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**The Beleaguered State, the Archetypal Patriot, and  
the Hope for National Rebirth: a Stylistic Criticism  
of Remi Raji's *Lovesong for My Wasteland***

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**Abstract**

Existing studies on the political poetry of Remi Raji have largely focused on the critical appraisal of its themes, technique and style against the backdrop of the context in which the poetry is produced, without paying close attention to linguistic evidence with which the poet engages his world and unveils his artistic vision and social commitment. This paper stylistically analyses Remi Raji's collection, *Lovesong for My Wasteland*, which captures the dilemma of an archetypal patriot given Nigeria's sordid history in about the first five

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decades of independence. It analyses six purposively sampled sequences out of the forty-five sequences of the long-breath poem. Engaging the tools of stylistic criticism, the paper identifies and analyses some style markers with which the reader's subjective impression of the text could be verified, objectified, and validated. The article reveals that the poet uses certain schemes and tropes which strikingly portray Nigeria's sordid post-independence national life, the persona's disillusionment/dilemma and remarkable demonstration of patriotic feelings, with the tropes of 'love' and 'hope' anchoring the prevailing message of national rebirth. Generally, the study demonstrates that truly the poets of the third generation of Nigerian poets, like their predecessors in the second generation, have abided by the stylistic peculiarities of the 'alter-native tradition', pushing to the background the style of obscurantism of the first generation of Nigerian poets in their bid to effectively convey their message of social regeneration to the people.

**Keywords:** love; national rebirth; Nigeria; patriotism; stylistic markers.

### 1. Introduction

The vicious circle of Nigeria's political instability and its attendant economic downturn are best configured by Jaggi's (1994/1995, p. 55) reference to 'Nigeria's peculiar mess', a phraseology that resonates with the title of Soyinka's volume of memoir entitled *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* (1994), where the word '*penkelemes*' is used as a Yoruba phonotactic corruption of the English expression 'peculiar mess'. In Soyinka's account, 'the *penkelemes* years' were those years immediately after Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960 when the elite were disillusioned by the bizarre turn of

political events in the country, as the emergent political leaders assaulted the sensibilities of the elite and the ordinary people with impunity, abusing office with unrestrained profligacy at the expense of the ordinary people's welfare. Ojaide (1996, p. 35) observes thus:

The experience of Africans ruling themselves was unpleasant and disappointing. Political independence was rife with various forms of corruption, which did not allow for anticipated economic growth at the expiration of colonialism.

Aside from the worrisome lifestyle of the political leaders and their ineptitude in governance, the factor of strong ethnic nationalism practically vitiated loyalty to the country, as sectional and national interests clashed with the requirements of patriotism. In fact, the wave of ethnic politics engendered the first military coup of January 1966, the counter-coup of July 1966 and the subsequent outbreak of the Civil War in 1967. Shortly after the Civil War came the wastefulness of the oil boom era of the early and mid-1970s when the revenue generated from crude oil sales was so enormous that Nigeria's Head of State during the period in question, General Yakubu Gowon (now retired), reportedly declared that Nigeria's problem was not that of generating revenue but how to spend it. After the overthrow of General Gowon's military administration, the successive and rather elongated military regimes (with skirmishes of civilian governments) that took over the reins of power until September 30th, 1979 and again from

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December 31st, 1983 to May 29th, 1999, literally ran the country's economy aground, with large-scale corrupt practices, rising debt profile, increased poverty level, unemployment, decayed infrastructure, and government's insensitivity to the provision of basic social amenities for the people.

Beyond the pathetic story of the negative impacts of military government on Nigeria's national life as evidenced in the gross violation of the people's fundamental human rights during the Buhari-Idiagbon administration, the unpopular stringent economic policy of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the Babangida administration, and the unprecedented tyranny of the Abacha years, the institutionalisation of a civilian government in 1999 up to the early years of the second decade of the 21st century has helped in no significant measure to attenuate the primordial challenges that stared Nigeria in the face at the dawn of independence. In fact, the elemental development challenges of ethnic conflicts, religious intolerance and concomitant crises, corruption, inept leadership and attendant followership distrust have reached an alarming proportion that one cannot but share Soyinka's (1994, pp. ix-x) fears encapsulated in what he calls 'the unfinished business, of that political entity, Nigeria, [...] its sociology and political pathology'. Akinnaso (2009, p. 1) gives an overview of the Nigerian condition thus:

Nigeria's nickname, 'Giant of Africa,' did not derive from size and population alone. It also derived from Nigeria's potential at the dawn of Africa's independence, when she boasted more skilled

professionals than other African nations and even assisted some of them in setting up state institutions. The potentials [sic] were enriched by vast mineral resources, cultivation of cocoa, production of palm oil, abundance of timber, and bounty harvests in various agricultural products [sic]. All that was needed to propel her to competitive heights on the world stage was good leadership and sound governance. Unfortunately, these have been Nigeria's nemesis. The leadership crisis, accompanied by a political culture of corruption, has persisted and deepened in spite of various experiments with parliamentary, military, and presidential systems of government. Nigeria still reels from light to darkness; from crisis to crisis; and from one form of corruption to the other.

With regard to the nagging issue of corruption, Nigeria had its worst record of corrupt practices in the early years of the 21st century: the Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of 2000 ranked Nigeria the most corrupt country in the world; the second most corrupt in 2001, 2002, and 2003; the third most corrupt in 2004; the sixth most corrupt in 2005; and the eighteenth most corrupt in 2006.

Soyinka, in his foreword to his play *Opera Wonyosi* (1988, p. 298), writes: '[...] art should expose, reflect, indeed magnify the decadent, rotted underbelly of a society that has lost its direction, jettisoned all sense of values and is careering down a precipice as fast as the latest artificial boom can take it'. Thus,

given the dismal state of a country which compatriots had looked up to at independence with high hopes, it behoves the literary writer to chronicle the undesirable events that have forced a potentially great country to its knees, crawling when her contemporaries around the world are making giant strides. It is in this light that this study explores *Lovesong for My Wasteland* by Remi Raji, where a patriot, who is confronted with the palpable failings in society, engages in a poignant foray of reflecting on the country's sordid history, assessing her present challenges, and resurrecting hope from the valley of hopelessness in a seemingly absurdist display of 'love' for the native land.

The aim of the study is to unpack, using stylistic tools, the poetics deployed in the collection, *Lovesong for My Wasteland*, to depict the patriot's sense of disillusionment, the palpable dilemma s/he is in, and the ultimate sense of hope s/he nurses as to the country's potential of rising from the ashes of history. We set out to achieve the following objectives: (i) to analyse the schemes and tropes with which the persona configures some indices of Nigeria's development challenges; and (ii) to evaluate the tropes of 'love' and 'hope' that the persona paradoxically anchors her/his message of national rebirth on in the collection. These objectives are predicated on Egya's (2011a, p. 23) submission as to the question of the artistic vision and treatment of language in the poetry of Remi Raji and his contemporaries:

Poets like Raji who are politically conscious are committed to language in a way that the language is *made* to carry out extra function other than the

aesthetic display of the linguistic items. Their idioms, in terms of content and form, are conditioned by the transformative powers of the words since the words are deliberately deployed to *alter* situations. For such poets, then, their preoccupation with language is, first, to have a proper sense of artistry with words and, second, to have the skills to engage the words in extra-artistic commitment.

## **2. An Overview of *Lovesong for My Wasteland***

*Lovesong for My Wasteland*, published in 2005, is Remi Raji's fourth volume of poetry, the earlier volumes of his poetry being: *A Harvest of Laughters* (1997), *Webs of Remembrance* (2001) and *Shuttlesongs, America: A Poetic Guided Tour* (2003). After the publication of *Lovesong for My Wasteland* in 2005 came *Gather My Blood Rivers of Song* (2009). According to Egya (2007, p. 111), 'Raji's consummate political theme, which is powered by what he calls "the nationalist imagination," is skilfully explored in his latest volume of poetry, *Lovesong for My Wasteland* (2005), more than in any of his previous collections'. Of interest is the year of publication (2005) of the collection when Nigeria attained the age of forty-five after independence. In this regard, Egya (2011a, p. 94) considers the volume as one that '[...] traces the history of Nigeria (her plunder, her brutalised people, her resilience in remaining as a nation) and reads like a tribute to Nigeria on the occasion of its forty-five years of existence as a sovereign state'.

### **3. Data for the Study**

The collection, *Lovesong for My Wasteland*, consists of forty-five sequences of the long-breath poem. However, six out of the forty-five sequences are purposively sampled to reflect the poet's attempt to chronicle Nigeria's political history and attendant challenges, on the one hand, and the persona's mood in reaction to the state of the nation, on the other hand. The sequences: 'The blemish of holes', 'Forty full seasons gone like yesterday', 'We have ore but invent nothing', 'This is the end, this is the end', 'Shall I write that epitaph now...?' and 'My land becomes a bride again' are stylistically analysed with a view to making a statement on the persona's sense of disillusionment with the turn of events in Nigeria's political history and the ironic twist of her/his sense of patriotism embodied in the hope for national rebirth.

### **4. Nigerian Poets and their Engagements with Political Themes**

The publication of *Voices from the Fringe* (1988) edited by Harry Garuba marked the emergence of a class of Nigerian poets 'whose presence and works had been so crucial to the emergence of third generation poetry' (Adesanmi & Dunton, 2006, p. 9) to the Nigerian literary scene. Poets in this (third) generation include Uche Nduka, Ezenwa Ohaeto, Ogaga Ifowodo, Olu Oguibe, Afam Akeh, Unomah Azuah, Lola Shoneyin, Nnorom Azuonye and Remi Raji. The third generation of Nigerian poets, according to Egya (2007, p. 112), 'has produced more political poetry than any species of poetry'. Political poetry is defined by Egya (2011a, p. 14) as:



[...] that variety of poetry that depicts and declaims the failure of leadership; that captures the helpless masses suppressed and oppressed by the establishment; that, whether moulded in optimism or pessimism, engages the society, the people, in charting a positive discourse of nation formation. This kind of poetry, belonging to the domain of protest literature, shouts, barks, screams, cries, curses, swears and prays in dire resignation, with the intent, most often, to awaken the consciousness of its audience, and to challenge, even if ineffectually, the regime of oppression silencing the society.

In this sense, the political poet cuts the figure of the conscience of society, as s/he considers herself/himself, as expressed by Egya (2007, p. 15), to be ‘organically linked to [her/]his nation, eager to speak with a fearless voice, to pursue interrogations, to seek answers and to evaluate societal orthodoxies on behalf of the ordinary people’.

One issue that is established in the literature as to the political force that gravitated the writing of political poetry by this third generation of Nigerian poets is the tragedy of the failures of the military in Nigeria’s governance. Adeoti (2003, p. 6) observes that ‘the military is not only a dominant political force in the country’s post-colonial governance but also a recurrent subject in its narrative fiction, poetry and drama’. Corroborating this assertion, Okunoye (2011) argues that the long years of military rule was a catalyst for the growth of

Nigerian poetry. So, the third generation of Nigerian poets were markedly characterised as that which actively engaged in anti-military poetry in Nigeria, writing against dictatorships. This literary tradition with the theme and tone of political commitment, as argued by Emezue (2005, p. 38), lies within a general literary practice in Africa:

Many of Africa's new generation poets reflect the quality of an age that is being swept in a woolly reverie of failures. They have therefore become lamenters or dirge singers by extension. They lament the atrophy of national aspirations as envisioned by her founding fathers only a few decades ago.

Egya (2011b, p. 50) contends that although most of the new poems in Nigeria's third generation of poetic writing are concerned with the nightmarish political conditions in Nigeria, especially in the 1990s, caused by military dictatorships, '[t]he major concern of these poets with military oppression in Nigeria is not new because earlier poets, such as Wole Soyinka in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972) and Niyi Osundare in *Songs of the Season* (1990), have dramatised and confronted the brutal regimes of military dictators in the nation'. It is noteworthy, therefore, that poets of the second generation that include Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Femi Fatoba and Tanure Ojaide have equally written against the evils of military government in Nigeria, 'a social vision which is largely shared by poets of the third generation [...]' (Ojaide, 1995, p. 24).

Primarily, the pre-occupation of poets of the second generation within the mega theme of political conundrum in Nigeria revolves around the civil war experience and its effect on the people and the polity, on the one hand, and the harsh economic realities of the country in the late 1970s and 1980s, on the other hand. Thus, poets in this generation write from 'their ideological perspectives poems which deal with the plight of the common people, peasants and workers' (Ojaide 1995, p. 7). Due to the coincidence of the period of writing by these poets with the agitation for the decolonisation of African literature, they made their poetry accessible to the public through a radical departure from the obscurantist style of the first generation of Nigerian poets in the like of J. P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, and Christopher Okigbo. As such, the stylistic peculiarities of their writing include: clarity and directness of expression; formal experimentation; a deliberate incorporation of African oral literary modes with the conscious introduction of proverbs into their writing; and preference for local speech pattern of their respective linguistic groups which the audience can relate to (Ushie, 2005, p. 17). Even when the allegation levelled against poets of the first generation, that they are writing on mundane (cultural) themes and personalised issues, seems founded, strands of political commitment such as reflection of the civil war experience in their poetry and anti-military writing cannot be wished away. Egya (2011b, p. 54) submits that:

Irrespective of the period, Nigerian poetry is preoccupied with one theme, the mega theme, i.e., the leadership failure that the country has been

grappling with since independence. From Okigbo to Soyinka, Osundare to Ofeimun, and Oguibe to Raji, the poet's engagement is nationalist, recognising a nation, a people, a disturbing social gap, and, beyond that, taking a definitive stand on the side of the people.

However, in spite of the disparate events that shape the political tone and themes of Nigerian poetry across the three generations, the view is still largely held that military governance has been most impactful, as Okunoye (2011, p. 65) argues:

Proof that Nigerian poetry has been very dynamic is that it has drawn on a variety of experiences. But of the three major events that have significantly impacted on it – the Nigerian crisis of the 1960s, the Nigerian civil war (1967-70) and military rule (1966-79; 1983-99) – the impact of military dictatorship has been far more pervasive and enduring. It gave a unique identity to Nigerian poetry by assigning it a new role and redefined the social standing of the poet: it emboldened the poet, inspired a variety of poetic idioms and modified the taste of the audience.

### **5. Reflections of the Archetypal Patriot: an Exemplar for Realistic National Rebirth**

The persona's lamentation about the Nigerian condition starts off on a quick evaluation of the socio-political atmosphere in the country as manifest in some aspects of Nigeria's national image which are captured in the sequence, 'The Blemish of Holes':

THE BLEMISH OF HOLES  
in that national dress  
the howl of hunger  
beneath the fake laughter  
Did I not see it, did you not hear it?

From the title of the sequence, 'THE BLEMISH OF HOLES', the tone is set for a depiction of decadence in Nigeria's national life. The visual image of 'blemish' is a metaphor for national shame, or dent on national pride; for a blemish is any sign or mark on an object or an entity that devalues it, detracts from its beauty and, therefore, causes it to lose attraction and admiration. So, the persona sees the image of Nigeria, a country which some people brand as the 'Giant of Africa' or 'the land flowing with milk and honey', in a negative light. The negativity is further buttressed with the use of the image 'holes' in the post-modifying element 'of holes'. Holes are invoked as a metaphor that specifically identifies the kind of blemish that is on Nigeria's national pride. A hole could be perceived in two senses: positive and negative. From the positive perspective, it could serve as a passage for emptying the undesirable, the harmful, and the unpleasant, while from the negative

perspective, it serves as a channel of wasting, siphoning or draining precious materials contained in an object or an entity. From the tone of this poem, there is no doubt that it is the negative meaning of 'holes' that the persona favours. In this respect, the persona gives the impression that the myriad of problems and challenges of development in Nigeria across different sectors such as economy, politics, education and national planning have all worked negatively towards causing the country setbacks. Little wonder the persona refers to the image of 'national dress' which is symbolic of the totality of Nigeria's national life.

When there are failings in the system, one major index is the level of poverty that prevails in society. In order to underline the degree of hunger that the ordinary people experience, the persona uses the onomatopoeic word 'howl' as a signifier that has an auditory appeal. One could be hungry, but the moment the hunger bites harder, it begins to 'howl'. So, the persona paints an extreme picture of the level of poverty and the attendant hunger in society. Contrary to the popular saying that a hungry man/woman is an angry man/woman, the people depicted in this poem are said to be laughing. Since hunger and laughter are literally antonymous and psychologically incongruous, one wonders why and how the people put up such a strange disposition. But there is also the saying among the Yoruba that when a matter surpasses shedding of tears, people simply laugh. Given the foregoing, the description might just be a paradox for the gravity of the people's suffering and deprivation, on the one hand, and their hapless state, on the other. This is probably why the persona sheds more light on

their miserable condition by using the adjective ‘fake’ to qualify the noun ‘laughter’, suggesting their helplessness and sheer resignation to fate. The persona’s depiction of the people’s strange reaction to national problems and their devastating effects on the individuals bears an inter-textual reference to Fela Anikulapo-Kuti’s rendition in his album, ‘Shuffering & Shimiling’ where he sings:

Fela: Every day my people dey inside bus  
49 sitting, 99 standing  
*Chorus: Shuffering and Shimiling!*  
Dem pack themselves in like sardine  
Dem dey faint, dem dey wake like cock  
Dem go reach house water no dey  
Dem go reach bed power no dey  
Dem go reach road go-slow go come  
Dem go reach road police go slap  
Dem go reach road army go whip  
Dem go look pocket money no dey  
Dem go reach work query ready  
Every day na the same tin

**English Translation**

*Fela: Every day my people are on the bus  
Chorus: Suffering and Smiling!  
49 sitting, 99 standing  
They pack themselves in like sardines  
They faint and wake like chickens  
They get home, no water*

*They get to bed, suffering exhaustion  
They get to the road, there is traffic congestion  
They get to the check point, police will slap them  
They get to the check point, soldiers will whip them  
They check their pockets, there is no money  
They get to work, with queries awaiting them  
Every day is the same story!*

The lines of Fela's lyrics above encapsulate the different facets of life where the ordinary people in the Nigerian society are deprived of the basic necessities and rights which could make living worthwhile for them. And instead of rejecting the undesirable and challenging the authorities that deprive them, they resign to fate as suggested in the chorus, 'shuffling and shuffling [...]'.

While the people seem nonchalant, the persona who is the conscience of society sees the issues in a different light and, therefore, invites the reader or the people generally to reason along with her/him, shifting from the first person singular pronoun 'I' in the first structure of the rhetorical question 'Did I not see it, did you not hear it?' to the second person singular/plural pronoun 'you'. Also, the verbs of perception 'see' and 'hear' are signifying elements that portray the palpable feeling of national decadence. Probably, the persona should have added the verb 'feel' to complete the three sides of the triangle. How come that a country richly blessed with natural resources finds herself in this terrible state? So, in the sequence 'We have ore but invent nothing', the anguish of the persona's heart is played out in the use of the first person plural pronoun



'we' followed by the main verb 'have' (we + have) to emphasise the inherent potential, possibilities and the endowment with which the Nigerian people could improve their conditions of living. In fact, the use of the object 'ore' after the main verb 'have' identifies what it is the people possess with which to make living worthwhile. 'Ore' is a mineral resource that could be tapped to enhance economic growth. However, it assumes a symbolic status in the sequence, typifying not just ore as a mineral resource but the general abundant mineral resources in Nigeria.

Ordinarily, one would have expected a society with such vast resources to prosper but the reverse is the case. The use of the adversative conjunction 'but', the verb 'invent' and the object 'nothing' in 'but invent nothing' paints a pitiable picture of the dismal result the people could show for having been blessed with so much. This is a paradox that suggests emptiness in the midst of abundance. At least, one would have expected the people to have 'something' to show for their abundant resources. And if not 'something', at least the quantifier 'little' could have been used to show that the people have some positive results for their efforts. So, the use of the signifier 'nothing' paints an extreme condition of the predicament of the Nigerian situation. The antithetical structure of the title is sustained in the rest of the sequence with the 'We have [...] but [...]' structure used copiously as in the following lines:

We have rain but hate to plant  
We have the heat and the glory of the rainbow  
But we kill our suns with hurtful glee

In every instance when the resources are highlighted, the persona uses nature imagery to emphasise what is possessed. The signifiers: 'rain', 'heat', 'sun' and 'rainbow' become striking, as they are considered to be the natural wonders that could be tapped for development. Considering the fact that Nigeria is an agrarian environment, one would naturally expect that such resources would be harnessed to boost agricultural production not just for subsistence farming but also for large scale commercial purposes. However, what happens is the inability of the people to take advantage of these resources. Regrettably, what we have is a penchant for food importation and that has resulted in a depraved economy. This paradox is emphasised with the poet's predilection for the adversative conjunction 'but' used four times in a sequence of just eight lines. Each time the conjunction is used, one can feel the persona's misery as regards the paradox of the Nigerian condition. Generally, the repeated use of the conjunction 'but' allows for direct comparison that reinforces the negativity so painted.

It is interesting that in contrast to the verb 'have' showing possession in the first part of the antithetical structures, after 'but', the verbs that are used ('hate' and 'kill') suggest some reversal of fortune. While 'hate' captures the attitude of the people towards exploring their environment and exploiting its resources for development, 'kill' expresses the actual action or inaction that is attendant to the people's lethargy. No wonder that the persona calls such a disposition 'hurtful glee'. In this imagistic expression, there is a clear example of oxymoron. For the adjective 'hurtful' ordinarily should not have been used to

qualify 'glee'. This is because 'glee' as an emotional state that gives internal joy should normally have attracted admiration. But when it becomes one that leads to stagnancy in society, it cannot but be hurtful. The persona's rage is further portrayed in the second stanza where s/he uses the metaphor of the earth's swooning in the farmer's hand to embody the totality of the natural blessings begging to be tapped in the people's environment:

The earth swoons in the farmer's hand  
But all we do is rape the land  
All we know is maim the mind  
All we plant are epitaphs for the dead

In fact, the imagery of the 'earth' and 'farmer' could have been deployed by the persona as a wake-up call to Nigerians to go back to the good old days when agriculture was the mainstay of the country's economy instead of the now over-reliance on a crude oil economy. One could deduce this from the image of 'rape the land' which is a metaphor for the nefarious activities of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where environmental pollution and degradation have left the people and their habitation impoverished, as opposed to agricultural activities that will make the land yield its increase from time to time. And instead of planting seeds that will germinate and yield at harvest time, it is 'epitaphs' that are planted 'for the dead', possibly suggesting the numerous deaths that have been recorded in the Niger Delta following serious agitations for 'resource control', among other possible forms and causes of

needless deaths in the land. In addition to the issues raised here, the rape of the land may simply indicate the different things that are done to abuse it. This is more so as it suggests some thinking around ecological discourse. The maiming of the mind could mean the less attention given to developing the mental state of people for productive endeavours, as against the attention given to 'dead' matters like the frivolous celebration of the dead.

One may have the impression that the crisis of development in Nigeria's national life is recent in her political history, but the persona gives us an insight into the protracted nature of the problem in the sequence 'Forty full seasons gone like yesterday'. Using the signifier of time, the persona provokes her/his fellow country men and women to wake up for national development. While historicising Nigeria's political development, the persona uses the temporal signifier 'forty full seasons' in the title to represent Nigeria's post-independence years (as of the time the collection was published in 2005). One will expect that within this temporal frame, Nigeria will have made some landmarks like other contemporary developing countries around the world which are making giant strides in different aspects of national development. To emphasise the fleeting nature of time, the persona compares the 'forty' wasteful years of post-independence Nigeria to 'yesterday'. 'Yesterday' as a temporal deictic element is used to alert Nigerians that there is the need to manage time judiciously not only in personal affairs but also in matters of national interests because time is transient. The import of the comparison of these two temporal frames in this poem will be fully understood if we break them into smaller units.

<b>UNITS OF TIME</b>	<b>FORTY FULL SEASONS</b>	<b>YESTERDAY</b>
Minutes	21,024,000	1,440
Hours	350,400	24
Days	14,600	1

From this statistical breakdown, we can see that the units of time: minutes, hours and days under ‘forty full seasons’ are incomparable to those of ‘yesterday’. How come then they have rolled away just like yesterday? In fact, to stir up the reader’s sensibility as to how time is considered precious and thus managed judiciously in traditional African societies, particularly for planting and harvesting of crops in agrarian societies, the persona favours the traditional method of dating by invoking the cultural image of ‘seasons’ as against the use of the adverbial element ‘years’ in a normal calendar. As such, the import of the adverbial element of traditional reckoning ‘seasons’ cautions that in any society where people are not awakened to their duties and just watch time tick away, it is inevitable, too that ‘forty full seasons’ could pass just like ‘yesterday’ and there will be no harvests to show for them. There is a saying among the Yoruba which roughly translates that, ‘while the lazy drone idles away,

the maize planted by the diligent at the beginning of the season reaches maturation in no time’.

The persona thus assumes the figure of a teacher-cum-sage, cautioning the people to have the right sense of judgement, using the metaphors of the ‘child’ and ‘elder’ as reflected in the proverbial account of the two personalities that could share the same unpleasant experience but would have to react to it differently just because of the level of their perception which is almost always tied to the factor of age:

When the child in you trips  
it grips the path  
with a foolish faith...

The elder falls  
and wonders at the root  
of his foolishness...

Two score and how many seasons gone like  
yesterday

So, the persona enjoins her/his compatriots to eschew childish disposition in matters of national development and emulate the elder with a profound discerning spirit. In assessing the problems causing underdevelopment in Nigeria, the persona’s identification of the case of the people’s inability to harness the resources in their environment for realistic development is not enough. Another serious issue is that of the general breakdown of national consciousness in respect of the values that should exalt the country. Therefore, in the poem entitled ‘This is the

end, this is the end', the persona demonstrates the height of her/his despair and distress following the total breakdown of Nigeria's value system:

THIS IS THE END, THIS IS THE END  
This is the age of sin  
This is the age of saints  
When the king is the chief of crooks  
And the rapist is next of kin to therapists.

In an attempt to intensify the possible irreversibility of the loss of national consciousness in Nigeria, the sentence with which the persona raises an alarm is repeated twice in the title 'THIS IS THE END, THIS IS THE END'. The use of the demonstrative pronoun 'this' invites the reader's attention to the contradictions in Nigerian society. The metaphor of 'the end' sounds like an allusion to the biblical account of the signs that will herald the end of times as recorded in (Matthew 24: 6-7) when Jesus Christ responded to his disciples' quest to know what the signs of the end of the world would be: 'And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places'.

The above-given account sheds light on the spiritual indices of what would herald the end of the world but it is pertinent to consider what the signs of the end are in the present Nigerian society. The persona draws our attention to the contradictions

inherent in the temporal frames, 'the age of sin' and 'the age of saints'. While one would acknowledge that there is no society that can be free of sin or one that can be completely made up of saints, it appears that the persona is telling the audience that there are no longer time-tested values that the people can hold on to for national development. The equation of the two obvious incongruous entities in the strange collocations 'king' and 'chief of crooks', on the one hand, and 'rapist' and 'next of kin to therapists', on the other hand, is striking. Whereas 'the chief of crooks' and 'rapist' are culprits who should be made to face the wrath of the law in a society where there is justice, they have ironically metamorphosed respectively into 'the king' and next of kin to 'therapists' who are supposed to be custodians of social norms and values. So, how does one reconcile the contrasting dual identity? Obviously, when these two remarkably contrasting entities are now married, one cannot but weep for the society that harbours them. The same picture is painted in these lines, too:

When the thief arrests the farmer and queries  
the law  
When suddenly the assassin becomes your  
neighbourhood priest

One must quickly note the persona's use of the adverbial clause of time evidenced in the lines 'when the king is the chief of crooks', 'when the thief arrests the farmer and queries the law' and 'when suddenly the assassin becomes your neighbourhood priest'. The wh-word 'when' is suggestive of the



confounding 'when' question, and the attempt by the persona to answer it. Also, the devaluation of chieftdom, the audacity of the thief and the hallowed status of the assassin indicate the precarious condition in the country, as certain elements in society who should have been made to pay for their misdemeanours go scot-free and also become celebrated after all, showing the extent to which the judicial system has been heavily compromised. In fact, the use of the adverb 'suddenly' in 'When suddenly the assassin becomes your neighbourhood priest' emphasises the strangeness, shock, and disappointment of how societal values unexpectedly have headed for the rocks. So, the persona asks rhetorically: 'Is this not the end? Is this not the end?' While compatriots may share the view that this is actually the end, s/he ironically turns around to retort: 'It is not the end but/The terrible end'. Going by the catalogue of contradictions that beset the Nigerian society, one cannot but agree with the poet that it is not just an end but an end that is most undesirable, hence the persona's use of the adjective 'terrible' to qualify the noun 'end'.

Considering the persona's disgust at the turn of events in her/his society, one would wonder if s/he would not give up on the Nigerian project and probably seek an alternative nationality in another country with great prospect. In the midst of her/his dilemma, the persona reacts negatively at the present time, hoping, however, that there will be room for her/him to reconsider her/his posture when the situation improves. So, s/he wonders in another poem: 'Shall I write that epitaph now/And amend it when a new world comes?' First, the tentative tone of these lines as opposed to a definitive tone which could have

been expressed in a structure like ‘Let me write that epitaph now...’ suggests the persona’s considerations for her/his native land in which s/he is not in a hurry to give up on it. In fact, her/his preference for a question clause ‘Shall I write that epitaph now...?’ in pondering on her/his proposed action in contrast to a declarative statement ‘I shall write that epitaph now...’ further intensifies her/his choice of weighing the options for treating the land of her/his birth which is experiencing serious challenges. The persona may thus have a message for every Nigerian that amid the challenges facing the country and their disenchantment with the Nigerian dream, they must exercise some self-restraint, some caution, and have some introspection so that it is the wise decision that is in the best interest of the country that will be taken after all.

The use of the metaphor ‘epitaph’ is equally intriguing. An epitaph is an inscription on a tomb as an expression of one’s parting words or feelings towards the deceased. Once the epitaph is written on a tomb, a tone of finality is implicit since the entity that inhabits the tomb is laid to rest forever, as the tomb itself is the final destination for the dead. So, how can the poet write an epitaph on Nigeria’s metaphorical tomb and then hope to amend it? Does it suggest that the poet expects that the country will rise again from its state of comatose, and not necessarily a state of death? In fact, the use of the temporal deictic element ‘now’ to suggest the present situation with which the persona is disenchanted in contrast to the adverbial clause of time ‘when a new world comes’ and the divergent actions to be taken across these two temporal frames is engaging. For the former, the persona seeks to bid her/his land

farewell, giving up on her dream by 'writing the epitaph', while for the latter, s/he envisages the possibility of reversing the action, as s/he seeks to 'amend' that which s/he must have written earlier.

The persona's dilemma portrays the kind of figure that the agent of social change should cut for themselves in society, facing some stark realities yet considering the possibility of change for the desirable. While they may be disenchanted with the turn of events in society and pour their resentment in the process, they still dream of a glorious future where evil will pass away and good will reign supreme. Ojaide (1995, p. 9), writing on the tradition of projecting hope in African poetry, argues that depending upon poets' peculiar insights, '[...] they project a vision into the future which may be in consonance with their wishes. Thus, strong as the trend of "The African Night-mare," many poets project hope'. Subsequently, when the land finally turns out to be what the persona desires, the epitaph will give way for a song of praise. So, the persona assumes the posture of a prophet, not of doom but of hope for the Nigerian state, and it is heart-warming to read her/him celebrate Nigeria again in the sequence: 'And suddenly my land becomes a bride again'. As a new bride, the country no longer wears a garment with the 'blemish of holes' as seen earlier, but now dresses elegantly like the 'garden of Arcadia'. The persona's reference to the 'garden of Arcadia' is an allusion to the European Renaissance arts where Arcadia was celebrated as an unspoiled, harmonious wilderness. The picture of the land, as configured in the patriot's imagination, is one of tranquility, glamour and grandeur and, therefore, an entity to behold and celebrate. No wonder this

admirable picture of the bride would spread like good news to the whole wide world as the persona celebrates:

Make the mountains sing your name  
Make the valleys vow in your name

The use of the topographical images of 'mountains' and 'valleys', which are not easily accessible like the plain land, portrays the persona's imagination of the far-reaching geographical locations where the new Nigeria would be heard of and celebrated. The persona adds her/his own voice too to proclaim the good news: 'I too proclaim you, woman, wife, mother, lover ... my land'. The portrayal of the land, using feminine images of 'bride', 'woman', 'wife', 'mother', and 'lover', shows her procreative propensity which may not be manifest now but embryonic. In fact, the persona's use of ellipsis after the four nominal groups is stylistically significant, as it conveys the message that there are limitless endearing terms with which the persona can now address the land of her/his birth. The regeneration of the persona's attitude towards the land may not necessarily derive from the fact that s/he is no longer disillusioned with the state of the land but the sense of patriotism drives her/his love for the land, as s/he writes:

For love is the only language I know  
In a season of parched promises and shrunken  
memories  
Love is the caprice of remembrance, the  
remedy of forgetting

The trope of love as the force that endures all things is conjured up in the lines above and it suggests that love is not shown only when the story is pleasant to tell; when it is a sad tale, too, love must prevail, after all there is a biblical thought that, 'it is the child that the father/mother loves that s/he chastises'. One can then understand the persona's dilemma and the attendant paradox in her/his thinking as played out in the title of the collection '*Lovesong for My Wasteland*'. In this title, there are two signifiers that deserve analysis. The first metaphor is that of 'lovesong'. A love song is usually rendered by a lover when s/he is excited and elated about certain sterling qualities or achievements that s/he admires in the lover. Under normal circumstances, a love song will not be rendered when there is nothing to be proud of and if it is actually rendered in a moment of grief, the tone of lamentation and regret is almost always unmistakable. One wonders, therefore, why the persona claims in this collection to have a love song, not for her/his father/mother land, not for his dear land of birth, but for 'my wasteland'. In this regard, there is need to consider the metaphor of 'wasteland' as used by the persona in this collection.

Remi Raji borrows the title of the collection *Lovesong for My Wasteland* from T. S. Eliot's poems 'Lovesong of Alfred J. Prufrock' and 'The Wasteland'. In particular, 'The Wasteland' published in 1922 is primarily regarded as a poem that epitomises the chaotic life of both individuals and society in the twentieth century. Thematically, it reflects the disillusionment and despair of the post-World War I generation. The world that Eliot portrays in his poem is one in which there is sterility, as waste has replaced traditional order and fertility. T. S. Eliot sees

‘the land’ where nothing good could come out of but Remi Raji through his patriotic lens sees fruitfulness in his own metaphoric ‘wasteland’ and, therefore, renders a love song for it. This shows a contrast between the poets’ perceptions of the ‘wasteland’ in the sense that Remi Raji shows love, conviction, desire, optimism and enthusiasm about Nigeria, while T. S. Eliot sees the world he depicts as a desolate unrelenting place, fragmented through time and space. Considering the abundance of resources in Nigeria, both natural and human, one does not expect that such resources would not be harnessed for the development of the land. As revealed in one of the sequences ‘We have ore, but invent nothing’, the problem of Nigeria is not that of lack or the wherewithal for development but that of managing or maximising the potential for meaningful development. So, in the real sense of it, Nigeria is not a ‘wasteland’ but given the realities of the squandering of the country’s riches by the leaders and the share loss of hope and disloyalty by the citizens, the land which is touted ‘the land flowing with milk and honey’ has literally become a ‘wasteland’.

Come to think of it, if the land were a wasteland in the real sense of it, would the patriot still have a love song to render for it? One would expect her/him, instead, to title the piece ‘Lamentation’, not for ‘my’ wasteland, but for ‘the/this/their wasteland’. By dropping the possessive adjective ‘my’, the patriot would naturally distance herself/himself from the land, thereby disowning it and possibly seeking the nationality of another country. So, the paradox of her/his disenchantment with events in her/his country and yet her/his resolve to believe in the future of the land is captured in the phraseology ‘lovesong for

my wasteland', as her/his love song emphasises the unwavering commitment that s/he has to the land and her/his undying patriotic spirit. Okunoye (2011, p. 80) comments thus:

The fact that the poets went beyond envisioning an end to the chaotic state of affairs to imagining a new dawn for their land indicates that they saw the vision of change as the only viable alternative to despairing. They therefore invest images of renewal, rebirth and fulfilment in a future that holds prospects of recovery and the fruition of their dreams for Nigeria.

In this regard, the archetypal patriot seems to have a message for all Nigerians that, in spite of all the odds, they should keep their patriotic spirit intact, not losing hope, preaching the paradox of 'loving in pains' as opposed to the Epicureanistic posture of 'loving in ecstasy'.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has attempted to shed light on the Remi Raji's account of the seemingly wasted years of Nigeria as a country wallowing in the abyss of underdevelopment and loss of national psyche. It has underlined the vital role of the poet as a visionary in society, that is, one who is able to look beyond the predicaments of the present into an imagined future that the people would ever dream to walk into. In relation to this role, the poet demonstrates, through his overall prophetic acclamations, that although there could be contending forces wresting the patriot's mind from staying steadfast, there lies a

future filled with high hopes consequent upon which the patriot needs to stand firm for her/his country.

The stylistic analysis of the poems, which we have carried out in this study, goes a long way to demonstrate that truly the poets of the third generation, like their predecessors in the second generation, have abided by the stylistic peculiarities of the 'Alter-native tradition' (Aiyejina, 1988) of Nigerian poetry in English, as they favour a style of writing in which the obscurantism of the first generation of Nigerian poets has been pushed to the background so that the message of social regeneration that they have for the people could be effectively delivered. Furthermore, the poet's preference for certain visual imagery, paradox, anti-thesis, temporal deixis, allusion and metaphor, as signifying elements, practically conveys the rage, the anguish, the threnody, and the manifest optimism for which poets of Raji's generation are noted.

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