

**RESISTANCE AND ADVOCACY IN PERFORMANCE POETRY OF DIKE  
CHUKWUMERIJE**

**BY**

**Benedicta Oseumenosen AKHIDENOR (MISS)  
ART2100167**

**FACULTY OF ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN  
BENIN CITY**

**NOVEMBER, 2025**

**RESISTANCE AND ADVOCACY IN PERFORMANCE POETRY OF DIKE  
CHUKWUMERIJE.**

**BY**

**Benedicta Oseumenosen AKHIDENOR (MISS)  
ART2100167**

**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN CITY, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF  
BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A. HONS.) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND  
LITERATURE.**

**NOVEMBER, 2025**

**CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this study was carried out by Benedicta Oseumenosen AKHIDENOR (Miss) in the Department of English and Literature, University of Benin, Benin city, under my supervision.

---

**Dr. Lilian C. Onyeiwu**

---

**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to God Almighty, for life, guidance, sustainance wisdom, understanding, and the unmerited grace to complete this project writing. May His name reign forever.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt appreciation goes to God for his unwavering love, mercy and grace to go through the process of this project work successfully.

My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisor Dr. Lilian C. Onyeiwu for her resolute patience, helpful counsel, and corrective feedback which has been the backbone of this research. May God continue to bless and sustain you. I also thank all my lecturers in the Department of English and Literature for their impactful knowledge and contributions. I also heartily thank Prof. Felix Airoboman, my uncle and mentor for his immense support.

I cannot find enough words to quantify my gratitude to my parents, Mr and Mrs. Akhidenor, who have provided, prayed for and encouraged me all through my schooling. And also to my siblings who did not give up on me. I love you all. Special thanks to my grandmothers for their continuous prayers and support, I thank you and really appreciate you both.

To my Aunties and Uncles: Aunty Lucy, Aunty Lilian, Aunty Amaka, Aunty Karen, Aunty Nneka, Mora, Mummy Sumaiya, Aunty Dora, Aunty Caroline, Uncle Ehiabhi, Uncle Jude Akhidenor, Mr. Boniface, Mr. Udeme and Raphael Idiagi. May God continuously reward you all for your efforts towards me.

To my friends: Mulikat, Onyinye, Joy, Cherie, Josephine, Success, Angel, Ebony, Mary, Loveth, Peace, Favour, Chisom, Ugochi, Jessica, Fabian, Francis, Victor, Benedict and Chidi. To my hostel roommates in room 104, 307, 407 and 403. A big shout out to you all for making my experience in this school, University of Benin, Benin city, a pleasant one.

To my NFCS and CBIU family, Board of Lectors, and Priests of Saint Albert Catholic church. God bless you all abundantly.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

	<b>PAGE</b>
	<b>S</b>
<b>TITLE</b>	i
<b>CERTIFICATION</b>	ii
<b>DEDICATION</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	iv
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	v
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	vii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1. Purpose of Study	1
1.2. Scope of Study	2
1.3. Research Methodology	2
1.4. Theoretical Background	3
1.5. Review of Related Literature	10
1.6. Thesis Statement	14
<b>CHAPTER TWO: PERFORMANCE POETRY AS A MEDIUM OF RESISTANCE</b>	
2.1. Economic Resistance	18
2.2. Social Resistance: Resisting Government's Neglect of Infrastructure	27
2.3. Environmental Resistance: Resisting Environmental Exploitation and	

Pollution 33

**CHAPTER THREE: PERFORMANCE POETRY IN ADVOCACY:  
ADVOCACY, EQUALITY AND GOVERNANCE**

3.1. Cultural Advocacy: Advocacy for Cultural Equality 36

3.2. Political Advocacy: Advocacy for Good Governance 48

**CHAPTER FOUR**

Conclusion 57

Works Cited 60

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the performance poetry of Nigerian Performance Poet, Dike Chukwumerije, arguing that it functions as a significant site for socio-economic resistance and constructive national advocacy. Framed within the dual lenses of Postcolonial theory and Marxist theory, the study analyzes his selected poems, which are "The Beautiful Ones Are Born", "Okwesilieze", "The Roads Are Broken", "Development Is", "The Wall and The Bridge", "The Revolution Has No Tribe", "We Are One Nation", "Belly Politics" and "Fix The Politics".

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In an era defined by global political disillusionment and a crisis of governance, literary artists have become active participants in the public sphere. Performance poetry has emerged as a preeminent medium for this public vocation, merging the potency of the spoken word with the visceral impact of live theatre to create a powerful forum for social critique. At the forefront of this movement in Nigeria is Dike Chukwumerije. Through performances like “The Wall and The Bridge” and “Fix The Politics”, Chukwumerije embodies this mandate. He harnesses the stage to dissect the entrenched pathologies of the Nigerian states from the corrosive effects of bad governance and the brutal political struggles for power, to the deep-seated cultural inequalities that fracture national unity. His poetry is not a passive reflection but an active agent of resistance and a clear, articulate form of advocacy for a more just and cohesive society.

#### **1.1. Purpose of Study**

The purpose of study is to explore how Dike Chukwumerije's selected performance poems are used as a means of resistance and advocacy. It examines the style, themes and figurative language employed by Dike Chukwumerije to address unequal resource distribution, government's neglect of infrastructure,

environmental exploitation and pollution, cultural inequality, and bad governance. And it gives voice to the marginalized while also seeking policy change.

## **1.2. Scope of Study**

This study investigates the dynamics of resistance and advocacy in Dike Chukwumerije's performance poems. It evaluates the themes of cultural inequality, bad governance, unequal distribution of resources, the struggle for human rights which are predominant in his selected poems: "Development Is", "The Beautiful Ones Are Born", "Okwesilieze", "The Roads Are Broken", "The Wall and The Bridge", "We Are One Nation", "The Revolution Has No Tribe", "Belly Politics", and "Fix The politics".

## **1.3. Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research method to explore the themes of resistance and advocacy which includes seeking reforms of government policies, social justice, and resisting cultural imperialism. The research method is non-numerical, interpretative, flexible, and subjective. The qualitative research focuses on understanding complex phenomenon through in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, economic, environmental and political contexts in which Dike Chukwumerije's work is situated. The non-numerical data used in this study are observations and textual analysis which includes the primary data and the

secondary data. The primary data used are pertaining to his performance poems which includes written poems, recordings of his live YouTube videos, and other performance notes. The secondary data are reviews of critical essays, academic articles, research journals, and comments from other scholars.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Background**

This study uses Postcolonial theory and Marxist theory. Postcolonialism, occasionally referred to as postcolonial theory, represents a scholarly pursuit dedicated to scrutinizing the enduring consequences of colonialism and imperialism across cultural, political, and economic spheres. Postcolonial theory seeks to study how European power, economy and culture affected the colonized both during and after the colonial era. Edward Said is frequently cited as a foundational figure in postcolonial theory, largely due to his seminal work, "Orientalism", published in 1978. Within its pages, he launched a critique of the West's perspectives and depictions of the "Orient" (the East), and how these representations influenced power dynamics and colonial ties. He establishes the term "Orientalism" as a critical concept to describe the Western world's commonly contemptuous depiction and portrayal of the Eastern world that is, the Orient. In the book we are made to understand that the orient is not only adjacent to Europe, it is also the place of Europe's greatest, oldest, and richest colonies, the source of

its civilizations and language and its cultural contestant, one of its deepest and most occurring images of the other. His work, especially "Orientalism," critiques the ways Western powers constructed a false image of the "Orient" (the East) to justify their dominance and perpetuate the colonial power dynamics. Said argues that history and culture cannot be explained without also studying the configuration of power within society. European and African history and culture cannot be understood without understanding the power struggles between them during and after colonialism. Said asserts that:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient, dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (3)

While Said's contributions are undeniably significant, other scholars, such as Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, have also left an indelible mark on this field of research. Homi Bhabha, professor and postcolonial theorist, views colonization as a formation of subjects, and he draws both colonizer and the colonized into a close relationship. However, he

deconstructs Edward Said's binaries and follows another theorist instead. According to Firdous Azim, "Bhabha examines various aspects (...) using Lacan's concept of the mirror image where colonizer and colonized are seen to be locked in a dialectical relationship" (238) (as originally cited). The two are mirror images, simply because they automatically learn and mimic one another, even if they are not aware of it. Bhabha studies this relationship and finds that they develop a hybrid identity instead of a binary through constantly learning from each other. Bhabha's theory of hybridity challenges the norms of all aspects of society, though especially the notions on identity and nation. He shows how these unified individuals exhibit a development that is in fact linear, but also quite complex. According to M. A. R. Habib, Bhabha's hybridity, "Expresses a state of 'in betweenness', as in a person who stands between two cultures" (750). Through postcolonial studies it is evident that while the cultures learn from each other, on an individual level they are stuck between two cultures. Through his assertion it shows that an individual in a postcolonial situation does not belong to simply one culture, because the process of colonialism has made a slight mirror image of the colonizer's culture.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is known for her concern with historical teaching or the colonial past. She insists that errors of the past are now accepted as

truth. She wants to rework this concept, and create a new truth that can be worked out as a multicultural curriculum. Spivak rejects any possibility of opposition between the colonizer and colonized, victim and oppressor. Spivak defines the postcolonial project by identifying the core problem it must overcome: the intellectual's tendency to represent the "Other" in their own image. She argues: "No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has been to sustain the Self by constituting the Other as a shadow", (5). Postcolonial theory must recognize that the desire to "give voice" to the oppressed often ends up creating a romanticized, transparent subject who conveniently fits the intellectual's own political and theoretical framework. The "subaltern" is thus produced as a mere shadow of the intellectual's "Self," reinscribing the very power dynamic it seeks to undo. Bhabha uses this psychoanalytic concept to deconstruct the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. They are not simple binaries but are locked in a dialectical relationship, each forming their identity in relation to the other. Through this process, they automatically learn from and mimic one another, leading to a hybrid identity rather than maintaining pure, separate cultural identities.

Frantz Fanon is a theorist and an activist. He claimed decolonization is an inherently violent and total process that replaces one "species of men" with

another and creates a new world. "Decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men" (27). In his writing, Fanon focused on the dehumanizing effect of scapegoating on the society, and also the effect on the individual. When a colonized people is oppressed for a long period of time, a violent reaction is almost unavoidable. Therefore, Fanon criticized this form of scapegoating and its after-effects on the people. However, it does not dwell on the colonizers, possibly because Fanon focuses more on fighting back on the oppression. Gugelberger Georg M. summarized Fanon's ideas saying: "Western racism is seen as a form of scapegoating that permits the West to cling to its power and leads to violent reaction by the colonized" (757). Postcolonialism explores the lasting impacts of colonialism on formerly colonized societies, with key themes including identity, cultural hybridity, language and power, and the ongoing struggle for liberation and self-determination.

Marxism is another significant theory used in this study. It is a philosophy that has contributed much to the modern world. German Philosopher Karl Marx helped the working class to question the injustice enforced upon them through their wages, lifestyle and oppression. Marxism, for many, is a beginning of progress and evolution. Marx believed that instilling his ideology in the minds of people like him, would one day make the world, an ideal classless society.

Marxism is a social, economic and political philosophy that analyzes the impact of the ruling class on the labourers, leading to uneven distribution of wealth and privileges in the society. It stimulates the workers to protest the injustice. The theory was formulated by Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels in their work, "The Communist Manifesto" which was published in 1848. It was a pamphlet they created during the age of Imperialism, rooting from their own struggles as members of the proletariat lot. According to Marx, history demonstrates the existence of class struggle centuries earlier. He explains the struggle through five stages. Primitive Communism, the age of Hunter-gatherers where every human was treated equally hence, there was an absence of class. The Age of Slavery where there was class distinction between the aristocrats and the slaves. Feudalism where the struggle was between land owners and the people who rented or used their lands for agriculture. Capitalism, where the labour community (Proletariats) worked their lives off only for the ruling class (Bourgeoisie) to profit from them. This is the stage where Mark and Engels compile "Communist manifesto" from their plight as workers for the British Factory owners.

Socialism is the phase that Marx believed the proletariats would revolt for their justice and eventually form a communist society, free of class distinctions and equal wealth. There are two obvious divisions in the Capitalist society – the

Bourgeoisie and the Proletariats. The exploitation of the latter is the essence of Marxist ideology. The Bourgeoisie enjoyed the power to control the toiling masses' wages and work, leaving them vulnerable to even replacements in the future. The former had access to modern equipment and tools to make work easier and quicker, leaving the labourer with low wages and adding more profits to themselves. The never-ending heavy labour left the workforce with a feeling of alienation from the task (estranged labour) and even humanity, focusing only on the yields. The Capitalists used every medium - be it religious, educational or financial to its favour to maintain power. This means every action and need of the labourers are dependent on the power of the Capitalists. Capitalism made man prioritize money over love and other emotions. Karl Marx calls this "False Consciousness" where people are made to believe money and materials are the ultimate. Such inequalities will eventually infuriate the proletariat and lead them to a revolution, in the view of abolishing Capitalism. The outcome of the retaliation, according to Marx, would be a classless and equal society which projects socialism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's relationship with Marxist theory is not one of simple adherence but of critical, deconstructive engagement. She uses Marxist methodology while rigorously critiquing its eurocentric and gendered limitations. Her most famous interventions argue that classical Marxist analysis fails to

account for the specific situation of the subaltern, particularly the subaltern woman, who falls through the cracks of both class and colonial analysis. Spivak's central argument is that the capitalist mode of production, as classically defined by Marx, does not seamlessly encompass the entire global population. The subaltern exists in a different space. She says: "The subaltern is not the proletariat. The subaltern is that which is not the subject of a history, that which has no line of social mobility... In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak" (202-203). The industrial proletariat in Marx's model is a functional part of the capitalist system, whose labour power is exploited. The subaltern, by contrast (e.g., the landless peasant, the tribal person), may be on the outside of this wage-relation, oppressed by a more complex web of pre-capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal structures that classical Marxism does not fully theorize.

### **1.5. Review of Related Literature and Justification of Study.**

This review of related scholarship is usually in relation to the topic and the poems the research is carried out on. Various scholars have made critique on resistance and advocacy as a topic and others have made comments and critical essays on Dike Chukwumerije 's performance poems. And some of this related works to the topic and the poet will be examined. Resistance poetry plays a vital role in challenging societal norms and power structures, empowering readers to

confront oppression, imagine alternative futures, and work towards social change. By amplifying marginalized voices, exposing systemic injustices, and inspiring solidarity and activism, writers create narratives that provoke critical reflection and inspire collective action. As readers engage with texts that challenge prevailing norms and power structures, they are invited to become agents of change, contributing to the ongoing struggle for justice, equality, and liberation. Tanure Ojaide, a major poet and critic, argues that the dysfunction of the Nigerian state produced a corresponding aesthetic in its poetry, one that deliberately rejects "beauty" for a harsh language meant to shock readers into awareness. He comments that:

The Nigerian condition of "rottenness" has produced a corresponding poetic aesthetic of "ugliness". The poet, in order to be faithful to the reality he depicts, must break away from the language of decorum and employ a radical, often raw and visceral lexicon that mirrors the societal decay. (8)

The form of the poetry is part of its resistance. By using fragmented structures, violent imagery, and Pidgin to break the "elite" code, the poetry formally rebels against the very system it critiques. Perhaps the most comprehensive theoretical framework comes from Oluwatoyin B. Vincent, who

defines resistance poetry as a fundamental "act of insurgency" against totalizing narratives. "Resistance poetry in Nigeria is a writerly act of insurgency. It is a discursive practice that seeks to dismantle the monolithic narratives of the state and give voice to the 'wounded humanity' of the citizenry. It is in essence, the literary equivalent of civil disobedience" (112). The act of writing and disseminating a critical poem is itself an act of rebellion. It is a use of language as a weapon to disrupt the state's control over public discourse and to assert the humanity of the oppressed. Thomas A. Hale situates performance poetry within a long global history of oral art, while also recognizing its modern media-savviness. "Performance poets are, in a sense, modern griots... They are the keepers of a community's stories, its conscience, and its collective memory, using the tools of rhythm, rhyme, and gesture to make their messages memorable and powerful" (302). Nigerian scholars have engaged with Dike Chukwumerije's work primarily by positioning him as a pivotal figure in the evolution of Nigerian poetry, bridging the gap between the written page and the public stage, and using performance to address pressing national issues. Dr. Pamela O. Ajakaiye (University of Lagos) analyzes Chukwumerije as a key example of the "new oralit" in African literature, where performance is crafted for both live audience and digital dissemination.

Dike Chukwumerije represents a significant shift in the Nigerian poetic tradition. He has mastered the art of "staging the word", creating a performance poetry that is deeply rooted in the griotic tradition yet fully mediated for the digital age. His poems are composed with a dual consciousness: for the immediacy of the live audience and the viral potential of the online video. (134)

Scholars see him not just as a live performer but as a savvy cultural producer who uses YouTube and social media to amplify his work, thus updating the ancient role of the oral poet for the 21st century. A prominent theme in the scholarship is how Chukwumerije uses his epic narrative performances, like "Made in Nigeria", to construct a unifying national narrative. Professor Charles A. Oku (University of Abuja) frames this as a project of "re-membering" the nation.

In "Made in Nigeria", Chukwumerije performs a powerful act of national "re-membering". He takes the fragmented, often painful pieces of Nigerian history, the civil war, political corruption, ethnic strife and weaves them into a coherent, shared story for a generation grappling with a fractured national identity. His stage becomes a space for reconciling

with the past to imagine a new future. (58)

His work is analyzed not just as entertainment but as a crucial cultural practice that helps construct a collective identity and process historical trauma through storytelling.

### **1.6. Thesis Statement**

This study explores the role of resistance and advocacy, as a medium for addressing the problems faced by marginalized communities in Nigeria by examining the style, themes and figurative language employed in Dike Chukwumerije's performance poetry.

## CHAPTER TWO

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Performance Poetry as a Medium of Resistance**

According to Marvin Carlson, "Performance is an activity that is, in a sense, always 'on display,' always subject to observation and interpretation by others... The fundamental, defining feature of performance is its 'framing' within a specific context that says, 'interpret this as performance'" (4-5). Carlson also famously discussed the inherent "doubleness" of performance, where the performer is simultaneously themselves and the character they are playing, a concept he traces back to the Greek theatre. "The whole apparatus of 'character' in the theatre is built upon this fundamental doubleness, the fact that the performer is both himself and not himself, both the person who exists outside the frame of the performance and the figure who exists within it" (6). Anything can be studied as performance if it is framed that way. A wedding, a political speech, or a trial can be analyzed using the same tools we use to analyze a play because they share this structured, "framed" quality. Performance poetry is not simply poetry read aloud. It is a distinct genre where the live, embodied presentation is constitutive of the text's meaning. Susan B. A. Somers-Willett defines performance poetry by its essential

elements: the poet's body and voice, which become primary instruments of meaning-making beyond the written word.

Performance poetry is a genre where the author's body is a primary medium. The performance is not merely an extension of the text but is integral to its construction and interpretation. Through gesture, intonation, rhythm, and movement, the performer inscribes meaning upon the live moment in a way that the page cannot capture. (42)

The text of the poem is incomplete without its performance. The poet's physical presence, a sigh, a clenched fist, a change in rhythm adds semantic and emotional layers that are part of the poem itself. The history of performance poetry dates back to ancient times, with evidence of oral traditions and storytelling in cultures around the world. Today, performance poetry continues to thrive, with a global community of poets and performers pushing the boundaries of the art form. The main role of performance poetry is to bring the written words of poetry to life and to create a unique experience for the audience which cannot be expressed or conveyed through words alone. Performance Poetry originated as a response to the limitations of traditional forms of poetry. It brings a shared understanding. It uses vocal techniques which include varying pitch, volume, body language that is

gestures, facial expressions and movements, pacing and timing, audience engagement, all for effective communication. While engaging the audience it also conveys key messages through voice and movement. It is quite common that spoken words, performance poetry and slam poetry have been used interchangeably and sometimes mistaken for the other but they have their key differences. Spoken word serves as an inclusive term for poetic performances. It is not competitive and theatrical as slam poetry and performance poetry. Spoken word varies widely in style and encompass both formats. It emphasizes language and rhythm, with less formal presentation constraints. It can engage diverse audiences, focusing on inclusivity. Performance Poetry is often non competitive and theatrical, it involves stage performance. It allows more artistic freedom in duration and form. Performance poets may prioritize storytelling and emotional resonance over competition. Slam poetry is competitive by nature. It is typically time limited and structured. Slam poets often aim for impactful delivery in order to be scored well by the judges at the performance. It fosters a competitive community dynamics.

Resistance is not always dramatic revolution. Resistance refers to the actions, attitudes or behaviours employed by individuals or groups to oppose, challenge, or refuse to accept a particular social order, authority, norms or policies.

This opposition can arise from various motivations, including a desire for economic, social and environmental justice. Through poetry the act of resistance can be expressed through the lines, stanzas, rhymes, figurative language, tone and mood of the poem. Chukwumerije, the activist in this case, feels the pain of the populace and expresses it through his/her words. The source of the resistance is mirrored and depicted in the poems. This is why performance poetry can be said to be a medium of resistance. It gives voice to the marginalized. While it is discussed as a medium of resistance it is also important to look at the various types of resistance.

## **2.1 Economic Resistance**

Economic resistance is the organized or individual opposition to an economic system, policy, or practice that is perceived as unjust, exploitative, or oppressive. It moves beyond mere complaint to active refusal and the creation of alternatives. Its aim is to challenge the control and distribution of resources, labour, and wealth. From the past years to the present time the issue of economic crisis is a reoccurring issue in Nigeria and there is no permanent solution. These issues in the economic aspects are: unequal distribution of resources, high rate of importation and less exportation, inflation and hike in fuel prices, dependence on crude oil and lack of diversification and unemployment. In Nigeria, there has been

several occurrences of mismanagement of funds been disbursed to sectors which are already thriving and other sectors are neglected especially the ones that are paramount to human lives like education, health, creation of job opportunities, agriculture, fishing, mining, transporting system, and extraction of other raw materials. It is noteworthy to say that not only the government but also the citizens have contributed to the poor conditions of the Nigerian economy. Nigeria operates a mixed economy, both the citizens and the government control the means of production. However, the unequal distribution stems mostly from class struggle, and tension arising from different social class as they all grapple with resources of the country. This is often characterized by the exploitation of the working class (proletariats) by the ruling class (bourgeoisie), thereby mirroring the Marxist theory. The elites have succeeded in creating a significant gap between them and the rest of the populace with limited access to basic necessities like healthcare, education, and infrastructure to the latter. While the working class faces exploitation through low wages, poor working and living condition, and lack of social security, the elites accumulate wealth and more power. Secondly, it is a known fact in Nigeria that most of the things used are imported. Ranging from building materials, clothes, to kitchen utensils, some food items (e.g rice, chicken, etc.) shoes, etc. Most foot wears worn in Nigeria have the inscription "Made in

China" on them. This is same with other foreign brands written on most products. This clearly shows that Nigerians are unconsciously helping to build and develop other countries to the detriment of the nation through countless importations and use of foreign products. Instead ways should be figured out to maintain the production of our own goods and venture into more of exporting than importing so as to enhance our economy thereby adding more value to our currency. And the question "what are the things I purchased with the money I took with me, that made it to finish so quickly and there is nothing much to show for it?" will also stop. Over the years till now the present time, Nigerians have been doing the silent "blame game". The recent government blames the past government for leaving the nation in disarray for them to handle and clean up the mess they left in their time of power. The government blames the people for their lack of co-operation in building a prosperous nation. The government is blamed by the citizens for their lack of transparency and partiality in their dealings. While acknowledging the past's role as seen in Chukwumerije's "We Are One Nation", this line argues against using history as an excuse for present inaction. In Dike Chukwumerije's "The Beautiful Ones Are Born" he portrays the detrimental impact this "blame game" has had so far in Nigeria.

We have not come to weep  
We have not come to despair  
We have not come to throw hands up  
And hang our heads in fear,  
We have not come to whine  
We have no tears to cry  
We have not come to stand in line  
Until our time to die,  
We have not come to wait  
For fate to favour us,  
We have not come to blame the past,  
When present things grow worse (1-12).

Dike urges Nigerians to desist from it (blame game) and to keep pushing to coexist together while fostering a developing nation. According to M.H. Abrams' "Glossary of Literary Terms", he defined "Imagery as having applications range all the way from the 'mental pictures' which, it is sometimes claimed, are experienced by the reader of a poem, to the totality of the components which make up a poem" (169). He uses agricultural imagery to portray the effects of disunity and lack of co-operation in the nation in the lines:

We have not come to contemplate  
Where it is plain to see  
What must be done to forge ahead  
And make our children free,  
We have not come to watch  
The leaves come off the tree  
The shadows creep across the wall,  
Till now is history  
It is our choice to act  
There is too much to be done  
We have not come to leave the cross  
To those yet to be born (13-24).

Rather, he pushes Nigerians to make a decision whether to keep disagreeing and doing things to make our economy dwindle away slowly like a candle light or to take charge believing that the country can still be turned around for good. "The Beautiful Ones Are Born" is a manifesto and a call to action. It redefines the "beautiful ones" not as a future, idealized generation, but as the present generation that chooses to act. "We have no tears to cry" suggests that the capacity for grief has been exhausted, leaving only resolve. The poem also tackles this notion: "wait

for fate to favour us". This challenges the common attitude of waiting for a messiah, or divine intervention. The goal is clear: "forge ahead" and "make our children free". This establishes a clear, intergenerational purpose, framing the struggle not for personal gain but for the legacy of future generations. "The shadows creep across the wall / Till now is history" lines 19-20 evokes the image of watching time pass idly until the present moment becomes a lost opportunity, a failed past. The poem ends with a direct challenge to the reader's sense of responsibility, invoking the powerful idea of stewardship for the next generation. The title itself is re-contextualized by the end. The "beautiful ones" are not those who are born into a perfect society, the poem argues that these beautiful ones are not coming; they are already here, and they are us, if we so choose. Dike Chukwumerije depicts this situation through his performance poem titled, "Okwesilieze" Igbo name which literally means "He is supposed to be a king" or "deserving to be a king". He portrays the Black man as a king who is poor which is an irony in itself as one who calls himself a king is meant to live well and be happy. Yet, the opposite is the case in "Okwesilieze". M.H. Abrams defines irony as, "In most modern critical uses of the term 'irony', there remains the root sense of dissembling, or of hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects" (184). "Okwesilieze"

is a foundational poem for economic resistance because it shifts the focus from resisting external economic forces to resisting the internal mindset of dependency and helplessness that perpetuates poverty.

Today, I saw a mysterious thing  
 A thing that vexed me to my very soul,  
 I saw the Black man dressed like a king  
 But crouching in the shadows with a begging bowl,  
 His children were starving in fields of cassava  
 Dying of diseases the palm kernel could cure,  
 Homeless in a land of rock and timber  
 "Why are you begging?" - He said, "I am poor" (1-8).

The poem opens with a shocking contradiction. "A king", a symbol of power, authority, and wealth is acting like a beggar. M.H. Abrams defines paradox as "A statement which seems on its face to be logically contradictory or absurd, yet turns out to be interpretable in a way that makes sense" (267). This "mysterious thing" is the central paradox that vexes the poet. Similarly, M.H. Abrams also defined metaphor as "A word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison" (130). The "black man" here is a metaphor for Nigeria

(Africa) and its people, who are "dressed like a king" (endowed with rich resources and a proud heritage) yet are mentally and physically "crouching in the shadows", adopting a posture of supplication and dependence. The poet elaborates on the paradox with specific imagery "starving in fields of cassava" line 5. In line 6 "dying of diseases the palm kernel could cure", palm kernel is depicted to have medicinal properties. This signifies that solutions to problems are locally available but unused. He is only "poor" because he fails to utilize the wealth around him.

Today, I saw a mysterious thing  
 So shocking I have no words to say,  
 I saw the black man dressed like a king  
 But standing like the lost by the highway  
 He huddles in a cage that had no gate,  
 He could see where the keys to his chains were kept  
 He stood in clamps but they had no weight,  
 "Why are you here?" - He said, "I am trapped" (17-24).

The king is now "lost", directionless, despite being on a "highway", a path that should lead to a destination. In line 21 "...a cage that had no gate", there are no physical bars holding him. The cage is mental. "He could see where the keys to his cage were kept", this shows the means of liberation are visible and within

reach (knowledge, resources, agency). "...Clamps but they had no weight", depicts that the burdens the Black man (Nigerians) feels are not real constraints but perceived to be. He chooses to see himself as a victim of circumstances rather than the master of his fate just like Nigerians do. This is a metaphor for self-imposed economic limitations. The barriers to economic prosperity, for example, access to credit, markets, technology are often bureaucratic, psychological, or political not absolute physical barriers. They can be dismantled.

Today, I saw a mysterious thing  
 Oh! How can I tell such a horrible story,  
 I saw the black man dressed like a king  
 But he was sharing a sleeping mat with poverty,  
 His poverty was a fat man with a bulging stomach  
 Lying on his back, beside a pot full of treasure,  
 This knowledge was all he seemed to lack:  
 That he could get up and make his own future (25-32).

The horror reaches its peak. The king is not just encountering poverty; he is intimately "sharing a sleeping mat" with it. This signifies a comfortable, accepted coexistence with a condition he should be fighting. Poverty, which is a metaphor is not a state of lack here; it is a state of indifference and passivity "lying on his

back". It is "fat" because it has been fed by inaction and acceptance. In line 30 "beside a pot full of treasure", the wealth is right there, untouched. The problem is not a lack of capital, but a failure to use it productively. It calls for: resistance to a dependency mindset, that is he urges Nigerians to stop seeing the economy as something that happens to them, and start seeing it as something they should build. The real economic crime is leaving resources idle. He wants Nigerians both the government, elites and the citizens at large to overcome the internal narratives of "lame" and "trapped" that prevent productive action.

## **2.2. Social Resistance: Resisting Government's Neglect of Infrastructure.**

The lack of good, effective, and functioning infrastructures and social amenities plays a major role in the nation. The most glaring and obvious parts that are lacking in this aspect in Nigeria are: lack of good roads, hospital equipments and machine, health system, poor educational system and facilities, lack of stable electricity, housing, and security. In Chukwumerije's "The Roads Are Broken" he mirrors the dysfunctional amenities which need attention by the government.

The water does not run,  
When you twist the tap  
But my face shines like the sun,  
The teacher does no come

When you go to school  
But my soul is still winsome,  
I haven't stopped laughing  
Even when the police  
Ask for a bribe or keep me in prison,  
I haven't stopped living  
Even when politicians  
Give me nothing to believe in,  
Do not mistake me  
For things around me  
For all the things ruined around me,  
The roads are Broken  
But not my heart  
It is not mind that is broken (1-18).

"The Roads are Broken" is a testament to resilience in the face of systemic collapse. The poem uses a repetitive structure to compare the failure of the state, its infrastructure, institutions, and governance, with the unbreakable spirit of the individual citizen. Its resistance is not a call for protest in the streets, but for an

inner revolution that refuses to let external decay dictate internal reality. This is a direct reference to the crumbling public infrastructure that cripples the economy. Bad roads increase transportation costs, damage vehicles, disrupt supply chains, and isolate communities. The poem symbolizes a broken pathway to progress, opportunity, and connection. The lack of clean, running water is a daily burden that disproportionately affects the poor, who must spend time and money seeking alternatives. This points to the collapse of the education system. It speaks to brain drain, poor teacher remuneration, strikes, and the systemic neglect that betrays a generation's future. The resistance is against victimhood, that is, choosing to remain "winsome" and for one's face to "shine" despite everything. Resistance over submission, being joyful in the face of corruption and choosing to live fully despite political betrayal. Insisting on being seen as separate from the "ruined" environment. In the context of Nigeria, this poem is a battle cry for the everyday citizen who, amidst the chaos, continues to hope, strive, and find joy, holding within them the true potential for national renewal. Dike Chukwumerije portrays what development is in his performance poems titled "Development Is" at the Nigeria Economic Summit. The poem defines "development" not in grand, economic terms, but through the lens of functional, everyday social and civic experiences. The poem "Development Is" presents a radical redefinition of

development. It argues that true development is not just about economic statistics, political grandstanding, or performative modernity, but rather about the creation of a functional, respectful, and predictable society where systems work, institutions serve the people, and citizens have the freedom to pursue their authentic callings.

Development is not a thing we are near

It is not spit and polish

Not to hang out new curtains

so the neighbours think we are doing well

Development is buses that run every five minutes

It is a telephone in a local government office

That is answered every time it rings (1-7)

The poem begins by rejecting the materialistic notion of development. It states development is not about "new curtains" or projects undertaken just to impress neighbors (other nations). This is a critique of governments that prioritize vanity projects like flying a new national airline or building a monumental bridge over fixing fundamental, everyday problems. The resistance here is substance over spectacle. The poem portrays economic and social resistance. It defines development as reliable, efficient, and accessible public services.

It is cars that stay, in lane, people that wait  
At midnight for red lights to turn green,  
It is civil servants who are civil  
It is public servants who are servants,  
Leaders that stay on their feet  
Till their people are seated  
Presidents that listen to questions without irritation,  
Development is not politics,  
It is not the gift to society from strong men,  
In office, to make us queue and force feed us  
Not what the government thinks is best for us (8-18).

The poem shifts to the social and ethical components of development. "People that wait/At midnight for red lights to turn green" lines 8-9 is a metaphor for internalized discipline and the rule of law. It suggests development is not just about laws, but about a collective social conscience where citizens obey rules even when no one is watching. This critiques the pervasive culture of impunity in Nigeria. "Civil servants who are civil/ Public servants who are servants" lines 10-11 is a play on words for a shift in the attitude of those in power. It calls for respect, professionalism, and a service-oriented mindset in government,

contrasting sharply with the often rude and unaccountable bureaucracy Nigerians experience.

Not Boko Haram that makes my destruction  
 The perquisite for its expansion,  
 Like farmers and herders, Like eagles and hawks  
 Development is to coexist  
 To coexist upon this planet that bubbles on  
 A delicate balance in unending space,  
 where comments collide, where  
 Chaos and creation are two sides of a coin  
 Development is the Wisdom to keep us spinning.  
 To take out today put back tomorrow  
 To fight between roles, pay back what you borrow  
 To walk to the future but I keep some of the past and stop  
 Telling our children we are indestructible (38-50).

This stanza depicts the importance of peaceful and harmonious coexistence among every living existing in the ecosystem. It poem even highlights "chaos" and "creation" as two inevitable sides of a coin. "To take out today, put back tomorrow" is a garbled version of a metaphor condemning the use of future

resources for present consumption. This is a rejection of a development model that focuses on GDP while citizens lack electricity, face religious and ethnic strife, the opposite of "peace", and feel trapped by limited opportunities. It is a call for a system that serves the fundamental human spirit. This is a challenge to the entire governance structure. If all these technical exercises do not "deliver better prospects for our people", they are meaningless. This is a results-oriented governance over process-oriented bureaucrats who can actually deliver peace and stability. The ultimate request is simple yet profound, the purpose of leadership and development is to restore the dignity of the citizenry.

### **2.3.Environmental Resistance: Resisting Environmental Exploitation and Pollution.**

Environmental pollution simply means contamination of the environment by harmful substances that threaten the peaceful coexistence of humans and the organisms around them. In Nigeria, one of the main source of pollution and exploitation comes from oil and gas exploration, deforestation, etc. Gas emitted from industrial activities, biomass burning and vehicles affect the residents around these areas. These activities cause ecological deprivation and hindrance of fresh flow of air (oxygen). Although, crude oil has contributed significantly to the development of Nigeria, it has also been a source of pollution due to oil spillage.

This is very common in the Niger Delta region like Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa-Ibom, Imo, Ondo, Abia, Lagos, Anambra, Edo. It is an irony that these oil producing states that are supposed to be very well developed as rewards for being major contributors are the ones suffering. When it comes to oil spillage, contamination of land and water, the people there are struggling. The water is bad for cooking, drinking and even fishing. The contamination on their crops to grow well. Although, it is on their land that crude oil was found, the government is not necessarily giving them something to hold onto while trying to survive. Therefore, it becomes a form of exploitation by the government. Instead of been indifferent to the suffering of these people and not putting any tangible effort to help them out of their misery, the government can find new ways through the workers drilling the oil to separate or filter the oil in such a way none is remaining on the land or water. If only as much effort as the ones put into the crude oil management is also put into other sectors mentioned above and means of trade and consumption, then it will have a positive impact in Nigeria. Not only the government but also the officials under should disburse funds evenly and enough support equally among these various sectors without putting their selfish interests as first on the list. This way Nigeria will be a better place for the people and not somewhere to flee from because of its partial governance and uncondusive environment.

## CHAPTER THREE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Performance Poetry as Advocacy: Advocacy, Equality and Governance.**

Performance poetry is a civic tool because it operates on a different wavelength than traditional political discourse. It can be used a means for advocacy, for seeking equality and good governance. Advocacy aims to change hearts, minds, and policies. While statistics about poverty, climate change, or healthcare gaps can feel distant, performance poetry translates these numbers into human experience. The tools of poetry: rhythm, rhyme, repetition, and metaphor, make complex messages simple and stick longer. Equality is undermined by "othering"—the process of seeing certain groups as less than human. Performance poetry does this by allowing an audience to literally "walk in someone else's shoes". When a poet from a marginalized group shares their lived experience of discrimination, their performance forces the audience to see the world through their eyes, breaking down the mental barriers that sustain inequality. Good governance requires an active, informed, and critical citizenry that can hold power to account. Performance poets act as societal watchdogs using the tools of art: irony, metaphor and satire. M.H. Abrams describes satire as "The literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it

attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation" (353). They can expose corruption, highlight policy failures, and mock the hypocrisy of leaders in a way that is both culturally effective and difficult to dismiss. Performance poetry's unique contribution across all three areas lies in its ability to communicate the "Why." Politicians and Policy Papers explain the "What" and "How." Performance Poets illuminate the "Why Should We Care?" It does not just argue for a better world; it makes the audience feel the need for it and believe in its possibility. This makes it an indispensable tool for anyone seeking to advocate for change, advance equality, and demand governance that truly serves its people.

### **3.1. Cultural Advocacy: Advocacy for Cultural Equality**

Cultural Advocacy is the strategic use of a community's cultural expression: arts, heritage, languages, stories, and values to influence public consciousness, shape social norms, and bring about positive social change. It seeks to change the hearts, minds and collective imagination of a society. John Gaventa, a Political Sociologist known for his work on power and citizen action, states: "Advocacy is not simply about 'giving voice' to the voiceless. It is about challenging the very structures and ideologies that produce voicelessness in the first place. It is a struggle over power—the power to define, to decide, and to dominate" (26). Similarly, Karín Wilkins links advocacy directly to communication for social

change: "Advocacy communication is the strategic use of communication processes and media to work for a social or public policy goal. It moves beyond raising awareness to actively persuading key audiences and decision-makers to support a specific position or action" (432).

Dike Chukwumerije's poetry serves as a mirror held up to Nigerian society, reflecting its cultural contradictions, and political failures. His advocacy is two fold: to politically awaken citizens to systemic issues like corruption, poor governance, and tribalism, and to culturally re-engineer the mindsets of the people, moving them from a place of passive acceptance, division, and despair, to one of active unity, resilience and self-reliance. Before cultural advocacy can be discussed, it is important to note some of the causes of cultural conflict in Nigeria which are: First is stories passed down by parents to their children through storytelling which is a symbol of oral tradition in Nigeria. This is the primary channel for intergenerational transmission of bias. Before a child even meets someone from another group, they are given a "script" of who that person is, what tribe that person belongs to, and the child is made to see reasons why associating with someone from that tribe is bad even when it is not that person's fault. This is where bias becomes powerful. If a child is raised hearing that members of "group Y" are "deceitful", any single negative interaction with a person from group Y is

not seen as an isolated incident involving that individual. Instead, it is seized upon as proof that the inherited stereotype is true: "You see? My parents were right!". These behaviours include: distrust and refusal to do business with, or believe members of another group, social cliques formed along ethnic lines leading to exclusion; and refusal to intermarry, preferential treatment in hiring a less qualified "Son of the soil" over a more qualified "outsider". Furthermore, there is also the indigene-settler and farmer-herder dynamics. These are not mere "conflicts"; they are the structural and economic areas where the aforementioned biases are activated with violent consequences. Indigene-Settler situation is the concept of "ingenuity" grants privileges (jobs, scholarships political office) to those deemed "original" to an area, creating a legal class of second-class citizens "settlers". A farmer from the Tiv ethnic group often Christian does not see a Fulani herder often Muslim as a fellow citizen struggling for livelihood. The herder, in turn may see the farmer through filtered narratives about being excluded from traditional grazing routes and being discriminated against. The economic dispute becomes an existing ethnic and religious war because of the pre-existing bias. Moreover, religion provides a divine and moral justification for cultural bias, elevating it from mere prejudice to a matter of cosmic truth. This dehumanizes the

opponent and makes violence not only permissible but, in extreme cases, a sacred duty.

Chukwumerije's central thesis is that the primary battlefield for Nigeria's future is not in the National Assembly or the oil fields, but in the hearts and minds of its citizens. This can be firmly depicted in Chukwumerije's "The Wall and The Bridge". "The Wall" and "The Bridge" are both metaphors and symbols for the choices Nigerians make that either divide or unite the nation. The "Wall" represents the mental, emotional, and social barriers that Nigerians erect based on ethnic prejudice and tribalism. Specifically, the "Wall" stands for: tribalism. The "Bridge" represents the conscious choice to foster unity, empathy and shared humanity across the nation. The "Bridge" is the active effort to connect, understand, and accept fellow citizens as equals, prioritizing a common national identity over narrow ethnic loyalties.

If a White man turned and called me nigger

My blood will boil in righteous anger,

For the evil of discrimination is clearly established

When a White man tries to treat me like rubbish (1-4).

This excerpt clearly shows the dissatisfaction felt by the Black man because of the way he is been treated as an inferior creature, though he is also human like

the White man created by the same God. He expresses his anger at the thought of the White man calling him "nigger". He frowns greatly on the way the White man does not miss out on any opportunity to downgrade him (Black man) showing him his(White man) sense of superiority because of his skin colour.

But if Hausas says Igbos are greedy and crude  
 And the Igbos says Hausas are haughty and rude,  
 And the "Ijaw" says the Itsekiri must die today  
 And Eza tells Azilo there is no other way,  
 If Yorubas declare it is awo or nothing  
 And we use federal character to share everything,  
 So before you can even smile and tell me welcome  
 You must first ask me where my father is from (5-12).

This stanza mirrors the irony of the situation Nigerians have found themselves in till this present time. In the previous lines 1-4 the Black man is enraged by the segregation of the Whites to them in every aspect of their lives. Here, in lines 5-12, the same Black man (Nigerians in this context) is seen antagonizing his fellow Black man, insulting each other, declaring war on each other and even proclaiming death on the other as seen in line 7 "And the "Ijaw says the Itsekiri must die today". Nigerians practice the same hostility that the

White shows toward the Black race to their fellow Nigerians because they are not the same tribe as them due to the multilingual nature of Nigeria.

If those who were settlers but now indigenes  
 Says those who are settlers cannot become indigenes,  
 And the constitution says we are all citizens  
 Local government keep issuing certificates of origin,  
 If my brother pass jamb but cannot go to Uni  
 Because he is Tiv and not Kanuri,  
 And Uni made a quota for his cashment area  
 So he must go back to Benue or wait one more year,  
 If it's okay to say it's not okay to marry  
 Someone just because they are calabari,  
 And that every tribe should have its own side,  
 Are we not then practicing apartheid? (13-24).

In these excerpt, lines 13-16 simply implies the spirit of hospitality which seems to be dwindling. Everyday people migrate from one part of Nigeria to another for one reason or the other. Maybe in search of new jobs, change of environment, business, etc. This individuals try as much as possible to adapt to the environment they find themselves in and communicate effectively with people

around them, so as to foster good relationship with the indigenes there. If the indigenes are not hospitable to this settlers, then the settlers will find it difficult living there in peace. If the history of the settlers are looked upon, it might even be discovered that they were not even the original founders of the place but were once settlers like this individuals. If the original indigenes of the community in question were not good people then the new found indigenes would not have stayed at the community for that long duration. And the new settlers would not have met them there.

When there is no faith to look deep inside  
And stop judging accents and surnames and dressing,  
This fire we are quenching will only keep burning,  
Which nation can stand dividing its people  
How can one build on foundation so brittle,  
If we cannot see ourselves in each other  
This journey ends here we are going no further,  
For when God made man he gave him no facial marks  
He did not make Gbagi, Okun or Angas,  
As sure as a Black man he is, just like a White man  
No culture is older than being human,

This is the truth until we accept it  
 Our nation will stumble on its broken fit,  
 For the same things can bind us that drive us apart  
 For the wall and the bridge are both in the heart (38-52).

This stanza from "The wall and The Bridge" shows the vast effects of tribalism on the country. A nation whose people are not united cannot grow, and stand the test of time. Rather the various tribal cultures should bring the people closer. These is portrayed in: "For the same things can bind us that drives us apart/For the wall and the bridge are both in the heart" Lines 51-52. This lines means both "the wall" (tribalism) and "the bridge" (the unity) both originate from the same place. Both the impulse to divide and to unite do not come from government policies or historical accidents alone. They are born from the values, fears, and choices within each individual's heart and mind. Another one of Chukwumerije's poems that addresses cultural advocacy is "The Revolution has no Tribe".

Do you not know that poverty is not an Ijaw man?  
 He will not spare the rest of us and afflict only the Ishan,  
 He will step over the river and come across the border,  
 So, when the drums sound let everybody answer

Do you not know that corruption is not from Nekede?  
 He will not hear that Ife had no dealings with Modakeke,  
 He will wake up all of our children at night with hunger,  
 So, when the drums sound, let everybody answer  
 Do you not know that HIV/AIDS is not Kanuri?  
 He will not select his victims and kill only the Fulani,  
 He will set the land ablaze from the Delta to the Sahara,  
 So, when the drums sound, let everybody answer (1-12).

"Do you not know...?" The poem opens with a rhetorical question, which continues through the entire poem. It immediately engages the audience in a dialogue. It assumes a shared, common sense that the listener has forgotten or been manipulated to ignore. There is personification in the poem. M.H. Abrams describes this term as, "Personification is another figure in which either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings" (132). Poverty is personified as "He", transforming an abstract economic condition into an active, malevolent force with agency. By naming specific ethnic groups (Ijaw, Ishan, Kanuri, and Fulani), Chukwumerije grounds his argument in Nigerian reality. He states that poverty does not respect these ethnic borders. The refrain, "So, when the drums

sound, let everybody answer" is introduced. "The drums" symbolize the call to fight this common enemy.

Do you not know that our enemies have no face?  
 They are indigenes no state, they come from no place  
 And, if this boat capsizes everyone of us will go under  
 So, when the drums sound, let everybody answer,  
 Do not say "I am an Iroko", when the forest is burning,  
 Do not say, "I am an Obeche", when the forest is burning,  
 Our differences will not prevent us from perishing together,  
 So, when the drums sound, let everybody answer (13-20).

The real "enemies" referred to in line 13 are "poverty", "corruption", and "disease" which are "faceless". They have no tribe or state of origin. There is also presence of personification because poverty, corruption, and disease are given human attributes "enemies" (usually pertaining to humans). Nigeria is described as the "Boat" in line 15. It presents a simple, undeniable logic of shared destiny. It makes unity a matter of collective survival, not just idealism. The poem presents a binary choice: unite and act or divide and perish collectively. The advocacy in Dike Chukwumerije's "We Are One Nation" is not based on a shared future and survival. It is an attempt to construct a national identity from the rubble of failure

itself. The poem begins not with pride, but with an admission of a violent, exploitative birth.

Though strange men from distant places,  
Tall and thin with ghostly faces  
Spouting lies and bloody deeds,  
Robbing, preaching God and creeds,  
Were the ones who drew the map  
Bound us all within that map,  
Though we stand on such foundation  
Badly built- we are one nation,  
Though we fought no freedom wars  
And no one tells the old folklores,  
No common cause to warm our hearts  
Soft burning flames to light our paths,  
No hero sung from North to South  
No valour that we brag about,  
Though we stand with such a history  
Badly written-we are one country,  
Though we fight against each other

Kill and strike down one another,  
Turn our rivers red with blood  
Pelt our faces with spit and mud,  
Raise our children to be suspicions  
Of their brothers from other regions (1-22).

The "ghostly faces" (British colonialists) created the entity called Nigeria through "lies and bloody deeds". The "Badly built" is a metaphor in line 8 which is central to the poem's realism. Chukwumerije does not pretend the "house" is sturdy; he admits it is leaking and cracked. The "map" was drawn, the boundaries were set, and everyone inside is now bound by a common fate. So it is left for Nigerians to stay as one body, one spirit, one soul and fight through obstacles together rather than tear each other apart. The poet admits the lack of a shared, heroic national narrative. Unlike nations with unifying independence struggles or epic foundational myths. He speaks on the feeling of a hollow national identity, where patriotic fervor has little to feel it. Lines 17-22 is the most direct concession, admitting the active, violent hostility between ethnic and religious groups. The poem uses vivid imagery "rivers red with blood", "spit and mud". The poet speaks against these "suspicions" that divide the tribes. This is why advocacy for equality

is important. In essence, cultural advocacy is the engine that drives the journey from mere cultural diversity to genuine cultural equality.

### **3.2. Political Advocacy: Advocacy for Good Governance.**

Political Advocacy is the deliberate process of influencing those in power to create, amend, or enforce public policy and law. It is a strategic series of actions designed to bring social or political change by shaping the public agenda, mobilizing constituents, and applying pressure on decision makers in government and other institutions. "Belly Politics" is a satirical indictment of the Nigerian political system. Through a central metaphor, the poem analyzes the triumph of base materialism over merit, competence and vision diagnosing a systemic illness that cripples national development. "Belly Politics" is a crude but devastatingly accurate metaphor for a political system, driven entirely by "primitive materialistic hunger". The "Belly" represents the most basic human need: food, survival, and by extension, immediate financial reward.

Adamu Magaji -Candidate

Will he win? - No

He makes fine speeches - True

He has fine feelings - Good for him

How come he won't win?

Belly Politics!

Chika Ugonna -Candidate

Will he win? -No

A man of vision -(yawn) What else?

Enterprising, educated, enthused young man

Good play on words - He won't win?

But why?

Belly Politics!

Shola Balogun -Candidate

Will he win? -No

A bright, young man -If you say so

Impressive records, he is full of zeal

I know you will answer, he won't win

Belly Politics! (1-19).

Alhaji Magaji is presented in lines 1-4 as someone who is good at speaking well and addressing the public. Even the speaker in the poem agrees to this fact. Yet is turned down the opportunity to rule. In lines 5-7, Chika Ugonna, a man of vision, enterprising, educated, enthused young man is also turned down. Although, in lines 7-11, he is portrayed as someone whom the people will originally like as a

good leader with good educational qualification. Shola Balogun is described as a "bright, young man with impressive records full of zeal" in lines 14- 17. He is competent and passionate. These three candidates have different qualities of being good leaders yet they get turned down. And the questions: "Will he win?, He won't win?" expresses the curiosity and shock of the speaker at this qualified individuals either winning or not. Yet the reply to each of these questions remains "Belly Politics". Belly Politics can also be said to represent corrupt practices like bribery and corruption, vote buying during election, indecisiveness of citizens to vote for good candidates due to poverty or greediness and interruption of electoral activities, negative influence of the thoughts of electorate and the Independent National Electoral Commission(INEC) officials, stealing ballot boxes and electoral materials during and after elections. The repeated, resounding "No" to their chances of winning confirms that this virtues are irrelevant. This system is not designed to recognize or reward them. It is a machine that reliably chews up and spit out merit. The tone is dripping with sarcasm, the response to "a man of vision" is a bored (yawn) "what else?" and to "a bright, young man" is a dismissive "if you say so" of an electorate that has come to expect nothing from it so-called leaders.

Belly Politics! Belly Politics!

Then who will win?

Not Adamu Magaji -No!

Not Chika Ugonna -No!

Not Shola Balogun -No!

Belly Politics! Belly Politics!

Then who will win?

Alhaji Kudi - Alhaji Kudi?

The illiterate? Belly Politics!

The...the...but why?

This way and that way,

Shake a hand here, shake a leg there,

Alhaji Kudi, he might win

Or Mazi Ego Juru N' Akpa - what?

That...that buffoon? - Belly Politics

That imbecile...that...that...oh why?

This way and that way

Shake a hand here, shake a leg there,

Mazi Ego Juru N' Akpa, he might win

Or Alhaji Burukutu - Impossible!

The man can hardly speak - Belly Politics!

How can? No

This way and that way

Shake a hand here, shake a leg there

Alhaji Burukutu, he might win?

But -kai!

Belly Politics is a strange thing

It raises our buttocks to the eyes of a laughing world

So long as those are rich, fleshy buttocks, well-oiled and  
tender

Who cares?

I do (20-51).

The poem's turning point is the question "then who will win?". The answer introduces the true victors in this system which are: Alhaji Kudi, "the illiterate?", Mazi Ego Juru N' Akpa "that...that buffoon? "that imbecile" Alhaji Burukutu "the man can hardly speak". These are the flawed policies; they are presented as fundamentally unqualified incompetent individuals. The poem concludes in a

shift from observation to consequence and personal response. "It raises our buttocks to the eyes of a laughing world" lines 47. It is one of the most striking images in the poem. "Belly Politics" is not just an internal failure; it is a national humiliation. The poem's power lies not just in its brutal honesty but in its final, defiant turn, a personal refusal to accept this reality, serving as a rallying point for all who similarly care enough to demand a politics that nourishes the mind and soul of the nation, not just the belly. Dike Chukwumerije's "Fix the Politics" is a direct piece of advocacy that moves beyond diagnosing Nigeria's problems to prescribing a singular, foundational solution. The poem starts with the poet calling his audience to listen, there by getting their attention (this action is peculiar to Chukwumerije).

Listen

A broken road does not understand Igbo

It will not maim the Fulani and let the rest of us go

The accident it causes will take all lives

But when a vehicle somersault it breaks all bones,

So you can speak Nupe till morning comes

It will not build libraries in our public schools

And when a woman, a young woman lies dying in childbirth

Your fluency in Ijaw will not save her life,  
 When you are been driven around in an ambulance  
 From hospital to hospital in search of oxygen  
 Northerner or southerner, you will die suffocating (1-11).

Lines 1-11 provides an imagery of a dysfunctional society a nation which does not spare anyone despite their tribe, religion, or region but unifies everyone in crisis. The stanza highlights lack of good infrastructures that everyone has to go through together not minding the origin of the individual. Infrastructures like: good roads in public schools, insufficient equipments to save lives.

No matter the passion you bring to your start up  
 Government can kill it with just one pronouncement  
 And no degree you hold, no grammar you speak  
 No decision you make to just face your work  
 No protest you stage can save you  
 From those elected to make and enforce our laws,  
 The way they see things is a wall around you  
 You cannot drive faster than the person driving you  
 No matter your wealth, education or achievements  
 You are subject to the mentality of the people in government,

Politicians in power hold the yam and the knife  
For to elect is to give the elected power over life,  
Which child will remain Almajiri  
Or grow up to become someone better  
This things are in the hands of people in power,  
Politicians in power hold the farm and the seed  
For to elect is to give the elected power to decide  
Whether security operatives can murder citizens  
And work away free,  
This things are in the hands  
Of those who run the country (34-54).

This is a classic Nigerian proverb. The "yam" represents the resources, the economy, the national wealth and the means of survivor. The "knife" represents the power of distribution. The person who holds both the "yam" and the "knife" has absolute control. They decide who gets a piece of the yam, how big the piece is, and whether anyone will get any at all. In political terms, this means the government control the national treasury, public funds, contracts, public projects and economic policies. They have the power to both provide for and deprive the populace. The farm extends the agricultural imagery and metaphor. The "farm" is

the entire nation, its land, its system, its potential. This seed is even more fundamental; it represents the source of future growth opportunity and life itself. A child becoming a beggar or a great individual is also depending on the government. Chukwumerije's response to all these crisis is "Fix the Politics". Only when people with committed hearts get into position, then can there be national progress and Nigeria can finally find its footing globally.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken an exploration of the performance poetry of Dike Chukwumerije, firmly establishing it as a significant medium for economic, social, and environmental resistance and also for cultural and political advocacy in contemporary Nigeria. Through a detailed analysis of selected poems such as "The Roads Are Broken", "Okwesilieze," "The Beautiful Ones Are Born", "Development Is", "The Wall and The Bridge," "The Revolution Has No Tribe", "We Are One Nation", "Belly Politics" and "Fix The Politics," the study has demonstrated that Chukwumerije's art is far more than entertainment; it is a deliberate and sophisticated tool for civic engagement. His use of metaphors, figurative language and style along with how it resonates with the postcolonial theory and marxist theory are also examined in this essay. The study successfully revealed a clear dichotomy in his work which resulted to some findings. As a medium of resistance, his poetry serves as a vocal opposition to systemic failures. It resists: economic injustice, by exposing a "political economy of greed" where public office is a means for personal enrichment at the public's expense. Social neglect, by framing infrastructural decay, symbolized by broken roads, as an active form of violence that breaks the spirit and body of the citizenry.

Environmental exploitation, by using powerful allegory to link the physical pollution of the Niger Delta to the moral pollution of the nation's leadership, warning of a mutual ruin. According to M.H. Abrams, "Allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the 'literal', or primary, level of signification, and the same time to communicate a second, correlated order of signification" (7). Secondly, he advocates for: Cultural equality, by arguing that national unity is an internal, psychological project, urging Nigerians to tear down the "walls" of prejudice in their minds and consciously choose to build "bridges" of understanding, ultimately forging a new, inclusive "Nigerian tribe". Good governance, by directly challenging citizens to transition from passive complainants to active problem-solvers, with the mantra "Fix the Politics". He provides a compelling call to resist what is wrong and to tirelessly advocate for what is right, providing both the mirror to see Nigeria's flaws and the map to guide it toward a more unified, just, and prosperous future. Based on the insights from Chukwumerije's poetry three recommendations are proposed: The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with cultural bodies, should formally integrate performance poetry and other art forms into civic education from primary to tertiary levels. Secondly, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and

media houses should move beyond merely highlighting problems. They should actively curate and amplify the visionary narratives found in art like Chukwumerije's. This means creating platforms for artists and thinkers who resist oppressing social norms and advocate for solutions. Furthermore, more Nigerian indigenous words and proverbs should be incorporated into performance poetry and other arts of poetry and literature as a whole (like the example of the Nigerian proverb of the "yam and the knife", and "the farm and the seed" used in Chukwumerije's "Fix The Politics"; to promote a deeper understanding of the Nigerian cultural traditions in works of literature and other fields of study (both written and oral), in order to preserve them in the minds of generations to come amidst the rapid evolution of the digital world.

### Works Cited

- Abrams, M.H, and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012. Print.
- Ajakaiye, Pamela O. "Staging the Word: Performance Poetry and New Orality in the Works of Dike Chukwumerije." *New Directions in Nigerian Literature and Criticism*, edited by M. O. Awodiya, Kraft Books, 2019, pp. 127-142.
- Azim, Firdous. "Postcolonial Theory." *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, vol. 9, edited by Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris, Cambridge UP, 2001, pp. 235-250.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Carlson, Marvin. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2004.
- Carlson Marvin. *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*. University of Michigan Press, 2001.
- Chukwumerije, Dike, "Development Is". Nigerian Economic Summit 23. Kemi Wilson. <https://youtu.be/t3OpynIxxS0?si=TvqvFTrN7NjE2ZFU>. 10:48. Accessed 16 April 2025.

Chukwumerije, Dike, "Fix The Politics". Performed by Karo Enajemo.

<https://youtu.be/rPvD1m87S0U?si=PD4tTZ0BPGaAd195>. 4:33.

Accessed 16 April 2025.

Chukwumerije, Dike, "The Wall and The Bridge". Produced by Ajifa Atuluku.

<https://youtu.be/dPwZutAiSi0?si=v8gKsyB4HXclb--0>. 3:18. Accessed 16

April 2025.

---. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." *The Drama Review*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2002, pp. 145-156.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington, Grove Press, 1963.

Gaventa, John, "Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis". *IDS Bulletin*, 2006, 37 (6), 23-23. (26).

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books, 1959.

Gugelberger, Georg M. "Postcolonial Cultural Studies—1. Origins to the 1980s." *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Groden et al., Johns Hopkins UP, 2005, pp. 756-761.

Habib, M. A. R. *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present*. Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Hale, Thomas A. *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*. Indiana UP, 1998.

Karin, Wilkins, G. *The Handbook of Development Communication and Social Change: A Power Analysis*. Chichester UK: John Wiley and Sons, 2014. p. 432.

Level, Mark E. "From Page to Stage and Back Again: The Tension in Performance Poetry." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2008, pp. 301-315.

Oku, Charles A. "Performing the Nation: History and Identity in Dike Chukwumerije's *Made in Nigeria*." *Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2021, pp. 55-70.

"Okwesilieze". Biringkpa.

<https://youtu.be/XGplZfNVbxw?si=DzKKjwlzXnX5JhPL>. 13:7. Accessed 17 April 2025.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, 1994.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 25th anniversary ed., Vintage Books, 1994.

Said, Edward W. *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*. Vintage Books, 1996.

Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2013.

Somers-Willett, Susan B. A. *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and the Performance of Popular Verse in America*. U of Michigan P, 2009.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Harvard UP, 1999.

---. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, Routledge, 1987, pp. 197-221.

"The Beautiful Ones Are Born: Poems by Dike Chukwumerije". *African Writer.Com*, <https://www.africanwriter.com>. February 23, 2007. Accessed 14 April 2025.

The Modern Language Association of America, New York. *MLA Handbook*. 2016. 8th Ed.

"The Revolution Has No Tribe". Iyke, Linus, Chinaka. <https://youtu.be/F-AAzjiBk1A?si=Wo52zNFqCL2b8mTa>. 3:7. Accessed 17 April 2025.

"The Revolution Has No Tribe: Poems by Dike Chukwumerije". *African Writer.Com*, <https://www.africanwriter.com>. February 19, 2007. Accessed 14 April 2025.

Vincent, Oluwatoyin B. "Poetry as Insurgency: The Nigerian Tradition of Resistance Verse" *Ibadan Journal of English Studies*, vol. 2, 2015, pp. 105-120.