

THE POETICS OF ORALITY IN SELECTED POETRY COLLECTIONS OF TWO FEMALE NIGERIAN POETS

Dr. Ifeoma Ezinne Odinye

Department of Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
Email: ie.odinye@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

The dynamic nature of orality has indeed created opportunities for modern Nigerian forms of poetic expressions. This implies that the critical features or principles of oral traditions are employed in the exploration of thematic issues, technique and other devices in written modern Nigerian poems. The variegated use of the traditional forms/methods of orature (proverb, aphorisms, Igbo vernacular norm and communal voice, poetic celebration of freedom, songs of exultation/praise poetry, chants, and other narrative poetry) is evident in Flora Nwapa's *Cassava Song and Rice Song* (1986) and Ifeoma Odinye's *At Sunset* (2018). This study has examined the extent the female poets infused traditional eloquence in their written poetry while echoing experiences violated by sociocultural change. The study has discovered that Nwapa adopted Feminist consciousness laced with praise poetry in discussing two metaphoric subjects of "Cassava and Rice", while Odinye employed various subjects and elements of poetry in exploring her subject matter thereby making her work emotionally sensitive. The study concludes that the selected poets' poetics of orality blends with nationalistic consciousness to tackle sensitive issues of corruption and civil disorder.

Keywords: Orality, Nigerian poetry, Narrative poetry, Vernacular norm

Introduction

The discussion on the poetics of orality is a contemporary commitment geared towards enriching African literature. All imaginative creations, written or spoken in one way or the other reflect the aesthetic imaginative qualities of "oral compositions/recitations" (Akporobaro, 35) shared by members of a cultural group. The emergence of written orality cannot downplay the usefulness of the oral form or the systemic recitation of event or series of events in any African cultural milieu. In Mineke Schipper's view, this written orality as a trend common among African writers keeps the "tradition of storytelling alive" (67).

The visibility of poetics of orality in contemporary written Nigerian poetry cannot be denied. This is investigated by exploring various traditional aesthetic principles associated with the oral modes of expression. Significantly, the role written poetry plays for the modern man satisfies the enormous roles of oral poetry. We find a sense of connection in the above expression which discloses to us the historical resources of the contemporary form. In F.B.O Akporobaro's view, "the oral forms preceded the written mode. The modern scriptic tradition is only a historical development from earlier and much older oral traditions" (37). A careful exploration of written Nigerian poetry reveals oral literary forms which capture the worldview and challenges of a given cultural milieu. It is on this account that Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1998) has observed that:

There is evidence in the oral traditions of effective uses of narrative poetry, parables, fables, paradoxes, myth, legends, proverbs, poetry of tenderness, poetic celebrations of laughter and joy, poetry of wit and humour, women choral poetry at naming ceremonies and puberty rites, love song, songs of courtship, wedding songs, farms songs, funeral dirges, hunting songs, drinking songs, epics, boasts, satire, songs of praise and of abuse, songs that celebrate absences and other varied aspects of life. (18)

Like the oral poetry, written poetry projects outstanding characteristics displaying rhetorical devices with new forms, techniques and perspectives. This implies that "orality is flexible and adaptable to change; that the oral mode can accommodate modernism through specific indigenous perspectives. As such orality proves to be an innovative force that allows for new forms of poetic expressiveness" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 18). These new forms adopting Nkem Okoh's view "do not reveal any significant degree of dependence on such prosodic devices as metre and end-rhyme, their techniques of composition indicate close parallels with written poetry. This is demonstrable by, say, their use of such

features as parallelism, formulaic utterances, or gap-fillers, repetition, alliteration, and assonance. Such other elements of allusion, symbolism, and imagery constitute a prominent aspect of such oral poetic tradition” (26).

The above elements are extensively used in the poetry of renowned Nigerian poets who belong to the first generation such as Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara, Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark etc. However, the emergence of modern Nigerian poets has exposed a new dimension in the use of aesthetic elements of oral expression as part of imaginative skills. Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Dennis Osadebay, Gladys Casely-Hayford, Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Tanure Ojaide and others have adopted pidgin as an effective medium of harnessing written African cum Nigerian imaginative poetic space. Nigerian poets like Chimalum Nwankwo, Odia Ofeimun, Ada Ugah and others unmentioned also have tremendous influences of oral tradition in their poetry revealing a strong sense of realism, oral poetic forms, and possible performance techniques infused in the lines of the stanzas. Ultimately, their poems project social impediments revealing oppressive tendencies using native words, pidgin, metaphor, imagery, allusion, proverb, anecdotes, wits etc as part of the poetics of orality. Female poets are not left out in the active exploration of the poetics of orality. Catherine Acholonu, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, Ifi Amadiume and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo have also contributed to adding flavour to contemporary Nigerian poetry. Oratorical resources borrowed from vernacular norms are also replete in their poems. Their use of poetic address is very vivid. Furthermore, they project the “poetry of wit coloured by Marxist undertone” (Maduakor, 81-82). The above mentioned contemporary qualities are consciously recommended for examination in the poetry of old and emerging Nigerian poets. The above notion also amplifies the reason for this research.

Significantly, this study explores Flora Nwapa’s *Cassava Songs and Rice Songs* (1986) and Ifeoma Odinye’s collection of poems, *At Sunset* (2018) for the purpose of highlighting the prominence of orality in their written poetry. The “Afrocentric perspective” (Ngate, 113) of this study also enriches discussion in contemporary written African poetry with the aim of revealing more intrinsic qualities and social issues.

Trends of Orality in Flora Nwapa’s *Cassava Song and Rice Song*

In the poetry book, *Cassava Song and Rice Song* Nwapa expresses a salient move for national consciousness and cultural identity. The title of the book creates a metaphoric sensation that captures the attention of the readers. The clear division of the book into two songs “Cassava Song” and “Rice Song” is very symbolic. Therefore, the significance of the subjects of discussion in relation to the earnest concern raised in the poems cannot be downplayed. Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1988) suggests that “*Cassava Song* symbolizes tradition, while the *Rice Song* symbolizes western influence” (664). One thing is certain; the orality of Nwapa’s poetry is incorporated in the title. The concept of the two distinct cultures fused into edible objects associated with their background is visibly obvious. The Southeastern part of Nigeria cherishes cassava as a staple food (an important native food consumed daily), while rice is a staple in the diet of many cultures in Europe/west. This instigates an integral aspect of cultural identity captured in the poetry. Nwapa’s determination in choosing her title displays a poetic artistic vision geared towards harnessing aesthetic satisfaction. The dichotomy of the subjects of poetic muse equally adds flavour to the dimensions of her poetry.

In *Cassava Song*, the poetical composition of Nwapa’s eulogy on cassava is very captivating. The aura of praise epithet associated with greatness in describing cassava reflects a serious subject matter communicated in simple lines.

Great cassava, we must sing
We must not forget
Thee, the great one. (CSRS, 1)

The nostalgic commendation of cassava as portrayed in the lines above elucidates its usefulness to the poet, to a larger extent, the Igbo cultural milieu where the poet grew up. The readers could decipher a signification of its unique commonality:

You grow in poor soils,
You grow in rich soils,

You grow in gardens,
You grow in farms. (CSRS, 1)

The commendatory tone of praise decodes the poetics of Igbo orature communicated in simple language. The simple linguistic platform gives coherence to the valued dignity and commonality associated with cassava as a social discourse: “You are easy to grow/ Children can plant you/Women can plant you/ Everybody can plant you” (CSRS, 1). The signification of society’s vulnerable members as cultivators of this crop is a distinctive advantage to the poet’s concern for poetic praise. As a poetic icon, the poet reiterates: “As children, you fed us/ You were like a mother/ You fed us fat/ But we easily forget” (CSRS, 2). The depiction of cassava as a woman, a mother projects the usefulness of the female gender as nurturers. This is in line with Igbo social and cultural norms where women’s roles as carers are deeply appreciated. Cassava is feminized to raise feminine consciousness that dramatizes the relationship between women and the cassava. This consciousness focuses on the beautification of motherhood as a natural force of hope, love and empathy. Nwapa gives further depth to the above views:

Mother and cassava are one
Yes, they are one
One loves her children
The other
Also loves her children. (CSRS, 11)

The above lines capture Catherine Acholonu’s concept of “motherhood and childbearing/ rearing as a significant part of African cultural worldview as it concerns family relationships” (31).

Female consciousness occupies the poetic space in Nwapa’s poetry. This is as a result of her overemphasis on the valuable usefulness of cassava to the eastern region in postcolonial Nigerian civil war. Nwapa invokes Igbo historical repertoires—tales, songs, rhetorical expressions to represent cassava as a strong matriarch. In the context of the poem, she narrates:

The women, they stood
Defiantly they stood
Armed only
With Mother Cassava. (CSRS, 41)

In the above lines, Nwapa reconstructs nostalgic historical moments to describe an untold part of the postcolonial Nigeria civil war and genocide heightened by western imperialism. Nwapa recognizes the salient role of women during the civil war— their courageous use of the cassava roots and stems as weapons for self defense, the protection of their offspring and selfless dedication to defending their cherished land against invaders. Again, Nwapa’s main task is to give women and cassava laudable recognition due to the bravery role they played in the horror war of 1967. Cassava performed a divine role of feeding the hungry children, soldiers, common men and women of Southeastern Nigerian origin. No wonder the poet uses a rhetorical question to inquire: “why should you not/ Give praise to/All mighty cassava/who has saved you?” (CSRS, 35). Note, the metaphoric ideology behind Nwapa’s praise for women and cassava could be to fill a gap in the literary space where women’s contribution in the civil war had been neglected. The collective notion of motherhood (mothers’ unending nurturance, care/love) and cassava’s salvaging role in feeding thousands in war prone zones make mother and cassava one in ideology. No wonder the poet confesses:

Both you and Mother
You are long suffering
You love your children
You are wonderful. (CSRS, 11)

Chimalum Nwankwo perhaps understands the emergence of Nwapa’s ideology by stressing that “Igbo cultural /family value of motherhood is woven into the role of the cassava staple in Igbo life” (50).

In the *Rice Song*, the critiquing metaphoric image of “Rice” breeds schisms in the Southeastern region of Nigeria. Contrary to the poet’s expectations of westernization, all cultural aspects needed to be cherished as common culture are relegated to the background. In her view, the traditional (cassava) is

viewed as being outmoded in the fast growing trend of western globalization after the civil war. This is very significant in Nwapa's ideological use of "Rice" as western modern tool of mental and cultural food domination. The debate surrounding the poet's ideology is that of war between the pre-colonial/civil war period of cassava consumption and the modern/contemporary relish of the western rice in every homestead. In essence, the old culture is at war with the new—tradition versus modernity culminating into class distinction and moral/cultural degeneration occasioned by capitalist exploitation. The narrator reflects:

So rice became a rich man's food
which he and his family
Ate only on Sundays and on
Festive occasions especially weddings. (CSRS, 53)

The repression of cultural values according to the poet is occasioned by 'rice becoming a delicacy and rare commodity' (CSRS, 58) in Igbo communities. This is a realization that times have changed leading to elevation of rice in all facets of the community. The reversal role of cassava and rice is wrapped in ironical mood—the cassava nurtures; while rice discriminates. The juxtaposition of cassava and rice is symbolic—'the cassava' exacts humility ("it grows in both poor and rich soil" (CSRS, 1); while 'the rice' is arrogant (it graces the home of the rich, only (CSRS, 53). The proverbial saying that "A poor man does not eat rice" (CSRS, 53) captures the stereotypical and discriminative mentality attached to eating rice by people. This punitive social consciousness according to Nwapa is responsible for cultural death and social disorder exposing citizens to humiliation, avarice/dissatisfaction. The narrator stresses the destructive nature of this modern mentality causing tension in marriages, a supposedly sacred union laced with love like early morning spring. This modern mentality presents the view that, "marriage is no marriage without rice" (CSRS, 55).

Nwapa's criticism of rice and its products deepens without reservation. The extensive use of narration, aphorism and anecdotes in the lines of her poetry contributes to the orality of her poetry. She confronts the new trend of acquiring foreign ways of life to the detriment of old ways to call for change. She laments:

Many drank palmwine
And did not have
The palate for Star beer
So salesmen went to drinking houses
Brought Star beer in cartons
and gave them free
To whoever was there....(CSRS, 60)

For Nwapa, the gradual introduction of foreign ways of life due to imperialism and civil war violates traditional lifestyle and changes citizens' perception about themselves. This national reality fuels the poet's call for revival:

Attention rulers of our great nation
Attention great generals
Who have fought in the civil war
Careful, you poets in uniform
We cannot eat words. (CSRS, 66)

Evidently, Nwapa calls for a reordering of the society eschewing old ways of life characterized by unity, love and cultural pride. This diversity of the poet's thoughts adds flavour to the orality of her poetry. The poet addresses the readers from her own standpoint, championed by the view that we are one people with different ideas, beliefs and customs—a notion of unity in diversity. She states:

...I am one of the population
And don't care about rice
I am an adult, a wife and
A mother(CSRS, 135)

Nwapa's declaration in the above lines aims at promoting the culture of eating cassava as a staple food. This emerges through her outright rejection of rice as a staple food characterized by class distinction, humiliation and devaluation of cultural values. The poet's confession of being "an adult, a wife and a mother (CSRS, 135)" who doesn't care about rice connects her maternal relationship and devotion to cassava as a national staple food that did not abscond from her natural role of feeding hungry Igbo people during the period of civil war. Like the Mother cassava, the poet will not abscond from her dedicated role of eating cassava. The personification of cassava as a "Mother"—a Great Mother" (CSRS, 2) is akin to the noble sacrifice of feeding millions and mothers' selfless nature in caring for their children and household.

The choice of Nwapa's subjects has an underlying tone geared towards culture preservation and passionate plea for the restoration of distinctive values. She has remarkably drawn from Achebe's cultural sensitivity in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) to raise awareness of negative foreign norms capable of disrupting social ethos. To her, an intrusion of foreign ways of life has certain negative aura which is capable of suppressing indigenous lifestyle.

Patterns of Orality in Ifeoma Odinye's *At Sunset*

The poetics of orality in *At Sunset* is what Hugh Holman observes to be the "body of guiding belief (principles) displayed by a poet" (403). Interestingly, there is the evidence of the effective employment of the aesthetic principles of oral tradition such as proverbs, tales, anecdotes, historical narratives, poetic exultation, Igbo vernacular norm, epic songs, poetry of celebration and wit in the collection of poems, *At Sunset*. Significantly, the use of the communal voice is a discernable means of echoing social conditions that have negative consequences on all citizens. A principal truth is that the above features of oral tradition aid in the discussion of social issues and thematic concerns discussed in this collection. The above view reiterates Ezenwa-Ohaeto's perception that the "exploitation of oral traditions produces fresh, exciting and artistic poetry" (*Contemporary...*, 23). In 2018, Ifeoma Odinye from Nigeria published a collection of poetry entitled *At Sunset*. This collection has a total of forty-six poems divided into six sections, namely: Woes of my Land, Songs of Childhood Memories, Songs of Reflection, Woes of Man, Songs of Liberation and Songs of Hope. The poems under these sections are very lyrical and moralistic dealing with significant issues that trouble Nigeria as a nation. The poems may appear very simple and serious, but they capture in a detailed way the problems hampering human existence and relationships.

The first poem of the collection, "Before Sunset" under the first section, Woes of my Land reflects a careful manipulation of thoughts and language as rhetorical techniques. The use of proverbs or aphorisms flavours communication in a beautiful way. This is very popular in Igbo community and their mode of expression. The title "Before Sunset" sheds light on the use of proverbial understanding which makes reference to past tortuous experiences leading to more bizarre ones. Figuratively, the title, *At Sunset* suggests that impending doom is envisaged as the nation addressed in this poem is heading to her worst period of existence. In a significant manner, Odinye presents the idea that there has been a dramatic negative change of events in society culminating into a more complicated bizarre condition without foreseeable end. The lines, "Before sunset, poetry births words/words formed from squeezed and weathered faces/wrinkled by life's unsteady visions..." (*At Sunset*, 2) present the idea of the proverbial concepts associated with Igbo communicative mode of expression. The truth inherent in the above lines is made explicit in the lines below:

Before sunset, poverty, kissed many lips
Lips that once kissed princes and princesses
In high towered embellished houses...
Before sunset, birds remained silent
The silence that awakened the owl
In the mid-day under a scorching sun.... (*At Sunset*, 2)

The captivating image of "poverty" visible in the above lines is meant to surprise the readers. Poverty is personified to convey the idea of societal lack and unmerited hunger that has ravaged the once richly

endowed people. The imagery of “silence” aptly describes the helplessness of the people in such bizarre conditions. This indeed is a distinct element of poetics of orality—a unique rhetorical representation of human suffering.

The communal phenomenon which manifests in the form of “communal voice”—a very unique characteristic of the oral performer in Igbo folktales is very visible. In the poem “The Sunken”, Odinye assumes a communal voice to comment on general experiences unleashing pain and suffering to citizens. Thus, the use of the communal “We” is very symbolic. Odinye laments:

We are the sunken
 We are the stuffed children
 Leaning on an empty column
 Paralyzed legs infested with poliomyelitis. (*At Sunset*, 3)

The images presented in the above lines depict helplessness, emptiness and weakness. The poet wishes to communicate on communal problems in a declamatory manner that advocates genuine depiction or statement of reality. The conformity to reality is very clear in the use of the communal “We” to speak on behalf a society that has been oppressed for a long time.

Again, relevant to the poet’s pattern of orality is the use of communal name. The poem “Afra my Afra” is an onomastic derivative of the name peculiar to Igbo people—“Biafra”. The name is woven into the poem to raise consciousness about the injustice done to the secessionist state of Biafra from 1967 to 1970, even until now. The use of the communal name in Odinye’s poetry therefore reflects the orality of her skill. “Afra” connotes “Biafra” which represents the nationalist aspiration of the Igbo tribe and their endless agitation to free their people from the clutches of Northern leadership in Nigeria. In “Afra my Afra”, the poet eulogizes and personifies the Biafra land, “Afra of proud warrior in green land fields/ Afra of which my father chants/ on the soil of distant lands/ your spirit resonates in me” (*At Sunset*, 11). Similarly, in the poem, there is the use of Igbo vernacular in constructing a rhetorical question which addresses the overbearing silence over the plight of Biafrans, Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria. The rhetorical question, “Is the oppressor’s hand stronger than your Amadioha iron hand?/ The hand which threw Amalinze the cat on the ground in swift bravery” (*At Sunset*, 11) is symbolic for nationalistic action. The words “Amadioha” and “Amalinze” are vernacular names very symbolic in Igbo cultural milieu. In Igbo worldview, Amadioha is a diety, a universal ideology of god of the Igbo people in southeastern Nigeria. In this poem, it symbolically represents the collective strength of the Igbo tribe. Also, the symbolic use of the Igbo name “Amalinze” makes reference to Chinua Achebe’s novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo’s victory over a great wrestler, Amalinze who was not defeated for seven years in Umuofia serves as a wakeup call to stir the spirit of Biafrans in the pursuit of their desired freedom.

The orality of Odinye’s poetry is very symbolic with underlying objectives. The poem “Memories” is very nostalgic. The persona feels nostalgic about good old memories and thus comments:

One picture, just one more to create the world I once cherished.
 The faces I once admired under the shades of Udala tree
 Where Udala Children gather in rustic fields of green leaves. (*At Sunset*, 14)

The use of vernacular norm as reflected in the words “Udala tree” and “Udala children” is very significant. Udala is an Igbo name for the apple-like fruit called “Star fruit”. The sweetness of its juice draws children to search and wait endlessly under its umbrella-like shed. The sour taste is also a special attraction to pregnant mothers who yearn daily for Udala balls. The use of the vernacular word “Udala” is symbolic of love and reunion. It effectively encapsulates the poet’s concept of unity—the idea of seeking for satisfaction from a single tree, by both young and old. In essence, the lines above conjure the image of unity or oneness in purpose/objectives leading to peoples’ peculiar penchant for searching and waiting. The vernacular inspired expression “Udala Children” thus captures the poet’s intention and language experimentation—lovers of Udala.

In the poem “Arise” the influence of oral tradition signals the nationalistic intention of the poet. Like a traditional town crier, the poet infuses eloquence into the lines of the poem in order to invoke

revolutionary reactions in the readers/ listeners. Although the poem is interestingly narrative in form, it urges the oppressed people to rise and defend their territory against ruthless invaders. The poet writes:

Awake! Do not conceal defeat
Your fathers' labour must not be in vain!
Arise, I say arise and take up the mantle!
You have tarried so long:
And the spirits of your fathers are ruthlessly restless! (*At Sunset*, 54)

In a significant manner, the poetics of orality the poet displays here is that which stimulates social vision to encourage a new change of action for the oppressed. Part of the nationalistic intention is reflected in the poem "My Song", in which the poet uses imagery and personification laced with proverbial expressions to make realistic statements. The poet writes:

My song will climb the ladder of wisdom
To feed the ailing crowd with thought provoking lyrics
And sweeten the ears with honey-tune...
I will recruit my song to fight this war
With ten thousand musical chords
To invade the musical strains
Like armed men firing bullets into the crowd. (*At Sunset*, 68)

The lines above are coloured with the features of oral presentation rendered in high value. The poet uses aphorisms and heightened imagery of musical instruments and song to convey underlying thoughts supporting social change. The poet's resolve to use the Igbo folkloric manner of narration in baring her exaggerated thoughts is very evident in the lines: "My song will travel all roads/ For I have seen people scampering for shelter/ On a road where four foot paths meet" (*At Sunset*, 69). The above poetic declaration creates the image of an oral performer who addresses a visible audience to draw attention to injustice and human oppression.

The orality of Odinye's poetry also manifests in the poem "The Dance". The metaphoric use of words features poetic reality that calls for urgent action. The use of anecdotal narration to criticize societal ills or frustration is so glaring when the poet says:

This is not the season to dance
And roll your waist like Calabar women
This dance is a new one
An alien steps of secret drums
Hidden in the unseen path of the gods. (*At Sunset*, 57)

The images in the above lines are employed to capture a poetic focus on two different/ opposite situations –good and bad times. The conjured image of rolling the waist like "Calabar women" encapsulates the bodily romantic/ happy mood that such an act can elicit. Significantly, the reference to the waist of Calabar women alludes to sexual gratification that could divert men's attention from serious situations. The deliberate orality exhibited in presenting a serious mood occasioned by changing events (sufferings, oppression, corruption, and marginalization) is an effort to alert the citizens on the looming doom that would befall the community. According to the poet, "the dance is an alien step" not conversant to the citizens.

The last poem of this collection "Exultation" incorporates praise songs to arouse nationalistic reaction. The poet writes:

With shouts of exultation
I applaud you all, children of light
Swallowed by the thick darkness of the night
Day by day, day by day. (*At Sunset*, 79)

The persuasive influence of the above lines gives aesthetic revolutionary pleasure to stir up the spirit of the distressed people of the land towards liberating themselves. The poet urges thus:

I applaud your determination
To stand so thick and strong
And bear the burden of the day. (*At Sunset*, 79)

The rhetorical decoration incorporated in the lines above spontaneously enhances encouragement. Therefore, it is not out of place to state that Odinye's poetic concern is nationalistic. A stanza of her poem interestingly captures the idea:

With the sound of drums,
I raise the song of harvest
To separate the wheat and tares
To cast the tares into the fire
To salvage our fields! (*At Sunset*, 79)

The conclusion of the poet to challenge bad elements through total annihilation indicates her seriousness in combating evil in society. The imagery of "drums" heightens the mood that would usher in an urgent action that would bring sanity. "Wheat" represents the good and valuable elements in society, while "tares" represent the evil and bad elements that must be destroyed to give way to a new era of peace and justice. Odinye's poetic address is likened to the voice of the oral performer who draws the attention of the listeners to an existing dehumanization that has silenced the citizens for too long.

Conclusion

Flora Nwapa and Ifeoma Odinye have displayed rhetoric aesthetic patterns (proverbial expression, aphorisms, allusion to tales, songs of exultation, Igbo vernacular concepts, imagery and symbolism) to flavour the orality of their poetry. Their resolve to fictionalize the Nigerian civil war as a poetic insight in exposing the plight of citizens justifies the Marxian perspectives inherent in their book of poetry. Again their use of Igbo concepts woven around historical events, words and cultural norms is indicative of their cultural roots—both poets are of Igbo origin. The poets have succeeded in a sharing an important historical memory of the Nigeria civil war marked by narrative distinctiveness geared towards national/cultural consciousness—Nwapa feminized her memory of "Cassava" wrapping it in conceptualized "motherhood" to showcase her poetics of orality; while Odinye reconstructs her memory by capturing oppressive situations that fight the rights of the people. It is not out of place to suggest that Odinye's poetic voice is laced with masculinity in the discussion of her various nationalistic songs for change. One distinctiveness is evident in the poetry of the selected female poets in this research; Nwapa's voice is soft and subtle, while Odinye's tone is high and warlike which is woven in her resolve in the poem "Exultation" to "raise a song of hope/ To remain faithful to that final harvest-hour/ Ripening with great dreams" (*At Sunset*, 80). The above lines by Odinye show the magnitude of her inner strength in condemning oppression and dehumanization. Her indication that there is hope for survival gives a pleasurable consolation that corresponds with human struggle. Despite their distinctive tones, both female poets stress on the collective effort of actualizing the common dream of freedom in the cultural, sociopolitical and economic conditions of citizens who have been neglected and oppressed for a long time. Their aim is mainly to cast insight on the communal aspiration to combat social vices in society.

Works Cited

- Acholonu, Catherine. *Western and Indigenous Traditions in Modern Ibo Literature*. Dusseldorf: University of Dusseldorf, 1985.
- Akporobaro, F.B.O. *African Oral Literature*. Lagos: Princeton Publishing Co., 2012.
- Ezenwa-Ohaeto. "The Other Voices: The Poetry of Three Nigerian Female Writers", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. Vol.22. No.3. (1988). pp.662-668.
- *Contemporary Nigerian Poetry and the Poetics of Orality*. Bayreuth African Studies 45. Bayreuth: Eckhard Breitingger Bayreuth University, 1998.
- Holman, Hugh. *A Handbook to Literature*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs Merrill Company, 1972.
- Nwankwo, Chimalum. "The Igbo Word in Flora Nwapa's Craft". *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 26. No. 2 (1995), pp.42-52.
- Nwapa, Flora. *Cassava Song & Rice Song*. Enugu: Tana Press, 1986.

- Ngate, Jonathan. "And After the Bolekaja Critics?" In S. Arnold (ed.). *African Literature Studies: The Present State*. Washington DC: ALA/Three Continents Press, 1985.
- Obi, Maduakor. "Female Voices in Poetry: Catherine Acholonu and Molar Ogundipe-Leslie as Poets". In H. Otokunefor and O. Nwodo (eds.) *Nigerian Female Writers: A Critical Perspective*. Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1989.
- Odinye, Ifeoma. *At Sunset*. Awka: Arise and Shine Press, 2018.
- Okoh, Nkem. *Preface to Oral Literature*. Onitsha: Africana First Publishers Limited, 2008.
- Schipper, Mineke. *Beyond Boundaries: African Literature and Literary Theory*. London: Allison and Busby, 1989.