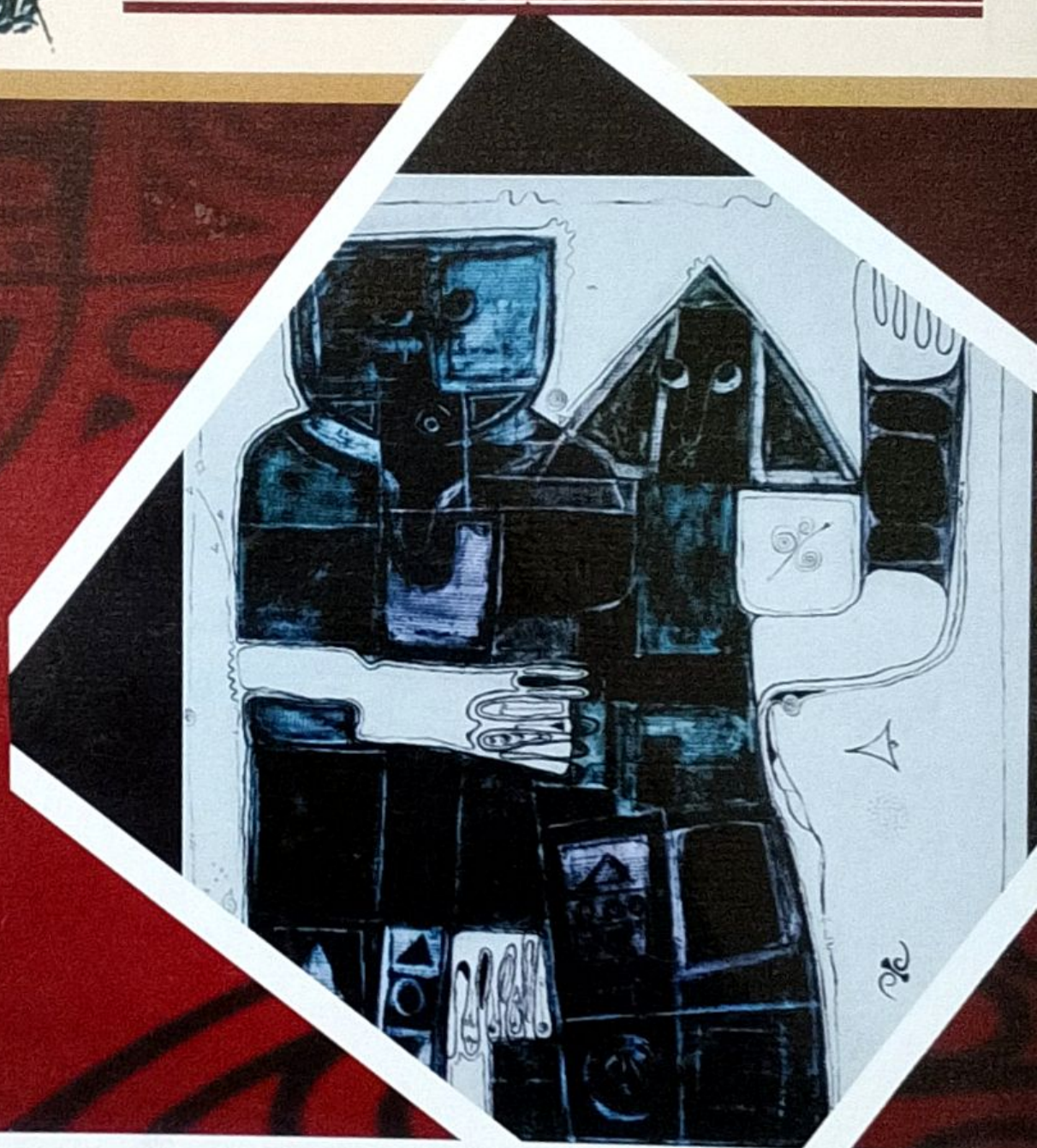




# OKike



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## Poetic Art and Politics in E.E. Sule's *Naked Sun*

Halima Shehu &  
Felicia Chibuogwu Chike-Okoli

### Abstract

Among the new poetic voices that have recently emerged in Nigeria, E.E. Sule, a radical contemporary poet stands out with a number of significant collections of poetry. However, he has received little critical attention in spite of the technical depth and power of his writing. The attempt here is to negotiate a literary space for him, and in particular, to locate his collection of poems in *Naked Sun* within the context of the ongoing discourse on political poetry. In the poems, Sule reflects on Nigeria's political history. He writes about the years under military regime and the disillusionment that resulted from that experience. Adopting the "Alternative" Marxist perspective, he focuses on the socio-political malady that characterized the despotic and tyrannical nature of military rule in Nigeria and urges for a national rebirth.

### Introduction

Political poetry has long had a presence in Nigeria since the late 1950s witnessed the emergence of poets who espoused the nationalist cause of an independent Nigeria. For first generation Nigerian poets such as Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, J.P. Clark and Christopher Okigbo, the struggle for independence and the civil war of 1967-1970 served as the starting point for what Amuta (1988) identifies as "the politicization of the Nigerian literary imagination". The next generation of poets led by Niyi Osundare, Tanuare Ojiade, Odia Ofeimun, Catherine Achonolu, and Femi Osofisan turned their attention to the turbulence created by the military juntas that took over control of government soon after the initial attempt at establishing a democratic system of government. These poets witnessed the oil boom of the 1970s and as well the dismal after effects in the 1980s and 1990s during which the illusion of wealth for all was shattered in the face of the rapacious actions of those who were in control of the country's resources. Their writing became preoccupied with socio-political problems and the sense of disillusionment that arose out of that period.

These poets went on to develop what has come to be known as the "Alternative" poetic tradition, a poetry that is somewhat political in tone and engages with the socio-economic conditions of life in Nigeria. Outraged by years of misrule and graft and the consequent negative



effects on the populace, they crafted a different poetic style that rejected the modernist preoccupation with emotions and linguistic esotericism of the poets before them, and instead, concentrated on a clear and urgent articulation of their peoples' experiences of military dictatorship, economic mismanagement, repression and social injustice. The third generation Nigerian poets made up of Remi Raji, Emman Shehu, Moses Tsenongu, Ismail Garba, as well as the poet under study here, E.E. Sule, has continued to use poetry to sensitize their fellow countrymen about the state of anomie caused by incompetent leadership.

Orr (2008) defines political poetry as relating to "a specific political situation; rooted in an identifiable political philosophy; addressing a particular political actor; written in language that can be understood and appreciated by its intended audience; and finally offered in a public forum where it can have maximum persuasive effects." Poetry and politics seem to connect through expressions and feelings about certain political situations and this is clearly demonstrated in the works of Nigerian poets as they strive to highlight the anomalies in their society especially as they concern the proper governing and welfare of the masses. This preoccupation with politics harks back to an ancient trend that Ojaide (2002) notes when he says that "in modern African poetry as in traditional songs, there is a focus on the current socio-political issues that affect the poet's people." Okon (2013) similarly avers that "African poetry has been the poetry of commitment to the political configuration of the African world with a view to bringing about desired change. In other words, politics is the substance while poetry is the form par excellence."

The subject of politics has therefore always been a major thematic concern and to a considerable degree has continued to shape modern Nigerian poetry creating for it a new explicit role and redefining the social standing of the poet. Hence, contemporary poets mentioned above use their craft to express rage and resistance against military regimes and their failed system of leadership. For the writer Helon Habila:

The dictatorship was good for literature because it supplied some of us with our subject matter, and while it lasted, it gave us an education into politics that we couldn't have acquired in school or anywhere else. We saw Pro-Democratic activists being killed or arrested or exiled - unfortunate for the victims but great stuff for writing. (2007)

Certainly, a scrutiny of their works soon reveals the strong commitment of contemporary poets to tackle what Chinua Achebe once referred to as "the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa". Undoubtedly, military rule has provided grist for a number of poets who strive to capture



the tyrannical and dictatorial military regimes of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and General Sani Abacha in the 1980s and 1990s the impact of which still reverberates to the present day. Poets particularly of the “Alternative” tradition bridged the gap between poetry and politics as they collectively raised the aesthetics of resistance in their outcry against the repressive regimes. Led by the poetic vision of Odiah Ofeimun, the first phase of anti-military poetry established the basic foundations and functions of such political poetry with regards to its preoccupations with misrule and the vibrant language employed to describe it. The second phase that emerged in the 1980s saw more poets building on what had already been laid down in terms of themes that cast off excessive modernist concern with private pain and grief and adopted a more public stance. The political poetry of “Alternative” Osundare, Ojiade, Maiwada and others sought “an immediate and unambiguous articulation of the nation’s tortured and fragmented psyche” (Aiyejina, 1988). E.E. Sule’s poetry similarly embraces this trend. For him, like others of his generation, poetry is seen as not only an interpretation of life but a functional act that creates more awareness of political and economic issues that directly affect his countrymen.

Sule’s view of political poetry is hinted at in a number of critical essays on Alternative poets written under his given name Sule E. Egya. Writing as a literary critic in *Poetics of Rage: A Reading of Remi Raji’s Poetry*, he observes that political poetry is “characterized, at least in Nigerian literary scene, by the aesthetics of resistance and rage against the militarized and failed leadership; and by the poet’s apparent empathy toward the ordinary people”. He sees this kind of poetry as “basically concerned with the fate of ... Nigeria, [which] having passed through a terrible military era emerged still into an inconsequential, trivialized democracy”, a view that is further stressed in his most recent text *Nation, Power and Dissidence in Third Generation Nigerian Poetry in English* (2019) where he notes that the emerging generation poets have continued to rail against the repressive regimes. Like Osundare and Ojiade before him, Sule’s verse is geared towards the reparation of a land destroyed by colonialism and subsequent ineffective leadership. Written in a distinctively fearless style, he makes a significant contribution in interrogating the oppression and repression of the Nigerian populace during successive military dictatorships.



### Political Poetry of E. E. Sule

Okunoye (2011) rightly notes, that the political situation in Nigeria has “emboldened the poet and inspired a variety of poetic idioms”. This quality is evident in the distinctive eloquence of E.E. Sule’s poems in the *Naked Sun* (2011) as he beams a searchlight on the ravages of military regimes. Reflecting back to those difficult years, his poetry is rooted in an identifiable political philosophy as it addresses particular political actors. Like other poets of the “Alternative” school, Sule employs Marxist dialectics to interpret the conditions of life in present day Nigeria as he tries to awaken the revolutionary spirit in its people. Seeking to reverse the system of misrule and graft, he urges the people to rise and take back what belongs to them in order to change the ills that have plagued Nigerian society among which is military dictatorship. Thus in *Naked Sun* is “that variety of poetry that depicts and declaims the failure of leadership; that captures the helpless masses suppressed and oppressed by the establishment; that, whether moulded in optimism or pessimism, engages the society, the people, in charting a positive discourse of a nation formation.”

Many contemporary Nigerian writers who are committed to the cause of improving the lives of their people find that a Marxist interpretation of society is useful for highlighting the economic conditions of the struggling masses. As Ngugi (1997), once pointed out, the literary artist must be imaginatively involved in his society, in “its economic structure, its class formations, conflicts, contradictions, political and cultural struggles, and its structure of values – particularly the conflict and tensions arising from the antagonism between those which are dying and those which are pointing to the future”. For Sule, like Ngugi, Marxism therefore offers a means of envisioning change in a capitalist society such as Nigeria where a clear class hierarchy exists between the bourgeoisie who are in charge of the means of production and the proletariat whose labour is exploited. The same perspective lends itself well to the political realities in Nigeria under military regimes that leaned heavily towards capitalism. Thus it is against the backdrop of the capitalist machinery of the military juntas that Sule appears to write the poems in *Naked Sun*. The sections in this collection is devoted to different but interrelated themes revolving around the social responsibility of the poet, individuals and society at large. Moving through the various sections, there is unity of purpose as most of the poems challenge the impunity of military regimes in Nigeria. They speak of the politics of the land, the power of the art of the poet as well as the role of individuals in standing up against oppression and blatant injustices.



Constraints of space here will permit the examination of only a few significant poems in the collection.

### Poetry and Power

It is a powerful thing when poetry finds its way directly or otherwise to the biggest issues in society and none more so than the politics that govern them (Zapruder, 2017). This is evident in *Naked Sun* where combining the imagination with the historical circumstances of his country, Sule launches a frontal poetic assault on maladministration in Nigeria. A vigilant critic of repressive military regimes, his writing is independent-minded and fearlessly rebellious. His sense of outrage and opposition has led him to lash out against dictatorship, oppression, and injustice in an attempt to confront power. In his demand for better standards of decency, fairness, and more humane values, his language is enlivened with a deep fearless passion. This is perhaps why tyrants fear poets because they write about things in an allegorical manner which at the same time has precise application.

If as Orr (2008) notes, it is the duty of poets to direct us to what we think in ways that are memorable, then, E. E. Sule succeeds in this task. *Naked Sun* begins with three poems under the sub-heading 'in the beginning tongues were unripe vowels' in which the stage is set for the concerns that will be raised in the collection. In them, the poet persona describes how he began his quest for poetry. In the first poem, 'kase and I', he remembers the search for words, for poetic skills with which to speak.

I recall  
 how we sped  
 in deciduous desert  
 of syllables  
 of rhythms  
 searching for the poet  
 in us  
 snatching ancient rhymes  
 because our tongues were unripe  
 but our instincts blazed

As the poet recounts his foray into the craft of poetry, he speaks of the effort involved and at the same time prepares us for the direction the poems will follow in this particular collection. He recalls how they sped in "deciduous deserts" searching for the poets in them. He seems to suggest that for one to venture into the craft of poetry, it is necessary to study



poetic efforts that had come before. He then goes on to make a confession that is somewhat familiar among poets especially those who are yet to find a voice and style. As with others of an artistic bent whose mastery of the craft is yet to mature, the poet sees himself as “snatching ancient rhymes and syllables” taking inspiration from poetic traditions already established because the need for poetry has been ignited in him. The poet’s inclination towards Marxist philosophy is soon made clear in next poem ‘if I must write.’

If I must write poetry  
I’ll skew  
on leftist stick  
chunks of delicious parable from  
rightist flesh

His decision to confront capitalist foes that as declared in the following verses is pronounced thus:

I will seek the starry eyeballs  
of leftist philosophy  
I will undo the fixed knots  
of rightist garments

I will weaken the sticky strength  
of rightist drawsoup

The poem ends with clear declaration of intent:

oh yes if I must write poetry  
I will burst the stubborn pod left  
in leftist’s hand...

I will seize the soft fruit clutched  
in rightist’s hand  
and expose worms that house  
its overripe creed

The third poem “let the poet be president,” points the reader to the matters of country and politics that are the main focus of the collection. Here, the poet persona blames the problems of Nigeria squarely on the quality of its leadership. His answer is to propose that a poet take on the highest political position in the country:

let a poet be president  
true poet of a true country  
we’ll plumb intestines  
of living words



pull our muse's detergent  
wash clean the conscience  
of our country

For Sule, only the visionary poet can pull the country out of the mire into which it has sank. However, while he desires that a poet become president it should not be just anyone, but a "true poet of a true country" who will not prevaricate but would harness the power of words to set the country free. If a poet becomes president, he will wash away the anomalies that have plagued the country and perhaps then...

we'll realize  
eternal rhythms of words  
in arresting  
wildnerves of poli-lies

The line "wildnerves of poli-lies" captures the excesses of politicians in Nigeria, in particular, the lies they tell for self-gratification. This speaks directly to the Marxist view that a small group of people in society create 'poli-lies' which in turn become the ideologies that people's lives depend upon instead of policies that will create better living conditions for them. This happens when cultural conditioning leads the people to accept without protest a system that is unfavourable for them. In other words, to accept their disadvantages as the logical way for things to be because of the false consciousness they have embraced (Dobie, 2014). It is this crippling attitude that Sule challenges in *Naked Sun*. He therefore strives to cleanse Nigeria of the deceptions created by the ideologies of the dominant class as he takes on the responsibility for identifying and uprooting what is wrong in society. Consequently, he attempts to sensitize the masses on the ways they have been cheated, deprived of their rights, and worse still, how unconsciously they have accepted the powerless roles ascribed to them by a rapacious class of leaders. The poet concludes saying...

and if a poet be president  
frayed embers  
of earthy tongues  
will seek death  
in talons of poetry  
rhyme will displace  
unrhymed utterances  
rhythm will humble  
tribalistic drums



The metaphor “frayed embers/ of earthy tongues” suggests the idea that the falsehoods of those in power will be overtaken as they “will seek death/ in talons of poetry”. For Sule, poetry has the potential to act as an antidote; for displacing “rhyme will displace/ unrhymed utterances”. This is the equivalent to the light of poetry displacing the darkness brought on by the mendacious promises of politicians. In the closing lines, “rhythm will humble/tribalistic drums” reference is made to the ethnic divisions and hatred fomented by politicians and which were the key factors in the most devastating crisis Nigeria has ever experienced. The civil war of 1966-1970 which began as pogroms against the Igbo resulted in the death of so many and ultimately destroyed trust between the various ethnic groups in the country.

In his verse, not only does Sule’s poetry interact with the history of military oppression in Nigeria, it is an interaction that sees poetry not only looking into history but attempting to redirect the future. Indeed, as most literary artists in Nigeria are concerned about the historical trajectory of their country, interest in the military regimes that held power for so long in Nigeria is perhaps unavoidable. According to Solanke:

The onus to call these rulers and sometimes, even the ruled to order has most times fallen on the Nigerian artistes, - a major part of who are poets. These set of writers have, for the period under review, been recorders, critics and way-showers to all involved in the development of Nigeria. (2013)

Echoing Orr, Andrew Motion (2007) outlines what he sees as the “sacred duty of poets” which is “to enlist the full support of their imaginations, their full range, their full gifts and the whole repertoire of their talent for language, to tell us the human truth about humanity, whatever those in authority may say about it”. Thus in *Naked Sun*, Sule strives to peel back the layers of Nigeria’s national history and to tell the truth about military regimes as he sees it. In the Marxist spirit, the poet persona engages with the politics of his land as he confronts the Military juntas that are represented as exploitative capitalists who oppressed the common people. As Ngugi observes, “it is not only the writer’s honesty and faithfulness in capturing and reflecting the struggles around him, but also his attitude to those big social and political issues”. Patriotic poets like Sule therefore pursue social transformation by using their art to challenge injustice whether under military or civilian regimes (Alu, 2011). Sule clearly stands with the working poor as he calls for more social, political and economic awareness of the issues created by that period of Nigeria’s history. The



poems in *Naked Sun* highlight the fact that the effects of what happened in the past are still being felt today.

Other important preoccupations of the poems selected for attention here include the search for identity, the need to fight complacency and to continue the struggle for justice all of which are important to the conceptualization of Sule's title poem "naked sun" as political poetry. Written in four movements, this particular poem employs the metaphor of the sun to highlight the dominance of the powerful military heads of state. In the first movement, the poet persona reminds all concerned of the time the military wrested the reins of government from the people:

you were there, papa  
weren't you  
when the sun stripped off his regalia  
and old age crept into your eyes  
when you hadn't  
gathered enough vision  
to road a survival  
for your children

The sun here represents the all-pervading destructive might of military regimes, the terror, hardship, poverty and the killings they unleashed on the populace for so many years and that permeated all aspects of life. Here as in "kase and I" as well as in others, Sule appears to write as a participant of the events mentioned but he is not alone as he brings the reader into it through the use of the pronouns *you*, *our*, *we* and *us* which cuts across the entire collection. The poet personae as well as the reader are seen as either victims of injustice or protesters against it; only in a few poems does the poet persona create a distance between himself and the subject.

History is invoked as a number of references are made to the betrayed dreams of the founding fathers of Nigeria:

Naked sun  
Is  
Plundered book of nationalism  
Worded by balewa azikiwe awolowo...  
When the penises of our military emperors  
Were yet uncircumcised

The poet therefore urges:

we must sing our song  
let us loosen  
these roped tongues



let us!

In pursuit of a just and egalitarian society, and in accordance with the poet's Marxist belief of creating change through revolution, the poet persona charges the masses to let loose their "roped tongues" and fight for their rights and to set themselves free. This image is repeated several times in the poem alluding to the repressed voices of a people in captivity. Silenced by those who hold the very guns that were meant to defend them, the poet laments that 'your tongue impotent /in the restricted drumtalk of silence/from the General's enclave' even as they suffer are 'bleeding from your raped tomorrow'. The poet therefore calls out to all members of society, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters and implores them to neither succumb to fear nor to be cowed by those who bring chaos and incite killings but to cast off the chains that shackle them.

The military era was occasioned by injustice perpetrated by the masters of the epoch. This did not only stagnate the country's fortunes but brought her to a complete dystopian and retrogressive state. For the poet personae, therefore, it was an era when the naked sun stripped off her regalia and humans turned tyrants which delivered the land to demons in form of human. The poor masses incapable of saving themselves seemed to be trapped in the quagmire of continuous military extrajudicial excesses. Hence military rule was not only oppressive; it did not have the capacity to improve the fortunes of the country but rather through the inordinate plundering of the nation's treasury turned it into a bankrupt retrogressive state. The dictatorial power of successive military governments crippled the potential of a promising nation and destroyed its hitherto thriving economy. For the poet therefore, it was an era when the naked sun stripped off her regalia and persecuted the people of the land

naked sun

you spread down rays  
of bewitching boots our palms  
of beguiling belts on our chest

naked sun

you spread down rays  
of khaki killings our land  
of beret bankruptcies on our bank

The symbols of power and cruelty as represented in the military accoutrements of boots, belts, khaki and berets provide striking images of repressive military misrule. The phrases "bewitching boot's" and "khaki killing" portray destruction and anarchy. The excesses of the military



juntas took on different forms that ultimately resulted in the plundering of a nation by a formidable group:

naked sun

is

the man-monster

always ever lucky

to get asorocked

and pisses on the

ashes of the masses

burnt for him by

national policies

A chasm separated the autocratic ruling elite that took possession of the seat of power, the presidential villa at Aso Rock, and the poor masses who were impoverished by policies of the military heads of state. Although this poem is written to chronicle past military dictatorship, the impact of that period resonates in present times as the gap between the elite and the poor masses has continued to widen. It depicts a country where the rich are getting richer in spite of the of abject poverty of many. The poet therefore goes on to urge for a change through a revolution that the people themselves need to set in motion. The poem ends in cry for all the people to rise up:

even in the furnace of the oven nation

we can find spittle

to quench this heat

Rather than lament the inability of the masses to combat the military oppressors, he sees untapped potential in them to reverse their own fortunes. Thus the poet says:

freedom lies in the hardened liver of sacrifice

freedom heaves from the rot of fleshy intents

In the above lines, Sule explores nationalist thinking and engages with the different classes of people in an attempt to construct alternative politics for his country that is the responsibility of everyone concerned. Hence he remonstrates with all when he cries:

Papa wake!

Mama wake!

Brother wake!

Sister wake!



He admonishes all to stand up, reclaim their freedom, and take back what rightfully belongs to them. Regardless of age or gender, the responsibility of national development falls on everyone. But to achieve freedom the individual must taste the bitter side of life; he must “learn the figtree wisdom of unhandcuffed legs”. The poet calls for such renewal that comes only to those whose hearts have been strengthened by sacrifice.

In the poem titled “killing along path of the naked sun”, the poet recalls how under military regimes the country’s economy was destroyed as the money meant for the people was embezzled and abject poverty ravaged the land. The people were silenced even as their stomachs growled from hunger.

that time  
in the empty market place square  
of wild yawns

that time  
in the shrunk ecosystem  
of roped tongues

that time  
in the windy choreography  
of unfed stomachs

The poet persona again employs the naked sun as a metaphor to depict the glaring brutality of military dictatorship.

Naked sun  
Fatherchristmased our path  
With orgies of killings

And killings blossomed with unfettered noun  
And death saged  
Our crescent hopes

The poet laments a land crippled with death as a result of incessant killings of writers, activists, journalists and many others who dare to challenge the dictators. Several references are made to key historical individuals who had striven to curb the excesses of military rule as in the following poem about Dele Giwa:

And our dearest dele  
Dele who was giwa  
In the lucrative wings of alphabets  
A frisk nib in our nation’s finger

A legendary vowel in the unheard speech of star



A kolanut in the wisdom of sky's teeth

That edifice

Crumbled into the sealed envelop

Of dictator's gap-toothed mockery

Here reference is made to the assassination of Giwa, a journalist, editor and publisher who had refused to be muzzled and was killed by a letter bomb on 19 October 1989. His name "Giwa", which means "elephant" in the Hausa language widely spoken in northern Nigeria, also appears to epitomize his stature in the eyes of the common man. He was held in high regard by many because of his concern over the questionable happenings in the country under the military. In other verses of the same poem, we similarly learn about another outspoken critic of military rule, the environmental activist and writer, Ken Saro Wiwa who was killed by the dictator General Sani Abacha. The poem recalls the execution of Saro Wiwa who in the face of tyranny did not succumb to fear. Instead, in defending the Niger Delta region from the wanton exploitation of powerful oil cartels, he found strength in a just cause. An Ogoni, Saro Wiwa stood up for the rights of his people in the face of tyrannical rule:

Saro wiwa dared

The naked sun like saddam to bush

He clawed at

The naked sun like dog at locked door

He scratched

The naked sun like rat on cemented earth

An outspoken critic of the military that refused to enforce environmental regulations on the foreign petroleum companies operating in the area, Saro Wiwa was arrested and executed:

Saro wiwa dared

Almighty

Naked sun

Chuckled

And wiwa was roped

In eulogizing Saro Wiwa's courage in *Naked Sun*, the poet "asserts the value of the individual and displays a strong moral sense of what is right and just" (Motion, 2017). In this manner, the poems in the collection support Maduaka's claim that one of merits of literature is that it provides alternatives that could uplift society: "literature enhances man's awareness of the interlocking relation between human freedom, the self-determination of people and progress in society and the necessity of erecting systems that sustain the life of social institutions" (1998).



However, the poet must leave the task of informing, convincing, lecturing, and describing to prose. Hence, Sule is careful not to slip into euphemisms, generalizations and obscuring abstractions that could impede the task he has set for himself.

### The Power of Form

Poetry is an art form that allows for fluidity as it possesses an inherent ability to free the poet from rules and structure thereby creating a space outside the status quo that permits them to express and view their society differently. This poetic license is evident in *Naked Sun* where most of the poems are deliberately written in lowercase. While an unconventional manner of writing, the deployment of this style could be an indication of the poet's refusal to allow his voice to be repressed under an established hierarchy. All the letters therefore have equal value, at least in size, thus rendering a more free-form style that exists independently of grammatical, punctuation or syntactical rules. Even the proper names of historical statesmen like Balewa, Azikiwe and Awolowo are written in the lowercase perhaps to imply that they could be everyman. The only group of people that is elevated are literary writers and poets like Soyinka, Clark, Osofisan, Osundare, Ojiaide and so on whose names are written in capital letters in the poem titled "in the funeral" to indicate the high esteem that the poet persona holds them.

Though Sule's urgent message is relayed more frequently in free verse, poems occasionally employ the use rhythm, that is, the measured pattern of words and phrases as in the following lines:

and we graveyarded wiwa  
in the carrion of ogoniland  
and we idolized wiwa  
in the jihad of his writing

Evidently, language use in poetry distinguishes it from other literary forms and the impact of political poetry lies in the fact that both politics and poetry can express views in an urgent manner. Where poetry is concerned, its power is ultimately embedded in its persuasive ability. But therein lies the danger because political poems could so easily become mere lyrical rants. However in E.E. Sule poems, we find a poetic voice worthy of note not only because of the social value of the messages it delivers but especially because of how it enlivens language. Here political poetry has "a dual aim: first, pierce the ears of the insensitive leaders; second, sensitize the society about the current anomie caused by an incompetent leadership" (Egya, 2011). In *Naked Sun*, with the use of striking images,



syntax and pristine syllables, Sule skilfully reactivates language in order to capture the despotic rule of military regimes. To teach about the abuse of power, a rich variety of figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, alliteration, personification and repetition are employed in the poems. An example is of course the repeated use of the scorching sun metaphor to aid the reader in imagining the pervasive hardship and destruction of people and land under military dictatorships:

I recall

under the naked sun

welter of screaming rays

stampeded our nerves

Language that engages through images, symbolisms and allusions is utilized to refer to the destructiveness of military rule as in the “naked sun” that is “like rat on cemented earth” abound in the poems. In the same poem, the poet uses the “vulture,” a bird that only feeds on unclean carrion to capture the image of the military ruler when he says:

his family turned carcasses

for vultures in khaki

his wealth turned polluted air

on the nostrils of naked sun

This implies that for the military ruler to survive there must be death, and unburied corpses. As in the poetry of Osundare, Ofeimun, and Raji who also represented the military oppressor in the form of poisonous and predatory creatures, the image of the vulture thus vividly expresses Sule’s utter disgust for military rulers. But while Sule’s poetry screams and curses bitterly, it simultaneously asks its readers not to retreat into the despair of victimhood but rather urges protest against the many ills that plague Nigeria.

Drafting his poetry into the service of a revolutionary struggle and the emancipation of oppressed masses, in the *Naked Sun* Sule successfully defines his role as a poet champion of the people. His poems speak decisively to political power and calls on all to reject insecurity, nepotism, religious and ethnic crises as well as embezzlement of public funds whether perpetrated by military or civilian regimes. Yet in spite of the excoriating language of the poems, they nonetheless retain faith in the masses and an abiding hope that they will rise to rescue themselves and ultimately bring about a better country for all.



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