

**REFLECTIONS OF POLITICAL EXPLOITATION AND RESISTANCE IN NIYI
OSUNDARE'S "THE WORD IS AN EGG" AND OKINBA LAUNKO'S "DREAM
SEEKER ON DIVINING CHAIN"**

**BY
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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,
FACULTY OF ARTS,
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BENIN CITY.**

NOVEMBER 2025.

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,
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NOVEMBER 2025.

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this study was carried out by ADISHI JUDITH OLISEWENDUM in the Department of English and Literature, University of Benin City under my supervision.

DR. IDEAVBOR BELLO

(Project Supervisor)

DATE

PROF. (MRS) H. O. OKOLOCHA

(Head of Department)

DATE

DEDICATION

This essay is dedicated, most, importantly to God Almighty, my sustainer, for His mercy, His Grace, and His beauty in life's creation. And to my parents Mr. and Mrs. Adishi for their support, love, prayers, counsel and care.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With outstretched hands with and a heart filled with gratitude, I want to thank my heavenly father, maker of heaven and earth, for being my strength, my anchor, my rock, my provider and my protector throughout this my academic journey in the University of Benin

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TABLE OF CONTENT

COVER PAGE	i
TITLE PAGE	ii
CERTIFICATION	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENT	vi
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of Study	1
Scope of study	1
Methodology	2
Background of the Poets	2
Theoretical Background	3
Review of Related Scholarships	5
Thesis Statement	7
CHAPTER TWO	8
POLITICAL EXPLOITATION	8
2.0 Introduction	8
2.1 Voices of the Oppressed	8
2.3 Silenced Truths and Censored Voices	15
2.4 Economic Hardship as a Tool of Exploitation	18
CHAPTER THREE	23

RESISTANCE AND THE QUEST FOR LIBERATION	23
3.0 Introduction	23
3.1 Poetry as a Weapon of Protest	23
3.2 The Power of Unity and Collective Struggle	27
3.3 The Role of Nature and Symbolism in Resistance	30
3.4 Dreams of Freedom and Visions of a Just Society	33
CHAPTER FOUR	38
CONCLUSION	38

ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the poetic works of Niyi Osundare in "*The Word is an Egg*" and Okinba Launko in "Dream-Seeker on Divining Chain", with a focus on their visions of freedom and justice. Grounded in Marxist theory, the research situates both poets within the socio-political contexts of oppression, inequality, and historical exploitation in African societies, highlighting how poetry functions as a tool for social critique and consciousness-raising. Osundare's work demonstrates a deliberate engagement with language as a weapon of resistance; his metaphors of the Word as fragile yet transformative, and the careful structuring of imagery and irony, reveal the mechanisms through which language challenges authoritarian power and exposes systemic injustice. Similarly, Launko's poetry combines lyrical introspection with socio-political observation, mapping the intersections of memory, collective suffering, and hope. Through his vivid portrayals of historical violence, social decay, and the persistence of human aspiration, Launko articulates a vision of a just society where freedom is both a natural right and a moral imperative.

The research foregrounds the poetic techniques employed by both writers, including metaphor, symbolism, and tonal variation, as instruments that dramatize oppression and highlight possibilities of emancipation. Close textual analysis of selected poems, including *The Word is an Egg*, Trapped Words, Ode to Anger, and Launko's Freedom Song, Petals, and A Forming Fear, demonstrates how the poets' works articulate visions of social transformation, collective memory, and moral accountability. By situating these texts within a Marxist framework, the study underscores the socio-economic and political critiques embedded in the poetry, revealing the tension between the oppressed and the structures that sustain their marginalization. Ultimately, this research presents Osundare and Launko not merely as literary figures but as cultural commentators and activists, whose poetry embodies both a critique of exploitation and a constructive vision for liberation. Their works illuminate the dynamics of power, resistance, and human aspiration, offering profound insights into the role of African poetry as a medium for social awareness, historical reflection, and the pursuit of justice.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how Niyi Osundare in “*The Word is an Egg*” and Okinba Launko in “*Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*” use poetry to reflect the problems of political exploitation and the ways people resist such oppression. Both poets come from a tradition where literature is not only for pleasure but also a tool for questioning injustice and guiding society. In many African countries, politics is often linked with corruption, abuse of power and the silencing of the common people. These poets, through their creative use of language, imagery and cultural references, give voice to the struggles of those who face exploitation in different forms. At the same time, they show how resistance can take shape in courage, unity and the demand for freedom and justice. It examines how the works of Osundare and Launko capture the deep pains of exploitation while also celebrating the courage of resistance, thereby proving that poetry is a vital force in the struggle for justice and freedom.

Scope of study

The scope of this study is limited to the works of two African poets, Niyi Osundare and Okinba Launko. It focuses on Osundare’s *The Word is an Egg* and Launko’s *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* by examining how both poets use poetry to speak about political exploitation and the spirit of resistance. This study does not cover all of their writings but narrows itself to selected poems in these collections in order to give a clearer and more detailed analysis. In essence, the scope of this study is carefully defined so that it remains focused on the two chosen collections and their treatment of political exploitation and resistance. This allows for a meaningful and balanced discussion of how Osundare and Launko use poetry as a voice for justice and change.

Methodology

The methodology of this study is based on a close reading and analysis of the selected poems from Osundare's "*The Word is an Egg*" and Launko's "*otu*". Since the study is literary in nature, it does not involve experiments or surveys but focuses on the careful examination of the poems as works of art that reflect real social and political issues. The poems are read with special attention to the themes, language, imagery and symbols that reveal the ideas of political exploitation and resistance.

This research makes use of a qualitative approach, that is, it interprets and explains the meanings found in the poems rather than dealing with numbers or statistics. The analysis is guided by the belief that poetry is not only a form of beauty but also a tool for speaking truth and challenging oppression. Also, certain secondary sources such as journals and previous scholarships are engaged.

This method makes it possible to draw meaningful conclusions about the role of poetry in reflecting and resisting political exploitation. This study remains focused and grounded in both literary and social realities through the use of textual analysis, supported with relevant secondary materials such as critical essays and books on African poetry and politics.

Background of the Poets

Niyi Osundare and Okinba Launko are two important African poets whose writings show a deep concern for society, politics and the lives of ordinary people. Their works carry not only artistic beauty but also a strong sense of social responsibility as they use poetry to question injustice and speak for those whose voices are often ignored.

Niyi Osundare is a Nigerian poet, dramatist and essayist who was born in 1947. He grew up in a rural community in Ikere-Ekiti, where he was surrounded by the rich oral traditions of Yoruba storytelling, proverbs, and songs. This background shaped his writing and made his poetry to be full of rhythm, imagery and wisdom from oral culture. Osundare studied at the University of Ibadan, then furthered his education in England and Canada, which gave him a wide literary exposure. As a committed writer, he

believes that poetry should not be for a few elite readers but should speak to ordinary people about their struggles and hopes. His works often focus on corruption, social injustice, oppression and the need for resistance. He reminds readers that words have power and poetry can challenge those in authority.

Okinba Launko, whose real name is Femi Osofisan, is also a Nigerian writer, playwright and critic. He sometimes writes poetry under the pen name Okinba Launko in order to separate it from his plays and essays. Born in 1946 in Erunwon, Ogun State, Osofisan grew up during a time of political change in Nigeria, which later influenced his strong interest in politics and justice. He studied at the University of Ibadan and later in France, where he gained more exposure to world literature and theatre. As Okinba Launko, he wrote *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*, which is a collection of poems that shows his deep concern for the political troubles of Africa and the pains of ordinary people. Like Osundare, he sees poetry as a weapon for exposing exploitation and for encouraging resistance against oppression.

Both poets share a belief that literature should not stay silent when society is in crisis. They write with passion and courage by using simple but powerful language to speak about the realities of corruption, inequality and the need for change. Their backgrounds in Nigerian culture, history and politics have shaped their writings, making them voices of truth and resistance in African literature.

Theoretical Background

Marxist theory is a way of looking at society, literature and politics through the view of class struggle and the unequal relationship between those who control wealth and those who labour for survival. The theory was founded on the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who argued that history is shaped by the conflict between the ruling class, who own resources and power, and the working class, who are often exploited. In simple terms, Marxist theory helps us to understand how power and wealth are used to oppress people and how resistance arises from those who seek freedom and equality. When applied to literature, Marxist theory sees texts as reflections of society and as tools that can either support or challenge systems of exploitation.

Several important thinkers have contributed to the meaning and development of Marxist theory over time. One of the earliest and most influential voices is Karl Marx himself. His writings, particularly *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*, which is coauthored by Friedrich Engels, laid the foundation for the understanding of class struggle,

exploitation and the misuse of power by the ruling elite. Marx showed how economic structures shape political and cultural life, and his ideas continue to guide scholars who examine injustice and inequality.

Another important figure is Friedrich Engels, who worked closely with Marx. Engels extended Marx's ideas and applied them to different areas of social life. His book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, gave a clear picture of the harsh realities of industrial society and showed how literature and culture cannot be separated from material and economic conditions. Engels also emphasised the role of ideology by showing how the ruling class controls ideas and culture to maintain power.

Later, the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci expanded Marxist thought with the idea of cultural hegemony. Gramsci argued that power is not only maintained through force but also through the control of culture, education and ideas. He believed that literature and art are important battlegrounds where the ruling class tries to shape how people think, but they can also be used by the oppressed to resist and create new ways of imagining freedom. His contributions made Marxist theory more sensitive to the power of culture and not just economics.

Another key contribution came from Georg Lukács, a Hungarian critic and philosopher. He stressed the importance of literature in reflecting social reality. Lukács believed that great works of literature should present a truthful picture of society and its struggles by helping readers to understand the conditions of their time. His ideas strengthened the link between literature and social consciousness, making Marxist criticism a powerful way of reading texts that engage with issues of oppression and resistance.

Marxist theory is highly appropriate for this research because both Niyi Osundare and Okinba Launko use their poetry to expose political exploitation and to encourage resistance. Their works are deeply

connected to the lives of ordinary people and show how leaders use power for selfish ends while the masses suffer. Marxist theory helps to explain how poetry becomes a tool of resistance, giving voice to the oppressed and criticising the ruling elite. It also highlights how literature is not neutral but participates in the struggles of society, either by supporting or by challenging systems of exploitation. In the case of Osundare and Launko, their poetry clearly stands on the side of the oppressed and uses art as a form of protest.

In essence, Marxist theory provides the right knowledge for studying political exploitation and resistance in African poetry. The contributions of Marx, Engels, Gramsci and Lukács show how the theory has developed over time, which makes it rich and useful for examining the relationship between literature and society. This study uncovers how poetry speaks against corruption and oppression while also inspiring hope, unity and resistance among the people by applying Marxist theory to the works of Osundare and Launko. In this way, Marxist criticism proves that literature is not only for beauty but also a weapon in the struggle for justice.

Review of Related Scholarships

There exists a massive scholarship on the works of Niyi and Launko, but most of these studies focus on themes such as ecology, metaphor, oral tradition and philosophical reflections, which leaves the gap for a direct and sustained exploration of political exploitation and resistance in their poetry.

Festus Moses Onipede and Gabriel Abiodun Abioye's study, "Like Animals Like Human Beings: An Ecocritical Metaphor Discourse of Leadership in Selected Poems of Niyi Osundare" (2023), examines how Osundare uses animal imagery to criticise leadership. Their analysis shows that animals such as lions, hyenas, elephants and lambs serve as metaphors for different kinds of leaders, which ranges from greedy and destructive to compassionate and peaceful. The study is valuable because it reveals Osundare's concern with leadership and power, but it looks at leadership mainly through the purview of ecology and metaphor. It does not give full attention to how his poetry tackles the political exploitation

and his take on the resistance that follows.

Richard Oliseyenum Maledo and Joyce Uzezi Edhere's research, "Experiential Metafunction: Representing Environmental Degradation" (2021), studies Niger Delta poetry by Tanure Ojaide and Nnimo Bassey. Their work uses Halliday's linguistic theory to show how environmental degradation is expressed in poetry. While the study gives a good example of how literature can speak about exploitation, it deals mainly with environmental issues and not with political exploitation or resistance in the works of Osundare and Launko.

Sharada Chigurupati's article, "Niyi Osundare: The 'Eco-Elegist' Echoes through his Elegies" (2020), presents Osundare as a poet who mourns the destruction of nature. The study shows how Osundare laments over deforestation, pollution and the misuse of the earth's resources. While this is an important contribution to understanding Osundare's ecological vision, it does not focus on the political side of his poetry, which is very central to this research.

Kehinde Pedro Amore and Kayode Amusan's paper, "Aspects of Conceptual Metaphors in Selected Poems of Niyi Osundare" (2019), looks at how Osundare uses metaphors to express ideas. Their study shows how he presents "*the word*" and "*the earth*" through different metaphorical mappings by linking language to nature and tradition. This work is useful in showing Osundare's creative use of language, but it does not address his political engagement or the idea of resistance.

Turning to Okinba Launko, Afolayan Kayode and Inyang Utitofon Ebong's study, "Of Divination Tray and the Search for Utopia: A Postcolonial Reading of Okinba Launko's Selected Poems" (2022), examines how Launko uses oral traditions, especially the Yoruba divination system, to comment on postcolonial struggles. Their work highlights Launko's use of culture and tradition in addressing African dilemmas, but it does not specifically concentrate on political exploitation and resistance.

Chukwunwike Anolue's "Magical Realism: The Spoken Word as a Superperson in Niyi Osundare's *The Word Is an Egg*" (2022) focuses on Osundare's use of Yoruba oral traditions and magical realism. He

shows how Osundare treats the spoken word as a living force with extraordinary power. This is a helpful perspective on Osundare's style, but again, it does not dwell on the political issues of exploitation and resistance.

Finally, V. A. Zhilina's article, "Justice in the Reflections of Political Philosophy" (2025), explores ideas of justice and equality from a philosophical angle, which touch on Marxist thought. The work is theoretical and gives a broad sense of how justice can be used to measure society. Though it is useful for this study's theoretical framework, it does not directly engage with Osundare or Launko's poetry.

From this review, it is clear that most existing scholarship on Osundare has focused on ecology, metaphor and oral traditions, while the little work on Launko has looked at oral culture and postcolonial concerns. None of these studies have given direct and full attention to the themes of political exploitation and resistance in both Osundare's *The Word is an Egg* and Launko's *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*. This is the gap that the present research aims fills. By using Marxist theory, this study shows how both poets confront political exploitation in African societies and how their poetry serves as a voice of resistance. In doing so, the research not only contributes to literary scholarship on the two poets but also highlights the role of African poetry as a powerful instrument of political criticism and social change.

Thesis Statement

This study shows that Osundare in "*The Word is an Egg*" and Launko in "*Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*" use poetry as a tool to expose political exploitation and to inspire resistance, and by applying Marxist theory, the research shows how their works highlight the struggles of the oppressed against unjust systems of power.

CHAPTER TWO

POLITICAL EXPLOITATION

2.0 Introduction

Osundare and Launko use their poetry to reveal the different faces of political exploitation in the society. Their poems speak directly to the pain and struggles of ordinary people who live under corrupt systems where power is often used for selfish gain. The vicious activities of leaders who enrich themselves while the masses are left in hardship are seen through the lenses of the poets. Also, how truth is silenced to protect those in authority is equally obvious in their poems. The fact that political exploitation is not only about greed and corruption but also about the way people are denied freedom of expression, forced into poverty and made to endure daily suffering are shown by the poets. This chapter uncovers how poetry becomes a mirror of political realities and a testimony to the injustices faced by the people. This is done by examining the struggles of the oppressed, the abuse of power by rulers, the silencing of truth and the use of economic hardship as a weapon of control.

2.1 Voices of the Oppressed

In both “The Word” and “Dream Seeker”, Osundare and Launko use poetry as a mouthpiece for the voiceless. Through vivid imagery, biting irony, and deep compassion, they bring to light the pain of common people whose daily lives are shaped by oppression, hunger, and political injustice. The poets speak not from a distance but as witnesses who share in the collective cry of a wounded land. Their verses become a chorus of suffering and survival, showing that the voice of the oppressed, though often silenced, continues to speak through art.

In Osundare’s poetry, the poor and marginalized are not passive victims; they are active bearers of truth. In “Trans-formations” (25), he presents a society where the ruling class crushes the people’s freedom. The poet writes:

The emperor has hounded the Word into exile

And given Silence a throne in our marketplace

People of our land,

Hold your heads with both hands

A pigmy despot parades giant padlocks

For the lips of our dreams... (25)

These lines paint a vivid picture of a nation where speech itself is dangerous, and truth is hunted down by those in power. The “emperor” symbolizes corrupt rulers who, through fear and violence, suppress the people’s voice. The marketplace, once a place of social exchange, becomes a stage for silence and subjugation. By urging the people to “hold [their] heads with both hands,” Osundare captures the helplessness and anxiety of the oppressed under authoritarian rule.

Throughout *The Word is an Egg*, Osundare uses ordinary experiences to represent political suffering. In “The Emperor’s Largesse” (67), he mocks leaders who pretend to care for the poor while doing nothing to ease their pain. The people cry, “Behold we hunger / And we thirst,” but the emperor responds not with food or justice, but with “100 bags of nouns / And 1000 bushels of adjectives” (67). Here, Osundare ridicules leaders who replace action with empty promises and propaganda. The “bags of nouns” and “bushels of adjectives” symbolize useless political speeches meant to deceive rather than help. This clever use of language shows how the oppressed are often manipulated through words that offer hope but deliver nothing.

Similarly, in “Ode to Anger” (58), Osundare transforms emotion into political protest. The speaker refuses to let his anger die, declaring, “Do not take my anger away... Dreams are dying, waters wailing / Medieval monarchs decree our lives from rocky heights” (58). Through this image of “Medieval monarchs,” he condemns the outdated, tyrannical rule that keeps people poor and voiceless. Osundare’s

anger represents the collective frustration of a nation tired of exploitation. It is not mere rage but a moral force that drives the oppressed towards awareness and possible resistance.

In “Pregnant Words” (45), Osundare also speaks for the silenced and powerless. He writes of “some words [that] burn the lips / Like forbidden fruits” (45), revealing that truth in a corrupt society becomes a dangerous thing to speak. The emperor’s statue “speaks volumes about bygone winds,” a metaphor suggesting that the memory of oppression continues to linger even when the rulers change. Through his language, Osundare gives life to the buried feelings of the masses, turning silence into speech and pain into poetry.

Turning to Okinba Launko, his poetry in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* mirrors Osundare’s empathy for the common man but carries a tone of reflective sadness. His voice is that of one burdened by memory, witnessing how his continent suffers under failed leadership. In “Sour Memories” (67), Launko laments the visible suffering of his people:

I remember: the banks of my rivers are lined with beggars

not with song

forlorn families left to the harsh teeth of harmattan

not with song

wasted bodies, surviving relics of treacherous governments

not with song... (67)

The repetition of “not with song” underlines a haunting absence of joy. What should have been music and celebration is replaced by sorrow and hunger. The beggars, the homeless, and the “wasted bodies” symbolize a society betrayed by its own leaders. Launko’s voice is not detached; it is filled with personal pain, for he carries “the burden of [his] continent” (67). This makes his poetry deeply human, blending personal memory with the collective anguish of Africa’s oppressed.

Similarly, in “A Forming Fear” (48), Launko’s description of “students fleeing from armed heroes protecting the state” (48) draws attention to state-sponsored violence against innocent citizens. The irony of soldiers being called “heroes” while brutalizing their people shows the poet’s anger and despair. Through this, Launko’s poetry, like Osundare’s, becomes an instrument of truth-telling a space where the oppressed reclaim their right to be heard.

Both poets therefore serve as interpreters of the people’s suffering, transforming silence into expression. Osundare’s direct and fiery tone calls for resistance, while Launko’s reflective sadness evokes empathy and remembrance. Yet, both voices echo the same truth: the masses are trapped in cycles of political exploitation, where power silences justice and greed replace compassion. Their poems document these realities, ensuring that the pain of the oppressed is neither forgotten nor ignored.

In conclusion, Osundare and Launko show that poetry can become the conscience of a nation. Through the cries of beggars, the silence of the censored, and the anger of the exploited, their works give shape to the voiceless pain of society. The voices of the oppressed in their poems are not whispers of weakness but powerful echoes of truth that demand attention. By turning suffering into art, they remind us that even in a world ruled by silence and fear, words still have the power to speak, to resist, and to heal.

2.2 Corruption and Abuse of Power

Corruption and the abuse of power form the dark backbone of many African societies, and both Osundare and Launko expose these realities with the precision of witnesses who have lived through deceitful regimes. Their poems are not distant commentaries but living testimonies against the greed, hypocrisy,

and cruelty of political leaders who enrich themselves at the expense of the people. Through strong imagery and biting irony, they lay bare how those in authority exploit power to silence truth, steal from the poor, and turn governance into personal profit.

From the opening pages of “The Word”, Osundare’s outrage against corruption and tyranny is unmistakable. His poetry reveals a world where words are chained, freedom is punished, and rulers pretend to serve the people while looting their future. In “The Emperor’s Largesse” (67), he mocks the empty promises of those in power, showing how they use words to deceive instead of to serve. The poem dramatizes the false generosity of an emperor who, rather than feeding his starving people, offers them “100 bags of nouns / And 1000 bushels of adjectives” (67). Here, Osundare attacks political hypocrisy: leaders use speeches to replace genuine action, and propaganda becomes a substitute for justice. The poet’s sarcasm underlines how corruption is hidden behind a show of benevolence, while the masses continue to suffer in silence.

In “Fire Words” (70), Osundare turns his anger towards the greed and violence that accompany colonial and postcolonial power. His powerful lines capture how conquest and corruption are often justified by history:

Greed in their eyes

Guns in their hands

Always the people fight the war

The conquerors write the history

But who does not know

The land came before the map? (70)

This extract exposes how the ruling elite, both colonial and native, manipulate history to defend their crimes. The “guns” and “greed” are not just physical symbols but moral ones representing those who rob a nation and still claim heroism. Osundare’s tone here is accusatory and fierce, turning the poem into a courtroom where corrupt rulers stand condemned.

Even in poems that appear reflective, such as “Can-Do” (16), Osundare never loses sight of the moral role of language in confronting corruption. He insists that poetry and speech can “uncrown the emperor” (16), turning the written word into an act of defiance. By linking language to power, Osundare shows that corruption feeds on silence, while words honest and courageous can dismantle tyranny.

Turning to Okinba Launko’s “Dream Seeker”, the poet continues this exposure of corruption but through a quieter, more reflective tone. His poems are filled with the sadness of one who watches his continent sink under the weight of its own betrayal. In “Sour Memories” (67), he presents a heart-wrenching vision of a land ruined by greedy governments:

I remember: the banks of my rivers are lined with beggars

not with song

forlorn families left to the harsh teeth of harmattan

not with song

wasted bodies, surviving relics of treacherous governments

not with song... (67)

Launko’s repetition of “not with song” creates a deep sense of loss. It shows how corruption destroys joy, dignity, and music the very soul of the people. The “treacherous governments” are not foreign rulers but local ones who have replaced colonial exploitation with domestic betrayal. Unlike Osundare’s fiery

condemnation, Launko's tone is mournful, yet his message is just as sharp: the abuse of power turns a once-living society into a field of sorrow.

In "A Forming Fear" (48), Launko focuses on state violence as a tool of corruption. He writes of "students fleeing from armed heroes protecting the state" (48), a clear attack on governments that use soldiers against their own citizens. The phrase "armed heroes" is bitterly ironic those who are meant to defend the people become their oppressors. Similarly, in "Petals" (40), Launko recalls how "the generals came and changed the script / with a scrawl of bayonets" (40), symbolizing how military rulers rewrite national destiny with force and blood. For him, corruption is not only financial; it is also moral and intellectual the betrayal of ideals, of the dream of freedom.

In "Freedom Song" (82), the poet calls for a spiritual cleansing of leadership. He insists that "chains are criminal / and fetters are a betrayal of man" (82). These chains represent political oppression and the corruption that binds citizens in poverty and fear. Launko's voice here turns from lamentation to defiance, encouraging people to reclaim their country. The repetition of "This country shall be ours! / This country IS ours!" (82) becomes both a prayer and a rebellion an insistence that the people, not the corrupt few, are the true owners of the land.

Launko's "Of Towns and Men" (105) extends the discussion by linking the decay of towns to moral decay. The "rust" that defines both "towns" and "voices of the living" (105) symbolizes how corruption corrodes everything from buildings to human values. The poet's use of the color "brown," repeated throughout the poem, reflects the faded dreams of a once-promising nation. It is a soft but bitter elegy to a society that has lost its glow under the grime of greed.

Both Osundare and Launko see corruption not only as political misconduct but as a spiritual sickness that kills conscience and justice. While Osundare's tone is fiery and revolutionary, Launko's is mournful and meditative. Yet, both poets meet at the same truth: power in the hands of the corrupt is a curse to the people. Through satire, imagery, and moral reflection, they strip away the false dignity of rulers and show

the ordinary people as the true victims of political decay. Ultimately, both poets affirm the power of truth and art in a corrupt society. Osundare believes in the power of “the Word” fragile yet explosive to challenge tyranny, while Launko finds hope in memory and resistance through song. Together, their works stand as moral monuments against abuse of power, reminding us that though corruption may silence voices for a time, poetry will always speak, judge, and awaken the conscience of a people.

2.3 Silenced Truths and Censored Voices

In many African societies, particularly those plagued by authoritarian regimes and historical oppression, the voices of the people are often stifled, their truths censored, and their narratives twisted to serve the whims of power. Poetry, as a potent instrument of expression, becomes a space where suppressed realities find articulation. In this context, Osundare’s “The Word” and Launko’s “Dream-Seeker” vividly explore the theme of silenced truths and censored voices, exposing the violence of suppression and the resilience of expression even under extreme duress. A compelling illustration of this is found in Osundare’s poem “Trans-Formations” (25):

The emperor has hounded the Word into exile

And given Silence a throne in our marketplace

People of our land,

Hold your heads with both hands

A pigmy despot parades giant padlocks

For the lips of our dreams

We raise a little song

In the corner of the street

He dispatches a chorus

Of guns and barbed wires (25)

Osundare personifies the “Word”, portraying it as a living force persecuted by a tyrannical ruler. The “emperor” represents oppressive authority, while “Silence” sitting on a throne symbolizes the enforced muteness of the people. The use of “giant padlocks / For the lips of our dreams” is particularly evocative, showing how censorship not only limits speech but also constrains imagination and hope. Even when people attempt small acts of expression, described as raising “a little song / In the corner of the street,” they are met with violence, captured in “a chorus / Of guns and barbed wires.” The poem, in this way, critiques the systematic silencing of dissenting voices and highlights the courage required to maintain speech and truth in such a climate. Similarly, Okinba Launko, in “Sour Memories” (67), captures the painful reality of silenced suffering:

Along the bank, they have built their stalls and filled
 them with paintings and beadwork hand-made jeweler, a dire cloth
 I am strolling like many others among these items
 But I am the only one bearing inside me the burden of my continent
 I remember: the banks of my rivers are lined with beggars not
 With song with the supplicating legends of the
 homeless not with song forlorn families left to the harsh teeth of harmattan not with song
 wasted bodies, surviving relics of treacherous governments

Not with song and they wear the flies and jiggers on their festering sores like decorative beads ... (67)

Launko’s extract depicts a landscape where cultural vibrancy and human suffering exist side by side, yet the true pains of the people are ignored, hidden behind the superficial beauty of markets and festivals. The

repeated contrast of “not with song” underscores the absence of expression and recognition for the oppressed. The poet bears the collective memory of this silence, highlighting the moral responsibility of the artist to speak for those whose voices have been censored.

Across both poets’ works, we observe recurring imagery and devices that interrogate censorship. In Osundare’s “Trapped Words” (40), the Word is “latched and locked / In the iron chapter / Of jointless seasons,” emphasizing confinement over extended periods. Syllables “peep / Behind the sentry / Of lips,” portraying the fragility of expression under scrutiny. This imprisonment of speech mirrors Launko’s depiction of neglected realities, where the suffering of families and the dispossessed is effectively silenced by societal neglect and governmental betrayal.

Moreover, in Osundare’s “Unspoken Tears” (50), he speaks of “tongueless tribes / Plodding through the abyss / of lamp less nights,” linking the inability to communicate to a historical and cultural marginalization. The “silent song / of a millennium” that has “lost its tune / to a clan of earless conquerors” amplifies the critique of colonial and postcolonial forces that mute indigenous voices. Similarly, Launko’s “Impediments” (122) describes ambitions that “die prematurely, among several tedious arguments on punctuation,” using bureaucratic and procedural language as a metaphor for systemic suppression. Both poets illustrate how structures whether overtly violent or bureaucratically banal conspire to mute essential truths.

The poets also explore the resilience of expression despite censorship. In “Can-Do” (16), Osundare celebrates the power of language: “I have heard melodies which re- / Turn the sword to its scabbard / I have seen well-aimed songs / Uncrown the emperor.” Here, poetry becomes a vehicle for resistance, a way to challenge authority and reclaim suppressed truths. Launko echoes this in Freedom Song (82), urging his readers to understand why “walls are wrong, all roads must be free / that chains are criminal / and fetters are a betrayal of man.” The insistence on freedom, both of movement and speech, embodies the persistence of silenced voices striving to assert themselves.

In conclusion, both Osundare and Launko demonstrate that the silencing of voices is a deliberate act of oppression, yet poetry remains a resilient medium through which censored truths can emerge. Through vivid imagery, powerful metaphors, and poignant contrasts between suppression and expression, these poets reveal the human cost of muteness while celebrating the persistent capacity of the word to resist, to remember, and to reclaim agency. Their works collectively affirm that even when truths are silenced, they never fully vanish; they wait, potent and alive, to be voiced and heard, shaping both memory and future possibility.

2.4 Economic Hardship as a Tool of Exploitation

In many African societies, economic hardship is not merely a consequence of poverty but a deliberate instrument of control and exploitation. Both Osundare in “The Word” and Launko “Dream-Seeker” interrogate the ways in which rulers, tyrants, and systems manipulate scarcity to maintain power and suppress the voice of the common people. Through their poetry, they foreground the structural forces that keep people in subjugation, highlighting how hunger, deprivation, and manipulated resources serve as weapons to enforce social and political hierarchies. The poets show that economic oppression is rarely neutral; it is a tool deliberately wielded to marginalize, intimidate, and silence the masses.

From Osundare’s “The Emperor’s Largesse” (67), the following excerpt illustrates the stark inequality enforced through economic deprivation:

And shout the people:

Behold we hunger

And we thirst

Our babies die in the cradle

The old age into penury

Taskmasters are generous with whips

Tax gatherers pound the road of every hamlet (67)

Osundare does not merely depict suffering; he critiques a system that measures generosity through symbolic gestures while allowing widespread misery to persist. The “taskmasters” and “tax gatherers” signify the instruments of an oppressive bureaucracy, whose enforcement of economic hardship ensures the people remain weak and disempowered. By juxtaposing hunger and thirst with the cruelty of governance, Osundare underscores how rulers weaponize poverty: by controlling access to resources, they maintain dominance over the vulnerable. The poem further satirizes the emperor’s “gifts” of language “100 bags of nouns / And 1000 bushels of adjectives” which function as empty, symbolic largesse, a stark contrast to the real, tangible needs of the populace. The metaphor highlights the absurdity of rhetorical compensation in the face of material deprivation, a clear statement on how economic hardship is exploited to sustain authority (67). Another powerful illustration of economic manipulation in Osundare’s work can be drawn from “Trans-Fformations” (25), where he writes:

A pigmy despot parades giant padlocks

For the lips of our dreams

We raise a little song

In the corner of the street

He dispatches a chorus

Of guns and barbed wires (25)

Although this extract directly evokes political repression, it implicitly ties economic control to social subjugation. By limiting opportunities and resources, the despot ensures that even the people’s “little song”

their capacity for aspiration and creativity is contained. Scarcity becomes a mechanism of fear: the people are so preoccupied with survival that their energies for resistance are curtailed, showing how economic exploitation functions hand in hand with political and social domination.

In addition, “Trapped Words” (40) portrays the internalization of economic oppression. Osundare writes that the “Word sweats / In the prison of / Silence” and “A trapped wind / Breaks beak and breath / Against the absolute bars.” Here, the poet extends the metaphor of economic exploitation to language and expression. Just as the people’s material needs are constrained by poverty and bureaucracy, their ability to speak out, to dream, or to mobilize is restricted. Economic hardship, then, is not only a physical reality but also a psychological cage that limits agency and sustains systemic oppression (40).

Turning to Bassey, his poem “Impediments” (122) offers a detailed critique of economic oppression within postcolonial societies:

It is not that hopes do not exist here:

only they die, premature, among several tedious arguments on punctuation

There are ambitions virulent as the flame of

Harmattan tree which make early ashes of young minds

But we talk of protocol and such things and

drink time away in our calabashes as we grow bald or grey

Hitting long on the same loquacious benches (122)

Bassey emphasizes that ambition and vitality in young people are systematically smothered by economic and bureaucratic barriers. The “loquacious benches” and “tedious arguments on punctuation” symbolize a society preoccupied with formality and rules while failing to provide the substantive support or opportunities for growth. Economic hardship here becomes both a literal and figurative barrier: the

scarcity of resources, combined with obstructive social structures, diminishes the potential of the next generation and keeps power concentrated in the hands of a few (122).

In “Sour Memories” (67), Bassey further explores how economic deprivation becomes an instrument of psychological exploitation:

I remember: the banks of my rivers
 Are lined with beggars not with song
 With the supplicating legends
 Of the homeless not with song
 Forlorn families left to the harsh teeth of harmattan not with song
 Wasted bodies, surviving relics of treacherous governments not with song (67)

This extract vividly portrays the human cost of economic oppression. By emphasizing the absence of “song” a metaphor for joy, culture, and vitality the poet links material hardship to the erosion of social and cultural life. Economic deprivation is presented as a deliberate strategy that sustains marginalization, leaving the people physically, emotionally, and culturally impoverished.

Both poets also illustrate how economic hardship interplays with systemic neglect. In Osundare’s “Fire Words” (70), he reminds readers that the violence and conquest of history often had economic motives:

Ask how many native skulls paved
 The conquistador’s ascent to the hilltop castle
 Where horsemen plant flagpoles
 On the juiciest bosom of a stolen earth (70)

Here, conquest and economic plunder are inseparable. The seizure of land, wealth, and labor underpins the rulers' dominance. The economic exploitation is not incidental; it is the foundation upon which other forms of repression political, cultural, and linguistic are constructed. Similarly, Bassey in "A Forming Fear" (48) reflects the destructive impact of economic hardship on communal and personal life:

I have seen them marching night

And day eating up our homes as did

The swollen mouths of rivers

In the season of flood

but it is not yet the time of soft rains (48)

Bassey uses vivid imagery to describe how material deprivation, when combined with political violence, devastates communities. The metaphor of floodwaters consuming homes underscores the relentless and uncontrollable nature of economic hardship imposed from above, showing its role as a weapon of oppression.

In summary, Osundare and Bassey converge in their portrayal of economic hardship as a tool of exploitation. Through metaphor, imagery, and narrative, both poets illustrate how hunger, deprivation, and scarcity are wielded to maintain control, suppress dissent, and erode social and cultural vitality. From the satirical depiction of empty largesse in "The Emperor's Largesse" (67) to the haunting portrayal of destitution in "Sour Memories" (67), these works offer a powerful critique of systems that weaponize poverty, revealing the human cost of economic oppression across time and context.

CHAPTER THREE

RESISTANCE AND THE QUEST FOR LIBERATION

3.0 Introduction

This chapter turns to the theme of resistance and the search for liberation in Osundare's "The Word" and Launko's "Dream Seeker". While the previous chapter showed how both poets expose political exploitation, corruption and the suffering of the masses, this chapter focuses on how their poetry becomes a means of protest and a call for change. Osundare and Launko do not only mourn the broken state of society; they also give the people courage, vision, and a language of defiance. Their works remind us that poetry can be more than art. It can serve as a weapon that awakens consciousness, strengthens unity and inspires hope for a better world. This chapter shows how both poets turn suffering into strength and silence into a powerful voice for liberation by examining how they use protest, collective struggle natural imagery and dreams of freedom.

3.1 Poetry as a Weapon of Protest

Poetry, for many African writers, is not simply a means of expression but a tool of struggle, a weapon forged in words to challenge oppression, injustice, and corruption. In societies where power is often abused and truth suppressed, poets like Osundare and Launko turn their verses into instruments of resistance. Both poets believe that language carries strength and that the poet has a duty to speak for the voiceless and awaken the conscience of the people. Their collections, "The Word" and "Dream Seeker", show how poetry can expose lies, question authority, and inspire action. Through vivid images, satire, and moral conviction, they use their poems as verbal protests against the exploitation and decay that afflict their societies.

One of the clearest examples of Osundare's belief in poetry as a form of protest appears in "Can-Do" (16), where he declares the transformative power of words and songs in shaping human destiny. The poet celebrates the might of language and its ability to overturn unjust systems. He writes:

I have seen well-aimed songs

Uncrown the emperor

Ataba pomnbe pomnbe pomnbe pomnbe

Only those who live

In certain regions of the moon

Know the mortal danger of little nouns

The unspoken thunder of needling ballads. (16)

Osundare equates poetic expression with political power. The “well-aimed songs” that “uncrown the emperor” (16) signify how the spoken word, though soft, can dismantle tyranny. The poet’s repetition of “Ataba pomnbe” gives a rhythmic force to the defiance, a chant of rebellion that stirs both courage and fear. The “mortal danger of little nouns” (16) symbolizes the threat that truth poses to oppressive regimes. For Osundare, a poem is not written to entertain but to liberate to transform silence into speech, apathy into action. The poem thus becomes a rallying cry, reminding readers that the smallest utterance of truth can unsettle a dictator.

This idea continues in “Fire Words” (70), where Osundare portrays language as a dangerous weapon in the hands of the oppressed. He warns of leaders who use deceit to glorify their colonial past while hiding the bloodshed beneath. The poet’s voice burns with anger as he mocks their hypocrisy: “Next time they sing brave anthems / For their ‘Founding Fathers’ / Ask how many native skulls paved / The conquistador’s ascent to the hilltop castle” (70). The poetic tone here is both sarcastic and accusatory. Osundare unmasks the lies of those who pretend to be heroes while feeding on the suffering of others. His use of history as protest turns the poem into an act of remembrance, refusing to let the crimes of the powerful be forgotten.

In “The Emperor’s Largesse” (67), Osundare ridicules leaders who pretend to care for the people while offering empty promises. The emperor responds to the people’s hunger with “100 bags of nouns / And 1000 bushels of adjectives” (67). These lines illustrate the emptiness of political speeches abundant in words, poor in action. Through humor and irony, Osundare exposes the futility of a system where oratory replaces compassion. His protest lies in revealing the absurdity of such governance.

Osundare’s title poem, “*The Word is an Egg*” (14), completes his vision of poetry as both delicate and powerful. The poet reminds us that “The Word, the Word / Is an egg: / If it falls on the outcrop / Of a stumbling tongue / It breaks / Ungather ably” (14). The metaphor of the egg suggests the fragility of truth and the responsibility of the poet to handle it with care. Words can heal or destroy, but once spoken, they cannot be recalled. Through this awareness, Osundare insists that poetry carries moral weight it can shatter lies and rebuild hope.

Like Osundare, Okinba Launko also treats poetry as a weapon for confronting oppression, but his protest often comes with a tone of sorrow and reflection. In “Freedom Song” (82), Launko’s voice rises like a national anthem of resistance. He writes:

And I understand now
 why waters run
 birds chirp
 because it is their nature to be free
 that walls are wrong, all roads must be free
 that chains are criminal
 and fetters are a betrayal of man. (82)

These lines express Launko's deep belief in liberty as a natural right. The simplicity of his language gives the message strength freedom, like nature, is meant for all. The repetition of "free" and "freedom" (82) drives home the urgency of liberation. The poet's protest is not just political but spiritual; it calls for a return to the basic truth of human dignity.

In "Sour Memories" (67), Launko turns his anger towards the failures of postcolonial leaders who have abandoned their people. He recalls, "the banks of my rivers are lined with beggars... wasted bodies, surviving relics of treacherous governments" (67). The image of decay and poverty mirrors the corruption and betrayal of political rulers. Through his lament, Launko transforms grief into protest, forcing readers to confront the contrast between the natural richness of the land and the man-made misery of its people.

Launko's "Petals" (40) also captures the tension between personal pain and collective struggle. When he writes that "the generals came and changed the script / with a scrawl of bayonets" (40), he exposes how military rulers rewrite the lives of citizens through violence. His protest is both poetic and political he reclaims the voice that dictatorship tries to erase. The "pollens" and "wings" he mentions later symbolize hope and resilience, suggesting that even in times of repression, the poet's words can still reach across distance and inspire solidarity.

In "A Forming Fear" (48), Launko's protest becomes more direct. He describes "students flee from armed heroes protecting the state" (48), mocking the irony of soldiers who harm the very people they claim to defend. His poem exposes the deceit in political propaganda and the hypocrisy of false patriots. Yet, like Osundare, Launko does not give in to despair; his poems remain acts of witness, preserving truth where official narratives lie.

Finally, in "The Night's Newcomers" (102), Launko uses ancestral imagery to portray poetry as a bridge between the living and the dead, reminding readers that the poet must "recognize them as they pass... halt those among them / in whose hands are hidden blessings" (102). Here, protest is not loud but sacred it is about remembering and honoring the struggles of those who came before.

In both Osundare and Launko, poetry becomes a living force that refuses to be silenced. Their verses burn with conviction, using metaphor, satire, and imagery to expose exploitation and inspire change. Osundare's words strike like thunder, unmasking hypocrisy and summoning action. Launko's voice, though softer, carries deep emotion and historical consciousness, using memory and song to challenge oppression. Together, they prove that poetry, far from being passive, is an active weapon of protest a tool for reclaiming truth, restoring hope, and reminding us that words, when spoken with courage, can change the world.

3.2 The Power of Unity and Collective Struggle

In the poetry of Osundare and Launko, unity and collective struggle emerge as powerful answers to oppression and political exploitation. Both poets speak for the people, not as distant observers but as active witnesses to the cries and courage of ordinary men and women who resist tyranny. Through their works, they reveal that change does not come from isolated voices but from the chorus of a united people. They show that when the oppressed come together, their words, songs, and shared pain become forces that can move mountains. The two poets believe deeply in the ability of collective resistance to break chains, dethrone injustice, and restore hope to broken lands.

In Osundare's "The Word", the spirit of unity is seen as the weapon that empowers the weak against despotic rulers. His poetry often transforms ordinary people into agents of transformation through the use of communal imagery, chants, and proverbs. In "Can-Do" (16), he uses the metaphor of the spoken word to demonstrate the power that collective speech holds in transforming society. Words, in his view, are not mere sounds but tools of revolution "I have seen well-aimed songs / uncrown the emperor" (16). Here, the word "songs" does not refer to a single voice but to the harmony of many, implying a community that sings together against the ruler's oppression. Osundare's choice of collective pronouns such as "we" and "our" throughout his poetry strengthens this idea of shared struggle. In "Trans-formations" (25), he writes of the "people of our land" who must "hold [their] heads with both hands," calling for solidarity in the

face of tyranny. These voices are not silent; they merge into a chorus of defiance that no emperor can silence. Osundare, “Trans-formations” (25):

The emperor has hounded the Word into exile

And given Silence a throne in our marketplace

People of our land,

Hold your heads with both hands

A pigmy despot parades giant padlocks

For the lips of our dreams (25)

Osundare captures both the oppression of the masses and their potential for unity. The emperor, representing corrupt leadership, has forced silence upon the people, but the poet’s call “People of our land” serves as a rallying cry for collective awakening. The imagery of “giant padlocks / For the lips of our dreams” (25) symbolizes the ways in which the powerful suppress the people’s hopes, yet the plea to “hold your heads with both hands” calls for communal courage and resilience. This poem turns despair into an act of unity; it transforms silence into an opportunity for collective speech.

Like Osundare, Launko in “Dream-Seeker” places great emphasis on unity, but his tone is often one of deep reflection, mourning, and hope for renewal. In his world, unity is not only political but spiritual, linking the living, the dead, and the unborn. He shows that collective struggle extends beyond the streets and into the hearts and memories of a people. In “Freedom Song” (82), Launko celebrates freedom as the natural state of humanity and portrays collective resistance as both physical and spiritual liberation.

Launko, “Freedom Song” (82):

And I understand now

why waters run

birds chirp

because it is their nature to be free

that walls are wrong, all roads must be free

that chains are criminal

and fetters are a betrayal of man (82)

These lines express Launko's belief that freedom is a natural human right. By comparing human struggle to the freedom of birds and rivers, he reminds his readers that unity is an inherent force of life not a privilege but a necessity. The repetition of "free" across these lines is both an anthem and a chant of resistance, echoing the collective cry of those yearning for justice. Launko later strengthens this theme when he commands the reader to "SHOUT: / This country shall be ours!" (82), a direct invitation to collective struggle and ownership.

Launko's "Petals" (40) also illustrates how unity persists even across distance and despair. When he writes of "the total wailing of a continent," he extends individual pain into a collective lament, turning private sorrow into a symbol of continental solidarity. Similarly, in "A Forming Fear" (48), the poet reflects on the courage of students facing armed suppression, describing their protests as part of a greater struggle for justice and truth. His imagery of "truncheons and bayonets" (48) reminds readers that resistance often comes with pain, but the poet's voice insists on the persistence of collective hope.

The power of unity, as portrayed by Osundare and Launko, is therefore both political and moral. It begins with shared suffering but ends in collective strength. The poets remind us that oppression thrives in isolation, while liberation grows in togetherness. Their words, though written in different voices, form a

single call: that true freedom lies not in the hands of one hero but in the joined hands of the many who refuse to remain silent.

In both “The Word” and “Dream-Seeker”, unity is portrayed not merely as a theme but as a living force one that transforms words into weapons and pain into power. Through their poetry, Osundare and Launko prove that even in the darkest times, the people’s song of togetherness can still rise, unbroken and unstoppable.

3.3 The Role of Nature and Symbolism in Resistance

In African poetry, nature is not just a background or scenery; it is a living presence, a voice that carries history, memory, and defiance. Both Osundare and Launko rely deeply on natural imagery and symbolism to express political resistance and the human struggle for freedom. Their works transform the environment the wind, rivers, fire, and earth into agents of revolution, endurance, and rebirth. In “The Word” and “Dream-Seeker”, nature functions as both a mirror and a participant in the battle against oppression. The poets use elements of the natural world not only to represent the suffering of the people but also to signal hope, renewal, and continuity. Through symbolism, they turn simple natural images into powerful commentaries on colonial and postcolonial exploitation, corruption, and the resilience of the human spirit. In Osundare’s “Trans-Formations” (25), the imagery of earth, wind, and fire stands as a vivid symbol of resistance and survival:

When the emperor shoots

His gun at our Word

Our Word will turn into

Earth, wind, and fire. (25)

This metaphor captures the unbreakable power of the collective voice, showing that even when silenced, truth transforms into elemental forces that cannot be destroyed. The “Word” represents both speech and

consciousness the voice of the oppressed people while the elements of nature symbolize endurance, transformation, and reawakening. In Osundare's vision, nature is inseparable from human life; it reacts to injustice, echoing the voice of resistance when human voices are muted. The "earth, wind, and fire" become symbols of regeneration and revolt, illustrating how nature can embody the people's desire for freedom.

Throughout Osundare's "Fire Words" (70), nature appears again as a powerful agent of political resistance. The poet speaks of "showers of fire tumbling down from the sky" (70), symbolizing both destruction and purification. Here, fire is a dual image it consumes lies and corruption but also illuminates the truth hidden beneath. His question, "What fate for our roofs / Thatched with the straw of absolute trust...?" (70) uses everyday imagery to criticize leaders who betray the people's faith. The natural element of fire, then, becomes a metaphor for both the danger of misplaced trust and the cleansing force of revolt. The same element that burns can also purify, suggesting that resistance may come through painful transformation.

In "Ode to Anger" (58), nature becomes the emotional ground of defiance. Anger is portrayed not as violence but as creative energy "A volcano is gathering in the pit of my stomach / Let me erupt in fables and fire songs" (58). The volcanic metaphor reveals that resistance is natural, inevitable, and transformative. Just as volcanoes reshape the earth, anger when channeled into art and truth reshapes society. Nature here becomes a metaphor for poetic resistance, with the poet's words functioning as eruptions that challenge tyranny.

Similarly, in "Can-Do" (16), Osundare's use of nature and symbolism reaches its height. He speaks of "rain-clouds gathering at the instance of a word" and "rivers walking up-hill on the order of a proverb" (16). These lines highlight the magical and transformative power of language, linking words with natural motion. Nature bends to the poet's speech, showing that words can move mountains both literally and

politically. Through these natural images, Osundare portrays poetry as a living force that resists oppression and reshapes reality.

Moving to Launko's *Dream-Seeker on Divining Chain*, nature also serves as a central metaphor for survival, continuity, and ancestral strength. In "The Night's Newcomers" (102), Launko's tone is meditative and ritualistic, blending nature with spiritual resistance:

The earth is opening her

Doors quietly in many places

Calling out her dwellers

To the jeweler of night. (102)

The earth here is personified as a mother figure, opening her arms to the living and the dead. This natural imagery symbolizes the cycle of renewal and resistance through memory and ancestry. The "jeweler of night" represents nature's creative force, polishing the souls of the oppressed into bright symbols of endurance. For Launko, resistance is not always loud or violent; sometimes it is found in quiet communion with the earth, in remembering and honoring the dead who fought for freedom.

In "Freedom Song" (82), nature is again the teacher and the voice of liberty. The poet declares, "I understand now why waters run, birds chirp, because it is their nature to be free" (82). This comparison between natural freedom and human bondage exposes the unnaturalness of political oppression. The poet turns nature into a moral mirror, showing that true freedom is instinctive and self-evident. When he proclaims, "That walls are wrong, all roads must be free, that chains are criminal" (82), he symbolically aligns human struggle with the natural world's refusal to be contained. The flow of rivers and the flight of birds become symbols of an unbreakable will to resist.

In both poets, nature becomes a language of defiance and hope. While Osundare uses fiery and elemental images fire, storm, wind, volcano to symbolize explosive revolt, Launko employs the quiet, organic strength of the earth, rivers, and night to represent endurance and spiritual resistance. Osundare's resistance is vocal, vibrant, and transformative; Launko's is meditative, restorative, and rooted in ancestral continuity. Yet both writers show that nature is inseparable from political struggle it is part of the human will to resist domination and reclaim dignity.

Ultimately, the use of nature and symbolism in both poets reflects an African worldview that sees no separation between the human and the natural. Resistance is a cycle, like the seasons, constantly renewing itself. In their hands, nature becomes not just a metaphor but a participant in the fight for justice. Osundare's storms and fires, and Launko's rivers and earth, together form a poetic ecosystem of resistance one that insists that as long as nature endures, so too will the human spirit.

3.4 Dreams of Freedom and Visions of a Just Society

In African poetry, the idea of freedom is often a dream deeply tied to justice, dignity, and humanity. Both Osundare in "The Word" and "Launko" in "Dream-Seeker" imagine societies where people live without oppression, deceit, and exploitation. Their poetry shows that freedom is not merely a political condition, but a moral awakening return to truth, fairness, and communal harmony. The poets use dreams, visions, and spiritual imagery to express the desire for a just society. They do not only dream of freedom; they actively envision it through language, song, and the power of the human voice. For Osundare, freedom begins when people speak again after being silenced by tyranny; for Launko, it is when the people remember who they are and reclaim their humanity through memory, love, and collective renewal.

From Osundare's "*The Word is an Egg*" (14), the poet uses the metaphor of speech as fragile yet powerful. The Word becomes a living thing delicate like an egg but capable of breaking barriers when nurtured with truth. His dream of freedom lies in restoring the word to its rightful place as the tool of justice and

resistance. The excerpt below captures the image of this fragile power and the poet's warning about the dangers of careless speech and silence:

The Word, the Word

Is an egg:

If it falls on the outcrop

Of a stumbling tongue

It breaks

Ungatherably." (14)

Osundare portrays the Word as the seed of liberation. His concern is that once truth is broken "ungatherably" the possibility of freedom shatters with it. Through this image, the poet calls for responsibility in speech, because a society that misuses its voice loses its soul. Osundare sees language as a sacred bond between the people and justice; freedom can only grow where words are free, honest, and courageous.

In several other poems, Osundare continues this vision of liberation through the power of truth and collective consciousness. In "Trapped Words" (40), he writes of syllables "peeping behind the sentry of lips," showing a people yearning to speak after long silence. The image of the Word sweating in the prison of Silence (40) symbolizes a society under oppression, where dreams of justice exist but cannot yet be voiced. Osundare believes that when speech is finally freed, it will come as a storm of truth a revolution of words. His lines in "Can-Do" (16), "I have seen well-aimed songs / uncrown the emperor," confirm his faith in the liberating power of art. For him, poetry is not a pastime; it is a weapon of transformation, an act that dreams a just world into being.

Similarly, in “Ode to Anger” (58), Osundare uses anger as a metaphor for creative resistance. He urges, “Do not take my anger away,” because anger here is not destructive; it is the fire that keeps dreams alive and burns through injustice. The poet’s vision of a just society is one built on righteous emotion, where “justice dangles on common gallows” (58) no more, and the poet’s voice helps restore balance. In “Fire Words” (70), he warns that history is often written by conquerors but reminds his readers that “the land came before the map” (70) a powerful statement of indigenous truth and ownership. Osundare’s dream of freedom rests on returning power to the people and remembering the natural order that colonization and corruption have distorted. His poetry envisions justice not as a distant dream but as a necessary act of remembering and reclaiming what was always ours.

Osundare’s “The Emperor’s Largesse” (67) also deepens his dream of a fair society through irony. When the people cry, “Behold we hunger / And we thirst,” the emperor answers not with food but with “100 bags of nouns / And 1000 bushels of adjectives” (67). Through this biting satire, Osundare exposes political hypocrisy the use of grand language to mask injustice. The dream of freedom here is frustrated by deceitful rulers who offer rhetoric instead of real reform. Yet, the poet’s mockery itself is an act of liberation; it unmasks the false and empowers truth.

Moving to Launko’s *Dream-Seeker on Divining Chain*, his poems also revolve around the dream of freedom, though his approach is quieter and more reflective. His vision of a just society grows from memory, pain, and the spiritual link between the living and the ancestors. His dream is not a single revolution but a continuous awakening of conscience. In the poem “Freedom Song” (82), Launko gives one of the most direct expressions of this ideal:

And I understand now

why waters run

birds chirp

because it is their nature to be free
 that walls are wrong, all roads must be free
 that chains are criminal
 and fetters are a betrayal of man. (82)

In these lines, freedom is portrayed as a natural state of being. Just as rivers flow and birds sing, humans are meant to live without chains. His voice is both lyrical and political; he connects the simplicity of nature with the moral necessity of justice. When he commands, “This country shall be ours! this country IS ours!” (82), he transforms poetry into protest, and vision into faith. Launko’s dream of a just society is built on collective ownership, unity, and the courage to reclaim what belongs to the people.

In “A Forming Fear” (48), Launko turns his attention to the obstacles facing freedom. He sees “students flee from armed heroes protecting the state,” a biting image that exposes the contradiction of governments that claim to defend the people while silencing them. The poet admits that he is “still at the scaffolding” of his self, caught “between romance and caution,” suggesting that freedom is a constant work in progress. His dream of justice is not naive; it acknowledges fear, but it also insists on growth. The phrase “bleached trees and wounded earth” (48) reminds us that oppression scars both the people and their environment, yet even in decay, the seeds of renewal remain.

Launko’s poem “Sour Memories” (67) explores another dimension of freedom the struggle to forget pain without losing identity. He remembers “wasted bodies, surviving relics of treacherous governments,” yet resolves to “surrender to the intoxication of Spring,” showing that despite the scars of history, hope must be reclaimed. Freedom, for Launko, is the ability to feel joy again after long suffering. Similarly, in “Petals” (40), he moves from personal grief to collective endurance, noting that “the generals came and changed the script with a scrawl of bayonets.” The poem’s conclusion “we shall live, our land shall live” (40) echoes a communal dream of survival and rebirth.

In “Impediments” (122), Launko exposes how internal decay complacency, bureaucracy, and loss of historical consciousness prevents true freedom. He laments that “hopes die premature, among several tedious arguments on punctuation,” a metaphor for empty talk and failed leadership. Yet he insists that memory and courage can rekindle the dream of justice. The “balm in my calabash” (122) symbolizes healing, the poet’s hope that regeneration is still possible if the people reconnect with their history and values.

Finally, in “Dream of Night Descending”, Launko’s tone becomes spiritual and haunting. The poet imagines God’s heart bleeding “black blood... across the sky,” a vision of divine sorrow for human suffering. Yet even in this darkness, he prays for courage and compassion, borrowing “his father’s hands to wipe your tears.” The dream of freedom here takes a deeply human turn it becomes an act of empathy, love, and remembrance. Justice, for Launko, is not only about politics but also about restoring tenderness to a wounded world.

Both Osundare and Launko share a vision where freedom is not granted from above but earned through collective will, courage, and the rebirth of the human spirit. Osundare’s fire burns through tyranny; Launko’s calm voice heals the wounds of memory. Together, their poems sing of a continent dreaming of dawn after a long night, a people longing not just to survive but to live fully again. Their dreams of freedom are not fantasies but blueprints for a just society one where truth is spoken without fear, where every voice counts, and where the land, the people, and their words are finally free.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

This research has examined how Niyi Osundare's *The Word is an Egg* and Okinba Launko's *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* reflect political exploitation and the spirit of resistance through the eyes of two committed African poets. Both writers, in their unique voices, use poetry as a powerful mirror of society, exposing the injustices, oppression, and corruption that shape the lives of ordinary people. At the same time, they use the same poetry to inspire courage, awaken political awareness, and call for a new sense of collective responsibility. Their works remind us that literature is not only about beauty or expression. It is also a means of confronting reality, questioning authority, and imagining a fairer world.

In the course of this study, it became clear that Osundare and Launko share a deep concern for the ordinary man. In their poems, we hear the cries of the hungry, the struggles of the poor, and the frustration of those silenced by corrupt systems. The first part of this research focused on the theme of political exploitation, showing how both poets boldly criticize leaders who abuse power, manipulate truth, and use poverty as a tool of control. Their verses capture the everyday suffering of the masses, not just as victims but as witnesses to a broken social order. Through images of silence, decay, and betrayal, the poets remind readers that bad leadership is not only a political failure but also a moral one.

The study then turned to the theme of resistance and the quest for liberation. In this part, the poets' words rose from pain to power. Osundare and Launko showed that even in darkness, the human spirit longs for freedom. Their poems celebrate the strength of unity, the power of collective struggle, and the resilience found in nature and dreams. Through vivid imagery of rivers, winds, and songs, they teach that no force can permanently silence truth. The poets

transform poetry into a form of protest, which is an open challenge to tyranny and a call to action for the oppressed to reclaim their dignity.

By using Marxist theory as the guiding framework, this research has shown that both poets write from a socially conscious perspective. Their works question class divisions, expose economic injustice, and emphasize the need for collective change. They give voice to those who have been denied one and insist that art must speak to the realities of society. Osundare and Launko do not only criticize; they also imagine. They dream of a just world built on equality, compassion, and truth, a world where power serves humanity rather than exploiting it.

Lastly, *The Word is an Egg* and *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* are more than collections of poems; they are testimonies of courage and conscience. Both writers use their art to document the struggles of their time and to awaken future generations to the importance of justice and solidarity. Their poetry shows that resistance begins with awareness, and that words—though fragile—carry the power to heal, to inspire, and to change societies. Through their voices, Osundare and Launko remind us that freedom is not a distant dream but a shared duty, and that the pursuit of justice remains the truest measure of humanity.