

**ORAL DISTILLATES AND POSTCOLONIAL TEMPER IN ADEMOLA DASYLVA'S
SONGS OF ODAMOLUGBE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper engages the self-validating domain of orality as a valuable and potent field in the depiction of postcolonial Africa, in particular Nigeria. The paper accounts for orality as the authentic core of the mode of self-assertion, continued self-existence and the consistent (re)validation of how traditional societies structured their worldviews and cultural aesthetics. It argues that African writers still utilise the aesthetic provisions that their oral backcloth and oral past provide in the identification, (re)appraisal and the representation of the postcolonial situation in Africa. Engaging Ademola Dasylva's *Songs of Odamolugbe* as primary text and data, the paper examines and explores features of Yoruba oral poetry and allied aggregates that the Yoruba traditional culture offers. This is clearly realized and apprehended in the crafting of the collection of poems and the overarching thematic foci and direction. These representations are captured within two extremes. Employing insights from postcolonial literary theory in its critique of the primary text, the paper situates the enervating frustrations, collapse of industry, economic inanities, atmosphere of fear, tensions, widespread underdevelopment, neocolonial excesses, prevalent hunger, deep-seated corruption and a general apathy to life and living as daily experienced in postcolonial Africa and Nigeria. As part of its finding, the paper attests that Dasylva's *Songs of Odamolugbe* relishes a completed precolonial past where African communities maintained a communal cultural ownership of their existence and presided over their own affairs. It concludes that the poetry collection decries and rejects the morbid realities that characterize the postcolonial African experience.

Key Words: Orality; literacy; African poetry; postcolonialism; cultural self-assertion.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discourse on orality, its significance, ramifications and potency, especially in preliterate societies, has continued to attract the interest of scholars of African literature. One of the most profound moments in the development of humanity was the historic transition from a pristinely oral setting to a writing culture. The relevance which orality maintained in such preliterate societies, particularly before the advent of the codification of thought processes in writing or print, finds ever-abiding credence in the worldviews and societal structuring of such early milieus. Indeed, orality remains as primordial as the existence of man on earth (Ong, 1982). Despite the emergence of writing coupled with printing and the continuous influence which it arrogates to itself, it has not reduced the efficacy of the spoken word.

Orality easily absorbs the complexities of sound and the spoken word. Very pristine African societies understood and availed themselves of the unique potentials that the spoken word carried. In most of these traditional African settings, the word was not only expressive of individual emotions or feelings but was equally representative of their worldviews and

cosmogony. The word was seen as phenomenal, hence possessed paranormal effects (Irele, 1975). The extent of the power inherent in the spoken word, especially as expressed in preliterate societies, remains a field of scholarly interest. Since man has the natural potential to produce coordinated and meaningful sounds, the converse implication is that this helps in the facilitation or otherwise of structuring societies either in smaller or larger units. Both the speaker and the audience, in a moment of time, establish oneness.

Ruth Finnegan (1970:1) insists that Africa possesses both written and unwritten traditions. She argues that the written forms are relatively well known while the unwritten forms are far less widely known and appreciated. One must quickly add that such oral forms which are uniquely the preserve of orally pristine societies especially in the African context are today utilised. The ensemble of African traditional cultural pool has not stopped engaging the creative sensibilities of African writers. Not a few of modern writers of African extraction borrow from the rich pool that orality provides. Liz Gunner (2004:2), in "Africa and Orality," contends that orality needs to be seen in the African context as the means by which societies of varying complexities regulated themselves, organized their present and their past, made formal spaces for philosophical reflections, pronounced on power, questioned and in some cases contested power. For Gunner, orality was the means by which Africa made its existence.

Orality and the creative imagination

Significantly today, African writers have continued to fuse the resources of orality in their creative writing as they depict the shortcomings that forge the modern historical realities of their time. Thus, according to Okpewho (2004:18), "African writers consciously borrow techniques and ideas from their oral traditions in constructing techniques dealing essentially with modern life." Okpewho states that African writers believe that even though their societies have changed drastically from what they were several generations ago, there must be certain fundamental elements in their own traditions that they can bring out into their own portraits of contemporary life. The deduction arrived at, therefore, follows that orality is symbiotically tied to the sustainability of Africa's existence with all the variants of its aesthetic values.

The influence that the spoken word exerts still remains centrally relevant to Africa as indicated by the specialized accord given to it. Despite the much-celebrated position given to writing, Ong (1982) contends that orality is relevant. Ong states that in all the wonderful worlds that writing opens, the spoken word still resides and lives. Finnegan (1970:83) situates the role which traditional poets and court praise singers play, especially in preliterate African societies. She avers that in the traditional kingdoms of Africa, with their royal courts and clearly marked differences in wealth, power, and leisure, court poetry flourished. The relevance of these poets, Finnegan contends, was seen in the preservation of the historic record and of genealogies. In his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Elliot (1932) informs that there are strands of interrelatedness and influence of the works of ancestral poets especially those of traditional settings which can be found in the works of modern poets. The issue of individuality in creative endeavours does not necessarily presuppose a distance from previous/early cultural traditions. According to Elliot:

Our tendency is to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work, we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's

difference from his predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice, we shall find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously (48).

Unarguably, the position indicated by Elliot holds true for modern African poets as well as others who experiment in the other literary genres. The view of Karibi (1991:107) remains valuable that the employment of the artistic resources of the African oral tradition in addressing the contemporary social history of Africa continues to engage African writers concerned with creating an artistically authentic African literature.

With the postcolonial burden placed by a Western hegemonic scribal culture, the need for the concretization of self-identity and a consistent self-definition has often triggered this ideological imperative and cultural expediency in African writers whether poets, novelists or dramatists. What one finds is that a significant number of Africa's leading poets consciously borrow from the rich pool of their traditional lore. This fusion of the different aspects of their loric tradition enhances the complexity of the thematic foci which they wish to relay. Irele (1975:4) recognises the umbilical cord that exists between the African writer and his oral heritage as explicated in his essay "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer: D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka." Irele posits that the main motive power in this movement proceeds from the endeavour of the African writers to work out a new spiritual coherence out of the historical disconnection between their African heritage and their modern experience.

Of importance at this juncture is the conjecture raised by Euromodernist analysts of African literature who hold that with the excessive use of these folkloric traditions, writers of African extraction lack universality (Irele, 1975). It must, however, be stated that the concept of universality is fluid. A close examination of universality as identified by these Euromodernist critics would whip up the bias of the sustenance of a Western hegemonic perception. The depth of the issues raised in the thematic constructs of the literary productions of African writers with the fusion of the elements of orality makes them original, authentic and universal. The veracity and originality of any work of art, especially of African literature in this case, is sourced from the fact that it aptly represents the socio-historical and political realities of the primary milieu of production. The conscious amalgam of the two generic orders, orality and literacy, does not reduce but only heightens the attainability of verisimilitude in literary crafting. Bernth Lindfors (2002:32) opines that some authors have been spectacularly successful in remoulding oral art into literary art; others have been miserable failures. Lindfors concludes that the most creative writers have been those who have united the oral and literary traditions available to them.

This crucial, most basic employment of these oral distillates has gone beyond the written tradition. Indeed, while there has been a transition from oral to written and the symbiotic representations of these two, it is important to note that the present dispensation of social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, Zoom, etc, has created a fusion where audio-visual and the written text coalesce to form a whole that is both intriguing and engaging. With the preponderance of these audio-visual and written texts, shared on these social media platforms, the growing consumers of these productions have become crucial participants and contributors of the form and content of the texts. Skits which parody and celebrate daily life highlight the public

disconnect and the apparent lethargy inherent in society. Literary productions, dipped in African lore and tradition, have equally found a utilization of these social media platforms.

Of theoretical leaning

Quite suitable for this study is the use of postcolonial theory as it aptly provides the framework of literary criticism for the discourse. Postcolonialism illustrates the multivalent layers of cultural hybridism as it seeks to recognise the wealth of literariness of colonised oral traditions and the situations of those areas after the initial contact with western colonial powers. The decay and dehumanising experiences of postcolonial Africa are portrayed by the work to be examined. Indeed, postcolonialism has taken different garbs of representation especially by various critics; this study employs that string of it that critiques the aftermath of the attainment of independence by African nations.

Postcolonialism is deeply tied to imperialism. Literatures with postcolonial temper in Africa evolved during and after the intervention of colonialism in Africa. Other areas which shared similar experience include Asia and Latin America. Inaugural critical works on this include Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Other works which capture such representation include Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Bill Ashcroft's *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), among others. Postcolonial criticism has not stopped adopting eclectic moulds in its approach. Such aims include the representation of the process of colonialism which is made from the perspective of the colonized, the determination of the effects of colonialism on the culture, politics and the economy of the colonised, among others (Habib, 2005). In very conscious attempts, many postcolonial writers construct a pre-colonial version of their nation different from the colonizer's perception and in this they topple the contemporary which captures the inanities that shape the postcolonial status of their countries (Barry, 1995).

Postcolonial burden in Ademola Dasylyva's *Songs of Odamolugbe*

The widely canvassed is that African literature is deeply utilitarian, especially as it tendentiously makes evident the overriding thematic preoccupation of the cyclical ordeals of bad governance, poverty, incessant military interventions in democratic setups, collapse of social structures, and lack of access to qualitative and affordable education in the daily existence of African countries years after independence from colonial domination. African writers, in their burdened outlook, depict these realities in their literary crafting, irrespective of the means of literary expression.

While describing the socio-political miasma in which the African poet operates, Tsaaior (2004:15) argues that it is the culmination of this quotidian complexion of affairs defined by monumental incoherence and paradoxes as well as an elephantine socio-political paralysis that has provided the impetus for many African contemporary poets, avatars of the poetic tradition, to appropriate public space.

Ademola Dasylyva's *Songs of Odamolugbe* (2006) is, without doubt, a combination of the employment of the English lexicon and the Yorùbá style of oral narrativisation. The collection presents a rich blend of imagery, metaphor and proverbs.

'Ira', which is the first poem, at once divulges the hitherto concealed anguish and animosity that had long dwelt in the subconscious of the persona. The poem is indicting as it is also accusative and condemnatory of the self-styled, home-grown African dictators who have not stopped holding their countries to ransom years after independence. According to the persona:

a patriot's ire,
 detonating offering,
 neutralizing rockets of verses,
 launched today,
 at
 their scumber: compradors
 of multinationals;
 similes of scud
 missiles
 today,
 at
 home grown tyrants, political
 mercenaries: missiles of metaphor,
 a patriot's ire, padded on
 my enthralled soul
 launched
 today,
 at
 them: murderers of our motherland
 (*Songs of Odamolugbe, 26*)

The poem utilises, in the foregrounding of its thematic essence, the technique of emblematic structure. The structure of the poem is jagged, serrated and bumpy. It connotes both the disarray of the mental landscape of the persona as it relates to the disheveled socio-political topography of the nation. The persona describes in vivid and imagistic terms the postcolonial situation of many countries in Africa with a market setting (Bodija) in the ancient city of Ibadan in Oyo State, South West Nigeria.

In Yorùbá cosmogony, the marketplace holds symbolic and primal philosophical trappings. The market square is an archetype of inclusion as it provides a nexus of interaction. The market, in traditional African settings, implies a peculiar front of the meeting place of personalities from the world of the supernatural. In many African folk tales, the market square or the village square provides the melting point of all the various strata of traditional communes. The world in traditional African worldview is seen as a marketplace where each individual comes to trade and afterwards proceeds home. Home here typifies the movement of the human soul at death to the abode of the ancestors.

Little wonder then that the persona utilises this motif as there is a deliberate depiction of the dregs of the society. At the market, the polarisation between the rich and the poor disappears.

suffocating children (s)trapped on
 bare backs of mammy mothers,
 in Bodija market wagons of
 wanton wheel-barrow boys
 and carts ... co-pilgrims!
 armoured tanks of
 ironies launched

today,
at
their crude politics of oil pricing, roads, rail and
air-ways, of education, ironing and stealing...!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 26)

In 'My Hoe Nips at Mother Earth', the persona evinces virtually all the intricate resources of orality. The poem is dramatic as it equally provides that energy of immediacy that oral performance only opens. This dramatic feature of orality is immediately noticed in the first line of the poem as the persona calls on the audience

Co-pilgrims on the famished road, listen!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 28)

The choice of the expression 'co-pilgrims' authenticates the politics of inclusion as well as its convert counterpart of exclusion. The deliberate use of it easily predisposes the listener to the fact that not all that is in the audience shares existential ties with the oral performer.

The 'road' also holds philosophical implications in African traditional world view. As used by the persona, it reinforces the belief that man is on a journey on this part of the cosmic divide before his transition to the world of the ancestral. This journey is inaugurated when the individual moves from the world of the unborn to that of the living. The road as motif is sustained in virtually all pristine cultures of the world.

In Judaea-Christian mythopoeia, the Christian is believed to be on a journey from his physical abode on earth to heaven (Philippians 3: 20, 21, New King James Version of the Bible). There is also a subtle condemnation of the Western incursion of pristine African settings as captured in lines 2 and 3

Kango-kango was the song of our fathers' gong
Before the harmattan of bastards broke its fragile tail

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 28)

Unarguably, oral performances dwell within the domain of sounds. This is noticeable in both stanzas 1 and 2 where expressions like 'kango-kango' and 'kange-kange' are the typical sounds that emanate from a gong. Like idiophones, these sounds carry semantic associations that are only decipherable by the initiate or members by that community. Gongs in pristinely oral settings like Africa are usually held by the town crier. The role performed by the town crier is that of an informer especially as he relays the decisions of the paramount ruler or the supreme council of elders.

My new song, kange-kange, from the tail-less gong
Breaks the ear-drums of our sleeping dusk,
Weary nightwalkers grope in mortal fear

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 28)

There is a preponderant deployment of proverbs, self-referencing, cross-referencing and personifications in the portrayal of thematic constructs. Personification, whereby non-human

things are imbued with human capacities and feelings, is used. In the third stanza, 'dawn' and 'banana trees' are personified

The dawn lays bare the nightmare incubus:

Banana trees masquerading loose wings
Dance to whirling wind, flap gnomonic scare.

(*Songs of Odamolugbe*, 28)

The concept of dawn in Yorùbá cosmology is metaphoric of a new beginning and the opportunity to begin or start again. The nightmare of misgovernance and all its aggregates that are foisted on the masses by the ruling class is here a metaphoric derivative of the incubus. In medieval times, the incubus is said to be a male demon that has sexual intercourse with women while they sleep. In traditional religious settings, this is seen as a taboo. Despite the prolonged hold that the incubus may wield at night, its potency is reduced to nought at the break of dawn.

The Yorùbá expression *Afẹ́fẹ́ ti fẹ́* (the wind has blown) occurs twice in the rendition as noticed in stanzas 4 and 32. The persona does not complete the expression as he expects the audience to do. The deliberate use of the expression creates an ambiance of exclusionary linguistic and cultural interpretation. An individual who does not share Yorùbá linguistic and cultural space would naturally find it difficult to meaningfully participate. The full expression is *Afẹ́fẹ́ ti fe, a ti ri fùrò adiyẹ* which is by interpretation: the wind has blown and we have seen the fowl's anus. At the

metaphorical level of analysis, the persona indicates that the natural law of karma which enforces reparations would make these rulers account for their misdeeds. Proverbs occupy significant positions within the Yorùbá worldview.

They are considered to be the repertoire of wisdom; they originate from keen observation of natural phenomena and from human interactions and relations. When proverbs are properly applied, they perform both imagistic and sociological functions. Self-referencing as earlier indicated is a prominent feature of oral performance. This is replete as shown in stanzas 22, 25, 27, 28, 29 and 30. The effect of this is to achieve and foreground toughness of character, assertion and even prowess. Traditional poets equally use this as an avenue to sing the praise of their lineage. Self-referencing as captured in stanzas 29 and 30 is used for self praise. This is typical of the *oríkì* tradition.

I, Odamolugbe, tapper of lore that lulls a crying cradle to sleep;
Singer of songs that taste like evening palm wine to listening adults.

My fowl is in the rain pursuing what is very dear to it!

I, singer who own the bush and own its outskirts,

I, the sitting seer who sees what those standing could not see!

(*Songs of Odamolugbe*, 30)

He recognizes and pays homage to poets before him as he seeks his place of relevance among them. He recognizes poets like Niyi Osundare addressing him as the *Odamolugbe* himself.

Kange-kange, my song from the broken gong,

Barren of Osundare's pastoral images,

The untiring Odamolugbe himself

A child that learns early to wash his hands sits with elders:

One evening, Oja-Logunja, Ogunba, Oba Areje, Agbada, Isola, Olatunji, Osundare, Omamor, Okafor, Okinba, Higo, Irele-e-e--e Darah and Ibitokun had invited me to a dinner in Baba Faleti's House; there the sayings of our elders had tasted like pounded yam!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 29)

The harrowing experience which the masses are forcefully subjected to is demonstrated in the poem. The persona identifies with this as he condemns the situation of a postcolonial Africa where a few cabal holds the various countries hostage to their greed, avarice and wanton disregard for human lives.

My kange-kange song of the phlegmic gong
Like the dawn, rips bare, bare their masquerade,
Forcing scary nightmares to scamper!
Nor rhyme, nor rhythm, save their song:
Rhumba music of hungry rumbling bellies, save
Fearful frame of fragile limbs, the living dead!
Here, together we trudge on this road
Of madding crowd, where yesterday's thief is Chief!
Side-by-side, hand-in-hand with fate,
The dead, the dying, all shrouded in poverty,
Wondering at our hollowness, dying at their pace!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 31)

As a collection which is redolent with social commitment, the anthology seems burdened with protest. Despite the bitterness and anger which the persona displays, he attempts provoking the gods in order to seek their speedy intervention especially on the traumatizing plight of the masses. There is a consciousness of the aesthetic touch of dark humour and anger. This, essentially, is the therapeutic effect that the literary provides. The elixir of balancing perhaps the continued dehumanizing experience that Nigerians have found themselves with occasional moments of psychic escape which the poetic opens is here captured. The drum takes the core of transmission in 'If the Gods Must Be!' The nation of Obai becomes the immediate setting as the poet takes the multifaceted problems plaguing the nation to the gods.

The rendition is first expected to be relayed by the Iya'lu-talking drum before the performer repeats it. African languages are tonal. Drums in their variegated capacities are used for signaling and dance music. It takes some level of practice and professionalism to play such tone instruments. In most cases, the oral performer could be singer and drummer.

In 'If the Gods Must Be!', there is a rich allusion to the Yorùbá pantheon. African spiritual world reveals a complexly populated maze of spiritual beings, the living-dead and spirits. Within the African cosmogony, there is a sacred interaction among the three cosmic realms of the unborn, the living, and the ancestral. It is strongly believed that for the continued harmony of the world of the living, certain rites of appeasement should be made. The persona argues that the well-being of the gods is tied to that of the living.

If the gods, the gods I say, if they must be,
My people, the people must live!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 33)

The persona goes ahead to call on the gods.

The war is here; the war is now!

You must tell it to Ogun!

They say:

Ogun from Ire is cloak'd in ironic septuagint,

Adorned in sceptre of flaming fronds,

Ogun's present where blood smells,

That he, Ogun, assists his faithful at war!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 33)

Of all the various tribal communes in Africa, it is generally held that the Yorùbá have one of the largest pantheons of divinities (Soyinka, 1976). These divinities have their connections with natural phenomena and in other cases objects. They have their expressions in human activities and experiences. Ogun is traditionally held as one of the most important deities in the Yorùbá pantheon. Ogun is seen as the protector of orphans; he is held as the master craftsman and artist. Ogun serves as the patron deity of blacksmiths and warriors, and all those who use metal in their occupation. He possesses both the essence of creativity and destruction. The Yorùbá view Ogun as the 'Lord of the road' of Ifa, which implies that he is the 'open sesame' to the heart of the repertoire of Ifa's wisdom.

Ogun's nature easily discloses fear and he is perceived especially as revealed by his activities as fearsome and terrible in revenge. It is therefore natural for the poet to call him first since the poet's call is about war against all that represent political chaos, misrule and democratic inanities in a postcolonial Nigeria. The poet does not stop at Ogun but equally makes mention of other deities in the Yoruba pantheon. He calls on Sango, Esu Laroye, Oya and Osun.

Tell Sango Olukoso also,

Through your evoking batakoto,

He too must hear this!

They say;

Sango is justice,

The great One,

Stern, fiery, his look;

A fighting dragon, they say,

Sango the great One

Whose growl is mixed anger of hungry

Lions, when rains fall!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 36)

While Sango is held as the god of storm and thunder, Oya is the female warrior goddess of wind and fire. Osun is the goddess of love, pleasure, beauty and diplomacy. Esu acts as a link between humans and the Yorùbá deities. He is also the benevolent trickster. Esu is the patron of roads, healers and magicians

Tell Esu Laaroye the great confuser at

Bere-roundabout traffic jam

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 34)

The poet attempts to summon these deities and charges them that except they do something drastic to redeem the masses from untold suffering, the lot of the gods would only be shame.

Drum it to Sango, tell it to Ogun,

Drum to Ogun, tell it to Sango!

Tell the gods, the war is now!

That vain gods are but dust

Where vision is the ferry of destiny

Warn the gods, Ayan:

That the masses must live or we stuff

Their mouths with ashes of our misery!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 37)

In "Compatriots arise", the clarion call moves to the downtrodden of the populace. The rendition is moving as well as arresting especially as it captures the ridicule that the denizens have been reduced to. The citizens do not have a stake in the socio-political events that daily play out in their firmament of existence.

Compatriots arise, arrest

Obai's enthralled dignity,

As we watch her squandered prosperity,

Leaders in vain glory transgress,

And leaches the gamblers' congress.

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 54)

Obai, here, is metaphoric of Nigeria in particular and Africa by extension. The economic quagmire in which the nation found herself was not placed on her by the colonial powers but this was done by its ruling cabal made up of its citizens.

The citizens of Obai wallow in wanton poverty not because the nation cannot cater to the wellbeing of its citizenry but because of the sheer mismanagement and pilfering that have remained the bane of Obai's progress. The indictment encapsulates even religious institutions which naturally should have served as the last resort of moral rectitude. Religion has become commercialised where the dregs of society have reduced it to a money-spinning wheel.

Compatriots arise, arrest

These meadows with predator's crown

Which brought the Bible and the Qu'ran

But they turned both garments

Into commerce and sacramental ornaments.

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 54)

Within this rendition, the poet re-enacts the June 12, 1993 national presidential election in which the world adjudged as the freest and fairest in Nigeria's political history. The military junta headed by General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the 1993 presidential election in

which the results demonstrated that late Chief M.K.O. Abiola won. After declaring himself winner, Abiola was arrested and detained. His prolonged incarceration resulted in his death amidst many controversies.

Mother Obai, did I hear you ask why we holler?

The 'Area Boys' in power milk the dairy dry,
And teddy-wolves make our children cry,
Their General the general hope annulled,
Like Oduche, the caged sacred python all appalled.

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 54)

Truly, oral performances have the stylistic qualities of parallelism, repetition, imagery, tonality, allusion, symbolism, digression, among others. In 'Helotry', the features of Yoruba oral poetry are foregrounded. There is a lead voice who must be an older member of the community and a chorus which consists of the younger in the society. There is the call-and-response pattern typical of an oral tell-tale performance. This is noticed in the first four lines and in the subsequent conversations that ensue between the lead voice and the chorus

Lead: Alakiti

Chorus: Alakitijan *(Songs of Odamolugbe, 62)*

This is repeated for some time so as to call the attention of the chorus. Story telling in African setting is not just a mere verbal engagement but essentially geared towards didacticism. The performer emphasizes, while agreeing to tell the story, that

Children", said he, "of what use is a story,

Unless it is an armoury that enriches the mind,
Unless my children, it kicks awake sedated giants,
In us, kick-starts our lethargic conscience, ... unless ... ?

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 62)

Through the use of invectives, the oral performer re-tells the historical trajectory of both the pristine, idyllic state of Africa and the present miasma in which it has been reduced. Africa here is celebrated like a woman much like the Negritude poets do

The story of a young, pretty black Queen:

Our elders say-

The whiteness of the teeth is

The beauty of the teeth;

Smooth skin is the wealth of a healthy body,

A pair of full, warm and roundish breasts,

The pride of a beautiful woman.

The young black Queen is the very beauty;

The brightness of a tropical sun,

Her pair of laughing eyes, her teeth white as ivory

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 65)

It is only an established fact that African writers usually depict Africa as a woman with the procreative possibilities and beauty that the female energy encapsulates. Continuing the persona adds

Two succulent, firm breasts with caps of anxious nipples,
Brimming with warm Atlantic milk, her face calm as morning;
Of enormous means and vigour: Aukar's gold
Was her bracelet, Musa's Mali her jewellery,
Kimberly diamond was her bangle, the Nile
Was her jealously guarded precious treasure;
Ghaneria's cacao was her beloved orchard,
Egypt's pyramid her majestic throne,
Kilimanjaro was her royal pavilion,
Drakensberg her footstool, her swimming pool
The Tanganyika lake ... rich and cultivated Queen.

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 66)

The allusion made to the rich natural endowments of places within the African continent lends credence to the fact that both its flora and fauna extend the tourist attraction that Africa provides. The Egyptian pyramid remains one of the greatest wonders of the world: both in ancient and contemporary times. The Egyptians believed that the spirit of a dead monarch left the body and travelled through the sky. The spirits of these royalties usually settled in their pyramids to renew themselves when the sun set in the west. This further portrays the depth of religious mystery that guided and informed the world view of African pristine cultures. Mount Kilimanjaro and the Tanganyika Lake are part of the geographical expressions of the natural diversity of the African continent. The depth of cultural aesthetics predominant in Africa's antiquity distinguishes the continent from others.

The persona informs of the peaceful ambiance and the progressive strides that Africa made in such distant past before the incursion of White hegemony. For the poet

The Queendom had flowed with milk and honey.

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 66)

The tale here told re-tells the painful ordeal that was thrust upon the African existence. One of the greatest moments in African historical trajectory was the interaction of the West with Africa.

Then came one long night of inaction, and weird dreams;
Faceless fellows from far distance, stealthily
They came, cunningly they knocked father out with
Devastating bottles of dry gins; his mouth
They stuffed with pound notes, the homestead
Over-ran, ravished the Queen, carted her wealth'way
To the land of jackboots!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 66)

This fundamental point in African history of the pillage and larceny meted out on it has continued to attract the interest of scholars of African history and also reflected in the

thematic constructions of African creative writers. The twin amalgam of slavery and colonialism significantly contributed to the African presence in the diaspora.

While slavery was not the exclusive preserve of any of the races, the African experience was without doubt the most arresting. In his analysis of the origin of the diaspora, J.E. Inikori (1978) contends:

It is important to point out at the onset that the slave trade was not the only source through which African peoples were dispersed all over the world. Some voluntary migrations may have taken place before the era of the slave trade and have certainly been going on since its abolition. Nevertheless, the slave trade has remained by far the most important factor which dispersed African peoples and their cultures all over the globe. Quantitatively therefore, the trade can be treated as the origin of the diaspora. (2)

There is a most remarkable dimension to the presentation of character typologies in the tale. The audience is told by the persona that the Queen 'had a set of princely twins': Tayewo and Kehinde. The (ir)relevance of the two characters are played out at the attempted rape of the Queen. After the initial contact of the strangers with the Queen, the audience is told that an intercourse occurs which results in the birth of an albino.

For seven strange months mother in her womb
Had carried a strange baby, then one strange morning
It arrived, unexpected: the Queen had bled
The morning the albino came ...
The size of a red-neck... without life almost;
Mother had nursed it, and together with
Its half-brothers grew to adulthood.

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 66)

The bizarre that takes place is the attempted rape and violation of the Queen by the albino. This results in a struggle between the Queen and the albino.

One strange night, the bastard stole
Into mother's resting room, tried to
Monkey and violate the sleeping mother, eewo!
Mother had resisted: the pride of a graceful Queen
Violence of a once violated goddess;
Again and again, the bastard came at mother,
Threw missiles, cutting deep into mother's ebony body.
The rogue tore open her clothes, pulled her braided hair!
Then the accursed went for mother's naked body.
Sangbangelete a-a-a! Lukuluku ooo!!!
... But mother though weak,
Dying defenceless, doubly resisted.

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 66, 67)

Every behavioural institution has its own sacredness within the African cosmic milieu. It is the most sacrilegious of all crimes for members of same family to engage in sexual intercourse. The height of it then is for a child to have sexual interaction with the mother. Sex in African cultural setting has both social and religious relevance. It is therefore not surprising for the audience to exclaim in total disapproval of what the albino in the story does. 'Eewo' is a Yorùbá expression which means a taboo. In ideally oral performances, interjections indicate the participation of the audience.

Without doubt, the realities that played out after many African countries fought for and secured their independence from colonial powers are a far cry from the expectations of the masses. In postcolonial countries like Nigeria, the situation rather became worse. The much-expected self-governance turned out to be the worst nightmare of the nation. Never in the history of the nation has there been this level of economic sabotage and rape of the nation's masses. It is indeed a taboo. Many African countries still wallow in the quagmire of economic and social retrogression while the elite class creates channels to enrich themselves.

The princely brothers the mortal struggle
They heard from across mother's room,
The older glued to his sleeper, adjusted his
Covering cloth, continued his criminal sleep;
Muttered sleepily to himself, "I will find out in
The morning whatever that busy noise was ... "
A person who wants to run from home
Complains "a snake has entered the house",
(Songs of Odamolugbe, 67)

Nothing compares to this display of sabotage and disloyalty portrayed by Tayewo, the older of the Queen's children. It would be counted as gross when good men maintain silence in times of evil. The viciousness with which the rapist attempts to have his way with the Queen goes to the length where he tries to knock her senseless. The character typology of Kehinde is here valorised.

But he who must be great shows promise as a child,
His brother jumped out of his sleeper, flung
His encumbering covering cloth, vaulted to
Mother's bedroom, the locked door he broke open-
(Songs of Odamolugbe, 67)

The struggle that ensues between Kehinde and the assailant of his mother results in the former's inability to rescue his mother the Queen. While he goes to seek help, chaos follows with Tayewo's captivity the next morning.

In the morning, Tayewo woke up
A captive of the bastard;
Must cook and serve the monster's food,
Must dance to the bastard's discordant tunes,
Run bastard errands and many more special duties;
(Songs of Odamolugbe, 68)

This is indeed a portrayal of those members of the society who supposedly should have championed the necessary reforms in the nation's polity but unfortunately have been silenced by mundane and monetary privileges. The nation has seen the advent of independence, remained in a comatose situation, neither progressing nor showing signs of the desire to move forward.

Hun ... children, such was
Our situation for a long, long time, the way
The bastard had always wanted it,
Messy, Chaotic! (*Songs of Odamolugbe, 68*)

Since independence, many African nations, Nigeria inclusive, have had separate shares of the bitter pills of civil war. Nigeria is yet to recover from the political damage and economic mutilation that resulted from the civil war. Ethnic lines became re-constructed indicating strong tribal bias and sentiments. Ethno- religiously motivated violence still festers in many parts of the country. Threats of secession arising from various ethnic divides still envelop the nation. Certain regions of the country have indicated dissatisfaction in the disbursement of the national budget and the chicanery involved in the assumed development of their regions. It would not be difficult for a careful observer to deduce that the nation has never been in a more chaotic and messy state.

Typical of poets who are of the socialist-realist orientation, there is the triumph of the human spirit. Kehinde invites other members of his neighbourhood to come and assist him in vanquishing the villain who has hitherto taken captive his mother.

One bright morning, Kehinde returned with an
Army of youthful patriots and friendly neighbours
In a rescue mission of mother;
Together, we chased the brute out
Of the homestead, our homestead;
Shocked beyond a bad dream, the bastard
Rushed to Sabo, seized a long, thick rope,
Committed judas, in the marketplace!
(*Songs of Odamolugbe, 68*)

It is quite necessary to note that the fight against institutionalised political and socio-economic injustice must be fought collectively. The youthful patriots are symbolic of the denizens while friendly neighbours are nations who are interested in the wellbeing of Nigeria. It is thus suggested that until the downtrodden members of the populace take their rightful position and fight for what rightfully belong to them, they would remain at the unfortunate rung of the ladder of the society. The vision of the poet here is rather revolutionary. Very conventional of oral tale types, the story teller usually instructs the audience to confirm the story told from others older than him.

The end of my story, children,
Ask Baba Faleti, and Okinba Launko,
They would confirm my tale;
(*Songs of Odamolugbe, 69*)

In "Elephant and Tortoise", there is a rich synthesis of the features of the Yorùbá tale type in print form. The use of metal gongs and talking drums at the background is so done so as to re-

enact the oral process in the telling of the story. In the poem, the stanzas are interspaced with the repetition of

Á ò mérin jòba
 Èwẹkún ẹwẹle
 Lóni a ó mérin jòba
 Èwẹkún ẹwẹle
 We'll make our king, 0 elephant
 Èwẹkún ẹwẹle
 Today, we'll make you our king, 0 elephant
 Èwẹkún ẹwẹle
 (*Songs of Odamolugbe, 70*)

The repetition which is expected to be done by the audience is meant to enhance participation in the oral process and to heighten emphasis on the theme of the tale being told. Through this, the audience pays close attention to the thematic focus of the content of the sentences repeated. The use of the elephant and the tortoise is a basic feature of character selection in African stories. In many of these stories, character typologies are usually placed on contrapuntal levels so as to demonstrate the varied proclivities of man. The list includes the quick-nimble hare, the tricky tortoise, the spider and their bigger counterparts who are usually the foolish with the most prominent elephant.

In the tale here told in the poem, the tortoise is metaphoric of cunning, wit and wisdom while the elephant typifies strength and enormous size. Yet this aptly portrays the ambivalent nature of man. Military might and prowess are extolled in the elephant. The poet uses the medium of the choice of the character typologies to retell the socio-political circumstances that led to the death of Chief M.K.O. Abiola.

It is still largely believed that the annulled 1993 presidential election, which Abiola won, was the freest and fairest that the nation ever conducted. The elephant here represents Abiola

There he was, the visioner,
 Standing solo, on the rooftop,
 His gaze onto the east fixed,
 Shouting solo, shouting hoarse! (*Songs of Odamolugbe, 70*)

The ideological garb that the late Abiola adorned received so much followership and patronage during the military junta of General Ibrahim Babangida.

Then came the charlatans, tempters,
 Amidst thundering drums in
 Pomp and pageantry, they came
 Feigning commitment; a volcano
 Of reactionary eruption of some
 Hidden magma of molten envy and
 Lethal lies, sweating blood
 Under their burden of broken oaths:
 Come down...

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 71)

The elephant in his foolishness arrogates much importance to himself. The call to make him king is geared towards his destruction especially as the gang that makes up his retinue is filled with sycophants and bootlickers.

The two-some, their appeal struck
His tenderly trusting heart;
Come down, a
Collective struggle it must be!
They promised partnership, to proclaim
His gospel of freedom, justice and truth
His vision of unity, but
First, he must come down!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 73)

The treachery in the call to serve is not noticed by the elephant. Perhaps, the size of the elephant's body is indicative of the largeness of his heart. He appears too trusting. He acquiesces to their demands but meets his Waterloo.

The visioner, from the rooftop
Tripped, ... then, fell from the rooftop
To the bunker below, the cap of our hope
Fell with him, a kinsman stole it!

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 75)

Perhaps one would have expected that the ones who called for his kingship would easily go to his aid. This, unfortunately, is not so. For when the elephant falls, he is said to have

'An acute brain damage, a tumour,'
The conspirators claimed:
'Too dangerous to live among
Peace-loving people!
So they caged him until
He was sound of health
But secretly, secretly, secretly,
His death, our death, they plotted.

(Songs of Odamolugbe, 75, 76)

The eventual downfall of the elephant is thus reminiscent of the demise of Abiola. It was a clarion call to serve but he was refused the mandate. The events that led to his death till date are still shrouded in obscurity. While some aggrieved quarters hold that he was poisoned through a cup of tea, others insist that he died as a result of his failed health. Political assassinations are no longer new on the political terrain of Nigeria. Many promising individuals have lost dear lives to

political opponents. During electioneering campaigns, the diction of Nigerian politicians is suggestive of a do-or-die inclination. During general elections, ballot boxes are stolen as voting

centres are reduced to war zones. Rigging, duplication of election materials, multiple votes, among many others plague the nation's elections.

Many countries in Africa are besieged by these problems. The sit-tight mentality has eaten deep into the fabrics of the consciousness of these leaders. At death, they replace themselves with their children with some of them occupying as long as over thirty years at the helm of affairs.

The call-and-response pattern, typical of oral performances, is also utilised in the poem titled "Dancing Sigidi in the Rain." The rendition opens with a lead voice meant to be accompanied by bata-drum and response by a chorus.

Lead: Jijo iya ka wo O

Chorus: panla sigidi bamu-bamu-bamu
"Dance for us the dance of a fool
You good-for-nothing (clayed) robot"
(*Songs of Odamolugbe, 79*)

Sigidi here is representative of diverse military regimes, both in Nigeria and in other countries in Africa, responsible for the economic devastation and socio-political retrogression. The dance of shame that Sigidi embarks upon is symbolic of the "Usurper-General" in the poem who maps out his way to self-destruction by his impoverishment of a nation. This is shown in stanza four

His rotund cheeks:
our glistening Sun-stung
back, yawning stomach of our generation
and rabid tears of a raped nation;
(*Songs of Odamolugbe, 79*)

Like others, the poem ends with the masses taking over power

Then angry youth tried him with fiery torches
to rubbles, the remains of a rot dancing
sigidi in the rain of people's wrath!
(*Songs of Odamolugbe, 80*)

2.CONCLUSION

The foregoing has examined the continuous relevance of orality and the utilization of the rich Yoruba loric tradition in the interrogation of the postcolonial situation in Nigeria, and Africa in general. In Ademola Dasyuva's *Songs of Odamolugbe* (2006), there is a conscious fusion of the properties of orality and literacy in capturing both the remote and recent contradictions that daily plague the African experience. The collection of poems is a demonstration that African oral performances thrive in the art-for-life orientation. Through the various poetic renditions within the collection, this study concludes that African literary corpus in its entire ensemble has always been stimulated by the goings-on of its immediate society. Ademola Dasyuva's *Songs of Odamolugbe* (2006) goes beyond the boundaries of the scribal culture as it throbs with character typologies, situation, setting and atmosphere that are uniquely reminiscent of an aboriginal society deeply entrenched in the cyclical rhythm which is sustained in the communal interaction with the metaphysical plane.

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