Literary Aesthetics and Postmodern Representations in Stephen Kekeghe's *Rumbling Sky* and Tunde Olusunle's *A Medley Of Echoes*

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Abstract

With the advent of the 21st century, Nigerian poetry has continued to illustrate exclusive aesthetic representations, complemented by postmodern ideology, that reflect both artistic innovation and social realities. While several studies focus on significant literary and syntactic transformations in contemporary Nigerian poetry, little attention is paid to the negotiation of postmodern realities of the 21st century with new aesthetic techniques in Nigerian poetry. This study, therefore, examines the literary aesthetics and postmodern representations in selected Nigerian poems published in the twenty-first century, with a focus on Stephen Kekeghe's Rumbling Sky and Tunde Olusunle's A Medley of Echoes. This paper adopts Russian Formalism which provides a rich foundation for the examination of literary aesthetics and ideology in contemporary Nigerian poetry, complemented by relevant postmodern techniques. The selected poems were subjected to qualitative methodology. Through critical analysis of the usage of fractured syntax, imagery, and free verse, this study underscores the psycho-social fractures caused by systematic failures, oppression, and corruption. It further evaluates the use of postmodern techniques such as lingual hybridity, intertextuality, and visual experimentation to represent the interface between colonial linguistic hierarchies and indigenous epistemologies. The findings reveal that contemporary Nigerian poetry embodies the nature of duality in its assertion of aesthetic autonomy while simultaneously functioning as an ideological discourse of resistance.

Keywords: *Literary Aesthetics, Twenty-first Century Nigerian Poetry, Formalism, Postmodernism*

Introduction

Contemporary Nigerian poetry is inextricably linked to the evolution of African oral tradition in which poetry, chant, and song constituted the primary modes of cultural transmission, memory, and communal identity formation. In precolonial Nigeria, poetic forms such as praise poetry, dirges, incantations, and epics functioned not only as entertainment but also as instruments of

moral instruction. While Charles Akinsete (2022:39) states that Nigerian poetry indeed has become a significant avenue for literary expression, Ojaide (2003:7) had argued that "Nigeria's poetry history is founded extensively on the oral culture of the nation, even before the introduction of written literature in the country by colonialism. Josephat Odey and Patrick Ogar (2021) argue that "The poetry of this era is woven in oral performance and could be said to be highly functional, because it is close to the daily and social life of the people". The advent of colonial rule in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reshaped the trajectory of Nigerian poetry, instigating a shift from the extant oral form to the written form. With the introduction of Western education, writing became a new expressive mode, which provoked a revolutionary move that displaced indigenous oral form (Gikandi, 2015).

The pioneer Nigerian poets adopted the written poetic form, but they started experimenting with English verse structures while superimposing their indigenous motifs and contents. Their poetry, however, reflected a melange of colonial modernity and Nigerian cultural heritage. This resulted in imitation and innovation in both poetic form and content. Donatus Nwoga (1994: 121-22), notes that the “pioneer poets are enlightened Nigerians who use their wealth of experience to fight common enemies: colonisation and poor opinion that the rest of the world appears to have about the ability of the black man” One major impulse of pioneer poets was the desire to portray African life, values and customs to refute centuries of vilification, denigration and misrepresentation by the Europeans (Josephat Odey and Patrick Ogar, 2021). Some of the notable pioneer poets include: Dennis Osadebay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Michael Dei-Anang, etc.

With the emergence of voices like Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, Michael Echuero, Okogbule Wonodi and J. P. Clark-Bekederemo in the 1950s and 1960s, Nigerian poetry entered a period widely regarded as the “golden age.” These poets project themselves and Nigerian poetry to the world by blending Western modernist techniques with African mythopoeic sensibilities. For instance, in a review by Nicholas Dolan (2024), it is averred that Okigbo’s *Labyrinths* (1971) exhibits a modernist lyricism richly influenced by T. S. Eliot, yet remains deeply rooted in Igbo myth and Catholic symbolism. The poets of this period began to withdraw from the public stage and turn to focus on personal concerns and inner reflections. Similarly, Akinsete (2020) confirms that "diverse literary forms (including cultural expressions such as music, sculpture, dance, painting, dressing and of course literature) that were produced in the twentieth century in Africa were heavily influenced by the fusion of Euro-Afrocentric experiences which

dominated the black continent from the mid-twentieth century" (242). To a large extent, these poets were variously described as poets who engaged in writing obscure poetry. Ideologically, their poems did not reflect the painful realities of society. This explains why writers like Chinweizu et al aver that those poets failed Nigerians in several ways:

> There is a failure of craft in the works of the euro-modernist Ibadan Nsukka school of Nigerian poetry. Despite the high praise heaped upon it from all sides, most of the practitioners display glaring faults, e.g. old fashioned, craggy, unmusical language; obscure and inaccessible diction, a plethora of imported imagery; a divorce from African traditions, tempered only by a lifeless attempt at revivalism (165).

The post-independence period ushered Nigerian poetry into the modern era when poets began to broaden their scope in both content and style (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 2016). Ideologists like T.C Nwosu, Ezenwa Ohaeto, Ossie Enekwe, Odia Ofeimun, Niyi Osundare, Femi Fatoba, Tanure Ojaide and Chimalum Nwankwo became the main voices behind modern Nigerian poetry. The thematic concerns of these poets were hinged on social ills such as corruption, dictatorship, poor leadership, environmental degradation, electoral malpractices and civil war. Emmanuel Obiechina (1971) holds that "…faced with the new realities of power and politics in Africa (Nigeria), writers have had to reappraise their roles in the society. The pre-occupation with the past had to give way to concerns with pressing problems of the present" (122). Poets like Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, and Niyi Osundare shifted the tenor of Nigerian poetry from obscurity to a more accessible, social mode. Osundare in particular insisted on the democratisation of poetry, arguing that "poetry is not the esoteric preserve of a few elite readers but a song woven for the ears of the community" (Osundare, 1984). His collection, "Songs of the Marketplace" (1983), projects this aesthetic shift, promoting oral performance, collective identity, and political engagement.

With the advent of the 21st century, however, Nigerian poetry experienced a remarkable transformation, reflecting both local and global cultural realities. This new phase aligns with the rise of postmodernism in world literature. Postmodern poetry is generally characterised by a scepticism towards grand narratives, playful reinvention of form, and an embrace of fragmentation, intertextuality, parody, and pastiche. Unlike the solemnity of modernist poetry, postmodern poets often play with language. They bend, disrupt, or even mock conventional forms. For instance, a poem may juxtapose free verse with fragmented prose, or interweave classical references with pop culture. Linda Hutcheon describes postmodernism as "an ideology of irony" that combines critique

with complicity, destabilising authority while revelling in plurality (Hutcheon, 2002). Akinsete (2023) argues that the complexities of the modern era serve as a main catalyst in the evolution of postmodern African culture.

Nigerian poets in the quarter part of the twentieth century have been largely described as "Young poets", "New poets", and "Younger poets". Niyi Osundare calls them "CNN generation of writers", while Odia Ofeimun refers to them "as the clap trap generation of writers" (Josephat Odey and Patrick Ogar, 2021; Inyabri, 2006: 68). Some of these contemporary postmodern poets include Peter Onwudinjo, Joe Ushie, Remi Raji, Charles Akinsete, Adimora-Ezeigbo, Femi Oyebode, Cecilia Kato, Olu Oguibe, Afam Akeh, Sophia Obi, Charles Ihuoma, Isaac Shuaibu, Hope Eghagha and Obari Gomba, Toyin Adewale, Ogechi Ironmatu, Isidore Diala, Uche Nduka, Onokome Okome, Usman Shehu, Chin Ce, Kemi Atanda, Kayode Aderinokun, among others.

In Nigerian poetry, the 21st century postmodern ideology resonates strongly with the lived experiences of post-colonialism, globalisation, trauma and diasporic dislocation. Josephat Odey and Patrick Ogar (2021) observe that "the writers of this generation are Marxist oriented" (163). With Marxist ideology, these poets leave an indelible revolutionary imprint on the minds of the masses. They use poetry as a creative means of advocacy and criticism. Their revolutionary fervour has persisted, as the younger generation of Nigerian poets continues their crusade for liberation from the constraints of capitalism. They position themselves as crusaders, critics, and agents of emancipation. Accordingly, Nigerian postmodern poetry frequently grapples with themes of trauma, globalisation, gender, diaspora, politics and other social realities. This aligns with Adebiyi-Adelabu and Esamagu's assertion that "one of the defining signifiers of third-generation Nigerian poetry is that it is characterised by a great deal of anger, frustration, cynicism, disillusionment, and pessimism; yet flashes of optimism are not an unusual feature of the poetry" (Adebiyi-Adelabu and Esamagu 2020:10).

The adoption of poetry in social media and the rise of digital publishing platforms have further diversified the voices shaping this poetry. Poets such as Charles Akinsete, Amatoritsero Ede, Lola Shoneyin, Jumoke Verissimo, and Efe Paul Azino exemplify the polyphonic nature of Nigerian postmodern poetics in their poems. Their works incorporate diverse influences ranging from Afrobeat rhythms and hip-hop idioms to Yoruba mythology and European modernism. For instance, Akinsete's *Chants of Restless Ants* modernises protest poetry by urging resistance on

'fiery pages of social media', merging Yoruba oral defiance with digital activism (Akinsete 2020: 36).

Aesthetically, the Postmodern Nigerian poetry revels in disjointed syntax, hybridised language, and intermediality. Chielozona Eze (2006) observes that "the new Nigerian poetry thrives on an ironic consciousness, locating beauty in dissonance and coherence in contradiction" (87). In other words, the aesthetics of the 21st-century Nigerian poem often embodies paradox, multiplicity, and irony rather than unity or harmony. This postmodern sensibility also entails a redefinition of the relationship between aesthetics and ideology. Terry Eagleton reminds us that "the aesthetic is not neutral, but a central ideological formation" (Eagleton, 1990: 24). Thus, the aesthetic strategies in Nigerian poetry are themselves ideological gestures. Furthermore, the development of form and content in Nigerian poetry has been deeply influenced by the rise of performance poetry and spoken-word culture in the 21st century.

Akinsete (2016) argues that literary texts are somewhat indebted to their inherent structure or form, which ultimately determines the quality of interpretation and criticism. Therefore, the study of aesthetics and postmodern ideology in 21st century Nigerian poetry seeks to bring to the fore, not only formal innovations but also broader cultural and ideological preoccupations. It further highlights how Nigerian poets deploy the tools of postmodern poetics not as mere stylistic features but as strategies for articulating the complex social realities. It is in this synthesis of aesthetics and ideology that Nigerian postmodern poetry derives its distinctiveness and relevance. The aesthetics of Nigerian poetry in the 21st century is inseparable from postmodern ideological waves, and together they showcase how art continually reinvents itself in response to the shifting literary culture.

The mélange of aesthetics and postmodern ideology in 21st century Nigerian poetry is, however, made possible through the adoption of the Formalist approach. Formalism, also known as Russian Formalism in its development, is regarded as a breakthrough in literary criticism (Steiner, 2016). As a literary theory, Formalism began in the early twentieth century, especially in Russia, in the 1910s and 1920s, and aimed to replace the focus of literary criticism with the features of a piece of literature considered in themselves, rather than with extrinsic considerations. Formalist critics developed the idea that literature is a unique and independent type of art, regulated by the internal laws (Davis and Womack, 2018). In its basic form, the idea behind the formalist theory is that literature exists when it is literary, and so it is known as literariness (Eyers, 2017). These formal

devices that convey this literariness are the rhythm, syntax, imagery, metaphor, defamiliarisation and structure of the narrative. The theory proposes that these factors are not just surface or appendages to a text but core to meaning and the ideal value of a text.

Therefore, literature was no longer taken as the result of emotion, biography or ideology, but as a system of devices arranged to create specific aesthetic effects. Through this, formalism was seen as a radical departure from the styles of criticism prevalent at that time, most of which were impressionistic and biographical (Gorkmez and Beyoglu, 2022). Formalism has not been free of detractors. Its extreme attention to literary form has attracted critics questioning an ahistorical and apolitical interpretation of literature according to the theory (Castle, 2013). Context, ideology, and social role are bracketed, and this poses a threat to formalist criticism because it reduces it to a linguistic puzzle with no relevance to the world out of which it emerges. Formalism, therefore, serves as a reminder that literature has its logic, and this cannot be explained entirely within the framework of historical, political, and psychological explanations. On that note, the contribution of formalist theory is in maintaining the literature's uniqueness, although it is in the process of interacting with other forms of analysis. Whether as an approach in itself or as an aspect of a larger critical theory, Formalism still defines how we read, interpret, and appreciate literature to some extent.

The Aesthetics of Experimental Poetic Form in Stephen Kekeghe *Rumbling Sky*

Rumbling Sky demonstrates Kekeghe's skilful deployment of aesthetics in postmodern poetry. Conspicuously, Kekeghe uses fragmentation and disjointed syntax to present the distorted mind of the oppressed people with a shattered psyche in the collection. Most of his poems are devoid of punctuation. As such, the reader only attempts to intermingle the non-punctuated, breathless poems to bring them to a state of displacement perceptible to the oppressed. For instance, in "*Hovering Horror*," the opening lines—"*We are in the hollow belly of the murky sky, floating on wings of the wind bearing anguish on our shoulders... / A cemetery of dumb ghosts and callous caretakers shrouded by darkness punctuated by the owl's songs*..." line 1-8 are rendered without full stops. This, however, creates a feeling of claustrophobia which develops into a continuous flow of despair.

This technique intensifies in "*Streams of Sorrow*," where the lines "*They throw bombs at us / as toddlers do with playthings; / the thick smoke, rising / to the darkening canopy / of the scary sky*..." Therefore, the enjambment in *lines 1-5* is used to create an effect of violence, which is unstoppable

and incessant. The disjointed structure also appears in "*Black Bloods*," where phrases like "*When they agonised Ogoni, crude became Wiwa's blood, our tragic treasure, conveyed in bullions of black bloods*" (lines 16-19) omit logical transitions, reflecting the chaotic aftermath of state-sponsored brutality. Similarly, "*This Boom*" fractures narrative coherence with abrupt shifts: "*In this wilting mangrove, / gas flares freeze your breath, / darken your lungs and livers / and crude, crawls into your waters*..." (lines 1-4). In this case, the disrupted syntax mirrors the upheaval experienced by the people of the Niger Delta, where oil exploitation displaces communities and strips them of both their land and their identity.

Kekeghe's strategic use of anaphora and repetition transforms his poetry into a kind of liturgical resistance, where recurring phrases accumulate ritual power with each repetition. The seven-fold incantation of "*They are the haramers*" across (lines 8, 14, 20, 26, 32) creates a judicial cadence that seems to put oppressive forces on trial before some cosmic court of justice. This phrase simultaneously functions as a cultural reference, appropriating the Islamic concept of "*haram*" (forbidden) for secular condemnation, and as a hypnotic device that induces psychological immersion in the trauma narrative.

The poet's manipulation of semantic recursion is particularly deft - with each repetition of the haramer refrain, the accusation mutates and deepens: from physical violence ("*with bloodied fingers*") to cultural theft ("*that stole our moon*") to generational destruction ("*that smoke our budding twig*"). This gradual disclosure that takes the form of a repetition is a perfect reflection of how systemic oppression spreads to various spheres of human life. The collection's leitmotif of "*blood*" in "*Black Bloods*" undergoes a remarkable alchemical transformation through strategic repetition. Beginning with the relatively concrete "*oily lakes*" (line 3), the imagery evolves through "*Wiwa's blood*" (line 17) to the more abstract "*dark bloods of slain paupers*" (line 21) before culminating in the devastating "*watery blood of scrawny children*" (line 37). Each repetition of the blood metaphor makes the realisation of its symbolism stronger, building an arch between a natural resource, a source of life, and a source of generational torment.

Kekeghe extends this method of repetition to the structural level of the collection, forming constellations through the recurrent use of industrial imagery (gas flares, pipelines), animal imagery (vultures, hawks), and planetary imagery (a dead moon, a sorrowful sun). These iterative motifs create a complex web of correlations to design the system of systemic oppression in Nigeria. In "*Burden of Being*," Kekeghe deploys repetitive cadence to embed profound effect with phrases

like "*surfaces and recedes, surfaces and recedes*" (line 113), mimicking the tidal nature of oppression that periodically overwhelms and then retreats from consciousness. The refrain of "*moans and words*" (line 165) initially suggests the reduction of revolutionary potential to cyclical futility, but is ultimately subverted through the very act of poetic testimony. The poem itself becomes proof that words can transcend moans, that art can transform suffering into resistance. This paradoxical use of repetition to both demonstrate and overcome oppression's cyclical nature showcases Kekeghe's sophisticated understanding of form as a political weapon.

Kekeghe's deployment of stream-of-consciousness narration serves as a powerful formal device that mirrors the psychological disarray of oppressed communities. This style repudiates traditional forms of narrative representation to convey thoughts and pictures in a chaotic, raw stream, as the thoughts and images overwhelm the victim of systemic violence. In "*Hovering Horror*," the opening lines—"*We are in the hollow belly of the murky sky, floating on wings of the wind bearing anguish on our shoulders... / A cemetery of dumb ghosts and callous caretakers shrouded by darkness punctuated by the owl's songs...*" (lines 1-8) eschew logical transitions, creating a sensory barrage that immerses the reader in the poem's nightmarish reality.

The technique becomes even more pronounced in "Streams of Sorrow," where the relentless repetition of "*They are the haramers*" (lines 8, 14, 20, 26, 32) creates a hypnotic, incantatory rhythm that mirrors the cyclical nature of oppression. Each new indictment—"*with bloodied fingers*," "that stole our moon," "*that smoke our budding twig*"—builds upon the last without pause, simulating how trauma compounds in the collective consciousness. The absence of stanzas breaks in those sections compels the reader to read the poems as the oppressed live their lives – without pauses for relief and without the comfort of clear or “pure” resolutions. This narrative style reaches its apex in "*Burden of Being*," where the speaker's internal monologue shifts abruptly from personal reflection ("*There is this burden of being that rests on your shuddering shoulders*") to societal critique ("*The high, busy in mind, sap the physical energies of the low*"), lines 75-76. These rapid changes reflect a disjointed mind of the person trying to balance their personal survival and communal destruction. The poem's concluding lines—"*You now scheme to enchain your faithful fans / of the years of sore rewards*" (lines 162-163)—demonstrate how stream-of-consciousness can reveal uncomfortable truths about complicity and betrayal in oppressed communities.

Kekeghe's adoption of free verse is not just for style, but also as a radical political statement, employing form to expose the chaotic operations of institutional oppression. The collection's refusal to use regular metrical patterns and rhyme systems is a formal rebellion against literary conventions that attempt to impose artificial order on the disordered realities of marginalised lives. The poems' breathless, uninterrupted stretches create a suffocating textual landscape that perfectly reflects the unending nature of institutional violence. This is the most compelling manifestation of the collection's structural resistance. The first lines of "*Hovering Horror*" show how good Kekeghe is at this kind of writing: "*We are in the hollow belly of the murky sky, floating on wings of the wind bearing anguish on our shoulders... / A cemetery of dumb ghosts and callous caretakers shrouded by darkness punctuated by the owl's songs*." (1–8). The poet uses a number of creative ways to create a claustrophobic textual vortex here. By leaving out normal punctuation, the poem generates a constant, overwhelming flow of imagery that keeps the reader's attention on the painful material. Strategic enjambment, which breaks lines in the middle of a thought ("*floating on wings of the wind bearing anguish / on our shoulders*...") lines 2–4, gives a strong impression of psychological fragmentation that is similar to how institutional violence breaks up coherent worldviews. At the same time, the quick buildup of conflicting imagery ("*hollow belly*," line 1; "*dumb ghosts*," line 5; "*owl's songs*," line 8) is like what victims of oppression go through when they have too much to take in.

Figurative and Symbolic Aesthetics in Stephen Kekeghe's *Rumbling Sky*

"In poetry, symbolism remains one of the effective ways in which literary language is deployed in a given text and meaning is inventively achieved" (Akinsete, 2016). Kekeghe's use of grotesque symbols and imageries serve as a visceral indictment of systemic violence, pushing readers to confront uncomfortable realities through disturbing, exaggerated depictions. In "*This Boom*," the lines "gas flares freeze your breath, / darken your lungs and livers" (lines 2-3) transform environmental pollution into a bodily violation, with industrial byproducts literally infiltrating human organs. Such a biological analogy brings some abstract ideas, such as environmental harm, into reality. The poem escalates this technique with surreal, bodily grotesquerie: "*menstruating pipes in / your dregs of drowning homes*" (lines 32-33). Here, industrial infrastructure is given reproductive functions, suggesting both violation (the pipes "*menstruate*" pollution into homes) and perversion of nature (the pipes replace human fertility with toxic discharge). This picture

confronts the reader with the realisation that capitalist exploitation distorts nature and human physiology.

"*Streams of Sorrow*" employs similar tactics with its depiction of religious hypocrisy: "*They are the haramers / that defend an impotent god / in the dark cloud / behind the dead moon*" (lines 26-29). The sexualised metaphor ("*impotent god*") reduces divine authority to failed masculinity, while the celestial imagery ("*dead moon*") inverts traditional symbols of hope. This grimy spiritual scene reflects the corruption of institutions that are supposed to be virtuous and without subjugation. The most disturbing grotesqueries appear in "*Black Bloods*," where oil becomes animate and gothic: "*The dark blood of our earth bloom wealth in private pockets of Abuja gods*" (line 9-11). In this metamorphosis, the transformation of a natural resource into a circulating fluid, and ultimately into a corrupted currency, becomes starkly apparent. This reveals how extractive economies transmute life into a commodity. The poem's closing image—"*watery blood of scrawny children and wrinkled youths litter our cringing creeks*" (lines 37-39)—collapses generations into a single grotesque tableau, showing how violence perpetuates across time.

Kekeghe deploys paradoxical and oxymoronic expressions to capture the extent of hypocrisy in our contemporary society. In "*Hovering Horror*," the phrase "*democrat's costumes*" (line 12) unmasks political theatre, where leaders don the guise of democracy while ruling as "*daring dictators*." Similarly, "triumphant CEOs" (line 33) juxtaposes corporate success with moral bankruptcy, critiquing capitalism's ruthless triumphalism. "*Burden of Being*" is rife with existential paradoxes: "*You are high as a successful man should be / but low as the unsuccessful are jinxed to be*" (lines 130-131). In this case, physical success is tantamount to spiritual poverty, causing the absurdity of success in a degraded system. The oxymoron "*reward of Success*!" (line 124) further mocks the hollowness of societal benchmarks, while "*community of Marx*" versus "*society of opulence*" (lines 143-145) contrasts idealism with soulless materialism. Even nature is set in a form of a paradox. In "*Streams of Sorrow*," the "*sad sun*" (line 16) replaces the moon, inverting celestial symbols of hope and casting light not to illuminate, but to expose the weight of despair.

With the use of personification, Kekeghe injects life to natural environment and industrial forces, making them effective agents of suffering. In "*This Boom*," crude oil is depicted as a predatory invader: "*crude, crawls into your waters, / meanders into your lands, / to choke your fishes / and kill your crops*" (lines 4 -7). This personification eliminates the boundary between a natural disaster

and an act of human sabotage. such that ecological devastation is being transformed into a willed, mindful behaviour. Similarly, gas flares are given malicious agency: "*gas flares freeze your breath, / darken your lungs and livers*" (lines 2-3), portraying industrialisation as a living, suffocating force. The poem "*Streams of Sorrow*" extends this technique to abstract concepts, describing oppressors as "*hovering vultures / on cold carcass*" (lines 12-13) and religion as an "impotent god / in the dark cloud" (lines 27-28). Even the sky is personified as a consumptive entity: "*Before the sky swallows our sun*" (lines 51), suggesting an all-encompassing systematic oppression. In "*Black Bloods*," oil becomes "*Wiwa's blood*" (line 17), equating natural resources with spilt life, while "menstruating pipes".

Postmodern Ideology and Poetics of Resistance in Stephen Kekeghe's *Rumbling Sky*

Thematically, Kekeghe's *Rumbling Sky* reflects the social ills that cripple the development of the people and the nation, 'Nigeria', at large. The anthology unravels the hypocrisy of religion, dehumanisation, and the psychological trauma of survival in oppressive environments. One of the major ideological concerns of Kekeghe in *Rumbling Sky* is the political and economic oppression of Nigerians, which is evident in the unfair exploitation of the masses by corrupt leaders. Kekeghe does not portray politicians and corporate elites in a very pleasant light; rather, politicians are metaphorically referred to as vultures and hawks, and corporate elites are thieves, more often than not, enjoying at the expense of the poor. In "*This Boom*", he writes: "*In that Villa of power, / your Executhieves / and Legislathieves / gather to share / your darkening blood...*" (lines 9-12). The "*Villa of power*" line 8 likely references Nigeria's Aso Rock Presidential Villa, symbolising corruption in government. The phrase "*darkening blood*" is a double signifier: it refers to both literal bloodshed and embezzlement of national treasures.

Environmental degradation through oil spillage, especially in the Niger Delta, is ruthlessly denounced in the collection. Kekeghe describes the land as being injured and polluted by gas flares, oil spillage, and industrial waste that choke both nature and human existence. In "*This Boom*", he describes: "*gas flares freeze your breath, / darken your lungs and livers / and crude, crawls into your waters...*" (lines 2-4). The personification of crude oil ("*crawls*") makes it seem like a living, malevolent entity, invading and corrupting everything it touches. The poem later highlights the effect of this devastation on human life; "*Do they see the kwashiorkor children / staring blankly at flaring gas / and menstruating pipes in / your dregs of drowning homes*?" (lines 29-32). The

"*kwashiorkor children*" (suffering from malnutrition) and "menstruating pipes" (a grotesque image of leaking oil) underscore the dehumanising effects of environmental ruin.

Kekeghe's criticism of religious hypocrisy in *Rumbling Sky* is one of the harshest criticisms of spiritual manipulation in modern African literature. The recurrent use of the term "*haramers*" (line 8, 14, 20, 26, 32) to describe oppressors does important ideological work by using Islamic language (from "*haram*," which means "*forbidden*") to denounce those who use faith as a weapon while breaking its most sacred rules. This linguistic method shows how power takes over religious language, as the poet says, "*defend an impotent god / in the dark cloud / behind the dead moon*" (lines 26–29). Kekeghe's theological criticism works on many levels that are very harmful: it makes the divine weak ("*impotent god*"), hides the truth ("*dark cloud*"), and kills hope ("*dead moon*"). The collection carefully explains how spiritual degradation works. Religious leaders look like predators with "*defaced religious faces*" (line 10), and their moral authority is seen to be a fake act. The strange picture of "bloodied fingers" holding religious clothing shows the cruelty behind religious pretension. Kekeghe focuses on how the prosperity gospel distorts faith, revealing how religious leaders become "*marketers of cruelty*" (line 44) who sell salvation while "*becloud[ing] communal love*." The poet calls this "altar of poli-religion" (line 34), which is a scary new word that shows faith as an exploitative scheme.

Most importantly, Kekeghe reflect how religion is instrumentalised to secure the consent of the oppressed. The poet's rhetorical inquiries, "*Why do the haramers cultivate woes on their evangelical paths?*" (lines 49–50), show how religious stories make injustice seem normal. The dead moon symbolises not only failed spirituality but also the active extinguishing of celestial direction that could lead to freedom. Kekeghe's critique is different because it acknowledges religion's dual nature. It shows how religion may be used as a weapon of destruction, but also keeps moments of real spirituality, such as looking for "*the half-moon in the sky / to light up our world*" (lines 40-41). This complicated view avoids simple atheism and instead calls for religious organisations to fulfil their prophetic function instead of serving power. The consequence is a harsh theological critique that nonetheless cares about spiritual redemption that is free of hypocrisy.

The book decries the destruction of aboriginal cultures in the course of industrial development and state terror. "*Black Bloods*" references historical atrocities like "*Odi ruin*" (line 20) and "*Ogoni*" (line 16), where communities were crushed for resisting oil imperialism. The line "*When Sapele*

raised a song of equity in the belly of her flowstation, / boots of mad military shattered her brain and might" (lines 30-31) metaphorically links cultural expression (song) to violent suppression, framing resistance as a mortal wound. The poem "This Boom" ties environmental ruin to cultural death: "*In this your mangrove / of mangled corpses, / the hovering vultures / see the gains, not the pains*" (lines 33-36). In this case, the mangrove, a tree that signifies the ecological and cultural sustenance, is transformed into a graveyard where vultures (corporations/ governments) profit from the decay. "*Hovering Horror*" extends this to spiritual alienation, depicting a "*cavern of crazy demons where ballots are burnt by yoked youths*" (lines 22-23). The burning of ballots signifies the destruction of democratic hope, while "*yoked youths*" evokes generational enslavement to systemic decay.

Kekeghe's work criticises the false promises of progress and modernity, especially in Nigeria after colonisation. The "*boom*" in "*This Boom*" is ironic because it refers to economic prosperity that only benefits the rich and destroys communities: "*In this wilting mangrove, / gas flares freeze your breath, / darken your lungs and livers*" (lines 1–3). The withering mangrove, which has always been a source of food, becomes a symbol of stunted growth, as industrial "progress" practically chokes the people. The poem uses cynical wordplay to show the truth about Nigeria's petro-state: "*your Executhieves / and Legislathieves / gather to share / your darkening blood"* (lines 9–12). These new words ("*Executhieves," "Legislathieves*") blur the lines between Nigerian leaders and stealing, implying that state institutions are just legal criminal organisations. The phrase "*darkening blood*" (line 21) stands for both real violence (like the Odi massacre mentioned in "*Black Bloods*") and economic extraction, which sees national riches as blood money taken from residents. "*Hovering Horror*" takes this criticism to the political stage: "*We are in a camp of chameleons of confusing colours / like daring dictators in democrat's costumes*" (lines 9–10). The chameleon images show how politicians act like democrats while ruling like autocrats, hiding their ruthless repression behind "costumes." "*Streams of Sorrow*" goes into further detail on this duplicity. In it, religious leaders "*defend an impotent god*" (line 27), which is a blasphemous reversal that shows how faith can be used to enslave people.

Rumbling Sky is quite dark, but there are times when it shows defiance and resistance. The last lines of "*Hovering Horror*"—"*And seek the half-moon in the sky / to light up our world...*" (lines 40–41)—bring back cosmic images from previous misery. The "*half-moon*" stands for broken but lasting hope, with its partial light fighting against the "darkening canopy" of oppression. "*Black*

Bloods" portrays resistance movements in the past, from Ogoni activism ("*When they agonized Ogoni, crude became Wiwa's blood*") lines 16–17 to heal's insurgency ("*in the heat of MEND's mission to mend withered wallets*") lines 35–36. These references ground the poems in real-life battles, turning the book into a literary record of resistance in the Niger Delta. The most complex opposition comes out in "*Burden of Being*," where the speaker grapples with their own complicity: *"You now scheme to enchain your faithful fans / of the years of sore rewards*" (lines 162–163). This self-blame shows how tyranny may even change the people it hurts, but the poem's sheer presence as a kind of testimony is a form of resistance.

The Aesthetics of Experimental Poetic Form in Tunde Olusunle's *A Medley of Echoes*

The innovative poetic techniques of Tunde Olusunle are analysed with many references to their intensification through structural experimentation, linguistic hybridity, rhythm, and imagery. The deconstruction of his play with form fragmentation, visual spacing, and use of multilingualism reveals how Olusunle uses the page as a more performative space. His combination of Yoruba with Pidgin English, as well as Queen's English play over colonial hierarchies of language, whereas his rhythmic and intertextual levels call forth carnal oral culture. Using vivid images and tonal transitions, he presents the postcolonial city of dissonance, the memory, and identity. As a conclusion to this analysis, it is possible to point to the way Olusunle has used formal ingenuity to bring about those complexities that his poetry aims to describe.

With the help of structural experimentation and visual form, Tunde Olusunle enhances thematic resonance. His poems go beyond strict lineation and presentation and turn the page itself into a location of visual and emotional interaction. The line spacing, fragmentation, typography and spatial orientation are clearly more than just style on the part of Olusunle, but it acts as a semiotic device that reflects, elaborates and performs the complications of whatever he is writing upon. This combination of form and visual form with content poetic requires that the audience rebuild, make sense of, and invest in the texture and tone of each of the poems. Defying not only the content of the words but also the terrain of the visual words, his poems encourage the reader to traverse through a kind of visual continuity where each spatial disruption, fragment, is filled with symbolic and emotional meanings. Olusunle has demonstrated this style with some notable emphasis on segmentation in the poem titled Ibadan, which is created to echo the structure of a sprawling city of the same name. The lines "Your, m, o, e, b, i, o, d mass" (before line 1) are deliberately fragmented, forcing the reader to reconstruct the word “mass” letter by letter. This visual

discontinuity not only creates an impairment of the speed of readership but also represents the chaotic and patchwork character of the Ibadan urban structure. The urban sprawl, as projected by the poet has outgrown its seams in an uncontrolled, almost natural expansion. Deconstructing the word, Olusunle resembles the chaotic and incoherent nature of the city; the one in which readers cannot help but feel the fragmentation of the city itself and the social system. This fragmented structure parallels the poem's assertion that the city "bursts at its seamless seams" (line 12), a powerful image that captures the overwhelming pressure and urban entropy that characterise postcolonial cityscapes.

One of the notable things about the poetic style of Tunde Olusunle is the use of dynamic diction with linguistic hybridity. He adopts a mixture of English, Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin in his poetry, which creates an impression of the multilingual situation in Nigeria and of the multifaceted character of its postcolonial identity. Such a careful combination of languages not only enforces the cultural specifics of his works, but it also makes his poetic texts become multivocal, in-depth, and free of the possibility of linguistic homogenisation. Including native languages inside English-dominated poetic forms and structures, Olusunle takes back poetic space into African linguistic cultures and enacts a postcolonial literary sovereignty that admires local idioms, expressions, and views of the world.

In the poem *Ibadan*, Olusunle exemplifies this hybridity through the use of Yoruba praise names, particularly in the lines:"*Omo ajoro sun/ Omo afi igbin fori mu*" (lines 2-3). These sayings are taken out of Yoruba oral poetry, popularly referred to as oriki, which is engraved in the cultural history and memory of the Yoruba people. Drawing upon them in a mainly English poem, however, Olusunle locates the text in a familiar cultural context, hailing the native culture of *Ibadan*. The phrase "*Omo afi igbin fori mu*" (line 3) (child who crowns the head with a snail) is rich in metaphor and symbolic reverence, indicative of Yoruba poetic expression. The ancestral knowledge systems are honoured by such inclusions and carried into prospect through the authority and cadence of performance by voice. In addition, there is the intentional clash between English and Yoruba in one stanza, which forms a dialogic tension, a kind of language play of postcolonial identity of modern Nigerian cities, which are already a place of cultural collision, negotiation, and synthesis. Similarly, in *Hollow Echoes*, Olusunle integrates a Yoruba proverb to deepen the thematic scope of the poem: "*Ogun omode / Ko le se'ere / Fun ogun odun*." (lines 79-81). Translated loosely as "Twenty children cannot remain playmates for twenty years," this proverb

conveys the ephemeral nature of human relationships and the inevitability of change. The choice to maintain the original Yoruba wording instead of providing a direct translation in the text of the poem is a way to maintain the rhythmic and cultural wholesomeness of the proverb. Simultaneously, it makes the reader (and perhaps, the non-Yoruba reader in particular) reconsider his or her own linguistic deficiency and admit the cultural peculiarity of the poetic addresser. The experience of loss, distance, and maturity, which the proverb universalises, shows that indigenous languages are able to convey deep and philosophical thoughts that cross geographical borders.

Alliteration, repetition and assonance are employed in the rhythmic cadences of the poems, which lend them a musical quality that heightens their emotional impact. In *Istanbul*, the poet employs liquid consonants and sibilance to mimic the sea's movement: "*Blue-faced, shimmering/ in supple waves/ beneath the summer skies*" (lines 3-5). The soft "s" and "w" sounds evoke the gentle lapping of water, immersing the reader in the sensory experience. Conversely, *Half Mast* uses staccato rhythm to mirror the abruptness of tragedy: "*Abuja, Kano ..., Kaduna ..., Kabong …*" (lines 14-17). The ellipses and incomplete listing are echoed by the theme of unexpected death of incomplete life as an eyewitness to air tragedies. The rhythmic pattern employed by Olusunle conveys the emotion, where the sound is intensified in terms of the theme. The musicality of the poems retains them in the mind of the reader after reading. The poems are reminiscent of the Yoruba oral tradition, using proverbs, incantations and rhythmic repetitions to give the impression of a performance poetry. This orality intercepts the written and the spoken, which situates the work in the African storytelling tradition. *Hollow Echoes* integrates Yoruba dirge motifs: "*Ha! / Ile nje eniyan/ Okun kun o mo eni owo,/ Iku o mo eni ire*" (lines 72-75). The exclamatory "Ha!" and proverbial lament ("Death is no respecter of the good") invoke funerary chants. Similarly, *Ibadan* mimics praise-singing (oriki) with its litany of place-names: "*Grovels from Apata to Alakia / Moniya to Molete, Ojoo to Oje / Omi Adio to Idi Ayunre*" (lines 6-8). The beat counting is a reflection of the Yoruba geography of speech. Taking the page as a performative space, Olusunle embeds oral aesthetics in his poetry thus making sure that it sounds sonically and culturally.

Postmodern Ideology in Tunde Olusunle's *A Medley of Echoes*

Among the most recurrent ideologies in the collection are nostalgia and loss, which recur as emotional motifs shaping both the themes and the tone of the poems. The theme of nostalgia is persistent throughout *A Medley of Echoes,* especially in such poems as *Hollow Echoes* and Half Mast. These compositions are contemplative of both individual and casual loss, on missing former

comrades and crying over time. Olu Obafemi *Hollow Echoes* is a sad tribute to lost friends and intellectual companionship. The speaker describes the pain of walking through "*unfeeling corridors*" and "*indifferent alleys*" (lines 7-8), where once there was "the genial laughter / Of kindred spirits" (lines 10-11). The metaphor of "a shrapnel / Searing through your being" (p. 5) gives the acute stinging pain of loss. The poem nostalgically recalls moments of "*boisterous banter / and egregious bonhomie*" (lines 21-22) in places like the Faculty and Staff Club, where "*frozen lagers and / Frothy palm wine*" (lines 29-30) fuelled intellectual exchanges. The catalogue of the lost personalities--*David Cook, Sam Adewoye, Zulu Sofola*, etc. (lines 53-55) is also a form of a memorial, and it emphasises life impermanence. The repetition of place names creates a sombre rhythm, while phrases like "forlorn mausoleums and cenotaphs" (line 38) evoke a nation in perpetual mourning. The poem critiques the performative nature of grief, where "*tributes pour in tumbling torrents*" (line 45), but meaningful change remains elusive. These poems concentrate on both personal and national mourning and show how the loss affects memory and identity.

Socio-political ills and disillusionment are not excluded in the work of Olusunle. *Ritual* and parts of *Half Mast* reveal corruption, bureaucracy and flaws of governance. The cyclical aspect of political theatrics is satirised in *Ritual*. The poem opens with: "Midweek again / And billowing robes and Hilfiger suits, / Porsche watches and suede shoes" (lines 1-3), mocking the opulence of Nigeria's political elite. The reference to "*Aso Rock*" as a "*hallowed shrine*" (line 5), where "*supra-mortals wield the key / Of mortality and immortality*" (lines 6-7), underscores the disconnect between leaders and the populace. The poem further critiques budget padding and embezzlement: "*Titrating billions of barrels / And mega-litres of our lifeblood / With phoney-figures and bloated budgets*" (lines 22-24). The idea of terrorist organisations such as Boko Haram and IPOB is mentioned (p. 13), highlighting the consequences of systemic neglect, where "*no propitiation / To appease the gods / Of creeping hunger*" (lines 29-31) is offered. Olusunle creates an atmosphere of rot in the political system through biting irony and imagery, with the plea being that people should be held locally.

In addition to the direct elegies within the volume, Olusunle creates a highly intricate poetics of grief which questions the workings of personal and social memory in the context of loss. The theme can be found not only in the subject matter but also in the structure and the rhythm of poems. The poem *Hollow Echoes* employs a remarkable auditory metaphor where grief becomes sound - "*that echoing hum/Swooning in your eardrums/ Like the buzz/Of a thousand bees*" (lines 15-17).

The synesthetic image produces sensory loss of heart and mind. The poet further develops this through spatial metaphors of emptiness - "unfeeling corridors" and "indifferent alleys" (lines 7-8) - that map emotional desolation onto physical architecture. In *Half Mast*, Olusunle innovates with the catalogue form, listing Nigerian cities ("*Abuja/Kano.../Kaduna.../Kabong*..." the lines 14-16) in the effort to establish a geographic memorial. Purposeful application of ellipses following every toponym indicates a lack of finality in the process of mourning as well as eternity in tragedy. The poem's structural innovation appears in its shift from specific names to abstract concepts - "*the tearful deluge/ Of national pain*" (lines 43-44) - mirroring how personal grief becomes collective trauma. Olusunle's mourning poems transcend conventional elegy by making grief a structural principle. The poems don't just describe loss; they perform it through their very architecture, creating what we might term an "elegy of form."

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the relationship between form and content in the poetry of Stephen Kekeghe and Tunde Olusunle is inseparable, with structural choices serving crucial ideological purposes. The broken syntax and gruesome descriptions used by Kekeghe, including the use of the word menstruating pipes and the darkening blood, have a graphic presentation of the dehumanising ecological impact of oil exploitation and political vampirism. His irritant opposition to the regular metre, to punctuation signs, reflects the breaking up of society, and paradoxes such as democrat costumes reveal social hypocrisy. On a thematic level, *Rumbling Sky* serves as an elegy of environmental and cultural loss, but the fact that the text was written as a form of protest in itself provides hope of resistance. In contrast, Olusunle reclaims indigenous aesthetics through multilingual expression and visual experimentation. Poems such as “Ibadan” and “Ritual” capture the chaos of urban decay and bureaucratic dysfunction, while Yoruba proverbs and dirge-like tones root his critique in cultural memory. His tonal range – lyrical, nostalgic, and a bitter satire – points to the double-sided postcolonial cities as a place of degradation and survival. The adopted collections break the Eurocentric literary expectations and assert African poetic sovereignty. The structure of Kekeghe poetry reflects the desperation of rebellion, whereas Olusunle's poetry represents the multidimensional nature of identity and memory. For both poets, form is not a mere embellishment but the very medium through which meaning is generated, compelling readers to confront the crises described. Finally, this research affirms the power of Nigerian poetry to break the silence and demand accountability through its structures and postmodern ideology.

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