

Semiotic Analysis of Okigbo's "Path of Thunder" and Raji's *Webs of Remembrance*

Solomon Awuzie & Osas Iyoha
Department of English, Edo State University, Uzairue

Abstract

This article contends that semiotic elements such as word-signs and symbols play very important roles in Nigerian poetic creation. They reflect the poet's manipulation of both cultural and traditional signs and symbols. The article further maintains that in order to decipher the messages of Nigerian poetry, these semiotic elements are interpreted. Through the interpretations of the word-signs and symbols in Christopher Okigbo's "Path of Thunder" and Remi Raji's *Webs of Remembrance* details about the Nigerian military experience are produced. The word-signs and symbols contained in the poems do not only help us to navigate Okigbo's persona's perception of the Nigerian military activities of the 1960's, we are able to penetrate Raji's persona's worries, feelings and experiences of the Nigerian military activities between 1970s and 1990s. This article concludes that by interpreting the symbols that are used in the poems, the messages or stories inherent in the lines of the poems are revealed.

Key words: Semiotics, Word-signs, Symbols, Nigerian Poet(s), Nigerian Military Experience

Introduction

In order to convey their message, Nigerian poets use language embedded with signs and symbols. In Nigerian poetry, semiotic elements have always played very important roles. They are used as tools to communicate the poets' messages to the people. They are also used as means to relate the people's values and to create beauty. Semiotic elements possess rich qualities and their usage distinguishes one poem from another and one poet from the other. Their presence in poetry says a lot about the poets. It reveals the poets as the sons and daughters of the soil and as persons who understand their cultural, social and political terrain.

This is because the presence of semiotic elements such as symbols in poetry shows that the poets have tapped into their cultural, social and political values as well as virtues. Hence they give the poetry that outlook and quality of being part of Nigerian cultural heritage. They also reveal the poets' immediate cultural and religious beliefs. Even though every poet uses them in the course of his poetic creation, their visibility in poetry depends on the focus of the poetry. For instance, the visibility of semiotic elements in the first generation Nigerian poetry has given it the outlook of a poetry that focuses on Nigerian culture and tradition as means of engaging colonial postulations of African sub-humanism.

This does not mean that signs and symbols mean the same things. In order to disclose their differences, they explain sign as a term that is less than the concept it represents and symbol as a term that stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. What this implies is that semiotic sign ranges from the alphabets to words with which a message is created, while symbol is a term, a name or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning.

Even though signs are useful semiotic term, since they help to put symbols in their right perspectives, in semiotic analysis, symbols play very important roles. They represent "something vague, unknown or hidden from us" – a task which sign cannot undertake. Symbol can take on "something relatively concrete, such as an object, action, character, or scene, which signifies something relatively abstract, such as a concept or an idea". They compare it to the simile and the metaphor thus: While "the simile and metaphor take the place of statement", "the power of the symbol is that it implies more than a statement can put into words". "symbol is anything which signifies something". He notes that it is in this sense that all words as well as signs can be regarded as symbols. Symbols have specific meaning in literature. According to him, "the term symbol applies only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself".

In poetry many things are used as symbols. This implies that a poet is at liberty to create symbol. He can decide to take his symbols from the world around him or invoke his personal symbols. Since the world around the poets may differ, it underscores the fact that symbols used by one cultural poet can be strange to another. Sometimes also, poets from the same culture background evoke symbols that may be strange to each one of them, especially when they are both using private or personal symbols. This also underscores the fact that symbols can be classified into two: conventional and private or personal symbols. While the conventional symbols refer to the symbols that are evoked from the poets' cultural background - this kind of symbols are usually understood by all; private or personal symbols are symbols known to the poets alone. Having established the fact that symbol is deep in its manner of representation, it is important to note that poets need them in order to produce quality poetry. Like the art of drawing where every stroke of the artist is important, every symbol in the lines of poetry adds to the overall meaning of the poetry. This is what gives poetry the quality of an artistic painting where "you will find a picture which will attract you more if you stand up close, another if you stand farther back" . It is also the quality that gives it that affinity with music.

Since the poet creates his poem by stitching one semiotic element onto another, the poem can be studied through interpreting semiotic elements that make them up. It is like trying to locate a house in a very big city. To get to the house, one would need to follow and interpret all the symbols on the roads and at the streets. For instance, in crossing a road to the adjoining street that leads to the house one may encounter a traffic light and would need to interpret the colours of the traffic light. These conventional signs and symbols are interpreted automatically, even without thinking about them. This is because the signs and symbols have been established by cultural convention over a long period of time and we have learnt and dealt unconscious with the cultural knowledge that necessitates their understanding. This is also the reason the signs and symbols in our culture require our ability to interpret them instinctively in that such interpretation

instantly help to shape our actions and thoughts. So interpreting these signs and symbols enable us to navigate the streets in the city or the lines of a poem. Just as the signs and symbols on our streets can lead us through the nooks and crannies of the city, the signs and symbols contained in a poem can reveal the story behind the poem, the poet's involvement in the poem and the magnitude of feeling that led to the composition of the poem.

In her essay on Nigerian poetry, Toyin Jegede (2003, p. 151) points out that Okigbo and his fellow poets of the first generation combine the conventional western poetic symbols and the indigenous poetic symbols "in strange but exciting ways, all of which foreground the hybridity of their poetry". The use of both conventional western poetic symbols and the indigenous poetic symbols in the poetry is meant to show the poet's transformation from his catholic background to traditional worship.

Like Jegede, Charles Bodunde (2000, p. 25) argues that even though Okigbo's poetry engages with the politics of his time with private as well as conventional symbols, he retains a basic belief in the private role of the artist and emphasizes historic and mythic elements above immediate social issues. Bodunde reveals further that historic and mythic elements occur in Okigbo's poetry "in the form of imaginative use of traditional symbols, images, philosophical hermeneutics, proverbs and myths". Gareth Griffiths (2000, p. 173) also explains the reoccurring use of symbols in Okigbo's poetry as the evidence of a strong influence of "his classical training, and [...] the style and doctrines of European modernism" which is one of the major thrusts of his poetry. Griffiths posits that his early work is essentially dominated with his private symbols and concerns with "the artist as a seer and as a visionary, rather than as an active social agent". In his argument, Ben Izevbaye (1972, p. 1) suggests that this has given rise to the view of his "poems as an impenetrable territory". He reveals further that this view has occupied reports of Okigbo's early view of poetry "as a type of cult from which the uninitiated is excluded [...] and by cautious critical explications in which the critic and the reader are Unmasked as intruders". Also writing on Okigbo's poetry generally, Romanus Egudu

(1972, p. 24) submits that Okigbo's "poetry is generally difficult and sometimes obscure" because of Okigbo's use of private symbols. Egudu links the difficulty of his poetry not only to his use of private symbols but to his claim thus: "My Limits was influenced by everything and everybody[...] it is Surprising how many lines of the Limits I am not sure are mine and yet do not know whose lines they were" (pp.24). He corroborates other critics on the style of Okigbo's poetry, when he stresses that Okigbo's style of writing is a night mare and that his style is conditioned by his profound love for controversy and creative haughtiness to the point that he constantly bragged that his intellect towered above that of ordinary men and women.

Like we have seen in Okigbo poetry, we can also find semiotic elements such as word-signs and symbols in Remi Raji's poetry. Remi Raji is a more junior poet to Christopher Okigbo and he belongs to the generation of poets referred to as the third generation in the Nigerian poetic terrain (Egya 2007; Awuzie 2011). Raji has been described as one Nigerian poet whose use of symbols in his poetry is moderate. In the preface to his collection of poems entitled *Webs of Remembrance*, Raji (2000: 9) confirms that the symbols that are used in the collection are conventional and they are for the purpose of responding "to the vicarious experience of being dehumanized by weapons of state in a period of anomie". Solomon Awuzie (2016) reveals in his essay that Raji's poetry contains symbols that reflect on the choice of his poetic theme. In his essay on Raji's poetry, Sule Egya (2007, p. 111) stresses that Raji uses symbols in his poetry to "convey serious social message to his land" and to consummate political theme. Niyi Akingbe (2016) acknowledges the interface between Raji's Yoruba mythical symbols and the public symbol in his poetry and stresses the importance of symbols to Raji's poetry.

Word-signs and Symbols play very important roles in Nigerian poetic creation as well as in Nigerian poetic interpretation. While the poets use them to recreate their personal experiences, they also deploy them to reflect on their different Nigerian historical experiences. Word-signs and symbols are part of the semiotic elements which are established by cultural conventions for the creation, the penetration as well as the

understanding of Nigeria and its landscape in poetic discourse. As semiotic elements, word-signs and symbols are made available and accessible for use to both Nigerian poets and their audience. The availability as well as accessibility of these semiotic elements to both the poets and their audience makes it possible for them to be interpreted. The fact that most of the word-signs and symbols are generally understood makes it possible for the poets to easily manipulate them for poetic creation. This is the reason it is possible to have two Nigerian poets manipulate these semiotic elements differently without causing any serious damage. Part of the reason for this is also because no two poets see or understand the country the same way. Hence the semiotic elements are used to express this vision and to reveal how the landscapes in Nigerian poetry have impacted on the poets either consciously or unconsciously. This fact is reiterated by Senenu and Vincent when they state that the semiotic elements are the images through which a poet expresses a vision of life that is hidden to the less imaginative.

However, it is important to state that the aim of this article is to properly explain how the interpretations of the word-signs and the symbols with which a poem has been created detail the poet's personal or historical experience. The article is meant to also reveal how these semiotic elements are the keys with which the hidden messages of a poem are unlocked. In order to do so, the term semiotics is explained and the difference between its elements such as signs and symbols are also established. The importance of the semiotic elements in Nigerian poetry is further demonstrated through the interpretations of the word-signs and the symbols with which Christopher Okigbo and Remi Raji manipulated their different poetry in order to reveal Nigerian military experience between 1966 and 1990. The reason for this selection is because both Okigbo and Raji poetry properly reflect the Nigerian military experience and by interpreting the word-signs and symbols that are contained in the poems the Nigerian military experience is easily deciphered.

Reading Story through the Poetic Symbols in Okigbo and Raji Poetry

Having acknowledged Okigbo and Raji's use of both word-signs and symbols in their poetry, the details about Nigerian military experience can be got through interpreting the word-signs and symbols that are contained in poetry. For instance, in the first poem of "Path of Thunder" entitled "Thunder can break", Okigbo's persona captures the activities of the first Nigerian coup with some resounding symbols, thus: "Fanfare of drums, wooden bells: iron chapter" (pp.55). The persona emphasizes the tension in the country at this time and stresses that "martial music" played on radio when the coup started. The "fanfare" of "martial music" drew a lot of people to their radios. This is evident in the line thus: "And our dividing airs are gathered home" (pp.55). The following lines and the symbols that are contained in them recount the activities that followed after the "martial music":

This day belongs to a miracle of thunder;
Iron has carried the forum
With token gestures. Thunder has spoken,
Left no signatures: broken (p. 55)

Exchange of gun fire soon erupted and then the government was overthrown. While "a miracle of thunder" represents the exchange of gun fire, "Iron" refers to "gun" and the "forum" symbolizes the parliament. People were happy over the activities of the military at this time. There was "mountain or tower" of "hostages" and these imply that so many politicians were taken as prisoners. In the second line of the stanza, the persona exclaims: "Iron has made, alas, masterpieces" (p. 55). By this the persona implies that the "military" has done a great job.

In the line that follows the refrain of the third stanza, the persona tells us that the coup plotters were arrested and imprisoned. Symbols such as, "barricaded", "iron", "handiwork" and "caged" are indicative of the coup plotters' arrest. The fourth stanza reveals the reactions of the people towards the arrest of the coup plotters:

Bring them out we say, bring them out
Faces and hands and feet,
The stories behind the myth, the plot
Which the ritual enacts. (p. 55)

The poem ends with a couplet where the persona expresses his skepticism about the fate of the country following the refusal of the military to release the arrested coup plotters. The fear that ended “Thunder can break” is resurrected in “Come Thunder”. As one reads onto the heart of the poem, the fear becomes stronger and reveals a counter-coup. The military officers were consolidating on the coup plotters’ triumph and yet continued to have them imprisoned. The persona warns the military, thus: “Remember, O dancers, the thunder among the clouds [...]” (58). In this poem, the military is addressed with the symbol of “dancers”. From line five to the end of the poem, the poet persona stresses his fears over the situation of the country. After which he writes thus:

The smell of blood already floats in the lavender-mist
of the afternoon.

The death sentence lies in ambush along the corridors
of power;

And a great fearful thing already tugs at the cables of
the open air,

A nebula immense and immeasurable, a night of deep
waters.

An iron dream unnamed and unprintable, a path of
stone.

The drowsy heads of the pods in barren farmlands
witness it,

A homesteads abandoned in this century's brush fire
witness it,

The myriad eyes of deserted corn cobs in burning
barns witness it. (p. 58)

In the poem, his fear is revealed to us in symbols. When the persona says, "And the secret thing in its heaving/threatens with iron mask/ the last lighted torch of the century [...]" (59) we see symbols such as "secret thing", "threatens", "heaving" and "iron mask" in full display. There reference is to the dilemma of the military at this time - the dilemma whether to execute the arrested coup plotters or not. In the last line that ends the poem, the military is referred to as "the last lighted torch of the century [...]" (p. 59).

The fear that runs through "Thunder can break" and "Come Thunder" suddenly disappears and in place of it comes the persona's expression of joy in "Hurrah for Thunder". The persona rejoices over another military coup and the death of the head of state. The joy that runs through the poem is stronger in the lines, thus: "Whatever happened to the elephant-/ Hurrah for thunder-" (pp.60). In the poem, "thunder" represents military, while elephant is another symbol for the head of state. In the poem, the persona describes how powerful the murdered head of state was:

The elephant, tetrarch of the jungle:
With a wave of the hand
He could pull four trees to the ground;
His four mortar legs pounded the earth:
Wherever they treaded,
The grass was forbidden to be there. (p. 60)

In lines twelve and thirteen, where it is written, "But already the hunters are talking about pumpkins:/ If they share the meat let them remember thunder" (pp.60), the persona refers to top military officers who were already planning on sharing government positions among their friends and well-wishers. The "pumpkins" and "meat" in lines twelve and thirteen represent the

good things of government. The persona advises the plotters of the counter-coup not to be carried away with the act of sharing their spoils, that they should expect another coup, in that, the fate of the country at this time was quite predictable:

The eye that looks down will surely see the nose;
The finger that fits should be used to pick the nose.

Today- for tomorrow, today becomes yesterday:
How many million promises can ever fill a basket [...] (p. 60)

With the two couplets above, the persona posits that everything that goes around comes around. To stress the tension that characterized the country at this time, he notes “If I don’t learn to shut my mouth, I’ll soon go to hell,/ I, Okigbo, town-crier, together with my iron bell”(pp.60).

In “Elegy for Slit-drum” which is the longest poem of the “Path of Thunder” sequel, Okigbo’s persona mourns and, at the same time, condoles the nation and those who had lost their loved ones to the counter coup. The poem begins with an apostrophe, thus: “Condolences [...] from our swollen lips laden with condolences” (p. 61). The repetition of the apostrophe in most of the lines of the poem is aimed at creating a deep feeling of mourning. The stanzas in-between each of these apostrophes are all created to reveal that things are not right. Hence, the persona tells us that there is need for “mythmaker to accompany” them—because the kind of things that were happening at that time were good enough to be mythologized. The reason for all these is because the country was then in a state of chaos. The chaos is represented with the symbol of the “slit-drum”.

In the poem, the “drum” is the symbol of the country’s unity. This is first captured in the fourth line of the poem, thus: “Condolences from our split-tongue of the slit drum” (pp.61). The “slit-tongue” is a symbol used to suggest the country’s diversity. The poem depicts that the major tribes in the country grief over each other. Hence, in lines six and seven, the persona posits that while “one tongue [is] full of fire/ one tongue [is] full of stone”

(pp.61). The apostrophe after the couplet of lines six and seven makes this point even clearer: “Condolences from the twin-lips of our drum parted in condolences” (pp.61). In the stanza that follows afterwards, he demonstrates the confusion that is inherent in the whole experience, thus:

The panther has delivered a hare
The hare is beginning to leap
The panther has delivered a hare
The panther is about to pounce (p. 61)

The persona further stresses the confusion in the country at this time, with the use of a lot of symbols: “the cabinet has gone to hell/ the timbers are now on fire” and “the cabinet that sold itself/ ministers are now in gaol” (pp.62). Such symbols as “hell”, “fire”, “sold” and “gaol” all create the aura of confusion and catastrophe.

In lines twenty seven and twenty eight, where the persona suddenly affirms: “The General is up ... the General is up... commandments ...” (p. 62), it is implied that a new “General” has been instated. Then there is a sudden focus on the activities of the new General. The activities of the new General are captured in the following lines: “the General is near the throne/ an iron mask covers his face/ the General has carried the day/ the mortars are far away” (p. 62). From line forty two to line fifty two, the General ceases to be addressed as General and like the General before him, he is addressed with the symbol of the “elephant”. This new “elephant” began his activities which left the country in another round of confusion:

Jungle tanks blast Britain’s last stand
The elephant ravages the jungle
The jungle is peopled with snakes
The snake says to the squirrel
I will swallow you
The mongoose says to the snake
I will mangle you
The elephant says also to the mongoose

I will strangle you

Thunder falls the trees cut a path
Thunder smashes them all—condolences.

Like all other activities contained in the poem, this particular activity is also expressed in symbols. For instance, when we are told that “Jungle tanks blast Britain’s last stand”, the persona meant that the military destroyed the last British legacy in the country. The British legacy in the poem refers to the parliamentary system of government which was the system of government in Nigeria at this time. By the line thus, “the jungle is peopled with snakes”, he affirms that the state of the country at this time was critical.

In lines fifty five, fifty six and fifty seven, thus: “a roadmaker makes a road/ the road becomes a throne/ can we cane him for felling a tree” (p. 63), the persona defends the first coup plotters. Even though the intension of the first coup plotters were noble, their example has become the way bad Generals get to power. In the last six lines of the poem, Okigbo’s persona consoles everyone who might have been victim in one way or the other of the chaos in the country:

we should forget the names
we should bury the date
the dead should bury the dead—condolences

from our bruised lips of the drum empty condolences

trunk of the iron tree we cry condolences when we break,
shells of the open sea we cry condolences when we shake
... (p. 63)

In one of the early poems of *Webs of Remembrance* entitled “Bound to remember”, the persona unclasps the ruin that was left of the country in the 70s, 80s and 90s, during the time of the military. The poet persona begins the poems by lamenting thus: “no water runs where the Niger flows/ no fish swims where

the Benue berths” (p. 14). The “water” and “fish” as used here are symbols of the good things of life. While one can say the “water” symbol is life itself, the “fish” symbol represents food. The third line of the poem reveals the persona’s state of mind as it concerns the situation of country at this time: “my spirit is grieved, my grief is long like the rivers” (p. 14). Because of his grievance, the persona vows that he is going to “remember the tadpole head/ of our terrible tales. I will remember/ the necklace of the albatross/ hanging in the hearts of butchers”. The things he is to remember are represented in lots of symbols. While the “tadpole head” symbol refers to the beginning of coup, and counter coup in the early years of the country, the “terrible tales” symbol describes the military activities of those times as terrible. By the “necklace of the albatross” symbol, the persona refers to the orders that were given to the soldiers at the time and by the “butchers” symbol, the persona simply meant soldiers. Hence, in the two lines, the persona says he would remember the beginning of coups and military activities in the country; without forgetting how tall the orders that were given to the soldiers those days were.

Aside the tales of the early military coup and counter coup in the country, the persona also captures the activities of one of the country’s most notorious military head of states with the use of symbols, thus: “I will remember the bomb-game goon/ I will remember his landmines of lies/ I will remember the oasis of blood” (p. 14). By the “bomb-game goon” symbol, the persona refers to the popular story of the country’s journalist who was killed with a letter-bomb believed to have been sent by the head of state. The “landmines of lies” symbol is used to stress the lies that the military Head of State told to cover the assassination of the journalist. In lines seventeen and eighteen, the persona laments with a rhetorical question: “how will I forget the pain/ when I remember the knife and see the scar?” In the last stanza that follows, the persona tells us that his pain is “beyond forgetting” because:

I see rodents still
I see reptiles in new skins

I see bats flying above the flood
And I smell the odour in the air
Which betrays the anus of the tribe
Dressed but naked like prostitute ...

Oh, I am grieved beyond forgetting ... (p. 14)

By “rodent”, “reptiles in new skins”, “bats,” “flood,” and “odour” symbols, the persona refers to the people that ought to help the country but who are also helping to destroy it. He also implies that this kind of people now dominate the country because of what the country has turned into and especially because of the activities of the military in the country. This is captured in the three lines, thus: “and I smell the odour in the air/ which betrays the anus of the tribe/dressed but naked like prostitutes [...]” (p. 14). The persona’s grief is not abetted even in “The mutineer’s song”. As a matter of fact, the persona laments the recurring coup in the country and vows to defile the military.

In the first couplet that begins the poem, the persona makes this known to us: “Let the skies cry in crimson rage I shall not flee/ Let the skies become one big beast I shall not hide” (p. 16). In the second couplet that follows the first, he makes things even clearer: “Let the land writhe in prickling shadows of coups/ Let the land grow on false detonations [...]” (p. 16) he would not be moved. With the use of the repetition of the word-sign, “let”, the persona creates a state of resoluteness. Apart from the fact that the persona vows to defile the military in all their activities, he also reveals some of the activities of the military of the time. Among the many activities of the military are the facts that “new maps be born”, “puzzles of state multiply,” “numerous lies flower,” “wind sneeze in toxic waves,” and “cry in crimson rage.” By “new maps be born” the persona refers to the boundary problem that was making the wave during this time, especially the boundary problem between Nigeria and Cameroun. At this time, the people are told a lot of lies. While some times they are told that the boundary between Nigeria and Cameroun has been moved forward and at other times they are told that it has been moved backward. All these happened and the people suffered.

By “puzzles of state multiply”, the persona talks about the act of state creation that was made everyday business during the military era. By “numerous lies flower”, the persona asserts that the military head of states were chronic liars. By “wind sneeze in toxic waves”, he says that the military head of state do a lot of unimaginable things. And by “cry in crimson rage”, the persona says that the military head of state inflicts serious pain on the people—makes them experience intense pain, such that could be compared to a “crimson rage.”

In “A country writes her own epitaph,” Raji’s persona describes the experiences of the people during this time using symbols. In the first stanza of the poem, the persona begins by stating that “From the beginning of night/ To the end of the day/ Vigils for death become the new/dance-craze of my people” (p. 20). Through such symbols as “vigils” and “dance-craze”, the poet persona unclasps that during these days, the greatest news that greet the people’s ears are news about the military head of state’s assassinations and people’s death. Such symbols as “vigils” and “dance-craze” are aimed at relating the gravity of the pains of the assassinations on the people. For instance, one can say that the careless gratifying assassination activities of the military head of states and their soldier boys are described with the “dance-craze” symbol and because of this constant news of death, the people kept “vigils.” In the second stanza, the persona also makes reference to constant killings in the country at this time. He says the military “build prisons like crooks/ Around their conscience” (p. 20) and then “They hatch new laws to sharpen old crimes” (p. 20). As a result of this, killings and assassinations become the order of the day and the following are their effects of them on the populace:

They wash their hands over me
Like a paparazzi of Pontius Pilates
They was their memories with wicked gins

From the beginning of night
To the end of day
My children flee the streets

Of sorrow and cremation ...
My children flee to other lands
Seeking the kindness of strangers. (p. 20)

One of the effects of these constant killings and assassinations news on the people is that it causes them to go on exile where they seek “the kindness of strangers.” While the “sorrow” symbol is used to signify death and killings, the “cremation” symbol signifies burial and the memorial tombs of the victims of the military in the country. Apart from the killings and assassinations, in stanza five we are told that even those who do the dirty jobs are underpaid: “The hangman grieves over over/work and underpay” (p. 20). Hence, in the last stanza of the poem, the persona laments further that he is filled with fear; not for himself but for his children:

From sea, swamp to savanna
I quake
From night, day to night
I tremble, for them, my children
For no one, not even the dead
Is safe
From these vigils
Of a new destruction. (p. 21)

The persona laments further in “For dead gods” and notes that during this time, the gods were useless to the people—the gods that were formally associated with ancient “bloodbath and death”(pp.39). The persona makes caricature of the gods in rhetorical questions, thus: “Where is the memory of your animal passion /Where is the passion of your tribal history/Where, the history of your legendary wealth” (p.39). Since the gods are assumed one of the distinguishing features of the people of Nigeria, the persona asks in rhetorical question, “where is the wealth of your dead clan?” The same question is repeated in the couplet that ends the poem, “Oh ancient of bloodbath and death/ where is your clan in the book of memory” (p. 39)? In this poem, the persona is of the view that even the gods were afraid of the

military at this time in Nigerian history: this is signified with the use of the word: “where”.

Conclusion

By interpreting some of the word-signs and symbols contained in both Okigbo and Raji’s selected poems, we have been able to navigate our way into the Nigerian military experiences and have also been able to perceive the poets’ different reactions to their different military experiences in Nigeria. Through the interpretations of the signs and symbols in Okigbo’s *Path of Thunder* poems, we are able to establish that the military activities of the 60s displaced the then corrupt civilian government. We are able to see that the modes of the poet as well as other Nigerians were that of joy and jubilation. This is different from what is seen as we interpret the word-signs and the symbols that are contained in Raji’s *Webs of Remembrance*. In *Web of Remembrance*, it is revealed how the country experienced more coups that plunged it into deeper chaos in the 70s, 80s and 90s.

We note the distinctions between the kind of symbols encountered in Okigbo and Raji’s different poems. While Okigbo’s poems present symbols that relate the Nigerian coup and counter coup experiences that at the same time reveal the poet’s feelings of joy about the situation, Raji’s poems confront us with symbols that only relate the poet’s feelings of sadness and regrets over the military activities in the country in the 70s, 80s and 90s. However, through the use of these semiotic elements, we have been able to navigate into the poets’ private knowledge and feelings about the military activities in Nigeria.

References

- Akingbe, N. (2016). Mythologizing Yoruba Orature: Lobotomizing Swiveled Pulses of Laughter in Niyi Osundare’s *Waiting Laughters* and Remi Raji’s *A Harvest of Laughters*, *Imbizo: Journal of African Literary and Comparative Studies* Vol.6, No 2. Pp..22-42.

- Awuzie, S. (2016). Contemplating the wind as spirit: Shelley's Ode to the west wind and Raji's select poems, in: *Internet Journal of Language, Culture and Society*. Issue 41, 15-23.
- _____. (2011). The New Historicist Practice and the Conception of the Dibia as a Poet Persona: Chinnoyerem's *The Changing Songs* and *The Shattered Pot and Other poem*. *Imbizo: Journal of African Literary and Comparative Studies* Vol.2. No.1 pp. 3-15.
- Egudu, R. (1972). The Defence of Culture in the Poetry of Christopher Okigbo, in Eldred Jones (ed) *African Literature Today*. No 6, New York: African Publishing Company, pp.22-64.
- Egya, S. E. (2007). The National Imagination in Remi Raji's Lovesong for my Wasteland. *Research in African Literature*. Vol.38. No 4, pp. 111-126.
- Griffiths, G. (2000), *African Literature in English: East and West*. England: Pearson.
- Isevbaye, D. S. (1972). Okigbo's Portrait of the Artist as a Sunbird: A Reading of Heavensgate, in Eldred Jones (ed) *African Literature Today*. No 6, New York: African Publishing Company, pp.1-8.
- Jegede, T. (2003). Towards a Conceptual Definition of the Poetics of New Nigerian Poetry in English, in Wole Ogundele and Gbemisola Adeoti (eds) *Iba: Essays on African Literature in Honour of Oyin Ogumba*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, pp. 32-39.
- Okigbo, C. (2008). *Labyrinths and Path of Thunder*. Lagos: Apex Books Limited,
- Raji, R. (2000). *Webs of Remembrance*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.