

Modern African Poetry, Distanciation Strategies and Selected Poems of Niyi Osundare

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Abstract

This paper investigates distanciation strategies in Niyi Osundare's poetry. These strategies include local imagery and symbolism, persona-switching, and elements of Yoruba oral tradition carefully juxtaposed with European poetic features. They distance Osundare's poetry from imitative tendencies, obscurity and esotericism, while promoting natural, collective and universal themes that generate an aura of "marketplace" aesthetics. At the same time, the poems address environmental degradation and pervasive socio-political corruption. The study undertakes a close reading of four selected poems: "The Politician's Two Mouth," "The Horseman Cometh," "They Too Are the Earth" and "Our Earth Will Not Die," drawn from Osundare's *Songs of the Marketplace* and *The Eye of the Earth*. Adopting a qualitative, descriptive and interpretive approach, the study draws principally on Brechtian distanciation, supported by postcolonial Marxist poetics and African oral aesthetics, to examine Osundare's poetry as an alter-native tradition in African literature. The findings show that Osundare's distanciation strategies neither reject social commitment nor function merely as aesthetic devices. Rather, they perform important ironic and ideological functions by promoting critical awareness, social mobilisation and the transformation of private experiences into collective consciousness.

Keywords: distanciation, oral tradition, alter-native tradition, social commitment, nature

1.1. Introduction

This investigation explores modern African poetry and *distanciation* as a technique, employing the poetry of Niyi Osundare for illustration. Like the two other genres of literature (drama and prose) contemporary African poetry remains challenged by the persistent conflict between using a borrowed European language and communicating a valid native awareness. Osundare's poetic *copus* provides the distinctive and revolutionary voice for transforming the poetry of social commitment in Nigerian literary arena. Many literary historians in Nigeria agree that he is the leading champion of a new kind of poetry. His poetry is a notable and dynamic literary force that has posed as the 'alter-native' tradition, especially to the poetic taste of Okigbo/Soyinkan generation of poets.

Largely focused on stylistics-cum-theoretical features, this paper tenders a critical reading of Osundare's poems. Exclusively, it examines his exploitation of the concept and method of *distanciation*. This is a methodological code that combines oral conventional components with

contemporary satirical distancing as a means of demystifying poetic language and appraising the socio-political decadence in post-independence Nigeria. Regarding the scope of the study, therefore, some poems were selected from *Songs of the Marketplace* and *Village Voices*. These poems were analysed and show that Osundare's use of distancing was not as a sheer aesthetic tool, but as a practical device for generating a 'critical distance'. Moreover, the essence of this distance is to enhance the role of the poet as a public voice of conscience, while empowering the common man and promoting wider critical awareness in the society. The specific objectives of this study are to: i) identify specific distancing strategies in selected poems of Niyi Osundare; ii) categorise samples of folklore and oral traditional forms in the poems; and iii) assess the socio-political role of distancing in the poetry of Osundare.

The scope of the study is limited to four poems purposively selected from Osundare's two poetry volumes, *Songs of the Marketplace* and *The Eye of the Earth*. Based on the ample incidence of oral mechanisms (myths, proverbs, folksongs) in the poems, in addition to humorous components, the poems were selected. Owing to space and other significant constraints, however, the few poems were taken for analysis. Although, many other poems like 'Siren' and 'Reflections' in the first anthology are suitable for the concerns of the study, 'The Politician's Two Mouth' and 'The Horseman Cometh' are selected for analysis. Likewise, several other poems in the second anthology like 'Forest Echoes', 'Homecoming' and 'Let Earth's Pain Be Soothed', are appropriate for the subject matter of the study, 'They Too Are the Earth' and 'Our Earth Will Not Die' are selected for illustrative assessment. The poems selected have adequate evidence that distancing strategy play a critical role in the poetry of Niyi Osundare.

2.1 Review of Relevant Literature

Obtainable literatures reveal that Niyi Osundare is one of the foremost figures of the "alter-native" tradition in African poetry (Aiyejina, 1988, pp. 112-28). His poetic method further attests that poetry could provide a crucial connection between the written verse and indigenous oral performance. It is a conscious blend of local oral traditions with Western literary forms which seeks to generate unique cultural identities. With Osundare, the African poet uses his craft in projecting a universal 'dialogue' involving local, traditional, pre-colonial texts and contemporary, foreign forces, in confronting the numerous socio-political issues within the society.

Scholars and critics who have worked on his poetry include Alu (62-84), Odinye (13-22) and Anyokwu (1-11). Alu's study on "Style and the New Poetic Revolution in Niyi Osundare's Poetry" centres on how Osundare deliberately crushed the convention of intricate, elitist Euro-modernist obscurity instituted by first-generation African poets, such as Wole Soyinka, substituting it with an easier, song-driven language meant to assemble the common person. Vital precise concerns discernible in Alu's critical analysis are the poet's unique technique in applying cultural hybridity, his simple and accessible poetic language, his societal commitment and support for the downtrodden as well as his satire on widespread socio-political rottenness. However, some

identifiable shortfalls in Alu's study of Osundare's poetry include an overemphasis on simplicity that negates the investigation into his reflective structural complexities like his skillful use of syntactic distortion and graphological deviation. There is an over-classification in the use of the term "Third Generation" of African poets, in addition to the negation of Osundare's "eco-poetic" dimension.

Anyokwu's "The Essentials of Niyi Osundare's Poetry" (2015, pp. 1-11) investigates the role of Osundare as a revolutionary, populist poet who blends Marxist ideology with Yoruba oral traditions to broker social change. His scrutiny underscores the poet's dedication to crafting accessible, "utilitarian" poetry that appraises societal injustice and serves the masses. However, the shortfalls of Anyokwu's analysis of Osundare's poetry lie in over-romanticization of "orality" and simplistic class reductionism, among other things.

Another vital landmark in the study of Osundare's poetry is provided by Odinye's "The Image of Corruption and Poverty in Contemporary Nigeria: A Study of Osundare's Songs of the Marketplace" is a critical work that centres on probing how systemic corruption and harsh economic denial obliterate the foundation of the Nigerian state. She scrutinises role of political corruption in creating fiscal inflation, economic abuse and poverty, leading into depression, disenchantment and desperation among the masses, hence necessitating ethical and public change. Despite the significance of her analysis, her study shows such shortfalls as much concern on the privileged over the downtrodden, slight range on victimhood and deficiency of linguistic evaluation.

On the whole, it is clear that these studies have been undertaken from different viewpoints. According to Anyokwu (Anyokwu, 2023, pp. 111-122), Osundare unlike the previous Soyinka generation, employs various shades of the Yoruba oral traditions, including tropes like *Oriki* (praise poetry), *Ofo* (incantation) and *Owe* (proverbs). These oral forms do not feature in his poetic content as sheer aesthetic devices. Instead, Anyokwu argues that they serve as deliberate *distanciation* from "Obscurantism". Thus, by decoding traditional Yoruba oral configuration into English, the poet generates a "market place" aesthetics, signifying a common, accessible ground that disconnects his poetry from the "ivory tower" elitism. This is noticeable in *Songs of the Marketplace* and *Village Voices*. Consequently, the poetic style explored in his poems is a mark of deliberate distancing from Euro-modernism to more far-reaching, socially committed performance poetry.

2.2 Empirical Review

Several readings have been conducted on Osundare's poetry. These include Jeyifo (1987, pp. vii-xv, 1988, pp. 314-20), Bodunde (1997, pp. 81-100), Nwagbara (2013, pp. 196-212), Ogunsiji and Ogungbemi (2016? 2018, pp. 419-38), Agofure (2016), and Anyokwu (2023, pp. 111-122). While some of these scholars anchored their studies on stylistic and linguistic paradigms, others are hinged on eco-critical perspectives. There are also some critics who view his poems from the

analytic spectrum of Postcolonial theory or cultural materialism, expressly satirising poor African leadership and its allied debasing socio-economic and stagnant political realities. Some scholars foster inquiries into the harmony of formal lyrical components. However, some studies have also ventured into distancing strategies of Osundare's poetics. Of the numerous participants in his scholarship, a few are discussed herein for the purpose of illustration.

Working on Osundare's poetry from the standpoint of eco-criticism that captures his commitment to environmental maintenance and protection, his poems are said to vividly depict the African landscape (Nwagbara, 2013, pp. 196–212). Nwagbara has already done considerable works on Osundare's environmental consciousness. He avows that the poet applies poetry to resist the capitalist annihilation of the environment. Accordingly believing in the idea of poetry at the service of society, he maintains the poet mobilises resistance against ecological degradation. Following the same viewpoint in her work on the "dynamics of Osundare's eco-poetry", Erukora (2021, pp. 53-62) examines the poet's role as a non-conformist eco-activist. Investigating Osundare's poetry through the searchlight of the "eye of the earth" she agrees that his poems serve as unambiguous warning against ecological cataclysm. Another prominent scholar who has remained versatile in his study of Osundare's poetry is Anyokwu. In his exploration of the poet's eco-poetics in such works as "*Sylvan Historian: Niyi Osundare's Ecopoetics*" (Anyokwu, 2023, pp. 111-122), he assesses the poet's exploitation of fauna and flora in creating a "local habitation" and a sense of eco-consciousness in his works.

A number of scholars have studied Osundare's poems from the formal lyrical and orality-centred perspectives. Some writers who have done extensive investigation into his stylistic and linguistic procedures are Aderemi Bamikunle (1995, pp. 121–37), Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah (2003, 45) and Biodun Jeyifo (1988, pp. 314–20). Bamikunle (1992, pp. 15–36) has accomplished far-reaching surveys of the development of Osundare's poetry, particularly highlighting the connection of themes and technique. He also identifies the poet's profound reliance on Yoruba oral artistic traditions. Part of Na'Allah's achievement hinged on his role as an editor and scholar who concentrated on the "people's poet". He has explored how Osundare's performance engenders a unique, orality-centred identity for his poetry. From these same perspectives of formal lyricism and orality, Biodun Jeyifo evaluates the poet's work. A versatile scholar of Osundare's poetics, he stresses the characteristic lyrical mode of *Songs of the Marketplace*, noting its ground-breaking, "on-esoteric" structure. Analysing the "demystification" of poetic language and the linguistic synthesis of far-reaching social beliefs, he argues that oral traditions played an unprecedented role in the poet's success. The significance of these lyrical and orality-centred critics cannot be overstressed. They explored Osundare's mastery in juxtaposing native Yoruba oral forms such as *owe*, *oriki* and *ofo* with the foreign English language forms, thereby producing an unparalleled "lyric of the marketplace" that is full of rhythm, sense and linguistic fluidity.

Several scholars have also worked on Osundare's poetry from the Postcolonial theory or cultural materialism perspectives. These include Biodun Jeyifo (1987, pp. vii-xv.), an outstanding

Marxist scholar whose works on Nigerian literature is far-reaching. Notably, he wrote the introduction to poet's *Songs of the Marketplace* (1987), highlighting the work's socio-political *materiality*. AbdulRasheed Na'Allah was the editor of *The Poetry and Poetics of Niyi Osundare* (2003, 45). Through this vital critical compendium the poet's works and his interests in socio-economic and political re-assessment as well as cultural re-affirmation were brought under extensive investigation from various perceptions. In his work "Niyi Osundare and the Materialist Vision: A Study of *The Eye of the Earth*" (1997, pp. 81-100), Charles Bodunde centres his analysis of Osundare's poetry on materialist vision. He equally stressed the significance of the connections between land, the natural world and cultural re-affirmation as well as ecological awareness. Another scholar, Christopher Anyokwu, portrays Osundare's poetry as a lucid art, problematising with neither ambiguity nor obscurantism. His versatile viewpoint which includes Postcolonial theoretical perception is clear in his work on the "Essentials of Osundare's poetry" (Anyokwu, 2015, pp. 1-11). One cannot but recall Funso Aiyejina's (1988, pp. 112-128) scrutiny of Osundare's poetry as the "alter-native" tradition. He argues that the poet generates an "alter-native" tradition, in which Yoruba oral traditions mingle with foreign literary components in the poet's works. He also observed a profound touch of commitment in Osundare's handling of the Postcolonial realities of Nigeria, in particular and Africa in general.

Moreover, some scholars have come to Osundare's poetry from the distanciation strategies. This crop of scholars argues that his stylistic strategies, seen in relation of their *demystification* of the textual substance and diction, *alienation*, as well as their exploitation of "defamiliarization" or "distanciation" mode, proffer a connection between poetry and the ordinary man. For E. Sule Egya, "distanciation" is a potent strategy employed in his poetry for the denouncement of an abstruse, exclusive and Eurocentric poetic structure. He avows that the technique was responsible for the poet's ability to generate a boundless, accessible, folk-centred, Afrocentric "poetry of the marketplace" (Egya, 2016, pp. 75-90). Another critic, Adebayo Bamikunle also investigated the stylistic procedures of the poet. He purposively dwelt on the poet's exploitation of the various components of Yoruba orature traditions as approaches to distance his poetics from contemporary "euromodernist" exclusivity and obscurantism, thereby ensuring that poetry is both art and a commitment with socio-political realities (Bamikunle, 1992, pp. 15-36). The critical works of Christopher Anyokwu has touched on the "demystification" of Nigerian poetry. In exploring Osundare's precise linguistic elements like direct, everyday, spoken language as well as performance-oriented forms, he notes that these components transform his poetry from a "private, meditative, and elite" space into a "public, collective event" (Anyokwu, 2015, pp. 1-11).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

For its notional support, the study employs the Postcolonial "Alter/Native" Marxist Poetics. The concept was propounded by San Juan (2000, 150), an outstanding Filipino Marxist scholar, whose work projects a substitute for conventional postcoloniality, on national emancipation or class

resistance. This concept directly addresses concerns surrounding critiquing conventional postcoloniality via historical materialism. It aids in blending Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation-distanciation) with the (alter)-native tradition, showing how Osundare exploits local Yoruba oral poetics to scatter elitist Euro-modernist obscurantism, stimulate class awareness, while critiquing neocolonial abuses in post-independence African state. Thus, the study applies the strategy in dissecting how Osundare re-works the age-long Africa's indigenous orature in generating a new, critical, and anti-authoritarian lyrical idiom. It is simply utilised in harmony with the Brechtian distanciation critical model. By relying on above selected model, the study will be applying a multiple format that involves placing side by side various conceptual frames. This is a form of hybridity frame involving culture of methodological shift revealing how poets resolve the pressure of traditional African culture and its crash with Western critical models.

First, is the conceptual structure that borders on orature or traditional African oral aesthetics (Ojaide, 2010, pp. 135-48). This is vital because poetry for Osundare largely acts as a bridge between African and European linguistic components. Yoruba customary aesthetics with its quality of performance mediate against the dry impressions of modern poetics. Thus, his poems exude a melting pot of old and new African poetic components. The old beaming its searchlights of varied performances, legends, myths, proverbs, incantations, etc, tones down on the new, especially its linguistic restlessness, as it were. This enhances the poet's distancing posture, loosing the emotional attachment to the poetic concerns.

The second string of conceptual frame towards analytical proficiency is to add Bertolt Brecht *alienation* effect (1964, pp. 91-99). This effect entails the transformation of common phenomenon into something strange. The reason behind this Brechtian *de-familiarisation* is the prevention of undue emotional attachment. It enhances critical assessment. A close scrutiny of Osundare's poems shows his frequent exploitation of devices such as exaggeration, pun, sarcasm and satire. These lyrical tools generally transmute the familiar catastrophic concerns of his poetry into some *novel signals* of further inquiry. These mechanisms, therefore, edge readers or audience into thoughts about such concerns as inequality, dictatorship, massacre, corruption, poverty and the depletion of nature or the environment, rather than uncritically sympathise with the victims.

Third, related and vital to the theory of Postcolonial Marxist Poetics employed in this study is the Marxist literary frame, specifically the Louis Althusser's Theory of Aesthetic Distance (1971, pp. 221-27). This concept is equally supported by Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre (*Verfremdungseffekt*). Since, Osundare's poetry is tangled in social commitment, as earlier noted, it regularly centres readers' attention on socio-economic inequality, class struggle, dictatorship, corruption, exploitation and oppression of the down-trodden. Consequently, the Marxist theoretical code is suitable for assessing the poet's application of *distanciation* to analyse the postcolonial ruling class of Nigeria and their capitalist establishment.

The justification for the choice of hybridity in technique for the study hinges on its objectives. Here, strategies that focus on distanciation, especially socio-political role of

distanciation, are deemed vital to the investigation. Moreover, folklore and oral traditional forms maintain a special place in the poems. As such, the local meets the foreign, signifying the intertwining of African orature components with the literary elements of the West, and particularly the language. Finally, it is vital to make an analysis of the interrelationship between nature and humanity in the poems.

3.1 Methodology

To ensure a thorough examination of distanciation strategies in Osundare's poetry, this study adopts a qualitative, descriptive and interpretive research methodology. It thrives on a close textual analysis. It equally centres on how the poet exploits oral traditional components and distancing devices in presenting an assessment of socio-political concerns in his poems. A purposive selection of four poems was made from Osundare's two major poetry anthologies, *Songs of the Marketplace* and *The Eye of the Earth*. Specifically, two poems were selected from each anthology. This is owing to space and other significant constraints. From the first anthology, 'The Politician's Two Mouth' and 'The Horseman Cometh' are selected for analysis. From the second volume, 'They Too Are the Earth' and 'Our Earth Will Not Die' are also selected for analysis. These poems are chosen on the ground that they maintained an adequate presence of oral mechanisms (myths, proverbs, folksongs) in addition to humorous components.

Consequently, methodological code of the study combines oral conventional components with contemporary satirical distancing. This is aimed at demystifying poetic language and appraising the socio-political decadence in post-independence Nigeria. Regarding the scope of the study, therefore, some poems were selected from *Songs of the Marketplace* and *Village Voices*. In the long run, the study is anchored by a hybridity in technique blending folklore and oral traditional forms, the alienation effects (*Verfremdungseffekt*) of Bertolt Brecht with the Marxist literary frame. However, the study largely dealt with thematic concerns and style of selected texts, stressing their veracity in the development of an "alter-native poetic tradition" on the African literary arena.

4.1 Analysis of Distanciation Schemes in the Poetry of Niyi Osundare

Some specific distanciation schemes are evident in the poetry of Osundare. This section illustrates this, by deploying specific samples from the selected poems. In 'The Politician's Two Mouth', a poem from Osundare's *Songs of the Marketplace*, the poet uses distanciation to highlight the mental, physical and ideological isolation of fraudulent politicians from the suffering populace. The poem is a biting commentary on postcolonial deception, in which distanciation strategies are used to lampoon dishonest leadership. Metaphoric expressions like "lying wolves", violent swords disconnect political rhetoric from reality; derisive imagery as viewing these politicians as hungry dogs who use a "sieve" to sieve or filter truth, hence, ensuring a critical distance between the leader's words and public awareness. Through diverse distancing procedures, the poet is able to

expose the insincerity of the ruling elites, forcing readers to critically take their distance from deceptive promises.

In this poem, metaphor depicts the central physical and ideological isolation in the poetry of Osundare: “The politician has two mouths / both sharp like the white man’s razor” (Stanza 3). This is a remarkable allegory stressing the duality of positions and deceit of the political elites. Hence the poet implies by reference to the politician’s dual “mouth” that with one mouth he promises ‘heaven and earth’ during elections, and with ‘another mouth’ he consumes, defrauds and embezzles the entire wealth of the people. Hence, the political mouths are like “white man’s razor”, which historically characterises the alien heartless exploitation that colonialism embodies. The crooked politicians are even worse than colonial masters in their ruthless detachment from the pains they inflict on the masses.

Earlier in Stanza 2, one reads: “He prostrates for a vote / but his mind squats like a hungry dog”. Here, simile is applied to ensure a critical distance from the stinking behaviour of the deceptive politicians. The poet is emphatic on the politician’s deceptive campaign strategies, by the use of spatial and behavioral imagery. Hence, through the cultural sign of veneration (“prostrates”), stressing his deceptive deep respect in physically lowering himself to the ground (“squatting”) to beg for the electorate’s support. He could do anything, even to mask his greed from the voters. Then, having been empowered by the gullible people, he heightens his dens of robbery and deception. This is exposed through proverbial pictures painted by the last stanza: “Whoever believes what the politician says / His ear is blocked by the carcass of truth”. The populace is lampooned for its gullible outlook. The people ought to have learnt from the past to be enlightened about the harsh reality of their exploitation and oppression. Instead, they have abandoned the truth (“carcass of truth”) which is now left to decay. With their naive trust in the politician’s “two mouths”, there seems to be no hope for the people.

Metaphor also serves as a means of visual and linguistic distancing in the poem: “Is it not the politician / who sees a snake / and hails an earthworm?” (Stanza 1). By design, the politician’s visual awareness, thereby, ridiculing his intentional twisting of the truth. It is ironical that the politician sees a deadly, poisonous danger but concentrates in his warm greetings (“hails”) of an innocent earthworm. Through this, speaker highlights the ruthless mental and ethical gap between political rhetoric and the people’s predicaments as politicians are absolutely isolated from the reality facing the masses.

Again, in ‘The Horseman Cometh’ also from Osundare’s *Songs of the Marketplace*, the reader could notice the poet’s application of distancing in underscoring psychological and physical separation between the deceptive politicians and the naïve suffering masses. The poet also lampoons postcolonial military leadership sham. In this particular piece, the Brechtian distancing mode of creating an aura of weirdness in that which is familiar is seen. As a brazen critique on military dictators, the poem thrives on the unmasking of the despots, the absurdity and brutal nature of their inhuman leadership styles as well as the toll these had on the depraved masses.

In Stanza 1, Lines 1–3, this trend is very lucid: “The horseman cometh / astride a steed of steel / with a sabre in his teeth”.

Here, it is observed that the poet employs allusive prototypes correlated to myths and fables. The poet uses allegorical devices creating medieval, epic villains, hence, avoiding the direct naming of any specific Nigerian military dictator. By this metaphorical structure, he distances the reader from literal political figures while showing the timeless, brutal nature of despotism

The wreckage of these military ravens is as unprecedented as it is historically ironic: “He comes like the plague of the locust / eating up the morrow” (Stanza 7, Lines 30–31). These lines suffused in Biblical and agricultural images aids in effectively distancing readers from the political disasters created in Nigeria by the military during the 1970s and 1980s. The poem looks how mild political problems graduated into huge cataclysmic natural tragedy, underling the enduring and overwhelming consequences of insensitive regimes whose miscalculations continue to haunt the nation until the present day. Thus, these pictures continue in Stanza 3, Lines 10–11: “His breath is the cannon’s boom / his belly a hungry arsenal”. Devoid of humanity as revealed in these lines, the despot as well as his agents is likened to some moving machines of war and armaments. Again, readers are distanced, seeing the military leader not as a imperfect human leader, but as a perverted, mechanical monster. Hence, his gun helps him blood-letting that turns the community into a desert: “Clanking in his copper mail / he makes a desert of the town” (Stanza 5, Lines 22–23). Here, the poet employs ancient, archaic vocabulary (“copper mail”), turning the modern, familiar context of a dictator’s fraudulent regime into an unfamiliar situation. The tyrant is now a destructive wanderer-warrior symbolic of the nation-wide anguish and death attributed to various military regimes. Through this Brechtian distancing mode, the poet detaches readers from the vicious acts from “stallion’s hooves” which signify the infamous military dictator, the “horseman”.

In the poem, ‘They Too Are the Earth’ from Osundare’s *The Eye of the Earth*, there is also an application of Brechtian distanciation strategy, poised at dislocating the delusion of privilege, societal naivety, and expose the physical and mental gap between the oppressed rural poor and the affluent oppressors. In Stanza 1, Lines 2–4, a socio-economic juxtaposition occurs: “Sprawled out in brimming gutters / They are the earth / Under snakeskin shoes and Mercedes tyres”. Here, one finds the physical distancing of the exploited from the wealthy. This is seen in the disparity between the gross wretchedness of the poor (“brimming gutters”) and the opulence of their oppressor, the ultimate symbols of wealth (“snakeskin shoes” and “Mercedes tyres”). This style pushes the reader into tackling the brutality of this callous class partition, creating a psychological gulf between him and the heartless elite.

This poem, ‘They Too Are the Earth’, equally underpins distancing through rhetorical estrangement: “Are they of this earth / Who fritter the forest and harry the hills” (Stanza 5, Lines 22–24). In other words, rhetorical questions are applied as mechanisms for alienation, bringing the authority of the cruel land-destroyers into questioning. The poet, hence, identifies the huge gulf existing between the helpless, benevolent, earth-preserving poor and the capitalist marauders and

greedy exploiters of the earth who sever the bond between nature and humanity. The poet invariably laments physical and manipulative labour: “The distant groans of thousands buried alive / In hard unfathomable mines” (Stanza 3, Lines 12–13). There is both topographical and mental isolation hinted through such words as “distant”. Here, it is the heartless oppressors who isolate themselves from the deadly human price needed to maintain their prosperity. The poet also laments the unfortunate seclusion of indigent rural inhabitants forced by state neglect or ecological disasters to abandon their ancestral landed properties: “The dying distant deaths / In narrow abandoned hamlets” (Stanza 4, Lines 17–18). There is emphasis on the cruel nature of governmental seclusion of rural poor inhabitants from the urban main streams of life.

In the fourth poem, “Our Earth Will Not Die” also from Osundare’s *The Eye of the Earth*, there are various instances of the application of distancing strategies. The reader encounters the subjugation of the environment in addition to human ruin: “A lake is killed by the arsenic urine / From the bladder of profit factories” ((Stanza 2, Lines 10–11). The oppressors have sabotaged the customary vision of nature as an unadulterated, nurturing mother. Applying distancing from anthropomorphic violence, the poem exposes many nasty human targets from factories and industrial sites in addition to other bizarre, disgusting desecration of the environment. Invariably, the modern man’s disgusting attitude to nature and the universe, forces the poet into a vision of interconnected mortality, where: “Fishes have died in the waters. Fishes. / Birds have died in the trees. Birds.” (Stanza 5, Lines 29–30). Thus, death ends all alike including man, devaluing his special pride, enhancing the distance the reader feels from the traditional “human-first” perception. The poem is a devaluation of man’s supremacy myth.

There is also the use of slavery metaphors, highlighting historical distancing: “Lynched the lakes / Slaughtered the seas / Mauled the mountains” (Stanza 1, Lines 2–4). Distance is generated from the normal, clean awareness of environmental wreckage, compelling readers to link environmental abuse with awful, historical human carnage. This becomes intense as the poem further deploys apocalyptic imagery, demonstrating climatic defamiliarisation: “a nuclear sun rises like a funeral ball / Reducing man and meadow to dust and dirt” (Stanza 4, Lines 23–24). Through the apocalyptic simile “like a funeral ball” and emblematic swapping of the life-giving sun for an agency of destruction, the poet radically distances the environment from its familiar, life-sustaining rural cycle. The fantasy of refuge turns into a bleak, isolated post-disaster landscape.

5.1 Conclusion

Niyi Osundare’s stylistic techniques of distancing allow him to convert familiar post-colonial socio-political predicaments into a vital creative experience. This re-reading of his selected poems reveals a conscious, versatile exploitation of distancing modes to confront the complacency of modern African society. By translating both tragic and mundane experiences into a musical force and metaphoric exploration, the poet provokes a re-evaluation of socio-economic disparities and

the environmental calamity confronting Nigeria. The investigation concludes that Osundare's poetic approach converts the private individual anxieties into the public political concerns, placing the truth in more conspicuous space through distanciation. It is more obvious to call for comparative studies applying the distanciation models to poet's use of proverbs, satire, myth and other features of tradition in his poems like *Village Voices*.

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