

## OSUNDARE’S PREDILECTION TO PERFORMANCE IN *SONGS OF THE SEASON*

**Uchenna David Uwakwe, PhD.**

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OVERRI  
DIRECTORATE OF GENERAL STUDIES, ENGLISH UNIT

### **Abstract**

Writers of African literature have severally paid attention to the conflicts in society at given points of their history, recollecting the transcendence into epochs that are considered monumental. The penchant to the concept ‘season’ has not only been made to impinge on the passage of time but particularly the deference to the breach which has begun to advocate the class ideology within the African society. Often, the experiences which had placed writers at certain crossroads have given vent to the metaphors which are imposed as the fulcrum of their elected themes. However, songs have not received as much critical study as poetry because they seemed always to bear traditional cum communal poise. They are traditional to the extent that they accompany such seasonal events as festivals, and communal in that they very easily become the property of the community in which they are rendered. Sometimes though, the original composer loses the authorship to the community. Even with the present status of oral literary studies, there is still so much to be done in the critical appraisal of songs. It becomes imperative to examine how Niyi Osundare’s title, *Songs of the Season* stands as the denominator of oral literary precepts, particularly as they implicate the tendency towards performance. And as modern African poetry, part of the engagement is to observe the extent to which they structure alternative poetics in traditional poeticization.

**Key words:** performance, song and poetry

### **Introduction**

Songs have remained very prominent in all facets of African culture and lifestyle. Apart from being employed in such traditional performances as festivals, other aspects of routine living are garnished with songs. Varieties of songs are performed during occasions, festivals or special events connecting people. Even in the course of laborious tasks, songs are consciously or unconsciously performed. Osundare adopts songs as para-poetic denominator of the attraction which he demands of his audience, the people, the oppressed who echo either the poet’s oppressed-persona or the ironical bourgeoisie-persona in the repeated lines that accentuate the disparity between the rich few and the marginalized multitude. The poet’s consciousness of the saturation of class conflict within the Nigerian society is visible in the adoption of personas and imbedded characters reflective of dramatic and prosaic modes of literary expression. This style effuses in the poetry collection as the extra-poetic devices that enforce the poet’s inclination to performance, known as the heartbeat of the oral literary tradition.

It is in this regard that the discourse of songs is often placed in ethnographical and anthropological contexts as cultural purveyors. The connectedness of the song with a given people who are usually identified with a set of cultural practices informs the perspective which is put forward in the Boston Review thus: “But people who are not as familiar with contemporary poetry do understandably make a distinction that on the one hand poems are ‘literary’ and on the other songs are ‘popular’, i.e. written in a language regular people can understand”. In spite of being distanced from the focus here, the shade of opinion here

---

implicates the need to clearly distinguish among songs, music and poetry in the understanding that there may be colluding parallels particularly between what is regarded as ‘literary’ and ‘popular’.

It is more logical to associate songs with the oral literary tradition, and poetry with the modern. In this perception, songs are as literary as poems after all, perhaps each with more inclination to different elements of figurative merit. A poem is seen to have a fixed form, written and identified with the poet and sometimes within the specificity of the poet’s style. But, songs belong to a given community where they are transmitted in the context of performance. These contexts may include but not restricted to such occasions as moonlight games, folktales, birth, child-naming, marriage ceremonies, chieftaincy installations and funerals. Therefore, songs mostly lack tangible existence until they receive life through performance, indeed among a people whose performance bind them to secular or spiritual rituals. It becomes imperative to analyze songs in their ritualized contexts in order to also locate their subject matter within each occasion of performance.

While songs may be accompanied by such traditional instruments as gongs and flutes (and others with native forms and names), the contemporaneous association of music comes with guitar, organ/piano and modern drums. Another fact of distinction is that music is often produced in the modulated atmosphere of studios while songs can be realized by performers who would rather attract the inclusion of the audience in the performance. It is in this regard that Niyi Osundare’s song-poetry seems to invite the comunality of the audience as co-performers. As poetry they are written and do not have accompanying instruments. But as song, they relate events that are common to ordinary people’s experience

Anyokwu, in attempting to extricate African poetry from Western models discusses what he regards as the measure of Osundare’s poetic revolution, citing lines from the other collection, *Songs of the Marketplace* which gives an easy parallel to the patterning in *Songs of the season*:

the hawker’s ditty  
the eloquence of the gong  
the lyric of the marketplace

The lexical choices, ‘hawkers’ and ‘marketplace’, are symbolic of the status among who are co-performers in the ‘eloquence of the gong’. Anyokwu’s verdict is that, “This Osundaresque *disembourgeoisement* or/and demystification of the language of poetry is an oblique broadside against the poetic practice of the Soyinka-Clark-Okigbo”(3).

Nesther Alu stirs the parameters compelled by the troika, Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike in *The Decolonization of African Literature* on what she regards as the “ardent demands and open agitations for authentic African imagery, laments, invocations and the re-rooting of modern poetry in oral traditions”(65). Alu places Osundare’s poetry in the ranking of the second generation of poet’s who have emerged on the African poetic arena among whom also is Tanure Ojaide. Thus, Alu cites Ojaide’s poem, ‘Naked Words’, here:

This is a family ceremony  
to which the world has come,  
If outsiders understand us

let them imbibe our wisdom and secrets  
but we will not change our songs

Perhaps, Ojaide's response here calls attention to certain suppositions on the dividing line amongst poetry, song and music, one of which is that a song recollects the feeling of a group as seen in the plural determiner 'our'. Nonetheless, the parallelism between the song and music is comparable to that between a parable and a story. In other words, certain adaptations are required for a song to be measured as music, yet whatever makes up the adjustment may become extraneous to the song texture. Consequently, as much as songs bear certain measures of musicality, Osundare's presentations as 'songs' would be out of place as 'Music(s) of the Seasons'. In the same vein, the presence of profuse poetic effects in music does not give warrant to their consideration as poems.

Cuddon Observes that many of the poets of the Elizabethan and Jacobian periods wrote fine songs as well as poems that might be set to music"(667). Indeed, music aligns within the consideration of songs which have been garnished with the appurtenances of modern musicology, tunes from keyboards/piano, guitar and their likes, but songs will rather go with such accompaniments as flutes, gongs, drums and other seemingly more traditional instruments that yield echoic tunes and may after all not appeal to non-initiates. The implication therefore is that songs call attention to the initiates as performers, and in so doing, also initiate more people into the embedded values. However, at the functional level, the obvious connection that is known of poems, music and songs relates to their adoption in creating certain mood in their occasions of performance. It is this mood that is generated in the translation from an individualized ownership of the art to its eventual place as communal possession.

Azuonye expounds the possible meanings of the seeming "nonsense" refrains in Igbo folksongs. In doing this, he reviews the responses from the audience by classifying the refrains into eight categories. Azuonye rejects the assertion that the refrains are mere nonsensical sounds and emphasizes that "each sound has a definite connotation, symbolic value or specific meaning" (72). The sense in the refrains which Osundare articulates for each song relate to the responses which the poet expects to elicit from his audience, the co-performers. In song of the tax-gatherer, the song that recurs within the poem is captured here:

When rulers are fat and broke  
It is the shame of the people

The message usually pertains to the ruling/ruled class, oppressor/oppressed, and indeed the confident comfortable rank, placed against the hopelessly downtrodden folks. In discussing the disposition to orality, Ezenwa-Ohaeto's elicits echoes from *Village Voices*, *Eye of the Earth*, *Moonsongs*, *Songs of the Marketplace*, and indeed *Songs of the Seasons* in asserting that Osundare's Yoruba nativity and the patterns of their oral tradition are decipherable in these collections which are pinpointed. Among many other comments which reveal a prime place appraisal of Osundare's craft, Ezenwa-Ohaeto insists that,

Osundare uses dramatic language... to capture humanity's weakness and predilection for sycophancy ... The voices which raise the songs are numerous. They include the street fighters, caricatured members of the ruling class, farmers, politicians and market-women(157).

Ngumoha appreciates how the string from Osundare's nativity and experiences foreground his poetry, especially in his inclination to orality in *The Eye of the Earth*: "the poet serves to

link his poem to the folk belief of the people of Ikere-Ekiti, it is an evocation of the primordial experiences of their ancestors”(128). Invariably, Osundare’s inquest into the myths of his native land prepares the ground for the plunge into the seasons which trail what Ngumoha regards as ‘primordial epoch’.

In *Songs of the Seasons* specifically, it is the inclination to the performance driving the songs which seems to precipitate the contrived taxonomy into songs, dialogue, tributes, parables and the trail which he regards as ‘sundry strivings’. Osundare foreshadows the entire collection with the caption, ‘a song of my land’, measurably suggesting the extent to which conflicts in the poet’s consideration pertain to the intrigues within his own nationality, Nigeria. While the songs adopt the Yoruba figurative patterns, their narrative contour spread across conflicts in the Nigerian nation. Hitherto, it affirms the deprecation wrought upon the tradition by western values, a corollary to the aggregate dehumanized tendencies in the poet’s society. While the major conflict in each song visibly projects their narrative function, Osundare amplifies his poetic and dramatic instincts in the choice of presenting his poems in variant expressive modes, with ‘songs’ as the pervading (alter)native poetic device.

The text for analysis is *Songs of the Season* initially published in 1990 and revised in 2012. This text happens to be one of Osundare’s scintillating collections, especially the ones with a leaning on the ‘song’ tradition, the others being *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983) and *Moonsongs* (1988).

### Central Narrative Elements

Osundare’s inclination to the narrative in the songs recollects the dual narrative roles which the song performs, especially in the Igbo oral tradition. The first is the *akuko-na-egwu*, (a song that performs a narrative function) and *egwu-nime-akuko (ifo)*, (a song accompanying a folktale). Similarly, tale-telling sessions interspersed with musical ingredients provide a great measure of magnetic pull. Since participation is an inalienable aspect of most African folktales, the makeup of the audience provides the scale by which the performer’s skill is gauged. For tales that are accompanied by songs, there are great prospects for performers to enjoy the patronage of participation. The songs are poetic and also echoic. The two levels of the performer’s skill that prominently come under scrutiny here include the tune and the theme. The performer attempts to influence the participation of the audience through these targets, drawing members of the audience, co-performer’s also of the songs who are usually inclined to one of either the tune or the lyric, or indeed both.

Beyond the functions of songs as tale-accompaniments, there are tale-songs, ballads which tell such traditional stories as myths and legends. In each of these contexts, it is with the artist’s design in embodying the conflict that the audience is drawn into the passion of each song. Sekoni adopts the myth of the jealous co-wife in observing that “conflict is the major source of tension in oral narrative performance just as it is in most other forms of fiction” (143). Sekoni’s assessment of the performer’s objective is that it activates what he regards as “emotive satisfaction”, within and among his audience. The derivation of the mythical essence, within the context of the given conflict generates some form of commonness of purpose within each setting performance.

Okoh is emphatic about the place of Enuani narratives in condemning the highhandedness and despotic inclination of kings. While these often adopt animal characters, they are only parabolic of the known patterns of dictatorship in the human society.

---

By means of such tales, members of the society reaffirm that in the Igbo political set up, the people have a say in how they are governed. Especially for rulers and kings who are wont to tread the dictatorial highway, there is therefore the warning that people's rights are not to be trampled on, a conclusion which Enuani performers emphasize....serving as the community's collective voice declaring that bad government - intimidation, highhandedness, repressiveness, or the oppression of the underprivileged - cannot be condoned(29-30).

In the paradoxical connotations which Osundare's titles bear, the forms of oppression which Okoh calls attention to are foreshadowed. These are replete in the section on 'parables' where Osundare's narrative density manifests in the titles: 'borrowing what they stole', 'slaves who adore their chains', 'they will sleep standing upright' and 'the horse which rode the rider'. Most probably, it is in this perception that Osundare connects with the animal figures in the Yoruba fauna, satirizing the catalysts of these conflicts. Some of the songs/poems tend towards sarcasm, espousing the deep-seated oppressive tendencies of the rich/ ruling class.

The hyena is adopted in representing despotic rulers in the poem 'crying hyena':

Once upon a time  
When ears were far from the head  
Once upon this amazing time  
A tribe of hyenas broke loose  
On his terrified kingdom  
Tearing fathers up at noon  
And eating up their children (95)

The hyena image easily points to the Yoruba depiction of the oppressive class and in the following lines there is a clue to the growing number of malignant elements which this image represents. The rulers condone the hyenas and the hunters only to prosecute the wishes of these rulers. The voice of the king says:

Hyenas! Hyenas! Why must you people  
Always find something to fret about?  
I have never seen a hyena in this land  
And my royal hunters have never caught  
Sight of any such offending cat...(96)

In 'song of the sudden storm' (97-98), the same hyena image effuses but with the addition of the lion in same avaricious quest which indicts the power and class incontinences. There are other animal images, positive in their traditional estimation - the gazelle, associated with "triumphant freedom; the antelope of "speedy hopes"; and the unrestrained questions of the talkative parrot; which instigate the assumption of a desirable change. In spite of these assumptions, the misdemeanors associated with the hyena are seen to return in these lines from 'song of the sudden storm':

BUT  
We saw the hyena with paws still dripping  
The blood of our recent hopes,  
We also saw the lion who gobbled us for lunch  
And lined up our children  
For his evening banquet (97-98)

---

In ‘different dreams’, the leopard is introduced to the pack of ferocious beasts, yet the sheep’s foolishness is berated;

“Let us go and eat” says the leopard  
To the straving sheep  
Unthinking, the wooly head  
Follows the cunning claw;  
Too late the eaten finds his folly  
So fast the eater finds his food  
Tell me, people of our land,  
Where can they ever meet:  
The cravings of the prowling hunter  
And the wishes of the prancing deer. (99)

In the last stanza of the poem ‘borrowing what they stole’, Osundare employs two nocturnal birds, known to draw attention to danger/horror, as additional animal images – the owl and the bat:

The owl hoots out a tune  
From the top of a knowing tree:  
“The world is up side down like the bat of night,  
How can a people now borrow  
What they used to own? (101).

In several lines of the poem/song ‘not my business’, the ‘once upon a time’ ritual translates with the same intensity to certain periods of the day ‘one morning’, ‘one night’ and ‘one evening’. The first line which reads, “They picked Akanni up one morning”, introduces the spate of unlawful mis-enforcements of the law by supposed agents of the law. These actions which are seen to apply to Nigeria, come with seemingly nationwide identities, Akanni, Danladi and Chinwe. But, in this poem, the attitude of the bourgeoisie is betrayed in this refrain which the inclusive persona renders here:

What business of mine is it  
So long they don’t take the yam  
From my savouring mouth (102).

The persona’s indifference at the plight of the oppressed calls attention again to the attitude of the King in the ‘crying hyena’, where the king had refuted the allegation that there were indeed hyenas, until his only son disappeared “Into the spotted beast’s capacious stomach” (96).

As part of the patterning of the collection, Osundare ensures that his thematic focus is captured in a manner that does not sound very cloggy to his audience, the co-performers of the ritualized songs. In so doing, the poems/songs which bear more compact figures – the proverbial titles are made to highlight each message. One of such instances is visible in the arrangement of the poems/songs. The message in ‘not my business’ is closely followed by the title, ‘slaves who adore their chains’, with the likelihood that even those who parade themselves as co-oppressors of the poor are seen to walk foolishly within the predators’ camp, in almost the same unwary attitude of the sheep image in ‘different dreams’. There is a visible application of poetic justice which is known to be prevalent in the African tale-telling tradition.

In another context, Azuonye fittingly locates functionality, authenticity, clarity and creative variation as the four intrinsic principles which a song should embody (Kaalu:48-49). What Azuonye does with the Ohafia singer of tales is, to a certain measure, comparable to what Osundare has done with the poems/songs in *Songs of the Season*. While these four elements are seen to be present in the craft here, the justification of authenticity in Osundare's collection comes in the creative variation which manifests profusely in the narrative technique adopted in the poems. The posture of the persona is seen to switch from the omniscient third person to the first person narrator, yet in each instance, there is an infallible performative consistency in the persona's association with the narrative characters. In this regard one might need to learn how this pertains to Austin's speech act theory, which enshrines that every occasion for speech making involves performing an action which draws the speaker and the audience into a purposive context.

In 'not my business' for instance, the distanced third person 'they' in "They picked Akanni up one morning" and that in "They came one night" assume a further unrecognizable distance in the passivization which follows in the lines: "Only to find her job was gone" and "A knock on the door froze my hungry hand". The levels of detachment in "her job was gone" might have been milder if 'gone' were substituted for 'taken', where the passivized performer would have remained with the boss/manager rather than the job which was said to have 'gone'. In the same vein, the subject of the 'knock on the door' which 'froze' the persona's 'hungry hand' is also passivized.

Much of the parabolic texture in the poem/songs which Osundare classifies as 'parables', comes from the characters in fables, animals which symbolize the power and class configurations in real life situations. To Abrams and Harper a parable is usually intended as "a tacit analogy, or parallel, with a general thesis or lesson that the narrator is trying to bring home..." (9). The understanding of the complementarities of traditional paradigms in the 'parable' and the 'fable' reveals the multifaceted potency of the poet's craft.

Many other songs are replete with the narrative elements. In 'song of the kangaroo', the opening line gives this indication – "In our country's court there is a kangaroo"(20), in 'retrenched' it opens thus: "once I had a job in hand". In these formulaic narrative openers that switch from the past to the present, they are rather made to recollect the cyclic move of the seasons, with the kind of malady which J.P. Clark's poem, 'Abiku' captures in the lines "Coming and going these several season". They are of events which had been in the past, and still remain now and will also in the future be. It is at this level that the fabula of the past 'once upon a time', variously adopted *Songs of the Season*, becomes relevant in today's postcolony and therefore translates into the parables which the animal images known in given African (Yoruba) tale-telling tradition illustrate.

### **Dramatic Elements in Performance**

The poems in the section, 'dialogue', exemplify the profundity of performance and how germane it is to the African literary tradition. These poems generate presumed dramatis personae within the dialogic patterns in the songs. Of the seven poems presented in this section, dialogue, only three visibly bear this dramatic mould. It is in the first dialogue, 'Olowo debates Talaka', that there is the explicit dramaturgy in the Yoruba meaning of these characters' names: *Olowo* (the rich), drawn against *Talaka* (the poor). The two songs that follow, 'buka banter' and 'at the senior service club', bear implicit characterization, with the voice of the implied characters' demand for food, indicating measures of sub-stratification within the two extremes of the poet's exploration of class. In the footnote to the term 'buka'

explained as ‘a cheap eating place’, the variant other is visibly drawn with the appendage of ‘senior’ to the latter title. The irony in the characterization comes more provocatively in an earlier title ‘song of the pandering don’, in which the professor ‘don’ is made to express his bitterness against “all that shit about equal rights”(12). Much more is said in his hatred for his students who are the voices in ‘buka banter’.

Ngumoha locates Osundare’s consciousness in recollecting the concentration of ritualistic images in the poem ‘rainsongs’. According to Ngumoha, “If you view rainfall as a process of spiritual regeneration and intentionally ritualize the practice, the benefits will be greater than if you see rainfall merely as a phenomenon of weather...”(132). Regarding the poem ‘rainmaking’, Ngumoha also observes how Osundare places his persona in the position where he is responsible for initiating the relationship between the heaven and the earth and also initiating the relationship between the priest and the people whose desire for the rain is met. It is in this priest-poet role that the dramatic density of the poem effuses. The persona demonstrates the power to observe seasons and indeed how to bring about mediation when the need arises. Supposedly, in Ngumoha’s estimation, it is in this capacity that the priest-poet is the ‘eye of the earth’. Another fact which implicates the sarcastic posture of the poems in Songs of the Seasons, the ritual effect of the songs also justify the place of the poet as some kind of priest whose incantative-lines seek to bring about a cleansing of his society from all manners of atrocities, particularly by the ruling class. To the extent that the incantations are rhythmic, their song value become apparent and in so far as they bear ritualized traditional patterns for rainmaking, they draw on the people as chorus that give effect to their performance as song.

Osundare’s dramatic instinct assumes another dimension in the section on tributes. Here, the context in which the factual characters adopted are eulogized in a manner that brings them into a fellowship with the people’s plights. Often, intrinsic dramatic and narrative features particularly of the oral traditional texture are decipherable in the poems. This may have come to emphasize how much these songs could contribute in the performance of rituals (traditional drama) and tale-telling (traditional narratives). It is the poet’s craft in knitting the choice of words and their figurative value that generates the compactness of their symbolism.

At each level, the song is marked out as being distinct from the normal pattern in language use, particularly in the kind of transference of figures which is identifiable in Chukwuma’s regard for “secondary orality”() – the creative potency of adopting a given sub-genre in the performance of another sub-genre, one with related characters, figures or functionality. Chukwuma’s observation with the Igbo oral tradition is also true of Yoruba poetry, where hunting songs are also adopted in eulogizing an accomplished hunter, or ultimately, at such a character’s burial. Among the Igbo for instance, one must not have killed a leopard before taking the *Ogbuagu* (killer of leopard) title, but accomplishing other feats that parallel legendary estimation becomes a criterion for such honor. This gives warrant to the transference of figures in ‘secondary orality’.

In spite of the poet’s attempt to ensure that there are modern poetic patterns in this section on songs, there are still connectors of the Yoruba oral traditional poetry, especially what Abrams and Harper regard as ‘performance poetry’, which is said to result from the “...sustained revival of oral poetry since the beginning of the print culture”(271). Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubiike recognize how these oral forms, including the folktale – which possess dramatic quality, lose their theatrical potency to the writing tradition. They assert that, “much of the



theatrical dimension to the performance of an oral narrative cannot be captured in writing”(37). These give the justification for Osundare’s recourse to songs, whose varied applications mediate in this existing gap.

One of the noblest of the *Ijalla*, the Yoruba traditional hunting poem, ‘A Salute to the Elephant’ is captured in some of its lines here:

Elephant, praise-named Laaye, massive blackish-grey creature:  
Elephant, who single-handed makes the dense forest tremble:  
Elephant, who stands sturdy and upright, who strolls as if reluctantly:  
Elephant, whom one sees and points at with all one’s fingers.  
The hunter’s boast at home is not repeated when he really meets the elephant,  
The hunter’s boast at home is not repeated before the elephant:  
Ajanaku, who looks backwards with difficulty like a man with a stiff neck:  
Elephant, who has a head pad but carries no load,  
Elephant, whose burden is the huge head he balances:

The several patterns and figures which have often been transferred to other sub-genres of Yoruba traditional poetry, including the praise poems/songs which Osundare designates as tributes, owe part of their symbolism to the mould of this traditional poetry. The Elephant figure is adopted in the tribute, ‘for Olof Palme’ where the one eulogized is said to be the, “Elephant that sought the peace/ Of the deer” (74). Also, in the tribute, ‘for Chief Obafemi Awolowo’, a closer parallel is drawn with the the lines in ‘A Salute to the Elephant’. These parallel extracts are presented here:

Elephant, who single-handed makes the dense forest tremble (A Salute...)

Ah! The elephant has fallen/ A gigantic emptiness has gripped/  
The kernel of our striving forests (Songs: 82)

Another obvious parallel with this Yoruba traditional poem is in the manner in which the objects of the tribute are subjectified using varied forms of apostrophe. The mood of the characters’ presence is contrived in the dramatic form which suggests a dialogue between them and Osundare’s persona address thus:

Your night was a commonwealth of stars  
Your sleep so quick with stubborn visions

In ‘for Chief Samuel Fal Adeniran’ the apostrophe which comes as appellations, rather recollect verifiable the roles which the character had played in his life time.

Teacher, father, founder; pilgrim hand...  
You moulded obelisks, you moulded mansions...(60)

Part of the force of figurines is the re-enforcement of the apostrophe with the metaphor in “pilgrim hand”. Same effect is achieved in the adoption of “O! truth” in the poem, ‘for Dele Giwa’(69) where the poet appears to place the persona with the eulogized personage in some kind of implicit dialogic context.

### Varied Poeticized Elements

Osundare patterning of the sections in give the hint of his intention of adopting varied poeticized elements. The first section, in spite of being captioned ‘songs’ maintains prominent poetic devices. Yet, the inclination to the variants of poeticization appears glaring with the last of the last sections which the poet locates as, ‘sundry strivings’.

In equating poetry with songs, Chukwuma draws its approximation to poetry in its structure and form. The distinctiveness in the language of poetry is observable at the lexical, semantic, syntactic, and indeed phonological levels. Osundare appears to have set out to draw a parallel between his identification with songs and their adaptability to modern literary expressions. It is in this regard that the titles which are made to fall under the songs bear the density of modern poetic elements, especially in their mood and forms.

Of the thirteen poems that are placed as songs, only the last two, ‘song of the tax-gatherer and shout of the people’, are structured without the regular pattern of stanzas. In nine of the poems: ‘song of the jobless graduate’; ‘song of the pandering don’; ‘song of the street-sweeper’; ‘and cometh the bulldozer’; ‘retrenched; song of the kangaroo’; ‘the road to Abuja’; ‘song of the tyrant’ and ‘song of the straying bullet’, Osundare fittingly applies the quatrain while in ‘not for the poor’ and ‘song of the Nigerian driver’, they are structured in stanzas of eight lines. In ‘not for the poor’, the poet in spite of beginning the first four lines in Yoruba language still makes them inclusive of the eight-line stanza. And as it is apparent, the translated meaning verifies that they are supportive of the poet’s intended meaning here:

<i>Bamubamu la yo</i>	- We are absolutely contented
<i>Bamubamu la yo</i>	- We are absolutely contented
<i>Awa o mo p’ebi n pomo enikankan</i>	- What business of ours if anyone is starving
<i>Bamubamu la yo</i>	- We are absolutely contented

The poet also puts to use varied kinds of rhyme. In ‘song of the tyrant’ and ‘song of the straying bullet’, the rhyme scheme is regularly patterned. But most importantly, in the refrains and other forms of repetition the value of the songs are seen to lie in their performance.

Visibly again, the poet uses these lines in not only calling attention to the psychology of the rich but also the ostensible helplessness which comes up in one of the titles in the section on parable, ‘not my business’. However, he explores the varied expressive modes he chooses, through the personas whose status fit into the two pervading class-rankings. Just as it is found in the poem, ‘not for the poor’, the poet sets up the poor and the rich in varied styles as the encompassing subject matter in most of the poems/songs. In ‘retrenched’, the burdensome labours of the persona are recollected in the repetition of the word ‘work(ed)’ which is made to occur in four lines and indeed twice in each of them. The first of this repetition goes thus: “I worked and worked as a factory hand”(line 5). In the next stanza, It comes with an ironical indictment on the same employer through whose machination the retrenchment came. It reads, “I worked and worked for a grateful boss”(line 9). And further this boss is profusely indicted in the entire sixth stanza:

...who broke the country?  
Who looted the millions of the oily boom?  
Who stole the licence to import our needs  
To swell their fortunes and shrink our own?

The adoption of the first person, ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘our’ against the third person plural pronouns, ‘they’ and ‘their’ point to the contrast painted here. As it is, ‘our needs’ continue to ‘swell their fortunes’. When the persona is employed in the third person stance, some of the predicaments of the poor are placed against their estimation within the society. In ‘song of the

---

street-sweeper’, the street-sweeper is derided by both the oppressor and his own children in these lines:

His children say he’s not a man  
The powermen say he’s just as poor

These varying moulds of contrasts are mostly visible with the repetitive patterns. While the repetition of lexical items implicates their derivation from a given stock, their semantic import recollects the poet’s disposition to his thematic inclination.

In the poem/song, ‘and cometh the bulldozer’ the employment of antithesis is uniquely contrived in:

The big bulldozer at war with peace...  
Armed with claws and iron laws  
Elephant legs on our huts and sheds  
Dead, dead deaf to wails and woes

Again, the multiple figurative patterns occur in the lines and stanzas which also heighten the employment of contrasts. In the lines captured here, there are alliterative as well as different rhyme patterns. These intensify the rhythmic effects and place them sufficiently as songs.

Apart from the contrasts which the poet places within each poem/song, in the arrangement of the titles, the poet also generates the force in the contrasts that he intends. The parallel placement of ‘song of the jobless graduate’ and ‘song of the pandering don’, appears to pit the student against his lecturer. More complex still, is the power-hungry lecturer’s attitude to his students who represent the other class. This is seen in the lines here:

His hero is Darwin read upside down  
Hitler, Rhodes and Somoza too  
He loves Mr Reagan as a man of power  
And worships Mobutu as a constant king....  
He hates the students – those eternal pests!...  
At the ‘Senior Staff Club’ beer flows for free

The mention of the ‘Senior Staff Club’ in one of the lines points to the manner in which Osundare contrasts his subject matters. They are not only embedded within a given poem but they are also derived as titles preceding other titles, with emphatic contrasts in the subject matter. The poet places the poems, ‘buka banter’ and ‘at the senior service club’, as restaurants of divergent classes one after the other.

### Conclusion

Osundare’s choice of the title *Songs of the Season* is not only homonymous and emblematic of the woes that indict the postcolony, but it is also emphatic about the recourse to traditional artistic patterns which enclose esteemed aesthetic taste. The predilection to ‘songs’, in the project of dissecting the matters accompanying the given seasons which Osundare probes, is significant in the transcendence of the African poetic (alter)native to Western forms of versification. The collection of poems in *Songs of the Seasons* are not in any manner cloggy, but the symbols are clearly indicative of the poet’s acquaintance with his environment, and indeed how the change in seasons implicates the crossroads of culture. To this extent, the recognition of ‘seasons’ assumes a remarkable bearing.

African literature has kept the implications of colonialism, of the West, most memorable. And so, the departure from the Western poetic models is also particularly noteworthy in Osundare’s *Songs of the Seasons*. Indeed, this collection draws attention to the decolonization

thrusts which Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike draw attention to. For Osundare, the African pristine culture in which songs were also adopted in presenting historical and intriguing narratives become effectual in recollecting other appurtenances of the tradition which the postcolonial season appears to have desecrated. Much of Osundare's seasons come with the effects of the autumnal West wind whose havoc implicate the class struggles which result in poverty, and indeed death for those whose unyielding pursuit of human equality run against exploitative and dehumanizing machinations. Osundare's songs also appear to exemplify patterns for decolonizing the cloggy style which Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike interrogate among some African poets here: "Why should the poet mangle the syntax and scramble the words in the first place? It is surely an excess of poetic license for the poet to mutilate the very medium of his communication only to force his reader to repair it in order to understand him" (214). As it usually is with these songs, the contexts of their performance are sufficient meaning-indicators for Osundare's revolution in the present poetic dispensation, another season of songs.

### Works Cited

- Alu, Nesther Nachafiya. "Style and the New Poetic Revolution in Niyi Osundare's Poetry". *African Research Review An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia Vol. 2 (3), August, 2008 (Pp. 62-84)*. Print.
- Anyokwu, Christopher. 'The Essentials of Niyi Osundare's Poetry'. *Transnational Literature* Vol. 8 no. 1, November 2015. <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html> Web.
- Azuonye, Chukwuma. "Kaalu Igirigiri, an Ohafia Igbo Singers of Tales" *The Oral Performance in Africa* Ed. Isidore Okpewho) Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1990: 42-79. Print.
- "The Meaning of the Meaningless Refrain in Igbo Folksongs and Storytelling Events" *Traditional Storytelling Today: An International Sourcebook*. Margaret Read MacDonald. Chicago: Fitzroy [http://works.bepress.com/chukwuma\\_azuonye/72](http://works.bepress.com/chukwuma_azuonye/72) Web.
- Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike. *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980. Print.
- Chukwuma, Helen. *Igbo Oral Literature: Theory and Tradition*. Abak: Belpot, 1994. Print.
- Clark, J.P. 'Abiku' *The West African Verse* (D.I Nwoga eds.) Michigan: Longmans, 1967. Print.
- Cuddon, J.A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books, 2013. Print.
- Ezenwa- Ohaeto. *Contemporary Nigerian Poetry and the Poetics of Orality*. Bayreuth: Bayreuth University. 1998. Print.
- Ngumoha, Emma. 'The Poet as Rainmaker: Fertility and Pluvial Aesthetics

In Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* *Tydscrief Vir LetterKunde*  
Vol 48 (1) 2011.[124-132] Print.

Osundare, Niyi. *Songs of the Season*. Revised ed. Ibadan: Heinemann,  
2012. Print.

Osundare, Niyi. *Songs of the Marketplace*. Ibadan: New Horn Press,  
1983. Print.

----- *The Eye of the Earth*. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1986. Print.

----- *Moonsongs*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1988. Print.

----- *Songs of the Season*. Revised ed. Ibadan: Heinemann,  
2012. Print.

Sekoni, Rapo. 'The Narrator, Narrative-Pattern and Audience Experience of  
Oral Narrative Performance' *The Oral Performance in Africa* (Isidore  
Okpewho eds.) Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2003. (139-184). Print.

*The Boston Review* <http://bostonreview.net/forum/poetry-brink/difference-between-poetry-and-song-lyrics>. Web