POWER AND CANON FORMATION: AN INTERTEXTUAL STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF NIYI OSUNDARE'S POETRY ON RECENT NIGERIAN POETRY OF ENGLISH EXPRESSION

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis: 'Power and Canon Formation: An Intertextual Study of the Influence of Niyi Osundare's Poetry on Recent Nigerian Poetry of English Expression' was carried out by me in the Department of English and Literary Studies. The information derived from the literature have been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. No part of this thesis has been previously presented for another degree or diploma at this or any other institution.

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CERTIFICATION

This thesis entitled: 'Power and Canon Formation: An Intertextual Study of the Influence of Niyi Osundare's Poetry on Recent Nigerian Poetry of English Expression' by Isah IBRAHIM meets the regulations governing the award of Doctor of Philosophy of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my late mother who discovered the literariness in me and to my two children Abubakar (Sadiq) and Hauwa'u (Siyam).

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the intertextual relationship between second generation Nigerian poets and the recent Nigerian poets from the perspectives of power relation and canon formation. The study submits that Niyi Osundare, the iconic poet of the second generation stock, exerts a lot of intertextual influence on the poetic practice of contemporary Nigerian poets particularly Remi Raji, Akeem Lasisi, Joe Ushie and Emmanuel Egya Sule who are examined in this study. The study argues that although the contemporary poets are not insular to the poetic influence of other global literatures, the core aesthetics of their poetry exhibits a visible intertextual dialogic with the poetic style of Osundare, their immediate forbear. This trend, as the study argues, instances an intergenerational continuity in the poetry genre. It also chronicles a paradigmatic shift of intertextual relations from the vertical angle where the former colonisers' artistic practice serves as model to the horizontal where the earlier tradition within the postcolonial space serves as model. The study is a qualitative research and essentially a content analysis of both the primary and secondary data which are sourced substantially from the library. It also deploys the Poststructuralist intertextuality as theoretical framework to probe the extent of the intertextual relations. The study establishes that to fully appreciate the recent Nigerian poetry of English expressions there is the compelling need to study its history of intertextual relation. In addition to the intertextual dimension, the study proves that the symbiotic nexus of power and canon formation equally provides the ontological base for the interrogation of the aesthetic sensibilities of recent Nigerian poetry in English.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

This study examines the poetry of Niyi Osundare within the premise of its canonical status and power relations and its subsequent intertextual significance for some contemporary Nigerian poets. The study is based on the assumption that Osundare occupies a central position in the history of not only Nigerian poetry in English expression but also modern African literature. His prominence manifests in his ability to construct and sustain a distinct poetic identity which in its matter and manner exemplifies the inscription of a decidedly African poetry that privileges, as its artistic subject, the voiceless African masses, fundamentally victims of leadership mismanagement and neglect. By so doing, he succeeds in consolidating a literary canon of decolonisation which is defined most importantly from the aperture of power relations and the deep seated binary opposition between the centre and the periphery as implanted in the nerve centre of language.

The inexorable but intricate relationship between power and canon formation in literary circles is such that not only are the two analogous, but they also signify each other complementarily. Canon is invariably a discursive site of not only literary tradition but of power relations and hegemony. As Foucault argues, power emanates not only in the vertical axis of political/institutional hierarchy but also in all horizontal axis of

intellectual, cultural and social discourses. According to Foucault, we think of power beyond the political domination and resistance but as a complex relation that policies and produces. Foucault (1980:29) further argues that "power and knowledge directly imply one another". Consequent upon this, he further states, "there is no power relation without the correlative – constitution of knowledge." As Foucault constantly emphasises, there is no "any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."Intrinsic upon any form of knowledge production, following Foucault's argument, is the interplay of power relations.

It then follows that power and canon – the latter a continuum of knowledge production – are two historically interrelated discourses. This is because right from "its origin in specifically textual and scriptural traditions" as Mitchell (2005:20) affirms, "canon is anything but a static or monolithic notion of power and authority." In contemporary literary practice, canon implies the standardization of literary texts by institutions and individuals as classics that in all their aesthetic and ideological nuances epitomise the dominant culture and or tradition of their context. Linked with the inherent subtleties of ideology and power relations, canon is necessarily a fluid and contestable terrain in literary practice. Adeoti (2001:21) captures the conflictual dimensions intrinsic in canon formation. He says:

> Canon, from its origin and practice is distinguished by contradiction. It presupposes the existence of commonly shared codes of creation and consumption of cultural product, which

> enhances the practice of arts. Yet, it implicates the existence of a set of prescribed rules by which 'standard' or 'correctness' in creation is measured.

To such question as to what constitutes a canon for instance or the standard of its measurement, there have been various responses. While Mathew Arnold's famous "the best which has been thought and said" is viewed by many a critic as the benchmark for canon formation, it is still been seen as unspecific a proposition to qualify as a standard signifier of canon formation. What constitutes the best, in Arnold's thesis, is not yet made clear. However, on the question of what makes a particular work canonical, Bloom (1995:3) says:

> The answer more often than not has turned out to be strangeness, a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange.

Bloom's claim, in a sense, re-echoes Aristotelian generic criticism where Aristotle singles out catharsis as an end effect of a successful tragic play. It also recalls the Formalist concept of defamiliarisation as an aesthetic element that defines the literariness of literature. Bloom (1995:3) argues further that:

> When you read a canonical work for a first time, you encounter a stranger, an *uncanny* startlement rather than a fulfillment of expectation (emphasis mine).

For Bloom, the uncanny is one of the archetypal aesthetic templates in canon formation which affirms that canon formation incorporates the inevitable

interplay of power and the uncanny. The uncanny in canon formation signifies, according to Bloom, a mark of originality, since, as Bloom (1995) argues, 'originality must always hover in an inaugural aspect of any work that incontestably wins the agon with tradition and joins the canon.' The uncanny becomes, in this context, a necessary pivotal encoder of power relation in canon formation.

However, by prioritising the aesthetic consideration of the uncanny as the mark of originality and as the totalising signifier of canon-formation, Bloom has ultimately exiled the historical, the political and the cultural as contingencies of literary appreciation and, therefore, of canon-formation. By so doing, he has consigned literature to the mantra of the 'universalist' apologists of Anglo-American New Critics. This claim however, is hardly palatable with the literary critics of the former colonies whose literary canon consists, first of all, of identity formation, complexities of Nation and Nationhood in matters of aesthetics and thematic concerns. This raises more questions than answers as, Bloom, for reasons more political and cultural than his mania for the universality of the uncanny, rejects the multi-cultural dissension of canon expansion championed by blacks and feminist critics for instance (see Guillory 1993).

The critical insights discussed above on the complementarities of the relationship between power and canon and the aesthetics of the uncanny form the central concerns of this study. The insights provide the centre-

planks for the study of the extent and pattern of influence of Osundare's poetry on recent Nigerian poetry as it relates to canon formation and the interface of power relations.

Niyi Osundare is unarguably the figure-poet of the Alter-Native poetry tradition in Nigeria who achieved his poetic prominence through avangardist experimentation with both form and content. The Alter-Native poetry tradition in Nigeria's literary history refers to the temporal and paradigmatic shift of artistic expression that emerged after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70). As a temporal poetry tradition, it refers to the post Civil War poetry aesthetics generally referred to as second generation poetry tradition which, as pointed earlier; emerged at the thick of leadership crisis that manifested about three decades after the Civil War; while its paradigmatic undertone manifests in its sustained experimentation with the aesthetics of negation deployed to counter and confront the excesses of the military regime that dominated the leadership space.

Seemingly, because of "his aversion to the pervasive atmosphere of state terror and repression, more than most of his contemporaries," as Bodunde (2003:285) remarks, Osundare reinterprets "oral aesthetics to create a form of poetry which is revolutionary in terms of content, form and medium of communication." For the first time in the history of Nigerian poetry of English expression, a manifesto poem prefaced his maiden collection *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983), charting, as it were, the poetic

recipe underlining his artistic concern and that of his generation, and a denunciation, all at once; of the preceding poetry practice.

Since "the process of canon formation" as Onyewuchi (1995) writes, "demands a fending off of the previously strong writings that had preceded it;"the publication of Osundare's *Songs of the Marketplace*, his maiden edition, in1983; supplementing the earlier efforts by Odia Ofeimun, as many critics argue, marked the emergence of a new poetic tradition called the Alter-Native poetry tradition in Nigeria's literary history. Thus, with the publication of the *Songs of the Marketplace* in 1983, Osundare consolidated the fracturing of the hitherto prevailing poetic sensibility in Nigeria's literary history.

Osundare's poetic oeuvre does not only succeed in popularising a tradition of cultural essentialism but also of poetry of critical discontent. The novel poetic sensibilities which Osundare remodeled and sustained was, in all manners of historical clarity, inspired by Odia Ofeimun in his maiden poetry volume *The Poet Lied* (1980).The publication of the *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983) instanced the poet's bold experimentation with and consolidation of a new poetic sensibility whose concentric effects is felt not only among his generation, but the next generation. "Since Niyi Osundare" as Echeruo (2012:63) writes, "Nigerian poetry has taken a decidedly new turn".In the opening manifesto poem "poetry is" in *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983), Osundare, in a manner quintessentially revolutionary; expresses his

discontent with the hermetic poetic practice of the preceding generation of Soyinka *et al.* and suggests, instead, a lucid oriented poetry in both form and content.

As such, one hallmark of Osundare's poetic identity and fame is his success in experimentation with the total stock of language, succeeding in the process, in refreshingly defamiliarising the reader by deepening his appreciation and vision. Equally unprecedented in Nigeria's literary history Osundare, with the likes of Femi Osofisan and Odia Ofeimun, pioneered verse journalism, where from 1985-90 he freelanced a poetry column in the *Tribune*, a renowned newspaper in Nigeria. With this singular act, Osundare succeeded in popularising his name alongside his new poetic style and vision. The series of poems published in the newspaper were later collected and published as a volume entitled *Songs of the Season* (1990). The newspaper sojourn offers Osundare an interactive platform with his teeming readers in form of letters; availing him in the process of the opportunity of stamping his canon of influence in the manner of poetry writing and appreciation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The dominant tendencies used in defining the aesthetic features of Nigerian poetry, besides the language factor, are to trace its intertextual root to the western art form; or link its aesthetics nuances to the Africa's traditional art form and, in the words of Chinweizu *et al.*, to define some poetry as the miscellany of the middle ground where the artists graft and embellish the western art form with the traditional oral arts. This study seeks to shift the debate on what constitutes Nigerian poetry from the dimensions mentioned above to a more self-conscious intertextual perspectives current in recent Nigeria's literary history.

In specific terms, contemporary Nigerian poets are more influenced by the body of African writings than other world literatures. In this vein, the problematic of this study is anchored on the premise that recent Nigerian poetry draws its core intertextual source materials from the immediate preceding generation. As such, this study proposes that while recent Nigerian poetry is not impervious to other influences within and outside the African continent, its core aesthetics exhibits inter-generational intertextuality with artistic practice set down by earlier generations of Nigerian poets. These intertextual echoes in the poetry of third generation Nigerian poets are examined from the discursive matrixes of canon formation and power relations. The study is therefore anchored on the following assumptions that:

1 The aesthetics of intertextuality defines the poetic idiom of recent Nigerian poetry in English expression.
2. The dialectical tension of power relations inscribes the paradigmatic change of poetic sensibilities between the second generation and the third generation Nigerian poets.
3. Recent Nigerian poets model their style after Niyi Osundare's inscribing a horizontal dimension of intertextual relations.
4. The intertextual dimension of recent Nigerian poetry affirms the Poststructuralists' postulation that texts are only defined by their intertextual relations.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to establish that the organic interface between power and canon or between canon formation and the aesthetics of intertextuality, defines the literary sensibilities of the recent Nigerian poetry of English expression. This symbiotic nexus invariably provides the ontological base for the interrogation of the aesthetic sensibilities of the poetry corpus in this study. As such, to appreciate the recent Nigerian poetry of English expression, one must have recourse to its literary history of intertextuality. In this light, this study therefore, sets to achieve the following objectives:

1. Demonstrate that as an active constituent of reality, recent Nigerian poetry of English expression is organically intertextual in its texture and mien.
2. Prove that recent Nigerian poets model their poetic style after Niyi Osundare a second generation iconic poet.
3. Illustrate that this intertextual influence is precipitated by the anxiety of canon inclusion and power relations.
4 Demonstrate that the intertextual relations can best be illuminated by the theoretical insights of Poststructuralist intertextuality.

1.4 Justification/Significance of the Study

Several researches have been conducted with regards to Niyi Osundare's poetry since the publication of his maiden poetry volume in 1983.The perspectives of the researchers range from the study of Osundare's Marxist orientation Victor (1986); Onyemachi (1988); Ibiwari (1991); to the poet's deployment of ideology in his poetics Maiwada (1993); Ibrahim (2010); his political commitment Abdu (2003); to his stylistic cadences Gabriel (1985).Recent studies, especially the book length critical compendium on the poetry of Niyi Osundare edited by AbdulRasheed NaAllah (2003) equally analysed Osundare's poetry from different critical perspectives.

The studies range from the examination of Osundare's styles in form of poetry as performance; to that of the examination of his infusion of Yoruba folklore and cosmos in the construction of a distinct African poetic identity. The compendium consists of about 38 articles by different scholars across the globe. It focuses much on the study of the style and themes of Osundare's poetry.

However, from the study of the available literatures on Osundare's poetry, there is much work to be done in the area of intertextual dialogic with the recent Nigerian poets from the angle of canon formation and power relations. This study fills this gap and contributes to the debate about the distinctiveness of the African literary canon and the availability of allusive texts within Africa which African writers draw from and engage in dialogic imagination. This study, in this context, responds to Ogede's (2011) claim that intertextual study is largely neglected in Africa. He says:

> Among the most prominent characteristic features of African literature largely unremarked until now, is how the writers negotiate strategies for authorship by looking to African texts before creating their own works.

This study intervenes to fill this discursive space by proposing fresh insights to demonstrate that Africa's intertextual dialogic is essentially horizontal in its social formation as a result of intergenerational intertextuality between the second generation and third generation Nigerian poets. These insights also manifest in the manner the contemporary Nigerian poets, unlike their

counterparts in the prose genre; draw their models not from the first generation but from the second generation Nigerian poets particularly Niyi Osundare. This instance, where a dominant social semiotics exercises influence over the other, as is the case between Osundare and the recent poets, codifies the interface of power relations and by implications of canon formation.

1.5 Scope and Delimitation

This study examines Niyi Osundare's poetry styleand thematic concern with a view to tracing their intertextual significance for some recent Nigeria poets. However, the study is limited to the study of four of Osundare's poetry volumes namely; *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983); *VillageVoices* (1984); The *Eye of the Earth* (1986), and *Waiting Laughters* (1990).The limitation is informed by the use of criteria sampling choosing only those texts that manifest the core stylistic and thematic particularities of Niyi Osundare; and which at the same time draw the attention of both literary critics and artists in addition to the recent Nigerian poets examined in this study.

While there are many recent Nigerian poets who draw their allusive data from Osundare's poetry, this work is restricted in scope to the study of the selected poetry volumes of only four of these poets namely: Remi Raji, Akeem Lasisi, Joe Ushie and Emmanuel Egya Sule. The selection is done

through criteria sampling by choosing only those texts that clearly reflect the core intertextual patterns central to the study.

1.6 Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative research that essentially undertakes content analysis of the relevant texts as methodological framework and poststructuralist intertextuality as critical analytical tool. The research is therefore library based. As such, materials in form of books, Journal articles, official monographs and Newspaper articles are sourced from the library (e-library inclusive) and other electronic and non-electronic sources.

1.7 Chapter Structure

The study is conceived and structured into five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction which consists of the background to the study, problem statement, aim and objectives, justification of the study, research methodology, and theoretical framework etc. Chapter two reviews the related literature and provides missing links that the current study bridges. In chapter three, four of Niyi Osundare's poetry collections namely *Songs of the Marketplace,Village Voices*, *The Eye of the Earth and Waiting Laughters* are analysed. Chapter four consists of the analysis of the intertextual dimensions between the selected volumes of Raji, Lasisi, Ushie and Sule on the one hand and that of Osundare on the other. Chapter five is the

conclusion as such embodies the purview of the argument raised in chapters one to four and in the course of the study.

1.8 Canon Formation in Nigeria's Literary Tradition

The interface of politics, culture and aesthetics in literary canon formation and its intrinsic complex power relations has been a contending terrain in both literary and cultural criticism for decades. Yet in colonised nations, including those internally colonised, the contention surrounding canon formation is deeply heightened and intense. In such nations, canon formation is analogous with identity formation as it codifies the aspiration and intrinsic desires of the colonies to construct their distinct, national identity in addition to their individual literary temperament.

The African experience, in our case, is an apt example. It signifies the daunting, yet endless, search for the redefinition of literature, including its canon; to suit Africa's sociopolitical experience in addition to its distinct world view and culture. The conferences held in the early 1960s in Makerere and Fourah Bay College are prompted in this direction. On the interplay of power relations, cultural identity and literary aesthetics in Africa's canon formation, Ojaide (2009:II) offers lucid explanation. He says:

> The cultural identity of modern African literature is a major consideration in establishing a canon for its text …these cultural qualities include the utilitarian function of the literature social cohesion, the ethical/moral nature of African civilisation, defence of African culture, African mystical life, ideas of law

> and order, peculiar attitude to time and space and special use of folklore and language especially of proverbs.

Endless as the list of the African literary repertoire may be, as suggested above, the list succeeds in establishing the intricate Africa's world view, and complex power relations manifested in its art form. This intricate pool of Africa's literary worldview, as a result of colonial experience, is *sine qua non* in the establishment of its canon. To corroborate Ojaide's claim, Waugh (2001:71) equally draws attention to the necessity of considering the knotty symbiosis of politics on the one hand and literary aesthetics on the other in matter of canon and canon formation. She says:

> To understand the formation of literary canon requires a series of the complex interplay of political and aesthetic values and a resistance to the desire to simplify things by collapsing one into the other (Waugh, 2001).

Besides the political and the aesthetics, the morality motif equally serves as an essential cultural template in Africa's canon formation. Again as Ojaide further observes, African's literary canon should also include:

> …those works that aim at changing the world as it is (often imperfect) and installing new values that will advance the betterment of society and individuals (Ojaide, 2009).

Thus, intrinsic to Africa's literary canon formation, is the privileging of its core values and their manifestations not only in art form but in the society at large. Africa's core values in its art form, in addition to its colonial and

postcolonial experiences, eschew the doctrine of arts-for-arts sake. It then presupposes that, across space and time, the notion of what is literary canon underscores the very *apriori* assumption of the question of what is literature. Waugh (2001:73) equally examines this trend in her analysis of the value indebtedness of canon and canon evaluation. The assumption that a text is *literature*, as Waugh (2001) remarks "is already bound up with *apriori* assumption of value." As such, to Waugh, literature is value-laden.

Ojaide (2009:10) further argues in this vein that "…the western definition of what makes literature is far narrower than the African concept of literature." This is because the definition of literature in Africa, as Ojaide further elaborates "…is inclusive of politics, philosophy, divination, mysticism and so on." From the foregoing, it can be deduced that it is difficult to truly arrive at what constitutes African literary canon without acknowledging the value indebtedness of its art form. However, this is not to admit that Africa's art form privileges matter over and above manner but that the two are symbiotically infused.

Canon formation in Africa is defined not essentially from the prism of textualities but from the vantage discursive spaces of culture, identity and Africa's colonial history. "Since literature is a cultural production," as Ojaide (2009) further reechoes, in his attempt to conceptualise African literary canon, then the "cultural identity of modern African writer is a major consideration in establishing a canon for its text". Cultural identity, as Ojaide

remarks, is a major signifier of Africa's literary canon. In this view, "The African literary canon" as Ojaide (2009:8) further explicates, "is based on the Africanness or Africanity and what it constitutes in literary terms." This submission provides a centre-plank for appropriating the dialectics of Nigeria's literary canon formation.

The history of literary canon formation in Nigeria arguably began with the emergence of published literary works in both English and vernacular languages. In the English medium it started in the late 19th Century with the evangelical literatures propagated by the white missionaries; while the indigenous versions sprang up at the beginning of the 20th Century. But, the Northern part of the country was much into writing in Arabic and Ajami as far back as the 15th Century. Thus, by way of historical necessity, we will restrict ourselves to the emergence of written texts in Roman script at the beginning of the 20th Century as our take-off point. The first quarter of the 20th Century witnessed the visibility of a significant number of literary texts written in the three major Nigerian languages, which, going by the semantics of canonicity as texts written with wider institutional prestige and readership, could be said to be canonical.

Fagunwa's novel *The Forest of a Thousand Demons,* Abubakar Imam's *Ruwan Bagaja* and *Magana Jari ce* 1, 2 & 3 are canonical texts written in the first quarter of the 20th Century. These writers pioneered artistic outlets that essentially depict the culture of identity formation as first

artistic principle since the writers were primarily concerned with the depiction of the cosmology of their respective cultures however remote. However, for the fact that canonicity in its strictest semantic sense implies wider readership, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages could not match the spread of the English language within and outside Nigeria. This is because while the three major languages are intrinsically provincial as such are taught in regions; English language is taught in schools across the country and spoken as an official language. Consequently it enjoys wider visibility and acceptability. In this regard, the language factor, in addition to other factors as the roles of the publication industries and academic criticism, constitutes one of the quintessential frontiers of canon formation in colonised countries as Nigeria. Onyewuchi (1995:2) further illustrates this claim where she says:

> For the Nigerian literary artist, the greatest canonical choice is the language in which to express creativity. Perhaps no other canon-aiding decision is as politically charged as the language question.

The above claim is particularly cogent in Nigeria's literary history since the Nigerian literary artist, like his African counterparts, is torn between using the colonialists' language and the indigenous language. However, language, with all its cultural and socio-political imperatives, is only a variant of the many essentialities of canon formation. The elitist politics of inclusion and exclusion counts a lot in this regard. To this effect, even though, for instance,

Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* (1952) is a pioneer text written in the English language, embodying all the ontological status of an African cosmology and literary aesthetics and Tutuola "being the most moralistic of all Nigerian writers," Achebe(cited in Killam&Rowe,2000:288),it does not enlist into the mainstream Nigerian literary canon as to be included in school curricula or to have earned the reviewers' 'favourable' comments for wider readership and recognition in the same proportion as that of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

But the contention surrounding the canonical status of Tutuola is enormous. Since one of the "…human activities that promote canon formation", as Onyewuchi remarks, "include the inclusion of texts on the curricula, reviews, literary awards…" "Tutuola's poor English," in the words of Killam&Rowe (2000:209); "necessitated some editorial intervention to render him intelligible to his readers."But this only explains part of the contention. Dathorne (1971:64) examines Tutuola's literary strengths from the way he treats his themes. He says while Achebe treats only the sociological themes, Tutuola treats the theme of threnodic myth of life and this, in Dathorne's view, is what gives Tutuola an edge over Achebe. Dathorne writes:

> Because of this, Tutuola stands at the very forefront of Nigerian literature and, by inference, African writing in English. He was not only among the first black African writers to be published and to win a measure of international recognition, but he was

> also quite definitely the first writer to see the possibilities of the imaginative translation of mythology into English.

Besides the misgivings surrounding Tutuola's competence in the use of the English language, he succeeds in bringing to public consciousness a distinctive magical realist trend; hitherto unexplored in African writings, by exploring the possibility of translating African cosmology into the novel genre. This trend is later sustained and modified by such writers as Ben Okri in his *The Famished Road* (1991). The debate surrounding Tutuola's canonical precedence in the evolution of the novel genre in Nigeria, however, revolves around the language factor, topicality and experimentation. As such, while Tutuola's precedence is acknowledged, it is however, with reservation. The novel genre, right from its origin in the Western art form, is a bourgeois' commodity; as such retains the elitist flavour intrinsic in it. This explains the deluge of attacks directed at Tutuola's linguistic immaturity. The visibility of Tutuola in the global literary scene, in this vein, is therefore as a result of the controversy surrounding the apprenticed use of the English language in his novels.

As a starting point in the context of Nigeria's canon formation in prose fictions, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* which can be classified as the first canonised text written in the English language to come , not out of Nigeria in particular but Africa as a whole. Nasidi's (2002:1) insight in this regards is timely. He says:

> …the year 1958 was the precise date of the emergence of what today has been known and **institutionalised** in our schools and universities as African literature: the year of the publication of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. (emphasis mine)

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, however, is not the first novel to come out of Africa. Much earlier, Thomas Mofolo, a South African novelist from Lesotho; enjoyed international recognition with the publication of his third novel *Chaka* in 1931.*Chaka* is a novel written in Sesotho but translated into English and other world languages. Equally in Nigeria, Cyprian Ekwensi published People *of the City* in 1952.However, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* set the pace of the literature of decolonisation through a conscious approximation of the language of artistic medium to come to terms with African reality.

Things Fall Apart is counter hegemonic as it embodies a figural narrative which in its ontology explores Africa's idiom of storytelling. In the words of Ojaide (2009:10), *Things Fall Apart* epitomises an instance where "the language of the coloniser becomes a medium of the colonised to interrogate the colonial enterprise in its political, moral and ethical dimension." In addition to the domestication of the English language, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* also draws its canonical strength and distinctiveness, through the use of proverbs. As Ojaide (2009:13) further argues "…proverbs give a distinctive cultural identity to modern African literature."It sets the pace for the narrative of decolonisation confronting the

colonialist myth of African history. As such it attracts enormous critical reviews in literary journals and newspapers in addition to the critical appraisals in the academia. The canonical visibility which Achebe enjoyed and which was the core source of his power relations was as a result of the role played by Heinemann, a publishing house owned by the whites. It is a reputable publishing house based in the United Kingdom but with adistribution network in virtually all corners of the globe. As one of the world's largest publishers, Heinemann enjoys the reputation of having seasoned editors in addition to compact marketing strategy. They virtually, at a point, enjoyed proportionate monopoly of publishing and distribution Africa.

Arguably, the publication of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* eclipsed the visibility of other peer texts in the poetry and drama genres of his time. Achebe's canonical status is also complemented by his receipt of the prestigious NOMA and Booker Prize awards and that according to Emenyonu (cited in Onyemelukwe, 2004:38),*Things Fall Apart* is translated into fifty five languages across the world. However, whether his subsequent novels matched his maiden one in terms of acceptability, as to sustain his canonical tempo, is a question outside the scope of this work.

In the poetry genre, Wole Soyinka's *Idanre* (1967), Christopher Okigbo's *Heavensgate* (1962) and J. P. Clark's*A Reed in the Tide* (1965)are

the progenitor collections in the poetry genre in English expression in Nigeria's literary history. However, this is not to assume that there were no poetry collections in English expression prior to the publication of the three poetry collections above. Gabriel Okara was much into poetry writing earlier than the trio of Clark, Soyinka and Okigbo. In the same vein Osadabey's *Africa Sings* (1952) is also a pioneer poetry collection. But the argument is that the prominence of the trio of Soyinka, Clark and Okigbo istraceable to their educational roots at the University College Ibadan, another institutional encoder of canon formation. The Ibadan University College and later with the University of Nsukka, pioneered poetry competition and poetry reading clubs that attracted the attention of international literary scholars as well as global publication outfit.

The trio of Soyinka, Clark and Okigbo started a poetic practice that hybridised the aesthetic tempo of the modernist tradition making waves in Europe of their time on the one hand with that of the African culture on the other. Unlike in the prose fiction, in the poetry genre of the first generation in Nigeria, there is no visible aesthetics of decolonisation defining the poets' cultural credo which in its matter and manner is public oriented.

It is necessary however, to restrict ourselves to the study of the iconic figure writers across the genres in each generation, to allow for deeper insight. In the poetry genre, Wole Soyinka forms the iconic figure poet who sustains the dominant poetic tempo of his generation.

In his first publication, *Idanre and other Poems* (1967), Soyinka demonstrated his vast knowledge of Greek mythology and Western modernist tradition. This knowledge is supplemented and blended, with the Yoruba mythology to constitute his distinct poetic style. This, as many critics have argued, is Soyinka's conception of literary identity and chronicled the birth of the canon of poetry genre among the first generation Nigerian poets. This blending of myth of origin as a poetic practice, ultimately bred 'occultist' and 'obscurantist' poetry style as rightly pointed by the Chinweizu *et al.* even though it was hotly contested by Soyinka. As such Nigeria's poetry in English at its nascent stage, going by the above, is intrinsically esoteric. This poetic trend is an extension of the poetic philosophy of Soyinka's European mentors from Eliot who believe that poetry cannot just be so easy to internalise as in plucking a flower to sniff its fragrance; to Ezra Pound, who religiously strove to the idiom of experimentation of the modernist condition of his time in his poetic picture.

Wole Soyinka as Nigeria's first generation iconic figure poet succeeded in carving a distinct poetic style for himself by embedding the uniqueness of Africa's artistic sensibility in "…myth, history and mores" in addition to Greek mythology and Modernist literary tradition. Thus, Soyinka's aesthetic drive is impelled by his desire to situate myth as an inescapable credo in Africa's literary practice. Soyinka further argues that "…myth arise from man's attempt to externalise and communicate his inner

sensibilities" (p3) This surrealist ontology of poetry, as an artistic practice, marks the beginning of canon formation in Nigeria's literary history in what is termed specifically as Euromodernism (see Chinweiru *et al.*, 1980; Nkosi, 1981).

This mythic surrealism as a specific literary practice, was however, less cogent in the face of the grim post-independence political reality in Nigeria. As Nigeria witnessed leadership ineptitude in form of corruption, abuse of administrative ethics and, most importantly, the socio-political dislocation suffered as a result of the 1967-70 Civil War the need for elastic poetic sensibility became necessary. Thus, the essence-ideal of the literary practice of the Soyinka's *et al*. became less desirable. This instance, among others, led to the emergence of a new poetic sensibility and a new literary canon especially at the end of the Civil War.

The revolutionary fervor of the emergent poets of the period evidenced in their leftist ideological stance marked an instance of overt power negotiation between the centre, herein referred to as the establishment; and the periphery by which is meant the emergent aesthetics of negation popularised by the leftist poets. The leftist orientation of the emergent poets led to their identification with the teeming masses and their cause in both form and content.

The emerging poets are overtly confrontational with the establishment in matters that border on Nation and Nationhood and the predicament of the

masses. The poets in this fold include Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Harry Garuba, Tanure Ojaide, Onokome Okome, Funso Aiyejina; Modupe Laslie-Ogundupe,Ezenwa Ohaeto etc. 'The distinguishing feature of these poets', in the words of Sallah (1995),'is that they have been largely nurtured under the harsh economic and political environment of the 1970s and 1980s. Consequent upon this experience, as Sallah further argues, '…these poets have assumed the task of art for social advocacy in the hope of quickening the possibility for the attainment of a better world'. They advocate for a change by daring the excesses of the establishment and their collaborators using their artistic medium.

They are labeled as poets of commitment for their continued identification with the plights of the common man through the relentless pursuit for his better condition of living. Due to their radical nativist quest in their poetic experimentation, they are so labeled Alter-Native poets; a name coined by Aiyejina (1988), himself a member poet. The name in this context denotes an alternative tradition which supplanted the earlier one as much as a tradition whose root is in the indigenous cultural world view. In historical terms the period was labeled the second generation of Nigeria's poets.

The post Civil War situation, which also marked the beginning of the emergence of a new poetic sensibility, witnessed the unprecedented out pouring of the poetry genre as against works of prose. Chinua Achebe produced his first poetry collection in the period (*Beware Soul Brother and*

other Poems 1971). The dominance of the poetry volumes is, as this study contends, attributable to the necessity for the immediacy of communication with the larger audience. In canonical terms, the poets of the period set the pace for the demystification of poetry and its appreciation in Nigeria's literary history.

These poets differ in all poetic manner and matter with the preceding poets. They experimented with the aesthetics of the uncanny by not making poetry mystic but by "a particular – commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar" (Royce, 2003:1).As such, they make poetry embedded in the aesthetic of the uncanny since "the uncanny" as Royce (2003:5) argues "[is] as a means of thinking about so-called a real life, the ordinary, the familiar and everyday" as against the mythic and the occultic.

Niyi Osundare is the iconic poet of the generation (Aiyejina, 1988). He exemplifies the manifestation of the overriding poetic nuances of the group. Osundare establishes his poetic credo and visibility, in the light of Bloom's argument, by experimenting with the aesthetics of the uncanny derivable from his Yoruba oral tradition and culture. As such his poetic wit and canonical status as Jones (2003:3) posits and as quoted elsewhere in this study, is linked to his ability at "…yoking seemingly contrary ideas to produce a new insight into a familiar subject." In this regard, as Jones further argues, Osundare's wit and humour are structured in such a way that they deepen sensibilities as they "give his poems a surface lightness that overlay a

deeper significance" (2003:4) His, is a poetic rendition of startlement and defamiliarisation which echoes the influence of the English Metaphysical poets especially John Donne and the renowned American poet Walt Whitman.

Thus, as it is with most committed poets, Osundare's poetry in the words of Bodunde (2003:273) is the matised around and "…from his aversion at the pervasive atmosphere of state terror and repression around them." He therefore developed his poetry through the use of incantatory and alliterative sounds in addition to the use of erotic metaphors and word play as pointed by Ojaide (2003), to satirise the misdeed of the establishment. In furtherance to this, he deploys the use of lyricism as a device to douse the ugly sides of most of the themes of oppression in his poetry collections and as a poetic credo embodying his distinct identity. Lyricism as such enhances the musicality of Osundare's poetry. Essentially therefore, "compared to his forerunners such as Soyinka and Okigbo" as Wei (2003:300) posits, "Osundare comes closer to the African tradition in his emphasis on the lyricism."This poetic style fossilised Osundare's poetic temperament and that of his peers of the second generation stock.

With Osundare and his co-travellers, a distinct performative, lyrical, accessible and committed poetic oeuvre is constituted as a canon in the second generation Nigerian literary history. In contrast to the first generation, in the second generation stage of Nigeria's literary development,

poetry received much visibility since more poets were produced than novelists and playwrights.

Although historical mapping in form of neat periodisation is a fluid exercise in literary history, especially in the light of determining the inclusion or exclusion of a writer from a particular generation even while a writer is still alive and writing, the outpouring of enormous corpus of poetry collections in the late 1990s and early 2000 marked the beginning of the third generation of Nigerian poets.

However, while this study concurs Garuba's (2005) claim that the detection of a new poetic sensibility different from that of the second generation started in 1988 with the publication of an anthology entitled *Voices from the Fringe: An ANA Anthology of New Nigerian Poetry* sponsored by the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) and edited by Garuba himself; the anthology is however, in the view of this study, only a forerunner collection foretelling the emergence of a new tradition and not a definite reference point of the emergence of a new tradition. As Garuba (2005:62) claims, only two poems out of a hundred in the anthology '…seem to… thematise the orientation of this new poetry in relation to what had come before'. Two poems out of a hundred seem insignificant a number to warrant a generalisation of a new tradition.

As argued elsewhere in this work, the detection of the new poetic sensibilities is made difficult, the more, as the corpus of the emerging poetry

collections sustains the poetic tempo of the preceding generation with little distinct changes. This trend, this study submits, defines the emerging tradition which is organically intertextual as much as intergenerational validating Garuba's claim that '…the imaginative space from which literature derives is literature itself' (p270).The canon that establishes the aesthetic sensibilities of the contemporary equally called third generation Nigerian poets is codified within the literary space of intergenerational intertextuality. In the context of this study, it is Remi Raji's *A Harvest of Laughters* (1997) with its obvious titular dialogic with Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* (1990) which brings to public consciousness of a generation of poets who is gripped by the anxiety of intertextual negotiations with its immediate forbears.

This is not however to claim that there were no conscious adoptions of the poetic styles of the poets' model in the same pattern of intergenerational intertextuality in anthologies and collections as Raji's. Raji's case, was the most visible attempt in titular correspondence to betray the emergence of such trends. In the same poetic garb as Raji's other contemporary poets enjoy artistic visibility such as Akeem Lasisi, Remi Adeoti, Abubakar Othman, Olu Oguibe, Afem Akeh, Ogaga Ifowodo,E.E.Sule, Toyin Adewale, Maik Nwosu, Unoma Azah, Nnimo Bassey and a host of others.

1.9 Poststructuralist Intertextuality as Theoretical Framework

This study draws essentially from the critical insight of intertextuality, a poststructuralist literary production and practice attributed to Julia Kristeva. Poststructuralism as both a temporal and paradigmatic premise(s) is replete, with multiplicity of significations. It is, as Goring *et al.*(2001) submit, for instance: "…a descriptive title that is sometimes used almost interchangeably with deconstruction." It also, as Goring *et al.* further remark, "…describes a movement of which one important element is deconstruction." Meanwhile, Callinicious (1989) identified two versions of poststructuralism. They are textualism, while the second is one in which the master category is Mitchel Foucault's notion of discourse within the binary opposition of Power/knowledge. Whereas the textualist "see us as imprisoned in texts unable to escape the discursive (or unable to see any reality unmediated by discourse); the second form "leaves open the possibility of contact with a reality unmediated by or through discourse" as Rorty in Callinicious (1987) concludes.

Harland (1987) on the other hand suggests that the poststructuralists fall into three main groups: the Tel Que! (A French Journal) group of Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida and the later Roland Barthes, the second group of Gilles Delueze, Felix Guattar and the later Michel Foucault and the third group of Jean Baudrillard standing on his own. Whichever the category mentioned above "French poststructuralism and by extension all

poststructuralist thinking" as Reily (2001) remarks, "articulate a conceptual standing on the scientificity of language." And that this metaphysics as Reily further affirms, is anchored on the assessment of their two-fold conceptual stand namely:

(a) Insisting on a notion of language as discourse and

(b) The continuation of metaphysics of production.

The continuation of the metaphysics of production as cited above is predicated on the Poststructuralist double stand on structuralism since as Bertens (2001) contends "Poststructuralism is unthinkable without structuralism," as it is a continuation and simultaneous rejection …not only of literary structuralism but even more, so the anthropological structuralism of Levi-Strauss. Thus, following Saussurean revolutionary view of language as system of difference without positive terms, Derrida (cited in Goring *et al.,* 2001) argues that one can discover (by deconstructing Saussurean argument) a relic of the old ideas, an extra-systemic entity, a transcendental signified. Derrida's famous thesis that there is nothing outside the text undermines the structuralist notion of the transcendental signified. In effect, therefore, poststructuralism is an "attempt to push the logic of structuralism to its logical conclusion."In this vein, "its impact on literary theory and criticism" as Goring *et al.* (2001) averse, "has been its argument that the play of signifier cannot be stopped or made subjects to the sway of any extra-textual continuity."

The above claim interrogates as much as undermines the orthodoxy of the inescapable role of the author/speaker in meaning making. Meanwhile, in the same vein, Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author* (1968) and Michel Foucault's *Who is an Author*? form the two famous theses in the 20th Century, that foreclosed the radical break from the traditional interpretative practice at which meaning is located to Authorial Intention. "Poststructuralism" from the foregoing, as Goring *et al.* further submit, "is …implicated in the Death of the Author and in consistently opposing any textual interpretation laying claim either to finality or undeconstructable authority.

In his *The Death of the Author*, for instance, Barthes underscores the traditional conception of the Author emerging anterior to the text. He says:

> …the modern scriptor (unlike the traditional author) is born simultaneously with the text [and] is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing (cited in Lodge, 1995:170).

However, the supposed death of the author which inaugurates the birth of the reader does not presuppose, for Barthes, an exhumation of a transcendental signified but rather a celebration of plurality. Barthes says:

> A text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the message of the Author – God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash(cited in Lodge, 1995).

The poststructuralists celebrate pluralism in literary interpretation through their skeptic orientation of the 'transcendental signified' and the celebration of the differential as against the referential nature of language. Belsey (2002:6) examines this asymmetrical relation. She says:

> …language and its symbolic analogue, exercise the most crucial determinations in our social relations, our thought processes and our understanding of who and what we are.

Since language determines who we are, how we think, it therefore controls reality and becomes "…no longer a means of communicating experiences or volition but simply a system closed into itself as basking in its own internal coherence" (Reilly, 2001:7).

The term intertextuality is introduced into public consciousness world by Julie Kristeva in her early work of the middle to late 1960s. It is such a fluid term which in its originating stage – at the eve of transition from structuralism to poststructuralism –is fret with different connotations. Since the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism conveyed a frenzied euphoria questioning the rationality and stability of key terms in literary production including meaning; intertextuality as Allen (2002) argues is adopted by both structuralists and poststructuralists across differing semantic levels. He says:

> …poststructuralist critics employ the term intertextuality to disrupt notions of meaning, whilst, structuralists, critics employ the same term to locate and even fix literary meaning.

Flexible as the term may appear, intertextuality in literary practice is a term overtly identified with the poststructuralists notion of interpretative indeterminacy and authorial plurality that affirms the discursive nature of language and textuality. Again Allen (2002:6) affirms this claim when he says:

> …the term intertextuality promotes a new vision of meaning and thus of authorship and reading: a vision resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy.

Intertextuality also seeks to redefine the indeterminacy of its discursive formation as such, as a cultural and historical term, it is often associated with notions of pastiche, imitation and the mixing of already established styles and practice (Allen, 2002). The etiological source of intertextuality is traced, in the words of Allen (2002); to "Kristeva's blending of Saussure and Bakhtin [to] its poststructuralist articulation in the work of Barthes and its structuralist – articulation in Ganette and Riffaterre. Essentially, the origin of the conceptual praxis of intertextuality is rooted in the seminal works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Mikhail Bakhtin; and Allen further affirms that Kristeva is indeed influenced by "both Bakhtinian and Saussurean models" in which she 'combines their insights and major theories.'

Both Saussure and Bakhtin subscribe to the fact that sign-systems and subsequently meaning are relational. However, while Saussure locates the relationality within the larger *langue*; Bakhtin on the other hand locates his

within the social context of what he technically terms "utterance." To counter Saussurean idea of relationality, Bakhtin/Volosinov argue that: "If sign-systems are relational it is not because of their place within an abstract system of language but because of nature of all language viewed in its concrete social situatedness." This presupposes the fact, as Bakhtin later proposes that all utterances are responses to previous utterances and are addressed to specific addressees. As such the Bakhtinian claim of non-originality of author/speaker resonates significantly in Kristeva's concept of intertextuality. It is worth quoting in full. Bakhtin says:

> …all language responds to previous utterances and to pre-existing patterns of meaning and evaluation …one cannot understand an utterance or even a written work as if it were singular in meaning unconnected to previous and future utterances or works. No utterance or work is independent or MONUMENTAL (emphasis mine). (Cited in Allen, 2002:19).

Here, Bakhtin questions the ontological basis of all utterances (works) as original, singular and pure. He further elaborates that "…the word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction." This is because "it never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice (Bakhtin, 1984a:2001) cited in Allen (2000:27). Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism enunciated above radiates Kristeva's critical formulation of intertextuality especially in her seminal work *The Bounded Text* (1980). In *The Bounded Text*, Kristeva critiques the notion of singularity and originality of the author in the traditional literary

practice. This in essence recalls Barthes' denigration of the anteriority of the authorship as capitalist commodification in his *The Death of the Author*.

Kristeva in her critical formulation sees every text as "a permutation of texts, intentionality in the space of a given text" and that not a single text in this permutation dominates as several of them incorporate "…intersect and neutralise one another" (Allen,2000:35). To further contextualise the textual practice Kristeva in Allen (2002) says: "All texts therefore contain within them the ideological structures and struggles expressed in society through discourses." As such, the business of the reader/critic, as she suggests, is not to approach it as a reservoir of facts but as a "practice and productivity" a term employed by Kristeva to mean that, "texts do not present clear and stable meanings, they [only] embody society's dialogic conflict over the meaning of words (2002:36) The convergence of the horizontal and the vertical or what Bakhtin dubs dialogue and ambivalence respectively; in Kristeva's words, is the dividing line between her intertextuality and Bakhtinian dialogic. She says:

> … In Bakhtin's work, these two axes (vertical and horizontal) which he calls dialogue and ambivalence are not clearly distinguished (1980:66 cited in Allen, 2002).

As such Kristeva replaces their supposed inter-subjectivity with intertextuality. Kristeva proceeds to state that in the horizontal axis "the word in text belongs to both writing subject and addressee." While in the

vertical dimension "the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus."

In essence therefore, as Allen (2002) further elaborates, "the communication between author and reader is always partnered by a communication or intertextual relation between poetic words and their prior existence with past poetic texts." In this context, Osundare's poetry is the anterior literary corpus from which the recent Nigerian poets draw their allusive materials. This is of importance to our study as it intends to first of all demonstrate that poetic development in Nigeria's literary history, if anything, is at present organically intertextual.

Basically therefore some of the major tenets of intertextuality as both literary practice and productions have to do with the view that:

- Intertextuality concerns a text emergence from the 'social text' but also its continual existence within society and history.
- A text's structures and meanings are not specific to itself.
- A text's meaning is understood as its temporary rearrangements of elements with socially pre-existent meanings.
- The dynamic literary word is to be conceived in both horizontal and vertical dimensions.

The insights of the tenets of intertextuality are deployed in this study to probe the extent to which Osundare's stylistic nuances are appropriated by the third generation Nigerian poets. The core tenet of intertextuality is that a

text's structure and meaning is not specific to itself. By implication this means that every text is an inter-text. This critical insight is patent in this study as it aids to interrogate the assimilation of the stylistic tone and tenor of Osundare's voice by the contemporary Nigerian poets in form of rhythmic flow, performative cadences; lexical borrowing and the adoption of satiric mode, tone and tenor among other things. Following Bakhtin, all utterances are as a result of other utterances or they are as a result of response to previous utterances. Kristeva draws her analogy from the foregoing to claim that the source of all literary texts is not in the society but in the previous texts. The intertextual relationship between Osundare and the budding contemporary poets examined in this study provides a discursive site where the antecedent texts not only define the textual relationship but inscribe a horizontal dimension of social formation and of power relations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section reviews the critical works on the canonical status of Osundare's poetry in African literary/critical field. The review, in this regard, is anchored on examining those critical works that define the distinct ideological, thematic and artistic deportments of Osundare.

2.2 Osundare's Craft, Vision and Poetic Credo

In furtherance to this, the dominant argument is that Niyi Osundare constructed his distinct poetic forte by the crafty exploration and adaptation of the Yoruba oral tradition (Jeyifo, 1987; Irele, 1988; Maiwada, 1993; Abdu, 2003; Ododo, 2003; Bodunde, 2003; Ibrahim, 2010; Ushie, 2005). To this we add Osundare's debt to some prominent world poets as Walt Whitman, Augustino Neto, Pablo Neruda, John Donne etc. As regards his conscious exploration of the Yoruba oral source, Ushie (2005a:2) in his illuminating essay sets to:

> …isolate from his (Osundare) poetry in English, elements drawn from his African indigenous milieu, which appear consciously carried over into the foreign tongue.

The task, in essence, is to establish a basic premise for the examination of the extent to which Osundare incorporates Yoruba folklore in his poetry. The aim of isolating such elements is to demonstrate and portray the distinct Africanness in Osundare's poetry in spite of his use of the English language as his poetic medium which in specific terms inscribes his canonical identity. As Ushie (2005:2) further stresses, paying attention to Osundare's Yoruba oral tradition in his poetry:

> …would help us to see what African identity has been inscribed into the texts from his Yoruba roots and also to determine how desirable it is for African writers to continue in their fidelity to the colonial masters' tongue for their cultural production.

Ushie's adventure, in this vein, is to establish the extent to which the identity of the African literary artist survives despite his use of the foreign medium in his poetic muse. To do this, Ushie selects three of Osundare's poetry collections as his texts-for-criticism, namely *Songs of the Marketplace (*1983); *Horses of Memory*(1998) and *The Word is an Egg* (2000). Ushie however, does not offer any reason for the selection. Abdu (2003) earlier than Ushie recognises the visible incorporation of the Yoruba oral tradition in Osundare's poetry. He says: "As a poet, Osundare operates within the vast and rich Yoruba cultural universe which he exploits in order to express his vision" (2003:xii).By exploring the vast Yoruba oral art form to construct his poetic vision, Osundare has demonstrated and fulfilled his pledge to identify with the unlettered fundamentally victims of neglect in the society.

However, unlike Ushie who samples only Osundare as a visible Yoruba poet who succeeds in essentialising the Yoruba oral tradition as his poetic style, Abdu (2003) enlarges the scope of his analysis to compare Osundare with Soyinka, his predecessor from the same ethnic background. He says Wole Soyinka as a poet equally explored the Yoruba oral tradition to create his artistic forte. However, each poet, Saleh claims; explores the oral source from his own distinct poetic temperament and ideology. Abdu (2003:xiii) says:

> While both Soyinka and Osundare explore the Yoruba cultural universe to constitute their artistic forte, for instance, the need for immediate relevance raises the best of Osundare's poetry above Soyinka's works.

Although Soyinka and Osundare create their literary identity by exploring the Yoruba cultural nuance, among other sources, Soyinka, it has beenargued, is less accessible than Osundare. Abdu is not alone in this comparative excursus. However, unlike Abdu (2003), Wei (2003) does not only compare Osundare to Soyinka but goes ahead to add Christopher Okigbo, Soyinka's coeval. She says: "compared to his forerunners such as Soyinka and Okigbo, Osundare comes closer to the African tradition in his emphasis on the lyricism." Wei in this regard, implicates lyricism as one poetic trope that defines Africa's literary tradition and which Osundare exploited to construct his poetic vision. It also implicates the fact that the

conscious infusion of the oral art form in to their poetry, is one distinct identity marker of Osundare's generation compared to its forbears.

Thus, while Abdu's (2003) comparative emphasis on the exploration of the oral source by the two poets establishes the opaqueness of Soyinka's poetic muse and the accessibility of Osundare's, Wei (2003); as pointed above bases her comparison on the intense lyricism of Osundare's poetry and perhaps the lack of it in Soyinka's . However, it is not all true with Okigbo judging by the lyrical undertone of his *The Path of Thunder* (1971). Lyricism as embedded in Osundare's poetic imagery, as Wei (2003) further remarks, establishes Osundare's distinct oeuvre and canonical status as it facilitates the wider appreciation of his poetic style across cultural and geographical frontiers. She opines that Osundare's:

> …imageries create a lyricism that is as nostalgic as it is anticipating, carrying a special flavour that is enchanting to modern readers, regardless of their country of origin (Wei, 2003:300).

Wei's isolation of lyricism as one hall mark of Osundare's fame across the globe is further corroborated by Raji-Oyelade (2003:232) but from the domestic front. He says:

> In Nigeria today Niyi Osundare is a major poet and teacher who is using the lyrical strategies and the oral sources of traditional African poetry for mass appeal in written texts.

Ojaide (1996) cited in Na'Allah (2003:315); in the same comparative gradient as Abdu and Wei, attests to the parallel exploit of the oral source by Osundare's generation. He claims:

> Though the post-independent generation of Awoonor, Okigbo, Clark and Soyinka was indebted to the oral tradition, it is with the new generation of poets that orality has become a distinct mark of West African Poetry.

This presupposes that while exploration of oral tradition by African poets in their art defines their cultural rootedness, in addition to their nativist outlook; it matters most when it is explored and crafted in such a way as to take the average African along, as it is the ideological resolve of the Osundare's generation.

Accordingly, Alu (2008:71) attests to Osundare's use of the rich Yoruba oral tradition. "The influence of various Yoruba oral genres such as the *Oriki* chant and *Ijala* hunters' song," Alu further remarks, "are very strong in collections like" *The Eye of the Earth* and *Moonsong*. From the onset of his analysis, Alu examines the distinct poetic style of Niyi Osundare with a view to tracing his (Osundare's) ideological leaning and sources of poetic inspiration. He concludes, in the thematic analysis of Osundare's selected volumes, as does Abdu (2003) that he (Osundare) "…is a poet devoted to serve the exploited African peasantry" (2005:62) as such:

> His works address a deluge of themes which include corruption poverty and administrative mismanagement and to a certain

> extent the lingering effects of colonialism on the African continent.

Alu, reechoes Osundare's poetic resolve in his first collection *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983) that the voiceless masses will form his artistic subjects. Alu further examines the poetic style and thematic preoccupations of the selected volumes and concludes that Osundare's literary achievement is attributable to the way he:

> …has come to produce a blend of poetry that speaks for itself and is quite independent and distinct from other poets, even in the same category with him….

Alu's analysis of the towering success of Osundare's poetry has for long being the concern of many Nigerian literary critics. Earlier than Alu, Obafemi (1989) examines Osundare's poetic strength not only from the success of the thematisation of the common man, but from the excellent revolutionary experimentation of his poetic craft. According to Obafemi (1989:1):

> The strength of this radical poetic category is found solidly in its manifest sense of urgency (immediacy) and the intimate involvement of immersion with the rhythm and tenor of the ordinary people, the peasantry whose aspirations, perceptions and worldview it poeticises.

The ideological concern with the plight of the common man forming the poets' thematic preoccupation could not have begun with the poetry of Niyi

Osundare in Africa. However, in Nigeria's literary turf, as Jeyifo (1987) claims, Osundare excels among his predecessors and peers. In Jeyifo's words:

> In all modern African poetry, all I repeat, only in the poetry of Augustino Neto and David Diop will you find the same depth and passion and lyricism in solidarity with the oppressed, the downtrodden, and the disposed.

Such an assertion is, however, not buttressed with relevant and specific examples. But then Osundare's thematic concern, as it is obvious, is tailored towards championing the cause of the common man. Osundare's revolutionary fervor, as he states in an interview, originates from his family stead where he claims to be farmer-born, peasant-bred. The Marxist revolutionary orientation acquired in the University only succeeds in cementing his peasant background. Ojaide, Osundare's contemporary, further buttresses this:

> The poet (Osundare) Yoruba background his university education and the Zeitgeist and volkgeist of the late 1960's through the 1970's in particular combine with other factors to shape the direction of his poetic exploration (2003:8).

However, conscious that one cannot divorce politics from poetry, Ojaide quickly adds the political source of Osundare's revolutionary concern with the plight of the common man. "World politics of the cold war eras' diverse implications for Africa, non-alignment, and Marxism," Ojaide writes, "also

helped to sharpen Osundare's poetic direction" (2003:21). Obafemi (1989:4) observes the same trend when he says that "the disillusionment that follows independence in Nigeria is one of Osundare's major concerns."Many concerned Nigerian elites, like Osundare, became visibly concerned with the leadership crises after independence, prominent of which is the avoidable Civil War.

It may be added to Obafemi's position that these concerns do not only form Osundare's themes in his poetry but that they help to articulate his poetic craft of double-vision. In the words of Jones (2003:8):

> The poet's constructive double vision, endowing his poetry with its thematic structures as well as its wisdom and far-sightedness, enables him to see the hope of the future while mired in the present and to see the downfall of the tyrant while still in the grip of his power.

Jones draws his argument from the analysis of the "Songs of the Tyrant" in Osundare's *Songs of the Season* (1990). In addition to modeling his arts on the rhythm of songs, dirges and proverbs, Osundare is also a master of his own kind in experimentation with the poetic language. In fact, it is argued that it is this experimentation that graciously appeals to the non-Nigerian reader. Bamikunle (1995:128) in his lengthy analysis of Osundare's themes and techniques equally observes this unique linguistic exploit. He says:

> …in the centre of the general revolution of Nigerian poetic language, Osundare holds a special pride. Osundare's

> delight in the play with words is apparent early in his poetic career.

The apparent revolutionary impulse in Osundare's experimentation with language, which many a critic terms as simple and accessible, inheres complex imageries that deepen imagination. This is because, simple and familiar as the language may appear, it is structured in such an impeded collocation as to heighten perception. "The simple narrative and description" as Bamikunle (1995:129) remarks, "hides a complex use of irony, sarcasm, proverbs and allusions to both local and foreign contexts and historical mythic figures." Raji-Oyelade (2003) equally concurs to the covert embeddings of complex images beneath the overt accessibility of Osundare's use of language. According to him, there exists "wry humour and powerful satire of the society" deep down the obvious clarity of poetic language in Osundare's poetry.

In the same category as Bamikunle (1995) and Raji-Oyelade (2003); Jones (2003:4) equally testifies to Osundare's poetic finesse of double embeddings of complex imageries amidst lucid language use. To Jones (2003), "Osundare can both be light and serious simultaneously with an almost metaphysical art". This is because, as Jones further remarks, "Osundare possesses a wit and humour that sometimes give his poems a surface lightness that overlay a deeper significance."Thus, beneath the

intrinsic visibility of wry humour in Osundare's poetry, resides deep consolatory message.

This uncanniness of experimentation with language which manifests in Osundare's poetry partly reflects the Formalists conception of literature and literary criticism. If done for its own sake, as they postulate, it defamiliarises and enchants the apolitical reader and, therefore, projects the universality and scientificity of literary study in comparison to other disciplines of equal standing. Yet, Osundare succeeds in his poetic vocation not with aestheticism *per se* but with the skillful synergy of the technique and content.

However, 'besides transferring traditional proverbs, metaphors and other devices of prosody into contemporary usages in language' as Wei (2009:299) further argues, '(t)he poet (Osundare) also introduces poetry in performance.' In fact as some critics argue, the distinct canon of experimentation which Osundare explores is to be located in his success with poetry in performance. To Ododo, (2003:335) the aesthetic significance and values in Osundare's art forms 'can only be assessed in a performative context'. He singles out Osundare's *Village Voices* (1984) as a perfect example of a dramatic and perfomative text. According to him:

> A closer look at this collection foregrounds a picture of drama text with an episodic structure, bond together with a single thematic concern…(2003:35).

In his illuminating study of *Village Voices*, Ododo examines the complex use of dialogue, characterisation, setting etc., as essential elements of dramatic performance. He concludes that "In the hands of Osundare, dialogue takes a fresh turn using traditional stylistic devices of symbols, images, proverbs as well as the evocative use of language. Ododo's views equally resonate in Raji-Oyelade's position that Osundare privileges his poetry on a performative paradigm. Raji-Oyelade (2003:231) submits that:

> A close reading of Osundare's works would show that his populist aesthetics, which encourages a large and intimate readership, is informed by his use of the folktale technique in poetic narration, his use and extension of traditional proverbs and most importantly, his employment of the performative mode both in writing and reading his works.

Obafemi equally sustains this argument in the same gradient as Ododo's. The difference is that while Ododo (2003) locates the perfomative mode in Osundare's *Village Voices*; it is in *The Eye of the Earth* that Obafemi earlier than Ododo locates his. Obafemi (1989) argues that 'There is a conscious attempt by the poet (Osundare) to return to the oral performance' and he does this especially in *The Eye of the Earth* where most of the poems are performed with accompaniment of traditional music.

It is unarguable that perfomative mode in poetry is one distinct element of African poetry; and Osundare as many critics argue explored it to the fullest to articulate his poetic vision and identity. Atukwei Akwai and

Kofi Anyidoho of Ghana as much as Okot P'Bitek and Taban Lo Liyong from Uganda equally experimented the performative sub-genre. However, with Osundare, the performative sub-text is accorded a systemic status that every line, every stanza, in fact every syllable is imbued with life as performance as Osundare further discloses in an interview. He says:

> …drama and poetry complement each other. Every word has a life, the syllables which compose this word have a life of their own and, of course, the different phonemes which compose these syllables are only sound units waiting for animation by the human voice.

The dramatic instinct in Osundare is therefore to be located in every line of his poetry read aloud. In his analysis of Osundare's success, Obafemi cites the performative essence as his most distinct trademark. To Obafemi, the performance cadences ensure the distinct poetic status of Osundare, Obafemi says:

> The proximal relationship to oral performance mode, the familiarity of the images, the simplicity and lucidity of the language combine to make his work distinctive from those of early Nigerian poets and in fact to advance of his own contemporaries (1989:16).

This explains why Osundare admits of the imperative of animating every single syllable and poetic line in his poetry. Through the artistic exploit of the performative sub-text in his poetic rendition, Osundare succeeds in animating the reading practice of poetry on Nigerian campuses drawing

much audience as the theatre goers. To this effect, Na'Allah proposes, citing convincing examples, that as pedagogical imperative, all teachers of Osundare's poetry should ensure the demonstration of the performative effect. Na'Allah claims that "it is practically impossible for Osundare to suspend dancing, beating of drums, playing of flutes or gong when performing his poetry" (2003:313). To this effect therefore:

> performers and teachers of Osundare's poetry must not ignore the performance note because only by following them could they create the type of mood, atmosphere and performance structure that the poems require.

Performance in poetry, going by the above, becomes an essential marker of literary identity for Osundare. This identity mode, as it is glaring in Osundare's poetry, secures for Africa, not only a distinct marker for its literary texts but for its literary criticism. Na'Allah's inherent conclusion is that performance and modern African poetry are two of a kind.

Besides the rhetorics of lyricism and performance as essential markers of Osundare's poetic canon, there exist other poetic ingredients of translation and transliteration. In this trend, once more, Jeyifo (1987), Obafemi (1989) and Bamikunle (1995) conspicuously steered the critical direction. Jeyifo in his introductory remarks in the 1987 edition of *The Songs of the Marketplace* compares Osundare with Augustinho Neto, the Angolan leading poet, from the scale of their expert handling of poetic craft and theme. "…like Neto"

Jeyifo writes, "the range of his (Osundare's) technical and stylistic options are quite impressive stretching from the part-transliterated, part-adapted reworking of traditional formal verbal rhetoric and songs…." Obafemi re-echoes Jeyifo's position where he says "Another method of popularisation used by Osundare is the part-translation, part-transliteration and even part adapted reworking of fundamental speech forms, verbal rhetorics and songs" (1989:14). To this he adds that:

> Allied with his power for skillful translation and transliteration and adaptation is Osundare's ability to manipulate and twist language effectively (1989:16).

Bamikunle (1995), unlike Jeyifo and Obafemi, locates the translation and transliteration essence in Osundare's *Village Voices*. He equally claims that the programmatic style running through all the collection is manifest in a sustained song-like rhythm used as a framework for all the poems. Bamikunle (1995:133) further writes that this song quality is enforced by Osundare's adaptations and transliteration of many well-known Yoruba songs into English. The same observation is sustained by Alu (2008), Abdu (2003), Ushie (2005), and Ibrahim (2010).

2.3 The Thematic Perspectives of Niyi Osundare's Poetry

Similarly, while most of the arguments put forward above as to the range of sources constituting Osundare's poetic style and vision tilted mostly

to the concern of his craft, other critics trace Osundare's poetic distinctiveness from the array of subject matter that he addresses. To Adepitan (2003) for instance, it is Osundare's concern with earth, especially as it relates to environmental degradation in addition to the artistic finesse with which he handles it that earns him distinct popularity. He says:

> Environmental concern for the earth creates an audience for the poet, who cuts across class and racial divides and unites the whole of humanity in an over-riding desire to relate to our physical world with enghlightened self-interest. The theme was rare in the African poetry before Osundare (2003:66).

By thematising the environment with all its flora and fauna, and adopting a sustained style to suit his poetic vision, Adepitan remarks Osundare sustains his leftist ideological bent. He says with the collapse of former Soviet Union many of his leftist friends renounced their allegiance overnight, but:

> The ascendance of ecological themes has ensured for Osundare an enduring relevance for his populist materialist concerns without the risk of becoming passé like much of Nigerian leftist rhetorics (2003:66).

Environment, with all its natural greenery, signifies to many across racial and cultural divides, an unadulterated source of consolation amidst the desolate and chaotic hobbling of modern life. It similarly encodes universal significance for many a critical mind. As such, Osundare's exploitation of its nuances and cadences to form both his rhetoric and stylistic priority is

received with great admiration across the globe. This, however, is not to assume that Osundare is the first to explore the ecological themes in Africa; but that, as Mensah (2003) reiterates, he (Osundare) belongs to what he calls sentimental nature poets who ascribe sustained and heightened significance more to nature than the superficial and cursory manner as done by Rubadiri and Diop for instance. Unlike the aforementioned poets, Mensah (2003:287) claims:

> Osundare's collection goes beyond the rather occasional character of the African poet's reflection on nature and offers a very intimate relationship with nature that is deliberately sustained in order to lead to a cautionary message for the reader's benefit.

Mensah buttresses his argument by citing examples from Osundare's*The Eye of the Earth.* Adepitan, meanwhile, corroborates Mensah's stance regarding the pantheistic significance Osundare accorded to nature in the collection.

In fact, to many critics, *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) signifies Osundare's pinnacle of poetic achievement and popularity as many view it as his *magnum opus* (Ibrahim, 2010). Adepitan (2003:63) says in this vein that:

> …Osundare is not just Africa's most successful poet right now; he also looks set to have given rise to an entirely new way of envisioning our environment and circumstances, radically different from whatever may have come before in modern African poetry.

This claim that Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*is his most accomplished collection is further corroborated by many critics not only because the collection won an award for the poet, but because of theGod-like proper place Osundare accorded nature in African cosmology. The general consensus of the argument tilted more to the universal appeal of the collection in addition to its therapeutic undercurrent and less to the poetic style.Kaze (2015:95) equally acknowledges Osundare's ecocritical deportment while appreciating Osundare's Katrina poems. He says while:

> Early Nigerian writers devoted their energies to social and political because they were the overwhelming issues during the period… Niyi Osundare has particularly been noted for his place as an ecopoet, especially with the publication of his *The Eye of the Earth*(1986)after many works centred primarily on social justice.

Adepitan (2003:77) however, is more vocal on this claim when he says that*The Eye of the Earth* may remain Osundare's most significant, most accomplished work for a long while. 'The claim to the foregoing generalisation is a result of the uniqueness of Osundare's handling of the ecological themes and above all, the poetic achievement of "…breathe of harmony that homologises experience and poetic craft" (Adepitan, 2003:77).

To Mensah (2003) in the garb as Adepitan, *The Eye of the Earth* is unprecedented in Africa's literary history in its treatment of theme of nature. "Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*", Mensah claims, "is in one sense

something of a rarity, a volume of poems by a modern African poet, constituting a sustained meditation on the theme of nature" (2003:287). Killam (2003) on this note compares the nature element of *The Eye of the Earth* and *Moonsong* to conclude that they are the most carefully articulated of all Osundare's collections. To him, they are "more unified in approach and sustained in achievement" (2003:140). However, Killam's praise of the two collections is not without a word of caution. He writes that for one to grasp the metaphoric allusions in the two texts especially *Moonsong*, requires "a thorough grounding in Yoruba cosmology."

However, while Killam picks Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* and *Moonsongs* for comparison, Brown (2003) chooses *The Eye of the Earth* and *Waiting Laughter* for horizontal analysis. The two volumes to Brown (2003: 105), "…best exemplify on the one hand, the philosophical and political ideas that underpin his work and on the other, the techniques and cultural resources that so distinctively shape his poetry." The claim hinges on the fact that the two volumes won for Osundare his most prestigious prizes.

While Brown generally assesses the two collections on matters relating to their political themes and philosophical vision, Adepitan (2003: 65) leaps further to trace the source of the philosophical themes from the poet's "ideological leaning." *The Eye of the Earth,* as Adepitan writes, "Has also become the ideational compliment of Osundare's initial ideological concerns with Marxism and populist notions of art." The revolutionary

fervour of the Marxist ideology on the side of the peasant resonates conspicuously in the text. The volume, so to speak, addresses the major predicaments of the peasantry in the hands of the capitalist power - brokers and creates a liberating space of optimism and triumph on the part of the peasantry at the tail end.

Meanwhile, to Bamikunle (1995), the uniqueness of *The Eye of the Earth*stretches far beyond its concern for the peasant but with the witty manner in which the volume is crafted. According to Bamikunle (1995:123); "The unique form of *The Eye of the Earth* lies in its almost total reliance on nature imagery and the writer's ability to animate every aspect of nature."The animation of each of the poetic lines ensures the performative undertone of the collection since Osundare himself suggests the use of musical accompaniment in the collection.

The animation of nature and its subsequent personification to suit the world view of the peasantry, as Bamikunle's argument suggests, is the overarching *leitmotif* in Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*. "In Osundare's Poetry," as Adepitan (200:63) concurs, "the earth breathes and talks, the earth… has eyes". However, despite the heightened significance accorded to nature in the collection, it is structured within the semantic grasp of the non-poets. The farmstead with its flora and fauna, in fact the entire terrestrial and celestial imagery configured in the collection are a quintessentially familiar terrain to the farmer-peasant. Raji-Oyelade (2003:237) equally affirms the

seminality of the nature empathy in Osundare's The *Eye of the Earth*. According to him, the overall uniqueness of the collection in Nigeria's literary history affirms the distinct sensibility of Osundare's generation of the Alter-Native poetry tradition at which Osundare is its iconic figure.

Similarly, the recurring motif of the animation of nature in *The Eye of the Earth* as Osundare's characteristic thumbprints finds its most conceptual paradigm in Garuba's (2003:49) proposed theoretical praxis that he labels animist materialism. Garuba's "overriding objective is to provide a theoretical and analytical framework for reading the scripts which our societies and our artists enact and to locate these texts within the socio-cultural arena from which they are generated." The precepts for his analysis, as pointed above, are inherently culture-specific.

The two critical domains which Garuba proposes are animist materialism and animist unconscious. These critical terms, Garuba argues, by virtue of their cultural preference are more poignant in appreciating the nature motif in African literature. The nature motif as employed and popularised by the Romantics, with all its attendant therapeutic semantic flux, is inadequate a concept, Garuba claims, to explain Osundare's reverence with nature in *The Eye of the Earth* for instance. To Garuba (2003: 56), Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* is the anthology which contains some of the most animist poems he has ever penned. As such, Garuba's intent, as the title of his stimulating article suggests, and as mentioned somewhere

above, is to provide an analytical framework for reading scripts that come out of Africa as Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*. He however admits that his was not the first attempt at this adventure as he acknowledged that many attempts at theorising African literature by cultural and literary critics were undertaken in different guises and appellations. However, Garuba acknowledged the tenuous and fluid nature of his core theoretical terms.

In Garuba's terms, animist thought instead of erecting graver imagery to symbolise the spiritual being, spiritualises the object world thereby giving the spirit a local habitation (2003:47). What this means in plain language is that:

> The objects… acquire a social meaning within the culture far in excess of their natural properties and their use value.

To the above, he adds that beyond the spaces of the social meaning acquired, the animist reveres the nature object significantly to the extent that it differs from its socio-cultural signification. As he further remarks "Niyi Osundare's poetry presents an interesting textual resource for the consolation of animist materialism (53). In a lengthy argument worthy of note, Garuba (2003:54) explains the reason Osundare's poetry perfectly serves the animist materialist critical taste. He says:

> In his poetry we encounter again and again the lyrical evocation of nature and the poetic self-dramatisation that we associate with the Romantic traditions, a naturesuffused with mystical presences and healing essences; a witmanesque self so

> expansive that it encourages therocks and the rivers, the birds and stars of the galaxy and every light and shadow that falls between.

Garuba's animist theoretical articulation is by all standards an ambitious one devoid of water-tight precepts for sustained critical experimentation. One questions the extent to which his animist conception of nature differs from the therapeutic notion of nature propounded by the Romantic critics. Generous as the critical framework might look, Garuba has taken the bold step by demonstrating that besides its universal aura of critical apprehension; nature is first and foremost socio-culturally specific, responding, as it were; to some Eurocentric critics that nature is their exclusive preserve. It also cemented the argument that literary critical practice should embody the socio-cultural specificity of its context if at all it would serve as a veritable tool for cultural probing.

From the review so far three outstanding qualities that distinctively define Osundare's poetry style and vision are manifest. First, is the poet's pronounced experimentation with the Yoruba oral art form which he adapted often translated and transliterated in consonance with modern artistic practice. Second, Osundare's poetry exhibits a distinct lyrical undertone so that it becomes programmatic as it is seen shot in virtually all of his poetic lines. The third and obviously the one that embodies the poet's stylistic ideology, is the preference and subsequent experimentation with the

performative mode. The performative aesthetics in Osundare's poetry ensures the poet's sustenance of the reader's interest by dramatising even the trivial themes that would have been glossed over. It also constitutes an engaging and enervating poetry that is necessarily proactive. From the thematic angle, one major characteristic features of Osundare's poetry acknowledged in this review, is his unrelenting thematisation of the plight of the voiceless teeming masses.

From the foregoing review of the critical works on Osundare's poetry, emphasis to the study of Osundare's poetry is generally made to his style and thematic concern. This study, nonetheless, acknowledges the importance of the critical appreciation of style and theme in poetry analysis. The study however, examines that the intertextual dimensions of Osundare's poetry with the recent Nigerian poets is glaringly not addressed. This is the gap which the study fills and upon which the problematic of the study is anchored.

CHAPTER THREE

METAPOETIC TRENDS IN OSUNDARE'S *SONGS OF THE MARKETPLACE, VILLAGE VOICES, THE EYE OF THE EARTH* AND *WAITING LAUGHTERS*

3.1 Introduction

Metapoetic trend, in the context of this study, refers to the waya writer consciously adopts a style that defines his identity and artistic credo especially in postcolonial Africa. While it is not within the provenance of this study to examine the various schools of thought for literary artistic medium in postcolonial Africa, it is apposite to generally state the three dominant trends. The three school of thoughts, according to Onyemelukwe (2015:iii) are the Purists, who adopt and advocate for the standard use of the language of the former colonies as artistic medium. The autochthonous constructionists on the contrary reject the use of the imported language while the Deconstructionists adopt the imported language but domesticate it to suit their cultural milieu.

Niyi Osundare belongs to the Deconstructionists school. One distinctive trait of Osundare's poetry and that of the Alter-Native poetry tradition is the conscious programmatic experimentation with the language of artistic expression. This trend, Osundare, more than any of his compeers, upholds as a primary artistic principle. These conscious appropriations of the

linguistic and oral aesthetic forms in addition to the thematisation of the pressing socio-economic status of the common man define the aesthetics of Osundare's poetry. It is also this provenance of self-reflexivity in form of metapoetic consciousness that inscribes the identity of the Alter-Native poetry tradition in which Osundare is a key figure. These characteristics explain the extent to which Osundare, for instance, belongs to the group of African cultural nationalists who adopt the middle course in the debate on whether or not to adopt alien tongue in Africa's artistic expression.

The middle course to Osundare and his like-minds like Achebe, is that the English language, for instance, can be domesticated (as against its outright rejection) to express vision as well as artistic voice that is pseudo-universalist in tone and tenor. This metapoetic deportment manifests, first of all, in Osundare's stylistic particularism. The preference manifests in his robust experimentation with language in form of his lexical choice, collocations, word-formation and intermittent insertion of Yoruba lexical terms. It also manifests in his deployment of imageries, metaphorical embeddings and the performative and lyrical undertones of his poetics which creates mellifluous oeuvre for his poetry. The organic interface of lyricism and performative undertone of his poetic rendition, for instance, has created a culture-specific visceral aesthetics which naturally requires the reader to come to terms with African hermeneutics in order to fully appreciate his artistic work.

Osundare, more like many of his African predecessors like David Diop and Augustino Neto for instance, has therefore constituted a hybrid voice that is foreign in tone but local in tenor by blending and domesticating the foreign tongue to address domestic issues. As such, while the aesthetics of experimentation defines the poetry of Osundare, it is however, to be placed vis-à-vis the poet's ability to blend it with local issues. In this context, from Osundare's maiden collection *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983), to his recent collection *Random Blues* (2011) the defining aesthetic is essentially that of experimentation. What follows in this chapter is the examination of four of Osundare's notable poetry collections: *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983), *Village Voices* (1984); *The Eye of the Earth* (1984) and *Waiting Laughters* (1990). The analysis is done against the background of each text's peculiar aesthetics which defines its dominant mood and tenor.

3.2 Declarative Tone and Tenor in *Songs of the Marketplace*

Songs of the Marketplace (1983) is Osundare's maiden collection. It consists of thirty-six (36) poems spread across three sections named 'opening', 'Songs of Home and Abroad' and 'closing.' The collection begins with a manifesto poem that prescribes his ideological stance in matters of poetry crafting and appreciation. The manifesto poem thematises the preference for accessiblepoetry over the esoteric type in matter of language use and imagery; as such it is seen by many a literary critic, as for instance,

Jeyifo (1986) as one that fractures the then dominant canon of the first generation Nigerian poets which many see as occultic and obscure (see Chinweizu *et al.*, 1980). In addition to accessibility, the overarching tone of the collection is essentially declarativeas it is replete with affirmative poetic statements in both epigrammatic and oracular forms. This tenor is conspicuous in the majority of the poems in the collection. In the same vein, the profound poetic diction in the collection is essentially demotic, suggesting, as it were, the poet's concern with the world view of the common man.

In this section selected poems from *Songs of the Marketplace*are analysed to illustrate the level of the poet's stylistic cadences and thematic concerns. 'Poetry is' the poem-opener of the collection, for instance, is the oft-cited poem that buttresses the poet's ideological stance. It is a bold declaration of the poet's vision on poetry. The first stanza of the manifesto poem negates, by strong affirmation, what poetry is not or should not be. By implication, the negation alludes to the preceding poetry tradition of the Soyinka troika who criticslike Chinweizu *et al.*(1980) criticise for making their poetry arcane. In the first stanza the poet affirms his discontent with esoteric poetry. To the poet, poetry is:

> not the esoteric whisper
> of an excluding tongue
> not a claptrap
> for a wondering audience
> not a learned quiz

entombed in Greco roman lore(3)

So recurring in Osundare's stylistic tenor is the use of polysemous adjectives and gerunds: 'esoteric', 'excluding', 'wondering', 'learning' that they evoke deep metaphorical embeddings and semantic flux. The obscure nature of inaccessible poetry, for instance, is made superlative the more not only by the use of the adjective 'esoteric' but by its noun collacative 'whisper.' The synesthetic sensation of sound in whisper connotes the stasis of loss and dumbness. The thematic thread is next sustained in the use of the noun 'claptrap' with its verbiage sounding connotation implying the extent of the aimlessness of personal musing as a medley of rhapsody. It also evokes the fact that any esoteric poetic rendition is a learned quiz. In this context the use of 'learned' essentially ridicules the notion of rote learning in poetry appreciation as against the most engaging and stimulating exercise of spontaneous poetry appreciation.

After excluding what poetry should not be the poet then proceeds tothe declarative affirmation of what poetry should be, employing, as his trademark, the evocative sound images of gong, ditty and lyric to depict the directness and lucid essences of poetry in the manner familiar to the unlettered. As such, in the simplest and directness of poetic musing with all its pictorial images; the last stanza sums up the poetic resolve of Osundare's poetic manifesto that:

Poetry
is
man
meaning
to
man. (3)

The man above is generic, referring to the entire human kind. By the use of common noun ‘man’, Osundare affirms his poetic resolve for including all and sundry as his artistic subjects. In practical terms, the poem opener is an ideological manifesto for committed literary artists, those artists whose major ideological concern is advocating the better condition for the poor masses.

Another ambitious poem in the collection, because of its lengthy rendition, is ‘Excursion’ (p7). The poem is more of experimentation with theme than with style. It aggregates and samples the manifold pathetic condition of the state of the nation especially as it affects the common man across various disciplines and locations. Its success is its ability to depict a picturesque state of lull of the common man whose hibernated state of mind denies him the intellect of responding quickly to his predicament. The style of the poetic rendition is modeled after that of Wordsworth’s ‘Excursions’, a poem of about one thousand stanzas segmented into many cantos. However, while Wordsworth stylised his using at least five poetic personae, Osundare veiled his personae using only the first persons singular and plural pronoun markers of ‘I’ and ‘We’ respectively.

The first stanza opens with the persona's declaration of his status as a troubadour poet whose role is to survey the state of the predicament of the populace amidst misrule and neglect by the establishment. A disparaging picture of a sick nation ravaged by malnutrition is portrayed in the first stanza using such physiological metaphors as 'sunken society', 'scaly skin', and 'swollen feet' to evoke the image of hunger. The same description is sustained in the subsequent two stanzas using similar adjective/noun collocation as 'bony cheeks' 'pin necks' 'hairless head' and so on, evoking a succinct image of a kwashiorkor patient. But then, the use of another anatomical metaphor 'body politics' indicates that the nation's predicament is ill-conceived and man-made as the persona discloses his stock checking:

> We meet eyes in sunken sockets
> teeth bereft of gum
> skin scaly like iguana's
> feet swollen like watermelon
>
> We meet babies with chronic hydrocephalus
> squeezing spongy breasts
> on mother's bony chests
> shriveled
>
> We see village boys' kwashiorkor bellies
> hairless heads impaled on pin necks
> and ribs baring the benevolence
> of the body politic.(7)

The three stanzas above depict a society plagued by famine the type that necessitates the declaration of a state of emergency. The sympathetic portrayal of the society is made vivid through carefully chosen metaphoric

collocations: ‘sunken sockets,’ ‘spongy breasts,’ ‘bony chests,’ and ‘pin necks’ etc. the compound collocations is a stylistic device which implies that their predicament is “compounded.” To buttress further that the condition in Nigeria, (the persona’s referent society) is unnatural, the persona in the fourth stanza ponders why the family head will roam the bush “trapping rats and insects” (p7) while the government is making a lot of money in the prosperous cocoa exportation to the West.

The state of poverty portrayed in the poemcuts across the city and villages. Thus, while those in the villages resort to rats and insects trapping, their counterparts in the city ‘rummage garbage heap’ (p8) to compete with hawks and vultures for rotting remnants. In the third canto when the persona traverses the city, there is a sudden change of persona from ‘we’ to ’I’ implying the preference of individualism as against communalism which the city cherishes and which the persona symbolises. The person goes through the push and pulls of the mega shopping malls and the jam and jab of the motor park touts, through the hypocrisy of “the plump preachers”, to the university corridors and found out that the story is all the same:

> In city fringes pregnant women
> rummage garbage heaps for
> the rotting remnants of city tables
> above, hawks and vultures hovering
> for their turn.(7)

However, the persona is now resolute that the bloated exporters and importers who reap exponential profits from their dirty deals await the wrath

of the populace. This is because, those exporters who connive with the western capitalists *for a chip of greedy glitter* (p15), the fortressed kings who *put a price on wit* by *stocking dissidents throats/with bullets from foreign friends* (p14), *the several government people in formidable helmets and gas masks* (p9) who through their *...unceasing layoffs* (p10) and dereliction of responsibility ensure the *running sores of broken humanity* (p10) will surely confront the sturdy resistance of the teeming peasantry. This, at least, is the thematic concern of the last stanza:

> But soon
> The people will shout
> When murmurs break through muzzles
> and will powers into action
> the oppressors cloud will clear
> the sun eastering hence
> a life full and free. (15)

The long poem, in a way, embodies the thematic and ideological concerns of the collection. The persona's kaleidoscopic survey in the poem reveals a stunning fact: that the predicament of the common man in third world countries as Nigeria is as a result of cultural decay, crude politicking, gross administrative ineptitude and dereliction of responsibility by the establishment.

In yet another social poem titled "Sule Chase" (p16), the theme of ethical decay is here sustained. However, unlike in the previous poem, in "Sule chase" the dominant poetic mode employed is satire. "Sule chase" instances a ruse of celebration of frivolities as a result of ignorance, cultural

decay, immorality and the trivialities of shadow chasing. It manifests poverty of conscience and misplacement of priorities. In theatrical terms, the poem is reminiscent of the theatre of the absurd.

It begins with the chase of Sule, the dramatic persona, from a stall in Lagos for shoplifting a crumbled loaf. For this singular act, Sule attracted the attentions of tailors, permanent secretaries with pending files, Barristers, Doctors, University Dons, among others, who dumped their primary responsibilities, despising the grave consequences, to pursue Sule the shoplifter. However, the irony resurfaces that those chasing Sule are nonetheless committing graver crimes than his. In fact the absurdity of the chase reaches its climax when Sule's crime is finally revealed that he only stole three kobo-loaf of bread out of abject poverty supposedly created by his chasers. More absurd is the ineffective nature of the nation's security outfit that arrived belatedly after Sule is killed:

> Hours Later
> The Homicide Unit arrives
> For an onthespot arrest
> They arrest Sule's corpse
> His left hand clutching
> A rumpled three kobo loaf. (18)

The satiric climax, however, is the depiction of the scene where Sule's corpse is 'arrested' and this implies arrant stupidity and unprofessionalism on the part of the security agencies. And Sule's corpse, for instance, depict an imagery of death and decay. Siren (p21), another poem in the collection,

also sustains the satiric undertone, typical of Osundare's poetic tenor. The poem is a sardonic attack on the gross abuse of power by the establishment especially in Nigeria's democratic context. Siren, for Nigeria's power-drunk politicians, symbolises a mark of physical and psychological dichotomy between the leaders and the led. The folly, which these leaders enjoy as a result of this dichotomy, is here caricatured. Meanwhile, the brutal act of violence and the show of bravado by the police escorts is much less endearing as they whip any 'bloody citizen'who block their way with "consummate despatch"(p21).

The case of the naïve bystanders who welcome the politicians is equally scathing. Herein lies the sharp contrast between the leaders' lustful life in air-conditioned exotic cars and the teeming masses who line up in the sun, with empty 'kwashiorkored' stomach, to salute the passing leaders. The hypocrisy, or so it seems, of the gullible followers, lies in their gratuitous display of solidarity through their "orchestrated cultural dance" to welcome the power wielders.

The show of power through the ubiquitous presence of the politicians in and around the city roads is not without its own consequences. If anything, it symbolises a dereliction of constitutional obligation as the time the legislators needed to legislate over the provision of social amenities was wasted in unnecessary itineraries. The persona intones this confusion:

[. . .]
no time for hospitals
and schools and roads
their Excellencies are not here
for the begging bickerings
of a faceless rural crowd. (22)

The tone of the persona is no less bitter as it portrays both the leaders and the led in the phantom world of rehearsals. In "At a University Con-Gre-Gation"(p28), the same case of decay of morality is critically x-rayed. The poem is an acerbic pillory of what passes as Ivory-towerism in intellectual parlance in the university corridors. The poem begins with a rhetorical apprehension of an endemic decay of scholarship in the university corridor. It censures the pervading culture of cosmetic scholarship built on fixated thinking and dogma. The "spectacled eyes" as used in the poem is a metonymy for the university dons. The poem suggests that as a result of decay in scholarship, university dons are *afraid of veering beyond the nose*, as they are uncomfortable with the concept of experimentation in their vocations. The tone of the persona is even lamentable as the play on con-gre-gation further implies fraud. For university dons, by virtue of their sticking to worn-*out albeit recycled semantic gymnastic*as source of scholarship, they are here portrayed as con-men. The persona voices his lament for the situation:

O my people
you stray
seeking here
a way across the wilderness. (29)

This theme of decay persists in yet another poem titled 'The Nigerian Railway' (p30). In recent popular Nigeria's parlance, the Nigerian Railway symbolises decay and inaction. The short cryptic poem describes, by way of graphical representation, the dilapidated often pathetic state of the once booming Nigerian railway:

dark sna
ky str
uctures
tor tuous
milli
pede on
legs
of iron
crawl ing
wear ily
from swamp to savannah.(30)

The unusual syllable breaking in the poem implies the state of disorderliness of the once thriving and reliable means of transportation in the country. Thus, by 'crawling wearily', alluding to the obsolete train coaches in a state of despair and, therefore, procrastinating to their destination, the corporation is here portrayed as a colossal failure since one of the cardinal advantages of locomotives over other means of transportation is its reliability. In "Ignorance" (p33), unlike in most of the poems examined in the collection, a more abstract disposition is proposed to trace the bane of Nigeria's problem. The title of the poem suggests its theme. It proposes that the weakness of the followership is as a result of ignorance.

If not out of ignorance, how can *Madaru steals public funds/and blocks the road/with a sleek Mercedes* (p34) only for the naïve followers to *sing his praises* and *envy his luck* (p34). "Udoji" (p35), on the other hand censures the ineptitude and lack of foresight of the then Nigerian government under General Yakubu Gowon. As indicated on the asterisked footnote, Udoji bonanza is a handout of Jerome Udoji, a so-called economic expert, who advised the then government on how to spend the excess money accrued on the wake of windfall of crude oil sales. The peasantry…*ask for food and water/to keep [their] toiling frames/on the hoe* (p35) but as a result of the introduction of too much money into circulation chasing too few goods, during the Udoji Bonanza, the goods and services become costlier and, therefore, unaffordable. The sarcastic tone of the persona becomes scathing when the poet likens the bonanza to a bribe with all its unethical connotations.

Like in 'Ignorance' in "Reflection" (p37) the thematic concern is on logical reasoning employed to trace the root of the spiritual and economic imbalance in the poet's society. It questions the hypocritical nature of the clergyin the society. As the poet persona intones, the clergy preach sainthood in the morning and satanhood in the evening. The poem's major concern is to find out what strips spiritual equality from being economic equality. Why, to draw from biblical analogy, is Peter robbed to pay Paul? Now if *we are all equal before the lord* why is it the*cocoacoffee tea growers pushing/Bellies*

bloated by kwashiorkor/And cocoacoffeetea drinkers/Fighting a losing battle with over nourishment? (p38) The poem derides the hypocrisy of the clergy in their role of creating and sustaining artificial economic disparity in the society through their self-serving interpretations of the sacred book.

In line with Osundare's identification with the deprived, "Soweto" (p47) re-ignited the theme of Sharpeville and Soweto massacre in South Africa where many protesting blacks were killed. The oracular undertone of the poem however, is vindicated with the overthrow of the apartheid regime in the early 1990s. 'Mindscope' (for Biyodun Jeyifo) is an exercise in philosophical pondering. The poetic persona, a defiant character of a sort, questions the various religious and cultural dogmas that blindfold an individual's conscience. The poem teaches the doctrine of logical reasoning in matters relating to man's existence where conscience and will are matched with proven action. The poem is dedicated to Biyodun Jeyifo, one of the leading figures of literary criticism in Africa.

The last poem in the collection is "I sing of change" (p89). It is replete with unequivocal poetic statement, clamoring for a world free of all that makes it inhabitable. Since leadership is the bane of the problem in most of the countries across the globe, the persona implores for altruistic leaders in contrast to dictators and corrupt leaders promoted by venal political system. The persona thus prays for …*earth/with no/sharp north/or deepsouth/without blind curtains/of iron walls* (p89). It is only when this is

achieved that the world will flourish and give birth to …*deserts treeing/and fruiting/after the quickening rains* (p90).

The overall poetic tenor in this collection is a declarative and clarion call by a defiant poetic persona for the establishment to face the grim reality bedeviling the society. It is a call for the leadership to salvage the situation by addressing the decay in the nation's polity. The decay manifests in failing infrastructures, venal administrative system, poverty and ignorance among others.

3.3 Oral Aesthetics and Agrarian Cosmos as Poetic Provenance in *Village Voices*

Unlike in the *Songs of the Marketplace*, in *Village Voices* (1984) there is an obvious shift in voice and thematic focus. In *Village Voices*, Osundare's major thematic concern is the predicament of the toiling farmers. As such, majority of the poems in the collection address the issues that directly or indirectly affect the common man. To achieve this, Osundare translates, transliterates even transmutes the fabled worldview of the Yoruba so prevalent in its oral aesthetics to the aesthetic appeal of the modern reader. His success with this experimentation translates into his ability to carve a distinct poetic mien which is not only African in outlook but in texture and substance.

The collection is dedicated to his father: a farmer, a drummer and singer in fact an embodiment of African peasantry who struggles to subsist amidst harsh realities of life. “I Wake up this Morning” (p1) is the preface poem of the collection and it is a clarion call for a poet to be committed in his vocation. By extension, it calls on Osundare’s generation of poets to make up from the poetic lull of the preceding generation of the troika of Soyinka, Okigbo, and Clark, who are seen as elitists and not so overtly politically committed. To fill the vacuum created by the troika, as the theme of the poem suggests, poets must identify with their artistic subject (the common man) by being lucid and unaffected in their musing. The poem embodies the very essential topos of committed poetry. It proposes that confrontational and daring as the themes of committed poetry should be, it should also be lyrical, appealing and popular as a towncrier’s gong.

The theme of the poem somewhat reechoes the Neo-classical debate on the role of art and artists in society. As regards the role of the artist in this case, the poetic persona appeals against autotelic art and poetic duplicity. By this is meant when art is crafted for its own sake it becomes ahistorical as such feigns ignorance to the socio-political realities of its context. The true artist, in the same vein, should desist from any form of complicity. The poet, as the theme of the poem resonates, should be truthfully committed and courageous. To demonstrate this urge for synergy of matter and manner, in this poem, a studious use of incremental repetition, incantatory rhythm and

vivid imagery is made to enact a compatible synthesis of the message and the medium. For instance, "I wear courage like a shield" is repeated three times to begin the fourth, fifth and sixth stanzas. There are equally vivid portrayals of perceptual images:

> I wake up this morning
> with a song in my throat
> a youthful breeze harps the leaves
> rising feet drum the road
> to meet the upland sun
> rousing my body
> to the virgin cool of earth.(1)

Thus, *youthful breeze harps the leaves' rising feet drum the road/the virgin cool of earth* all serve too readily to conjure perceptual images. The trend is sustained throughout the poem.

In the same vein as the theme of 'I wake up this morning', 'a Dialogue of the Drums'(p5) reechoes the theme of commitment to the cause of the masses as against fraternising with the establishment. It takes the shape of a dialogue reminiscent of Socrates' the ancient Greek philosopher. In Socrates' discursive dialogue, a fellow is engaged in a dialogue on an issue of which the initiator of the dialogue knows the answer. The essence is to make the outcome of the truth logically uncontested. In this poem, dialogue is enacted between the people's poet and the court poet. While the larger populace forms the chorus of the peoples' poet, by implication, the select few forms the chorus of the court poets whose *hippo hands slap the*

drum/like a slab of flabby flesh (p5),indicating the triteness of the poetry of court poets who are not in tune with the predicaments of the larger populace.

The poem is, therefore, a contest of relevance between the people's poet and the palace poet. The cautionary message of the poem is that palace poets should be wary of the calamity that will befall them as a result of their outworn relevance to the larger citizenry. Portrayed in despicable metaphors as "eunuch', 'woman's opoo' 'vultures', the court singers are cast as predators that live so that rulers would become dictators. The resounding optimism of the poet persona is his conviction that court poets are sitting on the keg of gunpowder. The persona contends that no matter how glittering their romance with the established is: *The people always outlast the palace* (p8).

The theme of "sleeping at five and twenty" (p11) is a wake-up call against indolence. The poem alludes to the stagnant nature of Nigeria after obtaining its independence twenty five years ago at the date of the publication of the poetry collection. The contention of the poem is that any nation at twenty five should be focused and independent not only in name but in conscience and substance. But a nation which goes a borrowing and *visiting relatives only/when the pestle is fighting the mortar* bespeaks of lethargy and decayed conscience. The poem's thematic undertone is the preaching of the doctrine of productive thinking for a liberated mind. The poem is replete with the images of impotence, and desolation to (p11)vividly

portray the extent of the decay such as ‘Wooden body’, ‘sleeping and snoring’ ‘heavy gourdlets swing between your legs’ ‘slothful back’ ‘limp stump’ etc.

Sleeping at five and twenty suggests an instance of “killing without a sword” (p13). In “Killing without a Sword,” the next poem in the collection, Osundare caricatures the hollow undertone of independence without self-reliance. It satirises the ‘virtuous’ implication of giving which impoverishes the mind of the receiver. The poem teaches the wisdom of teaching one how to catch a fish as against dishing the fish. Many African countries got their independence without fully getting ready for its nurturing and sustenance in line with Africa’s socio-political and cultural realities. The scenario created a dependency trajectory of imbalance in the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised where the colonised always depend on the colonisers by modeling their development plan after the colonisers, insensitivity to the implication of the cultural differences. The poet’s argument is that no meaningful development will take place in any nation if consideration is not given to the socio-cultural andeconomic variables. As the persona intones:

> Our worst enemy is he
> who sends us to pluck
> a fruit deliciously beyond our reach.(13)

Thus, to pluck a delicious fruit, herein implying adopting breathtaking western models of governance beyond the reach of the African persona, will

be counter-productive. The doctrine of prudent management is preached in yetanother poem ‘Eating with All the Fingers’ (p15). The poem is a reworking of the Yoruba proverb that warns against squandering of one’s limited resources. It is only out of greed, the poem cautions, that one uses all his fingers to eat when the food ration is not one’s alone. Since resources are limited and demands unlimited, prudent plans should be made in resource allocation so that no one usurps other’s ration. In the event this principle is abused, chaos and protest naturally crops up as the persona intones:

> We will raise our voices
> and tell the world
> we will not be watchers
> of others eating. (15)

A defiant mood of protest engulfing all and sundry is enacted through the collocation of the plural marker “we” and the modal of obligation “will” which is repeated twice above. And that while *we will raise our voice* suggests sedentary protest *we will not be watchers/of others eating* impliesphysical confrontation.

“Eating Tomorrow’s Yam” (p16) is sequel to “Eating with all the Fingers”. The poem reprimands the ills of excessive spending and the lack of foresight on the part of the leadership at the level of family and the state. As the theme of the poem suggests, it is only the foresighted who predicts what the future holds and plans ahead, the prodigal who is too myopic relishes the pleasure of the soul, as such allows tomorrow to take care of itself. In this

poem, Osundare draws essentially from the Yoruba proverb to satirise the absurdity of fatalism as many religions preach and which many of the African leaders seem to be practising. The fatalist, who is the prodigal in the poem, says:

> And says the prodigal:
> 'tomorrow will take care of itself,
> how can we know the next day
> if we die of hunger today?'(16)

The realist dictum for prosperity is to plan for the future and not to allow tomorrow to take care of itself. To submit to fate, as the theme of the poem implies, amounts to recklessness.

More than the poems treated above "Feigning Rebel" (p20) is a deeply political poem. It is a scathing attack on the multifaceted nature of the Nigerian politicians who will dine with the sheep in the morning and the wolf at night. Many a power-seeking politicians wear the apparel of freedom fighters to exploit the unsuspecting electorate; only to change to their original status as soon as they assume the mantle of leadership. They appear to be firebrand *telling us the system is bad/ and the only way it should go is/down*(p20). But *by daybreak/those fires are gone* (p20). The poem draws a word of caution for readers to be wary of the oratory rhetoric of these types of politicians in their murderous quest to ascend the mantle of leadership. These types of politicians are not the real revolutionists but feigning rebels. The tone of the poem is admonitory and the style well couched. Osundare

deliberately begins the first stanza and ends the last stanza with rhetorical questions. In the first case, the aim is to provoke and inspire readers' conscience to always be cynical at the first encounter with sugar-coated politician:

> Tell us
> are you real revolutionaries
> or feigning kings
> waiting for crowns? (20)

These lines serve as a prompter encouraging open-ended confrontation of the politicians in the event they derail.

"*Alarinka*" (p31) recounts the escapades of a ubiquitous persona who, like a penny, traverses many locations in the country. The poem is essentially an affirmation of the societal role of the committed poet, as a chronicler of societal happening who is expected to stick his neck to all nooks and crannies, from palm to palm, bank to bank to, the open mystery/of underskirts (p31) to expose the ills of mischief in the society. *Alarinka* in Yoruba means a wanderer. In this context it refers to the 'I' poetic persona who is Osundare himself whose task is, as a committed poet, to traverse all nooks and crannies to record social happenings:

> I am a toy-thing
> thrown in to tease the waves
> by beach brats
> I have touched the threshold
> of the sea
> riding beach wards on the saddle
> of undulating waves.(31)

The persona's prying eyes and troubadour status makes him to become a toy-thing a metaphor here indicating a play-thing one that is not to be considered so serious.

Village Voices,as the title indicates, exhibits Osundare's conscious attempt at identifying with the worldview of the unlettered villagers. The witty persona discovers that the ignorant villagers are always at the receiving ends of Government's policy as much being vulnerable to sly politicians. The collection as such aggregates the villagers' misgivings to the hearing of the 'distant' establishment in a simple poetic diction and familiar imagery.

3.4 *The Eye of the Earth* and the Therapeutic Power of Nature in Africa

The Eye of the Earth (1986) is Osundare's third poetry collection which won for him the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) poetry prize and the commonwealth poetry prize all in 1986. Unlike in the previous collections, in *The Eye of The Earth,* Osundare experiments with nature, demonstrating, in the process, his artistic versatility. In fact, Osundare's deployment of visual presentation as evident in his use of imagery and the use of musical accompaniment in most of the poems is more apparent in this collection. The collection is divided into three parts, "Back to Earth", "Rainsong" and "Home Call" with an interlude of "Eyeful Glances".

The first poem in the collection is entitled ‘Earth’. The poetic rendition proceeds with a concrete declaration of what the earth is: the ethereal essence of shelter (whether temporary or permanent). This presupposes that man’s life is ephemeral compared to earth’s:

Temporary basement
and lasting roof

first clayey coyness
and last alluvial joy

breadbasket
and compost bed.(1)

Osundare draws from the feminine metaphor of ‘coyness’ to suggest earth’s virginity and naivety. In Yoruba cosmology, earth is believed to be the spouse of the sky, as such, their symbolic relationship breeds the fertility of all the ethereal resources. The poem is a celebration of the earth and what it stands for as the source of man’s livelihood.

“Forest Echoes”(p5) another poem in the collection, is a dramatic enactmentof an encounter celebrating the Oke Ubo Abusoro forest as symbolic of the therapeutic and threnodic work of nature to the Yoruba. The Oke Ubo Abusoro forest is a popular forest in Ikere Ekiti, the poet’s home town. To the persona, the forest contains a parallel analogy of the human society at least from the communal angle of role playing. But unlike the corrupt, greed-ridden human society, the Abusoro forest is an abode “of a thousand wonders” (p3). The entire poetic rendition is performative. Even

the echo metaphor in the title implies mimesis of a sort. All about nature, in the poem, is "a green desire" and "perfumed memories" creating, in the process, a stimulating aural and olfactory imageries as they help in portraying the aromatic, albeit, charming appeal of the leafy world of nature. The poet persona, with a romantic hindsight, recounts the aesthetic beauty of the serene forest life in terms of its fraternal relationship between the celestial and the ethereal bodies. The relationship he portrays is enamored:

> The rains have kept their time this year
> (Earth has (finally) won the love of the sky)
> Trees bob with backward sap
> and leaves grab a deepening green
> from the scanty sun.(3)

Using the "bob" metaphor, Osundare portrays a sexual image evoking a love relationship – even if platonic – between the sky and the earth. The persona goes ahead to celebrate the beauty of forest life where *Iroko* exerts its towering influence as "…the crown of the forests" which stamps its authority against the timber merchants. In the birds' family, the persona's eyes caught the partridge, "alert like road side grass", and the weaver bird "singing mute straws into eloquent patterns (p8) The elegant and radiant posture of chameleon is also chronicled by the persona as it "…dazzles the forest with a garment of a million mirrors" (p8).

However, forest life with all its beauty is not without its shortcoming of the cannibal calvary, as the iroko, the crown of the forest, also "…swallows the shrub". (p50) the elephant "…tramples the grass" and

carnivorous hyena "harries the hare." Yet, these instances are insignificant to fracture the beauty of the forest. Even "those midgets which mirrored monsters" (p4) did not alter the beauty of the coy forest. Midget here is a polysemous metaphor as noun and adjective connoting ubiquitous insects, gatekeepers of the forest, and as metaphor alluding to the timber merchants who destroyed "a forest of million trees" to "a forest of milling trees" (p5).

"The rocks rose to meet me" (p13) is yet another poem with dramatic enactment between the poetic persona and the world of nature symbolised by the rocks. However, while in "Forest Echoes" the dramatic scene seems to be solo in "The rocks…" the enactment is richly dialogic. *Olosunta* and *Oroole*, as annotated at the end of the poem, are two imposing rocks worshipped as deities in Ikere Ekiti, Osundare's birth place. The communion began with *Olosunta,* the treasure of gold, yearning, with a kindred spirit, for a reunion with the persona who, like the westmost sun, is severed from his cultural root by western education. As the conversation ensues, Osundare, using the poem as a discursive space, reenacts his socialist political leaning to crave for a society "of equal fingers"(p14) through equitable sharing of the nation's wealth for all and sundry.

Oroole the second rock-deity speaks next in the manner of dramatic turn-taking. As it is with the Yoruba *Oriki*, its style which Osundare adopts in this poem, a panegyric encomium always precedes the speeches of deities.

Thus, while *Olosunta* houses the gold, *Oroole* is the fountain of harvest and fertility. *Oroole* is revered as it possesses the power to:

> [. . .]
> Swell the grain
> With living water from (its) rocky arteries,
> fatten the tuber.(15)

The two deity-rocks symbolise, for Ikere people, a fountain of livelihood and protection. As such, not necessarily by coincidence, their rocky towering disposition symbolises for the Ikeres an effigy of immortality. The theme of the poem is made more visible and realistic not only through the dramatic enactment but through the poetic finesse of incremental repetition and musical accompaniment. For example the repetition of "the rocks rose to meet me", "pyramid of the brood", the use of the musical enactment from the beginning up to the last four stanzas ensures the crescendo of the dramatic enactment while the quieting of the drum in the subsequent stanzas indicates a sort of dramatic resolution.

"Let Earth's Pain Be soothed" (p27) meanwhile, reenacts a normal routine seasonal African phenomenon where prayers and sacrifices are offered to the rain gods for the full and bountiful commencement of rain. In a simple, highly lyrical (especially as it is dotted with refrain) undertone, the poetic message is a proclamation for rain and the benefits derived there from:

> Let it rain today
> that perched throats may sing

Let it rain
that earth may heal her silence
Let it rain…. (28)

The title of the poem suggests that it is the earth that craves for the rain so as to be soothed. However, this is an understatement. The rain is also needed for the 'perched throats' and the 'rumbling stomachs' Meanwhile, this is not a prayer for rain with pessimistic tone of whether the prayer would be answered or not; the tone is optimistic in fact celebrative that the rain will surely come so "that children may birth and bawl and bail" (p28).

The optimistic tone in the poem is sustained in the next poem entitled "First Rain" (p29) suggesting that the rain prayers have been answered. The poem is suggestive of the fact that there is always an aromatic nostalgia attached to the first rain for the trained nose of the peasants. This is suggested through the use of the onomatopoeic collocation of "a tingling tang" (p29). The 2-stanza poem is ingeniously declarative in its tone and tenor conjuring familiar images of "vapour", and "dust", essential element in rain- making.

Another poem, "Excursion" (p41) is an examination of the labyrinth yet, alluring world of nature in the manner of the same titled poem in his maiden collection *Songs of the Marketplace*(1983). However, while the 'Excursion' in *Songs of the Marketplace* examines the theme of human folly and trivialities, this one celebrates nature. The poem is couched in lyrical animation which helps to enhance the liveliness of the poetic narration. The

wanderer persona, in the manner of a gadfly, traverses the nature's world taking stock of the various species of nature that constitute its symbiotic coexistence. The persona examines the "cornfields", "ripening yams" and "groundnut leguminous lilt"; the lengthy columns of "soldier ants", the "lakes", the "duck", up to the "dung beetle".

To show organic affinity between the persona and nature, the persona traverses the nature world bare footed passing *boulders and pebbles which answer the whisper/of calling feet* (p41). A striking note of comparison between the two Excursions (that of human world and nature's) is that while the human world is adulterated and corrupt, nature's world is naive and inspiring in its innocence, reechoing Blake's concepts of innocence and experience. "Farmer-Born" (p43) on the other hand, is a poem that borders on the concept of identity. It is an affirmative declaration of the persona as a farmer-born and peasant-bred. The poem ,however, goes beyond the identity motif as it portrays the persona's critique and cynicism of the western economic modules of free market economy, where demand and supply forces, as a result of the free trade economic modules, determine our consumption. He says:

> I have thrown open my kitchen doors
> and asked hunger to take a seat,
> my stomach a howling dump
> for Carolina rice. (44)

The bane of Africa's economic quagmire, as the theme of the poem implies, is its preference for imported goods, (Caroline rice) at the expense of the home grown produce. To suggest that Africa's predicament is as a result of its lack of sound economic policies where the norm is to satisfy the immediate needs, the poem is dotted with culinary metaphors evoking olfactory images e.g., *the aroma/of fresh-felled forests,/(of akee apple colours*(p43). It is also replete with sexual images *fondled the melon breasts/of succulent ridges* to suggest the extent of the bastardisation of Africa's communal method of production and consumption as a result of the embracement of the western type.

In "They too are the Earth" (p45), Osundare uses the earth as a metonymy for the world of nature to affirm the theme of justice and altruism. As such, the earth, in the poem, not only stands for man's abundant resources but justice and freedom. The poem celebrates the immense contribution which the "labourers of the earth" make so that it will survive. It evokes the contribution of the labourers, the miners, water vendors and their ability to survive the harsh economic system especially in third world countries. The persona obviously asks the burning question that to what extent are the timber merchants who "fritter the forest" and gold miners who "harry the hills" are they of this earth. Do they have human compassion? These are some of the themes of the poem. The poem is a prayer for the conservation of the earth and all that it stands for. While "They too are the

earth" affirms the conservation of the earth" Ours to Plough not to Plunder" (p48), is a prescriptive poem of a sort describing how the earth should be judiciously conserved and ploughed. The poem already indicates the persona's clarion call for utilising the earth's abundant resources. By extension, the poem is an assertion of the spirit of nationalism since one of the key determinants of nationalist agitation is the conservation of the earth and its territorial boundary.

3.5 Laughter as Ideological Subtext in *Waiting Laughters*

Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* is a collection of long poems conceived in four cantos. Throughout its considerable length, the poetic rendition sustains the vivid idea of waiting "and the imminent relief of a true laughter." *Waiting Laughters*, therefore, symbolises Osundare's achievement in sustaining a programmatic metaphor (the laughter) that runs through the collection. Laughter, in the collection, signifies happiness, liberation, freedom while its absence connotes anger, frustration, and despondency.

The philosophical undertone of this lengthy collection is manifest in the poet's ability to explore the parable of laughter vis-à-vis the myth of waiting in matters relating to leadership, human interactions and in fact of life generally. Waiting here connotes both hope and the role of time as the arbiter of man's disposition to life in its entirety. The paradox of life

manifesting in anxiety amidst hope and despair especially as it affects the developing countries, is, in the collection, examined within the precincts of laughter. The choice of laughter as programmatic metaphor is arguably to douse, in the manner of relief catharsis in comedy, the tense condition of "gloom and despair" affecting African countries.

However, to think of laughter in this collection as a monolithic entity is to underestimate its discreet manifestations. As an arbiter of happiness, laughter is manifested in its varied cognates as giggle, mirth, glee; chuckles etc. to establish its relative disposition across space and time, since as Osundare approvingly quoted Zero Mostel that "the freedom of any society varies proportionately with the volume of its laugher."

3.5.1 First Canto

The persona in the opening canto assumes the metonymic attributes of wind to traverse the variegated essences of human life and the world of nature. The wind persona, assumes the attributes of air, traversing, with impunity to all that is considered sacred, implying that life itself is an open secret. The paradox of life revealed through the persona's narrative is that while *the door was sentry/the walls (were) all ears* (p8) suggesting that nothing is hidden permanently under the sun. This is because what is assumed dead and buried is ridiculously open and timeless *in the belly of Time's uneasy shadows* (p80).

In this canto the persona examines the various shades of waiting. While some waitings are worthwhile and natural, like waiting for the growing of finger nails, waiting for the cogency of idioms which split their atoms; other forms of waiting are absurd and demeaning like the waiting in the visa office. The bane of underdevelopment in most African countries, as is the thematic concern of this segment, is the preference of most African elites for the so-called 'greener' pasture at the expense of staying at home to help build their respective countries. This brain drain syndrome is reflected in the light of how African elites line up in the Western embassies, often hopelessly, to obtain visa to enable them 'travel' abroad. Osundare, the poetic persona, as one of the African elites, narrates his experience.

The persona satirises the inferiority complex that arises in the manner of the interview (or is it interrogation?) between the white embassy officials and the African visa seekers. He says:

Waiting

> The anxious fumes of the visa awe-office
> thick with queries, thick with fear
> and stamps which bite trembling papers
> with purple fangs, and seals pompous
> like a mad phallus. (11)

To portray the vivid images of the visa office, Osundare first of all plays lexical pun on the word 'office' to 'awe-office' suggesting, as it were, the awe and frustration that await the visa seekers. The deliberate compounding of awe-office all goes to imply the bottlenecks encountered by the visa

seekers. The entire exercise of the interview is reduced to ‘queries’ amidst uncertainty of ‘fear’ of disapproval by the embassy officials. The use of “trembling papers” in the stanza above implies that the visa seekers tremble throughout the period of the interview even while their papers are approved and stamped. The abuse of courtesy in the interview is made more vivid through the use of sexual imagery of mad phallus. It implies bastardisation of ethics in the characteristic manner of mad phallus. The predicaments of the visa applicants are made worse in the manner of the cold reception they receive from the imperial embassy officials. The dramatic enactment is worth quoting in full:

> The visaman, rightly, suited
> his hair correct, his parting severe,
> takes two furtive looks at the crowded hall
> then shuts the window with a cold,
> imperial hiss. (11)

Nothing is more condescending and contemptible like the manner in which the hopes of the applicants are shattered. The visa man’s suit symbolises both at once, his imperial posture and supposed genteel manners. The use of ‘suited’ connotes both noun and adjective respectively. However, the visaman’s ‘furtive looks’ and ‘imperial hiss’ betray his graceful outlook as it exposed his imperial mindset.

This section of the first movement ridicules the entire rituals that characterise the issuance of the visa on one hand and the trivial and the unprofessional way in which the paramilitary officials treat international

travelers on the other. The persona's encounter with custom officials goes thus:

> Waiting
> Just waiting, the Customs uniformed fingers
> in the entrails of my puking box;
> turning, turning, churning it like a bad diet,
> probing for pellets, probing for dusts
> … still waiting while rugged finger stretched me
> full length against a rusty rule
> rattled the sacred shrub below my navel. (13)

For a "trained" custom officer however, to descend so low to be churning luggage in fact deliberately procrastinating so as to be bribed by the susceptible travelers, tells a lot about the state of decay of a nation as the persona's country. To suggest the corrupt nature of the officials, Osundare's chooses 'eating metaphors' of churning a diet. The use of "rusty rule" suggests the barbaric attitude and application of rules of antiquity suggesting the backwardness of the persona's country in matters relating to global practice.

The dramatic encounter with the uniformed officials reaches its climax when the officials' probing fingers extend to visa applicant's sexual organs. The persona appears more polite and modest for describing his private organs as 'the sacred shrub below my navel' (p13). Again, the use of sexual images in this context implies rape of conscience and integrity by the uniformed officials.

The first segment of the long narrative is dotted with eroticimages and euphemistic metaphors: “sacrum of the moon” (p6); “concert of hips” (p8); “like a mad phallus” (p11); “the sacred shrubs below my navel” (p13); “uncircumcised penis of okro”(p14); “the monks orgasm” (p15); “de-filing the watery fence” (p17); “testicle of the giant clock” (p18), etc. to portray the extent of the illicit nature and endemic decay of conscience in the persona’s society. But the decay, unfortunately is seen sustained as a vicious cycle where *every tadpole is a frog-in-waiting/in the wasted waters of my greed en-tidal land* (p17). This decay does not only connote hopelessness and despair but is also derisible. As such, it is cogently thematised within the laughter paradigm.

3.5.2 Second Canto

The second canto opens up with the interrogation of the concept of time in its various manifestations. To many, time conjures expectation and apprehension, others, ecstasy and cautions to cite but two instances. While to a felon condemned to death, time signifies doom and despair; to the groom, time conjures ecstasy and adventure.

In the same vein, while to the husband, whose wife is in the labour room, time implies apprehension, anxiety and expectation, to the coup plotter time is short and brute. In this highly philosophical opening, Osundare examines the role of time in the realisation of

diverse/paces/with/diverse persons (p30). Like *a home-sick traveler on the platform of tardy trains* (p29), time to many a diverse persons is tormentingly long, illusive, even if important. To buttress his philosophical conception of time the persona recalls his ordeal in the theatre room in the hospital. The said operation took place on the10th of January of an unnamed year.

The operation creates the imagery of the interface of life and death where the anaesthesised persona finds himself in a state of hibernation. And for the necessity of using knife to rescue life (with all the knifing connotations), the use of surgical knives, as the persona intones, is a cruel kindness an oxymoron connoting pain and gain. The anecdotal ordeal of the surgical operation, as the persona writes, is a fiction:

> All the world is a canvas
> island of scarlet seas
> (in) continent splash of prentice painters. (35)

However, far from the fact that fiction is associated with lies, in the persona's account, the surgical operation he undergoes is a truthful-lie. The scenic imagery of the rendition is created in such a pictorial manner to suggest how disjointed and uncertain time is to him:

> And minutes
> drag their
>
> feet so
> in- finitely. (36)

This suggests how infinite and laborious time was to him during the operation. However, this is slightly a misnomer. Far from being infinite and uncertain time, is the calibrator of life and death to the persona. It is time which determines whether he comes out of the theatre room alive or dead. The last line of the poem sums up the overriding assumption of the collective role of time in the orchestration of human conscience. It says "Time ambles in diverse paces…" (p36).

Meanwhile, the predicament of Africans as a result of slave trade through to the colonial period, as the theme of the segment suggests, does not stop at economic and political exploitation. It also exploited the African psyche and conscience. This endemic vicious cycle looms large in the provenance of laughter and waiting. As the persona intones:

> But for how long can the hen wait
> Whose lay is forage for galloping wolves? (37)

The rhetorical rebuttal above apparently alludes to the apartheid regime in South Africa (*Waiting Laughters* was published before the abolishment of apartheid regime in South Africa). This section of the poem examines the themes of perpetration of the presence of the colonial lords in the African continent through carrot and stick. The Sharpeville/Soweto massacre of blacks in South Africa, the incarceration of Nelson Mandela for almost twenty five years, the assassination of vocal African nationalists such as Walter Rodney, Patrice Lumumba, Thomas Sankara, the silencing of Steve

Biko and many more African nationalists speak a lot about the reluctance of the Western world to allow African countries to genuinely become independent. As such to the African continent the prospect of waiting is gloomy as suggested in the refrain in this section: *Time ambles in diverse paces.*

The section also thematises the concept of identity and alienation especially in the way most African elites prefer to think and express themselves in colonial tongue. This form of cultural alienation could be traced to the dawn of independence in Africa in the 1960s. The question which the persona seems to ponder upon is that: to what extent is the African genuinely African when he thinks, writes and speaks in foreign language? This debate often defines the literary history of African art form. Osundare rekindles this absurdity of using foreign tongue and consequently foreign mindset by the African elite to express the African experience; the same accusation in which he is also a victim. This absurdity and cultural incongruity is examined within the parable of laughter: The persona relates:

> Here, my tongue
> But where, the mouth?
> The tongue is parrot
> Of another forest. (40)

Osundare in the above lines suggests that tongue and mouth are organically united to strike the analogy with language and thinking. As such, whoever thinks in somebody's language, as the theme of the poem implies:

Feed the seeds
of an alien tree. (40)

Thinking in foreign language is tantamount to feeding the seeds of an alien tree and amounts to cultural enslavement. To further satirise the cultural naivety that breeds this incongruent cultural alienation Osundare goes theatrical:

A white white tongue
In a black black mouth. (40)

The picture above evokes an absurdity bordering on racism and inferiority complex. But what is the role of time in dislocating this suctuous imbalance? *When will this wandering tree seek/the loam of its father's forest?* (p40) These are the critical questions Osundare raises expecting answer within the ambience of time.

3.5.3 Third Canto

The third canto however, examines the problem of leadership in Africa and its consequences on Africa's development. The hopeless situation is here cast in the idiom of waiting while the despair is couched in the idiom of the parable of laughter. The persona's country is portrayed as being lethargic and in a state of lost unable to get its leadership bearing right *like the mouth [unable to find] its tongue* (p45). The nation's state of apathy is vividly captured in the second stanza of the third canto:

My land lies supine

like a giant in the sun
its mind a slab of petrified musing
its heart a deserted barn
of husky cravings. (45)

Using carefully chosen metaphors with their semantic sound evocation as in "slab" "deserted bin" "husky cravings", a scenario of endless waiting (craving) is erected for the "unhappy land" to wake up from its slumber.

The first poem of the collection is politically charged in tone. The poem dwells on the theme of military dictatorship in Nigeria. Nigeria witnessed a chain of military dictators especially after the overthrow of the Shagari regime on December, 31st 1983 by the soldiers. The coup ushered in the military leadership of General Muhammadu Buhari. Then, a palace coup on August, 27th 1985 brought in the military leadership of Ibrahim Babangida. Babangida later stepped aside on November, 17th 1993 for General Sani Abacha to steer the mantle up to June,7th 1998.

Nigeria, under the military regime of Sani Abacha, at a point, became a police state. However, going by the time of the publication of this volume, the poem alludes to the military rule of General Babangida. Through the suppression of the rule of law by suspending the constitution, all military rulers govern by decrees. As a corollary, military regimes erect a scenario where *Fat cows swallow lean cows/crows call a feast at every dusk* (p45). It evokes a regime where cultural, political and economic cannibalism is the norm. All through the poem, images of death, starvation and fear abound as

the rule of law is suppressed and *decrees strut the streets like swaggering emperors* (p46).

However, military dictators do not operate in isolation. All military regimes around the world have their own civilian collaborators who also participate in squandering the nation's wealth. The persona pillories these mischief makers:

> And yet corpulent towncriers
> clog the ears of hotless lanes;
> praise-singers borrow the larynx
> of eunuch thunders.(46)

Because of their self-serving interest to squander the nation's wealth, these town criers have pawned their conscience as they become so obese and stiff-necked to know the predicament of the toiling masses. The persona, in this vein, in tones:

> *Ibosi* o!
> Hands which go mouthwards
> In seasons of ripening corn
> have lost their homeward trip
> to the waiting bowl. (46)

The civilian collaborators become professional propagandists as they ensure that through their rhetoric they clog the ears of the dictators with false-hood and half-truth. The poem is replete with images of despondency, anger and disappointment. In the next poem, the theme of corruption is sustained albeit in a different way. Almost all the professional cadres in the society are guilty of one form of corruption or the other. Just like the civilian collaborators in

the military regimes, the clergy too grow corpulent as a result of the extortion of the congregation in the name of tithe. The Judges, as much as the police and the University dons are also guilty.

The brutal manner in which the military regimes proscribe the existing democratic institution is satirised by Osundare in the subsequent lines. The proscription targets all those institutional mechanisms that guarantee human liberty. In their place, draconian decrees are imposed. This is but a laughable scenario:

I proscribe the snail
I proscribe the shell
[. . .]
I proscribe the tale
I proscribe the TRUTH

I proscribe HISTORY. (50)

The declarative tone of the proscription saga is here portrayed as dramatic, suggesting the laughable nature of the proscription as a bazaar of a sort. But then, the despotic proscription is myopic. Whereas it is easy to suspend constitutional provision by proscribing its extant rule of law; it is difficult to proscribe TRUTH nor can one proscribe HISTORY. That is why Osundare embolden the two indelible concepts: TRUTH & HISTORY. The implication is that the despotic leaders are poor students of history. As history has it, the world has witnessed the rise and fall of many dictators. In his debut collection *Songs of the Marketplace,* Osundare claims that the

people always outlive the palace. The next lines are, therefore, words of caution to the power-drunk despots across the world:

The prophet who thinks he has conquered tomorrow
let him mount galloping mountains and marvel
dodging canters of the horse of time

The shogun who says he is an awesome god
let him take note of burning statues
and streets wild with vengeful spears…. (51)

Like the Japanese generalissimo, the shogun of Osundare's land assumes himself a god. But the tide of history is always against those leaders who played god to perpetrate their ungodly agenda against the wishes of the resilient populace. The tone of the persona, in this instance, is torn in-between being declarative and prophetic. The poetic message of the lines are clearly oracular suggesting that in the covenant of waiting between despotic leaders and resilient followers the latter always outlive the former.

In the same vein, in one of the didactic poems in the segment Osundare uses Yoruba fabled allegory of a toad and snake to warn about the repercussions of greed. The reworking of the Yoruba oral tales not only cautions the ills of greed but also preaches the importance of foresight. It says:

Ah! *aramonda*
The mouth has swallowed something
Too hard for the mill of the stomach. (64)

The English proverb 'look before you leap' also teaches the same lesson. But in the Nigerian context the use of the idiom of eating to imply gluttony is

most befitting where the vogue of eating national cake is entrenched as cultural norm.

On the whole, the organic fusion of the Yoruba oral art forms (in form of the verbal techniques of proverbs, riddles, use of repetition, folkloric incantations fables etc.) the domestication of the English language (by decontextualising it) in addition to the use of lyricism and performative undertone give Osundare's poetry a distinctive songlike texture that sets it apart from not only the poetry of his predecessors but also his compeers. These unique features, this study contends, define the iconicity of Osundare's poetry and justify his emulation by the third generation Nigerian poets. His poetic style serves as a model because of its relevance in addressing the perennial issue of corruption, nepotism and colossal mismanagement by the establishment even under democratic dispensations, a condition in which the third generation Nigerian poets find themselves.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INTERTEXTUAL DIALOGIC BETWEEN OSUNDARE'S POETRY AND RAJI'S *A HARVEST OF LAUGHTERS* LASISI'S *NIGHT OF MY FLIGHT*; SULE'S *WHAT THE SEA TOLD ME* AND USHIE'S *ECLIPSE IN RWANDA*

4.1 Introduction

In current Nigerian poetry of English expression, there is a spate of intertextual dialogic between such third generation Nigerian poets as Remi Raji,Akeem Lasisi, E.E.Sule and Joe Ushie and their immediate forbears, particularly Niyi Osundare, for instance. This poetic intertextuality affirms the growth of Nigerian poetry on the one hand and inter-generational continuity on the other. The growth is a phenomenon in literary periodisation which affirms the intrinsic drive of the artists in postcolonial condition to look inward for their allusive sources.

Inevitably, this focus on postcolonial social formations chronicles a paradigmatic shift from the vertical axis where the artistic tradition of the colonisers wholly serve as 'models', to the inward-looking horizontal axis in which artists draw their intertextual models from the artistic practices set by earlier generations of artists within the postcolonial space. However, manifestation of the intertextual affinity differs from poet to poet, justifying the view that while the poets examined in this study are influenced by Osundare's poetry, for instance, they nonetheless define their level of dialogue by the dictates of their individual styles and thematic focus.

Like the thematic resolve of Osundare their alter-ego, the general thematic concern of these poets is the upliftment of the lots of the common man. As such, the intertexual relationship is not characterised by deft lifting of Osundare's poetic style by his legatees but the emergence of a liberating space of adaptation and symbiotic adoption. This instance gave birth to a mode of literary grafting that is defined by a fluid context of reception. Literary grafting is, in this context, the assimilation of the poetic voice of one's model. The context of reception refers to the response of the committed literary artists to the endemic visibility of venal political and administrative system in their country of origin. As the venal political system persists, the aesthetic of negation popularised by Osundare and his compeers equally become cogent and ageless in the hands of subsequent generations of writers.

The organic interface is defined not holistically by the noticeable tracing of assimilated poetic voices but by the originality of effects the grafted aesthetics exerts on the reader. What follows in this chapter is the analysis of the intertextual negotiations between Osundare's poetry on the one hand and that of Raji, Lasisi, Sule and Ushie on the other.

4.2 Osundare's Poetic Influence on Remi Raji's *A Harvest of Laughters*

This section of the study explores the intertextual dialogue between Raji's *A Harvest of Laughters* (1997) and Osundare's poetry collections

preceding Raji's especially *Village Voices, Songs of the Marketplace, Waiting Laughters* and *The Eye of the Earth*. Raji's grafting of Osundare's aesthetics, unlike any of the poets treated in this work, developed out of hands-on tutelage by Osundare. Niyi Osundare was Raji's mentor and teacher at the University of Ibadan. As a mentor, Osundare's creative writing classes, not only with Raji, transpired even outside the classroom boundaries.

Raji's assimilation of Osundare's poetic voices illustrates the organic relationship between writers and their alter-ego in which the voice of the mentor, no matter how well assimilated, often echoes at the background. As Ogede (p.xiii) observes "…to labour to disconnect oneself from all of one's predecessors is to be grossly evasive if not downright dishonest." This is more truly obvious in the case of the literary/creative relationship between Raji and Osundare.

One of Raji's leading critics, Sule (2011), confirms this intertextual spectrum of influence between Raji and Osundare. Sule says that "it is impertinent to point out that similarities abound between Osundare's poetry and Raji's poetry." From Sule's point of view, the similarity is that both Raji's and Osundare's poetry are "…imbued with the spirit of the song (p1). This, however, states only part of the relationship because in truth Osundare's spate of influence on Raji is so overwhelming that it transcends

the song motif as the intertextual examination of the two poets illustrates below.

First of all Raji's *A Harvest of Laughters* could arguably be seen as a sequel to Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* as the two titles suggest. This implies that Raji's title, from the onset, is a response to Osundare's and as such, it implies a reopening of a dialogue with Osundare's. However, the title's suggestion of intertextual dialogic with only Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* is misleading. Raji's *A Harvest of Laughters,* on the contrary, is replete with eclectic borrowings from Osundare's other previous collections. Raji's first import of his intertextual borrowing begins with the adaptation of the prose style of Osundare's introductory note. In most of Osundare's poetry collections there are usually introductory notes explaining some of the ideological concerns contained in the poetry volume. In the introductory note to Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), for instance, he states his notion of an ideal literary artist thus: For … the visionary artist is not only a rememberer, he is also a reminder (p.xii).Raji in his introductory note to*A Harvest of Laughters* adopts Osundare's prose style thus:

> For this poet is not just an indiscriminate farmer of barren word or thought words: he is a human harvester of pregnant pod.

The style of the sentence formation in the two instances above is glaringly similar. They all adopt participial sentence pattern all beginning with the preposition "for", where two issues are juxtaposed the first one a negation

encased in a dependent clause and the second, a declarative assertion in an independent clause. In his ‘A Dialogue of Drums’ (p6), a titled poem in *Village Voices* (1984), Osundare states his artistic credo in clear poetic terms thus:

> I will sing my own song the way that pleases
> the ear of my heart. (6)

Raji in one of his prelude poems titled “Introit” also adopts the above poetic rhythm:

> I will spread my songs
> In a sunlight of webs. (12)

The only variation, especially in the first lines of the two poems above, is that Raji substitutes Osundare’s ‘sings’ for ‘spread,’ and this is ingeniouslydone since all songs, as Raji proposes, are sung. He avoids the tautology of repeating the verb ‘sing.’ In this context, Raji adapts Osundare’s declarative tone as an ideological self-positioning poetic style. ‘I Rise Now’ is the title of the second poem in Raji’s collection and equally the same title of the lastpoem in Osundare’s *Village Voices* (1984). The only difference is that the in Osundare’s case the title is in upper case while in Raji’s it is in lower case.Raji, it is our contention, adopts the phrase to state similar thematic resolve of rising to defend and champion an ideological position. In Osundare’s first stanza he says:

> I rise now
> for, it is time to go. (71)

While in the lines above Osundare seems to have retired, Raji is resolute to take over and continue with the dialogic, however, using the metaphor of laughter in the lines below:

> And I rise now
> With long drum of laughter. (14)

The temporal placement of the two dialogues above is timely and symbolic. This is because Osundare's placement of his as the last poem of the collection indicates a closing of poetic struggle, while Raji's logical placement of the titled- poem at the beginning signals the opening of a poetic dialogue, an instance of inter-generational continuity. This instance symbolises both farewell bidding by one tradition *I rise now/for it is time to go* and the emergence of another tradition and *I rise now/with long drum of laughter* for Osundare's and Raji's generations respectively.

The drum metaphor implies loud poetic vocation while the laughter signifies fulfillment for the discovery of a new voice for the persona. This symbolic intertextual relationship enriches the stylistic pool of third generation Nigerian writers as Raji in addition to defining its profound growth. The intertextual dialogue, meanwhile, continues in the next poem entitled "Gift" (p15). In this poem, Raji resorts to the use of nature metaphors to create his imagery, reminiscent of Osundare's in *The Eye of the Earth* (1986). To fully realise his theme of multidimensionality, Raji uses imagery of chameleon with its many shades of colour thus:

The chameleon has given me the gift
of a thousand garbs. (15)

These lines are a reworking of Osundare's previously used expression in his *The Eye of the Earth*. In one of the stanzas, in his long poem 'Forest Echoes' Osundare creates similar 'chameleon' imagery thus:

… this chameleon
which dazzles the forest
witha garment of a million mirror. (8)

Both poets use the chameleon metaphor to create the imagery of plurality albeit with a variation in context and number. While Raji's is a thousand, Osundare's is in millions.In yet another pattern, Raji adapts the rhythmic flow of Osundare's to couch his own poetic voice, in the use of rhetorical questions and lexical choice. In his "They too are the Earth", apoem in T*he Eye of the Earth*, Osundare deploys rhetorical questions in the last stanza to subject the earth maulers, including the establishment, to a spate of interrogation whether through their destruction of what the earth stands for they really belong to this world. Osundare crafts his last stanza thus:

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? (45)

In the same rhythmic tempo as Osundare's, Raji in his poem "Have you seen that land' (p11), sustains the pattern. In fact he frames the poem all through by the use of rhetorical questions:

Have you dreamt of that land
Where Laughters beams bury Earth's pain?

Have you seen that land?(18)

While Osundare uses earth for all what it stands for, Raji instead uses land as his own metonymy. However, so towering is the influence of Osundare's poetry on Raji that he cannot help but adopts Earth as a lexical choice, in the second line of the poem cited above. In the same pattern of lexical borrowing, Raji finds Osundare's lexical register handy. The term eunuch (*Okobo* in Yoruba) signifies sterility, infertility and dumbness. However, Osundare promotes the term as a discursive register in most of his collections. Raji also uses the metaphor in the same manner as Osundare to realise, the same theme. In the poem "I wake up this morning" in *Village Voices*, Osundare employs eunuch collocation thus:

My words will not be like a eunuch wind
fluttering leaves in a barren forest.(2)

In this context, the use of 'eunuch' implies a state of barrenness, inaction and lull. In this long poem, Osundare stresses the inter relationship between the artist, art and the society. In an 'Orphan cry' (p21) …Raji, similarly, adopts Osundare's 'eunuch collocation'. He writes:

I see the loud mirage
of eunuch gods. (22)

Using eunuch to amplify the meaning of mirage as something not real, false and illusionary sends similar thematic import as Osundare's. As such beyond

the adoption of the lexical collocation, the thematic import of the 'eunnch' metaphor is equally intended. The second section of Raji's *A Harvest* is entitled "nature songs" implying that the poems in the section treat the theme of nature. The concern of the section meanwhile recalls that of Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* (1986).

The second poem in the 'nature songs' section in Raji's *A Harvest*... is "Rain song" and it is the same title Osundare uses for a particular section in his *The Eye of the Earth*.It is observable that there is enormous intertextual influence between Raji's first poem in the second subsection entitled "'nature songs' and Osundare's opening 'poetry is' in *Songs of the Market place* indicating that the intertextual influence goes beyond Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*to other previous collections. "Poetry is" is the manifesto poem in the collection not only for Osundare, but for his generation of poets. To carry the larger society along, as is his ideological resolve, Osundare, in this poem, prescribes accessible poetry as *sine quo non* for a committed poet. To create an imagery of lucidity and accessibility, he draws upon the use of common and demotic metaphor. He says in the third stanza that:

> Poetry is
> … the luminous ray
> on the grass's morning dew.(3)

In Raji's 'Fire song,' similar pattern is repeated especially in the way in which he weaves the theme of the poem around the fire metaphor. In the last

stanza of the poem, Raji engages Osundare in a dialogue on poetry of commitment. He says:

> …mint me
> into a luminous story of liquid gold,
> i shall be your evidence. (24)

Whether "luminous ray" in Osundare's collocation or Raji's "luminous story"; the same message of poetry of splendor filters in the two poems, signifying both an extension and interrogation of Osundare's version. The collocation 'liquid gold' as used by Raji on the other hand is equally an adopted collocation from Osundare's stock of lexical permutation that inscribes his stylistic identity. For instance, in *Waiting Laughters,* Osundare uses the 'liquid' collocation abundantly e.g. 'liquid depth' (p80), 'liquid lessons' (p88), 'liquid snores', 'liquid breath' (p91). The influence of Osundare's poetic tradition on Raji is so profound. Raji's poetic voice in A Harvest… even though so loud and clear, betrays the assimilation of Osundare's stylistic cadences. This grafting is even more visible in the manner Raji adapts Osundare's tone and tenor as it affects the overall aural texture of the collection.

4.3 Intertextual Dialogic between Osundare's poetry and Akeem Lasisi's *A Night of My Flight*

Akeem Lasisi is equally one of the contemporary Nigerian poets who benefits from the mentorship of Niyi Osundare's poetry style. He is one of the prominent performative poets after Niyi Osundare. Lasisi has to his

credit, four poetry collections namely: *Iremoje* (2000), *Wonderland* (2001), *Post Mortem* (1999) and *Night of My Flight* (2005). *Iremoje* won for Lasisi the ANA/CADBURY poetry prize in 2000; while *Wonderland* was the runner-up of the same prize in 2001. In this section, Lasisi's *Night of My Flight* is considered and analysed from the perspective of the collection's intertextual relativity with some of Niyi Osundare's poetry volumes. *Night of My Flight* is generally a reworking of the Yoruba oral version of a song rendered for a maiden about to wed. However, this is just the general overview of the collection. The volume is also about the reinterpretation of the transitory concept of life, just like the transitory leap of a maiden from spinsterhood to matrimony. The collection equally treats the very many socio-political issues affecting the common man and the society at large.

Night of My Flight (2005) is conceived in six sections: "Spinster's eve", "Time to say Bye", "On the wings of the Wind", "Upside down", "Turning point" and "Jemila." The collection, is essentially performative, one hallmark that reflects Osundare's influence on him. Apart from adopting the performative style of Osundare, Lasisi is equally a lyrical poet. Lasisi freely borrows Osundare's pattern of incremental repetition of phrases and poetic lines.

In the opening 'Spinster's Eve' Lasisi repeats "I hail from…" almost four times possibly to emphasise the importance of the source of his poetic muse. Repetition of the phrase aside, the phrase "I hail from" is ingeniously

adopted from Osundare's in "A Dialogue of the Drum" in *Village Voices* (p6). Osundare in the quoted poem says:

> I hail from a line of drummers
> And understand perfectly
> The language of the leather. (6)

In this poem, especially in the lines cited above, Osundare emphasises his poetic signature tune as a committed poet on the side of the voiceless masses. This however contrasts aptly with Lasisi's adaptation of the same line.Lasisi writes:

> I hail from a race where not to sing is a sin
> Not to dance is death. (4)

Both Osundare and Lasisi in their respective lines above adopt the same rhythmic pattern, albeit in different wordings, to filter the same message. The phrase "I hail from" implies that the cultural background of the two poets serve as inevitable source of their literary worldview. By coincidence, rather than by design, Lasisi is reechoing; in Osundare's manner, the organic affinity between art form and the worldview of the Yoruba.

Lasisi borrows copiously from "A Dialogue of the Drums." For instance, Osundare is fond of using 'when' as an adverbial temporal marker to introduce his poetic lines especially when he intends to juxtapose two contradictory issues. In one of the stanzas in 'A Dialogue of the Drums', Osundare says:

> When the target of a proverb
> Feigns the ignorance of an alien. (5)

Lasisi in the same rhythmic pattern and style as Osundare's reworks his own lines thus:

> When Pastor Chris rang the bell for Searching Souls
> Swift as a swift. (6)

Also:

> When I had to dig my gold,
> Conscience companioned my goal. (17)

This pattern is repeated in page 19 where Lasisi reworks Yoruba adage to suit his poetic muse. It goes:

> when a slave coughs
> they say the fool is harming air.

The same form of collocation is also visible in the third stanza page 39, and the second stanza page 59 to mention but two instances. Besides the use of "when' Osundare also adopts, as his style, the use of 'let' as a transitive verb indicating an imperative mood of the first or third person as for instance:

> Let me save you now
> Before you drown in the torrent of self praise. (6)

Also,

> Let runners of accusing songs
> Put legs in their words. (7)

This poetic pattern recurs in another titled poem 'Chicken story' in the same volume where Osundare introduces a stanza thus:

> Let the ear sift
> What the mouth says. (14)

The use of 'let' to introduce a stanza with the intent of drawing didactic lessons in the manner of reworking of Ijala praise songs, is awash in many of

Osundare's poetry volumes. Lasisi adopts this pattern assiduously as the following samples establish. Lasisi couches one of his stanzas in the poem "Spinster's Eve" thus:

> Let us roll the Westerly wind
> To see if the pines of the East would dance with glee. (p9)

In page 25 of the same volume Lasisi writes:

> Let me rise as early as the cock
> That my sun can touch a century rules.

However, it is in page 20 where Lasisi reworks a Yoruba proverb to serve the taste of the modern reader that his dialogic with Osundare becomes so obvious. He writes:

> Let the masquerade lose not his head
> In the euphoria of the mask. (20)

The didactic caution above contrasts sharply with Osundare's admonitory poetic lines in his oft-cited poem 'Unequal fingers.' In the fifth stanza Osundare writes:

> Let no one tell us again
> that fingers are not equal. (60)

The parallel drawn from the two lines each from the poets to serve different subject matter, expresses the explicit intertextual manifestations and the clear precedence of Lasisi's poetic muse traceable to Osundare's.

Yet, Lasisi's intertextual dialogic with Osundare's poetic vocation is apparently eclectic. Apart from adopting Osundare's poetic tenor in *Village Voices* the same dialogic extends to Osundare's maiden collection *Songs of*

the Marketplace (1983). In his debut collection, Osundare dedicates a metapoem thematising the primary concern of the literary artist in a Postcolonial state as Nigeria. The thematic concern of the poem is commitment to the cause of the common man. This commitment is seen shot through in both manner and matter. In the manner of poetic vocation, the committed poet should privilege accessibility by drawing upon the aesthetics and the worldview of the demotic and the peon just as they form his thematic concern. The manifestoe poem which is titled 'poetry is' reads in part that poetry is:

> not the exoteric whisper
> of an excluding tongue
> not a claptrap
> for a wandering audience
> not a learned quiz
> entombed in Grecoroman lore. (3)

These lines allude to the poetic practice of the generation preceding Osundare's in Nigeria's literary history. They negate the doctrine of poetic obscurity through the use of the collocations 'exoteric whisper', 'excluding tongues', 'claptrap', 'learned quiz' etc. Lasisi in page 5 in the titled poem 'Spinster's eve' engages in intertextual reworking of Osundare's lines in the same rhythmic tenor and pattern.

He writes:

> … poetry is not
> Coded verses
> On open palm of every hand
> … poetry is not

The irony of the rose

The rose in the thorn

… poetry is not
Paradox of birth
Parable of death.(5)

Osundare's presence in Lasisi's lines above is obvious. They seem to engage in crafting similar subject matter using slightly altered discursive registers. Thus, while in Osundare's lines, poetry is not an 'exoteric whisper' in Lasisi's it is not "a coded verse" while poetry is not a 'claptrap' in Osundare's register, in Lasisi's it is not the 'paradox of birth' or the 'parable of birth' all denoting to the outworn relevance of the idea of poetry as a myth. Unarguably it was Osundare, among his compeers that popularised the idea of poetry as a metatext. It is logical therefore to propose; at least going by the examples cited above, that Lasisi's allusive source is Osundare's.

In the same collection (*Songs of the Marketplace*) Osundare in a particular poem entitled 'Excursion' (p7) examines the various socio-cultural and political decays bedeviling his society. To do this, the persona in the poem dons the toga of a troubadour poet who, as a travelling minstrel, plays guest to some of the very many avenues of social interactions namely institutional establishments, household and social centres etc. To narrate his experience, the persona uses first person narrative technique to add value and credibility to his stock checking. As such the use of the phrase 'I have been through' recurs intermittently as can be seen from the examples below:

I have been through
the secretariat (12)
I have been through

the push and pull
… I have been through
the Jam and Jab. (11)

Lasisi, in like manner, reworks this phrasing in his long poem 'Spinster's eve' to narrate his own experience. Lasisi writes:

Through the village days
Where randy farmers…
…through college days
where naughty boys pricked your puns
…through the orient
through the delta
through licentious discos…. (13)

Osundare's influence from the above comparative positions is glaring. The 'been to' effect as both a stylistic and ideological stance reflects dialogic affinity between the two poets. In both instances, the theme of commitment is seen resonating in the manner quintessentially that of a public poet. This public declaration of demotic poetic voice, as demonstrated, forms an instance of continuous conversation between the two poets. In 'A Dialogue of a Drum' for instance, Osundare in the first two lines, affirms in a declarative tone, the ideological thrust of his poetic muse on the side of the larger voiceless populace in this manner:

When I raise my voice
The world will be my chorus. (5)

In like manner, though not entirely in similar rhythmic nuances, Lasisi equally couched the same theme under the influence of Osundare. He says:

> The world should rise and dance
> To the rhymes of my flight. (8)

The overriding thematic import of both poets is to declare their poetic pledge quintessentially in the manner of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda that the helpless citizenry will form their artistic subject. It is argued that one of Osundare's peculiar sources of artistic reservoir is his ability to rework Yoruba adage and axioms to suit his poetic lines through translation and transliteration. Lasisi is also influenced by this insight and adopts it as his poetic identity. In "Not in my season of Songs' (p10), in a manner of *Ijala* praise chant, he admonishes his readers thus:

> He whose forehead is twins
> With a hanging cliff
> Let him not peer into other people's fault. (10)

Obviously this is apopular Yoruba proverb couched in Ijala praise rhythm. Even though Lasisi is equally of Yoruba stock, Osundare's influence is seen filtered in these poetic lines. In 'Spinster's eve', the same pattern is reechoed on pages 9 and 5. Lasisi writes:

> He who knew the trick of undying, stored its baritone voice
> In a roaring disc of immortal thunder. (91)

The same style is repeated in page 5:

> He who shall strip the street of hope
> Shall meet the galloping anger
> Of our hungered road. (25)

Osundare's poetic style reechoes in the two examples cited above. However, while in the first example Lasisi only succeeds in reworking Yoruba adage; in the last two examples Lasisi experimentation suggests elements of assimilation as he is seen using his own discursive register even though he retains Osundare's poetic tone. The fact that Osundare's poetic style serves as allusive materials for Lasisi is clear. Compare these lines from Osundare's *Village Voices* with Lasisi's poetic lines cited above:

> He who has not seen the sea
> let him taste salt in the stew
> he who does not know fire
> let him watch a forest blaze
> …he who does not know the poet
> Let him listen to the footsteps of words.(2)

This stylistic mode, where the first line stresses an implied indirect question while the second line proposes a definite answer, is dotted in many a collection of Osundare's. On the other hand, Osundare's third collection *The Eye of the Earth*(1984) profoundly thematises, in artistic terms, the therapeutic role of nature in Africa. In one of the titled poems 'Forest Echoes' (p5), for instance, Osundare examines the various animal and plant species in his native Oke Ubo Abusoro forest in their habitat formation, vis-à-vis their roles to the cosmology of the Africans. While taking stock of the different species, the persona appreciates the symbiotic interrelatedness of the plant and animal species as they help in building the forest as a whole. In

the reptile species, he examines the multicolored nature of chameleon in these poetic lines:

> Let them just like this chameleon
> which dazzles the forest
> with a garment of a million mirrors. (8)

In ‘Spinster eve’ Lasisi reworks these poetic lines using different animal species thus:

> Have you seen the elephant grass
> That does not dazzle the field with million kids? (16)

The intertextual dialogic in this context is clear. Even though Lasisi only styled his lines in rhetorical question, the import of lexical registers as ‘dazzle’ and ‘million’ betrays the intertextual affinity between the two poets.To portray himself as a committed public poet, Osundare focuses on the themes of corruption, rape of conscience, decay of morality and many of the illicit vices using sexual images. In *Waiting Laughters* alone Osundare uses a handful of sexual images some of which are: “near the sacrum of the moon” (p6) “the concert of hips’ (p8) “like a mad phallus” (p11), “penis of okro” (p14) “the monk’s orgasm’ (p15) etc. Lasisi equally uses these images in similar pattern as Osundare’s. In the *Night of My Flight* Lasisi explored these images generously: “…the scorpion hiding in the anus of the road” (p11); “An ovum so crisp” (12) “…blameless nipples yearning…” (15) “…my fallopian pride” (p5) “Dip his penis into a rabbit’s arse” (p19) etc. It will benefit our argument to give contextual evidence. In the *Waiting*

Laughters Osundare narrates his ordeal in the hands of the corrupt Nigerian paramilitary operatives who pilfer his travelling bag and frisk his body in the most unruly and outdated manners:

> The customs uniformed fingers
> In the entrails of my puking box
> turning, turning, churning it like a bad diet
> … rugged fingers stretched me
> full length against a rusty rule
> rattled the sacred shrub below my navel. (113)

In 'Spinster's eve, Lasisi reflects his bedroom experience adopting Osundare's style to describe his private affairs. He writes:

> Now the fasting is done
> The siege is down
> From a little below my navel line. (14)

The euphemistic collocation of 'below my navel' recurs in both Osundare's and Lasisi's poetic lines, to indicate the organic correspondence of their poetic vocation.

Often, as a mark of African identity, Osundare adapts the use of Yoruba totems to strike a vivid imagery and to imbue his poetic lines with a sense of cultural root. These totems are in form of animals, legendary figures or plants. In the *Waiting Laughters*, for instance, Osundare pillories the cannibal mindset of the African power holders vis-à-vis the resilient resolve of the citizenry. To do this, he draws upon the popular image of a mythical fish known amongst Yoruba as '*Arogidigba*'. Osundare writes:

> Waiting
> like the tadpole in the crucible of the pond

…pulling the serpentine tails of fickle eels
De-filing the watery fence of *Arogidigba*
Whose stomach is cemetery for hapless shoals. (17)

Lasisi too on page 18 of his *Night of*… affirms his persona as a metaphoric *Arogidigba*. He says:

Set to light and run the sphere
I am *arogidigba* the lion of the sea
In a colourless race for colourful poems. (18)

The use of the Arogidigba' totem by Lasisi could not have been by coincidence as Osundare himself confessed his intertextual borrowing of the metaphor from D. O. Fagunwa's novel, a renowned Yoruba pioneer novelist. The interface of intertextual musing between Osundare and Lasisi, so far examined above, is visible in the manner, most conspicuously; Lasisi adapts Osundare's lexical collocation and adopts some of his poetic lines. It also manifest in the way Lasisi, who is also conversant with Yoruba folklore, assimilates some of the Yoruba totems and topoi which Osundare similarly assimilated. However, unlike the poets treated in this study, Lasisi skillfully assimilate Osundare's performative poetic oeuvre.

4.4 The Thematic and Stylistic Interface between Niyi Osundare's Poetry and Joe Ushie's *Eclipse in Rwanda*

Joe Ushie is one of the prominent voices of the third generation Nigerian poets. Like many of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors, Ushie is also a university don – cum poet. He is not only a

university lecturer but an active academic unionist. This activism, among other variables, influences Ushie's public bent in manner and matter of his poetry rendition. As such, in the same garb as his father-poet figure, Osundare, Ushie is also a committed poet, a term which in the socialist parlance denotes a socialist realist poet.

Ushie has authored five poetry collections namely: *Popular Stand* (1992), *Hillsongs* (2000), *Lamb at the Shrine* (1995), *A Reign of Locust* (2000) and *Eclipse in Rwanda* (2004). *Eclipse in Rwanda*, our text-for-criticism, was first published in 1998 at the thick of the harsh political reality of the military dictatorship in Nigeria. As a result, most of the political poems in the collection address the gory state of governance under the then military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha who, at that time, was the head of the sitting junta. The contention of this study is, however, that Ushie borrows richly from the stylistic pool of Osundare's poetry, especially the aesthetic of negation, to respond to the misrule of the government of the time. In fact, most of the poems in Ushie's *Eclipse*… engage in intertextual dialogue with previous poetry collections of Osundare as the following analysis shows.

Although in Nigeria, the idea of poetry as a metatext started with Odia Ofeimun in his *The Poet Lied* (1980); where in poetic terms he censures Clark's *Casualties* as snap-shot poetry for its lack of larger public bent, it was Osundare who gave the notion of manifesto poem a resounding

visibility. In his maiden outing, *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983), Osundare devotes a poem entitled 'Poetry is' to outline his major poetic manifesto. In 'Poetry is' Osundare defines not only for himself but for his generation the ideal art and artist for his society. The ideal poetry, in the words of Osundare, is realistic one, while the ideal artist is a committed and public one. The manifesto poem exercises patronage for most of the third generation poets as it relates to poetry appreciation and execution. Ushie, composes an opening poem entitled "Songs of Sisyphus" (p2) (*Eclipse in Rwanda)*. The basic thematic concern of the poem is a clarion call on the poet to elevate the public concern above the personal. In fact, its basic message is that the society should dictate the poet's theme. Ushie writes:

> Quartered in this shell
> which shapes my tongue
> how can I change my song
> when the hills burn still
> and the smoke chokes the vale. (12)

The thematic concern above is for the poet to tenaciously stick to the cause of the larger society when it is at odd with the establishment. In clear terms, Ushie's presupposition is that it is impossible for him – and for all committed poets – to look the other way *when the hills burn still* and *the smoke chokes the vale* (of his people) (p12). The intertextual conversation between Osundare and Ushie, in this context, is that, while Osundare essentially prescribes his stylistic poetic preference, Ushie emphasises the thematic. In 'poetry is' Osundare writes in part thus:

[…]

Poetry is
the hawkers ditty
the eloquence of the gong
the lyric of the marketplace
the luminous ray
on the grass's morning dew. (3)

In the lines above, Osundare, prescribes an unaffected consumer-friendly poetry; which suggest his tilt and penchant for accessible poetry. Ushie's interface with Osundare, in this vein, manifests in the way he inscribes his poetic lines to emphasise the inexorable significance of contriving the voiceless masses as his artistic subjects a claim that Osundare is equally emphatic about. Ushie writes in one of the stanzas:

How can I change my song
when the claws of that leopard
on throne are deep in the

flesh of our clan's sheep still
administering a tiered death. (2)

The persona's voice above is defiant, suggesting that so long are there dictators (leopards) in the society; his poetic muse will rise against them. The repetition of the line 'How can I change my song' in the 8-stanza poem implies a reenactment of a dialogue with an imaginary adversary poet reminiscent of the performative cadences of Osundare's poetic style.

Ushie's 'Song of the Sisyphus' equally engages in active intertextuality with Osundare's 'The Dialogue of the Drum' (*Village Voices*). In this poem, Osundare engages in a dialogue with the palace poets in order

to expose their shortcomings and their apparent irrelevance to the society. In like manner, the persona in Ushie's *Song of Sisyphus* equally reacts to an imaginary call by the court singers to compromise his vocation. The persona intones:

> …I will sing lifelong the song
> of that child or phanned by design;
> of that woman widowed by plan;
> of our streets peopled by bones;
> …of the human rays headed for west, for waste. (12)

These lines reenact the dialogue on similar themes between Ushie and Osundare. The two poets all pledged their fidelity to the cause of the voiceless masses. Prior to Ushie, Osundare writes in the 'Dialogue of the Drum':

> When I raise my voice
> The world will be my chorus
> I, owner of the throat for pleasing songs. (5)

Osundare, in the lines above, alludes to the fact that the entire voiceless humanfolk will form his artistic constituency as possibly against the privileged few at the corridor of power. Yet, commitment, as the persona further intones, is not of having a larger constituency but of being truly committed to facts as against falsehood:

> I will not only give legs to my coiling words,
> I will also give them the fang of facts. (7)

It means therefore for a poet to be truly committed he should not only thematise the larger populace but should, most importantly, reflect the truth in his vocation.

Ushie titled one of his poems 'Towncrier' on page 14. The title echoes Osundare's use of the metaphor in his first two collections: *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983) and *Village Voices* (1984). Towncrier as an idiom used by Osundare in these collections signifies public voice and towncriers' use of gong as a metaphor referring to clarity of poetic rendition. However, in Ushie's case the metaphor alludes to the court poets who serve as the mouthpiece of unpopular dictatorial regimes in Africa and elsewhere. Ushie's use of towncrier instances an intertextual dialogic of semantic distortion/reversal. The opening stanza states the vivid enactment of the role of the towncrier in Ushie's terms:

> We listen to your mouthing of those
> Iron-fisted, self-armouring laws of the leopard
> roared through your pay-staked tongue. (14)

The use of the compound 'iron-fisted' and 'self-armouring' alludes to the dictatorial military regimes who rule by decrees, while the leopard metaphor implies a cannibal government on the one hand and a multifaceted one on the other. In the case of the latter description, the persona refers to the former government of General Ibrahim Babangida, the then military junta of Nigeria from 1985-1993. Babangida, because of his deceptive antics, is likened to the football legend of Argentina, Diego Maradona, who is famed as one of

the world's best dribblers in football. As such, Ushie's description of the junta's multifaceted deportment using the leopard coloured skin is apt here especially when Babangida's regime became increasingly unpredictable in its policy making and implementation.

The same conversation with Osundare continues in the second stanza. Osundare titled a particular poem 'Siren' in his debut collection. In this poem, he satirises the reckless display of power by political office holders in the manner of their arbitrary use of siren. In Nigeria, it has become a norm for political office holders to arrange for a crowd to welcome them during a political function. And what foretells the arrival of the political office holders is a convoy of exotic cars and a loud siren. Herein however, lies the irony of the self-serving divide: while the government officials are in air-conditioned cars, the naïve by-standers are basking in the sun amidst hunger and fatigue. Osundare portrays the vivid scenario of social inequality in these lines:

> Siren Siren Siren
> the clangorous convoy
> of powers and power brokers
> conditioned in Mercedes back
> far, very far, from the maddening crowd. (21)

The convoy, in the lines above, is enjoying the excesses of air condition in their exotic cars far removed from the predicament of the toiling *kwashiorkored children/waving tattered flags/ in the baking sun* (p21).

The use of siren in Osundare's term symbolises an instance of social divide between the political elites and the larger toiling masses. Ushie, draws his references from Osundare's poetic lines. As the lines below suggest:

> We hear the bliss-blistered tongue of the trader
> Proclaiming annual pluses which, like the passing
> Excellency's sigh-reign, agitate the ears of the lean
> Salesboy. (14)

While Osundare uses siren as both his title and programmatic metaphor in the poem, Ushie opts for the homophonic pun on the term using sigh-reign (see the third line above), to draw upon both the acoustic and semantic senses of the word. The semantic sense suggests that the naïve masses are now wiser as such are tired of the unpopular reign so that they sigh for its perennial insignificance; while the acoustic sense underlines the utter nuisance and outworn the loud siren provokes among the citizenry. We also notice similar reworking of some adjectives in the two poems suggesting a feedback to an earlier message as is the norm in dialogues. For instance, Osundare's use of 'kwashiorkor' to describe the toll of poverty on the bystanders parallels Ushie's 'lean salesboy'. Ushie also reenacts the scenic dramatic siren theatre in the same manner as Osundare's as seen in the third stanza:

> We watch the cosmetic camaraderie of the rented
> Camera-daring crowd shouting hosanna to
> the leopard, long live the General!

This contrasts sharply with Osundare's:

Siren siren siren
Police acrobats on motorbikes
wielding whips with consummate despatch…. (21)

The slight difference is that while in Ushie's version the crowd is rented and is fraught with camera displaying 'towncriers', in Osundare's, the crowd is naïve as it is consumed by the show of artistic skills of the police escorts even if they are whipped to clear space. In addition to the foregoing, Ushie's 'towncriers' also sustains Osundare's theme of caution given to the myopic palace poets. In 'A Dialogue of the Drums,' Osundare rebukes the palace poets who are accomplices to the unpopular government of most dictatorial regimes. Osundare writes:

Your drum, dumb in the marketplace
Only talks in the palace of gold
Your song extols those whose word,
Behead the world (7)
…The day is coming, coming first
I can almost see its sun behind the moon
…You can hear the resounding fact:
The people always outlast the palace (*Village Voices*,8)

The overarching theme in the above lines is admonitory, cautioning the excesses of the palace poets. Ushie, however, pushes this theme a bit forward, in similar manner of realisation. Ushie cautions the towncriers (his term for court singers) in these words:

We watch your tongue, a river- bed for the
gushing flood of endless double-talk
…We watch your face, dustbin
for the town's palace-drawn curses,
…Ah poor crier you can't beat the rich!

The thematic concern of the quoted poetic lines in both Osundare's and Ushie's send similar messages that the court poets only fraternise with falsehood (i.e. with the establishment) which makes them unpopular the more. The resounding resolution in both poems is that the people, the court poet misrepresents, will always triumph as the people will always outlast the palace.

However, Ushie's resolution is richer in ambivalences. It reads: 'Ah poor crier you can't beat the rich!' It means that the towncrier (palace poets) is as frugal in foresight as he cannot beat the reach (herein rich) of the resilient citizenry. It also shows that the poor towncrier is at the mercy of his rich mentors who can fire him when he becomes irrelevant. The study contends that Ushie's placement of thematic resolve at the last stanza as much as the striking use of idiom and message draws antecedents from Osundare's. Compare these two lines in reference to the court poet by Osundare and Ushie respectively:

> The people always outlast the palace (*Village Voices*,8)
> Ah! Poor crier, you can't beat the rich (*Eclipse*…,4)

Ushie, meanwhile, in yet another poem 'Mannafall', sustains the thematic interface with Osundare's 'Unequal fingers (p60) *Village Voices* and 'Forest echoes' (p3) in *The Eye of the Earth* (1986). In 'Mannafall' Ushie criticises the man made uneven distribution of wealth and social privileges prevalent

in most third world countries. As usual, Ushie traces the source of this disparity to the political elites. The nine-line poem is worth quoting in full:

> You always say to me:
> Manna falls no more
> But now I say to you
> That mannafalls still
> And no fall in its fall
> But stops in trays of few
> Fixed high in the sky
> Who must BLOCK its fall
> To us here below. (15)

The poet's treatment of the theme of social and economic disparity in the light of the perpetuation of social imbalance in form of unequal distribution of wealth is clear above. The textual precedence of the treatment of this theme, this study argues, is in Osundare's poems 'Forest Echoes" and 'Unequal fingers'. In one of the stanzas in 'Forest Echoes' Osundare thematises this cannibal carnival:

> Behold, too, these preyers
> in the cannibal calvary
> if the forest:
> the*iroko* which swallows the shrub,
> the hyena which harries the hare…. (*The Eye of the Earth*,10)

The towering height of the *Iroko* tree, as portrayed in the lines above, is enough to block the sunlight meant for the dwarfing shrubs to grow. This is a striking analogy to Ushie's 'Manna fall' where those few fixed high 'In the Sky' block the manna fall for those below. In yet another poem 'Unequal fingers', Osundare satirises the age-old proverb that fingers are not equal as such the society should not be equal too in matters of wealth sharing. But

Osundare argues that this is a false claim to perpetuate arbitrary imbalance. To buttress his claim, he traces the source of the divide:

> Let no one tell us again
> that fingers are not equal
> for we know
> how the thumb grew fatter
> than all the others. (*Village Voices*, 60)

This parallels Ushie's tracing of those select few blocking the manna fall. The treatment of these themes of the root of the social imbalance and their continuous perpetuation through deceptive antics defines the two poets' commitment to the public cause. In 'Home reel' another poem in Ushie's *Eclipse in Rwanda*, the theme of nostalgia and re-union with nature is realised in the manner conspicuously Osundare's in his 'The Rocks Rose to meet me" (p13). 'Home reel' like 'The Rocks Rose to meet me' is a nostalgic dramatic enactment between the persona and the world of nature. The first stanza of the long poem runs thus:

> At the last bend
> named Libong Kekwoe-akai
> the aquiline elephant grass
> welcomes you with its
> wind-powered waves.
> The primordial hill top forests
> of silk cotton tree shaved into
> islands of groves by seasonal
> flames, mark your arrival. (19)

The above lines contrast sharply with Osundare's first stanza in 'The Rock Rose to Meet me' as can be seen below:

> The rocks rose to meet me

like passionate lovers on a long- awaited tryst
The rocks rose to meet me
their peaks cradled in ageless mists. (13)

The persona in Osundare's 'The Rocks…' is welcomed by two imposing rocks namely Olosunta and Oroole. In the process of the reunion, a dramatic scene is enacted in which Olosunta, one of the imposing rocks, speaks first:

"You have been long, very long, and far
…your feet wear the mud of distant waters
…I can see the westmost sun
in the mirror of your wandering eyes." (13)

In the dialogue above, Olosunta laments the long absence and apparent changes on its guest. One of the changes is that its guest is Europeanised: *I can see the westmost sun in the mirror of your wandering eyes*. Ushie, in like manna, enacts similar dramatic scene:

Ah, it's you!
Riotous ecstasies. A diagnosis
of your foreign physique. (19)

While Osundare uses 'westmost sun' to allude to the persona's sojourn in the West, Ushie uses 'foreign physique' to allude to the same theme. Again, in the last but one stanza of the same poem, Ushie draws both his thematic and stylistic tenor from Osundare's poetry to thematise the duplicity of politicians in his society. Osundare in 'The Politicians two mouth' (p57) in *Village Voices*, earlier than Ushie, addresses this theme. He writes:

Is it not the politician
who sees a snake
and hails an earthworm
he prostrates for a vote

but his mind squats like a hungry dog. (57)

Ushie treats this theme however, using different idioms and metaphors. To show the multi-sided nature of the politician Ushie, for instance, uses the metaphor of chameleon:

But your heart bears its own cross
for the people's lean necks bearing
the middlemen's weight
for the sown ignorance from where
the chameleon politician reaps his votes. (20)

By treating this theme of double-dealing and deceit orchestrated by the politicians, the two poets clearly establish themselves as public poets. However, Ushie was influenced by Osundare's audacity in the treatment of the theme and style. Ushie in the last stanza of the same poem adopts one of the famous metaphoric collocations used by Osundare to depict the imagery of inaction, barrenness and sterility that is the use of the term 'eunuch'. Ushie writes:

… A hiber
nating ballon of pity hangs
from your heart like eunuch's
desire imprisoned between his thighs. (21)

As mentioned somewhere else in this chapter, Osundare uses the eunuch metaphoric collocation abundantly in most of his collections. Ushie shares with Osundare the socialist ideological bent. Expectedly, therefore, both poets champion the cause of the masses as against the privileged few at the corridor of power in their poetry. Ushie's assimilation of Osundare's

aesthetics manifest in the similar manner they address the predicament of the oppressed. In addition to this, Ushie also adopts some of Osundare's lexical collocation to enrich his poetics as illuminated above.

4.5 The Intertextual Negotiation between Sule's *What the Sea Told Me* and Osundare's Poetry Collections

Emmanuel Egya Sule's *What the Sea Told Me* was published in 2009. It is his maiden poetry collection which won for him the ANA/NDDC Gabriel Okara Poetry Prize and the AWF/Anthony Agbo Prize for Poetry in the same debut year. Sule is a vocal literary critic cum creative writer, whose creative writing tutelage spans into about three Nigerian universities, the latter of which is Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State where he currently teaches.

In addition to his debut poetry collections, Sule also had two more poetry collections namely: *Knifing Tongues* (2005) and *Naked Sun* (2006). Sule also experimented with the short story genre where he authored *Important Heavens* (2004) and *Dream and Shame* (2006); and the novel genre at which *Sterile Sky* (2012) won him the Commonwealth Book Prize for Africa in 2013. The successes he recorded in the two collections codify Sule's visibility.

In *What the Sea Told Me* (2009), Sule experiments with the 'sea' as a programmatic metaphor from which he couches his poetic theme and style.

Like many committed African literary artists, Sule, in this collection, is a cultural essentialist, nationalist and Pan-Africanist to the core. As a public poet, most of the poems in the collection address the many disturbing socio-political calamities bedeviling Africa, ranging from war, famine, political instability and ethno-religious intolerance. Some of the poems however, address the poet's personal feelings. As such the collection succeeds in synergising the personal and the public as a poetic credo. However, to create his poetic voice, so as to achieve poetic prominence, Sule consciously engages in intertextual dialogue with Niyi Osundare's poetry. Sule in *What the Sea Told Me* draws his allusive materials, in both manner and matter, from the poetry works of Niyi Osundare.

The first sign of Sule's dialogic with Osundare manifests on page ivof the preliminary pages. Sule, in this page, attests to drawing his poetic metaphor of the 'sea' from Osundare's poetic lines which run thus:

> These words walk on the sea
> and they never sink. (p.iv)

While there is a biblical allusion to Jesus walking on water, the above epigrammatic lines form the source of Sule's programmatic use of the sea metaphor to explain the extent to which he consciously responds to Osundare's poetic 'utterances'. Expectedly, this inspiration suddenly manifests on page 7 in one of Sule's titled poems 'I plead'. The poem, as the persona intones, states Sule's confession and subsequent admission of

Osundare's role as a poet father-figure whose 'pastoral' role guides Sule's vocation throughout the collection. Sule writes:

> Bear me down your abode
> to pluck Niyi's pastoral rhymes. (7)

The lines above clearly demonstrate the state of the poet's preparedness to work in the footstep of Osundare. To buttress the lines above, Sule comes so open to confess that "I hide behind Niyi rhymes"; indicating so unequivocally that Osundare is his poetic alter-ego. In the last stanza of the same poem, such unambiguous confession is made stating, in the process, that it is Osundare's poetic inspiration that will guide the poet-persona to carve his own distinct poetic identity. Sule writes:

> The sun my companion will linger ashore
> Senegal's flutes will never grow weary
> in this ritual of Niyi's pastoral rhymes. (7)

Osundare's mentoring role, in Sule's words, is the 'sun' of his poetic companionship. The 'sun' as a metaphor connoting light and guidance, alludes to Osundare's towering influence not only on Sule but also on the members of Sule's generation of poets. This declaration of patronage is sustained in another poem 'How long must this poem be barren' (p51). The poem is a kind of lamentation by the poet-persona who is yet to realise his distinct poetic identity despite his tenured apprentice, characterised by modeling of his vocation after some renowned poet-figures. Sule says:

> I have sought syllables and phrases of pen music
> gentle on metres like morning breeze on leaves.

I have embellished my talent with tones of master poets
racing with the Wind in search of illusory name.

And yet the poem remains dry and barren
an impotent fury in the empire of my talent. (50)

The persona's confession of lament is so obvious to suggest that before Sule realised his preferred model in Osundare's poetry style, he has experimented in vain with many master poets. This substantiates Sule's confession at the beginning of the collection that he hides under the pastoral rhyme of Niyi Osundare, and not any other poet.

True to Sule's admission of Niyi's mentorship, the tone and tenor of *What the sea told me* is indebted to Osundare's towering influence as the example cited below demonstrates. On page 2 in a poem entitled 'I take a humble step' Sule demonstrates this poetic patronage. The first stanza of the poem reads:

Into your magical self
with nothing
but eloquence of
the Wind. (2)

In this stanza, the persona discloses his angle of poetic vocation in form of its visuality, appeal, and thematic concern from the metaphoric embeddings of the 'eloquence of the wind'. The use of this expression 'eloquence of the wind' as a poetic voice and credo is traceable to Osundare in his *Waiting Laughters.* In the *Waiting Laughters*, Osundare writes:

Waiting

like the silver fire of the adze, tongue honed
on the eloquence of the wind…. (77)

The persona's tongue, as the two lines above signify, is honed in the eloquence of the wind, suggesting as it is, its larger audience and its ubiquitous presence across all nooks and crannies. This use parallels Sule's above where he admits couching his public poetic voice as sound and unaffected as the eloquence of the wind. The use of the 'eloquence' (and its adjective variant 'eloquent') collocation is so conspicuous in Osundare's *Waiting* L*aughters*. Some of the examples are: 'the rapid eloquence of the running vowel' (p5) 'With the eloquence of the sword' (p53); 'the eloquent valle which loomed' (p61).

The same use is predominant in Sule's *What the Sea Told Me:* 'eloquent madness' (p5), 'eloquent mediocrity' (p2), 'the eloquent idiom of the sea' (p29) etc. This indicates that it is not by coincidence that the collocation pattern is repeated in Sule's work but rather a mark of intertextual dialogic between the father-poet and the ephebe. Meanwhile Sule's 'Typically' (p3) is also reminiscent of Osundare's titled poem, 'The Rock rose to meet me' in *The Eye of the Earth* (p13). Osundare, in this poem, thematises the organic affinity between man and nature as the persona and the towering rocks in his Ikere domicile symbolise. The poem is couched in form of a dialogue between the rocks and the long lost persona (who is Osundare himself). In Sule's 'Typically' similar dramatic scenario is

created. However, while Osundare's affinity is with the rocks, Sule's is with the sea. While "Olosunta", one of the towering rocks in Osundare's 'The Rocks', serves as deity and source of gold, *his belly still battle ground of god and gold* (p4), the sea's treasure in Sule's 'Typically' (p13) goes beyond the gold treasure. Sule writes:

> …the evening sun
> sends me gold
> the night moon
> pours down silver
> on your nightly apparel.(13)

The intertextual significance between the two poems is obvious, as they both reenact the dialogic of the theme of nature's therapeutic relevance in Africa. In fact the symbolic welcoming in the first lines of the two poems exemplifies a poetic conversation between Sule and Osundare. In Osundare's opening line, for instance, he writes: *The rocks rose to me/like passionate lovers on a long awaited tryst* (p13) while Sule's slightly adopted version goes thus:

> You welcome me
> with windy waves
> seductive laughter. (3)

Sule, in the same poem, borrows some collocated phrases from Osundare's lines in *Waiting Laughters* to engage Osundare, once more, in an intertextual dialogue. Osundare on page 80 of his *Waiting Laughters* recounts his travelling experience from Amsterdam to Lagos. In the process, he narrates his own view of the sea. Osundare writes:

[…]
For the Sea
too, is silence of seeing sands, silence of unspoken
bones.

In the same manner, Sule reworks the theme of the silence of the sea, though in different style, to craft his own version of the notion of the silence of the sea. Sule writes:

Awesome how beneath your silence
disparate tribes of lives
quiver with laughter and chaos. (3)

Though captured in different styles, the underlying intertextual utterances between the two poets, in this context, is about the silence of the sea and what it entails in metaphoric terms. Meanwhile, one of the prominent poems in Osundare's second poetry collection, *Village Voices,* (1984) that talks about social disparity is "Unequal fingers". The persona of the poem pillories the self-serving artificial disparity created by the power-holders to perpetuate their unpopular regimes and to persuade the gullible masses to admit the precarious situation as predestined. To realise his theme, Osundare, in this poem, uses the popular analogy of the all fingers-are-not-equal adage. The persona in the poem is defiant as he exposes the source of the selfish imbalance to the greed of the establishment and their gimmicks of perpetuating their hold on power. Sule extends this theme in his adapted title "parables of fingers." The opening lines of Sule's 'Parables…' begins with a rhetorical question enacting a dialogue with Osundare which goes: "who

says fingers are not equal?" (p31) This is, however, a reworking of Osundare's lines and an echoing of Osundare's argument. Osundare writes *Let no one tell us again/that fingers are not equal* (p60). Osundare meanwhile provides answers to the root of the artificial unequal fingers:

> […]
>
> for we know
> how the thumb grew fatter
> than all the others
> the funds for our community centre
> built your palace
> the funds for our rugged roads
> bought your car
> the funds for our water scheme
> irrigate your banks in Europe. (60)

Osundare, from the above lines, traces the root of the artificial disparity to corruption orchestrated, most especially, by the leadership. Sule's version however, is different. His source of the artificial disparity, as the lines below vindicate, is traceable to the distortion of history and facts. Sule writes:

> Fingers' rapid legs
> have trodden treasure of histo-lies
> have crossed ridges of vast dreams
> nomadic with untamed longings. (51)

The pun on history above indicates the poet committed concern with the history of extortion as suffered by gullible African masses in the history books of the colonial masters and their African collaborators. Sule, like Osundare, craves for a society devoid of the extortionist divide between the haves and haves not. The persona as such is declarative in his assertion:

Fingers shall remain equal
on the lips of this reform
to author wild arithmetic
to out-Sea the sea. (51)

This ideological stance of a classless society precedes in Osundare's version of the poem. He writes: *let no one tells us again/that fingers are not equal* (p80). Sule however, extends the imagery to a larger frontier by tracing the root of the parable of the unequal finger not only to the distortion of history but to the roles of the contracted sugar-coated propagandists who ensure the perpetuation of the disparity through rhetoric. Sule writes:

This parable of finger
is a song-dance of tongues. (51)

Between Osundare's 'Unequal fingers' and Sule's 'The parable of fingers', a conscious intertextual conversation ensues bordering on theme and style. Apart from the thematic dialogue between the two poets, Sule also borrows some lexical collocation freely from Osundare. For instance, to conjure images of free association of his poetic lines and free movement of his poetic thought, Osundare uses the lexical term 'liquid' as his programmatic idiom. In *Waiting laughters,* for instance, Osundare uses 'liquid depth' (p80); 'liquid lesson' (p88); 'liquid snore' (p9); 'liquid breath' (p96) etc. This parallels Sule's use, for example: 'liquid lore' and 'liquid idiom' (p13); 'liquid laughter' (p15); 'liquid accent' (p9); 'liquid bliss' (p39) and 'liquid tales' etc. The lexical borrowings by Sule are obvious.

Osundare and Sule are both public poets who privilege the plight of the larger society as their thematic preoccupation. As a public poet, Osundare is readily concerned with the state of the decay in the society as a result of the plundering and rape of the community's wealth by the leadership. To portray these concerns in poetic terms, Osundare is fond of using erotic images like 'the monk's orgasm' (p15), 'the concert of hips' (p8) 'near the sacrum of the moon' (p6), 'penis of okro' (p14) etc., (*Waiting Laughters*). Sule's use of sexual images in a manner typically Osundarean is obvious: '…in their scrotum' (p5) 'orgasm of iron' (p14); 'Aida's hips' (p33); 'supple sexuality' (p36); 'moans of defilers' (p37); 'misfired penis' and 'wayward penises' (p461). The proposition here is that, Sule is not only influenced by the use of the sexual images as a means of portraying rape and decay in the society but that he is equally influenced by Osundare's lexical collocation in conjuring the sexual images.

For instance, Osundare in *Waiting Laughters* uses "monk's orgasm" (p15) while Sule reworks his as "orgasm of lion"; Osundare's "defiling the watery fence" (p17) becomes Sule's "moans of defilers (p37) while "concert of hips" (p8) parallels "Aida's hips" (p35) as used by Osundare and Sule respectively.Sule, like all the poets treated in this chapter, is attracted to Osundare's public poetic bent in the manner he addresses those issues that affect the voiceless masses. This cannot be divorced from the fact that third generation Nigerian poets cannot afford to ignore aesthetics of negation

which Osundare popularises to censure the symptomatic ineptitude of the establishment in their country and the world at large. Consequent upon this, Sule openly admits the mentorship of Osundare and demonstrates same as he adapts Osundare's satiric mode, word play and lexical collocations among many other stylistic cadences to create his own poetic voice.

Osundare's influence on the four poets examined above is contingent upon intrinsic poetic forms namely the apparent adoption of his lexical collocation, use of homour and wordplay; the assimilation of his tone and tenor which includes the lyrical and performative undertones and the adaptation of the aesthetics of negation which he popularises and which is embellished in satirical mode to address thought provoking themes as leader's excesses; cultural and moral decay among others. While each poet's dispositions to the nature of his intertextual negotiations define his level of aesthetic grafting; the overbearing result is the creation and emergence of a hybrid poetic voice which is readily intertextual in outlook.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The dominant trend normally explored in defining postcolonial literature, often called Anglophone or Commonwealth literature in former English colonies and Francophone literature in former French colonies, as two examples; is to inscribe it in relation to its cultural root or its tangential aesthetic interface with colonial literature. This study however, establishes that other conceptual paradigms exist; one of which is to locate its core aesthetic from its intertextual relations with earlier artistic traditions within the postcolonial space. In this context, contemporary Nigerian poetry, as this study demonstrates, exhibits intertextual affinity with its immediate preceding artistic practice.

This study however, does not suggest that at the present global network of cultural transfer and linkages, Nigerian poetry is impervious to other forms of intertextual negotiators with other world literatures. But, argues that, recent Nigerian poetry derives its dominant aesthetic features from the intertextual dialogic with the artistic traditions of its forbears.

This intertextual engagement between the contemporary Nigerian poets and their immediate forbears of the second generation stock is however, examined, in this study, within the precincts of power relation and canon formation. The insight given by Foucault is adapted to interpret the

power relations amongst the two generations. Prior to Foucault's seminal treatise on power, power was only conceived to manifest from the top-down echelon.

With Foucault's insight, power relation is seen to always manifest in any form of discursive interactions. In fact, following Foucault, all forms of cultural semiotics as literature, music, and architecture constitutes at the same time a site for power negotiations. In the context of this study, Osundare's domineering presence in the poetic consciousness of the recent Nigerian poets, instances the emergence of an intrinsic mechanism of influence and control definable within the context of power relations. However, while the intertextual engagement between the two generations as examined in this study is defined within the perspective of power relation; its literary interface is however probed within the context of canon formation. Canon, in this study, is examined from the extent a particular regime of literary practice becomes visible and standardised as models through the discursive practices of regulation of control and promotion by publishing industries, reviewers and academic criticism.

From the achievements and the relative visibility of Osundare's poetry, as this study illustrates, he has established himself as a canonical writer. Writers generally become attracted to a dominant canon of perception within their intellectual control which they would want to adapt or repel. In fact, it is this interface of convergence and divergence that characterises the

intertextual relationship between Osundare and the recent Nigerian poets like Raji, Lasisi, Ushie and Sule examined in this study. This study, in this vein, establishes that there is much besides the fascination of these writers with the poetic practice of Osundare but the emergence of a literary tradition that is in constant conflict with its past.

Canon as such is the dominant tradition of arts and letters which spans time and space, but tradition in this study is conceived not as handing-down of core cultural values, but following Bloom, as 'a conflict between past genius and present aspirations in which the prize is literary survival and or canonical inclusion'. This study demonstrates these insights by showing that the relationship between Osundare and the recent Nigeria poets is that of cultural conflict between a past genius (herein Osundare) and the present aspiration by the recent poets for canonical inclusion.

In the same vein, this study establishes that what attracted most of the recent Nigerian poets to the poetics of Osundare is the drive to appropriate his (Osundare's) use of aesthetic of negation and dissidence, borne out of Osundare's ideological resolve to confront the excesses of the establishment not only in his home country, but the third world at large. As established in this study, the aesthetic of negation manifest in Osundare's poetry in the manner he dramatises his themes through the deployment of satire,pun,wry humour and the energetic animation of his every poetic lines to ensures its performative outlook.

The study circumscribes some of the instances where Ushie adapted some of these performative cadences popularised by Osundare. However, it is in Lasisi's *Night of my Flight* that you see this penchant for experimentation with the performative mode in the same garb as Osundare. Apart from the dramatisation of the themes, Osundare is also very conscious of his lexical choice and collocations especially in the manner he portrays erotic images which he deploys to depict the decay in society as a result of gross leadership mismanagement. The argument in this study is that recent Nigerian writers also face the same perennial leadership problem. As such, as an ideological necessity to confront the establishment, they find the use of the sexual imagery popularised by Osundare useful; since in third world countries as Nigeria, one cannot separate arts from politics.

This is why in chapter one Waugh's argument in respect of canon formation is adopted. Waugh, unlike Bloom, argues that it is impossible to separate politics and arts in canon formation in postcolonial nations. In postcolonial literary space, canon and canon formation is synonymous with identity and Nationhood. As such, one of the points of convergence between Osundare's poetry and that of recent Nigerian poets is that they portray themes that address core issues on identity, Nation and Nationhood. Yet; there is apparent divergence between the two divides. The recent Nigerian poets examined in this study expand the frontier of their poetic verve by ingeniously blending the public and the personal as manifest especially in

Sule and Lasisi's poetry. This is linked to the fact that Osundare and the recent Nigerian poets differ at the core of their ideological resolution. While Osundare is a revolutionary Marxist who believes in mass revolution as an end product of social struggle, recent Nigerian poets prefer the individual survivalist instinct where the poetic persona, not the larger society, is the agon of change. So to slightly differ with Osundare, their creative genius, in the manner of the realisation of their ideological concern, these poets misread Osundare's poetry to constitute a distinct canon of literary assimilation and grafting which sustains and extends the frontier of political and cultural essentialism popularised by their immediate forbears.

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