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E-Mail: jahadsresearch@gmail.com

info@researchersjournal.org

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Intersections of Memory and Poetic Justice in Raji's *Web of Remembrance*

¹Chidimma Elekwachi, ¹Onyekachi Peter Onuoha & ²Offiong, Erete Ebong

Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar

elekwachi@unical.edu.ng; otosifidelis@yahoo.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2145-8>; Phone: 08134515875

²Dept. of Modern Languages and Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Calabar,

Nigeria. offiongebong@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9839-9424>

Onyekachidara@unical.edu.ng, Onyekachidara@gmail.com

Abstract

There is a relationship between memory and poetic justice in Raji's *Web of Remembrance*. There are a lot of critical submissions on Raji's *Web of Remembrance*, most of which focus on political poetics, poetics of rage, etc., but very few attempt to examine the said text from the intersections of memory and poetic justice. This paper, through the framework of poetic justice, identifies moments of recollection within the *Web of Remembrance* and observes that the poet consciously refashions memory in order to poke the consciences of society. This study adopts the qualitative discursive approach to textual analysis and submits that the poet's persona's attempt for justice within the framework of art finds poetic "fulfilment" within the concepts of reimagining memory in *Web of Remembrance*. Through the juxtaposition of memory and remembrance in the erecting of tombs within the *Web of Remembrance*, this paper examines memory and poetic justice in Raji's *Web of Remembrance*. It submits that Raji's hailstone judgment is a reflection of his artistic vision. This paper concludes that through poetic justice, the poet's persona establishes poetic memorials like many of the third-generational poets of his time.

Keywords: Witnessing, Poetic Justice, Memorial, Tombs, Memory, Remembrance

Introduction

The human memory plays an active role in the composition of art. The human memory powers the human creative imagination and leads to literary output. Joan Gibbons corroborates the foregoing thus; "A good and accurate memory that can store and retrieve knowledge and experience used to be one of the most desirable attributes of learning and the acquisition of knowledge" (1). The authorial vision within the framework of art is the principle that aids the gleaning from memory

amidst the interfacing influence of the imagination Komolafe Ayodele Michael. and Onyekachi Peter Onuoha wrote about memory thus: “memories are defining characteristics of man; they are a form of socialization of self-worth, and they are the promise of the definition of what is good and bad in the African traditional environment” (84). Raji’s work strives for memory, and poetic justice is one of the cardinal principles of Raji’s *Webs of Remembrance*. David Gurnham write said that; “There can be little doubt that both memory and imagination are important faculties for reflecting on the moral and legal questions of our time” (1). Without memory a write has no imagination and without imagination there is no possibility of poetic justice. In the attempt for Raji to remember the injustice done to his people by those in the corridors of power, the poet persona proclaims hailstone judgment against them amidst the memorials of the afflicted. Jacqueline Adams in classifying art against dictatorship as solidarity art foregrounds the kind of art which Raji’s work find expression. Adams went further in classifying solidarity art thus; “Repressive regimes can spark creativity, in that individuals who do not consider themselves artists seek ways to communicate that evade repression and censorship. New art forms emerge, new artists arise, and preexisting artistic genres evolve, while more established art forms, venues, and artists may be repressed. When, for example, national security doctrines result in the incarceration of what come to be called “political prisoners,” these prisoners may begin making art in their cells, and their relatives may begin creating denunciatory art”(15). Raji’s Web of remembrance is a denunciatory poetics against repressive and oppressive government in Nigeria.

Sule E. Egya sees *Web of Remembrance* as a political poem and notes that “we mainly tag Raji’s poetry as political. We may take political poetry as that variety of poetry that depicts and declaims the failure of leadership; that captures the helpless masses suppressed and oppressed by the establishment; that, whether molded in optimism or pessimism, engages society, the people, in charting a positive discourse of nation formation” (14). What Egya refers to in the article is the function of memory and how it is poetically appropriate in seeking poetic justice within the framework of art. Michael A. Quinlam wrote with regards to poetic justice that “the study of poetic justice necessarily involves a study of ethical principles in literary art, for the very idea of poetic

justice implies a judgment regarding the morality of any action. As a result, then, of studying criticism, it is possible to come to a partial knowledge of the principles by which a given race of people was governed at the same given time" (ii). What the foregoing highlights is that poetic justice is an act of literary retribution within the work of art and that it reflects the morality of society. Memory and history are enablers in the poetic composition of *The Web of Remembrance*. Onyekachi Peter Onuoha and Komolafe Ayodele Michael observed that "memory and history provide the poet persona the capacity to use collaborative data sets to account for those responsible for the exploitation of the masses" (105). By extension, it is a reflection of the principles by which the Nigerian military government and the democratically elected government rule Nigerian society. Paul Ricoeur, while writing about the reality of the historical past in which memory finds expression in today's poetic composition of Raji, notes that "we talk sense about the past by thinking of it in turn, under the sign of the same, then under the sign of the other, and finally under the sign of the analogue" (13).

Raji reimagines the past under the same sign of the past even in the present; memory recall makes Raji locate the search for justice within the sight of historical crime. In the sense that Ricoeur corroborates that "under the sign of the same, "re-enacting" the past in the present under the sign of the same I place the conception as a re-enactment of the past" (13). The *Web of Remembrance* is a re-enactment of the past, and the coming back of traumatic memories by the poet is a product of history, which is powered by the memory of such history. Raji's *Web of Remembrance* is a re-enactment of memory in fierce remembrance of the evil of military dictatorship and, by extension, an enactment of memorial for the plight of the masses, using poetry as the memorial tomb as evidence for seeking justice. Jonathan Kertzer writes about poetic justice: "Literature reveals the intense efforts of moral imagination required to articulate what justice is and how it might be satisfied" (1).

Poetic justice is a literary judicial pronouncement on the failure of governance and the chronicling of history through legal mediation and retribution against the offenders. Onyebuchi Nwosu and Anike Adeshina frame failure of government from the corrupt perspectives and state

that; “Corruption scandals are not new in Nigeria as they have been the major reasons given by the military for their interventions in politics since the 1960s” (15). This indicates that corruption which leads to bad government is as old as the Nigerian society and engages in fierce battle with the creative. Raji continues in the tradition of Achebe, who insists that art performs a function. Achebe notes that “art for art’s sake is deodorized dog shit.” Achebe as well as Raji do not believe in the concept of “art for art’s sake.” Quinlan, in conceptualizing Raicine’s submission in *Phedre* within the framework of poetic justice, notes that “poetry should serve an ethical purpose; the ancient poets made of the theater a school wherein virtue was taught not less effectively than in the school of philosophy” (25). Raji’s *Webs of Remembrance* serve an ethical purpose, which is that of justice and building a memorial for those who were deceased by the Nigerian system of government. The *Web of Remembrance* opens with salutation as a means of opening the ethical floor for the pronouncement of justice and denunciation against the political class. The poet’s persona informs us that “I come gently/ like the evening rain” (13), the evening rain being symbolic of the effect of the actions of the political rulers, which becomes epic in the “evening” of the masses, and the effect as storming like the rain. In the face of such political mismanagement, the poet persona comes “in silence/like the dews of a virgin morn,” and silence traumatizes the poet persona and makes the resources that power creativity. Ifeoma Ezinne Odiye and Beatrice N. Ebingha observe that; “Courage spurred by assertiveness is the hallmark of feminist tenets” (16). Beyond gender courage is spurred assertive tenets of Raji’s poetic justice and traumatic remembering. Odey Josephat Adoga and Otosi, Fidelis Basse corroborating patterns of corruption genderised it in their submission thus; “The male controlled society in Africa and Nigeria in particular uses power as an instrument of negation to frustrate the dreams and aspiration of women by instituting a reign of terror and disillusionment” (115). Raji in asserting the past through memory sees the plight of the society as a singular concept that affects both genders.

In this process of silence, the poet persona pays tribute to forebears and speaks: “rites/ of the first tuber and leaves to you/ Oh forebears of redolent words/ Salute to you who ponder our ways to sunlight/ Salute to you who hold the pestle of songs/ to the mouths of mortal wrongs” (13).

The poet persona calls the ancients into witness against the political class, and then, after salutation, the poet persona makes a request. "Give my voice the sonorous strains of bitter kolas; give my voice the slippery depths of colobus bananas; let my eyes curve into the past; like a sickle in the harvest of gladsome songs; let my blood draw the things; gone, going, and coming..." (13). In the mood of incantation, the poet persona asks for courage to draw from the past, and like the sickle in harvest, his imagination draws from the things gone, going, and coming. The poet's persona notes, "I come tenderly, like the full moon, among gasping stars" (13).

The poet persona came fully prepared, like a full moon, and the persona, through poetic justice, brought peace among the gasping masses, which represents the star from the stifling actions of the leaders. The poet persona continues to indicate the role of memory in powering poetic imagination when the poet persona in the poem "Forward to the Past..." states that "Aroma of rheumatic shocks/my land, my mouth is bruised/by a contortion of curses" (15). The forward to the past, which makes use of an elliptical dot, indicates the continuous gleaning from memories to make a case for the plight of the masses, whose wounded sore bruises the psyche of the poet persona, who is also a victim of the political class. The contortion of curses indicates the nature of how the judgment will sound. The poet persona affirms the temperament of this research thus: "The totality, flesh and spirit, of the poems in this collection is conceived as an instinctive response to the vicarious experience of being dehumanized by the weapons in a period of anomie. I have willed these poems as direct products of a political, or shall I say nationalist, imagination" (7). The poet's persona wills the flesh and spirit of the poem as a nationalist imagination and poetic justice through the art of remembering. Reibenterin Alberta Amaila, attempting a definition of poetic justice, submits that "Poetic Justice" is the title given to that literary doctrine that has to do with the relationship between sin and retribution (iv). Through literary poetic retribution, Raji in *Web of Remembrances* hopes to hold accountable those Nigerian ex-military governments and the metamorphosed military democratic leaders through the vehicle of art.

Poetic justice in Raji's *Webs of Remembrance*

Raji's *Webs of Remembrance* is a poetic composition in the artistic vision of retribution as poetic justice. Egya while writing about the *Web of Remembrance*, was of the opinion that "Raji is basically concerned with the fate of his nation, Nigeria, having passed through a terrible military era and emerged still into an inconsequential, trivialized democracy" (14). What Egya is referring to is the workings of a traumatic memory of the poet's persona that seeks justice within the framework of art. Cathy Caruth, while theorizing trauma, notes that "traumatic neurosis emerges as the unwitting re-enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (2). The traumatic past becomes a source for a literary composition holding leaders accountable. Lee Artz in accounting for the foregoing submit that; "The ideal speech situation, the democratic sphere, imagined by rhetorical theorists can only be realized within and among democratic social movements that challenge existing power—not by speaking truth to that power—but by speaking the power of our new truth: we are the majority, we must collectively argue,debate, and decide how to save humanity. Conditions of life for millions of world citizens in the 21st century indicate that for democracy to exist, the economic and political power of corporate capitalism must be replaced with a just society" (160). Raji through poetry speak is own truth against power that has metamorphosed from military rule to a democratic one.

The poet persona is firm and determined to pass judgment against the oppressive political class, and in clear terms, the poet persona says: "My spirit is grieved; my grief is long like the rivers; I will not forgive; I will not forget; I will be the lie God's vengeance of truth; I will be thunder in the kidneys of liars" (16). In the grief of the poet persona, the persona makes a firm decision. The persona insists on using truth as a medium of divine justice, and he does this through the framework of remembering. Anne E. Wilson and Michael Ross, while writing about remembering, note that "remembering is often a social function" (51). What this indicates is that through poetic justice, Raji performs the social function of seeking justice for the masses, who are powerless and voiceless in Nigeria as a result of a lack of agency. Poetry becomes an agency to speak truth to power. Wilson and Ross note further that "when we recall these same memories in conversation, these same memories may also serve as interpersonal functions" (51).

Intersections of Memory and Poetic Justice in Raji's Web of Remembrance

Raji engages in interpersonal conversation through his poetry, and he does this through the recalling of past memories and conversing with the masses through the malleable presentation of memory through the conduit of poetry. Kimberley A Wade et al corroborates the foregoing thus; “In connecting us to the past, memories determine who we are. But we don’t access that past, we construct it – and in doing so we construct ourselves” (3). The poet's persona, in an attempt to insist on his action, prepares a memorial for those who were hurt by the actions of the political class. The poet persona’s “spirit is grieved” and the persona’s “grief is long like the rivers” (16) illustrate the extensiveness of such grief. In his attempt to forget his grief, the poet makes him remember in a rhetorical frame: “How will I forget the pain when I remember the knife and see the scar?” (16). The scar is always present in the psyche of the poet's persona, and the use of natural elements to reflect this loss indicates the continuous nature of the injuries the political class inflicted on the masses. Jinran Qie affirms that; “There are certain psychosocial impacts of scars that are required to be dealt with appropriately” (221). Raji’s psyche scar is dealt with through the framework of poetic justice and resistance within the framework of art.

The poet persona’s memory could not go away, and through poetry, the poet persona reminisced about the failure of leadership. Elaine Reese and Kate Farrant, corroborating the foregoing, note that “reminiscing or talking about the past with others is a critical part of our autobiographical memories” (29). The *Web of Remembrance* is autobiographical as well as collective. It illustrates the fluidity of memory from the personal to the collective when the oppression is a collective one but the individual feels different as a result of how they perceive it. The poet's persona affirms this damage thus: “no water runs where the Niger flows; no fish swims where the Benue berths, my spirit is grieved” (16). This is nature's cause, but human actions have affected the climate to the extent that what was nature to the Niger is no longer in existence.

The poet persona frowns at the transition of military men into supposed democrats, and through their depiction, the poet persona suggests that their nomenclature does not change their DNA of corruption. Loubna Bahouli affirms the foregoing that; “...that there is a connection between military institutions and levels of corruption in African nations” (449). The poet's persona

thus bears witness to the recurrent nature of bad leadership. The persona notes, “I see rodents still; I see reptiles in new skin; I see bats flinging above the flood; I smell the odor in the air, which betrays the anus of the tribe; I see them dressed but naked like prostitutes; Oh, I am grieved beyond forgetting” (16). The persona uses destructive metaphors in describing new leaders whose newness is basically based on their names. In the poem “This Land Tickles Me,” the land is used as a referent to the actions of the political leaders. The poet persona associates the intensity of love with the effect of pain caused by political leaders, and this sweet-bitter pie tickles the poet persona into action. Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale and Opeyemi Ajibola observe that; “We see in Raji’s poetic oeuvre a fine balance between the poet’s preoccupation with the sociopolitical realities of the nation state and the representations of his loveworld, extolling that all-too-human other side of life” (323). The foregoing indicates that anger is an underlying symbol of the poetic love of justice.

The poet's persona seems to suggest that the actions of political leaders and their effect on the masses seem to have no cure: “This land tickles me/Tonsillitis of ailment without herbs” (17). This effect makes the poet persona frown because many have tongues but lack memory to recall that the suddenly transformed democrat was once a general wielding guns and oppressing the masses. The persona notes “full of tongues, without memories, of a waking sense” (17) and highlights the function of memory in seeking poetic justice.

Poetic Witnessing and Remembrance in Raji *Webs of Remembrance*

There is a poetic remembrance of those subjugated by the actions of the state to the extent that the poet's persona asks rhetorical questions. Shoshana Felman and Doris Lous submits that “oftentimes, contemporary works of art use testimony both as the subject of the drama and as the medium of their literal transmission” (5). This is the case with Raji’s *Web of Remembrances*, which uses literary testimony in his attempt to witness against political injustice in Nigeria. In the poem “Detainee?” the poet persona asks, “What is a detainee without his trophy/ of violent hours, minutes/ like a millennium’s millipede/ in the cave/ of the captor’s chamber/ pot/?” (19). Through rhetorical questions, the poet's persona builds a memorial for those subjected to extreme forms of

brutality by the Nigerian state. In witnessing, Shoshana Felman is of the opinion that “a “life testimony” is not simply a testimony to a private life but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony that can penetrate us like an actual life” (2). Raji’s work represents the relationship between text and life.

The poet persona affirms that the oppression of the people is massive when the persona says, “Why is the detainee/the common breed/the next of kin/to all/my kindred ones?” (19). Political imprisonment becomes the collective fate of the people in a totalitarian government like Nigeria. Raji first attempts to heal from the traumatic experience of the military era through poeticizing his experiences and poetry becomes traumatic extensional of his personal trauma. Felman further notes that “the capacity to witness and the act of bearing witness in themselves embody some remedial quality and belong already, in obscure ways, to the healing process” (4). The *Web of Remembrance* is Raji’s process of healing from traumatic memories. In the poem “A Country Writes Her Own Epitaph,” the poet's persona, through testimony, prepares a memorial for those killed and those oppressed by the political class. “From the beginning of night to the end of day, Vigils for Death become the new dance-craze of my people” (22) as the state murders them in cold blood. The masses have to “flee the streets of sorrow and cremation; my children flee the lands, seeking the kindness of strangers” (22).

The poet's persona affirms the fact that due to tyrannical rule, the masses flee the country and seek the kindness of strangers so as to live. Felman further notes that “as a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference” (5). The *Web of Remembrance* is composed of memory, and memory provides the referent for the poet's persona to compose his art. The poet's persona chronicles the effect of a totalitarian state when he submits that “not even the dead are safe” (23). The poet persona continues to bear witness against a totalitarian by asking a rhetorical question: “Who sings when

the beast prowls, when night thickens with dreams of blood, when sorrow's scent suffocates, when the remains of lean laughter sing?" (25).

The actions of the political class are not allowing the masses to sing as a result of their suffocating presence, which draws and flows the blood of the masses in sorrow when the beast prowls. Even the poet's persona is affected by the actions of the totalitarian government. "When slit drums stand spent and deaf in defiled groves, who sings? When rhyme's winds run amok like amputated tongues? When boots barrels and the gift of grenades chase the choir into silence?" (25). The poet persona cannot sing because of the "rhyme's wind" of guns, which chases the choir into silence with grenades and bullets. In highlighting the effect of resistance on both the human mind and the physical body, the poet persona in the poem "My soul is stitched" affirms the effect of the resisting power: "because I broke the emperor's/ testicles in a nutshell/ crash of screaming songs/ they covered my head/ with ash, hot as hell/ because I rode in a paddle/ of proverbs against the aching/current of an envious sea" (26).

Speaking truth to power is like breaking the emperor's testicles; the emperor and the political class do not like to be told the truth, and as such, they do everything possible to silence the poet persona. So the political class deals ruthlessly with the poet persona because of the persona's attack on power: "They tore my sails/ and drowned my voice/ because I caught our drunken gods/ in a beastly pose/ and sold the canvass/ to sneering mortals" (26). The poet's persona is like a watchdog that does not keep silent but informs the masses of the failure of leadership, and as such, the supposed leaders tore the persona apart and attempted to drown the person's voice because the persona exposed political drunken individuals who assumed the position of the gods in society. The Drunken gods' response to the poet persona's actions and "they scattered my flesh/ to dragon streams.../ But because my soul is stitched / to rivers of songs/ they cannot kill the truth/ of my liquid lore. / And because my soul is sown / in rivers of songs/ I've grown deep/ deep against the toxic tide / of their feudal wreckage.

"My soul is stitched to the fate of sonorous rivers" (26). As a result of the poet persona's outspokenness as a resistance mechanism, the political class symbolically scatters the flesh of the

poet persona. Amidst the oppression and intimidation of the poet persona, the poet persona is determined to proclaim his message, knowing full well that the political dictators cannot kill the trust. The poet persona, though persecuted, has grown beyond the toxic tides, which include molestation, oppression, and exploitation of the poet persona. The poet's persona compares his soul to a river that flows with effect and fertilizes those who come in contact with his message and poetic witnessing against the corrupt political class. The poet persona in "An Underground Poem" reconstitutes his body as a medium of resistance, thus: "My body is a temple/ of angry music/ Flames in my brain/ Itching forms in my blood" (27).

The plight of the masses becomes a muse for the composition of angry poetry against the oppressor; the burden of such knowledge of the oppressed is a source of concern for the poet's persona. The poet's persona is also a victim of the collective suffering of the masses. The persona notes that "a maddening echo fills my soul. I am the survivor in this hole, where melodies are made on platters of skulls" (27). The echoes of the affliction of the masses fill the soul of the poet persona, and the poet persona is a survival of state brutality. In an attempt for the poet's persona to highlight his afflictions and the oppression of his people at the hands of the oppressor, he remembers the platters of skulls and, through poetry, erects a memory for those killed by the instrumentality of state brutality. The poet persona, through laughter, frowns at those who take sides with the oppressors as a result of their changing principles: "Even in this hell-hole haven of my conscience, I laugh at the colorful cowardice of chameleons and castrated dogs" (27).

Even at the subjugation of the poet's persona and his people, he still laughs at the oppressors of their supporters, who are chameleons and castrated dogs. The poet persona uses poetry to confront and speak truth to oppressors. The poet's persona notes that "I speak of mortal sins above; I speak against gods who refuse to burn, die, or sink in their own flames" (27). Through the art of poetic speaking, the poet persona speaks truth to power and holds those to account who have refused to burn, die, or sink in their own flames, which is a product of dictatorship and misrule in Nigeria. In an attempt to hold the oppressors to account, the poet persona withholds some privileges that act as protection for the oppressors, thus: "No more the

eunuch, anointed in a film of fainting prophets. No more the unwilling wheel/ to priests of antic pranks. No more your carrier of curses on these wild windy days, no more.” (27).

The poet's persona disrobes the religious leaders who are interceding for the oppressors and proceeds to hold them to account. The poet's persona affirms that “I belong to no bacchanal, no babel of Goddam gods, in the middle of an eclipse” (27). The poet persona disassociates himself from those drunk by bribery and corruption, those who sing praises of political leaders as a result of the things they benefit from the political leaders, although it causes darkness in the lives of the masses in society.

Reimagining History through Poetry in the *Web of Remembrance*

Raji, the poet persona in the second instalment of *Web of Remembrance*, reimagines history through a poetic lens. Onuoha (2011), in writing about the interface of history and poetry, notes that “memory is a product of history and the fibula of creative literature.” (17). Poetry gleans from historical memory, as indicated in Raji’s *Web of Remembrance*. Onuoha's account of the role of poetic remembering notes that “the art of remembering... is a literary litigation against the power that be and those who have missed using the said power to the detriment of others in society” (25). The poet's persona poetically captures the dark days of military rule in Nigeria and its stifling effects on the Nigerian masses.

The poet's persona, in an attempt to forget, remembers the continued presence of military brutality in Nigeria. The persona in the poem “Cyclone I” notes that “Nightmare flickers in our twice-thrice-beaten eyes, no more meaning/ in the grammar of lives My pain goes like a stubborn present tense” (30). The brutality of the poet's persona and his people is such that it no longer makes sense to the people, nor does it surprise them any longer, as a result of the persistent nature of their exploitation and molestation in the country. The poem “Cyclone II” seems to suggest the dawn of civil rule from military oppression, but the oppression of the masses takes another form, thus: “Light breaks again Where the eclipse grows A slender relief Touches Earth’s brow” (31).

The civilian rule did not bring total peace and the operation of the masses into the hands of their oppressors.

The civilian rules seem to be a reflection of the military rule because it is the same people in power, "transformed" dictators now democrats. The poet persona in the poem "Cyclone III" highlights the plights of the masses thus: "Darkness springs Where the farmer falls / We reap the newly grown / We reap the spittle in the soil The salt and the sand We grieve and reap Sewn in Earth's veins" (32). The former, which fell, was military rule followed by a civilian administration, which did not, in the real sense, benefit the masses the way it was supposed to, and the masses continued to live, reap, and grieve in the hands of civilian rulers even when many lost their lives to make it possible. The foregoing is illustrated by the poet persona's submission, "Where the wolf is the shepherds' in-law, the sheep is a feast in their garnished game of blood in the wind" (32). The civilian rule shares a close relationship with that of the disposed military rulers, and this has a negative effect on its dispensing of democratic dividends to the masses.

Highlighting the foregoing effects of this relationship, the poet persona in "Cyclone IV" notes that "And the wind that carries dust carries rain. The same wind brings fire. Fire licks." "The whirlwind... and the whirlwind binds us to a rainbow of dreams and nightmares." (33). The poem ended in elliptical dots, indicating that the affliction of the masses is continuous, which illustrates the cyclical nature of military and civilian rules in Nigeria. In the poem "Malediction for a Maximum Ruler," the poet's persona builds a tomb and poetic memorial for those who were brutalized and, to some extent, became silent in death. The dedication before the body of the poem implicates our interpretation within the poetic stanza.

The poet person in the dedication submits that, "And for those who still suffer from the shadows and knocks of tyrants, this poem is recommended as a morning meal, daily..." (34). The poet persona continues in the process of poetic justice against oppressors, thus: "Write the poem, the wind hailed me; chew the bones and drink the blood of emperors in your appetite for writing; churn that blood art" (34). The poet persona is aided by nature to bring justice against the oppressors in Nigeria through the art of poetry and advice, thus: "...chant no more evil about the

beast; feel no more nightmares when next you hear the creeping rumours of minted monies exhumed." Sing your harmless song, O poet, and ask no extinct questions about Tyrannosaurus rex. (34).

The poet persona advises the masses that their mental health should not be alarmed by political corruption whenever the loots of the former military rulers are discovered. Though the poet advises the need for indifference as a coping mechanism, the poet's persona affirms the impossibility of such a disposition, thus: "But I tried most in vain to kill this knifing nightmare; I tried in vain to slash the cursing tongue; not to remember the emperor of scars" (34). The foregoing highlights the effect of trying to forget; trauma is very difficult to forget in the memory of the poet's persona. The poet persona refuses to make excuses for those who were in charge of the nation, trying to implicate the civilians as accompanists and thereby focus the criticism on the political class. "Who forgot his brains in a luncheon of prostitution, I tried in vain not to seek foolish questions like, "Who held the treasure-key when Cyclops burned the State House?" or "Who sprinkled the soil with seeds of sorrow and irrigated the mind with threats of self-succession?" (34).

Although the civilians are accompanists in the art of corruption, the poet persona says he would not seek such foolish questions because it seems the military forced them to engage in corrupt practice. The poet persona indicates means of holding dictators to account, thus: "In the emperor's trail, let there be a conference of curses; in the tyrant's praise, let cannons of fake biographies be burned; and on the terrible soil, which swallowed the pig, let an epitaph of the piss be written" (35). The poet persona recommends the need to hold despotic leaders to account through art, thus: "here rots Nebuchadnezzar forever King of Looters; he wrote his name in blood, on rivers of blazing shame, here lies the curse forever" (35).

The poet's persona proposed the need to hold despotic leaders into account, whether dead or alive. The poetic justice is also recommending that other poets and critics hold totalitarian rulers accountable. Through poetic rhetorical questions and refrains, the poet person builds memories of hurt and exploitation, wrestling out the memories from the strongholds of history and reclaiming

them. In the poem "Farewell to Myth I," the poet persona, through poetic rhetorical questions and refrains that appear like chants, re-resurrects history through a poetic frame, thus: "Where are you, oh Olokun? They rape you and raid your children. They march on your fertile brows. They rig rods of crude pain in your vein" (36). Through rhetoric, the poet's persona gradually builds a memorial for those who are victims of rape, raids on children, and destruction of the natural environment, and attempts to witness against the political class.

The poet's persona, through metaphoric piling, continues to bear witness against the political class and their corrupt practices in Nigeria. The poet's persona notes that "Where are you, Olokun? Watch them shell and loot the gold in the swamp. Merchants and mechanics of thorns. Watch them burn the helpless air." The poet's persona questions the African god Olokun, and such questioning foregrounds the helplessness of the masses.

Conclusion

Raji's *Web of Remembrance* masterfully weaves together the intricate intersections of memory and poetic justice, illuminating the complex nature of trauma, remembrance and its externalisation of memory. The study indicates the fluidity of memory and the fluid boundary between personal and collective memories in art which indicate that the personal can actually be the collective in condemnatory art. Historical poetry which is enabled by the framework of art makes memory malleable to within the framework of poetry. This study indicates that poetry engages with history and keeps historical records alive through re-enactment as it is indicative of Raji's *Web of Remembrance*. Historical memory provides the raw material that Raji used in *Webs of Remembrance* to seek poetic justice within the framework of art. Through historical reference, the poet's persona re-domesticates and brings corrupt government and ex-military officials to trial. The poet's persona's attempt for justice functions as a method of testimony and witnessing through the metaphoric piling of institutional and individual actions that had brutalized the masses and, by such acts, passed hailstone judgment against them. The web of remembrance is a poetic tomb for those who lost their lives as a result of leadership failure, and it is a memorial for them and a

memorial of the survival of military and democratic brutality. The poet's persona's hailstone message emphasizes his artistic vision within the framework of art.

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