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A comparative study of contemporary East and West African poetry in English

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INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEMPORARY PHASE OF POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN POETRY

> Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more "foreign" elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude. (Said 1993: 15)

Background

That postcolonial poetry is vibrant, diverse and worth scholarly attention is undeniable. Although suggestion to the effect that fiction is the genre that most appropriately renders postcolonial experiences has been made by scholars such as Jenkins (2002), modern African poetry has been very active in projecting the inner experiences of the people as well as mediating socio-cultural and political experiences since its inception. Thus, as a genre for making both profound and artistic statements, the recent past bears witness to its potency (2002: 575). Evidently, poetry is no less powerful a medium for registering the postcolonial condition and the cultural aftermath of Empire which is often described using metaphors of mixing, and other cognate concepts illustrating this inclusiveness characteristic of postcoloniality – such as 'integration' (Ruth Finnegan and Brian Street), 'hybridity' (Homi Bhabha), 'dialogism' (Bakhtin), 'double writing' (Wole Soyinka), syncretism, creolization, bricolage, *metissage* or fusion – all of which inform the theoretical frame employed in this study. In light of its nature and potency, modern poetry as a genre speaks to, reflects or refracts, as well as dialogues with the realities of postcoloniality. This is why Ramazani (2001), for example, considers it as the perfect mode for expressing the complex cultural experience associated with post-independence Africa.

While postcoloniality is often characterized by hybridity, Begam and Moses (2007), among others, persuasively argue that hybridity is not just an aspect but indeed the basic fabric of the postcoloniality. It is a basic fabric because the interactions occasioned by colonial encounters, as well as those characterizing postcolonial existence, ensure that mixed socio-cultural practices are the norm – and are manifested in expressive arts such as poetry. Central therefore in this study is the argument that dialogue or dialogic relations in contemporary African poetry are not limited to interaction or exchange between some central-colonizer and periphery-colonized, but rather characterized by what John Haynes (1987) describes as a "scatter" of cognate texts written or

spoken in Africa. Among others, Rajeev Patke (2006) highlights the dynamics between poetry and colonial history. Taking into consideration the definite – almost one-to-one – relationship between art, literature or poetry in particular on the one hand, and the totality of relations of production (between artist and the society), it is inevitable that hybridity is articulated in this poetry with characteristic pungency. There is minimal dissonance between African people, life in its various ramifications and experiences thematized in pre-colonial African poetry and those transmuted in postcolonial written African poetry. Consequently, the postcolonial socio-cultural, political and even economic predicament in Africa is best imagined or perceived through what Ramazani (2001) has called the "hybrid muse". It is so-called because it benefits from dialogism in the Bakhtinian sense of a text whose interpretation entails positing more than one founding centre (Hanks 1989: 114). The contemporary African poem/text is thus a 'contact zone' or site providing space for the creative interaction of multiple cultures that in a way challenge the colonial and cultural hierarchialization of groups, metaphorically enunciating the diversity of experiences interacting or coming into contact and therefore exemplifies the "intercultural energies of postcolonial poetry" (Jenkins 2002: 580). In this study I read contemporary poets as reaching out to forms of expression and experiences beyond established boundaries, whether genre, ethnic/linguistic or discipline.

The focus of this thesis is essentially on the hybridity of postcolonial African poetry from East and West Africa. This introduction therefore begins by examining what contemporary African poetry and the concept of hybridity refer to in this study. While the contemporary is read in relation to the general modern (or written) African poetry in English, I use the notion of the era (the contemporary) as being marked by a diversity of source texts or 'influences' to define hybridity. I then outline the field from which poets writing in the contemporary period draw textual material, poetic ideas and aesthetic influences. Thereafter, I proceed to define the theoretical framework used for analysis. This sets the stage for a comparative study of East and West Africa and the poetics these diverse sources inscribe in contemporary times.

A rich and vibrant poetry has issued from the hybridization of the English muse with the long-resident muses of Africa, India and the Caribbean (Ramazani 2001: 1). Contemporary poets, unlike their predecessors, use the concept more poignantly to dramatize postcoloniality. Recent poetry uses elements of hybridity more openly than its antecedent, to the extent that it has come

to loosely mean philosophical acceptance of diversity beyond the traditional colonizer-colonized divide. Ramazani's study echoes the fact that some cultures, or epochs in a tradition, are more vividly and inorganically hybrid than others (2001: 182), which is true to a large extent of modern African poetry tradition in English. Through the incorporation of hybrid techniques, language (medium or mode) as well as thematizing hybridity, this poetry rejects various forms of hegemonic policing, transcending borders which were earlier believed impermeable. It is not just 'double poetry' as Ramazani argues, or simply a product of 'two worlds', but rather results from a multiplicity of consciousnesses as I detail shortly. This poetry often tends to absorb and assimilate poetic traditions from different cultural backgrounds that have at one time or another had contacts with Africa or encountered it through formal or informal education in its metre, structure, diction, poetic 'language', tone and rhythm. Contemporary poetry's rejection of rigid scripts and techniques, in favour of protean hybrid forms is more an articulation of the desire for freedom and democracy, which earlier poetry may have expressed, but not with the poignancy and force marking the era. Rather than what Evan Mwangi (2001) calls a mere capitulation to foreignness as was predominantly the case with most of their predecessors, hybridity among contemporary poets examined in this study leans more towards aesthetic enrichment than a culturally politicised gesture.

Contemporary times are typified by a new critical, theoretical and ideological milieu of creative practice, which inevitably and obviously has implications on the emerging textualities. My thesis is that, apart from the influences of the socio-economics of the times or what Tanure Ojaide refers to as "the conditions of the age" which place their stamp on the African imagination, an interplay of past and contemporary or 'new critical, theoretical and ideological contexts' (1996: 136) is largely responsible for the shift in poetics. First, contemporary poetry to some extent exhibits national and hence region-specific features. Creative writers and critics of modern African poetry, notably Ojaide and Chidi Amuta, observe that in the new[1] poetry, poets or voices are unabashedly local and they attempt to reach a particularized audience as well as talk to their compatriots (1996: 69) – a view I consider relevant to my present concerns.

[1] Here used not to mean poets being read for the first time, but rather newly published volumes or collections.

Whereas foundational poetry[2] tended to address the whole world and humanity in its diversity, if not the entire African continent, contemporary poetry shifts focus to national and consequently accentuate a regional temper. The validity of this argument is interrogated across the two regions, East and West Africa. The claim that, like never before a significant concern for and of the people, or 'masses' – in particular what Amuta (in relation to the poetic temper of Odia Ofeimun) designates as "impeccable patriotism" and poetry's insertion within everyday realities (1989: 194), marking modern African poetic discourses is evaluated. My point is that as the nation-state focus is privileged in the contemporary period, a tendency and inclination towards regionalism becomes inevitable – bearing in mind that material and ideological conditions underpinning poetics tend to overflow neat nation-state borders. Emphasis is, however, laid on the interplay and dialectic between national and regional realms as explicated in the theoretical frame adopted for the study. Positing that region as the basic unit of literary analysis seems more congruous with realities on the ground than the much narrower nation-states which have sharper internal ethnic divisions, I argue that contemporary poetry tends to manifest itself more at a regional level. Besides the pronounced "national" character, a certain "radical Marxist bent" distinguishes the works of contemporary poets from that of the first and second generations of modern African poetry (Garuba 2005: 15), or what I refer to as the foundational generation in this study.[3] I, therefore, investigate the extent to which the nationalist focus is manifested in each region. How, for instance, can one argue that the departure from this ur-text is, arguably, the most significant distinguishing feature of contemporary poetry? How does this shift affect or effect poetic compositions in the two regions? Is it correct that the contemporary period lacks an aesthetic fulcrum, or what Garuba describes as a "ritualistic centre" (quoted in Adesani and

[2] Defined in this study as pre-colonial, colonial and early post-independent African poetry works which include pioneer as well as first post-independence works in English.

[3] A number of critics have noted the entry of a peculiar characteristic "newness" into recent African poetry. Among others Biodun Jeyifo (1988), Nwachwukwu-Agbada (1993), Femi Osofisan (1996), Charles Bodunde (2001), Pius Adesami and Chris Dunton (2005; 2008), Charles Nnolim (2006) and Newell (2006) have all observed that there is a shift, although in varying degrees, focusing on West Africa or Nigeria. Evident in recent poetry is a kind of vitality and ebullience which is very contemporaneous and which one senses in the poetry and poetic manifestos written as from the 80s. While Nwachwukwu-Agbada rightly describes the 1980s as the decade in which there emerged a poetic vintage of a different tenor, Newell identifies the so-called AlterNative poets responsible for this new tenor, providing the incentive for this abandonment of the old dichotomy(s) (Newell 2006: 135). To Femi Osofisan, the mid 1990s is the time a new kind of writing which is astonishingly different in (West) Africa and manifesting a violent rupture with the goals of literature as understood and interpreted by the previous generation emerged (1996: 25). I regard the period with 'new' styles and themes, in which fixed identities are melted down described by Newell (2006) as coinciding and overlapping with what is designated in this study as the contemporary.

Dunton 2005: 13), which gave coherence to the pre-1980s poetry? The argument that new (that is, recent or contemporary) poetry "demonstrates a shift from the totalized pivots of antecedent Nigerian poetic practices" – which Garuba exemplifies as ritualism, cultural nationalism and its centralizing myths of transcendental identity, nationhood – is comparatively assessed. Can the same be true of the entire region, West Africa, or is it peculiar to Nigeria? I also interrogate whether the same applies to East Africa. It is these questions that inform the present effort to compare the poetry of East and West Africa, although a lateral rather than a hierarchical approach to the regional poetic traditions is emphasised. This comparative approach privileges possible literary dialogue between East and West Africa.

A qualification is necessary concerning the term comparative as applied in this study. Comparative may either take the form of studying cognate forms and meanings (within historical linguistics) or establishing of cognates or borrowings (historical connections) on the one hand, and more generally, adducing typological parallels, that is, making analogies between historically unrelated 'languages' or forms on the other. The latter however does not always demand that one provides proof for an argument or intuitive reinforcement (Nagy 1996: 2). My point of departure is that parallels, divergences and simultaneous historical developments can be discerned within regions and sometimes across the whole of sub-Saharan Africa (Barber 2007: 46). A comparative analysis of East and West African contemporary poetry is motivated by the need to provide the basis for examining dialogue and dialogic relations across the two regions. Such a comparison inevitably evokes the discourse of regionalism which, as Okunoye (2009) contends, was first empowered by the anxiety of writers like Taban lo Liyong (1965) who detected discrepancies in literary productivity in various parts of the continent. While lo Liyong's worries revolve around the unequal quantity of literary output from the various regions making up the continent, my focus in the present study is more on the aesthetic (dis)continuities, disparities and disjunctures. Bearing in mind that there is much to be gained from comparative analyses of the works of African artists, as Rosenberg (2008) observes, this study sets out to glean some of the 'local' inflections, as well as interrelations within and across the East and West African regions in the continent. A comparative approach involving parallel lines of interpretation, which in my view enhances the likelihood of a deeper understanding of poetic activities in the individual regions, is privileged. Furthermore, my comparison of contemporary

poets operating in the two regions and who oftentimes employ the same language (though arguably in different ways) is a deliberate attempt to countermand some of the basic assumptions of the field of comparative literature. While the comparative frame makes disaffinity (therefore presupposing similarities and differences) a prerequisite for any comparison to take place and often displays a predilection for comparisons that involve Euro-American creativity as at least one part of every comparative equation (Rosenberg 2008: 100), the present study is not limited to an analysis of disaffinities or restricted by the requirement that one dimension of comparison be drawn from Euro-American discourses. If indeed comparison cannot be removed from the normal human perception of things, particularly where there are similar features as in modern African poetry, then this paradigm in my view provides invaluable insights into the creative and critical appreciation of the genre. I examine intertextual and dialogic relations across contemporary East and West African poetry rather than a simplistic focus on similarities and differences.

The aim of this study is to understand the shaping spirit of East and West African contemporary poetry. Against the widely held belief that modern African poetry is a product of 'dual aesthetics' or a 'two-world' poetic paradigm, I deconstruct this binary by locating contemporary poetry on the interstices of multiple poetic traditions, intellectual climates and genres. Although Anglophone African poetry is indebted to the English literary tradition as well as indigenous or precolonial African (oral) poetic continuities into the written tradition of this genre, little attention is paid to what constitutes 'African' and 'English' traditions of this poetry. The African component has been the subject of several studies[4] with little or no attention paid to English and in particular, to the other European traditions whose contribution is often uncritically or reductively regarded as simply 'English' or Western poetic tradition. Firstly, this study recognises the creative significance of non-English western poetics such as French, Russian, West Indian, African American and generally the African diasporic constituency. Together with these are intellectual trends associated with these literary traditions such as negritude (often linked to francophone Africa and the West Indies), Marxist (and socialist politics in Eastern

[4] Joel Adedeji(1981), Gerard (1970), Blair (1976), Awoonor (1975), Soyinka (1976), Anyidoho (1982) Udechukwu (1984), Fraser (1986), Sekoni (1988), Nwachukwu-Agbada (1993) and Adu-Gyamfi (2002) among others, have all demonstrated how the umbilical cord linking oral or traditional African literature with its modern counterpart was not severed at the birth.

Europe), Black aesthetics (and the African American and the diasporic element). Secondly, I show how the role of Swahili poetic tradition is often neglected when talking of Africa's literary heritage, yet it plays a key role in shaping contemporary East African poetry. Equally neglected within the African 'world' is the definitively central role played by the few pioneers writing in English and the first post-independence (or 'foundational') generation of African poets. In light of recent trends, theories and criticism of modern African literature, I also examine the impact of postmodernist contempt for genre boundaries and intertextuality – or inter-/multi-disciplinary nature of contemporary discourses. The whole gamut of influences is drawn so as to locate the spectrum a contemporary poet in East or West Africa operates in, positing the poetry as a product of multiple voices and sources. This is an attempt to demonstrate how the contemporary scene of poetry is a form of magnetic flux of forces that mould a unique poetry and poetics. Contrary to the two world model, contemporary African poetry is a multi-worlds or cultural affair. Subsequently, contemporary poetry is never pure or pristine since poetic elements and textures permeate and cross various borders.

The overall justification for such a comparative study is grounded on the view that, other than Romanus Egudu's (1979) scanty attempts to recognize the "diverse experiences" that have shaped the creative imagination of poets from various parts of Africa, little attention has been directed to deciphering how a poetic tradition is generated. Later attempts by Ojaide (1996) culminate in asserting the uniqueness of the (Black) African poetic imagination, successfully differentiating and distancing it from a presumed 'Western' tradition of poetry. This in my view only serves to reinforce paradigmatic binaries at the centre of the false and idealistic monolithic conceptualisation of Africa; that artistic principles and practices forming the shared philosophy used by Africa give a common base for modern African poets and poets of African descent. The study is therefore motivated by the need to map influences and forces shaping modern African poetry outside the traditionally overarching colonizer-colonized dichotomy as a way of appreciating the dialogues and intertextual relations that thrive in contemporary poetics. There is also a need to bring forth a comprehensive comparison of these two literary regions on the continent, and hence examine the trend poetry production and consumption has taken in the recent past. This urge is anchored in the frequent allusions made to the effect that the two are fundamentally distinct and have evolved divergently. For example, East African poetic

expression is often (unfavourably) compared to West and Central (and even South) African poetry as studies, observations and comparative attempts by wa Thiong'o (1973), Ogundele (1980), Onyeji (1983) Rubadiri (1984), Goodwin (1984), Emenyonu (1988), Anozie (1989) and more recently Ojaide (1995; 1996) all testify. A brief survey of these will suffice to draw attention to the need for the approach used in the present study.

While comparing the language of writing in West Africa to that in East Africa, Ngugi wa Thiong'o observes that whereas writers in West Africa "are fed linguistically from below" hence producing works in a form of English that is peculiar to the region, their East African counterparts predominantly use Standard English (1973: 23). He describes the kind of English in East Africa as "very much the sort of school English with correct grammar etc" unlike the West African variety, with idioms and rhythm of speech of the people whom it is addressing (1973: 23). The present comparative effort however demonstrates that such sharp contrasts are significantly blurred in the contemporary phase of modern African poetry largely due to accentuated intertextual dialogues marking this era. Ngugi's observations made in the 1970s describe the assumption that West African literature is characterized by profound orality,[5] backing the view that whereas the region witnessed a smooth transition between the pre-colonial literary forms and their modern/written counterparts, this was not the case in East Africa where there was a somewhat sharp rupture. The impression created by Emenyonu (1988) and Ojaide (1996) among other critics is that oral discourse is the "absolute foundation of Nigerian" (Emenyonu 1988: 34) and by extension West African literature. Ojaide (1996: 33-45) discusses the concept of orality in recent West African poetry focusing on the nature, extent, and impact it has had on representative 'newer' poets. However, he limits his analysis not only to West Africa, but to two representative poets, Kofi Anyidoho of Ghana and Niyi Osundare of Nigeria. In an earlier study Ojaide (1995) explores new trends in modern African poetry and compares West African to East and Central African poetry. In this study, Ojaide sees "Malawian and

[5] I am taking orature as African indigenous literary traditions, that is, a vortex of diverse poetic and artistic practices that can and have been rediscovered and resynthesized in new directions by contemporary writers, and that are constantly leading toward a new sense of [poetic] culture (Beach 1992). As generally assumed in this study, this literary tradition comprises of the specialized verbal art forms, traditional songs, song poems, various forms of oral narratives, tales, legends, myths and historical narratives together with proverbs, riddles, chants, lyric poetry, and epics – through which cultural continuity was guaranteed. In considering the particular influences this tradition has had upon modern African poetry, I confine myself to the almost limitless elasticity of the forms of verbal expression that can broadly be classified or designated as poetry.

Zimbabwean poets as tending to be more descriptive of physical landscapes" while their West African counterparts from Nigeria and Ghana are "linguistic iconoclasts" (1995: 11). Ogundele (1980) on the other hand compares West Africa with South Africa, focusing on the prophetic, public and personal voices as indicators of divergent aesthetic manifestations in poetry. Other related studies, however, tend to look beyond the African continent. For example, casting a much wider scope, Onyeji (1983) compares African poetry and Caribbean poetry in English, using Syl Cheney Coker as representative of West African poetics. Although specific to the genre of poetry, Ngugi compares East African to West Indian literature citing the 'foreign' language as posing unique challenges to the East African writer, unlike his/her West Indian counterpart to whom English is a native language. Evidently, none gives adequate attention to contemporary poetry in East and West African poetry. No previous study has attempted comparative research between the two literary regions although frequent sweeping statements signal such endeavours. Despite the different comparative or near-comparative scholarships on certain individual poets from the two regions, no previous comprehensive comparison of poetic practices and approaches between the two regions, so far as this study is aware, has been done.

The need for scholarly evidence to support any such comparative conclusions, especially in contemporary poetry, is therefore of critical significance in dispelling perverse myths about poetry from these two regions. My focus on the contemporary also stems from the need to redress what Tanure Ojaide and Joseph Obi read as the dearth of critical attention or tendency by many critics of modern African literature to bypass recent African poetry for familiar and over-exposed works of the Peters – Awoonor – Soyinka – Okigbo – Clark – Brutus generation, either as a result of laziness or the fear of charting new courses (2002: 139). Most of those reviewed zero in on foundational poetry, leaving out much of that published in the last three decades. This study therefore bridges this gap and contributes to the literature on contemporary poets and poetry.

An analysis of intertextual dialogues between the two regions provides a rubric for examining questions of poetic discourse from a relatively wider perspective than does the more narrowly defined study of individual influences. This is in lieu of the fact that contemporary poets are perpetually trapped in a web of intricately intersecting forces and traditions, and hence becomes impossible, if not misleading, to attempt to isolate or track these influences. The position of this

study is that it is impossible to make any meaningful postulations or comparisons before attempting an appreciation of how literary traditions are moulded, the sphere of influences under which the poets operate and possible intertextual dialogues which often mark expressive culture. To some extent, this is why I view interactive dialogic and intertextual relations between the various forces, events and developments constituting the contemporary as prompting the emergence of a 'contemporary' poetic tradition with region-specific tempers – although centrifugal forces reinforce homogenous poetics in disregard of regional specifities and peculiarities.

The comparative approach of the present study is, therefore, grounded on the need to explore possible connectivities (continuities and discontinuities) between literary regions as a means of gaining a perceptive insight into the genre as practiced and consumed in Africa. A primary supposition in the present study is that the contemporary conceptualisation of composing poetry as well as range of informing mega texts significantly differs in contemporary East and West Africa. If it is true, as Ezenwa-Ohaeto argues, that "Nigerian literature is often taken as the representative voice of African literature" (1991: 155), then it is necessary to regularly place different African regions *vis a vis* the West Africa so as to understand developments and trends in expressive arts. The position Ezenwa-Ohaeto ascribes to Nigerian literature as the benchmark of African expressive culture (poetry in particular) therefore justifies and provides the basis on which a comparative study between East and West Africa is pegged. While concurring with Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Oyeniyi Okunoye (2004) attributes the 'representativeness' of the Nigerian experience to the assumption that it (Nigeria) is the most developed and influential country in the region and consequently, the most representative of the African context (2004: 16). He further quotes Nadine Gordimer's argument that "without Nigeria, English-language African literature would be a slim volume affair" (1973: 19) to augment this view. [6] Although contestable, I argue that with regards to poetry this is tenable to a large extent. It is Ezenwa-Ohaeto's view that, at least, this is largely true in relation to Anglophone African literature which I consider more

[6] In relation to the position of Nigeria in West Africa, John Povey also argues that there seems no easy explanation of why Nigeria should have taken precedence in this initiation of a new English-language literature (1970: 83). The position I take in this study is that the social situation of Nigeria is a fundamental reason for her pre-eminence. Following Povey, it is interesting to speculate upon the fact that the four major writers, Clark, Achebe, Soyinka, and Okigbo, were all at Ibadan University at the same time and that the spark that ignited such varied talents in the country and region may be glibly attributed to them (Povey 1970: 83).

relevant in this regard. Such analogies across regions help reflect on the direction East African poetry is or should be taking, itself being a part of the larger African literature. If, as Mwangi (2001) seems to suggest, East African contemporary poetry tends to avoid hybridity at the superficial linguistic level, this study set out to establish if this is also the case among West African contemporary poets, and if not, how it differs.

The intricate and complex dialogues in contemporary poetry are partly occasioned by modern-day globalizing forces – such as internet publishing of poems and the nascent blog culture. Anyidoho's (1983) study makes conclusions which to some extent provide the impetus for the current study. He persuasively argues that rather than retarding African oral traditions, modern audio and visual technology actually promotes it, giving old forms a new lease of life, as evident in the 'double-publication' of *PraiseSong for TheLand* (2002)– issued both in print and audio form. In my view, poetry mediated by such technology indefinitely leads to hybridized rendition of the art as the two media complement, aesthetically dialoguing and enriching each other's texture. The evidence of all the gains this art stands to derive from a dialogue with modern technology, as well as African oral heritage, "comes as a real puzzle" (Anyidoho 2006: 14) and, in my view, is worth critical attention. However, as Anyidoho concludes, so far it seems studies in this area have been limited mostly to a few scholars and creative artists. This study, therefore, is a timely intervention and contribution towards understanding how creative synthesis across different media such as print/newspaper, live/audio, CD-Rom or internet enriches the production and consumption of poetic experiences. In total disregard of the creative potential and renewal issuing from such contact zones and interactive dialogues between disparate languages, genres, disciplines, media, little attention has been paid to such interfaces and transient forms.[7]

Since all comparative literature, according to Bernheimer *et al*. "should take account of the ideological, cultural and institutional contexts in which […] meanings are produced" (1993: 5-6), it is expected that the 'East' and 'West' of Africa produce distinct poetry. In lieu of the fact that different parts of the continent experienced different forms of colonialism – ranging from settler

[7] Majority of scholars and critics have tended to probe the African poetic imagination to determine degree of its dependence on received or 'alien' (Povey 1972; Awoonor 1975; Moore 1977; Baunman 1977; 1986) and 'native' (Mutiso 1974; Nwoga 1976; Egudu 1978; Nkosi 1981; Anyidoho 1983; Fraser 1986; Aiyejina 1988; Irele 1990; Ojaide 1995; 1996) traditions.

and direct to indirect rule[8] – experiences peculiar to each region tend to condition literary production such that it becomes possible to draw attention to shared attitudes, techniques or formal orientations. I foreground the power of regional discourses to influence and control the production and consumption of poetry, as such shared experiences invest poetry with common thematic preoccupations and tend to fix its literary borders. This is why like Maughan-Brown I read each regional literary output as "determined by a specific set of material and ideological conditions, and produced at a specific historical conjencture" (1985: 4) which in this case includes very specific and regional material and ideological conditions *en vogue* in the contemporary literary epoch. The shared commonality, however, should not detract from the fact that even among poets of the same nationality, class alignment and even generation, it is not uncommon to find great divergences in worldview and ideological alignment as Amuta (1989: 58) cautions. Apart from English as a common expressive medium, the regions are populated by diverse ethnic languages that (in)directly shape the composition of contemporary poetry. First, the linguistic aspect ensures that the continent is strongly divided along colonial lines (Gerard 1970: 37) demarcations which produce categories such as Anglophone (and Francophone) West Africa. Besides European-derived languages as the criteria of mapping out literary regions, indigenous African languages play a key role in shaping the poet's imaginative consciousness. David Dorsey rightly points out that "African poetry requires special attention to cultural particularities" (1988: 27) which in my view are largely linguistically underpinned and over-determined. In other words, since "Africa is made up of multiple and disparate identities, cultures and territories" (Enwezor 1998: 29 – 49), it is necessary to use the regional approach as most nation-states in Africa are not necessarily homogenous ethno-cultural entities as their Western counterparts. The totality of oral and written poetry works of East or West Africa produced by its inhabitants therefore constitutes the region's poetics. Region tends to embrace and embalm most of this ethno-cultural diversity often occluded if smaller nation-state units are used.

[8] Whereas in most of West Africa colonial authorities did not have adequate white population to carry out administrative duties in the colonies (due to a multiplicity of factors, central to which is the region's unfriendly environment) and hence trained Africans to lead their fellow blacks, the settler population in most of East Africa provided manpower for directly administering the colonies. For details see among others Christopher (1984) and Collins (1991).

In constructing conceptual and theoretical frameworks capable of elucidating the multiple forms of literature and their interrelationships, the role of institutions and other extra-literary factors in the production and diffusion of literature (Awuyah 1993: 271) is central. It is within the regional approach adopted in this study that such multiple facets may be factored in and the role of (regional) institutions or extra-literary factors that transgress nation-states' geo-political borders is adequately appreciated. For example, 'institutional background of literature' which include "descriptive analysis of the network of agencies operating in the production of literature, in its diffusion (publishers), in its transmission (schools), in its evaluation (newspapers, academies, literary prizes), in the training of writers and readers" (Ricard 1987: 298) cannot be confined to neatly overlap with such narrow political boundaries. The factors help fix and set up literary borders overwriting politically motivated categorisations. As most institutions with a regional appeal, especially the foundational universities,[9] literary journals and publishing firms – gave way to more national-oriented counterparts, contemporary global forces have significantly altered and reconfigured spatial-temporal dynamics. Furthermore, advocating for a national literature and nation-state unit in my view should not necessarily preclude regionalism. Pertinently, the regional approach adopted in this study is augmented by aspects of national approach[10] as this minimises the proclivity to engage in vague and sweeping generalities. Due to the fact that many scholars of African literature are convinced that this literature may rewardingly be demarcated regionally, this study perceives contemporary African poetry as more region-specific than national. For example, if national poetry should "explicitly assert the rights and aspirations" (Miller 1993: 66) of a particular nation-state, then, most contemporary poetry collections (including anthologies largely viewed as 'national') often look beyond national borders not just in their themes but aesthetics as well. Arguably, there is sufficient socio-cultural and political evidence to support the sort of region-based approach adopted in this study.[11] I use Marion Arnold's argument that it makes sense to consider art regionally despite the difficulties this also portends (2008:3) to justify why this study privileges the East-West ('region') axis.

[9] In particular, Makerere University in Uganda, Fouran Bay College in Sierra Leone and University of Ibadan in Nigeria had broadly defined catchment areas for both students and staff.

[10] Related to this is the national literature approach which Awuyah (1993) complements with other studies such as "West Africa literature" which clearly embrace regionalism.

[11] Whereas *Boundless Voices* (ed. Luvai 1988), for example, anthologises numerous poems which do not exclusively voice rights or aspirations of Kenya or Kenyans, *Summons* (ed. Mabala 1980) demonstrates attempts to draw attention to Tazania the nation.

Arnold seems aware of the challenges facing the choice of units of literary analysis in Africa, whether ethnic nations, nation-states, regions, or simply embracing the pan-African perspective that ruptures cultural and political boundaries on the continent – homogenising literary production and expressive culture.

Sources and Influences of Modern African Poetry: Standing Solidly on the Local Ground?[12]

The poetry considered in this study is bound by one cultural element, the English language. Anglophone parts share a common cultural colonial or 'imperial' experience which unites (Great) Britain and its former colonies. The linguistic expression binds together apparently diverse socio-cultural regions such that the ubiquity and even dominance of 'imperial' culture and language in the regions under comparison comes as no surprise. The field covered by this study, Anglophone Africa, is held together by a number of factors. The regions form part of a global community united by English. Hence the dominant expressive or literary tool is English. The two regions, to a large extent, exhibit a shared pattern of development, especially with a history of twentieth century decolonization, and set of creative possibilities this discourse opens. The modern colonial history of the East and West African regions has had a significant impact on formal education and expressive literary culture in the respective regions. Considering that a fundamental distinguishing factor between what is today known as Anglophone West or East Africa has issued from colonial occupation patterns, it is obvious that similarities and differences abound. Basing my point on Ngara's argument that it is history and social conditions that give rise to African literature (Ngara 1990: 7), similarities (and differences) between the two regions certainly inscribe striking continuities and discontinuities worth scholarly attention. While the British used direct rule in East Africa, the indirect administrative system proved more suitable for West Africa. Speculations about the colonial presence and settler pattern being a retarding factor in East African writing that critics like Povey (1970) make in my view should not be dismissed.[13] In this study, I draw attention to other dimensions of orature, the role of foundational poetics, diasporic influences and contemporary intellectual discourses, in particular

[12] I borrow the phrase from Sallah (1995: 19) to question the contemporary emphasis on 'Africanness' of recent poetry – especially the so called alternative poetics.

[13] Hillary Ngweno and Ngugi wa Thiong'o among others lament the apparent present deficiency and attributes it to colonial pattern employed in the region.

postmodernism typified by among others, mixing of genres, a decanonisation of cultural standards as well as being avowedly "populist" oriented.[14]

As far as oral discourses within contemporary African poetry are concerned, it will suffice to mention that the extent to which references to oral traditions hold the means of imaginative solutions to problems of aesthetic and ideological dimensions (Julien 1992) in African poetry has taken a somewhat evolutionary trajectory. I mentioned earlier how oral texts and texture is woven into or deployed in poem-texts distinguishes the contemporary from foundational African poetry.[15] What I reiterate is that from "slavishly mirroring orature" (Okpewho 1992: 316) in much of foundational poetics (with a few exceptions), contemporary poets attempt more nuanced and metaphorical usage, conceiving it as a trope and model for contemporary poetry. Significantly, therefore, contemporary poets explore what Okunoye calls the "other possibilities" (1998: 33) beyond the preoccupations of their predecessors in using orality, as evident in the privileged position an ethno-cultural approach to the study of modern African poetry occupies. Poets go beyond facile exploration of the recourse to the oral 'roots' to embrace it as an ideological import of poetic form, artistic philosophy and social utility (Okunoye 1998: 33) and not a mere political gesture. In analysing their works, I consider the extent to which contemporary poets explore orature by theorising the genre or form as "representing the basic intertext of the African imagination" (Irele 2001: 11).

That orality functions as the creative matrix for most African modes of discourse is undoubtable. In this study, however, what I foreground is the creative dialogue issuing from the transatlantic feedback[16] – a sort of literary cycle encompassing Africa, the West Indies and America. Critics such as Jacob Drachler observe that the dialogue between Black or Negro Africa and its "outside" world is a significant literary force, correctly concluding that "a more particular and poignant interchange" exists between Africans and the African Americans or the so-called New-World Negroes (1969: 13). This dialogue begins with the basic understanding that African

[14] Postmodernism in poetry is marked by four distinctive features which; iconoclasm, groundless, formlessness and populism. See http://www.textetc.com/modernist/postmodernism.html

[15] Among others, for instance, Okpewho, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Tanure Ojaide, Brown, Okunoye, Mwangi, Nwachukwu-Agbada, Ruth Finnegan and Eileen Julien have all signalled these changes within recent modern African literature.

[16] Marquez (1972: 1) what they had before is influenced by their perceptions of an African world. This is what Abiola Irele generally terms "Euro-African inter-textuality" to refer to validating the development of modern African literature trans-Atlantic inter-textuality (see Femi Abodunrin, 2007).

cultural traits have survived in varying degrees among Africans of the western hemisphere. Various European traditions from France, Britain and Spain blended with Africa's Yoruba, Dahomean and Ashanti traditions to form what Jahn calls "a colourful new folklore" (1967: 139) which in turn forms the basis for a new poetry; 'Black' poetry – a poetry whose most important elements of style (rhythm and themes) are derived from Africa (Jahn 1967: 140). These are some of the traits that contemporary poets, most notably Anyidoho, appropriate in their compositions. The affirmation of cultural consanguinity and sameness between African and diasporan Africans is, therefore, critical. It is important to mention that at the centre of the revolutionalized curriculum at Nairobi University in the early 1970s was the need to privilege works by Africans in diaspora over those by English writers. The American and Caribbean experience and literature, as products of the new curriculum, would later testify to and their works affirm, inscribed a poetics clearly departing from that produced by foundational poets who did not go through the same syllabus. Afro-American and Caribbean poetic tenor and cadences are evidently more pronounced among West African poets than in the works of their East African counterparts. In Anyidoho's publications, for example *The Pan Africa Ideal* (1989) and his later creative pieces in *Ancestral Logic* (1993), the Ghanaian poet instances these close ties between African and Caribbean poetry. And as the collection under study affirms, Anyidoho builds mental bridges reconnecting the continental and diasporic African psyche to ancestral time despite irreversible physical separation – that is, 'wounds to heal' (1989: 10). Similarly, although more confined to thematic preoccupations, Mugo's *My Mother's Poem* (1994) exemplifies such dialogic textual relations between African American and contemporary Africa poetry. Besides revering numerous African American and Caribbean subjects, especially those she calls "matriots", the collection is laden with allusions to Africa as a family that includes the Caribbean, African American and the African diaspora in general, as evident in her poem "In Praise of Afrika's Children" where she promises a song "in praise of [my] her loved ones/scattered by imperialist/history/across the Americas/across the Caribbean" (1994: 5). Judging from the ubiquity of Black figures in this collection, like John La Rose in "On This Tenth Milestone" or the numerous African American and Caribbean 'matriots' and 'sheroes' (heroines), it is arguable that her consciousness of the diasporic element of African history (or 'herstory') does not end with mere content. The foregoing serves to affirm that contemporary

poets write from an unlimited textual canvas – looking beyond the 'English' world to 'other' western sources.

Within the 'African' or indigenous component of modern African poetry, I also draw attention to the position of the Swahili literary tradition. It must be mentioned from the onset that this emanates from past historians' failure, as Abdulaziz correctly points out, to acknowledge and recognize the African initiative in the formation of Swahili culture (1979: 8), hence the tendency to see it as Arabic rather than indigenous to Africa. In privileging the significant and fundamental role various ethnic literary traditions play within modern African poetry, the study relocates Swahili poetic tradition as a sort aggregate of various vernacular literary traditions in East Africa. *What* is today known as *mashairi* (that is, poetry in Kiswahili and in the Swahili poetic tradition) is thus read as engaged in aesthetic intertextual dialogue with contemporary African poetry. This argument is premised on the thesis that the trend on the East African Coast has always been the Swahilization of the Arabs rather than the Arabization of the African Muslim inhabitants (Abdulaziz 1979: 8), hence 'Africanization' of Arabic prosodies and the galvanization and coalescing of various Bantu (and in recent times, non-Bantu) ethnic oral poetry traditions. Since the impact of urbanisation in the last three decades has been overwhelming not just in East Africa but across the continent, there is, therefore, sufficient reason to believe that Kiswahili poetry, or *mashairi*, has become ubiquitous – a situation compounded by the fact that in most of the region, Kiswahili is not only taught in schools but is also a medium of instruction. In contemporary times, *mashairi* is "a magnetic force in its own right" (Mazrui and Bakari 1996: 1045), attracting a diversity of ethnic literary traditions which are synthesised into a now significantly influential Kiswahili literary tradition. This is the reason why Irele is of the view that literature in Kiswahili (and Hausa in West Africa) shapes contemporary poetic discourse (Irele 2001: 44).

Often ignored is the fact that poets operating in the contemporary era have the advantage of an emerging poetry tradition their predecessors did not have. As one of the sources of contemporary poetry, this study foregrounds the role pioneers and immediate post-independence poets play in forming and shaping poetry of the last three decades. Firstly, there exist obvious differences in the education and training the two generations of poets are exposed to. Although contemporary poets more or less share similar apprentiship experiences as encountered in their education

backgrounds, this is substantially different to their predecessors. Secondly, unlike foundational poets, contemporary poets have a broader spectrum of past African poetry (by African poets) from which to draw templates and, in Bloomian terms, revise. For example, unlike their predecessors at Makerere, the Susan Kiguli generation is exposed to a radically different syllabus. Although David Rubadiri went through Makerere University with its typical English syllabus, like many of his contemporaries that later taught at university, he resorted to exposing his students to the nascent African poetry that existed. Kiguli who is by and large representative of the contemporary generation, recalls that they were brought up on poetry that was more engaging and relevant to the modern society which was emerging in East Africa. Works by foundational poets such as Gabriel Okara ("Piano and Drums"), Lenrie Peters ("In the Beginning"), Christopher Okigbo ("Heavens Gate"), Kofi Awoonor ("The Weaver Bird") and David Rubadiri ("An African Thunderstorm"), which spoke to the more familiar and immediate East African socio-cultural landscape, formed the poetic diet on which they grew. Similarly in West Africa, most of the so-called alternative poets – some whom went through school in the late seventies and early eighties – are products of such 'revised' curricula. For example, what is striking about English departments at this time is what Wumi Raji (2004) describes as a "truly international character" of the staff, with members drawn from the USA, Wales, India, Uganda, Ghana and of course from Nigeria. Foundational poetics provide a base on which contemporary African poetry intertextually builds on, 'swerving' from and 'correcting' – to use Harold Bloom's ideas.

What I emphasize in this study is the fact, that despite the physical separation, East and West Africa are connected by certain factors. It is significant, for example, that David Cook – one of the literary pillars of Makerere and East Africa in general - later relocated to University of Ilorin's English and Literature department in 1977 to take up the post of professor and Head of Department. Products of this department, therefore, benefited from a wide range of diverse literary experiences all distilled into the Literature or Creative Writing syllabus. Unlike their predecessors, or earlier Ibadan colleagues, Ilorin students benefited from David Cook's exploded canon concept, which disrupted so-called conventional notions of the canon. For instance, right from the first year of study, students were introduced to Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, excerpts from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, a

selection of the war speeches of Winston Churchill, some of the sermons of John Donne, Yusuf Idris's *The Cheapest Nights*, Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and a selection of poetry from different parts of the world. Instead of the rigidly defined English literature canon, Cook often attempted to include "all works that leave lasting impression on the imagination by making their points with great eloquence" (Raji 2004: 3) – an approach that I argue marks contemporary poetics. Such texts as well as those by the immediate post-independence generation arguably have the effect of exposing budding poets to unique consciousness and possibilities in poetic composition based on an emerging 'local' tradition unlike their predecessors who relied wholly on unmediated oral poetics which was restricted to poets of (Great) English background. While the Makerere Literature (Honours) programme – just like that in Ibadan before curriculum changes – remained confined to 'great literature' with little, if any, literature from other countries such as France, German or Russia (USSR). By comparison the contemporary poet is unlimited by such structural or systemic means. The works of Marx, Lenin, and speeches by Che Guevara and Fidel Castro as well as the works of Frantz Fanon, as Niyi Osundare (1996) rightly observes, significantly influence African poetry especially what I refer to as the contemporary poets.

Within the realities of inhabiting the contemporary global village, where avenues to further studies, access to scholarships, translations, publishing and publications or conferences are not limited or restricted by the colonizer-colonized binary, contemporary African poets are not limited by regional boundaries but transgress the earlier dichotomous exchange into other European countries such as former USSR, Germany and other (formerly) socialist states such as China.[17] Awuyah captures this phenomenon when he writes that, unlike any time before, contemporary cultural production is increasingly being determined, "sustained and rejuvenated through exchanges, travel and interactions between the various scholars" (1993: 279) and creative writers of the world, it is obvious that the contemporary era witnesses intense intertextual dialogues and dialogic relations among texts and poets. Contemporary poets also operate within the spirit of contemporary (postmodernist) scholarship. They thus write within an intellectual environment typified by its disregard for 'originality' and little respect for generic boundaries since texts freely travel in intertextual dialogues. In respect to Rajeev Patke's (2006)

[17] In relation to China for instance, it is worth noting that Mao Tse Tung was a banned text and therefore out of reach for much of the foundational generation of poets in Kenya.

suggestion, that it is ideal to read Anglophone poetry in conjunction with other genres, I juxtapose disciplines and other genres of literature that are often embroiled in intertextual and dialogic relations with contemporary African poetry. Postcolonial poetry is marked by transient genre boundaries and hence unstable-multiple identities. The multidisciplinary nature of most contemporary discourse and the concept of intertextuality undergird recent poetry. Drama, music, sociology, economics, politics, anthropology, linguistics and journalism intertextually feed and dialogue with contemporary poetry. More recently in contemporary times, Osundare's poetics benefits from his journalistic engagements as well as linguistic academic background. The works of Udechukwu, to cite another notable example, betray a direct influence of painting, in particular, his 'free flowing lines' have a bearing on his poetry's spontaneity and lyricism. Mugo's poetry feeds on performance as is evident in the way words in her poetry virtually strive to come off the page and form part of the action.

Reading Contemporary African Poetry as Hybrid

Owing to its centrality in this study, the 'contemporary' needs to be delineated and defined. However, as a point of departure, concepts such as 'epoch', 'period', 'generation', "'movement' and 'school' in literary circles are at once notional and real. I do not intend to delve into the problematic area of periodization and related literary paradigms such as generation, literary movement or school.[18] However, to get a sense of what the 'contemporary' connotes, these concepts are inescapable. As time segments and not some illusive temporal slabs out there, they are crucial and valuable tools for thought and analytical purposes. Specifically, I envisage generational concept and periodization as conterminous and overlapping to the extent that they are highly interdependent. What I imply is that literary works are often products of their time, shaped by the prevailing socio-cultural, political and economic context of production. The need to consider the specifity of individual works in their socio-historical context cannot be overemphasized.[19] Every trend in literary expression, I argue, has a specific background or historical frame of reference and evidently, contemporary African poetry is no different. The context in which modern African poetry is produced has been changing throughout its brief

[18] See Garuba (2005) on periodization, in particular, in connection with modern African poetry.
[19] Among others, Abiola Irele (2001) is very much concerned with the socio-political conditions under which African texts are produced.

existence. Forms and conventions of poetry that prevail in a certain time are over-determined by the conditions and circumstances of production. Although these forms and conventions may adequately and sufficiently serve the aesthetic needs and imperatives of a particular era, it is inevitable that tastes shift and what appears to one generation or a certain period like great or 'major poetry' often reads like doggerel, insufficient or malpractices of the art to the next. Of particular concern therefore, is ascertaining and validating the assumption that the contemporary socio-political and economic times are different and hence have occasioned or engendered a certain identifiable poetics. This begs the question: What properly merits the cognomen of 'contemporary poetry' in this study?

Recent, modern African poetry already has a history and merits the tag literary tradition. However, for a literary tradition that only dates back to the 1950s, what may be considered its 'present' – and hence contemporary – phase therefore is debatable. In literary matters in particular, the word 'contemporary' might well be a misnomer and ambiguous. Because serious modern African poetry[20] is barely 80 years old, I intend to read the contemporary as some sort of collapsed "present". The contemporary is read as a complex, shifting and often contradictory field of cultural production. For the purposes of this study, the adjective 'contemporary' designates or modifies both a period of production and a poetics (style) – intertwined as the two may be. As a temporal concept, I use contemporary to refer to poetry published in the last three decades. Considering that this poetic tradition hardly spans seven decades, and in lieu of the overwhelming number of volumes and anthologies that have proliferated in the recent past, I confine this study to poetry published as from 1980. Beginning in the 1980s and building in the 1990s, anthologies and critical collections focusing on an apparently emergent poetics, distinct from hitherto dominant one, become the focus of modern African poetry.

The 'contemporary', as a temporal marker, captures part of the postcolonial period seen as an era of socio-political turmoil and unpredictable economic conditions, besides reflecting the diverse spaces that construct the postcolonial experience in East and West Africa. In relation to such

[20] Alain Ricard (2004: 141) states that African poetry written in European languages was born in the 20th century, and started to develop in the 1930s but remained imitative and derivative. This is why for this study, borrowing from Irele (2001), I argue that the advent of "serious" or more autonomous African poetry of English expression is barely seven decades old, taking the late 1950s and early 1960s as the beginning of what may be described as modern African poetry.

spaces, Chinua Achebe for example concludes that "our contemporary world interlocks more and more with worlds of others" (2009: 111) rightly capturing this diversity. Contemporary cultural productions creatively capture and represent this intricate web with 'other' worlds, spatially and temporary separated, to the extent that these become the defining feature of the period's poetics. The 'contemporary' as used in this study is inscribed within and in consonance with what Homi Bhabha calls the current 'global' moment (2002: 16) – a period marked by different features. Across the 'third world' (Africa) this period was marked by among others, four main definitive features; the galling economic and political situation, the internet and technological innovativeness and the realities of inhabiting the global village and the novel usage of orality. While technological advancements in communication are reflected in new consumption patterns (slum, blogs, open-mic nights, audio reading sessions, presoetry), many of the socio-economic issues marking the time thematically and aesthetically reverberate through poetry emerging from Africa; contemporary African poetry. More subtle forms of orality and intertextual dialogues with oral texts and texture distinguish contemporary poetics. Since every ground has optimal conditions for the growth of a particular form (Khamis 2005: 147), the contemporaneous discourses have produced the various 'songs' examined (*Song of the Season, Praise Song for TheLand, My Mother's Poem and other Songs, Song of Lawino* and other contemporary song-school texts) in this study with their diverse inflections.

However, even more important is the fact that in terms of aesthetic attributes, the post-1980s poetic productions have come to acquire a number of identifiably distinct and distinguishing literary attributes and features; what may be termed a contemporary trend in poetics. In this sense, the 'contemporary' applies to poetry of or in the style of the present or recent times definitely propounding the *zeitgeist* or 'spirit of the time' – presupposing an antecedent poetics and precursor to contemporary. The poetics of the contemporary coterie must be understood in relation to their socio-political and economic experiences which are undoubtedly different in the contemporary times. Literary production like most cultural output cannot be separated from sources, social effects and backgrounds, history of ideas and politics – what Leitch (1988: 26) designates collectively as its "sociohistorical setting". African poetry, whether oral or written, has always responded or challenged or dialogued with the social world from which it arises and to which it is subject. Undeniably, politics and poetics are inseparable as they often dovetail.

This is why, like Okpewho (1985), Fraser (1986), Stratton (1994), Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1999), Simatei (2001) and Okuyade (2010) among others, I consider contemporary poets as not just responding to but also as conditioned and overdetermined by socio-political and economic issues that dominate this era. Contemporary poetry thus develops within the ambit of the post- 1980s political woes, economic afflictions and social inequalities since conditions of production eventually impact upon a genre's salient features. The post-1980s dictated a certain poetics within modern African poetry. While Florence Stratton (1994) observes that contemporary African literature is generally marked by disillusionment and dissent with *current* events, Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1999) goes further to assert that the circumstances occasioned the need for aesthetic shifts, in particular, the quest for and manipulation of orality in responding to the prevailing bleak socio-economic and politics factors. In connection with artistic agency assigned to socio-economic and political circumstances, Robert Fraser (1986) is more explicit when he observes that out of the period's misfortune, some positive results are evident in literature. He says:

> They [the socio-economic and political developments] thrust the oral transmission of verse, hitherto regarded chiefly as a standby, into the limelight, and hence procured a much needed rethinking of the way in which highbrow art could learn from the oral tradition. In many cases the consequence was a rediscovery of the immediacy of orality as a means of communication. (1986: 314)

Fraser suggests that closer intertextual ties with orality and oral texts issues from political gestures and responses to the tough times arguably triggered in Africa by 'external' and global aggression, in particular, of economic nature. The political gesture or strategy of looking inwards when confronted by external forces, for instance, towards indigenous expressive forms as opposed to received variants serves to affirm independence, reiterate commitment to indigenous institutions and rally for solidarity among the audience. These socio-cultural, economic and political developments in various African nations, Isidore Okpewho argues, "have made *today's* poets sad and angry critics of their governments and societies, as well as of the European powers" (1985: 19 my emphasis) to the extent of initiating a recognizable body of aesthetics expressing discontent. As it becomes symptomatic of this literature, and poetry in particular, to portray the contemporary society as riddled by deceit and corruption,[21] such dissent is often aesthetically manifested through recourse to satire and social realism as creative tropes.

[21] Generally, post-independence African literature has come to associate Africa with a 'fallen world' (Jones 1975: 5)

As evident in the output of most contemporary poets, East and West Africans alike, the poetry is animated by the collapse of what Simatei (2001) calls the dream of independence. This is what *Songs of the Season* illustrates in chapter four. Although modern African poetry generally expresses angry statements and reflects bitterly on this sad and sorry state, it is more pronounced among 'today's' poets and in contemporary literature in general. The trend signalling emergence of contemporary poetry and poetics is therefore partly prompted by the somewhat unfortunate development in the African continent: the economic downturn that affected the publishing industry, the poets and their audience – as Abodunrin (2007) details. Like the novel, therefore, poetry functions as "a challenge to the national project just as it is inspired by them" (Abodunrin 2007: 219). Simatei (2001) correctly points out that the novel tends to antagonize the national project precisely because it activates the disparate and at times discordant identities and voices within the national space, an argument which can be extended to the poem. What Abodunrin says of novelists in East Africa may thus apply to poets as well. He observes that they "have moved from affirmation in [colonial and first-two decades into postcolonial time] to delegitimation in the postcolonial era" (Abodunrin 2007: 219). Generally this shift in 'creative temperament', he argues, is underpinned by the belief that after having supported the aspiration of African nationalism and the idea of nation-building that animated these aspirations, the partnership between writer and the nationalist-politicians could not continue into the postcolonial period (Simatei 2007: 219). This may be attributed to the fact that after political independence, earlier explicit political positions and alignments, ideological effects of cultural nationalism which largely underpinned pre-independence nationalist inclinations, became more ambiguous (Attwell 1984: 87) in the postcolonial times. Changes in political allegiance and alignment inevitably implied a shift from earlier 'nationalist' leaning to more revolutionary aesthetics in literary orientation and evocation as writers and politicians tended to chart different paths.[22]

Thus I contrast contemporary poetry with foundational poetics – which encompases scattered pre-colonial and colonial voices (pioneer) - and immediate post independence African poetry ('first' generation). The term 'contemporary' compels a reexamination of the previous generation's poetics and the literary epoch in general. Significantly underpinning the shifts in

[22] It is well documented that the political class/ruling elite not only differed from prominent literary figures but even arrested and incarcerated a number of them. This is the reason why several of them (such as Micere Mugo, wa Thiong'o etc) opted out of their countries.

poetics or 'creative temperament of poetry' in general, is the change in African poetry's orientation from nationalist (in colonial times) to a more revolutionary/radicalist stance (in postcolonial and contemporary times).[23] Whereas the violence of colonialism and the attendant socio-political ruptures it occasioned in Africa arguably constitute the background and impetus of modern African literary expression, the latter independence and subsequent postcolonial developments significantly mould the poetics of the late 1970s and is even more pronounced in what I here call the contemporary era. While events after independence[24] demanded another shift as the poet's voice had to adjust and realign itself to fully express and confront the bleak socio-political realities of the times, this has been accentuated by the latter 1980s and 1990s combination of internal (local/national) and external (global/foreign interventions) forces.[25] In relation to Nigeria for example, though largely applicable to the entire content, Ebeogu (1983) points to the aggressive and dehumanizing capitalism, the restless vitality of its urban dwellings, the peculiar vigorous humour of the citizens even in the midst of an economically under-privileged and of the class differences often generated by the kind of acute capitalism that has ensnared the continent. The contemporary poetry canvas bristles with indignation and drips with venom and vitriol, as the examples of Osundare (*Songs of the Season*), Ofeimun (*The Poet*

[23] For example, whereas literature of the 1960s and 1970s tended to focus on political corruption which accompanied the decolonization phase and destroyed the very fabric of good governance, the increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots dominated much of 1980s creative writing. Literary production and criticism of the time vividly captures and responds to the times, thus often positing literature as a weapon against the rampant denial of basic human rights. As one contemporary poet puts it, housing, food, health and other basic needs taken for granted in the 1950s and 1960s became the focus of attention in the eighties (Ojaide 1996: 125). Instead of romantically glorifying abstract concepts such as negritude – a key preoccupation of earlier (foundational) Anglophone and Francophone poets, the new poets look beyond colonial devastation of Africa, in the process discovering or unearthing new themes and new approaches aimed at checking growing internal crisis.

[24] Ogaga Okuyade (2010) explores the political chaos of the immediate postcolonial era enumerating them as among others, the disturbances that attended the early years of the newly independent (African) countries, the civil wars, the military coups, the prevalence of political, economic corruption, and the culture of impunity, all which dominated creative works.

[25] The cause of this pervasive sadness and bitterness in poetic voice emanates from, among others, the state of affairs in respective countries, Africa and the world in general and the apparent continued 'presence' of white man (symbolised by the IMF and World Bank in, for example, Osundare's works) in the African society, its politics and economics with attendant western capitalism in contemporary Africa, a sadness which compels African poets to be ardently critical. As the idea of a genuinely 'postcolonial' moral and social order has been thwarted by 'internal' forces of nepotism and corruption and by hegemonic external agencies (Bhabha and Comoroff 2002: 16), contemporary poets increasingly voice their concerns on behalf of the people as they identify with the masses. The post-independence political collapse compounded by economic fiasco ingrained resentment of the status quo across the continent.

Lied),[26] Oguibe (*Blood*), Angira (*Laments*) and the various voices anthologised in *Summons* among other contemporary poets affirm.

Besides the thematic engagement with the status quo, these hardships have aesthetically shaped contemporary poetry. The point being made is that 'contemporary' socio-political experiences and intricacies have occasioned a new aesthetic focus and trajectory. The 'new kind' or contemporary poetry therefore is actually a product of the mind of the 'new' poet operating under 'hostile' conditions – the harsh socio-economic and political events and experiences marking the last three (1980s, 1990s and 2000s) decades.[27] Although writing is often regarded as a political act for the black writer (Gates 1988), such hostile existential realties compel and consign recent African poetry to quasi political activism with interventionist goals. The ontological realities inscribe what Emezue calls "dominance of threnody"[28] or what Adesami calls "aesthetics of pain". This poetry's domineering angry tone (arising from the socio-political and economic context of production) and urgent need to communicate compel artists to think beyond conventional publishing and embrace other avenues of 'publishing' leading to what Fraser (1986) calls "rediscovery of the immediacy of orality". Contemporary African poetry's investment in the representation of these experiences means that there is an urgent message that needs to get across to the citizenry and masses within the shortest time possible. From corruption in government to near-calamitous poverty levels, the context demands out right a new 'voice' for the artist to adequately address the woes within the society. Sometimes, the urgency implies less attention to aesthetics as emphasis is primarily on the profundity of the message, with poets doubling as activists – for human rights or political activists.[29] This is part of the reason why contemporary poets are often described as 'highly politicized' critics of postcolonial regimes in their respective countries (Newell 2006: 133). They are highly politicised since any

[26] Ofeimun's most recent volumes clearly signal this predilection right from their titles: *Go Tell the Generals*, *A Boiling Caracas and Other Poems*, and *I Will Ask Questions With Stones If They Take My Voice*, and *Lagos of the Poets*, a poetry anthology.

[27] Literature and poetry in particular does not grow or flourish in a vacuum, but rather, as waThiong'o rightly postulates, is given impetus, shape, direction and locus by social, political and economic forces in a particular society (1993: xv).

[28] In particular where Emezue argues that artists "invest their metaphor with anguished threnody"

[29] This has been the case with Ken Saro-Wiwa for the Ogoni people in Nigeria, Niyi Osundare through the column in a weekly newspaper, Jack Mapanje and Frank Chipansula in Malawi, Socialist critique among poets from Tanzania or Micere Mugo and the Moi regime in Kenya. This is what Sule Egya (2011) reads as a situation where art and activism is bridged.

aesthetic choices and preferences (un)consciously send political messages. I read contemporary poetry as inextricably intertwined and conditioned by contemporaneous conditions.

In other words, contemporary African poetry refers to a body of poetic works designated and distinguished by subject matter, aesthetic pattern and poetic vision. Basic features contradistinguishing contemporary poetry – in my view conterminous with what Funso Aiyejina dubs "poetry of an Alter-Native tradition" (1998: 112) – from foundational poetics include conscious attempt to interrogate tensions between simple-complex poetics opening a dialogue between the two and a deconstruction of what 'publishing' conventionally implies. Within contemporary African poetry, what Edna Aizenberg describes as the old-new tug between form and content, and which in foundational poetry (especially of the 1960s and 1970s) took the form of debate whether the language of poetry should be simple or complex (Okpewho 1985: 21), takes another shape. The direction form-content debate takes in contemporary times may be gleaned from what has come to be known as alternative poetics. The challenge of reconciling these polarities has led to a renewed focus on orality. To a large extent, the poetry of post-1980s, therefore, testifies to the belief that relative 'simplicity' or accessibility of poetic language need not necessarily compromise the poeticity of a text. Simplicity and accessibility of diction and images need not be read in earlier essentialist terms as 'true' mark of African poetry. Rather than assuming that oral discourses belong to some immutable past, "there is a contemporary phase of oral traditions existing side by side with modern literatures of Africa" (Abodunrin 2007: 17). In contemporary poetics, often weaved into bitterness is a discernible anxiety and conscious attempt to return poetic expression to the cadences of the indigenous languages, and a renewed vigour to echo the rhythms of speech as used in ordinary conversation while still retaining sensibilities of literate discourses – hence typically hybrid. Consequently, emphasis significantly tilts towards valorisation of orality and a poetics taking oral texts as preferred models for composition and consumption of poetry. As Charles Bodunde correctly points out, this is partly due to contemporary poets' conscious strategic adoption and appropriation of the traditional (oral) minstrel whose art was an expression of the people's social and historical experiences (2001: 129) which is evident in the pervasive 'song' metaphor running through most of this poetry.

Despite always being in dialogue or exhibiting dialogic relations with modern poetry, the manner in which oral traditions[30] are deployed by contemporary poets remarkably departs from their predecessors. African poets have always reached back to traditional modes of expression and oral forms, in Ngara's words, to "lend their poetry a certain freshness and liveliness that marks it off from the flatness and colourlessness of conventional language and English cliché" (1990: 191). The early poets, especially the first post-independence generation, explored the African cultural environment for their imagery in the bid to validate "their African cultural heritage" (Ushie 2005: 14).[31] Critics such as Gerard observe that the influence of (oral) tradition upon the birth and growth of modern literature in sub-Saharan Africa at first seemed primarily negative (1970: 35), a view which presupposes a recent trend in which there has been a shift towards a more 'positive' or, one of mutual 'interrelatedness' with the two informing and enriching each other, and which underpins my argument here. Although Gerard attributes this to the notion that unlike the novel which is arguably a 'new' genre on the continent,[32] poetry to the contrary has a long established tradition of production and consumption, my concern is with this relative 'positive' or departure from negative 'influences' among contemporary poets. To get a sense of these changes, a brief explication will suffice. Whereas the first post-independence Africa generation only attempted to use oral literature as mere folklorism,[33] or for the purpose of localizing their works, it is undeniable that a few go beyond such simplicistic "importation of local colours from oral tradition into their writing" (Sekoni 1988: 48). Within this relatively less

[30] It is generally assumed in this study that (oral or) literary tradition comprises the specialized verbal art forms traditional songs, song poems, various forms of oral narratives, tales, legends, myths and historical narratives (Bamikunle) together with proverbs, riddles, chants, lyric poetry, and of course tales, myths, legends and epics – through which cultural continuity was guaranteed.

[31] For example, while Soyinka in *Idanre and Other Poems*, Okigbo in *Heavesgate*, Awoonor in *Rediscovery and Other Poems* and most profoundly p'Bitek in *Song of Lawino* are all preoccupied with African folk traditions in varying degrees, the use into which they put this material also greatly varies. Even in some of their latter works, shifts may be discerned in predominance or preference of orature resources.

[32] Although at first the oral poetic tradition loomed on the periphery of what was considered to be 'modern' African poetry expressed in English, with time it has come to significantly influence the orientations of written African poetry. From the view that sharp, irreconcilable differences and lack of organic continuity marked these two poetic traditions to latter perceptions that it can form important bedrocks onto which the new poetic culture may be anchored, Gerard (1970) regards the transition as from 'negative' to 'positive' influence.

[33] The assuming of a folkloristic view of oral literature, as most writers in English do; as a nostalgic past is only good as an aesthetic embellishment. They tend to overlook the various areas of possible connection between oral literature and written literature.

subtle approach, the use of orature in written literary works is perceived as functionally limited to a gesture in cultural preservation as well as facilitation of communication through use of familiar sayings, proverbs and symbolic structures selected from the oral traditions of the people.

Another distinguishing feature in the deployment of orature within written poetic discourses is that the foundational generation poets, as Okigbo, Soyinka and Clark-Bekederemo exemplify, adopt an approach which mobilized traditional African culture as a resource for a worldview which privileges the importance of myth and ritual in exploring contemporary issues and examining the African predicament.[34] By conceptualizing oral discourse in this manner, most foundational-generation poets envisaged the oral 'text' as mere aesthetic embellishments which imbue their works with 'authenticity' or pristine 'Africa's' rubberstamp – often for cultural politics and as means of instancing "commitment to cultural roots" most evident in the works of writers Elimimian (1989) calls the "traditionalists".[35] Despite the apparent overlaps such that this trend continues into the contemporary period, the use of orality in African writing significantly shifts from being merely derivative of oral traditions (Julien 1992).[36] In other words, the relevance of this tradition in contemporary poetics is not limited to a mere mass transfer of motifs, technical devices and language manipulation (or direct relationship with orature) but embraces dialogic dimensions as well. Orality's vitality, immediacy and spontaneity are pillars on which contemporary composition is built on. Contemporary poetic texts display the basic characteristics of hidden dialogue with conceptualisation of this genre in oral contexts manifested when they absorb, privilege or suppress elements from either Europhone or African poetic discourses. Although since the pioneer phase, the manner in which orature is deployed within literary texts has served as the main distinguishing criterion of a poem written by African

[34] In the 1970s, writers experimented with diverse ways of recovering oral strategies in the written works. A common approach, for example, was to collect and translate oral poetry into English, experimenting with traditional oral forms in written verse (Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth My Brother* (1971), Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1967) are some of examples of this approach). Engagement with mere 'recovery' for some sort of archiving and as a (political) gesture towards literary anti-colonialism and cultural decolonisation underpinned the era's poetic output. Although there were some notable exceptions of sustained critical deployment of oral forms, for example, Okigbo, Soyinka and Clark-Bakederemo who signal a shift in usage by adopting an approach mobilizing Africa's oral expressive culture as resources for a poetic worldview – privileging the importance of myth and ritual in exploring contemporary issues and examining the African predicament, I argue that this becomes the sole preoccupation and to some extent, the nerve centre of contemporary poetics. This conceptualization marks a major aesthetic reorientation, providing the base upon which their successors have built on and hence the distinct poetics. http://www.bookrags.com/tandf/poetry-and-poetics-tf accessed on 18th January, 2011.

[35] These include Okot p'Bitek, Kofi Awoonor, Christopher Okigbo,

[36] Although relating to fiction, this argument advanced by Sekoni (1988) and echoed in Eileen Julien (1992).

writers, the extent and intensity to which references to oral traditions are made has been somewhat evolutionally; from downright imitations and mere translation of African ideas and idioms to contemporaneous ingenious engagements and subtle intertextual relations. In contemporary poetics, orature is what Kofi Owusu considers as crucial "artistic paradigms" (1989: 753) that go beyond foundational limitations. Paralleling EuroAmerican communication and reader-response theories with certain African indigenous aesthetic principles, Owusu locates the Black or African speakerly[37] texts within such interactive performer-audience dialectic. This conceptualisation is valorised in contemporary poetics as most poets emphasise the audience factor in their craft at various forums (Egya 2011: 53) – a consciousness that significantly reconfigures a poem's texture or aesthetics in general.

Related to interactive dialectics is the fact that in traditional as well as modern societies, in oral as in written literatures, the African artist always sees himself (or herself) as "a man...speaking to men."[38] Nowhere is this more evident that in contemporary African poetry. Even when the poet speaks for or on behalf of his/her people – especially when giving expression to a communal or collective consciousness – the reader still gets the sense of "a man...[or woman] speaking of [M]an to men" (Owusu 1989: 751). Quite outstanding is the view that there is a deep-seated inclination – based on African literary practices – to regard the relationship between storytellers and listeners, between actors/performers and audience, and between authors and readers, as one of creative symbiosis. Foregrounded in contemporary African poetry is the belief that 'live' aesthetic experience informs the aesthetics of art since poets approximate indigenous African literatures' shared experience as 'text-making'. The prominence given to the audience or reader and shared experience is used to perceive theories of reception, reader-response and the aesthetic experience as inscribed in African oral poetics.

In this study, oral repertoire encompasses African American mediations, hence I talk of Black literary tradition which shapes the contemporary African poetic text; a text with striking affinities with what Henry Gates (1988) describes as "speakerly texts". Contemporary poetry

[37] Henry Louis Gates (1988) characterizes these texts as those privileging the representation of the speaking black voice while Hurston and Reed have designated them as 'oral books' or the 'talking books'.

[38] This is taken from Serge Doubrovsky (1973: 106) who posits that through the beauty of the words or rigour of the construction, "a man is speaking of man to men". This conviction undergirds the works of various prominent contemporary poets, most notably, Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun and Tanure Ojaide all who conceive their poetry as simply a particular case of interhuman relations and a special mode of confrontation with the Other (1973: 106).

equally assumes the primacy of the reader's participation and response based on the prototypical shared experience of the "call" of the poet-persona's voice and the "response" of the audience. Similarly, the idea of literary text as a "tissue" woven is rooted in African oral tradition and in contemporary times envisaged or interpreted as intertextuality. It is therefore my conviction that contemporary African poets are sufficiently sensitized – unlike their predecessors – to those elements in the African literary experience that can very well form the basis for critical theoretical frames of modern poetry (Owusu 1989: 755). Although to some extent modern African poetry is informed by this consciousness since its inception, my argument is that the assumptions underwriting Gates' speakerly texts equally underpin critical theories and 'schools' which see the African poem (and any literary text) as both "an act of communication" and as "tissue" – a conceptualization that has increasingly gained prominence in the contemporary period. Partially therefore, oral traditions have assumed the role of conceptual and theoretical frames for modern poetry in a manner they did not in the formative years of this poetic tradition. Rather than read oral and written forms as discontinuous or as antithetical terms like Albert Lord and Walter Ong, contemporary poets and scholarship envisages the two realms as ensnared in productive intertextual relations, as boundaries contradistinguishing 'texts' are transgressed. This is why the 'song' metaphor assumes paradigmatic dimensions issuing from the praise-song form, its antithesis – the song of abuse, the dirge - and the concept of 'Song of the season' stand out in the works of some contemporary poets. I read this trend in contemporary African poetry as a dialogic response to earlier criticism urging for the translation of African modes of expression to combine with an attempt to capture the natural rhythms of English (Ngara 1990: 191). Hence the reason why Okpewho, taking Pol Ndu's poetry as representative of contemporary poetics, sees the poet's echoing of traditional divination poetry as potential model for how to combine the best of the African oral tradition with techniques of modern European poetry (1985: 22). In other words, what marks out contemporary poetics is the concerted conscious attempt to merge the best from the various source-traditions for a distinct poetics expressing the African soul and existential realities on the continent.

Alongside the foregoing are the significant technological advancements which have proliferated despite the prevailing economic challenges. Contemporary poetry is subsequently marked by a reconceptualised notion of publishing. Besides the oral text and live performance occupying a

central position in contemporary poetics, through dramatised readings or performance of poetry, the era has seen publishing encroach on what Olu Oguibe (1999) calls the 'netscape' – one of the numerous scapes added to Arjun Appadurai's (1996) catalogue. Although the valorisation of oral discourses has led to redefinition of publishing to include performance, contemporary poets embrace the internet as an alternative to traditional 'publishing'. More often than not – and in my view due to the awareness of the demands of such media, they render their poems with sophisticated audio-visual instruments via equally sophisticated audio-visual broadcast channels, in addition to frequent usage of ultra-modern theatre stages (Opara 2008) for events such as slum, def-jam, rap or open-mic sessions common in contemporary times. An attempt to grapple with and meet the challenges of literary productions in an internet age is therefore another definitive feature of contemporary poetry. Generally, engaging with the possibilities offered by 'sophisticated audio-visual' equipment such as the CD-ROM have yielded some significant achievements in African poetry – often seen as performance-oriented poetry. Consequently, there seems to emerge some sort of shift in the general intellectual temper and climate of the epoch. Chidi Opara's observation partly signals the shifts I refer to; contemporary times are witnessing a change from the erroneous belief (in Nigeria and Africa in general) that this genre is only an intellectual exercise, whose entertainment dimension should be suppressed and even sacrificed for intellectual-philosophic reflections and engagements. Contemporary poetry therefore is reaping the fruits of a renewed emphasis in the genre's entertainment value evident in the resurgence of poetry readings, slum or open-mic sessions, dub poetry, rap poetry and the Def-jam phenomenon. Like in other parts of the world – especially in America - contemporary African poetry fully exploits the entertainment aspect of the genre, and hence enhancing itself and society professionally, economically, politically, socially and culturally. Such 'populist' leanings remain the hallmark of postmodernist discourses. While their predecessors tended to view their craft reductively from a limiting prism of poetry as being only an intellectual exercise, with its attendant professional, economic, political, social and cultural consequences, contemporary poets open up the genre through intertextual relations with contemporaneous (mega)texts such as recent emphasis on inter- or multidisciplinary approach, genre porosity and ruptured conceptualisation of publishing hence deconstructing the genre's 'elitist' exclusivity[39]

[39] If one considers, for example, remarks by Okigbo when asked to read his poetry before conference-participating

that marked and dominated the pre-1980s poetics. Publishing poetry via the internet definitely impacts upon conceptualisation and aesthetics of African poetry. Having already contributed largely to the collapse of poetry hegemonies formed along Ibadan-Ife-Lagos and Nsukka-Enugu-Owerri literary axis – prevalent immediately after the Nigerian civil war - there can only be speculations of what it will accomplish in African poetry in general. The 'new poetry', Jeyifo notes, takes the language of poetry and the diction of figurative expression to the metaphoric market-place (1988: 316). Images are drawn from familiar and more often than not, immediate contexts. The poetry is therefore largely 'populist' in orientation as it operates within postmodernism's emphasis on the well-known and easily accessible, as well as resolves to engage the audience directly, without levels of book learning interceding. The concomitant change in intellectual traditions, in particular, those revolving around production and reception of poetry have undoubtedly impacted upon contemporary output's aesthetics. The changes have proceeded apace with developments in the technological world.

The four identified key socio-economic and aesthetic developments – that is, socio-economic and political unfoldings since 1980, the manner orality is deployed, technological advancements such as the internet and digitized information storage and globalization – definitively distinguish the contemporary phase. They are multifariously manifested in the practice and theoretical formulation of contemporary poetry aesthetics (imagery, diction-language, attitude, tone, rhythm, allusions, form and structure). The general complexion of this poetry is therefore distinct from its antiquities. Most of the poems examined in this study imply a socio-historical point of view that marks the era's emotional and intellectual attitudes. To engage with such poetry, a nuanced theoretical framework is necessary.

Hybridity as a Theoretical Frame

It is customary, Ramazani postulates, to understand postcolonial literatures as complex intercultural fusions (2001: 41). Like other literary genres, poetry transmutes and transposes lived experiences and is therefore bound to represent or refract postcoloniality's complex fusions and the contemporary catholicity of taste and interest. Being a social act, poetry cannot be

audience. He would not read claiming the audience was not 'poetic' enough, (no need reading poetry to non-poets) which contrasts with most contemporary poets ready to – as Anyidoho puts it – dramatically read or perform their poetry. I have in mind Kiguli, Anyidoho, Osundare and Mugo among others.

conceived outside of history and specific social environments – and which vary from one region and epoch to another. Following studies such as Eileen Julien's (1992) and Isidore Okpewho's (1992) which eruditely show that most postcolonial texts are characterized by *métissage* or hybridity, I read contemporary poetry as hybridized texts. The contemporary poem is a multilayered space in which diverse literary discourses and texts cross, conversing with each other. These texts are hybrid because they rely on what Soyinka calls "selective eclecticism" (1975 : 329), that is, a process which involves integration of various media of expression (such as sculpture, dance and music of Africa) into the moulding of the sensibility that tries to carve new forms out of diverse texts or influences – reflecting the unified conceptualization of the experience. I read contemporary poetry alongside Lionnet (1998) as a mixed (*métis*) cultural expression incorporating or interweaving (*tissage*) from various ethnic, geographic, epochs, personal and linguistic registers. Hybridity, in particular, the variant that Lionnet designates as *metissage*, is a reading practice that allows one to bring out the interreferential nature of a particular set of texts (1998: 8). Positing hybridity as a metaphor or trope for understanding the manifestations of contemporary African poetry's evolutions, intermixture, or playfulness, I perceive poetic texts produced in the last three decades as a 'knotting' together of countless – some already knotted – indigenous and received models, languages, images and genres (Begam and Moses 2007). It is a metaphor for a process of mutual borrowing when different cultures or literary traditions meet, intersect and blend, transforming or 'hybridizing' each other within African poetry.

As a theoretical construct, I use hybridity in this study as a strategy of reading the politics of culture in the postcolonies or, like Kapchan and Strong, as providing "a unique analytical vantage point" (1999: 242) which acknowledges the intricate and complex weave of issues at play in contemporary literary discourses. The contemporary era is characterized by the 'playfulness of forms'[40] and overlapping of literary traditions in a much more attenuated degree than preceding literary epochs. Hybridity endeavours to disrupt and even erase boundaries. As a tool for analysing contemporary poetry, hybridity provides for the transgressive and ambivalent

[40] The postmodern times, which coincide with what is here described as the contemporary era, have been viewed by scholars as marked by playfulness of forms especially as manifested in poetry. This is evident in the mixing, fluidity or crossing of genres such that little respect is paid to hitherto traditional boundaries. See Ramazani (2001) also for his argument that even the borders of our mind are ever shifting. Such interplay between forms, traditions or cultures is emblematic of hybridity.

poetics of the contemporary times examined in this study; press poetry, written performance, printed orality and storytelling poetry. In reading such admixtures, hybridity is envisaged as a hidden inscription of difference (Salgado 1999). The relative profundity of such 'hidden inscriptions' of difference within the confines of a text in the recent past is what leads Evan Mwangi (2007) to correctly argue that hybridity has become more accentuated in contemporary (East) African poetry. The contemporary African poetic experience thus thrives in a liminal space; on the interstices of various genres arts/media, literary periods or movements/generations, expression or language as well as different poetic traditions, poetic elements or features criss-cross these boundaries,

The focus in this study is on the 'interreferential nature' of contemporary poetic texts arising from contact and movement across boundaries (overflows its borders) in an aesthetic (and/or theoretical) quest. Considering that literary texts often make imaginative use of other texts (Hynes 1987: 110) whether oral or written, it is understandable that works of modern African poets and scholars reveal that this genre is dominated by a "profoundly syncretic imagination" (Jenkins 2002: 576) which I read as resulting from the wide spectrum of influences and diversity of textual sources informing the form and content of poetic output. Hybridity, as conceived in this study designates a central characteristic feature of the process of literary eclecticism; borrowing.

Although Bakhtin (1981) seems to privilege the novel as the site of hybridity, I find Njogu's (2004) intervention that dialogism and the resultant aspects of hybridity, are unrestricted by genre. Hybridity presupposes textual dialogues that in the final text appear as 'hidden'. The proliferation of poetry employing song (that is, stresses performance, protean in nature and which readily accommodate other genres or forms, underlying narrative aspect) in contemporary times, as evident in Osundare's *Songs of the Season*, Anyidoho's *PraiseSongs for TheLand*, Mugo's *My Mother's Song* and generally, the song school, is testimony to the centrality of hybridity. A dialogic and intertextual engagement between poetry and song, beyond structural patterning, arguably accentuated in contemporary poetics ensures that the song-metaphor pervades. A symbiotic intertextual relationship evolves between genres or literary-expressive forms tapping on the regenerative power of energies on the margins. In this study, therefore, song functions as a hybrid and dialogic framework for reading contemporary poetry.

My position in this study is that, as Ricard (2004) rightly reminds one; "poetic consciousness is first and foremost linguistic consciousness: the keenest consciousness of the language situation must be sought within poetry" (2004: 141). Thus, in directing the study's attention to the poetic space as a rich site of hybridization, the research does not erroneously elevate the poetic genre. The poetry selected for analysis provides (textual) contact zones between English, indigenous African poetic traditions and 'Other' languages, genres or literary forms, hence sites of possible interaction, or 'social renewal' in the productive sense this study adopts. It is Edward Said (1994) who notes that there is intense entanglement of cultural forms in ex-colonized regions, and this is manifested in the literary texts – poetic ones being no exception. By analogy, such intense entanglement points to the intertwining, overlapping, intermingling, or simply mixing of not just 'alien-Others' and 'native' poetic traditions, but within a more democratic (contemporaneous) field. Due to the diversity of literary traditions and textual sources at play, with some (for example, English) historically occupying privileged positions within modern African poetic discourses, hybrity as conceived in this study places emphasis on non-hierarchical connections that encourage lateral relations, rather than live within bounds created by a linear view of history and society. For example, Visweswaran points out that all hybrids are not equal since "there are hierarchies of [the] hybridity" (1994: 132). In this study therefore, hybridity is premised on the idea of 'difference on equal terms'. Although Miller (1990) argues that it is impossible to have identity and equality at the same time, the theorization Young (2001) makes allows for such simultaneity and 'uncanny relationships'. The various hybridizing elements and texts freely interact on equal footing – as cultural standards and aesthetics are decanonized in contemporary times.

Hybridity as used here closely relates to the concept of liminality. From this concept the study borrows tools of analysis such as the liminal *personae* or figure – in this thesis designated as the fluid personae. Of the various studies of liminality, Victor Turner's (1970) theorisation of the liminal space as "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (1970: 97) is closely related to the notion of 'contact zones' and hybridity's third space. The ambivalence and ambiguity marking the liminal, the contact zone or the third space, is a source of both 'pollution' and 'pollination', introducing 'pure possibilities' such as novel forms and genres that draw aesthetic sustenance from both parent-forms but are clearly not

either; presoetry, storytelling poems, performance poetry and song school poetics exemplify this uncanny aesthetic complexity. The fluid persona, for example, is a liminal figure in the sense that it is both a part of, and yet separate from the society (or audience) – hence inscribed in the collective 'we' as well as an individuated 'I', and remains inextricably bound together in Anyidoho's poetry as I explicate in Chapter Two.

Contemporary African poetics may thus be read as simultaneously a negation or suppression of dominant (and conventional) conception of the genre, and acceptance of difference and generic diversity; it is a case where absolute duality is erased. Critical within hybridity as a frame is perhaps the realization that poetry, and its related others, should not be seen in terms of opposition but, more correctly, in terms of complementarity – often arising from intertextual relations. It is within such a frame that closely related genres (or modes/forms) such as dance, song, drama (performance) and storytelling, are read as complements, rather than opposites, of poetry. Similarly, other media such as print press, audio-CD and the blogosphere are perceived not as 'replacements' or sources of retardation but as "realms of pure possibility" for modern African poetry. Each of these other realms (genres, forms, media) have their own formal structure and conventions by which the other realm (contemporary African poetry), through differention, is able to (re)define its own boundaries – hence the alienating hybridity emphasised in the study. The contemporary works sampled are paradigmatic of the era's characteristic profusion of genre fluidity and hybridity in form and themes. The accentuation of dynamic (re)configurations of apparently complementary 'opposites' in poetic discourses in contemporary times is of core concern. Hence poetry, as a genre or medium of artistic expression, is envisaged as a contact zone, enabling the interaction and intertextual dialoguing of artistic forms, media and genres. If within the contemporary poem, texts and textual material travel, cross and interact, the coming into dialogue between textual and other aesthetic recourses of one genre with another, such as drama or press and poetry, is read within theoretical paradigms of intertextuality – rather than as influences.

Scope and Limits of Study: Poets and the Poetry

Because this study zeroes in on contemporary poetry of English expression, it is limited to Anglophone East and West Africa, locking out African poetry of 'other' linguistic expression,

such as that from Francophone and Lusophone countries as well as some in African languages. Further, Anglophone poetry is distinguished as pre- and post-1980s. The study focuses on the latter, designated as contemporary African poetry. The writers or anthologies selected for analyses have one thing in common; their conscious engagement and focus on experimenting with both form and content as they delve into untrodden poetic paths. The study is based on poem texts from anthologies; *Summons: Poems from Tanzania* (1980), *An Anthology of East African Poetry* (1988), *Boundless Voices: Poem from Kenya* (1988) and *Uganda Anthology of Poetry* (2000), together with individual collections by Micere Mugo (*My Mother's Poem* 2002), Niyi Osundare (*Songs of the Season* 1983), Kofi Anyidoho (*PraiseSong for TheLand* 2002), among anthologized others. These provide the corpus from which the concept of hybridity is comparatively analysised. From Micere Mugo's printed performance, Richard Mabala and his colleagues' poem-stories – which though not novel feeds on Swahili poetics, Niyi Osundare's experiment straddling journalism and creative writing, precolonial oral literary forms and modern poetry, Kofi Anyidoho's double-publication strategy to intertextual dialogue between Okot p'Bitek's song school tradition and contemporary poetics, the sampled poetry and poets represent poetic trends I regard as emblematic of contemporary poetics, especially the centrality of 'song' in recent poetic discourses.

If an anthology is understood in its earliest sense,[41] the sampled anthologies represent consciously selected medley of contemporary 'good' poems conveying the notion of evolution or succession of various phases of modern African poetry. Due to the relatively larger output of poetry volumes from West Africa in the recent past, I limit the study to two peculiar texts, namely *Songs of the Season* by Niyi Osundare from Nigeria and *PraiseSongs for TheLand* by Kofi Anyidoho from Ghana. It is not just that these two poets are representative of current and dominant trend contemporary poetry is taking but their poetry most aptly exemplifies the phenomenon identified with contemporary poetics from the region. Both collections project a bold experimental spirit that balances the integrity of art and the relevance of content, availing a cross-sectional representation of contemporary poetic output and trends. As evident in the newspaper serialization, Osundare exploits the Yoruba oral repertoire for form, style as well as content while at the same time appropriating journalist resources. The latest poetry publication

[41] That is, 'collection of flowers' (in Greek) or miscellany (Latin).

by Anyidoho on the other hand exemplifies concerted efforts to bridge the gap between indigenous African poetry and literate English tradition (written versus sung) as practiced within modern African poetry. Most of the sampled collections enter untrodden paths. While Osundare's is the first such sustained engagement with mainstream newspapers, Anyidoho's is the first publication to combine sound and print. Such novelty triggered the curiosity of scholars and an attempt to understand how the resulting texts transpose poetic experience to new heights.

The study is also confined to two regions on the continent. The region came to be known as British East Africa protectorate as all the three nation-states, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, were subjected to more or less the same colonial design[42] with little variation, leading to a profound impct on the culture and lives of the people of the region (Ogude 2003: 158). Indeed, Arnold (2008: 12) posits that the British presence in East Africa was to have a decisive influence on education and culture – the ingredients of literary production and consumption. The nation-states making up Anglophone East Africa share approximately the same socio-historical (and cultural) circumstances and experience the same intellectual, literary and poetic trajectory.[43] Like East Africa, Newell (2006) affirms that West Africa has a long history of travel, migration, and trade, all of which were accompanied by acts of cultural exchange. Unsurprisingly therefore, both regions are made up of various ethnically defined 'imagined communities' (or 'nations') that have been in constant dialogic interactions throughout their history – and hence never pristine, sacrosanct ethnic cultural units. There is a veritable proof of the cultural affinities of at least West African peoples, if not the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. By early twentieth century, Britain ruled present-day Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, while a vast stretch of the territory came under French rule. Although as Newell observes, the region known as 'West Africa' – and even 'East Africa' – is fluid and indefinable, containing elastic boundaries which stretch and contract in ways that defy simple ideas about cultural or national identity (Newell 2006:1), for the purposes of the present focus on African poetry of English expression, it makes sense to limit the region to Anglophone West Africa, that is, Nigeria, The Gambia, Sierra

[42] For example, the formal integration processes in the region started with, among other things, the construction of the Kenya-Uganda Railway, 1897-1901, the establishment of the Customs Collection Centre, 1900, the East African Currency Board, 1905, the Postal Union, 1905, the Court of Appeal for Eastern Africa, 1909, the Customs' Union in 1919 followed by the East African Governor's Conference of 1926 (Thobhani 1972).

[43] With Makerere as the centripetal force around which the region's modern literary tradition orbit or revolve, in addition to the factors I outline.

Leone and Ghana in West Africa, and Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania as countries in which poetry of English expression is pronounced. Due to the overwhelming scope and large output of poetry emerging from 'West' Africa, for this study I confine myself to Ghana and Nigeria, that is, arguably "the major Anglophone parts" (Innes 2004: 271) in the region. The number of poetry collections sampled for analysis therefore precludes the possibility of an exhaustive account of any of them.

Taking linguistic and ethnic dimensions as the basis of ascertaining relative homogeneity of regions, I consider these two analytical units as plausible means of categorizing poetry and for examining contemporary poetic productions. I conceive the two as marked by elastic (ethno-cultural) boundaries. Following Even-Zohar, I evince each region as a 'multiple system' constituting of "a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structural whole, whose members are independent" (1978: 7). While Kiswahili defines East Africa, the Ewe literary corpus (which straddles three distinct nation-state boundaries; Benin Republic, Togo and Ghana) and the populous Yoruba provide entry points into the complex ethnic region that is West Africa.

Outline of Chapters

As will become evident in subsequent chapters, what I read as cutting through recent output is the valorisation of song as one of the ideal models for poetic composition. The following chapters, therefore, engage with different facets of song; from the praise song – hatched as a dirge in Chapter Two, *mashairi* as a Swahili sung poem tradition influencing poetry in written English in Chapter Three, what Osundare calls 'songs of the season' in Chapter Four and how the experiment dialogues with journalistic discourses, the different 'Lawinos' singing in contemporary times in Chapter Five, through to Mugo's mother's poem and other songs in Chapter Six. As a unifying metaphor in contemporary poetry, song-form thus explains why recent poetry is replete with and informed by diverse texts and intellectual discourses available to the poet in East or West Africa. Chapter Two commences by exploring a hybrid and liminal figure in Anyidoho's poetry, that is, the fluid persona in *PraiseSong for TheLand.* Anyidoho's persona in this collection is predominantly hybrid, having roots in the indigenous Ewe, African American and English poetics. It is through such a reconfiguration of the poetic voice that

Anyidoho is able to disrupt binaries such as past-present, sound-print, individual-communal as well as poet-poetry/art-artist. His artistic philosophy, that he is "Dancer and The Dance" (2002: 22), underscores the indivisibility between the art on one hand, and the artist on the other, hence epitomises hybridity's ambivalence and precarious presence within the same text or narrative voice.

Chapter Three moves on to examine storytelling poetry, interrogating the interface between narrative prose and poetic discourses. As an analytical tool for interrogating apparently opposing or competing literary forces speaking within the same voice or text, hybridity in this case is able to dissolve the binary logic of colonialist discourses underpinning dichotomous constructions such as 'pure' poetry and story-like poems. The song metaphor allows poetry to be read as a medium for narrating or telling stories, besides its customary functions. The chapter privileges Swahili literary tradition as a potential source for contemporary East African poetry and defines it as a hybridization of different ethnic literary traditions in the region. Both the fourth and fifth chapters examine the centrality of song in contemporary African poetry. While Chapter Four explores liminality between literary and journalistic practices using the example of *Songs of the Season*, the fifth chapter uses song as a conceptual frame in defining song school poetics – a mega-text shaping contemporary poetic discourses. Osundare consciously opens an intertextual dialogue between what may be described as popular poetry on the one hand, and the so-called serious or academic poetry on the other using the metaphor of poem as 'a song for all seasons'.

In Chapter Five, the idea of a performance on page is introduced. Using Mugo's collection, the chapter engages with how drama intertextually engages poetry, alienating or distinguishing modern African poetry. What I call performance potentialities are used to interrogate binaries such as live-written performance, theory-practice, simple/accessible-difficult/esoteric as well as how the poet thematizes male-female gender constructs in *My Mother's Poem and other Songs.* Finally, Chapter Six concludes by drawing deductions from arguments advanced in the five chapters. It makes a comparative analysis between East and West African poetic hybridities, pointing out that the dialogues and exchanges among poets in contemporary times ensure diverse texts and textures, as well as that intellectual discourses are not region-specific, but freely travel. The chapter also accounts for some of the notable aesthetic departures between the two regions,

in terms of the deployment of hybridity. The next chapter examines what Kofi Anyidoho calls a 'praise song for the land' and the fluid persona poetics it privileges.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FLUID PERSONA IN KOFI ANYIDOHO'S *PRAISESONG FOR THELAND*

Introduction

This chapter draws out the uses of hybridity in Kofi Anyidoho's *PraiseSong for TheLand* with a particular emphasis on the fluid nature of the persona's identity. Anyidoho reconstructs the persona as a conscious effort towards challenging and dismantling various binaries, mostly springing from the oral-literate dichotomy in modern African poetry. My argument is that various forms of binarism that have hitherto constituted and defined the terrain of modern African poetry are untenable in Anyidoho's recent renditions of poetic texts. Using his latest collection, I intend to show how Anyidoho deploys a fluid persona to push traditional boundaries and aesthetically collapse binaries inherent in modern African poetry, striking a delicate equilibrium between the individual-community, ordinary/simple-poetic/complex language, print-sound and generally, African-Western poetic forms. His *PraiseSong for TheLand* blurs spaces between individual and community, past or pre-colonial and present or modern Africa, African and African American experiences, African poetic forms and English poetic models, ordinary versus poetic language, poetry versus drama/dance and language versus music among others. This text, like most contemporary poetry, is a complex site characterized by fusion of diverse poetic approaches, devices and elements from different poetic traditions of the world. My task is not merely to demonstrate the obvious, the hybrid nature of Anyidoho's (and in general contemporary) poetry, but to bring to the fore the novel usages, adaptations and nuanced function into which it is deployed. Following Saavendra (2004), Mwangi (2007) and Ramazani (2001), this chapter advances the argument that contemporary poets have reversed the initially contestatory and antagonistic relationship to perceive the Afrocentric-Anglocentric poetic encounter positively, as a site of renewal – as one way in which newness enters the poetry genre. In particular, it examines how Kofi Anyidoho verbally and formally fashions, or presents, his poetry as straddling the discursive gap between Afrocentric poetics on the one hand, and English traditions of poetry as received through colonial education in Africa from early to mid-twentieth century, on the other.

Firstly, I examine how this perspective is grounded in his Ewe literary background and enriched by his scholarly interest in the larger African diasporic family. I therefore briefly explore Ewe oral poetry, alongside his Pan Africanist and racial consciousness to establish the base from which his poetry takes off. Secondly, I delve into the melancholic tone and language this base engenders. This lamentation, whether grounded in the Ewe dirge, Afro-American resistance texts, Negritudist roots,[44] or US Black Power movement, is appropriated to modern African poetry, inevitably resulting in intersection and hence hybridization of this poetic space. This intersection is primarily due to his deployment of what I call a fluid persona. The next section, therefore, delves into Anyidoho's conceptualization and conflation of the poet and the voice-persona - 'I' as simultaneously the 'We'. The two common perspectives and the in-between strand – marked by fluidity – are discussed at length. Fluidity is not limited to the persona's identity only. Rather, running through this collection are intertextual relations alluding to Anyidoho's conceptualisation of poetry as 'total art'. This, as I show, proceeds into more intensified intertexting to the extent that the porous generic boundaries are virtually collapsed. The chapter concludes with an examination of the blurred drama/dance and poetry boundary. Anyidoho's notion of conterminous dancer and dance ("I/We is/are Dancer and The Dance") signals this collapsing of formal boundaries. Thus, the poetic experience is presented as a liminal space in-between various polar opposites. This is the basis upon which the sound-print dichotomy, the interstices between individual and community, past and present/precolonial-postcolonial, African poetic forms versus English poetic models and ordinary versus poetic language is approached. This is coupled with an explication of how Anyidoho handles hybridity as a theme in this collection.

In its verbal dexterity, tonal complexity, persona-identity fluidity and imaginative transformation of inherited genres, forms, or themes, *PraiseSong for TheLand* occupies what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls the "in between" space. What I describe as a fluid persona gestures towards this inbetweeness or hybridity. For discussion and analytical purposes, the fluid persona is framed in this chapter as a poetic device or voice that locates Anyidoho's poetics in 'borderline spaces' between African and English on the one hand, and, African and African American poetic

[44] Traces of negritude philosophy, in particular, the coming into consciousness of the condition of one's blackness in various racist European contexts, can be discerned most profoundly in "Dreams in Babylon" although expressed via the daughter's ugly encounters.

traditions on the other. It imbues the poem's persona with textual and narrative fluidity or liquidness. Providing a bridge between personal and social comment, the fluid persona endows Anyidoho's poetics with a sense of anticlosure and a decentring of the writing/composing self. As I will illustrate, it serves as a means of undermining I/Us-versus-Other rhetoric – here extended to the range of binaries examined. In analysing *PraiseSong for TheLand*, I focus on how Anyidoho creates a fluid persona, combining African sensibilities associated with a song/poem-persona, and the Western conceptualization of speaking voice-character in poems to solve what he views as "the full burden of the poet's voice" (Anyidoho 2002). Like most contemporary African poets, he deploys a hybrid point of view to produce poems influenced and shaped by their African affiliations, received Western (modern) literary tradition and mediated African traditions such as African American poetics. Such a reconfiguration or perspective, I argue, is significant as it enables an important recovery of the fullness of his message. The persona's unstable identity is largely representative of the dual- or multivalent nature of modern African poetry which frequently oscillates between its major parent-traditions. Therefore, this persona symbolically embodies the overlapping relationship between modern poet and the indigenous cantor or *heno*, as theorised by Anyidoho[45] himself. Fluid persona is thus a means of inscribing in his poetry a tragressive voice and perspective.

The four salient characteristics that Georgbeeyi Adali-Mortty (1967) identifies in Ewe poetry, melancholy, rich allegories, fantastic metaphors and peculiarities of rhythm (and melody) have informed most Ewe modern poets. However, the manner in which Anyidoho deploys these poetics, I argue, is unique and more related to other contemporary poets in different parts on the continent. What Oyeniyi Okunoye (1988) says in relation to the generations the Ewe *heno*, Kofi Awoonor and Anyidoho represent is quite relevant and may provide some light to the distinction I signal. Where exactly these generations depart may be exemplified by, on the one hand, what Okunoye sees as "Awoonor's debt to the Ewe poetic tradition which ranges from outright translation and adaptation to the modelling of his poems after various Ewe poetic conventions", and on the other, what for Anyidoho is "an extension of that tradition, an extension which seeks to apply old styles and techniques to new and wider dimensions of life" (1988: 100).

[45] He has demonstrated, using the principle of past flowing into the present, how the modern poet, whether preoccupied with print medium or otherwise, is a continuation of indigenous models.

Contemporary poets, Anyidoho included, attempt to extend the poetic tradition into new spaces rendering it hybrid.

Specifically, this tradition bequeaths Anyidoho's poetics its dominant feature of tone. The tone of Ewe conversational language together with the lament's tonal contours – especially its melancholia – can be discerned in his poetry. In addition, like Ewe oral poets, he pays special attention to the intricacies of language; the tradition's extensive use of ideophones, morphological devices or techniques of Ewe language inflection or derivation, clear-cut boundaries between word stems and affixes as well as phonetic patterning – a heritage of Ewe which is an agglutinating language. Also, the notion of embedding and what Anyidoho classifies as incorporative or complex forms (1983: 112) are interspersed in his poetry in the same manner they are in oral contexts – encompassing what Julia Kristeva calls intertextual relations. Like the oral artist to whom different forms were viewed as subject to variation in structure or content, and meaning depending on contextual factors, Anyidoho freely interweaves various forms or 'texts' to come up with an approximate or equivalent of composite poetry informed by his theory of total art. Related to the foregoing is the issue of generic boundaries in art. Anyidoho appropriates the indigenous oral artist's performance, marked by disruption of, or unboundedness to, generic boundaries so that his poetry is located on the interstices of drama, dance, song and conversation thus practically and symbolically collapsing the genre boundary between print and sound. The privileging of the 'voice', both metaphorically and in audio CD-form in Anyidoho's poetry, issues from his allegiance to Ewe tradition and worldview.

Beyond the level that critics of Anyidoho's poetry have engaged with, continuity in his works may be envisioned at the intra-plane. Here, an author's previous works form an intricate web, or inter-textual relations as successive works are directly or indirectly constructed by means of earlier works. Such an understanding is central to Anyidoho's literary output. At the thematic level, for example, *A Harvest of Our Dreams* (1984) which includes the poet-persona's impressions about America - especially its plentiful resources - finds echoes in *Earthchild*, where the same impressions are developed further– having been composed while he was staying in America. This also preoccupies him in *PraiseSong for TheLand,* in particular "Dreams in Babylon" and, even more intensely, "Lake Forest", in which the vast wealth of the United States is overtly contrasted with the overwhelming needs in other countries. His first collection, *Elegy*

for the Revolution - modelled after the lament of the Ewes - anticipates *PraiseSong for TheLand* which to a large extent is actually 'the ultimate song of sorrow'. Carried over is the poet-persona's unrelenting passion, even amidst overwhelming sorrow, to push on towards a successful ending with characteristic optimism and hope. Despite the pervasive loneliness of the persona in *Earthchild*, there is an underlying expression of hope, most perceptible in the title poem which celebrates African music and song, emphasizing that even though the vicious slave-traders and zealous missionaries entered Africa, these forces cannot destroy the power of African musical expression.[46] The same optimism is echoed in *PraiseSong for TheLand* where he reiterates that those – in reference to alien western forces – who stifled their voices are now surprised, ending confidently that "They couldn't take away our song" (2002: 31), which he (together with diaspora writers) now sing. Even more striking is his limitation of his poetic language to a certain corpus of images, diction, phrases or epithets which not only recur in successive poetic works but most strikingly retain the same range of meanings or series of semantic clusters. Peculiar are certain word-images or keywords generating a list of recurring motifs that have come to mark all his works, from the first to the one under focus in this study. He seems to build a certain poetic vocabulary or cluster of interrelated words, phrases and expressions revolving around particular images. The frequency with which harvest, (snow)/(thunder)storms/winds/hurricanes, memory, dance/r, drums, future/past, twilight/dawn(s)/sunset(s), word/voice/silence, seeds, promises, dreams, hope, soul(time), rainbow and sorrow appear in this collection is obtrusive to the extent that it cannot go unnoticed stylistically. More often than not, they are conspicuously marked from the rest by initial-capitals. Reminiscent of Ewe tradition's tendency to sustain certain metaphors throughout (Adali-Mortty 1967: 8), Anyidoho demonstrates an equally sustained consistency in his utilisation of images. The frequent recurrence of 'infantmen', 'panther', elephants, honeybee and ripening in this and his earlier collections, among others, point to this predilection towards conservativeness with words and images. In "Desert Storm", published online, he talks of how "in those heady days dreams:/The Hope The Promise Somehow" irrespective of "how far afield/the HoneyBee may fly" and how war is not a video game meant for kids but has been turned "by infantmen" to "a meal of death cooked in blood" alluding – satirically so – to

[46] These are construed as the avenues through which Africans gain power to overcome their oppressors.

unnecessary wars waged against innocent (civilians) in reference to the US-led military invasion of Iraq in 1991. In "Slums of Our Earth" Anyidoho mentions that the aspirations of the citizenry are more often than not "dreams deprived of memories of joy" (2002: 57). What is evident in his poetics is a conscious attempt to continue not just his mother's poetics, but in tandem with his earlier forms and concerns.

As evident in his works, a critical devotion is extended to the consequences of the colonial incursion and the failure of independence – as a pet engagement with the Black condition. Significantly, Anyidoho privileges 'memory' considering that Black writing in general is intimately linked to a collective quest or memory as evident in the opening poem in *PraiseSong for TheLand* titled "Memory &Vision". He attempts to forge a trans-national Black identity as his poetry largely operates within the discourse of shared cultural memory (Gale 2009). In lieu of the fact that Black writing is remarkable for its ability to compel a journeying back in space and time to reflect on the assault of history as it seeks to locate black peoples and their conditions in time, prioritizing a shared experience as opposed to personal quests (Gale 2009), the opening section is entitled 'journey into time'. He draws inspiration from the spiritual and spatial journeys of African people in this collection.

The fascination with this consciousness is not confined to the collection under study. Gale (2009) demonstrates the sense in which *AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues* builds on Anyidoho's Pan Africanist consciousness by imagining the possibility of constructing a global Black community – which is pursued or continued in *PraiseSong for TheLand*. This worldview informs his conceptualization of both the role of the poet and function of his poetry. This is why, in a somewhat new note of characteristic impatience and anger, the collection instances the conscious cultivation of a voice expressive of racial and Pan Africanist consciousness and concerted efforts to reconfigure its reception by the desired audience. The standpoint Anyidoho assumes positions him to perceive socio-political experiences and realities quite distinctly. Instructively, any informed reading of Black expressive cultures appreciates their immersion in history. As evident in this collection, he explores history as a riveting subject matter for poetry much the same way as African American poets did during, and shortly after, the Harlem Renaissance (1920s and 1930s) – literary and poetic activities that significantly informed and inspired vibrant modern African poetry in the 1950s. This view is reinforced by Opoku-

Agyemang who reiterates that the vastest depths and structures of African history, slavery and the slave trade ought to be regarded in a sustained way and mined in a serious fashion for its lessons, its truths and its metaphors (1996: 64). Colonialism's dehumanization, domination and exploitation, from Anyidoho's perspective, are currently being propagated by the manner in which the indigenous ruling elite has been managing independent Africa. The lines "And the land fallows/again into endless/fields ripe with Mirages" (2002: 80) suggest how African states keep making false-starts to the point that he strikes a note of pessimism of regime changes.

Anyidoho is unambiguous in his message for Africa and adopts a somewhat burdened tone:

> It cannot mustnot be
> that the rest of the world came upon us
> picked us up used us to clean up their mess
> dropped us off into trash and moved
> on into new eras of celebrative arrogance
> hopeful somehow hopeful that we shall forever
> remain lost among shadows of our own doubts (2002: 24).

Intimately attached to his native Ghana but overwhelmingly embroiled in aspects of racial consciousness, Anyidoho speaks for and on behalf of the African continent, "us" pitting it against "the rest of the world", but more so Europe. He does not conceal his indignation and impatience (with choices and decisions) as he makes emotional identification with Africa; "Have we not knocked upon the stranger's heart/knocked and knocked so hard so long/our fingers bleed&run into our tears?" (2002: 58).

Incontrovertibly, the Ewe lamentative tradition, African American slavery and politics, Pan Africanist ideologies all underpin Anyidoho's poetics – like other contemporary African poets preoccupied with contemporaneous predicament of postcolonial Africa. This consciousness inscribes a certain melancholic tone, typical of the Ewe dirge and the African American blues, which intersperse his poetry. As for the latter, the assumption on which DuBois's aesthetic theory is built explicates and affirms the thesis being advanced. The premise is the foundation upon which Harlem Renaissance poetry and Black or African American poetic aesthetics are based. Through the emotive power and, above all, melancholia, art function as the point of entry into the world of the African in America (Gikandi 2000: 35). The Black ontological centre, its soul or spirit, is encapsulated in this melancholic tone. It is important to point out, as Dathorne quoting Adali-Mortty (1960: 51) does that the Ewe worldview – as evident in Ewe verse – is

characterized by a "pervasive sadness" (1975: 18). This is evident in this collection. Kofi Awoonor and Anyidoho himself have delved into the persistence of the theme of Ewe (dirge) singer or poet's ultimate loneliness and sorrow (Akpalu, for example, says "I am sorrow's child"). The collection is evidently informed by what Dathorne (1975) says most Ewe verse always expresses, that is, a kind of 'instatiable longing' which inscribes this pervasive sadness. This marks the works of Ewe poets such as Kofu Hoh and Kofi Awoonor, where this sadness germinates a certain yearning[47] – which is also evident in some of Anyidoho's poems included in this collection. The ubiquity of feelings associated with suffering and images evoking misfortune, exploitation and marginalization attest to this fact. Although *PraiseSong for TheLand* shows a considerable variety of theme and style, the ubiquity of images evoking sorrow, anguish, distress, misery, agony and the concomitant loneliness stands out. This is largely because Anyidoho generally appropriates the Ewe lament and, more specifically, the lonesome position of the indigenous dirge singer. Like the African American poet, he rejects the romantic escape in some imagined pristine or pre-colonial Africa which leaves him face to face with stark everyday realties. Like other contemporary alternative poets, he sings dirges for modern African states – in particular, Ghana, his country. The nuanced melancholic introspection which mark *PraiseSong for TheLand* may thus be traced back to a blend of African American brotherhood, his Ewe roots as well his positioning as a contemporary (or 'alternative') poet, who is often seen as an angry poet.

Melancholic Tone and Vision in *PraiseSong for TheLand*

Made up of the poem "Memory and Vision" which is subtitled 'for Children of *Musu'*, the first part of *PraiseSong for TheLand* plunges the reader into both the predominant thematic mood of Anyidoho's poetry and the general melancholia that marks subsequent poems. History, and in particular the history of black people, is at the centre of his concerns. For example, he describes explorations into this rich and sometimes distressing history as "a journey" "all must make into" the past, "in order to come to terms with" the future (2002: 23). Since, as Patke (2006) argues, there is no history without memory, the title of the opening poem is thus significantly suggestive

[47] For example, Hoh's "Dzifo le fie" (The Sky) best illustrates this. He also appropriates the Song of abuse genre, using a praise poem with its built-in element of abuse. The line "A Baby is a European", in my view, informs Anyidoho's pet-image 'infantmen' which often designates Europeans, Whites or colonizing forces. To some extent may be attributed to the concept engaged with in Hoh's satirical poem.

of its thematic preoccupations. But even more relevant is the notion that there is a "loud silence on slavery" in southern Ghana despite the period and event having impacted the community profoundly (Bailey 2002: 122). It is this "faint memory" (*ibid*) in particular that Anyidoho sets out to amplify. In the poem, he signals the concerns that preoccupy him in this collection, saying

> For five Hundred Year and more we have
> journeyed into various spaces of the Earth.
> …
> There is something of Our-Story
> something of our Mystery
> carved into every TombStone
> in all the Graveyards of the World
> something of our History (2002: 23)

Quite explicitly, Anyidoho captures this history as one "of pain", "shame" and "endless fragmentation" as a distinctive theme of his poetry. The memory of slavery, the Middle Passage and the degenerate traffic to which his ancestors were subjected to make a haunting presence in his poetry as they do in Aime Cesaire's among others (Irele 1967: 64). He goes beyond mere cataloguing of evils meted on his kind; the Black community. As has become characteristic of his poetics, the above stanza appeared in the introduction of *AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues* (1993).[48] Undoubtedly, slavery is cast as the root cause of the perpetual misery of Blacks whom he characterizes as "Ophans". Anyidoho reminds;

> For Five Hundred Years – and more –
> We have journeyed from Africa
> Through the Virgin Islands into Santo Domingo
> from Havana in Cuba to Savanna in Georgia
> from Voudou Shores of Haiti to Montego
> Bay in Jamaica from Ghana
> to Guyana from the Shanty-Town
> of Johannesburg to the Favelas
> in Rio de Janeiro
> …
> and all we find are a Dis-
> possessed and Battered
> people still kneeling in a Sea
> of Blood lying Deep
> in the Path of Hurricanes. (2002: 28)

[48] "There is a journey we all must make into our past in order to come to terms with our future. In the last decade or so I have journeyed into various spaces of the world. And everywhere I go I must confront dimensions of myself that I had not known were there... There is something of my story carved into every tombstone of the world, something of my story enshrined in every monument and every anthem ever erected in the spirit of endurance" (Anyidoho 1993: xi).

Parts of this stanza, in particular those which echo an integrated global African community, appear in "HavanaSoul" in *AncestralLogic*, where he again envisions a Pan Africanism through an air route to counter the memory of the Middle Passage linking up the African world.

From this brief explication, one gets a sense of where Anyidoho is coming from, ideologically, and hence appreciates his characteristic blending of vision with poetic craft. Through his poetic persona, he clearly speaks on behalf of a deprived and destitute lot "kneeling in a sea of blood" (Anyidoho 2002). This to a large extent echoes W. E. B. DuBois's 'sorrow songs' which are considered a microcosm of the achievements – and despondency – of African descendants in America. In other words, one anticipates moaning evident in images such as "harvesting tears", "sorrow's deepest Soul", dispossessed", "battered", "sea of blood" which conjures up a desolate community. In the second through to the fifth section, Anyidoho validates the assumption that this collection, after all, is not a "praise song for the land" but rather an elegy for the land and its people, a "song of Sorrow" – note the striking affinities between this 'song of sorrow' and DuBois's and African Americans' idea of 'sorrow songs' which are defined by lyrics that plunge us back into the spirit and flesh of oral expression (Yusef Komunyakaa 2007). He extends the scope of these centuries of denigration to include later colonial and present postcolonial misery as continuations of slavery. In the title poem, Anyidoho most equivocally confesses this endeavour. Although he points out that "Once so long" he strained his hopes "in wake of dirge singers", he convincingly concludes that it is from them (the dirge singers) that he has "learned of inner Joys", and that "only close knowledge of private Pain/may give to an aching Soul" these inner joys (2002: 53). Celebrating their art, he envisages the "eloquence of dirges singers" as a searchlight through nightmares or, proverbially, as "a walking stick in the cripple's hands" and, even most poignantly, as the "key to secret doors" (*ibid*). Conclusively arguing that indeed, the ultimate song of joy is the "song of sorrow", he vows "once more" to go "To the ancient dirge singers" (2002: 56) to enrich his craft and art. This is arguably what he accomplishes in this volume.

The ubiquitous nature of imagery alluding to distress and suffering affirms the pervasiveness of melancholic tone in this collection. Like African American literature, Anyidoho's poetry responds directly to the many sorrows occasioned by slavery, significantly because he represents the family left behind in the passage to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. The keywords in

Anyidoho's poetry, that is, cluster of interrelated words and references, point clearly in the direction of bereavement and the generally pervasive anguish. The word 'sorrow' and its variants and associations such as 'nameless sorrow that ripens', 'pools of sorrow'; 'sorrow's deepest soul': 'sorrow laden tears', 'piling sorrows', 'broken promises', 'sweet and sour hope', 'gates of doom' recur with striking regularity in the imagery of his poetry. Words and phrases such as the "little Pools of Sorrow", covering "face with Frowns", 'fractured soul' and 'stormtime' give poems in the collection a melancholic feeling. All these serve to affirm as Du Bois (1990) notes, of nearly all the songs, that the music is distinctly sorrowful.

The memory of slavery has become a palpable part of Anyidoho's consciousness much the same way it animated Aime Cesaire among other Caribbean poets. This memory sustains a commonality of experience of Africans, irrespective of which side of the Middle Passage they inhabit. Images such as winds, hurricanes and the 'sudden wild thunderstorms' of the South, which both awed and impressed the negroes – at times envisaged as being 'mournful', adorn Anyidoho's poetry instancing shared realities. Most of his images and metaphors are consistent with what John Rickford and Russell Rickford designate as "ideologies and experiences of African American or black culture" (2000: 44). For example in "Her Memory", the poet-persona ponders the negative impact of the West noting how "hostile Winds/rose against his Voice/invoking Thunder" (2002: 37) while in "Regret", the repertoire of images mentioned earlier is used to draw attention to everyday concerns of the desolate lot; "Thunder's Growl", "the slender end of Dream", "the trembling hands of Dawn", "every possibility of Hope", "a Plunge/into StormTime" and "the rage of ThunderBolts" (2002: 49). Judging from his concerns and pool of images, he shares more with diasporic Africans than often acknowledged.

Popular forms of American poetry, in particular the blues poems – from African American musical tradition are defined by themes such as human struggle and emotional despair (DuBois 1990). These two evidently adorn Anyidoho's collection. The referent 'Blues' which is common in African American culture generally adorns this collection of his poetry. Before this volume, Anyidoho dedicated an entire volume to diasporic affiliations entitled *AncestralLogic and CaribbeanBlues* alluding to his African American orientation. Emotional resonances of the blues can be discerned throughout this collection. While some poems, right from their titles, such as "Twilight Blues" and "Do Not Ask About the Blues" clearly allude to the blues tradition,

several others suggest links between these two literary forms; "Ours is the **IntroBlues**" (2002: 25 Bold print in the primary text),[49] and in "Lake Forest", where he writes "of constant rhythms of strife/&/of relentless soulful blues" (2002: 86). He demonstrates sustained awareness of the African American emotional and socio-cultural landscape.

To some extent, his poetry may be described as song or 'music of an unhappy people' or 'of the children of disappointment' as it focuses on the unfortunate fate of Africans as it captures unvoiced longing towards some conceived truer world. Like in Black poetry of the diaspora, livid anger runs through and forms "an important emotional springboard" (Irele 1967: 64) for the poetry of Anyidoho. Consequently, a long and bitter evocation of the political, material and even spiritual desolation of his race adorns this collection; its history is depicted in the opening poem as "of shame" and "endless fragmentation" (2002: 24). Characteristically, therefore, his indignation – like Aime Cesaire's – is prompted directly by the evidently lamentable conditions of Africa, its physical and moral misery. This is why one of the most ubiquitous phrases in his poetry alludes to the concept discussed in the essay "Of the Sorrow Songs" in DuBois's *Souls of Black Folk.*

But what else does Anyidoho borrow from African American culture, literature and poetry in particular, besides the omnipresent gloomy tone that colours his poetry? Possibly, the literary influences can be seen as either thematic or aesthetic. Arguably, the content of his poetry – due to the (melancholic) perspective he adopts – has a lot in common with much of African American output. This is evidently not limited to *PraiseSong for TheLand.*

Anyidoho retrieves the American experience positing it as a common store house of values, and transforms them into realms of contemporary relevance for all Ghanaians and Africans. Although pervasive in *PraiseSong for TheLand*, some notable thematic-content influences are evident in earlier poems such as one titled "To Ralph Crowder" which explores the fate of African race and is dedicated to an American by the same name, and "Mr Poacherman" which utilises a typically African American character. This continues into the collection under study,

[49] It is pertinent to note that this is part of the poem titled "IntroBlues" appearing in his earlier collection, *AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues* (1993).

where “BrendaMarie”, “Lake Forest” and most strikingly “Dreams in Babylon” exemplify his concerns with African Americans and the American experiences in general.

In terms of aesthetics, Anyidoho appropriates the literary qualities associated with African American and Caribbean poetic tradition in his sentiments, his imagery as well as total atmosphere of his writing. First, and like Langstone Hughes had done before him, he found in the African American elegiac forms such as blues, jazz and spiritual the form and language for his poetry. Notably, they are all imbued with grief. He found in the blues the tone, texture and basic language for his poetry. Secondly, Du Bois’s belief that through all the sorrow of sorrow songs, there breathes a hope, a faith in the ultimate justice of things (Hughes 1959: 139) undergirds Anyidoho’s poetry, especially *PraiseSong for TheLand*. Characteristically, his poetry is coded in ‘minor cadences of despair’ which often change to ‘calm confidence’ and the hope of triumph. The African American blues are not intrinsically pessimistic as they enable the poet-persona to transcend pain while keeping memory alive.

Poetic forms of lament such as blues are often rooted in antiphony as they are written after the manner of Negro folksongs – ‘the rhythmic cry of the slaves’ which articulate their message (of the slave) to the world. This provides some of the salient and defining features of African American poetry. Their call-and-response pattern is commonly deployed in modern African poetry as it defines Harlem Renaissance poetics. Anyidoho uses the highly self-conscious nature of African American poetry, often figuring the act of performance. The repetitive aspect may be considered ubiquitous in most contemporary traditions and Anyidoho makes adroit use of repetition in this collection.

Apart from elegiac poetics of the blues, Anyidoho is significantly structurally shaped by the African American jazz tradition. Typically, jazz is characterized by syncopation and improvisation. But how is it appropriated in poetry? Since poetry expresses and verbally captures the experiences of a certain people, it often tends to be symbolic of an era. The desperation and (the Great) depression that characterized hard-hitting times in Harlem of the 1920s and 1930s called for an artistic expression that would embody the Black community’s woes, hopes and aspirations. Like Harlem life, jazz tended to be rhythmically a series of syncopated rhythms which overcame and defied the moaning gravity of suppression the African

American community faced in America's New York. Interspersed throughout its structure are elements of surprise and momentum in the midst of otherwise overall, more familiar and repetitive beats. The persistent attempts by the community to demand civil rights, race riots, poverty, gang violence and continued suppression and inequality rendered life in Harlem monotonously blue. Most importantly, however, a glimmer of hope for a better tomorrow never died. In jazz, this is aptly captured rhythmically. Rhythmic surprises in jazz symbolically capture the need to rise above, and urge to transcend, the gravity of depression and repetitive circumstances.[50] Appropriated into Harlem Renaissance poetics, this approach to poetic creativity undergirds Anyidoho's poetry.

Despite the engulfing element of sorrow and desolation in this collection, as earlier indicated, there are moments of surprise – especially the snatches of joy – in *PraiseSong for TheLand*. This may be attributed to the Ewe worldview that partly informs the collection.[51] Any examination of Ewe traditional songs (or poetry) as Adali-Mortty reminds us, is "a study in sweet sorrow" (1967: 4). Like Anyidoho's previous collections, *PraiseSong for TheLand* also utilizes paradoxes and irony which in my view partially exemplify Anyidoho's concerns for the 'in-between'. This collection, like *Earthchild*, infuses the dirge with a characteristically optimistic tone, frequently juxtaposing pleasure with pain and sadness with hope to underscore their 'indistinct boundaries'. These, the study holds, often 'overlap' marking the characteristic liminality, exemplified by lines such as "I harvest tears from laughter's eyes./ I even sow some joy/ in sorrows" (2002: 108) which demonstrates the ironic paradoxes Anyidoho explores. This has characterized even most of his earlier collections.[52] The poem titled "Sweet & Sour Hope" further testifies to these paradoxical relations omnipresent in Anyidoho's poetry. He places 'harvest of promises' side by side with 'broken dreams' to explore possibilities in various relations. He seems to capture the postcolonial situation in paradoxical binaries; "A decade of

[50] In a typical jazz performance, some instruments wail and moan as if depressed, others continue repetitively throughout in a somewhat monotonous pattern while still others, in defiance of the gravity of 'depression' or melancholic moaning, rise above as if overcome with joy (overdrives/riffs).

[51] A worldview anchored on the proverb "suffering and happiness are brothers", meaning, to be a whole person one has to be balanced. If one has not suffered in life, then s/he will not be able to discover true happiness. Those who are suffering are told to remember that they cannot succumb to the trials of hard times.

[52] Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1998:129) says that Anyidoho calls attention to the unreliable nature of contemporary reality, and the fact that pleasure and pain possess indistinct boundaries.

Sweet & Sour Hope" (2002: 79) echoing the unpredictability that marks contemporary socio-political times, more so in African countries. Notice, for example, the juxtaposing of two apparent opposites in

> Brand-new statesmen convene
> into our halls of fame & shame (2002: 80)

which in addition to providing musical effect in the form of the rhyming 'fame' and 'shame', evinces the 'neither-here-nor-there[ness]' nature of African leadership. Corrupt and immoral individuals often pose as statesmen to the detriment of various nation-states in Africa. This ambivalence is crucial and arguably stems from Ewe orature. As he points out in line with Anlo-Ewe tradition, despite the constant lamentation there is a characteristic "fundamental optimism" (Anyidoho 2003: 5) embedded and evident, for example, in the denouement of "Do Not Ask About the Blues", "Why cant we stretch our Hopes/beyond an Eazy Lazy Life?" (2002: 67) or this summation in the tribute to "Fokoko":

> It will be the story
> of the ancestor
> who was born taller than everyone
> never crumbled with age
> but walked tall and firm to very last

Despite the reality that he (Fokoko) is actually dead and no more. This can also be attributed to negritude poetics, in which the 'song of the slave', beyond expressing the grievances or cataloguing of hurt[s], is also "an inventory of hope" (Dathorne 1975: 217). The dirge and blues elements already mentioned do not exclusively constitute this collection. Besides the said optimism, there are also outbursts of joy and hope ("promises" or "hope") amidst the otherwise unvaried ubiquity of mourning, the eternal tom-tom, instances such as the "sow[ing] [of] some Joy/in sorrow's deepest Soul" (2002: 22) or "broadcast[ing] of sorrow on Joy Radio" (2002: 75) abound. This comes out much more explicitly in "Praise Song for TheLand":

> I've stammered and suffered hiccups.
> I've groaned and yearned and moaned.
> I've cried a storm & wept riverfulls of joy. (2002: 54)

"Hopes", "Dreams" and "Promises" ('Rainbow') compete with already said ubiquitous sadness, (private) pain, deepest moans and overwhelming "strained hopes". These intensely symbolic aesthetics have influenced other poets and in particular the Contemporary African poetic voice.

To some extent, as evident in Anyidoho's poetry, the voice appropriates jazz's syncopated rhythms. This is evident in this collection where syncopation is graphologically approximated. The manner in which Anyidoho creatively engages with the 'white space' or blanks spaces in this volume alludes to, on the one hand, Jazz's typical improvisation and syncopation while on the other, these spaces represent an important feature of Ewe oral poetry; the dramatic pause. The significance of these pauses or moments goes beyond the mere necessity for stopping for breath (Anyidoho 1983: 335). One feature that marks out this collection is conscious and sustained engagement with this space. The dramatic import of these pauses is most glaringly evident right from the volume's title; it is a "PraiseSong for TheLand". Throughout this volume, the frequency and manner in which elongated or omitted space between two words is used begs critical attention. Together with peculiar capitalizations, space as a device recalls the Akan and Ewe funeral dirges' rhetorical use of silences to arrest the listener's attention and is quite conspicuously deployed in the volume. In the title poem, he cautions that

> "Before the Praise they say" (2002: 55)

leaving unconventionally lengthened space between 'Praise' and 'they' to indicate the impregnated silence or elongated pause aimed at inviting pensive reflection and focusing more sombrely on the subject. Examples of this are numerous in this collection. Besides African American Jazz, therefore, Anyidoho may have appropriated 'silences' meant to elicit silence rather than verbal expression or serve to focus reflection (Agawu 1995: 46) as evident in the case of Akpafu funeral. The placing of an accent on a relatively weaker beat and shortening of words by dropping certain sounds or, visually, through orthographic spaces can be discerned in this volume. My view, augmented by the accompanying audio material, is that innovative use of space between words, unconventional compounding, imposed line-ends in-between certain words allude to jazz music's typical syncopated rhythms. However, this device may also be traced to the special drum language. Within this tradition, Jones observes, each phrase is separated from the next by a prolonged rest (1959: 100). In *husago* performance for example, emphasis is characteristically achieved by the duration of the rests, which are very effective in giving a rather startling pungency (*ibid*). This is painstakingly deployed in *PraiseSong for TheLand*.

This technique of pausing is sometimes significantly integrated into the thematic drive of the poem, occurring at critical positions. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this rare and ingenious fusion or case of poetic vision overlapping with craft. In "BrendaMarie" the dramatic import of the pause is borne out by the narrative moments immediately preceding and succeeding it. The silence is used to isolate the lexicon 'alone' hence also physically implying this. He talks of "Journeys"

we make. Alone. In the night. (2002: 39)

weaving meaning into the typographic realisation as well. The same device is used in the terse concluding stanza of the poem titled "Naita-Norwetu", where dramatic pauses are integrated into the meanings being constructed;

Then a silence came. Sudden

Silence deeper than the Dawn.

deeper than a Yawn.

Where have all our laughters Gone? (2002: 43)

Conclusively, if there is any single peculiar feature in this collection, then it is the dramatic pauses which stand out. Boundaries between stems and affixes are clear-cut (Gregersen 1977: 83) in Ewe language, a feature he adapts and foregrounds especially in omitted space between words, compounds and phrases. The several poetic structures inherent in the fundamental linguistic properties of the Ewe language are exploited by poets using English. Like the indigenous Ewe poet-cantors, Anyidoho pays special attention to intricacies of language for depth and beauty of poetic expressions (1983: 105). In *PraiseSong for TheLand*, Anyidoho graphologically captures glides typical in oral rendition as conventional breaks are sometimes elided. Demonstrating that the inadequacy of the alphabetical script, he thus uses non-alphabetic means and symbols for the more dramatic instances that call for "tricks of print which appeal to imaginations" (Okpewho 1985: 30). In "BrendaMarie", for example, unusual compounding suggests this play with phonetics. The title refers to Brenda Maries Osby, but the name is conspicuously orthographically realized as "BrendaMarie" without spacing, to indicate the glide in-between the conjoined words. Similarly, those who accompany the persona in the journeys he makes alone in the night are designated as the "CompanionSeekers of the Light." (2002: 39)

hinting at the tight bond or shared vision. Note the clearly marked boundaries that impromptu line-ends in parts of the last two stanzas:

> Corner of this Market-
> Place of kindred Souls
> You & I may sit among the Oases
> & count the endless Deseart
> Grain by countless Grain
>
> Till then I must forever trem-
> ble my lips (2002: 40)

This shifts or distributes emphasis to the final words of lines (Market, Souls, Oases, Deseart and Grain). The space between 'then' and 'I' in second-last line above signal a silence, anticipating the relatively accented first-person pronoun 'I'. The separation of 'marketplace' and 'tremble' is a conscious attempt to apply Ewe inflection and derivation, and tonal contours which infuse subtlety in poetic expressiveness. Unusual and unconventional capitalizations are evident throughout the entire collection. By capitalizing in-between compound words, Anyidoho is cognizant of the clear-cut boundaries between stems and affixes typical in Ewe (Gregersen 1977: 83) but which he extends to certain contrived compounds. For example, in "Twilight Blues", Anyidoho metaphorically talks of "wearing a NeckLace of SevenSuns/And EarRings DiamondMoons" as "The RainBow" (2002: 44) was the girdle. The same technique is used in 'KilimaNjaro', 'RiftValleys', 'FootStools', 'SoldierAnts', 'HumanMould' (*ibid*) 'DirgeSingers' and in "StormTime" such as 'SilkCottonTree', 'HowlingStorm' 'ThunderClap' and 'WailingSounds' (2002: 61) to signal this 'clear-cut boundary'. He may also be appropriating the Ewe tradition's poetic patterning which cherishes and allows for a gentle play of sounds – sometimes in dialogue with sense (Anyidoho 1983: 106). For instance, this may be attributed to morphemes often coinciding with words in Ewe hence insinuating this embedded consciousness in his poetry.

Re-conceptualization of Poet-Persona: Fluid Persona

In this section, I argue that no single type of persona appears to dominate or is given undue preference, within a single poem or the whole collection. The fluidity betwixt and between the poems is so frequent as to defy a single definitive identity of the persona. This is a feature transposed from the Ewe poetic tradition in which no single voice appears to dominate a given

performance, and belief that the 'I' is contained in the 'we'. Anyidoho details how 'character' (which is played out by an actor/actress) is always fused into 'participant' (1983: 265). The persona, like the voices, is intricately weaved into a single textual unit, despite the superficial 'incoherences' and incongruities in viewpoints. This fluid character of the persona enables the poet to inhere his poetry with certain aesthetic peculiarities.

There are two polar-opposite approaches, and a possible third in-between, which is neither of these two but both of them simultaneously. O. R. Dathorne's conclusion that the "African poet is still a member of a group, and although not its medium, he continues to write with the group in mind" (1975: 164) illustrates one extreme. More specifically with respect to Ewe cosmology and worldview, Komla Amoaku (1985), following Dathorne, points out that since the artist is not an isolated individual but an inseparable part of the society's unitary whole, he obviously expresses or voices various concerns on behalf of the collective whole. He is more of the collective sensibility of the society. The antithesis to this view, often propounded by romantic critics, holds that the poet is an individual genius above and untrammelled by society. Early modern African poetry in English tended to lean towards the former, envisaging the poet in Renaissance terms as a sort of enlightened subject and celebrated as an autonomous and self-directed individuality or as an individual complete in himself (Whitman 1967: 343) or herself. Traces of the 'autonomous individual' the Enlightenment literary heritage (which informed the notion undergirding the primacy of the individual voice during modernist era) bequeathed English poetry can be discerned in early modern African poetry written in English. However, this modernist tendency is not the preserve of the English tradition, or peculiar to its poetic practices in general. Rather, certain genres or forms such as the lyric or dirge more often exclusively featured a single and singular voice

The second approach which places premium on collectivism and the community, has been championed by Leopold Senghor and is often used as a distinguishing characteristic of all Black-African writing by negritudist and Afrocentric scholars.[53] Although often dismissed as overgeneralization and oversimplification of a complex and diverse culture, Senghor strongly argues that the Negro African society is "a community society" in which emphasis is placed on

[53] See for example the position of Chinweizu *et al*. on this.

the group rather than the individual (1964: 93-4) – a view shared by Kenyatta (1965: 297). Other scholars, on the contrary, have persuasively demonstrated and emphasized an underlying reciprocity between the community and individual. Mbiti (1970) echoes Eskia Mphahlele's *ubuntu* philosophy: "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am"[54] (1970: 141 or 1989: 141) which, despite privileging communal existence and communitarism in general recognises the interplay between the individual and community within African thought system. Within the AnloEwe community for instance, although the role of the community in creativity (musical or otherwise) tends to be privileged over that of the individual (Dor 2004: 28) like in most African cultures, the place of individuality is not completely obliterated or wholly de-emphasized. This is why for this study, like Kwame Gyekye (1998),[55] I read Anyidoho's poetry as foregrounding dialogical relations between personhood and communitarianism. Anyidoho redefines/reconfigures these approaches thus rupturing the binarism between the two. In analysing the ambivalence or fluidity of Anyidoho's poet-persona, I borrow Gyekye's idea of moderate or 'restricted communitarianism' which also recognises the individuality of the person (1998: 317-22). The tension between the poet as an individual and as part of the community is resolved in Anyidoho's poetry, especially *PraiseSong for TheLand,* in line with one of the Ewes' central tenets that "the talent of the individual poet-cantor achieves full realization only in the communal participation of the ensemble of singers, drummers, dancers and their audience (1983: 232). Further, he adds that although the creativity of the individual poet is highly valued, this creativity can only come to fruition within the communally organized drum group with input from all members of the group (1983: 242). Ruth Finnegan's argument that in both non-literate and literate societies, "poetry is a medium through which an individual can, in a sense, free himself from the here and now and through his creative genius both reinterpret and rise above his environment (1976: 210) and community lends credence to this position. It should not imply that personal and deeply experienced vision is not relevant to the poet's community

[54] To reinforce the fact that this is a commonplace worldview among African societies, I note that it often forms part of the proverbial repertoire of different communities. The Asante of Ghana (among others) for instance have it as one of their proverbs.

[55] Gyekye rightly cautions against succumbing to the temptation of exaggerating the normative status and power of the cultural community in relation to those of the person, thus obfuscating the understanding of the real nature of the person.

Within the indigenous tradition, songs record something of the anguish, the sadness and the emptiness of life in general or one's own life although, as Fraser correctly reminds us, they must first be seen as a creative expression of the anguish of one's society (1986: 318), the artist must be seen as a creative expression of the agony of an individual soul (*ibid*). The poet-persona's selfhood is thus envisaged as not delinked from the general social text but rather, in reality, as the artist's perception of the self and others generally responsive to his or her time and place (Njogu 2004: 10). For Anyidoho, the 'We' is social "unindividuated" just as the 'I' is collective and communal in outlook. This conceptualisation enables the poet-persona to distance the inner self from the out-self to the extent that the inner-self may be considered 'other'. Objectification of the 'self' establishes a critical dialogic relationship. Like Agevodu who says "I am sorrow's child", or, the example Fraser (1986) provides of the way in which Vinoko's and Domegbe's personal experiences and miseries were often appropriated and represented as communal. Thus the persona is both 'I' and 'he' blurring the line between 'me' and persona-poet, Anyidoho.

Before elaborating these perspectives using the collection, it is important to examine a common conceptualisation of the poet among the Ewe community, and which I believe significantly informs Anyidoho's creativity. The poet often portrays or considers him- or herself as a lone figure isolated and alienated from the rest of the society. S/he inhabits a space removed from the rest of the society s/he she writes about. This isolation becomes the moral justification for keeping a critical searchlight on the rest of the society (Anyidoho 1995: 245). The isolation of the self from its out-self echoes the separation and sometimes withdrawal typical of the indigenous Ewe poet. There are also several images signalling solitude in Anyidoho's collection. From "Eternal Orphans", the Oases (2002: 40), "the wizard's only son" (2002: 53), the lonesome owl, sea gull's orphan child, (*ibid*) to "the last surviving Orphan Child" (2002: 56), Anyidoho's lines demonstrate significant awareness and intimate bond to the indigenous oral poet's perspective. The individual is portrayed as alienated from some 'other', be that 'other' him- or herself, his or her vision of life, or the world in which s/he lives. This backdrop provides an important base from which to appreciate the different perspectives Anyidoho employs in this collection. The ubiquity of images alluding to solitude and loneliness in Ewe oral poetry and in Anyidoho's written poetry should therefore serve as a reminder of the latter's umbilical cord.

The dominance of images of loneliness, however, should be read as an essentially artistic and symbolic projection that need not reflect actual circumstances of the poet's life and social standing (Anyidoho 1995: 245). Thus the Ewe dirge tradition, like postcolonial African poetry and other Black arts is a product of the alienating conditions defined with reference to social, political and economic status which confer upon the poet seclusion and a marginalized individual's status. For the Harlem poet, this alienation is occasioned by dis-location, and marginalisation of the African at home and abroad. The poet-persona in both traditions is a marginalized individual beyond the mainstream of their community (Anyidoho 1995: 245). This distancing which engenders the all-important "critical distance" provides what Gikandi calls 'the condition of possibility' for a modern African and African American identity and aesthetics (2000: 34). But for Anyidoho who alternates these perspectives, the critical proxy provided by the 'I' persona, omniscient persona or third-person voice serves crucial aesthetic functions. Anyidoho is distanced as much as he is immersed in this society; the model of subjectivity – as evident from the poet-persona – signal cases of individual, to some extent autonomous experiences which are transformed into the universal and transcendent voice, as evident in poems such as "BrendaMarie", "Do Not Ask About the Blues", "Fokoko", "Mother Courage", "Dreams in Babylon" and "Lake Forest", where the poet-persona is a member of the society in which Brenda Marie, the great Fokoko, the daughter Nana Akua, and the scholar-dramatist Efua Sutherland respectively exist.

Like the oral poet who Finnegan says, is neither merely the voice of communal pressures, nor an individual with untrammelled genius, and hence poetry is construed as the creation both of a particular community and of a particular individual (1976: 213), I position Anyidoho as a faithful protégé of this tradition. As the poems attest, his persona flexibly switches from one position to another uninhibited. This fluidity marking the persona allows for individuality to reinforce cultural communitarianism as personal experience and for emotions to be situated within a more embracing collective feeling. That love for cultural community while striving at the same time for individual artistic excellence and expression which exemplify what Gyekye (1998) calls "moderate communitarianism". This is why, as evident in this collection, the poet-persona's individual, autonomous experience is transformed into the universal and transcendent voice. It is a model of subjectivity that is variously fluid, multiple, permeable and contingent. By assuming

various voices, the fluid persona creates a wide variety of moods ranging from the dirge-like tribute to Efua Sutherland, proverbial utterances of "Agbakpe", personal pathos of "Dreams in Babylon", satire in "Lake Forest" or the rousing Pan Africanism of "Memory and Vision". In Anyidoho's poetry, the persona is redefined and reinterpreted, hence recontextualized to combine Afrocentric perspectives with English aesthetics and conventions. The product is a hybrid of two, to some extent contending poetic traditions, as often signified by the orality – written binary opposition.

The indigenous African poetry represented by the Ewe dirge tradition which stresses a spirit and attitude derived from this lament is embedded in poem-texts. The 'song of sorrow' with its lamentative persona and the concomitant loneliness and sadness evoked informs Anyidoho's poetry. Like the typical Ewe dirge singer, Anyidoho uses rich imagery to express the immensity of the loss, for example, in "Fokoko" where he equates the loss the family suffered to dependent climber-plants' fate; "The family felt like little climber plants/deprived of the towering hold of the giant oak." (2002: 69). In the poem written in memory of Kofi Agovi, Anyidoho's signals the African belief that death marks a transition into another phase of existence but communication across these realms of existence is possible; the poet-persona addresses the departed saying "I remember the last quarrel we had" and "I remember last promise you made" (2002: 65). Although titled "Praise Song for the Land", the prevailing mood, the tone of the persona and the ubiquity of images typical of the indigenous dirge remind one of Awoonor's "Songs of Sorrow". Not only does he keep reminding us that he has "followed/ The DirgeSingers" or vows to "once more" go "To the ancient dirge singers" (2002: 55-6), but the pervasiveness of images suggestive of loss and moaning, such as "strained hopes", "an aching soul", "wounded soul", "deepest moans", "so much pain", "cried a storm", "groaned…and moaned" and general inscription of collective sorrow hint to the contrary. The persona constantly evokes solitude and loneliness using the images of "widow mumbling to herself" and "the last surviving orphan child" (2002: 53; 56) which recurs severally in the poem. The persona provides the strongest bond to this tradition, saying that from it (the dirge), he has "learned of inner joys" and gained "close knowledge of private pain" (2002: 53). I consider this poem an appropriated dirge since despite the title suggesting that it is a praise song, it is the sad, almost bitter tone that marks the last five stanzas. The pained persona keeps asking; "Have we not wept

& wept enough?" and, even more distressingly, "And have we have we not begged enough?" (2002: 57-9). Typical of the oral tradition, the persona assumes a 'collective' and plural steadiness of voice which translates the possibilities of community often affirmed by the African traditions. He deploys this lamenting spokes-voice to moan on behalf of the human family the sorry state of African, the misery of the poor or Third World countries perpetually dependent on Western aid;

> ... How many times
> Have we not photographed our pain
> in black and white in full colour
> in total technicolour
> and in giant poster size
> for pity and for pleasure
> of rich & proud neighbours? (2002: 58)

Like Awoonor, Anyidoho uses the dirge's repetitious nature, in particular, accumulating and piling images as evident in these lines, in 'black and white', in 'full colour', in 'total technicolour' and, ultimately, in 'giant poster size'. However, his poetry is not limited to this tradition alone. There is ample evidence to suggest that it is very much within the English or Western poetic conventions. The English tradition and modernist poetics, which is largely a written tradition informs his judicious use of rhyme, stanzaic structure and metre. The persona also espouses individuality, making personal reflections in a typically modernist meditative manner, or punny ego. Although mostly in free-verse, he creatively works the line, infusing musicality using rhyme. Owl/soul(s); blame & shame; soul/wall(s); fame & shame; but much more striking in "Do not ask about the Blues" where, again, the lamentative element is present;

> as I walk towards your Tomb
> with a memory full of Scars
> I must search your Past
> for broken pieces of the Stars
> by which you sailed so Fast
> towards the gates of Doom. (2002: 64)

Whereas the oral tradition relied on the tonal nature of most African languages, Anyidoho composing in English exploits the language's poetic resources for rhythm. By rhyming the ending of the first and the last line (Tomb/Doom), the second and the fourth (Scars/Stars), third and the sixth (Past/Fast), Anyidoho aligns his poetics with the English tradition's obsession with

rhyme schemes. Embedded within this, however, are grief-laden images, typical of the dirge; 'tomb', 'scars', 'broken pieces' and 'doom'.

Already evident is the fact that melancholic introspection ineluctably engenders the mourner-artist as an individual expressing personal anguish, as well as the family or community's collective grief. The lyrical style thus abounds. But generally, there is diversity in the persona's identity, both within a single poem, and across the collection. Anyidoho tackles the individual-communal binary axis, collapsing the poles into what this study is designating as hybrid persona. This takes variety of shapes in *PraiseSong for TheLand* the most noticeable being the disolving of the individual/community dyad such that 'I' is 'We' andn vice-versa within a single poem text. The dichotomy implied by individual-community opposition is dissolved as the fluidity marking the persona's unstable identity is foregrounded. For analysis purposes, I distinguish three general patterns the persona assumes in *PraiseSong for TheLand:* the simple, simple-complex and complex persona. Although rare, the poet occasionally maintains a uniform persona identity throughout a poem as opposed to where the persona is hybrid. More common however are cases where a poem proceeds from either an individuated stance and ends with a multi-voiced, sort of all-encompassing one, or vice versa. A slightly more complex pattern is one in which Anyidoho oscillates between these extreme multiple times within a single poem. All these should be viewed both from a single-poem perspective and across a number of poems in the collection. Lastly, there is dynamic variation of persona's identity in a single repeated stanza in different poems. All these patterns I have foregrounded in the text deserve some attention.

To begin with the uniform version, the persona's identity in *PraiseSong for TheLand* is at times presented as speaking for an individual or communal self. In "Her Memory", "BrendaMarie", "Naita-Norwetu", "Future" and "Ancestral Saga" the poet uses a predominantly individualistic kind of persona, while "Twilight Blues", "Regret", "Mother Courage" and "Memory and Vision" use a collective voice that is largely representative of the society through the deployment of pronouns suggestive of the desire to reach to his community of origin. He uses this loose homogeneity to advance a common goal, either bemoaning a departed member of his academic family or to decry the state of Africa and Africans in general. Even within the oral context, some of the most moving laments in Ewe tradition are songs dedicated to the memory of close

relatives (Anyidoho 1995: 246). This is also evident of Anyidoho's literary context although he is not limited to close relatives or necessarily triggered by death. As this collection reveals, he dedicates 'moving laments' to members of his academic family such as Efua Sutherland, Brenda Marie S., Kofi Agovi and Ama Ata besides 'actual' close family members such as his daughter in "Dream in Babylon" subtitled 'For Nana Akua' – which again as a departure, is more of a dedication than a lament as the loss is not necessarily occasioned by death – and "Fokoko" which, as 'a family tribute' mourns the passing on of his grandfather. The rest are clear cases in which the poet-persona bemoans the late personalities and celebrates their significant contributions; "Do Not Ask About the Blues" is subtitled 'for Efu and the children in memory of Kofi Agovi' while "Mother Courage" is 'a tribute to auntie Efua Sutherland from All Her Children in the arts', "Monuments of Word & Wind." celebrates Ama Ata Aidoo, "Doctrine & Ethics" is 'for Mallam Femi philosophy Teacher' and "Ancestral Solitude" is written on his way 'returning from Fiaxo burial of Daavi Ablavi'.

In "Mother Courage" – dedicated to Efua Sutherland and in memory of Kofi Agovi, the persona assumes a collective identity. Taken from the German dramatist and poet, Bertolt Brecht's play, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), this poem is couched as an elegy by 'Mother Courage's' children who in this case are 'all her children in the Arts' – especially the young people she trained to carry her vision into the far future (Anyidoho 2000: 77). A distinguished cultural visionary and activist, her impact on the society has been described as at once comprehensive and enduring, having built models of excellence in culture and education. Having died on the 21st January, 1996, Anyidoho captures the departed scholar's "unusual impact" and unexpected exit in "Mother Courage". Consistently using the plural pronoun 'we' to collectively honour the departed one and mourns her loss, he writes:

> [...] We were
> busy carving praise songs for your next
> Birthday. We did not know you must... (2002: 72)

The poem goes on to capture the pain of death and the irreplaceable nature of the loss incurred upon the death of this poet and great thespian of Ghanaian theatre. The collectiveness depicted by the persona, especially in such dirge-proper poems, gestures towards a mourner expressing or sharing the loss and sorrow accompanying the death of a loved one or a colleague or

acquaintance with "compelling vision for a better society" (Anyidoho 2000: 79). The choice of the title is apt as it signals the passion with which this major literary voice and icon, like Brecht's protagonist, invested her energies in the building of model programmes and institutions and in the training of a future generation/…strived to nurture all 'her' children or students and hence the unison lament. Similarly, 'Memory and Vision' maintains a collective 'we' voice throughout, appropriate for the diverse solidarities Anyidoho forges ranging from local (national), to global including Africans in diaspora. This homogeneity of voice serves to speak for the 'human family' the poet imagines, signifying the single African identity, whether in Africa or in the diaspora, a view the poet fervently champions:

> In spite of all that pain we can say Without a Doubt
> that as a people we do hold the World Record
> for survival against the most Unreasonable Odds.
> yes we hold the most spectacular Survival Record. (2002: 30)

The solemnity in the persona's voice and the passion with which the persona-poet holds the subject in my view does not allow vacillation. Rather, he adopts a uniform, undivided focus to cultivate the much elusive homogenous identity of the Black people worldwide. This is further signified by his consistent preference for the plural possessive form 'our', in place of the excluding individualistic singular possessive 'my'/'mine'. His persona seemingly echoes certain indigenous art-forms which often and constantly identify the voice of the poet as that of the people or community. Thus, poetry is posited not as an individual ego display, but rather as the proud demonstration of the collective voice of the people (Anyidoho 1984: 351) and hence the persona is envisaged as spokesperson of the people. Although the persona in "BrendaMarie" and "Naita-Norwetu" seemingly speaks for him- or herself, s/he establishes a bond with the departed expressed in solidarity gestures such as "to bring our sunshine..." and "in our living room". The 'I' often morphs into all-embracive 'our', 'us' or 'we' in a pattern I will focus on next. All these serve to speak collectively for the living and the ancestral world, the hereafter commonly celebrated in the African cosmology which expresses a desire to go beyond to the land of the dead, grounded in the African belief that one's ancestors are in the spirit world (Awoonor 1974: 20). This is most foregrounded in "BrendaMarie" which is couched as a dirge for the celebrated

African American poet Laureate of the State of Louisiana.[56] The poem opens with the persona declaring acquaintance with the subject's poetic works; "I've just had a private/session with your book of poems–" (2002: 37) directly addressing her, typical of the dirge's apostrophe. Noting that s/he regularly interacts with her poetic works, the poet-persona infuses the poem with rhythmic elements such as alliteration and consonance typical of literate English poetic traditions poignantly describing a book as 'the house of words';

> the seventh such session since
> the south winds came & claimed
> the house you built with words
> and scattered your voices
> into bits of memory

The persona wanders from the world of the living to that of departed, or ancestors as typical in dirge contexts. In her poetic works, Brenda Marie uses many voices of black women to weave a tapestry of what may be called 'Black New Orleans life'. These are the voices that Anyidoho writes, have been "scattered", "into bits of memory" as their owner has departed. However, Anyidoho does not limit himself to these uniform or morphed patterns (simple and simple-complex) only. Equally common is the complex persona whose roots may be traced back to Ewe poetics.

Within the African-Ewe poetic traditions, the poet is a protean hybrid of composer, arranger, diviner, dancer and songster. It is an incontestable fact that poetry in the African context is not recognized as an individual art form, but as a collective artistic experience that is 'performed and shared' with an abiding communal spirit[57]. This is evident in *halo*, which combines songs of insult with dance, drumming, mime, 'poetry' and spoken forms in addition to costumes and a variety of visual icons. The most common kind of persona encountered in *PraiseSong for TheLand* is a fluid and unstable identity representing the complex pattern. Typical of hybridity, the persona's identity is torn between and simultaneously merged in these two traditions and

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[56] With roots in Creole culture, her published works include *Ceremony for Minneconjoux,* University of Kentucky Press, (Lexington, KY), 1983; *In These Houses,* Wesleyan University Press (Middletown, CT), 1988; *Desperate Circumstance, Dangerous Woman,* Story Line Press (Brownsville, OR), 1991; *All Saints: New and Selected Poems,* Louisiana State University Press (Baton Rouge, LA), 1997.

[57] Sunday Odada (2003: 335) rightly offers this as a justification for his study, which I borrow here to affirm the existence of the propounded binary, African-communal versus English or western-individual.

perspectives as it often operates in the 'in between' space. It is usual to view the indigenous poet, or *heno*, as both him- or herself and the community simultaneously.[58] Robert Fraser uses the example of two renown Ghanaian *henos;* Akpalu Vinoko and Henoga Domegbe to show how poets remained individuals while at the same time artistically representing the entire community (1986: 317-24). Anyidoho appropriates this feature into *PraiseSong for TheLand* with the persona expressing personal anguish as though it were a collectively shared socio-political sentiment. Quite successfully, he renders the public and the private indistinguishable as public issues often determine the character of interpersonal sentiment - as poems apparently speaking of personal relationships in the collection reveal. This tends to posit the persona as simultaneously 'self' airing personal woes, and collective identity hence voice of the community, as "Dreams in Babylon" testifies. In other words, the voice of the poet functions both as an index of personal judgment as well as a gauge of communal or national consensus. If hybridity is about criss-crossing of boundaries (Hall 1994), and bringing otherness from beyond those boundaries (Webner 2001) then the deployment of the persona in *PraiseSong for TheLand* illustrates fluidity typical of hybridity.

Fluidity of the persona being the dominant pattern in *PraiseSong for TheLand*, it is exemplified in the title poem, "Do Not Ask About the Blues", "Fokoko", "Lake Forest" and in "Dreams from Babylon". The fluidity of the persona in these poems represents the unstable, fluctuating identity of an individual, at once self and at the same time, identifying with the community. The ambiguity and instability of the poet-persona's address can be discerned in its oscillation between the two perspectives. This, as Ramazani rightly observes, is an attempt by contemporary poets to embody the postcolonial subject's "fragile sense of poetic identity as both alienated from yet longing for reconnection, with the community" (2007: 130). Anyidoho is optimistic that an 'ideal fusion' or a synthesis of the two poetic tradition's voices is not altogether impossible. This strategy allows him to merge the poet and his micro-society, foregrounding the common or shared experience; for example, the sense of loss associated with death. This persona, as I insist, thus encapsulates the interstitiality typical of postcoloniality and the postcolonial subject. Unlike the oral artist who characteristically remained in solidarity with

[58] As espoused in Ubuntu philosophy theorized by among others, Ezekiel Mphahlele, identity as a member of a group comes first, based on the idea that "I am because we are."

the community and the modern artist, who, as a member of a small, highly educated literary elite, is often alienated from the community hence speaks for and often to him- or herself, Anyidoho's fluid persona embraces both, and is not confined to either. In the title poem, the persona's identity shifts frequently between 'self' and 'collective' representative of the community. The poet achieves this by using interchangeably the singular 'I' and plural variant 'We' of the first person pronoun. In my view, this serves to signify the fluid nature of the African (postcolonial) identity. Little distinction between the self and the family or community arises in the African cosmology, as the two are intricately woven into each other. This collection demonstrates this fluidity using an ambivalent and unstable persona, evident right from the title poem. In "Praise Song for the Land", the persona's perspective switches from the first-person voice, "I want to sing a praise song" (2002: 53) to the collective stance in the rhetorical question that serves as refrain to the second part of the same poem, "But have we not wept enough?" (2002:57). The poem explores all possible angles to a given subject, providing different perspectives from the impersonal, individual to collective experience. Although the poem starts with the persona expressing a heartfelt wish to "sing a praise song for the land" (2002: 52), as mentioned earlier, it avoids the singular 'my/mine', opting for the collective possessive form 'our';

> I must remind our people
> of our many many Failures. (2002: 52)

Espousing one of the noble tasks of the poet within the oral context, the poet-persona instances the power and role of song or poetry to "transpose society's achievements and failures into monuments" (Anyidoho 1995: 245). Before turning to achievements, the persona first reminds the people of their failures. In the lines above, Anyidoho appropriates a truism from the oral repertoire, that in order to fully savour the pleasures of life, there is need to taste a good sampling of many of its sorrows (1995: 257), just as one ought to think of failures alongside successes. In the "many failures" therein lie the people's achievements, which he celebrates in the ultimate praise song. It is important to mention that this urge echoes lines composed by Akpalu, in particular, in one of his few near joyous poems; "There is song, we shall sing it" (1974: 36) or "I shall sing you a song of sorrow" (1974: 33), whose confident tone Anyidoho amplifies to "I want to sing a PraiseSong" in his collection. The refrain "the song of sorrow/is/the ultimate song of joy" best illustrates this ambivalence espoused in the idea that within the sorrows are joyous

moments. This axiom is echoed by Chinua Achebe when he states that celebration does not mean praise or "approval although the two can be part of it, but only a part" (2009: 121). In the next lines however, he switches to the collective 'we' and sustains a communal collective voice, "And have we have we not begged enough?" (2002: 58) to the end, urging Africans to put aside the perennial begging bowls and take more pride in themselves and their heritage. The burning individual desire to praise at the beginning grows to embrace the entire community, in a lamentative rhetorical stance;

> Have we not knocked upon the stranger's heart
> knocked and knocked so hard so long
> our fingers bleed &run into our tears? (2002: 58)

This exemplifies the pattern of the persona's shift from individual to collective in single poem. I read this shift as not breaking the poem into separate parts but rather as providing overall formal coherence, signifying the simultaneity of identity within an individual. This duality finds amplification in the multiple manners Anyidoho deploys to his persona. This complex fluidity is also evident in the first section of the opening poem (2002: 22) and second-last poem titled "Ancestral Saga" (2002: 108). While the former takes the collective position 'We', the latter reverses this to rely on first-person singular viewpoint. They are identical structurally;

> We are (I am) Dancer and The Dance.
>
> Time before memory.
> Memory beyond Time.
>
> We (I) harvest Tears
> from laughter's Eyes.
> We (I) even sow some Joy
> in sorrow's deepest Soul.
> We are (I am) Dancer and The Dance.
>
> In the space between the Drum & Us (I)
> You'll feel unfold
> The endless saga of AncestralTime.
>
> We are (I am) Dancer and The Dance.

He maintains this fluidity between the persona's perspective and that of the community, largely presenting them as identical and interchangeable. The blending of different voices does not stop with alternating the individual and the collective. At a more rudimentary level, one arguably more practical, Anyidoho presents himself as a poet-singer, sometimes alternating his voice with

that of his late mother, Abla Adidi Anyidoho, herself a poet-cantor in the Ewe oral tradition. This interlacing of voices also takes place at a more theoretical plane in *PraiseSong for TheLand*.

Hence, the individual-community fixity is collapsed as persona becomes transient between the two polar oppositions. At the surface it may appear ambiguous and confusing, but read closely, it symbolizes the fluidity of the identity of the individual in the Afrocentric cosmology. The shifts are necessary for introspection as viewpoints change, availing all angles. The individual is often defined in relation to his or her community. In other words, it is an ambivalent relationship in which the individual is 'self' as much as he or she is the embodiment of the community or, he or she is neither him- nor herself. This alternation between self-expression of an individual and as representative voice of a group provides different viewpoints to a single subject. In the family tribute, "Fokoko" – which opens with an impersonal third-person voice - the persona provides a sort of independent, objective perspective to foreground the exceptional qualities of the deceased subject. A device taken from Ewe poetic repertoire, frequent use of quotations not only from celebrated minstrels but even from people reputed for their wisdom (Adali-Mortty 1967: 9) adorns Anyidoho's collection. This detachment affords the poet-persona a somewhat objective angle to which the facts informing the entire poem are pegged. This is a technique Anyidoho uses to detach himself, preferring to quote other 'texts'. "Fokoko", like his *Oral Poetics and Traditions of Verbal Art in Africa* (1983) is a tribute to his grandfather Abotsi Korbli Anyidoho whose songs inspired him as a child. He uses the pronominal reference 'it' to distance both the persona, and the poet-persona, before quoting a song;

> It was your father Abotsi Kobli
> traveller healer and poet
> who once said it in song:
>
> *the lame panther*
> *is no playmate for antelopes.* (2002: 67)

and proceeds to catalogue the exceptional qualities of his subject, aptly captured in animal imagery; panther, antelope as well as physique metaphors; tall, cripple and hunchback. The poet-persona relies on 'fragments of songs' – just as he does on condensed folktales. By intertexting the poem with the song, Anyidoho demonstrates that his persona is indebted to the wisdom of indigenous songs. Similarly, the poet-persona relies on the African folktale and

general communal oral repertoire of sayings to keep distance from what is a widely believed and indisputably objective view. "Dreams in Babylon" opens thus:

> They say the Lonesome Poet
> is one
> Who Travels a LifeTime ... (2002: 97)

The use of omnipresent third-person ('They') narrative perspective provides a detached, depersonalized and objective persona whose viewpoint serves to complement and enrich the 'I' and 'we' perspectives. In the above lines, Anyidoho engages with the theme of the poets's ultimate loneliness, which is persistent in Ewe oral traditions describing him as "the lonesome poet". He also alludes to an Ewe truism, that travelling around is worth the experience since, as Ewe wisdom has it, the non-travelling child claims his mother's soup is the best soup in the world (Anyidoho 1983: 200). Indeed, Anyidoho has engaged with this idea both critically and creatively. He grapples with the status of the poet in society emphasizing the persistence of the poet as a loner within the Ewe cosmology. Noting that it is essentially an artistic and symbolic projection which need not reflect the actual circumstances of a poet's life and social standing (Anyidoho 1995: 245), he rightly argues that a poet's loneliness and isolation from the communal mainstream is crucial for his role in society. As Awoonor and Okunoye, among others have shown, it is a recurrent theme in Ewe oral poetry. This perspective affords the artist a distinctive status and 'social distance'[59] from the rest, rendering him or her a somewhat detached individual. The poem "Agbakpe" exemplifies this, as the persona maintains a depersonalized, third-person perspective throughout. I highlight it to show the wide-raging possibilities Anyidoho's persona oscillates between.

A complex pattern of multiple shifts can also be evidenced in "Dreams in Babylon", which presents a personal experience for the benefit of the society. As much as this is the poet-persona's family predicament, it metaphorically suggests and 'extends' to the larger African family. To some extent, it appropriates the lament often provoked by a personal tragedy as in the traditional Ewe practice of dirge. It sets off from the objective third-person viewpoint into a largely individualist stance, (as one of the parents of the subject) intricately linked to the family-

[59] Awoonor affirms this saying, "the artist is characterized by a distinctive status or social distance from the rest of the group" (1973: 430).

community; "And here at last I must retrace our Steps" (2002: 98). These are interspersed by instances of clearly collective positions the persona assumes, as in:

> Always there are things in our past
> we pray our children may not have to know. (2002: 98)

to avoid the un-African stance of depicting a family as a personal possession and hence speaks on behalf of all parents, not the narrow sense of 'we' (the persona-spouse). In the next stanza, the persona reverts back to the individual identity – "I drove once more down..." (2002: 100) – although he still links the 'I' to the family-community through consistent use of the possessive 'our'. This serves to portray the complex identity of an individual who is at once self and at the same time an embodiment of the family, and community at large. The tone of some of his personal poems is largely conversational. Although Anyidoho can be personal (Palmer 1993: 79), relying on a personal voice especially in poems such as "Fokoko" and "Dreams in Babylon", he deploys it in a manner that widens its horizons. While tackling the question of racial inequalities, he uses a very intimate and personal voice to bring to the fore issues of relevance to the entire global family in "Dreams in Babylon" dedicated to his daughter, Nana Akua.

> And your Teacher – in her kind of kindness–
> thought for your best interest
> you really must
> be in a Retarded School.
>
> Your mum in silent rage
> displayed the long letter
> you wrote once upon a Deep Sorrow.
> They did not believe
> you could think&feel&hurt so keen. (2002: 101)

I hold that this conceptualisation of the 'voice-character' enables the poet to present the poems as inhabiting the liminal space between common (unspecialized) everyday speech and what may be designated as specialized poetic language in western conventions of this genre. He continues a tradition started by his predecessors, that is, a preference for an idiom closer to speech than literary diction and syntax. Most poems reveal Anyidoho's conscious efforts to dismantle the interstitial space between poetry as speech or conversation and the 'other', as specialized poetic or literary diction and syntax. This conceptualization also affords the poet the freedom to wonder inter-textually and hence the inherently incorporative nature of *PraiseSong for TheLand.*

The collection is characterised by material from other literary sub-genres such as proverbs and aphorisms, folk song and tale among others. The 'new' persona is released from the earlier narrowly-defined thematic bracket to its present unlimited concern. However, most importantly, this perspective offers him tools to challenge the individual-collective dichotomy in modern poetry. The persona in Anyidoho's poetry combines features of African indigenous poetry with those conventionally associated with 'voice character' in English or generally Western poetics. Most noticeable is individualism linked to modernist literary movement in western scholarship. Predominant is the perception that poetry is a reflection of the individual alert intelligence, which is at odds with the indigenous African concept of poetry as the distillation and clarification of a community's thought and feeling (Goodwin 1982: xv). Poetic experience has to incline itself either to the isolated individual reading stance, or position itself as a shared utterance with an audience. It may also opt to straddle the in-between, that is, both and neither – switching between the aforementioned or remain distanced, impersonal 'third-person' perspective. Thus, modern African poetry, itself a derivative from both traditions, has to grapple with being *both* and *either* simultaneously. This dilemma finds an outlet in the fluid persona that marks most contemporary poetry.

Modern African poetry has always concerned itself with the appropriateness of its language in communicating meaning. This debate has led to the sharp divide between 'nativists' or traditionalist aesthetics on one side and 'Euromodernists' inhabiting the opposite end of African literary spectrum. Whereas the former coterie of poets primarily advocate for the primacy of living speech in poetry, hence 'simple and accessible' Afrocentric poetics, the latter celebrate the meditative, 'esoteric and inaccessible' poetic language. This essentialist stance is most astutely propounded by Chinweizu *et al*[60] who, while hailing 'aesthetic traditionalism' exemplified by Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* as "possibly the best rounded single work of African poetry in English today" and 'authentically African', go on to condemn assiduous "aping of twentieth century European modernist poetry" as embalmed in the works of Wole Soyinka and early Christopher Okigbo (Ramazani (2001: 143). Evidently, therefore, there exists a gap between these two camps, though not so pronounced in contemporary times as in the previous decades.

[60] Polemically referred to as the 'Bolekaja' critics or the troika, made up of Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jimmie Madubuike

A dichotomy majority of contemporary poets set out to erase is this 'simple-difficult' notion about the language of poetry. By blurring the boundary between modern 'poet' and the indigenous 'cantor', Anyidoho's poetry inevitably challenges this language dichotomy associated with 'cultural nationalism'. Thus, *PraiseSong for TheLand* avoids either extreme, occupying the interstitial space. I argue that it is inherently marked with clarity of expression derived from language usage patterned largely after African traditional models – in particular the dirge – while at the same time embracing the Anglophone ideals of appropriate poetic language. Typically, the dirge includes sung portions often regarded as music, as well as some parts spoken or delivered in a free, speech-like rhythm, exploiting what Agawu designates as the intonational contour, rhythms and tone patterns of speech (1995: 77). As evident in his collection, Anyidoho exploits the continuum from 'emergent speech' through 'speech proper' to fully formed song or full-fledged singing voice (Agawu 1995: 77). The range enables the poet-persona to remain quite 'conversational', relying on written words that are conversational in tone and habit. Consequently, the space between Europhone traditions – associated with values of opacity – and the Afrocentric simplicity and clarity is dissolved. He uses diction that reflects a measure of knowledge of his audience, as the 'native' cantor did while simultaneously applying suitable vocabulary that does not celebrate simplicity for its own sake. Significantly, the extremes are harmonised as no single stance dominates, but rather a harmonious blend between the two is attempted, and in my view successfully achieved. The language in this collection thus signals what John Haynes describes as the 'copy' or print-based poem on one hand, and 'song-model' poetry on the other (1987: 40-49).

The "oral, brief, communal, occasional proverb-laden 'songs"' overlap with the "written, scribal, single-authored" poetry. In this collection, Anyidoho takes care of maximum clarity, adopting a speech-like mode intertwined with snippets of the individualistic, meditative or reflectively introspective language. He creatively appropriates the language in the poems to everyday speech structure, manipulating it to the way it would have sounded if actually delivered in speech. This has roots in Ewe poetics. Pitch contours of melodies as well as intra-rhythmic organisation of syllables, words and sentences of the Ewe oral poem or song roughly approximate rhythmic organisation in normal speech forms and patterns (Anyidoho 1983: 311). This is why he makes every effort to capture aura and cadences of African language speech and rhythms in his

poetry.[61] Thus, although written, Anyidoho's poetic utterances show affinities with the ordinary speech and conversational style - what some critics have described as carrying a 'speaking voice'.

Although not peculiar to Anyidoho, he uses an almost conversational tone frequently in this collection. As much as some texts are versified, he finds cadences of conversation appealing for poetic language, for example, when he uses question tags which imply a listener; "and yet we understand, don't we?". Occasionally, Anyidoho employs conversational linguistic features which remind one of a live-audience context. He employs rhetorical questions and the probing question tags to recognize the presence of the audience and integrate them into the text; "Too bad he has to go. And yet we understand, don't we?" This has the effect of not just reinforcing his message, but also begs for reader's active participation or affirmation as s/he is inclusive in the subject 'we'. In the title poem, Anyidoho adopts and adapts this form such that the persona presumes an immediate attentive audience, employing certain African speech mannerisms:

> Before the Praise they say
> I must remind our people
> of our many failures. (2002: 55)

He relies upon the use of first-person to enhance a kinetic sense of identification between reader and poet (Kinnahan 2009: 181). This approach allows him construct or imagine an audience and create lively exchange. Translocating the common indigenous way of stating a truism: by suggesting that 'they' or entire community concurs. Like Wole Soyinka whose poems unfold like a personal drama with private experiences as keynotes to his poetry (Dathorne 1975: 191)[62], Anyidoho often organizes various experiences, mostly intensely felt personal encounters, giving them artistic finish to form moving poems. Embedded in his poetry, therefore, is an underlying dramatic element which underpins Anyidoho's poetry. Worthy of mentioning also is that this preoccupation with personal experiences appropriates blues' expression of personal feelings and

[61] Peter Thuynsma (1998) makes a rough distinction between the White and African traditions of addressing saying, whereas Whites' manner of addressing people is often colder, less personal and certainly less spiritual, their African counterparts often dramatise their feeling, tend to act them out, to feel and to touch. The African's emotions are far more palpable while his or her thoughts are more accessible (1998: 186).

[62] Consider his satirical "Telephone Conversation" which features a young black man telephoning a white landlady about lodgings. Similarly, "The Immigrant" and "And the Other Immigrant", in which the escapades of a black worker and of a student in Britain respectively unfold dramatically, based on Soyinka's encounters during his travails in Europe.

mood of the poet-persona. In a sort of 'talking to oneself about feelings' several poems evolve from poet-persona's encounters or escapades. Based on personal experiences in America, ''Dreams in Babylon" makes use of 'conversational turns' (Haynes 1987: 2), adopting the spontaneous conversational intonation and form of language;

> Last month in Austin Texas
> I drove once more down Lake Austin Boulevard.
> I stopped by your old school on West Lynn.
> Two girls your former age –
> one Black one White –
> came downhill… (2002: 100)

re-enacting on print encountered or spoken recollected thoughts. In "Lake Forest", a series of different private experiences are organized into the poem. Anyidoho satirizes these experiences, from the ice-cream shop encounters, the Christian book store incident to "the little boy from a grey mansion" encounter. How the ice-cream shop experience is organized into poetic form will suffice to illustrate this point;

> A woman comes in with a child
> and buys icecream for her Dog.
>
> The salesman wipes a smile away.
> She looks him down and explains:
>
> She must be nice to her Dog
> Lest she reverses from Good
> &
> bumps into anger of her God. (2002: 88)

By maintaining this conversation-like interaction, Anyidoho enters an 'in between' zone occupied by such poems, which Haynes refers to as 'found poems'[63]. By and large, 'found poems' exemplify intertextuality and hence hybridity, since the poet manipulates and presents 'texts' composed of a 'language' s/he did not create. In particular, Anyidoho appropriates the conversational tone of *halo*, delivered in a free speech-like rhythm but often tinged with satire and sarcasm typical of *halo* poetry. Underlying the lines above is the sarcasm in carrying a baby but buying ice-cream for a dog. The satirical manner in which he portrays the West in general in "Lake Forest" is striking. This tone can be discerned in the apparent exaggerations when he

[63] That is , texts copied out from other sources or presented out of the original context, in this case perceiving the 'monological' conversation as having taken place in the poet's mind, before being 'transposed' onto paper.

describes "each mansion as an I-Land", engulfed by "a sea of closely manicured lawns/nurtured green and eternal as a god." The satirical mode can be discerned in:

> From SunRise unto SunDrown
> the sprinklers turn & twirl & dance
> spraying cool blessings of Clearwater
> for eternal comfort of the lawns. (2002: 87)

Anyidoho uses a conversational style to express this sarcasm and hence communicate the theme of the poem; speak disparagingly about "corporate America", Europe and Western values in general – that there, life is "an endless reel of fun-times" with "every other corner" having "its shop of sport&games" (2002: 91). In tones varying from critical to satirical introspection the poet shifts the blame from Western exploiters to African political class. Assuming more than just a concerned individual's viewpoint, Anyidoho poses as the 'impeccable patriot' surveying African's unhappy lot let down by inept governments and fate of victims of imperial powers' greed. Like any poet within the Ewe oral traditions, Anyidoho thus assumes the role of a critical assessor of human relations. In this collection, he provides very pointed satirical commentaries on political leadership at national and global level, a tradition in Eweland associated with Akpalu.[64] The pointed political satires signal his dedication to truth and social justice.

Characteristic of both the indigenous oral forms and certain African American genres, Anyidoho occasionally approximates contextual spontaneity as lines appear to issue at the spur of the moment. This is evident right from "Memory & Vision" where repetition and parallelisms aspire to the oral artist's reliance on such slight variations and alternations to prolong performance or supply emphasis. After building a gloomy picture, the penultimate moment of this poem affirms that "we hasten to remind ourselves", bringing out a certain insistence, and near-optimism in the ability to transcend this misfortunes saying:

> that just to survive
> simply to survive
> merely to survive
> barely to survive
> is not & can
> never be enough. (2002: 30)

[64] Akpalu Vinoko represents one of the song traditions, the lament or dirge repertoire.

Proceeding to exclaim how, apparently despite every effort to keep the African race down, "we (Africans) stand so tall". The fact that 'we' are still surviving makes the African special and worth being celebrated. This spontaneity is often captured in series of near-same lines that seem to pile up meaning, achieving emphasis cumulatively. Anyidoho is seemingly informed by "the improvisatory nature" (Agawu 1995: 78) of the dirge. Insisting on why he keeps going back to the dirge singers, Anyidoho's persona says that "In their songs" he heard:

> the midnight hooting of the lonesome owl
>
> the shrieking call of the sea gall's orphan child
>
> the deepest moans of the maimed panther
>
> the final sighs of the departing soul. (2002: 53)

Relying on parallelism, each line seems to anticipate a closure that is not forthcoming but achieves desired emphasis. Each successive line seems to compound and pile emotional intensity to capture the depth of the loss being moaned. The message is progressively driven home as the line "the final sighs..." aptly signals a postponed and eagerly anticipated climax. The effect is similar to that in actual performances where audience is treated to a trance-like impulsiveness typical in ritual-poetry. Tendency to cumulatively pile images upon images reinforcing each other, for example, introductory verse in "Agbakpe"; "Rock is heavy/Salt is heavy/And Anvil indeed is heavy" before contrasting with the sea turtle approximates this performance aspect. This parallelism achieves a similar effect in this stanza which juxtaposes what are construed antithetical images; Christmas crackers versus battle gun and emergent versus established hegemonies;

> ChristmasCracker does not challenge
> The warrior's battle gun.
> The stool of sudden wealth
> does not dispute the rights
> of the Old AncestralStool. (2002: 105)

The reconfiguration Anyidoho gives his persona enables him to challenge, disrupt or dismantle a number of binaries inherent in modern African poetry. I have shown how the language of his poetry collapses the space between individual and the community, and ordinary conversation or speech-like language on the one hand, and the so-called specialized language of poetry as conventionally understood within dominant English or western practices and poetics on the

other. Quite significantly, the individual-community dichotomy is challenged by the persona's identity instability, providing ground for revitalizing and innovating poetic practices in modern African poetry. The flexibility marking this all-encompassing fluid persona enables the poet to embrace oral poetry's accommodativeness or incorporative nature as a crucial poetic device in this collection. This allows the poet to innovatively integrate material from both traditions as well as from other (sub)genres. Anyidoho, therefore, unavoidably summons intertextual relations with other forms and traditions.

To some extent linked to such reconceptualization of the persona in Anyidoho's poetry is the highly intertextual nature of the poems in *PraiseSong for TheLand.* However, what Anyidoho calls principles of embedding and rank order are very much at work here (1983: 134). More explicitly, various forms are best seen not so much as discrete items with invariant properties, but rather as members within varying orders of interrelationships each one defined and being defined by the other (1983: 110). What has been called intertextuality by Julia Kristeva is what Anyidoho sees as overlapping in structure, form and content of different verbal genres within the Ewe tradition. This is a case of oral traditions providing theoretical frameworks for reading modern creative forms, besides the established or hitherto conventional ones deployed in mainstream poetics. The wide range of choices at Anyidoho's disposal when intertexting speaks to his endeavours, that is, seeking a poetics of flexible and diverse perspectives. This alludes to the flexible conceptual paradigm for forms of Ewe verbal arts. Advanced as the linguistic model of genre analysis, it is marked by transfer of form and technique among various genres of verbal arts – appropriated in Anyidoho's written poetry. The category he terms complex forms, which are definitively incorporative, are approximated in this collection. The persona in his poetry affords him opportunities to wonder through time and space unrestricted by limitations imposed by Euro-American poetry conventions. Although this incorporative nature is a central feature in African indigenous literary forms, it has come to be a significant mark of modern and more so, contemporary African poetry occurring as "transferred-forms" (Bodunde 2003: 282). There is little respect for boundaries, hence high mobility and fluidity between and within various 'texts' or genres. Fragments from other (sub)genres and texts are incorporated into the contemporary and written poetry to imaginatively comment on contemporary social institutions. This, I hasten to add, is made possible because of the sort of persona Anyidoho employs; one

who assumes both the indigenous narrator-like stance, at the same time remains entrenched in the English conventions of the tradition. However, these 'texts' serve the same function within the written tradition as in the oral cultural where they are relocated or recontextualized from.

Oral art forms are constantly being reconstructed to assume 'new' roles in the conterminous oral-literate culture in contemporary Africa. Anyidoho's poetry, like its antecedents, frequently draws on other oral forms or subgenres, ranging from the use of 'proverbial lore', integration of 'snippets of fables' to songs. This fluidity has been exploited by the majority of contemporary African poets. However, Anyidoho does more than most of his contemporaries in the sense that he appropriates oral aesthetics to create a form of poetry which is revolutionary in terms of content, form and medium of dissemination. Before integrating fables for example, he reworks them to fit into the poem's structure. In the poem "Mother Courage", the persona summons the folktale about new life at Kyerefaso, 'Foriwa', which the subject in the poem later expanded into a refocused play extolling the potential resourcefulness of 'outsiders'; "New Life'/*Foriwa* (1967). Metaphorically designated as 'the young gazelle' to foreground Efua Sutherland's modesty and reticence, this poem shows awareness of the Ewe concept of the hereafter or *ahali*, personified to heighten its vividness (Adali-Mortty 1967: 9). Intertextually, both the fable and play link the poem to the African indigenous folktale and folk wisdom and the straightforward socio-cultural realism of the play hence amplifying its meaning. The poet-persona eulogizes his subject as having contributed immensely before his untimely death, much the same way as the tale's legendary figure, a stranger who opportunely helped revitalize and reenergize the docile village;

> You were Mother Courage with a Heart the
> size of Love large enough for your children's
> tears for your nation's fears. You were
> Foruwa the young gazelle who tip-toed
> our dawn rearranged the world you found
> gave a new meaning disappeared be-
> fore we could think of saying Thanks. (2002: 74)

This affects the poem with accentuated meaning the gesture carries in the fable tale, part of which is to portray the departed as exceptionally endowed with invaluable virtues. It is also an allegory to the protagonist in Bertolt Brecht's drama - the zealous 'Mother Courage'. This is informed by the fact that although Efua Sutherland would have used her considerable talent and

skill in the promotion of a spectacular individual career, she instead opted to selflessly share her gifts with the society at large by investing her energies in the building of model programmes and institutions and in the training of a future generation (Anyidoho 2002: 78) hence she is equated to the ingenious outsider who helped rejuvenate the society. The persona is not bound in the English poetic style, hence is at liberty to draw from other resources to make his or her point clear. In this case, the tale provides an apt resource to celebrate the exceptional human the departed Efua Sutherland was. This fable helps reinforce the departed's reputation as founder and mother figure behind the National Theatre Movement among others, such as Ghana Society of Writers, Ghana Experimental Theatre and *Okyeame* literary magazine. Her qualities and contribution are more legendary than ordinary human, signified by the mythic excerpt or intertext.

Similarly, in 'Memory and Vision', Anyidoho alludes to the proverbial 'bone-cracking dog' (which the adage shows, cannot crack iron (Anyidoho 1983: 199) in the folktale to illustrate the misery and unfortunate situation of the persona, in the image of a literal and symbolic dog;

> We are the Dog who caught the Game
> but now must sit under the table Cracking
> our Hopes over Bones
> over Droppings from the Master's Hands. (2002: 29)

Effectively presenting the intended message, of sweating for others to reap (what?), as is the case in modern corrupted economic orders. Anyidoho effectively captures this in the image of the dog-master relationship, as already enunciated in Ewe folklore. However, closer examination reveals that the form being weaved into poetic structure is not just simple snatches of folktales but rather a distinct oral. This can be evidenced in "Her Memory", where "the roaches [that] came/and ate priceless bread/ and shifted the blame on mice" (2002: 34) signals a somewhat internally organized form and patterning at work. Even more striking is what on the surface appears as recasting into series of fragments of different oral tales, often summed up as wise-sayings or proverbial units, weaved into the texture of poems – most notably in "Agbakpe". The technique Anyidoho deploys undoubtedly has its roots in Ewe oral repertoire. Broadly, the proverb or *lododowo* among the Ewe, as Nketia (1958), Finnegan (1970) and Anyidoho (1983) have shown, is by and large a model of compressed or forceful language. From this standpoint, the aforementioned technique may be considered a manifestation of different approaches to the

usage of proverbial lore. There are two possible oral forms feeding Anyidoho's poetic fantasy grounded in Ewe lore; *hamelo* and *abebubu*. Embedded in Anyidoho's poetry is, on the one hand, an effective and elaborate use of proverbs of a special kind known as the 'song proverb' or *hamelo* (Anyidoho 1983: 349). Often used in song, they perform similar aesthetic and structural roles in poetry. Alternatively, Anyidoho may be said to be deploying a special proverbial form identified in Ewe as *abebubu*, which, traditionally, was a preserve of the most skilled orators demanding immense wisdom, superb verbal creativity and nimbleness of mind (Anyidoho 1983 139) in his written poetry. This kind of elaborate proverbial sayings can be condensed into the more formal short – in particular to suit the poetic form. Although they may pass for snippets of folktales, they structurally appropriate this proverbial form. Two examples will serve to make this link and signal the structural affinities between the oral repertoire and as approximated in Anyidoho's volume of poetry. From the examples he collects in his fieldwork, it is clear that the form deployed in say "Goat says the idle jaw lends itself to gossip/That is why it always chews the cud" (Anyidoho 1983: 139) or:

> Cat says the things he witnesses
> And closes his eyes upon
> Dog has not seen even half of them
> And he is barking all over town (1983: 349)

This to a large extent shares striking structural similarities with, for example, a stanza in "Agbakpe" revolving around the pregnant crab's logical rationale that since there is no cure for the looming stubborn headache, she decides to gather all her precious brain and store them in her stomach before selling the empty skull to the imbecile owl. Indeed "Agbakpe" is a coalescing of clusters of truisms carrying moral weight. Further thematic parallels may be drawn between what is said about the diversity of experiences that the cat has witnessed, and those captured in 'song poems' constituting this poem, pitting 'the StrawHat' against 'the Helmet'; 'ChristmasCracker' and 'the warrior's battle gun'; 'the Stool of sudden wealth' or 'ArmChair' *vis a vis* 'the Old AncestralStool' and the 'Bucket' against 'Old Gourd'. The hilarious nature of final stanza, its thematic organisation and structural affinities affirm that Anyidoho is consciously approximating 'song proverbs':

> It was the pregnant Crab who said:
> There is no cure for migraine
> That is why she gathered

all her precious brains
and stored them away in her belly.
And then sold her empty skull
to Yevu's brother *Adzexe* the owl. (2002: 106)

The thread running throughout this poem is not just the rapid succession of metaphors but a sustained paralleling of ideas in two sets of oppositional images and ideas. The crab or "Agatsa" is a common image in Ewe literature. Often used in proverbs, riddles, fables and wise sayings such as one pitting 'walking sideways' against 'never loosing the way', 'its shell never running completely dry of oil' (Anyidoho 1983: 201) or the ideophonic riddle-like cue for storytelling session turn-taking. Anyidoho similarly deploys the image of the cunning 'pregnant Crab' recognizing this stock Ewe literary image. The owl on the other hand commonly associated with bad omen is presented as foolish and effortlessly duped and is hence the antithesis of the brilliant crab. This is the central structuring pattern sustained throughout the poem; Agbosege the Sea Turtle is contrasted with the rock, salt and anvil in terms of weight, the tussle between 'the StraHat' and 'Helmet' over who makes the king, 'ChristmasCracker' challenging 'the warrior's battle gun', the Stool of sudden wealth or ArmChair contrasted with the Old AncestralStool, *dzakpali* hen pitted against poultry chicken while 'The Bucket' engages the 'Old Gourd'.

Thus, it is not only the general folktale and proverbial repertoire that are exploited in this regard. Various excerpts from the proper Ewe song gamut find their way into his poetry. Although Charles Bodunde (2001) distinguishes two levels of creative transfer of songs, my concern in this study is more with their 'intertextual' function than details of the transfer process. I examine both levels in *PraiseSong for TheLand* where in the poem "Fokoko", Anyidoho incorporates lines from the song the persona's father – himself a dirge singer. Significantly, he marks out the two lines drawn from a song orthographically, using italics;

the lame panther
is no playmate for antelopes. (2002: 67)

The layered nature of songs inevitably infuses hybridity into the poem when incorporated. A song is structurally a poem, if rendered in print form. Besides the already discussed specialized song-proverbs, proverbial language is generally often exploited in song-lines. The two lines taken from the particular song's 'original' form serve to foreground admirable attributes the poet-persona associates with the subject of this poem; a lame 'panther' jealously and fiercely

guarding the younger family members. Instead of his mythical sweet smelling breath luring others into destruction, this panther remains "[...] the one/to whom the children had to turn" (2002: 68). The song – like the ingrained proverbial saying – acts as an authoritative and autonomous text, augmenting claims made by the poet-persona. Manifestly, he uses songs to comment on situations and reinforce (political) messages rather than merely move the narrative in poem or play. As evident above, the song provides a frame from which to envisage the subject in the poem, packaged as a wise saying critiquing the subject.

More often than not, however, it is various elements of song or techniques that poets exploit in their poetry. Most notable in *PraiseSong for TheLand* is the use of chorus and antiphonal structure. The standard form of the dirge follows the traditional call-and-response pattern (Agawu 1995: 76). The use of refrain is a common device for suggesting a potential audience and hence performance-oriented structure. Anyidoho (1983: 132-58) discusses the indispensable nature of team spirit in the realisation of a successful performance, which in my view he puts into practice in *PraiseSong for TheLand.* Call-and-response pattern is an important part of most African traditional and later African American aesthetics. Although this is not as pronounced as in other works by associates or previous collections, the antiphonal structure is embedded in a number of poems in this collection. For illustration, the title poem will suffice. Anyidoho makes use of complex refrain patterns. Whereas the conviction to praise the land recurs in a manner reminiscent of refrain-stanzas, repeated three-times, the poet-persona keeps reiterating that "The Song of Sorrow/is/The Ultimate Song of Joy". Typical of standard dirge patterns, the lead intones the call to which the chorus responds. The lines also seem aware of the Ewe oral tradition, in particular, lines composed by Akpalu or in his manner. A dirge piece composed by Awoonor's cousin called Vedu of Wheta, announces that "This drum is sorrow" (1974: 34) while Akpalu himself sung that he played "the drum of joy" (1974: 36). Considering the interchangeability or overlap between drum, and song or poem within Ewe cosmology, links may be made but the manner in which this is emphasized hints towards the emphatic and recurrent nature of refrains:

> Yes:
> The Song of Sorrow
> Is
> The Ultimate Song of Joy. (2002: 56)

However, the latter section of the poem reveals that this is not even the refrain. The regular recurrence of the rhetorical question "have we not begged [and wept & wept] enough?" which is repeated six times suggests a shift in emphasis. Repetition of lines or whole segments, Awoonor argues, serves to "create the emotional poetic lead into other sections of the poem" just as, in some cases, it functions as the rounding up or the poetic finale (1974: 24). The six times vary, starting with 'wept', through 'wept & wept', 'begged' repeated thrice before the 'rounding up' which combines 'begged and wept' enough. These series of repetitions mentioned above anticipate and achieve a sort of 'poetic finale'. The persistence with which the poet-persona insists "so many times", the ubiquity of the rhetorical "How many times" (five times) accompanied by the affirmative "Have we not.." all echoed in the stanza testify to the tendency towards duplication of various phrases or lines. This signals a performance requiring that a leader 'call' a line as others 'respond' to it. It is a relatively complex antiphonal pattern in which certain phrases or lines are repeated many times in different combinations alluding to the musical basis of most traditional poetry. The all-important sense of community which informs traditional forms and social relations is implied.

A more subtle signal towards the classical song structure is hinted in "Her Memory". The poem's structure recalls the cyclic nature of the indigenous song whose beginning might as well be the ending. Besides very slight variation, the opening is actually the closing stanza;

> He wore Her Memory
> Like
> an Old AncestralHeirLoom (2002: 34)

and;

> Still wearing her Memory
> Like
> an Old AncestralHeirLoom. (2002: 36)

suggesting that the performance comes to fruition. This is the structure deployed in "Ancestral Saga" where the opening line is also the closing line; "I am Dancer and the dance" (2002: 108). Stock refrains may be considered an Anyidoho idiosyncrasy. By using refrain line(s) or whole stanzas as characterized by refrain lines, some even carried forward from Anyidoho's earlier collections, such as;

And those who took away our voice
They are now surprised
They couldn't take away our song. (2002: 31)

which is also used in the title poem "Earthchild" in a collection with a similar title. By theoretically separating the 'voice' from the 'song', Anyidoho (1983) hints at the partial dissociation of the word from its acoustic realization. The voice in its multifarious dimensions has always been the object and subject of African poetry. To appreciate what he says or get a sense of what I mean, a few lines from Akpalu and Dunyo's pieces will suffice. In one poem, Akpalu pleads to his people to "Offer prayers for the poet/that the chorus' voice be clear" (1974: 29), while in another, "Clear your voices and sing 'Agoha' to us." (1974: 36) places the quality of voice at the centre of poetic art. The transient nature of the voice can be deduced when he poses, "Can you sing with Akpalu's voice" (1974: 42) or its multiplicity evident when Dunyo, considering the poet as a road, says "I shall be on the roads with many voices/I shall be on the roads with song" (1974: 70). More complex however is "It is the voice of the song I salute" (1974: 38) which signals its uniqueness in different songs. In his poems, Anyidoho is cognizant of such possibilities; he talks of 'hostile winds' rising against his voice in the poem "Her Memory" (2002: 36), how "the house you [Brenda Marie] built with words/and scattered your voices/into bits of memory" (2002: 37) or attempts to catch "the twilight in your voice" (2002: 38), while in dirge-like "Future", Anyidoho asks "If I came at sunrise/with a tear in my voice" (2002: 47) and in "Mother Courage" he says "We could have stretched/ our voice to touch your Soul in Flight." (2002: 72). This deteritorisation of the voice is metaphorically signalled by the accompanying audio-CD (sub)text.

The gesture of redefining publishing to include the audio element and the foregrounding of the notion that African poetry remains unfulfilled or half-way realised since the "song lyrics" are but elements of a larger set of communicative practices – that goes beyond the visual – assumes prominence. The poet draws attention to and disrupts the apparently indivisible performance-print dichotomy often deployed in African poetry. By combining print with sound, Anyidoho affirms his long held belief that the word as *mere* print or on the page cannot "carry the full burden of his voice" (2002: 11). The collection represents his experiment of linking print with sound, not merely "as a restorative process that returns the primacy of sound to its aboriginal

status" (Awoonor 2002: 9), but rather, as a way of hybridizing or enriching the written medium of contemporary African poetry by adding an audio-dimension. In this study, this is viewed as an attempt to collapse the interstitial space between the visual media on the one hand, and the audio on the other. It presents the contemporary poetic experience as occupying the liminal space between print and sound since the 'voice' is both multiple and transient. This serves to reaffirm the poet's poetic mission of "reclaiming back the voice" into contemporary poetic discourses or 'giving voice to' the resentment of a black person against the moral and economic alienation to which he has been submitted by White domination. The audio text inscribes performativity in written poetry. It also serves to demonstrate the sense in which a shared musical heritage amazingly survives in the various languages that Africans now sing. The metropolitan space in the major cultural hubs of the Black diaspora must take the credit for conserving values that survived the Middle Passage. This equally signals contemporary cultural freedom, a freedom that has led to the restoration of indigenous practices often suppressed in the colonial era through the agency of missionary education.

Other than songs, the proverbial lore is starkly embedded, and hence intrinsically worked into the poem texture. Being an extremely pervasive form, its occurrence is not restricted to specially defined occasion or place/context but rather often overlaps in structure, form and content with other verbal genres. It undergoes changes, restated as he refines and weaves the associated idea into the poem, "rather than leaving them bare as we find in early collections of poetry" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 1998: 125). Anyidoho appropriates the proverb's specialized language of parallelism and analogy in his poetry in what he terms principle of embedding. I perceive the resulting poetry as a hybridized form due to this intermingling of different literary resources. The special use of traditional proverbs is a common aspect of Ewe song practice (Anyidoho 1984: 350), and by extension, therefore, poetry. In Anyidoho's poetry, as in indigenous setting, their (proverbs) sense of beauty and impact lies in novelty of application. In the tribute to 'Auntie Efua Sutherland', he finds it convenient not just to end, but also to justify the entire poem by embedding an Ewe proverb, in its rhetorical form:

> We are doing our very best. But really
> Auntie Efua how can we offer an Antelope's
> burial to an Elephant? (2002: 75)

A modest send-off is not commensurate with a person of her stature, in the persona's view, considering the immense contributions she made to her society. Anyidoho does not simply insert the proverb, but first reworks its structure changing it into its rhetorical form before weaving it into the poem's texture.[65]

Although Anyidoho relies on formal properties of the Ewe dirge, he is not defined by its indigenous cultural-contextual sphere or limited by its narrow thematic boundaries. He appropriates it to its Western poetic form that is unbound thematically. Several critics[66] have enunciated that Anyidoho's poetry, as the poems in this collection testify, demonstrate the capacity of this indigenous poetic practice to respond to, and cope with the challenges of serving a function beyond the limits of an ethnic formation. This distinguishes his poet-persona as s/he combines elements from both traditions. This is where the effectiveness of Anyidoho's approach lies. Unlike his peers and predecessors, his use of the dirge tradition goes beyond its ritual associations with death. Anyidoho does not focus on particular deaths, but rather, uses the tone, the tradition of exhortation and even the philosophical concepts to comment on reality (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 1998: 132), hence tactfully negotiating the interstices between modern-written and indigenous poetry or dirge. In my view, he introduces another dimension to the indigenous form as well as to the modern form, by using features of the dirge to serve as the base form for appropriating its idiom.

As much as an elegiac sensibility underlies his poetry, rather than bewailing the passing of a loved one or various ills which flesh is heir to, I concur with Fraser (1986) who observes that Anyidoho finds it fit to lament the fate of his country. In his poetic reflections, Anyidoho is preoccupied with the socio-political state of post-independence Ghana in particular, and the African continent in general. Although in reference to *Elegy for the Revolution,* what Okunoye (2006) says may as well apply to this collection. The persona does not conceal his frustrations with the status quo or 'new' regimes. Socio-political imperatives find voice in his poetry, most notably in "Memory and Vision", "Sweet and Sour Hope", "Naita-Norwetu" and "Twilight

[65] This proverb has different manifestations; for example, A crab cannot become a bird or You cannot make a silk purse out of a sows ears, (all pointing to the need for due respect for different identities)
[66] Such as Apronti (1979), Fraser (1986), Palmer (1993), Awoonor (1993), Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1998) and Okunoye (2006).

Storm". In "Sweet & Sour Hope" for example, he makes a passionate statement of frustration and unequivocal denunciation of the emergent indigenous ruling elite;

> Brand-new statesmen convene
> into our halls of fame &shame
> wearing rented cocktail suits
> their inaugural speeches
> carefully prerecorded
> …
> And the land fallows
> again into endless
> fields ripe with Mirages. (2002: 80)

These lines evoke the pathetic atmosphere of the Ewe lament with the attendant helpless acceptance of the uncertainty of the future. Like majority of the poems in *PraiseSong for TheLand,* it is politically coded in its depiction of the unfortunate fate Africa and Africans often find themselves in. This rage sometimes soars into insults instancing a fusion of lament and insult. In "Naita-Norwetu", Anyidoho, in the spirit of the *halo*, offensively refers to the political elite as "hyenas" who, rather than secure a bright future for the younger generation will instead "come and auction their Hopes/to hawks & crows in borrowed Clothes" (2002: 41). Like "Taflatse", it is representative of Anyidoho's poem in the mode of the song of abuse. Expressing his disgust and contempt for amnesty granted to corrupt leaders, Anyidoho writes:

> There was a conference of Ghosts.
> Last night. In our Living Room.
> I heard them speak of Amnesty
> for those we hoped were all in Hell. (2002: 42)

He seems generally conditioned by the spirit of the song of abuse. Although a number of the poems are dirges in the strict sense of the term, involving losses in form of deaths ("Brenda Marie", "Mother Courage" and "Fokoko"), his poetic concerns are unlimited. This is why in this study, I consider 'functional transformation' or broadening since he casts wider to explore not just deaths or the Ghanaian condition, but what may be called global family which Anyidoho seems concerned with. It is a transposition of essentially private idiom to the public domain of Ghana's national life and by natural extension, the aforesaid global community. However, quite distinctly, he seizes occasions for actual moaning to decry or make sharp socio-political commentaries. For example, he uses the poem moaning "Mother Courage" to express dissatisfaction about the way things were handled at the 'Old Drama Studio'– which she helped found and establish – upon her untimely exit. Typically a dirge complete with subtle features

such as the characteristic denial accompanying the loss being grieved (even after apparently accepting that she is no longer alive, "You were Mother Courage ..." (2002: 74), he goes ahead to doubt saying "Maame Efua when you go ..." (2002: 75) expressing uncertainty which marks traditional laments), the poet-persona laments; "please tell them.":

> [...] Tell Uncle Joe de Graft and Tata
> Amu. Tell them that the national The-
> atre is ready at last but they planted it over
> the grave yard of your Old Drama Studio.
> And that we are doing our best to put back
> on stage the festival drama you all composed
> at the dawn of our nation's birth. We are
> doing our best. But there are technical
> problems with our grand design:
>
> In your Grand Vision you created so many
> parts for Giants. But now all the original
> cast is gone. And we are stuck with a Dwarf
> Brigade. (2002: 75)

He uses contrast between the compelling vision she had for a better society and the short-sightedness of contemporary leadership to subtly comment on the demolition of Ghana Drama Studio, which she not only founded, but also supervised the building of. Designed in harmony with performance demands of African theatre practice, it was unfortunate that flimsy reasons were given for the pulling down of this monumental investment. Every effort is made to contrast 'our grand design' from her 'Grand Vision'; the 'Dwarf/Brigade' they are left with from the 'so many parts for Giants' she created.

The hopelessness that marked the post independence period, and the subsequent series of political unrests are bemoaned in his poetry. He has written a series of poems focusing on the debate revolving around a Ghanaian assessment of the positives and negatives of Nkrumah and his legacy. In "Sweet and Sour Hope", although "a new dawn breaks" bringing with it optimism in postcolonial Africa, it has always tended to be marked by "yet another harvest of promises" as "pedlars of broken dreams" (2002: 79) rarely delivers. All that the political elite do each time they take over is to fill the masses with optimism only to plunge the countries into further anarchy and misrule. The result is captured by the paradoxical lines "A harvest of promises &/A decade of sweet and sour hope" (*ibid*) which designates the unpredictable nature of military regimes. The juxtaposing of these apparent opposites serves to denote this ambivalence that

marks such governments, to them the space between the extremes (good and bad) is so often crossed. One is never sure what to expect between 'sweetness' and 'sourness' though, arguably, destruction marks the takeovers, signified by the 'fractured images'. This paradoxical juxtaposition is evident in "the ultimate song of joy" being described as actually "the song of sorrow. The poet-persona says that:

> There is no genuine praise except
> where great battles are won
> No deserving praise except
> where great despairs are blow apart. (2002: 55)

embracing the spirit of oral philosophy. Antithetical structural paralleling of apparently oppositional images dominates "Mother Courage". The perversity of images suggesting extreme opposites, such as "boil in throat" obstructing "children's Joy" or "a raging boil" amidst "children's Hope"; "peace of Death" *vis a vis* "the pain of Life" (2002: 72); "Yesterday our joy…" versus "Today our sorrow…"; broadcasting "Sorrow on Joy Radio" (2002: 73); "Giants" versus "Dwarf" and, the denouement most evocatively captured in the rhetorical question; "how can we offer an Antelope's/burial to an Elephant?" (2002: 75). This is an attempt to thematize hybridity's ambiavalence, suggesting the possibility of inhabiting complex and interstitial but not overlapping spaces. It is within such liminality that Anyidoho locates Ghana's fate. For example, the post-independence coup prone Ghana – not unique in West Africa – is the subject of some of his poetry. In a pessimistic tone, he presents the political side of Ghana and Africa as 'a song of sorrow':

> Once there were RainBows
> in corners of our Souls
> but came StormTime &
> the colours turned to Smoke &
> the smoke became the AcidRain
> that Washed the Laughter from our Song. (2002: 60)

The poet-persona describes the rain after the 'stormtime' as 'acidrain' to symbolize the various military-led regimes and despondency that marks their tenures. Instead of rain which is meant to signify hope and rejuvenation, the regimes make 'harvests of promises' which later turn out to be contaminated showers, or 'acidrain'. What follows the 'acidrain' is but another 'decade' of misrule and corruption.

The theme of Africa's perpetual economic dependency on its former colonial masters also finds discursive space in the 'expanded mourning resources' of his poetry. The prominence he assigns this theme is signified by the refrain "And have we not begged enough?" (2002: 58-59) repeated four times in the title poem. The poem "Praise Song for the Land" tackles the dependent economic status of most African nation-states, as envisaged in the rhetorical stance the persona assumes:

> So many times. How many times
> Have we not knocked upon the stranger's heart
> knocked and knocked so hard so long
> our fingers bleed&run into our tears? (2002: 58)

Another theme initially excluded from this repertoire but which finds its way in Anyidoho's poetry is his indictment with the corrupting influence of 'Euro-Christian' ethical systems. Anyidoho views Christianity as not only incongruous with the African worldview, satirically exposing some of these misconceptions, but as often prone to misinterpretations. He decries the negative side of Christianity in "Doctrine & Ethics" using a depersonalized persona, who catalogues the wrongs 'they' (Christians) have committed against God. The poet-persona's indifference is evident in the (mis)interpretations he gives to conventional Christian teachings;

> God was said to have taken Yusuf's wife.
> And when God's Child was said to be born
> They saddled God's Child with an Ass
> and abandoned God's Child among the Sheep. (2002: 96)

Indeed, the whole poem is a series of accusations the poet-persona believes 'they' have done against God. These distortions elicit humour as they caricature Christian tenets and ideals literally construed from the eyes of a non-Christian African.

Anyidoho's poetry does not stop at thematically expanding the resources of mourning. Rather, he consciously enlarges the aesthetic resources of modern African poetry. This is evident in his attempts to redefine what poetry ought to be within the confines of modern African poetry. How does his poetry look beyond conventional textures, to accommodate Anyidoho's concept of poetry as total art? The extent to which various texts and subtexts are embedded within the poem's structure sometimes leads to a composite form, one whose genre boundary keeps shifting. This is what characterises Anyidoho's poetry. In particular, the line between drama or dance and poetry becomes elusive in this collection, underpinned by Anyidoho's metaphoric

conception of overlapping dancer and dance. With such a porous border, Anyidoho sneaks in basic elements of dramaturgy into his poetry. Anchoring my argument on the 'song' as the structural equivalent of the poem in the Ewe tradition (Awoonor 1974: 24) and aware that songs are inseparable from dance, I demonstrate how in Anyidoho's poetry dance-inspired rhythms are embedded to capture the Ewe conceptualisation of poetry. To appreciate Anyidoho's approach to poetry, it is important to consider more idealistic realisations of what he has called 'total art'. A theoretical separation of different 'texts' informing his poetics provides a point of departure. Anyidoho informs one that in Ewe song-practice a distinction is made between the verbal or poetic content and the musical content of song texture (1983: 306; 1977). What constitutes the 'totality' of poetic fantasy in Ewe context includes a song-text (the entire song which combines, the melody [tune or *nyabge*] together with the instrumental accompaniment, that is, verbal element given musical material or with musical dimension supplied) and the poetic text – which within most African oral poetry are interdependent (Anyidoho 1983: 298). From this perspective, one appreciates the inseparability of music, drama, poetry and dance.

The foregoing conceptualization finds outlets in Anyidoho's literary practices and engagements. In the play *Musu: The Saga of the Slaves* which explicitly embraces the idea of a dance-drama and music by the National Dance Ensemble of Ghana, some of Anyidoho's poetic lines are integrated into the performance. Poetry dramatization in *Children of the Land* and *Cosmic High Court* similarly embodies this holistic approach to art as an attempt at more subtle written-dramatizing. While the former is the story of African liberations struggle and independence movement told through poetry dramatization, the latter recounts events surrounding the occasion of Ghana's first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's death in a foreign land. *Cosmic High Court* is an adaptation of the poem "In the High Court of Cosmic Justice" published in the collection *Earth Child* (1985). Together with the play, the two are moving examples of poetry as a dramatic multimedia experience, a conviction that fervently shapes his poetics. This calls for poetic lines to be interspersed with invocations, drumming, singing and dancing by both performer and audience alike. It is the attempts to appropriate this in *PraiseSong for TheLand* that is the focus in this section. Crucial is the fact that apart from such explicit ventures, Anyidoho devises a unique virtual performance form which not only attempts to return written African poetry to its dramatic oral roots, but strikingly also extends and enriches the poetics of

written poetry in English. Most importantly, he constructs a form that aptly conveys the totality of consciousness and hence communicates feelings from a deeper and less articulate level (Brun 1967: 280) than may be reached by otherwise ordinary poetic-texts.

Anyidoho's poetics may not be understood fully in isolation. Like "Mother Courage" – which in this context allegorizes both Brecht and Sutherland, he takes the challenge of developing new sets of forms and techniques, largely by reconciling various traditions, beliefs and practices to the realities of his contemporary existence. These two 'pathfinding' scholars are known for building models for art, in particular, theatre. While Efua Sutherland did pioneering research into Ghanaian oral traditions and in the process introduced unique dramatic form – for example, *anansegora* which is a creative model of storytelling drama - Bertolt Brecht dismisses rules of conventional drama to devise what has come to be know as 'alienating effect', that is, attempts to distance the audience from getting emotionally engrossed or involved as actors dissociate as far from subjectivity of characters they portray. This concept of epic theatre in which drama is conceived as a multimedia event, socio-musical drama or musical-dramatic performance involving song, dance, drumming, mime, poetry and spoken forms alongside a variety of visual icons and costumes informs Anyidoho's idea of total art; a sort of 'artistic amalgam' of drama, poetry, music, dance, and visual arts (Dor 2004: 39). In *PraiseSong for TheLand* Anyidoho approximates performance oriented structure to show leanings towards overarching conceptualization of poetry.

Artists – whether singers or storytellers – within the Ewe community are charged with the responsibility of safeguarding community history. Anne Bailey (2002) observes that this community, like most other Africans, deeply reveres its history. Like his oral predecessors, Anyidoho exhibits a commitment to not just his local community's history, the southern or Anlo Ewe, but that of the African community in its broadest terms. At a local plane, he interrogates Ewe history. One poem in this collection assiduously demonstrates this bequest. Structurally alluding to a typical performance, "Husago" or journey of the beginning wraps up the collection. This position is symbolically relevant as it is meant to take back or remind the audience to the origins of the community.

Appropriating the rhythms rather than relying on diction or words to convey its message, Anyidoho's "Husago" recalls the annual *Hogbestosto* festival – a commemoration of the group's early history; the grand exodus and escape from the tyrant king Agokoli of Notsie.[67] Marked by dancing and drumming selection, *misego*, which literary means "gird your loin tight" (Fiagbedzi 1977: 56), the event forms a core part of the community's conscious. It is a re-enaction of migratory journeys accomplished through symbolic backward-forward movements (Nukunya 1997: 106-7). Embedded is *husago*, one of the seven dances accompanying Yeve cult (Jones 1959: 100). A special *Gankogui* pattern, it features a special sort of drumming played in a declamatory way "as if drummer is speaking in words" (Jones 1959: 100). Anyidoho's collection pays tribute to this heritage remembered in song and drumming. He heavily relies on verbal repetition and untranslated diction drawn from the festival's repertoire. The poem, on the surface, is a verbal rendition of drum music on paper. Textually, it relies on 'husago' and 'misego', repeated in twos and threes, regularly separated by ideophones 'KinDin' and 'GonGon' – largely tonal and rhythmic patterns of speech which drums produce - arranged in a somewhat structurally regular pattern. The conscious attempt to infuse his poetry with 'texts' using drum language, in my view, captures and represents the essence of Ewe poetics since drumming or *vufofo* is invariably conjoined with verbal art or poetry.[68] By intertexting what Nketia (1963) describes as "nonsense syllables", he demonstrates that poetry – modern African poetry in particular, as perceived through the Ewe worldview - is incomplete without speech mode of drumming. Nonsense syllables are closely related to drum beats as ordered sounds. Anyidoho is fully conscious of the value of drum beats as well as of patterning, integrating and crossing of drumbeats with terse poetic lines. Specifically in this poem, he relies on syllable initials of the plosive type such as 'd', 'k' and 'g' – consonants which represent heavy beats (e.g. Gon, Kon, Kin). Successive long beats GoGonGoGon and relatively rapid ones like KinDin testify to this. For example, Anyidoho aptly captures "GoGonGoGon" (2002: 113) to mark it as the final punch line and hence climax of performance. The closing poem significantly places the drum and the drumbeat at the centre of poetry's sensibilities, considering that drummers – also

[67] The *Hogbetsotso* festival is a song-dance performance dramatizing the 17th century exodus of the Ewes from Notsie. This re-enactment of their migration includes all activities that took place on the memorable night at Notsie culminating in the breaking down of the kingdom's perimeter wall.

[68] The Ewe word *vufofo* translates to drumming which refers to an artistic performance that combines the beating of drums with singing and dancing (Anyidoho 1983: 299) and reiterates Awoonor's broad understanding of 'drum' within Ewe or African context (1974: 16).

considered historians (Chernoff 1979: 35-6) – occupy a special place in this society (Bailey 2002: 125).

While contrasting the northern Ewe with their southern counterparts, Agawu (1995) pays tribute to AnloEwe's rich heritage of drumming and dancing. This poem's structure and diction, therefore, alludes to the ubiquity of drumming and dancing in actual performance, which is basically a (symbolic) "backwards-forwards dance".[69] Evidently, he is informed by the practice of using drums as speech surrogates prevalent among West African communities. He appropriates the latent musicality of Ewe words which stems from the language's tone and rhythm. Metaphorically, as well as literally, the drum is central to any performance, especially in dances where it guides the feet of the dancers. Incorporating the drum therefore inadvertently suggests that the poems aspire to actual performance which, as Dor (2004) points out, is characterised by the simulation of the rhythmic and the phonemic tonal qualities.[70] The structure, therefore, alludes to this;

> Husago Husago
> Husago Husago Husago
> Husago Husago
> Husago Husago Husago
>
> Husago KinDin Husago
> Husago Husago
> Misego Misego Misego
>
> Misego GonGon Misego
> Misego Misego
> Husago Husago Husago
> Husago KinDin Husago

He appropriates the latent musicality of Ewe words which stems from the language's attributes of tone and rhythm. This collection is hybrid judging from the variety of poetic forms included. It is unique in the sense that it anticipated the sort of reception Anyidoho's related poetic ventures and experiments elicited. The feedback issuing from his attempts to publish holistically, that is provide audio rendition of written poems, suggests that the reception to the

[69] Which his other poem, "Ancestral Saga II" subtitled "Prelude" captures aptly as "This Husago Dance/This Dance into a Future/That ends in the Past./Two steps Forward/to where Hope/rises like RainBows./One step Backward/to where Sorrow/falls like Tropical ThunderStorms".

[70] Again which parts of "Ancestral Saga II" captures in the opening two lines; "The Drums guide our Feet/In this backwards-forwards Dance".

experiment is overwhelmingly positive.[71] Like the popular African American verbal forms, and indigenous Ewe poetry, Anyidoho's poetry bridges the gap between the dancer and the dance or art and the artist, 'serious' or mainstream and popular poetry as well as written and sung or performed poetry. The most important outcome of the experiment, Anyidoho posits, is his decision to include audio recording not as an alternative way of publishing his poetry but rather, as complementing it. This follows the publication of two CD and cassette recordings, *Agbenoxevi* (2001) and *GhanaNya* (2001), which seemed to foreground the audio dimension. Anyidoho has effectively used in his holistic publishing approach in *PraiseSong for TheLand* (2002).

Finally, Anyidoho tackles hybridity more directly as a theme in this collection. This is in contrast to most of what has preoccupied this chapter thus far; discursive stances. In "Dreams in Babylon", he thematizes as well as dramatizes Stuart Hall's (1994) 'diaspora identities' and Edouard Glissant's (1993) 'cross-culturality' as an inevitable postcolonial condition. In this poem, Anyidoho dialogues with the question of 'otherness', interrogating the notion of language purity often transgressed in recent times. He obliterates the notion of 'standard' English, suggesting that like most cultural phenomena, claims of an authentic or even correct 'english' are untenable in the contemporary "multi-cultural" world;

> *And all you did*
> *was*
> *To Look & Sound Different*
>
> *And in a Multi-Cultural World!* (2002: 102)

as well as issue 'identity' and 'home', presenting them in Hall's terms as 'not fixed essence':

> I recalled how once a upon a Troubled Time
> because you "had an accent"
> they laughed you into Deep Silence

and;

> And Gateway Apartments # 1640-J
> now belongs
> to some other Alien Family

[71] I have sampled some of these and included them in the appendix.

The persona recalls an ugly incident in which 'manner of speech' was used as a criterion to mark identity and hence racially discriminate. The poet also describes 'Gateway Apartments' as "our old shelter in Babylon" (2002: 102) to suggestively distance it from what he would call 'home'. It is a mere 'shelter', from which they soon moved out, 'some other Alien Family' took it over. My reading of this is that the poet endeavours to show that 'extraterritorial and cross-culturalism' are not just inevitable, but will continue to mark the global culture. He recognizes 'transculturation' as a potent muse for poetic creativity in the foregrounded proverbial statement:

> They say the Lonesome Poet
>
> is one
>
> Who Travels a LifeTime
> Searching for Eternity
> ...
> Who Traverses Eternity
> Searching for a LifeTime (2002: 97)

Later affirming my literal interpretation of 'travelling' and 'traversing' to refer to their physical sense by stating that 'yesterday' he was in Rotterdam while 'The day before' yesterday, in Ithaca and still 'today' he is speaking from Lake Forest. Anyidoho frequently revisits and interrogates the debate and struggle within Ghana about, not just the relevance of, but also Ghana's role in propagating an overarching Pan Africanism. In itself, the ideology envisioned a new African identity oblivious of European-derived nationalities and sub-nations. His conceptualization of Africa often transcends national borders as it imagines "The Asante the Azande and the Mande/the Mandingo and the Bakongo/the Basuto the Dogon" all "a people who once built Civilizations/of rare Glory" and contributed significantly to 'World History' (2002: 27). By calling upon 'all those who have journeyed from Africa' and generally imagining a sort of 'Global Africa' or homogenous collectivity of a people "Dispossessed and Battered" (2002: 28), Anyidoho embraces a hybridized identity going beyond the nation-state facade. This has always been one of his core thematic preoccupations.

Although not so enthusiastic with coining lexical items unlike Niyi Osundare and Micere Mugo, Anyidoho's expressive power is informed by African languages as well as a number of hybrid linguistic constructions. Suggesting that the influence of Kiswahili – a near Pan African language – is not limited to East Africa, Anyidoho addresses the late African American's soul in

Kiswahili. In his tribute to Brenda Marie, he ends with the Kiswahili equivalent of 'rest in peace' stylistically encompassing 'culturally specific language acts' (Brown (1998: 111). Brown insightfully argues that bilingual and multilingual nature of spoken discourse pervades the African continent. In other words, Anyidoho recognizes the third component of Africa's triple heritage (the Arabic-Islamic world), which is the core of the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown Anyidoho's distinctive genius in his deft traversing of various seemingly unbridgeable divides between past-present, individual-community and orality-textuality among others, which result in the creation of an entirely novel mode, form and poetics. The African American tradition blends ingeniously with song textualities derived from African poetics as well as the Western derived literary medium of writing. In particular, it is the song texture that underpins his theory of poetry and experiments with recent technologies that enable him to inscribe the voice in his text. With Anyidoho, the discursive and conceptual binarisms are configured along the lines of the oral, traditional, communal, public on the one hand as opposed to the written, modern, individualistic, private on the other, which colonialism imposed upon the description of African realities are challenged and eventually collapsed. His approach thus evinces hybridity in this continuous 'overlapping' between the two poetic traditions, occasioned by his philosophy of fluidity between past and present. His poetry is located at the confluence of several intersecting literary histories and cultures, indigenous as well as those perceived as alien – from African standpoint. Alongside envisioning the poet as cantor or *heno*, Anyidoho dismantles the 'theoretical interstitial space' between the various branches of performance arts; music, drama, poetry and dance – giving rise to the influence of a multi-disciplinary approach to composing poetry. His brand of poetry thus recognizes the indigenous literary practice where all these tend to occur together in "one unified performance" (Okunoye 2005: 97). For Anyidoho, especially in the collection under study, the indigenous African-Ewe poetic practice is recreated in the context of his print poetry. Whereas dramatization of poetry, as Okunoye argues, is the only tolerable alternative to the ultimate experience of poetry performance that thrives within the traditional society, Anyidoho blurs the liminal space between this 'ultimate experience' and his written poetry. His poetry continuously and dialogically engages this in-betweeness, contesting and 'collapsing' the dichotomous binary oral performance-written performance. This is also

what Micere Mugo engages with as I will show in Chapter Six. I have also attempted to show that the contemporary poet looks beyond what Ali Mazrui (2005) calls the "Triple Heritage" (the indigenous, Islamic and Western), to embrace the African American and diasporic heritage. Rather than the obvious focus on literary traditions of Africa, Western or Islamic origins, contemporary poetry dialogically benefits from the mediated African poetics; African diasporic poetic discourse. *PraiseSong for TheLand* in particular foregrounds the African Diaspora as source and model for African poets. This is the direction Taban lo Liyong pursued although it is certainly much more intensely and extensively explored by Anyidoho, among others in contemporary poetics. It is not the indigenous African literary tradition *per se* but rather, as a result of the slave trade and other global relocations,[72] mediated due to recontextualization and interaction with other cultures in America, the Caribbean and Europe. The diasporic literary tradition therefore has immense potential of reshaping or invigorating modern African poetry which hitherto largely remained oblivious of the complementary rather than antagonistic role African American culture, for example, may play. It must be remembered that its predominance among contemporary poets – operating within global interdependence and the increasing rapidity of exchange across vast distances – emanates from the fact that contemporary poets are exposed to diverse cultures and literary traditions unlike isolated cases among their predecessors. The next chapter re-examines the Triple Heritage with the aim of appreciating Swahili literary tradition as a significant megatext shaping contemporary poetics in East Africa.

[72] It is estimated that people of African ancestry who live outside Africa add up to the staggering number of 150 million people, scattered across the world, but particularly concentrated in the Western hemisphere. (Mazrui 2005)

CHAPTER THREE: FEEDING FROM BELOW: INFLUENCE OF *MASHAIRI* TRADITION ON CONTEMPORARY EAST AFRICAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

Introduction

> [Poets should] use their talent in order to promote understanding by the people of the land…of national policies, and particularly of the responsibilities of the citizens resulting from the implementation of the Arusha declaration.[73]

> Is Homer any less a poet because of the narrative temper of the *Odyssey* or *Iliad*? Is Derek Walcott a prose writer because *Omeros* tells a story using the tools of fiction and playfully proclaiming that women smell better than books/libraries? What about the dramatic poetry of the Greeks, Shakespeare and others?[74]

Whereas the previous chapter linked contemporary African poetry to the intertwining of African American images, and poetic idioms within the Ewe poetry tradition and the general black experience, this chapter engages with an African literary tradition mediated by Arabic contacts; the Swahili poetic tradition, which will be discussed within the broader context of the Swahili and East African literary traditions. Without doubt, this is one of the oldest, most pronounced and relatively ubiquitous poetry traditions in East Africa with a rich oral and literary history. Since modern African literature and poetry in particular did not grow out of contact with Europe and European literature alone, this chapter explores the possible aesthetic impact resulting from the co-existence of two or more poetry traditions in East Africa. While Swahili poetry tradition, like most African indigenous arts, is established and has served East African societies since antiquity, European and Arabic literary influences are relatively recent literary practices. My focus is on the interface between these arguably dominant poetic traditions in the region.

The major argument I present in this chapter is that contemporary poetry written in English emerging out of East Africa, and especially Tanzania, exhibits salient distinctive features which underpin Swahili poetics. This results from the lively dialogue and dialogic relations between, at one level, the various African-language poetics and Swahili producing *mashairi*, and on the other, intertextual dialogue between *mashairi* and poetry from the region written in English and which involves not mere ideological subversion of hegemonic practices (collapsing the boundary

[73] Harries (1972: 52), quoting Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's statement during his meeting with UKUTA members in state house.
[74] Raji, Wumi. "Poetry is Demonized and Abused," http://everythinliterature.blogspot.com/2007_05_01_archive.html (accessed July 3, 2009).

between traditional elements or *mashairi* and poetry in English), but an aesthetic search for a poetics that expresses and addresses the complexities of the area. At the core of this chapter, therefore, are efforts to examine and establish the extent to which the contemporary poetry in English in the region dialogically interacts with the more pervasive Swahili literary tradition. More importantly, however, the Swahili tradition as conceived in this study recalls Ewe (African) oral traditions in the previous chapter. Swahili tradition is envisaged as an umbrella of diverse Bantu, non-Bantu and Arabic literary heritages that have been in constant conversation[75] in the East African region. While contemporary African poetics encompass the African American literary tradition as dicussed in the preceding chapter, indigenous poetry tradition – which feeds contemporary practices of this art – is conceived as significantly mediated by (classical) Arabic poetry in this chapter. By appropriating Swahili literary sensibilities and forms, contemporary poets are envisioned as not just 'feeding from below' but 'writing from within'.[76] Swahili poetics are thus read as encroaching or intertextually engaging English-langauge poetry traditions as received and practiced in the region. This conceptualization, however, should not foreclose the fact that as a literary tradition, modern Swahili (*mashairi*) engulfs both Bantu and non-Bantu oral traditions, nor should it create the impression that appropriating narrative/story form is peculiar to East African poetry, rather it is the ubiquity and preference I draw attention to.

Swahili Literary Tradition: The Oral and Literate Precursors to the (Post)Modern *Shairi*

That poetry is an important component of the Swahili cultural identity is well documented[77] and it is not my intention to reemphasize this in this study. Worth repeating for purposes of the present section however, is the fact that the Swahili divide their poetry into three categories; the *shairi*, the *utenzi* and the *wimbo*. These are not entirely distinct but, as is often the case with literary forms and genres, overlaps abound (Ntarangwi 2003: 15). It is from these three categories that what may be called definitive features of Swahili poetic traditions may be

[75] This may be explained by Mwangi's (2011) concept of 'translation' whereby various African-language literatures in the region are perceived as translating the 'other' and therefore dialogically interacting with each other, arguably issuing from what has been designated as 'rooted cosmopolitanism'.
[76] The phrases are used in the sense of the idea of history from below, which is a corrective measure on African historiography in Ogude (1999), in the sense of reaching back to or privileging of oral traditions and sources.
[77] From Harries (1962), Allen (1971), Knappert (1972; 77), Mulokozi (1982), Shariff (1984), Mazrui and Shariff (1994) and Ntarangwi (2003).

deduced for the sole purpose of establishing and ascertaining or explaining possible crossings or intertexting across poetry in English and Swahili poetry as practiced in East Africa.

Historical accounts affirm that long before foreigners from across the Indian Ocean (Arabs, Persians, Chinese and Indians) came to the East coast of Africa, the littoral people were using poetic expressions as part of their socio-cultural practices – which predominantly fall in the *wimbo* category. Unlike most indigenous literary traditions, Swahili is unique in the sense that it has both oral and literate traditions coexisting for relatively much longer than others on the continent. In this study, I do not isolate – like Pouwels (1992) among others – these two realms of this tradition. Undoubtedly, the oral component of this literary tradition is very much like the other related forms of African oral literature, whose defining components include what has been called "survivals of pre-literate Swahili oral literature" (1992: 271). Structurally, they lack the sort of explicit metrical patterns associated with literate poetics as they were composed primarily to be sung or accompanied by drums, thus engaging the full range of the reciter's sensorium and, therefore, deployed other forms of prosody.[78] More important is the fact that from these early recognizable form of 'true' Swahili versification - marked by three syllables in either of the two-three beat hemistiches as Knappert (1979: 37, 45) observes, there evolved what was deployed for most classical Swahili verse such as *tenzi* upon encountering Arabic's pronounced prosodies.

What came to define the 'golden age' of this literary tradition, therefore, is a product of these two mutually reinforcing spheres of this tradition; with *wimbo* representing the oral-tradition and *tenzi* embodying the literate realm. Considering that the two realms are not neatly separated but, naturally like in any other world culture, are characterized by co-existence and interchange between them,[79] as such, one cannot talk of uncontaminated strands of this literary tradition. Therefore, I consider modern *mashairi* as a product of cultural realignments and negotiations, socio-political events of the distant and recent past, as well as part of the 'present' (or contemporary) that have affected and shaped poetic textuality and output. Rather than perceive the two as discrete forms, I consider the oral and the literate as overlapping and feeding off or enriching each other organically. The organic product is in turn not envisaged as discontinuous

[78] They, therefore, do not lack metre as Pouwels (1992) insinuates.
[79] It is well-known from history that oral and written literatures throughout the world interact (1985: 48), for more on the interrelatedness of oral and written traditions, see Durosimi, *et al.* (1988).

with 'modern' Swahili, but instead as conterminous and frequently overlapping.[80] Since my intention is to position Swahili as an important indigenous literary tradition at the disposal of most contemporary African poets, I focus on the oral element which in modern times has been reinvigorated by the admission of other Bantu and non-Bantu oral traditions in the region – as Kiswahili penetrated[81] the hinterland of postcolonial East Africa.

Along the coast of East Africa and its Islands, the first written Swahili poem (Aidarusi's *Hamziyya*) appeared in the mid seventeenth century (Knappert 1972: 120) as literacy remained a "highly restricted" undertaking confined to the Arabic language, if not Arabic speakers (Pouwels 1992: 269). It restrictively existed as a scribal tradition. Much later, however, this written versification began supplementing orally rendered forms, which hitherto, were vibrant but latent among Swahili communities. The view that oral traditions are not some fixed immutable phenomenon but rather evolving and responsive to emerging socio-political and cultural developments is fundamental. Like any other art, Swahili poetry is not a static literary tradition but rather, with changing circumstances and themes, its poetics have significantly shifted.[82] It has been changing and evolving in both form and content over time, accommodating diverse accretions, into its 'modern' and contemporaneous state which departs from the conventions of this tradition as pre(de)scribed by Amri Abedi (1954).[83] This highly prescriptive work epitomises the metric rigidity often ascribed to the tradition's contact with Arabic prosody which is often regarded the hallmark of Swahili poetry. Emphasis on the tradition's indebtedness to Arabic literature tended to be exaggerated during the golden age with undue attention paid to features of Arabic provenance (to the extent of positing this literary tradition as non-African and therefore not indigenous to the continent), a more comprehensive picture of what defines this literary tradition therefore must take into consideration both the oral and literate realms.

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[80] For example, Eileen Julien is critical of those who regard orality and writing as exclusive domains. Orality and writing have continually influenced each other for a long time, as Albert Gérard (1981) and Harold Scheub (1992) have shown in their studies.

[81] Although this may have been ongoing, but limited to trade caravan routes from 1800 – 1850, it is not until the (European) colonial phase in the 1930s up to independence that the language actually spread to the hinterland. Whitely (1968) documents that up to 1900, Kiswahili remained a language of the coastal strip running from Somali, encompassing the various Islands, to Mozambican coast.

[82] A position championed by among others, Ali Mazrui (2001). Swahili poetry – like all other poetries – changes its form and content over time in response to wider fundamental social and economic realignments in the society.

[83] Abedi (1983) embodies Swahili poetic tradition's rigidity and is credited for having summed up its conventions.

Undoubtedly, Swahili culture is a form of Bantu culture incorporating Oriental influences in varying degrees over its history. Despite early scholars (most of them of European origin), such as Harries (1962), Hichens (1963), Allen (1967), Knappert (1972), Ohly (1973) and Pouwels (1992) among others painstakingly striving to distance the so-called 'pre-literate' communities from the written Swahili poetics, I envisage the tradition holistically and, more importantly, as an indigenous African literary tradition that enriched its lexical repertoire and prosodic forms by contacts with (classical) Arabic language and literature.[84] This is aimed at interrogating the notion of two-tiered development of Swahili literature,[85] championed by among others, Ohly (1973), which de-emphasises and obscures the existence of a vibrant unwritten, pre-Arab poetry among ethnic Swahili, as it ignores the organic coexistence of oral and written realms within the culture. The 'pure' elements of Bantu folk culture derived from what has been called proto-Swahili, itself a derivative of proto-Bantu with roots in Shungwaya,[86] harmoniously merged with inflowing (Arabic) Muslim-Oriental accretions. What is designated as pre-literate roots, in my view, survived in spite of the various colonial incursions until the mid twentieth century and were reinvigorated with the clamour for political independence of East African states. The inward expansion of Swahili culture into the hinterland has significantly bolstered the indigenous African elements of its poetry. Recent manifestations of this tradition – especially in postcolonial East Africa – suggest the extent to which distinctions, made by Ohly and Pouwels among others, are untenable. Conscious efforts through institutions such as the East Africa Swahili Committee, University of Dar el Salaam's Institute of Swahili Research, Association for the Advancement of Swahili and Society for the Enhancement of the Swahili Language and Verse,[87] ensure that this literary tradition is increasingly and progressively being re-oriented with its oral roots, as it once again interacts with indigenous African literary traditions. The premise for this argument is that, in postcolonial East Africa, Swahili literature – and to a lesser extent,

[84] Arabic language, literature and orthography first arrived in North Africa around the 7th century and then trickled down the East African coast alongside Islamic religion.
[85] Rajmund Ohly (1985: 462) makes a distinction between what he calls Great Tradition on the one hand, that is, works representative of privileged groups largely drawn from wealthy Muslim lineages, and on the other, Small Tradition designating the numerous folk literatures (1985: 483) which I do not wish to be preoccupied with here.
[86] This is an historically acknowledged dispersal point for several Bantu communities of East Africa.
[87] I single out one of the objectives, that is, to develop Kiswahili in Bantu terms and encourage poetry as a special study (Whitely 1968: 111).

culture – is no longer limited to the coastal area,[88] but has spread inland into Tanzania (Tanganyika) and Kenya (Zubkora *et al.* 2009: 2) making significant inroads into DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and other parts of southern and central Africa.[89] This means that the once strong Arabic influence is progressively waning, giving way to (re)alignments and reconfigurations initiated by contact with other forms of African oral literatures. Engaging with contemporary Swahili literary traditions therefore is interacting with multiple voices and texts from diverse oral traditions within the Swahili-speaking parts of the continent.

Postcolonial Swahili poetry or *mashairi* is generally positioned as an indigenous base embracing elements, features and devices from the other oral literary traditions across the region. In fact, demarcating an "inside" or "outside" for this tradition in East Africa increasingly becomes problematic. Borrowing Mulokozi's (1974) view that Swahili poetry (*mashairi*) is that poetry, written or oral, which has been or is being produced in Kiswahili, it is arguable that the majority of its oral output shares formal and aesthetic attributes with most of the region's oral traditions of poetry. Subsequently, some of the features I single out as shaping writing in English, therefore, have their provenance in 'survivals' of the pre-literate Swahili[90] and therefore may not be exclusive to what has been called ethnic Swahili. Swahili literature presently thrives in the context of or against the background of diverse other oral traditions, which most Western (European and American) scholars assume were phased out by the impact of Arabism and Islamism. As Kiswahili extends in wards, it reconnects with its Bantu roots while organically embracing other non-Bantu literary elements/traditions.

Accompanying this hinterland encroachment is the process which Mazrui and Mazrui (1995) call deIslamization (and detribalization) of Swahili culture. I have mentioned the progressive waning of the Islamic factor which earlier formed a major part of vocabulary and imagery of Swahili

[88] Although cultures of the interior were introduced for the first time to Swahili literature by Hamed Muhammed el-Murjebi aka Tippu Tip, my position in this study is that Kiswahili literature has become a much more established literary tradition than what Swahili literature – literature by small coterie of native speakers. This Swahili literature, together with the spread of Kiswahili language, has helped cultivate a vibrant Kiswahili literary tradition, of which the contemporary poetic out is referred to as *mashairi*.

[89] Hunwick, for example, recognizes and appreciates the facility and rapidity with which 'up-country' poets coming out of non-Swahili and, in many cases non-Muslim, backgrounds have adopted and adapted the classical Swahili poetic forms of *tendi*, *nyimbo* and *shairi*, to local concerns.

[90] Although, in my view, they should not be envisaged as mere survivals, as this places them in a sort of continuous or linear evolutionary scheme rather than envisage them as contemporaneous in the sense advocated by Isidore Okpewho (1988), among others.

language and literature. As this medium serves the expressive and communicative needs of other religious systems and worldviews other than 'tribal Swahili' and Islam inland, it has tended to shed off much of its formative Arabism, together with Islamic theology, catechism, imagery and illusion as it encounters and accommodates 'vernacular' traditions. Once again, its characteristic "basic receptivity" (Mazrui and Mazrui 1995: 24) ensures that the inland or *bara* cultures are absorbed into its aesthetic and communicative fabric. To get a sense of what I mean, one needs to envisage developments of its language, Kiswahili, as a pointer to its literary trajectories. Because European colonial forces such as Germany considered Kiswahili as a buffer language, offering "the buffer solution" (Mazrui and Mazrui 1995: 9), it tended to form a sort of middle language, ranked between the language of the rulers and the numerous 'tribal vernaculars' below (*ibid*). What lends credence to this argument is the thesis advanced by Stanislaw Pilaszewics (1985) of the gradual transition from oral to written literature. In this claim, written literature in African languages such as Kiswahili forms a link between oral literature and literature written in European languages by Africans (1985: 61). Subsequently, it is plausible to argue that Swahili literary tradition therefore serves contemporary poets writing in English as a sort of bridge mediating between English literary traditions as received from colonial education and the various – Bantu and non-Bantu – vernacular oral traditions ('below'). As a polysystem, it thus avails what Mulokozi perceives as the "common denominator" for the diversity of literary 'subsystems' in East Africa and makes it possible to speak of Swahili poetry a sort of aggregate[91] of various indigenous traditions, much the same way as one speaks of the 'national' culture of Tanzania (Whiteley 1968: 101). Swahili literary tradition in this study, therefore, is a construct embracing different 'tribal vernacular' oral traditions. Appropriating Swahili poetics is, therefore, to a large extent, recourse to African literary traditions.

Although the distinction may not be as clear cut as is being implied, the general tendency towards centring individualist experiences in poetry of English expression on the one hand, and the predilection towards pronouncing communal experiences in most Swahili poetry on the other, cannot be downplayed. This trend was reinforced by the compression of this philosophy into a single Swahili expression, *Ujamaa*, in the late sixties. Besides *Ujamaa* policies, the other

[91] In a sense, the sum of its regional cultures expressed in local languages (more than 100 of them) and the local customs and situations.

significant determinant of modern Swahili poetics is the Kezilahabi factor, credited for initiating a departure from the hitherto fixed metrical form and rigid patterns of rhyme. Together with other scholars, Euphrase Kezilahabi spearheaded the debate which has had the most profound impact on the form of the modern Swahili poem as known today. The subsequent conflict this debate triggered between the conservative 'old-school' poets and their contemporary, revolutionary oriented counterparts has generated radical formal and thematic changes in modern Swahili poetics. This critical debate nurtured Swahili poetry into its heyday in revolutionary terms, as it injected a new life into this literary tradition providing clear-cut, tailor-made ideological orientations (Mulokozi 1974: 144) into which poetic expressions and thoughts are channelled through or fitted into. A readily discernible feature of this tradition is that both young and old poets find themselves inadvertently drawn into the heated class struggle as they became spokesmen or women for the working class[92] or the emergent petty-bourgeoisie (*ibid*), just like their counterparts writing in European languages – such as Bertolt Bretch. By foregrounding content over form, valuing accessibility above linguistic or imagistic subtlety and preferring 'statement' to 'song', they attempt to make their poetic language coincide, approximate or aspire to normal everyday speech, rhyming syllables notwithstanding. The *shairi* form as envisaged from the 1980s, therefore, significantly differs from its classical sense and many of its manifestations prior to the contemporary times.

Conclusively, therefore, its contemporary phase remains both "classical" and "inventive" without being stilted (Gerard 1981). Indeed, the *shairi*-form has a real flexibility that enables much variation (Shariff and Feidel 1986: 501). *Mashairi* tradition thus encompasses works inspired directly by folk tales – and due to the hybrid nature of the Swahili culture – lifted from the myths and legends of diverse parent-cultures. Undeniably, most African indigenous poetic beliefs overlap with tenets of *mashairi* tradition. The majority of poems in this tradition are based on 'stories' [in their style, ideological and or ethical message with the main purpose of telling (about) something or to teach]. The *tenzi*, in particular, as "narrative poems" used to "explain stories", or issues demanding length and clarity (Sharriff 1988; Biersteker 1996: 171), and constitute a major influence on contemporary poetics discussed in this study. As conceived

[92] Which the language, Kiswahili, helped construct throughout the colonial and postcolonial times as it was instrumental in the urbanization process in East Africa (Mazrui and Mazrui 1995).

in this study, therefore, *mashairi* tradition – modern manifestation of Swahili culture's poetic tradition - may correctly be summarised as the spirit of creative experimentation ushered by later contacts with the Western world, and subsequent 'decolonization' clamours that characterized Swahili culture in general. This new poetic style resulting from the continued use of meter and rhyme in a manner that is non-traditional and more flexible rightly captures the new literary spirit (Mulokozi and Kahigi 1976; Mazrui 2007), embracing both the more traditional and conventional poetics. Thus, as used in this chapter, the term *mashairi* designates a postmodernist tradition of break-aways – especially from otherwise hitherto rigid and homogenizing 'conventional' poetics – which were highly formalized. However, in a more generic sense, it embraces and typifies both thematic and formalist departures - the mood of the time[93] - as well as continuities witnessed in most modern African literature's *free-verse*, *vers libre* and *shairi huru* as evident in various contemporary poetic evocations. Like other world cultures and literary traditions, Swahili has been responding to diverse voices and is embroiled in a dialectical interplay between oppositional forces of absorption and differentiation (or conservative and radical/liberalist politics). It is within the *mashairi* that the struggle for artistic space which Njogu (2004: 73) talks about is best negotiated. The two opposing poetic forms find accommodation and apparently coexist, innovatively enriching each other. They strive to reconcile or, at least, strike a dynamic equilibrium between the various opposing forces or positions. Interestingly, like the literary tradition of *mashairi*, *Ujamaa* was equally a compromise between the moderate and the radical tendencies in the region.

The *Shairi* form in contemporary times, what may be referred to as postmodernist Swahili poetics, evolves from the complex socio-historical context of the genre – and is therefore informed by multiple discourses and voices. To distillate the key features of *mashairi,* I explore crucial literary and poetic elements and conventions held in this chapter as paradigmatic of the tradition, and which will enable one to draw parallels between poetry composed in English from the region and *mashairi*. Although the legacy of Arab presence at the East African coast remains most pronounced in Swahili poetry, there are several salient features of this tradition that can be attributed to its oral traditions or 'survivals'. Isolating features constituting this analytical

[93] Blommaert (1999: 308) rightly states that this is because literary debate was part of a larger debate on the meaning of *Ujamaa* and the correct implementation of this policy.

category is necessary before establishing a possible commerce of texts and textures across these two traditions of poetry.

Of the outstanding features of *mashairi* Mulokozi (1974) identifies, the hallmark formal aspects of this poetry such as the use of *vina* and *mizani* may be ascribed to classical Arabic poetry. With some degree of precision, some scholars have reduced the conventions of Swahili poetry to simply "symmetry and structural rigidity" (Khamis 2005: 142). Rhythmic symmetry and metric balance derived from Arabian influences remains a hallmark feature of this poetic tradition. Besides these structural peculiarities, however, the other characteristics distinguishing Swahili poetry from other traditions of poetry - aspects such as historical determinants, language medium, cultural and social values (1974: 127) - issue from the tradition's (East)African context and may not be useful for the purposes set in this chapter. It is specifically how peculiarly these are manifested in written works that is of core concern. From the previous section, one can – with an appreciable degree of accuracy – ascertain some of the contradistinguishing features unique to Swahili poetry discernible in poetry expressed using English as medium. However, due to the obvious fact of the near impossibility of documenting direct influences, more emphasis is placed on the particular imaginative use of the poetics of Swahili language in English. Influences at linguistic medium level such as the use of untranslated words and phrases are evident and often have a bearing on the textuality of poems in English. The general Swahili (linguistic) culture has shaped poetic expressions written in English from East Africa. Explicit influences such as linguistic elements from Swahili culture's Kiswahili, for example Richard Mabala's "Turn-Boy" and Marjorie Macgoye's *Make it Sing* demonstrate attempts to accommodate linguistic infiltrations. The turn-boy is described as "kanzu'd", that is, clad in Swahili clothes, just as poetic space avails space for Kiswahili lexicography to permeate English *langaue*. Lexical items such as *uhuru, sufuria, wananchi, jambo, ngoma* and *mzee* form part of contemporary poetry's texture. The dramatic encounter between the old man, a passenger, and the turn-boy in "Turn-Boy" starts with customary exchange of typical Swahili greetings

> *Shikamoo Baba –*
>
> *Marahaba;* (1980: 35)

This instances the ubiquitous nature and domineering place of Swahili language and literature in contemporary productions in English. Although Swahili cultural and social values generally

determine aesthetics of poetry in English, I single out the passion for *hadithi* or storytelling, the Afro-Islamic worldview from which most of the contemporary poets perceive contemporary life, and the tradition's prosodic patterns. In my view, historical determinants Mulokozi (1974) mentions largely remain peripheral as they are too broad to be identified with precision. Similarly, the African sensibility, culture, worldview and responses to the poet's own peculiar reality Tanure Ojaide (1995: 4) may only serve as mere indicators but not means of establishing possible carry-overs. With this in mind, therefore, the salient literary features and devices regarded as either peculiar to Swahili poetry or specially pronounced within this poetry and which are appropriated when the medium of expression is English include, among others, genre fluidity with specific reference to Swahili context, the folkloristic approach, language (content-form dichotomy) dialogic nature inscribing competitive spirit, peculiar metaphors and specialized use of repetition.

Broadly, early written Swahili poetry (or *tenzi*) is either narrative, that is, recounts the various triumphs of well-known heroes[94] or didactic, admonishes people to better behaviour (Harries 1962). This background helps appreciate the poetics of modern Swahili poetry since, if this genre is not telling stories, then, it is providing moral lessons. Propensity towards narrative mode may be attributed to the blurred boundary between song (*nyimbo*), prose narratives (*hadithi*) and the poetry's multifarious manifestations, in particular the epic form. Within this literary tradition, there exists a fluidity of genre such that there are narrative songs or *tenzi*, which to a larger extent is the classical and ideal poetic form of Swahili people. Conceptually, therefore, within the Swahili worldview, the historiographic epic poem often narrates stories (significant record of historical events), these are narratives presented in form of singing (Mbaabu 1985: 67). It is possible to talk of oral narratives that are sung or chanted and are still considered poetry, just as some transcribed narratives may be presented as a sequence of lines hence versified. Genres, or elements thereof, move in and out of several genre frames, incorporating or alluding to other genres (Barber 2007: 43; Bauman 2004). Besides this fluidity which undergirds most oral genres, the Arabic tradition in which the line between imaginative

[94] I use narrative not in the generic sense often deployed by postmodernist scholars, where it refers to "all texts of verbal art" (Karin Barber 2007: 45). Rather, I use it in its restrictive sense to mean the art of storytelling, with an identifiable thread running from the beginning to the conclusion, that is, in its classical sense as tale. A narrative may have multiple narratives strung together in an episodic style, with others embedded within an overarching narrative.

writing and historiography is quite thin, if not completely non-existent, imbues Swahili poetry with an equally blurred distinction between these two. *Hadithi* in Swahili, therefore, is not limited to fictive compositions. Rather it embraces both real life experiences[95] as well as the fantastic aspect of creative minds within a single textual architecture. By *hadithi* I, therefore, do not simply mean storytelling as conventionally envisaged. This is the conceptualization appropriated by poets writing in English, who narrate their experiences through poetry. In the same vein, although song-proper (*nyimbo*) genre exists, rarely are *tenzi* (long poems) forms which are only recited (*kariri*).[96] Instead, as Ohly (1985) correctly notes, songs (*nyimbo*) are the main source of poetic expression, distinct only in as far as they are less stringent with metrical patterns and rhyme because they are couched in free verse. More often than not, they are performed – without accompaniments – using rhythm and voice (as opposed to speech-mode or harangue) hence strictly 4-line strophes, each line divided into syllables ranging from 8 to 11 and stringent end-rhyme patterning. The fluidity referred to can also be discerned in other specialized forms. The poetic form called *taarab*, for example, is a genre of sung poetry accompanied with instrumentation in varying degrees. This tradition seemingly draws a boundary between song-proper, and poetic forms that are sung to even fully fledged instrumentation; its (taarab's) identity is shaped by its performance in the sense that, when it is recited or sung it is considered *mashairi*, and if there is musical accompaniment to this singing, it is considered *taarab* (Ntarangwi 2003: 149). This genre fluidity between song, story or prose and poetry is appropriated in poetry in English, with varying degrees of success. What this means is that features, such as the four major qualities cited in definitions of African music, that is, call and response, percussiveness, syllabic singing and short musical units that are repeated in small variations (Chernoff 1979; Merrian 1982; Djedje and Carter 1989) – (quoted in Ntarangwi 2003: 153) may be found in most Swahili poetry. The section titled "Songs of Freedom" in Macgoye's *Make it Sing* and poems such as "A Village Song" in *Summons* signal this fluidity

[95] To get a sense of what I mean, two translations will suffice. While Rugatiri Mekacha (1992: 112) translates "umetuachia hadithi mitaani" as "you have given us something to talk about", "you have given us a story here" (1992: 96). This conceptualisation echoes what Farouk Topan (2001) details as inevitable reconfigurations the art of narrative underwent upon being transferred to paper when the Swahili acquired the knowledge of Arabic orthography. In writing, the stories were not read as mere fictional stories but rather as 'histories' of Swahili peoples of particular places and periods (2001: 107-8) largely due to the degree of reality invested in them.

[96] There are formal ways or tunes of singing Kiswahili poetry. Tunes are governed by number of lines in a verse, the number of syllables in a line and rhythm and rhyming of such syllables (Mbaabu 1985: 67). *Tenzi*, like the quatrain *mashairi* is meant to be sung.

right from their titles. The arrangement of story units into linear or nonlinear plot, heavy reliance on descriptive narration and recognizable characters also infiltrate Swahili poetry. These form part of the repertoire of texts the poets reach to while composing in English.

The foregoing fluidity allows poets to freely borrow source texts across genre boundaries. One of the genres often drawn upon is prose, whether in its written or oral form. Heavy appropriation of resources considered peculiar to folktales is what I designate here as the folktale approach.[97] Thus the folkloristic style, defined by a melodiousness of verse and a specific character of narration normally associated with folk tales (Frolova 2007: 10), is one feature that poets deploy while writing in English. Narrative conventions observed by narrators of indigenous folktales are intertexted in modern poetry. This style's straight didacticism, black-and-white characters and simple plot inform much of contemporary poetry's conceptualization. As an indicator of this propensity, the narrative verbal morpheme *-ka-* (instead of a specific temporal morpheme) predominant in Swahili poetry is appropriated while writing in English. This continuity marker common in Swahili prose or poetry is approximated while writing in English to initiate story atmosphere. The *tenzi's* staid structure is approximated as the textual architecture of most contemporary poems unfolds through equivalents of minimal narrative units. Further, often associated with Swahili poetry is the use of a predetermined formulaic openings. The tendency to start off poems in a predetermined pattern remains definitive of this tradition despite the "explanatory hinterland" (Barber 2007: 79) which produced it having been forgotten or ceased to exist. For example, the first stanza of most *tenzi* is woven around the idea of recognizing the almighty's (Allah's) presence and power or requesting for writing material; "niletee kalamu" or "Mtumwa leta kalamu na karatasi".[98] Like the overly didactic nature, this feature persists despite the conditions which inscribed it having ceased to exist (Mulokozi 1974: 135). They have survived despite the feudal context that produced them having profoundly changed. The use of a special introduction within a poem, a sort of introit, is an old feature and common even in contemporary poetry categories, for example, Zanzibar's *taarab* genre's stylistic innovation with

[97] This underpinned early Chicana literature. Stylistically, the folktale approach is defined by features such as; one-dimensionality, depthlessness, abstract style, isolation and universal interconnection, sublimation and all-inclusiveness.

[98] A common trend in this poetry often functioning as the preamble, translated as "give me a pen" or "Servant bring a pen and a piece of paper" respectively. There are modern *tenzi* compositions whose thrust is castigating this uncritical rigidity and adherence to archaic preamble overtaken by socio-cultural shifts in Ireri Mbaabu (1985: 69; 73).

the preamble (Traole 2004: 78), is appropriated when writing in English. In addition, the relatively uncomplicated folklorist style of defining and developing characters can also be discerned in *mashairi*. The main theme often pits the 'good' against the 'evil', conforming to socially defined values. In poetry, the characters or poetic voice(s) choose or align themselves with either position often with the central aim of exposing socio-political, economic or cultural issues affecting the society. Such rudimentary characterizations imbue poetry with either/or situations, where the audience is compelled to choose a side and a viewpoint to identify with or castigate. Consequently, the penchant for didacticism underpins poetry. Traceable back to the oral Swahili traditions (regarded as Small Tradition within Swahili literary discourse), narrative prose or *hadithi* is habitually didactic in principle (Ohly 1985: 466), a feature that infiltrates Swahili poetics as well. Finally, therefore, and like their counterparts using Kiswahili, contemporary poets composing in English maintain a fairly uncomplicated narrative flow or what Wanjala (1978) describes as "pipeline plots" to drive moral lessons home.[99] Quite ingeniously, they combine predilection towards the narrative with the lyric and meditative poetry. Of these competing modes, however, the narrative if not embedded and is often quite glaringly foregrounded relative to the descriptive[100] mode.

I, however, hasten to caution that what I read as a peculiarly Tanzanian and to a large extent East African poetic attribute may not be exclusive. First, it is important to note that English poetics – one of the nucleus building blocks of modern African poetry of English expression – is marked by similar porosity across genres. It is, therefore, expected that its 'offshoots' will reverberate with traces of what had taken place in the earliest English poetry,[101] as well later Euro-American poetry in the wake of modernism. In the former, for instance, poets basically aimed at articulating shared experiences of the English, whereby their identity as a people was largely defined. The poetry, therefore, inescapably acquired and developed an inclination towards the sort of narrative mode discussed earlier. More recently however, Morrison and Motion commenting on new mainstream poetry in the British scene note that "narrative" is "a key element" (in Gregson 1996: 109) because poems that tell stories have acquired greater centrality.

[99] Chris Wanjala (1978) where he perceives "pipeline plots" as a means of making literature accessible to some imagined "average Swahili reader".
[100] Descriptive poetry, as opposed to narrative, is in this case poetry largely devoted not to actions but emotions.
[101] See Nile (1999) for details on these developments in English, in relation to the oral discourse.

In America, whose poetry tradition equally struggled to free itself from its English roots, this mode – emblematic of Longfellow's poetry – was later obliterated by modernist criticism.

In terms language usage, besides already mentioned use of Kiswahili expressions, poets appropriate different linguistic resources and features perceived as idiosyncratic to Swahili poetry. Poetic language in Swahili poetry may best be appreciated as issuing from what Alamin Mazrui sees as a "weaker or soft relationship" between everyday speech on the one hand, and 'poeticity' on the other, among the Swahili people (1992: 75). Herein lies a major distinction between the two traditions. While English or generally Western poetics is anchored on the contrary, that is, that poetic art should aspire towards everyday speech, the belief is that "everyday speech of the common Swahili is expected to aspire to poeticity" (Mazrui 1992: 75-6).[102] Such a conceptualization has a bearing on the aesthetics determining ideal poetic language. By transferring this conceptualization when using different linguistic medium, it certainly means that different poetics are engendered. Swahili poems of dialogue exemplify this tradition's bias. Poets with a Swahili background or who have interacted with its poetics therefore bring with them this conceptualization into poetry in English. However, it is evident in contemporary times that the relationship between the two should not be read as oppositional but rather, following Kimani Njogu (1995), as informed by simultaneity of presence and absence insofar as the poet approximates everyday speech while ordinary speech patterns approximate the poetry which it has come into contact with. More correctly, therefore, it is a reciprocal relationship in which everyday speech and poetry influence each other both at the level of diction and subject matter (Njogu 1995: 141), in addition to syntactic patterning and formal structures. As I demonstrate using poetry written in English from the region, this understanding determines the poets' conceptualization of ideal language for expressing poetic thoughts. Like most contemporary poets striving for aesthetic relevance, poetry composition is conceived neither by simply privileging content over form or vice versa but, in their reciprocity, as entangled in

[102] There is a school of thought in English poetry, represented by such people as Wordsworth and Coleridge, to the effect that poetry should approximate the ordinary language of conversation which is contrary to the Swahili culture where ordinary conversation should try and approximate the elegant language of poetry (Asante and Abarry 1996: 214).

mutual dependency and mutual reinforcement. The simple-difficult axis[103] or tensions between on the one hand, an accessible 'realistic' diction and on the other, use of Arabisms, Islamisms and archaisms associated with most classical Swahili poetry comes into play in poems written in English from the region. Poets tend to carry over the dominant approach to this dichotomy in Swahili poetry, not only inclining their poetics towards an emphasis of message, but embracing the 'simultaneity of presence and absence' which informs the conservationist-liberalist binary in contemporary aesthetics. A very important convention emphasised in Swahili traditional poetry is *kujitosheleza* or verse to verse coherence for the meaning-whole of a poem (Khamis 2004: 18). In Swahili poetry, this tends to be foregrounded at the expense of its antithesis, *kutojitosheleza*, which implies 'fragmentation', 'fuzziness', and a 'lack of cohesiveness' (*ibid*). The latter conceptualization, which echoes modernist poetics, implies that most lyrics or poetic texts appear to be made by a fusion of semantically incongruent pieces as opposed to the preferred semantic homogeneity of the poetic text. Contemporary poets place a high premium on this idea, avoiding the modernist predisposition towards complexity for its own sake. More specifically in terms of language usage, ancient forms of verbal parrying are sometimes carried over into this poetry. In addition, the tradition's tendency towards the doubling of word stems or shortening of words (often to get the required number of syllables and rhyme Abedi 1954: 33-43; Mbaabu 1985: 64) recurs. This, however, is not intended for new meanings but more so for emphasis purposes. The ability to use language creatively, especially inventing neologisms, is a common feature among Swahili poets (Ohly 1985: 462) though, certainly not peculiar to Swahili poetry tradition.

The agonistic and competitive nature of (African) oral culture is discernible in many forms of public performance in Swahili literature and also informs poetry written in English. For example, Pouwels observes that competition and conflict on all levels and through many forms has long been characteristic of Swahili civilization (1992: 271). Not that this is totally absent in other world literary traditions but serves to reinforce the fact that the Swahili tradition like most African traditions shows proclivity towards agonistic spirit. Competitive dialogue poetry sung by women during wedding dances and the *kabati* dance of Pemba exemplify these foregrounded

[103] A dichotomy best captured in metapoetry, for example Mugyabuso Mulokozi's "Ushairi ni Nini" (What is Poetry?) and in particular the refrain line: "Is poetry ideas [message] or rhyme and meter" which, he seems to resolve in the poem in favour of the former; that poetry is defined by content and not rhyming constraints – the wisdom, dialogue, advice, exhortation, opportunity and opinion among other positive values and is neither just rhyme or metre.

agonistic relations as the main aesthetic organizing principle. To a very large extent, Swahili verse is conceived as dialogue. Beyond the ethnic Swahili boundaries, dialogue and challenge poetic forms in other Bantu literary traditions abound and demonstrate affinities with poetry based on *kujibizana*[104] or the dialogic principle, such as *marumambo*, a tradition in Kiswahili poetry which refers to a kind of cross questioning between poets. The examples discussed by Mazrui and Shariff (1976) will suffice to illustrate the apparent perversiveness of this aesthetic aspect which is appropriated by contemporary poets as an organizing principle. From *cengerecema* among the Embu, *chengere chema* among the Meru, *gycandi* among the Gikuyu to several similar forms among Mijikenda groups, the spirit of challenge and the duality engendered by the poetic form serve to illustrate its ubiquity. This is why it forms one of the several 'texts' at the disposal of East African poets and hence their inclination towards competitive spirit.

Swahili poetry demonstrates a propensity towards imaginative use of saturated metaphorical symbols and pithy, maxim-loaded expressions, which sometimes form a secret code, like the parable (*fumbo*) verses which are expressions with hidden meaning.[105] Typically allegorical reflection is not only a common but, to some extent, definitive feature of this tradition[106] – like other African oral traditions. Contemporary poetry in English, I would argue, is laced with lines or features evincing the older oral tradition, which as Knappert notes, is abounded in a "lively stock" of proverbial wisdom "hidden in the hearts of village elders" (1972: 45). Some of these collections of gnomic formulae can be discerned in poetry from the region written in English. By relying on Swahili worldview, in which the question of morality is tied up with the whole fabric of the society and moral decline is etiologically a sign that something else is wrong in the society (Khamis 2004: 28), the Swahili poet's role is inclined towards commitment. This viewpoint is shared by poets, whether using Kiswahili or English language. The poet is not just a creative writer in the Western sense but the mouthpiece of what are generally accepted as the

[104] For details on this device which often inscribes dramatic poetics in Swahili poetry, see Shariff Noor (1983), Ann Joyce Biersteker (1996), Alamin M. Mazrui (2007) and Kimani Njogu (2008) who perceives dramatic performance of *mashairi ya kujibizana* as 'dialogue poetry' and as ubiquitous in Swahili literary tradition.

[105] Working with poetic ambiguities in order to convey secret messages of adoration is a common feature of Swahili poetry (Kresse 2005: 115).

[106] This predilection is used as the most distinguishing feature of *taarab* genre, where textual innovations have resulted in the conservative *taarab asilia* on the one hand, and *mipasho*, whose language and poetical imagery are very open and non-disguised, on the other (Khamis 2002: 200).

best values in the community (Harries 1966: xii). The didactic nature of Swahili poetry is extended into compositions in English. Like Swahili poetry, poetry in English is charged with the task of providing a model-life in literary forms or some sort of ideal held up to the community for inspection and inspiration. For example, *Maneno ya Hekima* or maxims, which should not to be confused with 'morals', form a critical part of the textuality of the poem. These sententious summaries of prose usually found at the end of a section are appropriated in English to impregnate the denouement with moral lessons. Closely related to the foregoing is *wasia,* another major traditional concept which Swahili poets frequently use. Intricately linked to the overall didactic orientation of Swahili poetry, *wasia* is an admonition or warning, a reminder of the ethical and religious principles which undergird the society (Feidel and Shariff 1986: 504). Poetry in English frequently offers itself as a suitable contemporary vehicle for *wasia* as I demonstrate in the next section. The admonitory tone is sometimes amplified and deepened by use of a proverb, strategically appended in the poem. Proverbial language, laden with succinct visual metaphors which encapsulate, identify and fix the poet's admonition, abound in this poetics. Poetry in English exhibits a predilection towards the promotion or presentation of social norms considered relevant to the Tanzanian culture as well as propagate the national ideology of socialism and self-reliance. Contemporary poets also assign many of their poems the didactic role of teaching and conveying information considered to be useful to the social and political life of Tanzanians, in particular. This is evident in their thematic thrust foregrounded using the *wasia* concept.

The principle of repetition is not only a utilitarian tool but a dynamic force (not mechanical factor) that lies in the heart of all poetry (Anyidoho 1983: 299; Finnegan 2004: 16) and, critically, functions as a criterion for distinguishing poetry from prose (1977: 130-1). It is "the most fundamental characteristic feature of oral literature having both aesthetics and utilitarian value, [a] device that not only gives a touch of beauty or attractiveness to a piece of oral expression (whether song or narrative or other kind of statement) but also serves certain practical purposes in the overall organization of the oral performance" (Okpewho 1992: 71). Specifically within Swahili poetry, Said Khamis (2004) and Kyallo Wamitila (1999) draw attention to the fact that repetition is one single feature that distinctly marks Kiswahili poetry, both classical and modern. It seems to have a special feature or quality in the whole gamut of poetical texts

(Wamitila 1999: 58), where it is not just repetition, but a repetition with variation; uttered purposely to create variation for artistic and semantic effect (Khamis 2004: 17). I single out one form of repetition that is peculiar to Swahili literary tradition and equally pervasive in a number of indigenous African poetic traditions. Besides the dominant and often very powerful pithy refrains, the use of accumulated repetition which endows Swahili verse with an ever-increasing force before reaching its climax at the end is striking. This feature has been identified in most African literary traditions[107] and may not be exclusive to Swahili poetry. However, it is striking the way in which most traditional Swahili poets end their verses by recapitulating the main theme; 'sign off' by naming themselves as they freely and playfully change tones. The frequency with which this tradition incorporates the refrain or *kiitikio, kipokeo or kibwagizo* (Ntarangwi 2003: 152) speaks to the device's prevalence within Swahili poetic aesthetics.

Besides explicit repetition, equally foregrounded in Swahili poetics is the characteristic preference for syntactic parallelism. Unlike most poetry traditions, its specific aesthetic function is often directed at cumulative impact of poetic message and rhythm as well as controlling audience movement through the lines (Njogu 1995: 147). Two or more poetic lines may have an identical noun phrase occupying the subject position and a similar prepositional phrase but differ only in the noun phrase occupying the object position. This device commonly deployed in poems composed in English may be attributed to Swahili poetics. This particularly helps mark the 'foregrounded element' as the crucial object of reflection (Njogu 1995: 148). Included in Soyinka (1975: 325) is a 'traditional' Swahili poem which illustrates this device:

> Draw wine for me in the pipkin-jar that was tapped by my own tapster.
> Draw wine for me in the little flask that makes a man stagger and sway.
> Draw wine for me in the wine-jar hot-mulled and dregged of its lees.
> When I am well wined I stand demanding my keen-edged sword,
> My keen-edged sword with its guard-leaves of steel and its hilt of mtupa wood
> My keen-edged sword that hangs from the peg where the war-horn and trumpets hang.

While in the first three lines of the above quote tapping of wine is clearly pronounced, the rest place emphasis on the 'keen-edged sword'. It is striking how the latter is introduced as the object of the fourth line before gaining prominence in the last two lines by occupying and recurring in the subject position. This is the "reasonable degree of predictability" which creates

[107] Piling of images, cumulatively can be discerned in Yoruba poetic forms such as *ijala*, common in Acoli oral poetry.

a rhythmic structure allowing novelty and surprise to overlap (Anyidoho 1983: 301). Both syntactic and structural paralleling is common across various oral literary traditions. Despite some of the identified features forming a sort of common repertoire available to poets from diverse traditions of poetry, underpinning the argument being developed in this chapter is that within Swahili poetics, these features are either pronounced or relatively specialized in function and affect.

First, I briefly explore how modern Swahili literature has evolved, from its classical origins into a recognizable modern tradition. This background provides the basis for understanding the Swahili worldview, sensibilities and historiography all of which define the tradition's definitive aesthetics and the resulting 'unique social-cultural matrix' that Swahili tradition and poetry in particular have become in the region. Second, I outline the specific hallmark features of its poetic tradition and the particular devices, elements or tropes, which define this tradition before identifying the four features often appropriated by poets writing in English. As the backbone of this chapter, I then interrogate the form or shape they assume in the new linguistic environment, that is, East African poetry in English. Bearing in mind that, the medium influences not just the transmission (Chatman 1978: 22), but the transmitted as well, I examine the paradigmatic shifts and new shape they assume in English. Finally, I conclude that poets appropriate among others, aesthetics such as the storytelling device which pervades the indigenous literary traditions undergirding modern Swahili poetry or *mashairi*. Overall, this is aimed at countering the assumption that whereas West African (contemporary) poets make more nuanced appropriations of the story-form, their East African counterparts are striving to strike the right cord in this direction.

Before delving into an analysis of how these 'texts' and textures are reworked and organised into coherent literary texts in contemporary poems, it is important to point out that definitive aspects of this 'polysystem' or literary tradition are limited to or readily evident in content but less discernible in formal and stylistic features. This is why focus is shifted from direct influences to possible intertextual relations. Poetry in English seemingly preserves some of the main structural features which took shape within Swahili poetics and oral traditions. Although it may not be possible to document a direct influence from great Swahili poetry writers to contemporary poetry in English from East Africa, for this study, more emphasis is laid on intertextual relations

as I consider Swahili a 'polysystem' or 'megatext' on which various contemporary African poets deliberately feed on. The question of the relationship between literature written in African languages and that written by Africans in European languages is extremely complex. To establish links and divergences between these two literary traditions, it is necessary to consider their interrelationships within specific areas or groupings with the same cultural background or even to analyze the two 'systems' as created by particular peoples (Pilaszewicz 1985: 64). Critical is the view that Swahili is a common if not dominant means of artistic expression in East Africa, especially so among poets from Tanzania. To trace various intertextual relations between any two traditions or systems, the outline of characteristic features already drawn becomes fundamental.

Narrative Poetics: Folkloristic Approach

> Storytelling is probably the most accessible and most popular of African traditional as well as modern literary forms. In its most basic form, the traditional oral tale is driven by an idealistic vision and a strong moral impulse, which enables the teller to refine and assimilate different historical and social experiences into a pattern of enduring and repeatable incidents (Dan Izevbaye 1995: forward).

The above quote sums up the argument I use to situate the narrative[108] poetics at the centre of East African poetry. As both the 'most accessible' and 'most popular' of traditional and modern African literary form, storytelling readily offers itself to contemporary writers of diverse genres as an element, form, device, and mode/medium for literary compositions. For the poet, storytelling serves as an organising or structuring principle, a device for composing and a perspective from which to view or source from which to draw poetic material. Although there are varying opinions among poets and critics on the definition of 'narrative poetry' in this study, I take it as poetry which tells a story or snatches of stories by describing action(s) using an organizing historical account of an event or series of events in poetic language.

It is with this understanding in mind that I venture into the fluidity marking the two art forms - poetry and storytelling - within contemporary African poetry. Of concern in this chapter is the

[108] By narrative I mean either consisting of or characterized by the telling of a story. Narrative style in poems is characterized by the telling of a story. I argue that it is 'simple' – as opposed to complex - with interlayered sub-plots. The poetry under review rarely diverges from a central plot-line; rather, it maintains the basic story structure with a beginning, a middle and an end, where action moves or events unfold through time. Although the 'conventional narrative structure' pointed out by Tzvetan Todorov (1969) as a rule has five stages, they can be rudimentary broken down to these three stages.

idea that the verbal art of the narrative or storytelling is an integral part of the Swahili culture (Topan 2001: 107) which finds its way into every other literary genre. The avant-garde variant which is my focus in this study, however, has done away with many of those rules, stretching and transgressing the boundary between poem and story. Significantly, the use contemporary poets put narrative form to in their poetry is not always similar. A number of contemporary (East and West) African poets make use of this form in their works. The tale is a sort of super-text which infiltrates every other genre. In particular, I examine the use of plot, narrative techniques such as dialogue and characterization, conflict or competitive spirit as a structuring device, allusion to prosaic setting, local colour, reader-grabbing openings and page-turning suspense all which render the boundary between poetry and prose permeable. The analysis proceeds from the chronological manner of presentation and then examines poet-persona as employing resources regarded as exclusive to the (conventional) narrator.

The preponderance of narrative poetics I refer to is a factor of the context of production. I postulate that, both temporally and spatially, the context acts as a fertile seedbed for such poetics. The urgency with which the themes needed to be broadcasted compelled such poetics to have minimal obscurity often associated with the genre's modernist strand. Similarly, the relatively low(er) literacy rates in the region demanded an art form that could easily be accessed, not an elitist forum which is what modern African poetry had become. Coupled with the pressing socio-cultural issues at the time and the disillusionment that followed the politics of post-independence and post-*Ujamaa* era in the region, a reconfigured poetics was inescapable. This reorientation demanded a tool with which to reach wider and diverse audiences, hence the recourse to the 'most accessible and most popular' art form. Similarly, the status of Swahili as poetry moved from its Wordsworthian conceptualization as mere "spontaneous overflow of compelling emotions"[109] aimed at persuading and affecting its audience's emotive state to didacticism and telling stories common with Swahili poetry, specifically acting 'explicitly' as a tool for social change, it was inevitable that its voice/persona, tone, language usage, and generally its characteristic temper was bound to budge. This is the same background that inspired West Africa's alternative poetics of the 1980s and 1990s as I later demonstrate. Due to the relative dominance of Swahili culture in Tanzania as compared to Kenya and Uganda, this

[109] William Wordsworth in The Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1798).

chapter focuses on poetry in English from Tanzania as this is where more obvious correlations between English and *mashairi* poetic traditions may be most readily evident. However, I also examine poems from the latter to illustrate the ubiquity of narrative approach to modern poetry.

Among the first Tanzanian poets to publish poetry in English were Yusuf Kassam, Walter Bgoya and Godwin Kaduma – a coterie that may be correctly considered the foundational generation in a country where poetry in Kiswahili undeniably overwhelms that published in English. While most of these no longer write or did not follow up their apprenticeship efforts, Kassam still writes and provides a ready model for understanding this genre as conceptualized and practiced in this part of the East African region – an area where the impact of Swahili poetry tradition is most vibrant.[110] To a large extent, poetry in English has tended to vary less diversely in Tanzania as compared to Kenya or Uganda. In "Maji Maji" (1996: 77), "The Brewing Night" (1996: 78), "Emptiness" (1996: 80), "Ngoma" (1996: 81), "The Recurrent Design" (1996: 82) and "The Splash" (1996: 83) all published in David Cook and David Rubadiri (1996), Kassam not only lays the foundation or provides the model for subsequent poets to base their creativity; he also exemplifies and signals the country's general poetics. While "Maji Maji" is explicitly couched as the story of "The Mzee" recounting events surrounding the revolt by locals against "The Germans", in "The Brewing Night", Kassam recounts events of "that memorable night" (1996: 78). The poet narrates this story revealing what transpired:

> It was long past midnight:
> Time dragged on, the clock wouldn't chime;
> The dog wouldn't bark, nor the baby cry;
> It was a moonless and windless night;

Apart from the sequential unfolding of events, there are a number of other features which, arguably, seem to be either derived from or dialogically engaging Swahili poetics. The second and third stanza end in a refrain alluding to the Swahili poetry *kibwagizo*, with the first hemistich framed as a question and the second presenting the response; "What was amiss? I knew not." The two seven-line stanzas are reminiscent of the generally rigid prosodic and repetitive pattern of Swahili poetry. A closer reading further reveals that the seven lines may be rearranged to form the classical four-line two-hemistich stanzas typical of the *shairi* form. The manner in

[110] Which may explain the relatively lesser output of poetry in English language from the country – what I earlier read as the inhibitory effect of a vibrant local-language poetry.

which Kassam uses punctuation attests to this. The frequent deployment of semi-colons and colons, as well as commas and full stops aids in realizing this poem's prosody in the typical manner of Swahili poetry. Also recurrent in Kassam's poetry is the inclusion of dialogue, a common and definitive feature of this tradition. In "Maji Maji", the poem frequently uses "the Mzee's" actual voice; "They fired bullets, not water, no, not water" (1996: 77) or the conclusion which presents the old man's actual words, introduced by the persona's narrating voice – which assumes the role of a third-person or omniscient narrator:

> Finally, exhausted, he sighed,
> 'The Germans came and went,
> And for many years
> No drums beat again.' (1996: 77)

In other poems like "The Brewing Night" Kassam uses a first-person narrator or eye-witness account to tell the story. He descriptively provides details of the setting ("a moonless and windless night") complete with clearly pronounced characterizations:

> Sitting on a stool outside his mud hut,
> The mzee scratched his head in a slow motion
> Trying to recall.
> His dim grey eyes quiveringly stared into the distance
> And with a faint faltering voice he spoke

Together with this reliance on a linear or 'pipeline' plot, simple-formulaic characterization, use of narration modes such as dialogue and overly descriptive language are all allegories to Swahili's cultural artefacts, beliefs and practices. "Ngoma", for example alludes to the 'popular' musical from which most poetic resources are drawn. This inclination and approach defines most Swahili poetry written in English. This approach to poetry has become the hallmark of poetry from the region. In one of his most recent poems titled "Paradise Lost" (April 2005) which revolves around what Ezekiel Mphahlele (2002) calls the tyranny of place (and time), Kassam, nostalgically contrasts his home town, Zanzibar, with his diasporic home, Canada, concluding by using a rhetoric question; "It makes me wonder/If I have also left my soul behind in Zanzibar?" This poem also contains a number of carry-overs from the already mentioned defining features of Kassam's poetics.

In the post-1980s era, East African poetry retains the general temper and character of the 1970s but, arguably, is more concerned with politics (Izevbaye 2004: 434) especially the failure of

political experiments in the member states, which is typical of postcolonial writers as society's goads to emotively deal with contemporary socio-cultural and political issues as the region's specific geographical and or historical situation demands. More often than not, their works are inextricably linked with the contemporaneous politics of economics and culture of their society. The disillusionment created by the 'failure' of African socialism under its linchpin, Julius Nyerere, dominates the thematic concerns of the anthologized poets. They seem to continue the kind of poetics initiated by not just Kassam but Muyaka as well. Writing partly within the Afro Islamic literary tradition, these poets, like Muyaka, consciously or unconsciously "build bridge between individual privacy and public concern" (Mazrui and Mazrui 1995: 120) since to some extent, the Swahili culture is so vital a component of their poetry. East African poetry particularly by Tanzanians has developed, or is developing its own internal emphasis: a critique of socialist-capitalist systems. Thus I read this poetry as partly manifesting what T. S. Eliot termed a "stubbornly national" characteristic, typical of the poetry genre – as much as this contributes towards the overall regional character of this poetry.

One of the main thematic concerns that significantly preoccupies East African poets is the conflict between socialist and capitalist socio-economic ideals. Marxist ideology, along with other literatures of this inclination such as Maoism from China and Juche from North Korea became leading tools of analysis and significantly stimulated the development of radical socialist tradition. Indeed, Yesufu (1984) concurs with David Rubadiri (1973) that East African literature in general is "clearly focused on a living social reality, presenting various facets of this reality."[111] The focus on social reality has became one of the major distinguishing features of modern African poetry from East Africa as opposed to that produced in West Africa and other parts of the continent. As I will demonstrate in the final chapter, it is not until the 1980s that West African poetry decidedly adopts such an approach that privileges the message under the auspices of the so-called alternative poetics. Exposing the pros and cons of these ideologies led poets to adopt predominantly narrative poetics, contrary to the predilection towards meditative poetry common in West Africa. I use this theme to examine the peculiarity in style it engendered within poetry of English expression since Swahili poetics are inadvertently underpinned by this

[111] Although reacting to the absence of Negritudist poetics in the region, this observation correctly captures the fact that the region tended to focus – in a Marxist tendency – on everyday social realities.

ideology. The quest for Afrocentric leanings or 'ideological nativeness' inscribes a distinct poetics which, though not wholly 'native' (as *Ujamaa* draws heavily from western socialist theories) sharply departs from 'national' poetic traditions in Kenya and Uganda. The first anthology of poetry in English from Tanzania provides an apt ground from which to appreciate this foundation and glean its inclinations that have defined the literary tradition.

Strikingly interspersing this collection are contrastive capitalist-socialist images and metaphors. In the works of Jwani Mwaikusa, for example, "The Awful Dentist" and "The Fountain of Life", Kudi Faraja's "Saluting Ujamaa", Richard Mabala's "The Socialists" and "Weeds" and several others anthologized poets, such as Alute Mghwai and Kajubi, capitalism is presented in ghastly images aimed at exposing its negative effects in the society. Of significance is the fact that these explorations are often couched in the form of a story in which the poet's views on socialism are far less ambiguous. In depicting the *Ujamaa* society, the poets sympathetically handle themes and ideas which expose and comment on such ills as economic disparity, social and political corruption, sexual immorality, deculturization and the paradox of political independence. Faraja, like other contemporary poets, critically examine this ideology. In "Saluting Ujamaa" for example, the ideology is derisively figured as all-powerful, emasculating buffaloes and rhinos, and memories of colonialism and slavery are evoked to criticize *Ujamaa* (Gikandi and Mwangi 2007: 140). Faraja sees *Ujamaa* as not any different from prevalent systems presenting it as just another form of enslavement:

> Ujamaa,
> I salute you!
> Grandson born of
> Slavery,
> Feudalism,
> Capitalism;
> I believe in nature's laws;
> The newborn
> Has more perfection
> Than his parents.

Most of the stories or poems issue from central symbolic images. Repugnant images such as ghost, dinosaur, weeds, as well as awful dentist, a destructive termite, a fighter and dog which adorn the collection function as the fulcram of the theme, and are aimed at dissuading the reader from uncritical acceptance of *Ujamaa* ideologies. In Isaac Mruma's "Two Dogs at the Gate", one dog – symbolizing the have-nots – is portrayed as "thin with apparent sickness,/Silhouette of

dry bones and hairless skin/Weak, faltering, but determined." while the other, representing the 'haves' is painted as "fat, healthy and twice as big as a St. Bernard," (1980: 42). To Mruma, like most of his colleagues, the distinction between the classes is clear cut and unproblematic such that the two images seem to capture and represent the situation exhaustively. The poet then proceeds to reinforce an unambiguous binary in which the 'the fat dogs' are presented as the common enemy and cause of all societal problems. The class system the ideology produces – with a few obscenely rich individuals surrounded by "the betrayed masses" (1980: 8) – is marked by glaring economic disparities and is given un-diverted attention. In a poem which serves to admonish his fellow countrymen, Alute Mghwai juxtaposes the resulting polar opposite lifestyles with the aim of contrasting and eventually discrediting Western capitalism's inescapable inhumanity. In "Take Note Dinosaur", his story uses the central image of a dinosaur to prophesize the impending failure of capitalist tendencies and paints a disturbing picture of socio-economic inequalities and the emerging insensitively-wealthy – contrasted with the *wajamaa,* peasant class or generally the masses. Again the distinction is quite clear cut:

> Of a mini Elysee Palace,
> Buckingham Palace,
> Or White House, with swimming pool
> Amidst grass huts surrounding dry water holes, (1980: 37)

Such juxtapositions aim to demonstrate the characteristic temper of *Ujamaa's* transparent conceptualization in "either-or" terms. One either lives in the 'mini Elysee', 'Buckingham' palace, White House or 'grass huts'; either a fat healthy dog or a silhouette of dry bones and so forth. As Yesufu (1984) quite correctly states, this characteristic focus demonstrates the poet's belief that they are writing poetry which, in keeping with the poetic tradition in their society, expresses a collective the reality, plight and aspirations of the masses, in addition to espousing the values and socio-cultural norms of the society. These poets wholly reject exploitative individualism (Western capitalism) exemplified in the greed of the ruling minority, especially the corrupt laden post-socialist leadership in Tanzania, as they laud *Ujamaa*.

Ujamaa offers itself as a sort of megatheme[112] implying that poets are essentially concerned with *mjamaa's* (individual's) welfare anchored on the belief that a person becomes a person through

[112] I use this term in the sense employed by Sule Egya (2011) when describing poets' general concern for the 'health of the State' and military oppression in Nigeria as the sole or main preoccupation of recent Nigerian poetry in

the people (*jamaa*) or community (*jamii*). Within such a perspective, the poet-persona predominantly speaks with collective consciousness which in most cases comes through a somewhat homogenous voice with little room for dissenting or counter-voices. To a large extent, the foregoing thematic orientation is also ideologically manifested in the poetry's outright rejection of Modernist aesthetics,[113] in particular poetics stressing compression, intensity, complexity and ellipsis. Initially, the poetic voice deployed in most cases embraces the spirit, ideals and values of socialist politics championed by the country's political leadership. As the poetic persona embraces these ideals, the poetic language inescapably undergoes 'loosening' from stringent obscurantism to relative accessibility, minimal complexity, compression or ellipsis. Subsequently, its tone and tenor acquires a certain characteristic 'populist' simplicity – as opposed to elitist prevalence. This is why I posit the emerging aesthetics as considerably reconfigured from dominant regional trends in Kenya and Uganda, or mainstream English poetics as bequeathed by Western system of education. Hence on the aesthetic plane, this rejection ushers in a poetics I designate in this chapter as predominantly narrative. With a persona that inadvertently assumes a role similar to that of the narrator in prose, these poems investigate *Ujamaa* from different perspectives as they recount the story or fate of various village-welfare projects – told from a villager-peasant's viewpoint. Unlike the fluid persona surveyed in the previous chapter, however, this poetry heavily relies on the first-person narrator in its singular or plural manifestations while occasionally shifting to an all-pervasive third person or omniscient perspective. This is largely because this poetry rarely utilizes 'exploded chronology', that is reflective-meditative poetics marked by fragmentariness, compression, ellipsis or complexity. First I make a survey of the predominance of clearly ordered chronology which is not as linear in the English or modernist tradition.

As is evident in anthologized poems by Richard Mabala, Juan Mwaikusa and Kundi Faraja, poetic material is presented in the form of 'minimal narrative units' sequentially linked in a

English (2011: 64). In this context, poetry from Tanzania is predominantly focused on discourses of disenchantment with the misuse of *Ujamaa* policies for selfish and individualistic enrichment at the expense of the community's welfare which overarchingly determines their poetics and vision.

[113] Among others, Jahan Ramazani (2001) has detailed the role modernism played in the formation of most postcolonial poets' aesthetics. It is this established poetics of the formative generation of modern African poets that their successors have (un)consciously reacted to. He uses the examples of Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka to argue that this generation was significantly influenced by modernists. However, of interest to this paper is the fact that modernist aesthetics made little, if no inroads at all into Tanzania.

simple linear pattern. The poem, envisaged as a tale, ineluctably presupposes a teller – the poet-persona - from whose perspective events unfold. Thus, a narrative poem built by narrative units implies a certain agent organizing a coherent pattern. A characteristic feature marking this poetry is the looming presence of a potential plot often not as pronounced in poetry – as in prose or Swahili tradition of poetry. Taking plot, like Harrington (1973), as a series of interrelated events, planned by human consciousness and creativity, progressing through a sort of linear or near-linear movements, it is striking that poetry written in English adheres to some sort of linear arrangement of material. Patterning of story units or 'minimal narrative units', according to narratologists, are often controlled and manipulated by the teller, in this case, the poet-persona. As the arrangement of narrative units, plot is rarely associated with mainstream poetry in English. Even when plot is used as an organizing mechanism in poetry, for example in Kunene, Liyong and Chimombo, attempts are made to appropriate rather than rely on explicit structure. Contemporary poets make conscious attempts to present their subject-matter by alluding to what narratologists refer to as "minimal narrative units", that is, parts which are linked together (using plot) to form a narrative or story. Although they are not as pronounced as in genres such as the novel, short story, drama or orature, minimal narrative units are central structural devices in *tenzi* or epic poetry – not only the oldest but also the most developed literate subgenre of the Swahili poetic culture. I therefore hold that poets operating from predominantly Kiswahili-speaking societies in East Africa often draw from this versified story-telling tradition. In some 'extreme' instances, the stanzas overlap or double as minimal narrative unit, with each systematically advancing the plot. The poet – as a narrator – arranges scenes, chooses the details of the characters, and gives them appropriate dialogue, ensuring that the overall or classical narrative structure of a beginning, body and ending is adhered to. Common in every story is a beginning, which introduces the background to the story, a middle, which tells the action of the event, and an end, which concludes and summarizes the story. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this point.

Richard Mabala, the editor and one of the anthologized poets in this collection, faithfully follows this causal structural pattern. Undeniably one of the most accomplished poets from the predominantly Kiswahili speaking nation, most of his poems adopt this simple-linear plot. He deploys various narrative markers to link the story-units of *Ujamaa* story. From "The Socialist",

"The Bureaucrat", "A Village Song" through to the metaphor-laden "Weeds", Mabala relies on a simple linear plot structure to interrogate the chasm between opponents and proponents of this ideological system. In "A Village Song", a poem recounting the fate of a *Ujamaa* village duped by their leader-chairman into communal projects designed to enrich or "fatten the belly of a big big man" (1980: 72), Mabala proceeds from "last night" when the capitalistic plot was hatched and the villagers' "dreams began". He goes on to recount the actual effectuation, detailing how the "Eighty acres" "golden crop" or cotton was produced, before making the damning revelation of the eventual fate of the offenders. Finally, and a point to which I will return, he offers a way forward which is typical of poems constructed as tales. The same pattern is employed in "Weeds" which begins with the actual date; "February 5th,/We planted the new seed…" (1980: 74) and proceeds through to the denouement. Were it not for the versification, the striking prosodic pattern and rhyme scheme, some of these poems would pass as a mere prose/tales. In "A Village Song", for example, the regular and strict rhyme pattern such as -plot/ -shot; - sold/- gold; - acres/ - makers; - white/ - night; - flowers/ -ours, a feature which may be associated with English poetry as much as it may be considered a carry-over from *mashairi's* rigid rhyme-schemes. The attempts to rhyme at all costs reminds one of classical Swahili poetic tradition in which it was common to sacrifice or strangle meaning, syntax or word morphology for the sake of strings of rhyme patterns.

The ubiquity of narrative linear pattern can be discerned in a number of poems included in this anthology. Exposing the folly of what Wole Soyinka calls "sloganeering" in "The Socialists", Mabala explores the distinction between fake socialists on the one hand, and genuine *ndugus* or comrades (peasants or workers) on the other. Instancing the disillusionment with *Ujamaa* voiced in recent Tanzanian poetry in English (Mwangi 2009: 91), the poet – like Mwaikusa and Macha – voices strong criticism towards blind nationalism and nationalization processes. The narrator-persona in this poem wonders through the village, encountering and engaging with different representative individuals or groups such as the bureaucrat, the priest and the student before disappointedly returning home. His disappointment stems from the misunderstood nature of this ideology, criticizing the corrupt and inefficient bureaucrats who make it impossible for Nyerere's ideas to thrive. Besides the snippets of dialogue which adorn this poem, I take note of narrative continuity markers or phrases such as "He continued" – repeated twice to create the illusion of

speech or spoken word. This inscribes the notion of a sequentially flowing narrative as evident in this stanza:

> Socialism is an attitude of mind,"
> He continued
> Gazing lovingly at the golden whisky in his glass
> …
> Love your neighbour as yourself
> The church and socialism are one,"
> He continued (1980: 51)

Often omitted in mainstream poetry – especially as received or interpreted by foundational (East) African poets - such features imbue the poem's textual architecture with prosaic continuity. Most of the textuality of the poems is replete with various narrative markers, especially lexical connectors such as 'and' or 'after' linking 'minimal narrative units'. For example, the connector 'and' is used over five times to the point of redundancy or even slowing the flow in Mwaikusa's "The awful Dentist". The skeletal structure advances from "...*and* graduated...*and* he started work (repeated twice) ... *and* they paid him...*and* so on went..." all which may be collapsed into conventional beginning, middle and ending of linear narrative structure. The use of such markers is thus not peculiar to Mabala's poetry. Clearly shunning incantatory form and hence chronologically organized, Mabala's "The Bureaucrat" vividly narrates the escapades of a symbolic termite. Figuratively alluding to the greedy capitalist class, Mabala foregrounds the destructive potential of the "Kinglet within his tiny kingdom". He portrays the society as facing impending danger saying "the world [is] at his jaws" (1980: 54) or at the mercy of voracious capitalist. Advancing a socialist agenda, Mabala concludes the narrative by spelling doom; that this minor king of some unimportant kingdom "Will perish," and be:

> Crushed beneath the heavy feet
> Of the peasants and workers
> Whose home you fed on. (1980: 55)

Mabala shows awareness of the heated debates between two contesting camps in Swahili; the conservationists who – as some of the poems show – advocate for a continuation of metrical poetry on the one hand, and liberalists on the other, urging for the adoption of free verse.[114]

[114] For a detailed discussion of this debate, see among others Kaandoro (1978), Mulokozi and Kahigi (1979) and Mazrui (1988); (1992).

Often thematically and structurally related to Mabala's poetry is Jwani Mwaikusa's poetics. A prolific poet with over ten poems in this anthology, Mwaikusa shares Mabala's disillusionment with post-socialist Tanzanian leadership. Like his contemporaries, he relies on linear narrative plot to explore the theme of African socialism and critique unabashed adoption of Western liberal politics in Africa. In "The Awful Dentist", "Ghost Mystery", "Going Crooked" "Blind Struggle", "In the Moonlit Foyer" and "Don't Count on Me", Mwaikusa narrates stories using poetry to illustrate the problematics of both socialism and capitalism. Critically siding with *Ujamaa* proponents, his persona often leaves no doubt that Western-capitalism is not the way to go as he expresses disenchantment with liberal policies. For example, in "The Awful Dentist", a subtle satirical commentary on capitalist economic order, Mwaikusa narrates the story of a dentist who, so eager to 'pull off' teeth, eventually exhausts all teeth and ends up jobless. Overzealous and clearly driven by the greed for wealth, as the persona laments, he in the end "had no teeth to attend to" (1980: 12). Like Mabala, he is disgusted by the moral, spiritual and physical decay of their country, largely attributed to capitalist self-indulgent greed. The same satiric tone is deployed in "Ghost Mystery", which again utilizes a linear plot typical of oral tales or prose fiction. Mwaikusa makes use of the sequential element by first setting the beginning of the story to be told – suggesting its timelessness thus;

> Once I housed a ghost
> And gave him food.
> He ate it all
> Convincing me he was a live human. (1980: 12)

The first stanza is reminiscent of a typical ogre tale, to which significant parallels are evident. The rest of the poem details this ghost/spirit's escapades in the narrator-persona's house such as walking on high-heeled shoes, sternly refusing to sleep on a bed on the floor – preferring to sleep on the ceiling, and its (ghost's) eventual fall "through into the earth" (1980: 13). In the typical fantastic fashion of ogre tales, the poem ends with the ghost's disappearance.

Erick Ng'maryo's anthologized poems, notably "The Fountain of Life", "One Fine Morning" and "The Trial" exemplify a narrator adopting a plain-speaking voice and relying on linear narrative structure. Commenting on greed-driven capitalism in "The Fountain of Life", the poet narrates how some "fellows" typify the greed that accompanies nationalization of national/natural resources. Filled with voracity, the group made up of the exploiters privileged-

political class decide that the communal fountain of life be privatized for maximum profits eventually shared among these individuals rather than the communal ownership for common benefit. This poem proceeds from the discovery of the fountain's existence, through the incessant greed before, finally, "a few [individuals] united" and decided in "unison" "to dig a pool nearby" the communal livelihood. This symbolically alludes to the insatiability accompanying privatization and nationalization processes in post-socialist Tanzania. Ng'maryo's concerns resonate with what Topan saw as the "increasing greed among middle management Africans, especially the *wanaizi*, a category of people who were appointed to posts vacated by Europeans and Asians through the policy of "Africanization" shortly after independence" (Topan 2006: 112). These 'fellows' or *wanaizi* progressively distanced themselves from the 'masses' through accumulation of wealth to become targets of their scorn, expressed profoundly in contemporary poetry.

Once the poem is presented as a story with content organized in a causal structure (clearly pronounced beginning, middle and ending), the role of the poet-persona is inevitably reconfigured. The poet-persona, with three main angles from which to divulge the contents, devises means of ensuring the audience remains engrossed through to the end. The persona may use the first-person perspective, the omniscient narrator or the meditative-reflective point of view. Due to of the nature of the latter - textual fragmentation without elaborate plot - one can hardly trace the conventional narrative structure as verses may be rearranged without necessarily affecting the thematic unity of the text. However, this is rare in this collection; only seven poems, most of them by Ng'maryo, use this otherwise modernist perspective. His poems, such as "Sunshine Filters", "What Loneliness", "What is Death Like", "There is Need", "What do you Feel?", "I Will Cling to your Garment" and "I Defend you With Reason and Argument" all illustrate the poet's passion for a meditative rather than a narrative approach to poetry. This shift to a more reflective voice denies the texts the sort of simplistic or 'pipeline' approach to plot common in much of the poetry in the anthology.

Undeniably, therefore, the poet-persona's voice is another feature showing significant influences from Swahili literary tradition. The typical Swahili narrative voice is replete with unending self-righteousness, often exposing perceived evils and implying the necessity of a different morality. I will return to this later when I explore didacticism. What can be discerned from this voice in

relation to these stylistic elements or approach enunciated here? First, the perspective orients the poetic text towards an abundance of details as opposed to abstractions and more elliptical poetics associated with meditative-reflective or incantations. This eye witness often relies on descriptive language to construct mental pictures constituting the story or experience, narrated in chronological order. This explains the general predilection towards narrative poetics. The first-person's lyricism, and its associated enthusiastic emotional expression, is used to privilege mere informing as the main objective of poetic text. The resultant fidelity to description often engenders a poetics which transgresses that conventionally associated or encountered in much of Euromodernist tradition of poetry or as it was practiced or interpreted by foundational poets in most of independent Africa. As a device, it is deployed – especially in the exposition – when setting the stage of a tale or helping the audience conjure up attributes of a given character. Apart from a few exceptions, all poems in the collection deploy either an 'I' or omniscient narrator – hence the tale-poem is told from the point of view of a storyteller - who either plays a part in the story or remains detached, but knows all the facts.

Poems by Juan Mwaikusa, Noah Ndosi, Kajubi and Richard Mabala exemplify this positioning of the persona as an eye witness revealing to the audience experiences, emotions and thoughts that constitute the poetic text. Poems such as "We Will Call no Christmas Ceasefire", "Our Husbands", "How Close Are We?", "Don't Count on Me", "I am a Fighter", "When I Say I Love You", "Don't You Think I am Troubled Too?", I Will Cling to Your Argument" and "I Defend You With Reason and Argument" all presuppose an 'I' persona or its plural variant. In Mwaikusa's "Don't Count on Me" the dead first-person narrator recounts events that led to his/her death. The poem is unique in that the persona witnesses his/her own death and 'lives' to disclose it to the reader. The persona constantly reminds the audience that s/he had earlier told them "long ago/not to count on" (1980: 141) him/her. In a revelatory tone, the persona describes how s/he met death:

> Those sterilised knives
> Gave me a wound
> That refused to heal
> And brought me to death. (1980: 141)

Such a conceptualization lends credence and poignancy to the message. The audience takes the persona's word as the persona in turn strives to divulge as many details as possible. In "I am a

Fighter", Mwaikusa satirically explores the question of power, its misuse and resulting corrupting tendency. Combining narrative voices, this poem mocks the fighter who, as the central figure adopts first person singular pronoun 'I' throughout the narration. On the one hand is the mainstream narrator's voice while on the other are snippets of dialogue typographically marked using quotation marks:

I was once a fighter,
A fighter of great prowess,
A fighter of great calibre.
"I am a fighter!" I shouted,
And before I had realised it,
I had won the fight.

My opponents gave way
And surrendered with fear
"You have won, " they said,
And grim faced, they left.
Without another glance at me, they saw the fighter,
Carried shoulder high by cheering supporters.

"I am a fighter!" I shouted
But there was nobody to fight,
So I had to relax.

But how can a fighter relax
Except by fighting?
How can a killer repose
Except by killing?
How can a dancer recreate
Except by dancing?
I had to relax too,
I had to repose,
I had to recreate.

"I am a fighter!" I shouted
But my enemies were no longer there,
They had long joined the mocking audience
Looking at me with nobody to fight.

So
I turned grimly to my supporters
Holding me high in worship:
"I am a fighter!" I declared to them. (1980: 63-4)

In this poem, most of the features associated with Swahili and other African poetic traditions surface. As already suggested, the persona employs a chronologically ordered pattern of presentation; from the proclamation that s/he is a fighter, then the appearance of opponents considering the challenge but 'giving way', the realization that no one was willing to take up the

challenge, the persona's reflections and contemplation upon being 'mocked' by the audience, before turning to his or her own supporters. Although the poem is narrated through the first-person point of view, even more striking is the frequent switch to monologic dialogue aimed at negatively painting the persona's unilateral and egoistic pronouncements; "I am a fighter", though shouted severally gets only one response, "You have won". Also evident is the syntactic and structural parallelisms around which *mashairi* are organized. This is discernible in the lines; "A fighter of great prowess//A fighter of great calibre" and "How can a killer repose/Except by killing?//How can a dancer recreate/Except by dancing?"

Although poetry and poetics remain dynamic in East Africa, the age-old concerns with cultural differences pitting conservatism against liberalism persist among contemporary poets. Using the 'I' narrator, "Missing and Wanted" by Barbara Agongaz re-examines this theme which preoccupied most early modern African poets such as Okot p'Bitek. Anthologized in Luvai's *Boundless Voices*, the poem depicts modern or Western inspired fashion in repulsive images reminiscent of p'Bitek's mouthpiece; Lawino. It proceeds through a linear pattern, from the opening stanza's past tense ("she was dark.../A village belle she was...") to:

> But now like the adder,
> The top layer of her skin is off,
> And she now looks like a pitiable returnee from
> The leper colony,
> Her dark African lips are red like a raw
> Tropical ulcer,
> Her shiny nails look like talons of some
> Unknown scavenger in a savannah wilderness.
>
> She is my first and only child, (Luvai 1988: 5)

This is the pattern that dominates this anthology. In Amateshe's three stanza "Repentant", the first poem opens with the line "Yesterday my emotions/burst like a dam/and..." while the second one proceeds to "To-day, deluged with/a deep sense of regret," (1988: 18). His two other poems, "The Tortoise Song" and "The Embryo" maintain this 'I' narrative perspective. The trend is evident in the works of Onyango-Ogutu, arguably one of the most anthologized poets from Kenya. His works also exhibit features associated with Swahili tradition after having done extensive research[115] into oral traditions of the Luo, one of the pillars of this literary tradition as

[115] Part of which is published in Onyango-Ogutu and Roscoe (1974).

conceptualized in this study. In "The Beggar's Walking Staff", "Mother of Man" and "The Sleep & The Play", both included in Luvai's *Boundless Voices*, Onyango-Ogutu instances the merging of poetic traditions into a new form. However, like his contemporaries, he alludes to chronological pattern although using more implicit means such as the metaphor of life as a journey – common in most African orature. In "The Beggar's Walking Staff", his life in the first line is symbolized as "a tiny invisible boat/on a timed voyage" (1988: 121). Drawing on images suggesting setting off into an uncertain and, as he designates it, "unknown darkness" this opening stanza signals a typical narrative's preamble. Using the journey motif, he also instances what I earlier mentioned, that is, the permeable linguistic border between Kiswahili and English;

> I'm alone on this safari
>
> to and from nowhere
>
> heading for some place (Luvai 1988: 121)

His preference for 'safari', a Kiswahili word carrying notion of adventurous journey, signals the overlapping I pursue in this study. The rest of the poem is characterized by an 'I' narrative voice adhering to chronologically patterned and paralleled events; "Life offers me breakfast...lunch...dinner I accept...I go to bed...and hopeful/that tomorrow I will accept from life" (1988: 121). This is more pronounced in "Mother of Man" which is modelled after etiological tales;

> My grandmother tells me:
>
> before woman was created
>
> the earth was without a song
>
> A dulled beautiless world
>
> without love without music
>
> Till one day Nyasaye took:
>
> a pinch of dust and a little water
>
> mixed and moulded
>
> mother of the world
>
> and named he Aloo (Luvai 1988: 123)

By invoking the image of the grandmother, Onyango-Ogutu allegorically suggests the art of storytelling which, in most indigenous African literary traditions, was synonymous with the hut and hearth. The poem thus intertexts the oral tale about origins and more importantly, the source of poetry ("She is the first one/to create poetry"). These intertextual relations are made more explicit in "The Sleep & The Play" (Luvai 1988: 125). The perennial intimate relations between poetry and song are alluded to by the poet-persona when he says:

> The song that I sing
>
> Is the consolation
>
> I wear in my heart (1988: 125)

He then goes on to invite the reader into a dance in "Let's all dance to a new dawn".

When it is not through the 'I'-narrator, then it is through the omniscient one's perspective the poem is rendered. Depending on a third-person perspective, Kundi Faraja's "Development" opens as a typical story of a public servant (a civil servant or politician) sarcastically described as "a man of the people". This referent intertextually recalls a prose fiction text by Chinua Achebe whose title, *A Man of the People*,[116] is alluded to. There is an invisible observer as he sets to respond to various issues raised by the citizens. In other words, the poem is conceived as a response to the prodding of a collective conscious representing the society's common good. It is an incisive criticism of the government and elected officials for the delays in meeting the needs of the people, several years after independence. A sort of autonomous, independent observer provides a 'third' view and insight into this issue of credibility. This witness tracks a representative of the government with the sole aim of exposing his inadequacies. The poet-persona opens this tale thus:

> A man of the people
> Enters his office
> to sit on the throne
> of Party and State,
> His stick of power
> Across the table.
>
> He looks into the files
> To see the demands
> Of the millions of people

[116] A satirical novel by Chinua Achebe.

Who…(1980: 30)

From such a viewpoint, the narrator is reduced to mediating between an event or experience, and the audience, avidly presenting it with as much detail as possible. This narrator poses as an arbitrator between the "the millions of people" on the one hand, and the so-called "man of the people" on the other. It is from such a perspective that Faraja is able to disclose and explore what the people expect of their leadership, and in the process, also details his (the man of the people) responses to how development ought to be achieved and, generally, how to approach the question of good governance.[117] To some extent, the narrative voice adopted appropriately suits the poet's intentions of giving an objective criticism of the system. The details are not to be treated as propagandist rhetoric - as they would if he used an 'I' narrator. Even more exemplary use of this voice-device may be found in the poem "Ploughing" by Noah Ndosi. In this poem the omniscient narrator, from whose point of view the story of a farmer and his pair of oxen is told, mediates between the human and animal world. Metaphorically, this is meant to depict the unequal relations between the two emergent classes in post-socialist Tanzania, the exploiter and the exploited, the oppressor and the oppressed, but focuses on the overworked and mistreated working class, civil servants, peasants or the masses in general. It is a subtle commentary of the capitalist system and concomitant exploitation of the working class following the waning of *Ujamaa* ideologies. Of particular concern is the fact that having assumed a reconfigured role – of a narrating persona - the poet-persona endeavours to capture as much detail as possible. Again, a linear progression of events is employed as the omniscient narrator descriptively details right from the preparatory stages, through the process of ploughing and accompanying exhaustion "in the last hours/of a crushing day" before concluding with a critical focus on the bulls; "escorted/to a cold muddy kraal". Like Faraja, Ndosi makes resourceful and metaphoric use of this device to highlight the plight of the voiceless, downtrodden members of society.

Most of these poems make extensive use of the descriptive narrative voice which acts as an omniscient reporter of the poem's minimal narrative units. I therefore emphasise that, contrary to what Ramazani designates as the "Western fragmentation of consciousness" (2001: 35), East African poets tend to construct a unified consciousness in their view of social reality. Such a perspective monolithic identity serves to provide a unitary call from an unambiguous perspective

[117] Which is regarded as a megatheme in recent Nigerian poetry (Egya 2011).

from which to articulate political dissent; one against the establishmentt agitating for a revolution in/of the status quo. The poet-persona and the audience blend in a sort of imagined communion. S/he writes from the standpoint of the class or *wajamaa*, whose focus remains the peace, harmony, order and continuity of their society. Indeed, as Shariff and Feidel (1986) affirm, the community sees the Swahili poet as an instructor.

As a genre, among poetry's internal structural features, as constituted in Western traditions, is highly elliptical language, thriving on the condensing of the subject and hence minimally divulging certain details to allow the audience room to contemplate upon the subject matter or provoke the thought process. From the narratologist's point of view, this allows the audience to be actively involved as they supply the missing links or fill in details the narrating agent considers unnecessary (or obvious). In this tradition, however, as evident in Ndosi's poem for example, keen eye on details is privileged and foregrounded as the case in prosaic genres. Ndosi's excessive use of adjectival lexicons, for example, "a whip flying violently/in fading echoes" and "the head goes dizzy/the mouth dries up/hands fumble for snuff", attempts to avail an as complete and well-rounded picture of the scene or events as possible. This voice acts as the reader's witness, leaving little room for elliptical poetics which arouses curiosity and imaginations as they fill in the gaps. In other instances, this focus on details, especially the relatively minor ones, serves to heighten suspense – as is typical in the novel and dramatic genres. In an adroitly descriptive manner laden with anaphoric connectors and indicators, the poet narrates much the same way as in Swahili epic poem, *tenzi*, in which the reader/audience is furnished with every detail in the tale (the Fumo Liyongo epic and much of Nabhany's poetry exemplify this inclination). Like Swahili poetry which in general possesses and evokes a level of consciousness of the described scene that is different from an everyday experience of that same scene – hence reflecting reality explicitly, poetry in English intensifies reality to enhance consciousness and sensitivity (Kresse 2005: 119). The familiar (such as ploughing or cockfight) is presented in a new light to persuade/compel the audience to reflect upon the situation or event more profoundly.

This is the tradition modern East African poets pick and appropriate into their poems, making them largely 'stories' about their contemporary socio-political existence – replacing the long heroic epics. Marjorie Macgoye's poetry sustains critical attention to such issues. Prolific and

also employing features typical of the folkloric approach, most of her poems tell of an event or a series of events, often reorganizing historical accounts and narrating them in poetic language and, therefore, predominantly narrative oriented. Besides using historic and political figures such as Harry Thuku and Mathenge as subjects of her poetry, it is significant that in her collection, *Make it Sing*, she includes a section subtitled "public events" where poems revolving around events such as the infamous demolition of an informal settlement in Nairobi by the postcolonial government, "Muoroto" among others such as "Nest Time 1993", "To a Church Builder (Nairobi), "August the First in Nairobi" and "A Suite for Uganda" are included. This focus on immediate socio-political realities tends to incline her poetics towards a predominantly narrative approach. "Famine in Karamoja", for example, details the unfortunate predicament of the citizenry, in particular, malnourishment, mismanaged health facilities and perennial issue of corruption:

> And so we hold off because the hopeful lorries
> turn back or are diverted, because the cash
> soaks into fees or petrol, because the prints
> they use to wring our hearts say already too late.
> And aid flows into some fatter land
> where the clinic scale shows which have a chance to survive. (Luvai 1988: 138)

The use of a narrative voice, plural first-person 'we', occasions the shift in approach to poetry. Much the same way, "Message Bearer" and "A Fight of Roosters", included in *Summons*, deploy a third-person narrator who tracks the central and symbolic character(s), meticulously reproducing every minute detail of the encounters/escapades. The omniscient narrator trails the messenger in "Message Bearer", taking note of all sorts of trivial details such as the manner of walking;

> Tiptoed half-runningly walked
> invariably changing steps
> like a marching soldier

While in the scene of the two warring roosters in "A Fight of Roosters", surrounded by an enthusiastically cheering crowd, not only does the narrating poet-persona capture the "swinging fast pecks of a beak", the roosters' hopping high, among other antics, but occasionally turns attention to the audience, capturing the entire scene as graphically as possible;

> little children took side
> cheering up the exciting show

and dust like smoke
floated in the air

At the back of the poet's mind, therefore, is some kind of 'documentary objectivity' in representing the scene. This approach is evident from the way these poets intermittently deploy narrative features and devices as they strive for objectivity while they invoke notions of observable reality. This, as Watson (1982) has shown, serves to alert the imagination of the listener or audience so that they may absorb what the story – in the poem – offers. As evident in "Message Bearer", the omniscient narrator painstakingly exudes as many details as is possible. It is therefore not surprising when slight details of his movement are divulged in what looks like an eyewitness account, bearing in mind the perspective the poet adopts;

flinging arms
backwards and forwards
at times sideways,
down and up,
Across applauding rivers
of the village

It is this occasional artless predictability of poetic lines that leads one reading this poem from a Western, or Eurocentric perspective to conclude that in some instances, the craft of poetry is sacrificed at the altar of (detailed) content. However, if approached from *tenzi* tradition, it is clear that the persona in such cases often embodies a typical narrator's voice which inevitably reconfigures poetic aesthetics. What is important is to read these details as aesthetic embellishments forming part of the textual architecture of the poem, much the same as *tenzi* narrations. As a result of the poet – appropriating the narrator's role and – consciously 'arranging scenes' and 'choosing details' sequentially ordering them, this poetic text is rendered as prosaic. In what I read as a departure from the sublime rhetoric of modernist African poetry or Euro-American poetics, marked by poetic evocations achieved largely by terseness, compression or lexical density – economy of words – this poetry is occasionally overly/unnecessarily verbose. In Kajubi's "Prospering of Society", one gets the sense of this departure from poetry as highly specialized and compact in language usage. Minimal efforts towards impregnating each word or phrase used with poignant meaning as redundant expressions abound. The words 'rent' in two successive lines in the stanza below and constructions such as "One of them/…Another/…The third…" do not necessarily introduce new layers of meaning or value to the poem. The poet shows little awareness of, or chooses to subvert, the notion that

conciseness of expression and economy of words is paramount in poetry. The elaboration that the "bus conductor" works with "the company offering transport" may be considered avoidable verbiage and unnecessary embellishments that compromise artistic excellence, or a vital device in building "enchanting immediacy" (Barber 2007: 28), one of the prerequisites to the textuality of poetry among the Swahili;

> The harridans
> Depend on the rent for existence;
> The young men pay the rent.
> One of them
> Is a teacher in the city.
> Another
> Works with the blanket manufacturing company,
> The third is a bus conductor
> With the company offering transport
> To those residents of the city
> Who have no Volvos, (1980: 4)

Conceived predominantly as story-telling discourse, the poems by poets from Tanzania juxtapose the role of a typical story-teller with that of the poetic persona. Read with the embedded Swahili tradition's consciousness in mind, this is not lack of gravitas and weight but rather, appropriation of syntactic parallelism common in Swahili poetry. When realized in Kiswahili, they do not appear redundant as in English but inscribe critical cumulative effect which undergirds Swahili poetics. The persona employs typical devices that are conventionally regarded as the preserve of the indigenous (oral) narrators of prose and poetry – whose effect, however, is not immediately evident on the surface when rendered in print. Extending into the English-language poetry of other East African countries, this multilingual (multiple poetic traditions) context underpins the narrative approach to the poetic genre. Poetry in English provides the 'contact zone' in which interaction between East African vernacular or oral poetry traditions interact with Swahili and English literary traditions, leading to the sort of literary transculturation and appropriation witnessed in contemporary poetry.

In Amateshe's *Anthology of East African Poetry* and Luvai's *Boundless Voices*, a similar predilection to confront the disparate and diverse facets of contemporary life through largely functional and transformative art is evident. Poems included in the former, for example, attest to the preference for narrative as opposed to descriptive poetics in handling mundane social issues. From Everett Standa's "A Pregnant School Girl" and "Wedding Eve", Jonathan Kariara's "A

Leopard Lives in a Muu Tree" to Richard Ntiru's "Twin Ceremony", inclination towards organizing accounts of varied experiences, events or series of events using chronological order, with an explicit thread running from the beginning to conclusion in poetic language abound. Standa's poem tellingly opens with an unidentified 'he' paying for the protagonist a "seat in the *matatu*" before walking away, and conveniently disappearing "in to the city crowd". From the second stanza, events at the bus stop are vividly recounted; passengers boarding, the cigarette smoking incident that triggers spitting and vomiting, then the nostalgic memories through which her (the 'pregnant school girl') predicament may be glimpsed. The omniscient narrator tells how the girl recollects events leading to her present quandary – "She remembers the warm nights" as well as the promises, the gifts, parties, and how "her classmates at school" envied her expensive shoes,/Lipstick, wrist watch, handbag" all which "she brought to school/ After a weekend with him;" (Standa 1994: 35). The narrative moves through into the uncertain and impeding future in the last three stanzas

> The future stood against her
> Dark like a night without the moon,
> And silent like the end of the world;
>
> As the *matatu* sped away from the city
> She began to tremble with fear
> Wondering what her parents would say;
>
> With all hope gone
> She felt like a corpse
> Going home to be buried.

The linear thread is sustained by lexical items such as 'the *matatu*...' denoting continuity. The poem shifts tense from past, into the present before concluding with future, all of which correspond with major parts of any narrative; beginning, middle and ending. In Kariara's poem, narrating the story of a leopard that "lives in a Muu tree" just outside the persona's homestead (Amateshe 1988: 110), a similar pattern can be discerned. While Standa's tale revolves around the issue of teenage pregnancy and attendant problems, Kariara examines infidelity within the institution of marriage and thus issues from an event. The persona – in this case, a victim of illicit relationships – expresses his concerns about his lineage and registers displeasure noting that "the-one-from-the-same-womb," or the brother, blatantly fathers children with his wives or,

as he puts it, "arches over my homestead" (1988: 110). In a resigned tone, the persona details his frustrations saying his wives:

> ... fetch cold mountain water
> They crush the sugar cane
> But refuse to touch my beer horn.
> My fences are broken
> My medicine bags torn
> The hair on my loins is singed
> The upright post at the gate has fallen
> My women are frisky (Amateshe 1988: 110)

Similarly, the surface simplicity emanating from the folkloric approach as discerned in most of the poems examined earlier is evident. A cumulative effect is created by the piling of parallels that depict the persona's growing frustrations, again gesturing towards mechanisms used in oral poetry to lay emphasis. In Ntiru's "Twin Ceremony", the paradox of human existence is dramatised again using linear narration. A sense of overtly ordered chronological pattern can be discerned in:

> While the gay crowd exchange winks
> Wondering if he knows...
>
> > Outside a draped coffin awaits the ultimate
> > Blackmail – 'dust to dust' –
> > As the businesslike gravediggers murmur (Amateshe 1988: 90)

Contemporary poets' engagement with everyday, existential issues is unequivocal. Ntiru juxtaposes events evoking joy and sorrow, wedding celebration with funeral rituals, but chronologically links them using narrative lexical markers such as 'while', 'as' and graphological signals for continuity such as ellipsis. Partly, the folkloric approach adapted by contemporary poets determines the nature of poetic language used. This is because there exists a mutual relationship between theme and style as content shapes its medium. The deployment of features associated with prose or storytelling (such as formulaic openings, refrain-like lines which double as summary of the thrust of the poetic theme) - despite occasionally assuming specialized usage - privileges language use commonly associated with prose.

Despite being universal in most literary traditions, the manner in which opening (or closing) formular and refrains or repetition in general are used within Swahili prose and poetry is arguably unique, and it is this peculiarity that is appropriated in poetry of English expression.

The manner in which certain forms of repetition are appropriated in this collection alludes to the tradition's conceptualization of choric material. In particular, some poets appropriate Swahili poetic tradition's *kibwagizo*, a specialized refrain to provide a kind of thematic skeleton summing up or emphasising the core thematic concern. Marjorie Macgoye makes outstanding usage of this device as I detail shortly. However, it will suffice to mention that attempts to have a single line as the opening and closing line in each stanza – undeniably, peculiar to Swahili poetics – is discernible in "To a Church Builder", but more pronounced in "Shairi la Ukombozi". In addition, their appearance in the penultimate or denouement group of lines, with some even standing out from the rest of the poem's main body, is an attempt by poets to use a refrain informed by Swahili tradition where as the diction suggests, the signing off is accomplished in condensed or terse lines 'pregnant' with the focus of the poem. More often than not, this is used together with the concept of *wasia*, an admonition, warning or reminder of the ethical and religious principles which undergird the society (Feidel and Shariff 1986: 504). As already indicated in relation to narrative poetics, storytelling in Swahili literary traditions – like in most oral traditions – is underpinned by moral lessons. The recurrent *kibwagizo* and wisdom laden *wasia* combine to give most Swahili poems rhythmic emphasis of didacticism. How is this appropriated when composing in English?

Disappointed by insincerity in the society, manifested in the tensions between socialism and capitalism's individualistic forces, Richard Mabala in "The Socialists" makes a conclusion which shows some semblance or awareness of the poignant and recurrent *kibwagizo*. Indeed, the gist of this poem lies in the poet's effort to distinguish between the two opposing ideologies. His conclusion foregrounds actions as main distinction criteria and is presented in the form of the exclamation, "By their deeds you shall know them!" (1980: 53). While English poetry tends to distribute emphasis with every line, and every phrase or word is injected with relatively equal stress, Swahili poetry reserves emphasis for the last line of the verse, the last verse of the poem or, if in free-verse, the final line. Western poetic conventions demand that every line is impregnated with meaning and thematic overtones are sprinkled throughout the poem text, and not necessarily coming at the end of the poem. If the poem as a story has an exposition, middle/body and an ending, it is often the latter that is charged with summing up the moral the poem teaches. This is relatively pronounced in Mwaikusa's "In the Moonlit Foyer" and "Blind

Struggle". Whereas in the latter he appropriates a combination of *wasia* and a sort of *kibwagizo*; "One day you will learn/That I am just as human." (1980: 140) to serve as a stubborn reminder of the persona's humanity, deserving due dignity, the former achieves emphasis using a combination of features; thematic, structural and verbal. The denouement is conspicuously set apart from the rest of the poem, appearing as two autonomous lines;

> And I am happy
> To walk in the reality of daylight. (1980: 141)

This separation structurally foregrounds the lines, just as their message is undoubtedly emphasised. 'And I am happy' signals a sort of conclusion. The backbone of this poem is to a large extent an encouragement for the society to 'walk in the reality of daylight' or moral uprightness. In a similar pattern, Manga Mmbagha winds up his three part poem with lines that bear an undeniably axiomatic thesis; "There is nothing sadder/Than the itching desire for freedom." (1980: 139) which serves to appropriately sign off the poet-persona's vision (desires) and thematic thrust of the poem more profoundly. It is, however, not a mere transposition of this device but rather, an innovative deployment as it departs from the (classical) pattern of Swahili poetry. Whereas, in *mashairi* it assumes a regular and roughly symmetrical pattern, for instance, at the end of each stanza, poems written in English tend to deploy an asymmetrical pattern. Moreover, they tend to spread their thematic thrust throughout the textual structure of a poem and not reserve it for the penultimate or denouement part. In Faraja's edifying conclusion, one encounters the sort of appropriation I read as exemplary of this feature. Structurally and graphologically set apart from the rest of the poet text, the manner he uses the refrain in "Saluting Ujamaa" is reminiscent of the Swahili *kibwagizo* as the moral chorus of the poem. He fittingly closes this poem with a reprise about the better and preferred route;

> I plead driving
> On a straight road safer
> Than on a crooked one. (1980: 70)

Much the same as Mwaikusa's "I am a Fighter" quoted earlier, in which the concluding stanza – separated from the rest – is characteristically a thematic summation of the poem, signalled by the use of the conjunction 'so', indicating a reason or consequence. Evidently, variations exist in the form contemporary poets writing in English put *kibwagizo* into, despite serving precisely the same role. In "Illegal Brew", a poem exploring the effects of alcoholism – a common social

menace - the poet narrates what eventually became of the initially "young and healthy" fellow "of favoured health", all of which started with only a few sips. As a typical story aimed at communicating a moral lesson to the audience and society in general, the poem singles alcoholism as an impediment to the society's progression to socio-economic development or advancement. The range of issues engaged by an admonitory outlook is broad. However, more than anything else, it is the concept of *Ujamaa* as an ingredient of the massive mobilization of human capital that most preoccupies these poets. Closely related is the unambiguous distaste for Western capitalism and the social stratification or inequalities it breeds which the poets unanimously banish. If the task of the poet is to proffer a specific socio-cultural philosophy towards the field of action, then in no other poetry is this entrenched as in poems emerging from East Africa, more so post-socialist Tanzania. The poet, therefore, accomplishes what Niyi Osundare describes as salvaging society from decadence (Quoted in Ojaide 1996: 74). In the reproving "Take Note Dinosaur" for example, Alute Mghwa exposes 'big brother's' wrong-doings assigning him such repulsive referents such as 'dinosaur' – to suggest that perpetuators of such social ills will certainly become extinct. Steeped in didacticism, this poem advances the underlying Marxist ideologies in the class-ridden society urging the reader to be wary of this heinous 'brother'. Assuming the responsibility of a committed or 'engaged' artist whose vision remains a more humane society, Mghwa concludes the poem by addressing the perpetrator of social and economic injustices thus:

> Take note, hypocrite,
> That like all dinosaurs,
> You are fast approaching extinction. (1980: 38)

Not only does the poet provide direction but also gives glimmer of hope by prophesying an end to the 'dinosaurs' of Tanzanian society in the near-future. Mghwa predicts the destruction of antisocial forces. As Kitula King'ei (2001) has insightfully observed, inculcation of faith and hope in a better future, or what he designates as the 'theme of hope' (whether in the power of God or change) is a definitive feature of Swahili (classical) poetry. In what I read as direct influence of classical poetics – exemplified by Muyaka's poetry – in which this theme of hope runs through, poetry from the region is laden with didacticism and optimism.

Like in Swahili poetry where the refrain is sometimes framed as a rhetorical question, either repeated or strategically positioned in the poem for diverse aesthetic effects, poems in English from the region appropriate this device. For example, in a tale about "a secondary [school] student" told in the poem, "The Ways of The World", the shocked poet-persona is compelled to soul-searchingly ask "Oh! What are we doing to our daughters?" (1980: 108). Upon sharing the experience provoking his/her concerns for the fate of girls in the contemporary society, the persona deductively poses this question to invite the audience to reconsider the issue. There is an overwhelming presence of complete (or near-complete) poems of admonition which, in the contemporary times, makes use of a form that has less historical precedence as a vehicle suitable for *wasia*. This poetry is exceedingly didactic and presumably aimed at salvaging the society from decadence – as this is always the part that lingers in the audience's mind at the end of the poem. Although frequently, and more so in classical phase, *utenzi* form was the more preferred metre for such purposes rather than the *shairi* verse form. The admonitory tone thus undergirds most of these poem-narratives and hence it is right to conclude, following Shariff and Feidel, that poets using English as their poetic medium are "entitled and expected to admonish" (1986: 505) much the same way as their Swahili counterparts do. This is accomplished by embedding *wasia* or didactic lessons in the repeated refrain or final stanza/part of the poem. The refrain, in its multiple manifestations, besides being one of the universal features common to poetry from different traditions, is specialized in Swahili literary traditions. The use of exact or slightly modified refrain is a common option among Swahili poets (Shariff and Feidel 1986: 502). It is still a ubiquitous device in modern Swahili poetry, just as it permeates poetry in English. Although some scholars such as Hurries (1962) linked the use of a "vividly and compactly" expressed moral, or axiom structured in a proverbial way to the Arabic heritage of Swahili poetic tradition, evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. Hurries's claim, echoed by Alice Werner[118], that "of course" the use of a refrain was borrowed from Arabian poetic practices (1962: 244) assumes the indigenous dimension as evident in the Bantu community's oral repertoire. In my view, this literary devise has a strong tradition in most indigenous African oral traditions, Swahili's *nyimbo* being no exception. It is a common oratory skill, neither peculiar to African orature nor unique to Arabic poetry as Hurries and Elkott seem to suggest but undeniably

[118] In particular where she details that undoubtedly, versification is 'of course' an Arabic influence.

peculiarly deployed within Swahili poetry. Poetry in English from the region tends to incline the thrust of art to didactic purposes. It is projected as an admonition, warning or sometimes reminder of not just ethical and religious principles but socio-political and cultural ideals and values which (should) undergird the society. This kind of poetry offers a great deal of moralizing advice suitable for or directed at people living as one national-community.

This inclination is not, however, limited to poets writing from Tanzania. It is arguable that the region's poetry is characteristically focused on social ills, and hence Gikandi and Mwangi's contention that the uniqueness of East African poetry resides in its attention to social and political issues in the region (2007: 139). This view echoes arguments such as those advanced by Yesufu (1984) in his survey of East Africa poetry. Using Jared Angira as a representative of contemporary East African poets, Yesefu points out that in the process of cultivating its typical acute sense of meaning, East African poetry – unlike its West African counterpart – is, to use Udenta's words, an art "clearly focused on a living social reality in its various facets" (1996: 80). This naturally leads into the content-form debate and its contemporary manifestations. The characteristic temper of poetic output from East Africa demonstrates the region's inclination towards Marxist emphasis on materialism as a major source of inspiration. Emphasis on didacticism is another feature appropriated in poetry with intimate links with narrative poetics. Since the structure of any narrative constitutes both the content (the 'story') and form (the plot) of a story, [119] an emphasis on one inevitably reconfigures the other. As evident in poetry in English from Tanzania, content is foregrounded for didactic purposes – sometimes at the expense of craft. On the one hand, this may be attributed to East African poetry's appropriation of the function and, to a lesser extent, form/structure of the oral story genre the poets draw from while on the other hand, the bias may issue from Swahili tradition's poetics and *tenzi* in particular; one of the core functions of *tenzi* was religious and moral instruction.

Some poets, however, make more explicit intertextual relations with Swahili culture and literary tradition. Marjorie Macgoye not only uses Kiswahili to title some of her poems, such as "Shairi

[119] http://www.inpoint.org/pdf/LanguageofFilm01.pdf This is a structuralist argument, which sees the most basic or necessary components of a narrative as *histoire* or story, content, chain of events, existents on the one hand, and discourse or the expression, means by which this is communicated on the other.

la Ukombozi"[120] and "Shukrani"[121] but integrates it in some of her poems. It is significant that whereas their titles are rendered in Kiswahili, not a single lexical item is used in the poems' diction. She seems to suggest the pre-eminence of this culture's language in the region. However, "Shairi la Ukombozi" illustrates one of the most sustained attempts to echo Swahili poetry's structural and rhythmic patterns, especially the caesura and the *kibwagizo* signalled earlier. She uses punctuation (comma and full stop) to divide each of the lines making up the five-line stanzas. This regularity is evident in:

> We miss a living voice, a dour and stocky presence,
> Abrupt in speaking, vivid, impatient of pretence,
> a heavy head, a heart heavy with understanding,
> We are too tame for lions. The pride has been disbanding.
> We miss a living voice, a dour and stocky presence. (1998: 76)

Noticeable in this poen is that the first line recurs again at the end of the stanza. This characterizes the entire poem. Whereas the pattern in the first, second, sixth and tenth stanzas relies on repeating the first line in the last, the rest alternate to repeat the second (in the third, fifth and eighth stanzas), third (in the fourth and seventh stanzas) and fourth (in the ninth stanza) lines. Such regularity is common in Swahili poetry where mid- and end-rhymes alternate in a similar manner. Furthermore, the concluding stanza is made up of various *vibwagizo* (plural for *kibwagizo*) lines drawn from the poems, affirming the point I made earlier that the final stanza is often designed to linger in the audience's mind. This is what I allude to by describing the poem as modelled on the Swahili mode. This is the case in "To a Church Builder" (Macgoye 1998: 85-6) where each of the six stanzas open and close with "if you must build..." (and which echoes Claude Mckay's "If We Must Die") often completed with different variants.

In "Maitu Njugira"[122] (Mother, Sing for Me), Mugo demonstrates not just *kibwagizo*'s ubiquity but its proxy and convenience in communication, juxtaposed with Kiswahili – and other African feeder languages such as Gikuyu (evident in the title, and 'uka') and Dholuo ('bi'). This poem establishes intertextual relations with the multilingual musical play outlawed by political authorities in Kenya.

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[120] First published in *Summer Fires* (1983), the footnote elaborates that it is a liberation poem in the Swahili mode, as a plea for the release of Ngugi wa Thiong'o when he was detained in 1978.
[121] First published in *Summer Fires* (1983), the poem is couched as an expression of gratitude for the 1978 release of detainees by the Kenyan government under Daniel Moi.
[122] First published in Luvai, A. (ed.) (1988) *Boundless Voices*.

No need, really, to know the language

at the basic receiving end.

Lef' ri' lef' ri',

ebu – bi – njoo – uka – kuja – hapa – nje –

gents – ladies closed – verboten – no – throughway –

pay here – piga – peleka – hapana kazi –

by order – private.

At arm's length they can afford

to be more precise; but we get the message. (Macgoye 1998: 80)

The oral narrative's dramatic element is evident in the vivid approximation of spoken, contextual language. A conversational, almost casual tone is evident in "No need, really..." as much as it is embedded in the hotchpotch text merging – using the punctuations signalling continuous flow – 'basic' English with Kiswahili, Kikuyu and Dholuo, arguably the main languages in most urban centres in East Africa. Macgoye uses this to infuse or capture the hybrid urban text into her poetry. By interspersing the text with everyday speech diction, not distanced or elevated, the poet instances this hybrid urban text, demonstrated by fluidity in language used by the poets in the sense that, a clear distinguishing boundary does not exist between what ought to be considered 'poetic' and that which should not. Macgoye, like her contemporaries, disrupts this binary, such that, the old or traditional poles, simple-accessible on the one hand, and difficult-esoteric on the other are unsettled in contemporary poetry. Structuralist distinguishes between literary languages in general or poetic language in particular, from ordinary language on the other. This distinction is blurred in postcolonial contexts and poetry.

As is evident in Swahili poetics, the content-form dichotomy often tends to favour the former, what Osundare terms 'gravity of content' and therefore – in line with the avowed materialist conception of literature,[123] privileging content over form. This is largely because Swahili poetry has extra-linguistic resources with which to imbue a text with poeticity and literary worthiness,

[123] A premise based on the belief that literature can change society or art has power to touch and affect. Consequently, anything that affects changes people and communities as propounded by, among others, Niyi Osundare.

beyond language. Poetic expression is not limited to linguistic resources. Economy of words may be paramount, but it is not the sole-defining feature of what passes as poetry within Swahili literary discourses. Poignancy of the message and formal devices such as prosodic patterns at the poet's disposal are equally essential in delineating the genre. It is not a case of poetics constricted by the demands of social realism as critical reception perceives this poetics but rather, the need to reconceptualize and expand critical tools to accommodate the hybrid nature and hence, its distinct poetics. Since the context of production and its content or form in literature are, to use Amuta's words, "dialectically interconnected areas" (1989: 9), or, as Richard Bauman correctly states, every text is produced in a specific context (2004: 7), neither of these may be fruitfully analyzed in isolation or assigned prominence at the expense of the other. Bauman's 'emergent elements', which in the case of East Africa include the precedence of Swahili poetry traditions, inevitably enter into the discursive process significantly determining the ways in which poetry in English is realized. Poetry of English expression in East Africa has what Bakhtin (1981) calls its "chronotope", that is, its way of articulating time and space or, sociological context. This is what Chidi Amuta (1989: 9) rightly emphasises. In lieu of this, East African poetry especially from Tanzania may be said to be predominantly narrative due to its predominant thematic orientation and the role the genre has been assigned by the Swahili worldview.[124] This ensures that it is an 'utterance' or text responding to or in conversation with a specific context, hence distinct regardless of a common linguistic medium.

A number of factors account for the trend. First, the secondary school literature syllabus in Tanzania initially showed minimal interest in English literature, while at university, English poetry or literature was offered as an optional course – but often discouraged by staff. While groping for inspiration, it is therefore expected that this relatively younger poetry tradition appropriates the more immediate and omnipresent Swahili poetic tradition. Its more explicit influences such as the concept of *kujibizana* or dialogue, the appropriation of conversational ordinary language and conceptualization of persona as a typical storyteller persona renders writing in English by and large an outgrowth of Swahili poetics. Besides this, another equally plausible account for this trend in the region may be gleaned from recent developments in the

[124] In particular, the view that poetic language has the power to catalyze change in society. Subsequently, this calls for surface simplicity and linear sequencing which marks most of the texts sampled. Clearly, message is more important than the form.

region. Evan Mwangi (2007), for example, correctly attributes predilection towards or dependence on orature and attendant performativity to annual school drama festivals. This tradition for schools and colleges in the region, he argues, incorporates poetic recitations that have in turn given rise to a new (contemporary) generation of writers who use simple and direct language of oral performance (Mwangi 2007: 141) or by taking a cue from traditional poetry - the kind that gestures towards what Ojaide perceives as aiming at clarity of expression by using simple language that matches their concern for the common people (1996: 84). Although an established tradition in Swahili culture, poetry recitations have imbued contemporary poetry from the region with its typical 'combination of semantically simple expressions and direct language'. The emphasis on indigenous oral traditions and performance in these festivals has had far reaching implications on the overall textual structure and language of recent poetry, as is evident in much of contemporary poetry included in the anthologies examined. However, as perceived in this study, the various oral traditions coalesce within (modern) Swahili tradition, which is very much a part of the contemporary urban literary tradition that informs and feeds poetry recitations.

To achieve this effectively and efficiently, poetry is conceived in predominantly narrative terms, that is, it functions as means of merely passing across information with minimal hindrances and in the most successful manner. Underpinning such perceptions is the view that literature can change society and art has the power to touch or affect – and thus, changes people and communities (Osundare quoted in Akpuda 2003: 7).[125] More often than not, it is instructive to note that the dialectical interplay and tensions between political commitment and the message on the one hand, and its form or aesthetic attributes on the other has shaped discourses on the nature of poetry with which the East African (Mwangi and Gikandi 2007: 138) literary region has come to be associated. The interplay is crucial in appreciating the poetics or variant[126] discussed in this chapter. Consciously or unconsciously, the poets seem to debunk the poetic space, presenting it in a relatively familiar and easily accessible narrative pattern more suitable for making profound didactic statements. Viewed from this end, poetic space is conjured as, to

[125] Especially West African contemporary poets who – if the singular criticism critics like Garuba, Ayiejina, Osundare and Salah have levelled, is the privilegenig poetic message, in particular the so-called alternative poets. For them, the urgency of the message does not allow dilly dallying with words and esoteric poetic diction.

[126] What I am calling variant here is poetry confronting contemporary Tanzania in an idiom that is simple and deliberately direct: with deep humanist ethos running through.

borrow Gregson's phrase, a "clear medium for reflecting experience" (1996: 172) in a given society. Thus the genre is postulated as a distillation and clarification of a community's thoughts and feelings and not an outlet of an individual's emotions and experiences. This brand of poetics anticipates an epoch when elitist conceptualization of art will be replaced by what Gugelberger describes as a "more democratic and participatory art" (1985: 1) hence a significant departure from mainstream (modernist) aesthetic tendencies in African poetry. Distinctively, poetry is constructed as an outlet of a myriad of socio-cultural, economic and political issues of concern to the contemporary East African world, telescoping these experiences using the most lucid possible means. The poetry imagines the society as homogenous and unified through (non ethnic) Swahili culture and language, constructing and reinforcing shared understanding and knowledge (common ideas, interests, histories and attitudes).

In these anthologies, most poets present the poetic medium as a 'clear' space void of unnecessary playfulness of language and modernist abstractions. The majority of the poets steer away from esotericism commonly associated with conventional or Eurocentric poetics – as practiced by majority of the foundational generation of modern African poets[127] who anchored their poetics on modernist premise, privileging the primacy of individual experience – and hence the heterogeneity or multiplicity of voices. As a result, the poetics are imbued with what Ugah polemically refers to as a characteristic "kindergarten type of simplicity" (1982: 12) emanating from the blurred boundary between poetry and prose. The variant therefore becomes poetry so minimal as to lose most indicators[128] of the intended genre more so as conventionally conceived of in Euromodernist tradition. It is a radical departure from more established or mainstream poetic traditions and conventions. If indeed the language of poetry must be inspiring, beautiful and affective as Raji-Oyelade (2007: 4) contends, then such slippages confer this variant almost

[127] Whereas the English poetic tradition – prevalent or as practiced in East Africa – cherished a special syntax, conventional formulas and above all, posited the art as heightened literary productions, Swahili poetry thrived on different praxis. For example, while positioning the poetics of Jared Angira as representative of East African poetry, Simon Gikandi (2003) presciently observes that this poetry is "deeply meditative" while James Currey (2000) sees him as a lyrical poet relying on a subtle fusion of searing satire and humour. Hence, carrying a predominantly descriptive tone achieved through verbal dexterity typical of oral traditions, this poetics appropriates storytelling techniques into its formal properties; the poets employ strategies commonly used by the story-teller to seduce their audience.

[128] The premise behind this argument is that, every literary genre has standard features by which it is recognized and from which no writer can escape. I therefore posit that other than certain basic poetic principles, such as verse and meter, little if any can be recognized in this variant.

doggerel status. The line between ordinary speech, clichés and colloquialism and the ultimate poetic medium becomes blurred to the extent of denying the reader that 'strange familiarity' or a spark of momentary surprise (*ibid*) so cherished in the genre. This tradition's (poetic) craft shuns most of the hallmark features defining Anglophone African poetry written in English. For poetry written in English, subtlety, ambiguity, and linguistic cunningness[129] remain key, contrary to this particular poetics which seems to be overwhelmed by the idea of poems as a blunt, plain-spoken message. Arguably, this orientation issues from the conviction that poetry should aspire to everyday language and not vice versa as is the case within the English/Western poetic system.

Like Swahili poetry, poems of English expression celebrate the plain, speaking voice as a potential vehicle of poetic thought. As suggested earlier, the narrative voice or medium, whether first-person or omniscient, naturally influences the transmission and the content itself. Arguably, less enthusiasm is shown towards artistic excellence for its own sake. The poetry is characterized by what Apronti designates as a "speaking voice" (1979: 35) which generates a sense of exploration, and hence the characteristic conversational-discursive mode discernible in a number of the poems. The effect of such a 'liberal humanist voice' in these poems is that it creates a feeling that the subject-matter involved is meant for everyone who cares to listen or 'with ears'. It consciously approximates poetry to story-telling, which was largely a public genre. Quite significantly, the narrator's point of view is informed by the moral sensibility of his or her 'imagined' community; the Tanzanian nation. Poetry is thus construed not as a private, more dreamy-meditative affair, but rather as the 'palaver tree or fire-side activity'. A typically familiar and sort of communally inspired tone overrides. These poets seem to work within Wiredu's postulation that in Africa, art – including poetry – is in the public domain, avoiding "unfinished or indecipherable works" (1980: 41). The characteristic infusion of conversational rhythm qualities endows this poetry with the 'speaking voice' Apronti talks about.

[129] Where the definition of poetry, proffered by Brown (1995: 62), is largely the Eurocentric one, tinged with modernist aesthetics.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined a number of source-texts available to contemporary African poets, in particular, poetic textures and structures associated with Swahili culture's poetics. I sought to demonstrate that East African poetry relies on *mashairi* as a megatext guiding and shaping the thematic and aesthetic purview of poetry written in English. By re-conceptualizing the Swahili literary tradition, in light of its postmodernist phase, as re-embracing diverse indigenous African traditions or voices, I have shown how *mashairi* – like West Africa's Ewe and Yoruba – is a multilayered contact zone. As Kofi Anyidoho's poetics gain from African American and black literary tradition, so did Swahili's expressive culture's interaction with Afro-Arabic and English fusions before its modern phase. In contemporary times, or its postmodern phase, Swahili culture has extended inwards, attaining a sort of pan-identity which, as I have argued, mediates the various vernacular poetry traditions.

In exploring the role of narrative mode in projecting socialist ideologies in East African poetry written in English as well as its place as an organizing literary device, hallmark features of recent poetics have been brought to the surface. The form and language of these poem-narratives is a clear manifestation of the influence of Swahili literary traditions on compositions in English. Incontrovertibly, the initially verbal – but later both verbal and written – art of story telling is an integral part of the Swahili culture in East Africa. The intimacy between the poetry and its ideological preoccupations has led to a distinctly East African narrative oriented poetry. The organizing values informing this poetics are predicated by the *mashairi* tradition. As I will conclude in the final chapter (and in contrast), the snippets of storytelling in West Africa are a reaction to preceding esotericism and an attempt to re-oralise contemporary poetry.

This traditions's classical poetics of narrative epics continues to dialogue with and determine the kind of poetry contemporary poets write, irrespective of linguistic medium used. In other words, antecedent poetics are not easily cast off but rather – in what may be read as related to Kofi Anyidoho's principle of continuity in African poetry – persist and dialogically underpin, and in some cases, overdetermine emergent modern poetry. Moreover, the role the prose narrative serves within Swahili literary culture is appropriated in the nascent poetic tradition using English as the medium of expression. If East African writers, as Peter Nazareth (1978) once stated,

seemed to be falling victims of some invisible colonial teachers, then more specifically, of those emerging from Tanzania – as the recurrent elements in the collection and examples from the genre of poetry studied show, may also be perceived as victims of certain invisible Swahili poets, and, in particular, the coterie Harold Bloom (1973) would call 'strong' poet-fathers. The overwhelming background of *mashairi* (as uniquely conceptualized in this chapter) points to its stature as a potent megatext in contemporary East African poetics.

There is always a clear moral agenda driving East African poetry in English. It is clear from the analysis that these poets consider their didactic purposes to be more important than everything else. However, if exaggerated, the tendency may work to the detriment of its poetic effectiveness. By, for instance, sacrificing imagistic complexity and formal musicality often perceived as the core of 'poetry' for the typical rhetorical doctrinairing or statement making, which at times seem to overwhelm their poetics, East African poetry drifts to doggerel. This is why Gikandi and Mwangi (2007) conclude that if East African literature has, of necessity, to be political and utilitarian, then direct political statements are rendered with 'aesthetic distance'. It is with this in mind that, like Osundare, I conclude that there is a need to take into consideration both the beauty of form and that of content. There is dire need for narrative poetry in English to adopt a middle way between the content and its container, between manner and the matter as Osundare persuasively proposes. The poets should attempt to 'precariously' balance didacticism with a language of poetry that is sensitive to minute details of rhymes, rhythm and other figures of speech and sound, which distance what is considered ordinary speech from the ultimate poetic medium. I have shown that one major reason that this poetry tends to over-rely on ordinary speech lies in the dilemmatic choice between either privileging content or form/aesthetic and which foundational as well as later poets had to confront – before the tradition of poetry in English became ingrained in the region. However, I am of the view that it is yet to arrive at what Yesufu (1984) sees as a harmonious marriage of art and ideas, since, as the illustrations summoned illustrate, there is an overt bias towards the narrative mode at the expense of the meditative and performance-leaning strands of poetry.

The question of the audience of African literature and its appropriate medium[130] triggered the urge to avoid complexities in language, replacing them with ordinary, simple and relatively accessible diction and range of images. Whereas within the Kiswahili context this simply meant doing away with archaic Arabism often the core of poetics, and embracing what had come to be know as standardized Kiswahili (*Kiswahili sanifu*), its transposition or carry-over into poetry in English implies compromising some of the hallmark features of genre. If poets using English as the medium of poetry imbibe prominent *mashairi* critics such as Kezilahabi's thesis that Swahili literary style should adapt to its new audience in the wider East Africa – and its attendant implications such as having a so-called 'common East African' as one's audience, redefining (or toning down archaism in) poetic language and subsequent reconceptualization of the poetic persona as a narrator – then their poetics ineluctably departs from modern African poetry as received and practiced by foundational African poets as demonstrated. While within the Swahili context ordinary-everyday language implies departing from earlier 'suffocating' Arabism, it suggests a stripping of the medium of all of its defining features in English to the extent that the otherwise ultimate poetic medium is reduced to mere everyday verbal evocations. Dialogically, this poetry demonstrates the fears poets and critics in the region often harboured; that writing poetry risks becoming an elitist act (as it did in early West African poetics) produced and consumed almost exclusively by urban, middle-class elites who can afford to buy books and (academics who can) decipher complex, artful realizations in English. This is the dilemma Niyi Osundare wrestles with and to a large extent resolves as I show in the next chapter.

[130] Which has been examined by among others, Taban Lo Liyong, Chris Wanjala (1978) and Peter Nazareth (1978) Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) and Okot p'Bitek (1986).

CHAPTER FOUR

A SONG OF THE SEASON: SINGING THE CONTEMPORARY THROUGH PRESOETRY

This chapter examines contemporary poetry published not just in newspapers but conceived specifically for newspapers and the medium's readership. Among other literary genres, poetry in newspapers constitutes a literary culture issuing from contact between literary and journalistic discourses. As a subgenre, or 'genre of reception' as it has been designated, poetry for newspapers enacts intimate dialogic relations between production and reception, and hence definitively participatory in nature – potentially dissolving the formal binary distinction between newspaper reader and newspaper writer. Although these may later be collected and published as an anthology, I focus on their formal and thematic preoccupation as presented in newspapers; poems *for* the press or 'presoetry'. Although poetry has long been a popular staple in the daily press or, as Fiona Chalamanda puts it, the "most frequently" used genre (2001: 381) of all creative writings in newspapers, it has not attracted commensurate critical attention from scholars of modern African poetry.[131] Using the column "Song of the Season" by Niyi Osundare, this chapter is an attempt to redress the apparent disregard for 'poetry corners' and 'literary supplements/pages' in general, arguably due to their dual and interstitial nature. First, what do I mean by presoetry?

For this chapter I use presoetry, that is, 'poetry for press' as opposed to poems published in newspaper without conscious awareness of the aesthetic/thematic specificities of this medium, or which do not attempt to embrace and juggle attitudes and elements underpinning poetic and journalistic discourses. I use the neologism presoetry instead 'tabloid poems'[132] which Niyi Osundare uses to designate poetry not just published in newspapers but more accurately, designed and particularly tailored for the newspaper medium such as the column "Songs of the Season" – later published as an anthology *Songs of the Season* (1992). The distinction between

[131] Rita Nnodim (2005), Oyeniyi Okunoye (2010) have both looked at *ewi*, that is, media poetry in general but not specific to press poetry. Moreover, they focus on Yoruba poetry and not English-language poetry. Besides Maughan-Brown (1991), Osundare (1998) and Chalamanda (2001), English-language poetry published in the press is neglected in criticism of poetry in general and in the criticism of modern African poetry in particular.

[132] However the term does not augur well in this study because 'tabloid' has the connotation of non-mainstream, yet the paper in which he publishes is what may be called a mainstream daily and weekly (*The Tribune* and the *Sunday Tribune*.

presoetry and poems in newspapers is important as it signals the fact that the writer is also brought into new relations with the reader and the content.[133] By locating presoetry within a larger corpus of creative writings in newspapers, its elusive and ambiguous nature and situation on the margins of either parent disciplines is recognized. As the neologism correctly implies, the genre straddles between the press and poetry. Presoetry is thus viewed as a hybrid form; a creative synthesis or integration of new aesthetics or forms from other media/disciplines, in a way that poetic or journalistic discourses "do not retain their strangeness" (Ojwang 2004: 169), but rather become assimilated (and sharp differences disrupted) into the service of the new sub-genre or art-form. Presoetry is inescapably a novel poetic form, neither exclusively literary nor wholly journalistic in orientation. It occupies an interstitial space between "thoughts recollected in tranquillity"[134] or "the spontaneous overflow of compelling emotions"[135] and hence an 'elevated genre' on the one hand, and 'songs' largely geared towards dissemination of 'newsy' information or 'public opinion', in this case, a critique of 'current' news items on the other. Such blending of information and entertainment, Talbot (2007) observes, involves hybridization of genre format. The subgenre provides space within which poetry interfaces with journalese to mediate contemporary and topical issues, and is thus hybrid.

In relation to poetry in books or what may be termed mainstream African poetry, presoetry exhibits traits akin to popular forms. Considering that creative writing in newspapers is neither 'elite' nor 'traditional' literary expression, it may be located within the 'popular' on the basis of what it is not. Karin Barber's (1997) idea of popular based on this 'neithernessness' is thus paradigmatic. In relation to being neither elitist nor part of an established literary tradition – categorizations which presuppose dichotomous opposition, Barber argues that:

> What this binary paradigm has obscured is the cultural activities, procedures, and products of the majority of people in present-day Africa. There is a vast domain of cultural production which cannot be classified as

[133] Jane Bryce rightly notes that in the column "Songs of the season", Osundare "demonstrates his ability to adapt his poetic voice to different purposes and media" (2003: 115) which, in my view, is a prerequisite for presoetry.
[134] The definition T. S. Eliot (1957) gives for poetry, and which I adopt here as describing mainstream poetry, to capture that sense of an 'elevated' genre.
[135] This long-held creed of African poetry originates from Wordsworth's (1798) famous definition of poetry. The challenge Osundare faces in straddling these extremes may be discerned in Chimombo and Chimombo's observation (in relation to Malawi) that poetry in newspapers is "too facile, ready-made, and uneven" since "not much care went into crafting" (1996: 101). Therefore retaining poetic merit in spite of the demand of having to compose more frequently than ordinarily expected in anthologies remains the challenge with which artists trodding this path grapple.

> either 'traditional' or 'elite', as 'oral' or as 'literate', as 'indigenous' or as 'western' in inspiration, because it straddles and dissolves these distinctions. (Barber 1997: 1-2)

Presoetry is marked by such transgressions and transcendence that blur neat categorizations. Although it has roots in conflation and dissolving of binary opposites, presoetry like most other art forms organically evolves (differentiates) in terms of aesthetic form and social function. I read the subgenre as a product of specialization within the broader genre of poetry, much the same way as praise poetry or the dirge which, over time, have organically achieved specialization in their spirit or intent, content and aesthetic form.[136] Since presoetry – and the related element of occasional poem – has similarly evolved and specialized in deliberation and articulation of shared public opinion or 'opinionating' (that is commenting, critiquing or mediating) news and public information for the audience, it may thus be regarded as an outgrowth of general poetics' re-orientation towards a particular end. Presoetry is hence envisaged not as a departure or deviation from a presumed 'conventional' or mainstream but more correctly, as the 'entextualisation' of everyday news items and opinion pieces. Most importantly, however, I attribute this specialization to influences or "formative affect" (Soyinka 1975: 44) inscribed by the medium of transmission and having to operate within a different context across media, modes of writing or genres due to inter-medial translation – in this case, from one genre/mode (poetry) to another (journalese, for a newspaper audience). Once written poetry is rendered via print media, as opposed to book form or literary-academic journals, it is forced to negotiate a new audience and content, displaying presoetry's ability to "draw in and creatively absorb materials" and textualities (modalities) from mass media such as newspapers (Karin Barber 1997: 6) or adapt specificities unique to it .

The uniqueness of presoetry lies in its inherently dialogic nature – in my view the reason it is regarded as a genre of reception. Poetry constituting *Songs of the Season* exemplifies discourse that explicitly acknowledges that it is defined by its relationship to other instances, both past, to which it responds, and future, whose response the songs anticipate. This past includes some of the genres posited as precursors to presoetry which are intertexted in the 'songs' as well as

[136] Although literary works have since classical times been classified as belonging to general types (which are variously defined), it is an undeniable fact that cross-genre dialogues or dialogic references as well as intertextual relations ensure that cross-overs and overlaps are common features. Such relations occasion disruptive acts of mixture which may lead to not just new forms of awareness or new networks of agency but emergence of new forms or genres as well.

envisioning a modern African poetics beyond the conventionalized. It is thus a dialogue between the genre's antecedent forms and present possibly emerging variants. From the title, the songs may also be taken as a column aimed at building a consensus. The poet and his audience are engaged in a social dialogue geared towards enhancing or creating public accord. At yet another level, this dialogic relationship lies in certain poems being conceived as 'responses' to other previous ones or as anticipating soon-to-be-published rejoinders. Such an (imagined/constructed) exchange is critical since the column acts as a site for manufacturing and manipulating public opinion. *Songs of the Season*, in my view, exemplifies discourse encapsulating such a social dialogue and hence poetry functioning as one of the cultural forms enacting certain forms of socio-political consciousness and enabling dialogue geared towards building a consensus. It is designed specifically for "explicitly public purpose of communicating to a newspaper readership" (Bryce 2003: 118) since Osundare is positioned as a conveyor of 'public' opinion within which his social and ideological affiliation and poetic vision are embedded. From an often ironic, satiric and near-pessimistic outlook, Osundare in *Songs of the Season* reflects on the impact of corruption, bad governance and its effect upon socio-economic conditions of the masses, comments on national and global issues, but most profoundly engages with the Nigerian ruling class forming the target of his satiric butt and vitriol, having raped and murdered the motherland – and what has collectively come to be known as contemporary poetry's megatheme in the country.[137] Core to this chapter, therefore, is the way in which this (sub)genre engenders a dialogic relationship between the poet and the reader, metaphorically dissolving the formal binary distinction between the audience or 'public' and the poet-writer – often/conventionally envisaged in isolationist terms.

This chapter seeks to show the dominance of the dialogic over monologic discourses in the *Songs of the Season* and other poems Osundare composes for newspaper audiences. I explore his poetry's peculiar textualities and texture; its inherent dialogic nature and preoccupation with public idiom and opinion, which in my view points to genre's contradistinctiveness. Therefore, a decidedly dialogic approach underpins the position taken in this chapter such that contemporary poetry is read as generically differentiating and aesthetically benefiting from 'intermedial

[137] On the question of leadership (or lack of it) or what Egya (2011) calls perennial miscarriage of good gorvanance forms what may be called a megatheme among contemporary poets in the region.

translation' and reconfigurations triggered by the use of newspaper medium both as an alternative and complementary outlet for modern poetry. Foregrounding topicality of content and immediacy of purpose (for thematics), the 'formal structuring' of the text into serial form or toning of the register (for poetic language) and reconceptualization of poetic persona – to assume position of columnist-journalist, this chapter argues *Songs of the Season* together with its subsequent progenies[138] afford Osundare the platform through which he implicitly exposes the falsity of the opposition between (written) poetry on the one hand, and forms such as song, commentary articles and prose on the other. The column also enables him to disrupt and reconfigure the boundary between popular and the so-called academic or serious forms as a means of responding to contemporary transgressive forms. Osundare straddles the conventions of the popular and the 'serious' such that presoetry in his hands typifies forms produced at 'contact zones' within modern African poetry at different realms.

Using Jurgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere (and opinion), Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, Julia Kristeva's intertextuality and Mary Louise Platt's notion of the contact zone, this chapter seeks to redress scholarly neglect of creativity in newspapers. Inter-medial translation – closely related to intertextual relations is also critical. Following on Karin Barber, newspaper poetry is the form of creativity that includes popular and everyday genres in the same frame as relatively more privileged and canonical ones (2007: 207). In spite of its marginal position within poetry as a subculture, the relative lack of sensitive and detailed academic interest this literary output has been subjected to, it is my conviction that it manifests a distinct literary character worth scholarly attention.

Basically, since the content and target audience departs from mainstream/conventional, the concept of intermedial translation is critical to any analysis of presoetry. It is, therefore, necessary to pay attention to what exactly changes, or put differently, what the choice of press as outlet for poetic 'muse' – as opposed to the mainstream/book form – entails. By the poetic form travelling from live performances or pages of the book into the press in what may be called inter-medial translation, conscious decisions about the poet's role, thematic preoccupation, aesthetics

[138] In this case I have in mind subsequent titles under which this experiment appeared besides *Songs of the Season,* such as *Rhythm Blues* and currently *Lifelines* as well as the monthly experiment through which a nexus between arts/poetry and politics is enacted.

and audiences have to be made. Trans-lation/-location or travel across media or genre has preoccupied various scholars and it is not my intention to delve into it in detail here.[139] It will suffice to mention in connection to poetic form that inter-medial re-location entails what Wole Soyinka calls "formative affect", that is, the particular genre (poetry) or form (poetic) acquires traits initially absent while shedding off others (1975: 44) and thus assimilates without subduing foreignness inscribed or occasioned by journalistic thought or discourse.[140] Following Mieke Bal and Joanne Morra (2007), I read translating across as also working within discourses and practices of intertextuality, intersemiotics and interdisciplinarity, which lead to movements across genres, media, bodies of knowledge and subjects – as is the case with Osundare's poetry corner. More figuratively, as they rightly point out, translating across is concerned with the marginal, the gaps, fissures and contradictions of working in the interstices between literature (or poetry) and media studies (or journalism) and the various boundaries Osundare transgresses in such endeavours. Newspaper as a medium of transmission impresses upon the art of poetry in what may generally be understood in light of translation (not linguistic, involving languages, or inter-medial in the sense of medium since the written mode cuts across poetry collections, anthologies and newspapers, nor generic, as in one genre to another, nor intersemiotic, that is, translation from verbal text to graphic form) involving recontextualization of form often regarded academic (serious) into popular, non-academic spaces. Presoetry thus emerges out of such intricate webs of dialogue between languages (in its diversity), forms, modes, media and genres.

An analysis of presoetry also finds the idea of public sphere, public opinion and notion of public good significantly paradigmatic. Osundare is not merely interested in broadening the genre's readership by publishing in newspapers but also making an intervention in public debates of national concern, voicing as well as raising the consciousness of the people. These concepts are pivotal in appreciating the column under study. They are crucial because the column sets off from the premise that it mediates between 'society', in particular the marginalised masses or the 'suffering' people, and the 'state', as well as dealing with the whole issue of good or transparent governance. Through this column, Osundare voices a sort of "consensus" and "a common good"

[139] Whitehead (1989), for example, cautions that writing for a new medium or genre entails much more than mere relocation of material.
[140] This may be related to the concept of linguistic hospitality hence, in this particular case, poetic hospitality.

which transcends individual desires and interests (Fraser 1990: 186). The dialogic orientation in the column thus ensures that this consensus about contemporary 'common good' issues from 'reasoned public debate' about a common often nationalist goal. He realizes or approximates such a consensus by often falling back on an ideal of 'the people' as his reading public – opposed to and/or separate from professional critics, academics and creative writing students. The collective-common good Osundare harps on in this column is largely the crystallization of 'the people's' spirit. This spirit is evident in the column, in particular, exemplified in the poet-persona's voice and central thematic preoccupations, its basic tone and intonations often aligned with the people as reflected in the column. I describe the voice as embodying the spirit of the people because the poet-persona in most of these songs brings out an "audience-oriented subjectivity" (Lane 2007: 94). The songs privilege a shared obligation to develop a dialogue within which an ethical understanding of common needs in the society is developed. As such, the column exemplifies the poet's concerted efforts as he strives for a relationship with his readers that defines them as members of one large (contemporary) Nigerian society, significantly imagining as an extended circle of readers of his poems. I read presoetry as presenting a clear case of the merging of poetry's socio-cultural context with technical form.

How does Osundare adjust or configure poetic form to reach out to the conceived 'public' audience more effectively? He does this by employing intricate patterns of addressivity. Core to this analysis are strategies through which the reader and the text are "synthesized in a friendly relationship", and what Norman Fairclough (1989) refers to as "synthetic personalization". Osundare invites his readers to a dialogue, and in the process creates familiarity and identifiable persona through hailing. For analysis, using Althusser (1969), I take hailing as a process by which the persons being hailed recognize themselves as the subject of the hail, and know to respond often arriving at the conclusion, 'that's obvious', 'right' or obviously 'true'.

Bakhtin's model for communication as well as Bakhtinian vocabulary (dialogue, dialogic, dialogism) provides a powerful tool for organizing and conceptualizing the 'conversation' between Osundare and his audiences. By reading *Songs of the Season* along the lines of dialogue or dialogic relations, the column is envisaged as an expressive and communicative exchange (or basic dialogue) between Osundare and his readership. The privileging of dialogic relations in presoetry is in part predicated on the assumption that unlike the kind Bakhtin had in mind when

contrasting prose with epic and poetry, presoetry is unique and just as dialogic as prose. In this unsustainable binary, Bakhtin posited epic and poetry as monologic while prose is seen as dialogic. According to Bakhtin, "poetry and in particular poetic rhythm, tends to reduce multiple voices to a single voice" (1981: 249) while "[P]oetic style is by convention suspended from any mutual interaction with alien discourse, any allusion to alien discourses" (1981: 285). Prosodic forms prevent a second voice from being materialized since "any intentional structuring of phonemes, any unity or construction of sounds (which is definitive of poetry) can present only one voice" (Shemtov 2001: 69). Harping on the fact that he does not completely dismiss the possibility of an occasional double voice in this genre, I locate presoetry as inherently dialogic. Although Bakhtin perceived the genre as intrinsically single-voiced, this subgenre exemplifies a unique accentuation of mutual interactions not only with 'alien' discourses, but with the audience as well. Bakhtin, however, acknowledges that the language of a poem can include references to other languages and voices, can quote or even ventriloquize 'others' although it cannot be 'an other' (2001: 70) – citing traces of dialogism in prosaic poetry (resulting from prosaification of the lyric). Despite prosodic structures shaping poems as monological, I emphasise the possibility of poetic discourse presenting two voices in the very same words and speech (*ibid*), or within the confines of a single poem. Presoetry in particular exhibits deeply embedded connotative powers and integration of diverse discourses; it is not merely dialogic, but has multiple layers and locations (surface and internal) of dialogic relations as the analysis details shortly.

By treating poems in newspapers as either journalistic pieces or as simply poems, the fundamental transgressive nature of the texts is obliterated. It is critical, therefore, to position creative writing in newspapers not only as crossing disciplinary boundaries (Chalamanda 2001: 379), but also as instancing dialogic relations between the two discourses; it sets these discourses in a dialogic interrelationship with each other. The column instances the power of poetic expressions (in newspapers) to dialogize 'popular' unofficial literary discourse as well as the more 'official' mainstream practices of poetry as practiced amongst most canonical African poets using English. This writing exemplifies antagonistic dialogue with recognized or 'official' discourse; the demands of column-writing (journalism) on the one hand, and those of creative writing (poetry) on the other. The negotiation takes the form of a unifying process which culminates in the more specialized poems for the press or presoetry, in contrast to mere poems in

newspapers. Presoetry inscribes dialogic interrelations that take place on the boundaries between newspaper-creative writing – sites of the most intense and productive interactions resulting in hybrid forms.

Voice as used in this study echoes Bakhtinian (1981) sense, taking on a broader connotation of style and discourse (Wales 2001: 407) and not just the poet-persona's perspective. Broadening of this concept makes it available for the criticism of poetry without confining it to prose as envisaged by Bakhtin who employs it with specific reference to the novel (1981: 259 – 422). Thus literary 'voice' is not just the audible aspect of a text, linked to a subject with certain characteristics and social affiliations but "a metaphor for discursive rendition of a particular consciousness" (Shemtov 2001: 69) and hence a means of identifying the speaker as belonging to a particular social category or class associated with the dialect or sort of thinking projected in poetic discourse. As the "speaking consciousness" (1981: 434), the voice in this column is closely associated with some imagined collective consciousness based on some sort of agreed upon set of conduct and values. The persona identifies with and bolsters the sociological and political views of the readers. To the contrary, some postcolonial authors convey their respective messages about their subjects' conditions without assuming a definitive 'voice', or without presuming that they speak for all members of their respective 'nation' or community.

The presence of what may be called "inner polemical words acutely aware of the words of another" that "cast a sideward glance" (Shemtov 2001: 65) reminiscent of Bakhtin's idea of utterances which "cringe in the presence or in anticipation of another person's word, answer, or objection" (1973: 163) endows the column with its peculiar dialogic nature. For analysis, I discuss what Bakhtin calls unmerged consciousnesses and voices which signal multivoicedness and therefore hybridity. Bearing in mind that "uttered word respond and reacts with its every fiber [...] to the unspoken words of another person" (Bakhtin 1984: 197), I show how some songs are structured in such a way that the reader is often persuaded to 'respond' – even when the poem text is largely monologic. In my view, the uniqueness of presoetry resides in the idea that numerous living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness (Bakhtin 1981: 276) come into play. As a hybrid genre, it is produced in highly complex intertextual chains of interaction with, among others, conception of poetry, audience and role of poet – his endeavour to reconcile polarized beliefs. I read presoetry as preceded and succeeded by numerous other

(texts) dialogue, pieces of language and aesthetic forms. Using, Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextual relations across various discourses or genres, this chapter focuses on the interface between creative writing and journalistic discourse or practices.

Within the foregoing conceptual frame, the analysis focuses on three main areas. Writing presoetry demands that the poet assumes a new role when writing for a newspaper audience. The first obvious difference lies in content as more often than not, presoetry deals with current and topical issues thematically. I explore how identification with the megathemes Osundare engages with in the column defines and hails his audience – often imagined as a public sphere in Nigerian society. From the range of themes, one cannot fail to recognize the obviousness in the imagined target audience. Secondly, it is undeniable that the 'poetic voice' needs adaptation to the new medium. A different style or approach to poetry entails a presentation of a different voice, tone and accordingly a different ideological positioning. Consequently, the line between art and activism is blurred. Osundare is more of a poet-activist than a writer whose poetic vision and artistic engagement is intimately and inextricably tied with the plight of the 'ordinary people', investing in their capacity to recover their inherent collective force and latent revolutionary vision. The poet-persona undergoes trans- and re-formation upon change of medium not only to address a new audience, but also espouse a new platform and different intent.[141] Thirdly, and most profound, is the re-establishment of a direct relationship between poetry and the general audience or readership. There is a need to adapt style and language for the lay readership or generally, different target groups – or writing with a slant.

Megathemes and Topicality

Songs of the Season opens or imagines a public sphere which acts as a discursive arena where 'private persons' debate 'public matters' for a presumed common good or shared interest. This serves as the basis for determining what passes as legitimate topic of and for public discourse considering that there are no natural givens in such cases. Themes handled by presoetry revolve around the contemporaneous milieu; the economic, socio-political or cultural issues 'of public concern' and hence matters of common concern, subjected to discursive contestation. In this

[141] This is closely related to what Kezilahabi saw in Swahili poetry as need to adapt poetics to fit new audiences of *mashairi* discussed in chapter three.

column, a common good may be interpreted as "the pre-political starting point of deliberation" which is to be transformed and transcended in the course of the debate (1990: 72). Topics discussed as restricted to the "common good" and in which discussion of "private interests" is ruled out or elevated for the society to emulate. The space is based on and stresses a view of politics as people reasoning together to promote a common good that transcends the mere sum of individual preferences (1990: 72) as Osundare often attempts to. I use thematic preoccupations of poems published in this column in the mid 1980s and the 1990s to illustrate what I call a 'public idiom' in the column. This demands a brief contextualization of the socio-historical and political developments in Nigeria (and Africa) in the 1980s and 1990s focusing especially on the politics of economic restructuring, corrupt, inept and insensitive (military) regimes, and general desperation in the country and Africa.

The decade (1980s) Osundare first ran this column was dominated by harsh realities of economic hardships, arguably prompted by and largely attributable to economic sanctions against African (Third World) governments initiated by the West through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. As the poems testify, the column was preoccupied with, among others, the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and its profound impact upon lives of majority of Nigerians and Africans in general in the mid 1980s. Imposed to ensure debt repayment and economic restructuring, many developing nations have been left worse off with soaring poverty levels partly because of the policies of these international financial institutions.[142] The period when *Songs of the Season* appeared in Nigeria – like most sub-Saharan Africa - was experiencing International Monetary Fund austerity measures and the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Program's (SAP) disastrous effects.[143] Politically, the country was under yet another ruthless military ruler, Ebrahim Babangida. This context or 'season' no doubt authorizes a particular political reading of *Songs of the Season.* Since for a critical understanding of presoetry

[142] For example, fifteen years of SAPs have not improved the quality of life for Tanzanian citizens (http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/36/347.html Accessed on 12th March, 2010), a case which is not unique to that country. The IMF and the World Bank have financed structural adjustment policies in Tanzania for about 15 years. Per capita income and basic human welfare indicators have fallen during this time period. For example, per capita GDP has fallen to the 1960 level and primary school enrolment rates plunged below 50 percent from an average of 80 percent during the 1980s.

[143] Not only is this the background to what has come to be described by various critics as 'aesthetics of pain' but perhaps, the Zambian reinterpretation of this institution as Satan is here ('Satana Ali Paano) best provides a picture of their adverse affects (Spitulnik 2002: 195).

in general, there is a need to link it to "the social and historical dynamics in which it operates" (Chalamanda 2001: 377), the period is central in appreciating the focus of this column. *Songs of the Season* is aimed at "capturing significant happenings of our time" (Killam 2003: 135), which I read as specifically referring to news and public information of significance. This focus, I argue, develops a public idiom in the poetry which prizes clarity and accessibility, avoiding (genre/literary) specialist jargon and pedantic display of scholarship.[144] Distinctively, therefore, this sub-genre embodies the liminal space between articles disseminating news, and poems designed primarily for aesthetic purposes and secondarily, to merely inform and to opinionate. As the title of this column suggests, these 'songs' capture or comment on most emergent socio-political issues and events of the week or 'season'. As Osundare reckons in the poem "Song for all Songs":

> The rain of my time will not shun
> The roof of my ears

In other words, he signals that the 'newsy' ("my time"), in-season or topical nature of subject matter in the column. Like East Africa (especially Tanzania) where a tradition of publishing topical verse in daily or weekly newspapers is a common practice, Osundare turns to timely political verses. The poetic form is thus a preferred genre for debating what Osundare calls "highly sensitive issues" (1999: 327) of national importance in newspapers – particulary because of its terse nature. He redefines and reconfigures the bounds and boundaries of column-writing by introducing poetic compositions as a means of inspiring critical rage against national and global inanities amongst his readership. Osundare weaves the art of poetic creativity with commentaries on everyday events or occurances – the target of much of his own wit and anger in this column. The featuring of topical poems regularly in the newspaper also opens the possibility amongst the audience to respond in thoughtful poetic responses to local tragedies and other sensitive news stories in a sort of dialogue.[145] He creates a culture distinguished by a vigorous presence of relatively brief, enjoyable and enlightening poetry that invites the audience into engaging with topical socio-political issues both in the country and world in general. At the end of this experiment, Osundare sampled some of these press-poems and published them as *Songs of the Season* (1990).

[144] http://www.cosmoetica.com/TOP80-DES77.htm
[145] Although more of dialogism than actual dialogue, or what may be termed dialogic relation.

Closely related to topicality is the concept of 'occasional poem'. If, more often than not, Osundare writes in response to what Mphahlele describes as an "ever-present stimuli" (1959: xxi),[146] an exploration of poems published in the column indicates that most of them arise from specific events in specific places and hence, to some extent, may be called occasional poems. By definition, an occasional poem is bound to an event occurring in a specific place and time (Edward Whitley 2006: 452) or relates to the concept of "pieces d'occasion" (Hegel 1975: 995). Poems such as "Not Guilty", "Sacrifice", "Where are the Millions Gone?", "Health for All by Year 2000", "IMF" and "A Tongue in the Crypt" in Osundare's own words "sprang straight from contemporary happenings and parlance" (1990: 4) and, therefore, may loosely be called occasional poetry. However, I hasten to caution that the column is not entirely dedicated to occasional or spatial-temporally restricted thematic subjects. Some of the issues tackled in the column transgress the confines of occasional poems. Socio-philosophical subjects such as those tackled in "Money" and "Truth" as well as perennial concerns or megathemes of African poets such as governance, contemporary living conditions, unemployment, joblessness and corruption not only cut across most postcolonial subjectivities or societies but have proved to be evergreen subjects.

Whereas mainstream poems generally handle any socio-culturally or politically relevant theme in society, presoetry narrows its scope to mostly current affairs or news[147] and hence is largely spatial-temporally specific. This is why Osundare foregrounds topicality and relevance when discussing what he holds as essential characteristic defining this column and presoetry in general. The new role the poet assumes demands that he informs his or her audience of any significant happenings around them as s/he shapes their critical responses. Despite the difficulties associated with marrying the 'muse' happily to politics, Osundare attempts a synthesis of the two. As Whitley argues, unlike private lyrics "designed to be overheard by a later audience", occasional poetry – and presoetry in general – address its audience directly rather than indirectly (2006: 452). While the target audience is principally local (as opposed to national or international/global), mainstream on the other hand casts a much wider net encompassing

[146] This may be related to what Mphahlele (2002) calls the tyranny of time and place in the sense that Osundare grapples with the contemporary Nigerian society which arrests his poetic imaginations.
[147] Although contested, I settle for what I call the most basic understanding of the term. News is defined by among others, characteristics such as relevance, immediacy.

national or global audiences. Herein lies the difference. Osundare strives to make his occasional poems unbounded in thematic scope in spite of directly addressing the reader. Like mainstream poets who speak to an audience beyond their nation and not just on public occasions, Osundare negotiates between an audience connected to the immediate events of the occasion (through hailing the contemporary Nigerian readership of *The Tribune*) and a larger audience (of modern African poetry in English) that later participates in the dialogue through published collection – when issued as a book. Osundare grapples with national issues in this column without limiting himself to a Nigerian audience but makes the works appeal to readers across the continent and entire globe. Some of the texts anticipate a global audience while others, in terms of relevance of content, look beyond the confines of specific time and place of composition. Using presoetry and the various 'occasional poems', Osundare thus addresses the temporally and geographically distant reader, but maintains intimate connections with his contemporary and immediate Nigerian audience. Arguably, in spite of the medium, Osundare, therefore, does not limit his focus only to "concrete cultural situations" (Brodhead 1993: 8) but looks beyond, embracing humanity in general.

In this column, Osundare's scope of thematic concerns not only widens, but also shifts to predominantly address topical issues. *Songs of the Season* demonstrates how the requirements of occasional poetry compel Osundare to articulate the local and global framework within which his otherwise nationalist poetics operates. It obliges Osundare to grapple not only with a wide range of issues but sieve these to those in public interest and relevance. Although the specific (social-political and) "cultural situations" of occasional poetry are "concrete" in ways that other literary productions are not (2006: 452), for example most of the 'tributes' are dedicated to well known persons in Nigeria (Chief Obafemi Awolowo, musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, educationist Chief Samuel Fal Adeniran, advocate Femi Falana, journalist Dele Giwa and engineer-academic Ayodele Awojobi), Osundare looks beyond Nigeria in his thematic subject to eulogize or recognize events and individuals elsewhere such as the Swedish politician Olof Palme and Women for Life on Earth – Greenham Common Women Peace Camp. While some remain localised, for example "A Song for Olusunta" or thematically tied to issues of national concern like "The Road to Abuja" and "A Song for Land", others anticipate and address any contemporary society, such as "Song of the Jobless Graduate" and "Retrenched", irrespective of

spatial-temporal distance. *Songs of the Season* demonstrates Osundare's ability to negotiate the multiple layers of meanings, hailing the diverse audience that constitutes the newspaper's readership. Presoetry's occasional nature also demands direct connection or association to a specific spatial-temporal space with the simultaneous effect of making the local-immediate setting or the specific representative of the Nigerian nation, African continent and humanity in general. The requirement of the occasional mode, that is, the poet locating him/herself in a specific or single space (Whiteley 2006: 452), pose a challenge to Osundare – and one which most other attempts at presoetry fail to confront. Osundare is compelled to re-imagine the people he considers as eminently representative of Nigerian nationality. The occasional mode forces him to simultaneously narrow and broaden the scope of what he regards as his readership, negotiating between the political ruling elite, the working class and peasantry, and those susceptible to bad governance practices across the continent. In most of his songs, he adopts definition of 'man' as conceived by Pablo Neruda – and which is appropriated from Blake (Riess 1972: xvii). Such a perspective foregrounds commitment and various means of hailing to appeal to different sections of the population with the purpose of raising awareness of their fate – in relation to ruling minority. The invariably diverse conception of subjects in his poetry is reflected in the titles that he uses in imagining and addressing his audience; 'Song of' the Jobless Graduate/Street-sweeper/Pandering Don/Nigerian Driver/peasant/those retrenched/children. All these constitute a sort of 'central node' representative of diverse network of contemporary Nigerian/African society. By conceiving the society in specified and disparate categories such as children, joblessed, peasants, or the economically marginalized and privileged ruling elite or politicians, Osundare establishes modes of identification with the social realities of the subjects and, therefore, is in a position to critique and comment on various issues afflicting the society. He concerns himself and identifies with the struggles and hurdles of the 'common' economically sidelined wo/man – what Whitley calls the posture of "the rough" (2006: 459). Osundare presents himself as a 'democratic presence' or a common man who speaks as and for, rather than apart from, the people (2006: 459). By locating the persona of his songs as one of the roughs/masses, he identifies with and speaks for these struggling segments of the Nigerian (and African) populace. Osundare imagines the 'downtrodden' subaltern groups in Nigeria to be a representative of both the national subpopulation as well as the poor in other African or Third

World countries. It is such a conceptualization that allows him to negotiate the global, local or national affiliations within the poetic space.

The column provides an opportunity for the poet to take sides and give his readers a deeper understanding of otherwise superficial news items. Adopting what Bourgault (1995) calls an agonistically toned thought, Osundare polemically attacks foreign and former colonial powers. Virtually all poems in this column, like the rest of his works in general, read like one song of protest against all forms of injustice and inequality and the universal theme of social deprivation (Anyokwu 2011: 5). As he metaphorically comments in the poem titled "The IMF", the institution at best:

> is
> the doctor
> who heals
> by killing
> the patient

He provides his reader a lens through which to view this body and its activities in Nigeria, Africa and Third World countries in general. The infamous retrenchment programme and its aftermaths dominate this column, as it aggravated the already grievous unemployment crisis – as evident in "Song of the Jobless Graduate" (1990: 11), "Song of the Street-Sweeper" (1990: 15) and "And Cometh the Bulldozer" (1990: 17). Like his oral predecessor, Osundare adopts oral narratives where actors were situated in a struggle between opponents often described in these stories with opposing sets of predominantly aggregative complexes (1995: 187). It is this agonistically toned reporting he utilizes to pit the actions of colonial powers, foreign forces together with African "despots" that receive the harshest Osundare's criticism. The painful effects of structural adjustment on ordinary citizens in African countries "have been reported in highly agonistic ways" (Bourgault 1995: 188) and Osundare – both as columnist and creative writer – is no exception. The foregoing orientation has led Remi Raji to perceive Osundare as objectively and reflectively taking into consideration all-sides of a given story or issue in his songs. Describing him as "the democratic smith in the forge", Raji (2007) correctly observes that Osundare's impartiality is evident since he "praises and scourges by the same nib of the pen". As journalists run numerous IMF-related stories, Osundare's column similarly captures and attempts an

interpretation of this powerful financial institution's impact upon lives of the people, especially what he calls the "joblessed", using poetic idioms:

> I worked and worked for a grateful boss
> ***
> I worked and worked, then the dizzying news:
> The nation is broke and factories fail
> The boss is licensed to suck and sack
> And that is how I lost my job

While the jobless graduate's lament echoes the job-situation in the country, it reinforces the image of IMF as a doctor who is eager to kill the patient instead:

> "B.A. Hons" in glittering scrolls
> Hood and gown like a masquerade
> But where the job to show for these?
> Where the job, oh where the job?
> Bosses are brutal with their nagging "NO!"
> Everywhere the gates are latched and locked
> With grating keys and retrenchment chains

Undeniably, the number of poems on IMF-World Bank sanctions – and in general the West's financial manoeuvres whether directly or indirectly hinting at their effects - dominates the column. The poems "IMF", "Retrenched", "Borrowing What They Stole", "Poverty's Offence", "Wolf Gift", "Money" and "A Song for the IMF" all tackle this international economic arm-twisting of Third World African countries by the boards of these organisations, further affirming the great profundity of agonistic tone in postcolonial writing. In "A Song for the IMF" for example, Osundare dramatizes what he believes is the situation in which Nigeria and most African nations find themselves. Posting these nations as "once upon a time" well endowed, indeed "so rich in everything:/Gold wrestled silver in the belly of her earth", Osundare is of the opinion that the donations the West makes to Africa were actually "grabbed" by "a breed of barons" who impoverished these Third World nations, hence shifting all the blame in a characteristic agonistic thinking:

> They met a land flowing with fortunes
> But left a desert of grating skulls.

Satirically, Osundare portrays African leaders as conspiring to rob the common citizenry whenever they engage in borrowing from the IMF. Although Bourgault assumes that "agonistic thinking's" pervasiveness in African creativity simply serves to "conveniently deflect the blame for economic exploitation" and mismanagement away from local elites onto "the evil forces of

the West" (1995: 187), in Osundare's case one encounters blame equally apportioned on (Black) Africans as well. He depicts a kind of unconscious collaboration between colonialist forces and African elites in this poem. Osundare deploys dialogue to capture this absurdity;

> "We have come to borrow some of the fortunes
> Which lie in your brimming banks,
> Do us this favour, and we shall pay back
> With all your stated interests".

Osundare says that true to the title of the column as 'Songs of the Season', the priority for the choice of the week's subject is its "newsiness" or its topicality (1990: 5). The column captures this restlessness and Osundare's quick responses. For example, soon after the government re-introduced school fees Osundare published the poem "A Peasant Debates A Professor" (1990: 31-4) in which he interrogates the burdening of 'the people', choosing to humorously refer to the then minister of education as the "wizard of books". Both as a commentary and documentation, the poem captures 'the people's' perception – as embodied in the peasant – of their government's insensitivity towards their needs, in particular access to affordable education. The questions the 'peasant' in this poem asks the 'professor' are representative of the concerns of the general populace. Similarly, the poems such as "Song for Children's Day" (1990: 129-31), "A Song for My Land" (1990: 28-31) and "A Song for Human Rights Day" (1990: 11-2), were all written for a particular event, steeped in the day's celebrations, and, therefore, appropriating that immediacy of purpose typical of journalism. This is why presoetry – more than mainstream poetry – predominantly focuses on what Arnold describes as "occasional and as topical as the morning's headlines" (1989: 3) and hence song idiom. The column attempts what waMakokha describes as "harvesting of everyday life" as an aesthetic matter besides imagination, myth and memory (2010: xxv). As an aesthetic of new literary production, the "mainstreaming of everyday life" runs through later variants of "Songs of the Season". In this case, the "cross-cutting and enduring power of the 'here and now'" serves as a strategic vehicle for hailing or defining the audience (waMakokha 2010: xxv). This is why as recent examples demonstrate, Osundare engages with 'here and now' issues such as the fate of the Nigerian football team's predicament during the 2010 world cup finals, the drama surrounding the presidency in "Missing King" series before the eventual death of president Yar Adwa and captures the tussling for power that dogged the runup to 2011 presidential elections in "Campaign Blues".

The potential role poetry plays in shaping and constructing political consciousness may be estimated using *Song of the Season*. Following Edelman's argument that "art is the fountainhead from which political discourse, beliefs about politics, and consequent actions ultimately spring" (1995: 2), I position the column not just as an exemplar of this nexus but as a site in which their complex relationships maybe understood and appreciated. As a columnist, Osundare plays a central role in forming and shaping the public's opinions in relation to public debates and issues of national significance and relevance. The column therefore acts as a site for reconstituting, in its diverse complexities, the political life of the nation. Unambiguously, he takes as his primary focus the need to denounce all forms of injustice, oppression and corruption in the society.[148] Through the column, he opens a conversation between the reader and the ruling elite as well as between his imagination of an ideal society and those of the geneal public. *Songs of the Season* brings to the surface the tension between, and even dialogue with, what may be called 'public opinion' on the one hand, and political leadership or authority (policy makers) on the other. This echoes Habermas's argument that public opinion is often held in high regard, more than opinions of those in political authority (Habermas 236). This seems to be what emerges from the column. That so corrupt is political authority that it is incapable of providing leadership, hence the huge chasm between public opinion and the exercise of political and social power (political leadership). As a critical authority, therefore, the column focuses on the insensitivity of the public administration (social, economic and political). As a genre, presoetry is instrumental in "shaping narratives around a particular social problems" (Jenny Kitzinger 2000: 61) – in this case, military (mis)rule, corruption and tough socio-economic times in Nigeria, and "guiding public discussion" – which is at the core of Osundare's endeavours in this column. Through this column, Osundare demonstrates a writer's responsibility for controlling the public's taste and choices.

My intention is not solely to examine the independent role played by artists in the shaping of political values and beliefs, but rather how Osundare – because of the thematic preoccupation and medium of expression – appropriates the role of an activist to that of a creative writer. I read this column as a crystallization of the evocative power of the arts, and more so poetry, in shaping

[148] As Brown rightly notes, Osundare is at the forefront championing the cause of the disenfranchised in society with an agenda of mass mobilization through political action in artistic production.

political ideas largely due to the nature of the medium Osundare works with and the strategies he uses to coerce the readers. In relation to this function, Edelman's claims are instructive. He writes that:

> The catalog of conceptions and perceptions stemming from works of art and forming political ideas and actions can be extended indefinitely. It is these, not the appeals, fears, or enthusiasms of the moment, that exert the fundamental influence on political maneuvering and its outcomes, for they shape the meanings of everyday developments. (1995: 7)

Specifically, it is how Osundare mediates in forming political ideas and actions as well as the fundamental influence he exerts in shaping meanings of everyday developments that is of critical concern. From the songs, conceptions and perceptions stemming from thematic preoccupations in this column may be estimated. For example, aware of the rancorous relationship between the media and the state or its institutions, Osundare – himself part of the former – helps the reader construct a critical position from which to read encounters between the two. In "Only Four", he adopts a sarcastic tone to self-consciously interrogate the press and art of reportage. This is an attempt to highlight one perspective with great clarity so that it functions as "rhetorical shorthand" to aid journalists and their audiences to make sense of fresh news stories (Kitzinger 2000: 61). By deploying a persona who aspires to be an emperor (join the ruling elite), double critique of both the state and the so-called fourth estate is given an ironic angle:

> When I become an emperor
> I will slay the press
> And hang all editors by their itchy pens.

In other words, the persona does not see any problem with the press until s/he assumes position of leadership. The "itchy pens" are dreadful only depending on which side of the status quo one occupies. As illustration, this is followed by a sort of excerpt reportage which the poet-persona uses to justify his intentions and loathing for "all editors", especially as perceived by those whose misdeeds they expose, in this case, university administrators and government functionaries. This is introduced by two lines which make explicit the persona's disdain;

> Just fancy my innocent fate
> In their unruly hand
> The students assailed my comfort
> For just a few hours
> And I called the police to quell the row
> My guests fired their guns
> (Afterall, the mob too fired

Their volleys of noisy chants)
And a few students decided to die...

It is clear from the persona's "innocent fate" triggered by the "unruly hand" of journalists that Osundare attempts to dramatize the often acrimonious relations between, on the one hand, university administration and students, and on the other, the press and corrupt elites in various managerial positions. Borrowing from Jenny Kitzinger (2000), these become "more than simply key events" operating differently from news icons. From the diction, for example, the choice to describe the police as "my guests" and the statement that "a few decided to die", the attitude and tone of the persona is anything but cynical.

In this case, the shooting of protesting students becomes one of the 'high-profile' episodes which outlive the conclusion of events on the ground, and, therefore, become part of a 'litany of key moments' inseparably associated with particular issues in public debate (1990: 61) – the insensitivity and arrogance of public servants. As a strategy, such allusions are crucial to poetry whose bedrock is 'economy of language' – just like newspaper articles which also rely on minimal print space. In "Not my Business", the use of 'high profile' cases or events that attract intense media interest and which continue to carry powerful associations is evident in the three cited episodes; the picking of Akanni, the dragging of Danladi and Chinwe's dramatic sacking "for a stainless record" (1990: 110). The concept of "a waiting jeep" into which victims of state violence are "stuffed", and the ambushing of targets in wee hours of the morning followed by "a lengthy absence" (1990: 110) become episodes embodying powerful associations crucial in public debates revolving around state suppression of criticism or opposition discourses. Osundare's message is to those who view such injustices as not their business and critique the notion that unless one is directly involved or confronted, then it is not his/her business taking a stand against or actively working towards the reversal or countering of such forces. Having insisted in the opening three verses that unless "they don't take yam/from [his] savouring mouth", the fourth stanza closes the poem thus:

And then one evening
As I sat down to eat my yam
A knock on the door froze my hungry hand
The jeep was waiting on my bewildered lawn
Waiting, waiting in its usual silence. (1990: 110-1)

For the audience to decode the persona's unfortunate fate, Osundare uses the three typified characters as reference points and keys to explain the government's cruelty to its citizenry. The same 'waiting jeep' evokes the fact that what the Akannis, the Danladis and the Chinwes went through awaits the persona. Similarly, the same "usual silence" will follow. These two act as media templates – which Osundare relies on in this column.

The column seems to thrive on the idea that political conceptions, as Eldeman argues, result from exposure to art forms, whether high or low, over a period of time. In engaging with *Songs of the Season*, the audience is exposed to multilayered identities Osundare constructs and articulates through the poem-personas and narrations. Some of these identities pit the economically marginalized against oppressive political forces represented by government (state power,) – all of which are important values in political consciousness. Identifying with the students (as he often does with the peasants, drivers or generally workers) is crucial in the process of political conceptualization and conscientization. This is because people perceive and conceive in the light of narratives, pictures, and images, generated by among others, works of art such as poetry. Hence these *Songs* become a "medium through which new meanings emerge" (Edelman 1995: 7), meanings that help shape the public's opinion. For example, I consider the manner in which Osundare sarcastically portrays as inappropriate and unjustifiable the actions or reactions of the 'fourth estate' in "Only Four" as dramatizing impunity of public institutions and in the process positioning the reader against them. The persona moulds the reader's own judgement of the situation by pointing out that:

> The press then screamed
> As if it was all a senseless massacre;
> But when I counted the corpses
> They numbered a meagre FOUR (51)

To further absolve himself of the blame, the persona sarcastically and in mitigation concludes that the event and outcome do not warrant the journalists' actions. Perhaps it is the subtitle that best signals how this poem should be read. "A Song for Obtuse Angle" seems to suggest the insensitivity and imperceptive view from which national matters are approached. After all, only four died – not forgetting that they "decided" to die – which, according to him is inconsequential – foregrounded in the summative rhetorical question at the end:

> Four, yes, only four!

From a crowd of a dozen thousand
How can FOUR dead be such a crime?

The presence of what may be called "inner polemical words acutely aware of the words of another" that "cast a sideward glance" (qtd in Talbot 2007: 65) in the above lines is reminiscent of Bakhtin's idea of utterances which "cringe in the presence or in anticipation of another person's word, answer, or objection" (1973: 163). The 'sideward glance' in the line "Four, yes, only four!" inscribes dialogism as it seems to respond to another voice, answering it in anticipation. It is this dialogical intercourse – as opposed to coinciding/overlapping with a single consciousness or a single voice – (1973: 167) that inscribes the sort of interactivity foregrounded by this column that I read as occasioned by Osundare's use of specialized devices or approach to poetics. Consequently, the column instances the innovative role played by intellectuals and artists such as Osundare and their influence in the construction of opinion-shaping images relevant to the political and economic realities marking the here and now. In a dialogic cycle, his conception of, and response to, the audience also benefits from notions of public opinion, public interest and common good. Rather than some faceless, abstract audience, Osundare uses poetic discourse to identify or put faces on his readers which is sometimes achieved through titling the poems as 'songs of' the driver, parent or politician, he directly appeals to various social categories since representatives of these categorises are convened as the imagined readers, to whom the column or song for the week is dedicated. For example, the corrupt in "The Road to Abuja" and those "Retiring into Farming", the mid-level income earners and workers in urban set ups, and those who obviously frequent relatively cheap food outlets in "Buka Banter" and "At the Senior Service Club". This is why I said earlier that the voices are not disembodied but are concretised figures.

As a formal characteristic, a 'concretised' voice is a luminal figure which functions as a device for manipulating the reader. In the poem "Song of the Sudden Storm", Osundare embodies the society's collective consciousness as he bemoans – on behalf of the Nigerian citizenry - the release of politicians imprisoned for looting the country's Second Republic in 1985. Appropriating the indigenous dirge singer's mission of introspective and communal purgation, which in my view is shared with the journalist, Osundare takes the platform of a concerned responsible citizen as he warns and urges the readers thus:

Ah the hyenas are back again
To thundering bugles of our crippled memory

The image of 'hyenas' creates and reinforces a repulsive affect; hence the reader immediately conjures a negative picture of the released politicians. The poet-persona considers it his prerogative to remind this community whose memory he says is 'crippled'. As a poet-colunmist, he is, therefore, the guardian of the society's memory. This further underscores Osundare's awareness of the whole gamut of potential readers the new medium he is working with avails, some in need of signposts to help read or interpret the poetry and make sense of news events around them.

Linguistic Topicality Markers

As more subtle means of inscribing topicality, linguistic markers form part of the intricate patterns of addressivity Osundare uses to signal the here-and-now feeling among readers. One such indicator is the use of the lexical item 'today'. The pervasiveness of the various forms of this word in this column is aimed at emphasizing the nature of the medium - daily or weekly - as opposed to mainstream poetry's irregular and unpredictable nature. This serves to consistently remind the reader of the immediacy of the subject, making presoetry distinct and peculiar to the medium. For example, in a poem exploring the rural-urban dialectic, Osundare engages with opposing perspectives of this dichotomy. Contextually, the poem is largely located within the harsh economic realities driving potential manpower into urban spaces, and the grim realities of challenging urban existence. Employing the lost child archetype (similar to "Akintunde, Come Home" in *Village Voices*) the poem "Come Home" is subtitled "a mother's plea". The persona in this poem – most likely 'a mother' – grows impatient with her son's absence from home and commandingly urges him to return home saying; "Come home TODAY" (1990: 11). Stylistically, the signifier 'today' not only translates to the 4th of May, 1986 on which the poem was published, but rather is indicative of the sense of urgency the poet seeks to evoke. This is after convincingly coaxing the reader to see the necessity and urgency, as she (the persona) gradually grows impatient before the final consensus that he (the son) should go back home "soonest", if not that very day – with emphasis further graphologically suggested by capitalization. The reader, arguably, is provoked by the insistence of the persona to the point of espousing 'her' (mother's) apprehension.

The strategy in which the persona's voice and poetic language adopts the medium's urgency pervades the column. In a poem published to commemorate human rights day, this feature is foregrounded using a kind of choric line bearing this word. "A Song for Human Rights Day" published on the 15th December, 1986, that is, the weekend after International Human Rights Day[149] usually celebrated annually across the world on the 10th of December. Highlighting various instances of notorious violations of human rights across the globe, the poem remembers the fate of those whose rights – in one way or another – had been underminded or violated. In solidarity, the persona coaxingly and unceasingly calls for a reconsideration of their fate as embodied in the somewhat choric line, "My heart goes to you today", emphatically repeated six times, besides its prominence (topical sentence) as opening line in five of the ten stanzas. This serves to emphasize the actual day of publication, falling roughly within what may be called Human Rights week. It is this technique that most aptly renders topicality in poems dedicated to or composed for a particular event or day. Similary "A Song for Children's Day" published on the 9th June, 1985 revolves around issues addressed on International Children's Day – a day set aside to renew commitment to improving the lives of children around the world. Celebrated on various days, ranging from the 1st to the 13th of June annually, this poem, therefore, clearly falls within the 'season's' major thematic concerns. The lexical topicality marker is foregrounded in a two-line refrain repeated throughout the poem. To capture immediacy of purpose or the 'here-and-now' mentioned earlier, the persona (a student whose parent has been retrenched) tells his colleagues; "If you don't see me in the parade *today*" (1990: 129-31), it is because – among other reasons- s/he cannot afford the required uniform for the occasion. Thus, the "line will be shorter at the stadium today" (1990: 130) serves as a topical marker, indicating that the poem appears on the very day the celebrations are held. The reader gets the feeling of directly being addressed, as the subject is congruent with the occasion. The poet deliberately hails his readership as he anticipates and addresses the reaction(s). He is seemingly conscious of the medium's frequency, that is, daily/weekly, and hence attempts to appeal to them as he addresses the reader on the actual day of reading; today. Significantly, such strategies erase the distance between the time of composition and publication.

[149] The date was chosen to honor the United Nations General Assembly's adoption and proclamation, on the 10th December, 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the first global enunciation of human rights.

It is important to understand first that all these topical issues are mediated not for their own sake but, in as far as they function as subjects of social import or serve as points of reference, for shaping public opinion. Osundare's presoetry does not stop at capturing the latest. It remains perpetually conscious of the potential of employing dialogic strategies especially within this medium. Like the oral poet whose role, approach and aesthetics occupy an in-between or liminal space, the persona in the songs appropriates this fragility of generic boundaries. It is, therefore, important not to limit presoetry to its creative affiliations but consider poems for newspapers as media texts which, like others, are a "tissue of voices and traces of other texts" (Talbot 2007: 63). Vision, or consciousness, in these poems is no longer presented "within one field of vision, but within several complete fields of visions of equal value [...] joined in a higher unity of a second order, the unity of the polyphonic" (Bakhtin 1973: 12). I will first engage with how Osundare captures the presence of a multiplicity of voices or consciousness in *Songs of the Season* before turning to how these voices/consciousnesses are manipulated to enter into dialogic relations within and across poems in the column. It is this dialogic nature that undergirds the communal pathos Osundare evokes in the songs. How do these songs valorize communal values often regarded as the pillars of a just and democratic society?

Although Bakhtin claims that for a poet, there is "nothing that might require the help of other or alien languages" (1981: 285) or consciousnesses, I use these songs to demonstrate how the column is defined by dialogue, dialogism and dialogic relations. Despite often being illumined by a single or unitary discourse, I hope to demonstrate that presoetry's uniqueness (dialogic nature?) lies in contradicting or opposing the dominant voice or consciousness. Unlike other (poetic) forms, presoetry is able to accommodate and present diversity of perceptions and multiplicity of voices through the use of shifting points of view or persona. *Songs of the Season* is infused with the eccentricity and peculiarity of a collection of (sometimes bizarre) persona-voices including those of the poor, the workers, the drivers, teaching fraternity and politician to mention a few – from whom Osundare may choose to privilege one or other voices representative of the audience's heterogenous composition. An entire poem may be construed as voicing a particular social category's concerns. However, within a single poem, there may be two or more voices in a dialogue. Specified characterized voices representative of social categories and consciousnesses are presented in dialogic relations.

Presoetry thrives on both explicit and implicit dialogues, intertextuality or interactivity and is hence constructed as conversations between the columnist and an imagined newspaper readership – necessary and appropriate for meditational role columnists play in 'hard' news. The broad notion of dialogism is useful and applicable to the communication process involving newspaper writers and readers. Dialogic relations between the two are both consciously and accidentally constructed through dialogic negotiations throughout the existence of *Songs of the Season*. In my view, the unique contribution of presoetry to modern African poetry in general is the maintenance of an intimacy of address inscribed in the poetry for the reader to respond to. Osundare appears to be well versed with his intended audience as evident in the deliberate appeals – targeting both the general and 'popular' audience as well as the limited circle – he makes to the reader. This presumably places the reader in a proxy position to identify with the convened addressee in the poem, instantiating a unique relationship amongst the participants and hence the designation 'genre of reception' – that is, one that triggers dialogue amongst and response from the audience.

Poetic works may also present varying competing or opposing consciousnesses by positioning voices in dialogue or dialogic relation to each other, so that each verbal segments are marked as belonging to a specified voice. *Songs of the Season* is characterized by a sense of plurality of voices and a unique pattern of dialogue achieved by the deployment of various points of view within a single poem and across various poem installments. For example, using the ingenious coinage 'Surgeon-General' (instead of Sergeant-general) in the poem "Diversope", Osundare is able to narrativise and juxtapose two separate – and to a large extent opposing – stories/consciousnesses or voices. It is obvious that Osundare is playfully engaging with the destructive role of the military in West African political terrain disguised in the reconstructive role of the surgical profession. By paralleling these two in this witty poem, the poet creates dialogue between forces of destruction and agents of reconstruction. Characteristically laden satire, the song details how the 'surgeon-general's' duties are rolled into one:

> Just last week he sent a fortunate patient
> On a blissful voyage:
> He sewed him up with the surgical knife
> In his bleeding belly
> Our patient went into everlasting night
> Sir surgeon into everprospering knighthood

"Chase him out of town," shouted the crowd,
Raging like a swindled storm,
"Twist his neck till he sees his ears."
But a quieter look shows the innocent man
Merely pocketed (didn't even steal)
A few millions...
And that, on ALL OF US's behalf.
Chase him out of town?

Whatever has become of African hospitality? (1990: 16-7)

Collapsed in the above extract are various consciousnesses; the omniscient narrator's perspective which seems sarcastic ("fortunate patient" sent into "blissful voyage" while the culprit heads for "everprospering knighthood"), that of the vengeful crowd baying for the surgeon-general's blood to administer instant (mob) justice and the "quieter look" or perspective which is complicit of the crime in question. While the dominant voice seems to interrogate idealized social values and misinterpretation of concepts such as 'African hospitality' – evident in the tone of the line "Whatever has become of African hospitality"- it is this radical outlook on politics and social issues that dominates the column and most poems. These voices are representative of the multiplicity of forces that contribute towards public opinion on a certain issue – in this case, corrupt (military) regimes. The juxtaposition of two apparently opposed consciousnesses or worldviews – through symbolic-representative characters is a ubiquitous definitive feature in these songs. This affords the readers opportunity to more critically confront two divergent perspectives of a particular issue, and hence places them in a better position to make sound and informed opinions. This becomes explicit in "Olowo Debates Talaka" where Osundare presents two contrasting approaches to acquisition of wealth; one of the rich represented by "Money Man" and the other, Talaka, representing the less privileged members or have-nots. In this relatively long poem dramatizing what the latter thinks about the former, Money Man's well-crafted responses illuminates the attitude the poet wishes to vindicate:

Talaka: Some call you wolf, some call you leopard
But, Money Man, the world truly knows
You are a cat with more uncanny claws–
A huge beast indeed with only a puppy's brain.

To which the 'man of money' responds

Olowo: Call me hyena, call me leopard
Call me the bloodiest in a tribe
Of monster beast;
But this I know;

A leopard labours hard for his daily prey;
I work hard for every kobo in my bank.

Whereas it is obvious that Olowo brags of ill-gotten riches (after all, he is the "cat with more uncanny claws"), his conviction that he deserves every cent he possesses, attributing it to hard work, is outlandish and eccentric. This is made poignant by images and descriptions such as 'wolf', 'leopard', 'hyena' and 'the bloodiest in a tribe of monster beast' all of which make profound the dissonance of consciousness and divergent worldviews expressed. Dialogically, the 'other' or opposing viewpoint is implicitly reinforced by portraying Money Man as an insensitive and braggart character.

Besides dialogism, Osundare also uses actual dialogue by bringing voices in the poem into actual dialectic exchange. Although this dialogic mode works well in availing multiple perspectives of an issue, Osundare departs from this explicit mode to more implicit ones. For example, an interactive atmosphere is created in the section titled "dialogue" where exchanges explicitly presuppose actual characters. However unlike in "Olowo Debates Talaka" where the two characters take turns, in "Buka Banter" and "At the Senior Service Club", Osundare establishes a simulacrum of dialogic engagement effective in availing more nuanced viewpoints by appropriating and co-opting what Bakhtin describes as an omitted second speaker who is "present invisibly" (Bakhtin 1984: 197). This somewhat implicit listener underpins and determines the structure of most songs in the column. Relying on the general belief that the world's economically marginalized are united by arguably the strongest force in the world – hunger - Osundare dramatizes a typical encounter in a relatively cheap food outlet to appeal to this social class. This is evident when the persona talks of 'ashaming' hunger "with lagos copses" glossed as frozen fish, relatively cheap food stuff. What Bakhtin calls 'deep traces' of an Other are left behind and have a determining influence on the first speaker's utterance. The structural pattern in "Buka Banter" suggests more explicitly the presence of such an 'other' or the addressee:

And you?

- Six wraps of eba

And meat?

- Mba! Mba!!

my pocket don loss im teeth

But in other poems, such as "At the Senior Service Club", the foregoing is more implicitly indicated. Events at this club are captured as an encounter or conversation in which, "although only one person is speaking", the "uttered word respond and reacts with its every fiber [...] to the unspoken words of another person" (Bakhtin 1984: 197) not explicitly suggested as being present. While the context of the former was a relatively cheap eating place or street stand where affordable food is sold, the latter shifts to a 'senior service club' often regarded as exclusive to members of academic staff. In other words, Osundare opens a conversation between these two symbolic texts to create a feeling of suffering or struggling in comradeship. He imagines both as his potential audience, besides instancing a dialogue across this divide (buka revellers – academic fraternity) through his songs. "At the Senior Service Club" is made up of four unmarked voices making orders, probably across the counter, in much the same way as the voices captured in the buka. Although the utterance is realized as a single poetic discourse and hence single voice of the persona, it is evident that this is a "conversation of the most intense kind" as the persona in some instances seems to be responding to "the unspoken words of another person" (ibid), in this case, a bartender. As suggested earlier, the bartender is present invisibly:

- I'll have gin-n-lime,
  Champagne du Bourbon
  & waterfalls of Scotch whisky
  on Niger rock

- Oh let me have my chicken
  wing, breast, and drumstick
  yes, the drumstick
  which beats the *gbedu* of pleasure
  in a palace of dancing teeth... (1990: 48)

It is certain that the addresser must have requested the next order before the final order quoted above. This is suggested by the expression 'oh' which indicates a sort of spasmodic reaction. The interjection 'yes' in the third-last line serves the same purpose as it seems prompted by the bartender who is invisibly present in the dialogue. This device runs through the songs in more subtle patterns. For example, the use of an archetypical village mother in "Come Home" (1990: 9-11); an 'ignorant' peasant in "A Peasant Debates A Professor" (1990: 31-4) and the (child-) son in "Poverty's Offence" (1990:8) all imply an 'other;' urbane or urbanite child, know-it-all

elite (professor), parent or a father respectively. There are also several unmarked others the poet uses to stylistically pair contrasting viewpoints. The 'I' in "Song for the Pandering Don" (1990: 13) for example enables him to juxtapose an innocent or ignorant eye with intelligent poetic consciousness and hence produce a stereoscopic vision typical of presoetry. This approach defines these songs. The persona in "Retrenched" ignorantly wonders; "Country broke? Who broke the country?" symbolically exemplifying the naivety or ingenuousness Osundare deploys to blur the boundary separating complexity from simplicity.

In "A Peasant Debates A Professor" the naive peasant is contrasted with the "wizard of books" providing an apt opportunity for the poet to elucidate and meditate on the pros and cons of re-introducing school fees in Nigeria. This long, witty and satirical poem reacts to the wedge placed between the impoverished masses and their only hope in a life of misery – education - described as the rude destruction of "the ladder" (1990: 32). First of all, the image of the ladder suggests a disconnect between these two social categories. By dramatizing the huge gap between the two 'I's (or 'eyes'), the poets makes it possible for his readership not only to decipher his intended meaning with ease, but also conditions them to side with the peasant – via the collective 'we'. While the agitated peasant is portrayed as inquisitively wondering; "What do we do then... How can we prevent their coming out?" (1990: 31), "Where shall we go..., Who will bring the jobs?" (1990: 32), "How is this to be?" (1990: 33) to depict the desperation and ignorance of the populace, the responses of the professor serve to reinforce the indifference Osundare aims to dramatize. In a very subtle way, Osundare seems to be interviewing his sources in the process – as often required in reportage journalism – of offering commentary on significant social issues and hence the 'peopled' consciousness.

While imagining and constructing poetry personas, Osundare puts on a Rawlsian "veil of ignorance"[150] to encourage thinking about society from the perspective of all members, be they less privileged as portrayed by the 'Retrenchee', 'Peasant' or informed professor and elites. What Bakhtin reads as the concept of voice of the other which engenders dialogic relationship or interactivity is thus inscribed into the poem's texture. By embedding the voice of an other, Osundare exemplifies the "unmerged consciousnesses and voices" Bakhtin talks about. It is the

[150] John Rawls (1971) points out that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like.

unmerged voices and perspectives which imbue the text with its characteristic dialogic relations across various styles, consciousness, and discourses in general. The use of multiple voices introduces external perspectives (in relation to persona-poet's), in addition to the overall narrative-persona. Such transgredience suggests that the persona is not necessarily the poet hence the possibility of being located outside of the 'self'. This is necessary for effective representativeness of the society's diversity – all directed into one vision. These different voices (languages or consciousnesses), characters and situations keep the readers engaged and are often congruent with their ears and tastes. Considering the political value of dialogue, the songs and column thus foreground a dialogue of ideas and voices. This is why, following Shepherd, I hold that dialogue in its multifarious forms is of immense value within liberal democratic political culture and hence a political virtue (Shepherd 1998: 185) that Osundare espouses in his commentaries.

Using the veil of ignorance technique where the familiar is juxtaposed with more unfamiliar perspectives serves to mediate the reading process, positioning the column as a public space where the Nigerian postcolonial existence, in its many facets, is constantly interrogated. The targeted readership does not have to struggle to understand or require the services of an interpreter to elucidate the message as it is not hidden in complex voices, as is common in mainstream modern African poems. Getting his message home thus becomes not a puzzle to be unravelled but rather a pleasurable and fairly uncomplicated but rewarding task. It is this inclination, among others, which has led his critics, in particular Stephen Arnold (1996), to describe him as the 'peopled persona', with regards to his poetic style, which intimately forecloses the audience in its poetic vision. He explores the hopes, dreams, failures and dilemmas as he grapples with the vagaries of African postcoloniality. As if heeding Eliot's call, Osundare as a poet, absents himself from the poem.[151] Similarly, Jeyifo reads his poetry as exemplifying solidarity with the oppressed, the downtrodden, and the dispossessed – and who form the majority of *The Nigerian Tribune's* readership. He achieves this largely through the subtle manipulation of voice or persona's consciousness – infusing it with journalistic

[151] Osundare seems to draw upon T. S. Eliot's canon enjoining impersonality, the injunction that a poet should "disengage" himself from the poem. This, I hold, allows him to manipulate without dictating as he distances himself from the poem.

consciousness, hence he plucks the reader's ire, winning sympathetic emotions in favour of the ordinary person's wretchedness, helplessness as well as ignorance.

Having shown the multi-voicedness nature of the poet-persona, I turn to the dialogue into which these voices enter with each other to discuss one of the stylistic strategies that render this poetry peculiar and conspicuous from conventional modern African poetry. I show that multi-vocality aids in minimising or completely erasing the traditional distance between the writer and the readership. By adopting a largely dramatic-dialogue with the so-called conversational mode dominating, especially in the section entitled 'dialogue', Osundare is able to accommodate this diversity of perceptions and multiplicity of voices. These are never what Gugelberger (1984) calls "neutral disembodied voices" but rather, peopled and infused with everyday experiences and inscribed with contemporary chellenges. In addition, borrowing from Shemtov, the column-design inscribes prosodic structures which significantly serve to materialize the voices with distinct will and ideology (2001: 69). If regarded as lines of a 'song of the season', 'lifelines' or 'random blues' as currently designated, the reader perceives them differently from the manner s/he would if they were presented in an anthology or collection of poems in book form.

As an intertextual construct, presoetry is preceded and informed by various other texts, pieces of language and aesthetic forms, notable among these are unfolding news items, ensuing socio-economic and political debates as well as the poetic form disguised as a newspaper column. In other words, as media discourse, presoetry is largely "qualitatively continuous with experiences of everyday life" (Meinhof and Smith 1995: 3), if these everyday experiences include expressive forms such as poetry/song, commentary or opinion editorials ('opeds'), letters from (newspaper) readers, etc. In my view, therefore, the uniqueness of presoetry resides in the idea that numerous living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness (Bakhtin 1981: 276) come into play. As a hybrid genre, it is produced in highly complex intertextual chains of interaction with, among others, conception of poetry and role of poet (in times of destitution) – his endeavour to reconcile polarized beliefs of the genre- journalistic discourses and fusion or the interface with literary/poetic forms, oral (popular) form and accommodation of elements drawn from different traditions such as *ijala* or hunters/praise song, the dirge and English poetics. If hybridization, then, is viewed as a device for creating double – or in this case multiple – voice/s (1981: 304, 358) and, therefore, the embedding of a journalistic voice within song or poetic forms such that

presoetry is to some extent multi-voiced, a number of discourses are in conversation in this column. As a dialogic means of relating to and understanding the contemporary socio-political and economic Nigeria – Africa - this column constitutes a text which, as Kristeva shows, is never a single seamless object but always "contains external elements" (1970: 68) resulting from dialogically engaging or appropriating 'other' discourses and artistic forms. The poem enters the newspaper medium as a song infused with Yoruba oral expressive/literary forms such as proverbs, riddles, songs of abuse (defined by persistent sarcastic tone), praise songs and the dirge. Through 'song' idiom, Osundare creates for himself both a form and a forum for tracking the pulse of the 'season' and singing about and for the present social milieu.

At an intra-level however, texts constituting *Songs of the Season* undeniably involve "explicit/implicit signalling of utterance inserted into another" (Talbot 2007: 64) as the texts engage in a dialogue. In "Song of the Tax-Gatherer", "Not Guilty" and "Shout of the People" Osundare uses two-line stanza or refrain/choruses to embed or 'insert' other utterances or voices. They may be envisaged as mere choric parts if the text is read as a song. However, considering that this is a commentary piece in a quasi-poem, the lines instantiate 'sideward glances' which inscribe dialogic relations. Expressing disgust with taxation, in this case extended into fines and bribes, the two-lines utterance seems to be in response to the dominant voice of the poem – inserted before each of the four stanzas: "When rulers are fat and broke/It is [*must* be] the shame of the people" (32 – 3). There seems to exist, beyond any doubt, a catalogue of crimes – committed by the "saintly bird", "our kings", "the Headman" and "Ghost poachers". However, all that the justice system can do is pronounce the perpetuators innocent, conveyed by the lines, "And the jury hurried down a deafening verdict:/NOT GUILTY!" (1990: 36-8) which the persona concludes in the fourth stanza is the folly of sending leopards to catch the other leopard. Such "interpenetration of multiple voices and forms of utterances" (Bauman 1991: 138) is also evident in "Letter to Fawehinmi" where a voice keeps reminding us that, "... these, are seasons of terror..." to describe the times of military dictatorships in Nigeria. In "For Olof Palme", the single line "Rest, spirit of the stirring wind" (80-2) acts as distinct voices in dialogue with the rest of the text. Such 'inset voices' engaging an overarching or dominant voice in a dialogue or dialogic relations is even more explicit in "Shout of the People". While in solidarity with the audience, the persona – immersed and in unison - enumerates all they have witnessed in the

hands of insensitive ruling class, a semi-autonomous voice separated from the rest of the text in regular intervals plays the role of the other creating a sort of dialogic environment. In part, the poem reads:

...
We have seen smokes without fire
We have seen fires without smokes

And shout the PEOPLE

Behold we starve

We have been trampled
Like penny carpets
Spat upon
...

At a glance, the 'we' does not seem to include the shouting "PEOPLE". These constitute intrusive external voices – indicated structurally, that is, graphologically set apart, and also departs from the general tone of the text – inscribing a sort conflict, diametrically opposed to original direction or flow. In the first example, the voice concludes that it is the people's shame, yet, it is evident that the speaker (poet-persona) speaks collectively – evident in the sarcasm laden opening line: "The tax-gatherer is the saviour of our time". The reader is invited imagine him/herself as sharing a common enemy with the persona and hence feels compelled to take a stand in opposition/against the perceived exploiting-oppressing 'others'. In "Not Guilty", however, the line between the two contradicting voices is less explicit, as evident in this stanza:

Not guilty! Not guilty!
Leaves heard it and told the trees
Not guilty! Not guilty!
the pigeon heard and told the partridge
Not guilty! Not guilty!
Even the dickering duck squawked menacingly (1990: 37)

The implicit dialogue between the voice of the judicial system and the public's opinion – here embodied in the sage-like voice of folkloric/oral discourses – creates an endless dilemma, which yearns for mediation for the sake of 'a public good'. While all seem to be well aware and openly tell it out; from "Leaves" to "the trees", "the pigeon" to "the partridge", "Even the dickering duck", the trusted judiciary prounounces the subject "Not guilty!". Such sense of 'internal dialogization' becomes more evident in "Slave Market, 1986" which juxtaposes two contradistinguishing voices; on the one hand, an economically marginalized group said to be "pregnant with misery" and on the other "a fattened baron" (22) leading a lavish and prosperous

life. Appearing as two parts, separated by the word 'Then' at the beginning of the sixth stanza, these two are reminiscent of the 'deep trace' of other's voice within a single utterance – in this case poem – Bakhtin talks of. Whereas they are presented as:

> a motley crowd, remnant majority,
> their faces one long map of uncharted anguish,
> their tattered garments held together
> by a stitch of lice
> their coverless heads, their shoeless soles
> their eyes burning distant like stubborn fires
> in old, forgotten caves (21)

The "fattened baron" is painted as gliding:

> ...in a glittering Benz
> Glossy like a giant dolphin; (22)

The poet creates an 'implicit internal dialogue' between these two social classes and by extension attendant consciousnesses. This is evident in the 'pleas' of the "desperate men and daring women" which are structurally foregrounded and marked as the 'other's' voice; "Take me, massa, me, massa," (22). However, the poet also conceives this voice as part of a single utterance - the poem - in the seventh stanza where no distinction is made. The use of pidginized English, such as "I don work/carry pounpoun..." (22), marks the utterance as other in such a way that two or more voices join the narrator (or main speaker) to create the impression of a dialogue (2001: 78). The manner in which the representative voice of the 'motley crowd' speaks echoes their desperation and misery:

> Even self, if you put elephant for
> Ground
> I fit carry am one time
> Look, massa, look massa,
> My arm complete, my finger (22).

It is the hidden existence of a second consciousness, in spite of such lyrically enriched poems appearing as monologue, and the function this fulfils particularly in presoetry is that of concern. Besides advertising themselves to the "massa" or master, these voices introduce the master-servant relationship the poet aims to convey – and thus dialogically intertexting slave markets in West Africa.

Beyond the intra-level, there is illumination of a single utterance (poem) using other forms or discourses such as song or music and journalism, alluding to the use of sideward glances already discussed. Osundare also engages other genres in dialogue. Crucially important to this study, therefore, is the existence of dialogic relations between this column and other expressive forms

such as oral poetry and songs. As evident in "For Fela Anikulapo-Kuti", the poem opens with lines from the celebrated Nigerian musician, Fela Kuti's album, "No Agreement" (1977). The poem opens an intertextual dialogue with this song, evident in the persona's words such as; "your song arrows the heart of robbing giants". Lines from the song are graphologically marked in italics, for example "*No agreement today/No agreement tomorrow*" which is lifted from one of Fela Kuti's albums. The poet, like the musician, reaches a consensus; there is no compromising with oppressive forces silencing the fight against progressive social change and psychological emancipation of postcolonial African societies, exemplified by the contemporary Nigerian society. Considering the position the musician occupied in this country, Osundare seemingly addresses his funs that cut across social classes and hence this is another strategy for hailing his readership. This presupposes that the massive following Kuti commanded using his musical prowess is the same audience Osundare has in mind such that it is on their behalf this persona speaks:

> Your song is the drizzle of dawn
> sparing no roof, however tall;
> so when monsters hurl down
> their spears of death, the PEOPLE
> are your shield, (96)

It is this audience that Osundare calls "the PEOPLE" symbolically capitalized to signal the central role 'they' play in this column. Strategically, the poet-persona also positions them not just as his/her 'shield' but s/he in turn as their guardian, speaking and championing their course. The denouement of this poem intertextually engages an excerpt from Fela Kuti's hit song in what I read as an 'other' voice being inserted in the texture of another:

> *No agreement today*
> *No agreement tomorrow*
> *Make ba broad hungry*
> *Make I no tallllllk*
> *I no go gree!*

At one level, Osundare's poem is aware of the words and voice (socio-political consciousness) of this song, inextricably woven into its texture and hence dialogue between two genres; music and poetry. On the other, the poet is conscious of not just the immediacy of pidginised English but its ideological orientation as the language most widely spoken by 'the people' – to whom the poem is largely addressed. He therefore writes in their language as a medium of speaking or directly appealing to them, thus using 'the perception of one language by another'.

Interspersing of different 'languages' is an equally definitive feature of poems in this column and instrumental in the construction and shaping of public opinion. By embedding 'other' languages, Osundare demonstrates a dialogic interactivity of different registers and dialects of English. In the poem "For Esiri Dafiewhare" the stage directions 'to the accompaniment of rattles and heavy drums, affectively threnodic' (1990: 85) suggest a conversation of a multiplicity of expressive styles. However, more subtly means are employed in dialogues between the verbal and audio aspects of poery. Aware that drum language and talking drum constitute a significant component of expressive culture in West Africa in general, "A Song for Olusunta" incorporates the characteristic beat of *agba* drum – a man-sized drum accompanying Olusunta festival. This forms part of complex layers of addressivity that define the column's textualities and embrace the diversity of his audience. The voice of this "wonder drum" is graphologically captured as distinct from the rest of the poem using capitalilzation:

> KERERE KE GIRODO
> KERE RE KE KE GIRODO
> So le AGBA hail the season
> With accents of dawn:
> Wonder drum whose leather is
> Hide of the gleaming sky, (99)

The persona sings praises after the drum's series of beats or "accents of dawn" have set the stage. Elements of the praise song are discernible in the epithetic and formulaic nature of praises; "whose leather is/Hide of the gleaming sky". Within the poem's texture therefore is the voice of a praise singer revering *agba* drum, itself in dialogue with the persona.

The foregoing dialectic between oral forms and modern subgenres or forms of poetry points to layers of dialogic relations within presoetry. Embedded in the various dirges constituting *Songs of the Season* are texts derived from the praise poetry tradition of the Yoruba. Marked by frequent use of epithets, highly figurative and very hyperbolic language, snippets of praise poetry intersperse the poems in this column. For example, the poem "For Olof Palme", in spite of being a dirge, Osundare employs patterns reminiscent of *ijala* (Yoruba praise genre) – complete with praise epithets (such as "music of running rivers", "canary of swinging forests" and "palm with a frond/from every clime" (82). Sven Olof Palme, the slain prime minister of Sweden, is moaned thus:

> Your heart was generous as the rain

Your eyes clear as a sunful sky
You were the thumb who halted the feast,
Urging other fingers to share the morsel
Rest, spirit of the stirring wind
Elephant who sought the peace
Of the deer
Arogidigba who tended the cradle

He models parts of "Buka Banter" and "At the Senior Service Club" on the praise tradition, coining humorous epithets for the various drinks and foods mentioned; the wraps of semovita are served "with obedient okro soup"; *amala* (food made from yam flour) is served "with a generous forest of *eweedu*" (a deep-green vegetable soup) while the "one square yard of *ponmon*" (cow skin) must come "off the back of a specially stubborn cow" (47). This densely descriptive mode continues in "Senior Service Club" as *Odeku* or Guinness stout is rhapsodized as:

the pleasurable cloud
in the belly of the glass
bitter-sweet paramour
of the generous paunch

By figuratively designating an alcoholic drink as the 'lover' – and more so one in a relationship with a married person – of the "generous" big stomach, Osundare appropriates this tradition's form for purposes other than flattering. The poet-persona is engaged in more than simply celebrating Guinness stout as evident in the ambivalence in the line "the pleasurable cloud" which evokes the illusive dimension of the pleasure derived from alcoholic beverages. In other poems, Osundare portrays the blurred line between the dirge and laudatory genres of oral traditions. "For Chief Samuel Fal Adeniran" makes use of the praisesong's propensity for praise names, in particular, of one Akure, the foundation principal of Amoye Grammar School in Ikere – the poet's hometown. Elements of laudatory apostrophizing and praise-poem's textualities are, however, most pronounced in "Song of Life" where the yam, grains foods, vegetables and wine are the subjects of praises, and "A Song for Olusunta" in which the huge rock in Ikere-Ekiti is profusely revered:

Yours are fingers of grains, toes of tubers
Your eyelashes are pumpkin leaves
Begging the tasty fancy of the homing basket
Waters of your roots are mellow wines
In sagely skins
Your teeth are the healthy beads
On the corn's crispy cob. (1990: 25)

Laudation is mostly achieved through deft and adroit symbolization and metaphors to give insights into its extraordinary nature. Parts of this phenomenal feature such as its grains, 'eyelashes', roots and teeth are presented as subjects of poeticization.

Besides praise-singing, the column positions the poet as the people's storyteller, recreating and reinterpreting the existential world in his poem-stories. Through this column, Osundare thus engages the art of storytelling and generally the folkloric text in dialogue. I read this as a kind of strategic-stylistic dialogism. To some extent, this is reminiscent of an extended subversive dialogue with mainstream/conventional practices in modern African poetry – which undermines hitherto conventionalized 'purity' of genre. This dialogic illusion is achieved through drawing on pre-existing forms of communication among the people such as songs and folktales. For example, through the song-metaphor, the column appropriates the story-idiom of oral discourses – hence implicit dialogue is suggested. As evident in some poems whose central idea seems to be 'telling a story', the poet is able to render the column as 'oral' – and therefore interactive or dialogic. In my view, the 'dialogic perspective' (Volosinov 1973; Medvedev/Bakhtin 1978; Bakhtin 1981, 1986) not only distinguishes poems tailored for the press but enables and enacts a space in which a process of deliberation thrives. Presoetry exemplifies plurality of voices as its range of expressivity includes aspects of orality, print-textuality and visuality of architectural and gestural patterns. It is this dialogue of styles between the poetic and narrative – explored in datail in Chapter Three – that I regard as critical to the newspaper medium in this chapter.

Dialogue of style in presoetry renders the execution and texture of poetic discourse hybrid. The poem "The Pot and the Pan" exemplifies a chain-song contest, reminiscent of the 'fairy' quarrel between the river and the road Anyidoho poetizes in Chapter Two. I read the feud between the pot and the pan as based on the classical 'better the turban than the mitre' argument. Appropriating folkloric textualities in terms of simplistic or linear characterization, foregrounded didacticism and fantastic settings in which personification dominates, the poem explores a negotiation between social forces – or a subversion of the Swahili saying "when bulls fight, the grass is trampled". In this case, the conflict between the underdogs is portrayed as oblivious of the 'real' enemy. While the Pot claims that he "deserve[s] the crown of the fireplace", having ashamed "so many flames/And farted on heaps of conquered ash", the Pan who "reign[s] in

harvest seasons/And bear[s] the heat of festive hearths" derides the latter as mere "hollowed earth" (1990: 18). However, the poet's message is unambiguous:

> And so they bragged
> So they quarrelled
> But neither said a word
> About the EATERS
> Of what they cooked.

The denouement of the poem carries what in oral narrative discourses is often known as the moral of the story; the clique in power pit the ruled against each other, in the process reaping economic and political capital out of such mass confusion. The proverbial undertones in this poem suggest that choices in contemporary existence are limited to the lesser evil. Using the two symbolic images, the poet paints a gleam picture of the unfortunate situation in which the citizenry finds itself, struggling only for those in power to benefit. Similar strategic-stylistic dialogism comes to the fore when Osundare evokes the aura of folktales in "The King and the Poet". The first stanza sets the scene by alluding to the folklore world, a world in which "lizards built mansions" and the tortoise "wears a crown" (1990: 124). This is the same approach deployed at the beginning of "Wolf Gift" which describes them as "the time/When toads bestrode the land/And snakes strutted like swaggering emperors" (1990: 115) or in "Crying Hyena" which captures the temporal distinction as "When ears were far from the head" (1990: 102). Apart from the formulaic opening "Once upon a time", the poem adorns features of oral narratives such as personification, simple-linear plot development, uncomplicated and symbolic characterization, exaggerations, and heavy didacticism. This poem seems aware of the oral narratives' language consciousness and thus dialogues or replicates this linguistic idiom common in oral tales as evident in the third stanza:

> Then, one day,
> His eyes red with wine, his groins dizzy
> With harem fatigue, he swiftly called
> The palace bard to strum a tune
> To ease his nerves
>
> The bard sang and sang and sang

Similarly, in "Wolf Gift" the third stanza takes the same turn typical of oral narratives – after setting the context:

> And one day
> A passionate fancy gripped
> The king of wolves: (1990: 115)

By infusing the poem with oral narrative textualities, the poet creates a rupture between poetry and prosaic oral tales. This enables him to embed a rich text critiquing the status quo of leadership so removed from the people that, as the narrator puts it in "The King and the Poet", the summoned bard only "saw funerals in every street/But told stories of fanciful fairs" (1990: 126). Like most contemporary literary works, the poem contains strong dystopian features which create, capture and portray contemporary Nigeria and Africa in/using macabre images. Using relatively simplified characterization, that is, his Majesty the king, the two contrasted bards and the solders/guard, Osundare interrogates the nature and role of poetry in the society. Clearly, the central duty of the poet is certainly not to tell "plastic truths", sing of the king's "anus having the scent of saints" or send him "deeper into orgasmic coma" to the point of seeing himself as God as represented by the first bard, but rather offer incisive critique of leadership that enables the king to be aware of "a raging sea/Right at the palace gate" (126). It is this second bard's perspective that becomes the paradigmatic expression of and for the contemporary imagination of existential socio-political and economic Nigeria and Africa.

Osundare's style in *Songs of the Season* engages the reader at an intimate level through the manipulation of narrative language and use of transient persona perspectives. He limits the social and temporal space between poet or medium of expression and his readers by using first-person voice. However, for a genre thriving on dialogue, the use of first-person voice is not adequate. Dialogic orientations and other strategies of synthesizing the reader and the poet in Fairclough's "friendly relationship" and "synthetic personalization" (1989: 62) are deployed. It is how the songs invite the readers to a dialogue, and generally how familiarity and personalized relationship are created that I turn to. How does Osundare present his themes as a means of collectivising the experiences of the audience/readers? In this column, Osundare employs certain stereotypes to collectivise experiences. These experiences include shared suffering and oppression at the hands of the elites (political and economic) as citizens and workers, which foster ties based on a common destiny. He seems cognizant of Gugelberger's observation that "without belonging to or accepting an identity with the oppressed, there is no way to affirm one's class position, no way to overcome oppression" (1984: 467) through the art of poetry. He is, therefore, aware of some sort of idealized "Reader" (Steve, 94) who will engage and identify with these experiences and therefore enter into a dialogue with him. This is evident in

"Retrenchment", where the experience of losing a job is collectivised in that the fate of the persona-victim is presented as if they were representative of the general readership – the 'retrenchee' and anyone who possibly suffered at the hands of IMF-instigated conditions are convoked as idealized addressees:

> I worked and worked for a grateful boss
> Who used me just the way he liked
> And raised my wage once a dozen years
> ...

And:

> I worked and worked, then the dizzying news:
> The nation is broke and factories fail
> the boss is licensed to suck the sack
> And that is how I lost my job (1990: 7)

The poem recognizes that there are readers among the general audience familiar with "a grateful boss" who, in spite of using his workers "just the way he liked", only increases their wages "once a dozen years". The reader is compelled to identify with, if not relate to, the persona's experiences as s/he is prodded towards 'it's me' position and sharing his shoes. In other words, following Klancher's argument, Osundare is aware that audience is not a mere "aggregate of readers" but a complicated social and textual formation (Klancher 1987: 6) that is consciously moulded. The portrayal of an insensitive employer, in particular, the expression "the boss is licensed to suck the sack" conjures up common experience as it conveys an attitude carried by employees struggling to make ends meet. Osundare shows that most employees share what Klancher calls "interpretative tendencies and ideological contours" (1987: 6) and in most cases discontented with their general existential situations.

Collectivization of experiences runs through this column as Osundare endeavours to produce socially and politically meaningful and relevant poetry. In "Echoes from the Rural Abyss", the graphological use of capitalization and foregrounding (occupies line-initial/subject position) of the plural possessive OUR, prefacing the five stanzas demonstrates this. Through this, the audience is coaxed on to the side of the persona by an illusion of a common bond embodied in this collective expression. The poem foregrounds the consistent insistency by the persona to portray rural existence in its homogeneity. The persona talks about "OUR" water, electricity, roofs, school and expressway making rural life a communally shared experience; "our long and

lingering nights"; "our eaves dog-eared like forsaken rags/our mansions are mud"; "our children are the unlettered legion"; "our bridge is a fallen mahogany" (1990: 17-8). Right from their titles, some echo the sort of synthetic personalization Fairclough talks about. For example, "Our Land is Rich Our Mind is Poor", "Shout of the People" and "A Song for my Land (1 and 2)" illustrate this community of 'our land/mind', 'the people' our or 'my land'. The reader is synthesized into the text (by references such as 'our land' or being part of 'the people') in an intimate relationship.

The poet-columnist constructs by presupposing an imaginary reader (addressee) who - depending on how approximate - identifies with particular values and attitudes of the actual reader. This is precisely the audience he wants to address and whose taste he wishes to cultivate throughout this column, as opposed to the 'actual' reader (impossible or difficult to ascertain). Because of the subject matter and approach deployed in the column, however, the 'actual' reader has a great deal in common with the imagined addressee inscribed in the text and is, therefore, likely to take up the positions offered unconsciously and uncritically (Talbot 1989: 47). This is why the 'distance' enables a reader to be more aware of the position and be more critical or make more informed decisions. In *Songs of the Season*, Osundare uses persona-voice to create distance between potential/imaginary and actual readers in such a way that, the distance is both minimal enough to allow one relate with the subject, and sufficiently maximum to allow critical consciousness. For example, in "A Peasant Debates A Professor" oscillation between these two poles come into play allowing a debate on the otherwise 'taken-for-granted way' to critique the ideal;

> The foolish man looks above the trees
> And thinks what lies up there
> Is just a sky.
> But who doesn't know
> There is the foolish man's sky,
> There is also one for the wise and strong?
> Mine is a sky of fattening rains,
> Of eternal suns
> And gold that glitters

And sarcastically he (Money Man) adds:

> How can you know what miracles
> Bloom my sprawling fields,
> You too wretched to see my sky?

Poverty is a stubborn cataract
In the eyes of lowly folks (38-9)

The distance imagined and enacted between Talaka and Olowo helps the reader in invoking the much needed 'critical consciousness'.

In *Songs of the Season*, Osundare uses different archetypal personae drawn from contemporary Nigerian society. By dedicating a song to various social groups using a representative or stereotyped member of the group, he is able to address the corrupt politician and public servant (Song of the Tyrant/Pandering Don/Nigerian Driver/Tax-Gatherer/Street-Sweeper), unemployed B.A. Hons. ("Song of the Jobless", "Retrenched"), "A Song for Anini" the robber, the peasants (in "Echoes from the Rural Abyss"), mother to the school-going child (in "Song for Children's Day"), Osundare uses archetypal personae and subjects as a way of hailing his publics, while simultaneously raising critical social and political issues for discussion – as his role as a columnist dictates. The poetic canvas he presents through *Songs of the Season* is peopled by human beings, especially disenfranchised members of the society symbolized in such personae as the desperate and poor locked in a fight with more favoured members of society (Anyokwu 2011: 3). These stereotyped typologies of the Nigerian citizenry are deliberately loaded with readily recognizable attributes – often drawn from news items or current national debates – contemporaneous existential experiences, which the readers identify with. This is one way he hails his audience, as these typologies intensify the familiar. They signal how individuals make sense of the social world, reveal the distinctions at work in society as well as power structures, existing social conflicts or relations (Barker (1989); Taylor and Willis 1999) and hence act as a reference points and points of cognition (Ogola 2004: 108).

Osundare locates the reader within a community of the oppressed as he immerses his persona amidst the readers. This column exemplifies practices which attempt to interpellate the reader, positioning them as social subjects of discourses revolving around income and economic conditions, peasantry lifestyle and concerned with sound political leadership. For example, aware of the citizens dissatisfaction with the ruling class across the continent, the persona in "Snaplines (3)" solemnly asks the "people of our land" – either fellow Nigerians or Africans – the question; "In what school do African rulers learn/The craft of graft?" (1990: 14). By such approaches, the reader does not bother questioning who the addressee is or doubt the shared

concern for graft-free leadership. The reader is compelled to 'tell' the persona or think about the background of African 'rulers' and leadership in general. Common in this column, therefore, are narrative strategies in which the audience is hailed by the stylistics and a sort of 'recruited' since the text directly invites him/her. By routinely and deliberately manipulating the readers into positions favourable to him and his designs, this column's audience recognize that Osundare is addressing them ("where are the workers/who man your factory" hence positioning the reader as one of these workers exploited by 'Money Men'); he positions the reader as a citizen, an ordinary Nigerian struggling with challenging contemporary socio-economic circumstances ("our earth is dry" implying that the reader is one of those whose livelihood is threatened). Osundare seemingly creates his subjects or the audiences for his poetic texts as they (readers) are 'constituted' by the text. The power of most of these songs resides in their ability to position the subject or create the audience as subject to the text akin to the "subject" of a king – in such a way that the subject cannot easily adopt an alternative or contrary interpretive position without feeling 'the odd one out' – as an outsider from the mainstream. In "Olowo Debates Talaka", he uses stereotyped characters to bring to the fore some of the woes of his readership. Most of the readers certainly identify with the imagery he deploys in these songs; "our earth is dry/The forests are scorched, and/River beds lie like remnant spines/Of ancient serpent;" (1990: 38) – especially the peasantry who eke out a life out of farming or by exploiting natural resources on a small scale, or workers who often feel exploited by capitalist investors in:

> Chairman, Manchair, Managing Director,
> Damaging-the-Erector,
> Money Man,
> Where are the workers
> Who man your factories?
> How much richer do they make you
> Each passing day?
> How poorer do they become?

To which Talaka, representative of the wealthy exploitative class/social category, casually responds; "I deserve the profits: I run the risks" (1990: 43) to justify his position. If utterances anticipate responses and answers, as Bakhtin's dialogic principle states – utterances 'cringe in anticipation of criticism' - then phrases such 'Money Man' (as a signifier, this phrase is inherently oppositional) and the variants used in this poem serve to reinforce loathing for the rich or elicit dissidence amongst audience. The sentiments and indifference expressed by the

'Chairman', Managing Director' or the sarcastically designated 'Manchair', constructs an imagined audience or public that is an 'other'; the worker whose labour ensures the 'Talakas' of this world evolve into 'Money Man'.

Osundare creates or positions the reader in such a way that s/he inescapably feels they are addressed directly; it's me. Through such strategy, the audience (familiar with Anini or a retrenched person) is involuntarily lured and absorbed by the text. Such manipulation is evident in the aesthetic texture of the songs in which although real, Osundare uses Anani (the then most wanted robber) as a paradigmatic example for robbery, among other social malpractices in contemporary Nigeria in "Song for Anani". Similarly, the numerous eminent personalities in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large are used as paradigmatic models for his message. The liminal space created between fictive and real-life persons in his conception of poetic personae enables him to enrich his poetic experiences with hybridized consciousness.

Thus marking out the column are intricate patterns of addressivity with some only possible, arguably, because of structural textures peculiar to the medium. For example, serialization and issuing of certain poems in installments is possible because of the daily/weekly nature of this medium. The author establishes a kind of continuity in this column, and, by conceiving the poem in such a way that it anticipates a reply, makes the audience look forward to the next issue. Besides the use of parenthesized instructions and 'captions' like "to be continued next week" and "cont'd from last week", "watch out for the (son's) reply" (1990: 11), "part I" or "part II", Osundare establishes a dialogue between these poems. In "Retrenched" and "Poverty's Offence" which appeared in the same issue (24th March, 1986), peculiar dialogic relationships and intricate patterns of addressivity can be discerned. Whereas the former perceives the effects of SAPs from the 'father's' point of view - having lost his job - the latter takes the son's perspective, narrated through an encounter with his teacher demanding school fees. Characteristic of presoetry, Osundare addresses or incorporates the reader's anticipated reaction – which constitute part of the subsequent text's concerns. Similarly, "Come Home" features the mother's point of view. Subtitled as "A Mother's Plea", parenthesized information at the end of this poem instructs the reader to look out for the son's reply. The poem paints a picture of a desperate woman urging her son to bring home wealth, like her neighbour's children have done:

Come home, son
Come save me
From this heap of darkening shame; (1990: 10)

At the end of this poem is a caption alerting the reader that the poem continues "next week". The second installment published on the 4th of May, 1986 reminds the reader to watch out for the son's reply. By setting various voices astir, the poet is in a position to delve into all possible depths and perspectives of his subject. In the reply, the subject is tackled from the son's perspective, detailing why he is not in a hurry to go 'back home'. I read this as an attempt to explore a given issue or 'story' from various points of view, in line with the tenets of New Journalism.[152] Using multiple voices, perspectives and consciousnesses, therefore, Osundare is able to cultivate suspense in the reader and engage a variety of social categories in a sort of conversation occasioned by the column.

As a suspense-creating device, offering poetic-texts in series works well with the newspaper medium. Not only does it create sustained anticipation to 'continuations' or 'responses', but also provides both space and time for the much needed feedback from readers, and hence a kind of "ongoing dialogue" (Bryce 2003: 126) is made possible. From a business point of view, this is aimed at customer-retention and hence increases sales and profits. Material for such 'piecemeal' presentation is not necessarily limited to the topical, but encompasses other issues worth critical public debate. Besides suspense, organization in serial form affords Osundare a forms long enough to exhaust his thoughts on a particular subject considering that as a columnist, the space available to him is not enough to develop or pursue a theme conclusively or interconnect it with related ones. As a platform, the column *Songs of the Season* offers Osundare and his readers an outlet to trigger and sustain public debate or 'dialogue'. Structured in this manner and appropriately entitled "Olowo Debates Talaka", this poem appears as one text in *Songs of the Season* although it was first presented in installments (1st December, 1985; 8th December, 1985) in the column because of its lengthy nature. In this, and other poems of its nature, Osundare foregrounds perennial thematic issues that remain luscious to the general newspaper readership. The title 'Snaplines' is serialised in a number of issues hence published as Snapline (1),(2), (3) and (4) on different dates, just like the current 'Lifelines' and 'Random Blues', serialised from

[152] One of the distinguishing features of this strand of journalism was an emphasis on exploring a given story from varying points of view (subjectivity), unlike the previous practice which was limited to objective reporting. See Ward (1973).

6th February 2010 to date. Osundare strives to interconnect his subject matter, and hence an overall coherence is discernible despite the piecemeal nature of the newspaper medium.

Osundare interweaves some techniques appropriated from oral traditions, in particular the *oriki*[153] poetic tradition with journalistic discourses to suit the nature of the newspaper medium. For example, some of poems for the press on certain subjects are presented in serial form, in different editions or issues. 'Snaplines' and 'Random Blues' may be stretched indefinitely as long as the newspaper continues to be in circulation or Osundare deems it fit. However, of significance is an underlying overall coherence as the various installments are bound together by close thematic ties as well other stylistic affinities. One may view each part as a separate and independent poem, which may be read in any order without affecting the overall themes addressed. Whereas "Snaplines (3)" appeared in the 5th January, 1986 issue of the *Sunday Tribute*, "Snaplines (4)" appeared on the 30th March issue of the same year. Notice the characteristic declarative parallels between the stanzas

The thief

Is not one who steals

but

One powerless enough to be caught

And:

The moon is the mother

Of the sun

As well as probing juxtapositions and reversals in "Snaplines (3)"

IMF plus Conditionalities

IMF minus Conditionalities

Conditionalities minus IMF

Which is echoed in "Snaplines (4)"

The cross against the Crescent

the Crescent against the Cross

[153] The Yoruba indigenous poetic tradition to which Osundare is heavily indebted (Agbada 1996). Karin Barber describes it (*oriki*) as a collection of separate epithets addressed to the subject (1991: 3)

These serve to suggest that this is one poetic text issued in installments. I describe this as presentation in installments since, possibly, they were composed separately. I, however, hasten to caution that this should not be mistaken for what Larrissy (1990) describes as a fragmentary poem. Whereas a fragmentary poem represents an isolated, disconnected state of mind, a poem presented in installmental form has a latent unifying strand. In the case of Osundare, this is conferred by thematic coherence as well as explicit stylistic carry-overs. Arguably, he has a unified poem in mind but opts to publish it on different dates, hence the serialization. Presoetry's expressive and signification potential is thus enriched by referring to what Roberts calls an "existing network of texts" (1994: 13) or sub-texts' intertextual relations. Serialization also creates a dialogic tension between the subjects/persona and all that they represent.

These songs use the community to define individualism. Poetic discourse becomes not a form of setting oneself above others but rather an avenue for communing with and binding oneself as equal to the reading community. Poetic contemplation does not necessarily set the poet apart from or above fellow citizenry despite the occasional personal and reflective cast. The sense of community in these songs is based on mutual response to socio-political and economic experiences since the column literarily exists to serve an imagined community of readers. As evident in this column, most of the poems dramatize this recognition and acknowledgement. This poetry's reconfigured focus significantly redefines the role of the poet.

The column enables Osundare assume a certain moral ground based on what Jonathan Kamholtz calls "an agreement between speaker, subject, and audience about how to identify virtues and heroes" (1983: 80) that is important to the readers of the column and society in general. *Songs of the Season*, like occasional poems, is grounded in a consensus of community values. He accomplishes this by imagining a moral fabric which he sees as his sole duty to defend on behalf of the society. Most of the poems bear a moral lesson that could be directed to one and all in the society. Together with the use of a 'voice of reason' or a conscious citizen-persona Osundare is in a position to condition or dictate how the issues presented are to be perceived and received by his readership, hence fulfilling his role as columnist. This is also true if the perspective is envisaged as appropriating an indigenous oral poet whose didactic overtones and concern for the people shows affinities with the contemporary newspaper columnists.

Using Charles Okumu's argument that oral songs are composed in response to an immediate event or as a means of reflecting a localized issue within the village or clan and are more often than not ephemeral (1992: 55), I read texts in this column as fervently appropriating this form. If, as Okumu posits, their length is dictated by, among others, the chosen theme and the reaction of the audience, then, recent versions of these songs show intimate affinities with the so-called oral songs. In recent renditions of these 'songs' under the column *Lifelines*, Osundare consciously foregrounds musicality and other principle oral devices, such as repetition and parallelism. This clearly aims to assert the centrality of the column's "public design" (Adu-Gyamfi 1999: 51), which gives the poems their folk or popular character. All the pieces published under the subheading "Random Blues" between February and July 2010 heavily rely on prompting verbal cues such as 'say', 'ah', 'yes', 'yeah' and 'alas' to suggest a relaxed control of parallels, and repetition:

> Some have what they need
> Some do not what they have
> Say, some have what they need
> Some do not what they have
> Equity has a formidable foe
> Whose first name is greed

The above lines aptly thematize the obscene gap between the rich and the poor. This skilful use of oral devices to convey pent up feelings by the majority of the citizenry endears the column to readers who readily identify with the thematic issues tackled. So pervasive is the use of various principle oral devices that I conclude, presoetry's poetics are significantly shaped by the indigenous literary traditions. Hence, I regard Osundare as not only using, but – as is common with contemporary poetics – also expanding features of oral idiom; the song of the season. He successfully utilizes song-form as a medium for "biting satirical lashes" against social injustices, oppression and corruption as well as for "raising social consciousness" as he spells out in his aims for the column (Osundare 1987: 11). Indeed as his engagements in this column attest, "every occasion has its hymn" (Osundare 1987 quoted in Bodunde 2001: 42).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I set out to examine the the dominance of the dialogic over monologic discourses in poems Osundare composes for newspaper audiences – what I defined as presoetry. I sought to explore presoetry's peculiar texture; its inherent dialogic nature and preoccupation with public idiom and opinion. The peculiar relationship between the reader and poet presoetry inscribes has been examined. The 'songs' examined reject a monological structure by incorporating dialogue and dialogic relations not only across the songs but also with other genres (prose, narrative, song) and texts. By assiduously embracing the reader, Osundare espouses contemporary poetry's valorization of, and central place assigned to, the audience. This audience is consciously constructed and defined using the techniques discussed; foregrounding topicality of content and immediacy of purpose, the 'formal structuring' of the text into serial form, toning of the register and reconceptualization of the poetic persona to assume position of columnist-journalist.

Using presoetry, I have read contemporary poetry as generically differentiating and aesthetically benefiting from 'intermedial translation' and reconfigurations triggered by the use of newspaper medium both as an alternative and complementary outlet for modern poetry. I have argued that *Songs of the Season,* together with its subsequent progenies, afford Osundare the platform through which he implicitly exposes the falsity of the opposition between modern poetry and oral forms such as song, interrogating the intersistial space between creative writing and journalistic accounts (specifically, commentary articles). Presoetry is hybrid in the sense that is disrupts the fragile boundary between the 'popular' and the so-called 'academic' or serious forms as well as the art of poetry and news reporting or commenting, providing an apt means of responding to contemporary ambivalences and transgressive forms. By straddling the conventions of the popular and the serious, presoetry typifies forms produced at 'contact zones' within modern African poetry. The metaphor of 'song' as literature for the whole community (irrespective of the obvious multiple layers), therefore, sheds light on contemporary poetry's inclinations towards the audience. Using song idiom, Osundare speaks to and for contemporary Nigeria and Africa in general. Like most contemporary poems, the songs are powered and energized by what Anyokwu describes as "creative anger" or "impassioned angst aimed at the corrupt, inept and reprobate ruling class, government functionaries and grotesque social types" (2011: 5) – a focus

which hails most readers of *Nigerian Tribune*. The works constituting *Songs of the Season* are not ahistorical poems that evade social issues but, as I have laboured to demonstrate, carefully composed, consciously ideologically charged – hence the reason as to why I concluded that the experiment dramatizes the liminal space between commitment as a creative writer and more explicit activism. I consider songs in the column hybrid in that they are not a mere valorization of the contemporary poetry's orality as a means of harking back to some authentic precolonial past, or as anticolonial gestures in the sense of counterdiscourse in relation to colonial aesthetics – as Mwangi (2009) would have it - but rather, what I have read as a productive site for disrupting and rejecting the dominance of 'literate' poetics as received or practiced by the foundational generation. The songs are at once 'oral' and 'literate' not just in texture but in their circulation and reception; 'songs of the season'. Next I explore song as a central paradigm in contemporary East African poetry.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SONG SCHOOL: UNREAL CONTEMPORARY LAWINOS IN RECENT EAST AFRICAN POETRY

Introduction

The relative strength and interest of contemporary East African poetry lies not just in the continuities (from oral singers or first post-independence poets who mediate this tradition) but in its very deviation from 'song-school' poetics as well as its implicit questioning of the ideological positions, formal structures and aesthetics embodied by *Song of Lawino* – resulting from an active and critical dialogue with the song school. In this chapter, I foreground the concept of 'internal dialogisation' to read *Song of Lawino* and p'Bitek's poetic discourse by contemporary poets as influencing or shaping their poems in a way that allows and enables them – to use Harold Bloom's idea –to rewrite or 'revise' this text. It is a dialogue not just with p'Bitek and his 'songs' but with the poetics of the first post-independence generation as well as their oral predecessors. I, however, hasten to caution that it is not the "polemical" emphasis that I wish to foreground but rather, a strategy of drawing attention to contemporary African poetry – which in my view has organically evolved out of such dialogic relations with related texts – and with song as a key megatext in this case. The notion of earlier poets (first post-independence generation earlier singled as ardent proponents of the 'song' as basis of modern African poetry) being considered as the undisputed and stable 'source' of and for contemporary poetry is of critical significance in this chapter.

Although one cannot rule out the possibility of explicit or "conscious stylistic borrowing" (Author? 1993: 606), following Bate (1970), I reiterate that the strength of the past in no way indicates the weakness of the future. If read within theories of intertextuality in which texts freely travel, and in which every text carries "textual layers", then contemporary poetry is merely engaging its 'others' in dialogue and existing in dialogic relation with them. The study thus moves away from simplistic 'source-study' to more elaborate patterns of allusions, textual and thematic cognates. De-emphasizing source-influence relations, the chapter focuses on how contemporary works illuminate p'Bitek's poetics and oral singers' (predominantly oral) stylistic features. Song school poetics and *Song of Lawino* inevitably and dialogically determine how contemporary East African poetry is read, and may be productively envisaged as a conscious or

unconscious response to these texts. While some embody direct responses to *Song of Lawino*, others by contemporary poets most explicitly and intensely enter into dialogue with p'Bitek's poetry or song school poetics in general. In other words, contemporary poetry opens up 'infinite' and 'random' connections between written and verbal cognate texts. In particular, those informed by song school poetics instance the intersection of orality and 'textuality'. Some of the works identified for analysis exhibit such intertextual open-endedness, offering both explicit statement of the poet's rejection or acceptance of this song school model as well as those that implicitly allude to such poetics or demonstrate its cognisance.

I advance the argument that contemporary African poetry basically shares the internal dialogization of discourse which characterizes *Song of Lawino* and p'Bitek's poetics in general, while at the same time dialogizing some of the key concepts and tropes that shape the epoch – as encapsulated in song school poetics. The focus is on the textual trafficking of ideas between on the one hand, oral song form and *Song of Lawino*, *Song of Lawino* and its contemporaries which results in song school poetics and, on the other, the products of this dialogue and contemporary texts. Primarily, therefore, this study zeroes in on the way in which selected contemporary poems demonstrate awareness of *Song of Lawino* and song school poetics in the form of an 'interior dialogue' and what Bakhtin calls the "dialogization of interior monologue" (1984: 74-5). It is an attempt to estimate affiliative relations between past and present literary texts or poets hence focus on 'influential' textual linkages by analyzing thematic likeness and disclosing related verbal patterns between and within poetic texts. I conclude that p'Bitek's structural and modal inventions have altered and significantly continue to affect the way in which contemporary poetry is written and read. P'Bitek's style or approach and song school poetics in general consciously or unconsciously provide a crucial point of reference and sort of megatext, not just in Ugandan poetry but that of most East African poets. However, of secondary concern in this chapter is the appreciation of the power of p'Bitek's poetry, the reach of his voice and enduring resonance of his vision not just amongst his contemporaries and compatriots, but also with those spatial and or temporary separated from him. Before examining these relations, how song school is conceptualized in this chapter will allow the drawing of parameters within which the theoretical frame employed is based.

In defining the phrase 'the song school', what Adrian Roscoe and John Haynes say in relation to this variant of modern African poetry is relevant. They both privilege song school as the ideal template for an 'African' poem. Whereas Roscoe first used the phrase in relation to p'Bitek's poetry to refer to what he saw as "the chosen model for a whole school of writing" (1977: 32), Haynes holds that essential in understanding this school is the view that the African oral poem (or song) is the best basis and model for modern African poetry (1987: 40). A number of African writers such as Okot p'Bitek, Mazizi Kunene, Gabriel Okara and Kofi Awoonor - and later Chinua Achebe in *Christmas in Biafra* (1973) - as their texts exemplify cogently subscribe to this view. Their works are emblematic of an identifiably distinct poetics whose defining features may be deduced. As used in this chapter, song school, therefore, designates not just the works of p'Bitek or well-known imitations by his East African contemporaries (such as Baruga or Oculi) but generally, a body of works exhibiting aesthetic features and espousing the political undertones that most explicitly distinguished *Song of Lawino* – arguably one of the earliest and most researched poems of this school. P'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, therefore, is critical to the establishment of some coordinates for defining this school's poetics.

Central to *Song of Lawino*'s aesthetic structure and inherently essential to song school poetics is the dramatic monologue. This form also underpins the structure of most oral compositions. If, as Roscoe holds, p'Bitek is identified as one of the vanguards of this 'school' within modern African poetry, what strikingly distinguishes his (written) songs is the fact that they are consciously modelled on the Acoli lament, with elements of the satirical mode and dirge embedded. As conceived in this chapter, therefore, song school consists of a body of works unified by the fact that they allude, through style, to song as a genre (Haynes 1977: 40). Any attempt to compose poems with *Song of Lawino* or the oral poem/song (such as the lament) as a model inescapably bears indelible marks of a dramatic monologue. This is why, as conceived here, song school designates poetry that aesthetically celebrates the dramatic monologue structure. On paper, the songs constituting or defining this school read like one end of a conversation. The dramatic monologue structure, as M. H. Abrams demonstrates, often involves conceiving a poem with a speaker who is clearly separate from the poet, who speaks to an implied audience that, while silent, remains visibly present in the scene. It is with such "series of remarks usually confessional, addressed either orally or in an epistolary form to another person

or to a group of listeners" (Phelps 169) with which I closely associate song school. Even more critical is the view that the other participating figures are essential to the understanding of the monologue (*ibid*) even though they do not speak or make explicit utterances, as evident in all of p'Bitek's songs. The distinction Sessions makes between 'perfect' and 'imperfect' dramatic monologues is relevant in analysing intertextual relations between song school poetry and their contemporary appropriations. While a 'perfect dramatic monologue' is that literary form which bears all the definitive characteristics, including a speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present (Sessions 1947: 508) – all of which are evident in *Song of Lawino*, imperfect dramatic monologues omit some of the features enumerated. In most song school poetry the persona is 'somatically external' to the poet and audience, and is understood as a natural person, just like Lawino, Ocol, the Prisoner and Malaya, the various voices in *Orphan* or Medisa in *The Abandoned Hut* – to use often cited examples. Like most dramatic monologues where the speaker, the audience and occasion are basic/essential defining components, the elements associated with perfect dramatic monologues assume centrality in song school poetics. The 'singer' or main character is often captivatingly conceived to form an arresting image of a literal person – 'other' than the poet. This character helps the poet to create "an artificial outward correlative of an emotion inwardly real in him" (*ibid*) as may be discerned in most songs. In contemporary songs, readers encounter the voice of the poet cloaked in a mask, a technique that most song school practitioners master and make definitive of this subgenre. The persona does not always coincide with a reflecting or meditating 'I' common in monologic mode. This allows the poet to explore forms of consciousness and self-representations, hence a means of expressing the views of a particular character and offering the audience greater insight into his or her feelings and inner self.

Apart from dramatic monologue's fluid nature which enables the audience to access otherwise inaccessible faculties, this form also signals hybridity foregrounded in this study. Bliss Perry's definition of a dramatic monologue as a form wherein the inter-relations of drama, narrative, and lyric mood are peculiarly interesting (2004: 269) suggests the sort of fluidity marking song school form such that the dramatic, narrative and lyrical elements shade into each other, but

often retain 'formal' or 'approximate' aspects of the dramatic monologue.[154] This fluidity undergirds the protean and composite nature of most song school poetry. The portrayal of the speaker as thinking aloud[155] allows the audience to access the otherwise inaccessible, giving insights into his or her personality and inscribing dramatic overtones.

Another way dramatic overtones are evoked in song school poetry is by always locating the speaker or persona in a sharply focused concrete setting, for example, Acoliland in *Song of Lawino*. The occasion or events, as depicted in song school, take place in a definite situation often a part of human existence. As in dramatic monologues, song school poems evoke a real (as opposed to abstract) experience, despite being imaginative re-creations or recollections. Sometimes the simulation is successful or transparent – especially so in perfect monologues – to the extent of being almost invisible. So far, I have discussed how the structure defining song school poetry, that is dramatic monologue, allows the audience to eavesdrop into the persona's interior or inward world as well as imbue the text with dramatic possibilities. Before examining the audience (as constructed or positioned by the choice of dramatic monologic form), I bring to the fore the special relationship that exists between the speaker and the implied listener – which evokes the dramatic monologue's sense of actual events in the present. The speaker addresses and interacts with one or more others, although the auditor's presence - what they say or do - may be discerned only from clues in the discourse of the single speaker. Herein lies the distinction from closely related forms or subgenres (such as the lyric, monologue, letter and other personal genres). The main principle controlling the poet's choice and formulation of what the persona or lyric speaker says is to reveal to the reader, in a way enhancing interest, the speaker's temperament and character. Thus the importance of the speaker is embodied in the idea that the thoughts and feelings s/he expresses are influenced and shaped by a latent hearer. What controls the poet's choice and formulation of the what the speaker-persona says are concerted efforts to reveal to the reader the speaker's temperament and character (Abrams), and in the process evoke the audience's interest and curiosity. Contemporary 'Songs' of Lawino combine the elements of the speaker and the audience so deftly that the reader seems to have some sense of control over

[154] In the sense used by Ina Sessions (1947) where the formal aspects of the dramatic monologue include "speaker, audience and occasion" while retaining the essential element of the speaker, but lacks one or more of the seven characteristics identified as underpinning a 'perfect example' of this form.
[155] A feature closely related to asides in theatre arts.

how much the speaker will divulge in his monologue. It is important to add that this interplay between a dramatic monologue's subject and the perception of the audience, which echoes an active and responsive audience typical of performances of aurally rendered songs, is significantly foregrounded in song school poetry. As evident in *Song of Lawino*, occasionally, the persona (Lawino) attracts the reader's decisive intervention through the digressions Ofuani (1988) discusses, instancing a sort of direct interactive relationship with the audience. Similarly, the conditions of oral expression Irele (2001) describes as typical of this school of writing may be said to issue from appropriating the oral song and attendant performance aspects. Despite the literate cloud surrounding the dramatic monologue form, characteristically inscribed in song school is the oral texture. The notion of a definite speaker in a definite situation – with dramatic overtones often embedded in the interplay between speaker and audience – remind one of oral texts. Thus the presence and active involvement of the audience, though often implied, is crucial as is the case in most oral performances. In the same vein, the thematically topical orientation that overarchingly defines most oral texts is reminiscent of the dramatic monologue's emphasis on the here and now – since the undergirding lyricism recreates the warm immediacy of a real or actual human encounter.

These dramatic leanings in structure and close intertextual links with oral texts are manifested in poetry's texture by other means. For example, poems in song school are invariably marked by short – one or two syllable – unrhymed lines which provide abrupt changes of pace to enhance dramatic effect. Similarly, oracular repetitive patterns and the typically proverb-laden language approximate everyday speech turns. The fact that the school deploys a form that exploits indigenous or pre-colonial African (Acoli) song relics compels scholars such as Haynes (1987) to use the interstitial designation, song-poem tradition. Conclusively, song school texts are products of aesthetic responses or dialogues and a continued questioning of pioneer texts such as *Song of Lawino* and others published in the late 1960s and 1970s in a diachronically related way and ultimately constituting a sense of a coherent tradition. Therefore, as a school of poetics, this strand consciously and organically evolves to disrupt existing discourses constituting modern African poetry, and, more so, between once polemically opposed poetics. In this chapter, features discussed as marking song school provide an analytical frame for assessing intertextual relations between recent poetry and early song school poetry in East Africa.

I employ Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextual relations and, peripherary, Harold Bloom's schema of influence and ideas on literary tradition as a series of struggles (read dialogues), first to uncover the variety and nature of dialogues resulting from the interaction between Okot p'Bitek and sampled contemporary (East) African poets, and then read this poetry as engaged in intertextual relations with the epoch represented by *Song of Lawino*. I consider the contemporary poem hybrid in the sense that, like any other poem, it is an 'interpoem' (Bloom 1973: 3) since all poems are rewritings of other poems (Eagleton 1983: 183) or, as Kristeva (1980) puts it, is a contact site in which various 'texts' coalescence to produce an 'intertext'. She argues that within the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another; any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is an absorption of and a reply to another text (Kristeva 1980: 36; Sewlall 2003: 61). Since for Bakhtin, hybridity involves a mixture of genres, modes of expression, languages, and texts from different temporal and spatial sources, contemporary East African poetry is read as a hybrid of temporal sources. All these concepts are not entirely unlike Jonathan Culler's idea of reading and writing. In his readings of de Man, Culler observes that "readings have to engage each other in direct confrontations as one reading is precisely the error denounced by the other and has to be undone by it" (Culler 1983: 247) – a notion which may be extended to writing. Texts are in dialogue with others and are hence in (in)direct confrontations in an attempt to – in Bloom's words – 'revise' or 'misread' their predecessors. However, rather than focus on the notion of 'denouncing' errors or 'correcting' mistakes (as Bloom and Culler seem to suggest), I foreground the concept of 'texts' freely moving in a dialogic manner to focus on the mixing or interplay of voices and their tensions, between *Song of Lawino* and contemporary African poetry. This entails a consideration of alternation in contemporary poetry between attempts to write *Song of Lawino* kind of poetry and the tactful departures, if any. From such a perspective, instead of envisaging these poets as passively or fully adopting the texture of *Song of Lawino* and p'Bitek's poetics – as Bloom's model advocates - I read contemporary poetry as modifying and obliquely questioning some of these. I would suggest that this poetry can be properly termed dialogic because it involves a dialogization, in subtle ways, of p'Bitek's imaginative values and discursive practice. Bearing in mind that 'dialogics' is but a massive project in intertextuality (Nyairo 2003: 12), and in light of the view that deconstruction transforms 'influence' into intertextuality – since the poet is an effect of a system of language in which s/he is inscribed

(Preminger et al. 1993: 606). I do not just examine influences *per se*, but engage with the ensuing dialogue and intertextual relations. Like other literary texts, contemporary poetic texts "make imaginative use of other texts" (Haynes 1987: 110) and are, therefore, constructed – directly or indirectly – by means of other texts, hence the reason why contemporary East African poetry is read as dialoguing with *Song of Lawino* and song school in general.

Thus contemporary East African poetry enters into a dialogue with both *Song of Lawino* and oral song text. This poetry opens an intricate pattern of relations since utterances or poems addressing or in response to *Song of Lawino* do not simply dialogize its discursive elements but also adopt, appropriate or approximate some of its discursive features as a totality of stylistic and thematic elements in the Bakhtinian sense (Ozdemir 2005: 552). Contemporary poems are coloured, affected and influenced by *Song of Lawino* structure (dramatic monologue), language (derived or associated to song form) and thematic preoccupations (for example, the valorisation of African culture). Where intertextual relations are not as explicit as in other cases, I argue that it is as a result of 'a hidden dialogue' which (un)consciously structures and frames their works. It is this hidden dialogue which gives the poem its thematic, aesthetic or structural coherence, as well as allusive links to song school poetics. In this paradigm, the anxieties Bloom refers to may then be read as responses to suppressed or subdued thematic and formal 'influences' from song school or *Song of Lawino* – representing chastened emotions and literary experiences. A distinction is thus drawn between implicit and more explicit textual affinities, tracing absolute continuities, and poetics that exhibit familiarity with p'Bitek's works or which seem to recall not just his path-breaking lament but others by African poets. Some poems in the sampled anthologies present innovative re-workings of Okot p'Bitek's style of poetics. Both at a stylistic and thematic level, contemporary poets demonstrate not a mere convergence of influences from preceding generations of African poets but an active engagement with some of their texts and textures marking the epoch, amounting to hybridity of their creative muse.

If features of song style inform or interact with those of written poetry within song school, one may point out that this is a case of an author speaking "in someone else's discourse" and hence a typical stylization which "stylizes another's style in the direction of that style's own particular tasks" (Bakhtin 1984: 193) – although without introducing into that discourse semantic intention directly opposed to the original one inherent in parody. Consequently, different styles typical of

various genres (song, oral narrative, poetry) are brought into a single space and ineluctably interact and fuse resulting in a confluence that forms part of this poetry's meanings. As the written medium opens new possibilities for features of song style, evolving into something distinctly written, written discourse acquires and intertextually alludes to performance quality of oral genres and orality in general. Eventually, such conversations lend the resulting text a performance mode often embedded in the dramatic monologue form among other features. Within the song school and as also evident in contemporary poetry, various literary and cultural discourses intersect hence the plurality of sources in the texts resulting from what Bakhtin reads as essentially polyphonic nature of narratives. Different styles and voices issuing from the many discourses that shape the production and reception of the text enter into a discussion with one another, and with voices outside the texts. Such that voices or styles considered external or 'other' to first, poetry as a genre and secondly, to contemporary East African poetry "appear to be internalized" (Swingle 1987: 69) as the poetry involves a dialogization of p'Bitek's imagination and ideological position, tenets of song school as well as related texts developed outside the region. This is why I read some contemporary poems not as reflexive evocations or mere (un)meditative monologues but rather as "half a dialogue with a questioning voice that, though silent, affects the way the poet speaks" or conceives his poetic discourses, as if he were answering, or answering back" (Wolfson 1986: 40) p'Bitek's Lawino and which echoes Bakhtinian definition of hidden dialogue.

This focus on dialogue and dialogic relations with Okot p'Bitek is cognizant of the manner in which 'ownership' of the song school is fragmented and decentred in contemporary times. One pillar of the indigenous Acoli practice of poetic composition and performance, and which this literary tradition has bequeathed modern African poetry's song school is the thesis stating that "which is traditional cannot belong to any one individual" but can only be copied and transmitted from one generation to another for further mutation and modification (Afolabi 1985: 93). Although quasi-indigenous, song school poetry has tended to take a similar trajectory. What contemporary poets and in particular those from East Africa are doing is indeed keeping alive the

conceptualization of 'originality and creativity' as enunciated within Acoli literary traditions.[156] In contemporary theory, Gilbert Murray (1968) similarly points out that "it is one of the feeblest of critical errors to suppose that there is a thing called 'originality', which consists in having no models" (quoted in Ellen Voigt 1999: 145) – a position that reiterates postmodernist critique on the concept of origin (Bhabha 1994: 38). Murray's position echoes that of intertextual dialogue and dialogism embraced in this chapter. I read creative contributions in the song school not as a mimesis of or as necessarily 'aping' p'Bitek but rather as mutating and modifying *Song of Lawino* as they engage it in dialogic relations. The products of such conversations have come to constitute a body of work collectively known as song school poetry. These various songs, therefore, may be read as 'performances' of a text composed by p'Bitek in a loose sense, considering them as renditions in light of 'mutations' or 'modifications' as evident in later song school poems (by p'Bitek's contemporaries and compatriots) as well contemporary texts in *Uganda Poetry Anthology* and *Boundless Voices* which are either inspired by or engage *Song of Lawino* in intertextual dialogic relations. P'Bitek may have successfully transformed this literary tradition from its earlier oral confines to the print space (dialogue between oral-literate realms), hence song school poetics, but undeniably, subsequent poets have continued the tradition such that in contemporary times, it is largely a dialogue or intertextual relationship across the literate realm – rather than an oral-written one. Most of the texts involved in this aesthetic transaction have been captured in literate realms, although a number of oral texts are still enmeshed in this web.

The opening chapter of this thesis made an attempt to catalogue fields from which a modern African poet may draw his or her poetic muse or source texts from. I read this field, or what Haynes reads as "a scatter" or "a shared cluster" (1987: 118) of texts whether written or spoken in (East) Africa as discourses referring to, describing or framing the interpretation of a text and, therefore, these texts may be regarded as some sort of mega-text. Textual antecedents provide ready, fertile and unlimited 'sources' for aesthetics that colour, determine or shape subsequent literary productions. Roland Barthes succinctly captures this saying "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody,

[156] It is worth mentioning that this is not an Acholi peculiarity. Creativity and originality in traditional society, Albert Lord (1976) cogently argues, is not necessarily in the material (the corpus) used as such, but in the artist's performance.

contestation" (Barthes 1977, 148). This multiplicity of antecedents plays a constitutive role in the text since it provides or contributes building blocks to emergent textures. Standing out in East Africa is the song school [mega-] text initiated by *Song of Lawino* which, as evident from critical works, provides a crucial reference point and template for contemporary poetics. I proceed from the premise that, given the hybrid nature of contemporary cultural forms in Africa (Agawu 2003: 58), written poetry in English is hardly a pure entity; the singularity of its identity is problematic. Such a reading presupposes a pool of 'texts' from which poets access and appropriate various textualities that constitute their poetic compositions. More so in the present times, the degree of hybridity is such that even various traditions or texts building up this hybrid poetry are themselves products of syncretism or are 'always already hybrid'.

I read his poetics not simply as continuity of Acoli – and by extension precolonial or oral African – literary traditions or aesthetics but as an ingenious blend of poetic traditions evident in the multiplicity of dialogic relations it instantiated. Not only did it mediate between literacy and lack of formal education, or Acoli and English but speech and writing (Ramazani 2001 quoted in Mwangi 2007: 57-8) as well. At a more literal level, this dialogue is evident in the elementary and critical role his mother – an accomplished Acoli song composer, singer and performer – played while he was composing *Song of Lawino*.[157] Evidently therefore, his written poetry engages this oral tradition in an intertextual relationship. For p'Bitek who was familiar with the ubiquitous song tradition – arguably the simplest (uncomplicated), commonest and most natural kind of poetry - it is no surprise that when he turned to writing poetry in English, this form provided crucial and overarching texts for his poetics. This is why Opali (2009), for instance, reads him as having consciously and unconsciously absorbed economic and socio-political conditions within which he lived and wrote, which I envisage as epitomizing one of the dominant perspectives to poetics in East Africa – concern for existential social realities. This is fundamentally important because as Bogan (1953) correctly postulates, the art of a period cannot but be approached by the attitudes, either emotional or intellectual, of a different period, and,

[157] That his mother imbued him with his creative spirit is a point he stresses in an interview with Lindfors. Similar;y, Johnson Ndukwe's "Remembering Okot p'Bitek's "Comic Singing'" elaborates this saying; P'Bitek's mother was a gifted singer, composer, and leader of her clan. Under the influence of his mother, p'Bitek grew up learning the tales, proverbs and songs of Acholi folklore with P'Bitek himself as an accomplished dancer and drummer. He is also on record as having acknowledged the critical role his mother played in his career, saying "...my interest in African literature... [was] sparked by my mother's songs and the stories that my father performed around the evening fire" (p'Bitek 1973: 21).

political, economic and cultural events that shape Africa's regions always bolster a flurry of poetry (Dike Okoro 2003). However, p'Bitek's poetics goes a step further prompting critics such as Killam to envisage him "as the embodiment of a distinctively regional kind of literature" (1984: 224).

Predicating my premise on the basic idea that with time, "less and less material is original as more and more of it depends on prior poems" (Schultz 1996: 26), I read contemporary East African poetry as engaged in a dialogue with *Song of Lawino*, and hence either consciously or unconsciously influenced by ideologies, structures, and other formal attributes that underpin song-school poetics in general. To make such an analysis, what Bodunde says in connection to how song is generally used is significant. Broadly, Bodunde offers two levels in which the song form is used within modern African poetry. One level is through "physical transfer" (Bodunde 2001: 42), or what Osundare prefers to designate as "mediated translation" (1987: 11). At this level, song is used as a technique of close translation such that traditional songs may be directly rendered in written poetry. In my analysis, such an approach to composition is designated as the translational method. Besides providing templates for contemporary poetic discourses, at the second level, song form is used to avail deeper meanings and illuminating by replication (Bodunde 2001: 42). Contemporary poetry envisaged as dialoguing and intertexting song school also appropriates the mood of oral songs. The conceptualization of song school as an analytical paradigm provides space to engage with mediated forms of oral songs. Contemporary poetry accesses the resources of oral poetics via song school – arguably, a poetic tradition often associated with literate poetics.

To begin with, the near-legendary persona (Lawino) has become the subject of dozens of homages, whether in the form of poems addressed to her or about her, or generally in the form of song school, which deliberately plays on the mode popularized by *Song of Lawino*. The success (and hence the reason why it is often intertexted) of this 'song' rests primarily on p'Bitek's creation of a convincing persona, with a vibrant personality that animates the entire text. As I demonstrate, the conception of such a persona ('singer') informs contemporary poetry. A number of poems published in the recent past seem to dialogically respond to Lawino or simply engage her in a sort of dialogue while some aesthetically allude to p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* right from their titles. I rely on tributes to Okot p'Bitek or his persona, Lawino, such as Marjorie

Macgoye's "Letter to a Friend"; the playwright cum poet, John Ruganda's "Reply to p'Bitek's 'Lawino'" and Jane p'Bitek's *Song of Farewell* to demonstrate thematic cognates and hence intertextual ties between issues explored in *Song of Lawino* and generally song school, and contemporary poetry. These texts help illustrate the common trend running through contemporary works; the ever-present, inescapable influence or of Okot p'Bitek's song school tradition.[158]

I then move on to examine some of the most striking parallels to *Song of Lawino* which engage song school poetics in a sort of intertextual dialogue or dialogic relation in *Uganda Poetry Anthology* and *Boundless Voices*. These include Julius Ocwinyo's "I Am Not My Brother's Keeper", which echoes the monologic lamenting personae in p'Biket's song, but who in this case is a politician; Okaka Dokotum's "Song of a Rebel", which right from its title engages song-school in dialogic relation and hence exhibits striking semblances with p'Bitek's songs; B.K. Okot's "Get Them By Their Roots", which evokes p'Bitekian rhythm; George Okot's poetry which establishes direct intertextual dialogic relations with p'Bitek's persona-singers such as Lawino, Ocol and the Malaya; and Otim Lucima's "African Lady" which seems like an extract from, or modification of, Lawino's lament, particularly in its repertoire of images. Although the focus is not solely on the folkloric repetitive nature, such as the use of refrain(s) as a structuring device, the refrain "Let no one/uproot the pumpkin in the old homestead" which intersperses the entire text and which cross-references a common Acoli proverb is useful in the analysis of intertextual relations. Of particular interest to this study are some contemporary poets who rework this very refrain and integrate it into their texts, such as Zinunula Iga's "No/Let no one uproot the pumpkin in the old homestead" in "Africa in Pain" which exemplifies this dialogic consciousness both in tone and structure. Besides the refrain, contemporary poetry also employs other means of imbuing the text with performativity, such as incorporation of dramatic texts and texture. The dramatic overtones of song school tradition are evident in numerous 'songs'; in

[158] Ward (1975: 225); Goodwin (1982: xvi); Rubadiri (1988) and Gikandi and Mwangi (2007: 15) all share the view that song school poetry – Okot p'Bitek's song-poem tradition – as shaped by the aesthetics celebrated in the influential *Song of Lawino*. Notable among these characteristics include dramatic monologue, condensed, oracular and proverbial nature (Godwin 1982: xvi), has continued to be of immense influence to East African poets. The school is marked by the short unrhymed lines, discursive, expansive and repetitive mode of the majority of African orature, and may be seen in the works of Taban Lo Liyong's *Eating Chiefs* (1975), Okello Oculi' The *Orphan* (1968), Joseph Baruga *The Abandoned Hut* Richard Ntiru's *Tensions* (1972) and a number of contemporary poets as discussed in this study.

Oculi's *Orphan* (1968) for instance, the dramatic element is achieved by imagining an orphan-boy sitting at the junction of an imagined East African village paths, receiving advice from passing-by villagers who include his grandmother, his mother's uncle, stepmother, a village elder and an age-mate. Taking cue from song school poetics, contemporary poets create or recreate an interactive environment between the persona and the audience using song-form textualities and dramatic monologue structure. They envision a deliberately discursive style which provides a performance space that allows for interaction, recalling oral songs' inherently interactive form. To illustrate textualities that demand, invite or encourage the activity and interactivity of persona and the audience, I use Susan Kiguli's poetry together with various poems from the anthologies, such as "A Dead Man's Funeral", "Mother", "My Grandmother's Chest", "African Lady", "The Sudden Knock", Black Woman", "The Forgotten Clay" and "I am Tired of You" among others. Another means used to augment and heighten the dramatic dimension in contemporary poetry, and arguably informed by p'Bitek's songs, is the use of short unrhymed lines with few syllables (except when a concise description is required) to provide a faster-moving verse typical of song-school. As a text, the meter in contemporary poetry reveals acquaintance with song school poetry. It is also worth mentioning rhetorical digression which is considerably a major formal or textual influence from the oral traditions. As Heron (1976) rightly notes, it creates an illusion of immediacy similar to the relationship between a singer and his or her audience. Essential and active interplay between the speaker(s) and audience constantly contribute to the flow of poetic ideas, as evident in *Song of Lawino* when Lawino invites Ocol into her "mother's hut" which, by extension is directed at the audience inviting them into the (make-believe) world Lawino re-creates.

There are several instances of thematic and ideological cognates between the two literary epochs in East Africa. The thematic space p'Bitek opened through his major works continues to animate the contemporary poetic scene. True, his poem has become the benchmark for poetry interrogating the conflict between colonial modernity and African traditions (Mwangi and Gikandi 2007: 139) which in contemporary times is dramatized by rural-urban dichotomy. In the contradiction between city life and rural, bucolic tradition is often used as a metaphor for the decadence and affluence of the ruling elite as against the communal but impoverished agrarian people (Bodunde 2001: 37). In as much as he has been accused by among others, Taban lo

Liyong, Ngugi wa Thing'o and Andrew Gurr for being shallow in his analysis of contemporary social problems, I situate p'Bitek as a pioneer commentator using poetic resources to diagnose and prescribe Africa's postcolonial ills. He introduced the grammar and idiom that has remained central in poetically engaging with diverse issues in contemporary society. I examine four contemporary publications with two couched as a 'reply' and a 'letter' to Lawino and p'Bitek (respectively) by John Ruganda and Marjorie Macgoye; and two others, one by George Okot and the last one by J. Teyie, in an attempt to demonstrate that *Song of Lawino* is a common "thematic cognate" (Haynes 1987: 113) in contemporary (East) African poetry.

John Ruganda, for example, engages p'Bitek's Lawino from a much more contemporary standpoint, questioning the relevance of key issues she raises in her song, *Song of Lawino*. In "A Reply to p'Bitek's Lawino", Ruganda deconstructs and, in the process, denounces all that Lawino held dear, positioning the poem as an antithesis to *Song of Lawino* – a position p'Bitek himself takes in his follow-up to *Song of Lawino*, especially in *Song of Ocol*. It must be noted that the response seems to be dialogically aware of the near-mythical Lawino's ideological position (Lawino appeals to Ocol to stay true to his own customs, and to abandon his desire to be white). Right from the title which alludes to the legendary figure constructed by p'Bitek, dialogic relations are intimated. Thus, whereas Lawino insists, with profound nostalgia, that African indigenous ways should not be discarded, Ruganda dismissively rubbishes this saying – through his persona that he "can't return to the village" because, although he "was not born in town", he owns no homestead in the village "at all". I read this as bringing into a dialogue the two consciousnesses and perspectives that inform *Song of Lawino* and this reply. The village-town binary Ruganda tackles should be read in the light of the wider tradition-modernity or African-European dichotomy which preoccupied Lawino and on which *Song of Lawino* is constructed. However, Ruganda moves beyond the romanticist metaphor of city as destroyer and village life as idealized (in the sense and spirit espoused by Wordsworth), deconstructing the idea of 'home' (dear to Lawino) and conceiving it as an ascribed construct rather than claimed or inherited - thus veering away from nostalgic attachments to 'rural' homes and by extension, valorisation of village life as evident in *Song of Lawino*. The urban-rural dichotomy is disrupted since, as evident in contemporary East Africa, urban centres have become homes to a generation that does not identify with or romanticize the 'village' Lawino fervently defended. In other

words, Ruganda embraces modern notions of dwellings and the positive contributions colonialism bequeathed postcolonial Africa such as urbanisation:

> I can't return to the village
> Let government tractors
> Uproot pumpkins in homesteads
> I don't care

Whereas p'Bitek's Lawino clings onto the "pumpkin" in the old homestead, Ruganda dismisses her stand as misplaced nostalgic dreams or, in his words; gathering "drops/of lost childhood urine" (1988: 174). Using the image of a spider and its web, the bonds attaching the contemporary times to African indigenous or pre-colonial culture are presented as snapping with the passage of time. Ruganda's persona echoes ideas central to the poet's philosophy, especially with regards to the question of the relevance – or rather, irrelevance – of key negritude tenets in the contemporary times. Privileging an idealistic notion of tradition, he even expresses doubt whether Africa's past is alive today, concluding that it "is no more." To the contrary, however, I hold that overlaps ensure that a clear line may not be drawn - even in the contemporary era - between on the one hand, pre-colonial culture and postcoloniality's modernity on the other. As a number of authors have shown, the two coexist mutually enriching each other.[159]

Clearly, Ruganda's poem thrives as an anti-Lawino perspective on the theme of cultural conflict. Following Kristeva, it is an altering of the 'thetic position' – that is, destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one (1984: 59). Undeniably, therefore, Ruganda's poetic consciousness reaps from the base provided by p'Bitek's poetry, in particular *Song of Lawino*, in his attacks on imperialism, denigration of traditional values, exploitation, neo-colonialism and the threatened social fabric of postcolonial society. By re-reading, re-interpreting or countering p'Bitek's thematic orientations, Ruganda engages him (and hence song-school) in an implicit dialogue since his voice and consciousness remain embedded within the reply Ruganda makes. This poem may be envisaged as a parodic appropriation of *Song of Lawino*'s ideological belief (or utterance) – especially the communal values Lawino fervently valorised, and which introduces into poetic discourse a "semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one" (Bakhtin 1984: 193) presented by p'Bitek. As texts, p'Bitek and Lawino are apostrophized with

[159] See, for instance, Kofi Anyidoho's stance on the relevance of the past as enunciated and enshrined in the Sankofa paradigm.

various voices and consciousnesses fusing into Ruganda's text. It is important to point out, however, that despite Ruganda's persona taking an anti-Lawino perspective, s/he does embrace all that Ocol stood for. In spite of the striking allusions to what Ocol stood for, for example, his avowed refusal; "To hell/With your Pumpkins/And your Old Homesteads", I read him not as aping 'white' consciousness that Ocol symbolises and ardently champions but rather as an African who, aware of existential realities in contemporary postcolonial East Africa, takes a stand informed by practical needs such as the change from precapitalist economic paradigms – often located in urban settings. This is why Ruganda adopts an anti-negritudist point of the sort Soyinka makes in the *Swamp Dwellers,* aligning himself with positions taken by the likes of Leonard Kibera who proclaims that "He was never in any case a real part of the old order" and that he even "never knew" the precolonial Africa so much defended in p'Bitek's works (Roscoe 1977: 193).

While Ruganda appropriates both p'Bitek's themes and style to compose his 'reply', Marjorie-Macgoye on the other hand retains her approach to poetry, staying aloof from aesthetics associated with the song school tradition. Despite thematizing p'Bitek, her approach to poetry shows little enthusiasm for song school poetics, in particular its regular stanzaic structure, each with four unrhymed lines. In this poem subtitled "In memory of Okot p'Bitek", not only does she eulogize the late poetic guru but engages with *Song of Lawino's* thematic concerns in a dialogue. Like Ruganda, her poem interrogates the romanticist (and Negritudist) conceptualization of 'homesteads' and generally (African) indigenous traditions. Of particular interest to the argument I am making is the closing stanza in which Macgoye writes:

> Where homesteads crumbled, let again the pumpkin
> Take root and bind the soil, speaking beasts, singers
> and sinuous dancers share all secrets with you–
> tell how we, in the shadowy city, loved you. (Luvai 1988: 137)

A number of cultural symbols which p'Bitek popularized such as the 'homestead', the pumpkin, spear and drums, among others, continue to bear the meanings and significance p'Bitek imbued them with in his poetry. Re-deploying one of p'Bitek's central image(s), in particular the recurrent 'pumpkin', Macgoye advocates for reconstruction urging that the relevance of traditions in contemporary era should be recognized. Arguing that the customs and traditions of Africans are not 'hollow', 'thin', easily breakable or 'blown away/By the winds' p'Bitek uses the

metaphor of its "roots reach[ing] deep into the soil" (p'Bitek 1984: 41). This very text travels, finding its way into Macgoye's poetry as evident in the lines urging that the pumpkin's roots should "Take root and bind the soil". This poem, however, goes beyond lament mode. "Omera" may be read as a liminal between a dirge and a praise song as it focuses on p'Bitek's personality and literary contributions, and is not so much directed at celebrating his creative or poetic works. A certain degree of fondness is evident in the poem as suggested by the manner she chooses to address him ('Omera'). This captures not just their shared ethnicity – whereas p'Bitek is a Luo from Uganda, Marjorie-Macgoye is married into and socialized as a Kenyan Luo - but their close relationship as poets. The referent is drawn from their shared dholuo language, meaning, 'my brother' or more generically, a young adult man. In this poem, like Ruganda and other contemporary poets, Marjorie-Macgoye's thematic material is informed and textually enriched by p'Bitek's perspective. Part of the meanings in this poem largely depend on other texts before them, in particular, p'Bitek's poetry. The use of 'again' in "let again the pumpkin/Take root..." is conscious of p'Bitek's text in which he strongly advocated this position ("The pumpkin in the old homestead/Must not be uprooted" (1984: 41).

Much more pointedly is George Okot's "Who?" which engages a number of Lawino's central arguments through a series of probing rhetorical questions. From the interrogatively framed title, this poem is conceived as an inquest into who killed him (p'Bitek). Consisting of a series of questions shaped out of references to p'Bitek's well-known works, the poem is thus a dialogue with p'Bitek's poetics as the persona engages p'Bitek's other character-personas (singers) such as Ocol and Malaya. I read answers to these interrogatives as embedded in the questions themselves. The series of questions create a space for internal dialogism, as key issues that preoccupied the late Ugandan poet are revisited. Through a series of rhetorical questions, George Okot asks:

> Was Lawino's traditional stand
>
> Too archaic for this "modern" world?
>
> Did her lamentative voice
>
> Touch the soft spot of
>
> "Modern" hardened men?
>
> …

Was your horn full of love?

By revisiting Lawino's concerns about postcolonial African culture, Okot's poem seems to rely on p'Bitek's earlier composition, drawing poetic inspiration from his creative imaginations. Indeed, one needs to have interacted with *Song of Lawino* and understood her "traditional stand" before relating the present text to the "modern" – which presupposes a 'traditional' – or as is the case in this study, the contemporary world. On the surface, it may seem a disjointed, fragmentary text that recalls the works of p'Bitek – only held together by the fact that the constituting series of rhetorical questions are all addressing thematic concerns handled by p'Bitek. The line "Was your horn full of love" for instance recalls the title of p'Bitek's ambitious anthology, *Horn of My Love* (1974).[160] He, however, retains p'Bitek's characteristic monologic form, with minimal dramaturgy. Throughout this poem, he encompasses and interacts with the other personas, affirming that his work would not exist had it not been for p'Bitek's earlier effort. Okot's work is a product of or has been created out of its precursor:

Ocol's proud and baseless stand:
Did it hurt many a shy man?'

Or from Song of Malaya:

The *Malaya:*
Was she bare and representative
Of decadence

In the above instances, the intertexted text – *Song of Lawino* – is used to undermine and, in the process, subvert p'Bitek's ideological leanings. In this poem, the ideological claims p'Bitek made and stood for are questioned, undermined and finally refashioned as, like Ruganda, Okot inscribes/advances a new position/vision; the questioning of assumptions. It must be noted that Lawino attracted the attention of some of p'Bitek's contemporaries writing in the 1970s. Then living in Uganda, Taban lo'Liyong of South Sudan and of Acholi ethnicity (like p'Bitek) called for an end to the Lawino lament in his poem, "Student's Lament" saying;

Lawino's dirge must end

[160] *The Horn of My Love* is a collection of Acholi folk songs about death, ancient Acholi chiefs, love, and courtship which, Gerald Moore (1984) comments that anyone "familiar with [p'Bitek's] own poetry, especially *Song of Lawino,* will recognize here the indigenous poetic tradition in which that fine work is embedded".

which is the versification of the thesis he advances in his essay "Negritude is Crying Over Spilt Milk" – much the same concerns Ruganda raises in his 'reply' discussed earlier. Whereas most contemporary poets are preoccupied with Lawino, the singer in p'Bitek's first song, others engage her estranged husband, Ocol, in dialogic relations and somewhat hidden dialogue. Teyie's "Denuded" in which the persona addresses a 'lover' relies on stock characters created by p'Bitek. The poem recalls the solitude into which Lawino was thrown by her 'philandering' husband:

> A denuded heart hungers for
> Something more; more than a
> Woollen jacket, bought to bury love.
> A warm word; yes, not an Ocol's scowl. (1988: 210)

Considering allegory as "commonly accepted experiences of life" whose related or attendant consequences, and associations, are used as surface argument for closely parallel situation which would seem to be incontrovertible once the surface or illustrative argument is accepted (Kunene 1976: 107), then p'Bitek's poetry becomes a crucial allusory text for this poem. Since allegorical signs always refer to anterior signs (Ogude 1999: 45), the reader finds *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol* and especially the section titled "My Husband's Tongue is Bitter" inescapably instrumental in understanding and appreciating possible meanings in this text. Unless one is aware of Ocol's arrogance (2000: 18), his bitter tongue ("The insults:/Words cut more painfully than sticks") and the fact that by Lawino just "walking past" him, "He hisses like a wounded *ororo* snake/Choking with vengeance" (2000: 385), the message remains somewhat inaccessible since this text informs the intended meaning – love requires 'warm words' and not Ocol's scowl. In a similar pattern, the question in Jane p'Bitek's *Song of Farewell* may be read as posed by Lawino to her estranged husband, Ocol. The 'you' may be read as an allegorical sign that recalls 'an anterior sign', in this case, Ocol. The persona's obstinate reminder that:

> That to be civilized
> You had to be ashamed
> Of what made you, you?

Although this is generic, it may be attributable to Lawino and certainly directed at Ocol and the ideological position he espouses. Within East African lingo, it is the Ocols who are considered ashamed of themselves in their desperate quest for some imagined civility.

The song school (and p'Bitek's poetry) are, therefore, important framing devices, and in most cases provide overall thematic coherence to these poems or snippets of thematic cognates. I read some contemporary poems, therefore, not as reflexive evocations or mere (un)meditative monologues but rather as "half a dialogue with a questioning voice that, though silent, affects the way the poet speaks" or conceives his poetic discourses, as if he were answering back (Wolfson 1986: 40) Okot p'Bitek's Lawino – and which echoes Bakhtinian definition of hidden dialogue. Having examined some of the contemporary ideological or thematic reiterations and re-interpretations of *Song of Lawino*, I next move to establishing some intertextual and dialogic relations between contemporary poets and song school initiators or practitioners at the aesthetic level. In particular, I focus on the use of the dramatic monologue structure, the lament and satirical modes or lampoon, social type personas or 'singers', parallelism and refrains to engage with how close or distanced contemporary works are with oral poetic traditions and techniques which defined p'Bitek's poetics – and by extension intertextual relations with song form.

As already mentioned, I consider p'Bitek's poetics as a mediation of African indigenous poetics. In particular, the form of p'Bitek's poetry is clearly derived from Acoli oral songs that accompany certain dances. Okumu closely links the first nine sections of *Song of Lawino* to the satirical criticism typical of songs accompanying the *Orak* dance; section eleven to political and topical songs accompanying *Bwola*, *Otole* and *Apiti* dances and sections twelve and thirteen to among others, the lament mode (1992: 65). The satirical, lament and open critical modes that he adopted from Acoli oral traditions, Okumu (1992) correctly concludes, enable p'Bitek to comment on a broad range of Western assumptions about Africa. It is this reflection on Acholi oral poetic forms often interwoven with proverbs, similes, metaphors and symbols that poets approximate when appropriating p'Bitek's song school. However, rather than consider the influence pre-colonial literary tradition, in particular, song, I use *Song of Lawino* as a model appropriating or 'usurping' oral literary traditions. This is premised on the view that *Song of Lawino* is nothing but a sort of anthology, or as David Maillu (1976) rightly states, a kind of collection of traditional material from which any artist may draw. Being the simplest, commonest and most natural form of poetry, song is considered the most immediate inspiration for modern African poetry in whichever language.

Song form generally is defined by a number of features. However, one central defining and formal feature of African songs, which is foregrounded in p'Bitek's renditions, is the interplay between the voice and chorus textually signalled by ubiquitous presence of a refrain. The choric part assumes both structural and aesthetic roles in p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*. Not only is it saturated with meaning, but is also constructed in such a memorable manner that it lingers in the audience's mind for some time after reading. Contemporary poets have found this a useful poetic device, hence its relevance in contemporary works and poetics in general. Whereas 'the pumpkin in old homestead/must not be uprooted' helps provide thematic coherence through the several stanzas in *Song of Lawino,* another contemporary poet, Zinunula Iga, makes direct intertextual references to this canonical text's refrain. Nowhere in recent poetry does p'Bitek's 'song' resonate as richly and subtly as in the eighteen-long stanza "Africa in Pain". Arguing that the colonialist should never have come, but since he did, he should not have left, Iga writes:

No

No, let us stop aping.
Let us learn how to talk, then we shall sing.
Let the parrot re-enter the forest,
Let the horse chew green grass.
Let the pig accept
The traditional tubers.
Let the cave man pick up his stones
And let Africa's sons clip their teeth. (2000: 152)

Most oral songs exploit reliance on internal balance achieved through symmetrically juxtaposed images and binary line formations (talking contrasted with singing; parrot/forest; horse/grass; pig/tubers; cave man/stones) for an insistent cumulative effect. The above stanza, in my view, is a variant, and paraphrasing of "Let no one uproot the pumpkins in the old homestead." Reacting to p'Bitek's position, Iga urges for a re-examination of approaches and models to various issues in Africa's development agenda. Relying on (both structural and thematic) parallelism throughout the poem, different renditions of 'The colonialist should never have come' are regularly interspersed to give the poem thematic and structural coherence. The repeated use of the declarative 'let' reinforces his ideological position and instances a texture typical of *Song of*

Lawino. Besides the use of symbolic animal characters such as the parrot, horse and pig, "Africa in Pain" resonates with deliberate allusions to *Song of Lawino* for example, his reliance on p'Bitek's refrain structure and poetic tone – as evident in the declarative pattern:

> No
> The colonialist should never have come

The refrain echoes p'Bitek's conclusion in *Song of Lawino* that no one should tinker with African indigenous traditions and values, or with "the pumpkin in the old homestead". The extent to which Iga is steeped in p'Bitek's poetics is also evident in his poetic diction. By using and foregrounding the word 'let' in sentence-initial position, for example; "Let us not be afraid to crawl down" and the numerous instances cited above, Iga's mind affirms familiarity and dialogic relations with p'Bitek's poetics. His conclusion, however, contradicts p'Bitek's stance. Whereas p'Bitek is categorical about the place of African customs and traditions, blaming the West for cultural dilapidation, Iga looks beyond to provide a sort of way forward in the postcolonial dispensation. He argues that since the colonialists left, the onus is on Africans:

> Let's take good care of the giant genteel lady.
> Africa is capable of living on her feet,
> If we would help her get off her knees.

The foregoing to a large extent underpins his poetic vision for contemporary Africa.

As mentioned in the introduction, p'Bitek appropriates the penchant for experimenting with artistic forms from the Western Modernist (literary) movement. In one of his renowned experiments, he collected and translated into English various oral genres from the Acholi community and published them as *Horn of My Love* (1974). However, it is the approach he deployed in *Wer per Lawino* and later *Song of Lawino* that remarkably stands out. The route of first carrying out fundamental research into vernacular/oral poetics as apprenticeship into poetry composition, then transcribing and later translating existing oral texts or paratexts, before venturing into writing 'original' compositions in English has become a common trajectory providing inspiration and formal material for several African poets. Basing this argument on Benjamin's (1992) thesis that translation itself is a form of writing, it is important to mention that generally, modern African poetry is a form of translation even when there are no indigenous-langauge originals (2011: 54). Although *Song of Lawino* is assumed to have an Acoli original,

some of the sampled contemporary experiments issuing from such 'reflexification' (Zabus 1991) or 'compositional translation' (Adejunmobi 2005) do not have identifiable 'originals' to which poets attempt faithful renditions in English or in writing. Even when there are, both the writers and their medium are not 'passive conveyors' of these originals (2011: 55) but rather alter them to suit new circumstances in which the texts are consumed, retaining some conventional elements of these 'originals' in oral form. The 'target' audience, genre and medium profoundly (and dialogically) shape the final text. I, therefore, privilege the significance of creative manipulation involved in the notion of translation, and its reconceptualization as 'performance at the level of culture' (Muhawi 2006: 4) which informs modern African poetry. To demonstrate the epochal dialogue at the centre of this chapter, therefore, it is necessary to highlight some notable compositional translations in modern African poetry. While Mazizi Kunene's MA thesis, an analytical survey of Zulu poetry, produces creative works such as *Zulu Poems* (1970), an anthology, and *The Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain* (1982), Kofi Awonoor's published research on Ewe oral poetry bequeaths modern African poetry audience *The Breast of the Earth* (1975). A number of contemporary poems similarly issue from such endeavours; Kofi Anyidoho's PhD dissertation published as *Oral Poetics and Traditions of Verbal Art in Africa* (1983) among the Ewe of Ghana, Steve Chimombo's *Malawian Oral Literature* (1988) which inspires *Napolo and the Python* (1994) and *Napolo Poems* just like Susan Kiguli's *African Saga* (1998) and poetry career in general benefits from her PhD research published as *Oral poetry and Popular Song in Post-apartheid South Africa and Post-civil War Uganda: A Study of Contemporary Performance* (2004). Inter-lingual and medial translation has also produced poems such as "If Death Were Not There" (Chinweizu 1988: 311) and "On Being Told that the Girl of His Desire is a Blood Relative" (1988: 249) just as it did *Song of Lawino*.

Inter-lingual or medial (and cultural) translation, therefore, is seen as a process from which the text emerges as a hybrid construct since, as Bhabha (1994) demonstrates, it is 'contaminated' by the cultural values (or 'texts') of its source – whether Zulu, Ewe, Chibemba or Acoli. This approach involving the placing of the paratext (or original) and the translation side by side not only offers "an opportunity to compare the two traditions" (Luvai 1988: xi) but, as suggested, significantly influences and shapes the final poetic product in English. It allows the two poetic versions to engage in Bakhtinian dialogue as they interrogate and negotiate each other. The

challenge often lies in rendering or 'translating' the oral and performative elements of these songs not just into English, but also onto the page. The final text, as Benjamin (1968; 1994) succinctly shows, is united visually on the page. Taking the 'original' transcription as one extreme and its 'free' rendition as the other, I take literal translation as sandwiched in between, therefore, existing in a sort of organic relation (1968: 82). In most of the texts from contemporary poetry, literalness and freedom are united as is evident in the *Song of Lawino*, the model of this approach. However, this technique is not limited to critic-poets whose scholarly interests takes them deep into research on oral poetic traditions such as p'Bitek himself, Kofi Awonoor, Mazizi Kunene, Jack Mapanje and Tanure Ojaide, among others.

Contemporary poets in East Africa such as Okaka Dokotum, whose MA research at Makerere surveys Lango oral poetry - in particular, the *ikoce* and *okeme* competitions - adopts the translational technique or compositional translation in their creative works, most notably, "Song of a Rebel" – itself laden with echoes of p'Bitek's *Song of Soldier*. Others, however, employ this strategy without necessarily carrying such extensive research in oral poetry. Compositional translation has been deployed by Loise Abukutsa, Zacchaeus Osoro and Angella Simwenyi, all anthologized in *Boundless Voices* as the editor's introduction reveals, as well as Samson Kanyoro's "Tropical Lullaby" in *Uganda Poetry Anthology*. I first examine the strategy of using translation as a means of composing, then look at attempts to embrace the oral composition method used by oral artists before concluding with song generally as an idiom for poetry composition. From these, a dialogue or dialogic relations between contemporary poetry and its predecessor may be deduced.

In a dirge celebrating the life of one 'Christine Vakhoya', Loice Abukutsa utilizes this poetry production technique of translating (own) text, originally composed in Nyore/luNyore, her indigenous language. Relics of Nyore literary material, reminiscent of p'Bitek's apostrophe are evident in:

> Oh! Look at how the animal plunged in water
> What animal?
> An animal by the name Karim,
> Oh hear

By using a structure which inscribes a participating audience and aspires to the call-response performance style, Abukutsa's poem draws on the dramatic monologue associated with p'Bitek – and which permeates Nyore oral poetry as it does Acoli. Due to what Lawrence Venuti calls "abusive fidelity", traces of the indigenous song are evident such as the rhetorical "what animal?" which is paused but not answered by the same choric group or vocal part. In as much as ascertaining whether a piece is 'original' as opposed to a translation is difficult, heavy presence of indigenous song's stylistic features, words and phrases without English equivalents and 'notes' from editors or authors help determine such crucial intertextual relations, which I argue, were initiated in East Africa by the late Ugandan poet. The linguistic hospitality of English language and written medium is therefore brought to the fore just as in p'Bitek's case. This poem illustrates what Ricoeur reads as the "pleasure of dwelling" in not just the other's language but medium (print as opposed to oral) as well, balanced by what he calls "the pleasure of receiving" the alien language or medium (oral) in the welcoming home (2006: 26), in this case modern African poetry.

Within this approach, various means and devices are used to draw the reader into the text's textualities. In "Mother, Stop Abusing Father" and "Who Am I", Zacchaeus Osoro draws from the Kisii oral song repertoire and relies on this technique in composing his text. The latter is conceived as a praise-chain song while the former renders a 'popular' song in English. Apart from the repetitive devices of oral poetry, the use of folkloric texts woven into the poem's textualities marks this composition. For example, this stanza retains much of its oral-textualities:

> Monkey, Monkey!
> Monkey please hold this child for me
> So that I can go to look for mother
> ...
> Help me with the child
> That I may go to find our mother
> ...
> Aeeh! Aeeh! Aeeh! Aeeh! (1988: 166)

Within oral literary tradition of this community in which a monkey is a stock fable protagonist (with multiple identities and symbolic/narrative roles), such a text recalls a common oral song commenting on changing social times in which the role of women is no longer confined to child-rearing/mothering. Although it starts as a family quarrel (the mother portrayed as quarrelsome, abusive and disrespectful), embedded in this critique is the inevitability of changing realities and

the need for women to engage in economic activities outside the confines of domestic spaces ("Gone to labour out there"). It becomes clear towards the end that the mother is, among others, a 'secretary' or 'teacher'. In the typical folkloric manner, the role of child-rearing is assigned to the symbolic 'monkey' (if no other human is available to care for the baby, then Man's closest 'cousin' may assume the role – based on the myth of [orphaned] children brought up by primates when the parents were killed). The apparently proud persona says that the mother is a 'Bwana's' secretary or, "Our mother is a school teacher" (1988: 166) suggesting that, after all, her absence and abjuration of mother-role is extenuated by her new stature. The decision, therefore, mitigates her estrangement from the matrimonial home and duties. This theme preoccupies (oral) artists as transitional postcolonial African societies grapple with the challenges of the interface between indigenous-modern existence – as is also evident in Serunjogi's "She Came to Cook" (1988: 183).

Considering the two dimensions of modern poetic discourse, that is, the phonic and the graphic, it is important to pay attention to ('untranslatable') phonic texts that find their way into the page, and how they are graphically/orthographically approximated or accommodated. Textually, the oral-literate interface is also metaphorically embodied in the interlocking or blurred (oral-literate) boundary signalled by retention of aural residues in the written rendition of oral paratext ("Aeeh!") – attributable to written medium's 'inhospitality' or incommensurability. Although this is the subject of the next chapter, it worth mentioning that paralinguistic devices such as loudness are orthographically signalled by punctuation (exclamation) – and not capitalization as Tedlock (1983: 48) suggests. But besides phonic dimension, certain folkloric textualities from oral songs are evident in Osoro's other poem, "Who am I?" which instances close intertextual links with the Kisii praisesong tradition. A strong sense of locale is evoked through the use of images linked to the persona's 'motherland' or landscape; Otendo hill, Manga hill and kinship to Ochorwa clan – echoing Bakhtin's intrinsic connectedness of spatial relationships artistically expressed in literature (1981: 84). It is, however, the simile that recalls song school poetic's predilection towards close ties between art and ecology or cosmology, evident in the use of images (texts) derived from immediate flora and fauna within the locality. Like Lawino, the persona proclaims his/her reverence of the clan:

> For I belong to the proud clan

Where boys are like *ebisiringi* plants
That die and germinate again. (1988: 168)

This text alludes to song school poetry's conscious effort to use imagery drawn from oral vernacular poetry (for heightening sense of loss and linguistic inhospitality). While Osoro attempts the genre of mock praise poem that is interspersed in *Song of Lawino*, Simwenyi employs the dirge form to lament death as a "confuser of men". This poem relies on oral song's repetitive nature and parallelism to translate a Wanga dirge appropriately titled "Death". The textual impact of the compositional translation approach is evident in this poem's general oral structure and meticulous internal symmetrical balancing: 'sneaking'... 'trips up a cousin'; 'crawling'... 'stifles the aunt'; 'running'... 'struck the uncle'; 'hurry'... and 'hushed the brother' (1988: 191) – among other textual elements appropriated from oral song and hence song school poetics. While some poets use parallelism as a form of repetition, the rhetorical technique of repeating is generally construed as a basic principle of oral art (Chukwuma 1976: 17). If the technique of composing poetry using translation renders a text susceptible to textual repetition of various kinds, then Kanyoro's rendition of a lullaby best exemplifies this. Besides the praise poem and lament forms, another formal text dialogically engaged with by contemporary poets is the lullaby. Relying on its structural pattern as organizing text in his seven stanza "Tropical Lullaby", Kanyoro retains this genre's regular stanzaic arrangement with four lines in each stanza. There is an over-arching parallelism with each of the seven stanza's opening and closing lines using the auxiliary verb 'will' – foregrounding the prophetic vision espoused. The poem revolves around (natural) cosmic forces; moving from 'clouds', 'sun', 'drought', 'rains', dawning ('morning') through to 'night' in the sixth stanza, before concluding with the all-encompassing 'life' in the final stanza:

And it is all life –
Cloud and sun and wind and rain and drought and
everything,
Contending –
It is life. (2000: 47)

In spite of the title preparing the reader for a lullaby, what one encounters in the poem, however, is an ardent philosophic comment on the inevitability of change, which undergirds the concept of life. This is evident in the conclusion that the poet arrives at; all these vast and dynamic forces contend but eventually collapse or culminate into 'life, and hence "It is life". Undoubtedly, all

will 'pass', 'shine', 'end', 'cease', 'come' for life to continue. Whereas this subgenre is functionally limited to lulling children, it is interesting how Kanyoro deploys its textualities and structures to make subtle and philosophic comments about contemporary life – an aspect often obliterated for the former.

The choice to employ compositional translation technique in composing contemporary poetry has profound implications on the eventual text. While in relation to *Song of Lawino*, p'Bitek acknowledges that the approach ended up clipping "the eagle's wings", rendering the otherwise sharp edges of the warrior's sword rusty and blunt, "murder[ing] rhythm and rhyme" (p'Bitek 1966: iv),[161] contemporary poets attempt to retain as much of these 'wings'. Of interest to this study is the need to evaluate possible contemporary renditions that have retained rhythm and rhyme even in their written, translated versions as Taban lo Liyong's *The Defense of Lawino* (2001) promises to. Besides fluidity and accommodative nature of song-school poetry, I read the strategy as entrenching lengthy compositions in modern African poetic discourses. P'Bitek has come to be associated with the relatively long or 'extended' poems. This is the form Haynes (1987) describes as the obese poems, which run several pages of print. Although p'Bitek popularized it, a number of other poets, notably, Okello Oculi (especially *Orphan* and *Malak*), Joseph Baruga (in particular, *The Abandoned Hut*) and even Marjorie Macgoye (see *Song of Nyarloka*) later followed suit, experimenting with different ways of using long poems in English in an African way to express 'African' emotions and problems (Heron 1984: 2) . But in the recent past, the obese poem has been adjusted into not-so-long form, but rather – and relatively – slightly more than the average 'conventional' modern poem.[162] Two of Okello Lucima's anthologized poems exemplify the sort of elongated poetic form I refer to. Whereas "When Tomorrow Comes" occupies four pages of print, spanning over ten stanzas, "Rhythm" equally attempts to cover almost three pages, hence embodying p'Bitek's legacy of long-poem model. Similarly, Jane p'Bitek's collection consists of six poems each spanning not less than five printed pages, while Macgoye's included in *Make it Sing* (1988) spans 1200 lines. Although

[161] This is due to what I have called linguistic inhospitality and medial incommensulability considering that the first version in Dholuo uses rhyming couplets, hence sort of occluded this performance atmosphere.
[162] I have in mind conventions such as length requirements by certain publishers and anthology projects, such as the 2010 Uganda Women Poetry Competition, in which potential poets were asked to submit unpublished poems of between 15 to 30 lines.

they do not employ the very strategy p'Bitek initiated, they have nevertheless adapted the relatively extended nature which in modern African poetry is a characteristic ushered by his works. The elongated nature of such poems more often than not issues from the compositional translation approach to composition.

Besides compositional translation, song school poetics appropriates more explicitly the strategy deployed in oral composition – a strategy that imbues the text with aesthetic uniqueness. For example, p'Bitek makes every effort to embrace the entire composition process typical of oral songs. Most notable is his idea of both implicitly and explicitly incorporating the audience into the creative process. In *Song of Lawino*, he attempts a method of composition that is quite similar to that of traditional songs; a group of singers working together and continuously altering the songs as they perform them. More implicitly, the final written text signals, or simply suggests, the presence of an active audience – what may be called 'restrained' performance that involves co-engagement of speaker-addressee or speaker-audience. Let me briefly explore actual attempts to embrace the audience (during composition) and the implication this has on overall textuality of the poem, before turning to more subtle means. The form this strategy assumes in contemporary times is that of poetry clubs and reading sessions providing feedback and suggestions incorporated into the text.

Collective production involving the oral performer and audience (Bodunde 2001: 12) provides a crucial structuring text often intertexted by contemporary poets. Although relatively fewer contemporary poets (from East Africa) attempt this route, instances of efforts to incorporate the audience in the text abound – as will be detailed shortly in relation to the dramatic monologue. The listener/audience is not passive but determines the tone and even content of the poem. However, this does not mean that the strategy has not been invaluable to contemporary poets. As I show in the final chapter, this method is used by some West African poets, especially amongst the so-called Nsukka group[163] as exemplified by the publication of *Voices from the Fringe*

[163] A group whose notable members include, but are not limited to Chinweizu, Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, Onuora Ossie Enekwe, Femi Oyebode, Harry Garuba, Catherine Acholonu, Femi Fatoba and Femi Osofisan.

(1988).[164] The input of this "weekly therapy" (Roscoe 1977: 138) approximates continuous editing in oral composition process as explicated in Ruth Finnegan's (1977) seminal work. But comparatively, poetry clubs are more vibrant and livelier in West (and some Central) African universities than in East Africa. As a metaphor for poetic composition, however, song mode has come to signal more than just orality in print.

Occasionally, this poetics and the approach it inscribes are implicitly suggested by other means. Some poets prefer to signal intertextual and dialogic relations with audience as co-producers, through use o song in their titles. The approach of titling poems as 'song of...' – despite not starting with p'Bitek – provides clear allusory links with song as a genre. P'Bitek, however, takes credit for introducing and popularising it within modern African poetry. This rubric dates back to biblical texts such as "Song of Solomon" and literary works such as those by William Blake (*Songs of Innocence and Experience* 1789/1794) *Song of Hiawatha* (1855) *Song of Myself* (1855) DuBois's *The Sorrow Songs*, before p'Bitek came up with *Song of Lawino*. This style of titling has been adopted by various contemporary poets. From Okaka Dokotum's "Song of a Rebel" – which thematically alludes to p'Bitek's *Song of Prisoner* and *Song of Soldier,* to titles such as *Song of Farewell* by Jane p'Bitek, "Song of Nyarloka" by Marjorie Macgoye, "Song of Kabwela" by Sengondo Mvung and "A Village Song" by Richard Mabala, the seeds p'Bitek sowed continue to sprout. The prevalence of this style has led some critics[165] to coin a name for it; comic singing, which has its roots in the oral tradition where most compositions were titled as the song of or for someone or some occasion, depending on its central subject matter or figure-protagonist. Of interest to this study is not the source of this approach but how it has travelled and the forms it takes within modern African poetry and in contemporary East African poetry in particular – and hence the collateral texts it engenders in this tradition. Notably, the idea of performance inherent in 'song' but absent in the word 'poetry' (Nagy 1996: 2) is central in this analysis. Interestingly, this style of labelling poetic texts has been adopted by other African poets especially the so-called AlterNative generation of West Africa. It is this rubric that informs most of Osundare's poetry collections as well as the column examined in the previous chapter;

[164] Worth mentioning – despite being outside the scope of this study – is Malawi where weekly workshops avail much need critical feedback before publication.
[165] Johnson Ndukwe in "Remembering Okot p'Bitek's 'comic singing'" says that *Song of Lawino* introduced a style that came to be known by this phrase.

Songs of the Season. Although it may be correctly argued that this is not exclusively a p'Bitek idiosyncrasy, I hold that it is the Ugandan poet who popularized the variant in the (East) African poetic scene. Theoretically, he may not be the 'inventor' but even more significantly, he acts as what Beach (1992) calls its 'master' and, therefore, envisaged comic singing as one of his legacies.

The ubiquity of more subtle forms of this style in East African contemporary poetry is of interest to this study. From Amateshe's "The Tortoise Song", Angira's "Ode for Josefina", Macgoye's "Maitu Njugira", Sunkuli's "I Sing for Achebe" to Sempebwa's "Army Song", the song mode is embedded in the poems' textualities and is only signalled or alluded to by the title. The referent 'song' and its variants (sing, sung, ode and lullaby) allude to the genre's oral composition technique, repetitive nature, performance oriented texture and topicality of subject matter among other essential features of the genre. Other poems that exhibit similar affinities include Mangeni's "A Lullaby" which, like Kanyoro's "Tropical Lullaby", signals links to a specialized song-form; lullaby, and, Aaron Mushengyezi's "A Dead Man's Funeral Song" which echoes the dirge. Besides Mushengyezi's text, experiences articulated in poems such as "Weep not Now", "Africa's Turmoil", "Oh! My Beloved Country" and "A Remote Field, Rakai" may easily be read as laments.

The most striking song-derived textures in Amateshe's poem are the folkloric element and parallelism typical of oral song. Besides the use of stock fable characters such as ostrich, eagles and tortoise, and the retention or transfer of their symbolic functions (with the ostrich and eagle functioning as 'contrastive enablers' to the tortoise's folkloric wisdom), Amateshe makes use of song-form's structural patterning. While the first, second and last stanza focus on the tortoise's unwavering conviction ("Mine is a slow rhythm ..."; "Mine is a cautious pose..." and the forward-looking concluding variant, "Mine will be a slow pace..."), the third and fourth stanzas focus on the contrastive dimension of this poem. Thematic weight of the third stanza ("Let the ostrich run/endless distances...") is emphatically reinforced in the fourth stanza ("Let the eagles fly,/...to mindless skies"), in the same pattern as the already mentioned first, second and final stanzas (Luvai 1988: 19). This 'song', therefore, reiterates the tortoise's symbolic and philosophic vision which is relevant to and worth emulating by humanity. A similar song-like parallelism is evident in Angira's "Ode for Josefina" in which the presence of an interlocutor is

only implied and is used to provide coherence to the entire ode/song. All the three stanzas start with the line "What next sweet Josefina" (1988: 22). But in the typical dramatic monologic model of the song school – although I shall come back to it in detail in a later section, the speaker signals the immediacy of an interlocutor:

> The motel is just a few miles
> At the turn of the highway
> O sweet Josefina we've passed the junction
> Of fakes and imitations
> So *lets* drive into the bay
> And take *our place* by the swimming pool.
> (Luvai 1988: 22 my emphasis to show indicators of a potential listener)

The addressee in this case is certainly Josefina, whose 'presence' helps conjure up a dramatic encounter. Dramatic undertones are evident in events presented as unfolding within the poem, for example, "O sweet Josefina we've passed the junction" (*ibid*). Although it is evident from the title that this poem is an ode (lyric poem or song), some contemporary poems make use of more nuanced means to allude to song. In Frank Anywar's "The Exiled Poet", the irked persona is certainly aware of the hostile reception his 'songs' receive from 'them' (the political elite). His perception seems to conflate poetry and song. He is aware of 'their' "clear detest" of his "pepper tasty songs" (Benge and Bangirana 2000: 3) implying a thin – if not non-existent – line between the two genres and, therefore, metaphorically signalling song school poetics. This is why he talks of "impedance" on his "voice-box" which, like oral songs, privileges sound and hence song-like, and his "throat-strings", which alludes to instrumentation and performance.

In addition to the explicit title, "A Lullaby" carries some of the implicit intertextual relations mentioned above. Like "Tropical Lullaby", its formal structure bears striking semblances with the oral lullaby's relatively 'simple' or uncomplicated structure, stretched tone and generally repetitious texture. While Kanyoro's is built around 'will', each of the four stanzas in "A Lullaby" starts with "Let me..." variously predicated. Simplicity in structure is evident in the verb phrases as well as predicates; sing, smile and dance from the first to the last stanza respectively; all second lines open with the phrase "Mind not the..." completed with 'frog in my throat', 'earthworm in my foot', 'curry on my tooth' and 'bile on my tongue' and the final line of each stanza uses the first line's verb with first-person pronoun 'I' as subject and second-person pronoun 'you' as object – modified as a 'melody'/'rhythm'/'warmth'/'taste' of love,

respectively. It is important to mention that of the texts or textual material contemporary poets source from the (oral) lullaby repertoire, more often than not, it is formal or characteristic frame rather than content. Conceiving function as a text, they often stretch this text beyond its oral range since the addressee or implied audience is often not an infant. In such contexts they play a more complex role, including generally expressing and reflecting human feelings about life, directing or focusing attention inwards. In Mangeni's case, the persona proposes a positive outlook in life, one which strives to get the best from an apparent heap of garbage:

> Let me sing you a song
> Mind not the frog in my throat
> I sing you a melody of love. (2000: 77)

From the metaphoric standpoint on which my analysis in this section is anchored, the poem is thus a 'song' the persona promises to sing and is linked to song school poetry (couched as a song to be sung). In spite of the 'frog' in the throat, the persona urges, the performance will be melodious and soothing. In other words, focus should not be on impediments or shortcomings (a frog in his throat) but rather on his or her capabilities (vocal output).

Through the implied audience, the character and attitude of the speaker is revealed. Despite the speaker being 'dead' in Mushengyezi's "A Dead Man's Funeral Song", the poet simulates the reader's imaginations by conceiving or imagining him/her as virtually real to the extent that the audience understands him or her as they would any other natural/living person as s/he keeps asking "Why are you treating me so" (2000: 89-91). Furthermore, s/he affectionately refers to the listeners as "my brother" (similarly applied in p'Bitek's songs) instancing the dramatic immediacy of an actual encounter. The boundary between death and life is depicted as fragile by the persona directly addressing the 'brothers' who seemingly are listening. It is through the insinuated presence of listeners and their 'hidden' prompts that the 'drama' unfolds. By "breaking and stretching" his "numb limbs", he reminds them ('brothers') that he "never was a night-dancer", upon "shutting" his "meditating eyes", the persona reminds them that he "never cast a prying eyes" into their "shoddy deals", or upon flattering him "with flowery praise songs", the departed persona rebuffs that while alive, he "longed for a kind word and deed" (2000: 91) in vain. The nuanced dramatic interplay, therefore, depends on the listener/addressee's presence, hence quite p'Bitekian in conception. However, it is Sunkuli's "I Sing for Chinua Achebe"

(1988: 206) that best exemplifies the point I am making in relation to indirect textual links to song-form. Instancing what this study reads as a dialogue between East and West African literatures, this poem is conceived as a song dedicated to the novelist, Chinua Achebe. Cultural symbols or images such as 'goatskin' and 'palm oil', and cultural or region-specific phenomenon such as '*chis'* and '*Amadioha*' become texts which provide clear instances of intertextual relations between East and West African poetry. I read this spatial travel of texts as an indicator of the existing dialogue between the two literary regions. These were probably encountered through exposure to West African literatures (such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Amadi's *The Concubine*). Similar echoes or dialogues are evident in Laibuta's "Which Man Died?" which recalls Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied* (1989) but directly, as addressed to Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (1972). However, within East Africa, the intra-dialogues and dialogic relations are equally evident.

Although from its title Dokotum's "Song of a Rebel" most immediately conjures memories of p'Bitek's *Song of Soldier* (1986), Bazanye Sempebwa's "Army Song" instances more subtle textual relations with the song school in general. While p'Bitek talks of a 'soldier', Dokotum a 'rebel' – which I read more as a soldier or group of soldiers that oppose or revolt a government than simply any non-conformist. With respect to the portrayal of these two, the persona in Sempebwa's poem may be read as a non-conformist 'soldier'. By inviting the reader to reflect on the destructive role of the military in postcolonial Africa, Dokotum, like p'Bitek, deploys a dramatic monologue to expose the inner self and psyche of military officers. The gory confessions the persona makes remind one what critics have said about p'Bitek's text; it reveals the horrific corruption and corrupting influence of the individual agent of destruction (Goodwin 1982: 154-72). Despite his meek beginnings (born and lives in grass), Dokotum's rebellious persona defiantly declares that "I kiss blood/And I can split brains!" (2000: 113) recalling the brutal soldier-persona in p'Bitek's text; "Scattering death across the land" (2000: 111). Whereas p'Bitek's persona talks of "Blood gushing/Like the swollen Nile" (*ibid*), the soldier in Dokotum's text similarly intimates that he fills "potholes and/loopholes of neo-colonial highways/with thick red tar!" (2000: 114). Unmistakably, from the confessions a sense of the presence of an interlocutor can be discerned; "I once had a hut, brother" suggesting

communal/kinship bond with the listener/reader – typical of song school's dramatic monologue structure. The persona's destructive inclinations are extenuated by the fact he has no heart:

> My heart was nibbed
> by worms of war
> stuffing it with stone;
> hard-granite. (2000: 113)

As he says, his "feelings are entombed" just like his "entoiled" soul. Having absolved himself of any emotional leanings, he goes on to catalogue his sadistic accomplishments such as spilling blood ("thick red tar"), waylaying, slaying, plundering, slandering, mocking, maiming, mutilating and massacring or in summary, 'mayhem is his motto'. This in my view echoes p'Bitek's persona who is seemingly so fond of his gun that he cherishes 'caressing' its 'butt' – suggesting passion for destroying and killing. This poem instances song school's technique of using a dramatic monologuer to highlight the character of both the addressee and the speaker, as well as foregrounded dramatic interplay between the two. Having signalled the presence of a listener whom he requests; "Do not blame me brother" (2000: 115), he goes on to demonstrate his awareness of the implied addressee's consciousness. As though he has seen him (the 'brother') holding his waist and sighing, the persona says:

> I have not gone to waste;
> I do the awful lawful!
> My hideout is unsearched
> Why? Listen!
> My kith and kin (2000: 114)

The utterance seems in response to what the listener may have said or suggested, exemplifying the dramatic interplay between participants in a dramatic monologue, such that the listener and speaker are realized as active, continuously living and thinking. Sempebwa's poem may not be as explicit but, like Dokotum, he engages p'Bitek in a more hidden dialogic relationship without explicitly celebrating war. The dearth of 'laughs' and mirth from "the field's vicinity" sets the stage for an encounter with "brave soldiers" (2000: 134). Interestingly, however, and unlike his compatriots, Sempebwa denies the soldiers agency. He portrays them as inadvertently trapped or 'suffocating', encircled by "a wicked barbed wire fence" (2000: 134). In other words, behind the mask of proud, rebellious and destructive soldiers (as presented in p'Bitek's and Dokotum's texts) is a tortured soul:

...We chuckle, we do.
But no one laughs within.
The guffaws and giggles are nothing
but the empty clattering of teeth
echoing in and out of hungry caves...
...no great feat.
A skeleton in an earthquake could do better. (2000: 134)

I read this not just as a rejoinder to p'Bitek's (and may be Dokotum's) text and position regarding the portrayal of the attitude and character of soldiers, but also as instancing dialogism which, in the Bakhtinian sense, is a text whose interpretation entails positing more than one founding centre (Hanks 1989: 114). To appreciate Sempebwa'a perspective, therefore, knowledge or awareness of p'Bitek's *Two Songs* (1988) is inevitable. That indeed within these so-called "Brave Men" is what the persona sees as "mutineers of thought...words" and hence agonized and suppressed inner selves. It is this chastened consciousness that keeps asking "Why are we doing this?/What answer? Answer me!" (2000: 134).

Intermedial translation involved in *Song of Lawino* does not simply create a new form but rather adapts a traditional form to new conditions of performance changing oral texts to suit the new circumstances in which the text is consumed; writing. Hence Lawino's lament, considered "thoroughly indigenous in form, content, style message and aesthetic philosophy" (Lindfors 1984: 146), makes use of multifarious texts drawn from oral discourses. By relying on the rich poetic resources of Acholi and Lango songs – together with English poems - p'Bitek creates something both old and new. Thus, a number of textual units or building blocks are carried over or reformulated from orature to suit the new medium. The ensuing dialogue and consequent interlocking implies correlation, and in some cases the questioning, of artistic and social functions pre-existing oral genres or texts heralded within the contemporary written poetic space. Although more often than not such relations encompass the central role these texts perform in "conditioning certain valuable means of cognizing and humanizing the society" (Bodunde 2001: 36), they transcend traditional functions ascribed to them within oral contexts. A frequently used text is the dirge and its celebration of death, which among modern dirge singers is extended to encompass not just loss but even reversal of fortunes. The resources or textualities of mourning, such as its lament form, style and philosophy are used to bemoan contemporary social rupture, the (economic and politically) engendered nation-fabric and fate of humanity in general. This is what Samson Kanyoro in "Weep not Now" and Cliff p'Chong in "Oh! My Beloved Country"

articulate when they position themselves as speaking on behalf and to fellow citizens. Like their West African counterparts, contemporary East African poets deploy the elegiac tone typical of oral dirge text to comment upon various (symbolic) deaths – ranging from the presumed demise of African traditions and values, humanity and nation among others. This recalls the concerns of the third chapter, where I explored forms of moaning in Anyidoho's poetry. In contemporary East African poetry, Kanyoro's poem for example opens with the persona consolingly saying "Wipe away your tears/Weep not now, Compatriots;" (2000: 45) and hence positions himself as speaking on behalf and to fellow citizens. As a text from song school poetics, the role of dirges is, however, extended beyond mere celebrating of loss and consolatory purposes to include foreboding, warning and mourning lurking 'deaths'. This is what Kanyoro aims at when he writes:

> Time shall be,
> When fascism is dead and buried
> Deep in the bowels of the earth. (*ibid*)

In an optimistic and confident tone, the persona spells doom on all forms of dictatorial movements emphatically noting that a time shall come when "proper elegies shall be sung" and "the youth shall trample death into the dust" (*ibid*). This is the same prophecy p'Chong seems to cast in a cry for his 'beloved country' that ends with the biblical "*Mene, mene, tekel!*". His country, like the biblical Babylonian Empire, is destined for catastrophic end. With the "Sounds of lunacy" and general despotic rule which "Shatter[s] the land/to its depths" and bullets raining "Like hailstones", p'Chong foretells the impending doom in this 'Kingdom' – much the same way the mythical finger did in the biblical Kingdom. He allegorically juxtaposes the Idi Amin regime with the impervious Babylonian kingdom. Contemporary poets also use the dirge text to prepare the audience for moaning metaphorically. It instances a case of a person who not only sees his or her looming death, but even composes funeral dirges in anticipation. This is illustrated by Mushengyezi's "A Dead Man's Funeral Song", in which the boundary between death and life is depicted as fragile since the (dead) persona directly addresses the seemingly listening 'brothers', and quite movingly, Okello Lucima's "When Tomorrow Comes" in which the persona plans for his burial, instructing:

> When tomorrow comes, when tomorrow comes
> Erect no podium, make no speeches

Our hearts are heavy with sorrow
The press and statesmen, please
Keep your convenient silence (2000: 116)

The coming 'tomorrow' or unknown future symbolically represents humanity's fate, death. In a typical dirge pattern, the poet goes on to graphically capture the "Mounds of fresh red earth" or graves – which house the departed. Within the dirge tradition, death attracts a range of images aimed at depicting it as unwanted, painful and untimely. In line with this genre, Lucima employs the image of 'acne' on an adolescent's face or skin to foreground the fact that it is least expected and, above all, unwanted. As in most oral texts, images are piled up for cumulative effect and emphasis; the acne image is reinforced by that of a 'Kingfisher swooping down on a school of fish' which, in turn, is reiterated by the fate of 'sea weeds and planktons' in the hands of fish.

Besides the dirge, another text often sourced from orature is its characteristic consciousness or voice. Contemporary poetry relies on the oral texts' collective and critical voice typical of fable tales – as championed by most contributors to the song school. In particular, folkloric (fables') voice informs this text. As an oral text, the fable is crucial within oral cultures as an instrument of offering "commentary on human affairs" (Kunene 1976: 107) which is one of the major preoccupations of most contemporary poets. Modern poets usurp its concern for human affairs. Moreover, orality is a megatext within which the technique of 'collective voice' – and the attendant communal vision – typical of most oral or traditional social and aesthetic practices (Bodunde 2001: 40) is inscribed. Such textures provide contemporary poets with an apt platform from which to connect and identify with the society's general course. These concerns formed the crux of p'Bitek's poetry and song school poetics, as conceived in this study in general: the voicing of the concerns of the society through archetypal figures such as Lawino and persistent use of open criticism mode as embodied in Acoli literary traditions. The two form part of the texts contemporary poets dialogically rely on while creating their poetic texts. A few examples from the two anthologies elucidate the pervasive nature of critical, satirical and collective consciousness and hence vibrant textual traffic between song school and contemporary poetry.

If commitment is broadly taken as a product of the degree of interaction between a text, its author and the reader's actually lived life, or simply, congruency between what is said in a poem and the actually lived contemporary ordinary life 'outside' poetic discourse, then, undoubtedly,

contemporary East African poetry remains to a large extent concerned with existential realities in the region. Appropriating or intertexting song school poetics, contemporary East African poetry articulates the subjectivity of people in the region in an idiom that approximates their 'mother tongue'; song,[166] and its proclivity for the topical. I use Sunkuli's "Beggar in Three Piece", Adyeri Kanyaihe's "Democracy", Cliff p'Chong's "Living Togther" and Jonatham Tusingwire's "I Like it All" to demonstrate how oral song's focus of the ephemeral, the critical and satirical modes persists within contemporary poetry. To appreciate this focus or dialogue within the contemporary milieu, what I outlined in the introductory chapter is relevant; the megatheme of good governance (or lack thereof) in postcolonial African states remains the bedrock of modern African poetry.

Postcolonial disenchantment and neo-colonialism, together with attendant focus on the socio-economic standards of the ruled and corruption of the rulers, is the focus of dozens of contemporary poems. Sunkuli's "Beggar in Three Piece" is a pointed critique of the contemporary political elites and the almost synonymous issue of economic misnagement which places African states in the bracket of perpetual beggars. This poem recalls and dialogizes much of Osundare's poetry, especially the *Song of the Season* in which he constantly questions the logic behind aid-initiatives to African governments and Third World economies in general. Like Osundare, Sunkuli exposes the folly of Bretton Woods Institutions' policy of Aid to developing countries by portraying the corrupt leadership as insensitive and insincere. They leave for the West with a "beaded knobkerrie" clutched on the left hand and a "rusty inter-Nation Begging Bowl" on the right hand (1988: 204). By using the image of a beggar for African/Third World nation-states, Sunkuli aptly captures the dependency and desperation marking most post-/neo-colonial economic order. The satirical manner in which the government representative begs betrays 'songs of justice's' satirical mode. Having presented his case, the suave beggar nonchalantly requests the donor, saying "Scoop us a little/You know", sarcastically adding that "Just a little/To keep them till next rains" (1988: 205). Despite excluding himself ("keep them") implying that he is borrowing on 'their' (countrymen's) behalf, the elegantly dressed 'beggar of/for beggars' apathetically adds that, just enough 'till next rains' capturing the unpredictable

[166] This is predicated on the argument that if music is a 'universal' language of humankind (Henry Longfellow quoted in Bruno Nettl 2005: 42) then song may be regarded as the mother tongue of most expressive cultures in Africa.

and precarious fate of the countrymen and women. This recalls Osundare's "Borrowing what they Stole" which satirises this whole process; "We have come to borrow some of those fortunes/Which lie in your brimming banks,/Do us this favour, and we shall pay back/With all your stated interests". Like Niyi Osundare's 'Songs of the Season' which draws on his native Yoruba orature, Sunkuli's poem alludes to the political and topical nature of song-form in general, but specifically echoes those that accompanied *Bwola*, *Otole* and *Apiti* dances among the Acoli – or the oral repertoire of most African communities as is the case in song school poetics in general. Not only is the beggar's reception foreboded by the "blood-red carpet" but, and derisively so, the tie is said to "beautifully strangle[d] [his] neck" (1988: 204). Similar satiric undertones are evident in the denouement of this text as the persona-beggar introspectively and pensively wonders:

> Now my suit
> Which cost me a fortune
> In a Parisian Textile
> Has denied me a fortune
> And my countrymen, life. (1988: 205)

As a symbolic image, 'three piece suits' have provided a source of ridicule of postcolonial African leadership or 'rulership' – a repugnant image for African political elite's insensitivity to their surrounding (stark poverty). For example, the anthology includes Vukoni Lupa-Lasaga's "Question for the Civilised" in which the persona inquires; "How can you be a gentleman/If you cannot perspire/Three-piece heat/In the noonday sun?" (1988: 143) instancing the ubiquity I allude to. Generally, the notion of 'aping' preoccupied song school poetry; in *Song of Lawino*, p'Bitek despairingly talks of the "progressive and civilised/ones" dressing up like white men or as if in a white man's country even "At the height of the hot season" (p'Bitek 1998: 23). One cannot help thinking of Sunkuli's 'tie' in light of p'Bitek's (through Lawino) belittling remark in relation to the clamour for anything from Europe; "blanket suits", "woollen socks/vests", "white shirts", "dark glasses", "...And neck-ties from Europe" (*ibid*) in the third section where Lawino mocks everything alien to Africa. Reading this representative in light of Ocol is therefore not farfetched. Sunkuli talks of "a Parisian Textile" which evokes the same sense of insensitivity and 'apemanship'. Evident therefore are intertextual relations between this critical voice underpinning modern African poetry and that which defined the oral songs mentioned earlier. Ironically titled as "Living Together", p'Chong's poem explores the same concerns with a

similar critical eye, sarcastically condemning those who talk "Of living together/And giving/And receiving from one another" (1988: 72), yet they obviously practice the contrary. In the typical dramatic monologue form, dialogic indexes which establish relations between the speaker and the listener/implied addressee are evident when the persona asks "Who's that …" suggesting the presence of an immediate audience. This form provides space and structure for critiquing issues presented. The world of three-piece men Sunkuli engages with is revisited and starkly contrasted with that of the 'countrymen'. The persona in p'Chong's rendition exposes the folly of political elite's dictum of living together, asking:

> Do I live together
> With the swells that flash
> In posh cars
> From monstrous houses
> Atop Kololo, Muyenga...hills
> To air-cooled offices
> Where they do not sweat
> Though entombed,
> While I, in tatters, pull and push
> In a taxi park
> To go and sweep streets
> In the blazing sun? (2000: 72)

Employing dramatic monologue's technique of direct address, the persona questions the postcolonial order in which those who can afford to shop in "a Parisian Textile" keep talking of 'living together', despite the gaping economic chasm and hence social distance between them. To make the critique even more incisive, the persona deploys satire disguised as children at play, further reinforcing the picture of two worlds apart:

> May your homestead
> Smell only of boiled beans
> And our homestead
> Smell only of fried meat? (2000: 73)

East African poetry has always maintained a focus on the growing distince between these two 'homesteads'. The entire poem is built around stanzas that pose different questions but all relate to the central idea of communal life and, apparently, its increasing irrelevance in the contemporary capitalist economic arrangement. A common theme in contemporary poetry, p'Chong's poem tackles the question of the 'masses' exploited by a greedy elite ('potbellied' brothers who travel in 'posh cars', live in 'monstrous houses' and work in 'air-cooled offices'). This dialogically engages p'Bitek's portrayal in which "The stomach seems to be/A powerful

force/For joining political parties" (1984: 36). More explicit dialogic ties with song school poetry abound in the pointed allusions p'Chong makes in the third stanza. Assuming the reader knows both 'Okello' and 'Okot', the persona asks:

> Has living together
> Reconciled Okello and Okot
> When Okello is cold and poor
> And Okot is warm and rich
> Because they belong to the same political party
> And are on the same electoral roll? (2000: 72)

Besides critiquing the widening gap between the rich and the poor, what p'Chong is referring to is the destructive outcome of political activity p'Bitek describes in his song, and in particular, the rivalry between Ocol and his brother (2000: 105) – despite both belonging to the 'Congress Party'. 'Okello' and 'Okot' are, therefore, texts whose meaning may not be fruitfully appreciated without reverting to p'Bitek's poetics. This megatheme and concomitant textual resources are deployed by other poets as they question political discourse designed to enrich a few. This gap between the haves and have-nots is what Tusingwire in "I Like it All" sarcastically captures, saying:

> I like to see them
> the bellied fellows
> standing audaciously,
> showering their lies again,
> their Benzes
> or Pajeros
> decorated by the village dust –
> and the naked kids drawing pictures
> with their fingers on the dusty screens. (2000: 141)

Using the same critical, collective and at times sarcastic voice, similar concerns form the subject of Kanyaihe's "Democracy" in which blame shifts from locals to the phantom that has come to be known as 'democracy'. He does not seem to conceal his apprehension for democracy, or "the good news" as the persona calls it, and reservation for global policing which, according to him, is simply a ploy by the world's superpowers to achieve clandestine goals. Kanyaihe writes:

> Democracy! Democracy! Democracy!
> The underdog and the overdog
> Have different meanings for the same word.
> The cold war is no more, but
> The idle giant still develops itchy figures

The might of hegemonic forces is contrasted with the hierarchically ordered Third World, a relationship captured in the image of a ready-to-strike "sledge hammer" and a helpless "fly" or "an elephant wrestling with a flea" in a typical 'underdog' versus the 'over/dog' scenario. By perceiving 'democracy' in ambiguous terms, the poet foregrounds a critique of the United States of America's arrogance and double standards encapsulated in 'American interests' that undergirds its foreign policies. In suggesting "different meanings", Kanyaihye posits that there is not just one model of democracy. In other words, democracy implies that the underdog lives at the mercy of "The tentacles of the Star-Spangled Banner [USA]" and which, as the persona ponders is inescapable; "Where can Man hide from the tempest?" (44). To support this claim, the persona portrays the catalogue of American military operations as inexhaustible:

> Operation Urgent Fury
> Operation Just Cause.
> Operation Desert Storm,
> Operation Restore Hope.
> Operation *ad infinitum*. (2000: 44)

Indeed, nowhere is unreachable since the US-led military operations traverse the globe, from the tiny island nation of Grenada, through Panama, Iraq, and Somali, and, as he concludes, may continue endlessly – considering that they are currently part of the NATO operation in Libya. The persona's contemptuous tone is evident as he seems to say, "[once} the fly is dead,/The poor ground lives to tell the tale" reminding the reader of the ill-fated Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Like p'Bitek and song school poetics, the contemporary poet has his or her hand on the pulse of the present milieu, commenting on virtually every socio-cultural, economic and political issue of significance.

What critics call generic 'incorporativeness' (Barber 1993: 79; Bauman 2004: 73) is an essential feature of most oral literary forms and has come to be a significant mark of modern, and more so, contemporary African poetry. Within oral text production in general, as in song school, poetry is rendered in the ambience of other art forms (Bodunde 2001: 16) and hence seemingly unfurls endlessly into other 'genres'. However, as an idiom, the song-form which forms the bedrock of song school poetics is known for its fragile boundaries with other subgenres. This fluidity forms a significant part of the texture of contemporary written poetry, which typically encapsulates and embalms fragments – or cognate texts – from other (oral) subgenres of poetry such as epic or

prose narratives, praise-poetry, song of abuse or from other genres such as the oral tale, proverb, song and drama. The folkloric elements or texts such as fables, myths and witticisms often travel into poetic spaces to "express experiences and extend meanings" (Bodunde 2001: 37) – such texts enrich a poem's textualities by adding layers of meanings to already existing ones and hence avail a wider range of interpretations. This allows poets to [re]connect oral forms or texts with contemporary social reality as they use them creatively within the texture of their texts. Similarly, the actual rendition may incorporate a variety of modes ranging from chant and reciting to singing. Most outstanding within contemporary works is the weaving of the dramatic form into poetic discourses. In both anthologies, a number of poems illustrate what Bodunde describes as elasticity in terms of aesthetic modes and genres (2001: 49) and incorporate diverse dramatic literary forms and the concomitant performance aspect. This signals openings for cross-genre or cross-mode dialogues within the confines of a poem, and with song school poetics. In the next section, I focus on intertextual (as well as intermedial) re-readings of the dramatic monologue structure of song school and performance in general. In recent times, performance has become definitive of poetic discourse not just in the region but continent in general. This is one way in which the audience, as a text, determines a poem's texture (and textuality). I read the performance element in poetry as texture imbued by the intertexting of performativity and dramatic overtones. This trend issues from the construction of contemporary poetry using frames appropriated from orature or approximating song school's poetics. Generally, African poetry as various scholars have correctly observed, is oriented to performance (Haynes 1987: 139 and Ojaide 1996: 24-5), a characteristic which is accentuated especially so in the recent past with the resurgence of poetry readings and performances (exemplars of more recent dramatic modes). A number of critics note that the tradition of poetry dramatization (re)emergences in the late 1980s, and 1990s (Ojaide 1996, Anyidoho 1999 and Rosenberg 2008). The mode of modern African poetry in general, Ojaide (2009) observes, tends to be more perfomative than reflective in these times. It must be noted that most indigenous poetic traditions in East Africa, such as the Swahili's *mashairi*, have a proclivity for performance – as demonstrated in the third chapter. Besides Acholi (and pan-Luo[167] into which p'Bitek's poetics may be lumped) literary tradition, "it is useful to remember that there is a tradition of dramatic

[167] The Luo nation, according to Philip Ochieng (*Sunday Nation*), lives in nearly ten states in Africa, namely Central African Republic, Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and the two Sudans.

recitation in Swahili poetics that has now extended throughout various portions of East[ern] Africa, specifically through the public educational system" (Rosenberg 2008: 114) which is collectively known as *ngonjera*. I envisage this as providing potential texts which poets using English as poetic medium weave into their poems, imbuing them with dramatic aspects. I will examine a variant of this trend as performance in general is the focus of Chapter Six.

One of the most outstanding discourse strategies in song school poetry is the use of monologues, and in particular – as evident in the works of p'Bitek – the dramatic monologues. The argument that song school poetics is after all not essentially 'African' (as some critics have argued) becomes important when this structuring device is examined in relation to recent African poetry. I mentioned that what can be singled out as the 'basic poetic form' in p'Bitek four songs is the "emotionally charged dramatic monologue" (Lindfors 1984: 153) and which most contemporary poets find relevant for organizing their poetic material. In an earlier cited example of a poet whose creative works employ song school's composition translation, Mazizi Kunene's epic poem retains the performance atmosphere (of the traditional epic poet), especially the rhetorical device of apostrophizing. The dramatic monologue, however, is not an exclusively 'African' poetic form. It does provide the overall structure for most oral songs in which the persona or voice is not always/necessarily that of the composer or artist. Within Western literary traditions, it is this form which has its roots in early imitations of Horace and Ovid which developed the tradition further (Preminger 1993: 799) from exclusively oral realm. If Browning's use of monologue had the most significant impact on subsequent poetry as Preminger *et al*. (1993: 799) suggest, then p'Bitek may be said to have appropriated these so-called "brief closet dramas with a single speaker" for modern African poetry. Like 20th century Browning's dramatic form of monologue – a form adopted most directly by Ezra Pound, p'Bitek creates 'dramatic' lyrics that enact a blurring of genres implied in form. For the purposes of this study, contemporary African poetry is envisaged as a text engaging oral songs in intertextual and dialogic relations, and in particular, one of its essential techniques; drama-in-poetry. As a style of introducing and accommodating conversational-discursive mode, antiphonal structure and choric form among other dramatic elements within the written text, inter-/medial-textual integration of 'performance aesthetics' has become definitive of contemporary African poetics.

The monologue strategy – whether the single speaker produces multiple contrasting voices or not - and the device of direct address this technique inscribes has become very common among contemporary East African poets. This technique is commonly used by various contemporary African poets since the dramatic monologue form in particular has unique ability to "detail powerful situations in remarkably few lines" (1993: 799), and is hence suitable for the poetic discourse. Equally attractive is this form's "uncompromising directness" and "element of internal dialogue" which make it attractive to poets who aim to 'speak' with deft poignancy and emotiveness (Ofuani 1988: 313). This is evident in Susan Kiguli's manifesto poem "I am Tired of Talking in Metaphors" (1998: 4-5) which employs this uncompromising directness with an implied interlocutor signalled by lines such as "I will just talk to you". Right from the opening lines, she unambiguously promises;

> I will talk plainly
> Because I am moved to abandon riddles. (1998: 4)

The same conviction is reiterated in the lines "No I will not use images? I will just talk to you", and strikingly resonates with the vow Osundare makes in *Songs of the Marketplace*, his first poetry volume ("poetry is man speaking to man"). The presence of a possible interlocutor may also be gleaned from constructions such as "I will tell/remind you..." and is made more clear in the persona's seemingly defiant retort: "I am here/Just as you are" which implies definitive speaker and addressee physicality. Although not much dramatic interplay can be discerned, this poem – like the rest included in *The African Saga* – employs most of the features identified with dramatic monologue and, therefore, instances close affinities with song school poetics. Dramatic overtones are signalled by the suspense-laden line: "I will tell you of how we held our heads/In our hands" which anticipates revelation of what transpired. Kiguli's poetics exemplifies this general trend among contemporary poets.

As a text alluded to intertextually within contemporary poetry, vivid lyrical soliloquies not only captivate the imagination of the audience but also provoke their intellect and are, therefore, crucial in triggering reflections on a particular subject. It is largely what may be called a framing model which is often used to weave or structure contemporary poetry. Some of the poems examined, such as "African Lady", "The Sudden Knock", "Black Woman" and "I am not my Brother's Keeper" among others appear as "one-sided speech" (Preminger *et al*. 1993: 529) in

which only the presence of an addresser, from whose perspective all is said, is explicitly indicated. Using apostrophe and the more specialized lampoon mode in some cases, the addresser specifies the audience and gives the message a focus, completing the communicative chain. In the voice of the persona in "African Lady" by Otima Lucima, one perceives *Song of Lawino*'s mood, tone and character. The poem may be envisaged as a nuanced re-reading of the portrayal of a character in *Song of Lawino*. In a one-sided speech apostrophizing 'the African lady', the speaker alludes to the text's orientation towards the song-form by declaring intentions to 'sing'; "I want to sing to your beauty". My reading of this poem privileges the notion that the lady in question may be the 'Clementines' of p'Bitek's poetry. In other words, one encounters traces of the proud Lawino valorizing the beauty of some imagined 'natural' Africa woman – while implicitly castigating attempts at modifying this apparent 'naturalness'. The poet redeploys the same strategy p'Bitek uses in *Song of Lawino*, where the implied addressee (Lawino's husband) helps shape and even determine how the poem unfolds. The undifferentiated (unspecified) speaker in "African Lady" poses; "Look at your head" to suggest presence of the subject of this poem, the 'African Lady', and hence embraces the dramatic monologue structure popularized by p'Bitek's poetic canvas. The target of the persona's attacks is a detail shared by both texts. Like Lawino, this persona singles out lips, nails and hair for satirical jabs:

> Your lips boxed bloody by lipsticks
> Like a rubbed ulcer patched on your dark face
> Your nails burnt red in cutex
> Like the paws of a murderous jackal
> Your face black-brown patched by cosmetics
> Like the ugly spots of the hyena
> Your Fanta hands and Coke legs
> Your torso dark polished
> Same person in different colours
> I want to sing to your beauty
> Brave beauty queen
> Listen to your hair
> Yelling in oil and hot comb
> To you its nails are nostalgic backward laments

This poem is acutely conscious of p'Bitek's text before it. Arguably, as projected, the 'African Lady' has a lot in common with the 'modern woman' Ocol is said to be in love with as evident in the section titled 'The Woman With Whom I Share My Husband'. While p'Bitek portrays "The beautiful one who aspires/To be like a white woman" as having 'red-hot' lips "Like glowing

charcoal", Lucima sees the African Lady's lips as "boxed bloody by lipsticks/Like a rubbed ulcer... ". The same approach of satirizing using caricature, in particular, images of 'blood(y)' and 'ulcer' are used in p'Bitek's text in which the lips are compared to a wild cat that has 'dipped its mouth in blood' or simply "look like bleeding", while the mouth is compared to 'an open ulcer' (p'Bitek 1997: 17). It is not just the satirical mode employed by p'Bitek that is redeployed in this poem but the negative sentiments Lawino evoked through ugly images such as 'boxed', 'ulcer', 'murderous' and 'ugly/hyena'. In spite of these repulsive images, the persona presses on with a burning urge to sing about this beauty, or as Lucima puts it, about the "Brave beauty queen". He declares intentions to sing about her 'beauty' but ironically and sarcastically focuses on her apparent unattractiveness. I consider this text as dialogically engaging and appropriating Acoli songs of justice, as mediated by song school associated with p'Bitek. Lucima's poem, like most of p'Bitek's, is a critique of contemporary obsession with 'whiteness' and modernist ways or what p'Bitek frequently termed apeman/womanship.

More striking intertextual parallels may be discerned in the fifth line where Lucima describes the African Lady's face which cosmetics have made to look "Like the ugly spots of the hyena" (p'Bitek 1997: 15). This is the impression p'Bitek creates when he talks of Tina's face/skin, having been tampered with to the extent of resembling "The ugly coat of the hyena". While he captures the contrast in complexion between the face – having been modified but the neck and arms remaining 'real human skin', Lucima talks of the "Same person in different colours" such that, while the hands are compared to 'Fanta', the legs are seen as 'Coke' or retain the torso's "dark polished" complexion. Even more interesting intertextual responses are discernible if one considers the persona as conceived in "African Lady" as the "boy friend" Lawino talks of in the section titled "The Graceful Giraffe cannot Become a Monkey". As presented in this stanza, this boy friend seems not to mind Lawino's said 'backwardness':

> Look at my skin
> It is smooth and black.
> And my boy friend
> Who plays the *nanga*
> Sings praises to it.

In other words, what Lucima's persona intends to do is already being done by the *nanga* player. One may be compelled to argue that this particular stanza inspired Lucima's poem as evidenced

by the close intertextual ties (imagery) and thematic cognates. The *nanga* player, like Lucima's persona, sings praises to her unmodified or 'uncontaminated' beauty. The beauty Lucima intends to sing about is certainly what Lawino talks of when she says; "Ask me what beauty is/To the Acoli" and by extension, African – to which she seems to have comprehensive answers.

I read a concealed dialogue between the Lucima and p'Bitek's poems in the sense that the former shows awareness of *Song of Lawino* but assumes a different point of view. This familiarity is especially evident in his description of hair (style). For example, whereas Lucima talks of her (African Lady's) hair as "Yelling in oil and hot comb" in efforts to straighten it like white women's, p'Bitek describes Clementine's hair as 'long' having been 'cooked' or fried "In boiling oil" or as 'yelling' in oil and hot combs. Indeed, Lucima's poem may be viewed as an extension of the section 'The Woman With Whom I Share My Husband' in terms of its thematic preoccupation and imagery – since it is an affirmation of the apparent essential beauty of the African Lady (who symbolically embodies and is regarded as custodian of African traditions and customs), or as espousing and engaging with the same thesis carried in the section "The Graceful Giraffe cannot Become a Monkey" (where Lawino claims that Ocol thinks she has "no ideas/Of modern beauty"). Intertextual links are thus evident at various levels; thematic, textual form (metre, versification), imagery, and structure (dramatic monologue).

Such intertextual affinities are not confined to poets hailing from Uganda. In Joel Mungai's "Black Woman" (1988: 86), both thematic and formal links to Lucima's "African Lady" and ultimately to p'Bitek's poetics are evident. Mungai replaces Lucima's 'African' with Black, and 'Lady' with woman, in an equally moving dramatic monologue. However, while Lucima sets out to celebrate the African woman's beauty, Mungai explicitly states right from the second line that she (the black woman) embarrasses him. Like p'Bitek and Lucima, Mungai also focuses on nails ("Your nails blood-red), hair ("You[r] hair orchre-red") and skin ("Your skin white-tanned"). Taking cue from song school's lament mode, Mungai's persona bewails asking:

> Oh black woman
> How long will you abuse yourself
> With values and vile
> Before you finally accept yourself
> For what you are? (1988: 86)

This is precisely the same thesis Lawino advances in *Song of Lawino*, and picked by Lucima in "African Lady". Mungai later shifts from lamenting to revering the black woman saying; "I, your husband and lover/Accept you for what you are" (1988: 87) which, by and large, is what Lawino demands of her husband. The conclusion this poem makes recalls the central argument in p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* – a thesis also echoed in Lucima's text. Of significance is the allusion this text makes to Lawino position:

> So, why debase yourself
> With values vain and base
> Others don't aspire
> To be like you
> So why die
> To be like them? (1988: 87)

Needless to add that all these efforts to modify looks are geared towards looking like 'white' women and appropriating what they construe as 'whiteness' or embrace 'modern' (Eurocentric) notions of beauty. This is why the persona cautions that 'others', in this case designating races other than African, do not strive to embrace African (Afrocentric) perspectives of aesthetics values. Lawino sums up this saying:

> And as no white woman
> Wishes to do her hair
> Of the hair with which she was born,
> I have no wish
> To look like a white woman.

Such intertextual links instance a dialogue and dialogic relations, whether hidden or not, between these poets. Clearly, Mungai's persona is infused with Lawino's voice and the consciousness she initiated. His text is ideologically enriched by dialogic relations as thematic and aesthetic affinities affirm.

Related to the foregoing intertextuality is the overlapping of a certain viewpoint. One may, for example, consider the conceptualization and depiction of "Men snatchers" by Jane p'Bitek as bearing striking semblances with p'Bitek's presentation of Clementine – who is portrayed as a 'snatcher' in p'Bitek's poetry. The disdainful picture of Tina Lawino painted in *Song of Lawino* may be discerned in Jane p'Bitek's "Let them Talk" where bodily features and make-up are targets of Lawino's lampooning. Reacting to their name-calling, such as Malaya among others, she christens her 'Tina' Anita saying:

See
How slim and shapely
Anita is.
She wears make up.
She has vessels upon vessels
Of different perfumes.

Together with the numerous dresses, treated hair and expensive imported shoes all of which, she concludes, men find irresistible. These "draw men" to her "Like a horde of dogs/Seeking to gobble one piece of meat" (2000: 38). Could this be what attracted p'Bitek's Ocol to Tina? Judging from the striking resemblances between Tina and Anita, the possibility may not be ruled out. The descriptive details adduced, however, are not aimed at, as is the case for Lawino, lampooning or belittling the 'snatcher's' efforts. She also captures what would be the fate of Tina in contemporary East Africa; insults, acid or hot water burns, spiteful and malicious gossip as well slanderous nonsense (1998: 40) and not a tribunal or council of elders before whom Lawino presents her case for arbitration.

By casting poetry in a performance mode, the persona assumes a listener/addressee's presence and hence addresses them directly. In Michael Mugambi's "The Sudden Knock", which envisions an encounter between death or 'Walumbe' and the 'mortal' human, the interface between dramatic or narrative tales and poetry is bridged. This poem intertexts and infuses the performance mode by recreating the confrontational atmosphere typical of oral genres such as verbal duels or songs of abuse. The poem presents a clear case of hybridity as it occupies the liminal space between an oral performance and written poetry. It recreates a discursive space that is interspersed with actual dialogue between Walumbe and the persona, appropriating conversational atmosphere and tone;

My wife is wan, my kids are cold
the times are hard, but so my heart
Before dawn?
Young as I am!
Before I have lived my due?

"Mortal man.
Shall I have debates with a mere…
You!" (2000: 81)

This poem is indeed best visualized as a dramatic encounter between death and mortal mankind. The reader is left visualizing the actual dramatic scene, as represented by face-to-face

conversation between these two – which retains actual speech turns and hestation markers ("a mere...") and vocal nuances such as rising voice or shouting ("You!"). At another level, my reading of this encounter is that Mugambi, like Meshengyezi mentioned earlier, dramatizes and collapses the abyss between death and life as symbolized in the possibility of such an encounter. He blurs the liminal space by disrupting these binary states, thereby enabling a meeting between the agent of death, and a representative mortal as well as integrating narrative mode within poetic discourse.

Like oral literary traditions from which it sprung, song school poetics by its very nature is participatory or to use Harold Scheub's phrase, "no proscenium arch exists" (1992: 84) in most of its texts. Generally, from Finnegan (1970: 10-1), Macebuh (1974: 22), Kunene (1980) to the 1980 African Literature Association (ALA) conference deliberations, the question of 'African aesthetic' and oral literary traditions occupy a central, if not definitive, role in modern African poetry. The hallmark of African oral poetry, written or performed, lies in the involvement of the imagined community of readers. Abarry (1984: 24) and Bodunde (2001: 12) highlight audience involvement as a significant aspect of oral art. It is so important to any oral performance that, Abarry argues, its obliteration or removal renders oral art meaningless. As a framing model, implied audience imbues contemporary poetry with unique textualities which aid in constructing the contemporary poetic text. The presence of an implied addressee – besides the definite speaker often present in the dramatic situation – renders the poem as dramatic as p'Bitek's and most song school poetry. Despite the centrality of the refrain in signalling an actively involved and present audience, I focus on alternative means of implying or inscribing its involvement.

Although contemporary poetry may not explicitly or directly allude to p'Bitek or exhibit overt intertextual relations, it nevertheless bears his indelible imprint especially his penchant for dramatic monologues. Just like most of p'Bitek's dramatic monologue texts involve direct speech from their 'singers' – but who may report or quote addressees not present, situationally (Ofuani1988: 312) - these poets depend on personae who 'harangue' or apostrophize the audience, relying more on shared experience between speaker and hearer(s), or on features of the immediately and perceptually present situation (*ibid*). I single out the use of inventive characters to engage with existential issues as a common strategy made possible by this form. The dramatic monologue provides a sort of play-space and an alternative persona with which a poet can

explore sometimes controversial or contested ideas. The utterances in such texts consist of words that hail the reader to suppose that they have been uttered by the main narrator. Consequently, as s/he tries to create a vivid situation in which all the details are presented, the main character in the dramatic monologue adopts a variety of strategies. Common among contemporary East African poets is to conceive the interlocutor in such a way as to allow the persona-speaker to be as dramatic as possible and allow space for debating a broad range of relevant issues. By imagining a mother, a grandmother, a husband, a lover or departed/jailed colleague, or even concretizing some abstract phenomenon such as Death as the listener, contemporary poets create monologic spaces in which a variety of contemporary socio-political, cultural and economic issues are tackled. Thus by inventing an addressee whose presence and immediacy is only suggested, contemporary poets recreate a performance space which they fill with dramatic texts. This is what Elizabeth Ohanya accomplishes in "Mother". By imagining her addressee as a 'mother', Ohanya's persona is in a position to interrogate, through a series of questions, a number of issues such as the anxieties and challenges of maturation. The poem is constructed in such a way that the 'mother's' responses are omitted but have a sort of bearing on the direction of the monologue. The persona's curiosity may be summed up by this stanza:

> Tell me mother
> Did you do all these things
> That I seem to do? (1988: 126)

The persona enumerates "these things" which include, among others; ever being a girl, attending night dances (in Boro), dancing to Magenge players, ever being caned, role-playing with (the persona's) father, being shy of physical changes (like growing breasts), suffering infatuation (the urge "to fly into" her lover's arms) or ever feeling homesick after getting married. The persona – subsequently conceived as an inquisitive and naive adolescent girl – is in other words introspectively reflecting upon her mother's childhood and transition into motherhood, wondering whether the mother has always been "Calm, strong/Kind and soft/Yet unbending with discipline?" (1988: 127) or whether she also faced anxieties and challenges like her. Soul-searchingly, the persona is deeply engrossed in a dialogue with herself but uses the imaginary mother-figure as the interlocutor in what may be called a one sided dialogue – suggested by the voice constantly reminding the reader of the presence of a listener ("Tell me mother…"; "Were you ever/Just a bit like me?"). Because the monologue in poetry is clearly connected to drama

and re-enactment, I read dramatic monologue structure as a text inscribing dramatic elements in written poetry.

Salim's "My Grandmother's Chest" similarly presupposes a granny present from whose 'chest' ("our Chest") – and in contrast to "Shiny metallic", "plastic", "Ivory", "Ebony", "Mahogany"/"English", "Soviet", "French", "American" or "Italian" chests – s/he has immensely gained, and hence is the source of "The startling songs" s/he "sing[s] today" (1988: 179). Like the introductory chapter, this poem celebrates the various (literary) traditions that have shaped contemporary (the persona's) creative impulses. This conceptualization enables the persona to valorise "the living wealth" acquired from pre-colonial systems of knowledge through the sage-like image symbolized by the granny. This is the same fashion in which Julius Ocwinyo 'constructs' and imagines a potential listener. In asking "Who told you/I am/My brother's keeper?" Ocwinyo's persona in "I Am Not My Brother's Keeper" presupposes an interlocutor ('you') whose literary function approximates that of the audience or 'community' in general in oral poetry. But generally, the idea of a person speaking alone, with or without an audience, as Preminger and others suggest, more often than not has a clearly dramatic element (1993: 798).

The role of an audience conceived as virtual is central in the poem's overall texture. In relation to Wole Soyinka's poetic works, Yaw Adu-Gyamfi observes that the poet conceives them in such a way that they demand that the readers to behave as participants as much as listeners, supplying the missing details in a sort of interactive manner. However, the addressee is still only implied. This is the strategy Teyie adopts in "Denuded" in which the absent-present 'lover' anticipates and apparently responds, filling in gaps left by the persona-lover. This is evident when the persona clearly states that love needs more than a "Wollen jacket" (in Luvai 1988: 210). According to him, more important is "A warm word;" – the semicolon anticipates an interjection "yes", but evidently this 'yes' appears as the 'other' or respondent's utterance, a conviction validated by what follows. The next line makes clear what I am suggesting. If 'love' demands more than Ocol's scowl, the persona seemingly ponders, then "What happened to the weaver birds" but which suggestively ends with "you ask" – clearly usurping or anticipating the interlocutor's role in (normal) speech turns. Such interjections have the effect of divulging the speaker's attitude towards his or her own words in the poem. It is also a case of 'voices'

merging within a single utterance and hence dialogic in nature, made evident, for example, in "I can only talk of flamingoes./The rest?/Of course not." (1988: 210-1); "So who plundered this particular house?/A thief of course! Probably two, or more…" (1988: 211). The recurrent choric text serves the same 'othering' purpose since it is not often clear that the 'I' corresponds with the narrating 'I'. It is such moments of dramatic interplay between the speaker and the addressee that I read as dialogically linked to song school poetics.

Some poets conceive the addressee – like p'Bitek's Ocol – as a husband and hence avail an avenue for a frustrated wife to air in public her resentments. Francis Imbuga's "The Forgotten Clay" instances a dramatic monologue in which the feelings, whims, biases, and attitude of the addressee are only accessed via the addresser him- or herself (Ofuani 1988: 312). The speaker in this poem – like in *Song of Lawino* – is a disgruntled wife protesting against the treatment she is receiving from the husband. In other words, the utterances in the poem-text consist of words that are supposed to have been uttered by the main narrator, or singer – as often is the case in song school poetry, a one-sided conversation. Consequently, as she tries to create a vivid situation in which all the details are presented, the monologuer-wife adopts a variety of strategies as she persuades the reader to buy her side of the story. The poem opens with accusations which signal an acrimonious relationship:

> Husband, yesternight you spat at me,
> Called my mother names
> And swore to replace my watery eyes
> With fresh glow-worm torches
> That would light the path of your manhood forever (1988: 39)

Through such strategies, the dramatic element – arguably not so much pronounced in modern ('high') African poetry[168] – receives prominence in some contemporary poetry due to the proxy of song school megatext which shapes and animates these poetics. This may result from the (postmodernist) fluidity that marks the boundary between the poetic and the narrative or dramatic genres, the recent (since the 1980s) fervour for performativity in modern (East) African poetry or simply, intertexting of orature's porosity of genres. As discussed in Chapter Three, this feature dominates much of the poetry written by poets from Tanzanian. The ubiquity of such

[168] Which in this case acts as a "contrastive enabler" in attempts to read the specificities of song school (Olakunle 2003: 30).

imagination and conceptualization in East African poetry attests to this text's relevance and suitability as a strategic means of exploring a myriad of thematic concerns in the region. 'Strictly dramatic monologue' set up a necessary ironic distance between the poet, the speaker and the reader (Preminger 1993: 800) to objectively explore and engage with various themes. This is what may be termed critical distance which is a prerequisite for objective exploration of social issues.

Besides the dramatic form, various images p'Bitek uses travel as texts into contemporary poetic discourses. I have so far examined some of the character-images such as Lawino and Ocol and how they remain significant in contemporary poetry. Next I engage with closely related ones, pumpkin and homestead, then orphan and conclude with the Malaya character-image. This instance dialogues between the two epochs and dialogic perspective of contemporary poets.

Although contestable, I read Namanya Ada's "Pumpkins" as a subtle critique of the image popularized by p'Bitek's refrain "The pumpkin in the old homestead/Must not be uprooted!". If this refrain provides thematic coherence to several sections in *Song of Lawino*, then the image of a 'pumpkin' serves a similar purpose in Ada's relatively shorter poem. Interestingly, the image retains the semantic ring p'Bitek bequeathes on it throughout his 'song'; as equivalent of African tradition and indigenous culture. In a fundamental and direct critique of p'Bitek's (through Lawino) ideological position, Ada asks whether the 'pumpkins' (culture)[169] should "talk for themselves or/Should someone do it?" (2000: 98). This is a fundamental question regarding the legitimacy of Lawino championing against deracination of African culture by colonial forces. Ada however raises issues p'Bitek gave critical attention to in his collection of essays, *Artist the Ruler* (1986). Quite succinctly, p'Bitek argues against the commoditization of culture and separation of 'culture' from the people. While engaging with 'what culture is', p'Bitek writes:

> This view of culture as something separate and distinguishable from the way of life of a people, something that can be put in books and museums and art galleries, something which can be taught in schools and universities for examination purposes, or enjoyed during leisure time in theatres and cinema halls []is entirely alien to African thought. (1986: 14).

[169] One should not destroy Acholi traditions and...ought to respect the clan, relatives, elders, ancestors, and their holy shrines, among a host of other traditional values" (Finnstrom 205)

Song school poetics embrace this idea of 'African thought'. Despite such a comprehensive view, p'Bitek constructs Lawino who seemingly voices his criticisms. P'Bitek, however, does not give due attention to what Ada questions; does culture have lips? Indeed, is it possible to speak for culture? In addressing this, Ada raises critical issues:

> In a black pot, the pumpkins are packed
> Like tinned fish for export.
> So helpless they seem to look!
> The owner is filled with ecstasy
> For he has a meal that is not
> To satisfy the hunger, only for his ego. (2000: 98)

By suggesting that culture looks "So helpless" when paraded in books, museums and art galleries, Ada likens it to the pumpkins in a pot placed "On fire". This image echoes the idea of 'killing' culture also captured in his critical work as curio shops selling dead drums (1986: 16). Once packed like fish for export or placed on a fire in a pot, the question remains "Will they burn to ashes?" or, "Will they resist the gradual fire?" (98). Considering the dynamic and organic nature of culture, it is certain that the conclusion Ada makes in the denouement is likely to prevail:

> Perhaps they will
> When all sounds are hushed.

In other words, all the activism and campaign to 'market' culture, or defend it as Lawino did, is unnecessary as it will certainly outlive efforts directed at mere 'ego'. It certainly will resist the gradual fire of interventionist efforts or passage of time. For Ada, culture does not need the defence of the Lawinos of Acholiland (or those in *Song of Lawino*); whether it has lips or not, the 'pumpkin' will only thrive if and when 'all the sounds are hushed'. As a text, the pumpkin, therefore, travels from oral culture through p'Bitek into contemporary poetry, bearing roughly the same semantic scope he inscribed it with.

Like the pumpkin, the 'homestead' – as a cultural symbol – also enters contemporary African poetry informed by and aware of *Song of Lawino*'s conceptualization. The 'old homestead', as used by p'Bitek, is a text symbolically laden with meanings. In "The Dead Homestead", Okot Benge reiterates Lawino's fears that if unabated, the 'Ocols' may end up 'strangers' in their backyard. The persona – who may be Ocol – in this poem, finds himself "A stranger", standing "on the ashes of a homestead/Demolished/Under the giant feet of civil strife" (2000: 124). In

other words, he is orphaned from his parent-culture. Benge advocates for the relevance of 'old homesteads' although a clear line may not be drawn from 'new homesteads'. Besides the pumpkin and homestead, another image-text from song school poetry is that popularized by Okello Oculi; the orphan. Arguably, this is the text that informs and even inspired Alfred Ocen's "Orphan's Voice".

Expectedly, published works by his daughter open equally interesting conversations with song school and some of his poetry. Jane p'Bitek revisits the question of morality and promiscuity linked to widowhood. In "Let them Talk" included in *Song of Farewell*, the persona laments about other women laughing and calling her "a Malaya", a concept which informs the singer of p'Bitek's *Song of Malaya*. In the typical song school monologic pattern, the persona addresses all those who "go around/Calling unmarried women/And widows malaya" (2000: 36), questioning (patriarchal) society's derision of single or widowed women. She foregrounds their fate saying:

> You
> Who are not malayas
> Respectably married women
> As you call yourselves –
> Were you not
> In the same positions? (*ibid*)

For the widows, the persona points a finger at "this cruel war" which has "snatched" from these women their husbands. She seems to echo the hypocrisy that p'Bitek's persona brings to the fore in *Song of Malaya* – that after all, she attends to so many clients to the extent that her services are on demand from the entire society; the clergy, teachers, students, ... married or unmarried.

Conclusion

By using song school as a reading frame, I sought to examine and demonstrate how the metaphor of the song introduced in Chapter Four is carried further and deployed in engendering a school of poetry closely drawing on the oral cadences. Of significance is the dialogic interaction between contemporary African poetry and song school tradition within modern African poetry which roughly represent temporally separated sets of poetic epochs or generations of poets; a dialogue which significantly informs textuality and any reading or interpretation of contemporary poetry emerging from East Africa. I set out to survey the trend and shape this poetics takes in the recent past – and the existence of a contact zone between them as well as dialogue or dialogic relations the two engender, and how it evolves into contemporary poetic spaces. The analysis made a *tour de force* through some recently published poems from the East African region, demonstrating how in one way (form) or another, there exists dialogic relations as contemporary poets allude to *Song of Lawino* and song school poetics. Drawing illustrations from *Uganda Poetry Anthology* (2002), *Boundless Voices: Poems from Kenya* (1988) as well as *Song of Farewell* (1994), I have shown how contemporary poetry has not only moved on from earlier exchange between a colonial centre and a colonized periphery to contemporary intertextual dialogues between and amongst African poets. Consequently, p'Bitek and the poetics he championed are positioned as significant megatexts with which other poets interact, rendering their works as contact zones between song school's aesthetics and various contemporary poetic consciousnesses. By envisaging hybridity as dialogue between diverse ideological orientations, regardless of whether they are within the same culture or literary tradition, the relationship between contemporary and foundational poetics has been brought to bear. Such a dialogue presupposes two (or more) literary consciousnesses or traditions across which texts and textures travel, crisscrossing permeable temporal and aesthetic boundaries. The often assumed clear difference between the more 'academic' and what I have described as song school poetics as practiced in East African poetry, therefore, gets disrupted and blurred in contemporary poetics. As argued, contemporary poets appropriate or intertextually dialogue with indigenous poetic practices as mediated by the aesthetics championed in *Song of Lawino*.

The basic argument advanced is that certain foundational texts – and hence foundational poetics – provide a significant point of departure, inspiration, poetic tone and ideological underpinnings

which determine and shape the approach contemporary poets employ in their compositions, metrical patterning, poetic language and vision. As it became evident, contemporary poetry is populated with voices and texts from preceeding texts by compatriots from the region, functioning as cognates or framing models for their poetic engagements.

Although generally considered an 'indigenous' poem in its form, content, style, message and aesthetic philosophy, its close intertextual links to oral texts from African societies may specifically be discerned in its peculiar imagery, ideology, narrative and rhetoric structure – elements that define the song school and which contemporary epochal continuities of *Song of Lawino* dialogue with and dialogically engage. I conclude that the dramatic monologue, together with its attendant energy and earthy idiom of the rural peasantry (which underpins song school poetics) when captured in English imbues contemporary African poetry with hybridity since the sharp differences are presented as hidden. This is why I read contemporary poetry as inevitably typified by instances of accentuated hybridity. In addition, the axiom that a song is a song whether sung, spoken or written down (p'Bitek 1973: 20) provides the critical theoretical underpinnings upon which various contemporary productions are based. The indigenous song's labythine wealth in poetic resources – as mediated by what I have called song school poetics – is preyed on by contemporary poets to intertextually enrich their works. Lastly, the element of performance inherent in and inscribed by the use of 'song' in titles, as well as other more subtle insinuations, is foregrounded in contemporary poetry. Dialogic intertextual relations between contemporary poetry and the concept of performance (in its different manifestations) distinguish the contemporary songs. The resonance of performance in contemporary poetry forms the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: PERFORMANCE POTENTIALITIES IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POETRY

Introduction

The assertion that the nature of print varies in different historical and cultural contexts, especially in light of recent developments spanning the past three decades, cannot be discounted particularly in the poetic sphere. The need to revisit print technology and pose questions such as; what are the limits of printed texts or what *printedness* implies (in the spirit of rethinking the nature of the [written] medium undergird the concerns of the present chapter). The crux of the thesis being advanced is based on the ubiquity and evidence of contemporary poet's commitment towards performance poetry, stemming from their indebtedness to oral tradition, possibilities offered by modern digital technologies, contemporary practitioner's allegiance or background in drama and theatre. While I showed in the previous chapter how this is suggested by the persistent use of the song idiom, this chapter attempts to explore how medial and linguistic incommensurability or 'inhospitality' occasioned by 'translation' (in its multifarious dimensions) is engaged with and resolved by contemporary African poets. The premise therefore interrogates the different symbolic values attached to print and reading in recent African poetry, focusing on the 'untranslatable'. Within a cultural vocabulary laden with performance and performativity, what is printable or representable on the page strives to, and even transcends, the limitation of the verbal or conventional orthography. Subsequently, every effort is harnessed to link or reflect modern African poetry to its possible indigenous roots or equivalents, not necessarily in an evolutionary continuum. As evident in the practice and theory of this genre – and as I demonstrated in the preceding chapter - what is regarded as the primal situation of oral performance is still being recreated or imitated by contemporary literary works, hence it is often convenient to think of certain literary works as imitations, or even extensions, of oral performances (Kellogg 1973: 55). The long-established tradition of dramatizing poetry in the continent offers itself as a relevant 'source-text' for contemporary practice of this genre in print. My focus, therefore, is its contemporary manifestations and the shape this literary phenomenon assumes in recent poetry works.

The aforementioned focus is based on the fact that most media constantly engage in a recursive dynamic of imitating each other, incorporating aspects of competing or complementing forms/media into themselves while simultaneously flaunting the advantages that their own forms of mediation offer (Hayles 2004: 69). Such intertextual dialogues and dialogic relations between performance as manifested within oral realms of poetry and contemporary print/written modes significantly play out in poetic discourses. Inspired or initiated by various first-generation of post-independent African poets, this trend has its provenance in the search for a poetic expression espousing what critics see as "a true African poetics" (Deandrea 2002: 116) which is often intimately linked to decolonization clamours on various fronts. In most cases, this reconnection implies close intertextual ties with orature. In other words, the search for a 'true African poetics' suggests that modern African poetry deletes a fundamental aspect which must and should be captured when African poetic experiences are 'translated' first, into English language and secondly, onto the page. In other words, modern African poetry is partly defined by its privileging of the performance tradition in much of precolonial African poetry. However, the foregrounded performance aspect of modern African poetry should not reinforce essentialist arguments such as the strength and appeal of "true African poetics" resides in the modern poetic text embracing composite art form – as cogently enunciated in Kofi Anyidoho's theory of (African) poetry.[170] Poetic discourse should be conceived as a dramatic experience issuing from the integrative nature of the tradition of the performing arts in Africa.

In its comparative endeavours, this study embarks on an excursion of possible affinities, disparities, continuities and discontinuities in contemporary African poetry with performance and hence notions of dialogue. To provide a contrastive enabler, the core objective of this chapter is to explore the manifestation of a redefined concept of performance in contemporary African poetry as evident in Micere Mugo's poetry – roughly representative of the contemporary East African poetic scene. By closely reading one of her texts as representative of contemporary African poetic trends, one argument advanced in this chapter is that the genre inherently displays what Deandrea (2002) calls performance potentiality in varying degrees, from one individual poet to another and, therefore, one region to another. Whereas Micere Mugo – arguably due to

[170] The idea of total art discussed in the introduction is central in this regard.

frequent interaction with community theatre and performance traditions[171] – almost reduces her collection to the status of a pre-text or drama 'script', wide ranging means have defined this general drive towards the theatrical in West African poetry. Attempts at literary "returning written poetry to its dramatic oral roots" (Collier 1992: 265) take diverse routes, ranging from explicit or 'live' performances and dramatic reading to more subtle ones like suggestive performativity. However, in this chapter, I use Mugo's poetry as the entry point into a terrain marked by relatively more nuanced sensibilities of performance, and in particular within the confines of the page. The arguments advanced provide the basis of the comparison pursued in the conclusion of this work.

A recognition of the generic slippage between what is read and what is enacted, a slippage suggesting new possibilities available to texts or books, despite being designed or conceived for private-individual or silent reading, undergirds the theoretical proposition employed in the analysis. In this kind of 'rediscovery of the voice' and 'performativity' on page, a sensitivity to poetry as a performed 'event' rather than as fixed 'object' on page (Tedlock 1971: 132) is inevitable. This perception is informed by the insistence in contemporary poetic discourse to use 'song' at the expense of 'poetry' – a move that invokes the idea of performance inherent in 'song' but absent in the word 'poetry' (Nagy 1996: 2), especially as conceived within modern African poetics. Mugo's collection, for example, is conspicuously titled *My Mother's Poem and Other Songs*, which I read as an attempt to privilege or foreground the understanding that it is a collection of 'songs' which anthologizes one poem; "My Mother's Poem". This is why, I argue, the text painstakingly transforms reading into a creative critical process. Equally significant is reader-response criticism, a perspective which positions poetry, and literature, in general as a performing art in which each reader creates his or her own, possibly unique, text-related performance. First, I turn to the reconfigurations crucial to the analysis of Mugo's poetry and contemporary poetry in general.

[171] Mugo has co-authored *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (with wa Thiong'o) and actively been involved community theatre projects in Kenya (Kamirithu) and Zimbabwe (ZAMBUKO).

Reconfiguring Performance as 'Performance Potentialities'

In order to contextualize the phenomenon and the strategic intervention Mugo's poetry makes, it is noteworthy to provide a background to the present trend. Before the Renaissance (14th – 17th century), to 'read' (or even 'study') a text meant pronouncing the words aloud, that is, how it sounds when read aloud or how it strikes the ears. The rise of silent, individual reading in the 15th century supplanted the oral and aural modes of reception giving rise to the so-called 'private' reader (Brantley 2007: 2). As opposed to the earlier more performance-oriented conceptualization of reading (oral and aural modes), the emergence of a somewhat solitary person, silently contemplating inevitably meant the interactive process was minimized, if not phased out completely. What this meant was that with time, the hitherto less pronounced private reading signals became more pervasive in texts as reading generally shifted from settings more easily characterized as performative – irrespective of the particular mechanism or kind of performance. Consequently, the authorial process of composition reciprocated by shifting from showing affiliation with performance, as had been the case, to increasingly aligning itself with the emergent solitary experience of reading. This heralded reconsideration and rethinking of the norms of print. Michael Warner's (1990) observation that the nature of print varies in different historical and cultural contexts – in response to multifarious changes in society - is germane in this regard. Undoubtedly, print undergoes metamorphosis over time into what it is in contemporary times, and specifically in the African literary context. It is this that modern African poetry inherits as the conventional literary dialect – contrasted with what I intend to pursue in this chapter; contrived, specialized orthography for poetic discourses.

However, in the modern African context, one has to consider the specificity of its poetic discourses and its relationship with print as a medium of expression. The emergence of written (or modern) poetry occasioned a huge gap between precolonial poetic practices of production and consumption of this art and versions encountered and developed through contact with formal colonial education.[172] In relation to this, I turn to Karin Barber (2003) and Kofi Anyidoho (1992; 1997). The text, onto which performance-potentialities are embedded, according to Barber, problematizes simplistic distinctions between 'text' and 'performance'. She contrasts

[172] Critics and poets alike have identified what they see as great disparities between poetry as composed and consumed in oral discourse, and as practiced in written form. See Osundare and Mugo's criticism for example.

'permanent artefact, hand-written or printed' from "unique, never-to-be-repeated realization or concretization of the text", a realization which she concludes, "brings the text to life" (2003: 324). A similar dichotomy is evident in the Lord-Parry conception of composition where, as Lord puts it, "the written technique...is not compatible with the oral technique, and the two could not possibly combine, to form another, a 'third', a 'transitional' technique" (Lord 1960: 129). From such standpoints, a false unbridgeable gulf between performance and 'text' seem inevitable, foreclosing the possibility of performance within the so-called 'text'. Does modern poetry therefore always imply an either-or situation as Anyidoho (1992), for example, implores one to believe? I hold that it is not a dichotomous binary involving choice between performance regarded as an "energized […] warm and living experience" and print medium on the other hand perceived as "the cold print on a page".[173] What I pursue in this chapter, therefore, is similar to Bhabha's idea of in-between space which – using the insider-outsider paradigm – sees a possibility of a performance on the page.

The kind of possibility I engage with is what comes out in their later revisions to these positions. For Barber (2003), the potentialities I talk of may be gleaned when she dicusses conceptualization of texts in which there are all kinds of different relations possible between a 'text' and its 'performance' even within the confines of written tradition. One of these, which relates to my concerns in this chapter, is written text's ability to be cues, scripts, or stimulants to oral performance. On his part, Anyidoho's later conviction that there is a way of "creating a form of printed poetry that *evokes* sound and inspires the earwitness *without denying the status of the printed text*" (2002: 16 my emphasis to foreground potentiality dimension) is germane to the present enterprise. In other words, one need not necessarily imply the automatic occlusion or exclusion of the other. It must be noted that as conceived in this study, text and textuality are not preserves of written media but, following Barber (2007), there is the possibility of oral texts and tenability of inscribing oral texts' texture on page. I take a 'text' as an intersemiotic translation from performance to print (Fine 1984: 89-102) – and, therefore, it is not obvious that textual activity inevitably entail loss of some performative elements. On the other hand, such a reconfiguration of 'performance' may allow a new relationship and a possibility of

[173] Mugo opines that poets have to decide on performance rather than the print medium for transmission of their work (1992: 44).

'performance' in written discourses – and therefore blur the apparently unbridgeable gap. So far, the only possibility remains 'live' poetry (or even drama) inspiring written and visual texts, in genres other than the more explicit performance genres. The question therefore is: how does written poetic discourse then reflect, signal, accommodate or incorporate these features/possibilities? To respond to such a dilemma ineluctably calls for the sort of hybrid theoretical frame adapted for the study. Writers, I argue, dialogically position their texts with performance and performative aspects.

My aim is partly to engage with effects of a text on the reader by linking them to influences from indigenous literary traditions, dramatic genre and concept of performance. It is worth mentioning from the onset that responses or experiences derived during a reading process are as numerous as there are readers[174] or what Fish calls "interpretive communities". Undoubtedly, since any literary work has two poles, that is, the artistic, created and facilitated by the author, and, on the other hand, the aesthetic which is the realization accompanied by the reader's consciousness-input or decoding (Iser 1974: 50), it means that the reading process is affected by the author (through intentions, style and themes), the text (through manner of presentation, textualities) and his or her own imaginations and experiences. Although Mugo, as the author, consciously constructs and imbues texts in this collection with performative potentialities, the onus is equally on the reader's creativity ('reeducation'), and hence an 'active reader' (Barthes 1974: 16) to evoke and realize these potentialities as well as participate in its re-creation. Similarly, the text specifies its own 'performance' in acts of reading. From this standpoint, therefore, how does the written poetic text attempt "to stretch from the page" and as Mugo (1994) puts it, out of the shelves yearning to be performed in as much as it remains on page? How far the borders or limitations of the page and accompanying 'flat marks of print' may be stretched underpins what I conceptualize in this study as performance potentialities. In addition, besides the text, is it not possible, or at least to a certain degree tenable, therefore, to accommodate what Kofi Anyidoho terms "a total art experience" within the boundaries of the

[174] Iser takes the "fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the 'reality' of a particular text" as ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written" (Iser 1974: 279).

page?[175] Put differently, how is the text marked as theatrical yet it is not (often) to be experienced in a theatre or in any manner more spectacular than a private or silent reading? Is it possible to have the reader in the end of a reading experience feeling that s/he has experienced a unique event even within the limits of the page? To respond to this question, 'determinate features' in a text which invite the reader to participate in a game of imagination are essential. Finally, while reading is it not possible for the reader to simply imagine him-/herself as receiving a direct communication or hearing the voice of the author despite the spatial-temporal distance? Is it not possible for the reader to imagine him-/herself in the act of reading as becoming part of an arena of performance? For the kind of performance I envision, therefore, a hybridized conceptualization that distributes agency through the author, text and reader is necessary. The idea of 'creation' echoes the realization accomplished by the readers which is not independent of their individual disposition and often acted upon by the different patterns of the text.

To engage with how the text seemingly defies and transgresses the deferral of time and space inherent in printed texts, depicting the poet and the reader as interactively in dialogue, I find Wolgang Iser's distinction between the artistic and esthetic dimension of a text as well as notion of schematized views used to bring to light subject matter instructive. I locate *My Mother's Poem* as a text that offers various "schematized views" or "perspectives" that the reader 'concretizes' in the process of reading (1974: 275). The author, through the text, therefore, goes out of her way to signal or 'key' performance. Besides the author's strategies, and the text 'stretching out', 'picturing' (Iser 1974: 282) accomplished by the reader's imagination is one other activity through which the form of performance envisaged in this study is constructed and conceived as possible upon reading. I hold that the reader's imagination is controlled and manipulated by the text's textualities.

A significant means of bridging the gap between the two dominant (and apparently opposing) poetic traditions in immediate post-independence poetry is the opening of close dialogic and

[175] It must be noted that various interventions have been attempted towards bridging this gap, and in the process creatively narrowing it especially in contemporary poetry. However, similar isolated efforts are evident in modern African poetry as practiced in pre-independence and most of the 1960s and the 1970s – as is evident in the poetics of p'Bitek, Awoonor and Kunene. What I, therefore, observe is that there is a striking drift from the genre's conception in the post-1980s with concerted efforts towards narrowing and even conflating contrasting understandings and conceptualizations of poetry.

intertextual relations between the two traditions. The notion of poetry as a performance and, on the other hand, as a written or 'text' is increasingly being reconciled. While in America, Cummings and Roy note that recently, there is a resurgence of performance poetry or, spoken-word poetry as it is commonly known (2002: 63), almost every contemporary poet in Africa emphasizes the inseparabitility and centrality of performance from poetic discourse. Interestingly, the phenomenon seems to have emerged round about the same time. Manifestations of this trend may be discerned in what is variously known as 'def poetry', poetry readings, spoken-word cafes and 'poetry slams' which began in 1984 (Walker and Kekyendal 2005) – and is often linked to the African American culture. In Africa, this development tends to revolve around the assertion that poetry, music and drama (within most African cultures) are indivisible. The ubiquitous presence of public recitals, radio and TV programmes dedicated to poetry performances and school and college festivals showcasing dramatized or choral verse performances testify to this trend. Although traces of such underpinnings are evident in the composition and consumption of modern African poetry,[176] it is undeniable that the 1980s take this even further. Different scholars such as Jawa Apronti (1979), Adedeji (1981), Anyidoho (1979; 1983), Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1984), Fraser (1986), Deandrea (2002), Ojaide (1996) and Quayson (1997) among others unanimously acknowledge that this significant socio-literary phenomenon which distinctively undergirds and dominates contemporary poetic discourse in Africa in general – though especially pronounced in Ghana and Nigeria – and which it is not my intention to repeat here.[177]

The point of departure in this chapter is that the focus is not so much on performance *per se* but rather on a peculiar kind. Although within modern African poetry performance is often understood simply as oral performance, in this study, the notion of performance and performativity is distinguished and imbued with meaning beyond that conventionally ascribed to it. In his theory of African poetry for instance, Anyidoho (1992) proffers three levels of performance ranging from actual or most explicit to very subtle and implicit manifestation of dramatic aspects. Although other scholars prefer to read these realms as live, audio-visual or

[176] Such as p'Bitek, Awoonor, Kunene, Okigbo and Soyinka.
[177] The phenomenon has been extensively studied and described differently by various scholars. For example, Kofi Anyidoho describes it as "total art" (1992: 47) or "full drama" (2002), Adedeji as "total theatre" (2002: 344-5), Ato Quayson as the 'holistic vision' (1997: 13) or philosophy of art, while Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1994) and Kofi Agovi (1989) view it as 'composite art form'.

suggestive performativity,[178] I turn attention to the second level of Anyidoho's theory of African poetry. In the second level, located beyond mere 'dramatic reading' but below 'total art', the fusion of poetry, music and action Anyidoho envisages it as characterized by a greater liberation from the text as cold print, with the dramatic impact frequently intensified. It is with this 'greater liberation' and intensification of dramatic impact that I linger on, interrogating whether it is possible off the page. In particular, his enunciation that it is one in which the focus on the text as written or printed material is minimized but not totally eliminated (1992: 47) provides for the possibilities I pursue in this chapter. While other studies in performance – like Okpewho (1979) and Gikandi (2003) – disregard such categorizations, I draw a line between 'potential' (or suggestive), 'recreated' (or audio-visual) and 'actual' (or live) performance to suggestive performativity. At the explicit level, suggestive performative has to do with precise instructions on how a text should be performed – inevitably locating the text as a pre-text, and the poet as a troubadour composing for others to recite or actualize. Not all suggestive performativity, however, can be reduced to mere instructions for a later performance. In this study, therefore, the manner in which this realm of performance is conceived tilts towards what in this study is designated as 'potentiality', often signalled multifariously on page. The material manifestations of a text on page, therefore, should always be read as some pre-text but as autonomous literary experience which, I argue, though for individual-private reading and pleasure, is infused and fortified with imaginative theatrics, keys, iconicity. I read 'iconicity' of poetic text as a means contemporary poets deploy in bridging gap between performance and text – a device for minimising 'untranslatable' aspects of poetic experiences. Such possibilities recall a Bhabha's interstitial 'third space' of enunciation. Within this "liminoid" space or field of possibilities, a field of hybrid, mixed forms that exceed categorical distinctions (1998: 81) between printed and live discourses is envisioned. This also calls for a distinction between performance poets and poets-in-performance,[179] before drawing a line between poems-for-performance on the one hand, and performance-in-poetry in relation to print medium.

The literary shifts and developments to which I draw attention have various implications in the poetic scene. Generally, most of the resulting poetry is predicated on a belief most evocatively

[178] For example, Olaoluwa (2008) provides similar criterion.
[179] Spontaneity is used here to distinguish between the two.

enunciated by Kofi Anyidoho, that is, belief in the ontological value of the word, not merely as a semiotic fact, but, and above all, as a natural cosmic force with a potential for creative and destructive ends (1983: 99). Performers – whether in print or oral contexts – are known to use language to construct worlds filled with things that can be heard, seen, felt, tasted or smelt (Joubert 2004: 88). This understanding is in line with Janheinz Jahn's argument that within most African discourses, "the word of the poet has not only called the 'things', it has produced them" and that "we see the 'things' when we read the verse" (1958: 138). In other words, it is within the poet's ability to make them ('things') in the word, since words and other semiotic signs evoke reality in the decoder's mind. In Mugo's poetry, this conviction is clearly suggested, for example, in a poem titled "In Praise of Afrika's Children" where the poet-persona – speaking for Mugo – says:

My words
will be
    angry bullets
from the
    volcanic barrel
    of the well-aimed
    AK rifle
    of my poem (1994: 9)

What Mugo is metaphorically suggesting is that her poetics encourage going beyond linguistic medium (as word become bullets), emphasizing the ideational aspects and content. Instructively, this line of argument partly advances Atukwei Okai's (1993) keen urge for the maintenance of the sense of the 'sacred surrounding of the word', affirming that poetry is primarily sound. This is why various contemporary poets strive to accommodate the phonic dimension in their written works – in response to earlier criticism that poetic experience has no life on page. In Mugo's poetry, the phonic is signalled by among other means, the interplay between silence and sound captured by the dialogue between the white and the printed space. The shift of emphasis from written verse to the live stage perceives the word as a cosmic force that cannot (and should not) be confined to the page, a force which may, however, only be suggested in print. This standpoint

has generated a number of theoretical stances and approaches to modern African poetry in general – more so the contemporary ones.

In disciplines such as ethnography, the possibilities I explore are envisaged as a case of translating performance. This view pits, on the one hand, the conceptualization of performance as non-textual and, on the other, a text as performance. Recent scholarship, however, persuasively argues for a shift from paper-based or print-oriented connotations and literate associations of 'text', broadening its scope to encompass oral text such as performances (Barber 2007 and Finnegan 2007; 2011). The notion of entextualization advanced by Barber makes it possible to say that Africa has always had 'texts' (Kortenaar 2011: 19) despite relative late inroads of 'literacy' into the continent. In the same vein, this study introduces a perspective that reads a text – in particular on page – as a "highly reflexive mode of communication" or performance in Joubert's (2004) view. Following Joubert, I read performance as setting up its own special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking, as well as writing, is to be understood (2004: 78). This conceptualization embodies diverse positions that attempt to deconstruct the conventional understanding of the performance concept.

Richard Bauman (1977) and John Foley (1995) signal the sort of performance possibilities this chapter seeks to explore. Bauman's argument that performance involves "special interpretive frame" in which speakers assume "responsibility for a display of communicative competence" and produce language designed for "enhancement of the experience" of their audience (Hymes 1975; Bauman 1975/2001: 178, 1986, 1987; Bauman and Griggs 1990) is paradigmatic to the analytical frame employed in this study. From such a perspective, performance is that which calls forth 'special attention' to, and 'heightened awareness' of the act of expression which is poetry in this regard. Bauman further adds another angle that performance gives licence to the audience to regard the act of expression or performance with 'special intensity' (1977: 11). Due to its centrality in this study's analytical frame, his position is worth quoting at length:

> Performance in its artful sense may be seen as a specially marked way of speaking, one that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking is to be understood. In this sense of performance, the act of speaking is put on display, objectified, lifted out to a degree from its contextual surroundings, and opened up to scrutiny by an audience. Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of speaking and gives licence to the audience to regard it and the performer with special intensity. Performance makes one communicatively accountable; it assigns to an

> audience the responsibility of evaluating the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's accomplishment. (1987:8)

Attention to a special interpretive frame and to acts of speaking and writing "put on display, objectified, [and] lifted out to a degree from [their] contextual surroundings" (Rampton 2009: 153) resonates with what Mugo's attempts and to some extent, achieves in *My Mother's Poem*. The idea of special attention and heightened awareness in my view is and should not be confined to 'live' performances but is conceivable even within 'suggestive performativity' or written performance as envisaged in this study.[180] As Bauman correctly concludes; "It is part of the essence of performance that it offers to the participants a special enhancement of experience, bringing with it heightened intensity of communicative interaction" (1975/2001: 182). In light of this, I position my understanding of performance in this chapter on the act of reading as possibly creative and active or dialogically participative, more or less the same way as more explicit forms of performance such as live or recorded. Performance is, therefore, a "provider of interpretive frame or arena", interrogating and critically reflecting on the communicative process. It provides a frame that invites critical reflection on communicative processes.

It is in light of Bauman's premise that performance does not communicate in a literal way only, but also in an interpretive frame - where a demand is put on the auditor to make special interpretations and not literally those of the words alone - that the analysis of Mugo's poetry is approached. In Bauman's words, performance represents a "transformation of the basic referential uses of language" beyond mere artful usage in poetic discourses (Joubert 2004 quoting Bauman 1975: 292). In particular, what I signal in relation to the concerns of this chapter is that taking Mugo's poetic discourses as 'communicative interchanges' or dialogue, her poetry asks the audience to interpret what she 'says' in some special way, and not to limit scope of possible meanings to what the words or verbal dimension of the text conveys. Her work demands that the audience looks beyond the referential function of words on the page. Two issues are crucial to the sort of understanding I wish to foreground in this chapter. By Mugo 'saying', I mean that her 'words' have an extended conceptual and semantic range; that she

[180] The example of how a hero in a novel is pictured although s/he cannot be seen which Iser (1974: 283) provides is instructive and relates closely to what I attempt with the poetic genre. With a novel – and poetry as well - Iser argues, the reader must "use his imagination to synthesize the information given him, and so his perception is simultaneously richer and more private" (*ibid*) than visual forms like film.

makes use of not just conventional alphabetic dialect but deploys 'contrived' orthography and 'iconicity'. In other words, her poetry goes beyond mundane communication strategies as reading is turned into performance (Tedlock 1983: 48). Besides the use of space and its representational imaginary, what is of special interest in this study is how words on the page, and the text in general, are given an enormously emotional impact through creative manipulation. The dramatic subtleness breathed into the page which saves them ("cold words on page") from the dullness, and gives them liveliness as well as imbues them with a certain interactive aura, which immensely reduces the impersonal distance created by writing as a means of expression. I interrogate the extent to which writing exceeds its determinations within structures and strictures of the text such that it is almost like the writer lurks in any reading exercise, instructing and guiding him or her how the text should be consumed.

It is clear that what Bauman designates as 'interpretive frame' is what Foley calls 'performance arena', that is, the "locus in which some specialized form of communication is uniquely licensed to take place" (1995: 47) and which in this case are pages of the text, *My Mother's Poem,* the space within which Mugo creates or recreates her poetic imaginations. Theoretically, it is within the pages of the text that Mugo, as a performer, 'goes' to perform or recreate an experience of poetic worth just as the reader or audience similarly visits the page to experience such poetic events or performances. I focus on the interactive dialogue between the performer (Mugo) and the audience (reader), as well as with the context (page) – a dialogue crucial in appreciating the uniqueness of this collection. If oral poetry and therefore 'live' performance is dependent on the very context within which it is created in a fundamental sense (Okpewho 1992: 67), then Mugo's text exemplifies the peculiar performance on page. This emanates from dialogic relations between resources available to a writer using the page (such as white space and alphabetic system) and her thematic concerns. The poem on page heavily relies on resources of the 'very context' as will be detailed. It is important to tease out the 'special' means she uses to re-interpret the page as a 'performance arena'. Then, as Foley puts it, both the performer and the audience, whether implied or tangible/actual, experience these events according to their recurrence in the appropriate arena (1995: 48). By placing emphasis on the necessity of both entering the 'performance arena' together, Foley concludes that "only there, and only with the cooperation of both parties, can the text or performance become fully an experienced event"

(1995: 49). This understanding is crucial to the reading this chapter gives Mugo's works at three levels; the author, the page and the reader or audience.

As a poet, Mugo is no longer simply a writer but theoretically, a performer. She thus employs means going beyond those often deployed by her contemporaries. By so doing, Mugo metaphorically approximates the performance poet's resources. In this conceptual framework, the role assigned to the writer-performer, that is, to elicit the "participative attention and energy of his audience, and to the extent that they value his performance and allow themselves to be caught up in it" (Bauman 1975/2001:183) is of central importance in my reading of *My Mother's Poem*. I, therefore, regard Mugo as a poet 'performing' on page with an active implied audience's presence lingering throughout the various poems included. The reader is not the ordinary- archetypal one - since, for a fruitful reading of her poetry, s/he is required to be experienced "fully" and join the poet in this performance arena. This is, like Foley I argue, crucial for the reader and the poet to enter the text together, metaphorically implying congruence of reading/interpretive frame. The experience is transformed into a sort of 'specialized form of communication', demanding what Foley sees as the inevitability of a different kind of encoding within this frame or arena. The conceptual framework therefore re-conceives the author, the reader/audience as well as the medium of expression. A central question, therefore, remains to what degree Mugo may be read as a performance- or context-centred writer or signals 'transitional' poetics in which a third performance is envisioned?

Considering performance as an interpretative frame, John Haynes (1987) presents a perspective quite relevant to this study's reconceptualization endeavours. Since, as he argues, "African poetry is oriented to performance" (1987: 139) or 'mouthbound', this concept is, therefore, indispensable from any analysis of the genre's manifestation in contemporary Africa. Tanure Ojaide (1996: 24-5) echoes this saying that the inherent performance quality of oral poetry has a bearing on the aesthetics and composition of modern African poetry. As the dividing-line between poetry and drama, (drama and story-telling) and poetry and story-telling are so blurred in the African (or oral) traditions – as already enunciated in the previous chapters - I move beyond Haynes's deduction that there is an important place for the "study of how poems may be performed", and "of the kind of decision performers make and composers leave open to them" (1987: 139). Indeed, how may poems be performed by readers, and not just by 'performers' as

conceived by Haynes? And even more importantly, what kind of decisions does the writer-performer, as defined within this frame, make or leave open to readers? My focus therefore turns to the text and how it is 'uniquely licensed' to operate within contemporary African poetry, and its context or the page.

To explore how Mugo uniquely licenses her text, I borrow the concept of keying devices. Keying devices, as Foley describes them, are "linguistic features that make an idiom a dedicated register to function as a dedicated medium for conveyance of meaning within the performance arena" (1995: 53), in this case, Mugo's *My Mother's Poem*. There are 'culture-specific' means of keying or marking poetic discourses mostly conventionalized within Western literary traditions and bequeathed on modern African poetry. I foreground the strategies or means Mugo uses to alert, 'instruct' or 'aid' her audience so that they understand the message within the frame of performance. Firstly, performance frame or arena is explicitly or implicitly marked (keyed) by the message it carries and will provide the audience with instructions or aids to understand the message included within that frame" (Joubert 2004: 75). Therefore, how does the message dialogue with performance frame to signal range of possible meanings within this framework? This calls for the examination of various contextualization cues which Mugo's poetry thrives on. The different devices and conventions by which written texts direct or stimulate one kind of reading performance rather than another remains one of the concerns of this chapter. Goffman (1974) advances Bateson's idea, explaining how frames are formed through 'keys' or metacommunication signals. Such (culturally conventionalized) communicative devices and signals help Mugo to 'key' her unique performances. They include figurative language, parallelism, special codes and formulae, special paralinguistic features, appeal to tradition and disclaimers by performers (Bauman 1978: 15-24; Fine 1984: 37-45; Joubert 1995: 295 and 2004: 58). Goffman's (1974) list of some of the most basic 'keys' or keying proves useful as a matrix of analyzing performance in print, especially the use of parallelisms, certain special codes, disclaimers by performer-writer and special paralinguistic features. All of these are useful in "encoding a set of different, highly focused meanings in order to convey, with communicative economy, a message indexed by other than textual strategies" (1995: 8, quoted in 2004: 75). For Mugo, para- or extra-linguistic means and strategies 'key' a performance unique to the printed page. Mugo's use of white space, for example, demands that the reader looks beyond

conventional textual strategies in appreciating poetic patterning in her poetry. This signals her intentions of economically expressing poetic message, without necessarily using linguistic terseness/compactness – as is the case in most modern Africa poetry.

It is important to bear in mind that what Mugo achieves in the collection is neither unique to the genre nor literature in general. For instance, some nineteenth-century realist novels loaded the narrative with clues about how to realize the text as an imaginative drama, such that whether reading aloud or reading silently, the reader's performance was heavily specified. My concern within contemporary African poetry is on the sense in which a (poetic) text allows itself to be imagined by a potential reader as an utterance coming from a speaking subject other than oneself. This is because meaning in Mugo's poetry emanates from extra-linguistic techniques – as much as from words-linguistic. The point of departure, therefore, is attempts by the reader to create a performance not necessarily triggered or inspired by visualizing action with the aid of 'stage directions' – provided by 'sub-texts'. As conceived in this chapter, the author or poet may move beyond such directions to construct the text in such a way that the 'main' text and 'subtext' are harmonized; both are complementary and interdependent signifying systems as evident in some of Mugo's poetry. From the performance on a printed page, what reaches the reader's eye (and ears) is not just light waves – considering that any written text has both acoustic or gestural signals as well as visual signals on paper – but imaginations of the writer-performer and those decoded by reader (Joubert 2004: 89), especially from the 'pre-text' and 'subtext'.

Due to the manner in which Mugo presents her poetry, one may not consciously ignore interpreting features and signals that strikingly fail to confine the text to the habit of silent reading and visual literacy. The major task is, therefore, gleaning devices or the means Mugo – and by extension her contemporaries – often deploy towards this end, and how texts "allow[s] to be imagined as utterance coming from speaking subject" and not from poet? Besides the keys already mentioned, Mugo attempts the use of 'iconic' translation or rendering of certain phonic properties constituting her conceived text. Her poetic imaginations take into account phonetic considerations and graphic, non-alphabetic features of poetic experiences explored in a poem, making *My Mother's Poem*'s 'typographical complexity' which enriched the 'imagined' experience of performance. Efforts to achieve fidelity to all dimensions of poetic texts introduce tension and dialogic relation within her literary/poetic dialect, such that the 'conventional

alphabet' dialect is challenged and contested by the 'contrived orthography' she imagines and deploys. She employs a system that uses typography and the print medium iconically, closely related to what Tedlock envisages as 'foreignizing orthography' which, however, does not hamper but rather enhances readability and hence performance as well.

In her efforts to re-inscribe the page with 'loyalty to performance' and retain as much of performance in the poetic experience on print-page as possible, she deploys 'the multi-layered iconic version of the text' so as to avail paralinguistic features or aspects such as dramatic pauses, narrative hesitations and repetitions, among other features of the verbal part of performance to the reader, making them available to the reader. This strategically and metaphorically appropriates the dramatic use of body language, voice, pause, tempo, gesture which, as Anyidoho correctly posits, reduces the distance printed pages creates between the poet and readers making poetry 'a living art' once again (Anyidoho 1992: 261-2). Using the paralinguistic devices for example, she adduces information on how, for instance, the full powers of the (poetic) voice, and the full dimensions of the live performance, may be realized. The page[-stage] simply offers a sort of score which guides, assists and even improves its readability and potential visualization of that 'performance'. It is, however, not a case of 'stenographic drudgery' (or boring special signs), as Tedlock (1983: 48) would argue, but an attempt to envision and capture on the page experience beyond the scope of alphabetic representation. I regard iconicity in Mugo's poetry as an attempt at "representative of a total process" or what Anyidoho calls 'total art' – which to a large extent is what she strives for. In other words she pursues "the endless calligraphic possibilities" Tedlock (1983: 48) talks of. I focus on the ability of poets to incorporate performance as transcendent of the ordinary understanding, beyond the barriers imposed by medium; print. As the poet composes, he or she ought to think seriously about the 'act of expression' and ineluctably the audience influences most of the decisions he or she makes. Both the form and content are consciously or otherwise shaped by the reader as he or she looms in the poet's mind.[181] It is this imminence of the audience that guarantees special attention accorded by the act of expression.

[181] Anyidoho stresses this but limits it to poems tailored for-performance saying; "one of the most important implications of this orientation [towards a poetry meant for performance] is the manner in which the actual process of writing may be influenced by the awareness of a potential audience presence and participation" (1992: 47).

One of the arguments I advance in this chapter is that the relative higher degree of performativity in contemporary African poetry emerges from a sensitivity to spaces or silences, as well as from certain oral patterns and multi-lingual figures of sound (which characterize text as utterance). In multifarious ways, contemporary African poetry responds to the widely held assumption that the power of the voice (spoken word) also lies in the profundity of silences or pauses. As Gold-Eisler aptly puts it, "pausing is as much a part of the act of speaking as the vocal utterance of words itself" (1968: 118-9). Significantly, therefore, Mugo's text – like Anyidoho's mentioned in Chapter Two – embodies a system of 'transcription' based on the pause. Normal pauses are indicated on the page by line breaks while longer ones are signalled by double spaces between the lines (with a dot in the empty space). Similarly, prosody is conveyed through adaptation of the orthographic conventions. Mugo thus composes poetry with the reader's imminence always lurking, for instance, she creates slots for audiences to participate in the enactment of written poetic texts. This literary text is, therefore, "conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for him/herself since as Iser rightly concludes, reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative" (1974: 275). This calls upon her reader's awareness of signals that render the encounter active and creative. I position the reader cognizant of these signals as one whose eyes have been 're-educated'. Re-educated eyes and ears as used here recall the idea of 'refocusing' the reader's attention and sensitivity to a text's narrative strategies, performance keys and Mugo's own ideology. Such eyes, for example, can discriminate the predominance of syncopated or synchronized pauses for dramatic suspenseful text, helping the 'reader-performer' keep tabs while reading-performing. Pauses which leave the audience hanging syntactically add suspense to the realization of the text in the reader's mind and are thus distinguished from pauses as mere breath stops. Similarly, the 're-educated' ear is cognizant of paralinguistic variations such as loudness, suggested on page by capital letters, or softness signalled by small case letters. It is re-educated eyes and ears that enable the reader to discard passive reading for more active and participative encounters. Mugo moves beyond this means in her text to use bold face and italics as I detail in this analysis. Although loudness and voice quality, as Tedlock (1983) notes in relation to Zuni narratives, are significant enough, pausing – as Kofi Anyidoho's poetry revealed earlier – is foremost among the paralinguistic devices that give shape and help distinguish contemporary African poetry (exemplified by Mugo and Anyidoho) from foundational poetics and generally modern African

poetry. Of significance is the fact that such gestures draw the reader into a projected im/mediacy that never forgets the genre's own genealogy in performance (1998: 81), forging a sort of alliance between the reader and the performer-writer-poet. Specifically in this study, reading is reconfigured not as the 'glazed gaze of a consumer' but rather as the careful attention of a producer or even more appropriately, the reader as a co-producer (Bruce Andrew 1996: 36) and participant in the process.

What is seen on page is in some way equivalent to or an approximation of the oral performance. All these endeavours render Mugo's poetry susceptible to multiple readings since overall meaning arises and emerges from the interaction of all the different strata constituting the poem-texts. *My Mother's Poem*, like texts which combine elements from more than one language or rely on verbal play, is dialogical by definition since it embodies more than one voice/text within a single utterance. Visual and auditive aspects of poetry interact with linguistic means of expressivity. However, although all poetry has a visual aspect as Cobbing and Upton (1998) note or, even more explicitly, most written or printed poetry already has a visual element, what I am proposing is not an interest in visual or concrete poetry *per se*, but rather, an envisioning of certain devices as indicators or potentials of the possibility of a much richer reading experience, and, therefore, a performance. This is informed by Birdwhistell's (1970) observation that 65% of the social meaning of a message is carried by nonverbal elements such as paralinguistic and kinesic features, especially considering that as a genre, poetry strives towards expressive profundity using as few words as possible. Communicative resources, other than linguistic signifiers, therefore, complement poetic diction in conveying a poet's social meanings.

I read the collection as imaging and imagining its possible users or readers and manipulating them towards a way of receiving its meanings, achieved through strategies that inscribe performance potentialities. Through a variety of allusions to the conditions of performance, this collection calls upon its reader to imagine public spectacles or an audience – and is, therefore, performative. This text – and Anyidoho's examined in Chapter Two – undoubtedly has a higher performativity quotient than most of its predecessors or contemporaries. I also explore how linguistic units or utterances constituting the oral idiom convey not just the literal meanings of everyday language outside performance but encompass, or are charged with, 'associative values' particular to the event taking place (Joubert 2004: 75).

The foregoing understanding of poetic text demands a specialized reader, one whose poetic sensibilities are 're-educated' as mentioned earlier – suggesting the crucial role assigned to the reader within this reconfiguration. Significantly, it provides an interpretive frame that allows readers to "perform" the poem as though they were reading a musical score. The onus is on the reader, therefore, to 're-educate' his or her ears and eyes to "subtlety and richness" not just of the spoken word as Tedlock urges but more closely to what Mugo and to some extent Anyidoho (or Atukwei Okai before him) advocate. The reader plays an important part in the entire literary experience as eliciting meanings out of a poem text is not confined to the genius of the composer only. From this standpoint, it is until the reader realizes that it is up to him or her to create the poem that the text is considered 'performed'. However, for the other end, and as an ideal poet should, Mugo consciously invites the reader to explore the text's 'interior' structure so that s/he experiences a new active and creative way of reading – perceiving – that is infinitely rewarding. The idea of a written text 'demanding dramatization', as well as the notion of ear and eye 'witnesses' to oral performances as elucidated by Mugo and Anyidoho, therefore, is instructive. Mugo always advocates for a poem on page 'inviting the reader to use his own voice' and visualize the experiences or, as she puts it, 'stretch' from the page asking to be dramatized (1994: introduction). It is such an understanding which endows the experience with 'performative potentials'. Confessedly, audience-centred perspectives inform the theoretical paradigm I employ in the analysis.

Such a conceptualization looks beyond the conventional 'literary' eye and ear, to some extent, heeding Anyidoho's calls for writers to "attempt to explore the possibilities of using the technology of sound as the primary medium of poetic dialogue ... [since] many of our people do not have eyes to witness the poetry of print but do have ears for the power of the sound and sense of words" (1986: 13). In this study, I regard not the oral poet, as Anyidoho does, but the modern poet as well as both an earwitness and eyewitness. However, the 'technology' in this case is not the same Anyidoho has in mind but rather the resources available to the writer within the confines of printed page. It is also not necessarily directed at those without 'eyes to witness' but those who have, to use Tedlock's idea, 're-educated' both their eyes and ears as this study demonstrates. This is where the opened page meets up with performance of poetry in its diversity – whether dramatized reading or total art of the kind Anyidoho writes about – such that

the metaphoric 'proscenium arch' between a reader and contents on the page is blurred. Using Zenani and Scheub's idea of "no proscenium arch exists" (1992: 84), this is by and large anchored on the acknowledgement that reading, even silent reading, is a type of performance. To be an 'active reader', and one whose senses are 're-educated', calls for sensitivity to (oral parts and) phonic dimension of written texts, as well as empathy for 'unconventional' visual textual components.

Before examining the context of this reconceptualized performance, a distinction between closely related aspects is inevitable. Such a distinction requires one to bear in mind that this performance it is not some 'performance' out there in the world that Mugo's text aspires towards re-presenting or capturing as faithfully as possible – as is the case in oral composition-performance on page. Rather, taking into account the concept of composition-in-performance, it is a virtual 'performance' that exists only in the audience's mind since they actualize it (only) upon encountering the text. This is why performance in this study is not some "discourse that can be lifted out of its interactional setting to become independent autonomous object" (Joubert 2004: 79) as implied within early folkloristic studies. This recalls the point made earlier that no original exists to which the text on the page is an intermedial translation. The unique interactive dialogue between poet-context-audience enables the reader (re)constitute the aesthetic qualities of an imagined 'original' performance, perceiving its unique, integral form as a dynamic, sensuous aesthetic communicative process (Fine 1984: 87). How close to that performance imagined by Mugo, therefore, depends on and ends with the reader. It need not resonate with some 'performance' out there in the reader's real world. Hence, this analytical paradigm reads 'composition-in-performance' where the poem-text is not merely being 'translated' or 'transcribed' as Tedlock and Muhawi argue – since there is no 'original' teller – but a poetic discourse issuing from the sort of spontaneity that characterizes oral performances. The distinction Okpewho makes between a text composed for and in performance, that is, a possibility of a text composed not for but in performance is instructive (1992: 68). I read *My Mother's Poem*, therefore, as composed in, but not necessarily for performance – although there are some poems for performance. For example, at what I read as lower level or more explicit suggestive performance and, therefore, what may be called poem-for-performance are poems such as "Priscilla" and "Plant a Tree". The captioned 'pretexts' and 'subtexts' in "Priscilla", for

instance, reveal that it is "Composed for Zambuko/Izibuko theatre group's *ngonjera* at the ZACT[182] cultural centre in memory of Priscilla Maponga who had just passed away in May 1991. Directions on setting and scene in "Plant a Tree" on the other hand, instruct the reader that it is composed "for and [to be] recited at a tree dedication ceremony in honour of Prof. Wangari Maathai and other women in Kenya People's struggle, at Le Moyne College on the 24th June, 1992". I will delve into more subtle and implicit performance potentialities at a later stage. Quite elaborately, the writer-performer informs the reader/s that the poem "Priscilla" is to be/was performed by a group called "Zambuko" (in Shona) or "Izibuko" (in Ndebele) – a term meaning "ford" or "river crossing" – which, according to McLaren, was in the vanguard of the march across the river from colonialism, racism, sexism, and capitalism to independence and equality, to socialism (1992: 92). Not all poems, however, embrace such overt means of keying performance. Of interest to this study in relation to such explicit cases is how or what means Mugo uses to blur the line between the performance as she conceives it and that awaiting realization on page, or as decoded by the reader/s. How does she 'flatten' pre- and sub-textual information, embedding it within the 'main' text on page? The resources available to her on page play a significant role in harmonizing the two. However, like an oral poet, Mugo is dependent on the context as meaning which is created by interaction between the page, linguistic and non-linguistic devices – aesthetic transaction between participants, audience-reader and context. The influence of oral context on narrative content (Okpewho 1992; Blackburn 1981) is thus not confined to oral performance since, as conceived in this study, performance is whatever that happens to a text in context (1992: 48; 168). As an oral performer relying on dramatic means at his disposal (such voice and vocal intonations, facial expression, costume, music, movement and space), Mugo exploits the space available on page.

At the core of these efforts is the use of performance as a means of deconstructing the notion of 'natural context' for poetic discourses – if context is generally taken as a set of discourse or external conditions that exists prior to and independently of the performance (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 68). Modern African poetry critics recognize the habitual context for (oral) poetry as live or recorded – either performed on stage or any other 'real' spaces by an actual performer before an actual audience. The so-called "natural context", that is, forums or spaces in which

[182] Zimbabwean Association of Community Theatre.

poetry in its diversity exist or is performed, free of compromising outside influences of whichever kind is debunked. Although ethnographers attempt to deconstruct this concept by confronting their own influence on what their local sources offer them, I further explore the possibility of the printed page as a potential and natural context for contemporary African poetry. In the theoretical orientation adopted in this study, and following Stone, I consider ideas of space as key elements of many African performances (1988: 7). The word space does not refer to physical space between graphemes but must be understood metaphorically as referring to an imagined and creative linguistic space in which the words exist in dialogic relationship with each other (Muhawi 2006) and hence performative by virtue of its texthood). In other words, a page is construed as a spatial metaphor for the stage such that space surfaces as a crucial performative imperative. I, therefore, locate the page as the space of, and with, multiple possibilities. It is only from such a vantage position that the possibility of performance on the otherwise two-dimensional page becomes tenable.

In Mugo's hands, space is not considered as a given or "container waiting to be filled" (Davidson 2007: 19), but rather, as a malleable aesthetic tool for communicating its textual context. In other words, poetry is the shape on the page produced by the poem rather than that which simply "fills a pre-existing space". Poetry, therefore, is the series of relationships between space and (other) aesthetics. Following Wole Soyinka, space is thus viewed as a medium in the communicative sense (1976: 39). It allows for creative manipulation and, therefore, forms part of the communicative tapestry; an attempt to enlarge possibilities for expression and communication. Thus, space as conceived in this chapter resonates with what Ngugi says in relation to drama and performance while contesting received notions and effecting interruption of usualness. His idea that drama need not necessarily be performed in special buildings set aside for the purpose but could indeed take place anywhere there is an 'empty space' (1981: 37) is extended to situate the page as a possible empty space where performance of poetry may take place. I use Mugo's collection to make this point. Characteristically, her poetry unfurls through the pages in a somewhat peculiar manner. Space is carefully delineated and to a certain extent, encoded with rhythm or rhythmic movements. If a performance is seen as a 'space' into which various performers 'enter', more or less the same way as a dance, then the page in the hands of Mugo approximates or appropriates this as I illustrate shortly. Space allows movement as well

as interaction if taken as a metaphor. As a spatial metaphor, the self-referential space of the page or printed surface produces poetry which refuses a passive reading. A sort of spatial interaction is envisioned between the poet and the reader, in which Mugo invites her audience to explore her poetry's 'interior' structure. Seminal to this study, therefore, is the relocation of the audience/reader as central to any single literary experience.

As the fulcrum of analysis, this kind of performance is also a domain where orality and literacy interact, where the coalescing of oral and written textualities is actualized and dialogic relations between phonic and graphic dimensions of written poetry play out. To investigate the interplay between various communicative devices and realms in *My Mother's Poem*, this study explores how Mugo leaves behind 'performative' register's unique ability to provide access to implied signification – much the same way written orality signals the text's aural roots. The sort of performance I engage with in the analysis is that construed as a means conveying certain extra-linguistic (nonverbal) messages and is, therefore, a sort of interface form. I read this performance as a communication about communication, or what Bateson calls 'metacommunication' (Bateson quoted in Bauman 1975: 295), that is, communicative devices that key performativity. In Mugo's collection, metacommunication strategies include, among others, framing, keying and traces of contextual influence all which signal performance. The analytical excursion through the collection broadly engages with linguistic, para- or extra-linguistic and metaphoric means Mugo deploys in 'reaching out from the page'. I start by examining linguistic means Mugo uses to signal performance and performativity. I discuss 'disclaimers of performance' such as pre- and sub-texts common in Mugo's poems-for-performance. Other means I explore include different special intonational devices, iconicity, idiophones and spelling changes to project paralinguistic nuances. Then I examine the various paralinguistic means she uses to suggest transcending the conventional orthography. Special paralinguistic features such as rate, length, pause duration, pitch contour, tone of voice, loudness and stress multifariously represented in print, as well as other special keys to performance of song/poetry (genres) in African context, are foregrounded. I also look at how Mugo appeals to the song tradition in Africa and her acceptance of oral discourse as a standard of reference, and implicit references to this body of art (traditional phrases and scenes that constitute singer's idiom). Parallelism or repetition of phonic, grammatical, semantic and prosodic structures

(Joubert 2004: 76) and especially the paralletic prosodic patterns pronounced in Mugo's poetry are also discussed. Finally, I examine more metaphoric significations such as the elusive left-hand margin which metaphorically gestures the fluidity of this postcolonial experience. Metaphoric devices examined include figurative language – statements and gestures suggesting presence and immediacy of reader/s and by extension, audience.

Linguistic Strategies of Keying Performance Potentialities

Postcolonial Africa, the context within which Mugo writes, is a space "filled with heterogeneous voices and diverse experiences" (Upstone 2007: 13) and in which the former colonial subjects find the opportunity to not just 'write back' but to the self as well, with various dissenting voices initially silenced being vented. The creative dynamism of contemporary Africa's poetic output, together with the contending ideologies and literary paradigm have in the recent past significantly defined and situated aesthetics, creative processes, cultural practices and forms they take within the contemporaneous existential reality. I read the eighteen poems which constitute *My Mother's Poem and Other Songs* as metaphors of the postcolonial experience, and sites of imagination and creativity, and as a departure beyond the orderliness of past colonial spaces. The collection is more correctly envisaged not as a mere reaction but also as a kind of subversive rereading, a sort of 'writing back' which, although intimately related to colonial (and received 'conventional') practices, also disrupts and extends its possibilities beyond, into contemporary manifestations of (post-) colonial experiences. The re-centring and re-entrenchment of performance is at the heart of modern African poetry, and, therefore, a critical organizing principle and composition strategy underpins this analytical paradigm. I read this collection of poetry as the embodiment of this heterogeneity or plurality, and, therefore, a site of marvellous contemporary realities that is fragmented and multifaceted. Focusing on linguistic or verbal means of suggesting performativity, I start with two poems more explicitly oriented towards poetry-for-performance mode. While one issues from a typical postcolonial experience – the celebration of heroes, and heroines of not just the 'struggle for freedom' but the multifaceted dimension the struggle assume in contemporary times - the other is largely a dirge, eulogizing fallen heroines and revolves around the protagonist-subject, Priscilla.

Composed "for and [to be] recited at a tree dedication ceremony in honour of Prof. Wangari Maathai and other women in Kenya People's struggle, at Le Moyne College on the 24th June, 1992", the poem "Plant a Tree" is/was (to be) performed using *ngonjera* mode of oral recitation. Generally described as short performance on political occasions, made up of poetry, song, dance and dialogue (McLaren 1992: 92), this particular *ngonjera* consists of 'extracts' from plays chosen for and suitably adapted to the particular occasion at which they were performed, for example, in memory of Priscilla Maponga for "Priscilla". It is in one of those instances when the group presented "specially devised *ngonjeras*" that were quite independent of their performed plays (*Katshaa*!). In other words the performance is decontextualized from its initial context to the particular memorial occasion, before re-decontextualization to the page. Designed and composed for particular occasions, the form allows new content, especially that relevant to the theme in question, to be spontaneously (or before-hand) incorporated during performance. These poems are thus graphic (verbal) representations of a performance held in May, 1991, by the Zimbabwean Association of Community Theatre and the other on the 24th June, 1992 at Le MoyneCollege.

However, it may not be apt to consider "Priscilla" as a set of pre-texts or mere script for the *ngonjera* performance, but more fruitfully, as in this case, to explore the relations it instances between what may be called 'main-text' on the one hand, and combination of 'pre'- and 'sub'-texts. Although there is little textual evidence on the surface to prove that it is a script awaiting actualization or realization,[183] the question I grapple with is to what extent such poems can be seen as inadequate or falling short of an actual poem-text – with the assumption that it issues from a particular performance event. Are there any glaring features which make the poem on the page appear as a script or a pre-text? I focus on the written re-presentation using the analytical paradigm already enunciated.

While celebrating Priscilla Maponga as their soloist and star, the performers in this text-poem make it clear that their central goal in the *ngonjera*-performance is to eulogize their departed colleague, their "enshrined theatre sister" as they refer to her, and a member of the

[183] Taking "realization" to mean the "independent of the individual disposition of the reader" which "in turn is acted on by the different patterns of the text" in the sense used by Iser (1974: 274-5).

Zambuko/Izibuko community theatre family (1994: 12). The persona in this poem encompasses the collective voice of the performing group; "We, Zambuko/Izibuko..." repeated twice (1994: 13) as 'creators/workers' and cultural workers. The plural pronoun 'we' functions in this case as a special code, reminding the readers to envision a team of performers on stage, addressing him or her; "*we* sing/and dance/choreographing" (*ibid*, my emphasis) and as they put it later on, "In echoing volume/*chokwadi* we say:" (1994: 14), hence keying the text as a performance and product of interaction between participants and soloist. Such signals may be ignored by insensitive eyes-ears. Their recurrent nature, together with alternate reference to the subject as "our" 'Priscilla', 'Dipuo', 'soloist' and 'star' conjures in the mind of the reader/s a team on stage, striving to gesture this bond. Such pronoun referents – which replace not just the noun Priscilla, but symbolize the presence of the departed performer – signal in the reader's conscious that she was part of the team and would have been on stage with them. A 're-educated' eye/ear, cognizant of (pronoun) codes prevalent in *ngonjera* performances visualizes a formation of performers of stage, persuading in unison with accompanying facial and bodily features.

At the core of any performance is the interactive space between the audience/readers and the performer/writer. By minimizing the distance as suggested above, the element of actively participating audience is introduced into the text and in the reader's mind. Since at the centre of any performance is the dialogue and dialogic relations between the participating individuals, Mugo's poetry metaphorically goes out of its way to embrace the audience. Besides the pronouns used to signal 'present absences' or performance potentialities, Mugo makes use of more overt means to incorporate the otherwise would-be spectators. Within the text, more subtle means of implying an auditor such as those explored in the previous chapter in relation to dramatic monologues may be discerned. Using carefully conceived rhetorical questions, a dramatic encounter between audience and performer is re-enacted in "A Question to Opposition Leaders", a poem ridiculing politicians' greed and self-centredness at the expense of much needed collective consciousness against dictatorial political regimes. In this poem, the persona persistently asks an implied interlocutor who, in a reading context, is the reader/s; "How could you?" (1994: 66). Designed as a refrain, the recurrence of this question presupposes an attentive listener (in this case, 're-educated' reader/s) and hence implicitly signals a dialogically implied encounter. Whereas the pronouns simply indicate an absent, passive figure, such interrogatives

imagine an active interlocutor. Alternatively, repetition enacts what Katherine Hayles (2001: 26) calls narrative multiplicity, which suggests participants and an audience. Thus the text on page illustrates the nature of rendition or the poem narrative. The silent reader appropriates the performer as s/he persistently (over a dozen times) implores the imagined keen listener for an answer s/he knows is not forthcoming. Although it may look redundant when envisioned simply as writing, but, I argue, indicates the potential of performance when perceived as an autonomous actualized performance.

A close reading depicts the struggle to embody both live and potential performance traits within the confines of the printed text – and dissolves the gap between reader and writer-poet. For example, unlike the overtly collective choral voice of a group of performers in "Priscilla", "Plant a Tree" employs an even more subtle approach. The distance between the performers and the reader of this re-presentation or visualization in print is immensely minimized. To close the audience-performers gap, the persona moves beyond use of the all-encompassing pronoun 'we' (for example in "we who refuse/to stampede/on humans" 1994: 73; 77) to the more pointed realization; "you and I" (1994: 74; 75). The mere possibility of talking about 'you' and 'I' disrupts the fixity of printed contents, allowing 'pop-ups' which illustrate or metaphorically signal Mugo's idea of words or contents on the page stretching or reaching out to the reader. It is such nuanced signals that, I argue, attempt to achieve what Fine (1984: 134) envisages; that is, stretching the channel capacity of print media. This elasticity enables Mugo to extend the limits of the two-dimensional page. The reader certainly feels part of the performance even when merely reading "you and I will water the seedling/tree" (*ibid*) – suggesting the intimacy between the performer and the audience in oral/live performances. The conceptualization of poetic experience is in this case made to capture the idea that the audience-reader is the 'you' while the poet is the 'I' hence integrated in the text – an argument reinforced by preceding lines such as "side by side", "shoulder to shoulder" and "hand in hand" (1994: 75). Such linguistic means suggest the immediacy and proxy of the speaker, or writer-performer as envisaged within this framework. Furthermore, the emphatic reference of the venue as "... *this* abundant Le Moyne soil/Onondaga native soil/bounteous Onondaga land" strategically at the beginning and before the ending of the poem alludes to situational context and similarly engenders the aforementioned propinquity of the performers (before the reader/s). The performance is brought closer and

made livelier though still on a printed page since the reader is persuaded to envision the imagined ('actual') performers before him or her, simultaneously gesturing and saying "On this ..." stage or page.

Another linguistic or verbal signifier used to assist the readers to conjure up the setting, suggest scene of performance and the particular participants involved is pre-texts which preface the text and provide background information. In addition, subtexts complementing the more subtle strategies are also included in attempts to key the performance. I read subtext or performance directions as a strategy of blurring or linking live 'performance' to its representation in print. For example, the pre-text in "Plant a Tree" informs the reader/s that the poem was "composed for and recited" (1994: 73) at a ceremony in honour of Wangari Maathai and other women in the Kenyan People's struggle. This context significantly keys the performance and avails a framework within which it is to be appreciated. The setting and scene is provided using linguistic signs or alphabetic system of notation, accessible to any potential reader. In Mugo's poems-for-performance, the tendency towards script-like text implies that performance instruction abounds in the collection. Apart from clearly suggesting where the audience should join in through a refrain, more explicit means such as stage instructions and notes on how they should be rendered are included. Two poems from the collection exemplify this 'scoring'. Although not written for performance, in the poem "In Praise of Afrika's Children" Mugo indicates that the final refrain, "I want to Sing", should be repeated "twice over" (1994: 11). This is reminiscent of musical scores where accompanying notes minimise the gap between the composition as imagined by the artist, and as realized by the audience. Similarly, in "The Woman's Poem" the finale refrain is accompanied by the instruction "prolonged refrain" (1994: 47) which suggest how differently at this particular moment the refrain should be rendered. This is an attempt to incorporate paralinguistic features specific to performance to enhance its readability for the sake of the readers.

The example in "A Healing Moment" makes it clear how subtexts are sometimes dissolved into the ('main') text. In this dramatic encounter between the persona and "a young man", Mugo demonstrates how the metaphoric 'suspended moment hanging between them' is transcended. The poet–persona details how she stretches out her feeling and hand "in readiness/for a handtouch" only for "The young man" to reach out "with open arms" and touch her with "his

authentic words:" (1994: 19). Mugo rightly captures the sort of possibility earlier explained, that is, the capacity for 'words' to 'touch'. The blurred line between the referent and the action is signalled by the merging of subtext with 'main' text. Rather than use stage directions, Mugo uses parenthesis without disrupting the narrative flow of the poem. With open arms, the 'young man' says:

> "May I please ask..."
>
> (then comes the question)
>
> "... for a hug?" (1994: 19)

The hesitation markers help render the action dramatic, especially with the moment of suspense inbetween the lines. In other words, stage directions are not always subtexts but sometimes made part of the text. This is why I hold that Mugo moves beyond explicitly marked means to instruct the reader on how certain refrains and sections of her poetry should be rendered differently. Even within the linguistic realm, Mugo deploys certain special tonal devices to capture various paralinguistic nuances and experiences. These range from the use of drawn out syllables and hence special spelling system, the use of this to broaden semantic reach of certain words, to the use of certain interjections that signal varied vocal rendition. First, I look at idiophones before examining more implicit tonal devices.

The *onomatopoeic* refrain deployed in "The Woman's Poem" makes use of drawn out syllables and hence is relatively lengthened compared to the rest. This coinage issues from extra-linguistic uses of conventionalized alphabetic systems. Glossed as "a Gikuyu and English mixed gril/hybrid for 'just imagine!'", the refrain "Ta Imaaaagini!" (as opposed to the more frequent '*Ta imagini*') is loaded with performative imperatives. Graphologically, it captures the rhythmic and exclamatory nuances the poet intends to highlight. The 're-educated' reader is unlikely to realize this as simply 'just imagine' without associated accompanying bodily gestures even within the enclosure of silent or private reading. S/he is also compelled to question why this phrase is italicised at the beginning of every stanza. Although phonic parallelism runs through the poem, especially in the refrain at the end of each stanza, this elongated refrain signals the climax of the poem by departing in vocal quality from the rest. Any attempt to read this even privately/silently inevitably compels the reader into an imaginary performance as s/he figures out

how this differs from the other renditions. Following Iser's (1974) argument that if communication between text and reader is to be successful, then the reader's activity must also be controlled in some way by the text, I read this as a case of the text going out of its way to determine and regulate the reading process. Undoubtedly, therefore, performance is latent on page.

A similar feature but drawing on a different means is utilized in "Intellectuals or Imposters?" where the refrain contains the interjection 'aha' to express triumphant satisfaction or some sort of excitement in the discovery that within the large category of intellectuals, there are 'imposters'. Thus "Aha! Intellectuals or Imposters?" is patently accompanied by the relevant, spontaneous and to a large extent knee-jerk (often unconscious) facial expressions and gestures, much the same way as the 'just imagine' already discussed. Together with the punctuation mark, the refrain is imbued with paralinguistic nuances. Relative loudness and stress is suggested in "Aha!" just as the subsequent interrogative contrasts this loudness with inquisitive (much calmer) tone. In the same manner, the refrain in the closing poem strikingly elucidates emphasis using exclamation (punctuation) mark and italics; "*One day!*" (1994: 83-5). These features provide the text with keys on actual realization and hence facilitate performance when read.

Italics serve an even more accentuated performance-oriented role in the title poem. Not only does it structure or divide "My Mother's Poem" into three thematic sections (upon receiving the news of the dad's death, the heartening 'conversation' with the mother and the emerging rejuvenated personality in the end) but also marks the mother's voice. The centrality of the mother's words is signalled by the difference in font. In line with her (African) feminist ideology, Mugo foregrounds and re-inscribes the centrality of the mother-figure in her life and, therefore, in contemporary society by extension. This is also evident in the fact that it serves as the collection's title. By assigning the mother the voice to pass the all-important message that she (the persona-daughter) should not "*romanticize home*", Mugo offers a critique of postcolonial African states' realities. For example, she reminds the persona that:

> *For many who are home*
> *Have jail*
> *For home*
> *Thousands who are home*
> *Have streets*

For home (1994: 81)

She further advises the daughter that since she has "chosen the path/of people's struggles", she should gather the courage to "build new homes" and:

Create new life
Create human beings
Out of these (1994: 81)

The change in font is, therefore, an attempt by Mugo to manipulate and overdetermine the 'realization' of this text – despite the medium apparently limiting such possibilities. The reader reflexively imagines the italicised text as a distinct voice from a telephone's speakers. The otherwise ordinary reading experience is, therefore, significantly heightened using such specially conceived orthographic devices. The reader is often left asking, why does a certain line, phrase or stanza appear different from the rest in print and, therefore, dialogically interrogates and engages with it, realizing it differently. In some cases, this shift in font signals intertextual relations with closely linked sources, as in "Priscilla" where the novel that ushered postcolonial disenchantment era, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born!* (1994: 12) is used to temporally contextualise the subject's birth. This is the sense in which "... *Mandela – Spirit of No Surrender*" (*ibid*) is used when comparing and celebrating the subject's (Dipuo Mkhize's) resilient nature. However, in some instances, the device is used to draw the reader's attention to particular ideas or concepts Mugo views as deserving refocus. The feminist ideology in "Mother Afrika's Matriots" – captured by a coinage – is further highlighted by the choice of font; "people's affirmative history liberated *herstory*" (1994: 28), as well as in "A Healing Moment" where, to amplify her social message of human justice, she uses the non-English *untu* ("communed with/intimate *untu*") or ubuntu – the philosophy encased in 'I am because we are'. This, in my view, is not necessarily or merely to denote linguistic-spelling inconsistency. In addition, the fact that the reader has to actively engage with such diction to derive possible meanings makes him/her participate as a co-performer in enacting Mugo's poetic text. S/he "actively practices a form of textual exegesis on the basis of fusing the textual surface with his or her own supplements and interpretive moves" (Olukòtun 2004: 158) to arrive at its meaning.

Mugo uses other devices to place emphasis, draw and refocus the reader's attention to the specialized rendition of particular stanzas, lines, phrases or words. Ingenious use of space helps signal words, phrases, lines or stanzas that are or should be realized differently from the rest.

Although refrains are a common feature of verse, whether written or recited, of interest in this chapter is not just their predominance but the unique ways they are suggested within the confines of written poetry. Of course, modern African poetry is generally replete with examples of texts incorporating this evidently oral feature or mnemonic device. In Mugo's collection, however, the extensive use of refrains stands out. Out of the eighteen 'songs' or poems, whereas nine have clearly marked and pronounced refrains, it is from structural patterning and usage of space that one deduces that they function as choric parts. Next I explore proxemics and how this is used to signal audience/reader participation in *My Mother's Poem.* However, first is an overview of refrains in this collection.

In *My Mother's Poem* the refrain component of poetry is significantly foregrounded. In "Birth", "In Praise of Afrika's Children", "Intellectuals or Imposters?", "Mother Afrika's Matriots", "To Be a Feminist Is", "The Woman's Poem" "On the Tenth Milestone", "A Question to Opposition Leaders" and "Prosaic Poem" Mugo deploys refrains which bear her central thematic preoccupation. While some of the explicitly marked refrains are re-statements of the poem's title, such as "Aha! Intellectuals or Imposters?", "Mother Afrika's Matriots", "To Be a Feminist Is" and "On this Milestone", others depart to carve the choric material out of a poem's central theme, summing up its thematic thrust. For example, by reworking a famous novel's title in a poem discounting pessimistic perceptions of Africa, Mugo insists in "Birth", the opening poem, that indeed "The Beautiful Ones Were Born" (1994: 1-3). In a persistent and optimistic tone, she underscores the overwhelming presence of 'beauty' emphasizing its ubiquity through the recurrent refrain. My point is that this heavy reliance on antiphonal structure instances a more fluid convergence of text and reader which brings the literary work into existence, lively realization and performance. Such a sinuous convergence is evident in "In Praise of Afrika's Children" whose core concern, as the captioned subtitle cum dedication hints, is to revere "the children of Mozambique and all Afrikana children who have been orphaned biologically, socially, politically and economically" (1994: 4). This desire is thus encapsulated in the persona's undying wish expressed in the refrain "I want to sing". The recurrence of this urge in the form of a refrain echoed by the audience throughout the poem emphasizes its pent-up state, patiently awaiting expression. These lines, even when read privately or silently, demand tonal variation that reflexively rises all the way before some imaginary denouement. As it shifts from

this mere desire to the more optimistic conviction, "I will sing", the reader undoubtedly conjures up the buoyant enchantment the poet intends. Somehow, paralinguistic dimensions are implied using verbal devices. These refrains are constructed in such a way that they insinuate performance in print.

Suggesting Performance Potentialities using Non-Verbal Means

In suggesting a different usage of the concept of proxemics, one more specific to the concerns of the present analytical paradigm, I wish to demonstrate how non-verbal means, such as space, are used to convey paralinguistic features like audience participation and stress, dictate pace as well as rhythm. Considering Mugo as a performer and the printed page as her stage, how uniquely does she use space? To begin with, print-space is significantly controlled, creatively manipulated and, to an appreciable degree, iconically used in the collection. Whereas proxemics generally describes the physical place where performance takes place and the way these spaces are utilized (Joubert 2004: 117), I do not limit it to mean mere relationship in distance between human beings and/or objects. Rather, meanings of spatial-proxemic relationships are extended to include those between words/diction, letters, lines and even stanzas in the poem. Mugo uses such relations to evoke and clarify certain aesthetic dimensions of her imagined performance in the mind of the reader. Considering that within *My Mother's Poem*'s communicative system are both verbal and nonverbal signs, semiotics of space, therefore, functions as a means of non-linguistic communication to signal time-pause relationships as well as foreground regularly recurring structures such as refrain lines of stanzas or rhythm enhancing phonemes. A sensitive or 're-educated' eye recognizes that this is creative use of space and not mere representation of space (Hall 1966: 79-108) – by means of language or visual communication. Mugo therefore uses space to signal alternating vocal parts or possible choric material, key emphasis in certain sections or illustrate various kinesic features relevant to the pace or rhythm of the poem. First, I discuss how she uses space to suggest the interactive pattern between soloist-persona and audience-reader before examining how semiotics of space suggests pace of delivery.

The possibility I suggest is embodied in the typographical pattern of poems in this collection. In relation to antiphonal structure, I demonstrate how they are typographically implied using examples that adorn this collection – especially those which do not have explicitly marked out

refrains. I argue that implicit refrains may be deduced from the symmetrical arrangement of lines and overall structural parallelism which is consciously created. Although atypically lacking explicit choric part, some stanzas or groups of lines bear significant resemblance to refrains. It is the textual foregrounding in particular that I read as almost serving similar ends, visually. Undoubtedly, refrains are significant in keying performance by suggesting presence of audience or participants other than the soloist-persona. Two poems, "The Isle of Youth" and "We Will Rise and Build a Nation", illustrate this nuanced usage of space.

Written in memory of Cuba's 'vigorous' youth charged with 'infectious optimism' and hope, "The Isle of Youth" meticulously brings to the fore this structural symmetrical patterning. Although it may not explicitly spell out which are the 'calls' and which are 'responses', felicitous utilization of space implies this. Call-and-response pattern, and, therefore, performativity, is thus suggested not so much by the poet instructing the reader (using parenthesis for example) as by the medium or printed pages themselves. The concept of the page as a visual statement becomes evident as this example shows Mugo's manipulation of the physical dimension of the page to reveal the text's suggested multiple voicings:

I watched

America's economic blockade

helplessly float on the sea waters

of the undaunted Caribbean

I witnessed

the youth dance

in celebration

on the dry shores

...

I lay on my back

gazing at the sun

absorbing the sunshine

of revolutionary visions. (1994: 15-6)

One needs not strain to see that choric parts are clearly spelled out by graphological-typographic structure of the poem. As already mentioned, ideas of space appear as key creative elements of Mugo's poetry. The typographical layout or arrangement makes it possible for one to detect conscious effort being made towards patterning the text in a way that performance roles can be implicitly signalled or shared equitably in a live performance. There is an explicit gesture towards symmetrical patterning of lead-lines to be taken by the lead-performer and stanzaic fillers apparently reserved for the audience or chorus – and by implication, the reader. Similarly, a hardly solid left-hand margin is used to distinguish potential choric parts from the would-be lead parts.

In another poem without a readily noticeable refrain, it is evident both through frequency and typographical foregrounding that certain lines serve this purpose. "We Will Rise and Build a Nation" best illustrates this. Celebrating nationalism, the poem is written "in defiance of neo-colonial dictators" but starts by cataloguing events leading to such dictatorial regimes. The preamble is thus captured in five stanzas all beginning with the line "At independence", predicated by the three stanzas all beginning with "Under neo-colonialism" (1994: 69-70). One need not indicate that the purpose they serve in both instances cited has affinities with earlier mentioned cases, where they are explicitly marked. The last five stanzas play on structural parallelism and typography to emphasize the persona's optimism in the nation's future. Significant is the idea that "We will blast/convert/fly home/plough/rise" all act as variations of the parent-refrain expressing the aforesaid optimism and aspirations. From the foregoing discussion it is clear that there is a sense of certain overarching parallelism and harmony which is regularly interrupted structurally, aurally, and visually but maintaining a recognizable pattern. In my view, this overarching harmony may best be appreciated using Hall's notion of proxemics in its broadest sense. The manner in which Mugo utilizes space, therefore, evokes performativity.

Mugo's concept of the page as a visual statement, and awareness of the visual impact of the white spaces as silence is of significance. Since the blanks determine the type of reading the reader will perform on the text, I hold that the literary experience is richer as the verbal text is

augmented by spatial signifiers and iconography – to a lesser extent. Typographic characters are freed from the background and made part of the foregrounded meaning and hence, borrowing from Iser, an enriched poetry reading experience with far richer "semantic possibilities" of the text is formed while reading (1974: 285). Exploitation of typographical possibilities does not only help in suggesting choric poetic material, but goes further, affecting rhythmic aspects of the language, the pace of reading and the way attention is given to particular words or phrases and consequently, a broader range of configurative meanings signalled.

Apart from the shifting left-hand margin, Mugo plays with the arrangement of lines and the use of white space. This has formal repercussions on a poem's prosodic pattern as well as paralinguistic subtleness resulting from innovative use of space. Prosody of a poem, Hartman contends, is the poet's method of controlling the reader's temporal experience of the poem, especially his attention to that experience (1980: 13). This enhances the reading experience, suggesting the rate of delivery, rhythmic and stress patterns. Other than general textual arrangement, quite striking in this collection is the length of the lines. Although it contributes to the earlier mentioned spread on page, it has significant implication on the text's realization, and eventual decoding process. The preponderance of relatively shorter lines, mostly ranging between one- to three-word lines is a significant departure from most modern African poetry and is peculiar to performance poetry. It is a departure in the sense that, generally, a poem is a poem, as Davidson (2007: 125) rightly points out, "because it looks like one." Modern African poetic tradition has taught its reader/s to expect that a poem should consist of lines, arranged into verses, normally stopping before the right-hand margin – except in free verse form. To a very large extent, Mugo's collection deviates from such generic patterning.

Of the eighteen poems in this collection, only two poems depart from the otherwise generic trend I focus on in this discussion; "Mother Afrika's Matriots" and the closing poem, "Prosaic Poem", both of which deploy relatively elongated lines. Whereas some sections of the former and most of the latter use five words or more per line, the rest of the collection is pervaded by clusters of four-word (or less) lines. This in my view is indicative of the collection's focus on performance, suggesting the inherent performative potentialities I foreground. The effect is that the text hits the eye right away, affecting our reading of the particular poem. In other words, this tends to foreground, specialize, extend and sharpen the text, hence an undeniably livelier interaction in

the course of reading. Snippets from "Intellectuals or Imposters?", "The Pan-Afrikanist Poem", "Mother Afrika's Matriots" and a stanza from the "Prosaic Poem" will suffice to illustrate this departure. Typically spread on the page, "Intellectuals or Imposters?" rarely uses lines of more than four words. Stressing the distance between her two subjects, Mugo deploys shorter, more dramatic and rakish lines to make her message congruent with the urgency in delivery:

When problems

translate into

deep seas

deep seas

daring

philosophical diving

deep seas

daring

skills in

floating

swimming

surfacing

show me those

who emerge

treading water

walking the shores

breathing courage (1994: 20)

Not only do the stanzas attempt to make maximum use of page-space but indeed limit line length to less than five words in each line. Glaring is the fact that the left-hand margin keeps alternating and shifting as the poem progresses creating the impression of fragmentariness, especially in terms of visual landscape. This spatial distribution of material on the page creates a text that specifically and explicitly disrupts the reading process in a normative structured way. The reader's eye is engagingly thrown backwards and forwards across the page and thereby

getting actively immersed in the process. At one level, the departure enables 'performance' or makes reading deviate from the ordinary – more often than not cursory glances. Overall, the reading experience is specialized and made more effective as the reader does not have to negotiate through winding lines, which burden the listener's patience if read aloud. The fewer phonemes imply smaller units of meaning which reach intended audience with minimal distortions.[184] One may argue that the simplification of textual structure and content is deliberate as extra-textual features of performance will compensate for any inadequacies. At another level, however, this departure disrupts timing of the performance of the poem. Shorter lines suggest urgency during oral delivery and, therefore, faster rate in realization, as opposed to lengthy constructions. For example, in a poem originally composed for the 50th birthday of brother James Turner extolling vanguards of Afrikana Studies,[185] "The Pan-Afrikanist Poem", the longest lines do not exceed five words. One-, two- and three-word lines proliferate;

Comrade

when you

took hold of the dynamite

and strategically exploded

the invaders' fortified castles

founded on historical lies,

me

your sister

balanced on

my level head

a *makuti* basket

[184] It has been argued that texts for oral delivery often have relatively shorter lines as mnemonic cues.

[185] A professor of African and African American Politics and Social Policy at Cornell, James Turner founded the Africana Studies and Research Centre in 1969 and organized Cornell's Council on African Studies. He credited for having initiated the term "Africana Studies" which Mugo realizes in this collection as 'Afrikana studies' – that is, the comprehensive study of the African diaspora and the three primary global Black communities - Africa, North America, and the Caribbean grounded on an interdisciplinary approach to African Studies and field of Black studies.

skilfully crafted

a *makuti* basket

heaving with

luscious fruit.

This pattern significantly influences the reading process and pace of decoding. The brevity implies a relatively faster rhythm which, arguably, renders the process more dramatic. This is also observable in poems such as "The Unknown Combatant's Poem" where Mugo alternates between lengthy and one-word lines, considerably engaging the reader's attention. The cumulative emphasis she aims to project aptly culminates in the exclamatory ("as a rock!"), suggesting paralinguistic nuances on how the line ought to be realized. The optimism in tone of the message is thus echoed in line-patterning as the 'combatants' of Mugo's imagined 'motherland' appear stubbornly determined and 'unshakable' in the face of adversary forces;

But the soul

of the being in us

remains

untouched

unmoved

unbent

obstinate

grounded

as a rock! (1994: 61)

This congruence in message and line-patterning aimed at reinforcing the emphasis achieved through diction is a common feature in the poem and collection in general. Mugo creates a sort of overall parallelism using this alternating arrangement of lines. From "the rock/standing/defiant/unbroken/unbreakable", "mother Afrika's children/born/unborn/stillborn", the soul 'remaining' "untouched/unnerved/unbroken/unbreakable!" (1994: 62) to "clawed/by ugly/clutching/venomous/apartheid/fangs" (1994: 63), this trend is definitive of her poetics.

When arranged vertically as they are in the collection, the white space surrounding the single-word lines creates blocks of texts which give the impression of well ordered, solid material – and compliment the idea conveyed in words. Their prominence on the printed page also adds emphasis and thematic thrust to the social message. It is such 'structured blanks' and blocks of the text which as Iser argues, "stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on the terms set by the text" (1974: 285). Such distribution of textual blocks on page also suggests a multiplicity of thematic perspectives or identities.

On the contrary, however, some of the exceptions mentioned rely on relatively longer prosodic patterning which makes oral delivery less dramatic or cumbersome – but appropriate for the particular message they bear. In a praise-like poem gesturing Mugo's concerted efforts towards 'engendering Pan-Africanism', the persona in "Mother Afrika's Matriots" makes use of relatively longer lines as she lauds the various 'matriots'. Apart from the opening and closing sections which are made up of typical short lines, the body of the poem – dedicated to various female personalities in each stanza – constitutes seventeen stanzas separated by refrains. The winding lines relatively slow down pace of reading, demanding from the reader closer attention to the subject being revered. In a stanza celebrating a renowned abolitionist whose book, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831),[186] which had a galvanizing effect on the anti-slavery movement, Mugo writes:

> Mary Prince, fearless daughter of sustaining African soil
> who spat on the virulent crumb-eating housenigger cult
> burning with each stroke of her pen Caribbea's slave-ridden
> fields. (1994: 31)

The book just mentioned is the product of the 'pen' in the third line above. Less action or dramatization is suggested as longer lines slow the pace of delivery. Mugo uses punctuations (commas) and compounding of lexical items ("crumb-eating housenigger", "slave-ridden") to manipulate the reader's realization of the stanza and therefore enhance its genteel rhythmic rendition. Such lengthy sentences demand that attention is focused on the identified rare

[186] The book is an extraordinary testament of ill-treatment and survival. Being the first account of a black woman's life to be published in Britain, it is largely considered as a protest and a rallying-cry for emancipation – in the process provoking two libel actions. It is her significant contribution to early black writing and general resilient nature that Mugo celebrates. The account offers a glimpse into the lives of enslaved men and women whose life stories cannot be traced.

qualities of the subject – which may not be possible in short, chant-like formations. This relative sluggish pace is equally evident in "Prosaic Poem". As the title correctly suggests, this poem contests generic classifications and in particular, the poem-prose distinctions. I hinted in the introduction that this blurring of boundaries (between genres; and metaphorically, between the 'kitchen' and the 'bedroom') is one of Mugo's central ideological preoccupations.[187] Made up of eight regular seven-line stanzas with each introduced and closed by the refrain "one day", the poem mostly features longer lines. "One day," she writes:

> we shall exterminate the short distance between
> the kitchen and bedroom of our lives, storm out
> of suffocating space between the factory and
> the overseer of our exploited creative labour,
> paving a path that leads to the buried mines of
> our suppressed human poetential. We shall walk it
> if it stretches unto eternity. (1994: 84)

By vowing to "exterminate the short distance between" the public and the private (or kitchen and bedroom), Mugo proposes to dissolve the fragile boundaries separating what she calls "ordinary human dialogue" from poetry, more private oriented 'reading' from relatively 'performance', poetry and song or prose and, related to her 'gendered' ideological inclinations, masculine spaces from those regarded as feminist. Besides dialogic relations across the 'patriot'-'matriot' and masculine-feminine divide, Mugo interrogates the boundary between form and content, between prosodic patterns and meanings which may be read into the poem. A sort of hidden dialogue is, therefore, embedded in her poetic canvas.

Related to prosody is the resultant typographic layout of the text on the page. Aiming at effective communication, Mugo departs from the ordinary, expected typographic to use compelling yet lucid patterns in this collection. Significantly, the arrangement of lines within a poem affects the sound of the poem often by emphatically privileging certain words or syllables and, therefore, suggesting particular rhythms and pauses. Put differently, the appearance of a poem more often than not affects or prefigures its reading. Consequently, the arrangement influences the actual rendition or performance. A flip through the pages give one the feeling of a somewhat free yet controlled arrangement, achieved by means of spatially organized

[187] Mugo talks of commemorating "those moments when we make prosaic statements that end up sounding poetic and then we are reminded that ordinary human dialogue is often punctuated with poetry" (1994: 83). This is what she calls the human 'poetential'.

typographical word-play or ordering. I read this as a move in the direction of post-modernist experiment with typography. However, as much as she has the liberty to organise the lines and stanzas as she wishes, Mugo seems to operate within a certain underlying control or restraint. She exhibits the 'heightened awareness' of the pattern she is cultivating, giving this arrangement special attention. Mugo exercises a great deal of typographic freedom and individuality hitherto alien to East African poetry in English.

The result of such graphological experiments is the multiplication of layers of meaning, rendering the poem subtler and accentuating its meanings. The text is richer as meaning making goes beyond the verbal dimension. As the collection makes explicit, the visual arrangement and fragmented syntax portends a range of non-verbal meanings which, as Davidson correctly argues, add to the verbal material and that, together, produce a variety of readings and a variety of potential meanings (2007: 129), what I read as multiplicity of configurative meanings. By making semantic use of space, Mugo creates a kind of cinematic impact in the layout rendering text reading a somewhat heightened, lively and engaging experience. I describe it as more lively because one encounters 'infinite shock' or the element of surprise (based on his or expectations of modern poetry's conventions) as s/he reads through the text. To appreciate the argument being advanced, Iser's (1974) idea that whenever a "flow is interrupted" and the reader/s is "led off in unexpected directions", an opportunity is availed to him/her to bring into play their own faculty for establishing connections (1974: 280). By connecting what is said to how it is presented in print, the dialogic relations hinted at earlier are fostered. For example, while insisting that the beautiful ones have been born, Mugo plays with tense to underscore this ubiquity of beauty. She writes that "the beautiful ones/were born/have been born/are born/will be born" (1994: 14) affirming the apparent omnipresence of beauty. Emphasizing this further, the lines that follow graphically demonstrate or insinuate this ubiquity in their characteristic spread and arrangement. The message is in the pattern, in as much as it is in the diction. Using Priscilla as the symbol of this beauty, note how this emphasis is visually achieved:

One Priscilla

two Priscillas

ten Priscillas

Priscillas upon

Priscillas

upon

Generations of Priscillas (1994: 14)

Evident above is Mugo's typographically experimental poetics, which, for instance, if it is said 'These words are crashing', then the words would be actually crashing letter by letter down the page, to the end of the page in order to convey that. In Iser's words, the literary text activates the reader's (own) faculties enabling them to recreate the world it presents (1974: 279). The reader thus 'recreates' this overwhelming presence in the mind much more graphically than when no effort is made to elucidate this beyond verbal content. The products of such typographic experiments and creative innovation remain potential and therefore what Iser designates as "the virtual dimension of the text", text in this particularly referring to the performance, endowing it with its reality (1974: 279) as perceived by the reader. The visual-graphic dimension is used to corroborate poetic words' poignancy since what is mentioned resonates in the resulting typographic pattern. This is the case in "The Woman's Poem" where Mugo envisions, or as she puts it, "imaginis" ('imagines') a progressive march upon being 'freed', 'unbound', 'unfettered', 'liberated'. Indeed, the spatially dispersed words and lines visualize this when she writes:

piloting

our own

history

forward

forward

forward

advancing

advancing

advancing! (1994: 46)

The (re)presentation is made more appealing to the reader's eye often used to conventionalized conservative metric patterning of lines and stanzas. In particular, it is this "subtle play between

expectation and surprise" and the underlying "unpredictability of creation" (Bunyan 1989: xii) or patterning that endows the work its unique aesthetic efficacy, more rewarding reading experience with multiple layers of signification. Through the visual dimension, words and lines can at best, therefore, become physically part of what the poet is conveying. My reading of the pattern above is that there seems to be some imaginary border being transgressed, as suggested by this spatial distribution. Although they can unobtrusively have little effect upon what she has to say, for the reader of contemporary African poetry with 're-educated' eyes and ears, such gestures render would-be dull and passive experiences more engaging. The resulting 'active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection' aroused by such patterns significantly transforms the reader's experience of the text. In this collection, such instances afford the poet a wider semantic range since space adds another layer of signification. Mugo's poetry thus offers polysemantic possibilities due to the polysemantic nature of her texts. The visual weight of words is manipulated and handled so organically in relation to meaning that it typography becomes part of and augments the signification layers.

As I have insisted, this is not limited to mere fanciful presentation. Merely decorative typography (in, for example, the visual/concrete poems) is as undesirable as the merely decorative word in the traditional or conventional poem. Rather, as used in Mugo's case, it supplements the poetic statement she aims to make. Performance and performativity should not be confined to live encounters only since texture may be presented in such a way that it almost 'comes out of the page' demanding the more active participation of the reader. This possibility is embedded in the text's structures and textualities as much as the reader is crucial in the decoding process. If performance is taken as active dialogic relations between performer and audience, then to bring Mugo's poetry to fruition demands the reader's imagination, which gives shape to the interaction between verbal and nonverbal dimensions of the text. I view meanings embedded in spatial metaphors as 'gaps' left by the text itself (Iser 1974: 280) with the author's agency, purposely to compel the reader to go an extra step in deciphering meanings and nuances of the poem. The spaces or 'unwritten parts' are aesthetically used to create dramatic pauses or emphasis, slowing or hastening the pace hence giving different delivery rates and musical flow. They "stimulate[s] the reader's creative participation" (Iser 1974: 276) by suggestively guiding the reading process. The poem, therefore, is not just a text to be read as in conventional

discourse, but rather, as an artistic arrangement of layered signifiers. In such cases, language functions primarily on an aesthetic level since communication of meaning sometimes plays a merely subsidiary role (Florence 1986: 2).

If with a literary text the reader 'can only picture things which are not there' as Iser (1974: 283) theorizes, then text conceived as Mugo's introduces a lively dialogue between the written and the unwritten part, allowing the reader the opportunity not just to picture things but engage with meanings issuing from juxtaposing voice and silence; graphic and phonic; orthography and graphic space/layout – hence enriching what Iser calls 'configurative meaning'. Contemporary unrhymed poetry uses the placement of words on the page to give a larger sense of the relationship between words and phrases, both in silent reading and in reading aloud. The blank areas or white spaces that result serve aesthetic purposes as is evident in "The Unknown Combatant's Poem" and even more extensively in "Plant a Tree". Of significance is the fact that it makes the reading experience transcend the ordinary as it heightens imaginations, hence the act of expression is reconfigured and enhanced. Its density and breadth of meaning exceeds the ordinary. Undeniably, this text is more evocative than 'conventional' ones to the extent that space is engaged with creatively. This dispersal of material throughout the page definitely interferes with the flow of the reading process and hence opens the text to multiple possibilities. An obvious possibility being the number of dialogic layers such consciousness introduces to the text. Hints of action or movement are discernible in what I call a literal graphic treatment of diction/lines achieved through illustrative typography. Arguably, some dramatic subtleness is thus breathed into the page, elevating the otherwise dull experience (in terms of duration through stress, rhythm and pace) to relative liveliness; the warm engaging aura of performance is appropriated by the choices the reader is compelled to make. Space on the page becomes part of the rhythm of the reading/performing of the poem. How subtly a sensitive typographical reading of a poem can heighten its meaning without in any way destroying the poet's original conceptualization of verbal dimension and relationships is what I regard as potentially performative. Her works elide or tampers with familiar modalities of prosody and hitherto other received conventions associated with poetry.

Keying Perfomance Potentials Metaphorically

The above conclusion provides a befitting transition to the final and more 'metaphoric' realm. Mugo metaphorically conscripts the reader in a position to decode her poetic intentions or message. To this end, she employs figurative language, statements and gestures to suggest presence and immediacy of readers – and by extension, the audience. I have pointed out elsewhere in this thesis that the idea of performance inherent in 'song' is absent in the word 'poetry' (Nagy 1996: 2). It is significant that this collection is conceived as a collection of songs. This is evident right from the title: It is "My Mother's Poem", and several other songs. What the title therefore suggests is that this is a collection of songs – whose hallmark feature is often the antiphonal, choric-soloist pattern and various other definitive features discussed in Chapter Five. This view is later affirmed by the subtitle 'songs and poems'. It is worth noting the precedence she gives songs as this explains the structural patterns she deploys in this collection as well other aspects already highlighthed. Further, the blurred line between 'song' and 'poem' becomes evident in poems such as "In Praise of Afrika's Children" where the refrain "I want to Sing" and persistent rhetorical question "[...] what song/dance shall I sing/dance?" (1994: 4-11) quite effortlessly becomes "what poem shall I compose". The elusive interstitial between these two art forms is signalled in:

> What poem
>
> shall I compose?
>
> Oh, what song
>
> shall I sing? (1994: 8)

Once poetry is conflated with song, and its composition with singing, then the stage is set for a performance. Designating a text as a song serves to imply its destination in performance, as opposed to a 'poem' which appears contented on page.

The song Mugo's persona vows to 'sing' demonstrates the metaphorically transcendent nature of her poetry. In a series of possible ontological accomplishments that this 'song' promises, Mugo writes that the poem/song is one "exploded with feelings", "bursting with laughter", "flowering with beauty", "caressing with tenderness", "embalmed with sweetness" and "soothing with comfort" (1994: 10) – also evoking song's parallel structure. Such possibilities are not limited to

'song'. In the title poem, metaphoric possibilities are envisioned in the final section where the once tormented persona is rekindled after calling the mother. Quite stunningly, Mugo writes:

> The sun shone through
>
> the telephone line
>
> its warmth
>
> and brightness
>
> lifted the mist
>
> that bogged down
>
> my vision. (1994: 82)

Conclusion

As this chapter sought to illustrate, the tradition of performance and drama have immensely impressed upon modern African poets who exploit the genre's resources even when using print medium. I have demonstrated how contemporary poets, in particular Mugo, imagine the page as a site of performance no less interactive than live (or recorded) variants of performance. The presence of diverse parallelisms, antiphonal structures signalled on the page diversely and various forms of stressing (and repetition) as well semiotic use of space reinforces and accentuates the performance aspect that is definitive of recent African poetry. This chapter privileged performance as the centre of an alternative analytical paradigm for contemporary African poetry's composition. I have traced the roots of this trend, whose main characteristic is the shift from written verse to the live stage, to the late 1970s when concerted efforts were made to incline African poetry towards a 'highly oral style', which in most cases translates to a poetry laden with performance potentials. Besides rupturing the boundary between poetry and drama, Mugo also challenges the issue of prose and poetry as fixed essences as often conventionally defined by generic rules. Besides the emphasis on performing poetry, what this proclivity implies in written medium is the blurring of the boundary between literary genres such as song, music, drama, poetry and oral tales.

Mugo's poetics and in particular the privileging of performativity, provides a contrastive enabler for reading the alternative school, and its focus on rupturing the boundary between poetry and

drama. Both, therefore, challenge the belief that prose and poetry are fixed essences defined by generic rules. As infiltrations and fragile boundaries have suggested, tensions between poetic and dramatic modes and forms prevalent in contemporary poetics engender a unique poetics and texture – with emphasis on the dramatic dimensions. Like her contemporaries, Mugo's poetry interrogates and challenges the view that contemplative reading is impossible within modern African poetry – and hence questions foundational poetics predilection towards reflective-meditative mode. In other words, a poetry written and designed 'purely' for reading is increasingly being transgressed as the performative aspect profoundly defines and shapes the contemporary African poem. The trend in contemporary poetry, therefore, is that a poetics which makes demand on both the eye and ear is noticeably being entrenched. The contemporary African poem, through its form, challenges the idea that there is a sense of a final, complete or correct reading somewhere within the text. It also transforms the reading experience into a virtual performance. As poems in the collection examined reveal, each poem-text lends itself to, and encourages, diverse readings or performances. Through this idea of a reading, whether private/silent or public, as a performance – something with a particular duration and process – this study has located Mugo's work as print-performance laden with potentialities of live performance. In line with Davidson's perspective, the idea of reading has been envisaged as being a different performance that has enabled a more detailed engagement with Mugo's works – often neglected in the criticism of modern African poetry in general. To arrive at such a rich and multi-layered text, Mugo employs a unique approach in terms of narrative strategy. The potential reader or audience is 'hailed' by the stylistics she deploys, such that the text invites the reader or audience into a performance signalled by the 'various keyings' I have discussed. The manner of presentation (in print) acts to persuade the target audience to adopt the ways of thinking of its creator which is the core of most performances. Next I make a summative account of all the foregoing arguments.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS: THE EAST-WEST DIALOGUE: A COMPARATIVE READING OF CONTEMPORARY POETRY

This section is an appraisal of (dis)similarities or (dis)continuities across East and West Africa, locating them within the grid I drew in the introduction. In broad strokes, I give a summative account of arguments I have made in the preceding five chapters with a focus on ascertaining whether a distinct and identifiable West African or East African poetry exists. The contemporary context – temporally defined as the post 1980s – characterized by multifarious dialogues, dialogic and intertextual relations between and betwixt poetry generations, literary regions and texts ensures that what may have started as distinct, region-specific poetry has evolved into the contemporary poetic discourses with minimal region-peculiarities. As modern African poetry evolves, strategic 'texts' initially confined to West or East Africa increasingly circulate freely unrestricted by institutional or structural specifities. From the theoretical frame employed, this may be explained by the fact that poetic discourses explicitly acknowledge that they are defined by their relationship to others, such that East African poetry responds to, and even anticipates responses from its West African counterpart. I have argued that there need not be explicit intertextual relations; that even when produced by a 'solitary speaker' – in this case, East/West African region, the poetry still typically "includes language derived" not just from a 'socially diverse discursive formation' but as I have argued, an econo-political as well as intellectual environment. This section, therefore, sums up by drawing conclusions from the present-absences noted, starting with Afrocentricity discourses and Black aesthetics, preoccupation with contemporary conditions of existence and the thin line between activism and creative writing, Swahili literary tradition and the dialogue between poetry and storytelling genre, the ambivalent persona that is both 'I' and 'We' as well as neither, polyvocality in contemporary poetry, the choric component, redefinition of publishing (double, press, online, printedness and 'oral'), performance and the interplay between silence and voice on page. Contemporary poetry is best appreciated as engaged in concerted efforts toward 'homecoming'; from Anyidoho's double publishing, Osundare's songs of and for the season, Mugo's performativity, attempts to 'reach' p'Bitek mediated by *Song of Lawino* as well as storytelling poetics which dialogically engages conceptualization of the genre in oral discourse. Running through contemporary African poetry are conscious and concerted efforts to conceive the art in such a way as to bridge this gap and reunite the text with the assumed 'ideal' – hence hybrid.

The nexus of this study has been the 'song' in its diverse manifestations within contemporary African poetry; from song on the page, on CD-ROM, in newspapers and as dramatized in written texts I have called song school. Central to this comparative endeavour was the thesis that while the affinities may be attributed to dialogues instantiated by actual 'crossing' of structural and institutional factors such as conferences (Kampala 1962), scholars (Beier/Gurr/Lindfors/p'Bitek), journals (*Transition* and *Black Orpheus*), publishing firms (Heinemann/AWS), and the overall British-English root, the dissimilarities stem from distinct contextual backgrounds the poetry voices or issues from. While West Africa's proximity to Francophone (as well as Negritudist) discourses and relics or 'wounds' of trans-Atlantic slave trade (Black experience and aesthetics) ensure much closer intertextual ties to African diasporic literature, East Africa's Swahili culture and p'Bitek's poetics inscribe fundamental differences in aesthetics. Although intertextual and dialogic relations may not be as explicit as I have suggested in this study, it is evident that each region examined manifests and articulates awareness of the 'other's poetics as dialogism presupposes. Afrocentrist discourses provide a sort of homogenizing force for contemporary African poetry. I have argued that such flattening of regional differences in poetics is in contemporary times achieved more effectively by the diasporic element – what I have described as mediated indigenous African poetics.

The relationship with Black American poetry offers a yardstick for comparatively analyzing and appreciating contemporary African poetry. The result of physical relocations into America, and other Western destinations, is that a particular poet is brought into more intimate relations (contact) with African American discourses. Although I have hinted that most, however, encounter this 'megatext' through formal education, pronounced cases such as Anyidoho's often result from frequent sojourns in America and the West in general. However, first – and related to the preceding point, it is, therefore, expected that since the destination of most West African poets is America, the proxy to African American intellectual life often dialogically shapes their poetics. Inescapably, West Africa is thus expected to show frequent intertextual dialogues with Black aesthetics in general as the case of Anyidoho attests. This predilection issues from more than just contacts with African American experiences.

Anglophone West Africa's proximity to the hub of Francophone Negritude writers significantly reconfigures its poetic output in English. Indeed, the provenance of Anglophone poetry cannot

be understood independent of the developments in the French capital, Paris. The relations between these two recall Bakhtinian dialogism: It is a case of one triggering the other (whether directly or indirectly). Francophone writers provide a rich text for Anglophone poets in Africa – more so to West African poets due to minimal influence of France in East Africa. This is why Gerard traces the origins or the "explosion" of African writing in European languages after World War II to the developments in Paris. In particular, he singles out the elaboration of the Negritude ideology by two black students[188] in Paris as a powerful catalyst for the hopes and energies of French-speaking black intellectuals – and collaterally, poets using English. Much of this Francophone writing acted as a challenge to their English-speaking creative counterparts and intellectuals in West Africa. In turn, this significantly encouraged black writers of English expression. As a text, therefore, Francophone writing functions dialogically in a Bakhtinian sense to affect production of poetry in Anglophone Africa – accounting for the relatively early sprouting and larger output in West Africa. Similarly, Black Consciousness movements (1940s – 1960s) together with attendant Black aesthetics – especially as conceived in the revolutionized syllabus in East Africa and as the stark reminders in West Africa or frequent pilgrimages by African American scholars and intellectuals attest provide centripetal-centrifugal forces that re-orient contemporary African poetry and its poetics diversely. The examples of Anyidoho and Mugo have demonstrated that while East Africa is only influenced thematically, West Africa embraces the 'song of sorrow' motif both in form and content. I also pointed out that much of West African poetry evolves from a common origin – either the wounds of slavery or bleak contemporary political experiences. Contemporary poetry has developed beyond the Negritudist foundational philosophy that propelled much of pioneer modern African poetry.

It is no longer tenable in contemporary Africa to talk of the kind of differences critics such as David Rubadiri (1972) made regarding preoccupation with immediate socio-political issues or lack of sympathy for the romantic vision of negritude as a distinguishing feature between East and West African poetry. Recent poetry from West Africa, as examples of Osundare and Anyidoho testify to, shuns what Rubadiri saw as "very dangerous" Negritudist inclinations whose final result is to press down the creative spirit (Killam 1972: 144). The emergence of an alternative poetics defined by aesthetics of pain in contemporary times makes such distinctions

[188] Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor among others.

invalid. Thus, although Rubadiri, Abdul Yesufu (1985) and Jones and Jones (1996) consider the works of East African poets (like Jared Angira and Richard Ntiru among others) as avowedly focused on the here-and-now socio-political and existential economic challenges in their poetry,[189] I have demonstrated using *Songs of the Season* that contemporary West African poets are equally preoccupied with such realities. Negritude's celebratory and nostalgic 'back-ward'[190] glance that underpinned much of foundational poetry has given way to the dominance of threnody in contemporary poetics. Contemporary poets, whether in East or West Africa, opt to cultivate an acute sense of meaning in their poetry and are "clearly focused on a living social reality", "social lapses" as well as "the results of these defects on the overall social order" (Yesefu 1985: 170). In this focus, East African poetry examined in Chapter Three relies on the story telling mode while its West African counterpart deploys various mechanics of prose – as well as journalistic discourses. Similarly, as is evident in *Boundless Voices* and other anthologies, negritude as an aesthetic philosophy is not confined to foundational West African poetry. Although Arthur Luvai (1988) counters Rubadiri's view (that the philosophy made minimal inroads into East Africa), my conclusion is that despite not being announced explicitly, tenets of this ideology are discernible in contemporary poetry from the region. As explicated in Chapter Three, Four and Five, proclivity towards exposing and commenting on such ills in the society as economic disparity, social and political corruption, sexual immorality, deculturalization, and the paradox of political independence (Yesufu 1985: 170) thematically underpin contemporary poetry. The "bitter and almost pessimistic vignettes of lapses in social order" Yesefu associates with Angira are discernible in the works of most contemporary West African poets – what was described as the 'aesthetics of pain'. Operating on the liminal of activism and creative writing, contemporary poets are united in their call for an end to the inept

[189] Yesufu observes that Richard Ntiru "operates along a line similar to that of his contemporary Jared Angira" (1985: 32) which is with characteristic sympathy for the destitute or 'paupers' of his society, (but lacking his characteristic language typified by revolutionary zeal). Beside the moral concern, Ntiru is preoccupied "not with revolution" but with the exposition of human failure and need to reverse its trend (1985: 33). This is also evident in many of the poems included in the region's anthologies.

[190] Which shows affinities with the *Sankofa* paradigm propounded by Anyidoho and Awoonor. In the contemporary era, a Negritudist vision may be seen as a "means to move forward" (Ngara 1990: 177) or, as Osundare puts it, "looking back is looking forward" (1986: x) while engaging with the intricate dialectics of human living.

and corruption laden contemporary political order, expressing more of the class conflict in the continent.

The kernel of critical exploration in Chapter Three, that is, how Swahili oral traditions (a significant part of *mashairi* poetics) dialogically and intertextually function as important nourishing grounds for most East African poets, provides the springboard to analysis of dialogism and dialogic relations with oral discourses or 'feeding from below'. Besides storytelling, I have demonstrated the extra-ordinary significance of poetry in Swahili society[191] and how the tradition offers itself as a potent model for the genre in English. Not only are public performances a common event but poems take a good portion of daily publications, especially Kiswahili newspapers[192] which ordinarily are read to the public via different modes (radio, palavers or public gatherings (*barazas*). This means that one is more likely to stumble on Swahili models than their English counterparts. Considering the facility and rapidity with which 'up-country' poets of non ethnic-Swahili origins and, in many cases non-Muslim religious background adapt, dialogue and intertextually engage with *mashairi* tradition to their immediate and local concerns, I have argued that this dialogism and intertextual dialogue is possible across the linguistic medium affecting poets using English. Judging from how East African poets engage with English as their poetic medium, I have concluded that they are informed by the *mashairi* poetics. While in West Africa, the resurgence of privileging content over form is part of the larger recourse to oral roots after straying into the confines of the ivory tower in the hands of the foundational generation of poets, it is a continuation of a prevailing poetry tradition in East Africa.

From foundational West African poetry's highly condensed poetic language infused with the intricate interweaving of images, metaphors and symbols - especially those inspired by Ibadan school of poetry - the contemporary generation has taken a radical shift to the so-called alternative poetics. The relationship between individual contemporary poets and the poetic tradition in West Africa is best captured in the coinage 'alter-native' which implies a radical

[191] See Middleton (1992: 188, 190) for a brief description of the role poetry plays in the life of the Swahili; Shariff's *Tungo Zetu* (1988) is also important here. Furthermore, a great deal of poetry is composed in nonstandard dialects. Swahili poetry is also stylistically complicated and unfamiliar, largely because it has been unstudied and left to specialists and to the Swahili, for whom the tradition is central.

[192] In particular *Baraza*, *Kiongozi Uhuru* in addition to weekly radio programmes aired regularly on Tanzania and Kenyan broadcast airwaves.

departure and contra-relation to preceding poetics or traditions – unlike contemporary East African poetry which, as I have argued in Chapter Five, is marked by notable continuities. East African poetry took off from a predominantly narrative texture, combining the narrative lyric with meditative poetics. In the Swahili poetic tradition, and most of oral poetry in the region from which it feeds in contemporary times, the genre is not conceived as a uniquely heightened literary experience but rather thrives on a different praxis. This is why once poetry is understood from *mashairi* perspective – as poems anthologized in *Summons* do, it tends to lean towards a predominantly descriptive tone often achieved through verbal dexterity. I have thus concluded that whereas East African poetry, in particular that written by poets from Tanzania, shows a preference for narrative mode, West African poetry on the other hand, as the examples of Kofi Anyidoho and Niyi Osundare demonstrate, leans towards more nuanced deployment of storytelling structures. The subtleness stems from their efforts to expand ideas derived from the oral tale traditions into wider contexts to generate intellectual responses. In other words, these poets rely not solely on storytelling, but rather on what Otiono (2007) calls the mechanics of prose, that is, the storytelling imperative of prose. East African poetry's preference for the storyline, or structure with descriptive details is contrasted with the dense metaphoric style of much of English poetics as practiced and interpreted by most foundational West African poetry. Central to this argument is the view that although poetry may tell a story, how the telling is accomplished is not always the same. It is the success in marrying the telling with highly imagistic, multi-layered metaphorical and highly allusive language, blistering lyricism and arresting expressions that I have argued is relatively deficient in East African poetry examined. Interspersing poetry with snippets of folktales is a common practice in contemporary poetics. However, although contemporary poets tell stories using poetic medium, the manner in which they effectively accomplish this is considerably different from that discussed in relation to East African poetry.

While contemporary East African poets rely on narrative elements to make their poems tell stories often with an explicit moral lesson for the audience, heavily relying on descriptive language - and a passion for divulging as much detail as possible - rendering their poetics in accessible and relatively uncomplicated imagery, diction and structure, contemporary West African poets on the other hand poeticize the oral narrative form in their poetry. The poem is

thus not just poetic thoughts presented in narrative form but a collection of various tales rendered with poetic devices and imbued with semantic overloads typical of poetic lines. A distinction was thus made between attempts to merely tell a story using poetry's versified form on the one hand, and building into poetic lines of folktales in snippety forms on the other. Some lines constituting a poem are intertextually drawn from the well-known oral narrative repertoire. Words, phrases and images are lifted from an existing oral-textual repertoire but reworked to conform to poetic metre adopted. Certain stock fable-tale characters are woven into contemporary poetic texts. Such a strategy allows poets to remain firmly within the 'canon',[193] while still appropriating story telling elements associated with African literary traditions. The telling is not only aesthetically appealing but inventively and intertextually engages the art of narrative-tales. For most West African contemporary poets, the story form does not just function as a device for 'Africanizing' poetic mediations but as a technique, medium and mode of rendering poetic imaginations. While the examples from *Summons* have demonstrated how East African poetry mostly relies on descriptive language – suggested by indicators of narration, that is, devices suggesting sequence - West African poets such as Osundare and Anyidoho employ subtle dialogues with the genre to not only advance moral lessons but also to complicate and imbue their poems with textual richness. Using a fluid persona for instance, West African poetry is distinguished by the intricate manner in which the narrative voices shift, lacing the dialogue with an omniscient-persona perspective. This is not the case with East African poetry where indicators of narration allude to a certain lurking plot, with poetic verses doubling as minimal narrative units.

By taking proverbs as highly summarized stories, I have also traced the major difference in the manner narratives are incorporated into poem texts. The frequency and manner in which proverbs or story motifs are reworked into poetic lines in West African poetry significantly differs from East Africa. This is why I have concluded that folktales form a significant gamut from which West Africa's poetic material is drawn, and hence the narrative element is transposed or aurally mediated. Hence, despite the Ewe dirge tradition constituting an intrinsic

[193] Canon is here defined not as a body of texts that has been fixed and set apart, reified as it were as monuments of a collective sensibility and imagination, expressive of a structure of feeling itself determined by a profound correspondence between experience and imagination (Irele 2001: 11), but loosely as that adhering to Eurocentric formalistic perspectives and expectations.

element in contemporary poetry (by inscribing a meditative, reflective and lamentative texture) – especially in the hands of Anyidoho, storytelling devices or mechanics of prose dialogue with the former for richer and hybrid poem texts. Even when explicitly drawing from oral tales, contemporary West African poets do not rely on mere channelling of poetic material in story/narrative form, or organizing a poem around minimal narrative units that unfold as a story in the manner in which most oral songs do. Rather, poets make folktale snippets compliment their poetic material largely within the poetic form. Fables are woven into a poem's texture to illustrate and reinforce the message. Parts of oral tales/texts travel into poetry so that they do not necessarily tell a story (in the poem) but rather reinforce a poem's thematics – and hence a single poem may make use of five or more different tales but all are overarchingly unified by a common theme. Instead of revolving around a central image as I have illustrated in Chapter Three for example, Anyidoho deploys a series of parallel opposing images. Overall, the poem is not a tale the persona wants to tell but rather is drawn upon as a text reinforcing poetic message. In some summarized versions presented as quoting a character in a folktale, contemporary West African poets do not have to assume – like their East African counterparts – a typical narrative voice, sometimes using an omniscient narrator. Ingeniously, the same material is delivered but through a persona who speaks, showcasing his or her knowledge of oral tales and using them for poetic ends. Retaining his or her position as a poetic persona (as opposed to assuming the role of an oral narrator), the poets intertextually link their texts to the oral repertoire. Through strategic and ingenious use of the personal voice in a way that widens its horizons, for example, Anyidoho is able to achieve lyricism by organizing verse in a way that it has what Ngara calls an incantatory and mournful effect (1990: 173). The reflective meditations often render the poem enthusing, avoiding a simplistic recounting of events. Definitively, therefore, it is the conceptualization of the poetic voice that occasions the striking differences observable in contemporary African poetry from the two regions under scrutiny. West African poets are generally quite sparing in divulging details of actual encounters or experiences of the tale and hence avoid reducing a poem to an eye-witness account. Unlike in East African poetry, these tale episodes are not made the foci around which the poem revolves.

Besides re-deployment strategies used in intertextually engaging with oral narrative genre, I have argued that in East Africa, the contemporary poem collapses oft-thought clear-cut boundaries

between ordinary experience, and elevated poetic ones (hence poetic language and ordinary expressions). Within Swahili literary traditions, one recounts everyday occurrences as stories to be embellished and told in the most captivating manner possible. Such an understanding further dissolves the boundary between real-life experiences and the fantastic literary world of imagination. Biographical texts have a lot of significance and relevance to the audience not only from a didactic perspective, but even as inspirational models of humanity. The importance of stories in shaping social realities and people's characters to significantly mould and influence future expectations as Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue come to mind. Stories, therefore, poetically create meaning out of daily happenings and in turn serve as the basis for anticipating future events. Core, therefore, is the awareness that it is necessary to make an imaginative deployment of oral symbols and techniques in a way that resonates with the changing expectations and lifestyles of the society, as Okpewho (1988: 24) and Irele (2001) urge. I have pointed out that the use of orature has adapted to its contemporary environment. Contemporary West African poetry, therefore, attempts this more than its East African counterpart – West African poets source poetic content from narratives but reorganize it to reflect and embody the new context; poetic form. West African poets demonstrate a more refined 'manipulative capability' especially in adapting oral material than their East African counterparts.

From his theorization and clear understanding of Ewe dirge, Anyidoho – as Awoonor (1979) also notes – is in a position to widen his own primary appreciation of the substance of the lyrical form of lament as both a personal and public statement. Whereas the perspective East African poets (especially from Tanzania) adopt limits them to only making what Awoonor calls 'public statements' (1979: 163), their West African counterparts on the contrary straddle both the personal and public unrestricted. As a result, they come up with richer and more arresting poems when compared to their East African counterparts. West African poets are able to fuse or reconcile individualist discourses with emphasis on collective consciousness within a redefined personal voice that incorporates the 'I' and the 'We' viewpoints while commenting on socio-cultural, economic and political issues prevalent in contemporary times. Where most Tanzanian poets composing in English prefer just one, that is, the communal, voice or what Jawa Apronti regards as "the poetry of the speaking voice" (1979: 41) and informed by what Robert Fraser has identified as the plural sensibility which emanates from a communal experience pertaining to the

well being of each member (1986: 336), the West African variant harmoniously blends the two visions within their poetic craft – fluid persona. West African poets' ability to institute varied voices, to exhibit the varied characteristics of people of different social status in their poetry is contrasted with a typically monotonous voice, whether the dialogic *kujibizana* or monologue typical of East African poetics. In a number of poems, Osundare and Anyidoho deploy a fluid persona evident in the interchangeable use of the singular and the plural form of the personal pronoun (I and We). As most poems in *Summons* and *Boundless Voices* reveal, East African poets heavily rely on either the 'I' or the 'We' narrative voices or perspective. As I have demonstrated, they even make use of the omniscient narrator rarely deployed in West African poetry. This impacts upon their aesthetics as the poetic language is shaped and influenced by the position the persona assumes.

The manner in which refrains – part of repetitive devices common in poetry – are deployed in contemporary poetry significantly varies across the two regions. Informed by various literary traditions ranging from *mashairi* of the Swahili, praise-singing or *ijala* from the Yoruba, the dirge tradition of the Ewe, together with English poetics, the refrain is manifested diversely – both regionally and individually. However, there is a sort of general pattern in the deployment of this device in contemporary poetics. While most of East African poets rely on *mashairi's* conceptualization, where the refrain (*kibwagizo*) serves to enhance the rhythmic dimension and, like in most others, provides thematic emphasis or coherence, a striking characteristic of contemporary poems from West Africa is how choric components are presented and consciously fashioned – with some deployed in more than one collection by the same poet. Striking among contemporary poets is the way some poets carry forward earlier notations in their preceding volumes into their subsequent collections to construct a whole procession of organic refrains. As the example of Anyidoho demonstrates, choric material may transcend the boundaries of a single collection. Stock refrains become emblematic of his poetics as exemplified in the first part of "Memory & Vision" and "Ancestral Saga" which share a slightly altered refrain ("We are the Dancer and The Dance" and "I am Dancer and the Dance"). Hardly, on the other hand, does one find such sustained persistency, consistency or progression among their East African colleagues.

The recent democratic travel of texts across spatial/linguistic/regional boundaries sees to it that the spectrum of potential literary (and non-literary) influence is by and large the same. For

example, I have demonstrated that the syllabus contemporary poets are exposed to suggests that East Africans encounter foundational poets from West Africa – evident in the literary diet fed to Susan Kiguli and her contemporaries, much the same way as West Africans. Neither can Okot p'Bitek be confined to East Africa[194] – despite the obvious existence of poets writing in the song school poetics among West Africa's foundational poets. Similarly, movements across the two regions in terms of journals, scholars, creative writings and writers and publishing ventures make possible intertextual relations between texts produced in the two regions. This is why, for example, Jane p'Bitek's "Tears of Laughter" published in *Songs of Farewell* (1994) exhibits close intertextual relations with Osundare's *Waiting Laughters: A Long Song in Many Voices* (1990). Jane p'Bitek's text dialogues with Osundare's image and, in particular, his notion of 'laughters' dialogues or dialogically informs Jane p'Bitek's "genuine/melodious/whispered/soft/roaring/harsh/confident" (1994: 22-3) among other laughters she envisions. Such intra-generation dialogues, I have argued, makes it impossible to talk of each regions as distinct and cut off from each other. While in Chapter Five I have demonstrated how foundational poets dialogically shapes contemporary East African poetry, it is worth restating that the texts and textualities they advocate travel freely within and across the two regions. The fact that West Africa – due to spatial expanse and factors mentioned in the introduction – not only had a head-start but generally had a broader spectrum of pioneer and foundational generation, and, expectedly, poets from the region have a richer and longer tradition within which textual 'ploughing back' and stylistic innovations take place. This partly explains why poetry from the region in general seemingly revolves around different individual established poets (scholars) who help nurture successive poetics, eventually evolving a somewhat distinctive school of poetics which contributes towards the identity of the region's poetry. I have pointed out that unlike their East African counterparts, contemporary West African poets do not have to grope for poetic models. The richness and diversity of the foundational generation in this region helps demystify the writing process for aspiring writers, poets included. Whereas East Africans either look West to English and Anglo-American models or remain in the shadow of p'Bitek's song school, West African poets have at their disposal Okigbo, Soyinka, Clark as well as

[194] He had a stint in Nigeria after escaping the Amin regime in Uganda.

Awoonor among others to emulate. I conclude that the 'rupturing of canonical authority' helps serve as a significant means of validation and valuation of poetic productions in the area.

As equally significant text (poet-fathers) and ordinates of contemporary African poetry, the iconic Ghanaian poet and scholar, Kofi Awoonor and Nigeria's Christopher Okigbo offer other options for West African poetics. In relation to the role of foundational poetry, not only is *Path of Thunder* widely viewed as the culmination of Okigbo's mission as town-crier but in my view, heralds a poetics which later defines alternative poetics – and therefore contemporary poetry. The collection inscribed the aesthetics of the 'public' voice in modern African poetry. A number of contemporary poets, notably Osundare, adopt a similar role; a modern-day town-crier, anxious to deliver a relevant and urgent message as is evident in *Songs of the Season*. Contemporary vanguards of this position intertextually dwell on the path-breaking ambience of *Path of Thunder* sequence in much of their poetry. They owe a direct debt to that segment of Okigbo's poetry which, as envisaged in this study, illustrates dialogic relations that contemporary poetics is anchored on. Contemporary poetry as defined in this study puts society before art in scaling of values – as Okigbo urged. Specifically, it is the 'public' voice which Okigbo inaugurated in those last poems that still ring in contemporary Nigerian as well as much of modern African poetry in general – hence, as I have argued, contemporary renditions are not just 'extensions' of Okigbo's poetics but rather, 'epochal continuities' in the tradition he inaugurated. It is this forceful public concern (in addition to the confident prophetic statement) he articulated that I have conclusively read as providing a launching pad for later poets and poetics. The characteristic anger, persistency of lament and repudiation of a world in shreds characteristic of Okigbo's poetry similarly defines contemporary aesthetics of pain.

It is what Nwosu (2007) sees as Okigbo's 'universalizing current' that remained at the core of his literary imagination that I regard as more pronounced in contemporary times. The contemporary characteristic eclecticism or catholicity of imaginative reference also informed the work of Okigbo. The somewhat homogenizing current ultimately defines literary and poetic imagination beyond the cultural boundaries of production. I consider the "third signifying field" (Nwosu 2007: 70) he initiated as a field not merely in a state of hybridity (neither wholly African nor English, a sort third sphere) but much more nuanced and marked by a new state of consciousness informed by a multiplicity of literary traditions (some sort of pan Africanist transnationalism) –

due to the broader spectrum from which to source poetic resources – and hence pronounced polyvocality. Contemporary poetry, therefore, takes further the exercise of reinventing the bardic voice(s) of the raconteur within a scribal culture[195] initiated by Okigbo's generation. Conclusively, I note that contemporary poet-sons/daughters attempt not just to embrace the father-poet's aesthetics wholesale or swerve toward their own poetics in Bloomian terms but, enquiry as envisaged in this study, intertextually engages foundational poetry and poetics in a dialogue. The swerving is triggered by what Bakhtin calls dialogism such that affinities are not necessarily the outcome of 'dialogue' or actual exchange but shaped by consciousness of his poetics.[196] P'Bitek and Okigbo offer models of poetics to be 'corrected' and made more relevant to contemporary poetic discourses. It is, therefore, a text to be transcended if not dialogically engaged with. Since revisions, like dialogic relations, are based on a presumed existing text perceived as 'inadequate' in certain aesthetic dimensions, I have read contemporary poets as 'revising' not to correct but render more relevant to contemporary context. Both, therefore, provide modern African poetry with a foundational text from which it has developed into contemporary poetics.

Contemporary poets in West Africa organize and form some sort of poetry or writer's clubs, often affiliated to university literature departments and serve not just as training grounds, but as initiators and shapers of a particular trend or drive a particular poetic agenda hence entrench and 'popularize' a certain innovation, stylistic approach or ideology. Remi Raji (1988) for example shows how Harry Garuba's *Voices from the Fringe* (1988) is a 'canonical' text of sorts, upon which the emergence of a contemporary poetic tradition that exemplies the Ibadan school of poetry depended on while Maik Nwosu's *Children of the Anthill* is emblematic of the Nsukka axis. What I have, therefore, concluded is that 'Song of Lawino' in a loose sense dialogically functions as such poetry clubs in East Africa, hence the convergence and centripetal pool around which dramatic monologues or 'songs' intertextually relate.

[195] In an interview accessed via http://www.sentinelpoetry.org.uk/0107/interview.html

[196] Unlike Bloom, I see literary influence, to borrow from Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, in the dialogic intertextual sense, such that each text is in dialogue with previous and contemporary texts, altering, transforming and preserving narrative patterns and strategies in endless possibility.

Leaning towards a characteristic emphasis on performance and performativity may be explained by predisposition towards 'total' art which in contemporary poetry partly issues from the resurgence of live performance of poetry (popularized in modern African poetry in the 1970s by the Ghanaian poet, Atukwei Okai). Subsequently, performance oriented works of Anyidoho, Osundare, Ojaide and Ofeimun are not isolated or peculiar cases. Rather, their presence implies that they are very much the poetics of the contemporary times as the propensity of these (textual) voices to generate, inspire or simply influence their peers and budding poets alike is undoubted. These poets have developed to occupy the centre stage of contemporary poetic productions. Since 'alternative' poetics initiated by certain (mostly Nigerian) poets have swept the entire region, the possibility of performance-laden written poems dominating is not far fetched considering the general tilt towards theatrical poetics. Although I have argued that how differently poets "call forth special attention to and heighten awareness of the act of expression" (Bauman 1977: 11) is often idiosyncratic in nature, they are inevitably directed at reuniting contemporary conceptualization of this genre with its imagined 'ideal' often conceived as oral, performative or interactive. If in Mugo space performs signification functions, then as Anyidoho's or Osundare's poetry has shown, a conclusion may be drawn regarding the agency or critical role assigned to the audience-reader.

The conceptualization of this genre in contemporary times reveals that there are differences inscribed by varying dimensions of performance and interpretations of performativity. How Anyidoho imagines an ideal modern African poem, for example, reverberates not just in Nigeria's Osundare but even in East Africa's Micere Mugo. As I have indicated, from Kofi Anyidoho's standpoint, poetry is conceived as a dramatic performance with the idea of dramatizing (written) poetry for stage presentation before a live audience occupying the centre stage. This belief similarly underpins Mugo's poetics. The fluidity marking the line between drama and poetry in contemporary West African poetry is evidently dominant in contemporary poetry from East Africa. A notable indicator of this predilection is the fact that even some foundational poets still publishing in contemporary times have been enmeshed by its ubiquity. Poets with a background in drama adopt Graham Furniss's (1996) 'intergeneric perspective' to produce poetry straddling genre boundary and, therefore, hybrid. For example, in his collection titled *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1988), the Nigerian poet-playwright, Wole Soyinka,

embraces this trend, infusing the poems with aspects of performance. Ojaide correctly notes in relation to this that Soyinka's new poems are highly indebted to the dramatic form (1991: 738). The influence of drama is most evident in his characterization of the personae or poetic voices. Without doubt, Soyinka's experience in drama intertextually adds entertainment value to "Muhammad Ali at the Ringside, 1985" among others included in the collection. To some extent, there is simultaneous production of double/multiple mutually allusive genres which draw on existing repertoires (Furniss 1996: 1) within the confines of the page as the poet innovates. It is this perception which informs the active integration of music (Okai), song (Osundare and Anyidoho), dance enactment (Osundare) and, as hinted already, a lively, participating audience (Mugo) – suggested by refrains and other forms of repetition.

As I noted in the introduction, there is a shift in approach, poetic material and thematic preoccupations in contemporary African poetry. I have attributed the "current shift in poetic materials and themes" (Ojaide 1996: 20) and the "new style, new voices and a new sensibility" (Adesani and Dunton 2005: 23) of the post-1980s to the conscious awareness and deliberate conscripting of the otherwise lurking audience as one composes. Such awareness engenders or anticipates performance and is manifested differently, although certainly more pronounced among poets of the alternative poetry movement in West Africa such as Osundare and Anyidoho. This trend is cognizant of the erased or minimized distance between author and reader and does not marginalize the reader to passive periphery, but rather demands and encourages his or her input in enriching the overall poetic experience. From the song metaphor underpinning contemporary poetry, the dialogic proxy of the audience is emphasized and imbues poetic texts with characteristic textual peculiarities. Since in every age, artists strive to re-align their medium so as to remain relevant and *en vogue*, I have argued that the shifts demanded a redefinition of literary aesthetics – as they dialogically respond to the new context, subject matter and even audience. This is because relevance in itself is a positive quality, significantly contributing towards a given art's aesthetic distinction. Osundare's *Songs of the Season* experiment attempts to re-locate the 'song' into contemporary Nigeria via the newspaper medium as I have discussed in Chapter Four. Poetry is conceived in such a way so as to reclaim its central position in (pre-colonial) oral societies (or aural contexts) where it not only broadcasted 'news' (scandalous events, praise, warn etc) but functioned like the commentary pages, with the poet serving as a

columnist. I have concluded that the level to which Osundare takes the anxieties that dogged most of his predecessors such as p'Bitek, Awoonor and Okigbo is unique. Through the column, the contemporary poem is conceived as 'a song of the season' – with the season in question overlapping with the conceptualization of the contemporary in this study. Contemporary African poetry, therefore, dialogically engages with continuity and rupture from the indigenous forms and practices in the process of 'reclaiming' poetry's sensibilities.

As far as language consciousness is concerned, the (near) absence of a Creole or pidgin in East Africa inhibited early growth of poetry in English. As I have argued in Chapter Three, the very presence of a vibrant Kiswahili literary tradition in the region should not be perceived as hindering the sort of vibrancy associated with this genre in West Africa but rather, read as a source of unique poetics in East Africa. In contemporary times, West African Pidgin has departed from a mere means of bridging oral-African language poetry with that written in English-language to its deployment as a trope and strategy for undermining the revered status of English and its poetic resources in Anglophone Africa. While West African poets (notably, Ofeimun and Ojaide) endeavour to bring the subversion of English to bear on their work through the intentional inclusion of Pidgin in demonstration of a form of linguistic hybridity that serves to brace the indigenous linguistic fragmentation of the region, their East African counterparts largely remain prisoners of Standard English. Despite being regarded as an inhibitory factor to the development of English-language poetry by early scholars in East Africa, the co-existence of the two linguistic consciousnesses as I have detailed in Chapter Three intertextually and mutual enriches contemporary poetic discourse.

Although Tanure Ojaide suggests that the aesthetic and thematic departures in contemporary poetry are limited to West Africa and not generic to contemporary African poetry (1989: 20), I have argued that the departure is manifested across the continent. The "crop of well-educated poets, many with doctoral degrees and educated abroad" (1993: 19) Ojaide attributes the shift to are spread throughout the different literary regions of Africa. I have demonstrated that unlike most of their predecessors, they first engage in theorizing and researching poetic discourse before plunging into poetic vocation. However, this approach has its roots in West Africa among some foundational poets such as Kofi Awoonor; systematic rigorous research and theorization during apprentiship phase is incrementally passed over from foundational generation to the

contemporary – relatively limited in East Africa. Apart from a few isolated cases (such Kiguli), vernacular East African poetic traditions (except *mashairi*) are an under-researched area. It is either that those who delve into this area never end up taking or focusing on poetic careers, or the most prolific and significant poets in the region rarely have literary backgrounds (Angira, Macgoye, etc) or never focus on poetry at postgraduate level. On the contrary, almost all major indigenous literary traditions in West Africa have immensely benefited from scholarly research; from the praise-song tradition to the dirges, among other indigenous poetic forms of the Yoruba, Urhobo, Igbo, Ijo or Ewe have attracted indepth full-length MA. and PhD. studies' attention.

Most contemporary poets (with academic backgrounds in diverse poetic discourses) declare in manifesto poems their poetic visions, intentions as well as their aesthetic purposes – a feature noticeably prevalent among West African than their East African counterparts. Such declarations expand the concept and conceptualization of modern poetry beyond its hitherto conventionally accepted confines. This is more pronounced in West Africa than in East Africa. I have demonstrated that Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, Kofi Anyidoho,Susan Kiguli,[197] Dokotum and Okot Benge from East Africa, among other contemporary poets employ this approach. Often coming at the onset of their poetic careers, such positions shape their poetics as well as dialogically orient successive generations.[198] Cross pollination of poetic vision that marked the Ibadan years provide the base on which contemporary poets and poetry builds on. Judging from these orientations, there exist aesthetic differences that inscribe formal and thematic peculiarities. In terms of poetic vocation's vision or poetic manifestos, there are striking affinities across the two regions.[199] The trajectory most West African poets take can be

[197] Not only does Susan Kiguli, to cite an East African example, delve into in-depth research at postgraduate level but as the vow she makes in the poem "I am Tired of Talking in Metaphors" (1998: 4-5) testifies, adopts a manifesto in which she promises to "... just talk to you" – like Osundare – with minimal abstraction saying: "I will talk plainly/Because I am moved to abandon riddles" (1998: 4) – a conviction marking most West African contemporary poets.

[198] A random example will suffice in explicating the point I am making here. Nduka Otiono states: "it is pertinent to note that it was not always easy for me separating prose from poetry, because having researched Oral literature in Africa for both my Honours and Masters degrees' dissertation, I had come to appreciate the interlocking process between the two forms. Purity of genre is certainly not one of the concerns of the oral artist." Such observations, I argue, inevitably shape the poetics of the poet.

[199] This is why I envision a unique regional temper in West Africa, since these manifestos are largely shared across national borders and even generations. Eventually, what they do and say is shared by most West African poets. For example, Ofeimun's notion and interpretation of the role of the poet, coupled with his passionate commitment to issues of national (or public) concern and socio-economic causes echoe Osundare's unambiguous declaration in "I

discerned in the so-called 'approach to the shrine', which, if the examples of its adherents and practitioners is anything to go by, is predominantly a West African phenomenon. The approach underpins the poetics of Okigbo, Senghor, Clark, Awoonor, Soyinka and Wonodi. Before plunging into this revered art, the poet first offers a reckoning of himself and his work to god, goddess, father or mother in a distinctly ritualistic fashion. I have noted that the extent to which intertextual dialogues across and within generations shape West African poetry is more pronounced than in East Africa.[200]

One argument that underpinned this thesis is that although individual 'canonized' foundational poets' impact upon contemporary poetic output is insurmountable, university communities serve as more significant shapers of poetry in West Africa. The 'presence' as well as proximity of Soyinka, Okigbo and Awoonor is thus contrasted with that of p'Bitek in East Africa, propounding that contemporary West African poets have a wider pool from which to draw poetic inspiration and material from. It is this factor that has seen East African poetry marked by lesser vigour as the range of invigorating influences remains much narrower or limited for lack of models to emulate. Views by critics such as Obi Nwakanma that there are four poets in Africa whose poetry can match, and is continually interpreted along, the poetry of the best anywhere in the world fortify the influential position of foundational poets, exalting and valorizing them to potential models for modern and contemporary African poetics. However, apart from p'Bitek, all the rest – Christopher Okigbo, Tchicaya U'tamsi and Leopold Senghor – all hail from West Africa. Other central figures in the modern African poetic canon such Wole Soyinka and Kofi Awoonor also come from West Africa. This explains why p'Bitek and song school poetics serve as the nerve centre of East African contemporary poetry. In terms of style, West African poets have 'experimented' unlimitedly with form. West African contemporary poetry is intertextually indebted to Soyinka's mythopoeia, Awoonor's songs of abuse and Okigbo's passion for ritual in

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Am a Poet", where the latter persuasively declares his artistic intentions and vision; "Poetry/Is/Man/Meaning/To/Man" (1983: 4). Such pronouncements determine not only the poetic container of choice or manner in which the medium is handled, but content grappled with as well. The conviction shapes much of contemporary poetics from not just Nigeria but the entire region.

[200] Unlike East Africa where the majority of contemporary poets embrace the song school making minimal variations as detailed in Chapter Five, their colleagues in West African\ often tend to adapt an element in a precursor's poetics and use it to build their own style. Though most pronounced in Nigerian poetry, there exists what I call dialogic continuity rather than disjunction (in relation to themes and aesthetics) in this region's tradition.

much the same manner p'Bitek (and song school model) functions in East Africa. Contemporary poetics is, therefore, sustained by both intra- and inter-generational dialogue at different levels. From title allusions and cross-referencing, to general intertextual relations, contemporary poetry instances a lively intra-regional and cross-generation dialogue and dialogic awareness. Generally, it allows the older and younger generation of writers to have a conversation and hence opportunity to examine possible regional disparities across the continent's poetry. I hold that to the contrary, there is a disconnection between University and poetic activities in contemporary East Africa as foundational or prolific modern poets are not always members of university faculties.[201] The region lacks the vigour with which West African poetry issues from poetry clubs linked to university literature and creative writing departments. This is why I have concluded that most variants of *Song of Lawino* in West Africa are often products of research and re-innovations achieved through poetry groups. I have also argued that with the near absence of active poetry groups or clubs in East Africa, p'Bitek's poetry – as evident from explicit and implicit intertextual dialogues with *Song of Lawino* – provides a aesthetic nerve centre for East African poetic discourses, hence the reason why the region has come to be identified with the song school strand of poetics. In light of such observations, I conclude that the role and influence of the foundational generation in West Africa is quite set apart from their colleagues in East Africa.

Ghanaian writers are more closely associated with the beginnings of English-language poetry in West Africa than any other West Africans (Izevbaye 1986: 820). Generally, the content and form of 'new' or modern poetry from Ghana is largely based on the ceremonial drum and the traditional oral poem. Kofi Awoonor - identified with oral, proverbially dense poetics – largely resulting from his effort to recover Ewe imagery in writing - influences the Anyidoho's poetic evocations which, as I have demonstrated, are equally anchored on Ewe orature. Like Awoonor, he utilizes the Ewe dirge tradition within the boundaries of modern poetic discourses. I have concluded that Anyidoho, just like Osundare and the majority of contemporary poets, is driven by more or less similar desire to be the spokesman of his time and people. The communal note, rhetoric strategy and earthy idiom reminiscent of Awoonor's (as well as p'Bitek's) songs, as well

[201] Some of the recognized poets in East Africa, unlike West Africa, such as Jared Angira and Marjorie Macgoye are not academics.

as the primitive force of the persona's tongue can be discerned in much of contemporary poetics. The repetitive rhetorical structure and expressions initiated by these poets is evident in contemporary songs. These songs achieve an extraordinary fusion of traditional African and modern English cadences, techniques, and themes. The analytical paradigm I have used reads intricate textual dialogues among contemporary poets as well. For example, Anyidoho's mediation of Awoonor's poetics in turn avails a text other contemporary poets engage with (for example, the last stanza of Oguibe's *Song of Sorrow* exhibits explicit intertextual links with Anyidoho's "Ultimate song of joy"). Hence contemporary texts allude to, complicate and enrich each other intertextually whether consciously or unconsciously. I have also pointed out that as far as the re-appropriation of the Ewe dirge metaphor initiated by Awoonor is concerned, it is not just Kofi Anyidoho who dialogues with this megatext. Anyidoho's poetry (among others defined by aesthetics of pain) may correctly be described – like Du Bois's – as "Songs of Sorrow". It is such textual affinities that persuasively lead to the conclusion that contemporary African poetics engage African American poetics in dialogic relations.

In the preface to an *Anthology of Contemporary Ghanaian Poems* (2004), the editors make a point worth reiterating in these conclusive remarks in relation to performance potentialities examined in Chapter Six. Woeli Dekutsey and John Sackey observe that in Ghana, "poets have been singing lustily for decades" (2004: preface). In this study, I have explored the metaphoric dimension of 'singing' which does not necessarily imply actual oral performance (as opposed to conventional print-publishing). The liminal between contemporary 'writing' of poetry and 'singing' as conventionally understood thus points to the accentuated hybridity associated with this poetics. Singing in the last three decades, therefore, assumes different dimensions as contemporary writing is dialogically defined by singing. The close intertextual links, certainly accentuated in contemporary poetics, between the oral and written modes can be seen in compositional approach. What I have designated as the compositional approach underpins the works of contemporary poets in East and West Africa – especially those appropriating foundational poetics – whether oral or modern. This approach is deployed by a number of contemporary poets anthologized in *Boundless Voices* examined in Chapter Five.

What Petro Deandrea describes as the fervent performance of poetry is not peculiar to Ghana but, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Six, inherently marks contemporary African poetry. Poetry

meant to be declaimed, or read out to large audiences, has become almost synonymous with contemporary African poetry. Although – using the examples of Anyidoho and Acquah – Ojaide attributes the influences of this tradition to textual dialogue with the former USSR/Soviet Union states, where (like Africa) it was traditionally ubiquitous, I have located it within oral antecedents, and more recently inter-disciplinary relations with dramatic genre. Often labelled as an act of popularizing the genre (dominant since the 1970s in Ghana), public poetry performances, recitals, regular radio and occasional television programmes wholly or partly devoted to poetry in English (and Ghanaian languages) have become part of contemporary poetic tradition in the country (Apronti 1979: 31; Anyidoho 1979 and 1983 and Fraser 1986: 313-4) and continent in general. Indeed, some of the recognized and established poets in the region have not had a single poem appear in print. Apart from Atukwei Okai, arguably the most dominant figure and who is credited for turning poetry recitals into a public event, the list of writer-performers is longer in West Africa than in East Africa. These include Kobena Acquah, Kwabena Aboagye, Okyeame Akuffo, Kofi Awoonor and even Kofi Anyidoho.

While some contemporary poets place emphasis on actual or live performance before audiences, others privilege the performativity potential of their texts. While in Chapter Two I have detailed how Anyidoho graphologically captures paralinguistic dimensions of poetic discourse in print in *Praise Song for the Land*, it became evident in Chapter Six that Mugo (like Osundare) strives to make the text hybrid in such a way that the poem on the page is a dramatization or an enactment, presenting a picture of poetry actively engaged or metaphorically reaching out to the audience. It is a 'performance' akin to that theorized in relation to *My Mother's Poem*. I have pointed out that Ghanaian and by extension West African contemporary poetry leans more towards live and recorded performativity. From Atukwei Okai and Kofi Anyidoho to those included in the anthology; Kobena Acquah, Ama Ata Aidoo, Kofi Awoonor, Kwesi Brew, Gifty Odoom, Doris Kuwornu, Rex Quarterly and Lade Wosornu, the poetic scene in Ghana embraces the first two levels of performance, that is, actual 'singing' more than virtual performance or potentialities discussed in Chapter Six. Anyidoho relies heavily on recorded performance while Atukwei Okai prefers to recite his poetic productions. Unlike most contemporary poets from Ghana, Osundare and Mugo do not emphasize actual stage recitation, or view written poetry as a pre-text for a more comprehensive poetic experience. Osundare's poetry is laden with characterization, snippets of music and dance together with more overt staging and scenography all of which allude to a 'full-blown public performance' and hence echo what I have designated as

performance potentiality. However, all of these are woven into the poetic text in such a subtle manner that one does not get the feeling that the poem is a sort of pre-text or is made cumbersome by parenthesized instructions. Neither is it – to use Ezenwa-Ohaeto's (1996) oxymoronic phrase – 'written orality' which attempts to reproduce oral speech on paper with utmost fidelity but, as I have illustrated using Mugo's poetry, painstakingly capturing on the page poetic expressions in a manner that the reader is in a position to deduce how the text should be 'received' and therefore realized privately. I have used the example of Mugo to show how contemporary poetry reflects the subtle ways that words can be made to insinuate ideas (as in the Yoruba oral tradition) and ontological experiences or actions within written medium. The potential of such poetics is captured in, for example, Osundare's "desire to manipulate the songs" to do, metaphorically captured in the lines "my song is space/beyond wails/beyond walls/beyond insular hieroglyphs/which crave the crest/of printed waves" (1992: 25).

Although Deandrea assumes that the resurgence of performance in contemporary poetry "has rarely gone hand in hand with similarly enthusiastic publication" (2002: 148), I have argued in this study that 'publication' goes beyond its conventional definition. I have used the term aware of its recent redefinition, which encompasses oral rendition.[202] By urging writers to "attempt to explore the possibilities of using the technology of sound as primary medium of poetic dialogue "... since many of our people do not have eyes to witness the poetry of print, but they do have ears for the power of the sound and the sense of words" (1986: 13), Anyidoho broadens the meaning of 'publishing' – a feature that defines contemporary poetry production and consumption. The outlets for poetic imaginations are multiple and none occupies the sort of privileged position 'writing' did among foundational poetry. The "re-presentation of written poetry through the multiple media of African performance tradition", as Anyidoho insists, "holds the greatest potential for overcoming the communication gap that has forced the poet as writer into an often celebrated but clearly marginalized position as a contemporary artist" (1992: 259). Such an understanding of the genre redefines what is conventionally regarded as publication.

The use of direct address implies or 'imagines' an immediate listening audience. Texts with performance potential, I have argued, presuppose and conscript the reader as detailed in relation to song school poetics in Chapter Five. Contemporary poets imbuing their poetic texts with

[202] Kofi Anyidoho extends the meaning of 'publishing', incorporating the traditional practice in publishing which could be accomplished through live performances. He points out that we need to revise our understanding of the concept of 'publication' to include the act of performing poetry in public (1992: 262).

performance potentialities consciously provide guides or sign posts on 'actual' realization of the poem. They recreate not just performable scenes but also present series of imaginative settings, vividly described to enable the reader to 'see' – hence arresting his or her imaginations, rendering the reading experience more lively. Inclination towards dramatization as Anyidoho (1992) postulates, and as I have shown, undoubtedly affects the very writing and texture of poetry. What double publication or the harnessing of contemporaneous advances in (communication/media) technology (as in Anyidoho's case) implies to contemporary poetics is evident in emergent poetry discussed. I suggest that besides availing alternative avenues for publishing poetry, the impact of the Internet and blog culture should be examined as similarly shaping poetic discourse in contemporary times. I also recommend further research into Kiswahili and Pidgin among other vernacular megatexts to asses their impact on the general production and consumption of poetic discourse.

The focus of this study has been, to a very large extent, contemporary works of African poetry which may be considered transgressive, formally and conceptually, of hitherto prevailing poetic norms and conventions in modern African poetry's brief tradition. My emphasis has tended to be on works which elide the emerging or established tradition of poetry, hence opening new frontiers for this literary tradition's last three decades. This transgression is read as pregnant with possibilities, a space fertile with new aesthetics for judging and appreciating poetry. It is both a conscious and unconscious attempt to enlarge possibilities for expression and communication within poetry genre of modern African literature.

Appendix I

Reception of Holistic publishing

1. The experiment's irresistibility or inviting quality

Anyidoho observes that during his first attempt at a television program, the director had to keep shouting at studio cameramen who found the impromptu or sneak-preview performance irresistible. He notes that they "felt compelled to look directly at the performer (Anyidoho) and the performance" much to the chagrin of the director. This points to the inviting and arresting power of the audio text, appropriated in *PraiseSong for TheLand*.

2. Preference for the Audio to the Verbal Text

Why Anyidoho makes concerted efforts to inject the audio aspect may be discerned from the disappointment of the young man who enthusiastically waited outside his office after his performance. The library messenger in the university with "an unmistakable excitement in his voice" requested to have the poems, not in their written form but rather, as he argued, there was no point in giving them to him on paper. Preferably, he said, on audio cassette or, as the others suggested, on video or *at least audio*. This suggests that by including the audio aspect, Anyidoho seemingly embraces or penetrates into certain audiences – inaccessible if one is limited to print.

3. The market woman sings back

The onion seller who "suddenly shouted, 'Ghana Nya'," the title of one of the poems Anyidoho had presented on a TV program, suggesting that this is the most effective form to reach his audience. To confirm her exhilaration, she is said to have turned to her colleague "and recited a couple of lines from the poems" validating the view that this is the art the community readily identifies with and treasures. At no one time, therefore, is such a piece and its delivery going to be an isolated or individualist event.

4. Responses from viewers

Many people were later to quote back to Anyidoho lines from the three he had presented. The TV host of the programme he first presented informed him later that he received "several requests" for a rebroadcast of the programme, a fact undoubtedly attributed to the audio performance. The programme was repeated at least twice.

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