Deixis, Historical Memory and the Contradictions of Postcolonial Freedom in Oloruntoba-Oju's *Losses*

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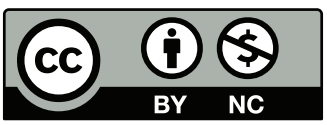
Abstract

This paper studies Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju's *Losses (Poems)* (1998). It situates the collection within the tradition of works written against the repressive military regime in Nigeria, and in Africa in general, pointing out the centrality of historical memory as used in the creation of a poetics of lamentation, resistance, and denunciation. In studying the prevalence of memory in the poems, I employ deixis as a paradigm to track the social environment which the poet creates; the person, place, and time of discourse are directly related to the dominant issue of social suppression, which is painfully remembered and represented in the poems. While the most common research approaches in memory studies have adopted models from anthropology, literature, archaeology, sociology, and popular culture, this work argues that a linguistic approach, particularly pragmatics, is equally suitable because of the way it situates meanings within specific social and ideological contexts. In employing this linguistic approach, this work examines how memory becomes a tool for protest and resistance against the dictatorial regimes in Nigeria. More precisely, it foregrounds the notion of freedom in postcolonial states as being intricately tied to the burden of remembering the past and learning from its pitfalls in order to build a better future.

Keywords: Historical memory, pragmatics and deixis, Nigerian military rule, poetry of resistance



Biography

Theophilus Okunlola has Master's degrees from both the Department of English, University of Lagos and from Mississippi State University. He is currently studying for his PhD in the Department of English, University of Wisconsin, Madison. He is interested in postcolonial theory and literature, and especially the representations of violence and cultural memory.

Introduction[1]

The inseparable relationship between history and literary creativity indicates how the recourse to memory in writing is not a recent practice but one which has endured for a long time and continues to do so. The act of remembering blurs temporal distances and presents past events as a continuous reality and an undertone for the present ones. This is what one confronts when reading Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju's *Losses.* Earlier discussions of Oloruntoba-Oju's poetry, such as Salam-Olopade (1993), Raji (1994), and Ushie (2001), though incisive, did not focus on this aspect.

The collection does not stand alone in the long line of poems that express dissatisfaction with a common predicament of postcolonial African nations: a period of military and quasi military rule. Collections such as *Earth Child* (Anyidoho 1985), *A Gathering Fear* (Oguibe 1988), *Rhythms of the Last Testament* (Eghagha 2002), and *Broken Pitchers* (Ododo 2012) are among others that document the reality of postcolonial hardship during the military eras of various nations.[2] For many postcolonial African nations, nothing sums up post-independence disillusionment better than the repression experienced during military regimes. While the collections mentioned are revolutionary in their antagonistic stance towards postcolonial oppression and dictatorship, Oloruntoba-Oju's poeticizing grip on the situation is exemplary in the current context – in blending revolutionary aesthetics with notions of memory. This trend is not only notable in Oloruntoba-Oju's poetry but is also found in his published drama, *Awaiting Trouble,* as noted by Adeoti (2003).

A teacher, social critic, and activist, Oloruntoba-Oju is described as "another member of that generation of scribblers who constantly place their writing at the service of groaning humanity" (*Losses* 43). Also notable is the fact that his poetry conveys its inherent revolutionary message in as simple a language as possible. The truth is "…borne/Aloft/Astride the friendly back/Of gentle nouns and verbs", as another poem in the collection puts it ("The new verse", 43).

This paper assesses Oluruntoba-Oju's representation of postcolonial dissatisfaction in *Losses* by examining the representations of historical memory in terms of a linguistic paradigm. In particular, this work adopts a pragmatic-stylistic approach to elucidating how Oloruntoba-Oju weaves the mundane – popular stories, places, and commonplace events of hardship in the country – together with more distant histories to show a trend of disillusionment in Nigeria. By contextualizing memory in linguistic discourse, the paper argues for a new approach to studying what Jan Assman (2008) has referred to as communicative memory. This approach, I show, reflects how language and style are deployed in *Losses* not just for aesthetic purposes but also to perform deliberate social functions of remembering and protesting, much like they are used by the other poets cited above. Furthermore, in contrast to the several attentions given to the place of history in literary works generally, and Nigerian poetry specifically, this approach helps in distinguishing between the work of memory and history in Nigerian poetry. The collision of history and memory often leads to the discarding of the nuances presented in poetry collections like *Losses.* Therefore, this present work accounts for the distinction and points of interaction between the two by using time, place, and person deictic elements and indicating how they are stylistically deployed

[1] This article is an extension of my undergraduate and Masters' theses.

2 Olaoluwa Senayon (2008, 71–130), in focusing on the dynamics of home and exile in modern African poetry, recounts the horrors of military intervention in postcolonial Africa as represented in *Earth Child* (Anyidoho 1985) and *A Gathering Fear* (Oguibe 1988). He argues that the hardship during this period was a significant factor in leading many to leave the shores of Africa. Oloruntoba-Oju's collection is not concerned with the migrant implications of military dictatorship; rather, it reflects how people struggle to make meaning under meaningless regimes.

for the making of historical memory. In doing this, it avoids the pitfall of simplistically just classifying all recourse to the past as a deployment of history.

Postcolonial contradictions, Nigerian poetry, and a linguistic paradigm

Depictions of the contradictions of freedom and a resort to history and memory are at least two significant dimensions in the poetry of disillusionment and resistance in the Nigerian literary landscape. After a long period of colonial struggle for freedom, culminating in the independence of the nation on October 1, 1960, the hopes of many people changed with the arrival of independence. The nationalist efforts for independence from the colonialists soon turned into nationalist efforts to redefine the freedom which they had hoped for initially; the enemy, this time, was the military government. The military intervention in Nigerian politics lasted for about thirty years in total, starting with the first military junta. The first military regime lasted from January1966 to October 1979. The second phase of military rule lasted from December 1983 to May 1999. Although the argument that underlies the incursion of the military into political governance is often justified as the need to ensure order and justice in a post-independence society plagued by the corruption and disorderliness of the civilian government, the military in no way represented a respite for the citizenry. Instead of representing hope, the most grueling forms of national violence and human rights abuse were experienced within this thirty-year period in Nigeria.

For poets and other artists, memory and remembrance were used to document the hopes of freedom and its contradiction as socially and politically constructed. Edward Said, writing on memory in social construction, states that:

> memory and its representations touch very significantly upon questions of identity, of nationalism, of power and authority. Far from being the neutral exercise in facts and basic truths, the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory, both in school and university, is to some extent a nationalist effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to an insider's understanding of one's country, tradition, and faith (Said 2002, 42).

Oloruntoba-Oju's title poem in the collection demonstrates the lure of history and memory in moments of disillusionment. The poem encapsulates some of the more powerful poetics of memory in Nigerian postcolonial poetry:

> In search of peace I reach for aged times
> Driven by today's throes I race arm-spread
> Into the warm bosom of yesterday (49).

The poems in Oloruntoba-Oju's collection are strewn with particulars of "today's throes", ever since the military repression represented in the opening poem ('Hawker'). It also links the past with the present through a poeticized recollection of old tyrannical kings in different epochs, in "The Rod of Tyranny" and "Iya Oba Laa…", two poems based on ancient lore. The poems, set respectively in ancient and modern times, as well as in history and in lore, foreground the underpinning of history in memory and the location of memory in history.

Eloquently stated, Said's view about the significance of memory and representations and to nationalist efforts raises an all too familiar challenge: the challenge of clearly distinguishing between history and memory. This problem is made even worse when the two concepts are merged together as historical memory. Pierre Nora, in "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux Memoire*" (1989), tries to clarify the difference between history and memory by first refuting the claim that whatever has passed becomes history, includ-

ing salient cultural and ancestral traditions. Nora's attempt to distinguish between history and memory is ultimately summed up with the assertion that "memory dictates, history writes, memory attaches itself to sites, history attaches itself to events" (Nora 1989, 20–21). The implication of this for the concept of historical memory is that any writing that simply represents events relies on history, but when sites such as names (of people, organizations, places), military ditties, geographical locations are attached – as we find in Oloruntoba-Oju's *Losses* – to those events, they become an embodiment of memory.

Nora opines that memory operates at the level of the individual and the collective. In other words, memory can be a representation from the individual point of view or the societal one and vice-versa. Oloruntoba-Oju details the interplay between the particularization and generalization of memory in his collection. The narratives of events and acts of remembering represented in his poems are not simply those of the individual; rather, they constitute collective memory. Unambiguously, the poet shows how the individuals involved in his poems are inextricably woven into the matrix of the society. Accordingly, memory is socially constructed and contextualized in the collection.

Against this background, historical memory is thus conceived as a social practice and construct through which people groups create institutionalized narratives about events. It is in the choice to institutionalize certain events rather than others that memory transcends just history. The process of institutionalization is commonly formal and politically influenced – a specific day may be chosen and sometimes memorials are erected to commemorate an event. However, institutionalization does not always have to be formal, as it sometimes emerges out of public interaction and engagement with certain events, especially when such events do not receive political attention. In this sense, historical memory can function as a form of subtle rebellion and protest. This is typically the case with the way the Nigerian military rule is remembered: through the songs, slogans and policies associated with the various military administrations that repressed the Nigerian populace. It is these genres of everyday and public interaction that Oloruntoba-Oju captures in his collection.

Jan Assman uses the concept of communicative memory to describe how memories emerge from social interaction. Building on the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory, Jan Assman, in his work "Communicative and Cultural Memory", (2008), divides collective memory into two different aspects: communicative memory and cultural memory. In establishing his argument, he writes that "time and identity is effectuated by memory" (2008, 109); this synthesis of time, identity, and memory may be divided into three levels, inner, social, and cultural, which directly relate to individual, communicative and cultural memory (2008, 109). What underscores the social level in the taxonomy, Assman explains, "is a matter of communication and social interaction" (2008, 109). He therefore admits that "memory enables us to live in groups and communities and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory" (Assman 2008, 109). However, Assman argues that social interaction and communication alone does not accurately reflect the broad idea of collective memory, which is, hence, a significant limit to its conception by Halbwachs. Therefore, he treats communicative memory and cultural memory as differing manifestations of collective memory. For Assman, communicative memory gives social and identity roles, not cultural ones. To have cultural memory, the socialization or social interaction must be aligned with cultural ethos, like myth, history, and legends. Assman writes: "cultural memory is a kind of institution. It is exteriorized, objectified and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation transcendent: They may be transferred from one situation and one gen-

eration to another" (Assman 2008, 110–111). On the other hand:

> communicative memory is non-institutional; it is not supported by any institutions of learning, transmission, and interpretation; it is not cultivated by specialists and is not formalized and stabilized by any forms of material symbolization; it lives in everyday interaction and communication and for this reason, has a very limited time depth which normally reaches no farther back than eighty years, the time span of three interacting generations (2008, 111).

Assman's argument on the disparity between communicative and cultural memory signifies that memory and remembering in the poems of the military era are primarily communicative rather than cultural.

Although this position can be challenged with evidence that shows that a poet could have taken a cultural and mythical defense against the limitations of freedom by the oppressive regime, the same dimension is not foregrounded in *Losses*. A good example of the former is Wole Soyinka who, in his poem "Idanre", takes a mythic standpoint to represent the carnage of Nigeria''s military regime. However, this is not the case with Oloruntoba-Oju's *Losses.* Here, memory is seen as not only socially and contextually constructed (as identified above), but also as communicative and continuous.

Herein lies an opportunity for a linguistic dimension to the study of memory, in that the focus on communicative memory gives room for the study of the centrality of context to the construction of memory and its presence in the "genres of everyday communication" (Assman 2008, 117). In different ways, various linguistic approaches rely on context for meaning production, the most dominant context here being the social context. Therefore, a linguistic study can interrogate any socially constructed phenomenon such as memory.

Sociolinguistics, especially 'Communicative Competence', can be a plausible tool to investigate communicative memory (Hymes 1972; Widdowson 1983). This concept puts emphasis on the importance of social conventions and everyday communication to justify, on the one hand, communicative competence, while on the other hand creating communicative memory. Like memory, social construction is also privileged in the study of meaning in pragmatics. In pragmatics, the validation of signs and their signification are conditioned upon social practices and convention. This position is variously accepted by other proponents of the discipline, who agree that pragmatics "studies invisible meanings" (Yule 1996, 127; Thomas 1995; Grundy 2000; Cutting 2002), but within the bounds of "human language in communication as determined by the conditions of the society" (Mey 2001, 6). Deixis is one of the tools for pragmatic investigation used to study invisible meanings by concentrating on the particular state of affairs – in terms of person, place, and time – that surrounds a particular conversation or social interaction.

The term *deixis* is coined from the Greek word *deiktikos*, which means reference. It presents the connection between language and context through the use of personal pronouns and demonstratives (Galita 2011, 36). Deixis works as a simple system of pointers, here (place deixis), now (time deixis), and I (person deixis). Drawing upon the systematic approach of deixis to pinpoint person, time, and place makes it viable and relevant in studying memory, which, as has been stated, relies on sites that can either be names, places, rituals and others.

At the level of person deixis, deictic elements are significant in establishing the relationship between the persona of the poet and other characters in the poem. Such relationships may be either inclusive or exclusive (Yeibo 2013, 110). Inclusive relationships signify an established bond between the persona and other characters in poems, while exclusivity

indicates separation. At the same time, person deixis shows the possession or ownership of particular things and events referenced within a poem. Time deixis is used in constructing the distinction between the present and the past and is also to describe events. It is used to launch the reader into a historical perspective about the subject of discourse in a poem. Place deixis, however, pinpoints places and sites of events. Altogether, the three deictic elements are used complementarily in the collection

Deixis and Historical Memory in *Losses*

Several poems stand out in Oloruntoba-Oju's poeticization of the collective predicament of the postcolonial. Among them are "Tolerance, Like a Wondrous Cuckold", "Hawker", "Harassment", "The Rod of Tyranny", "Iya Oba Laa …", "Tell them, Mandela …", and "Down the throat of Pieter Botha", among others. "Tolerance, Like a Wondrous Cuckold" attempts to capture the moment of colonial subjugation and the despoliation of a once beautiful African landscape:

> Her beauty was a tuneful melody
> Hummed from coast to coasts
> She sat in great splendour
> Green, innocent, bejewelled, bedecked
> And in distant lands they sang:
>
> There lies a beauty in Niger area
> Full bloom, bubbling promises
> With wondrous wealth water-wombed
> Only awaiting the seasoned tapper
>
> Then came the vandals
> Beaky-nosed from distant lands
> Next came the vandals
> Home-grown and unabashed
> Together, prising away my lady's locks
> Frittering her priceless treasures…
> (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 12; emphasis mine)

The poem reflects different time periods in Nigeria, which is metaphorically described as a lady in the poem. The country is intimated in the poem with the words "Niger area". This geographical description of the present name of the country sets the poem within the context of the time past. There is also a reference to "distant lands", where Niger area is coveted, marking the beginnings of colonial incursion into Nigeria.

An inclusive use of deixis in this poem both separates and simultaneously links time and history into a series of continued predicaments. Pronominals such as "her", "she", "my", and "they" are used to both indicate and separate the participants in the poem. In the opening part of the poem, the deictic element "her" is a referent that suggests that the persona and the referent do not share an inclusive relationship, which is not the case. Along with the person deixis, the deixis of place and time create an ambience that fosters remembering by paying close attention to the colonial and postcolonial experiences of Nigeria in the hands of various people.

The history of Nigeria's development, for a long time, has been one tale of exploitation after the other. From "vandals from distant lands", which refers to the colonialists, to the "vandals home-grown", representing post-independent leaders, exploitation and suffering seems to have become an integral part of the nation's narrative. This continuity is also achieved through a deictic structuring: "*then* came the vandals … *next* came the vandals". Only the deixis of time separates the different "vandals", otherwise there is no difference in the substance of their character or in the effect of their collaborative ("together") action. Freedom from colonialism never translated into development; instead the sufferings it brought require the citizens to remain "tolerant" in the hope that freedom would one day become wholesome. The persona, albeit very grieved, recognizes himself as a part of the social reality to whom "tolerance is preached" in spite of the "ravish [done to his] lady".

The throes of history link effortlessly with today's throes in Oloruntoba-Oju's poetry. In "Hawker" there is also a striking use of deictic elements as referents for personages struck by the continuity of hardship and dissatisfaction from the past to the present. The persona of the poem is identified with the personal pronoun, as he remembers the tragedy and reflects on the suppression of voices struggling for freedom. The poem recalls the revolutionary push of some military men, whose failed coup attempt led to their execution at the hands of the prevailing military dictatorship.

> They proclaimed their wares in the faint hours of the night
> .....
> They proclaimed their quaint wares on Martial bugles
> rubies and pearls, but rejected
> For the alloy
> ......
>
> "Revolution" on Rediffusion!
> Unripe, Hawker, Unripe
> For every seed must wait its season
> Is this the beleaguered *South*
> And even cradling fists punch holes in the sky,
> At the name of *Amandla?*
>
> I look in the book of sanctioned lores
> Only one fate:
> The venturing cock-
> roach, in the court of steely beaks
> .....
>
> Only one fate...
> Not the mustard seed now
> Nought except a secret trump
> Else,
> Adieu, *Hawkers...*(Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 9)

Historically, the failed coup attempt took place on April 22, 1990. The "revolution" proclaimed on the radio was tainted with talks of tribalism – "rubies and pearls but strangely alloyed". The leader of the coup was Major Gideon Gwarzo Orkar, who was executed on July 27, 1990. Through the use of pun, the poet has the title "Hawker,"referring to Gideon Orkar, who tried to hawk revolution on radio ("on rediffusion").

The interplay of history and memory is seen in the poem with the use of words such as "revolution" (which recalls the great revolutions of history), "*amandla*" (the Zulu and Xhosa word for "power" and freedom), and "south" (that is, South Africa, the location of the struggle for freedom against apartheid). The quest for freedom underlies the use of these three words. *Amandla* was often used as part of a chant to mean "power to the people" during the period of intense protests against the apartheid regime in South Africa. Consequently, "south", as used in the poem, becomes indicative of apartheid South Africa, while "revolution" in many quarters is understood as actions, often violent, taken to ensure a change in government or administration so that people can enjoy a new lease of life. By combining these words, the poem consciously evokes remembrance of a period of total subjection both in military led Nigeria and in apartheid South Africa. The poet communicates the common pain in the two nations through these words that are used in everyday interaction, but contextually and stylistically foregrounds these expressions by signifying how they have become collocates that embody historical injustice within a specific time period. However, Nigeria, sadly, in the poetic rendition, is not South Africa, where even children rise and shoot up resisting fists – "cradling fists punch holes in the sky" – where there is a clarion call for freedom – "at the name of *Amandla*". Oloruntoba-Oju combines this historical perspective with ancient lore to predict the fate of Gideon Orkar. "Only one fate" awaits the cockroach (revolutionary) who ventures into the "court" of chickens (the military dictatorship – "steely beaks"). "Not even the mustard

seed can save them" – a biblical allusion to faith – is used to articulate the eventual death of the coup plotters.

The theme of bondage and intolerance continues in the poem "Harassment". A dictatorial military government customarily silences every form of protest and opposition, "the shrill voice of reason" (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 15). The sharp contradiction between hopes for freedom in democracy and confinement under military rule is captured thus:

> When the promise of a democratic dawn breaks
> And, lo, to a wildlife jingle
> What other noise from martial bugle
> But a peremptory call to
> A robotic jig
>
> A little to the right
> A little to the left
> *Lef rai lef rai* Halt!
> Ajuwaya...
> (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 15)

The parade slogan of the military seen in the poem is symptomatic of the reigning order in the society. Everyone is expected to become militaristic in their approach to life. The state of affairs during this period is accurately captured through the use of the time deictic element "now": "When living now holds only/ Twixt the devil and the blue sea" (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 15). Acronyms such as *NEPA* (Nigeria Electric Power Authority) and *NITEL* (Nigerian Telecommunications) are also referenced in the poem for their inefficiencies. Altogether, the present time in the poem is bleak both in terms of governance and infrastructure.

The country is in debt and the leaders collect more for their personal gains than to benefit the citizens, who unfortunately must work to pay. The use of "our" identifies the persona with this reality, where he is not only a rememberer, he is an active participant in the scourge:

> When our non-erring populace must pay
> The price for gone-by sins
> Bear the burden of debts unknown
> (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 14).

Memory, History, and Silences in *Losses*

One of the challenges the poems in *Losses* confront is the culture of silence and collusion –with the former engendering the latter – in the face of intimidation and dissatisfaction. In fact, the notion that evil thrives because people keep quiet appears like a backdrop against which to examine the culture of silences and collusion as poeticized in the collection. Apart from actually showing the direct involvement of certain leaders in the exploitation of Nigeria, the poet indicates how being silent and telling others to remain so represents collusion. Oloruntoba-Oju approaches the agitation against these silences through the instrumentality of memory, history, and lore, and through a deft manipulation of deixis. Throughout history, the despoliation of the African landscape has taken place through sundry forms of collusion. As shown above in "Tolerance like a wondrous cuckold", the home-grown vandals unabashedly collude with vandals from distant lands. But another form of collusion is perpetrated by the "cuckolds" of history:

> They ravish my lady and preach tolerance
> Ah, tolerance, you are that wondrous cuckold
> Chancing on sweaty sinews atop his spouse
> He calmly unhooks the leathery fan on the wall
> And gives them the comfort of cooling breeze
> (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 12)

Here, in addition to the gripping analogy of

the cuckold, the poet deploys a tripartite separation of participants through an employment of deixis. In place of the two-way deixis – "me", "us" vs. "them", there is now a three way division between "me" (the poet as muse of history and resistance), "you" (the deprived), and "them" (the oppressors). Here we have a deployment of distance between the persona of the poet and his colleagues who collude through silence and "tolerance". Put differently, the idea of tolerance is an appeal to the deprived to become silent. Within the context of a poem that chronicles how the country has been dissipated by the colonialists and the post-independence leaders, the deployment of the tripartite person deixis is significant in resisting silence and condemning tolerance. In other words, while the persona of the poet maintains a distant relationship between the "you" and "them" in the poem, his very act of remembering and narrating the experiences of exploitation in the country is a rebellion because he is instead required to be tolerant, silent, and consequently, live in oblivion as if nothing is happening. Oblivion thrives where people become silent. Thus, deixis interplays with historical memory in the poem to represent a way of condemning tolerance and resisting silence.

In "Another Parable: apata, the rock", Oloruntoba-Oju relates memory to lore, by weaving an analogy with biblical paradigms and also relating them to science:

> Must I like a prophet dash
> My staff in anger against your side
> For a gushing response in this wilderness?
> Senseless, apata
> Congealed masses of little use
> Apathy, it's you I abuse...
> (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 11)

The analogy here is biblical – Moses angrily striking the rock with his staff for the miracle of gushing water in the wilderness – but Oloruntoba-Oju also yokes words from English and Yoruba to form a sense of the apathy eflected by the addressee. *Apata* in Yoruba means "rock". However, rock is ambivalent in material and metaphorical character, being steady (hard) and reliable but simultaneously senseless, hence, "apathy". Also, from the scientific indices that rocks are formed from molten mass congealed over time, Oloruntoba-Oju derives the analogy of *apata* as apathy – congealed masses of little use.

The poet also makes use of the first and second person pronouns as the deictic elements to distinguish between the two persons in the poem (the "I" and the "you"). Unsurprisingly, the persona is critical in the poem, and the criticism is levelled against the addressee, whose apathy to things has become unbearable. "I" and "my" point to the persona while "you" and "your" refer to the addressee. Relating this to the period of military regime in Nigeria, where leadership was fraught with nonchalance and carelessness for the citizenry, the anguish in the poem becomes clear. The military government here then represents the "congealed masses of little use". In the poem as a whole, the personal pronouns "I" and "my" are used six times and, although this suggests singularity, the personal pronoun is more like the voice of the collective. Therefore, the anguish expressed in the poem is as much that of the collective as of the individual.

Deixis and Haunted Pasts in *Losses*

The way the past has been presented in poems like "Tolerance: like a wondrous Cuckold" and "Losses" in Oloruntoba-Oju's poetry is consistent with the notion that many escape to the past in order to find succour for the present. While many other postcolonial writers in many works have also represented this view, it is clear that this perspective is not absolute. Studies in postcolonial trauma (Rothberg 2008; Craps and Buelens 2008) justify the idea that the past is not always as innocent as many view it. Memories of the past significantly influence and haunt the present, and in

such situations escape from the present may not even be found in the past.

In the title poem of the collection, "Losses", the poet employs a strategy of writing through time to present a contrast between the past and the present using time deixis. In the first part of the poem the poet presents a rationale for the retreat to the past in the light of today's pain. The remembrance of the throes evoked is familiar. In a time of collective captivity by the military government, the places of escape differ, but the need for escape remains sacrosanct for all:

> In search of peace I reach for aged times
> Driven by today's throes I race arm spread
> Into the warm bosom of yesterday
> For today's bloodied riches only lose us
> The ringing laughter of bye-gone moments
>
> In search of memories, I traverse Okededе
> Looking long on rusty landmarks that bore
> The scars of pattering feet
> When sandals neither our lot were
> Nor our coveted were
> Ah, blessed, blessed land
> To think I'd ever be a stranger to thee!
> (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 49)

Significant aspects of memory are also elicited with time and place deixis. Names and sites are referenced, thereby creating remembrance for the persona who is the remembrer. The poem is consistent with the use of the personal pronouns "I" and "our". However, disillusionment soon sets in:

> Is this the kirk is this the hill
> Is this the mountain top still
>
> Why are my fond memories cruelly assailed
> With this still-milling mass of inhumanity
> .....
> No longer at ease now, my friend
> In this crowded lane of my lost "happiness"
> (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 49–50)

The contrasts between the past and the present are easy to point out in the poem. The past is represented as glorious, while the present is gloomy. The obvious displeasure with the present is a reason for a solitary visit into the past. Words such as "aged", "yesterday", and "bye-gone" reflect the past, while the present is reflected with the use of "now" and "today". The past is effectively captured through place deixis with the mention of towns such as "Okededе" and "Jebba-South".

This poem certainly alludes to the voyage of the ancient mariner, the albatross of time, and the bliss of return and recovery. What undergirds the process of remembering here is the allusion to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's (1834) "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The line, "Is this the kirk? Is this the hill?" in the ancient rhyme presages a joyous return as the ancient mariner sights again these landmarks of "mine own countree." However, in Oloruntoba-Oju's rendition, the return to the past soon produces an anti-climax, in which the poet persona is greeted by a "still-milling mass of inhumanity". Oloruntoba-Oju's poem is a demonstration that memory sometimes disguises history. As it turns out, what the poet's memory renders as the "happiness" of ancient times was actually disguised in "the ocular membrane of youth"(Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 50), that innocence of childhood that rendered him blind to the surrounding misery. As the title poem of the collection, the way memory is deployed here, and the grim pictures of the past, is consistent with most of the other poems analyzed in this work so far. This poem therefore becomes a summary of the dystopic history of the nation-state, where neither the past nor the present is a place of safety. What is arguable, however, is the level of the suffering experienced in the

past and the present. Oloruntoba-Oju's use of deixis to conjure memory and history to poeticize the suffering under military rule seems to show that the present time poses a lot more dissatisfaction to the people. This dissatisfaction is connected to the fact that the anticipation of independence represented much hope but the reality of it gave much despair.

On a Linguistic Investigation of Memory: Conclusion

From the analysis of the deictic elements in Oloruntoba-Oju's poetics of memory, history, resistance, and disillusionment, it is clear that the use of person deixis and the function of inclusiveness and exclusiveness is directly linked to the division between the society and the leadership. The poet is careful not to always blame the helpless citizens, as the deictic elements portray inclusiveness between his persona and the masses. Whenever there is a reference to the leadership of the military administration, an exclusive relationship is created. This foregrounds the social stratification and disunity between the rulers and the ruled, which typifies many of Nigerian situations during the military period, and sadly, still today. However, the poet also rallies against the people's apathy and their witting or unwitting collusion with the oppressors. In those instances, he creates a deictic distance between the persona of the poet and the colluding masses.

One of the most significant criticisms of postcolonial writing concerns the way it constructs the past without reference to the future. While remembrance is vital in pursuing the future, most works give little or no indication as to what can be done to achieve the gloriousness of the past in the future. The use of history and memory has therefore been reduced to a means of escape to the past. However, memory should not only be used a means of escape; it can also be used as a curative to the woes of the present. Moreover, as has been demonstrated in the analysis in this work, the past is not always as glorious, pristine and without its blemishes as it is sometimes presented. Therefore, until postcolonial writers and critics begin to constructively interrogate the past, present, and future, solutions to the hardship of many postcolonial nations may not be found. Through his interrogation of the past and the present, Oloruntoba-Oju appears to index a non-apathetic inclusiveness in the struggle for freedom as the path to the future.

Finally, expanding the frontiers of knowledge and research in memory studies requires deploying new methodologies. This paper has drawn preliminary attention to the viability of linguistic paradigms in the study of memory. This writer believes that linguistic approaches can be critical in unfolding social and ideological tendencies embedded in memory. In nations where oblivion seems to thrive, institutions of learning, especially at the tertiary level, should evaluate interdisciplinary and appropriate cultural and systematic methodologies to combat ignorance. This is even more significant in recent scholarship, as more researchers are tending towards interdisciplinary studies in language, anthropology, history, and archaeology, among other disciplines. This paper's reading of Oloruntoba-Oju's use of the poetics of memory and resistance offers a view of the potential of such interdisciplinary evaluation.

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