergent petty-bourgeoisie. From the history of the reallignment, transformation and emergence of various ideologically

contending classes we shall contextualise the emergence of the radical avant-gardist ideologue, Niyi Osundare, in relation to his first two collections of poetry, A Nib in the Pond and Songs of the Marketplace.

- 2 i But before we go into that we need an outline of the emergent neo-colonial state to be able to contextualise some of the forces that brought about the emergence of the radical ideologue.

Capitalist truncation of traditional, feudal bases of authority has to a large extent instituted the ascendancy of the comprador bourgeoisie over other classes, though there is some level of fluidity in the realignment of classes in which some feudal elements transformed themselves or still hold some level of authority essentially quasi-primordial in the new independent state.

The 1960s saw the emergence of five universities. Fairly adequately funded by the central government and the competing regional governments the universities were able to maintain some degree of outonomy. The intelligentsia was recruited to service the immediate needs of the universities and to train manpower for the consumption of an enlarging public and private utilities. While the intelligentsia could at this time

seek the favour of the emergent bourgeoisie, at the same time it attempted to remain aloof from the bourgeoisie, particularly from its depraved propensities. When expressed, the angst of the intelligentsia with the state of affairs immediately after independence, was within the confines of bourgeois humanism. The enterprise of the intelligentsia and its products was generally sucked in within the ambit of a nascent hegemony as anybody with a university education was a qualified 'professional' who could fit into the demands of a consumerist culture, all in the name of social progress. With the university as their base, the intelligentsia felt relatively unencumbered in expressing and articulating their findings or critique as 'dispassionately' as possible. The subjective colouring of their researches were either perceived as scientific or that the subjectivity possible in the humanities is reduced since the intelligentsia felt relatively above class antagonisms, being neither organically linked to the state nor being fire-brand ideologues of the oppressed classes. Encased within the confines of the Universities the obvious problematic of the intelligentsia was the contradiction of 'autonomy' and alienation. Emerging from this milieu, the earlier

Nigerian poets were to sweep everything before them.

The recognition of the magnitude of the subjectivity of the intellectual has polymorphous historical causes. We shall for convenience prune them to three broad overlapping instances.

The world in the 1960's was the glorious arena of the cold war and nationalism in many third world countries. A communist Soviet Union, then a taboo in Nigeria, had emerged a super world-power and was all over championing the rights of still colonised nations for self-determination. In some instances it even went to the extend of physically committing itself to the defence of those rights. The Soviet might and system would to some degree impinge upon the consciousness of the conservative Nigerian intellectual. But the idea of left-politics, radicalism, was mediated, like so many features of a neo-colonial state, through the aegis of Western countries whose conservative establishments in the sixties and early seventies were increasingly being challenged by students and intellectuals. The immediate structure that was challenged as the centre for manufacture and dissemination of conservative ideology was the university. A culture of radical inquiry even if it was sometimes devoid of revolutionary praxis was

engendered. This new mutation was sometimes the direct result of the liberal western university to which some Nigerians had gone to study. It must be pointed out though that the events of the 'roaring sixties' of angry radicalism, never made much of an impression on some Nigerian students studying in Europe and America.

The outbreak of the civil war in 1967 redefined the role of the intellectual. It was the watershed which sounded the swansong of the romantic floating intellectual. The war situation clearly made the active 'objective' stance of the intellectual a tautological nuisance. Some of the intellectuals found themselves on the Federal Government's side while the others joined the Biafran cause. Another group, the 'third force' lacking the material logistics to separate the factions from war attempted to stand morally superior to the contending demagogues and war-mongers. The increasing clamour of this 'force' irked the Federal Government and they were to be incarcerated for the most part the war lasted.

At the end of the intra bourgeois war in 1970 the state whipped up the nationalist sentiments of reconstruction and was in a position following the era of oil boom to cultivate the favour of intellectuals particularly in healing the wounds created by the

hostilities. Perhaps because of the role of the universities and the intellectuals it spawned and the increasing demand for tertiary education, new universities were added to the already existing ones.

Events at the international level were also to directly affect the development of the intellectual in Nigeria. The aftermath of the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1973 was to make imperialism sit up and try to break the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) as the supreme oil cartel. The success of the West was reflected in Plummeting oil prices and a general uncertainty in the oil market. The increasing corruption of the various regimes and the articulation of the economy on dependent capitalist structures was also to heighten tension as the populace was made to bear the brunt of austere fiscal measures. The general recession was reflected in increasing staff/student unrest. The nuisance posed by this open challenge to the state was reciprocated. This is seen in the general curtailment of university autonomy. The union of the academic staff of universities transformed itself from a mere organ for the protection of the rights of its members to forcefully comment on the affairs of the country culminating in joining the central Labour

Congress (NLC). As the most conscious and articulate wing of the union it gave the central union a fiery radical tinge. From this spectrum the radical Nigerian intellectual had a base, even if a limited one, for praxis and to attempt therefrom to anchor his concern with the masses. Realising the importance of the University in the general sphere of politics, economy and social life, the state through cuts in funding, imposition of autocratic, barely competent Vice-Chancellors, expulsion and forced retirement of radical staff and students, through the harassment of Academic staff Union of Universities (ASUU), attempted to crush the incipient potentiality of radicalism. The extent to which the state has succeeded or not is another matter, what is obvious is the palpable presence and influence of radical ideologues in most fields of national life.

The literary intervention of the radical specifically involved his perception of the 'old' aesthetics, principally its inability to celebrate the creative genius of the people. This, the radical writer feels to be a major failure of the pioneer writers in a world germane with the properties for revolutionary change. In poetry they point to the example of the old aesthetics, the direct inheritance from a colonial

ethos, as one increasingly bent towards formal orgasms. The radical poet therefore challenges this privatist nihilism and insists that poetry should be a social force for the radical transformation of the oppressed.

Osundare perceives this to be the role of the true artist. In his 'The Writer as a Righter,' he proclaims that writing itself is a political act the more so for the African writer who must continue the fight for the total decolonisation of the continent. He realised however that poetry may not stop a .38,³ that the writer's strategy is a slow and painstaking process of appeal and persuasion. But because of the 'technoligisation of the word' the writer could see the contradiction facing him since he can only be read by those with some education. What we can therefore surmise from this impasse is the initial role that a vanguard of the revolution would play, to,

demolish the chains and dungeons of the king
and rout his taskmaster, and disperse the
clouds of mystification formented by the pontiff
between the people and the firmament of social
awareness.⁴

Osundare clearly entrenches himself as an organic intellectual. He rejects the role of the writer as an abstract entity. The writer must earth his vision with the people in exploding the tenuous but concrete

linkage between spiritual and secular authorities in perpetuating the suppression and oppression of the masses. Aesthetics for Osundare is to serve a clear ideological purpose as a persuasive stimulant in the mobilization of the people. And beyond this, aesthetics becomes a necessary and integral part of ideological commitment. Infact, Osundare by insisting that -

The call at the moment seems to be more for a literature of praxis, a concrete, activist literature with a clamorous statement about the social situation⁵

wants to ensign the piquancy and exciting pungency of the potentialities of new ways of thinking and perception. This will make Osundare's practice part of the avant-garde tradition.

One of the first to notice this avant-garde tradition in Nigerian poetry is Afam Ebeogu.⁶ He noticed that the writers are basically loosely grouped, reject negritudism, call for a 'nationalist literature' and insist that literature must be freed from 'colonial complexes'. In defending his choice of avant-gardism Ebeogu sought to differentiate it from its decadent, nihilistic connotation. For him avant-gardism can not be merely a contemporary literary movement where the text reveals its formal properties, either as a mark of

departure from, or, through the parodying of preceding literary tradition, whose sets of signs have become dead or effete. The avant-gardist writer then is the one who attempts to establish new ways of looking at things by posing fresh questions to the perspective from which we had hitherto approached reality. Avant-gardism then would, according to the above definition, when looking at the perspective of literary history, be present in almost all epochs of literature. Our point is to say that this is clearly not so and would certainly blur the peculiar hues of avant-garde art as a product of distinct historical configurations. Avant-gardism was not a phenomenon immanent, waiting for a discoverer. It is more or less the fruition of ideas and actions in pre-commune Europe. It was a period marked by radical intellectualism and the advent of a new generation. The term avant-garde is clearly French in origin and in some other European languages is interpreted as the 'new art' or the vanguard. The revolutionary and radical thinker had adopted the metaphor not just for the sphere of literature but in a generalised inclusive way as well.

A certain, Gabriele-Desire Laverdant, three years to the 1848 revolution had affirmed the connection of art and politics -

Art, the expression of society, manifests in its highest soaring, the most advanced social tendencies...Therefore, to know whether art worthily fulfils its proper mission as initiator, whether the artist is truly avant-garde, one must know where Humanity is going, know what the destiny of the human race is... Along with the hymn to happiness, the dolorous and depairing ode... To lay bare with a brutal brush all the brutalities, all the filth which are at the base of our society.⁷

There is in this formulation the idea of the interdependence of art and society, a view of art anchored in the belief that it can be used as an instrument of social transformation.

Outside political literature, it was rare in the 1870s to find the term. Only after the repression of the commune and, the disaster of the Prussian war did the concept begin to acquire a secondary meaning. The cultural-artistic avant-garde emerged side by side with and distinct from the socio-political avant-garde. According to Poggioli the parallel development of the political and artistic radical avant-garde survived in France up to the appearance of one of the first of the little modern literary magazines 'La Revue Independante.' Other magazines subsequently emerged inspired by, but having different trajectories to 'la Revue Independante.' It is from these new magazines that

the secondary figurative meaning of avant-garde culturally assumed a primary (sometimes even, only meaning. The supplanting of the earlier, essentially, culturally based avant-garde does not however mean the total rupture of the alliance of radical political cum radical aesthetic avant-garde. If it remained however, the reality was more in appearance than in substance.

- 2ii. In both Songs of the Marketplace and A Nib in the Pond Osundare attempted to fuse the tradition of radical political and radical aesthetic thoughts into a coherent scheme. For him 'revolutionary literature and art should help the masses to propel history forward.'⁸ Further, adopting Pablo Neruda as his patron poet, Osundare underscores the importance of the people in his poetry:

I made an unbreakable pledge
To myself. That the people would
find their voices in my song.⁹

Not surprisingly Osundare would in his practice attempt to define what poetry is in relation not only to the specific practice of the pioneer Nigerian poets but also some Euro-modernist obfuscations generally.

In 'Art for Ass Sake' (ANITE p.6) Osundare revolts against the 'ideology of obscurity'. The sarcastic

tone of the poem and the pun on the title is against the idea of arts for arts sake. Osundare's allusions in the poem was partly drawn from the injunction of Christ, 'give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' The fine distinction Christ made between secular and spiritual authority is played upon by Osundare as a satire against the arts for sake' concept-

Art is art

Life is Life (ANTP p.6)

In the third stanza through the ellipsis in syntax of the first two lines-

Hone your tropes
mind your figures,

and the alliteration of voiced bilabial plosives in the third line-

Don't pollute poetry with politics-

the poet shows the aridity and untenability of this kind of art which has made it 'shorn of the human touch'. The persistent and widespread suffering of the common people echoed in the image of the atekererekay demands the instant attention of the poet and is in fact his proper raw material. The poet refuses to celebrate the idiosyncracies of 'patricians, kings and Queens' but would rather, concentrate on the

atrocities perpetrated by the nobility. The poet is able to suggest the concrete linkage between the impoverisation of the masses to the role imperialism plays in the so-called independent African countries -

belching bullets on tattered masses
On Europe's African factories multiplying
Profit princes and profit pariahs (ANITE, P.6).

This excess greed lodged in the logic of the profit motive instead of merely producing harmless gaseous vapours from the belch of satiation would instead produce 'bullets' to cow the masses into silence. Osundare notes the state of deprivation of the masses in 'sprawling slums'. At the same time he notes the simmering discontent which is building up in the 'bukas'. The buka is where the poor gather to eat and sometimes hold impromptu 'congress meetings' to let off steam on the conditions of their existence. In declaring his stance as one with the people, the poet goes on to define what poetry ought to be.

In the 'Writer as a Righter,' Osundare has attacked the practice of the pioneer Nigerian poets as part of the complex of the bourgeois educational system which separates the artist from his roots¹⁰. If the colonial ideology has distorted the values of the

society, the choice of Osundare is to show us new areas of feeling which reside in common life and which give poetry its pulse.

In 'poetry is' (SOTMP.3) there is a formulation what art should be worked out, through both a negation and confirmation of its (non) attributes -

'not the esoteric whisper
of an exluding tongue
not the claptrap
for a wondering audience
not the learned quiz
entombed in grecoroman lore

poetry is
a lifespring
which gathers timbre
the more throats it plucks
harbinger of action
the more minds it stirs.

This veiled attack shows that the idea of poetry derived from Euro - modernist obscurisms makes this type of poetry digestible only to a few. But at the same time Osundare does not deny the validity of sensuous imagery. This imagery when seen affirms the many sidedness of man's needs:

poetry is
what the soft wind
musics to the dancing leaf
what the sole tells the dusty path
what the bee hums to the alluring
nectar
what rainfall croons to the lowering
eaves.

Thus inspite of Osundare's immediate political concerns he does not ignore the sensous, the aesthetic side of poetry. In fact such is his concern with style that in almost all his collections each is built on a hermeneutic backdrop. The opening section of ANITP generally reads like it is targeted to fit with the idea of dawn and life rousing in the morning. The poet sings praises to the 'word' ('The word' I & II, p8-9) as a subverter of silences. The word is compared to a pod exploding in the dry season and, like an egg which 'spreads ungatherably'. With an ear for the figurative the poet attempts to go beyond the traditional use of language: For Osundare the noun becomes a 'happening Icon.' From the store-house of idioms Osundare fashions out language as an active, expressive tool. The admirable play on words raises new possibilities-

a universe
of adverbs without
adversity (ANITP, P.9)

or,

'commas without comas.

Words therefore are not neutral units of speech acts but serve specific functions in apprehending reality. Thus, the 'comma' which would

ordinarily have been` the point (,) that marks the smallest division of a sentence....` 11 is played upon by Osundare by bringing in another `coma` which may have the same approximate syllable sound but is totally different in meaning.

The self consciousness of language in teasing out new areas of perception could also have a negative impact. Because in as much as the word can enlighten by expressing in many ways the elements of reality, it can also obfuscate or hide behind the skirts of `occultism`. Thus, `accessibility or its lack can be partly the factor of empirically verifiable lexical items at the level of language itself and the world view or philosophy of the writer and how all these are the `common wealth` of the writer and his mass audience. That is why in `Calling a Spade` (ANITP, P9.) Osundare suggests that -

the simple word
is the shortest distance
between two minds

The simplicity of the word however does not reduce the profundity of the reality it is trying to communicate. Those who are capable of expressing the need for change must be blunt (captured in the image of the `Spade Callers`) while at the same time -

till the fertilest terrain
for the richest harvest.

From the point of view of ideological mobilization various people have emerged who through their special talents, self-denial and quest for the truth have pledged their energies and their endowments for the Common good. Also, through their sharp perception of reality they point to the existence of injustice, oppression, and courageously call for change. There are many poems in the two volumes under consideration in this chapter replete with this type of outlook- 'A Nib in the Pond' (ANITP, p.12-13), 'Our Dream will not Die' (ANITP, P. 35), 'The warrior of change' (ANITP, P.38), 'He came form the Mountians' (ANITP, P. 39-40), 'The Sand Seer' (SOTM, P.31-32), 'Zimbabwe' (SOTM P.52-54), 'For Bob Marley' (SOTM, p.57-58) and so on.

In the title poem 'A Nib in the Pond,' the poet through the image of the sharp, pointed nib observes the same sharpness and incisiveness of analysis in the persona of the poem who is able to pierce through the most daunting of obstacles. From the context, the persona is a model insurgent who disturbs the peace of the oppressors. In the first stanza the ability of the persona to resuscitate words and make them pulse with

active reality is brought out -

we read your lines
Opening up the earth
like a book of paths
hear your voice
melting the wax of
a thousand seasons.

The ability of the persona, who incidentally is a writer, to enliven the text with a sense of urgency is clearly shown in the last two lines of the stanza -

hear your voice
melting the wax of thousand seasons.

Moreover, the quality of the writing is metaphorically imbued with the power of causing convulsions in the 'barracks and powerbrothels' and in 'overturning plots of plunder'. Osundare's imagination recreates the vision of the citadels of power in the compounding of power and brothels. What new word emerges is the notion of power as being misused and which like the prostitute can be acquired like a commodity. The 'plots of plunder' which the powerful manufacture and unleash on the hapless is captured through a direct comparison in the equation of the evil machinations of the powers that be to 'bowls of poison.' But it seems as if for Osundare bringing out these facts would not be enough if the persona had not the ability where -

we sing the line
 and hear our voice
 read the words
 and see ourselves
 In the mirror of every letter.

This makes the 'we' in the last stanza to assume a heightened perception of mundane reality captured in the earthy, recondite proverb-

Now
 though hands are two
 we know which wipes the anus
 there is a fork in the road
 but we know the shorter way home.

This shows how vicariously the writer-persona can invest his reader with the power of creative discrimination. One slight issue however: The verb 'throw' in the second stanza used in connection to the 'nib' seems inappropriate. We point this out since Osundare insists on the active use of the component of the sentence in capturing the reality he is trying to communicate. Thus, to 'throw a nib' even if the 'pond' is metaphorical does not aptly relate the object 'nib' to the action 'throw'. 'Throw' would have been appropriate for a spear or a pebble; a 'nib' has to take a much sharper verb than 'throw' to disturb the 'pond of silence.' But more importantly, the poem echoes the communicating link between the author and the reader as a factor of literacy. Since the poem is

actualised from the context of writing and the apprehension of its reality through reading, which intercourse is primarily denied the non-literate.

If the above example is representative of ideological mobilization of the audience through the new Vistas of 'knowing' dependent upon the power of the word and indirectly working on the consciousness of the subject, the poem 'Zimbabwe' (SOTM) takes the example of the direct confrontation with the enemy through the armed struggle. The poem is dedicated to the slain Zimbabwean generallisimo Josiah Tongogara and the guerilla fighters who fought in the war against the white minority regime of I-Ian Smith. The poet shows that a new dawn would give Africans the reins of power. The poem is punctuated with the refrain of 'The cock has crowed' thus emphasising the certainty of that dawn. The poem is very direct and the poet merges his consciousness with that of those who desired and fought for the new dawn, as he reports from the interchangeable collective pronoun 'our' and 'we'. The person recounts the aspects of the struggle that included several aborted peace talks and the betrayal by local agents of the white minority represented in the image of the clergy [perhaps Abel Muzorewa who was

part of the Ian Smith government]-

Men collared out of our fold
by the folly of ghostly power.

The victory of the freedom fighters though not in vain was not without its casualties - orphaned children, widowed wives and so on. The encounter which removed the enemy violently has also left its mark on the landscape. But to the poet the scarred face of the country ('ruins') is a living testimony to an epic struggle for self - determination which is part of the chain of reaction already set in motion in other parts of Africa -

Yet another milepost
on the sizzling roads
from Cairo to Cape (SOTM, p.53)

Against this background of commitment by the oppressed to national liberation another battle is being fought by the African working people. This involves the class struggle within the so-called independent African states. In the poem 'Bakalori' (ANITP, p.29-30) the poet finds ready material in the theme of the popular struggles of the peasants who have been denied adequate compensation for lands forcefully acquired by the state for quasi-capitalist agricultural enterprises. In the first two stanzas the poet scornfully states the oppressors' feast of plunder -

Ripped open
 again
 the floodgates of peasant blood
 unleashed
 onced more
 the iron heels of dispossession.

The oppressors are appropriately given the image of the vulture which swoops on 'loots of carnage.' The obvious reference to the botched 'Green Revolution' programme of the Shagari regime ('grey') is further aggravated by the spilling of peasants blood-'reddening'. In the last stanza there is the fact that the greed which induced the carnage will not be left unchanged. The calloused hands of the peasants will grab the 'handle of the machet' bent on vengeance. But it is not the machete alone that will be used even as the dispossession of the peasants is not that of land alone: The oppressors drop confettis of promises that never attain concrete fulfilment. Hope and future aspirations are also denied the masses ('promise Land', ANITP, P.32-33). So the option is for the masses in a collective revolutionary action to -

Arise
 with long knives and guns
 you for so long slaughtered
 at the alter of profit Baals
 Arise.
 with marching thunders and whistling winds.

Throughout the two collections in this chapter the masses and other committed individuals are celebrated. Notable figures like in the last section of ANITP ('positive archetypes') are eulogised and their example immortalised. But it is the common man who is the central concern of the poet. Osundare celebrates the many - sided features of this class of humanity ('I am the common Man,' ANITP, P. 50-51). Positively rehabilitated by the poet who realises the full potentials of the common man, the possibility of change is echoed. This change will have a revolutionary effect on the society -

unfellable
like a tree with a million roots
I will shake the earth
with giant fruits
lading the four winds
with seeds of change.

But this generally positive view of the common man assumes a contradictory tone in some instances. In 'Sule Chase' (SOTM, P.16-18) for example, the poet panoramically, pursues the act of a petty theft that would ensue in tragic consequences -

The chase starts in some shadowy stall
on a hungry afternoon
'Oleee barawooooooo Onye Oshiii"
Rises from tepid earth
To the baking skies
.....

The race gathers more legs
 In every lane
 Tailors with giants scissors
 permsecs with PENDING files
 Barristers with dusty wigs
 NEPA experts with fused bulbs
 Telephonists in dead head-sets
 The doctor with a coughing stethoscope
 The don with his chair aloft
 The sergeant has just gone to inspect
 His tenth mansion....
 The housemaid with the W.C. broom
 Reuters agents dying not to miss
 The show....
 All skinning each other's heels
 Surging for the virgin blow

Where through some analogy everybody was
 guilty of attacking a common thief. This
 'universalisation' of the guilt complex by Osundare is
 however a departure from the normal grain and suggests
 that he has not yet totally freed his poetry from
 certain tendencies of the pioneer Nigerian poets. From
 the example of 'Sule Chase', the poet ironically was
 not interested in the cause of the theft. What held
 his interest was the effect he creates. Thus the poem
 completely looses its moral. Sule's (a common man)

theft is not a moral issue. Incidentally in the poem 'Sule' does not even get the benefit of class solidarity: He is chased by other commoners like him as well as by members of the middle class and the intelligentsia. The Shameful irony that Sule had stolen a three kobo loaf of bread which he could not even eat, certainly puts a damper to the poet's understanding of the phenomena of class struggle. The ironic tone of the weight of the crime and the punishment meted by the society becomes a jarring note in Osundare's conception of the class struggle: Sule who should have had the sympathy of the poet is instead barbed by this ironic twist in his fate -

And sule has
The Onceinlife luck
of leading Lagos in a race.

It seems rather uncritical to celebrate 'Sule' thus. The society is not even shocked by its treatment of such an unlucky fellow. The moral that unwittingly comes through in the poem emphasises the fact that the poor pay high for their little sins while the rich and mighty go free. If the poet expects the reader to be shocked by this apparent irrational behaviour of man he succeeded only at the cost of disallowing the possibility of transcending the basic

realities he is reporting. If no lesson is learnt by the people who chased 'Sule' it may look a sad representation of the way we are, robbed of an inner reflexive voice. In fact, the whole poem, where everybody is apparently guilty, approximates to Clark's poem 'Casualties'.¹²

On general note however, the poet celebrates the heroism of the common people in a society where one increasingly finds it difficult to reproduce himself. The poet calls for a comprehensive overhauling of society to be rebuilt on collectivist socialist foundations.

But in as much as the poet celebrates the common man, the poet has nothing but scorn for the petty-bourgeoisie and particularly, for members of the university community. The poet is irked by the fact that the supposedly most enlightened members of the society are so engrossed in crass banality that they, and inevitably the university, have become so stagnant as to be unable to help carry out the needed social transformation of their society. Osundare paints a shocking picture where -

At the senior staff club
 brave dons wrestle it out
 with sweating bottles
 Swilling and staggering
 belching stunning ignorances
 in lofty mouthfuls. (ANITP, p.25)

This serves as the background to the decay of the university where dons are 'cretined by giant dreams of blinding power'. Osundare points to other sources of power and knowledge deriving from nature itself -

the sky opens forth
 like a blue book
 of paths unread -

but the 'dons' ensconced in egos battered by the soporific effect of beer are unable to perceive.

More alarming is the fact that the university system with its supposedly heightened awareness has not been able to remain insular from the graft and corruption in the wider society. In 'Returning Dons' (ANITP, p. 26-27) we see the abuse of the Sabbatical leave where some members of the intelligentsia use their terms to acquire material wealth and walk in the corridors of power no matter how briefly-

Wise ant
 you have lined up your chilly hole
 with the windfall of sabbatical summers
 Merry ride in the mercedes
 of your clever harvest.

When university dons are not involved in this, they

are caught up within the vortex of the culture of producing papers for the 'Appointments and promotion committee,' the sole agent of determining one's progress in the university no matter the substance of the papers produced. The skewed nature of the reward system has reduced knowledge to a poor commodity where quantity supercedes rigour and quality. The university don is forced to produce papers in an arcane language

The language watery
No, "ab" "initio," "ceteris paribus"
"Horribile dictu," "mutatis mutandi"

(SOTM, p.24-)

latinisation being the hallmark of erudition. Things have reached a stage where to be published, the university don has to

Grovel before the editor
And dusts his shoes... (SOTM, p.25)

Yet another aspect of university life is presented in the image of the university congregation. At the congregation instead of important issues taking precedence over flatulence and buffoonery, the dons indulge in verbosity and intellectual masturbation-

Jargons take over the podium
and slogans rumble
the belly of the hall
fustian grenades detonate
and eggheads explode
with barren approbation. (SOTM, p.28-29)

The title of this poem ' At the university Congregation' with the splitting up of the word congregation into three distinct syllables, sarcastically intones the poet's conception of that body. The further existence of the word ' con' as the head syllable with a distinct semantic meaning casts aspersion on university congregation as a dubious enterprise. The total picture one gets of the university and its members is of unseriousness. Its members are a shepardless herd whose life is aimless:

O my people
 You stray
 Seeking here
 a way across the wilderness. (SOTM, p. 29)

Although this bleak picture of the university intellectual is what generally obtains, there is, here and there, thin rays of hope in the idea of the intellectual who is committed and dedicated . This is the idea that is expressed in 'Mindscope' (SOTM, p.62-63). The poem is about an honest, daring and incisive personality. This character portrait is against the corporate mediocrity found in most intellectual circles. The persona of 'Mindscope' is a dynamo of vision and action:

to each eye, light
 to each mind, question
 to each question, will
 to each will, action.

Osundare's displeasure with the university community is against the background of the fact that as the obviously potentially most conscious members of the community, they have failed to lead the battle for the emancipation of society from the organised domination of the state by a tiny unde-mocratic clique. The university community is so steeped in the system, its conservative values, that it is not ready to challenge oppression. Two broad classes of intellectuals are discernible from Osundare's portrayal of the intellectual. One section can not go beyond its petty - bourgeois nature to be ideologically committed to oppressed sections of the society. The other class of intellectuals are however committed to the struggles of the oppressed. This commitment will hopefully culminate in the revolutionary transformation of society. To situate the nature of the transformation Osundare explores the nature of petty - bourgeois elements and highlights their ambivalence. But overall the irony is that the intelligentsia who ordinarily should be the most enlightened class for ideological

mobilization have developed a dialectical resistance to being mobilised. This is because they may not just be mere consumers of ideology but also active producers of forms of ideologies. Moreover, they lack the vision as a class for the transformation of society. They may fear losing the benefits that accrue to them as a class and they may also aspire for upward social mobility. Only a whittling away of their status by the state can perhaps force some of them to align with the masses.

As a result of the ideological bankruptcy of bourgeois classes in relation to social transformation Osundare declares his stance with the oppressed. But as we have noted the medium of communication no matter its accessibility limits the poet's direct contact with the intended carriers of his vision. Even allowing for the accessibility to a mass audience, literature is just one of the several ideological mobilizers in the 'consciousness industry.' Thus, it is possible for the mass audience to be buffeted by other contending ideologies which may limit, curtail, obfuscate, merge, cancel or openly challenge revolutionary ideology. The appellation of the individual to institutions, formal and informal, also compound the issue. It is perhaps the increasing savagery and bankruptcy of the

Nigerian state and the continued pauperisation of a broad mass of social classes which should give the hope that all is not totally lost. This is what makes Osundare's poems and vision so hopeful like in the last section of SOTM -

Soothing
like blended serenade
of bird and insect I
wait open armed to embrace
afemosu punctual spirit.....(p.78)

In this section lambent with be forces of nature, a concern that will be expanded in The Eye of the Earth, Osundare creates an ideal, a world without oppression. In this world it is possible for man to realise his full potentials.

For Osundare to establish his ideological stance he needed to question past and present practices of art, culture, politics and economy. His stance is initially avant-gardist, in the traditional sense. Two distinct elements of his avant-gardism are the activism and antagonism which derive from a conscious need to politicise art, to make it directly relevant as a subversive tool and the creator of new, transcending consciousness. His view of ideology comes across in the distinct class positions of the oppressed and the oppressor. The compression of ideology into a 'this'

versus 'that' syndrome, while it does not allow for a fuller view of ideology, affords the writer a sharp delineation of the fields of ideological practise of the oppressor and the oppressed and also creates the urgency for social transformation in the collections. In other words, Osundare's view of ideology is elucidated through typification. The oppressors and their ilk are represented as carriers of the dominant oppressive ideology while the oppressed and their friends are represented as valours, long-suffering but ever hopeful of the creations of a new world. The language of the poetry, although allusive in some instances is clearly more accessible than that of the pioneer Nigerian poets. The language is devoid of mythic lore and the private musings of the poet as an individual ego.

CHAPTER TWO - FOOTNOTES

1. Alvin Gouldner: The dialectic of ideology and technology, London, Macmillan, 1976, p. 23-24
2. See Five African writers Talking, Austin, Occasional Publication series of university of Texas, edited by Bernth Lindfors.
3. Don Lee, 'Two poems,' as quoted by Ezekiel Mphahlele in Voices From the whirlwind, London, Macmillan, 1972, p.54.
4. Niyi Osundare: 'The writer as a Righter', p.3
5. Ibid, p.6.
6. See Okike, No. 23, 1983.
7. As quoted by Renato Poggioli in The Theory of the Avant-Garde, Masachusetts, the Belknap University press, 1968, p.9.
8. As quoted by Niyi Osundare in ANITE from the collected workds of Mao Tze Dung, Vol III.
9. As quoted by Niyi Osundare in SOTM.
10. Niyi Osundare, op.cit,. p.15
11. A.M. Macdonald (Ed.): Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, Edinburgh, Chambers Ltd., 1978.
12. J.P Clark: Casualties, London, Longmans, 1978.

CHAPTER THREE

'Social reality and Transcendence: The example of Village Voices.'

All these voices need to be listened to critically and carefully, precisely because there is no authentic voice or transcending unity that structure the diverse experiences of African peasantries and because these oral documents are social texts with hidden and often multiple meanings.¹

Although this is Isaacman's critique of historiographers of the African peasantry who ignore the cultural basis of a peoples life as they seek to collect: 'hard empirical data' we find the rejoinder useful in coming to terms with the ideological implications of Osundare's ensignation and mediation of the peasantry; how the peasantry is affected by, and how it affects other social classes and, generally, how the peasantry organises its self-reproduction.

Attempts have been made by writers to show the gap between the elite and the masses. In spite of this tradition little or no interest has been shown by Nigerian writers to ensign the peasantry as a distinct social group whose largely agrarian units have become important aspects in the active development of the Nigerian State. Village Voices² is an exception. Osundare's peasant origins could be one of the factors that worked positively in shaping his

ideological view concerning the peasantry. He presents a picture of the conditions that affect rural life. He showed his commitment by merging his voice within the inner voice of peasant life, to give us vital information, comments and views through which individual and collective voices are etched in songs, proverbs, festivals, ceremonies. All these voices are transmuted within the echo of verbal arts resonating now and then with a timbre of militancy.

But production is only a part of the complex social relations. Consumption, and the use and the exchange of value of the product forms the other integral complex of social relations. Seldan has noted how Macherey has given an insight into the self deception of the text as a unified work using free implements (devices) as really the deployment of 'disparate materials' which are 'worked over and changed in the process'.³ Taking our cue from this and added to the context of a largely unlettered society where the literate are a relatively tiny but powerful group, the primary contradiction of the text; its intended and real audience is brought into even sharper focus in Village Voices. But to be able to understand not only the form but the nature of this contradiction one needs a commensurate knowledge of the peasantry even if in an exploratory manner. This will help us see the peasantry as a concrete class within

concrete social conditions. Knowledge of this will show how pre-textual ideology (the notion of peasantry/revolution) is transformed, off-set, transcended and indeed become transmuted into almost totally new ideological positions engendered by the writer's postulations, the 'being' of the text and its analysis.

- 3:11 Most studies on the peasantry generally accept this class as an ambiguous social class. While this may describe, it falls short of apprehending the essence of the peasantry. Marx more than qualifies his notion of the peasantry as 'mass of potato'⁴ by recognising the fact that there could be revolutionary peasants whose ascending consciousness and pauperisation, amongst others, would serve as corrolary to their overcoming the strictures that stand against their general interest. Fanon⁵ infact, in the light of the relatively fewer number, quiescence and conservatism of the African proletariat, sees the African peasantry, for example, as the truly revolutionary class who bear the brunt of the oppression of imperialism. Fundamentally what interests us about the peasantry as is applicable to Osundare's Village Voices, is the fact that we are dealing with a historically derived relations of production and domination based on control of land by

the peasantry either as tenants or smallholders but, generally to a large degree, controlling their means of production. Isaacman in fact postulates that: Work or, more precisely, the peasant

labour process has a profound impact
on the material as well as cultural
universe of the peasants.⁶

- 3.1ii Looking specifically at Western Nigeria, the context of Osundare's Village Voices, we observe many social, political and economic fermentations. The incorporation of the Yoruba commodity economy into the world capitalist system, particularly the introduction and burgeoning of the cocoa product for cash exchange, fundamentally transformed traditional relations of production. Peasant groups, emerged ostensibly to protect peasant interest. The creation of a Cocoa Marketing Board in 1947 marked government's intervention in the peasant sector. This also gave peasants the chance to organise mainly through mutant nationalist individuals and groups. Some of the groups that emerged were the Nigerian Farmers Union and the Maiyegun Society. The latter group, for example, were active during the 'Swollen-shoot' scourge forcing the government to accept the authority of the Maiyeguns instead of the Native Authority officials. Later on peasant disenchantment with colonial agricultural policies would in part be channelled through nationalist agitation for independence.

After independence peasant agitations were to assume a magnitude hitherto unknown. The 1968-69 riots precipitated by the Agbekoyas was remarkable. Its support and leadership was peasant based. The immediate cause of the riot was the flat-rate tax. Other causes were the import restriction as a result of the civil war which affected the volume of trade of the peasant's wives, heavy rainfall the previous season which had led to damaged crops, poor harvest and poor earnings. In perspective the turn the expression of the grievances took could be said to be a result of the failure of constitutional means in resolving peasant problems. In spite of the success of the Agbekoyas the problem of a guiding ideology made them compromise some of their demands. The implication of this has been noted:

... In general, there has been little political, in the sense of ideological content in the development of Nigerian cooperatives. No indigenous doctrines of socialism have supported the movement in its fight against commercial interests; the movements leaders have never made appeals to the 'masses' to unite under the cooperative ideal against the elite or capitalist class.⁷

Thus, the communalism of the peasants can initially facilitate peasant interest but, without a transcending vision they are hindered. Against this background Village Voices is an ideological intervention to re-order the quantitative voices of the

peasantry and imbue it with a capacity for revolutionary change.

Some of the poems in Village Voices are more or less direct transpositions of indigenous Yoruba songs and in instances where the poet could not find English equivalents, the original vernacular word is maintained with the meaning decoded at the level of end notes. The ideological implication is that it is almost impossible to render a context bound phenomena in another, totally different cultural matrix holistically. Some cultural - contextual, not just semantic, thread that binds the seams of thought and expression are expunged from the transposition. What one is left with at best is a diluted universe of experience. Missing also from the transposition is the song as an aural-visual performance with the accompaniment of possibly drums, gongs, gestures and other non-verbal aspects of communication. But most especially absent are the audience and the performer in a fluid dynamic context, the essence of an oral performance.

3.1.iii Village Voices recounts the key experiences of a day: The act of waking up sets the pace and builds up to a general chatter as the world is fully roused, shaking off the dross of slumber. There seems to be a lull at noon ('voices about coming and going') as

the voice becomes reflective. The closing stages restates the earlier militancy and awaits the coming of another dawn.

The opening and closing poems show a raconteur through whose mind the rural world is crystallised and analysed. If the examples from these poems evince a poet - teacher -

My words 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 thoughts
and plant the earth with potent seeds. (p.2)

put my words in your left hand
so they do not land in the stomach
with the unwitting morsel
then plant them like a yam seedling
which multiplies the original breed(p.71)

and, structurally, serve as the ectoplasm for the rest of the poems, what we shall logically be talking of is the echo of the villager's voices in the poet's consciousness. But an ectoplasm does not define the physiognomy, nor indeed the essence of matter. So, apart from the general outline above, we can also see that the inner structure of Village Voices is the contending consciousness of the villagers and the poet. To demonstrate this it will be best to take the poems section by section even if we may run the risk of repetition, as some of the ideas reecho across the sections.

In the first section, 'voices in dialogue and banter' there is an amazing, instinctive sense of

rhythm which fairly captures traditional oral poetics. This is succinctly realised in the poem 'A Dialogue of the Drums' (p.5-8). Structured in the form of a banter, the poem has two fiercely contending personas who declaim the beauty and sanctity of their artistic practices. By a recourse to a rich feast of words, the protagonists argue out their causes to the accompaniment of verbal calisthenics and collateral musical instruments that resonate the statements of the artists and conjure visions of ideological platforms on which each singer has pitched his tent. The banter was engineered by the first protagonist who began with an initial self praise-

When I raise my voice
The world will be my chorus
I, owner of the throat for pleasing
songs,
And hands sculptured (sic)
For the talkative face of the drum....

and goes on to a loaded, thinly veiled riposte against the quarry -

But there are some people I know
People (sic) whose names I will not mention
Whose hippo hands slap the drum
Like a scab of flabby flesh
Flogging mere noise from
Its tuneful belly.

By questioning the ability of the second protagonist in a community where art is in high esteem a serious damage would have been done to the personality so traduced. Only a sound equally sharp defense will ameliorate matters. But inspite of, or because of the

defense, the first protagonist has succeeded at least in provoking his opponent to a joust. If the bone of contention appears, initially, to be the issue of aesthetics, such an interpretation is discouraged by the second protagonist whose rejoinder indicates that-

I understand all your words
And even those you haven't spoken.

But since the real intention of the attack by the first protagonist has not been fully revealed, it seems wiser to bid time and pick up the gauntlet on the issue he has ostensibly been called to defend, arts -

I hail from a line of drummers
And understand perfectly
The language of the leather
Bata which speaks with two elegant mouths
Omele which carries a high-pitched face...
And gangan which wasps its waist
For the embrace of prodding arms.

This brilliant parry which signifies that the speaker is an adept artist also, forced the first protagonist to declare the conditionality of his practice -

I have thrilled royal steps
With gbedu's majestic accent.

From this, issues are no longer oblique; the waiting game of the second protagonist has paid and, for the first time, he went on the 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.

A belittling picture of a palace courtier easily

attracted by the glitter of wealth is painted here. His arts can not serve a communal purpose but is plied for fascist ends, in the service of those in authority. The call to the second protagonist to substantiate his accusations-

Let runners of accusing songs
Put legs on their words
Lest they be like a woman's Opoo
Sprawling like a beheaded snake -

seem like a call to strike at an exposed flank and was gladly accepted -

I will not only give legs to my coiling words
I will also give them the fang of facts.

Thus, the weapon of the first protagonist is used against him: The second protagonist's accusation (stanza four) graphically described by the first protagonist as lacking the venom of a real snake in the image of 'Opoo' is played upon by the second protagonist who gives his 'coiling words' the 'fang of facts'. We gather then that the royal court singer shies from musical instruments like 'reso', 'ogbele' and 'adan'. Those are instruments that symbolise communal intercourse as in rites of passage, welcoming a newborn (reso), mourning a departed one (ogbele), and satirising anti-social behaviour like stealing (adan). The communal songster then goes on to deride the courtsinger -

You were in the palace running endless errands
 Like a shuttle in the loom
 Your eunuch drum a dumb stool
 For harem buttocks.

From this picture, the royal singer seems to have descended to the depths of degeneracy: He has lost whatever power he had and now approximates to an inanimate object (loom), a tool fashioned to serve and weave the cloth of royal debauchery. The drum, part of the trademark of the artist in striking communal tunes, has in the hands of the first protagonist become impotent - 'eunuch'- and only serves to support 'harem buttocks.' From all these, the first protagonist in the verbal battle seems to have lost the initiative and is now on the defensive -

Must we all extract paltry pennies
 From squalid lanes
 Frequenting miserable ceremonies
 Like vultures bald as
 The drums we beat?

The pungency of the rhetoric, witty as it is, casts aspersion unincidentally on communal abodes, abodes of the not so privileged - 'squalid lanes,' 'miserable ceremonies'. It is obvious then that the ideological stance of the first protagonist pushes him to pour scorn and denigrate the people and communal events that integrate and sustain their reality.

The last stanza containing the second protagonist's rejoinder serves more like a coup-de-grace to a thoroughly chastised opponent. In this is also

contained a warning of an apocalyptic end for
 betrayers of the people -

Your fish will come belly-up, someday

Its underside beamed at the laughing sun-

But the most important thing really, which is the
 essence of the second protagonist's stance, is captured
 in the maxim-

The people always outlast the palace.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the social
 conditionality of arts and the commitment of the
 individual artist is predicated on the views,
 impressions and consciousness of the artist and how he
 perceives his society. Osundare's concern is to what,
 and in whose cause the commitment is professed.

In 'A dialogue of the Drums' Osundare explores the
 ideological ramifications of two artists of different
 temperaments. At the end of the banter it is obvious
 that the populist's arts is positively celebrated.
 The structure of the poem is clearly designed in favour
 of the people's artist, that is, one who takes his arts
 to the 'marketplace.' We sympathise with the second
 protagonist at the seemingly unwarranted and unprovoked
 onslaught of his aristocratic counterpart. By the
 time we are midway through the poem, the first
 protagonist is on the defensive and we see him hedging

-

Let runners of accusing songs
 put legs in their words.

Also, having spoken first, the first protagonist can not have the last say as the poet (Osundare), apparently in the spirit of fair-play allows each of the combatants four stanzas respectively. This, (particularly the principle of the last say) gives the second protagonist more opportunity to ideologically undermine the position of the first protagonist.

Nonetheless, when we look at the overall positions of the protagonists things may not be as distinctively shaped as we have inferred.

According to Bayo Ogunjumi⁸ Yoruba oral arts partly developed from the celebration of the divinity of the Oba. And although the divinity could and has been challenged, the complex of religion, worship and daily existence make the people more or less accept the authority of the oba on some atavistic - cultural matters. So the first protagonist may be right in claiming that:

When I raise my voice
The world joins the chorus.

Also, against a whittling, grey communal conformity, the first protagonist may be correct in asserting the right of the individual-

And let him die of thirst
Who thinks my fish should not find a river
Broad enough to suit its fins.

So against the background of validating and invalidating claims and counterclaims the truth it

seems, lies somewhere in the interstices of contradictions set up by the clashes of opposing forces. But while such opposite stances are generally assumed by African artists, the case of the first protagonist is seriously undermined in spite of the elegance of his casuistry. In the first instance, it is possible to have different classes consenting on a number of issues. The consent may be as result of complementarity of interest. It may also be through either raw force or the ascendance of a hegemonic class, or both factors; which may make the people 'join the chorus'. This will make art, from this spectrum, assume the potential of being used as part of the ideological complex to legitimize class rule. But, specifically, what makes the ideological posture of the first protagonist reactionary is that he is opposed to the people and refers to their ethos in derogatory terms - 'paltry,' 'squalid', 'miserable.' Osundare further shows that the first protagonist is a pitiable personality who seeks to protect a selfish interest; his own material well-being supercedes any genuine concern for others. He appears not even committed to the arts which he professes to champion but is an informed philistine, the bankruptcy of his practice as much the bankruptcy of his ideological stance.

Hidden by the rafters of proverbs, maxims, aphorisms and all kinds of wise-sayings, the peoples

voices highlights the ferment of contradictions, tensions, militancy and profound philosophical postulations.

In 'Not in my Season of Songs' (p.9-10), the abuse as a skilled form of verbal riposte is employed. The structure of the poem takes the form where the persona pretends restraint while at the same time going on to heap invectives on his victim. As usual the poem is full of vivid imagery. The persona does not attack his victim by grabbing his throat directly, instead, oblique references couched in wise-sayings are made in the first stanza. The persona adopts a stance of self righteousness from the assault of an unprovoked person. The unwarranted assault will cause the provocateur some irreparable damage -

Sigidi thirsty for a dance of shame
Craves a festival in the rain
Bees hum peacefull in the fallowing farm
A restless boy punctures their hive
With a crooked stick.

The parallelism makes 'sigidi' and 'boy' acquire the same semantic implication. Also, the effective use of the conditional phrases 'would have,' 'were this', emphasises the attempt to lull the victim into a state of quiet relief; that the victim is receiving a whimper not the full gale of a magazine of expletives. This gives the persona room to unleash further a retinue of abusive words -

Yes, I would have told you
 About your swollen testicles
 Which crook your legs
 Like miserable bows,

About your lips thick like hippo skin
 About the elephant legs of your mother
 And your father whose head
 Rivals a buffalo's own.

But the whole torrent of abuse goes beyond a spellbinding personalised attack on a hapless victim and can be situated within the context of forms of oppression and the ensuing class struggle. The victim seems to fuel the ire of the persona not for being what he is as a person but for his especial distinction; related to an incredibly unattractive posse of oppressors -

Your father the D.O's shit carrier
 Who hounded kinsmen as tax debtors
 And drafted people into labour
 For crumbs of the white man's table

 Your uncle the produce buyer so fattened
 On ugly money he looks like
 A bag of cocoa with a ball for a head
 Or his brother the sanitary inspector
 Who can extract bribe from a corpse.

From the poem, it is obvious that the relationship of the various characters is not necessarily consanguinous but the result of their being common agents of a class.

Apart from the obvious class based ideologies to which most of the poems in Village Voices owe their timbre, Osundare also deals with some existential problems. Here the tension is set through the contradiction of individual perception of reality on

the one hand and on the other, how that will conflict with communal needs.

In 'Killing Without a Sword' (p.13) for example, the persona is a long-suffering fellow who is to learn that-

.... Our worst enemy is he
 who sends us to pluck
 a fruit deliciously out of our reach.

The weird desire of the persona's friend to have a moon and the fruitless efforts of the persona to fulfill the impossible whim is captured in the stretching of the persona's body 'like a rubber.' But from the bizarre request and the failure to to comply a sound lesson is learnt which appears the ruby of folk wisdom-

There are many ways of killing
 without a sword.

In 'Chicken Story' (p.14) Osundare enacts the peculiarities of individual personalities. The rhetoric is ironical; the toothless chicken 'eats pebbles' and 'swallows sand' yet, comparatively larger animals with dentures can not copy the same dietary habits of the chicken and live to tell the story! The recognition that the 'mill,' inside all men grinds with different magnitude is a pointer to individual differentiation ranging from the psychological to the physiological. What is emphasised in the poem is the

necessary uniqueness of the human specie.

In 'Eating Tomorrow's Yam' (p.16) the tension is the product of the contradictory interests of the individual and the community. The first stanza serves as a prelude to the drama that will ensue-

When cutting a tree in the forest
it is the wise who watch
where it will fall;
the not - so wise merely enjoy
the conquering edge of the axe.

At the centre of the imbroglio is the utilisation of scarce communal resources. While the community advocates for prudence the prodigal wishes to satisfy the urge of the moment unmindful of tomorrow, his logic being:

'tomorrow will take care of itself,
how can we know the next day
if we die of hunger today?'

The communal rejoinder-

'how can we see tomorrow
if we eat its yam today?-'

is as full of logic as the prodigal's quip. But since for Osundare communal ethos must triumph we see the communal will being practicalised -

They then cut the yam into seedlings
and plant tomorrow's harvest
it is meet to live on herbs and grains today
if that ensures tomorrow's yam.

Communal prudence with a vision for the future therefore supercedes individual profligacy with its demands for the satisfaction of the hunger of the

moment. We further see at the end of the poem that the wise - saying in the first stanza is reiterated, through the outcome of the clash of opposing interests. These stanzas also serve as a form of authorial comment on the world of individualism and communal well-being.

'Advice' (p.19) is another poem that deals with folk wisdom. This short, graphic poem examines, through an ironic tone, the concept and result of deliberate falsehood -

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.

'Eating Tomorrow's Yam,' 'Advice' as with some of the other poems in the first section of Village Voices are Inclusive - Existential ideologies 'seeking to stamp some meaning on life from the point of view of moral secular systems.'⁹

The last four poems in this section however assume a different tone. 'Feigning Rebels' (P.20-21) looks at Pseudo - messiahs who ascend the throne full of revolutionary fervour which never goes beyond rhetorics. 'Akintunde come Home' (P. 22 - 23) is a plea to a person who has gone to the city to return to the village and live with what is obtainable there. It seems as if the village is

equally devastated but what the persona fears for Akintunde is the impending holocaust threatening the world:

Come home, son,
through our thatched roofs
we can see the devouring deluge
of looming clouds.

The logic of the plea is that communal sharing will help Akintunde survive better than if he were in the city where endemic individualism had robbed that society of a sense of 'fellow-feeling.'

'A Reunion' (p.27 - 29) shows the remarkable shift of status and consciousness occasioned by the pull of the written word:-

We started school the same day
and together bore the flaying fury
of the teacher's ceaseless cane
together we parroted ABC
till we scribbled our first broken letters
in the whiteman's tongue.

But the persona (poet) of the poem seems to have changed, becoming part of an ascending social order -

I went to the university
where I wore three - piece suits
and ate sumptuous dinners in mortar - board...
the university
where Europe's books smashed
the gourdlets of my manhood
and splashed the juice in desert caves.

Here, reminiscent of Okot P' Bitek's 'Ocol',¹⁰ the ennui that has gripped the emergent elite class is transmuted in the loss of libido: And as in Sembene Ousmane's Xala¹¹ the sterile, the impotent and visionless can not hope to uplift the society. As a

member of the intelligentsia the persona admits his class' hedonism and incompetence and is pained by his association with the intelligentsia. But he is redeemed somewhat through having the courage to admit the untenability of his privilege, since it is not earned, vis-a-vis his hardworking ex-colleague. This admittance is heightened by the ironic tone of the persona who attempts to make hollow and expose the fraudulence of the elite class. Finally, even better, we see the pledged class suicide and the attempted pact on more egalitarian lines:

We must smash this wall
built of the iniquities
of class and crime
then shake new hands
over the ashes of severance.

This attempts to unify, if not totally ameliorate, the countryman and his city, western-trained elite.

The second section of Village Voices has a relatively quiet mood. Compared to the other sections the energy here is more undertow than a palpable physical action. The voices in this section celebrate the intimate details of village life. They contain traces of anger, sarcasm, irony and defiance and generally end on a cryptic note. Most of the poems do not threaten overt revolutionary action. By showing us aspects of the villager's experience through the expression of their cultural wealth Osundare laid the basis of a fluid reality which is being ruptured by

various forms of oppression and the need to counteract it. It is in this section that the poet really allowed the voice of the villagers to speak without an intervening consciousness. The poems are sometimes direct transpositions of oral songs. They move from the dirgeful ('The pillar is Fallen,' p.37) through the serio - comic and bawdy ('The cock's comb of Fire,' p.39 - 40) to the light in tone ('The Bride's song,' P.41 - 42). The exception may be the poem, 'Craddling Hands' (p.38) which may fit in either section as it is a poem which celebrates agrarian toil through the symbol of the hand. The terse imperative voice on which it ended-

Heads
which toiled in the thunderstorms
let them eat
with the softening rains -

prepares for the beginning of the third section, 'voices of anger and indictment.'

The third section is an extension of the tone of protest which contains instances of radical rethinking of the state of affairs where obfuscating systems and their attendant ideologies are put to task by sharp discomfiting questions -

We ask again
why have a few chosen to be thumbs
and the many others omodindirin
clinging precariously
to the periphery of the palm? ('The land of Unease',
P. 46)

Is it not the fire
which moulded the padlock
that also forged the key? ('The Padlock and the
Key' p. 65).

What makes these questions join the agenda is part of an increasing consciousness of blatant injustice pervading the land ('Unequal Fingers', P.60 - 61; 'The Stars Did it,' p. 63 - 64; 'Dying Another's Death', P. 55 - 56). The injustice is partly mediated through the notion of fate, for example, in 'The stars Did it.' In the poem a militant voice challenges the objectivity of fate expressed in the celestial body; 'star', as the factor perpetuating the repression of the individual and community. The militancy opposes this essentially Positional - Historical ideology where peoples, occupations ... are placed in a 'single continuum of criteria, of complementarity, competition, and frontal conflict.'¹³

In summary, Village Voices is a watershed when seen in the overall oeuvre of Osundare's poetry. Thematically and stylistically it sets the tone for the emergence of a distinct poetic voice which in the earlier two collections considered in the second chapter had not yet been concretised.

Village Voices also shows a remarkable orality. This orality has been echoed here and there in the first two collections and forms part of the complex of a hybridised eclectic style in the later poems after it. In Village Voices we notice Osundare's deployment

of ideology as largely a system of oppositional, polarised, political institutions, ideas, groups, systematised on class lines, existing side by side with the notion of ideology as a possible paradoxical existential phenomena. It is this latter notion (while not totally ignoring the class basis of ideology) that will come to form the fabric of an increasing concern for universal ideals.

Because of the poet's choice of a distinct social group, the peasantry, Village Voices is ready material for the exploration of the contradiction of 'intention and achievement' from the background of the historical conditionality of the literary product and its audience.

Although Osundare borrows and sometimes immerses his own voice in that of the peasantry it is obvious that it is a concerned petty - bourgeois voice that gives the poems their coherence. That is why the disparity and difference in peasant life is articulated, subsumed and consolidated as united in its clamour for social change and justice. Taken further, this will give the semblance that ideology is a factor of geographical location - Village versus town. This would have amounted to a trivialisation of a complex social reality. A reading of the earlier collections and Osundare's polemical work, 'The writer as a Righter,' shows that the poet is aware of the issue; that a comprehensive social movement must involve an

allignment of various symphatetic groups to the cause of social change. Choosing the peasantry as a class is an attempt to highlight their plight and their contribution to the society. Village Voices is one voice in the literary production of Osundare which attempts a peculiar 'Village outlook' on reality. But the structure of the collection as well as the language and medium in which it is communicated alienates the product from its intended audience.

Chapter three:

Footnotes

1. Allen Isaacman: 'peasants and Rural Social Protest' in African Studies Review, Vol. 33, No 2, Georgia, 1990, p.18.
2. Niyi Osundare: Village Voices, Ibadan, Evans Brothers, 1984.
3. Raman Seldan: A Readers Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, Brighton, Harvester press, 1986.
4. c.f., Karl Marx: Eighteenth Brumaire of Bonaparte Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1980.
5. Frantz Fanon: The Wretched of the Earth.
6. Allen Isaacman, op. cit., P.2.
7. C.E.F. Beer: The Politics of Peasant Groups in Western Nigeria, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1976, p. 35.
8. Bayo Ogunjumi: 'Slavery, Oral traditions and cultural transmission in Yoruba pre - capitalist societies.'
9. c.f. Goran Therborn: The Ideology of power and the power of Ideology.
10. Okot p' Bitek: Song of Lawino Song of Ocol, London, Heinemann, 1984.
11. Sembene Ousmane: Xala, London, Heinemann, 1980.
12. Goran Therborn; op. cit, p. 25.

CHAPTER FOUR

'The enigma of reality and the expanding vision of humanism in The Eye of the Earth and Moonsongs.'

4.1 A preliminary exploration of concepts is necessary to bring out how ideology has been used to explore the conditions of humanity in the collections under review in this Chapter.

There are several theories about how our solar system came into being. Each of these theories is backed by commensurate 'scientific data'. The earth for example, is several thousand years old and it is still evolving. The overall surface area of the earth is some 510 million square kilometres. Of this, 361 million square kilometres or 70.8% is occupied by the world ocean. 16 million square kilometres or 3.1% is occupied by glacial formations. In essence then, only 4th of the earth's surface has human settlement on it. The moon on the other hand is a satellite of the earth. In fact, according to Lewis Manson² it was a part of the earth. Presently its distance from the earth is from about 353600 km to 376000 km. The moon functions as a 'barometric indicator and distributor of atmospheric moisture'. When these are taken conceptually as 'nature' we can see the effect they have on humanity and how society in turn affects them.

'Society' does not merely represent the totality

of peoples living on (a) given piece(s) of land(s) and 'nature', the physical environment abstracted from or different from 'society'. Relatively speaking, it is possible to distinguish between nature and society, but they are in essence indivisible and 'together constitute a single world'.³ A definition of nature is given by Engels thus:

The whole of nature accessible to us forms a system, an interconnected totality of bodies, and by bodies we understand here all material existences from stars to atoms.⁴

Marx has also talked of one science, the science of history. This science can be divided into two; the history of nature and the history of man. Both are 'dependent on each other so long as men exist'.⁵ While the reciprocal influences of society and nature is obvious it can also be said that society is a higher form of matter consisting of 'thinking beings' capable of self-awareness and cognition of their material world. But society cannot exist outside the confines of Nature. Man influences nature in a purposeful, conscious manner and through it production takes place. Through man's action on nature certain matter are extracted, isolated from its origin, and enters society where its form is subsequently changed. In the

context of commodity production those objects as 'components of social systems' become commodities within society. From the extraction, in some instances exploitation of nature, a vacuum is necessarily created which leads to varied structural changes in nature. Moreover, emission from production wastes and processed objects leads to consequences like appearance in both society and nature of hitherto substances that do not exist in natural conditions. This invariably creates perturbations within the dynamics of natural phenomena. Apart from the issue of extracting and discharging substances, man's activities also affect his nature. All these have led to many side-effects - loss of forest areas, desertification, pollution, acid rain, the melting of ice-caps, leading to increased flooding, the 'green - house effect,' depletion of the Ozone layer and the consequent heating of the earth and many other bizarre facts. Added to these is the fear of a thermonuclear war.

Osundare's poetry in this chapter considers all these facts and fears. Man's activity has severally affected the earth but this, including the need to protect Nature, can only be understood historically since:

In practice the protection of nature relates only to those components of nature on which the lives of persons depend, and whose state in turn depends on the behaviour of persons, and is partly regulated by persons.⁶

The needs of man have always indicated the magnitude of man's intervention in nature. In earlier eras with a relatively low level of development of productive forces some particular natural object of either utilitarian or religious value was protected. Later, objects were protected as private property of individuals. These did not achieve wide goal purposive, conscious and internally regulated action. A purposeful notion for the protection of nature emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. The early concern with this variant of the need to protect nature was the result of protecting exceptional natural sites. Soon to emerge was the need to protect nature for economic reasons, to preserve raw materials and reserves of natural resources. Since then there has been other fall - outs of the need to protect nature. New issues like social, political and health needs have emerged. The new concerns involves not only ethical factors but also addresses the basis of man's common

humanism. Man's sojourn on earth has engendered complex ideological crises (existential , class, political) which has deepened with the coming of the industrial revolution and the relations of production it has created. If the agricultural revolution sowed the seeds necessary for the erection of civilizations, the industrial revolution sharpened the complexity of that civilization. Osundare's contribution is to create a lyrical, rational voice that chastises, yet soothes and attempts to stem the tide of man's alienation from himself. In doing this he deployed the dialectical method in its full sense.

4:1i Dialectics generally is the science of Universal connections of motion and development. It is through the principle of interconnection that the general and abstract laws of Universal relations are sketched. There are principally three laws of dialectics; law of transformation of quantity into quality, law of negation of negation and law of unity and struggle of opposites. All three laws however, do exist in one object or phenomena to a degree. Our principal concern here is with the law of Unity and struggle of opposites. This law is widely accepted as the core of

materialist dialectics and Osundare's deployment of ideology assumes this scope in this chapter.

The specific feature of this law posits the presence of naturally exclusive aspects, but at the same time those aspects are interconnected as opposite poles. A magnet, for example, consists of a North and a South poles. When similar ends of two magnets are joined they repel each other and when the opposite poles are brought together they attract each other. At the same time if one should break the magnet at say, the south pole, the broken pieces will always have a North and a South pole. This interconnection of opposites is what constitutes the concept of contradiction.

- 4.1ii In The Eye of the Earth (TEOTE)⁷, and Moonsongs (MS)⁸, Osundare's vision widens to look at the situation of humanity generally. The background remains the African environment and how it is affected by actions from within and without. At the heart of this mechanism is the enigma of reality and what humanity can do positively for itself.

Through these poems Osundare manifests a kind of cultural osmosis from the mixture of local and 'derived' sensibilities giving rise to an immense spectrum of mental and Physical images that suggests the poet's

yearning for the common brotherhood of mankind and the restoration of an active equilibrium between man and his environment. The choice of the earth and the moon as symbols is instructive. Those are elemental objects that are common to us. Stylistically we are into one of the many implosions of the new African Poetry. An admittance of western tradition of written poetry built on the threnodic echo of a tradition of African performance poetry. This acceptance of eclectic influences is however not the product of an uncritical universalism but is confidently anchored on native soil. In the two collections we see a more sophisticated schema of looking at reality. Ideology, in particular, which in the earlier collections sometimes stands in the manner of mutually exclusive polarities now fully deploys the dialectic which helps the poet in confronting the basis of the simultaneous unity and dissimilarities in a given reality. Osundare had recourse to a 'consistent voice', a trend earlier mooted in the example of Village Voices.

In TEOTE, the earth is the recurrent image. Nature, mother earth, is the generous provider, man the avid, destructive, irrational consumer. In spite of its many splendours, the image of the earth may appear

passive when we look at it from the point of view of the action of man: It appears more sinned against. Reading between the lines we see the earth as an active force, serving as that all important linkage to man's primeval force and to lose that linkage is to become a being adrift. The persona of TEOTE feels that adriftness and alienation and tugs at the memory of mankind to remind it of what the earth used to be. So in as much as man through his actions reshapes the earth, the earth reciprocally reshapes the nature of man. In MS, the moon is suffused with an active imaginative quality and precipitates action in and on others. The poets diction in MS may appear in relation to TEOTE a repetition. The language is too 'saccharin' and the verbing of nouns no longer surprises like before. In respect of TEOTE one can understand the lush rhapsodic language used in evoking a remembered past but in MS the technique becomes verbose, too much poetic weight is hammered on a line. The dilemma really is the instance where opaque language attempts to do justice to the opaque symbol of the moon. We notice a constant struggle to arrest a fixed symbol of the moon, its protean nature, and at the same time an uncertainty on what the moon should

represent. This sometimes leads to undue frivolity. But inspite of this, when successfully carried out, the enigmatic quality of the moon in MS best extends Osundare's new understanding of the dialectic of ideology. In fact, a more rewarding understanding of the two volumes is possible if MS is seen as an extension of TEOTE which, apart from the increasing sophistication of the dialectic, has the moon as a symbol. The moon is a satellite of the earth and Osundare shows that the moon is integrally linked to events on the earth -

The moon is an exile
 in the territory of the sky
 with fugitive baggage
 and platforms of rocky sandals
 ex
 patri
 ated
 by hostile fumes
 and unrepentant poisons
 of foreign factories (MS, p.36)

While the creation myths of some African traditions underscores the relation of the sky to their cosmos, we can not help but notice some similarity to the idea that the sky and the earth were once very close until the destructive acts of mankind drove the sky further away to escape from annihilation. In the above context, the 'refugee' status of the moon is ascribed to a

technologised world. The issue in relation to the African context especially, is further deepened by a subtle connotation to the effect of the interference of an outside power as the agent of the severance of the once close affinity of the moon and the earth: 'foreign factories' is a fairly obvious image of the industrial manufacturing companies operating in and from the developed countries. The splitting - off of the word 'expatriated' echoes Edward Brathwaite's style. Through the separated lines given to the split syllables the reader necessarily slows down, taking in each split as distinct before reassembling the syllables to give a semantic meaning. This draws attention to the word 'expatriated' as a possible pun to the Nigerian mentality of relying on foreign experts. Also, apart from the idea of dependence, the word as an ironic verb feature, assumes an active causal force to indicate the idea of removal as an alien.

The above poem indicates the dialectical linkage between the earth and the moon. We shall work from the first instance, life on earth through the symbol of the earth before we go to an analysis of the moon.

4.1111 Many artists have drawn inspiration from the earth

as a force. Seamus Heaney, for example, in a jocular mood celerates his linkage to the earth thus-

When I lie on the ground
I rise flushed as a rose in the morning
In fights I arrange a fall on the ring
To rub myself with sand

That is operative
As an elixir. I cannot be weaned
Off the earth's long contours, her river - veins
Down here in my cave

Girded with root and rock
I am cradled in the dark that wombed me
And nurtured in every artery
Like a small hillock

Let each new hero come
Seeking the golden apples and Atlas
He must wrestle with me before he pass
Into the realm of fame

Among the sky born and royal:
He may well throw me and renew my birth
But let him not plan, lifting me off the earth
My elevation my fall.⁹

In TEOTE the earth provides the basis for a quasi-autobiographical piece. We get a picture of facts and an imaginatively recreated past and a projected future respectively. The narrative of the poem is realised through the consciousness and perspective of a centralising ego: The poet - persona himself conducts the reader through the varied mazes and nooks of the earth where the rhapsody on the wonderful, of things

past, present and future is more than counterbalanced by the tortured feeling of loss. The ego as the informing consciousness which straddles across it marks TEOTE amongst the collections under consideration in terms of poetic voice. At the same time there is a palpable immediacy in conveying the trails and trials of the journey of the persona in the present back to the past and onwards to the future.

The first section 'back to earth' (p. 2-21) serves as the attempt to 'reconnect' with the vital forces. The memory burrows into the earth itself to come up with distinctive sensuous images which is dispersed until it permeates the landscape totally. The opening stanza of 'Forest Echoes' (p. 3) is arguably one of the most memorable lines ever written by Osundare. In fact, it matches certain sections of Wole Soyinka's reenactment of his childhood environment in Ake.¹⁰ The point being made is that it takes a really sharp memory and a luxuriant imagination to recall the scope of the past, its bright colours, peculiar smells, with such level of integrity.

A green desire, perfumed memories
a leafy longing lure my wonderer feet
to this forest of a thousand wonders.
A green desire for this petalled umbrella
of simple stars and compound suns.

Suddenly, so soberly suddenly,
 the sky is tree - high
 and the horizon dips into an inky grove
 like a masquerade scribbling loric fear

in lines of festival streets -

Under these circumstances it is easy to see how the poet crosses the threshold of the spatial and temporal where time can no longer be reckoned in conventional terms. In fact, time assumes an objective existence on its own -

taunted is time whose needle's eyes
 gates our comings and goings
 time which wombed the moon
 to bear the sun,
 the hole in the ragged wardrope
 the gap in the ageing teeth
 the bud on the ripening tree
 oh time,
 coffin behind the cot (TEOTE, P. 4)

'Taunted' should apply to that conventional notion of time. Clearly, time shows itself in other guises; in the negative sense as 'the hole in the ragged wardrope', 'the gap in the ageing teeth,' and in the positive sense as 'the bud in the ripening tree'. But these when taken in themselves either present a side of reality or reality as separated existence. Reality for Osundare is a coupling of opposites -

oh time,
 coffin behind the cot.

There is a complex of reality here captured in the

severe brevity of the paradox.

Although in the recollection of the past, the point of view is synthesised through the consciousness of an adult, the poet deploys the impressionistic consciousness of his childhood to show us a glorious past -

Where pampered yams break heaps bounds
and the plantain leans earthwards
with joy of harvest.
This is Ubo Abusoro
where my first faltering steps
broke the earthworm on the path of dawn (p.5).

Here the destruction wrought on the natural vegetation is both a factor of objective phenomena, 'time', and that of man (agbegilodo), particularly the timber merchant 'whose exploitative improvidence is symbolised... by the ubiquitous agbegilodo.'¹¹

All this 'looking back' Osundare says, 'becomes one of the weapons against a looming monster.'¹² So the memory shifts, to present a durbar, as it were, of the flora and fauna: The Iroko is the sturdiest of trees which forces the sawyer to beat 'a hasty retreat to the whetting stone'. The Oganwo may have height but it lacks the 'hardy majesty of the Iroko'. The Ayunre gives way easily and becomes the 'clown of the fireplace.' But above all these the poet endorses the palm tree. Apart

from the fact that it is evergreen it nurtures nuts,
 wine and life. From these the poet moves to the fauna
 - 'bevy of birds' 'barracks of beasts'. From this
 aspect of life the poet is more captivated by the
 potentials of the image of the chameleon as the
 metaphor of reality -

Count your colours, oh chameleon,
 aborigine of wood and wind
 count your colours
 in the rainbow of the fern,
 in the thick, ashen hide
 of the sappling tree.
 Count your colours,
 dandy hueman who walks
 so natively naked because he has
 a forest of a thousand garbs.

It is the attributes of the chameleon, its
 kaleidescopic aura and its apparent harmlessness vis-a-
 vis other mean or destructive fauna that makes it the
 choice for imparting a daily but hardly recognised
 profundity -

... the sun
 ... succeeds the night (p. 10).

Further lessons of life can also be drawn , for
 different reasons, with the example of termites -

... a queenly pharoah swollen
 with stony orders,
 block-headed termites building...
 laying bricks and eggs
 their milling chambers tenanted
 by lashes of unquestioning labour -

against this background -
 their winged tribe akimbo

standing in some safe and sweatless shade (p.10),

the rhetorical question -
 and when these eggs are hatched
 will they, too, adult into
 a brick - laying brood,
 unquestioning ? -

is answered in the 'silence' of the text; given Osundare's perception of social classes which the termite hierarchically exemplifies. The new world the poet would wish for the hatched eggs is a free egalitarian one brought about by the questioning of the oppressive status-quo and its subsequent destruction.

A vista of reality can also be gleaned from the example of the Patonmo which actively presents a coy, deceptive outer world and shrinks back at the slightest threat to its existence in order to protect its virtue-

Coy mistress of gallant pilgrims
 swooning, swooning at every touch.
 Old men say your corset is calico
 your undershirt of fastest steel.
 But after each protest, your leafy gaurds
 are down again
 down when the invading stallions are gone...(p.11).

After the incredible, breath - taking journey through the womb of time, partaking in a kaleidescope of experiences drawn from the scenery, from mother earth, it is almost with a jolt that the reader is reminded

that all is the work of memory: -

Any now
memory,

loud whisper of yester - voices
confluence of unbroken rivers
lower your horse of remembrance
let me dismount (P.12)

The next poem, 'The rocks rose to meet me' (p.13 - 17) makes use of the prominent physical features of the poet's locale; the Olosunta and Oroole rocks. The rocks 'occupy a central place in the cosmic consciousness of Ikere people.'¹³ They are regarded as objects of worship and are adequately respected. Olosunta is celebrated with the necessary feeling of awe by the poet. But the celebration does not achieve the same religio-mythic aura which the people of Ikere invest on the rock. What the poet is interested in about the rocks are their quality as 'creative, material essence, as lasting monuments of time and place.'¹⁴ This is so for the poet because the religio-mythic aura has lost its hold on him as an informing existential force-

The god I have killed
since wisdom's straightening sun
licked clean the infant dew of fancy (p.14).

What the rock can positively give to the poet is its famed gold which will be for the rectification of a

devasted 'material essence' -

The gold let us dig
not for the gilded craniums

of hollow chieftains
(time's undying sword awaits their necks
who deem this earth their sprawling throne)
With the gold let us turn hovels into havens
paupers into people (not princes)
so hamlet may hear
the tidings of towns
so the world may sprout a hand
of equal fingers (p.14).

The labour to be expended for this noble cause is clearly not for the reification of the greedy tendencies of Chieftains who are summarily condemned in the brilliant aside '(times undying sword awaits their . . . sprawling throne)' but the next aside '(princes)' is a bit of overwriting since the poet's meaning has already being suggested adequately in 'paupers into people'. From this poem one notices the easing off of the tension between the village and the town as obtains in Village Voices. At the end of the poem we are faced with a practical issue which serves as a commentary on life -

Yield your gold, lofty one.
But how dig the gold
without breaking the rock?

Rupture, violence, is part of man's built. On the surface the rhetoric may beg the issue since it seems

man can erect new material/spiritual cultures only by wrestling the components of the structure from nature itself. What Osundare is contemplating is whether there ought not to be a moral rider in man's appropriation of nature. For example, should natural features lose their form (aesthetic and so on) for man's utilitarian needs or for some form of gratification? From Olosunta we move to Oroole and the Commentary on reality is that pain/discomfort is a corrolary (perhaps ever beneficent) of mankind -

(harmattans here whip with flaying fury
of a slavemaster,
but how can we banish them
without a season of unripend peas?) (p.15).

'Harvestcall' (p. 18 - 21) celebrates the fruitful alignment of man's labour and nature's benevolence in the first three movements. In movement I for example, Yam, 'the king of food' becomes the metaphor of underscoring the interplay of opposing factors in man's attempt at assuaging the 'anger of hunger'.

This is Iyanfoworogi
where yams, ripe and randy,
waged a noisy war against the knife,
here where, subdued by fire,
efuru provoked mouthful clamour
from the combat of hungry wood:
the pestle fights the mortar
the mortar fights the pestle
a dough of contention smooths down
the rugged anger of hunger - (p.18).

This is a sharp perception of what may be thought as simple mundane chores but transformed by Osundare into an epic battle. The alert attention to the process of production culminates in the paradox:

a dough of contention smooths down
the rugged anger of hunger.

The fourth section of the poem returns us to the present of the poet's memory: Part I to III appear as a dated past. This acts sharply as a comment on the present. The mood is no longer joyous but lamentative. An unnatural scarciness has enveloped the earth. It is not as if the earth is barren, it is just that perhaps man is no longer ready to tease out from the earth its riches. Although it is not suggested why it is so in the poem, it may not be unconnected with the people's cultivation of cash crops through the agency of colonial agricultural policy. Or, it could be the result of western education which has stolen some of the labour hands to the school yard.

The second major movement of TEOTE, 'rainsongs' (p.27 - 37) is a celebration of the giver and sustainer of life. This is understandable within the context of an agrarian community totally dependent on the rain. From the first poem, 'Let Earth's Pain Be Soothed' to

the last poem in the section; 'But sometimes when it rains', we notice a sequential process. The dry, dusty, famished environment later becomes too wet for comfort. Between these two extremes of want and plenty we also derive a comment on the ambiguity of human character: man complains for a lack and complains when there is too much. In this section there is a concern with mood, landscape or image for its sake without much overt political tones except in the poem, 'Who says the drought was here?' (p.34 - 35). This poem serves as a reminder to the evil days, as a note of caution in the days of plenty. In one instance the joyous Now is compared in the same breath to the parlours Past -

palms have shed their shroud of brown
cast over forest tops
by the careless match of tinder days
when flares floods the earth
and hovering hawks taloned the tale
to the ears of the deafening sky.

The third section, 'homecall' (p.39 - 51) is the anchor leg to the marathon flight of memory and imagination. It opens with a dense, quietly contemplative poem 'Dawncall' (p.39 -, 40) then shifts to an active meditative voice in the panoramic purview of 'Excursion' (p. 41 - 42). In the third poem, 'Farmer - Born' (P. 43 - 44) the poet states his

resume as it were. This is the emblem which he carries, which partly defines the cause of his humanism. We see the unmatched attachment of the persona to his rural background as a factor to the earthy groundings of his aspirations. This romantic ideal is despoiled by new demands, new ways of life which would seem to leave the poet permanently famished. The irony of the repeated phrase, 'Farmer - born peasant - bred' is nowhere profound as in the last stanza:

Farmer - born peasant bred
 Classroom - bleed
 I have thrown open my kitchen doors
 and asked hunger to take a seat,
 my stomach a howling dump
 of carolina rice.

'They too are the earth' (p.45) argues for the recognition of the wretched of the earth and the 'weaker sex.' It is an irony of fate that while the mighty can cruise in their mercedes cars, the poor end up 'cruising' on the tyres of the cars which have been fashioned into shoes. While Osundare asserts the citizenship of the wretched of the earth, he questions whether those who have the means and power to exploit and degrade the earth can be honoured with same -

Are they of this earth
 who fritter the forest and harry the hills
 Are they of this earth
 who live that earth may die
 Are they ?

But the earth does not sleep. It is the inscrutable eye of justice, knowing and appreciating the sufferings of the working peoples, the poor, and totting up the crime of the oppressors. A judgement whose tone echoes the revolution is visited on the oppressors -

And the earth,
 the earth receives the green fruits
 with dusty tears,
 the earth receives them
 saying:

behold these seeds planted so soon
 in the season before the rains
 let them sprout in the month
 of daring struggles;
 let them bloom
 and kill the killer pest (p.47)

This poem shows that Osundare has not lost his old militancy. He does not harangue from poem to poem like in the earlier poems. The militancy here is an aspect of the exploration of possibilities of life. Thus given the vista presented by the poet earlier in TEOTE, and when the poems are taken as a whole, the militancy becomes a logical culmination to the dynamics of change.

'Ours to plough not to plunder' (P.48 - 49) is a resume of the earth as well as the poet's concern with

how it should be exploited for the good of man -

Our earth is an unopened grainhouse,
a bustling barn in some far, Uncharted jungle
a distant gem in a rough unhappy dust

This earth is
ours to work not waste
ours to man not to maim
This earth is ours to plough not to plunder.

The last poem in TEOTE, 'our Earth will Not Die' (p. 50 - 56) is as much an expression of fear as of hope. The dimension of the destruction of flora and the annihilation of fauna is on a catastrophic scale. The issue is beyond that of the secretion of industrial effluents or the devastation of natural landscape through myriad other means but that of the greater danger of a nuclear holocaust -

weeping willows drip mercury tears
in the eye of sobbing terrains
a nuclear sun rises like a funeral ball
reducing man and meadow to dust and dirt.

'Stubborn hope' confronts this possibility thus:
our earth will see again...
....The sea will drink its heart's content
when a jubilant thunder flings open the skygate
and a new rain tumbles down
In drums of joy.
Our earth will see again

this earth, OUR EARTH.

To entrench Osundare's humanism in TEOTE there is an extensive use of personification. The earth, its animate and inanimate properties breathe and pulse with

life. In the long run we are reminded that whatever image or symbolism we note in literature the end result is the attempt to address the human being. The artefacts that are used in the communication serve to deepen the metaphor of life as a 'mask dancing'.

MS is the poem that shows the highest eclectic influence. In parts it echoes writers like Achebe (who made popular the Igbo proverb; 'the world is like a mask dancing'), Soyinka (the use of paradox), Maya Angelou (Now I know why the caged bird sings) and Edward Brathwaite.

The promethean - like figure of the moon is mobilised to serve the poet's intention. The moon has a capacity for good and evil, death and life, youth and maturity and other coupling of opposites. While the aftermath of the synthesis of opposites provides a profound commentary on life it is not always possible to know what particular aspect of reality the poet is referring to or its applicability. The vagueness may be the result of the moon itself, its enigmatic quality. In this instance, concrete, discursive language when it is used emphasises its failure to fix a permanent grin to the face of the moon. When the language is highly allusive sometimes it

succeeds merely in dancing across the face of an idea leaving the footsteps of lyricism in its wake. The poet perhaps envisages this criticism and to ameliorate matters he confesses the culpability of his device -

All, all await

The echoing thunder of my riddling chants (P.2)
Generally, the poems can be markedly surreal and in instances lack the narrative structure of the earlier poems.

Before we look at MS we shall point out some 'forensic' issue about the moon as used by Osundare. It is generally assumed that it is the moon which creates tidal waves and diurnal changes on the earth. Osundare echoes this perception thus:

And the moon masters the stars
masters the sea
sharpens every tip of its tidal teeth
Battles every grain of its salty roost
Probes every drop of its diurnal blue
Ah! the latitudes of sweat
On the brow of the sea; (Ms p.2)

Sharing the same idea is the poem 'In memory of Lake Nyos' (P. 13) -

Ticking tantrum of sleeping earth,
the moon laughs in lava
houses molten spasm
from the spine of trembling fumes;
the moon, the moon's fingers
are epochs of ash,
her bowl lakes of lethal lore.

Scientifically it has been verified that it is not the moon which has these cataclysmic effect on the earth but the planet Venus and to a lesser degree Jupiter. The moon merely regulates the timings of these climatic occurrences.

In MS the many guises of the moon is stated time and again in imagistic and linguistic turns thus reiterating its change-ability -

And in the the milky grove
between the cloudmountains
the moon's tropical eyes
are like chameleons of silver forests (p.5)

The notion of transformation, earlier noted in TEOTE, operates on many fronts and suggests plurality. We shall isolate and use for illustration two instances. At one level it is a celebration of an intrinsic quality, a metaphor of reality itself. At another level the poet assumes the consciousness of the creative powers of the moon and its ability to shape and influence reality itself -

We called the statue
To a talking feast
Before knowing the chisel
Never left a tongue in its rigid mouth..

The matter will be redressed when-

From the silence of the seasons
From the hush which murdered the wind
With thunder's swords

We borrow the restless throat of adoko.
 We borrow the permanent quarry
 On the parrots beclamoured beak

... From seasons which pass but never part
 I borrow moonbeams to shape the wind

That is why the moon is called to witness the depravity
 of man's existence and in the form of a supplication
 to inquire 'how long' the debasement will last -

Can you see the bamboo ribs
 Of our walls strummed like a rusty harp
 By the fingers of playful rains?
 Can you count the furrows on the village brow
 When the ploughshares has bared its teeth
 And the season reaps the moan
 Of broken worms? (p.9)

The seasons then are of utmost importance, their hues
 and variety suggests mutability and dynamism (poem IX -
 X).

Oh heels, oh tree!
 and the plagues which christen the epochs,
 the booms which branch in eras... (p.16)
 ...

A monday flings open the door of the week,
 A plaint clay in its waking hand:
 Supple moments, oh supple moments!
 And brittle breaths unchain the dance
 And ample hands unhush the drum
 Not even the salt of sea, so bitter
 With foams of epileptic scars
 Not even the deciduous hustle of declining herbs
 Can grey this dappled dream
 So gently planted in the temple of our sleep
 The universe which sows its minutes
 Will reap its hours (p.19)

In some instances the enigma of life is captured

appositionally. In 'Mooncantation' (p.24 - 26) the first four stanzas present a luminous fairly positive image of the moon. The other stanzas except the last one, chronicle a series of misdeeds, unequal economic relations, the exerting effect of nature and other philosophical issues. The poem ends on an unequivocally positive note:

The moon the moon is a crown without a king,
the shoal without its sharks, the flame without
its fang; the moon is the throaty clatter of
breaking chains of breaking chains of breaking
chains.

When such positive outlook occurs it signifies the instances when nature is not allowed to mechanically replicate her dialectics. This echoes the possibility of man's intervention in the affairs of his life. The negation of man's reality is not to lead to some neutral state or to regression but to progress. MS clearly indicates this. That is, in as much as there is the attempt to capture the objective structure of reality as shifting:-

The world is a mask dancing
 mask dancing
 mask dancing
Every agile sole knows the sizzling symphony
of the winged dust (p.34)

the last stanza suggests that things can not be allowed to blindly take their 'normal cause' -

But if the sun drags the river
 into its searching harem,
 can it lift the sands
 from the armpit of earth? (p.35)

The last stanza of 'When' (p.51 - 52) is also a variation of the above theme. It is a record of struggle, a record of defiance:

We shall not go till we have eaten the elephant of
 the moon
 We shall not go
 till our scrupulous eyes have stitched the broken
 tendons
 of the sky
 we shall not go
 till our green dreams spawn golden suns
 in the chronicle of stubborn trees.

'Shadows of Time' (p.70 74) sums up all the poet's earlier explorations where -

Life's tide crash and crest
 In the oceans of our growing eyes (P.71).

Transformation of reality through the action of man and the passage of time is the one permanent feature of life on earth. The earlier concerns of Osundare in TEOTE is further enlarged, reiterated in MS. There is anguish, joy, greed, sacrifice, dessication, regeneration, constantly clashing and overcoming one another. The point of reference remains the human being and the possibilities of expanding his consciousness, a more active disposition to the

realities of life on earth and how a new Man can sustain a better, more egalitarian world community.

Using the common symbol of the earth and the moon Osundare has succeeded in looking at reality as a dialectical phenomena. As representative metaphors the earth and the moon are forces that are interlinked with the struggle of man. They are not divisibly detached natures, external to mankind nor are they inscrutable forces that nebulously affect the conduct of man. While it is true that the cumulative effect of man's use of his environment not only threatens the environment and man himself, Osundare believes that it is not too late to appeal to the rational part of man to exercise some caution. But where possible he suggests a world revolution that will dismantle the structures hampering the progress of mankind as a truly unified body. This enhances the action of mankind on earth and can provide a measure of distinction and not of extinction.

Chapter four. Footnotes

1. Oleg Kolbasov: Ecology: Political Institutions and Legislation Moscow, progress publishers, 1983, P. 24.
2. Lewis Manson: The Birth of the Moon. California, Dennis Landman, 1978.
3. Oleg Kobbasov; op. cit., p. 9.
4. Friedrich Engels: Dialectics of Nature, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1974, p.70.
5. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: The German Ideology, Moscolwd, progress publishers, 1976.
6. Oleg Kolbasov; op. cit., p.19.
7. Niyi Osundare: The Eve of the the Earth. Ibadan, Heinemann, 1986.
8. Niyi Osundare: Moonsongs, Ibadan, Spectrum, 1988.
9. Seamus Heaney: North, London, Faber and Faber, 1975, p.52.
10. Wole Soyinka: Ake: The Years of Childhood. Ibadan, Spectrum, 1988.
11. See the Introduction, p. xii of TEOTE
12. Ibid, p. xii.
13. Ibid, p. xiii.
14. Ibid, p. xiii.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: 'Between the mission and the vision'.

This thesis primarily attempted to show the factors that imbue Osundare's poetry with its peculiar ideological outlook. We begin from the premise that the concept of ideology itself, inspite of having various interpretations and meanings can only be understood dialectically. Viewed as such, ideology becomes a complex of ideas, meanings, system of values, that man gives and has of himself, his universe, which he supports or rejects, and which necessarily affects his actions. These ideas are not just imaginary in the sense of their not being 'real' but can become concrete material forces when acted upon by the human being. But even if the guiding principle is praxis and man's ability for further cognition emanating from this praxis, the individual may not be totally aware of the specific complexity of his placement, the result of his action (and the action of others) in a wider and ever changing social reality. Thus contradictions may arise from man's acts. Through these processes we have attempted to look at the unfolding practice of Osundare up to Moonsongs. It is not possible however to simply

study Osundare from a textual scope without an idea of the background that influenced the crystallisation of his ideas.

The early generation Nigerian poets, emerging from the crucible of colonial ideology, at least succeeded in laying some basis for an understanding of modern Nigerian poetry in English. The pioneer generation of Clark, Okara, Echeruo, Okigbo and Soyinka further consolidated that tradition. This generation attempted to communicate a sense of severance from their African roots in an essentially esoteric voice. The style of their poetry, even while using local motifs, borrowed heavily from the Euromodernist tradition of verse which sometimes celebrates the private anguish of the poet. At the time when the poets were seeking for some sense of identity from the damage done to their psychical and physical selves the tenor of their anguish could not have been any less privatist: In the first place there were few western type educated Nigerians. Their audience was therefore restricted to possibly those few, and an essentially white clientele. Thus, while they were fundamentally irked by colonial abuse to define and authenticate the African personality, they were ideologically and

practically compelled or ideologically persuaded to practice their poetry within a neo - colonially structured milieu. Secondly, until the later half of the 60's the poets were not too interested in or economically affected by the crippling nature of post - independent Nigeria, a position that would have enabled them to anchor their angst in the general disappointment of the masses with independence. While Okigbo showed the keenest perception of the situation and reflected same in his later poetry, the rest, like the leopard, found it difficult to change their spots. But it was at this point that the depressing conditions roused up new demands and expectations. These indeed assisted the emergence of the Osundare generation and the institutionalisation of radical thinking in the country's cultural and intellectual life. This minor revolution gave new perspective to the codification in poetry of the dynamics of social malaise.

Osundare's early poetry declared its commitment to the wretched masses and denigrated the privileged class whose corruption, ineptitude and servile mentality to western capitalist ethos has robbed the country of progress. Objectively, his attempt is a negation of the earlier practice of poetry in Nigeria from a

traditional avant - gardist posture. In this tradition, radical political thought fuses with a radical aesthetics. While his radical politics calls for a socially based ownership of the means of production, the aesthetics issue is not all that straightforward: while there can be no 'permanent aesthetics', Osundare's early verse attempted to free Nigerian poetry from arcane formal constructions. Graphically the poetry may be more accessible than the pioneer poets. Also, the systems of thoughts he refers to may be more easily understood. But inspite of these tendencies, aspects of the past practice of the pioneer poets manifest themselves here and there.

In the early Osundare ideology functions from the perspective of absolute negation - old/new, privileged/masses. Ideology then operated on the basis of typification; the working people and their allies and the bourgeoisie and its allies. This affords a sharper perception of the problematic of oppression and struggle in which there will ultimately be a transformation of the status - quo. Here the philosophical posture is rational, logical.

By Village Voices Osundare has reached a watershed in his development. His poetry looks both

backward and forward to an understanding of reality as a political, social and historical - existential systematised phenomena. This will deepen Osundare's perception of the concept of ideology even as the idea of class struggle still retains its immediacy. On the one hand we notice, particularly in the instance where we have a successful fusion of the poet's and the villager's voices, an understanding of phenomena beyond just politically polarised systems, views or ideas. We note further, an increasing concern with the existential interpellations of individuals and groups as possibly having a profound effect on the way reality is perceived. At this stage the poet's choice of the peasantry fulfills in part a logical commitment to the plight of a section of society which forms the majority. It is possible, because of the choice of a class distinct from others (peasantry) to assume that the ideological schism engendered by polarisation in the earlier poems is present in this 'maturing' Osundare. There is that schism of town versus village which, but for the earlier idea of unity of the oppressed, would have reduced the dynamics of revolution to an oversimplification. Also, the heavy oral quality of the poems furthers the commitment of

the poet in speaking the 'language' of the people, as it is expressed in songs, proverbs, folk - wisdom and so on.

The later development of Osundare and the deployment of the concept of ideology apprehends reality as an enigma but with man ever capable of transforming his life positively inspite of set - backs. Coupled with the idea of reality as paradoxical is the idea of the Universalisation of that dialectic. Since the fate of mankind and the environment is intricately connected, Osundare admits the pluralistic ways in which reality unwhorls itself. His choice of symbols from natural phenomena (earth and moon) underscores aspects of nature which influence mankind's behaviour and how mankind and nature dialectically influence each other. But Osundare's universalism and its vision of a unified mankind is specifically related to the perspective of the underdog (Nation, class), who must repossess the world from those who abuse it.

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