



Original Research

Constructivist Referents in Oumar Farouk Sesay's 'The Song of the Women of My Land'

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Abstract

The purpose of the research was to examine the constructivist referents in Oumar Farouk Sesay's poem 'The Song of the Women of My Land'. This required an analysis and understanding of the referents (terms that clearly and indirectly refer to persons, things or events) and whether the referents were used in the poem to express grief by women. The research questions were as follows: a) Does the poet use referents that suggest the death of traditions that celebrate old women, song bards, and songs from the past more than any other word? b) Is the poet more likely to employ poetic allusions to indicate negative constructivism? and c) Is the poem's use of prosodic features related to the message? This study used computational and content analysis methods, which incorporate a careful poetry-reading critical approach, to identify and calculate constructivist referents. The referents were then manually broad-coded to include whole lines and verses. The exact words, phrases, and sentences related to the topic were coded and their frequency was determined. These were calculated by counting the number of times a referent appeared. The themes were then selected and interpreted, with a focus on relating them to the poem's constructivist viewpoint. Finally, the main prosodic elements of the poem, as well as the referents that create them, were established. The results show that most referents by African poets are used to emphasise that traditional culture is dying and that the referents romanticise the fleeting nature of beauty in poetry and the pacifying effects of rural pastimes.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine how referents are used in African poetry, with a particular focus on Oumar Farouk Sesay's (2016) 'The Song of the Women of My Land'. The use of referents in literary analysis is an integral part of African poetry but has received little attention. According to Kusch (2016), a literary referent is not an open door between the minds of authors and readers. This is because the literary representation does not correspond to reality. Because of this, most literature students find poetry more difficult to study and understand than prose. A figurative description of the poem, which is considered a semi-scientific creation of a poet that Aristotle (c. 350 B.C.) perceived as a neurotic or hero (cited in Watson, 2019), worsens the situation. While the general public has access to many critically acclaimed African books and poetry, including works by well-known authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiang'o, and others, research indicates that little literary criticism that examines the references made in these works, particularly those by Sierra Leonean writers, is available. As a result, little is known about the works of African writers, let alone those from Sierra Leone. For instance, in their criticism of Africa, Wenske (2021), Siundu (2020), and Tunde (n.d.) employed references to race, African aesthetics, and other elements to depict their more populous, well-known countries and homelands. Students studying for public exams such as WASSCE, BECE, NECO, SSCE, GCE, NCEE, JAMB, and university students in West Africa perform abysmally due to a lack of understanding of referents in poetry (Thulla, et al., 2022). The study will be useful to the field of English language studies in general, as well as to underperforming students, because

it will assist them in developing critical thinking skills by studying the references of literary works and interpreting them in ways readers may not have considered previously, particularly in understanding poems from Sierra Leone and other African countries.

Furthermore, there is a disconnect between what other non-African writers say about African literary subjects and what Sierra Leoneans understand and consider to be true. This is due to a disagreement over how to connect the appropriate referents in African poetry to African ideologies and institutions, such as Conrad's (cited in [Kazmi et al., 2021](#)) portrayal of Africans as degenerate people in 'Heart of Darkness' or [Dale et al. \(2020\)](#) stereotypical media portrayal of blacks, or the possibility that the literature currently in use may not be sufficient to establish this relationship. The aim of this study is to correctly connect references and meanings in the selected poem. A close reading of Sesay's poem was conducted, with a focus on identifying, calculating and analysing the use of referents. The referents were then manually broad-coded to include whole lines and verses. In the second step of coding, exact words, phrases, and sentences were coded to identify their frequencies, prosodic features, and connotative interpretations. The codes were then categorised, and the frequency of each referent was determined by counting the number of referents and themes were then identified. In studying Oumar Farouk Sesay's poem, the authors discuss constructivism at both the cognitive (individual) and social or pastoral levels. This implies that the constructivist approach can be used to help African students relate to literary works and increase student writing performance, which is similar to [Taufik et al. \(2020\)](#) findings. This paper examines the concept of constructivism to study the literary components of the selected poem, which suggests that Sierra Leonean traditional practices are dying and being replaced by foreign traditions as a result of modernism ([Thulla, 2019](#)). The authors believe that a) the poet would use referents suggestive of the death of traditions that celebrate old women, song bards, and songs of bygone times more than any other word, b) the poet would more likely employ poetic allusions to indicate negative constructivism?, and c) the poem's use of prosodic features would be related to the message? The paper begins with an introduction, then reviews the literature on referents in African poetry, moves on to a detailed analysis of Sesay's poem, and concludes with a discussion of the study's implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1 History of African Poetry

The history of African poetry began in the 1960s when African poets and Pan-Africanists advocated for African liberation before most African countries gained independence. This period includes the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Before writing was introduced to Africa, oral artists, as [Onebunne and Obasi \(2019\)](#) claim, Africans told stories orally. They argue that 'African literature springs from an inborn love of telling a story, of arranging words in pleasing patterns, of expressing in words some special aspects of our human experiences.' (p.2) According to [Thulla et al. \(2022\)](#), these oral means included stories, proverbs, riddles, songs, music and dance to express their thoughts. According to Okpewho (cited in [Thulla, 2019](#)), the origins of African oral literature date back to the 19th century. At that time, Europeans such as James George Fraser (1854-1941) and his colleagues began collecting information on the customs and oral literature of the communities they ruled. The resulting works are all based on oral tradition and, according to [Scheub et al. \(2023\)](#), Sheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1973), al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), and Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* (1956) are some examples.

Most of the poetry produced during this period was didactic and secular, such as the *gabay*, *jiifto* (chant poems), *buraambur*, *balwo*, and the *hees* from Somalia ([Scheub et al., 2023](#)). Reactionary poets and Pan Africanists who eventually became known as nigrITUDE poets, such as Césaire, Léon Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor, first emerged during the colonial era. According to [Micklin \(2008\)](#), the best-known Negritude works by these poets were Damas' 'Pigments', Senghor's 'Hosties noire' and 'Chants d'ombre', and Césaire's 'Cahier', which founded the periodical 'L'Étudiant noir'.

The terrible occurrences that are inherent to postcolonial Africa are presented in postcolonial poetry and contemporary African poetry, the majority of which occurred before and after most African countries obtained independence ([Jones, 1967; Okiche, 2018](#)). Lenrie Paters, Wole Soyinka, Syl Cheney-Coker, John Pepper Clark, Oswald Mtshali and Leopold Sédar Senghor, Titilope Sonuga, Titilope Sonuga, Titilope Sonuga, Ijeoma Umehinyuo, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Dylema, Caleb Femi, Siana Bangura, Gbanabom Hallowell, Oumar Farouk Sesay, amongst other prominent poets of the era. Our study topic is pertinent

because African poetry appears to have never stopped romanticising Africa or demonising its institutions or leaders, even though the majority of modern poems are about love, family, death, and religion. In his poem 'The Song of the Women of My Land' we explore the question of whether constructivist referents in modern African poetry still stigmatise or romanticise.

2.2 The Use of Referents in African Poetry

African writers, according to Kamara (as cited in [Thulla, 2019](#)), frequently draw on their African heritage and culture when they set out to write. According to Henderson (cited in [Foreman, 1997](#)), who wrote 'Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Women's Literary Tradition', Black women 'speak from a multiple and complex social, historical and cultural positionality, which, in effect, constitutes Black female subjectivity' (p. 9). This suggests that interpretation, or our title term, referent, is an old practice in black literature in which African writers use objects, persons, and places. To reflect on the views of the usage of myth in Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry, Biswas (n.d.) employed mythical allusions in his analysis of Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetic form. In a similar vein, [Orhero \(2023\)](#) focuses on how Ojaide and Anyidoho use their poems to revive verbal combat traditions to interpret and modify contemporary realities. In a more profound approach, [Okunlola \(2021\)](#) uses deixis to show how the referents are intimately connected to the social suppression issue depicted in Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju's 'Losses' poetry. Aside from [Ulogu and Okunna \(2022\)](#), who recently used cultural referents to examine the cultural items present in selected texts by Chinua Achebe and George Ndubisi, very few scholars have used referents to analyse the poetry of African writers, and the tradition of Africa continues to be lost primarily because very little is known about it ([Thulla, et al., 2022](#); [Fofana, et al., 2021](#); [Adom et al., 2021](#)), which provides justification enough for the need for the present study.

2.3 The Role of Referents in Conveying Meaning in African Poetry

A referent is the thing to which linguistic expressions or symbols in poetry refer. To convey the desired meaning in poetry, literary critics have frequently used mental images, symbols, figures of speech, and other techniques ([Arifah, 2016](#)). African poets use referents to metaphorically represent what objects or symbols mean to convey their ideas, feelings, and emotions. These referents may be more abstract concepts that cannot be physically perceived, touched, or seen, such as actual words, or they may be literal entities that are being referred to ([Abrams and Harpham, 2014](#)). Speaking of African poetry, Gates (cited in [Bennett and Royle; 2023](#)) states that black people have always been masters of the figurative: saying one thing to mean something entirely different, which has been basic to black survival in oppressive Western cultures. This is supported by the fact that the figurative is a major concern in African poetry. Even now, poetry like Sesay's 'A Song of the Women of My Land' makes this embodiment clear. According to [Copeland and Struck \(2010\)](#), allegorical presentations are another literary device that contributes significantly to expressing meaning in literature. These presentations can be scary to students and even seasoned academics who venture outside of their historical specialisations. It is possible to compare and contrast allegory with verbally drawn-out metaphor. It is only a very extended metaphor from one viewpoint, but not from another. According to [Bandia \(2014\)](#) and [Wales \(2014\)](#), the use of referents by African authors frequently appears obscure to modern readers because it is a distinctive feature of African poetry.

Research also demonstrates that poets frequently use referents to express various emotions in poems that are subjected to literary critic analysis. Regarding the significance of referents in African poetry, [Gaudioso \(2017\)](#) said that occasionally the presence of the referent is so strong that misunderstandings are certain to arise during the interpretation of poems if this reference is not recognised. According to [Wainwright \(2015\)](#), poetry is the most personal form of literature, and African poets have extensively used referents to successfully communicate their intended meanings. The best indicator of a poem's intended meaning is the presence of relevant referents, and the poem's meaning is determined by the language's articulatory potential. [Noel \(2014\)](#) and [Rayan \(2014\)](#) made the observation that the use of obliquity in poetry is appropriately verified for meaning and that the comprehension of referents is inexorably developed by the purposeful usage of symbols.

A symbol, according to [Nabukonde \(2012\)](#), is an object or an action that denotes another thing through association, likeness, or convention. It might stand alone as something, or it might allude to something more substantial. Though none are unchangeable and are determined by various cultures and eras, several symbols have generally acknowledged, universal meanings. Politics and metaphors are two examples of symbols that are used in daily life. Literary symbols are used to convey a text's meaning in a way that goes beyond what

is explicitly stated and suggests a different meaning based on cultural understanding. Symbolism can contribute to an internal system of meaning by enabling a writer to explain abstract concepts in personal words that are in keeping with their surroundings. Poetry is made more rich and complex by symbolism, which adds a new depth to readers. This study examines if the poet's use of references is compelling enough to communicate his constructivist ideas in a clear and succinct manner.

2.4 The Theory of Constructivism in Behaviour Transformation

Constructivism is a problem-based learning approach that focuses on basic communication skills such as listening and speaking. It has stimulated interest in many sociocultural studies, especially literary studies, and has enhanced the effectiveness of criticism. It emphasises adaptation and assimilation, allowing humans to integrate new information into existing frameworks without altering existing knowledge (Thulla, 2019; Crossman, 2016; Carpendale, 2013). Understanding human learning and brain function helps apply learning activities to various subjects, similar to the functionalist perspective. Constructivism, a problem-based learning philosophy, supports investigative research during the constructive learning process, focusing on interconnected parts (Sorden, 2012; Tarnopolsky, 2012; Tan, 2021). According to Kalina and Powell (2009) and Pecore (2013), a student's ability to build individualised learning strategies depends on the situation. The relevance of contextual characteristics in discourse meaning is highlighted by Kecskes (2014), Holmes and Stubbe (2015), and Malyuga and Tomalin (2016), which offers a useful framework for examining whether learning theory may minimise conventional practices in Sesay's poetry.

Scholars such as Choy et al. (2021) and Ma and Xia (2021) have examined acculturation types but have not studied the relationship between acculturation and enculturation. According to Ferguson and Bornstein (2012), cultural practice is a distinct process that produces traditional acculturation and 21st-century interpersonal influences. Studies such as Troesch et al. (2021) have linked cultural practice to acculturation, second language skills, and constructivism, highlighting foreign dominations affecting human systems and civilizations. What this study looks at in the chosen poem is how diasporic experiences dilute identities, resulting in hybrid representations in cultural forms and a mixture of cultures. Indigenous rites are diluted when they interact with Western traditions, as is implied in the selected poem (Welsh, 2010; Dutfield, 2017; Gould, 2014; Hussain, 2017; Menon, 2016; Witmer and Scully, 2022). The endorsement of the acculturation model for second language acquisition by Tavakoli (2013), Larsen-Freeman and Long (2014), and Téllez (2016) helps to explain how ethnic minorities acquire languages.

However, several scholars have emphasised its lack of attention in L2 learners, as it suggests acculturation is closely linked to language learning and influences usage efficiency and that it has not produced convincing results, leading to minority unrest among colonial tribes (Majavu, 2022; Gathii, 2020; Mamdani, 2020; Maylam, 2017; Heleta, 2016; Adger, et al., 2014; Kaul, 2012; De Costa, 2010). In a study, Wei and Xu (2022) show how exposure to a second culture can directly and indirectly improve a learner's 'L2 WTC' (p. 258). A similar finding was made by Panicacci (2019), who found that immigrants' attachment to their traditions and host culture and 'heritage language (L1) and host language (LX)' (p. 87) are related. Conversely, folk revivals entail sympathisers of dominating cultures being culturally motivated by their own civilisation, according to Orosco (2016) and Barlow (2017). Sibani (cited in Thulla, et al., 2021) highlights the strategy of opposing infiltration and corruption through non-acculturation methods.

The increase in population, which is a result of acculturation and adulteration, is one example of how Western civilisation has impacted traditional African societies. In Sierra Leone, traditional art is largely used for training, counselling, and education (Thulla, 2019). Modernisation has led to the loss of cultural humanities and emotional responses in African arts (Fofanah, et al., 2021; Porto and Zembylas, 2020; Thulla, 2019; Pillay, 2014). While African poets like Oumar Farouk Sesay, Christopher Okibo, Dennis Brutus, and Kofi Awonoor continue to explore themes of tribal sentiment, racism and apartheid, literature and visual arts have the most symbolic impact on such issues.

The constructivist method, which social scientists and narrative researchers have borrowed, supports the notion that encounters with the outside world have an impact on people's views and behaviours. According to Esin et al. (2014), this method adopts naturalism and analyses the effects of diversity and participants' shared meaning, making it suitable for the current study. Participants' shared meaning, in this case, the poet, the poem's context, and the larger context are determined by this method's adoption of naturalism. This viewpoint made it possible for the authors to properly examine the references made within the poem's greater narrative and give a perspective-based interpretation. The study examines and interprets

references in 'The Song of the Women of My Land' by Oumar Faruk Sesay using constructivist and/or acculturation interpretations.

3. Method

The study examined Oumar Farouk Sesay's use of language to suggest the death of tradition, poetic allusions used to express negative constructivism, and the connection of prosodic features to the poem's meaning. This study used both content analysis and the computational approach used by Kao and Jurafsky (2012) to compute and interpret referents and prosodic features of Oumar Farouk Sesay's 'The Song of the Women of My Land'. These methods were used to obtain statistical results and a contextual understanding of the selected poem. A close reading of the poem was carried out, with an emphasis on identifying the referents. The referents were then manually broad-coded to include whole lines and whole verses. In the second step of coding, the exact words, phrases and sentences related to the topic were coded and their frequency was determined. These were calculated by counting the number of occurrences of a referent. The themes were then selected and interpreted, with a focus on relating them to the poem's philosophy. Finally, the main prosodic elements of the poem, as well as the referents that create them, were established.

4. Results

This section presents the results of the study. The study used content analysis and computational methods to analyse the poem's referents and prosodic features. The researchers read the poem, broad-coded and recoded topic-specific words, and calculated their frequency. Themes were chosen and interpreted. The research questions were as follows: a) Does the poet use referents that suggest the death of traditions that celebrate old women, song bards, and songs from the past more than any other word? b) Is the poet more likely to employ poetic allusions to indicate negative constructivism? and c) Is the poem's use of prosodic features related to the message? The results of the study are presented below.

Research question a): Does the poet use referents that suggest the death of traditions that celebrate old women, song bards, and songs from the past more than any other word?

To answer this question, the researchers read the poem closely and identified the referents, which were then manually coded and computed. Table 1 below displays the concrete words used in the poem and the word count.

Table 1. Concrete Words and Word Count

| Word | Count | Word | Count | Word | Count |
|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|------------|-------|
| Chipping | 1 | Lost | 2 | Bits | 2 |
| Women | 5 | Memory | 2 | Ploughed | 2 |
| Sponged | 1 | Pain | 1 | Celebrate | 1 |
| Lives | 8 | Commune | 1 | Unborn | 1 |
| Ankles | 1 | Soul | 3 | Song | 13 |
| Forlorn | 3 | Roams | 2 | Fields | 4 |
| Land | 7 | Dirge | 1 | Chisels | 1 |
| Echo | 2 | Verses | 2 | Stuttering | 1 |
| Theatre | 1 | Toil | 1 | Tenor | 1 |
| Wriggling | 1 | Hollering | 1 | Gain | 1 |
| Laboured | 1 | Fading | 1 | Cuffed | 1 |
| Terrain | 1 | Mindscape | 1 | Away | 3 |
| Tune | 6 | Servitude | 2 | Lyrics | 6 |
| Story | 2 | Today | 1 | Scorned | 1 |

| Word | Count | Word | Count | Word | Count |
|------------|-------|------------|-------|------|-------|
| Remains | 1 | Strip | 3 | Pen | 1 |
| Screeching | 1 | Lips | 1 | - | - |
| Ghost | 1 | Dying/Dead | 3 | - | - |

The authors anticipated the poet to employ words more frequently, connoting the demise of a tradition and extolling old women, song bards, and melodies. The result shows that, overall, the poet used more frequent words that celebrate the women of old, the song bard and songs of the past (Women (5); Lives (8); Song (13)) and the attitudes (Lost (2); Forlorn (3); Memory (2); Servitude (2); Strip (3); Dying (3)) than any other word in the poem. This result is important because it supports the notion that African writers use precise references that are relevant to their cultural milieu.

Research question b): Is the poet more likely to employ poetic allusions to indicate negative constructivism?

To answer this question, the researchers carefully studied the poem, identified the referents, grouped them into themes, and then manually coded and computed the referents. Table 2 below displays the poetic allusions used to express constructivism and their interpretation.

Table 2. Poetic allusions used to express constructivism and their interpretation

| Referent | Number of Referent | Interpretation |
|--|--------------------|--|
| /...chipping.../ /...bits... trees.../ /...fading.../ /...memories...time.../ | 6 | Traditional African institutions are disappearing. |
| /...dereliction.../ /...sponged.../ /Women's...//...sang...fields...//...ploughed...terr ain...//...collective.../ | 12 | A traditional pastime of song bards (the women of old) and their efforts to maintain these pastimes. |
| /...celebrate...gains.../ /...give lyrics...lives.../ /...commune...unborn.../ /...beheld...lives...//...servitude...soul...//...dereliction...lives...//Who...soul.../ /For a song to sing... lives.../ /Today...fields...//Left...wind.../ /Remains...land.../ /The...lives.../ /It...lyrics.../ /a fading...echoing.../ /Now...poets/ /The... lips/ /The...voice/ /the song ...land/ /verses...toil/ /...they...ghost/ /...is all that remains...land./ /Tune... tenor.../ /Leaving...song.../ /The dirge...lives!/ /...lives./ /...my.../ /...scorned.../ /...my land...laboured.../ | 20 | Today there is a desire to revitalize African traditional practices, but traditional performers are no longer available. |

The authors assumed that the poet would more likely use poetic allusions to express negative constructivism, mostly directed to show the death of tradition and neglect of the old way of life. The result indicates that the poetic allusions refer to mostly three interpretations: 1) Traditional African institutions are disappearing with 6 referents, 2) A traditional pastime for song bards (the women of old) and their efforts to maintain these pastimes with 12 referents, and 3) Today traditional African institutions are neglected and there is a desire to revitalize them, but traditional performers are no longer available with 20 referents. This result corroborates the researchers' initial assumption that African writers tend to use reference details lamenting the decline of the African way of life as a result of the damaging effects of modernity.

Research question c): *Is the poem's use of prosodic features related to the message?*

To answer this question, the researchers carefully studied the poem, identified the referents, and determined the common prosodic elements. Table 3 below displays the common prosodic features found in the poem.

Table 3. Common Prosodic Feature of the Poem

| Common Prosodic Feature | Sample Referent |
|---|---|
| Alliterative: /c/ sounds /f/ sounds /v/ sounds /d/ sounds | 'chipping', 'chisels' 'fading', 'forlorn', 'field' 'vast', 'void' 'dereliction', 'decapitated' |
| The long vowels: The /t/ tones: | 'soil', 'sang', 'song', and 'story' 'tune', 'tuning', and 'tenor' |
| The onomatopoeic words: | 'Wriggling' and 'Hollering' |

The authors also assumed that the poem's prosodic features would be related to its meaning. The result suggests that the poet's choice of sound devices, mostly alliteration and onomatopoeia, supports the idea expressed in the poem (see Table 3). This result is important because it will help readers of African literature pay attention to the prosodic elements of African poetry, especially those related to poetic and literary content.

5. Discussion

This section reflects and expands on the study's main results. Generally, it focuses on the poet's use of referents, poetic allusions, and sound devices to reveal rapidly disappearing African institutions.

5.1 The poet used referents glorifying old women, bards, and old songs more often than any other words in the poem

Farouk chooses African poetry allusions as a way of demonstrating his ethnic background. This enables the reader to make the most of the visual impact of these references that 'ordinary' words cannot convey. For example, the use of the word in Extract 8 (see Appendix 1) 'sculptor' in the first line supplements the use of the word 'chisel' in the second line. Throughout his poems, he uses phrases consistent with his pastoral life and way of living, presenting the reader with these images symbolically and emphasising his claims about everyday life and ordinary people. The poet employs words such as 'strips' (line 3), 'echoing' (line 4), 'fading' (line 4), 'forlorn' (line 5), 'fields' (line 5), 'ploughed' (line 7), 'mindscape' (line 7), 'sponged' (line 12), 'scars' (line 19), 'tune' (line 19), 'Wriggling' (line 33), 'Hollering' (line 34), 'stuttering' (line 37). By juxtaposing images of neglect, loss, and emptiness, the poet paints a deep loss and sorrow for this fleeting antiquity.

Excerpt 1 serves as a harsh reminder of a rapidly vanishing legacy. The poem depicts a rustic rural agricultural life as well as women's buried retreats in remote communities. The poet's perspective of the concern and anguish of a fading institution (the African song) and its practitioners (the women of old) is the main theme of this poem, which opens symbolically. In the first stanza of the poem, the author connects 'chipping away of bits of trees' (line 1) and 'fading fragments of women's memory'. (line 4) In addition, contact between Africa and the West has had a profound impact on their traditions, culture and folklore, leading to acculturation and adulteration, and the adoption of Western lifestyles by Africans to such an extent that they had nearly totally replaced them. This finding is important. This is because, consistent with the findings of Piaget (2013), Crosman (2016), and Thulla (2019), young people who are only concerned with the present are often persuaded that traditional African practices are archaic because people integrate new information into existing frameworks without adjustments.

5.2 The poet more likely would employ poetic allusions to indicate negative constructivism

The bolded words and phrases in Extract 8 reflect neglect and erosion, which has serious consequences for today's youth, who are moulded by social, political, and economic events. These images skillfully capture this carelessness and fragility through pragmatic detail. Farouk, for example, combines creativity and ruin in his portrayal of cultural decline and transformation from the past. He argues that key components of our society are constantly being destroyed or neglected in our efforts to construct. The use of this image emphasises decadence and neglect, suggesting that the songs of these bards and heroines died long before they perished. These heroines were forgotten before they died, and this folk tradition died before it had a chance to develop. In line 12, the poet describes the inner state of mind of these women using the phrase 'terrain of their mindscape' (line 29). This is similar to the youthful receptive mind explored by [Thulla \(2019\)](#); [Porto and Zembylas, 2020](#); and [Fofanah et al. \(2021\)](#), from which the poet's topic may have originated.

The poet's use of the phrase 'the dirge of their lives!' (line 46) invites the reader to pause and interrupt the flow of the poem to summarise and embody the themes of recurring death, decay, and fading memory. The phrases 'Like a sculptor chipping away...Time chisels away bits of their memory' (lines 1-4) helps to describe the poet's mood and mental state. Extract 2 emphasises the constructivist idea — and Farouk's strong point — that not only are portions of memory erased, but the melodies of the tune are peeled away in such a way that Africans are forced to learn new habits and simply incorporate them into existing frameworks without making any changes. This is consistent with the findings of many researchers who have studied the relationship between acculturation and enculturation, including [Choy et al. \(2021\)](#), [Ma and Xia \(2021\)](#), Schumann (as cited in [Zaker, 2016](#)), [Ramos et al. \(2009\)](#), and [Zaker \(2016\)](#). Extract 3 outlines the communicative purposes of indigenous practices in the past, one of which was to communicate with the unborn (and possibly the dead). This has significant implications for the study of literary referents. Contextualizing the poet's image in literary criticism is crucial to understanding the message of poetry. As [Thulla \(2019\)](#), [Tavakoli \(2013\)](#), [Larsen-Freeman and Long \(2014\)](#), and [Télez \(2016\)](#) have found, these practices are linked to shared social values and morality among African peoples, especially indigenous communities. It helps clarify the references of the poem.

In Extract 4, a melancholy melody that seems to die entirely plays as the speaker wanders through equally depressing scenes. The poet's soul is trapped like a ghost in search of a historian and cultural performer to tell their adventures and stories. In this poem, Farouk seems to show the connection between women of the past and women of today in terms of perseverance in the face of misadventure. According to Farouk, women have used songs in the past to express themselves, contemplate their lives and free themselves from the shackles that bound their souls and 'dereliction decapitated the epic of their lives.' 'Who ploughed their soil and soul/For a song to sing the story of their lives' (line 29). These souls crave replacements that they cannot find right now. They are looking for a singer to sing a story about the enslavement of women at the time. The song of the women, on the other hand, has been demoted and dismissed. This poem makes explicit reference to the 'indigeneity of place-based' ([Witmer and Scully, 2022](#)). The speaker, on the other hand, offers a ray of hope, stating that there are still practitioners who lap the priceless but outdated tune of those forgotten women in poems, rhythm, and tunes of their songs, attempting to bring back the songs killed in the 'forlorn fields' (line 4) to sing the dirges of rural women. This is essential to the study of literature as it perpetuates the legacy of our societies, advances educational and historical studies, and strengthens our sense of identity.

The poem, in Extract 5, continues with the inevitable fading of the old institution, the respect for the women of old and the inexorable passage of time. The poet focuses on these subjects throughout the poem, but there remains only a glimmer of hope in the sense that many of Sierra Leone's traditional arts have been neglected due to the negative effects of modernisation, and even fewer people understand their special importance. The speaker expresses this in the poem with forceful lines. These are metaphors that suggest the past is going away as time passes. Farouk produces poetry in reaction to these subjects, believing that it would serve as a rallying cry for a return to the ancient ways, the preservation of traditional culture, and the remembering of our forefathers and mothers. This finding is generally significant because the decline of African traditional practices should concern not only African urban areas but also rural groups, supporting the arguments of researchers such as [Heleta \(2016\)](#), [Maylam \(2017\)](#), [Gathii \(2020\)](#), [Majavu \(2022\)](#), and [Mamdani \(2020\)](#) who argue that acculturation is harmful and that there is reason to be concerned about the incursion of a foreign way of life into Africa's. The poem's explanatory tone, which is largely moaning and gloomy, is presented in the poem, highlighting the severity of the neglect and degradation.

The poet conveys this tone in a careful and meditative manner. Indeed, the poet may be contemplating himself, but as the poem proceeds, a note of passionate explosion arises, expressing hatred and open emotional outbursts for the unsung heroines and their lost history. Words like ‘chipping’, ‘time’, ‘chisels’, ‘memory’, ‘fading’, ‘echoing’, and others have sad meditation connotations, which highlight the acculturation notion that had never achieved any good results other than discomfort among indigenous tribes in Africa. In Extract 6, the phrases in bold seem somewhat hopeful. However, the expressions highlighted in lines 38-43 continue to undermine the glimmer of hope in lines 32-37. The poem's voice not only exposes and criticises, but also provides a useful detail of a significant sector—existing song bards, poets, and melodies—from which to construct an unaltered, undiluted, or perverted dominant culture, which is a tactic used by sympathisers of the dominant culture to combat cultural infiltration and adulteration by their civilizations (Orosco, 2016; Barlow, 2017).

5.3 The poet's sound devices in the poem support the ideas presented in the poem

The imagery of the poem and the sophisticated patterns of alliteration, assonances, and melody echoes that run throughout the poem reflect the early activity of the poet and the declining trend of unwritten songs of the women of the past. In Extract 8, for example, alliterative /c/ sounds of ‘chipping’ and ‘chisels’; /f/ sounds of ‘fading’, ‘forlorn’, ‘field’; /v/ sounds of ‘vast’, ‘void’; and /d/ sounds of ‘dereliction’ and ‘decapitated’ communicate the progressive deterioration of those women's song. The poet employs long vowels such as ‘soil’, ‘sang’, ‘song’, and ‘story’ to evoke nostalgia and hymns to the deceased heroines, as well as a bell that summons the reader to act, remember, and make use of the old. He employs the /t/ tone of words like ‘tune’, ‘tuning’, and ‘tenor’ to convey hope and to remind the reader of the next steps. He also uses onomatopoeic words like ‘wriggling’ and ‘hollering’ to increase a sense of urgency. This has important implications for the context and audience to which the poet appeals in his poem, the need for reform of young people and society as a whole, as expressed in Extract 9, which consists of several end-stopped lines that appear to follow the poet's train of thought as he explores his emotions, primarily lamentations.

The way that each line (or stanza) flows into the one after it symbolizes the passage of time and the irrevocable deterioration of important African cultural practices. This has a tremendous influence on African customs, culture, and folklore as well as on emotional and psychological reactions. The reader is urged to pause briefly while reading the poem, noting specific phrases such as ‘died’, ‘ghost’, ‘screeching’, ‘toil’, and ‘remains’ to ponder what the poet is trying to say. Or, skip or delay the text to prepare the reader to transition to the next word or next line (such as the last line action of a poem). Because this study focused on only one poem, the conclusions are limited. Nonetheless, the results are important because they show how to analyse the work of African writers in general and how to examine referents so that readers can understand them. It is proposed to conduct similar studies on other poems by different authors to broaden the generalisation of the results.

6. Conclusion

The study has examined the different literary components of a poem. Reflecting on the results, it is clear that most referents by African poets are used to emphasise that traditional culture is vanishing and that the references romanticise the transient nature of beauty in poetry and the calming effects of rural pastimes. We learned about the form and meaning of African poetry by delving into the many components of Sesay's poem. This knowledge will certainly help literature students improve their critical thinking skills by examining referents in literary works and interpreting them in ways readers may not have considered before, particularly when it comes to understanding poems from Sierra Leone and other African countries.

Furthermore, through analysis of Sesay's poem, we were able to discover that African poets often used poetic allusions and literary devices to evoke forgotten experiences from the past. This understanding would allow readers of African poetry to appreciate references to Africa and to appreciate the good and bad effects of modernism. This study will also allow literary scholars to conduct a similar study, which will increase interest in the works of African writers, especially Sierra Leone writers.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Selected Extracts from Oumar Farouk Sesay's Poem 'The Song of the Women of My Land'

Extract 1

chipping away of **bits of trees**
the **fading fragments** of the **women's memory**
(Lines 1-4).

Extract 2

they sang in the forlorn fields about their lives; songs
of how they **ploughed** the **terrain** of their **mindscape** for **memories of lyrics lost in the vast void of time**, in
those days when a song beheld their lives;
when servitude cuffed the ankles of their soul,
and **dereliction decapitated** the epic of their lives (Lines 4-10).

Extract 3

With a song, they **sponged off** their anguish, to behold their **collective pain**,
to **celebrate their gains**,
give lyrics to the tune of their lives, cheat the tyranny of time,
and **commune with the yet unborn** (Lines 11-16).

Extract 4

In those days when a song **beheld their lives**; when **servitude cuffed the ankles of their soul**,
and **dereliction decapitated the epic of their lives**. (Lines 8-10)

...

Who ploughed their soil and soul
For a song to sing the story of their lives (Lines 28-29)

Extract 5

Today the tune roams the forlorn fields like sounds looking for lyrics. (Line 24-25)
The song of the women of my land **left in the memory of the wind** (Lines 30-31).
The tune tuning the tenor of my verse is all that **remains of the song of the women of my land** (Lines 43-44),
The dirge of their lives (Line 46),
Time chisels away bits of their memory (Line 2),
It strips away lyrics of the song of the women of my land (Line 3).

Extract 6

Like a sculptor **chipping** away at bits of wood,
Time chisels away bits of their **memory**
It strips away lyrics of the song of the women of my land Leaving only a **fading tune echoing** the song (Lines 1-4).

Extract 7

Now feeding the verses of poets, it echoes in fields Wriggling in rhythms and melodies,
Hollering in distant tunes
In places far afield from the forlorn fields, where the song of their lives died.

The stuttering lips of my pen
And **the screeching voice** of my nib
try to sing **the song of the women of my land** (Lines 32-37)
In **verses far from the theatre of toil**
where **they left a song that now roams the land stripped of lyrics like a scorned ghost**.
The tune tuning the tenor of my verse,
is all that remains of the song of the women of my land (Lines 40-44).

Extract 8

Like a sculptor chipping away at bits of wood, Time chisels away bits of their memory
It strips away lyrics of the song of the women of my land Leaving only a **fading tune echoing** the song,
they **sang** in the **forlorn fields**
about **their lives**; songs
of how they **ploughed** the terrain of their **mindscapes**
for memories of lyrics lost in the **vast void** of time, in those days when a **song** beheld their lives; when servitude
cuffed the ankles of their **soul**,
and **dereliction decapitated** the epic of their lives... give lyrics to the **tune** of their lives...
Yet time **strips** the lyrics and **scars** the tune, leaving a **dying song**...
Leaving the song to tell the **story** of their lives

Today the **tune** roams the forlorn fields... For a song to **sing** the story of their lives The song of the women of
my land
left in the memory of the wind.
Now feeding the verses of poets, it echoes in fields
Wriggling in rhythms and melodies,
Hollering in distant tunes... The **stuttering lips** of my pen...
The **tune tuning the tenor** of my verse... Who laboured and died **leaving a dying song**:
The dirge of their lives! (Lines 1-46).

Extract 9

where the song of their **lives died**. The stuttering lips of **my pen**
And the screeching voice of my nib
try to **sing the song** of the women of **my land** In **verses far from the theatre of toil**
where they left a song that now roams the land stripped of lyrics like a **scorned ghost**.
The tune tuning the tenor of my verse,
is all that **remains** of the song of the women of **my land** **Who laboured** and died leaving a dying song:
The dirge of their lives! (Lines 36-46)