

## **The Song of Songs: Focalising Love and the Public- Personal Poetics in Remi Raji's Poetry**

**Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale**

Department of English,  
Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria  
Email: ebomobowale@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0098-5439>

and

**Opeyemi Ajibola**

Department of English,  
Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria  
Email: ajibolaopeyemiwumi@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3094-1285>

### **Abstract**

Much of the existing critical scholarship on Remi Raji's poetry appraised the poet's portrayal of his angst against oppression and the oppressors of the people. His poetry has often been read within the poetics of rage and social discountenance. Sule's projection of Remi Raji as an angry poet has enjoyed the dominant estimation by which Raji's poetic oeuvre is engaged. This study examines four of Raji's collections of poetry – *A Harvest of Laughters*, *Lovesong for my Wasteland*, *Sea of my Mind*, *Webs of Remembrance* and *Gather my blood Rivers of Song*, exploring the poet's loveworld, with a view to underscoring how a focus on the tropes of rage, discontentment and disillusionment in the collections mask the poet's dominant presentations of lovesongs for the land, a mistress, nature, and others. While it is right to say that Raji's poetry is overtly political, it is more accurate to relate that there is more to his poetry than the political theme. We see in Raji's poetic oeuvre a fine balance between the poet's preoccupation with the sociopolitical realities of the nation state and the representations of his loveworld, extolling that all-too-human other side

of life. This study calls for a broadened conception of Remi Raji's poetry, beyond the aesthetics of rage, angst and disillusionment to the poet's depiction of the capacity of love to herald hope, and ultimately right the wrongs in the postcolony.

**Keywords:** Remi Raji; Public-personal poetics; Poetics of rage; Nigerian poetry, Lovesongs.

### Introduction

But I have learnt the reward of patience  
When anger failed. My refuge is in songs...  
(*Lovesong for my Wasteland*, p. 51).

The poetic persona in the extract above attests to the power of love to prevail and triumph when anger fails, reiterating the truth in the biblical line that love never fails. *Lovesong for my Wasteland* from which the quote is taken is one of the renowned anthologies of Remi Raji. Remi Raji is the pen name of Aderemi Raji-Oyelade, a poet, literary theorist, former president of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) and professor of African American Literature. In 1988, Remi Raji was featured in *Voices from the Fringe: An ANA Anthology of New Nigerian Poetry*, a collection that showcased many renowned poets, many of whom are now often referred to as constituting the Third Generation of Nigerian poetry. At the time *Voices from the Fringe: An ANA Anthology of New Nigerian Poetry* was published, Remi Raji had just begun to write. His first collection of poetry, *A Harvest of Laughter*, was published in 1997, almost a decade after he was introduced onto the world stage alongside other poets like Ogaga Ifowodo, Olu Oguibe, Maik Nwosu, Uche Nduka and Toyin Adewale. Raji's second collection, *Webs of Remembrance*, followed closely on the heels of the first, and it got published in 2001. The third, a travelogue, *Shuttlesongs America: A Poetic Guided Tour* was published two years after. The fourth and fifth collections, *Lovesong for my Wasteland* and *Gather my Blood Rivers of Song* appeared in 2005 and 2009, respectively. *Sea of my Mind* was published in 2015 while the latest, *Wanderer Cantos*, got published in 2021. Raji's seven poetic collections, alongside poems published online, often on <http://www.remiraji-nigeria.com/>, have enjoyed much critical attention. His poems have been translated to German, French, Swedish, Ukrainian, and Hungarian languages. Raji's most recent writings celebrate his triumph over the coronavirus.

Much of the existing critical scholarship on Remi Raji's poetry has explored the poet's portrayal of political angst against oppression and Nigeria's oppressors. His poetry has often been read within the poetics of rage and social discontentment. It is clear that critics have consistently and profusely dissected and labelled Raji's poetry as political poetry. Sule Egya's *Poetics of Rage: A Reading of Remi Raji's Poetry* (2011) is the first book-length study of Remi Raji's poetry. Egya submits that Raji's poetry presents "a vision anchored in a past plundered and wasted, in a present burdened with frustration and anguish and in a future envisaged with surpassing optimism" (p.18). In "The Nationalist Imagination in Remi Raji's *Lovesong for My Wasteland*" (2007) and *Poetics of Rage: A Reading of Remi Raji's Poetry* (2011), Egya, hardly looks beyond Raji's overt political themes. Other literary analyses of Raji's poetry also project his thematic preoccupation with Nigeria's political quagmire. Owhorodu (2018) explores the projection of national (di)vision through animal symbolism in *Lovesong for My Wasteland* and *A Harvest of Laughters*. He employed semiotics to interpret the two collections and asserts that dialogue is presented as the poet's panacea for progressive coexistence in Nigeria. Olaniyan (2014) explores the depiction of laughter and anguish in *Harvest of Laughters*. He relates that Raji's poetry does not only represent the untold anguish experienced in his milieu, but also present laughter as an antidote that would cushion the populace's pain. Oripeloye (2017) examined the factional realities, that is the presentation of the lived experiences of people in *Gather My Blood Rivers of Song*, and he submits that Raji's presentation of the tangible properties of events, not as history, but the facts in reality, essentially differentiates him from others who merely document events. Oluseye, Senanyon and Ogbulogo (2020), engaging *Sea of my Mind* conclude that Raji's poetic oeuvre illustrates the animist turn in ecocriticism.

Critics have also examined Raji's poetry's formal and linguistic properties. Ayeomoni (2012) presented a graphostylistic analysis of some poems in Raji's *Web of Remembrance* while Oluwayemi (2020) examined the deictic centre and pragmatic implications in *A Harvest of Laughters* and *Webs of Remembrance*. Similarly, Adegaju and Udoeka (2016) conducted a stylistical analysis of *Lovesong for My Wasteland*. The critics affirmed that Remi Raji abides by the stylistic peculiarities of the "alter-native tradition" to effectively convey his message of social regeneration to his audience. Ogungbemi (2016) employs van Dijk's approach to critical discourse analysis and M.A.K. Halliday's transitivity framework to examine the

interconnectivity of language and ideology essential for understanding Raji's poetry. He posits that a strong link exists between transitivity and ideology in Remi Raji's poetry. Besides the linguistic analysis of Raji's poetry, Akingbe (2015) and Shittu (2020) explored the employment of orature in Raji's poems. Akingbe (2015) asserts that in Raji's poetry, Yoruba orature serves as the vehicle of literary communication, which provided him, an alternative communication platform to foreground the depth of his poetry and fraternise with his audience. Shittu (2020) submits that in Raji's *Shuttlesongs: America*, there is the employment of the visual images of two Yoruba divinities, Sango and Oya, which is notable because the use of the images of these deities is deployed outside the cultural domain of the deities. From the foregoing, it is clear that there is a paucity of scholarly attention on Raji's thematic preoccupation with love and the ends to which such representation is made, despite the fact that there is ample thematization of love and romance in every one of Raji's poetry collections. In actual fact, one does not find much discursive analysis on the representations of love in African literature. Hence, this study explores the representation of love and the public-private poetics in five out of Raji's seven poetry collections to afford a fuller appreciation of Remi Raji's poetic oeuvre. The collections from which poems for analysis are selected are *A Harvest of Laughter*, *Webs of Remembrance*, *Lovesong for my Wasteland*, *Gather my Blood Rivers of Song* and *Sea of my Mind*.

### **The Other Gaze: Imaging Love and Public-Personal Poetics in Remi Raji's Poetry**

In 2006, in the introduction to a collection of short stories, *African Love Stories* (2006), Ama Ata Aidoo contends that in spite of the fact that thematic preoccupations with love are lacking in African documented literature, love is a classic theme, not only in literature but also in life:

It is indisputable that, apart from what nature endows humans and occasionally visits on us in the form of disasters and destruction, love is at the bottom of nearly all earthly happenings: great achievements, as well as mischief, murder and mayhem. Indeed, what we may choose not to remember is that love is not only the most serious literature, but one of the three human tales that are. The other two being our quest for and worship of the Creator and politics. (vii)

This assertion, however, presents a shift; for *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) bears an apology and a confession where she reneges an earlier assertion that she would never write about lovers in Accra, because according to her, in the African environment, there were more important things to write about. The shift in Ama Ata Aidoo's literary and critical preoccupation, in a sense, exemplifies the slow but sure shift in the acceptance of the critical and thematic preoccupation with love as worthy of scholarship. Gone are the days when scholars regarded an engagement with the theme of love as trivial, but one with wars and crises as a worthy cause. In actual fact, it is the lack of love that produced many if not all of the traumatic maladies that any African society has ever had to grapple with. The shift has thus birthed such edited texts as *African Love Stories, An Anthology* (2006) edited by Ama Ata Aidoo and *Bending the Bow: an anthology of African love poetry* (2009) edited by Frank Chipasula, and such critical explorations as "Governing Intimacy: the Politics of Love in African Fiction" by Kathleen Hanggi and "The Politics of Love and Identity in Nigerian Diasporic Fiction" by Atolagbe Opeyemi (2015).

Love in Remi Raji's poetic oeuvre is a cocktail; it is as complex as it is encompassing. Raji's poetry captures the many faces and phases of love that there are: love for the land, love for the past, love for a mistress, love for the dead, love for the invisible, love for nature, love for tech and love for an ideal such as truth, justice and so on. In *Lovesong for my Wasteland*, the poetic persona sets out the subject and object of his devotion – his fatherland. In fact, *Lovesong for my Wasteland* is described by the poet as a long breathe love poem. In the prologue, a performance poem, when characters like Asabi, Takie and Gambia misunderstand Gong and doubt his loyalty to the communal cause, Gong, the representation of the poetic persona, the authorial voice in the collection, relates that his land heaves with a quiver of song, which he must sing, lest the past overtakes the present. Gambia quizzes why he does not feel as Gong feels, in spite of the fact that he was in the year of the Elephant, just like Gong.

It is then clear that Gambia is unmoved by what moves Gong. Gong must sing, speak and write because a love for his land motivates him perpetually. In VIII, the poet employs rhetorical questions to underscore the place of love in a time of war, hopelessness and helplessness. The poetic persona asks "but who is afraid of tender songs/in a land accustomed to stings and grief?" (*Lovesong for my Wasteland*, p.22). In XVII, the poetic persona states clearly that he loves his country with a vengeance. Love is the reason the persona seeks the nation's salvation

from “the rubble of that violence” (*Lovesong for my Wasteland*, 29); it is the reason for his stubborn determination to embrace the land like a new love (*Lovesong for my Wasteland*, p.62).

In *Gather my Blood Rivers of Song*, the poetic persona’s fatherland is described as a “country of urgent memoirs”; it is a country that he vows to love to death (2012, p.25). The country fiercely loved by the poetic persona is however a house of hunger, a place one where “death hawks her passion per penny” and where there remains the “Sodom smell of things” (*Gather my Blood Rivers of Song*, p.33). Scatological images are employed in such poems as “Animus II”, “Monotones”, “I ache with loneliness” and “Somewhere she shall be stoned” to decry the state of affairs in the nation, and to show how unworthy the land is of the poetic persona’s devotion. However, the poetic persona pledges to yet think of renewal and thereby “forget despair/to become the finder of footprints and new loves (*Gather my Blood Rivers of Song*, p.33). In order to speak of hope in the midst of chaos and deprivation, the poetic persona fixes his gaze on the possibilities for change, healing and renewal. To him, love will herald the hope that is so much needed. In spite of the drought of peace and progress, the poetic persona upholds the power of hope. He sings of the “aftermath of fractured year”, the years that would succeed the reign of locusts, when the termites who “come with fangs of iron” must have departed”, the nation will “bleed” but yet “dance in hope” (*Gather my Blood Rivers of Song*, p. 129).

In the two other collections chosen for analysis in this study, *A harvest of Laughters* and *Webs of Remembrance*, “I rise now”, “Old havocs”, “1995” and “This land tickles me” are poems that present the poetic persona’s devotion to his nation, a land that tickles him “like a new love/Sweet-bitter pie of pleasure grilled/ in pints of pain (*Webs of Remembrance*, p. 17). The poetic persona, moved by unfeigned love and unwavering devotion in “I rise now” speaks of the bibliotherapeutic prowess of his art:

And I rise now  
 With long drums of laughter  
 To slaughter a thousand dragon-dreams of pain.  
 Oh laughter, legacy of mask  
 My wind of burning words  
 Beyond the blues. (*A harvest of Laughters*, p. 16)

The poetic persona chooses to opt for redemption in the midst of so much destruction; he chooses to seek succour amidst the sorrows of the past and the present. "Old havocs" affirms the place of love and love songs in an ailing nation. In "Old havocs", the poet employs biting satire to lampoon the practitioners of religious hypocrisy and pious evils. He tells of "hollow men with livid faith" whose god is their belly and greed, their sole motivation. The poetic persona laments how "hollow men in garbs of gods/in torn plumes in tumbling turbans and carousing cassocks chorus pestilence to panting throats" (*A harvest of Laughters*, p. 19), all for filthy lucre. In "1995", the poetic persona again affirms that hatred and lust still remain at the root of all evil and all that plague the nation. He relates how nations divide "like malicious molecules/a hexagon of hate/in their ethnic paste" (*A harvest of Laughters*, p. 69), all because love is lacking. In "This land tickles me", the poetic persona like a bridegroom of a century reaffirms his agelong devotion to his fatherland; he maintains that his land tickles him soft and hard, and without end (*Webs of Remembrance*, p. 17).

Besides the poetic persona's hymn of love for his fatherland, he sings of love for a woman, a mistress, sometimes nameless, at other times, a chameleon with many faces and many names. The poetic persona's lovesongs for the woman is all the more poignant, cast against the backdrop of a love-drought nation and a greedy man-eats-man world. In *A Harvest of Laughter*, the segment titled "Dimple Songs" is dedicated to the celebration of love, life and the lover. The first poem in the segment celebrates four women- Annabelle, Segi, Chikwenye and the poetic persona's mother. In "Four Women", four women, representative of the women in the poetic persona's life, are adulated. Segi, the "mother of many mothers" (*A harvest of Laughters*, p. 34) has transited from the world. Annabelle is the one with the tempting wings, the bell in the tidal songs of the poetic persona.

Annabelle is the first among the rest and the one for whom explicit erotic imagery is dispensed. She turns the poetic persona softly towards the "thigh of sea" where his desires dissolves into her breath. While Annabelle, though most desired is temporally outside of reach, Segi and Chikwenye have left the scene. Mother is the one for whom the poetic persona drinks and laughs and lives. Another poem in the anthology, "Endless Wondering" posts a "sea of questions" to the woman. In "A simple thought named Desire", the poetic persona sings of a woman whose dark skin is reminiscent of the women celebrated in Leopold Sendar Senghor's "Black Woman", "I will pronounce Your Name" and JP

Clark's "Agbor Dancer". The poem "Song of Absence" is also redolent of Niyi Osundare's "Song of Absence" I and II. "Song of Absence" and "To a certain Love" both employ the trope of absence to foreground the mistress' evanescence and the poetic persona's insatiable longing for her.

In *Sea of my Mind*, the poetic persona submits an invocation to love. The collection is a celebration of mother's love and fatherland, consisting of fifty poems that appear in five divisions: Introit, Waves, Ebbs, Flows and Recessional. As Remi Raji did in *A harvest of Laughters*, there is in *Sea of my Mind* the celebration of womanhood, motherhood and the joys of lovers. The eponymous poem, "Sea of my Mind" is dedicated to the poetic persona's mother. The poem speaks of the last moments of his mother, before her departure for the world beyond. The sea is a leitmotif that features again and again in Remi Raji's celebration of his mother. The poetic persona eulogises his mother as the "sea", the source from whom he draws his life. He vows to treasure the memories of his mother's love as long as he lives. The world is a sea and his mother's eye, another kind of sea. The world being often metaphorically categorized as a sea, is one that the poetic persona can only navigate under the watchful eyes of his mother. At his mother's dying, he who had been "naked like a sailor" travelling "the length of the earth" must behold "the twisted sea" in her eyes and bid her farewell. He takes solace in the Yoruba traditional belief system of the existence of four worlds – of the unborn, the living, the ancestors and the "dark continuum of transition where occurs the inter-transmutation of essence-ideal and materiality" (Soyinka, 1990, p.26). To the poetic persona, in death, his mother, one "fairer than the oil of the gods", "the last incense", has become a goddess. "Abebi" speaks of the poetic persona's memory of his mother. His memory of her is his sole possession to mark her "victory above the vanity" and reclaim Soyinka's assertion in *Death and the Kingshorseman* that "memory is the master of death" (1975, p.20).

Other poems written to celebrate women in *Sea of my Mind* include "Your name is the perfume of night", "There's no beautiful poem like you", "Breathing", "Clinging" and "I like your adverbs". These poems ride on the crest of visual, aural and tactile imagery to tell of fleeting affections and temporary pleasures. In these poems, there is the unrestrained employment of erotic diction. For instance, in "I am the one you breathe", the poetic persona metaphorizes his invitation to his mistress to have the most intimate of meetings:



Paddle me right and survive the trip:  
 put a tear in the saddle and bear the accident  
 of the fatal fall....  
 Say my name now,  
 I am with you. Say my name. (*Sea of my Mind*, p.66)

The poetic persona, poem after poem, employs images drawn from the flora and fauna, especially the sea, to foreground the vastness and the unquantifiable passions that drive his love trunk. The beauty and melodies of love are most audible in a poem like "Breathing". The flatteries and the rhythms of the poem bear the sweet melodies of love:

I like your body breathing...  
 I like your breeding  
 Your breath in and out  
 The heaving of our crested lobe  
 The panting speech of your eyes  
 The vanilla pout of your lips. (*Sea of my Mind*, p.72)

The mistress' influence on the poetic persona makes him willing even to be lost in her. He asserts that "in the grove of the silence/in the tongue of the panting/in the bones of your shadow/I will be content to lose my name" (*Sea of my Mind*, p.72). Love is captured in the lines as that for which a man would trade his all. It is not unusual for love poems to employ hyperbole, either in the description of the poetic persona's feelings for the subject cum object of his love, or in the poetic persona's description of his mistress' unparalleled qualities. In "Your name is the perfume of night", the dream woman is said to possess a graceful gait, a bright breath, the sweetener smile and a name that is the perfume of the night. The love the poetic persona professes is one that breaks boundaries and transcend transitions, so much so that celestial beings join in the lover's coitus. In "River, take my heart", the sun and the moon mate in the riverbed of the lover's breath. Additionally, the sun, shining bright and hot, makes its home in her eyes (*Sea of my Mind*, p.73). The mistress is the honeyed lump that stumbles in the lover's throat; she is the rope that binds, and the ventricle of passions. In "Now I compare you with the skin of rivers", a poem evocative of William Shakespeare's "Shall I compare thee", the poetic persona proclaims that theirs is the Everest love. In "Toast", a poem in *Webs of Remembrance*, dedicated to Adesolape, the poet's wife, the poetic persona compares his love for her to the moon's in its fullest smile above

the supple sea and skin of earth. These poems couched side by side with poems with obvious nationalist themes present the balance that gives the appropriate and accurate picture of Remi Raji's poetic world. In the poem titled "The poet", the poetic persona affirms that as long as life shall last, there will be battle cries but there will also be the mating cry.

While many poems in the anthologies studied bear inter-textual homage to poets; some are written to celebrate poets, mentors and legends in the literary world. Poems in *Sea of my Mind* and *A Harvest of Laughters* present intertextual exchanges with Niyi Osundare's *Waiting Laughter* and *Tender Moments* and Christopher Okigbo's "Heavensgate". Sule Egya affirms Osundare's influences on Remi Raji. He relates that Osundare's poetry and Raji's poetry are imbued with the spirit of song; they employ literature as an ideological weapon useful in redeeming the land from the quagmire of retrogression and they both draw from the Yoruba folk wisdom. Besides Niyi Osundare, Christopher Okigbo's linguistic pools and stylistics manipulations are discernible in some of Remi Raji's poems. For instance, the repetition of the lexical item "naked" in "Sea of my Mind" is reminiscent of Okigbo's renowned evocation of "Mother Idoto" in "Heavensgate". In celebrating some poets, close friends and certain exceptional benefactors, Raji pens "Intimation of a final departure" for Ayo Fadiran, alias Kados; "This garland too light yet on creation day" for Niyi Osundare; "Duty" for Odia Ofeimum; "Kiagbodo" for John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo; "Kwansaba II" for Eugene B. Redmond, the American poet and emeritus professor and "A country writes her own epitaph" for poets with whom he shares some generational affinities: Ogaga Ifowodo and Akin Adesokan. Ogaga Ifowodo, Akin Adesokan, Remi Raji and poets such as Uche Nduka, Maik Nwosu, Olu Oguiibe and Toyin Adewale are often categorised as belonging to the third generation of Nigerian Literature. "A country writes her own epitaph" alludes to Ogaga Ifowodo and Akin Adesokan's detention during the inglorious era of General Sani Abacha. "An underground poem" was penned for Jack Mapanje, the Malawian bard. These poems for poets and acquaintances affirm Raji's confession in "All of me is people" that when he is "naked to want, warmth and life's riddle", he knows and he rests assured that "all of me is people" (*Sea of my mind*, p. 38).

Remi Raji's loveworld bears melodies for not only his mother, his mistress, his fatherland, fellow poets but also nature. For instance, in *A Harvest of Laughters*, the segment appositely titled "Nature Songs" present a celebration of the wonders of nature and the employment of nature

tropes. Fire, rain and the wind are presented as natural elements that are capable of bestowing knowledge to the men. The poetic persona in "Rain song" pleads that he be taught the "long notes to new cotton songs" and be lent the "new fibre miracles of the loom". To the poetic persona, the harmony that nature and how nature's end results are for good, accentuate that which is missing in the nation. He shows how the wind help transport seedlings, how fire mints a luminous story of liquid gold, and how the rain gives room to the sprouting of the roots of rocks. Hence, the poetic persona "craves the serous rods of rain on the barren bosom of this land" (*A Harvest of Laughters*, p. 27). In *Lovesong for my wasteland*, Raji's vision of renewal and hope is borne on the wings of the wind, the rain, the dawn, riverbirds and the spring. In "XLI" and "XLII", the poetic persona foretells that his land will become a bride again and his nation will flourish like the garden of Arcadia.

In *Webs of Remembrance*, Raji's celebration of his lover employs mature images. His love for her is described as the moon's smile and the rainbow's true grin which goes beyond the iced dessert of empty passion. In the *Sea of my mind*, Raji's love for nature shines brightest. The sea is a motif that pervades almost every poem in the collection. *Sea of my mind* employs images draw from the flora and fauna to foreground the thematic preoccupations of the collection. "The sea" captures the immensity of the poet's mind; the collection, like a limitless sea, is rich in tropes and themes and the emotions that it accentuates. "There's no beautiful poem like you" for instance presents the speaker's fascination at the sea, which is representative of the love of his life. Simile is employed in lines 9-10 to foreground the lover's breath-taking attributes: Like the bee to its pollen/Like the sea to its bank... (*Sea of my mind*, p. 75). To the poet, love is "the tail-tongue of rain lispig tuberous notes in the twining seasons/the immortal kiss of morning dews/on naked shrubs/the cherub utterance of stars..." (*A harvest of laughters*, p. 31). What nature is to Niyi Osundare's poetry, it is to Remi Raji's poetry, in enriching the themes, extending the tropes and embodying the ideological sublimations of the poets.

Just as Raji's poetry celebrates love in its pure forms, it draws attention to love counterfeits and the evils perpetuated when hate disguises itself as love. "The predator's prayer" tells of a bloody vulturous love. "Somewhere, she shall be stoned to death", written for Amina Lawal, a woman sentenced to death for adultery and having a child out of wedlock, under the Sharia Law, recreates the injustice of the men who are

vampires and those who kill in order to save. The poem “Soft bite” presents the poet’s cautionary piece on one of the inventions of the modern world – the PC. The poetic persona speaks of a world where the personal computer is fast becoming a personal companion to many people. The modern world is one of bites, bits and bytes. The poem underlines how computers are fast replacing and deplacing humans. The Personal Computer, for instance has become a Personal Companion; it accesses “secrets and glitches” that are hidden from other people. The poetic persona is amazed at how “all of our life is tied to these tiny things-open books & faceless groups” (*Sea of my mind*, p. 37).

The poem relates not just the wonders that advancements in information technology perform but also the havocs that have been wrecked by them. Many nowadays connect to others across the globe via the internet but yet relationships are hardly healthier. Family times are taken over by chats with strange beings on such social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Hi5 and the likes. Now, people value the time spent with their gadgets more they value the time spent with their loved ones. The poetic persona in the fifth stanza, also underscores the menace of moguls and hackers who engage in cybercrimes. The poetic persona proclaims that the advancement in information technology are destructive aids; they kill and heal. The last stanza relates the dilemma of the present age: Who, or what shall we delete; where, or when shall we repeat The song of Origin: Let there be light, without destruction! (*Sea of my mind*, p.37).

“Soft Bite” effectively captures the impact of technological advancements which of a dual nature, just as love can be sweet on a one side and when mismanaged, it turns sour. In all of Remi Raji’s poems, there is a fine balance between private and public themes. In *Poetics of Rage: A Reading of Remi Raji’s Poetry*, Sule Egya rightly relates that most poets of Remi Raji’s generation, Remi Raji inclusive, dwelt on public concerns, just like the poets who wrote in the generation preceding theirs, and that in their critique of political corruption and societal malaise is their commitment displayed. No doubt, Egya’s assertions are correct, but as this study shows, Remi Raji’s poetry dwells on public as well as private themes. Egya’s assertion project the dominant expectation that African Literature is necessarily and always politically-oriented. This expectation has been prominent in American as well as African literary scholarship largely since Fredric Jameson’s publication of his extremely controversial yet influential “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational

Capitalism" in 1986. Yet, it is contended, that in Remi Raji's case, there is a flip to Jameson's renowned assertion, in that while Remi Raji's poetry engages substantially with global inequalities and the problems that beset the nation state, there are evident engagements with private concerns. Love affairs are projected, living and dead colleagues are celebrated and the poet's loveworld is vividly displayed line after line. Remi Raji's poetry engages the political economy with the same vigour as it does the romance between the poetic persona and a mistress, the poetic persona and his land, the poetic persona and his muse, his mother or nature. Raji's poetry displays "a linkage between the political and the libidinal, the public and the private, that is fully naturalized and unabashed" (Hillenbrand, 2006, p. 639). Remi Raji's poetry troubles the notions around the "radical split between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power" (Lazarus, 2011, p. 92).

## Conclusion

Many would regard an engagement with the theme of love as trivial, but one with wars and crises as worthy of critical appraisal; while in reality, it could be said that it is the lack of love that produced many if not all of the traumatic maladies that any community has ever had to grapple with. All great literature arguably deals with issues of relationships- relationship between man and man, relationship between man and woman, relationship between man and the environment, and so on. Hence, the theme of love is just as "serious" as those of wars, trauma and catastrophes. To Remi Raji, the poet's first commitment is to love: "A poet's first duty is to make love/To language, to land, and to liberty (*Webs of Remembrance*, p. 68). In *Lovesong for my wasteland*, there is the expression of the power of love to heal and revive. The poetic persona asserts that "for Love is the only language I know/In a season of parched promises and shrunken memories/Love is the caprice of remembrance, the remedy of forgetting (*Lovesong for my wasteland*, p. 66). To the poet, love is the cure, at the end of it all, love is all that will matter. To him, love must again spell the colours of the rainbow "where the hardness of hatred used to rule" (*Lovesong for my Wasteland*, p. 20). Remi Raji, just like Niyi Osundare especially in *Tender Moments* (Christopher Anyokwu, 2008:103), celebrates what Anyokwu called the "the all-too-human amatory side of life", employing love as leitmotif to emphasize the drought of all that can heal

the world and effect a change in the postcolonial nation, an abiding concern that the poet raises in each of his collection.

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