



## **Of Divination Tray and the Search for Utopia: A Postcolonial Reading of Okinba Launko's Selected Poems**

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## OF DIVINATION TRAY AND THE SEARCH FOR UTOPIA: A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF OKINBA LAUNKO'S SELECTED POEMS

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### ABSTRACT

Primordial oral literary forms have always been very central to the evolution of modern African literature. Arguably, these forms have impacted on modern African poetry, not only on account of their recurrence in the works of poets, but also as important indices in current African poetry studies and criticism. Contemporary African poets have since stretched the limits and aesthetics of these forms to emphasize their relevance in the postcolonial space, following after the Negritude poets who set the antecedent in the use of Africa's primordial forms albeit to serve cosmetic purpose. This paper, using selected poems from Okinba Launko's *Dream-Seeker on Divining Chain* (1993), *Commemorations* (2007), and *Seven Stations Up the Trays Way* (2013), discusses the different tropes and manifestations of oral forms in modern African poetry. The writers isolate the poet's use of Orunmila, the Yoruba divinity muse, to comment on or navigate the dilemmas of the postcolonial space. The paper concludes that the dialectic prism of Okinba Launko's poetry, which is etched in the contemporariness and relevance of Orunmila, exteriorizes the malaises that have continued to dim Launko's visions of hope and utopia in the Nigerian space.

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## Introduction

Critical perspectives on modern African poetry have provided common insights into the use of primordial forms by African poets. For example, whereas Ato Quayson (2001, 202) in his accreditation of Wole Soyinka's works relevant to this discussion, appraises the novel dimension describing it as an "attempt at a new mythography that draws from the indigenous resource-base", Oyeniyi Okunoye (2008, 78) argues about this harnessing of the postcolonial tangent when he situated the contemporary uses of primordial forms by African poets thus:

The postcolonial...is remarkable for the uniqueness of its conception of...wide ranging and often conflicting assumptions with regard to the response of the literary culture of postcolonial societies to colonialism and all it precipitated...the postcolonial is not just a temporal marker but also the designation of a [hybridized] consciousness.

Indeed, we saw in Negritude poets an ideological engagement, within the quest for "hybridized consciousness" (Okunoye, 84) that favors a subjective re-affirmation of black consciousness through an intangible deployment of primordial tropes but after the Negritude experience, we now continue to see in contemporary African poetry polemic uses of primordial typologies deployed by poets in their mediations on issues that affect the Africa and the global space. This paper engages the poetry collections of Okinba Launko in four sections. The first section introduces the subject of Postcoloniality with recourse to the use of primordial forms by African poets in their attempts to engage with issues in the African landscape. In the second section, the writers discuss the different typologies used by Africa poets and narrow in on the centrality of Orunmila to Okinba Launko's poetry. The third section is a robust engagement with the social traumas in the Nigerian space that the poet mirrors while the conclusion of the paper renders a value judgment on the poetry of Okinba Launko that have been studied to the effect that the poet's vision of utopia is still a mirage on account of the serial manifestations, in his nation, of those malaises he has isolated.

An overall assessment of the use of primordial forms as intervention trope in African poetry captures two dimensions. Firstly, one finds examples in the poetry of Okot p'Bitek in *Song of Lawino and Ocol* (1984), Tanure Ojaide in *Fate of Vultures* (1990), Niyi Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth* (2000) and others, poets that adopt multiple cultural forms as tropes in their poetry. The second distinction has shown poets who have been synonymous with particularity or fidelity with a form. Wole Soyinka, for example, has been very consistent with his adoption of the Ogun myth as his intervention trope in "Idanre" in *Idanre and other Poems* (1967), *Ogun Abibiman* (1976), The "Mandela Poems" in *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1989) and *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known* (2002). Apart from Soyinka, we also have Kofi Anyidoho whose lines in *A Harvest of Our Dreams* (1984) are consistent with his use of Ewe funeral dirge, Ezenwa Ohaeto who has deployed the Udje Masquerade format in his verses in *The Voice of the Night Masquerade* (1996) and Okinba Launko whose creative consciousness is anchored on Orunmila.

### **Okinba Launko's poetry and Orunmila as intervention trope**

To many critics, Okinba Launko, whose real name is Femi Osofisan, is best popularly known as a dramatist. However, for reasons unknown, critical resources available on his poetry, despite making outstanding statements through that medium, are very lean. Notwithstanding, what may attract an average reader to Launko's poetry hinges on two dimensions unique to his poetry. One, is the resonance of his dramatic instincts replicated through "performance" in his poetry while the other, which calls for our attention in this paper, is his peculiar use of Orunmila as a major intervention trope in his poetry. Orunmila, in the Yoruba worldview, is the god of divination, knowledge, progress and wisdom. He is believed to have the capacity to solve problems, riddles or phenomena of private and public concerns in a way that transcends simple approximations. Fasan Rotimi and Sesan Azeez Akinwumi (2017, 116) explain the importance of Orunmila to the worldview of the Yoruba by asserting that:

The configuration of Yoruba religious cultural belief in Ifa divinatory poetry ascribes different semantic denotations/ connotations to the word. It is believed among the adherents of Ifa that the word belongs to Olodumare (the Supreme Being) and that Orunmila, the arch divinity, is the very medium of expression. Ifa adherents, therefore, believe that the word of Olodumare is relayed through the various chapters and verses of the Ifa corpus. A divining chain and other paraphernalia of divination are used in the revelation of the word of Olodumare...In the Yoruba imaginary as encapsulated in the Ifa religious system, the word is viewed as possessing the capacity for life and death in socio-human relationship

This very essential centrality of Orunmila to the formation of existences and its survival in terms of physical and spiritual functionality is again reinforced by Peter Muyiwa Awodiya (1995, 75) who not only lends credence to this perspective but also draws attention to its nexus with Okinba Launko's poetry when he says:

Orunmila, as the features deity in the Yoruba mythological background, provides the metaphorical framework for the presentation of ideas which have appeared in one form or another throughout Osofisan's poetry. As the traditional source of his poetic inspiration, Osofisan draws his creative impulse from Orunmila, his muse. He demonstrates this by titling...his new poetry collection as *Dream-Seeker on Divining Chain*... when he says that "the journey of these poems are facilitated by Ifa...

The divinatory prowess of Orunmila is entrenched in the Ifa myth, with the Babalawo as the priest and custodian. The Babalawo, on behalf of his client, probes into the origin of problem through his art of divination and then gives counsel on the required antidote through prescription (s) of actions and (or) rituals. Thus, Launko's coinage of the title indexes in *Dream Seeker on Divining*

*Chain and Seven Stations Up The Tray's Way*, using words like “Divining Chain” and “Tray” (which are divination tools of Ifa), project his attachment to Orunmila as a primary muse. On the other hand, the pervasive presence of Iwapele, wife of Orunmila also permeates Launko’s poetry. Like the Senghorian attachment to the “black woman”, the poet creates an inextricable link between himself and Iwapele and uses her to encapsulate the memory, mystery, permanent presence and influence of the ancestors. An attestation to this dual interconnectedness is relayed in his allusion to “two rivers” in “Sweet Refrain” (91), one of the poems in the Fifth Movement of *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*. The exact words read:

One for my land  
Two for my two rivers

Hence, Iwapele, Orunmila’s wife and Launko’s parallel muse takes diverse representations in the poet’s mother and wife. The persona also manifests in iconized goddesses like Oya, wife of Sango and Moremi, the Ife Matriarch that saved her people from the forays of insurgents to create a grotesque metaphorical reincarnation of virtue, wisdom, intimacy, camaraderie and love. In fact, Launko uses the character of Iwapele to concretize a creative temper that espouses the coalescing of temporal and mundane existences. For instance, “Letters to Mama”, one of the sections in *Commemorations*, not only reminiscence on the life and times of his mother, her dispositions towards morals and virtue, the pain of death and separation, but also adopts the epistolary structure of the twenty cantos, which is suggestive of a mutual exchange between the two personas (mother and son) intended to upset space barriers and to objectify the inspirations that emanate from his trysts with his muse. However, a linear distinction can be drawn between the roles of Orunmila and Iwapele in the poet’s work. While Orunmila is presented as the source, the one providing the dream-seeker with knowledge, Iwapele is conceived as rendering the inspiration and the needed accomplice in the adventures of knowledge. Working together, these dual mytho-poetic poles serve as the primordial pillars that coalesce to form the creative ideology in Launko’s poetry.

Indeed, the nexus between the poet and negritude ideals is captured in his remodeled affirmation of an entrenched cultural mode of Ifa. Like a typical Babalawo, the poet, uses myth in his ‘divination’ process of isolating the challenges of his space and in his suggestion of antidote, while mimicking the ritual and corrective process of the Ifa divination art. In “A Brief Notice” the divining tray and chain appears the most visible instruments to his clients, even though he has other tools which he also uses for his trade. He provides the reader of *Dreamseeker on the Divining Chain* (7-8) some insight into the importance of the divining chain to the Babalawo thus:

The divining chain is a metal string  
at the tail ends of which eight halves of  
the nuts of the opele palm –tree have been  
sown, four at each end. Each of these half-

nuts naturally has an inner conclave, and

an outer convex, side.

The middle section of this string or metal, which is the longest part, is usually bare, and it is here that the chain is held. In such a way that the two ends hang down side by side.

When divining, the priest throws the chain always with the right hand, and always away from himself. Then the position of the two parallel lines of shells on the mat, that is, whether concave or convex, dictates the message

of the casting. This is what is recited.

Since each side of the chain has sixteen possible configurations, that is sixteen possible different arrangements of the shells, it follows that Ifa divination has sixteen major predictions, while the minor ones are

a series of multiplications of these.

Each time the priest throws the chain, the resulting pattern tells him what verse of Ifa to recite, and it is this verse that carries the message relevant to the problems of the client. Hence, since the problems in this world are innumerable, the skill of the diviner is assessed on the basis of how many of these verses he is able to memorize.

But consultation with Ifa, as stated by Launko in “Escursus”, the opening to *Seven Stations Up The Tray’s Way*, are “not only always for divination or even gnosis. Sometimes, as the Odu reveals, Ifa also opts for exercises of pure intellection--- or even a light banter and fun” (vi). Therefore, the compositions in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*, *Commemorations* and *Seven Stations Up The Tray’s Way* are a mixture of the ethereal and the mundane, the personal and public life, the satiric and the purely entertaining forms enlivened with elements of performance especially in *Commemorations* where, in the words of Fasan and Sesan earlier cited, the poet compacts “a multigeneric interface of orality, myth, history and dramatic performance” (114).

In these collections, the poet presents the divination process which is very critical to the votaries of the Orunmila cult with the oracular tone in poems like “Beginning”, “Invocation” and “Coda” in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* and the poems in “Iba” in the “First Station” in *Seven Stations Up The Tray’s Way* to emphasize the critical essences of initiation, tutelage, ritual, propitiation, invocation, active silence and spiritual retreat to the divination process. Interestingly, in “Orunmila’s treasure” (84-86), the poem that begins the “Fifth Movement” in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*, the capacity of Orunmila intervention transcends spatial barriers is emphasized but the process of engagement remains sacrosanct as Orunmila rejects the substitution of propitiatory objects like “ado” (a small calabash for storing herbs) “ase” (a symbol representing the power of the word) and “eso” (a magical fruit) with modern alternatives like “ring”, “watch” and “necklace”. The poet’s journey motifs as seen in his use of time, setting and movement in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* and *Seven Stations Up The Tray’s Way* enforce the importance and dynamic nature of knowledge. In the globalized space and especially in the postcolonial African environment, the enormity of complex situations warrant the need for intervention and Launko, through Orunmila, provides such insights and antidotes into those socio-political and even cultural infractions in the spaces he mirrors. The poet launders the efficacy of poetry to surmount all odds as he posits, in “Ifa and the Hunter”, the last poem of the Fifth movement in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* (100):

Of what use is a gun  
Beside the eloquent power of a flute  
Or the euphonious fountain of a pen.

Earlier, the poet has set the task of his intervention and the essence of his poetry. In the “First Movement” of *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* we pick the relevant words from the poet in “Pilgrimage” (19)

I arrive Iwapele  
your name on my lips...  
This pilgrimage is for wounding  
this wounding is for remembering  
this remembering is for cleansing  
this cleansing is for healing

If the poet’s intention is to secure cures for the anomalies in the land he mirrors, it becomes pertinent to dispense such to his audience who, by having access to his poetry and, perhaps enmeshed in the same infractions, also need to apply such ‘medication’ to entirely rid their space of those distortions. This link between the poet and his audience is established in the Third Movement, in “Forest encounter” where in “(v) the season’s riddle” (52) he writes:

let us dare to spit out

our curses & complaints  
before they begin to lick  
the newspapers,  
  
before the spittle of  
their falsehoods  
soaks tomorrows  
headlines  
I am the season's riddle, and you the unraveling code

These lines set the pace for the conditions of dystopia that inundate the poetry of Launko. In *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*, poems in the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Seventh Movements reflect these conditions. Whereas the poet, in *Commemorations*, eulogizes the exploits of great men like Ayo Banjo, Nelson Mandela, Ken Saro Wiwa, Christopher Okigbo and Obafemi Awolowo, in “Twelve Canticles to a Master” (36- 48), “Tshotsholoza!” (49- 58), “Saro Wailing” (63-70), “I Remember Okigbo” (81- 84) and “Mourning from a Corner of Shyness” (85- 91) respectively, the threnodic tone of “Saro Wailing” and “I Remember Okigbo”, in particular, provides the thrusts of social relevance as these poems also reflect the conditions of injustice under which these heroes fought and died. The Sixth (“Homeland”) and Seventh (“Alafia”) stations in *Seven Stations Up The Tray's Way* not only reinforce the social impulses in earlier collections but also culminate in the poet's suggestion of antidote and prospect of restoration.

### **The crises of mediation and dystopia in Launko's postcolonial space**

Launko's compositions, relying on his muse, confront the crises of leadership and inclement political situations which have become the bane of most African countries in the postcolonial space as well as the failures of civilian leadership and its alternative, the military rule. This stance is reflected in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* where in “Locusts” (31), one of the poems in the Second Movement, the poet says:

Hurry, they say –  
the afternoon is all a-clamour  
  
& young men and women are scattering everywhere  
like discarded leaves  
  
offals on a crossroad abandoned...  
The locusts are here  
but there is only discord among the afflicted  
  
The carrions are here  
they bare their teeth on the silos of our soil



on the baskets of our riches, our pots of oil...

The locusts are landed:  
continuous division among the victims  
is what the conqueror needs

parasites in stiff khaki cloth or flowing gown  
they eat our harvests & our virgins...

With the use of words like “locust”, “carrions” and “parasites” in these lines, the poet criticizes the predatory nature of both corrupt military and ‘democratic’ leaders whose inclination is always to siphon the wealth of the nation, “eating our harvests and our virgins”.

The poet also draws a distinction between the oppressed and the oppressor by pointing out the organized chaos and theft of the nation’s resources as against the disharmony and helplessness of the led. This condition of hopelessness is tacitly linked to the themes of exile, loneliness and estrangement in the poems of the second Movement in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* like “Release” (32), “Exile song” (.33), “Solitude” (34-35) and “Separations” (36-37). The dedication of “Separations” (36-37), to Wole Soyinka, who went on self- exile at the peak of the Abacha regime, points at the ordeal of artists during the military era of 1983 to 1999 when the nation was brought to its knees on account of a national election that was annulled. It was a very dark period that saw the killing, persecution or incarceration of voices of dissent who stood against the tyranny of the military junta. Only the poets who went on self- exile, like Soyinka, appeared free from the extrajudicial killings or imprisonment without trial that prevailed in the country:

I am thinking of you and  
Of the broken reed  
between your white teeth and  
the blades of bayonet

and a rainbow on the green bottles  
and a uniform woven of herbs  
upon your slender form  
for untold battles

Adieu!

Let us rise with glasses  
and shake hand once again  
my foot on the road of migration  
and yours heading slow for the prison cell.

Launko's elegy on exodus of artists provides a launching pad from which he offers a robust perspective of the crises as we see in "Cleansing song" (42), one of the poems in the Second movement of *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*. The poet adopts the persona who derives solace from other poets, and uses the number six as symbolism for dimensions of global chaos. Evident here is a double sense of estrangement that a poet experiences while living abroad, first the disconnection from his country, as reflected in "Sour memories" (68) and the second arising from anguish of racism, which is captured in "Paris Latin Quarter" (69). With titles like "The lost child" (59), "Meeting in Harare" (71), and "My African Heroes", the poet not only lambastes the African leaders for their insensitivity but also criticizes the lust for the mundane, and consumerism of African nations. In fact, a parallel catalogue of heroes and anti-heroes within and outside the African space are juxtaposed in "Grafitti" (121) where, in his hoisting of spaces and leaders of repute in other lands, he uncovers the crises of leadership failure and its corollary on the Nigerian space as he points out, affirmatively, that:

wherever you name or applaud  
from washington to westminister to the wailing wall)  
I shall counter with a million with a million local examples:  
monuments in carven calabash m.i.n.  
all wearing pips and tinsel  
(all the salt of the earth...)  
ALL-  
impostors, in posters ...

The lampooning of Nigerian leaders in the poet's banal use of m.i.n. (which means "made in Nigeria" leaders) magnifies their characterised limitation, incompetence and ineptitude that have expectedly denied them the status of global reckoning.

Of course, the collateral damages that this failure of leadership has caused extend beyond challenges associated with the brain drain syndrome into other issues too numerous to mention. Pervasive hunger, scarcity of food and corruption triggered by capitalism echo in "Rice" (76- 77) where the regime of hoarders has made survival impracticable for the less privileged, creating a volatile situation which does not bode well for national peace. The poet draws attention to this as he points out that:

the hearts of suffering  
can sharpen  
on the blade of hunger  
into anger  
  
the rich men can buy fertilizers

from the government ships  
for non- existent farms

when the poor need fertilizers  
they know that one calabash  
of anger is enough.

As further reflected in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*, these lines imply that the persistence of suffering and neglect inflicted on the masses can trigger a revolution as indicated in “Resistance” (87), “A song is ripening” (88-89) and “Thunderbeat” (90). In “Thunderbeat” (90) the poet invokes and personifies thunder who he says is “one of those/ who have been stung by the termites/of the homeland” (90). He goes further to use the victimhood of thunder to assert the prospect that those oppressed by the recalcitrant leaders would soon harness their potential to resist and terminate all manifestations of annihilation. The relevant words read thus:

One day you will  
bring your many selves together:  
the part of you that are wrinkles or  
fallen hair, the  
ashes  
as well as the embers-

thundering through the deaf ears of rulers  
to start a fire there  
cantering into the belly of the poor  
to rouse a hope there.

Even at the risk of paying the supreme price, the surpassing importance of freedom is stressed in “Gorbachev’s firestorm” (78-79), “Gani’s daughters” (80), “Ngugi will smile yet” (81) and “Freedom song” (82), all in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*. Unfortunately, the poet’s certainty in these poems remains yet to materialize in actuality because the oppressed are in comatose and seems unprepared yet for the struggle that will rid the land of oppression.

The poet’s dissatisfaction with the plight of the masses perhaps explains his recourse to mediation as an avenue with which to express his determination to confront these leaders, taking on this urgent duty of exposing other vices in the land. The poet makes this known in “Tomorrow” (57)

Tomorrow I shall rise at dawn in the rain,  
and head for the house by the sea, I shall  
not wait for an umbrella or for breakfast,

I shall have only the password for the barracks

Through the forest onto the expressway,  
over the mountains of refuse and clogged drains,  
I shall pass the beggars and the go- slows,  
blowing the only siren I have; my poem.

I know the newspapers will be gawking at me,  
and the tax collectors and the police checkpoints;  
But I shall not stop, not even for the priests  
who will be brandishing their bells and their prophecies.

One finds in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* a litany of social woes like the pauperization of citizens, decay in infrastructure and the bastardization and corruptness of hallowed public institutions like the police force. Added to these is the pall of uncertainty and insecurity that now pervades the land. In “Our Days”, one of the “Homeland” poems in “The Sixth Station” of *Seven Stations Up the Trays Way* (79) the poet paints a vivid picture of the sad condition thus:

At anytime at all,  
Something may explode  
Something even more terrifying  
Than your worst nightmare

At anytime at all  
Boots of stamping warriors  
May wake the dawn  
By your windows,  
with guns  
and on the streets are hunters  
chasing like hunting prey  
people you once knew  
as neighbours and friends.

The challenge of insecurity also contributes, in “Song of Time” (81), to other anomalies. There is infrastructural decay; citizens have turned to fugitives in their own country, presented as a place where one encounters the tragic irony of a rich nation wallowing in lack and poverty. This tragic situation supplies the reason for the earlier mentioned scourge of brain drain, which takes its toll because citizens no longer wish to live in their own country. But the poet gives an important clue to the origin of these challenges pointing out that:

They handed us a nation  
Bleeding in many places

And we went in search of bandages but failed  
We could have brought healing  
We could have brought consolation  
But each thought only of his own greed  
Each only sought the juicy parts  
That he alone could chew

The pertinent point here, however, is not in the ‘wrong’ colonial legacies that the poet has alluded to, but the lack of ingenuity by Africans to manage their independence and tragedy of successive failed governments reflected in “Along the Road to Yesterday” (82- 83). “Those who will not Die Well” (84- 85), however, adopts a militant tone to castigate not only the corrupt leaders but also civil servants, child traffickers, heroes of financial crimes, dubious business merchants and crooked medical practitioners. Launko, in this poem, becomes a prophet who foreshadows a calamitous end for all who contribute to the social miasma.

In all, the “Nation Poem” in *Seven Stations Up The Trays Way*, wraps up “the story of a continuous nightmare a / a recurrent cavalcade of thieving and inept/ leaders” (89) and presents an unimpressive scorecard of his nation after 52 years of independence in this lament (86)

52 years of independence  
Today, but nowhere do we hear  
A whisper of joy and fanfare,  
Nowhere even a smile of celebration,  
Only a haunting threnody, wailing  
Of the many dreams betrayed

Indeed, a gloomier perspective is further evident in the fact that the transition of leadership from military to civilian has not changed the situation at all. In “A forming fear”, in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*, the electoral process is being prepared that will usher in civilian rule but the poet is quite cynical about the process and says that:

without turning, without turning on my head  
I can see far beyond the seductive sheen of placards  
  
I can interpret the discordant ardour of manifestoes  
& the phony rainbows on the flags of polling booths (53)

The poet’s cynical apathy can be attributed to the continuation of those bitter experiences of the military era and he wonders (88):

How could we have foreseen  
That today, 13 years after

We threw the generals out  
And installed the politicians  
On the saddle of state, that  
Our fresh- born Democracy  
Would only lead us away from  
The luminous vision we saw

Sundry crooks and criminals  
Command the helms of power

and the people watch their hopes dwindle  
as the years roll by,  
watch as other nations leap ahead  
with steady strides,  
leap and leave us far behind  
while degradation  
eats inexorably into the pores  
of national life

Yet, despite the prevailing tragic conditions, it is characteristic of Launko to give a sense of hope and rebirth to his readers in his poetry. The precursor to this beacon of positivity, as seen in “Impediments” (122), in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*, is the need to forget the hurt of the past and build a virile nation. The poet’s words of hope and rebirth are captured in “Coming laughter” (120) where despite the situation, he believes that:

Somewhere in the dark shadow of [the nation’s] eyelids  
the laughter began to split open  
like a slow earthquake

Say we shall survive!  
there are poems in the hidden cracks of a biography  
known only to geckos  
there are tender eggs waiting to hatch with wings  
in the mutest wombs of pain.

The same prospect is replicated in “A song of mending” (122), “Maple trees” (125) and “We are still climbing” (126-127). Indeed, even in the midst of societal gloom, Launko foresees a future where, after the defeat of forces of retrogression, normalcy would return as seen in “The streets are dancing” (134- 135), the last poem in *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain*. The same tenor of hope and rebirth recurs in *Seven Stations Up the Trays Way* in poems like “Believe” (97), “Be Ready Always” (98- 99) and “Incantation” (100). After deploying the metaphor of new birth and

procreation in “A new Daughter Comes Home” (102-104), “The Hope” in *Seven Stations Up the Trays Way* (113), resounds with prospect of hope or a tone of robust optimism:

The hope is that our song  
    forged around this dancing Tray  
and a little circle  
    will blaze out, and spread warmth  
        across many fences and bleeding hearts—  
        that muffled syllables  
    of our voice  
will know eager translations:  
that in every cell where joy is wanting  
the padlocks will grow weary,  
                                and  
                                break

However, it is worth pointing out that these predictions of hope as put forward by the poet remain yet unrealized in the polity which he had hoped to impact most with his verse. The prevailing dismal conditions need to be urgently reversed because hope has no terminal point. In other words, protracted expectations of this utopia may push the already bad conditions to the precipice of irredeemable loss or damage.

### **Conclusion**

Launko’s location of his poems within the context of African traditional religion affirms his pro-cultural stance. As a poet-sojourner, he embarks on a quest for the re-discovery of self and nation, unlike Negritude poets who are preoccupied with the inroads and cultural corrosion and social distortions arising from Westernization and globalization and the trend of cultural apathy arising from these phenomena.

Although his allegiance to cultural reaffirmation, like his progenitors, draws from the folklore of his culture, he presents a neo-negritude stance that universalizes those forms by showcasing their relevance on the conditions he mirrors. However, Launko’s gnosis of hope remains submerged as years after he produced *Seven Stations Up the Trays Way* (2013), his latest poetry collection, the vices he critiqued have remained more entrenched and, subsequently, intractable. No doubt, the poet, and all other stakeholders in our socio-political predicament need to embark on other urgent meditational retreats so as to divine alternative possibilities that may translate Launko’s visions of hope and utopia into reality.

### Declaration

There is no issue of potential conflict of interest with regards to this paper.

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