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Styles and Nigerian Socio-Political Challenges in Selected Poems of Niyi Osundare

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ABSTRACT

This study presented a stylistic analysis of Niyi Osundare's "A Villager's Protest", "Unequal Fingers", and "The Politician's Two Mouths" to investigate the socio-political challenges facing Nigeria. Through a close examination of the poems' linguistic, literary, and thematic features, the paper accounts for how the poet critiques the country's hollow political promises, corruption, and social injustices. Through the use of a qualitative approach, this study employed stylistic analysis to explore the poem's use of run-on lines, parallelism, syntactic juxtaposition, connotation, simple sentences, and a host of other literary and linguistic features to convey the poet's message. The analysis revealed how Osundare's poetry reflects the complexities of Nigerian socio-political realities, casting light on issues such as succession crisis, abuse of power, lack of direction by Nigerian leaders, tribalism and marginalisation, corruption, and hypocrisy, among other socio-political challenges. The findings demonstrate the communicative importance of literature in reflecting and shaping societal discourse toward social justice and inclusiveness in leadership and power. It is concluded that Niyi Osundare's poetry is a communicative tool for social problem discourse, offering perceptions into the details of Nigeria's socio-political challenges and the need for a comprehensive overhaul in the country's political affairs. Through the findings of this study, Nigerian political actors and the electorate who have the interest of the country at heart are better guided on how to tackle the challenges head-on to ensure the nation's development, thereby boosting the country's foreign image.

Keywords: Niyi Osundare's Poetry; Presentation Styles; Socio-Political Challenges; Social Injustice

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1. Introduction

Nearly every country in the world is battling with one socio-political challenge or another[1–3]. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has long grappled with complex and intricate socio-political challenges that have hindered its social development and political stability[1]. These challenges, ranging from corruption and leadership crises to ethnic tensions and economic woes, have been a recurring theme in Nigerian literature. One notable poet who has engaged this phenomenon extensively is Niyi Osundare, who is a prominent Nigerian poet and critic. In his poetry[4], he employs his unique poetic voice to critique the socio-political scenery of Nigeria, shedding light on the country's leadership failures, social injustices, and the struggles of the masses. Extant studies have explored social issues in Niyi Osundare's poems from other perspectives, leaving out the stylistic viewpoint of the Nigerian sociopolitical challenges in Niyi Osundare's poetry. This paper conducts a stylistic analysis of Niyi Osundare's three selected poems, namely: "A Villager's Protest", "Unequal Fingers", and "The Politician's Two Mouths", to uncover how the poet's use of linguistic and literary devices reflects a thematic critique of Nigeria's socio-political challenges. By examining the poem's concerns, linguistic features, and literary techniques, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of literature in reflecting and shaping societal discourse on leadership, power, and social justice in Nigeria. In this paper, Nigeria's socio-political challenges stylistically presented by Niyi Osundare are analysed, including the insights the poet offered into the complexities of Nigeria's socio-political realities.

1.1. Related Studies

Niyi Osundare's poetry has been given attention by scholars who examine the poems from various angles and perspectives. This review synthesises relevant works by scholars on the poems, showing key themes and insights. Obaje and Kehinde[5] investigate the dialectics of patriotism of the Nigerian electorate and their leaders in the poems, exemplifying the benignant judgment of glorification to a patriot of a nation. Obaje and Kehinde's work on the poem differs from this research, as this work, building on this existing work, delves into how linguistic and stylistic devices are used to express the socio-political banes of Nigeria, while that of Obaje and Kehinde[5] simply investigates the patriotism question between the masses and their leaders. "The Politics of Language in Niyi Osundare's Poetry" by Obaje and Kehinde[5] examines Osundare's linguistic strategies to critique power dynamics and social inequalities. While Obaje and Kehinde[5] primarily centre their business on the poem's linguistic strategies to critique the themes of power dynamics and social inequalities, this study looks into how these linguistic and literary strategies are stylistically employed to critique the social and political challenges of Nigeria. Egya et al.[6] analyse "A Villager's Protest" as a representation of Nigerians' frustrations with governance and corruption by investigating "Protest and Resistance" in Niyi Osundare's poetry. Egya et al.[6] simply focus on the analysis of the themes of the poem without delving into the linguistic and literary devices, and how they are used to critique Nigerian socio-political issues, which is the main focus of this study. Adelowo et al.[7] investigates the ways in which selected poems of Niyi Osundare mirror the poet's attitude towards the underdog by exploring his thematic preoccupations and considering the contributions of Niyi Osundare's work to growing societal improvement. Although Adelowo et al.[7] focus on the poetic exploration of commonality in Niyi Osundare's selected poems, they do not approach this from the stylistic analysis point of view, which is the main focus of this work. Alu[8] explores Niyi Osundare's poetic style by exposing how the poet synthesises Western and Yoruba oral literary techniques to communicate his thoughts, neglecting how the poet stylistically unearths the Nigerian sociopolitical challenges. Moreover, the scope of Adelowo et al.'s[7] work does not go beyond poetic exploration of commonality in Niyi Osundare's selected poems; meanwhile, this work expands its scope much beyond that. These scholars have notably contributed significantly to the deeper understanding of Niyi Osundare's poetry as a powerful expression of resistance and social commentary.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

This research's theoretical framework was rooted in an eclectic Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, which provided a comprehensive lens to examine the representation

of Nigeria's socio-political challenges in Niyi Osundare's poetry. The eclectic CDA approach seamlessly combines the strengths of Fairclough's[9], van Dijk's[10] and Wodak's[11] CDA models. The reason for adopting this approach lay in its capacity to unravel the intricate relationships between language, power and ideology within discourse. By integrating these models, this study can scrutinise language, social attitudes, cognitive processes and historical and cultural contexts. Fairclough's[9] CDA approach serves as the foundation, highlighting how discourse shapes and is shaped by social structures, and examining the language, power and ideology. van Dijk[10] enhances this foundation by emphasising context and social cognition, illustrating how language influences social attitudes and beliefs. Wodak's[11] discourse-historical approach completes this framework, integrating critical linguistics with social theory. Key concepts guiding this analysis include discourse, power dynamics, ideology and context. Discourse refers to language use in social contexts, reflecting and shaping power relations and ideologies. Power dynamics encompass relationships between social groups, influencing language use and discourse. Ideology represents underlying beliefs and values, shaping discourse and social attitudes. Context encompasses social, cultural and historical settings, influencing discourse and language use. This study operated under three assumptions: that language use reflects and shapes the socio-political realities of Nigeria, discourse analysis reveals power dynamics and ideological underpinnings, and context influences discourse and language use. Through this eclectic CDA approach, this study provided an in-depth understanding of Osundare's selected poem, shedding light on the complex interplay between language, power and ideology in representing the Nigerian socio-political challenges.

2. Materials and Methods

Data collection involved multiple-layered reading of the poems—"A Villager's Protest," "Unequal Fingers," and "The Politician's Two Mouths," each guided by specific analytical concerns derived from the study objectives. Initial readings established familiarity with the narrative, while subsequent readings of the poems focused on identifying issues of Nigerian sociopolitical challenges stylistically presented in the selected poems. Thirty excerpts that cut across all the levels of stylistic analysis of the socio-political challenges discussed in the poems were purposively selected from each of the three poems, totaling ninety excerpts. After a thorough examination of the poems, the researcher discovered such stylistic devices as simple sentences, contrasting sentences, metaphors, personification, enjambment, and so on that revealed a deeper meaning beneath the surface meaning. The study adopts a qualitative interpretive research design, which subjects data to content analysis. This method of analysis allows for an in-depth examination and exploration of the poems' use of language, imagery and other devices to convey themes and messages. The study's theoretical framework is rooted in an Eclectic Critical Discourse Analysis (ECDA) to categorise and contextually analyse how styles are deployed to present the sociopolitical challenges of Nigeria in the poems. The reason for using this theoretical approach is based on its capacity to provide a comprehensive lens to examine the representation of Nigeria's socio-political challenges in the selected poems and its capacity to unravel the intricate relationships between language, power and ideology within discourse.

3. Results

In the scathing verses of Niyi Osundare's selected poems—"A Villager's Protest," "Unequal Fingers," and "The Politician's Two Mouths," the poet launches a fierce attack on Nigeria's socio-political ills, exposing the country's long-standing problems with unflinching candour and laying bare the festering wounds of a nation in crisis. Through a masterful weave of various stylistic devices, Osundare unmasks the rotten underbelly of political deception and corruption, the suffocating grip of poverty and inequality, the systemic failure of accountability and resource management, the gruelling cycles of neglect, abandonment, and inefficient leadership. This analysis delves into the stylistic arsenal Osundare employs to convey the anguished voice of the masses, exploring the ways in which his poetic craft reveals the entrenched injustice and neglect that have long plagued Nigeria. Analysis under Section 3.1 focuses on "A Villager's Protest," Section 3.2 examines "Unequal Fingers," and Section 3.3 discusses "The Politician's Two Mouths."

3.1. Styles and Nigerian Sociopolitical Challenges in Niyi Osundare's "A Villager's Protest"

Various Nigerian sociopolitical challenges stylistically presented in Niyi Osundare's "A Villager's Protest" are systematically analysed hereunder.

3.1.1. Political Deception and Corruption among Nigerian Leaders in "A Villager's Protest"

Political deception and corruption by Nigerian leaders refer to the widespread habits of manipulating information, exploiting power and engaging in corrupt practices for personal gain. This challenge has become a cancerous part of Nigeria's landscape, undermining the country's development and democratic values. Osundare, in the poem, critiques this challenge through various stylistic devices discussed below.

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of Political Deception and Corruption among Nigerian Leaders**

Osundare, through various stylistic devices, critiques political deception and corruption in the forms of false promises and manifestos and bribery and embezzlement in the poem. Syntactically, the use of simple sentences such as "They come more times than the eye bats its lid" (lines 1–2) conveys a sense of directness and urgency, highlighting the persistent and relentless nature of politicians' false and empty promises before they are voted into office. This is a pointer to persistent visitation and lies by Nigerian politicians during the period of the election. The compound sentence, like "They come armed with sweet words, inflated promises and a chest that bribes with countless prostrations" (lines 10–14), reveals the cunning and deceitful tactics employed by Nigerian politicians to win votes. In addition, such compound sentences as in "We' ll build schools… (line 16), and turn all nights into day" (line 20) mimic the grandiose promises of politicians, which are eventually revealed to be hollow. This is the level of politicians' deception in Nigeria. Before the election, they promise heaven and earth, but after the election, they do nothing. The use of parallelism, as in "We' ll" and "They come", stylistically creates a sense of rhythm, underscoring the politicians' persistent and enticing promises. In the same vein, the use of repetition, particularly in the refrain, "They come" (line 29), "They talk" (line 30), and "They promise" (line 31) drives home the cyclical nature of corruption, emphasising that this issue is an ongoing process in the country. The employment of passive voice in the poem, as in "promises forgotten," emphasises the point that politicians culminate hollow political promises with a lack of accountability and responsibility as they blame their predecessors or external factors for their inability to perform.

Furthermore, the syntactic juxtaposition of "They talk" (line 32) and "They promise" (line 33) with "Now in" (line 34) and "promises forgotten" (line 35), just like Jolaoso and Azeez[12] opine, highlights the disconnection between politicians' words and actions, which are all at variance. Nigerian politicians always lie by promising the voters heaven and earth before elections, but betraying people's hopes afterwards. This disparity between the words and actions of politicians leads to political deception. The use of the syntactic device of enjambment, as in "We' ll build schools, We' ll build hospitals" (lines 18–19), creates a sense of flow, reflecting the smooth, convincing rhetoric of politicians, which they use to deceive the people. Conversely, the employment of caesura as in "Now in and promises forgotten" (lines 34–35) interrupts the flow, and this signifies the abrupt abandonment of promises that lead to deception and corruption among Nigerian politicians. Word order, such as "The mouth now is too honourable to greet, the belly too obese to bend" (lines 40–41), is also significant. This is because the reversal of the expected word emphasises the corrupt politicians' prioritisation of self-interest over public service. The phrase "Our man becomes a locust seen but once in several seasons" (line 42) uses a complex sentence structure to highlight the fleeting nature of political power and the corrupt politicians' lack of accountability and responsibility. Through the deliberate syntactic arrangement of the poem, the poet masterfully exposes the deceitful tactics and corrupt practices of Nigerian politicians. Through his meticulous and artful deployment of the syntactic devices, Osundare[4] has successfully critiqued political deception and corruption among Nigerian politicians.

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Political Deception and Corruption among Nigerian Leaders**

Political deception and corruption at the phonological level are portrayed and encapsulated through deliberate sound devices and choices. The use of alliteration, as in

"sweet words" (line 12) and "softness consume fat salaries" (line 38), conveys a sense of musicality, emphasising politicians' enticing and deceptive promises as well as their slick rhetoric. Also, the repetition of the voiced, bilabial, approximant /w/ sound in "We' ll" and "western" generates a sense of scope and grandeur, which emphasises the exaggerated political promises. The assonance in "fat cars" and "juicy damsels" (line 36) creates a sense of indulgence and excess, highlighting the Nigerian politicians' corruption and personal enrichment at the expense of the masses, who are impoverished by the politicians' thievery and corrupt behaviour. This line provides a harsh comment on how Nigerian politicians use the nation's wealth for their own personal gain instead of providing amenities for the people[13]. There is the employment of consonance in "dust-laden mats" and "departure of the man of power" (lines 46–47) to convey a sense of finality and abandonment, underscoring the politicians' neglect of their constituents, which is a pointer to an indescribable level of unfulfilled political promises and corruption among the people who are "power-stung" (line 50). The use of echoism (onomatopoeia), as in "thunders" (line 44), creates a sense of power and intensity. This is a deliberate attempt in the poem to highlight the politicians' abuse of authority and mandate given to them by the people whom they are running away from now. This is how most Nigerian politicians come to their constituency incognito to avoid and depart unannounced to avoid people[14]. With careful deployment of phonological devices, the poet shreds and lays bare the deceitful tactics and corrupt practices of politicians in Nigeria.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of Political Deception and Corruption among Nigerian Leaders**

Semantically, the connotative use of such words as "obese" (line 41), which connotes greed, excess and corruption; "Esuru" (line 48), which represents something that grows swollen-headed and outgrows its bounds, symbolizing corruption and excess; "power-stung" (line 50), which implies the corrupting influence of power; and "sweet words" (line 12), which suggests insincere or manipulative language, contributes to the overall tone and themes of political deception and corruption[15]. The careful deployment of these words shows how Nigerian politicians betray the trust of the people through lies and insincere words. Also, the denotative meanings of words like "come", "sweet", "inflation" and "promises" create a sense of allure and enticement, highlighting the politicians' ability to deceive and manipulate for their personal gain. The contrast between "cockcrow" (morning hour) and "sundown" (nightfall) as found in lines 5 and 7 creates a sense of urgency and finality to underscore the politicians' tendency to make promises during an election but abandon them afterwards. The metaphor of such expressions as "agama on the rock" (line 17), "power is the bird of the forest" (line 52) and "Esuru grows swollen-headed" (line 48) creates a vivid image of the politicians' adaptability and deceptions, transience and unpredictability of power that has stung politicians and growing arrogance and corruption. All these are deployed to highlight the politicians' ability to manipulate, to behave drunkenly once they attain power and to highlight their disconnection from the people whom they claim they represent in the government. The use of words such as "dust-laden" and "departure" (line 46) hints at the sense of irony and hypocrisy to underscore the politicians' deception and corruption occurring through lack of accountability and responsibility[16]. This is the reason why Osundare employs the semantic devices above in the presentation of the socio-political challenges of political deception and corruption among Nigerian leaders.

- **Graphological Level of Analysis of Political Deception and Corruption among Nigerian Leaders**

Modu and Rufai[17] explore how Niyi Osundare graphically represents ideas, themes, and concepts to emphasise what is communicated generally in Niyi Osundare's *Village Voices*, without focusing on how these graphical representations foreground Nigerian sociopolitical challenges, which is the thrust of the current study. The graphological devices of the poem also portrayed this theme of political deception and corruption. First, the use of irregular stanzas and varying line lengths is used to convey a sense of disorder and chaos, which mirrors the politicians' corrupt practices. Another is enjambment, as in "They come more times than the eye bats its lid/when they need your vote" (lines 1–3). This run-on line style of the poem is to create a sense of urgency and flow to emphasise politicians' insistence and deceptive tactics before and during the period of the election. Close to this device of enjambment is caesura (internal pause), as seen in "at cockcrow," (line 4), "at noon," (line 5), and "at sundown" (line 6). The importance of this caesura in the poem is to

convey a sense of pause and reflection on the politicians' tendency to make promises all the time before elections, but abandon them after elections. Furthermore, the indentation of certain lines, such as: "We' ll build schools" (line 16), "We' ll build hospitals" (line 17), and "We' ll bring water to every backyard" (line 18) is a style to create depth and emphasis, highlighting politicians' relentless empty promises. Finally, the use of whitespace, as in empty lines between stanzas, creates a sense of separation and disconnection. This underscores the politician's disconnection from and abandonment of their constituents. The use of these stylistic devices in the poem is deliberate and contributes in no small measure to the portrayal of the theme of political deception and corruption [15]. This is the reason why the poem has employed these stylistic devices to present political deception and corruption among Nigerian politicians.

3.1.2. Economic Inequality and Poverty by Nigerian Leaders in "A Villager's Protest"

By economic inequality and poverty by Nigerian leaders, we mean unequal distribution of resources favouring the elite and leaving the majority in poverty, which is a state of economic deprivation where citizens lack the financial resources to meet their basic needs and live a dignified life [16]. This socio-political challenge is caused by the leaders because, despite the fact that there are enough natural resources to cater to Nigerians, they deny Nigerians comfort. This challenge is critiqued by Osundare through various stylistic devices, as examined below.

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of Economic Inequality and Poverty by Nigerian Leaders**

The poem's syntactic arrangement greatly unmasks this theme: the use of simple sentences [12], such as "We' ll give the farmer the best of his sweat" (lines 25–26), conveys a sense of directness and promise, highlighting the politicians' assurance to address poverty in the country. However, the promise to tackle poverty is found to be hollow, and they "forget" to alleviate poverty as promised. So, the level of poverty in the country continues to increase. Also, the compound sentence shown by "…And make poverty a thing of the past" (lines 27–28) reveals the depth of the poverty problem among the common people in Nigeria and the need for radical change. There is also use of syntactic juxtaposition in the poem, as in "We' ll build schools/We' ll build hospitals" (lines 16–17) and "fat cars, juicy damsels" (line 34). This juxtaposition highlights the disconnection between politicians' promises and their self-serving actions, which indicate that economic inequality has unleashed many untold hardships on ordinary Nigerians. In addition, the juxtaposition of expressions like "We' ll build schools/We' ll bring water to every backyard" with the reality of abandoned promises, "promises forgotten" (line 33), and personal aggrandisement displayed by "fat cars and salaries" which the politicians consume, emphasises the economic inequality between the political elites and the ordinary Nigerians in the country [17]. The use of anaphoric repetition, as in "We' ll", creates a sense of urgency and responsibility to underscore the need for urgent action to address economic inequality and poverty through equal distribution of resources and the provision of infrastructure that will benefit all, irrespective of status or class, in the country. In addition to this, the repetition of similar sentence structures, as in "They come", "They talk", "They promise", emphasises the cyclical nature of empty promises and the perpetuation of economic inequality among the common people of the country. The adoption of enjambment in sentences like "The mouth now is too honourable to greet/the belly too obese to bend" (lines 37–38) and caesura as seen in "Our man becomes a locust/seen but once in several seasons" (lines 40–41) shows the deliberate line breaks and pauses that create a sense of disjointedness that mirrors the disconnection between the rulers and the ruled. Furthermore, the poem's syntax employs the use of irony, as in "The mouth now is too honourable to greet/the belly too obese to bend", highlighting and emphasising the politicians' hypocrisy and neglect of the poor voters, who they can no longer associate themselves with now, unlike the period before the election. The gap is now widely bridged between the wealthy and the poor, revealing inequality [18]. By carefully deploying this syntactic choice, the poet uncovers the long-standing issues of economic inequality and poverty, which have both hindered the progress of the nation.

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Economic Inequality and Poverty by Nigerian Leaders**

Phonologically, the theme is also portrayed. The repetition of the voiced, bilabial, approximant /w/ sound in "We' ll" is a way of creating urgency and promise to highlight politi-

cians' false assurance to address poverty, which is a very germane socio-political ill in the country. The consonance in the phrase "dust-laden mats" and "departure of the man of power" reveals a sense of finality, emphasising the neglect and abandonment of the poor in the country. This shows how the less privileged people in Nigeria have been made to suffer the problem of economic inequality [19]. The employment of onomatopoeia as in "Thunders" (line 42) conveys a sense of power, strength and intensity which highlight the politicians' abuse of authority through the greedy accumulation of wealth, satisfaction of sexual lust and creation of a wide gap between the leaders and the led, who are strategically made poor to maintain the gap between them [20]. The voiceless, bilabial, plosive /p/ sound repeated in words like "poverty" and "power" is used to create a connection between the two to underscore the symbiotic relationship between political power and poverty. The former is the source from which the latter originates in Nigeria. The attempt to project the theme of economic inequality and poverty has made the poet deploy this stylistic device.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of Economic Inequality and Poverty by Nigerian Leaders**

The poem artfully portrays this theme through artful and deliberate word choices and meanings. The denotative meanings of the words like "poverty" (line 27) and "sweat" (line 26) used in the poem convey a sense of struggle and hardship, highlighting the reality of poverty in Nigeria, where leaders embezzle all the funds that are supposed to be used for the provision of jobs for the youth and infrastructure for the benefit of all [21]. There is a sharp contrast between the means of "sweet words" and "promises forgotten". This contrast creates a sense of irony and betrayal of trust, underscoring politicians' failure to fulfil their promises and address poverty in the country. The words like "fat" to qualify "car and salaries" and "obese" expose a sense of excess and indulgence, and this highlights the politicians' self-serving behaviour. The "fat cars" they ride, and the "fat salaries" they consume bridge a wide gap between the ruler and the ruled, and between the rich and the poor in the country. The metaphor of "power is the bird of the forest" (line 50) conveys a sense of unpredictability, free-roaming and transience of political power and the need for accountability by addressing the high level of poverty and bringing the monstrous level of inequality to a bare minimum in the country. Furthermore, the employment of the phrase "The mouth now is too honourable to greet" is a pointer to irony and hypocrisy among politicians. This is semantically used to emphasise the politicians' neglect of the poor. The words such as "dust-laden" and "departure" create a vivid image of abandonment and neglect, highlighting the politicians' disregard for the poor and the have-nots in society. In addition, the phrase, as in "make poverty a thing of the past" (lines 27–28), is to conceptually create a sense of hope and possibility in a poverty-ridden country like Nigeria, highlighting the need for change. The repetition of "We' ll" also creates a sense of promise and possibility, underscoring the need for action among the ruling class to address poverty in Nigeria and stop placing their personal interests above the national interest [22]. The semantic devices and choices in this poem indeed expose the deep-seated issues of poverty and inequality in the nation. This is why Osundare has deliberately deployed this stylistic device.

- **Graphological Level of Analysis of Economic Inequality and Poverty by Nigerian Leaders**

The visual arrangement of the poem also contributes to the critique of these issues of economic inequality and poverty. The irregular stanza and varying line lengths convey a sense of disorder and chaos in Nigeria's socio-political landscape. This way, irregular stanzas and varying line lengths mirror the impact of poverty and inequality on society. This is so because the challenges of poverty and inequality have far-reaching effects, such as high unemployment rates, regional disparity, and political exclusion, among others, which have cut the country into shreds. The use of enjambment, as in "We' ll give the farmer" (line 25) "The best for his sweat" (line 26) suggests a sense of flow and continuity, emphasising the disconnection between the hard work of the farmer and reward, which politicians fail to give to the hard-working people who produce food for the nation. In addition, the use of caesura, as seen in "And make poverty/A thing of the past" (lines 27–28), creates a sense of pause and reflection on the damage that poverty and inequality have done to the nation and the need for change. Moreover, the lack of punctuation, like a full stop or exclamation mark, in certain lines like "Our dust-laden mats announce the departure of the man of power", conveys a sense of flow and urgency, hinting

at the consequences of neglect on the people. Finally, the employment of whitespace, as in the empty lines between stanzas, generates a sense of separation and disconnection to underscore the gap between the wealthy politicians, who consider themselves more equal than the ordinary people of the country[23,24]. With careful and deliberate use of syntactic, phonological, semantic and graphological devices, Osundare unmasks the long-standing and ingrained issues of poverty and inequality in Nigeria's socio-political sphere. This is why Osundare has used all of these stylistic devices to present and critique economic inequality and poverty inflicted on the people of Nigeria by the leaders.

3.1.3. Lack of Accountability by Nigerian Leaders in "A Villager's Protest"

Lack of accountability by Nigerian leaders refers to the absence of transparency and responsibility in governance. This behaviour of the leaders is characterised by non-transparent decision-making, unresponsiveness and impunity. Osundare critiques this through masterful deployment of various stylistic devices as examined below.

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of Lack of Accountability by Nigerian Leaders**

The poem's syntactic structure employs simple sentences[12] as in "The mouth now is too honourable to greet" (line 37) to create a sense of directness and irony for the purpose of highlighting leaders' hypocrisy. The politicians who visit the nook and cranny of their various constituencies before election to seek support from the people by showing humility "with countless prostrations like agama on the rock" (lines 15–16) and making many promises now (after election) feel too big to be responsible for their duty and be accountable to people whom the politicians' "mouth now is too honourable to greet" (line 38). In addition, the complex sentence structure "The mouth now too honourable to greet, the belly too obese to bend" (lines 38–39) reveals the depth of the leaders' corruption and lack of accountability as they do not "greet" and "bend" to the people anymore. Public servants arrogantly become public masters after the election. The juxtaposition of "We' ll build schools" (line 17), which they promise before the election, with "fat cars, juicy damsels (line 35), which is the reality after the election, highlights the disconnection between leaders' promises and their actions. This lack of relationship between politicians' words and actions leads to a lack of accountability to the people. The passivity of sentences like "promises forgotten" (line 34) emphasises that the politicians are irresponsible and unaccountable as they neglect and abandon their constitutional duty for their self-serving style and their personal political gain[25]. As the subject of the sentence is passive, so are the Nigerian politicians passive in their responsibility. The repetition of the word "now" in phrases like "Now in" (line 33) and "The mouth now…" (line 39) creates a sense of urgency and immediacy, underscoring the betraying disposition of Nigerian politicians immediately after the election. This shows that politicians, after every election, betray the trust of their constituents, engage in deceitful practices, and prioritise their own interests over people's needs. The repetition also emphasises the need for accountability. Also, the poem's syntactic fragmentation, as seen in phrases like "at cockcrow at noons at sundown" (lines 4–6), "Now in and promises forgotten" (lines 33–34), and "the belly too obese to bend" (line 40), conveys a sense of disjointedness and fragmentation, mirroring the leaders' disconnection from their responsibility and their constituency. The use of parallelism in "We' ll build school/We' ll build hospitals/We' ll bring water to every backyard" (lines 17–20) is a pointer to the responsibility of the leaders, and they are profoundly aware of it. However, the juxtaposition of this with the post-election display of luxury in riding "fat cars," "consuming fat salaries and constituency allowances" reveals the leaders' lack of responsibility and accountability[26].

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Lack of Accountability by Nigerian Leaders**

This theme of lack of accountability is also phonologically portrayed in the poem[27]. The repetition of the voiced, bilabial, nasal /m/ sound in words, as in "mouth" and "man", creates a sense of continuity and connection, highlighting the leaders' responsibility, which they neglect and abandon. The assonance used in "honourable" and "greet" creates a sense of irony and hypocrisy, highlighting the leaders' lack of accountability to the people whose mouths are now too honourable to greet. The consonance used in words, as in "obese" and "bend", conveys a sense of heaviness and inflexibility, underscoring the leaders' resistance to change. This resistance to change is the cause of politicians' persistent lack of accountability. Also, the repetition of the voiceless,

bilabial, plosive /p/ sound in words such as "power" and "promises" shows the connection between the leaders' power and their broken promises [28]. The politicians are ordinarily elected as leaders for the purpose of serving the masses by meeting their needs, but their corrupt and decadent nature makes them irresponsible and unaccountable.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of Lack of Accountability by Nigerian Leaders**

The semantic properties of the poem's language also significantly contribute to how the poem masterfully drives home the lack of accountability. The connotations of words like "honourable" and "obese" create a sense of irony and contrast, emphasising the leaders' hypocrisy and lack of accountability. In addition, the use of words like "forgotten" and "departure" denotes a sense of abandonment and neglect, hinting at the leaders' lack of accountability occasioned by their "promises forgotten" after they have been voted by the people. The use of metaphor in "power is the bird of the forest" creates a vivid image of the transience and ephemerality of political power and the reason politicians should be responsible and accountable. This is because the power that makes them misbehave today is unpredictable and may change hands soon. Also, the repetition of "We' ll" in the poem reveals a sense of promise and responsibility, underscoring the need for accountability. This repetition furthermore indicates that the politicians are cognizant of the point that they should be accountable to the people, but their penchant for stealing and inordinate desire to ride "fat cars" and "consume fat salaries and constituency allowances" makes them misbehave and forget to be accountable in failing to fulfil their political promises [29]. Furthermore, the use of adjectives like "fat" and "juicy" to qualify "cars and salaries" and "damsels" signifies a sense of excess and a high level of moral decadence in the leaders. This highlights the self-serving attitude of the leaders. Nigerian leaders prioritise personal enrichment over the welfare of the people. So instead of meeting people's needs, they leave them in the lurch. The employment of imagery, as in "fat cars/juicy damsels/and the best there is in the world of softness" (lines 35–36) and "dust-laden mats announce the departure of the man of power" (line 45) evokes a sense of excess, decadence, neglect and abandonment of responsibility by politicians. The symbolism, like "The distant wayfarers" (line 58), which symbolises the common people who are seeking shelter and protection and "the bird of the forest" (line 52), which allegorises the transience of power and how it can quickly change hands, are deployed to remind the leaders of the need to be responsible and accountable [29,30]. While Adelowo et al. [7] investigate Niyi Osundare's poetic advocacy for recognition and fair treatment of the commoners in Nigerian society, the current study examines Niyi Osundare's styles of revealing Nigerian sociopolitical challenges.

3.1.4. Mismanagement of Resources by Nigerian Leaders in "A Villager's Protest"

Mismanagement of resources by Nigerian politicians refers to inefficient, ineffective and often corrupt use of the country's resources, leading to widespread waste, embezzlement and underdevelopment [31]. The poet deploys various stylistic devices, as explored below, to critique this.

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Mismanagement of Resources by Nigerian Leaders**

Phonologically, the assonance of the /u:/ sound in "consume" and "constituency" hints at the connection between the leaders' actions and their responsibilities. The leaders' actions are a stark contrast to their responsibilities. They are entrusted with the duty to serve, to prioritise the people's needs and to manage resources for the greater good. Instead, they choose to serve themselves by exploiting their power for personal gain. Their actions betray the trust placed in them, neglecting their duty to provide education, health and infrastructure facilities and violating the essence of their responsibilities. The consonance in "dust-laden mats" and "departure of the man of power" (line 44) creates a sense of rhythm and abandonment, underscoring the consequences of mismanagement. The consequences of mismanagement by Nigerian politicians are far-reaching and devastating [32]. The villagers live in poverty, as seen in "dust-laden mats"; they lack infrastructure because the leaders neglect to build schools, hospitals, and roads, and provide electricity and water, which they vow to bring to every doorstep. Also, repetition of the voiceless, labio-dental, fricative /f/ sound in "fat cars" and "fat salaries" conveys a sense of excess and decadence, highlighting the leaders' decadence and emphasising the continuous nature of mismanagement in the country.

- **Semantic Level of Stylistic Analysis of Mismanagement of Resources by Nigerian Leaders**

The poem's semantics masterfully convey the theme of mismanagement through deliberate word choices and meanings. The connotative meaning of "fat" in "fat cars" is excess, and that of "juicy" in "juicy damsels" is indulgence. The deliberate use of these words is to highlight the leaders' corrupt practices through the mismanagement of resources, giving their personal needs priority over the public good. The list of words as in "fat cars, juicy damsels and the best there is in the world of softness, consume fat salaries and constituency allowances" (lines 35–38) is to emphasise the depth of resource mismanagement in the country. The poet, through this listing, portrays that instead of using our resources for developmental projects that will benefit all and sundry in the country, they use them to acquire all that is listed for their personal benefit[33]. Also, the employment of "dust-laden mats" and "departure of the man of power" (line 44) generates a sense of abandonment and poverty to highlight the consequences of mismanagement.

- **Graphological Level of Stylistic Analysis of Mismanagement of Resources by Nigerian Politicians**

Enjambment as a graphological device is employed in the poem as seen in "fat cars, juicy damsels/and the best there is in the world of softness", which is used to create a sense of flow and excess, underscoring the endless and relentless nature of leaders' decadence and resource mismanagement in the country. In addition, caesura, as in "And make poverty/A thing of the past", conveys a sense of pause and reflection, highlighting the need for change in using our mismanaged resources to address poverty and hardships in the country. Finally, the lack of punctuation in lines like "dust-laden mats announce the departure of the man of power" creates a sense of flow and urgency, demonstrating the consequences of mismanagement. These stylistic tools and devices vividly portray the theme of mismanagement of resources in Nigeria[34].

3.1.5. Cycles of Neglect and Abandonment by Nigerian Leaders in "A Villager's Protest"

By cycles of neglect and abandonment by Nigerian politicians, we mean the repeated patterns of disregard and abandonment of projects, policies and citizens' needs, often driven by personal gain, corruption and lack of accountability. This theme is also portrayed stylistically by Osundare in the poem.

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of Cycles of Neglect and Abandonment by Nigerian Leaders**

The use of repetitive clauses, such as "They come…They come…They talk…They promise" is a way to create a sense of rhythm and emphasis to underscore the politicians' persistent neglect of their constituency and constituents. The issue of neglect by politicians is not accidental but a tradition among all Nigerian politicians. They regard their constituents as spare tyres, which the vehicle owner does not remember until the one he is using wobbles. The complex sentence "They come armed with sweet words, inflated promises and a chest that bribes with countless prostrations" (lines 10–15) reveals the depth of the leaders' deception and abandonment. This indicates the level of hollow promises that they do not intend to keep and other deceptive tactics that they employ to win votes. Then, after they have won the votes with lies and propaganda, they abandon the people to face their struggles alone, and never come back until it is time to make another empty promise. The syntactic juxtaposition[12] of "We' ll build schools…We' ll build hospitals" and "fat cars, juicy damsels…consume fat salaries" highlights the disconnection between the leaders' promises and actions. The leaders come with lofty promises, like refreshing rain showers on the parched earth. They vow to build schools, hospitals and infrastructure. They also promise to empower farmers and eradicate poverty, painting a vivid picture of a utopian future. However, like a mirage, their promises vanish into thin air once they seize power. They forget the people abandoning them to their struggles; instead, they indulge in luxuries. Their fat cars and juicy damsels (line 35) show a stark contrast to the villagers' dusty mats and neglected huts. The people, once hopeful, now feel betrayed as they realise that the leaders' promises are mere words devoid of substance. In fact, the leaders' disconnection from their promises and people's needs is palpable, a chasm that seems impossible to bridge. The repetition of "We' ll" creates a sense of promise and possibility. This, however, contradicts the reality of neglect and abandonment. This is because the villagers once welcomed their leaders

with open arms, eager to believe their words and promises of a better life. But as time passes, the leaders' words become hollow, and their actions become a stark contrast to their vows. Schools remain unbuilt, hospitals unequipped, water scarce, people live in perpetual darkness, the farmers' sweat goes unrewarded, their labour unvalued, poverty lingers and becomes a constant companion to the people. In reality, the leaders' indulgence in luxuries mocks the people's struggles [35]. Fat cars pass, juicy damsels smile from afar, and softness envelops them, a world away from the villagers' hardships. All these make the people feel abandoned to face their harsh realities alone. Their trust was shattered, and their hope dwindled. Furthermore, the use of passive voice, as in "promises forgotten", emphasizes the leaders' lack of accountability. This is because their words are empty and their actions are unchecked. They promise the world but deliver nothing. Unfortunately for the people, no one holds the politicians responsible and accountable for their broken promises, their abandoned projects or their neglected people. They become untouchable, and their power and privilege shield them from scrutiny. Their mouths grow too 'honourable' to greet, their bellies too obese to bend, symbolising their dishonesty about the people's struggles. The poem's syntax generates a sense of flow and continuity [12], reflecting the ongoing cycles of neglect and abandonment among Nigerian politicians.

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Cycles of Neglect and Abandonment by Nigerian Leaders**

Phonologically, the repetition of the voiceless, velar, plosive /k/ sound in "cockcrow," "come," and "consume" reveals a sense of continuity and connection. This highlights the ongoing cycles of neglect in Nigeria. The cycles of neglect continue unabated, a never-ending spiral of abandonment and disregard. Each new leader comes with fresh promises, but the same old neglect and abandonment [36]. The villagers' hopes are raised only to be dashed upon the rock of forgotten promises. The leaders' priorities remain unchanged: personal gain, indulgence and luxury. The people's needs are ignored, their struggles and hardships unaddressed. They do not care to build schools or equip the hospitals, and the fields are left unattended. So as soon as seasons pass in Nigeria, the cycles of neglect deepen. The use of assonance, as in "mouth," "now," "honourable," and "greet", creates a sense of irony and hypocrisy, highlighting the leaders' lack of accountability through neglect and abandonment. In addition, the use of consonance in "power" and "prostration" conveys a sense of intensity and corruption, underscoring the leaders' abuse of authority. Also, the use of echoism, as in "thunders", creates a sense of power and urgency, highlighting the leaders' neglect and abandonment of the people. Finally, the repetition of the voiced, bilabial, plosive /w/ sound in "We' ll" and "western" generates a sense of promise and responsibility. This contrasts with the reality of neglect and abandonment of the people by the leaders [37]. The constitutional responsibility of politicians is to serve the people by providing life-comforting facilities for them, but the leaders betray this expectation and abandon them for their personal gain.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of Cycles of Neglect and Abandonment by Nigerian Leaders**

The semantics of the poem artfully convey the theme of cycles of neglect and abandonment through deliberate word choices and meanings. The connotation of such words as "sweet words" and "inflated promises" creates a sense of deception and insincerity, emphasising the leaders' lack of integrity. These people's words and actions are never the same. They interpret politics as a medium for telling lies. They make promises they never intend to keep. The sweet words and inflated promises are just campaign strategies and ways to deceive people to win votes. In addition to this, words such as "fat" and "juicy" connote a sense of excess and decadence among politicians. This highlights leaders' self-serving actions and their corrupt priorities as public servants. The metaphor of "power is the bird of the forest" creates a vivid image of the transience and unpredictable nature of political power and the need for accountability, which has become alien among Nigerian leaders [38]. The use of words like "forgotten" and "departure" denotes a sense of abandonment and neglect, highlighting the way leaders in Nigeria dash the hopes and aspirations of the people in the country. Politicians forget and depart from their duty and responsibility; instead, they ride in fat cars and lavish public funds on themselves and their cronies. The employment of synecdoche, as in "the mouth now is too honourable to greet" and "the belly too obese to bend", suggests a sense of hypocrisy, underscoring the leaders' lack of connection with

their constituents as they are now "too honourable" to greet and relate to them. The symbols of "locust" and "wasp" create a sense of destructive power and urgency. This highlights the need for change among the leaders who have destroyed the image of the country nationally and internationally as a result of the destruction they have caused to the resources of the country and the physical and emotional damage they have caused to the ordinary people of the nation.

- **Graphological Level of Analysis of Cycles of Neglect and Abandonment by Nigerian Leaders**

The graphology of the poem, in the nature of irregular stanzas and varying line lengths, creates a sense of chaos and disorder in a country like Nigeria, where neglect and abandonment of ordinary Nigerians by their leaders have become a tradition. Also, the use of enjambment, as in "They come armed with sweet words/inflated promises", conveys a sense of flow and connection, highlighting the leader's deception. This also suggests that the cycles of neglect and abandonment are a continuous process and do not apparently have a terminal end[39]. Finally, the lack of punctuation in certain lines, as in "our dust-laden mats announce the departure of the man of power", creates a sense of flow and urgency, underscoring the consequences of neglect and abandonment in the country. The graphology of the poem generates a sense of disjointedness and fragmentation, reflecting the leaders' disconnection from their responsibilities and constituents. All these stylistic devices were deliberately deployed by the poet to project the socio-political challenges facing Nigeria as discussed above[40,41].

3.2. Styles and Nigerian Sociopolitical Challenges in Niyi Osundare's "Unequal Fingers"

Various sociopolitical challenges stylistically presented in Niyi Osundare's "Unequal Fingers"[42] are systematically analysed hereunder.

3.2.1. Neglect of Public Welfare by Nigerian Leaders in Niyi Osundare's "Unequal Fingers"

By neglect of public welfare by Nigerian leaders, we refer to the failure of those in government and positions of authority to provide essential services and improve the living conditions of citizens, while placing personal interests, political gains or private entitlements over the needs of the people[42].

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of Neglect of Public Welfare by Nigerian Leaders**

The poet employs a similar sentence structure (parallelism) to expose the government's abandonment of public welfare, which was the main reason why they were elected into the public office for their personal and selfish gain as shown in "the funds for our community centre/built your palace/the funds for our rugged roads/bought your car" "the funds for our water scheme/irrigate your banks in Europe" (lines 31–33). The effect of this similar syntactic pattern creates rhythm and emphasis on how similar successive Nigerian governments have been in dashing the hope and aspirations of the common man through neglect of public welfare. There is also employment of short and fragmented lines in the poem, as shown in "our rugged roofs leak cold fears/of the rain coming" (lines 15–16). The fragmented structure reflects instability, suffering and deprivation orchestrated by neglected welfare. The sentence "We are not bats" (line 38) is an example of a declarative sentence, which is the type of sentence mostly used in the poem, and shows how bold and confident the neglected masses are in a direct and point-blank expression of their awareness of neglect and deception around them.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of Neglect of Public Welfare by Nigerian Leaders**

In lines such as "famished months/Years of unnatural famine/ragged roofs/wrinkles rack the blows of crawling babies", the poet uses imagery and paints vivid pictures of poor welfare conditions as the lines emphasise hunger, homelessness and poor healthcare. Also, the poet semantically juxtaposes the suffering poor with the wealthy elite in "two grains didn't jingle in our bowl/chicken legs dance/at the bottom of simmering pots". These lines expose the unequal distribution of resources and neglect of public welfare. Symbolism used in "the thumb grew fatter/than all the others" (lines 30–31) typically represents the wealthy class, who selfishly enrich themselves while others suffer.

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Neglect of Public Welfare by Nigerian Leaders**

Repetition of initial consonants (alliteration) /m/ in "money monopolised" and /r/ in "ragged roofs" creates musicality that stresses hardship caused by neglect of welfare. Also, the repetition of the lines "when the time is right/the stick will tell all ears/the silence secret of the drum" creates rhythm and reinforces the warning that hidden corruption and neglect of the welfare of the masses will eventually be exposed.

3.2.2. Social Injustice among Nigerian Leaders in Niyi Osundare's "Unequal Fingers"

This sociopolitical challenge concerns the act of partiality exhibited by Nigerian political leaders who deny the commoners the opportunities available to the political class and the rich in society. The styles deployed by Niyi Osundare[42] to express this challenge are analysed in turn.

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of Social Injustice among Nigerian Leaders**

The poet employs short and fragmented sentence patterns like "when two grains didn't jingle/in our bowl" to reflect suffering and tension among the common masses. These broken sentence structures mirror the scarcity and hardship faced by the poor. Also, parallelism employed through the following similar sentence pattern—"the funds for our community centre…" "the funds for our rugged roads…" "the funds for our water scheme"—emphasises corruption and the endless diversion of public funds by the ruling class.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of Social Injustice among Nigerian Leaders**

Strong imagery, symbolism and contrast are employed by the poet to expose social injustice. Poverty and hunger are seen in expressions like "famished months" (long period of hunger) "yawning ribs" (painting the picture of craving for food) "ragged roofs" (unhealthy shelter) of the poor while wealth and excess appear in "festive kitchens," "corpulent cats," and so on. The metaphor employed in "the thumb grew fatter/than all the others" symbolises how a few people (just only the thumb among all other fingers) are socially unjust by becoming richer through exploitation and deprivation.

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Social Injustice among Nigerian Leaders**

The poet uses alliteration and sound repetition to reinforce meaning. The repetition of the initial consonant /s/ in the expression "silent secret" creates a bitter and mocking tone. Also, the repetition of "we shall know" (lines 40–43) adds rhythm and shows the people's growing determination to challenge injustice in Nigerian society.

3.2.3. Oppression and Exploitation of the Poor in Niyi Osundare's "Unequal Fingers"

Oppression and exploitation of the poor are explained as the unfair treatment and abuse where the leadership class uses their power to take resources, rights and opportunities from the poor masses for their own gain[42].

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of Oppression and Exploitation of the Poor by Nigerian Leaders**

Osundare uses parallelism to emphasise systematic exploitation: "The funds for our community centre/built your palace/the funds for our rugged roads/bought your car/the funds for our water scheme/irrigate your bank" (lines 33–36). The use of constants shown in possessive pronouns "our…your" exposes how public resources are diverted. Fragmented lines like "when two grains didn' t jingle/in our bowl" create a broken, suffocating feeling, like being under the oppression of the leaders.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of Oppression and Exploitation of the Poor by Nigerian Leaders**

The poet employs strong contrast and imagery to reveal exploitation. Poverty shows in expressions like "famished months" (line 4), "yam was gold" (line 8), "crawling babies" (line 12), "ragged roofs" (line 15), and so on, while opulence is demonstrated in "chicken legs dance" (line 20), "festive kitchens" (line 24), and "corpulent cats" (line 26). Also, the metaphor in "...thumb grew fatter/than all of the others" (lines 32–33) reveals the leaders' "thumb" exploiting the masses' "all of the others". Symbolism like "stick" and "drum" shows that oppression won' t stay hidden, and that exposure and resolution are coming near.

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Oppression and Exploitation of the Poor by Nigerian Leaders**

Alliteration of /f/ employed in "funds...farm" links the elite's greed, and /k/ in "crawling babies," "...cold...coming rain" sounds harsh and suffering. The repetition of pattern of "we shall know" creates a rhythmic and drum-like beat of warning and resolve. The refrain "when the time is right/the stick will tell all ears" suggests the oppressed will speak out.

3.2.4. Class Division in Niyi Osundare's "Unequal Fingers"

By this, we refer to the unhealthy separation of people in Nigeria into different social and economic classes based on wealth, income and education. Class division based on wealth is evidently stylistically portrayed in this poem, "Unequal Fingers"[42].

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of Class Division by Nigerian Leaders**

Osundare uses contrastive sentence structures to divide the classes: the lower and poverty-stricken class and the upper and high-standard living class. The conjunction "while" (line 17) introduces a sharp and conspicuous contrast between the poor "we have known famished months" (line 4) and the rich "chicken legs dance at the bottom of simmering pots" (line 20). Also, parallelism like "the funds of our community centre…/the funds of our rugged roads…" highlights how the ruling and upper class enriches itself to the detriment of the poor and lower class.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of Class Division by Nigerian Leaders**

Again, the poet employed imagery and contrast to highlight class division. The poor and lower classes are identified with poverty, hunger and suffering. The images of this are painted in expressions like "famished months" (line 4), "years of unnatural famine" (line 5), "ragged roofs" (line 13), "yawning ribs" (line 23), while the rich and upper class enjoy luxury as evident in lines like "festive kitchens" (line 24), "pamper corpulent cats with corned beef" (line 26), and "your palace" (line 35). In addition, the use of metaphor in "the thumb grew fatter/than all the others" allegorises the upper class becoming richer and more powerful than the common people.

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Class Division by Nigerian Leaders**

The repetition of the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ and that of the voiceless labiodental fricative in expressions like "silent secrets", "famished months...festive kitchens" creates rhythm and emphasis on the division and suffering of the common people. Furthermore, the repetitive pattern of "we shall know" implies the growing awareness and resistance of the oppressed and lower classes against the privileged and exploiting class.

3.3. Styles and Nigerian Sociopolitical Challenges in Niyi Osundare's "The Politician's Two Mouths"

The different sociopolitical challenges stylistically presented in Niyi Osundare's "The Politician's Two Mouths" are systematically analysed hereunder[42].

3.3.1. Manipulation of the Electorate in Niyi Osundare's "The Politician's Two Mouths"

Confining the definition to this poem, we say manipulation of the electorate refers to the use of lies, propaganda or misinformation by politicians to influence voters' decisions for their own selfish ends rather than for the public benefit. This theme is stylistically portrayed at syntactic, semantic and phonological levels[42].

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of the Manipulation of the Electorate by Nigerian Leaders**

Osundare uses rhetorical questions and command sentences to reveal and highlight how Nigerian politicians manipulate voters. An example of a rhetorical question found in "Is not the politician/who sees a snake/and hails an earthworm" (lines 4–6) emphasises the politician's habit of intentionally misrepresenting reality to receive the electorate. Also, the imperative sentence "ask him to wait till/you bring a sieve" (lines 13–14) urges people to scrutinise political promises carefully instead of accepting hook, line and sinker.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of the Manipulation of the Electorate by Nigerian Leaders**

The theme of manipulation of the electorate is conveyed in the poem through semantic devices like metaphor

and imagery. The metaphor in "The politician's mouth has two edges" (line 1) implies double-speaking and a deceitful attitude of the politicians, which is a major tool of electoral manipulation. The image painted in "he prostates for a vote/but his mind squares like a hungry dog" (lines 7–8) negates outward humility with onward selfishness, indicating how politicians manipulate voters for personal gain.

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Manipulation of the Electorate by Nigerian Leaders**

The poet employs alliteration to highlight deceit and manipulation. In line 5, the poet says, "sees a snake" ('s' alliterates). The repetition of this voiceless, alveolar fricative /s/ creates a hissing effect associated with the cunning and deceptive way of politicians.

3.3.2. Public Gullibility in Niyi Osundare's "The Politician's Two Mouths"

Public gullibility can simply be explained as the tendency of ordinary people to believe, trust or be deceived by what those in power say or do, without questioning or investigating the truth. This is stylistically evident in the poem "The Politician's Two Mouths."

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of Public Gullibility in the Poem**

The employment of conditional sentence structures and attention-getters (vocatives) is used to highlight the electorate's tendency to believe politicians' hollow promises unquestioningly. The conditional sentence structure "whoever believes what the politician says" (line 5) shows the consequence of blindly and gullibly following or trusting political leaders, whose sole tool to get people's support is lies. We have a vocative or address form or attention getter in line 18, where the poet says, "Ah, friend". This is to personalise the warning and draw attention to the gullibility of ordinary citizens.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of Public Gullibility in the Poem**

At the semantic level, Osundare conveys this theme through the use of metaphor and imagery. The metaphor in line 6, "his ear is blocked by the carcass of truth", suggests that a gullible person is unable or unwilling to perceive the truth. In addition, imagery in lines 19 and 20, "your soul will tell you/the biting pains of folly," vividly portrays the suffering and regret that result from trusting politicians blindly.

3.3.3. Corruption and Self-Interest in Niyi Osundare's "The Politician's Two Mouths"

This can be explained as the misuse of public office, resources and authority for personal gain rather than for the welfare of the people. This is stylistically conveyed in the poem as follows:

- **Syntactic Level of Analysis of Corruption and Self-Interest among Nigerian Leaders**

There is the use of a rhetorical question in "Is it not the politician/who sees a snake/and hails an earthworm?" (lines 4–6). The stylistic effect of this is to reveal the self-interest of politicians. The politicians deliberately distort the truth for gain, not out of ignorance. Also, Osundare uses the coordinating conjunction "but" which contrasts in "he prostrates for a vote/but his mind squares like a hungry dog" to split action from motive. Public humility of the politicians versus private greed shows corruption. Votes are the real interest.

- **Semantic Level of Analysis of Corruption and Self-Interest among Nigerian Leaders**

Animal imagery like "hungry dog" (line 8), "snake...earthworm" (lines 5–6), and "lying wolf" (line 10) are all employed to emphasise the deceit and greed of the leaders. The semantic effect of this is to convey the politicians' corrupt nature. A hungry dog paints the image of insatiable self-interest, and "lying wolf" signals the corruption hidden under the membrane of lies. There is also the use of body-part metaphor as shown in "mouth has two edges" (line 1). The semantic effect of "two edges" and "murder both ways" (line 3) is double speech. Politicians use words corruptly to harm, showing self-interest over public welfare. The diction of "sieve" and "carcass of truth" (lines 14 and 16) implies uselessness because "sieve" connotes that nothing is left, and this, by implication, means that politicians do not hold the truth, and the "carcass of truth" suggests that truth is dead or murdered by corruption.

- **Phonological Level of Analysis of Corruption and Self-Interest among Nigerian Leaders**

The repetition of the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ in words like "Politicians..." (line 1), "Prostrates..." (line 7), "...power" (line 11), "...pains" (line 15) contributes to this theme. The popping /p/ sound phonologically mimics sharp, striking accusations. It emphasises the persuasive and condemning tone against corruption in the poem.

4. Conclusions

This study has provided a richly detailed understanding of the socio-political challenges facing Nigeria. Through a close examination of the poem's language, imagery, themes and other literary and stylistic devices deployed in the poem, the researcher has identified and discussed several critical issues, including political deception and corruption, economic inequality and poverty, lack of accountability, mismanagement of resources and cycles of neglect and abandonment by Nigerian leaders. The findings of this study underscore the significance of literature in reflecting and critiquing societal issues. Osundare's poem serves as a powerful commentary on the complexities of Nigeria's socio-political landscape, highlighting the need for transformative leadership, accountability, and collective action. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on Nigerian literature and society, offering insights into the role of poetry in shaping public opinion and promoting social change. The study's findings have implications for policymakers, leaders, and electorates, emphasising the importance of addressing these challenges to promote national development and stability. Finally, the study displays the value of literary analysis in understanding the complexities of societal issues and promoting critical thinking and reflection. As Nigeria continues to navigate its socio-political challenges, Osundare's poetry remains a relevant and powerful voice, urging citizens and leaders alike to strive for a more just and equitable society. Early completion of this research was limited by the inaccessibility of funding from any agency.

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Conceptualization, O.B.J. and S.O.O.; methodology, S.O.O.; software, O.B.J.; validation, O.B.J. and S.O.O.; formal analysis, O.B.J. and S.O.O.; investigation, O.B.J.; resources, S.O.O.; data curation, S.O.O.; writing—original draft preparation, O.B.J. and S.O.O.; writing—review and editing, O.B.J.; visualization, O.B.J. and S.O.O.; supervision, O.B.J.; project administration, O.B.J. and S.O.O.; funding acquisition, O.B.J. and S.O.O. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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