

The Dramatic Structure of Niyi Osundare's *Waiting Laughters*

Amani Wagih*

Waiting Laughters is the Nigerian poet Niyi Osundare's second volume of poetry that won The Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 1991. The collection is regarded as a poetic response to the corruption and dictatorship gripping contemporary African society, especially in Nigeria. The title of the volume *Waiting Laughters* indicates the role of laughter as a weapon of resistance that the African society is waiting for, considering it an epitome of freedom. Osundare manipulates laughter to criticize the elites' oppressive practices upon Nigerians. James Philips explains the importance of laughter as a tool deployed by the oppressed to overcome oppression. By laughing at the tactics of the oppressor, the oppressed are endowed with enough force to resist and to get rid of their fear.

Laughter can be a powerful support for a people trying to resist and survive what oppresses them. Laughter can be related to critique of oppression – mocking, exaggerating, or making fun of the ideology and practices of oppression and the oppressor. Laughter generated in this way can also provide a small example of risk and freedom in speaking truth to power in dangerous times and in dismantling a bit of the fear that often acts as an instrument of control. (Philips 187)

Moreover, James Scott, E.P. Thompson and Pierre Bourdieu, in their social studies of the role of laughter as a tool of resistance, contend that laughter can be a powerful form of protest; it is one of the “weapons of the weak” according to James Scott (Goldstein 7). The oppressors or elites can display their power through political and economic control, whereas the oppressed can resist through laughter; a path that Niyi Osundare follows in his collection *Waiting Laughters*. Throughout this collection of poems Osundare presents different scenes that depict the oppressed and pinpoint laughter as a serious issue and thus create “a link of intimacy with the audiences” (Muhlesien 242), urging them to resist for a better future. In other words, resistance implied in laughter is a kind of resistance presented in a “positive and optimistic sense” (Philips 192).

* Associate Professor, Cairo University.

Nigerian poets can be classified into three categories: the pre-independence poets, who were mainly concerned with romanticizing native tradition to face colonial hegemony, and therefore they presented a cultural message; the post-independence poets, who were more interested in asserting national identity and the role of art in urging people to change, and therefore their message was a social one; and the military period poets, who witnessed military oppression and therefore their messages were mainly political. Osundare belongs to the second generation of Nigerian poets; he falls in the second category, the post-independence period. However, he creates the link between the three categories. Osundare stressed native traditions, clinging to the authentic African culture, aiming to resist the corrupt social and political entities in the Nigerian society.

Osundare believes that “Art has the power to touch. Art affects. And anything that affects, changes people, changes communities” (Osundare 55). Therefore, he relies on various techniques in his works with the aim of urging his people to reform their society. Like many other African writers, Osundare considers himself “the conscience of the society”; accordingly, he satirizes “the corruption of modern governments” (Ojaide 44), as in the collection under study.

This collection of poetry is divided into four sections; Osundare subtitles each section in a way that serves a function of the dramatic structure. In other words, the four sections function as acts in traditional dramatic structure; they are divided into the dramatic exposition, conflict, climax and resolution. The recurrent use of the two words “waiting” and “laughter” sets the theme of the collection from the beginning and holds the four sections together. It is a universal motif denoting that despite the dreary conditions of living, hope in a better tomorrow still exists: “The twin issue of waiting and laughter as the major aspects in the collection *Waiting Laughters* provide a thematic focus on hope in the midst of despair” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 2).

Moreover, the collection is subtitled “*a long song in many voices,*” thus setting dialogue as an integral element throughout the collection: the personas vary between elements of nature, animals, or even the poet himself. And Osundare deploys various techniques including tableaux, visual and auditory images, graphic presentations and repetitions to convey his message. *Waiting Laughters* can be categorized as an example of visual poetry. Eduardo Mitre explains the techniques that characterize visual poetry, and Osundare used many of them:

the visual poet explores and exploits all the possibilities of language treated as a material substance: the connotative use of its graphic signs, its distribution in space, the fragmentation of words, and the introduction of other nonlinguistic elements such as drawing and the imprint of certain

objects leading to the creation of a combinatorial art... the poet is transformed into a calligrapher, an artist, in brief a builder. (qtd. in Bohn 24)

Since Osundare aims to produce poems for performance, he relies heavily on visual details portrayed in tableaux. Therefore, he deploys graphic signs, fragmented words and structures, and visual scenes because he believes that “in deciphering the written message, the reader proceeds according to both verbal and visual cues, which are structured in such a way that they complement each other”; thus transforming “the poem into a picture” (Bohn 15).

Exposition

The first section subtitled “*Some laughters are very significant*” serves as an exposition in which Osundare sets the scene for his collection. As in a dramatic exposition, Osundare provides background information by introducing a series of memories that reminds the audience of the rich past. The repetition of the refrain “Tonalties. Redolent tonalties” (WL 2) stresses the poet's intention to recall past memories where his people were enjoying laughter: when their simple stories carried by the storms were transferred from one place to another; when their “fancies” led to happiness; when their cheeks were “giggling” and their “ribs” were moving up and down celebrating their mirth. At that time in the past, the elements of nature corresponded to man's happiness: the winds were laughing, and the palms were dropping nuts. Despite the celebration provided in the first scene, Osundare introduces a shift that anticipates a drastic change of mood: “I pluck these words from the lips of the wind... I pluck these murmurs” (WL 2); the reduction of “words” to, simply, “murmurs” prepares the audience to a kind of metamorphosis from happiness to misery: in which the wind abandons its laughter in the desert; “sands” take over grass, and “pebbles” strangle “pasture” (WL 4). To reinforce the change into sadness Osundare provides a number of binary opposites. He confirms that “Truth” is always constant despite different attempts of the corrupt political systems to destroy it “in a society where Truth is subverted under various circumstances... Truth will always be vindicated” (Taiwo 4): truth is always there in the “valley” and the “mountain”, the “boulder” and the “river”, the “flame” and the “ash”, the “desert” and the “rain” (WL 3)... etc.

Then Osundare starts to draw dramatic tableaux using the motif of “waiting.” Though the following episodes portray scenes of corruption, Osundare does not abandon his growing sense of optimism, his belief in his people's will to revolt against injustice. Though people are waiting and time is passing with difficulty carrying reminiscences of past memories, hope in restoring laughter still exists.

The poet engages the audience in a series of appeals to learn patience from elements in nature “like the rain, the sand and the baobab tree for decisive action” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 107):

Teach us the patience of the sand
which rocks the cradle of the river...

Teach us the patience of the rain
which eats the rock in toothless silence

Teach us the patience of the baobab
which tames the rage of orphaning storms...

Teach us, teach us, teach us... (WL 7)

The natural environment is in direct relationship with man from which he should learn the power of resistance. Though the natural elements are weak, they surpass their mighty opponents: the sand shakes the river; the rain dissolves the hard rock; and the short African tree “baobab” controls the destructive storms. However, people are still waiting for hope in salvation, for the mirth of: “the heifer” inside his mother's womb waiting to be born; “the fists” waiting to find “their aim”; “the grass” waiting for “the dew”; “the beard for its chin, the knee for its cap/the night for its day, the prayer for its amen” and “the tadpole” to be a frog (WL 10, 14, 17). Osundare concludes with the hope to restore justice when “the tyrant” is portrayed waiting for “his noose” (WL 14). The above visual images provide a sense of waiting for completion; even the despot after being hanged justice will be accomplished. Thus, Osundare imparts to his audience a hope in a better tomorrow.

Another visual scene is presented in which Osundare describes the visa office in Nigeria where many people aspiring to achieve their dreams across the Atlantic are waiting to apply for their visas. In this scene, he criticizes the attitude of the Nigerian officers towards the people. According to Osundare it is an office of fear and sorrow, an “awe-ffice” (WL 11) that is ironically set in sharp contrast to the aspirations of the applicants; the narrow place is crowded with people asking questions, worried and doubting whether they will have their visa; the walls are high; it seems that the office itself adopts the haughty attitude of its officers. While the visa officer is described in his arrogant appearance shutting the window coldly in front of the people's requests, they answer passively by yawning, looking at their watches and waiting:

The visaman, rightly suited,
his hair correct, his parting severe,
takes two furtive looks at the crowded hall
then shuts the window with a cold,
imperial hiss; (WL 11)

The crowd's answer is a yawn,
and a few blank trips to a tired watch. (WL 12)

The physical appearance of the officer reveals his interest in his outward appearance more than performing his job that is directly related to people, and this is considered part of the corruption of the government in Nigeria. He is dressed in formal attire that perfectly fits; pays much attention to his hair style; looks at the crowds stealthily and then produces this hissing sharp sound of a superior while closing down the window. The Nigerians feeling inferior, their only reaction to his disdain is to continue waiting for a long time to the extent that their watches become weary from waiting. Though their visas would allow them to emigrate, their dreams would turn into nightmares because the Atlantic is “a wilderness of barbed walls/brooking no windows, its doors of deafening steel” (WL 12). Osundare warns his fellow citizens that their passports are means to “pass ports” (WL 12), but by crossing the Atlantic they will be living in the prison of the “imperial” power that once colonized their land and is still controlling their future. The dehumanizing attitude of the colonial and neo-colonial powers is reinforced by the repetition of the indifference of the Atlantic in this stanza:

Passports are pass ports
Knock still ye who may;
the Atlantic springs a door of deafening
steel (WL 12, 13)

In another episode, Osundare elaborates his criticism of despotism by giving two examples. The first one is the Bastille, the symbol of oppression and tyranny, where the stones were screaming and the streets were in turmoil because of injustice. However, when the “royal” ruler was beheaded by a “humble axe”, his head fell down in dust because “the crown is only a cap!” (WL 22). The second example is derived from the local Ikere mythology:

Orogododo Orogododo
Orogododo Orogododo

Oba ba ti beyi
O mo d Orogododo o o o o

The king's brave legs are bone and flesh
Bone and flesh, bone and flesh
The king's brave legs are bone and flesh
The castle is a house of mortar and stone
Mortar and stone, mortar and stone
A chair is wood which becomes a throne
And Croesus builds a castle of strident stone.
Oh teach us the patience of the Rain
which eats the rock in toothless silence (*WL 23*)

In Ikere mythology “Orogododo” is “a remote place of banishment for dishonourable rulers” (*WL 22*), and the king who dances “with a dizzy swing” (*WL 22*) because of his tyranny is punished by going to “Orogododo”. Osundare stresses the fact that power is transient; therefore, the king's “brave” legs that were misused are made of “bone and flesh” that will perish one day; his castle is made of “mortar and stone” that can be destroyed; and his throne is a chair made of wood. To reinforce the same idea of transience, Osundare provides an example from history: Croesus, the wealthy king of Lydia (Asia Minor) who built his castle of hard stones and it became obsolete. Then he repeats the same lines used earlier, to call upon his people to learn from the strength of the “Rain”; however, the use of capital letter in this line personifies the rain in its power to dissolve the hard rock silently. In other words, a simple element as rain can demolish the mighty castles of great sovereigns as Croesus, and similarly, Nigerians can overcome the tyranny of their rulers.

Osundare concludes the first section of the collection by providing a number of tableaux that reflect visual scenes of expected joy because of the ability to resist tyranny. The first tableau presents weak creatures overcoming much more powerful ones: ants dragging “fat cockroaches”, “a hatching fruit” finding its way among rough leaves, small “termites” trying to eat hard wood (*WL 24*)... etc. In the second tableau Osundare uses the persona to express the inevitability of joy after resistance:

My song is space
beyond wails, beyond walls
beyond insular hieroglyphs
which crave the crest
of printed waves. (*WL 25*)

The persona's song exceeds the limits of space; it overcomes pain. Though the song appears weak, it insists on resisting oppression and in turn the persona will enjoy life: “the song going beyond walls indicates an unwillingness to be restricted by mundane impediments” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 109). In the third tableau Osundare joins the two motifs of waiting and laughter for the first time stating the effects of this combination: the waiting for “laughters” will inevitably cast off “silence” and invigorate the “rocking teeth... syncopated seas... the cheek... the jaws... the brows retreating eyes... [and] seeing lips” (WL 27).

Conflict

The second section entitled “*The freedom of any society varies proportionately with the volume of its laughter*” summarizes Osundare's socio-political perspective. It serves as the conflict in traditional drama; the struggle between opposing forces (the ruled and the ruler) is manifested in different episodes describing the present. The section starts with the repetition of a previously used stanza:

Wait
ing...
And the hours limp a-
long,
with
band-
ages
of fractured moments (WL 29)

But the addition of the following refrain adds to the heaviness of waiting:

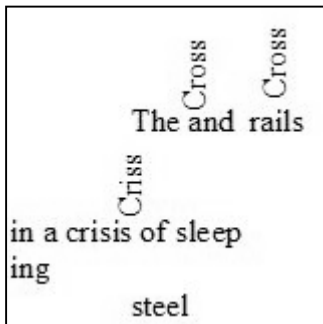
*Time
ambles
in
diverse
paces
with
diverse
persons (WL 29-30)*

The graphic presentation of the above verses, dividing the act of waiting into “wait---ing” and the personification of time as moving slowly by different people

in different steps add to the monotonous pace of waiting. Though time itself is walking slowly, the act of waiting is not for happy moments anymore; people are waiting for expected sorrow and sufferings as the visual scenes to follow indicate: the criminal is waiting to be hanged, the “home-sick traveler” waiting for “tardy trains”, the deer waiting for the gun, (*WL* 29)... etc. In other words, since bondage prevails and freedom is forbidden because of the tyranny of the despot sufferings take over happiness.

In the following tableau Osundare satirizes the dreary condition of the railways because of corruption and mismanagement. As Egya Sule explains in “Art and Outrage: A Critical Survey of Recent Nigerian Poetry in English” that Nigerian poets always expose the plight of Nigerian leadership, and in turn the government:

Nigerian writers, especially the poets – have continued to expend their literary energies on the perennial problems of leadership in Nigeria. Irrespective of the period, Nigerian poetry is preoccupied with one theme, the megatheme, i.e., the leadership failure that the country has been grappling with since independence. (54)



Here, the criss-cross pattern of the railways, the play of words “criss” and “crisis” in addition to the “sleeping steel” and the split into “sleep” and “ing” (*WL* 32) reinforce the corruption that the Nigerian community suffers from as well as the monotonous atmosphere of waiting. Osundare concludes the scene by a rhetorical question that stresses the lack of interest in any change: “No matter how fast/ the millipede may run/will it not always find the earth ahead/Waiting?” (*WL* 33). The same blandness is emphasized by more graphical presentations in another visual tableau in which words composing the sentence are fragmented:

And	minutes
Drag	their
feet	so
in-	finitely
in	grey
boots	of
leaden	hours
each	wink
a	wail... (WL 36)

Now it is not only hours limping, but even “minutes” are moving slowly in heavy hours, and every “wink” brings more suffering. The heaviness in reading the above verse corresponds with the act of monotonous waiting. Besides, the use of grey and dark grey matches the spiritless atmosphere overwhelming the present in Nigeria.

Osundare explicitly states the bitter truth that “the whole Niger area is still in serfdom inspired by alien accents” (Taiwo 5) and is still waiting for more oppression and sufferings instead of resisting.

The innocence of the Niger
Waiting, waiting
fourhundredseasons
for the proof of the prow...
waiting
for the dispossessing twang of alien accents
waiting
for scrolls of serfdom, hieroglyphs of calculated
treacheries
waiting
withoutafacewithoutanamewithoutafacewithouta-
waiting
for the Atlantic which drains the mountains with
practiced venom...
waiting for the bubbles of Bussa...
waiting
the Nile knows, the Limpopo lingers,

the Kilimanjaro preserves the lore in icy memory
waiting...
Ask Sharpville
ask Langa
ask Soweto

Where green graves cluster like question marks (WL 37-8)

The cramming of words in the above verse indicates that this act of waiting will eventually eradicate the African identity; the inability of the words to be read as one comprehensive word emphasizes the lack of an identity: face or name “without a face without a name.” According to Osundare, this is the purpose of the imperial powers; therefore, he refers to the major African rivers as all of them suffered from the destructive influence of “alien accents.” He wonders are the African nations waiting for revolutionary figures like Bussa (who led the rebellion against the British Empire) to set them free; for how long are they going to wait. For how long will the hen wait and lay eggs and she knows that her chicks will be devoured by wolves? Then he invites his audience to act, to remember past massacres instead of waiting: to ask Sharpville, Langa and Soweto about the young people who were murdered because they called for freedom and justice.

The imperial powers and their supporters are not the only ones responsible for the deterioration of the African/Nigerian identity; Africans/Nigerians themselves are also to be blamed since they have abandoned clinging to their pre-colonial heritage. Some of them are described as “History's stammerer” (WL 41); they destroy their African heritage including their identity. Osundare urges them to “memorize the vowels of the father's name and create positive history” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 108) for the welfare of their African societies. Then he concludes the second section by the same line of time passing slowly because people are indifferent: “*Time amble in diverse paces...*” (WL 41).

Climax

In the third section “*Lofty sorrows cast shadows of lengthy laughters*” Osundare merges the present and the future to reach the climax of his work: intense sorrows destroy laughter, so for how long will the oppressed endure repression? He starts the section by stressing the growing sense of boredom because of waiting: “Waiting/ all ways waiting” (WL 45). The double meaning provided by “all ways” indicates people's submission to dictatorship. They are 'always' waiting in every field and by “all ways” while successive dictatorial regimes are practicing repression. Therefore, Osundare employs a new series of

appalling visual tableaux to criticize despotism in an attempt to urge the oppressed to act.

A king there is
in this purple epoch of my unhappy land;
his first name is Hunger,
his proud father is Death
Which guards the bones at every door (WL 45)

The first tableau describes the present condition of the Nigerian society where “Hunger” rules as a king, and his father “Death” waits at every doorstep. In the second tableau Osundare associates dictators with vultures and crows who feed on the bodies of hungry people “and have grown fat at such feasts” (Taiwo 7). The markets “wear their stalls like creaking ribs” (WL 45) because of hunger, and the “squares are sour” (WL 45) because of the absence of friendly gatherings. In the third tableau Osundare recalls the dream of the Pharaoh during the period of Joseph, the messenger of God and the son of Jacob, but in Osundare's version the “Fat Cows” devour the “Lean Cows” alluding to the rulers and the ruled respectively. In a fourth tableau, Osundare provides a series of oppressive tactics: “ordinances” fall heavily “like iron showers”; “decrees” move proudly in every street; “hangmen hug the noose like a delicate baby” while the oppressed thank “Death” for taking their lives. The fifth tableau gives an account of the public officials “towncriers” (WL 46) who praise the repressive acts of the rulers; they are “corrupt public officials [who] loot the national treasury dry while the spokesmen of these regimes have enriched themselves by specializing in fabricating empty propaganda for the government” (Taiwo 3). The poet releases an outburst seeking help in Yoruba words “Ibosi o!” (WL 46). He invokes the past, the ancestors' heritage, to save his people. Osundare gets himself involved, being a Nigerian citizen, by using the pronoun “My”; “My land” (WL 47) hoping that pre-colonial heritage can save neo-colonized Nigerian society.

In a sixth tableau Osundare continues presenting a number of corrupt officials to urge his people to resist corruption: the fat clergyman waiting for his share; the “white-wigged judge” for his turkey; the severe looking lecturer for his chair and the policeman for his bribe (WL 48). And here a question can be inferred: what are Nigerians waiting for to resist? Why are they “Waiting/still waiting”? (WL 49). Are they waiting for more oppression, for more hunger and death? “African leaders are so power-drunk, that their preoccupation lies in formulating proscriptive decrees or edicts” (Taiwo 49); their oppressive rules are carried on by “vulgar guns” signed “in blood” and “unleashed in the crimson spine/of

trembling streets” (WL 49). “These are the seasons of barking guns” (WL 49), but still why are people waiting? The elements of nature correspond to man's condition and act against their nature: the lion “bans the flock”, the cloud “bans the rain”, the valley “bans the river”, the sky “bans the sun”, and the sea “bans its salt” (WL 49).

In an attempt to urge his people to revolt, Osundare deploys aphoristic short poems in which he coins traditional folktales from his own perspective. In other words, he uses the tales as allusions to the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in the form of dramatic dialogues. He introduces the tales by holding a comparison between the “hyena” and the “despot”: as the former is waiting to celebrate “the anniversary of its pounce”, the “African despot” is waiting to celebrate the “seventieth year of his rule” and Africans are equally waiting (WL 55).

The first tale describes the hyena who asks a group of lambs complaining “about my eating habits” to choose a spokesman to “come freely to my den” and present their point of view. The tale is “a metaphor of the oppressor and the oppressed in most societies” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 110), but Osundare “captures this aspect of the autocratic despot in the aphorism of the hyena” (Taiwo 8).

The second tale is a witty dialogue between a hungry snake and a wise toad. The tale starts by the indigenous Yoruba words: “Okerebu kerebu/Kerebu kerebu” (WL 63) which means “wonder of wonders” as the end of the story proves that the ingenuity of weak is a tool to conquer the more powerful. The hungry snake has not eaten for a week and wants to eat the toad that maneuvers: “Suppose I turn into a mountain?/Asks the toad”, but the snake does not give up “I will level you in the valley/Of my belly” (WL 63); the toad threatens to turn into a river, “You will flow easily through/The channels of my mouth” answers the snake (WL 63); what about becoming one “Of your favourable children?” asks the toad, then “I will eat you/With all the motherly love” replies the snake (WL 63). When the toad fails to dissuade the snake, it “turns into a rock” that the snake swallows “With delicious dispatch” (WL 63). But “Ah! aramonda” “the wonder of wonders” the snake's stomach fails to function: “The mouth has swallowed something/Too hard for the mill of the stomach” (WL 64). Osundare through this tale sends a message to his audience that the greed of tyrants and exploiters is never restrained even by rationale, “only courageous acts can defeat implacable foes” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 110).

The third and fourth aphoristic poems satirize the foolish behavior in the relation between the ruler and the ruled. In the third tale, the “baby antelope” asks her wise mother: “Tell me, mother/How does one count the teeth/Of a laughing line?” (WL 72), which is a sign of foolishness of the ruled. Similarly in

the fourth tale, the wisdom of “Mosafejo” juxtaposes his foolish behavior of giving his only daughter “in marriage to six suitors” (WL 75); thus the conceited ruler who claims wisdom is a fool.

Osundare concludes section three by a variation of a previous stanza; now: “The stammerer will one day call his/ Fa-fa-father-ther's na-na-na-me” (WL 74). In other words, hope in the prosperity of the Nigerian nation still exists when it readopts its neglected Yoruba tradition. The fragmented structure of 'father' and 'name' highlights the present status of negligence of pre-colonial heritage, but at the same time placing the word “father” amid fragmentation emphasizes the possibility of a reunion with the riches of the past. The same tone of hope recurs towards the end of this section to prepare the audience to the coming section: “The water is going/ Going going going/The water is going”(WL 68); “I wait for life/And that is why my heels are strong” (WL 68); now the act of waiting is not for sufferings anymore because the persona is waiting for life that will endow him with enough strength to resist oppression.

Resolution

In the final section of the collection entitled “*Correct your laughter*” Osundare provides the resolution to the conflict previously stated and developed to a climax in sections two and three respectively. Though the persona is still waiting, the purpose changes:

Waiting
still
waiting
for the laughing rainbow on the brow of the mist
when sea meets sky on canvas of colour-ful suns. (WL 81)

Osundare continues developing his tone of hope throughout this section thus providing the final resolution. The two motifs “waiting” and “laughters” are rejoined in different variations. Moreover, Osundare deploys a variety of colors (rainbow) instead of the shades of grey previously used in section two: the Red “of the watermelon”, the “Brown” of freshly baked bread, the “Yellow” “chasing” the “Green” of the mangoes, and the “Blue” of the sea “of princely dolphins” (WL 78); having the colors written in capital letters stresses their dominance, that is to say, the prevalence of joy and in turn of laughter.

In this section Osundare also used graphic presentations, but the content is not indicated by the structure, as employed previously; it is not the monotonous waiting because the purpose is clear and can be attained.

Long-
er
than
the
y
a
w
n
of
the
moon
in
a
sky
so
brown
with
heels
of
fleeting
fancies (*WL 84*)

However, the far-fetched dreams are not the end because hope exists in “a diamond tear” waiting in the “eye of the cloud”

dropping
dropping
dropping
later
in
hails
of
greening
showers (*WL 84-85*)

The expected rain will bring life back to: “tendrils” dancing out of “joy” and the “drums” will be waiting to celebrate the “rainbow harvest” (*WL 85*). As “visual poetry combines two types of sensorial experience, sight and sound, that are presented as complementary” (Mitchell 5), the vividness of colors, the visual

image of dancing plants and the auditory image of the sounds of the drums create an atmosphere of celebrations and hope in better future.

The future is referred to after a few stanzas accompanied by the poet's insistence upon resistance. He acknowledges the fact that "joy-killers reach for the neck/ of our laughter" trying to drag us back to our misery while enjoy listening to our cries of suffering (WL 86), but who cares; one day they will "find ready grave/in the labyrinth of their venom" and our laughter will "surely come back/to the paradise of our lips" (WL 87). African nations will be waiting like "Masekela 's eternal song" the song of the rain, the song of prosperity and celebration, the song of "laughing showers" (WL 93): "the rain is also used as a symbol for its fertilizing, cleansing and re-generative qualities. The rain is a fertilizing agent and its intercourse with earth" results in expected prosperity (Luga 86). Osundare gives the example of Masekela, the South African music composer, singer and trumpeter because he is an anti-apartheid artist who advocates resistance, and the trumpet is a musical instrument associated with popular music.

Osundare poses a rhetorical question concerning laughter: "What happens to LAUGHTER which waits too long/in the compost of anguished seasons? What.....?" (WL 94). The answer is laughter prevails; in other words, sorrow must give way to laughter because through laughter, resistance emerges. Osundare provides a circular structure to his collection by repetitions of supplications and lines. He starts and ends his poems by appeals: after asking his audience to learn patience at the beginning, now he asks God to endow his people with the strength, courage and wisdom of fragile natural elements that overcome the mightier ones without the destructive effect. Osundare being a member of the African community includes himself in the supplications: "A cardinal point for understanding the African view of humankind is the belief that I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1969, 108-9). In other words, he is part and parcel of his society and in turn uses the pronoun "us":

Grant us

the fortitude of the lamb which lames a lion
without inheriting its claws

the daring of the egg which hardens its temple
in a golgotha of breaking shells... (WL 95)

Osundare ends his poem by repeating the first line in section one: "I pluck these words from the lips of the wind" (WL 2) that changes into "I pluck these

words from the laughter of the wind” (WL 96); now the lips are laughing. And “The season calls for the lyric of other laughters” that are “About to burst” (WL 96-7). In other words, laughter will bring more laughter but on one condition that Africans join hands and resist repression, when “A million fists, up/In the glaring face of complacent skies” (WL 97).

Waiting Laughters presents a unique form of poetry. The collection is divided into an introductory phase, a conflict leading to complications or climax and then a final resolution. Though the pattern seems linear, Osundare adds a cyclic structure to hold the sections of the collection together. Moreover, the employment of dramatic dialogue enriches the poems and helps in conveying the poet's message. Osundare succeeds in combining the techniques of poetry and drama to create the poetry of performance. In other words, he merges “visual and verbal elements [that] not only appeals to the reader's intellect but arrests his or her gaze” (Bohn 15).

Works Cited

- Anyokwu, Christopher. “The Essentials of Niyi Osundare's Poetry.” *Transnational Literature*. 1 November 2015. Vol. 8, issue 1, pp. 1-11.
- Bohn, Willard. *Modern Visual Poetry* Associated University Presses, London, 2001.
- Ezenwa-Ohaeto. “Survival Strategies and the New Life of Orality in Nigerian and Ghanaian poetry: Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* and Anyidoho's *Earthchild*.” *Research in African Literatures*. Austin: Summer 1996. Vol. 27, issue 2, pp. 70- 89.
- Goldstein, Donna M. *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence and Sexuality in Rio Shantytown*. University of California Press, 2013.
- Luga, Carmel Asser Igba. “Niyi Osundare and the Tradition of Modern Nigerian Poetry: Analysis of *Songs of the Market Place*, *Village Voices*, *The eye of the Earth* and *Waiting Laughters*.” Thesis submitted to the Post Graduate School, Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Arts in English (Literature). September 2006.
- Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Heinemann, 1969.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory*. Chicago University Press, 1994.
- Muhlesien, Susanne. “Accents and Sterotypes”. *Cheeky Fiction: Laughter and the Postcolonial*. Rodpoi, 2005.
- Ojaide, Tanure. “Modern African Literature and Cultural Identity.” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 35, no. 3 (Dec., 1992), pp. 43-57.

Osundare, Niyi. "My Poetry is influenced by Yoruba Poetics." *Guardian*. 10 July 2005.

----- . *Waiting Laughters*. Malthouse, 1991.

Philips, James J. "Resistance Is Carried Out in a Positive and Optimistic Sense." *Honduras in Dangerous Times: Resistance and Resilience*. Lexington Books, 2015.

Scott, James. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press, 1985.

Sule E. Egya. "Art and Outrage: A Critical Survey of Recent Nigerian Poetry in English." *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 2011), pp. 49-67.

Taiwo, Emmanuel Floronsu. "A Reading of Yoruba Traditional Proverbial as Socio-Political Satire in Osundare's *Waiting Laughters*." *Lumina*, Vol. 21, no. 2 (October 2010), pp. 1-15.