Aspects of Proverbial Hermeneutics in Niyi Osundare's Poetry: Motivations, Patterns and Interpretation for Meaning Delivery

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Abstract
Osundare says that "Sometimes a proverb breaks within my [Osundare's] grasp like the chapter of an ill-remembered dream". A cursory reading of Osundare's poetry shows that the proverb is one of the major creative mantra of the poet's creative imagination. Therefore, this paper investigates the proverb as a style of literary composition in Osundare's poetry. We encounter a poet whose deployment of proverbs in poetry is as common as we have it in prose and drama genres of African Literature. For the reason that of all semiotic figuration of meaning in Osundare's poetry, the proverb is the least critically visible and it remains under-investigated, consequently, this paper will analyze and index aspects of Osundare's rhetorical use of proverbs as a means of meaning making.

***Keywords**: Proverbs, Stylistics, African Literature, Meaning Making*

Introduction

Proverbs are products of oral culture of Africa and when harvested into the creative literary form, its pragmatic essences of meaning energize and amplify the meaning frontiers of the written literature. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Ola Rotimi, Niyi Osundare, and Femi Osofisan who write in English have made a virtue of proverbs in their works. One immediate benefit of oral-written contact is the preservation of the tradition of the oral culture, both in it 'pastness' and progression into the future. Therefore, the oral tradition of

proverbs, we can claim, serves as an attraction and a bridge into the written format for the stylistic characterization of the written literature (Okunowo: 2010).

Raji-Oyelade (1999:74) has observed that "There is virtually no substantial controversy about the value of proverbs in culture, and the significance of proverbs in Yoruba traditional societies as repository and verbal effulgence of wisdom is indeed proverbial"[1]. In Yoruba socio-linguistic context, for example, one's eloquence in proverbs represents a linguistic wherewithal and astute deep knowledge and wisdom. It is also a mark of oratory that provides one with reverence. Achebe's "among the Ibo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" in *Things Fall Apart* (1980:5) underscores the stylistic import of proverbs as quintessence of speech making and ordinary conversation in African socio-linguistic culture.

Proverbs are figural and signifying acts of meaning that mediate interpretation and negotiate pragmatic signification at linguistic, philosophical and cultural levels. The veneration for proverbs as verbal strategy in Yoruba rhetoric culture, albeit most of Africa, can be gleaned in the metaproverb: *Òwe lẹ̀ṣin ọ̀rọ̀, ọ̀rọ̀ lẹ̀ṣin òwe, bí ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọnù, òwe la fi í wa-* the proverb is the horse of the word, the word is the horse of proverb, when the word is lost, it is the proverb we use for finding it (Osundare's translation). This idea suggests that the proverb is the template for clear verbal elocution into which the listener/reader is invited to enter and share in the thoughts and beliefs of the encoder. In general terms, proverbs are formulations from Yoruba's world view and socio-cultural realities of traditional ethos, ethos which include, among others, human behaviors and interaction, social conduct, honesty and truthfulness, destiny and fate, relationships, families, neighbors, the community, friends and acquaintances. In Yoruba speech and cultural communities, proverbs are part and parcel of communication; the usage goes beyond occasional ornamental application, thus it is a source of 'public education and consciousness' of the communal ways of life. For instance, Ẹ*ni tá a bá sún mọ́ là á jarunpá lù* (On the one we are nearest {in sleep}, we sprawl) maps into the domain of neighborliness. Owomoyela's (2005:12) makes the same observation

when he says that "Proverbs, often incisive in their propositions and terse in their formulation, are deduced from close observation of life, life forms and their characteristics and habits, the environment and natural phenomena, and sober reflection on all these". Thus the ontological spectrum of "vehicles", "horse" and "palm-oil" point towards the conceptual pragmatic function of proverbs in African semiotic milieu. Given a rhetorical context of situation, "a proverb […can provide] data that are at once linguistic, philosophical, psychological and cosmological"[2] in its expression of ideas and penetration of message. For example, proverbs can perform a pragmatic function of warning, persuading, encouraging, scolding, etc; e.g, *Awọ̀lú màtẹ́, ó mọ iwọ̀n ara rẹ̀ ni* (literally; One who remains within his bounds negotiates out of trouble or disgrace). It is a proverb that incites caution with an undercurrent effect of warning and the possibility of the negative consequence of ignoring such wisdom of self-caution.

A large number of works have been written about the sociology of proverbs[3] and similarly in African writing generally, especially proverbs as conveyance of meaning in prose and dramatic genres. However, not as quite many in its theoretical and rhetorical import in African written literature. Critical examination of proverbs as a creative premise of meaning in Osundare's poetry, as far as I know, has always been done cursorily[4]. In consequence of this lip service, Adeeko (1998:28) aptly makes similar observation:

The critical importance of the writers' coding of their histories in native idioms and literary figures of speech often gets lost in the disalienating criticism that substitutes the troubled virtues of transnationalism for the genuine identitarian passion of earlier nativisms. Postcolonial criticism, the main metropolitant category in which African literature fits today, has been able to show the dominance of allegory in postcolonial writing but has never considered the conspicuous presence of the proverb to be of any theoretical value.

Criticism of African writing needs to pay more attention to the argument that proverb, as meta-speech, is a unique telling feature of both African oral and written literature, beyond its sociological

nuances[5]. Osundare manipulates proverbs, by creative appropriation of translation/'transcreation' and interlingual transfer, webbing Yoruba idioms and meaning into English for poetic communication. Osundare's authentication and identification of Africanity via proverbial speech making, one may argue, is from the point of view that "the proverbs of a community or nation is in a real sense an ethnography of the people which if systematized can give a penetrating picture of the people's way of life, their philosophy, their criticism of life, moral truths and social status"[6]. Additionally, because of its obtrusive presence, particularly in bilingual African literature, proverbs can be regarded as heuristic window to discovering the essential fabric and identity of the canon. What is lacking, in the case of Osundare criticism is the understanding of its stylistic depth in terms of its literary and linguistic manipulations as a poetic agency of style that institutes poetic meaning.

Niyi Osundare and Proverbs

Niyi Osundare was born in 1947 in Ikere-Ekiti, in Ekiti State of Nigeria to a poet-drummer-farmer father- Ariyoosu Osundare and an "Indigo weaver of fabrics and fables"[7] -mother. Osundare's education spanned through the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, the University of Leeds in England and York University, Toronto, Canada. After many years of teaching at the University of Ibadan, rising to the position of professor, Osundare is, at the moment, a distinguished Professor of English at the University of New Orleans. He is a poet, dramatist, literary critic, essayist and public commentator. However, Osundare is most known and famous as a poet, having written over ten volumes of poetry, four plays, a book of essays and countless polemics on literature and language, including culture and society.

There is a super-abundance of proverbs in Osundare's poetic corpus and we therefore consider its deployment as crucial to the interpretation and understanding the poet's imagination. Moreover the deployment of proverbs requires a more focused sustained study, both in its literary and linguistic forms. In the eyes of Osundare, without the proverb, a gulf exists between the word and the meaning it conveys. The proverb, as the extract below suggests, is the element that bridges that gulf between the word and meaning, including communication impact in discourse:

Sometimes a proverb breaks within my grasp
Like the chapter of an ill-remembered dream
Other times a happy phrase throbs in my hand
Like the clay of a pulsing idiom

Bridge now
Gulf thereafter (*Word*: 23).

Niyi Osundare is a poet well-rooted in Yoruba language and culture, and being both a linguist and a writer of international status, his knowledge of the English language has been demonstrated. Osundare's poetry amply illustrates the endless creative possibility that the African proverbial idioms in African literature in English medium could generate for meaning making process with aesthetic efficiency and the imperative of communication. For example, in the following extract:

They will kill many moons
On the saddle of their heels
They who stalk our banks
For snores of slumbering crabs (*Laughters*: 73).

In these lines, we have a 'transcreation' and abstraction of meaning from a Yoruba proverb - *Ode tí ó ńretí àti sùn akàn á pé létí odò, Ode tí ó ńsó Elédùnmarè orí egùn ni ó má a kú sí.* (A hunter who lays in wait for the slumber of the crab has a long time to wait, a hunter who crouches in watch for God will die in the saddle of waiting). The subject of financial misappropriation and corruption has been introduced into the semiotics of the proverb "They who stalk our bank". Similarly, the persona hunter character-metaphor has been transformed into "they" from 'hunter' in the original (politicians/military junta) and "crabs" and '*Elédùnmarè*'within the context of interpretation into "our" (the larger society). Thus proverbs in Osundare's poetry are, to a very large extent, an indispensable template of the poet's stylistics of ways of meaning.

In passing, Ojaide (2003), citing *Songs* (1983), *Moonsongs* (1988) comments that Osundare uses materials from Yoruba mythology but

not from the pantheon, and that the strength of *Waiting Laughters* (1990) can be located in Osundare's use of Yoruba axioms, proverbs and myths. In our estimation, a close analysis suggests that Osundare has reconfigured the pantheon figure *Olósunta* (*Midlife* 1993) as meaning. For example, "*Olósunta*"[9], as used in "The Rocks Rose to Meet Me" (*Earth*: 1986), is that in which Osundare pitches his metaphorical proverbial tent "The rocks rose to meet me/like passionate lovers on a long awaited tryst" (13), drawing meaning culturally embodied in its domain of semiotics. In general term, for Osundare, "*Olósunta*" is a pantheon figure for literary creation; it is both a metaphorical and proverbial figure for meaning making, in which the poet reminisces the past, reviews the persona's domicile in subjective land and long absence from home: "you have been long, very long, and far" (13), and contemplates communal sustenance, welfare, unity and past, in which "*Olósunta*" is the gathering point.

Further on Osundare's use of proverbs, Brown (2003) observes, without substantiation, that "Even for the reader without knowledge of Yoruba proverbs, much of Osundare's work bears the cast of proverbial utterance[1]". According to Brown, "Indeed some of the more obvious echoes are from proverbs that exist in English". This statement is false and attests to some of the misinterpretations by western criticisms of African literature, by which they perceive meaning in African literature on the thesis of western idioms known to such critics, and which they wrongly think "echoes" western worldviews. We observed that the creative ability of Osundare at manipulating Yoruba idiom into English expression for the understanding of non-Yoruba English readers may have informed this erroneous point of view. We assume that it is a deliberate refusal to acknowledge the semiotic sources of such proverbs as a result of the deep-sited western prejudices against what other sections of humanity contribute to the world. In another instance, it might simply mean a misreading or "Larsony syndrome" (Armah 1977; qt Chinweizu et al 1983).

In all, Osundara's proverbial thesis can summarily be explicated thus from "Who is Afraid of the Proverb?":
The proverb is:
-*Eloquent kernel pod in the pod of silent moons*:

"The proverb" entails fluency of expression- quality of human- juxtaposed with the metaphor/personification "silent moons" to emphasize the "eloquence"

-kola in the mouth of the mountain:
"The proverb" juxtaposed with "kola" evokes the proverb *Enu àgbà ni obì ti ńgbó* "Kola nut is sweetest in the mount of elders"- elders have the audacity of discourse, where others may fear to make meaning openly. In other words "the proverb" metaphorically has audacity of meaning in discourse.
-the drum which left its echoes in the auricles of leaping streets:
"The proverb" imitates and elicits sound/echoes of drum with an ontology that suggests 'memorability' and 'long lasting' and 'effectiveness' of meaning couched in proverbs.

-the shortest distance between many truths:
"The proverb" as a pungent means/ medium of providing prompt truth and meaning in a short
span of a discourse. That is, saying much with little number of words.
-the dialect of the drum:
"the proverb" implies a language, a means of communication, metaphorically perceived in two popular Yoruba drums, *gángan* and *àgídìgbo* which are used literally in talking/making meaning in performance with semiotic import, requiring pragmatic interpretation . For example, in Fagunwa/Soyinka (1982:1) "My friends all, like the sonorous proverb do we drum the *àgídìgbo*; it is the wise who dance to it, and the learned who understand its language".

-silent salt in the feast of delicious words:
"The proverb" is conceived within the domain of food, whereby the proverb-as-salt metaphor sweetens words-as-food metaphor. In simple terms, the metaphor suggests the elegance and aesthetic and communicative value of proverbs in speech or discourse, and as the proverb goes, "proverb is the vehicle of discourse" or as Achebe puts it "proverb is the oil with which words are eaten".

Osundare's Proverbial Formulaic
Osundare rhetorically employs proverbs in four major ways: (1). Proverbs are used as a reiterative or annotative commentary, where

proverbs are used in a variety of patterns. (2). Yarning tales from proverbs to reformulate poetic composition as second order text. (3). Proverbs are reformulated in the flux of poetic composition as premise of subject matter and (4). Composition of poetic idiom as parallels of proverbial figurations. The forth pattern features within the first three frames as our analysis will show in this paper and subsequent forth coming ones. The other major discovery of this stylistic option is what we can describe as the incorporation of pre-existing texts of traditional oral narratives and historical events as proverbial texts (2 above). Osundare thus becomes *Afintànpòwe, Afòwesòrò* - One who uses tales/history as proverbs and proverbs as speech to make and draw pragmatic meaning.

For its essence, proverbs as deployed by Osundare apprehend unacceptable behaviors, exposes falsehood and deception found in political arena. Proverbs challenge absolute power and oppression. Proverbs confront corruption and self-aggrandizement at the expense of the collective and communal comfort. Osundare uses proverbs to interpret his discomfort at the suffering of the hard-working, oppressed common folks. However, at another level, proverbs are deployed to mobilize and institute hope for a better future, patience and perseverance and the courage to confront and displace tyranny, and as Osundare proverbially ruminates:

Time it may take
The stammerer will call
His father's name
Time it may take
The sun will rise
Above the tree (*Nib*: 45).

In all, proverbs in Osundare provide a didactic exploration of socio-political and economic happenings and invite the readers to take side. Importantly too, proverbs yield the aesthetic of Osundare's poetic discourse. In this current paper (1) we will solely dwell on the proverb as reiterative commentary of meaning.

Proverb as Reiterative Commentary of Meaning

The questions which may confront an analyst are questions about compositional structure of proverbs and meaning in the continuum of artistic creation. This is the first frame of Osundare's proverbial tableaux and it is the focus of this paper. This striking technique is the deployment of proverbs as 'choruses', reiterative commentary of meaning. What we mean by this is the stylistic application in which proverbs are used to echo, support, authenticate or give authoritative appeal to a point of view. We have identified three compositional structures, with pragmatic and expressive implications in this regard.

The first one is a pattern in which a proverb ends a composition. For instance, there are instances of this in (*Nib*: 1983), (*Village*: 1984) and (*Word*: 1999). We analyzed one example in each case for our analysis. The second pattern is that in which proverbs are used as opening and closing remarks as found, for examples, in "Listen, Book Wizards", "unequal Fingers" (*Village*: 58, 60-61) and "When We Write the Epitaph of Apartheid" (*Nib*:43). One example in each case sufficed for our analysis. The third obtrusive pattern is that in which proverbs are incorporated in alternate fashion within stanzas of poems as I will show in "I Will Eat in the Fold" (*Nib*: 17-18), "The One Who Departed" (*Memory*: 5-18) and (*Midlife*: 56-59). For ease of identification, italics are used for focus on lines in which proverbs appeared.

To illustrate the first pattern, in "Atewolara" (*Nib*: 15), the following lines will suffice for our analysis:

Reared as we are

To take life
As a knotty theorem
Of unarguable givens

And cry the people:
Who shall save us?

Then
Came a whisper
Urgent like Harmattan finger

Prompting like a prick:

Wake you up
And befriend your mind
You will see the answers
Permanenced in the lines
Of your palm

The proverb is reworded and reformulated as a prime order text in the last stanza of this poem, while a second order reformulated text of the proverb forms the thesis (title). In Yoruba; *Atelewo eni ki-itan ni je or Atewolara-* literally: our palm never deceives us (one achieves success with certainty of one's effort not trusting/relying on someone else's, but one's self). The poem suggests the unreliability of asking and getting help based on one's belief in religions (stanzas 1 and 2)- "desert temples", "mystery mosques" and "shrinking shrines" to overcome the "knotty theorem of unarguable givens"- problems and difficulties of life. The modifiers "desert", "mystery" and "shrinking", by their semantic content of negativity, conceptualized the futility of the various religions, embodied in "temples", "mosques" and shrines". The proverb helps to incite this truth of relying on self- certainty of one's handiwork rather than the expectation from somewhere else, in which one may be disappointed. In an extended interpretation, it may mean an indictment of over reliance of African governments on Western nations for all sorts of assistance, and this has not served Africa well; the so-called help is always predicated on Western nation's interest and what resources of Africa these nations can freely exploit.

In another poem, "Promise Land" (*Nib*: 32-3), the proverb is used to implicate the unreliability of promises of the political class, who only become brutal despots on getting to power. Consider the following lines:

Should we should we not pray
For them who thunder promises
From prefab podiums
Feeding famished ears with vows
Of promise lands

…them who banish thought
From action
Murder reason, exile hope
Hang poets for their dreams

Arise
With long knives and guns
You for so long slaughtered
At the alter of profit Baals

We shall reach the Promised Land
Through the tracks of our palm.

The proverb is creatively flushed into the composition, manipulated from its original structure and metaphorically parallel to the 'reaching'- moving/traveling to the promise land through the tracks (marks on the palm) - road of the palm, which, again, implicates the idea of the people- "we"- being reminded and mobilized to rely on what they, the people, are able to do for themselves, and indeed that they (the people) should rely on themselves to mobilize against tyranny. The metonymic "palm" is a reference to self, instituting self-effort in the proverb. The proverb in the last stanza of "Sleeping, at Five and Twenty" (*Village*: 11-12) is didactic and it is used to echo the intolerable behavior and traces of lack of wisdom in younger people in the cultural polity, which is the theme of the poem. For example in the following lines:

At five and twenty
There you are
No farms no barns
No wives no children
Visiting relatives only

Your palms thick like hippo skin
Your mates wrestle in the village square
You grapple massive morsels
In your neighbor's kitchen
Where a bowl of *iyán*

Puts you flat on your slothful back
Living each day

Till the sun goes down
Behind the trees
You will never hear the whizzzzzz
When the world races your sleeping ears

We say a child is foolish
His mother says "As long as he doesn't die"
What death kills a child faster
Than arrant folly?

Lack of wisdom or sign of laziness in the youths is considered more dangerous than death in the culture. A proverb akin to this is *àkúnkún'bí sàn ju ràdàràdà*- it is better for one not to be born than be born and messed up. Consequently, a lazy or foolish child is of no use and not much better than a dead child. Here we see a single proverb manipulated in different ways to project different levels of message: internationally: between western nations and Africa, between despot-rulers and the large oppressed society, within self for personal success.

Finally, in "Lovers Quarrel" (*Word*: 78):
I have heard leaves argue
In the parliament of the wind

I have caught a few hot words
On the lips of doves

I have seen wine and water
Locking horns in an agitated glass
Even between tongue and mouth
There are occasional quarrels…
But no matter how tough the Word may be
We do not cut it with a knife.

Each of the stanzas, except the last, is composed as a metaphor of inevitable conflicts in the natural world, and conflict as natural part

of existence. On the same stroke, which the proverb in the last stanza implicates, the "word", the metaphor for the issue at the crux of any quarrel cannot be so impossible as to make the quarrels so impossible to resolve- so big/tough as to require a knife to cut- solve- into manageable pieces. The idea that is drawn here is from the bizarre attempt/suggestion to use the physical object "knife" to cut non-physical abstract concept into bits. In other words, quarrels can be resolved through dialogue, discussion and negotiation, (words of mouth) rather than the application of force (knife). Osundare, in this instance, translates the proverb into prime structure of English from Yoruba- *òrò kì í tóbi ká fi òbe bù ú, enu la a fi só*. We note however that the last phrase of the proverb- "*enu la a fi só*"- we use mouth to say it- is not included in the translation, and such deliberate omission is a stylistic option in Yoruba usage, with the assumption that the interlocutors share the structure and knowledge of the proverb. Even though the proverb is translated into prime level meaning from Yoruba semiotics, the idea that it conceptualizes is easily understood by its semantic oddity and fact, including the template of the metaphoricity constructed in the stanzas of the poem, at the prime order level of meaning.

For the second pattern of the proverbial frame these extracts:

1. Let noone mistake
2. the slowness of the cat
3. for a flash of fear
4. when it is pouncing time
5. the speed of the paw
6. will surprise the mouse's impertinence

7. Listen you book wizards
8. your pens are spears
9. in the eye of this land
10. your ink the stench
11. coursing through gutters
12. and government offices
13. carrying debris of rot
14. from the stagnant pond
15. of legislative houses

16. We know it all
17. for with all these long throats
18. who still seeks magic
19. in the disappearance of food?

20. Let no-one mistake our sleep
21. For a s stupor of death
22. The slowness of the cat
23. Is skill
24. Not a lack
25. Of will

A close examination shows that there are a number of creative adjustments made to the proverb in the process of composition. The original in Yoruba is *Yíyó kélékélé ekùn, bi t'ojo kó, ohun tí yó (pa) je ní ńwá*- the leopard's measured slowness is not a sign of cowardice/fear, it is simply looking out, strategizing for a prey (prime order translation). Firstly, Osundare replaces 'leopard' (*ekùn*) with "cat" (*ológìní*) and such an exchange is common in the use of this particular proverb in the semiotics. Secondly, Osundare provides a semantic and structural parallel phrases to the proverb (lines 20-21), frame (4), embedded, as we have noted, into the other three frames to connect the pragmatic import of the proverb to the semantics of the subject matter. Thirdly, Osundare sticks to the second order meaning in the first part of the proverb- *Yíyó kélékélé ológìní*- "the slowness of the cat"- but implicates the pragmatic meaning of the second part of the proverb at prime order level interpretation in two ways (lines 4-6; stanza one and 23-25; last stanza); which simply means 'being wise' and 'being strategic', as further suggested by the parallel drawn with the proverb in lines (20-21), as against the second order translation - *ohun tí yó (pa) je ní ńwá*- prime order translation as 'looking for what (to kill) to eat'.

In the context of the poem, the proverb implicates the prime order interpretive meaning of 'do not mistake gentleness/patience of people for spinelessness'; with the pragmatic illocutionary force of *warning* to misuse of power (lines 7-15), graft and corruption (lines 16-19), for a possible people's uprising against culpable power and mis-governance. Furthermore, these lines (*Nib* 44-45):

1. Time it may take
2. The stammerer will call
3. His father's name
4. Time it may take
5. The sun will rise
6. Above the trees.

7. Let them keep their lockless keys
8. Let their smiths forge more spikes
9. For steel walls
10. Let jackboots pound the laager
11. With heels of Hitler's children
12. …

13. We will see you
14. From the seeding of our
15. Dream
16. To the germination of our
17. Hopes
18. Watered by the
19. Sweat
20. And
21. Tears
22. And
23. Blood
24. …when in lurid colours
25. We write
26. The epitaph of apartheid

27. For
28. Time it may take
29. The stammerer will call
30. His father's name
31. Time it may take
32. The sun will rise
33. *Above the trees.*

The proverb in this extract has the thematic force of *patience* and *perseverance* for its pragmatic interpretation. It is a prime order translation of the Yoruba original- *ojó ló lèpé, akólòlò a pe baba*. For reformulation, Osundare replaces "*bab*a" (father) with "father's name" (lines 3 and 30) to (at prime order level)- 'time it may take a stammerer will pronounce (articulate) father (baba)'. Again, Osundare provides a similar prime order parallel semantic and structural phrase (line 4-6 and 31-33) (embedded frame 4) to connect readers, who may not share the meaning of the proverb in stanza one. The same proverb appears in two other poems- "Not Standing Still" (*Nib*: 12) and "Noon Yet" (*Nib*: 19). In the former, the proverb is incorporated with a parallel prime order phrase as in:

The circle which has a beginning
Also has an end
A little patience is what it needs
The stammerer will call
His father's name

The latter is constructed as an abstraction of the proverb without the inclusion of the actual proverb in the composition as in the following lines:

Time it may take
The raw yam will turn
A smiling morsel
But not too much time
So it doesn't turn
A crawling mash.

This instance also projects the idea of *patience* with *perseverance.* While the opening provides an anticipatory apprehension of the subject matter, the same proverb, in its variants, provides both a sustained reiterative or echo and closure of the implied meaning in the poems in which this pattern is deployed.

Regarding the third pattern of this frame, Osundare provides a repetitive alternation of proverbs within stanzas, making the deployed proverbs to demand attention to the gestures of meaning

which constitute the locus of the poetic composition. For example, in "I Will Eat in the Fold" (*Nib*: 17-18), out of the seven stanzas, a repeated proverb constitutes three stanzas in alternation. Similarly, in "The One Who Departed" (*Memory*: 5-18), the proverbs "The cock has Crowed Behind the Man" and "The Matchet is the Man" are, alternately within stanzas, repeated six and eight times, respectively in the poem. Equally is some portions of "Human in Every Sense", section three of (*Midlife*: 56-59), where Osundare engages in the fusion of inter-lingual transfer and translation, a style which has increasingly become idiosyncratic to Osundare's poetic lore. We will pursue my analysis in this regard with the first and the last examples we have identified. The first one is for its metaphoric manipulative dimension while the last one is for its dimension of inter-lingual transfer. The first:

I have showered the dew
Of dawn, chaste
Seen my cleansing
In the mirroring globule
On the brow of grass

I have washed my hands
In the spring of wisdom
I will eat in the fold

I have minted my mouth
With the maiden droops
Of upland springs
Fished fancy from free falls
And seen through the mist
Of gentle cataracts

I have washed my hands
In the spring of wisdom
I will eat in the fold

I am a hen
Strut safely through

A bramble of leeches
My plumbed pride unhooked
By a colony of blood merchants

I have washed my hands
In the spring of wisdom
I will eat in the fold

The clay which goes through fire
Grows too hard for
For the softening worms of decay.

The poetic persona gives a catalogue of experiences, metaphorically, which make the persona wiser, putting him in a good stead of becoming "The clay hard for worms to incite decay". This poem implicates the well-known concept that 'wisdom comes with experience and experience comes with age', but in addition, in Yoruba semiotic world, wisdom also comes with patient interaction with *àwon àgbà*- the elderly ones: *Omodé tó bá mo owówè, á bá àgbà jeun*- prime order translation; the youth who washes his hands clean enough will dine with the elder. The proverb infers that wisdom acquisition is through cultural tutelage of (*àwon*) *àgbà* - the elderly ones being the custodians of culture and wisdom. Thus to gain entry into that knowledge, a linguistic cultural rite of passage into discourse, and climb the 'wisdom hierarchy', the youth will have to interact, with patience and respect for the elders, with the custodians of the knowledge- the elders. The pragmatics of the proverb also implicates its didactic function, reminding us of one of the tenets of the traditional education, whereby, as Lawal el al (1997:637)[10] observes:

> Proverbs are thus employed to reinforce and sustain the traditional respect for elders, […] it serves also as a potent means of social control […] settling quarrels and disputes […] and for the younger generation, […] level-headed youths crave the company of elders so that they can glean linguistic, cultural and historical information usually conveyed in elders' speeches […] are full of appropriate proverbs.

The proverb as used in this context echoes the persona's position of impregnability- "I am a hen/ Strut safely through/A bramble of leeches/My plumbed pride unhooked/By a colony of blood merchants", a result of the persona's learning and tested experience, having "washed [his] hands in the spring of wisdom". This conceptualization, in an extended sense, indirectly functions as a warning for condescending power, who may want to underrate the collective consciousness and the resolve to displace the tyranny of the ruling few.

This projection has its semantic and structural character in Yoruba incantatory second order discourse. Osundare creatively manipulates the proverb into a metaphor, hence SPRING OF WISDOM IS ELDERS and THE FOLD IS KNOWLEDGE and therefore, from that experience, THE PERSONA IS HARD CLAY defying worms of decay, in which sense TYRANNICAL POWER IS WORMS OF DECAY, which the persona, as a representation of the masses, has the immunity of experience to withstand and overcome, prevailing. It is useful to refer to another poem, for comparison, in which this proverb conceptualizes a similar idea of knowledge. I am referring to "Midlife", section (VI) of (*Midlife*: 93):

My continent is a sky ripped apart by clever crows,
Awaiting the suturing of a new, unfailing Thunder
But tell me, Africa,
Tell me more about this eternal childhood.
I have washed my hands in rivers
Of many seasons:
I can now share the feast of ancient wisdoms
I have cut my teeth in forests of sturdy ivory,
Ripening cornfields drive no fear into my jaws.

The persona seeks to find the cause of the problems afflicting Africa, with trepidation of wonderment why the continent's problem- "eternal childhood"- seems to defy every solution, but will have to await an "unfailing thunder"- a metaphor for a revolution. Thus for the persona, experience- "[…] washed my hands in river of many seasons" embodies the authority to cast a backward glance into "ancient wisdoms" to find the cause and solution to Africa's many

afflictions. Again, Osundare manipulates the structure of the proverb and provides a defining parallel phrase to the semantic and structure of the proverb- "I have cut my teeth in the forests of sturdy ivory/Ripening cornfields drive no fear into my jaws".

My second example for this pattern is metaphorically constructed in the semiotics thus: *Omi ni eènià* (HUMANS ARE STREAMS), *tó bá sàn sí íwájú, á tún sànsí èyìn* (they flow forth and flow back) and like tributaries that join into a river- *tí a bà pàdé lókè apàdé ní ìsàlè* (we somehow flow into one another- encounter each other in life).The proverb, *Omi l'ènià*, Osundare's composition, appears six times alternately in the poem to incite the sense in which humans and elements will inevitably have to encounter one another and cohabit. The following are extracts from Osundare's creation, providing the Yoruba version, translation and interpretation in a poetic composition to engage meaning:

1. Omi l'ènià ….Humanity is river
2. Omi l'ènià …. Humanity is river
3. Tó bá sàn wá …. When it flows forth
4. A tún sàn padà …. It also flows back
5. Omi l'ènià …. Humanity is a river

6. Those who passed have not parted
7. Those who passed have not parted
8. Their footprints settle the crest of every wave…
9. They are the fragrant armpit of the seasons
10. April's prickly showers…
11. *Omi l'ènià.*

12. A long, wide river we all are…
13. Together we chase the waiting sea

14. Omi l'ènià

15. If we do not meet in the rapid mountains
16. We strike a tryst in the gentle plains

17. Omi l'ènià

18. The snake which roams the wild in the company
19. Of its skin
20. Soon finds its head under the hunter's club
21. Pebbles which join heads will form a rock
22. Tree which share branches will form a forest
23. Whose tribe is memory of a sole finger?
24. Omi l'enia

25. One broomstick cannot sweep the street
26. Omi l'ènià

27. And Mississippi joins the Niger
28. In a many-fingered pledge before the sea…

29. Omi l'ènià

    a. I am the ubiquitous and in the broken
    b. Scene-tax of a stammering discourse,
    c. The but which tempers the flame
    d. Of volcanic clauses…
    e. Omi l'ènià (Midlife: 56-59).

We think that lines (1-5), which is the proverb, is not for fancy of translation, it is so composed, inclusive of the prime order translation, for the purpose of sharing the content of the semiotics with the non-Yoruba speaking wider audience. The interesting thing about this poem is that Osundare creatively provides other proverbs (lines 18-20, 27 and 25-26) and proverbial phrases (lines 21, 22, 27-28 and 30-33) whose universal truth-content substantiate and justify the signification of the meaning being communicated by the proverb-*Omi l'ènià* - in the poem. Essentially, human solidarity, cohabitation, cooperation and, necessarily, inevitability of needing one another, naturally, are mediated by this poem. The proverb conceptualizes the idea that humans are mobile/nomads, and we do not know where each of us will find ourselves in the future unknown, and that knowledge suggests the possibility of humans criss-crossing and needing one another (lines 15-16), again, inevitably. The repetitive *Omi l'ènià* proverb incites an awe of the humans, metaphorically

interpretive of the elements always criss-crossing one another. The idea implicates an ideological impulse of Osundare's conceptualization of human fellowship and dependency, suppressing isolationism of the individual or groups in an age where human interaction is mediated by nuclear threat, terrorism, global aggression and brutal technological dominance, including repression of freedom and liberty.

All the proverbs in the poem are eloquent bearers of the interpretation we have analyzed above, the inevitability of humans criss-crossing and needing one another. For example, *àìrìn pò ejò, ni ó fi ì ìyà je ejò*- not going about as a group (to instill fear) is the undoing of the individual snake- meaning; the consequence of not cooperating with one another is our undoing (lines 18-20), thus cooperation engender triumph/success. Similarly and interestingly, the organization of the discourse structure, with the application of coordinating conjunctions ("and" and "but") and referring elements, instituted by genitive "of" and attributive relative clause headed by "which", which make organized meaning possible (lines 30-33) is a metaphoric referent conceptualized as some kind of cooperation, and mapped onto the idea of human necessary solidarity generated by the primary proverb- *Omi l'ènià*.

Conclusion

In this major formulaic of Osundare use of proverbs, where proverbs are formulated as reiterative commentary of meaning, we identified three patterns as analyzed above. While these patterns are clearly identifiable, they do overlap in terms of their reformulation and restructuring for meaning delivery and aesthetic effect. The other major frames, apart from proverb as reiterative commentary of meaning, are yarning tales from proverbs to reformulate poetic composition, reformulating proverbs in the flux of poetic composition as premise of subject matter and composing poetic idioms as parallels of proverbial figurations. These frames are the subjects of other papers being researched.

Notes

[1] Raji-Oyelade, A. "Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture: A Playful Blasphmy" in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 74-82, (Spring) 1999.
[2] Lawal, A. et al, "A Pragmatic Study of Selected Pairs of Yoruba Proverbs" in Journal of Pragmatics, 27, pp. 635-652, 1997.
[3] Lawal et al "A Pragmatic Study of Selected Yoruba Proverbs" in *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 27, pp. 635-657, 1997. See also Oke, M. "Precepts for Tenure Ethics in Yoruba Egungun (Masquerade) Proverbs" in *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 9, Aug. 2007.; Oladeji, N. "Proverbs as Language Signpost in Yoruba Pragmatic Ethics" in *An African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, No. 2 pp. 45-57, 1988.; Yusuf, Y.K. "Yoruba Proverbial Insights into Female Sexuality and Genital Mutilaton", in ELA: Journal of African Studies, 1&2, 1997.
[4] To cite few examples, see Obiehina, E.N. *Language and Theme: Essays on African Literature*, 1990.; Ojaide et al, *Culture, Society, and Politics in Modern African Literature*, 2002.*;*
[5] See the example of Shelton, A. "The 'Palm-oil' of language: Proverbs in Chinua Achebe's Novels" in *Modern Language Quarterly*, 30.1 pp. 89-111, 1969.
[6] Akorobaro, F.O.B and Emovon, J.A. "Nigerian Proverbs: Meanings and Relevance Today". Lagos: Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, (1994). Qtd by Fasiku, G. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 1.4, June, 2006, pp. 50-63.
[7] Osundare, Niyi. 1984. *Village Voices.* Ibadan: Evans Brothers. p.vii.
[8] According to Osundare: A huge, imposing rock in Ikere, worshipped yearly during the popular Olosunta festival; reputed to be a respository of gold.
[9] Brown, S. "Still Daring the Beast: Niyi Osundare and Contemporary Nigerian Poetry" in (ed.) Na'Allah (ibid).
[10] Lawal, A; Ajayi, B; Raji, W. "A Pragmatic Study of Selected Yoruba Proverbs", *Journal of Pragmatics* Vol. 27, Issue 27, 1997, pp. 635-657.

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