

**MARXIST LITERARY CRITICISM OF ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN NIYI
OSUNDARE *SONG'S OF THE SEASON* AND KOLA EKE'S *MAY 27 AND OTHER
POEMS*.**

BY

**Marvellous Elo- Oghene IKECHUKWU (MISS)
ART2100234**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE
FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY**

NOVEMBER 2025

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LITERATURE, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN
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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study was carried out by Elo Oghene Marvellous IKECHUKWU in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

Dr. A. I. Egbah
(Project Supervisor)

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project work to God Almighty for giving me the wisdom and understanding needed to complete this project.

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ABSTRACT.

This study examines the theme of poverty, unemployment, and exploitation as an economic challenge facing the current Nigerian state, as represented in Niyi Osundare's "*Songs of the Season*" and Kola Eke's "*May 27*". The poets proffer solutions from their perspective. The findings reveal how Kola Eke and Osundare use everyday language, incorporating literary devices to convey the situation of poverty affecting the masses, the extent of inequality leading to exploitation, and the devastating effects of unemployment on citizens. This was viewed through marxist literary theory, which depicts a society where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, a reality currently captured in the Nigerian context. The findings challenge the idea that poverty is a result of laziness; instead, they highlight poverty as a tool used by the ruling class to weaken workers. The poets call for a revolution, emphasizing the need for equitable distribution of resources to eradicate poverty, unemployment, and exploitation.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the themes of poverty, unemployment and exploitation in Niyi Osundare *'Songs of the Season'* and Kola Eke's *'May 27 ' and other poems* in order to inspire change and tackle Nigeria's socio-economic challenges, including inflation, recession, and hardship. Specifically, the objective of this study is to explore the extent of economic deprivation of the masses, high rate of joblessness and social injustice experienced by the majority of masses in Nigeria and to proffer actionable steps to change the negative norms.

1.2 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on selected Nigerian poems that conveys the themes of economic challenges as represented in Niyi Osundares *'Songs of the Season'* and Kola Eke *'May 27'* and other poems. The poems were chosen for their portrayal of the current states of individuals and nation battling with significant challenges that involves hardship, joblessness and inflation that requires urgent attention. Specific instances in the poem highlights these issues and potential solutions can be explored through the poets perspective which offers valuable insight to encourage positive change within the Nigeria context. Niyi Osundare is a Nigerian poet whose works, like *'Songs of the Market place'*, *'Village Voices'*, and *'A Nib in the Pond'*, focuses on major issues of poverty, corruption,

moral degradation, social justice and inequalities. Osundare's poems serves as a powerful voice for the masses, raising global awareness about the realities and struggle within the country. On the other hand, Kola Eke has penned notable poetic works such as '*October 1960' and other poems*, '*Covid 19' and other poems*, '*June 12' and other poems* and is a globally acclaimed scholar.

1.3 Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research approach. Qualitative Research is a naturalistic interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meaning which people attach to a phenomena (actions, decisions, belief, value e.t.c) within their social world (Ritchie and Lewis,3). Five collections were carefully subjected to thorough examination to gain understanding of the subject matter. Following a detailed evaluation, two collections; "*Songs of the Season*" obtained as a digital PDF and printed copy , and "*May 27 and other poems*" purchased as a hardcopy from kenjohn's bookshop were chosen for effectively bringing to light the current challenges faced by Nigerian mass population, viewed through the lens of Marxist literary theory, which exposes a society marked by class division where the upper class controls societal affairs and wallows in riches while the lower class bears the burden of labour and suffers oppression at the hand of the ruling class.

The poems within this collections particularly '*Not for the poor*', '*Songs of the jobless graduate*' '*Songs of the street-sweeper*' and '*Retrenched*' from '*Songs of the*

Season’ and *‘Face-me I Face –you’ ‘Hawkers’*, and *‘Poor civil Servants’*, from *‘May 27 and other poems*, were analysed in depth, with annotation and extraction of relevant excerpt incorporating secondary materials such as online papers and dictionaries for contextual interpretation and understanding, in order to explain the themes of poverty, unemployment and exploitation facing the current Nigeria state.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This research employs the Marxist Literary theory as a Model for understanding economic challenges in the poems featured in Niyi Osundare and Kola Eke's recommended poetry collections. Marxist Literary theory is a loose collection of ideas and methodologies that uses marxist ideology as a perspective to mirror, analyse and understand a literary text, (183). Marxist literary theory manifest itself in its literally criticism based on the 'Historical Materialism' developed by a philosopher and economist Karl Marx. Historical Materialism is that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all historical events in the economic development of a society, in the change in the mood of production and exchange in the consequent division of the society into distinct classes and in the struggle of this class against one another (25).

According to Terry Eagleton, Marxist criticism is not merely a sociology of literature concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Marxist literary criticism probes beneath the surface level of literature,

examining how class struggle and economic forces are embedded in literary works. It analyses how societal influences shape literary styles, forms and meaning, and how literature reflects and fosters societal change (2).

Marxist Literary theory originated from the foundational texts of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, particularly their analysis of ideology, base structure relations and class struggle which later aid the application of Marxist thought to literature and culture (116). In literary criticism, Marxist perspectives are reflected in the works of Charles Bressler who outlined key concepts of Marxism, including:

1. Class Struggle; This is the conflict between two social classes in the society, particularly bourgeoisie (higher class), who control the capital and means of production, and the proletariat (lower class), in charge of labour production. He describes it as the engine of historical change, where the bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat through ownership of means of production (184).
2. Economic base and Cultural Superstructure; The base represents the economic system and material condition, which influences the superstructure including literature, is shaped and influenced by the base (186).
3. Alienation; Alienation a concept developed by a Marxist philosopher, refers to the process by which capitalism disconnects individuals from their labour, workers become commodified "cogs" in the production machine stripping them of their humanities (187).

4. Ideology; This refers to a system of ideas, beliefs and value that shape how people understand and interact in the society, in the case of Marxist literary criticism, it examines how dominant ideologies in society serves to legitimize the interest of the ruling class, often at the expense of the marginalized class and groups (189).

Furthermore, George Lukas expands Marxist literary criticism asserting that literature reveals social and historical reality and that literary characters can embody ‘problematic consciousness’ where individuals grapple with complex thoughts and emotions i.e the struggle of the proletariat, resulting into self- awareness and consciousness ultimately leading to societal change (83). Meanwhile, Leon Trotsky added that culture emerges naturally from experiences of the masses rather than being dictated by the state, that is, culture should be connected to the past while looking forward to the future. Literature should reflect the voices, struggle and realities of the masses (3).

In contemporary times, Fredric Jameson has looked at Marxist literary theory as a basic requirement for literary interpretation, subsuming it in the realm of historicism. This means that a literary text should be understood and interpreted in terms of how it came to existence, relationship with society and how the immediate historical context and socio-cultural norms work together to bring about a deeper understanding and interpretation of a literary work (98).

Ideavor Bello takes this further in his work by saying ‘Literature should serves as a means to raise the people’s consciousness the working people that is, to their place in the society, exposing the rottenness of the land (6). This Marxist dimension of literature shows that Marxism is not a lone ranger but it’s an inter-play between literature and societal values.

The application of Marxist literary theory to this research will facilitates an examination of class struggle in society depicted in two poetry collections, allowing for a distinctive understanding of the socio-economic dynamics that perpetuate inequality, hardship and oppression.

In conclusion, this demonstrates that literature is not just about mentioning class struggle or societal violence against the poor masses but about the rich and complex representation of class struggle, and societal violence in its characters, plots and themes.

1.5 Review of Related Literature.

Niyi Osundare and Kola Eke’s poetry have received critical scholarly reviews over the years, especially within the theme of Marxist ideology. Christopher Anyokwu works looks at how foundational background and structure shape Niyi Osundare poetry, through the Marxist literary model. His findings highlights that Osundare poetry incorporate his unique ability to blend Yoruba cultural heritage with Marxist ideology (2).

Effiok Bassey Uwatt asserts in her work that, ‘writers have always been struggling side by side with nationalist or pan Africanist against colonialisation, slavery, tyranny, cultural aberration, psychology and disorientation’. Using the Marxist literary theory, Uwatt posits that Osundare poetry reflects the multifaceted struggle, encompassing human, spiritual, religion and environmental dimension as he takes side with the common people in the society. Uwatt findings indicates that Osundare is a radical poet who writes with the intent of driving societal change(1).

Oloko Multameed Jamiudeen, examines Osundares poetry using Halliday’s theoretical grammatical metaphor which looks at meaning in terms of idealization and impersonalization within the framework of systemic functional linguistics (SFL). His findings reveal that Osundares poetry deploys English as a foreign language to convey Africa indigenous world view and perspective to the global audience (8). Ideavor Bello takes this further by employing the Marxist literary theory in showing how Osundares poetry performs the town crier unction, serving as a voice that alerts both the readers and the public to crucial issues in the society. Bello’s findings reveals that Osundares poetry not only informs society about developments, but critiques the negative actions of the leaders, cautioning against misdeeds while rallying the masses to take actions against oppressive leadership(2).

Elizabeth N. E nukora uses an eco-critical literary discourse in the examination of how Osundares poetry critique Nigerian leaders for their corrupt practices which

impacts negatively on the people, their psychic and the environment, highlighting Osundare's pursuit for justice, equity and fairness by exposing the contradictions in contemporary Nigerian society (53-54).

Okachukwu Onuah Wosu, adopts a sociological theoretical approach as a model for understanding how Osundare's poetry challenges and resolves the societal issues emerging from the harsh reality of governance and politics that perpetuate suffering among the masses (165). Moreover, Esther Iria Jamgbadi posits how Kola Eke leverages myths to explain and critic pressing socio-political issues that also promote social control, articulates societal reforms and advocates for accountability (44).

Ijeoma Susan Ilechukwu uses the new historicist approach to portray how Kola Eke exposes corruption, particularly within Nigeria's civil service, electoral commission and broader political leadership and also his means of suggesting solutions to mitigate these societal issues through his unique artistic language (239). Despite their varied approaches, most of these reviews relate to this work. These reviews collectively highlight how Niyi Osundare and Kola Eke's works mirror contemporary societal challenges, with the fusion of local dialects which represent Nigeria's context, and English to expose societal issues affecting the masses.

Considering the existing reviews, this study stands out because none have addressed the identification of challenges such as poverty, unemployment and exploitation,

proposed solution to liberate the masses, there by revealing an important gap and distinguishing itself from preceding reviews.

1.6 Thesis Statement

Niyi Osundare '*Songs of the Season*' and Kola Eke '*May 27*' and other poems explore poverty, unemployment and exploitation as significant challenges facing Nigerians and the viable solutions to mitigate these issues.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 POVERTY

In Nigeria, inequality is a manifestation of widespread poverty among the masses, characterised by limited access to basic amenities like education healthcare and economic opportunities. Meanwhile, small elite controls the nation vast resource perpetuating a system where poverty is inevitable. Various scholars have offered diverse definitions of poverty, Mike I. Obadan definition provides a useful framework. Specifically, Obadan defines poverty as ‘multi-dimensional; it is characterised by a lack of purchasing power, exposure to risk, malnutrition, high mortality rate, low life expectancy, insufficient access to social and economic services (623). Additionally, R. Egwea perspective complements this view, suggesting that ‘poverty centers on lack of access to resources or in ability to meets ones need’ (38). Under the topic of poverty, two key points will be discussed in order to examine the widespread deprivation of essential resources among the masses and the dehumanizing effects on individuals, showing how these issues perpetuate social inequalities and yields severe consequences in a class based society.

2.1 Economic Deprivation

Economic Deprivation is the lack of sufficient income, assets and resources to meet fundamental needs and maintain a minimum standard of living. It can be experienced at an individual or household level and its a form of social and economic hardship. Deprivation can be defined as a state of observation and demostrable disadvantage

relative to the local community or the wider society to which an individual, family or groups of people belongs (Towsend, 31). These deprivation results in wide range of negative outcomes such as lower educational attainment social exclusion and alienation. In Kola Eke's collection the poem "*Hawkers*" conveys the devastating impact of economic deprivation on education, highlighting how financial struggle can hinder access to continued and higher education ultimately leading to school drop out affecting individuals socioeconomic prospects.

Hawkers battling to
 Make ends meet
 Little by little a
 Birds builds its nest
 Secondary school leavers
 Hawking corn
 Primary school leavers
 Hawking groundnut. (*May 27 ,49*).

Through the marxist Literary view, this extract ironically juxtaposes the potential for better opportunities with the harsh reality of economic hardship faced by both secondary school leavers and primary school leavers. It exposes the struggles faced by individuals deprived of economic opportunities. The poor in society are forced to drop out and resort to menial labour like "hawking" just to survive. Meanwhile, the wealthy continues to thrive, accumulate riches, and the masses struggle to " meet ends meet ".

In summary the masses are deprived privileges to access good education and a better life due to systemic inequality and this can be addressed if there is equitable access to education and a fair distribution of resources in society.

On the other hand, Niyi Osundare reveals the plight of the deprived masses in "*not for the poor*", individuals who suffers from social exclusion and marginalization in a class based society.

(To the tune of:

Bamubamu la yo

Bamubamu la yo

Awa o mo p'bei npomo enikankan

Bamubamu la yo)

In the world this is the only country

Where air is free for every breath

The beggar, the tramp, may gorge themselves

Without a kobo to the national purse

Hence our sleep, hence our sloth

Hence a nation perpetually broke

So, tax the air, rate the breath

The poor may die if they so desire

Who says we suffer shortages of graves, (*Songs of the Season (10)*).

Niyi Osundare a leading voice in contemporary African poet is celebrated for his commitment to social justice, drawing on Yoruba oral traditions to critique systemic inequalities in post colonial Nigeria. "*Not for the poor*" satirizes the ruling elite callous indifference to the suffering masses, using a performative structure inspired by Yoruba song of abuse (Ajagbo). Through the Marxist literary view the poem exposes class disparity where the rich exploits the poor while maintaining dominance through commodified culture and resources control.

The poem begins with the tune of "Bamubamu la yo " examining its thematic and symbolic roles while incorporating literary devices like metaphor and code switching to reveal the dialectics of oppression and social exclusion and marginalization of the poor masses. The poem opens with a Yoruba incantatory tone, "Bamubamu la yo " evoking the resonant beat of the Apala drum which is being translated as " we are contented, we are absolutely contented, what business of ours if anyone is starving, we are absolutely contented". Marxistically, this tune embodies false consciousness, where the masses contentiously derives from surplus value extracted from the poor labour oil wealth, agriculture and others, yet dismisses their starvation, echoing commodification where masses suffering is neglected. The drum rhythm traditionality unbiased is co - opted as a tool of exclusion of the poor, alienating them from communal enjoyment and provoking dialectal awareness.

In subsequent lines(in English) Osundare uses hyperbole and sarcasm amplifying the elites logic, proposing to " tax the air " commodifying lives essentials, turning breath into rich privileges . The metaphor in " gorge themselves' ironically equates the poors survival to gluttony, while" shortage of graves" personifies death as a surplus resources , highlighting expendability . The refrain " not for the poor " repeated boster like, functions as anaphora a hammering ideological barrier and fostering alienation to stir revolutionary sentiment. Also, from the marxist perspective, the elite " sleep and " sloth" reveal parasitic capitalism, where the rulling class swims in luxuries and privileges while preying on the poor even when they are starving to death. The contrast of Free " air" against tax necessities exposes objectification of humans which becomes marketable, alienating the poor from existence itself.

2.2 Alienation and Dehumanisation.

In this situation, an individual is seperated from the product of their labour, the process of production, their own human potentials and their fellow workers often due to their state of powerlessness in the capitalist society. On the other vein, dehumanization is the process of treating people as objects, stripping them of their inherent dignity and humanity. These theme is represented in Niyi Osundare collection, the poem "*Retrenched*".

Once I had a job in hand

Menial though, I stuck to it

It put no beef in the cooking pot
But I shamed my hunger with Oku Eko
I worked and worked as a factory hand
I worked till my hands were rough like granite
At thirty and five I look like sixty
My frame is crouched like a bended bow
I worked and worked for a grateful boss
Who used me just the way the way he liked
And raised my wages once a dozen years
I worked and worked then the dizzying news
The nation is broke and factories fail
The boss is licensed to suck and sack
And that is how i lost my job
Who weilds the knife and who the lamb
Whose blood must flow like august rain
To wet the the root of the desert greed
Of those who think they own the earth
And so I lost my job
In a plant I served with youth and strength
I know no trade besides the one
That sapped my life for twenty years. (*Songs of the Season ,19*)

Alienation in "*Retrenched*" emerges as the workers separation from social foundation, turning a once integrated life into a one of solitude and disconnection. To begin with, the speaker is cut off from society. " And so I lost my job, in a plant I've served with youth and strength". The factory represents his community , now he is outside it, illustrating his separation. The line " who weilds the knife and who the lamb" utilizes metaphor to reveal the speakes helpless state as the animal,the bosses butcher, rendering him powerless, no control, no voice and no place. The individual also suffers from inner alienation. The worker ages fast ," at thirty I looked sixty, my frame crouched like a bended bow" these makes use of simile to compare his body to a broken bow, bent, useless, ready to snap that is, his body betrays him such that he no longer recognizes himself. Moreover, there is the loss of work identity , the poem opens with pride where the worker claims ownership of a job that can atleast provide food for him. " It puts no beef in the cooking pot, but I shamed my hunger with Oku Eko". The imagery of food shows that the job gives dignity " Oku Eko" (corn meal pap), is cheap yet he ate it without complain. The job was his place in the world, after "*Retrenchment*" he says; " I know no trade besides the one that sapped my life for twenty years". The repetition of " I worked and worked "emphasizes loyalty, now that loyalty leaves him, he become empty. The job was the workers only skill, loosing it erases him.

Dehumanization is also reflected in three major aspects in the poem. Firstly the worker is being used like a machine, "I worked and worked like a factory hand", "I worked till my hands were rough like granite ". Osundare uses simile to explain how the

worker is being used as a factory hand, implying that he is a tool and his hands become very hard as granite. It exposes how the boss uses him the way he pleases, an act of treating a man like an object. Secondly, the worker is thrown like trash." The nation is broke and factory fails", " the boss is licensed to suck and sack" . This reveals the wasteful effort of the worker who renders service with his youth and strength to his boss for good " thirty years" but with the word "suck and sack " an alliteration that sounds cruel and fast like a whip, he is discarded by his boss. The poet also uses irony to point out that " the nation " says its broke but the bosses still get rich, " the workers blood must flow like august rain to feed the " desert greed" of their boss, a metaphor that turns suffering into water for the rich. Furthermore, the worker is reduced to a number, the poem never gives the worker a name, he is only "I" and later on, the "I" is erased. He is a "lamb" , a "hand" . This strips him totally from his individuality as he is not regarded as a person.

2.3 Summary

In "*Retrenched*" Osundare uses everyday language to show Alienation and Dehumanization negatively impacts an individual, the act of cutting them off from their work, pride and people leaves them frustrated. The use of Literary devices like simile, metaphor and repetition makes the pain real and evident. Osundare stands as a voice for the poor, turning silence into a weapon against bad rulers. The final image " blood

watery" " desert greed" remains a warning that when workers are Retrenched, society itself bleeds.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 UNEMPLOYMENT

In Nigeria, unemployment poses a significant challenge as both the literate and illiterate engage in a cutthroat competition for menial jobs that can hardly sustain them and their families. This can be due to corruption of leaders, colonial legacies economic mismanagement and global inequalities. Unemployment is not just about the global statistics, it's a harsh reality that leads to desperation, forces people to migrate, fuels crimes and ignites resistance.

3.1 Consequences of Unemployment

Unemployment can be defined as a state of being unable to sell ones labour service despite willing to do so at the going wage rate (Pigou, 252). It's a state whereby abled bodied individuals are willing and available to work but cannot find job. This study covers the devastating consequences of unemployment as depicted in the recommended collections.

"Songs of the Jobless graduate".

I have been through the jungle of books

Wrestled down the spine of muscular tomes
 I've battled nights with a column of letters
 Limping into a dawn of blood shot eyes
 Now out at last with " the golden fleece"
 "B.A. Hons" in glittering scrolls
 Hood and gown like masquerade
 But where the jobs to show for these?
 Where the job,oh where the job?
 Bosses are brutal with their nagging " NO!"
 Everywhere the gates are latched and locked
 With grating keys and retrenchment chain
 My soles are sore my tummy flat
 They say there are jobs for those who wants
 With a B.Sc. in your cute left hand
 Scrounge the binfor delicious crumbs. (*Songs of the Season*, 11-12).

A class based society created a system where workers are exploited by their bosses and owners. Education promises upward mobility, but in reality unemployed graduates roam the street despirate for jobs while the rich stay in power.This makes people feel worthless and disconnected from their labour. Osundares poem shows how hard study yields no job, only suffering under a brutal economy with the use of Literary devices like metaphor " jungle books" and "muscular tomes" portraying books like a

strong beast like enemy. The use of imagery " Blood spot eyes" a picture of exhaustion from sleepless nights. The graduate works like a poor soldier in the " jungle " of capitalist education, sacrificing health for a degree but all becomes false consciousness, just when the thought of being free from Exploitative System due to educational attainment the reverse is the case. The young graduate physically breaks down (sleepless nights,bloody eyes) reflects early poverty leading to hopelessness and health ruins. The graduate gets empty rewards for his sacrifice " Now at least a golden fleece" B.Ahons in glittering strolls " hoods and gowns are like masquerade. The poets uses metaphor of " golden fleece (priceless treasures) won through heroic struggles to reveal the irony of just a useless degree. This simile " hood and gown like a masquerade compares graduate robe to fake traditional costumes showing meaninglessness, and "glittering strolls " which sounds proud, but just a hollow pomp. The degree is the bourgeoisie prize that tricks workers into believing that hardwork leads to success but in reality, the rulling class reserves jobs for rich elite, creating surplus labour. This has a negative impact on the emotions of the helpless poor graduates, what they pride in becomes their shame. " The masquerade" hides the lies, leaving the graduate alienated with no real power or income to survive. The line " But where is the job to show for these? Where the job oh where the job," reveals the cry of the despirate graduates an emphasis that forces the reader to feel the frustration and hopelessness . This is the voice of the poor masses who voices out against the system for over production of educated workers to keep wages low, a share of wide spread suffering, an evidence of mental hardship, turning a graduate into a beggar in

their own society , isolating them. Also, the line "the bosses are brutal with their nagging" No! , everywhere the gates are latched and locked, with grating keys and retrenchment chain " uses personification to explain the cruelty and beast like nature of the bosses who reject these graduates and push them off to suffering, the gate latched and locked, with grating keys shows the harsh working conditions and retrenchment chain" serves as discipline and sacking of workers while the gate symbolises class barrier. The masses in need of jobs are totally excluded from the common wealth and they are trapped in the pond of poverty. " the chains" shows how unemployment enslaves the Jobless causing hunger amidst powerlessness.

Osundare uses metaphor, irony and imagery to expose capitalist cruelty that education builds hope but unemployment renders poor, revealing the graduate struggles from heroic " wrestler" to bin scavenger in a class based society. It is correct to say that poverty is not laziness, it is the weapon the ruling class keep to weaken workers and thus the poem calls for revolution.

In Eke's collection, *"Face- me I face you"* reveals the impact of unemployment on individuals.

Face me I face you houses

Abattior of the

Poor and down trodden

Face me i face you houses

Poverty of parents
inherited by children
Face me i face you houses
None is certain
About the next food
Face me i face you huts
Where privacy is banished
Face me I face you rooms
Babel of hoodlums.
A short distance away
We hear voices of the poor
Those besmeared with dirt
Voices calling on policy makers to
Bestride the environment
With low cost of housing (*May 27, 52*)

This extract exposes how capitalism keeps the poor trapped in slums so the rich can stay rich. These face me I face you houses (cheap, crowded rooms in Nigeria where families stares at each other across a yard) are prison built by poverty. Face me I face you houses repeated about four times in the extract is like a sad protest chant. The buildings are long, dirty and with many tiny rooms. Toilet, kitchen, yard are shared. However the rich own lands and houses the poor pays high rent for tiny uncomfortable space where

there is no privacy or dignity and due to unemployment these individuals are left with no rent money, exposing them to insecurity. "Abattoir of the poor and down trodden" is a metaphor that compares the living conditions/ housing to that of a slaughter house for animals. The house kills the poor slowly. The society treats the poor workers like meat for the slaughter house no job, no food, no medicine, no future. Children are affected as they grow up weak, sick or dead. "Poverty of parents inherited by children" this reflects severe starvation, a no escape situation. The rich in the society perpetuate a mindset of work hard and succeed but in the contrary it's not so, these results as hunger passes down like a disease, kids go to bed hungry, no school, picturing the unemployed future ahead. "None is certain about the next food"

These films show the tension of individuals who may end up with empty stomach as a result of uncertainty of the capitalist society. When there is no employment, food becomes a gamble leading to a devastating impact of hunger, people decide to steal food or beg, insecurities, parents end up exchanging blows (fight), kids cry and sleep become mission impossible. The head of the family is paralyzed in shame of not being able to feed his family. "Face me I face you babels of hoodlums" uses biblical allusion referring to tower of Babel comparing it to noisy and chaotic. The rooms are crowded with young angry youth which paves way for crime rising, exposing a state of no jobs, idle hands, sets of frustrated humans and they may likely delve into theft, drugs and gangs of terrorists not because they are bad but because the system starves them. "A short distance away, we hear the voices of the poor, those besmeared in dirt" is an image that reveals the

shame and dirt of the poor who lives near the rich areas but are ignored by the elites and exposed to insecurities that may even lead to death. Finally, "voices calling on policy makers to bestride the environment with low cost of housing" this explains how the poor begs the rich leaders to build cheap houses for them, which reveal the contrast between how politicians promises houses but builds malls instead, hopes dies the poor keeps voicing no one listens.

In summary, the masses are exposed to hunger, shame and stress, crime and violence as a result of unemployment a challenge that voices for a release till date in the Nigeria context.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 EXPLOITATION

In a society where class struggles exist there is bound to be exploitation, whereby the ruling class (bourgeoisie) exploits the masses (proletariat), taking an unfair advantage of them for personal gains. Karl Marx defines exploitation as a situation where the workers exchange labour power to capitalist for wages however workers are exclusively compensated for their time and not for the value they produce (3). Similarly, Nicholas Vrousalis echoing in this idea, defines exploitation as a form of domination exercised for the purpose of material or social gains (6). These exploitation can show face in various forms; Socio Economic exploitation, personal exploitation, structural exploitation and others. However, this subject will be divided into social economic exploitation and personal exploitation which will be explained respectively.

4.1. Socio Economic Exploitation.

This is a situation whereby the rich elite's in the society unfairly uses the poor labours or resources for their own gain, driven by imbalance of power in a class based

society. Eric Williams defines Socio Economic Exploitation as the systematic use of social power (e.g race, class or legal status) to extract economic value from one group for the benefit of another typically through forced or unpaid labour, unequal trade or resource control (19). These is illustrated in the recommended collection, *May 27 and other poem* and *Songs of the Season*, respectively.

"Poor Civil Servants"

In Green republic

Civil Servants

like little children born

Without normal skin colouring

Lack of pigment

In their skins

As salaries cannot stand

Cost of living

Lack of pigment in

The iris of their eyes

Due to wicked salaries

Wicked conditions of Service. (*May 27, 54*).

The poem exposes how civil servants are turned into Albinos, children born without " normal skin colouring" that protects them. Eke metaphorically compares civil

servants to Albino children who their skin and eyes are pale and fragile to low wages that strips workers of their "pigment" (money) needed to shield them from hunger, disease and shame. The ruling class (government, capitalist) extract surplus value from the civil servants which includes teachers, nurses, and then leaves them with poor starvation wages. The workers are drained, their body and soul turns ghost white. They are exploited to the fullest. "Salaries can not stand the Cost of living" reveals how workers are paid below their labour cost in so much that they can not buy food, pay rent or even buy medicine for their personal health concerns. This absolute impoverishment forces families to sell more hours, send children to hawk or borrow at killer rate. Furthermore, the repetition of "lack of pigment" lays emphasis on the same wound, twice grinding the bone of these workers on continuous non-stop level. The use of extended metaphor "iris of their eye" explains how their eyes lose colour which represents its brightness and sparkle turning blurry due to malnutrition, stress and sleepless nights. The civil servants no longer see the future, a result from the state blinding its own workforce so they cannot see the theft. "Wicked salaries" and "wicked working conditions" is personified giving evil agency to pay slip and contracts. This underscores the working conditions which becomes a legal chain and class weapon, no sick leaves work, no pension, sudden stacking and no salary increments, leading to more labour for the same less payed civil servants, worsening the situation. "Green Republic" which was made to be promising growth and plenty, becomes an irony. The flag is green but the workers pocket are empty,

the nations wealth and resources is siphoned to ministers and ruling elites while the masses suffers from exploitation.

In conclusion, civil servants are exploited, being payed low wages that cannot purchase their basic necessities like food, clothes and rents, they suffer from cruel working conditions like long hours, no leaves, broken offices, sudden dismissal and finally the government takes full labour but gives back starvation pay leaving workers hopeless, weak and suffering without protection. This is not supposed to be, even distribution of resources will go a long way in curbing these Exploitation.

4.2 Personal Exploitation.

This is when an individual (or a group) directly takes unfair advantage of another persons labour, body, emotions, time and trust for their own gains while giving little or nothing back. It happens face to face or in close relationships and it takes form like financial Exploitation as represented in Niyi Osundare "*Songs of the Street Sweeper*".

I know a man who is graunt and grey
 He sweeps the street without a pigmy broom
 He sweeps everyday for forty years
 Till his back is bent like an ancient bow
 GRA kids and their candy wraps
 Leaves and leaves from careless kitchens
 Bulbous gobs from ailing guts

Are All for him to clear and clear
 On these states visit is life is hell
 He sweeps and scrubs and scrubs and sweeps
 The ruler eyes must veer from dirt
 Though country side is a sewerage dump
 He sweeps for forty years
 Now they say its time to go
 They put his broom in his tired bag
 To put in his coffin when he dies. (*Songs of the Season*, 15-16)

Firstly, the street sweeper experiences labour Exploitation, " He sweeps everyday for forty years" . The sweeper sells his labour power for wages but the rich extract absolutely surplus value, taking maximum hours of his time and then leaves him with minimum pay. The use of repetition " sweeps and scrubs and scrubs and sweeps" exemplifies the endless mechanical rhythm of alienated labour. Secondly, the Street Sweeper experiences body exploitation, " back is bent like an acient bow" reveals how the body of the sweeper is used until it breaks down, totally affecting his physic. The use of simile " like an acient bow" turns the spine into a weapon that becomes useless for anything but sweeping. Emotionally the Street Sweeper is consumed " on those state visit his life is hell" and he is to smile despite his suffering so that the VIPs sees spotless roads, just to protect the elites image while in his hidden inner torment. An irony is used here to express the workers emotional rage of not being paid while trying to impress the rulers.

More also, the sweepers time is being exploited " forty years now, they say its time to go" this showcases how the entire life of an adult is sold for survival wages. Each time "he sweeps " and sweeps counts stolen years. The employer waits till his body collapses, then discards the employee like a used worn-out rag, no retirement plan, just a " broom in his tired bag". Finally, the trust of the sweeper is betrayed where " they put his broom in his tired bag" to put in his coffin when he dies ". The worker trusted the system to value his loyalty of which was just a mirage. The boss pays trust with a selfish joke " a broom as a pay for a wasteful life in loyalty to him.

In summary, the street sweeper suffers Exploitation in labour, his entire life (40 years) gone for low pay, body, his back is broken to keep the street clean for his boss, emotionally he is shattered, trying to suppress that smashes him, also his time, youthfulness wasted together with trust in his job which is dashed in pieces as it could only get him a broom in his coffin when he dies. This evokes pity and raises awareness about the need to foster resilience in individuals, empowering them to stand up for their rights and refuse Exploitation.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study analysed the portrayal of poverty, unemployment and Exploitation as a significant economic issue facing Nigeria,as highlighted in Niyi Osundare "*Songs of the Season* " and Kola Eke "*May 27 and other poems*. This comparative study made use of the Marxist literary framework to examine the poets stance on economic challenges and the steps proffered to curb the situation.

The study's key findings reveal that systemic inequality is a major barrier to accessing quality education and a better life for the masses. Furthermore, the analysis shows that equitable access to education and fair distribution of resources can effectively address this issue. The poets' portrayal of unemployment and its effects on individuals is clear. Osundare's use of everyday language vividly depicts how joblessness destroys

human dignity, while Kola Eke's work highlights the exploitation of civil servants through low wages and poor working conditions. The study also finds that the poets employ literary devices like simile, metaphor, and irony to expose the capitalist system and the struggles of the poor. Osundare's voice stands as a powerful critique of the system, turning silence into a weapon against bad governance. Moreover, the analysis reveals that the masses are exposed to hunger, shame, stress, crime, violence, and hopelessness due to unemployment. This challenges the idea that poverty is a result of laziness, instead highlighting it as a tool used by the ruling class to weaken workers. Finally, the study calls for a revolution and emphasizes the need for equitable resource distribution and an end to exploitation. By addressing these systemic issues, Nigeria can take a step toward becoming an equitable society.

The significance of these study is to bring to light the economic issue suffocating the masses and amplifying their voices in their to raise awareness about the struggle of the marginalised, this research inspire individuals and communities to strive for a society where there is balance of power between the rich and the poor. The study findings underscores the need for systemic change, advocating for equitable resources distribution, improved access to quality education to break the cycle of poverty and policy reform that protect workers rights and prevent Exploitation.

The study contributed to the understanding of the detrimental impact of unemployment on individuals and society, going beyond educational boundaries. It

showcases the power of literature in raising awareness and inspiring social change as depicted in the recommended poetry collections and also reveals inequality in the Nigeria context, highlighting the need for all hands to be on deck to tackle the situation, bringing it to an end. This research in general aims to inspire change and promote a more just and equitable society.

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