

The poetics of rivers and the intertextual practices in Joe Ushie's '*Bekwang River*' and Gabriel Okara's '*The Call of the River Nun*'

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, the imagery of rivers and their semantic significance in Joe Ushie's '*Bekwang River*' and Gabriel Okara's '*The Call of the River Nun*' were investigated. The study is necessitated by the assumption that given the geographic commonalities between Ushie and Okara, there are bound to be corresponding continuities in their topographical verses, specifically in terms of how they depict the bodies of water in their immediate environs. The paper adopts the eclectic approach; drawing critical tools from 'postcolonial formalism' as its conceptual framework in combination with the ideas and concepts drawn from the intertextual theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, in an attempt to establish the intertextual practices – possible convergences and divergences – in the poem/s of Ushie and Okara. The analysis of the selected poems, Okara's '*The Call of the River Nun*' and Ushie's '*Bekwang River*', reveals that the river motif, which is strongly present in the poems of Ushie and Okara, does not only serve as a poetic representation of the state of their physical landscapes but is also used to make important poetic commentaries that touch on human nature and the political circumstances of their milieu. The poetics of Ushie and Okara also intertextualise at the level of tropes, as can be seen in the personification and metaphorisation of rivers in the poems analysed, which are deployed to make major statements on the flow of time and its implications on human actions. The study then is indicative of poetry and poets' place in society as the watchers of the times, preservers of traditional norms and values, pathfinders in a directionless universe, prophets who warn and exhort the people, and the defenders of the oppressed.

Keywords: River poetry, Nigerian poetry, postcolonial formalism, Joe Ushie, Gabriel Okara.

INTRODUCTION

Both Joe Ushie and Gabriel Okara are Nigerian poets from the oil-rich but eternally impoverished Niger Delta region, which is also known for its labyrinths of creeks, rivers and streams. Their poems, as a consequence, have been noted to be preoccupied with the extant bodies of water in their environment, which in turn constitute the river motif that this paper aims to study from the perspective of intertextuality. It should, however, first of all be pointed out that, in relation to the subject matter of this study, Ushie and Okara's art stands on an enduring world literary tradition of river and river-themed poetry. From the classical poetry through the English and the American poetry tradition, river-themed poems abound. For

instance, in Homer's *The Iliad*, the battles are fought against the backdrop of the sea, apart from the over twenty rivers named in the poem. In Book Twenty-one, which is entitled 'Achilles Fights the River', the narrator depicts the significance of the Xanthus River in Achilles' defeat of the Trojans (Homer, 1990). The river is not just a body of water; it is depicted as a living entity that aids or blocks warriors in their quest to rout their enemies, as the opening lines of Book 21 suggest:

But when they reached the ford where the river runs clear, the strong, whirling Xanthus sprung of immortal Zeus, Achilles split the

Trojan rout, driving one half back toward the city, scattering up the plain where the Achaeans themselves stampeded off in terror just the day before when Hector raged unchecked (Homer 1990, p.388).

In the above excerpt, it is seen that Xanthus River has human qualities; it is strong, it is whirling, has a divine origin and it 'runs'. The persona also records that '... at Achilles' charge the Xanthus' swirling currents choked with a spate of horse and men – the river roared' (Homer 1990, p.388).

Among the poems in English literature that have river as their subject matter are Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'The Brook', Edmund Spenser's 'Prothalamion', Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'To the River Otter', Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 'To the River Charles', Kathleen Raine's 'The River' and Anne Wilson's 'Teisa', which Keegan (2002) describes as 'one of the very few works by a woman within the subgenre of river poetry. . . which at first appears to fulfill all the conventions of eighteenth-century locodescriptive verse in general, and river poetry in particular' (Keegan, 2002, p.267). However, further analysis shows how the poet's persona, in the words of Keegan, 'uses the landscape in and around the River Tees as a place to articulate a covert resistance to the appropriation of poetry about nature to support a nationalistic and inherently patriarchal agenda' (Keegan, 2002, p.268).

Some of the river poems in the American literary tradition are Emily Dickinson's 'My River Runs to Thee', Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'The River', Luia J. Rodriguez's 'The Concrete River' and Langston Hughes' 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers'. In his critique of Hughes' 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers', Hogan (2004) observes that the river trope depicted in the poem 'comes to stand for the common history and common experiences connecting people of colour over distances of time and geography' (183). From Hogan's words, one can glean the idea that the river is a symbol of identity for individuals and groups. Amber Grieve (2012) has written an aesthetically pleasing acrostic poem entitled 'Amazon Rainforest Poem' in celebration of the Amazon ecosphere. The poem goes thus:

Amazing animals are scattered around the forest
Majestic trees sway with the breeze
Amazon River filled with fish life
Zillions of creepy crawlies on the forest floor
Outstanding waterfalls catch your breath
Nature comes to life in the Amazon (Grieve, 2012, Par1).

L. E. Goldstein's 'Amazon Is not for Sale: A Poem' on the other hand is a narrative poem which decries the prospect of industrialising the river space. His poem is a form of protest aimed at ensuring that the natural state of the river

is not tampered with by the predatory activities of modern man: 'They say that in the Amazon each tree was planted by an ancestor, branched and spread/throughout time. But soon construction trucks will tear from the river/to these trees, where the children hang their clothes to dry . . .' (Goldstein 2015, Par1).

River-themed poems also abound in Asian literature and the literature of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Rania Al-Ardawe's research entitled 'The Poetic Image of Water in Jahili and Andalusian Poetry: A phenomenological comparative study' suggests that the depiction of water in Asian poetry predates the advent of Islam as can be exemplified in the works of the Andalusian and the Jahili poets (Al-Ardawe, 2016, p.34-39, p.48-58). An example of river-themed poem from the Chinese poetry tradition is Xi Chuan's (2012) 'The Other Side of the River', whose opening lines go thus: 'On the other side of the river/there is a flame/burning May/burning August/when the pagoda tree blooms, the professor with lentigo bows to her/when the orange blossoms fall, an heir of graceful demeanour waves to her and smiles' (Chuan, 2012). It is apparent that in the poem the persona deploys the river as both a geographic and cultural space, all of which account for the invaluable significance of the river in the Chinese/Buddhist cultural life. The river is also an object of worship, perhaps a goddess, as can be seen in the fact that it is personified; and a life re/source, as the inhabitants of the poem not only bow but also look up to her.

Bader (2017), in his critique of Claudio Magris' *A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea*, has noted how the river can be a spring for radical political ideologies like Nazism in Europe and postcolonial nationalism in Asia, particularly in Baghdad, which is said to be a creation of two rivers – the Euphrates and the Tigris (Bader 2017, Par1, Par7). Among the poems that are based on the Tigris are Badr Shakir al-Sayyab's 'The River and the Death' and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri's (2013) 'Tigris the Welfare Donor', which, as the title suggests, depicts the river as a life source, as can be exemplified in the opening lines: 'I greet your bank 'Tigris' from distant/please welcome me/Tigris the welfare donor, Tigris the orchards owner/please welcome me/I greet your charming bank thirsty seeking your shelter' (PoemHunter.com/poem/tigris-the-welfare-donor/). It should be noted how the persona addresses the river with meek reverence, acknowledging its status as a home, its vast natural wealth and its ability to quench the individual's thirst literally and figuratively.

The Nile River poetry genre/tradition must also be acknowledged, not only because of the importance of the Nile as a body of water that affects the socio-economic life of most parts of the MENA region but also, most importantly, because of its enduring legacy as the bringer of life and sustenance of the world's oldest civilisation. Ewaidat (2016) has traced the stages of the representation of the Nile in modern Arabic poetry – from the time when it was mostly an object of worship and effusive praise to

contemporary times when the Nile also serves revolutionary purposes (Ewaidat, 2016, p.84), as its degradation also leads to the degradation in the living standards of the people; a situation that inspires writers to protest through their arts. Among the poets who have poeticised on the Nile that Ewaidat (2016) interrogates are Hafez Ibrahim in 'Look at the Eminent District of Azbakia', Ahmed Shawqi in 'The Nile', Mahmoud Ismael in 'A Song for the Nile', Hisham Al-Jakh in 'A Vertical View of Medan Al-Tahir' and Farouq Goweda in 'A River that Lost its Contumacy'. It can be noted from Ewaidat's (2016) analysis that while poems like Shawqi's 'The Nile' and Ibrahim's 'Look at the Eminent District of Azbakia' eulogise the Nile, poems like Goweda's 'A River that Lost its Contumacy' and Al-Jakh's 'Joha' decry the pollution of the Nile owing to unwholesome human habits.

The Sherine incident of 2018 as reported by Joshi (2018) in *Egyptian Streets* has shed light on the deplorable state of the Nile in recent times on the one hand and how that intertextualises with the dictatorial and insensitive leadership with dire consequences on free speech and the general wellbeing of the people, on the other hand. The story is told of how a fan asks the popular Egyptian singer to perform her song 'Haven't You Drunk from the Nile?' to which the singer replies, 'No, you'd get schistosomiasis. Drink Evian instead' (Joshi 2018, Par1). This subtle satirical comment is said to have earned the singer six months imprisonment from the authorities amidst apologies and regrets. But then the publicity that the incident generated has brought to the fore the irony and paradox in the Nile circumstances; the idea that the river could be at once a life source and a death source.

Apart from the Nile, Africa is blessed with many rivers and other forms of water bodies. Some of the major rivers in Africa as listed by Ogunseitan (2011) are the Congo River, Orange River, Limpopo River, Benue River, Zambezi and River Niger (1-5). Without doubt and as also observed by Ogunseitan (2011), these rivers have equally inspired poetry just like the other rivers around the world. Mthwa's (2015) 'Crossing the Limpopo River' is a narrative poem which tells the story of Sithembeni Ndlovu, a migrant woman, and the brave decision that she has to make in crossing the crocodile-infested Limpopo River on her way to South Africa, where she hopes to work menial jobs in the heat of the xenophobic attacks in that country. The poet deploys the agency of the Limpopo River and the personal story of Ndlovu to interrogate the postcolonial woes of the African continent, where the average citizen struggles to survive amidst poor leadership, failed policies and general underdevelopment (Mthwa, 2015, Par 1). Getachew Robele's (2009) 'I am the Congo River' is one of the poems inspired by the Congo River. In the poem, the persona is the Congo River itself and uses metaphors and similes for self-praise. The Congo River refers to itself as 'the flowing Gold' and 'the bright face of the tropical rainforest.' It compares itself to other rivers in Africa and around the world; Amazon, Nile, Ganges, Danube and

Mississippi, among others. One of the poem's central themes is unity; the oneness of the rivers alludes to the oneness of the human race. Perhaps, humanity can take a lesson in unity from the relationship among rivers.

Ikyereve's (2010) 'Sunrise in Benue' is a praise poem dedicated to River Benue. In the poem, the persona paints a picture that captures the beauty of the sunrise in Benue with the river as a backdrop. The persona equally accounts for the human activities occasioned by the rising of the sun. Farmers are seen going to farm to tend to their crops as the sun from the river reignites hope in them.

What can be noted in this discussion so far is the idea that the river in the hands of a poet can serve numerous purposes beyond the mere description of geographic spaces. This is exactly what will be investigated in the river poems of Ushie and Okara shortly after the conceptual and theoretical queries have been answered.

'POSTCOLONIAL FORMALISM': AN IDEOLOGICAL/ THEORETICAL TRUCE BETWEEN THE AESTHETICISTS AND THE HISTORICISTS

The ideological standoff between the formalists and the new historicists is not new to literary history. The matter is particularly grave when viewed from the lenses of postcolonial criticism, which conventionally begins and ends with an overarching consideration of history and the social realities in texts with little or no regard to form. The formalist aesthetic arrogance and disdain for anything social and historical in the text has not helped either, as this stance encourages suspicion whenever the word 'form' is heard by the new historicist who is interested in the critique of postcolonial literature as a history-based text. The fact that form tends to 'forget' history is worrisome to the postcolonial critic who perceives history as the basic stuff of the text. However, a postcolonial critique that solely relies on history for its reading risks being considered as operating outside the realms of literature, if there is no mitigating framework that allows for the negotiation of form-content inclusion in its analysis. This realisation has led to lively debates on how the texture of postcolonial interpretations of texts could be spiced up with aesthetics. Again, the resurgence of formalist critiques in recent literary history has come with exciting possibilities, including its inclusion in postcolonial reading of texts.

For instance, Su (2011) writes that 'While a renewed interest in aesthetics is apparent throughout the humanities, it is particularly striking in postcolonial studies' (65). Su's conclusion is that despite the risks involved in approaching the postcolonial with formal aesthetics, it is worth trying because the postcolonial 'could benefit from a more thorough investigation of the deliberate refusal to reduce thought to a single set of categories that have been at the heart of modern aesthetic discourses' (Su, 2011, p.80). Su's submission implies that both fields – postcolonialism and formalism – stand to gain by aligning

their critical tools, and at the same they risk irrelevance or even self-extinction if they continue apart. McLeod (2001) is also of the view that postcolonial criticism can remain valuable and relevant by drawing from aesthetic practices and eschewing its insensitivity to form (87). Many approaches have been advanced on how the new relationship between form and content could be forged in postcolonial criticism and literature generally. Most of these approaches are situated in the new formalist framework which is signalled by a renewed interest in formalist methodologies, especially in terms of 'how works of literature exceed the constraints of their immediate context' (Dam, 2016, p.236) and how issues of aesthetics could be handled alongside those of history and politics, for as Greta Olson and Sarah Copland have rightly observed, there are 'instances in which forms are used innovatively to query or challenge dominant ideology and those in which they function to support it' (Olson and Copland, 2016, p.208).

Rooney (2006) has also philosophised on the imperative of bridging the form-content dialectics in literary criticism by asserting that form is essential to both literary and cultural studies (25). She goes on to suggest that 'rather than confine or contain the concept of form, as a high modernist Marxist aesthetics arguably once did, we should set it rigorously to work in every interpretive practice that claims the name of reading and thus rethink, reread, as its complex effectively across social life' (Rooney, 2006, p.43). This implies that, for Rooney, form should not only be inside-text, it should also be outside-text accounting for how all social phenomena are perceived by the critic and how they are all mapped onto the tropes in the text.

For this study, 'postcolonial formalism' was proposed to explain how form operates or should be made to operate in the postcolonial reading of texts. The methodology in this study was based on Wolfson's (2006) assertion that 'if an investigation of cultural formation will improve our sense of the production of literary forms, reading for form will also improve our sense of how cultural forms are produced' (12). Thus, our understanding of postcolonial formalism is predicated on our understanding of the concepts of form/structure itself. Baldick (2001) has noted the many uses and applications of the term 'form' in literary criticism; as a genre, patterns of poetic devices (objective correlative) or as the unifying principle of design in a work of literature (100). Though mechanic form, imposed as it is predetermined, has its function and place in literature and criticism, most critics prefer to work with organic form, which is malleable and constantly evolving, especially given the onerous task of making form work in historical and political discourses. According to Abrams and Harpham (2009), form has a Latinate root 'forma' which refers to 'idea' or the central concept in literary criticism and is viewed and perceived differently by various critics (p.125). Form has over the years become a vague term after decades of definitions and redefinitions by successive theories and theorists. Noting this, William

Mitchell (2003) writes that 'if form has any afterlife in the study of literature, its role has been completely overtaken by the concept of structure, which rightly emphasises the artificial, constructed character of cultural forms and defuses the idealist and organicist overtones that surround the concept of form' (p.2).

Form is usually discoursed in terms of its relationship with content, with many critics steeply divided on the issue. The monistic view of form and content is that both are inextricably linked while the dualistic view owns that a separation between form and content is possible. It was believed that for the formalist-historicist impasse to be lifted there has to be a proper theorisation on the form-content dichotomy. It was also believed that the mistake that the formalists made was to have assumed that history and politics could be divorced from the text in any given reading. Conversely, the reaction of the historicists to the formalist principles was quite extreme; certainly, an outright rejection of the formal properties of a text and the sole preference for historical and political content was a grave and regrettable mistake.

The lacuna is even more apparent in postcolonial studies, where politico-historical issues are interrogated without reference(s) to how they are *troped* in the text. The truth is that the interpretive enterprise could be enriched if the postcolonial could be made to align with the formal on certain theoretical paradigms. The prospect of getting this done lies in the doubling of form or the *ambivalencing* of form. This concept is based on the understanding that history is usually implied and ingrained in the formal properties of a text, even though the die-hard formalist chooses to ignore it and, conversely, the socially committed discourse only pretends that it has not noticed the relevance of the formal features in the text that help to foreground its hermeneutics. Postcolonial formalism then is an attempt to synthesise the formalist-historicist dialectics by admitting that just as the critique of otherness is made possible through the recognition of Selfhood, the beauty of the postcolonial discourse is dependent on its acknowledgement of the formal qualities in the text and how they are instrumental to the existence of the text as a whole, including its theme(s), perhaps the only formal quality that the new historicists have held unto over the years.

Postcolonial formalism aligns itself with the tenets of activist new formalism which, according to Levinson (2007), seeks to 'restore to today's reductive reinscription of historical reading its original focus on form in a bid to release the text from the closures they have suffered through a combination of their idealizing impulses, their official receptions, and general processes of cultural absorption' (p.559, p.560). Postcolonial formalism involves the liberation of the postcolonial text from the strictures of interpretation to which it had been confined by the new historicist's overarching emphasis on content matters to the detriment of the formal properties of the text. In postcolonial formalism, textual tropes are seen as the

foundational motivation for a text's existence and they are that which give rise to the political and historical issues that the text also embodies. This way, the postcolonial formalist critic is not only conscious of the politics played in the text but also aware of how such politics is *troped*. Thus, in postcolonial formalist critique, a metaphor is not just a metaphor; it is a politicised trope. The simile is draped in political and historical garbs. And the personification lies within as well as outside the text. In other words, the postcolonial formalist is expected to approach a text at once conscious of how form motivates politics and history, and how history and politics take their shapes from form. A reading of Ushie and Okara's poetry in the later part of this paper will illustrate this view of postcolonial formalism which serves as a conceptual framework in this study. But then again we need to answer the question of intertextuality which is the main theoretical framework for the study.

Intertextuality: The semantic masquerades and the flow of texts

Intertextuality is one of the postmodernist theories whose aim is to establish semantic relations among texts. The notion of intertextuality can be traced back to the classical literary thoughts of Plato and Aristotle in terms of how the literary work shares existential affinities with the extra-literary realities that it strives to mimic. Eliot's (2020) modernist theory on poetry in his seminal essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) is equally anticipatory of the postmodernist idea of intertextuality as Eliot pointedly declares that 'No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone' (Eliot, 2020, p.1). Eliot goes on to explain how the arrival (publication) of a new work automatically revises the entire canon of literature in a bid to illustrate the relational nature of meaning in texts. Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics and its synchronic perception of language, especially the view that the unity of the linguistic sign (the signifier and the signified), which signals the primary level of relational meaning, is arbitrary and is mediated by difference(s) unwittingly inaugurated the notion of intertextuality in language. In Saussure's structuralism, therefore, meaning is a product of a system of interrelations and no word can make sense without our comparing it with other words (Graham, 2000, p.8). And the same applies to texts.

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin is the widely acknowledged progenitor of intertextuality even though he never made use of the term. The term 'intertextuality' was, in fact, coined by Julia Kristeva who offered a critique of Bakhtin's work in an attempt to make it available to her French audience while studying in Paris. Bakhtin had earlier criticised the formalists and Saussurean linguists for ignoring the social and, perhaps, cultural aspects of language. Bakhtin considers every utterance as dialogic in the sense that it is uttered in response to previous

utterances and in anticipation of future ones. Pechey (1987) in referring to Bakhtin's utilisation of the terms 'dialogism' and 'heteroglossia' states that they represent, respectively, the formal and social modalities of the same phenomenon so that the novel (text) could be seen as a form of writing 'whose inside and outside are of the same order: intertextuality constitutively internalised' (62). This is Bakhtin's way of ameliorating the formalist's denial of the outside text, a critical vacuum that new formalism has attempted to fill. Thus, if postcolonial formalism allows us to find extra-literary meaning in forms, then intertextuality allows us to connect those meanings through texts.

The various and often confused meaning of intertextuality has been noted by critics such as Graham Allen, Mohammad Shakib, Brain Ott, and Walter Cameroon. However, all the critics agree that intertextuality is interested in how cultural objects share meaning. The core principles of intertextuality are contained in Kristeva's 'The Bounded Text' and 'Word, Dialogue, Novel' both published in 1980. These works, which are largely influenced by the writings of Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin, fashion a semiotics that views the text as an intertext; meaning that texts are constructed out of pre-existing discourses and that a text's meaning is dependent on its relationship to other texts (Graham, 2000, p.35). Kristeva maintains that '... any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (Kristeva, 1980, p.66). Kristeva uses the word 'ideologeme' to explain how the text is at once a linguistic and a cultural sign located in society, history and politics. This aspect of the theory justifies Kristeva's admiration for Bakhtin whose critique of Russian formalism is described as remarkable for its attempt to transcend the limitations of the formalist framework by situating the text within history and society. The ideologeme then as defined by Kristeva is an 'intertextual function read as "materialized" at the different structural levels of each text. . .' (Kristeva, 1980, p.36). In other words, the ideologeme is the outside text. The poetic language or the dialogic texture of the text which Bakhtin specifically identified with the novel is claimed by Kristeva to be a possible textual feature not only in poetry but also in any kind of writing.

The literary word is seen to be dynamic and has two parts: the horizontal dimension and the vertical dimension. The horizontal dimension is constituted by the writing subject and the addressee while the word in the vertical dimension is constituted by text and context, which are 'oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus' (Graham, 2000, p.39). The subject in any discourse is defined based on the mode of discourse. Kristeva specifies two kinds of subjects in her theorisation: the subject of enunciation, which is the subject of a narrative act and the subject of utterance, which is the character speaking in a text. In any case, Kristeva differentiates between a work and a text. A work is a physical text which has its finitude and which the author can claim ownership.

A text, on the other hand, is a discourse; it is continuous and unending, defying the author and any form of finality because its emergence is in response to an existing discourse and its meaning will continue to be shaped by future discourses. The words spoken by a person have personal agency, where the speaker is the subject of utterance. However, this agency is seen to be lost when the words are rendered in writing, as the new mode automatically creates a subject of enunciation. Thus, the subject of enunciation is apersonal. This is the type of subject found in poetic persona, where the 'I' in the poem does not necessarily refer to the poet but can be assumed by the character speaking at any given time. Any given discourse is characterised by ambivalence, a term which Kristeva uses to replace Bakhtin's heteroglossia and hybridity.

Kristeva conceptualises the thetic phase in the human discourse to infer the monologic stage where language is seen to be characterised by singularity. The terms phonotext and genotext are oppositional in the Kristevan discourse. The phonotext is monologic in nature and is linked to the thetic parts or aspects of the text. The genotext, on the other hand, is dialogic given to doubling and repetition; which explains why it constantly 'disturbs, ruptures and undercuts the phonotxt' (Graham, 2000, p.51). Thus, the conflict in the text is always between the forces that resist ambivalence and those that promote ambivalence. Ott and Walter (2000) have noted that 'though reading intertextually does not require specific textual knowledges, there are nonetheless some texts that make specific allusions that invite readers to exercise specialized knowledge' (430). Shakib (2013) has identified two major types of intertextuality; ekphrasis and iconotext. Ekphrasis is a text that devotes itself to the description of an image, an art work or nature's art. It is an utterance that gives verbal form to the silent image. Iconotext refers to the utilisation of an image in a text or the use of a text in an image through reference or allusion, whether implicitly or explicitly (Shakib, 2013, pp.1, .2).

In this study, a poet's description of a river can be considered an instance of ekphrasis, where the river is seen as a nature's silent art or image which is verbalised in poetry. The river could also be seen as iconotext, where it is textually alluded to in a poetic discourse. Shakib equally identifies imitation and quotation as the two theories of intertextuality. Imitation is ekphrastic in nature and has already been mentioned at the initial stage of this section of the paper. The idea of quotation often appreciated in intertextuality is that which does not involve quotation marks. It is assumed in the intertextual theories that there is no original text, as every text is created from texts that are already in existence, through devices such as allusion, parody and pastiche, among others. Perhaps, this explains why Zengin (2016) sees intertextuality as 'a set of relations a text has with other texts and/or discourses belonging to various fields and cultural domains' (p.300). Adolphe Huberer (2007) in quoting

Umberto Eco has also maintained that in intertextuality, authors lose agency over texts as works are created by other works and texts emerge through other texts (Huberer, 2007, p.57).

In this paper, postcolonial formalism has been conceived to help the researcher interrogate the issues of otherness alongside textual tropes, while the notion of intertextuality will facilitate the understanding of how the river-themed poems of Ushie and Okara are related and how together they respond to the other tradition of river poems around the world.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON JOE USHIE AND GABRIEL OKARA

In this section of the paper, an attempt is made to establish the intertextual relations in the biographical information between Ushie and Okara. This will help to appreciate the corresponding intertextual relations in the oeuvre of the two literary figures. Most of the information gleaned on Okara was got from Theo Vincent's 'Introduction' to Okara's *The Fisherman's Invocation* (1978). Gabriel Imomotim Gbaingbain Okara was a poet and novelist born on the 24th of April 1921 and went to join his ancestors on the 25th of March 2019. He hailed from Bumoundi Community in Ekpetinma Clan in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. He was educated at Government College, Umuahia, and Yaba Higher College. Okara trained to be a pilot during World War II in the British Royal Air Force, though he did not complete the training. Okara studied Journalism at Northwestern University in 1949. He worked briefly for the British Overseas Airway Corporation and as an Information Officer for the government of Eastern Nigeria. He wrote scripts for radio and translated Ijaw poems into English. During the Nigerian Civil War, Okara served as an ambassador for the Biafran side alongside Chinua Achebe. After the war, he served as the director of the Rivers State Publishing House in Port Harcourt between 1972 and 1980. Okara was a fine artist who painted with water colour. He also taught briefly at Ladilac Institute, Yaba shortly before World War II. He worked as a bookbinder after the war. Okara traded in pigs at one point in his life. Okara is best known for his poems, some of which are 'Piano and Drums', 'The Call of the River Nun', 'The Mystic Drum' and 'You Laughed and Laughed and Laughed'. Theo (1978) describes Okara as a natural poet apparently owing to the conscious depiction of the poet's environment in his poems. Vincent also reports that 'Okara sees all arts as surrealistic, advocates the use of local imagery and emphasizes the magical power of words in invoking content and local atmosphere' (Vincent, 1978, p. xiii). In *The Voice*, Okara through the central character, Okolo, searches for the lost cerebral wholeness of the African society. Though this work is prose, it has a poetic breath made more apparent not only by its experimental nature but also because it invites the reader to think

throughout the reading process, as the author takes him on a quest for the *it*. And just like poetry, the reader has to get to the end of the novel and still wonder what the *it* possibly is. He then has to define it for himself. It is at this point that the reader realises that looking for the *it* is at once a personal, lonely and dangerous exercise since the quest questions the foundation and political arrangement of society. The author notes this right from the beginning of the novel when he writes: 'Everything in this world that spoiled a man's name they said of him [Okolo], all because he dared to search for *it*' (Okara, 1964, p.23).

Joseph Akawu Ushie is a professor of stylistics and literary criticism in the Department of English, University of Uyo, Nigeria. Like Okara, Ushie was born in the 20th century, though he is much younger than Okara and, at the moment of writing, still alive, though Okara himself is not dead in poetic terms. Ushie, just like Okara, is from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. He hails from Akkorshi, Bendi, Obaniluku Local Government Area of Cross River State. Ushie began his early education at St Peter's Primary School, Bendi, and finished his secondary school at Obudu where he attended Government Secondary School. Ushie was also educated at the University of Calabar, where he read English and Literary Studies. For his Masters and PhD, Professor Ushie studied at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, where he met and interacted with many eminent minds one of whom is Professor Niyi Osundare, his mentor and poet of global renown. Ushie has so far published six poetry anthologies. They are *Popular Stand* (1992), *Lambs at a Shrine* (1995), *Eclipse in Rwanda* (1998), *Hill Songs* (2000), *A Reign of Locusts* (2004) and *Yawns and Belches* (2018). Just like Okara, Ushie is a poet who uses his art to speak for the masses and to confront those difficult issues in society that only brave minds like Okolo could take on. For instance, Aboh (2013) borrows Macauley Mowarin's phrase 'lamentation poet' to describe Ushie's poetic commitment, as can be noted in the deployment of poetic arts in bemoaning the sad realities in his milieu (Aboh, 2013, p.108). Ushie and Okara's poetry also intertextualises at the level of social and environmental commitment and tropes as the analysis of their river-themed poems in the following section will reveal.

The poetics of rivers and the intertextual practices in Joe Ushie's 'Bekwang River' and Gabriel Okara's 'The Call of the River Nun'

One of Okara's most popular river-themed poems is 'The Call of the River Nun'. The River Nun, said to be 160 kilometres long, is one of the Niger River offspring. It is located in Rivers State, Nigeria, and has its history linked to the colonial trade in slaves and palm oil. This is the river that Okara immortalises in 'The Call of the River Nun'. Egya (2016) refers to the Nun as a well-known river in the Niger Delta region and asserts that Okara is the first to

poeticise on the river and to use same 'with the intent of showcasing the rich landscape of the Niger Delta' (4).

The poem is organised in five stanzas and twenty-eight lines. It is written in free verse and makes use of run-on-line or enjambment. From the title, it is apparent that the river is personified, and indeed, personification is the central poetic device in the poem. The first stanza of the poem is made up of four lines and is written from the personal perspective thus: 'I hear your call!/I hear it far away;/I hear it break the circle/of these crouching hills' (1978, p.16).

Among the poetic and rhetorical devices utilised in the quoted lines are anaphora and personification; the former is exemplified in the expression 'I hear' while the latter can be deduced from the stanza's textual relations with the title of the poem and from the expression 'these crouching hills'. The posture that the hills assume is a human one. The first person pronoun 'I' is apersonal in intertextual terms because it has been textualised. The call can be performatively realistic for anyone who utters the lines. The word 'hear' appeals to the auditory imagery while expressions such as 'circle' and 'crouching' constitute visual imagery in the poem. The expression 'far away' notates the distance, both literal and metaphoric, that exists between the persona and the river itself. Okara had had cause to be absent from home on many occasions in his life; whether it was fighting in World War II or roaming the Nigerian civil war zones in search of peace. Thus, it is interesting that from the first stanza, the persona creates that deep sense of nostalgia that sustains the subject matter of the poem. The river then is a symbol that connects the persona with his home. This goes to corroborate Oyeniyi Okunoye's assertion that Okara draws copiously from local imagery and symbolism to decorate his verse and to establish that existential affinity with his homeland (Okunoye, 2008, p.3).

The repetition of the third nonperson pronoun 'it' cognitively steers the informed reader to Okara's *The Voice* in which Okolo the hero quests for the 'it'. The 'it' in this poem is not less problematic than the one in *The Voice* because even as the reader already knows that the 'it' is a pronominal representation/reference of/to the 'the call', it is difficult to say exactly what kind of call it is. Or could it be the same call as the one represented in Eyoh Etim's *Missed Calls*? Is it the call for the persona to come home? If it is, then which home? Does the persona's home lie in Bamoundi and the Niger Delta or does lie beyond this world? The conventional formalist's attempt at disambiguation might be of little or no help at this point because it is apparent that the idea of call and home ought to be taken all together along to the end of the poem. These questions taken together with the text's inherent ambivalence, create a sense of semantic openness that is often associated with Barthes' scriptible or writerly text, which is said to be genotextual in nature because it invites the reader (critic) to produce their own meaning.

The four lines of the first stanza are actually three simple

sentences or statements. In intertextuality, they are called utterances. The first expression can functionally be called an exclamatory sentence. It captures the excitement of the persona when he first hears the river calling. It has the SVO structure, where S is the pronominal Subject (I), V is the Verb (hear) and O is the Object (your call). The object is a nominal made up of the determiner (your) and noun (call). The second expression has the structure SVOA, where 'I' is the subject, 'hear' is the verb, 'it' is the object and 'far away' is an adverbial of place. The third expression is the only sentence that constitutes enjambment in the first stanza, the first two having constituted end-stopped-lines. It has the structure SVOVO, where 'I' is the subject, 'hear' is the verb, 'it' is the object, 'break' is the verb and 'the circle of these crouching hills' is the object of the verb 'break'. Stanza one has a total of nineteen words, the least among the poem's stanzas but it is enough to set the tone for the rest of the poetic discourse.

In the second stanza of 'The Call of the River Nun', the persona responds to the river's call with nostalgia, a deep longing to see the river again. As it is with the first stanza, the river is personified in the second stanza and that is evident in the lines: 'I want to view your face/again and feel your cold/embrace; or at your brim/to set myself and/inhale your breath; or/Like the trees, to watch/my mirrored self unfold/and span my days with/song from the lips of dawn' (Okara, 1978, p.16). It is seen that the river has a face, is capable of embracing and, like the dawn, it can sing. This conjures the image of the river as at once a delight to the eyes and loving or caring. But then the reader ought to be reminded that the poet is only using the river as a metaphoric symbolism to discourse his cultural attachment to his home. Thus, the river is more than a river; and whatever epithets are ascribed to it must be seen as representing the Niger Delta as a whole. This recalls the dynamics of the inside and the outside texts in intertextual criticism. The simile in the sixth line of the second stanza captures the rich vegetation, especially the trees that surround the Nun and how their images are reflected on the surface of the river. This is what the persona refers to as 'my mirrored self'. The stanza is rich in imagery; mostly visual or sight imagery. Examples of words that convey visual imagery in the second stanza are 'face', 'brim', 'trees' and 'lips'. Words such as 'feel', 'cold', and 'embrace' constitute tactile imagery and help to create a sense of physical connection between the persona and the river. Syntactically, the whole of the second stanza is one long sentence, a compound-complex sentence of forty-four words, which equally fits the complex thoughts expressed in an attempt to depict the image of the river and what it signifies to the persona.

The third stanza of 'The Call of the River Nun' continues with the anaphoric repetend, 'I hear', which is indicative of the certainty of the call from the persona's perspective. The word 'lapping' is punny; it refers, as Nwoga (1967) puts it, to the sound that the waves make when they hit the

river bank (p.152), but it also refers to a musical instrument that reinforces the rhythmic melody in the poem. Like 'the song from the lips of dawn' in stanza two, the musicality in the word 'call' itself is striking owing to its repetitive nature and the sound of the river birds as they 'hail' the aesthetic dance (movement or flow) of the Nun. The word 'ghost' is a universal poetic imagery that represents the past, and in this case, it refers to the persona's childhood. The river then is an objective correlative for time and memory. Its flow is linked to the flow of the human memory and the consequent passage of time. The persona is not only nostalgic towards a place, but he also misses a cherished phase of life which is inevitably irretrievable. The entire third stanza of five lines reads: 'I hear your lapping call!/I hear it coming through;/invoking the ghost of a child/listening, where river birds hail/your silver-surfaced flow' (Okara, 1978, p.16). The stanza has twenty-five words arranged in two sentences; the first, in the first line, is structurally a simple sentence and functionally an exclamation. The second is a complex sentence. The presence of kinesthetic imagery is very strong in this stanza and it is conveyed by the use of words like 'lapping', 'coming', 'invoking' and 'flow'. These movement words give life and vitality to the verse, binding the flow of the river to the rhythm of the poem.

In the fourth stanza, the tone, as well as the perspective of the poem shifts when the persona moves from discoursing a specific river in time and space with all its symbolic significance to talking about a personal river, its ceaseless flow and the effect it has on the persona's life in terms of ageing and dying. It is interesting to note that all this occurs in the persona's imagination, making it a cognitively engaging poem. This is the idea expressed in 'the final call that/stills the crested waves'. The sea of life is fraught with dangers; and death, whether sudden or gradual, is one of them. It can then be said that the poet uses this poem to visualise his death, which is not any less personal to anyone who reads the poem, as death is the facticity of human existence. No wonder Olatunbosun (2019) wrote these sad words in March of 2019: 'The river Nun called, and Gabriel Okara answered at last' (Olatunbosun, 2019, par1).

The fourth stanza is the lengthiest of all the others with ten lines and forty-five words in three sentences. It begins with the same simple exclamation noted in stanzas one and three: 'My river's calling too!' The use of the possessive determiner personalises the river to the poet and his experiences. The word 'river's' is a contracted form of 'river is' and the redacted form is perhaps to aid the rhythmic sharpness of the line, just like the syncope in 'found' ring' in the third line of the stanza. The personification of the river is sustained in this stanza as well as its symbolism of time, its passage and irrecoverable effects on human existence. Gingel (1984) maintains that 'the symbol of the river is an insistent motif in Okara's work' and that 'readers of Okara's poetry cannot go far without recognizing its meaning and significance'

(p.286). The significance of this poem in this stanza is that Okara is being called to go home eternally, which he did in 2019.

The fifth and final stanza of the poem is a supplication that the persona addresses to his creator in the form of a rhetorical question: 'O incomprehensible God!/Shall my pilot be/my inborn stars to that/final call to Thee/O my river's complex course?' These lines intertextualise or echo the final stanza of Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'Crossing the Bar' which is also a poem that meditates on death and reads: 'For though from out our bourne of Time and Place/The flood may bear me far,/I hope to see my Pilot face to face/When I have crost the bar' (Tennyson, 2020, par4). Notice how the use of the expression 'face to face' in Tennyson's poem echoes the expression 'I want to view your face' in the first line of the second stanza of Okara's poem. Tennyson's poem also uses the word 'call' which is recurrent in Okara's poem. The river and the journey motifs are also present in the two poems and they make up the objective correlative that tropes death, which is a subject matter in both poems. This final stanza of 'The Call . . .' is made up of twenty-one words, five lines and two sentences. The first sentence is an exclamation while the second sentence is a question or an interrogation. The poem has an overall word weight of one hundred and fifty-four, and it has a total of twelve sentences.

At this point, it might be necessary to highlight the postcolonial significance of Okara's poetics, especially as captured in 'The Call of the River Nun'. Okara is widely known as one of the pioneer poets in African literature. According to Nwoga (1967), the pioneer poets were confronted with the problems of colonisation, which they engaged through their poems (p.121, p.122). The colonialists' attempt to deny Africans their humanity and dignity through the perpetration of cultural falsehood was fiercely resisted by the pioneer poets who used their poetic arts to teach the Africans the need to be proud of their cultural heritage. Thus, it was not uncommon for the pioneer poets to pay glowing tributes to the tokens of their cultures which had then been seen to have been eroded by colonial values.

One can recall how Chinua Achebe (1988) decried the shame a schoolboy felt when he was asked by his teacher to write about the harmattan and had to instead write about the snow because he felt that the harmattan was inferior to the snow. 'I think it is my business as a writer,' Achebe (1988) writes, 'to teach that boy that there is nothing disgraceful about the African weather, that the palm tree is a fit subject for poetry' (p.30). Indeed, as Dasyuva and Jegede (2005) have reported, the early modern African poets like Okara found it necessary to 'incorporate aspects of their culture into their poetry' (p.112). This then explains the celebration of landscapes not only in Okara's poems but also in the poems of Ushie as well as other popular African poets. The physical features such as hills, mountains and rivers in the poets' milieu are usually used to make statements about the African cultural pride,

though they can also serve as materials for the interrogation of the systemic rot in the postcolonial African society. Ushie equally has attempted this feat in his poem 'Bekwang River'.

One of Ushie's river poems is entitled 'Bekwang River'. Bekwang is a river in Akorshi, Bendi, in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. As earlier noted, the location of the river is the poet's home town. Akorshi is divided by two rivers, the other being Athlelekor. These rivers have implications for the spiritual and economic survival of the Bendi (Agiopu, 2010, par3). Like Okara, Ushie immortalises the river in the poem 'Bekwang River', which could be described as a postmodern ode to the river. Unlike Okara's 'The Call of the River Nun' which is written from the first person narrative point of view, Ushie's 'Bekwang River' is in the second person. This can be seen right from the first stanza which goes thus: 'Flowing quietly, leisurely/You remain our America, our lady/Always declaring eighteen though/Methuselah met you here' (Ushie, 2005, p.35). The poem is a free verse and uses enjambment to make for freedom in the flow of thoughts, just as the river flows freely without obstruction. The same verse form has been reported for Okara's 'The Call of the River Nun'. Thus, it could be said that the two poets choose their verse forms consciously so that the form fits the subject matter being discussed. In the poem, 'Bekwang River', the persona describes the characteristics of the river. The river, Bekwang, is given human attributes, just like Okara does in 'The Call . . .' Indeed, it can be said that the personification of rivers is a universal intertextual practice adopted by poets in order to give life to the life-giving source in their arts. Rivers are usually denoted with the third person pronoun 'she'. 'Bekwang River' is organised in eight stanzas of varying length.

In the first stanza of 'Bekwang River', the persona observes the movement of the river, 'flowing quietly, leisurely'. At this particular time, the river is at peace with itself, almost like taking a stroll. And if the river is calm, the environs will also be calm. Of course, the sense of serenity associated with the river can be contrasted with other times, perhaps in the past, when the river loses its cool. The expression 'You remain our America' implies that the persona and the members of the community usually find something new and exciting each time they encounter the river. In other words, the river never ceases to amaze them. The use of 'America' in the line also constitutes metonymy or antonomasia. The description of the river as 'our lady' justifies the earlier assertion that the river has feminine qualities. More than that, the expression is suggestive of the beauty of the river; the kind of beauty often associated with youth and womanhood. In the eyes of the poet, the river is ever young, 'Always declaring eighteen'. But then there is also a hint of cultural criticism in the statement as the cognitive mapping of the words recalls a situation in the Nigerian public service where some workers keep declaring their age to avoid the axe of retirement from falling on them. The use of biblical allusion,

which is seen in the invocation of Methuselah, is an ingenious intertextual strategy deployed by the poet to convey the agelessness of Bekwang River. The import of the persona's statement is that though the river predates Methuselah, the longest-lived human textualised in Genesis chapter 5 verse 27, the river is not only still in existence, it is also still youthful thousands of years after Methuselah's death.

The first stanza of 'Bekwang River' has four lines and seventeen words arranged in one long complex sentence, with the first line having the structure VAA (flowing quietly, leisurely). These words and their structural arrangement capture the rhythmic movement of the river, as well as its carefree and blithful character. The second line has the structure SVOC (you remain our America, our lady), the third line has the structure AVOA (always declaring eighteen though), while the fourth line is structured SVOA (Methuselah met you here). What should be noted here is that the persona in this poem is actually at the bank of the river as an observant-narrator/commentator, unlike Okara's persona in 'The Call . . .' who is perceived to be far away from the scene.

In the second stanza, the observant persona is still preoccupied with the movement of the river which he now describes as 'hesitant' and noiseless. The dominant trope in this stanza is simile which the persona uses for the purpose of comparison; first, the 'weaving' flow of the river is compared to 'beads' as the river moves through the surrounding African settlements. Then the distribution of the settlements themselves is likened to ridges made by students, with emphasis on their haphazard or disorderly nature. But then there is beauty and orderliness in this geographic chaos as it is caused by the paths that the river takes and as can be perceived in the word 'contour'. The way the river divides the settlements into two inspires the persona to compare the place to 'a half open book', with the villages hanging 'on the walls of the hills' where the river passes through. One cannot but appreciate the art of nature being so *ekphrastically* depicted here. Then the persona goes on to list the settlement that the river passes through: 'filing past -/ Ketioung, Begiatsul, Bendigie,/ Begiatte, Akorshi (the poet's birthplace), Kewoe-akai,/ Begiagbai, Omale, Begiaggbah, Lishi'kwoe' (Ushie, 2005, p.35). This stanza is another long complex sentence of forty-four words organised in ten lines. Its complexity suits the equally complicated though rhythmic movement of Bekwang.

The poem's third stanza has three lines and fifteen words; it is used by the poet to trace the flow of the river to where it empties itself into another river, Imong, which the persona refers to as Bekwang's comrade in a bid to sustain the humanity of the river. In the fourth stanza, the persona begins interrogating the river through the use of apostrophes. 'Tell me,/What horizontal length you attain in your silent flow,/What depth you reach in your drilling,/If you really love the waving elephant grass/Whose feet you're always hugging' (Ushie, 2005, p.35). The poetic

dialogue with the river is meant to reveal its epic size, and its huge and traversing character and personality. This stanza has thirty-one words and five lines made up of one main clause and four subordinate clauses. The fifth stanza retains the apostrophic form of the fourth stanza and reads thus: 'Tell me, Bekwang,/Where you hide your muscle in your flow/Why you display not those rocks that/potable but loud-mouthed Attlakua hurls/Down when in fury/Yet, those toothless wrinkled/libraries of our history recount/one after one once when/you slyly pinched a family/fracturing it in your smile-inducing stroll/Down down to Bateriko' (Ushie, 2005, p.35, p.36). In any case, the structure of the lines echoes a part of David Diop's 'Africa' which says, 'Africa, tell me, Africa/Are you the back that bends/That lies down under the weight of humbleness?' (Diop, 1967, p.111).

The dominant imagery deployed in the fifth stanza of 'Bekwang River' is visual imagery. It is exemplified in words like 'muscle', which is suggestive of the river's strength which it needs to carry heavy objects like 'rocks' to its destination. The expression 'toothless wrinkled' serves to highlight the timelessness of the river and its history, an idea that was first illustrated in the first stanza. In this stanza still, we begin to see different characters to this river compared to its calm composure in the initial stanza: 'you slyly pinched a family/fracturing it in your smile-inducing stroll'. These lines suggest that the river is equally capable of mischievous actions. The fifth stanza has eleven lines and fifty-five words. It is the lengthiest stanza of the poem. In the sixth stanza, the river is presented as a reaper, transporter and, possibly, a seller of melon, one of the valuable plants among the peoples of Cross River. The persona describes the river's deeds in euphemistic terms, but the keen reader is aware that the river must have over flooded its banks in order to get the melon fruits.

The sixth stanza has five lines and twenty-five words and reads: 'Twice in a while/We've seen floating fruits of melon, harvested far from the banks/by you, in flight like Cash On Delivery/to we-know-not-whom' (36). Note the use of simile in the excerpt which assigns to the river the character of a seller, though we do not know exactly who the melon is to be delivered to. However, what is interesting about the poem is that the river assumes the character(s) of the people whom it serves by mimicking their actions of harvesting and selling their farm produce.

The seventh stanza is also apostrophic. The river is addressed as if it is there to answer although we never get any response from it. In this stanza, the persona draws from the folkloric history of the people to determine the spiritual mystery surrounding the river and its angry character which is seen in how it wreaks havoc on the crops and even helpless human beings. But of course, all these are rendered in euphemism. Is the poet implying that the passage of time has robbed the river of its ancestral spirituality and fierce attitude? Is the river now weak and effeminate? Is the poet using the present state of the river to decry the lost cultural values of the people? Questions

like this, it should be noted, help to keep the text open and, hence, sustain its writerly texture in Barthesian terms. This stanza has nine lines and fifty-two words arranged in one long compound-complex sentence.

In the eighth and final stanza of the poem, the river is accused of being silent in the face of the fast disappearing mores of the people as can be seen in the inhuman vices and their characters depicted in the stanza: ' . . . This knife brandished in water;/This calmly-going dog that steals/to the last, the compound's eggs;/this male dog which charges/for a bite with lips-sheathed incisors' (36). Thus, it can be said that the postcolonial angle of Ushie's poetics as far as 'Bekwang River' is concerned is to use the poem as a symbol for referencing the vibrant cultural life of the Akorshi people that has now been lost to modernity. The river is a memory token that inspires the poet to reflect on what was and what now obtains in his society. The stanza is made up of forty words and eight lines rendered in multiple sentences. The entire poem has a total word weight of two hundred and seventy-nine. Ushie's depiction of Bekwang also serves to interrogate the colonialist discourse that saw nothing aesthetic about the African landscape, but it also decries the negative influences that colonialism has brought on the people's culture and tradition. This is the same way that Okara uses the Nun to discourse complex postcolonial issues that border on time and its ravaging effects on the individual and society.

Conclusion

The intertextual practices in Okara and Ushie's poetics in 'The Call of the River Nun' and 'Bekwang River', respectively, have been the focus of this paper. Driven and sustained by the tenets of postcolonial formalism and intertextuality, the study finds that form and content, history and aesthetics, can be made to harmoniously coexist and be useful in any critical enterprise, as one can inspire or motivate the other. The intertextual practices discoursed in the selected poems are not only realised through similarities and commonalities but also through differences, which is the best avenue to harvest meaning in any intertextual reading. While both texts are ekphrases on river, the individual river objects, as well as the peculiarities of their depiction, are different, even though they draw from the same linguistic signs. Okara's art expresses nostalgic feelings of home inspired by a rememory of the river; Ushie's art interrogates the river to make sense of the lost times in our body politic. The tropes analysed in the two texts have also been found to connect with other river-themed poems around the world.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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