

Orality, Indigenous Aesthetics, and the Poetics of Memory in Maria Ajima's *My Inene, My Grandma*

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Abstract

This study examines the deployment of orality and indigenous aesthetics in Maria Ajima's *My Inene, My Grandma*, with a view to demonstrating how the poet reimagines African oral traditions within contemporary written poetry. Drawing primarily on Oral Tradition Theory, with support from Postcolonial Theory, the study explores the ways repetition, chant structures, storytelling patterns, indigenous language, symbolism, and communal imagery function in the selected poems. Using qualitative textual analysis, the first five poems from the collection, including "My Inene, My Grandma", "Arias for the Marias", "My Three Little Chaps", "This Native Love" and "The Trust of a Child" selected and purposely analysed. Findings of the study reveal that Ajima's poetry is deeply-rooted in oral literary traditions, evident in its performative structures, praise forms, rhythmic patterning, and embedded folktale elements. The findings further reveal that indigenous linguistic expressions and culturally-grounded imagery serve as important aesthetic devices for preserving memory, articulating ancestry, and affirming cultural identity. The analysis also shows that the interaction of orality and indigenous aesthetics enables the poet to bridge the divide between oral tradition and written literary forms, thereby sustaining indigenous knowledge systems within contemporary poetic discourse. Through representations of grand-motherhood, kinship, communal values, and indigenous womanhood, the collection emerges as a poetic archive of cultural continuity. The study concludes that *My Inene, My Grandma* exemplifies how modern African poetry functions as a site where oral heritage is preserved, transformed, and aesthetically revitalised.

Keywords: African Literature, Poetry, Orality, Indigenous Aesthetics, Ajima Maria

1. Introduction

The relationship between African literature and oral tradition remains central to the production of contemporary African poetry, where indigenous aesthetic forms continue to shape both poetic structure and thematic expression. Oral tradition, as Ruth Finnegan (1970, p. 3) argues, "...constitutes a complex system of verbal art characterised by performance, communal participation, repetition, and cultural embeddedness". Similarly, Isidore Okpewho (1992, p. 28) observes that "African oral forms are not merely artistic expressions but vital repositories of collective memory and indigenous knowledge". In this regard, modern African poets often draw from oral resources to construct texts that are both aesthetically rich and culturally grounded.

Maria Ajima's *My Inene, My Grandma* exemplifies this continuity between the oral and the written. The collection is deeply rooted in indigenous experience, deploying oral stylistic features such as repetition, chant-like structures, praise naming, and the integration of indigenous language. In the poem "My Inene, My Grandma", for instance, the repetitive invocation *My Inene, my grandma* functions as a form of praise poetry, echoing traditional African modes of address and reverence. The poem further

incorporates indigenous expressions such as “Iyeka, onkam, enwa”, which not only enrich the texture of the poem but also signal a linguistic and cultural identity that resists complete assimilation into English. This blending of languages aligns with what Ngūgĩ wa Thiongo (1986, p. 11) describes as “the reclamation of African linguistic space within colonial languages”.

Beyond language, Ajima’s poetry reflects oral storytelling traditions through its vivid imagery and narrative elements. The grandmother figure in “*My Inene, My Grandma*” is presented as a storyteller who recounts folktales of hares and rabbits, elephants and lions, thereby invoking the animal tale tradition central to African oral narratives. Such representations reflect the role of the elder as a custodian of cultural knowledge. This idea aligns with Jan Vansina’s (1985, p. 27) assertion that oral tradition functions as “...a source of historical knowledge and cultural continuity”. The collection also extends its engagement with orality and indigenous aesthetics to themes of lineage and communal identity. In “Arias for the Marias”, the repeated naming of *Maria Egbe* followed by different names such as Jennifer, Ohenwam, Omenka and Okoh among others creates a rhythmic, chant-like sequence reminiscent of liturgical recitation and African naming practices. Similarly, “My Three Little Chaps” and “The Trust of a Child” foreground intergenerational relationships, illustrating how values, behaviours, and identities are transmitted within the family unit. The latter poem, in particular, employs simple, proverbial expressions such as “The trust of a child, / Is like a hook on a strong wall” (line1&2). This mirrors the aphoristic style typical of oral wisdom traditions.

Furthermore, Ajima’s poetry reconfigures traditional gender roles within an indigenous lens. In *My Inene, My Grandma*, the *grandma* is portrayed not only as a caregiver and storyteller but also as a farmer, hunter (stanza 4) and participant in the king’s court: “She stood shoulder to shoulder with the men... She spoke her mind and spoke the truth” (stanza 5). This multifaceted representation challenges reductive portrayals of African women while remaining rooted in cultural specificity. As Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994, p. 45) notes, “African women’s experiences are best understood within their socio-cultural contexts rather than through imposed external frameworks”.

This paper therefore argues that Maria Ajima’s *My Inene, My Grandma* is a compelling example of how contemporary African poetry sustains oral tradition through the use of indigenous aesthetic forms, while simultaneously constructing memory, identity, and cultural continuity. Through close textual analysis of selected poems using qualitative methodology and postcolonial theory, the study demonstrates that Ajima’s work does not only preserves oral elements but also reimages them within written literary discourse, thereby bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

2. Conceptual Clarification

The basic preoccupation of this section is to briefly explain the major concepts that are relevant to this study.

2.1. Oral Literature

Oral literature refers to verbal art forms that are composed, performed, and transmitted through speech within a community. It includes genres such as folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, chants, and songs, all of which are embedded in social and cultural practices. Finnegan (1970, p. 2) defines oral literature as “a performative and dynamic art characterised by features such as repetition, audience interaction, and variability across performances”. Similarly, Okpewho (1992, p. 31) emphasises that oral literature functions as “a repository of communal memory, preserving historical experiences and cultural values across generations”. In addition, Walter J. Ong (1982, p. 36) explains that “oral literature is shaped by the conditions of primary orality, where thought and expression depend on mnemonic devices such as rhythm, redundancy, and formulaic structures”. These perspectives collectively highlight oral literature as both an artistic and cultural system rooted in performance and communal knowledge.

2.2. Poetry

Poetry is a distinct form of literary expression marked by the deliberate and artistic use of language to convey meaning, emotion, and experience in a condensed and aesthetically patterned manner. William Wordsworth (2012, p. 611) defines poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity”, thereby foregrounding its emotional and reflective dimensions. In a more formalist sense, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1817, p. 12) conceives poetry as “the best words in the best order”. This emphasises the precision and craftsmanship involved in poetic composition. From a linguistic perspective, Roman Jakobson (1960, p. 356) argues that “poetry foregrounds the poetic function of language, in which attention is drawn to the message for its own sake through patterns of sound, structure, and parallelism”. This establishes poetry as a highly structured and aesthetic use of language that combines emotion, form, and meaning.

2.3. Indigenous Orality

Indigenous orality refers specifically to oral forms and communicative practices that are deeply embedded in the cultural, linguistic, and epistemological aspects of indigenous communities. It emphasises the idea that oral expression is not merely a mode of communication but a way of knowing and preserving identity. Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986, p. 15) asserts that “language and orality are central to the construction of cultural identity, arguing that African oral traditions embody the historical and philosophical consciousness of the people”. Pio Zirimu, who introduced the concept of orature, (1971, p. 8) contends that “African oral forms should be recognised as complete literary systems with their own aesthetic and structural integrity”. Likewise, Mazisi Kunene (1981, p. 23) maintains that “indigenous oral traditions reflect a holistic worldview in which art, history, and philosophy are inseparably intertwined”. These scholarly positions present indigenous orality as a culturally grounded and intellectually rich mode of expression that sustains communal identity and knowledge.

2.4. Indigenous Aesthetics

Indigenous aesthetics refer to the artistic principles and evaluative standards that arise from within a specific cultural context, particularly those rooted in African traditions. This aesthetics emphasise functionality, communal relevance, symbolism, and the integration of art with everyday life. Chinweizu and his collaborators (1980, p. 21) argue that “African literature should be judged according to indigenous criteria that prioritise clarity, social purpose, and cultural authenticity rather than imported Western standards. Abiola Irele (2001, p. 69) further observes that “African aesthetics often combine artistic beauty with moral and social instruction, reflecting the collective orientation of African societies”.

In addition, Wole Soyinka (1985, p. 5) highlights the symbolic and ritualistic dimensions of African art, noting that “aesthetic expression is deeply connected to spiritual and cultural realities”. This define indigenous aesthetics as a culturally embedded system that shapes both the form and function of artistic expression in African literature. This provides a solid foundation for analysing Maria Ajima’s *My Inene, My Grandma*, particularly in relation to its deployment of oral techniques and indigenous aesthetic forms.

3. Empirical Review

Empirical studies on orality, oral literature, and indigenous aesthetics in African poetry have consistently demonstrated that contemporary African writers draw extensively from oral resources to construct meaning, reinforce identity, and sustain cultural continuity.

A significant empirical contribution is provided by Finnegan, whose extensive field-based research on African oral traditions establishes that oral literature is fundamentally performance-oriented and dependent on context, audience, and occasion. Her study shows that oral texts are not fixed but dynamically recreated during performance, with elements such as gesture, tone, and audience interaction shaping meaning. This finding is crucial for understanding how written African poetry, including Ajima’s work, attempts to simulate performance through repetition, rhythm, and vivid imagery.

Similarly, Walter J. Ong, in his empirical and theoretical investigations, demonstrates that oral cultures rely heavily on mnemonic devices such as repetition, redundancy, and formulaic expressions to aid memory and transmission. His distinction between primary and secondary orality highlights how modern written texts often retain oral features despite being mediated through literacy. This insight is particularly relevant to contemporary African poetry, where oral techniques are consciously embedded within written forms as eminent in Ajima’s *My Inene, My Grandma*.

Another important empirical study is that of Isidore Okpewho, who examines African oral narratives and concludes that they function as repositories of communal history and cultural values. His analysis reveals that oral forms are not merely artistic but serve social and educational purposes, reinforcing norms and collective identity. This aligns with poems such as *The Trust of a Child*, where moral instruction is conveyed through simple, proverbial language. In a study of contemporary African poetry, Stephen T. Ogundipe analyses the poetry of Ezenwa-Ohaeto and finds that the incorporation of oral techniques such as chant structures, repetition, and indigenous imagery enhances both the aesthetic and communicative functions of the text. He argues that the use of orality in African poetry should not be seen merely as a reaction to colonial influence but as a deliberate artistic strategy that enriches meaning and form.

The foundational research of Milman Parry and Albert Lord also provides empirical evidence on the mechanics of oral composition. Their studies of oral poets reveal that repetition, formulaic expressions, and standardised imagery are essential tools for composition and performance. These features facilitate both memorisation and creativity, allowing performers to adapt narratives to different contexts. This is applicable to African poetry, where similar devices are used to evoke oral performance.

4. Theoretical Framework

Although extensive scholarship exists on African oral traditions and their influence on contemporary African poetry, little or no scholarly attention has been paid to Maria Ajima’s *My Inene, My Grandma*. Existing studies have largely concentrated on canonical poets, leaving Ajima’s deployment of indigenous oral aesthetics underexplored. This study seeks to fill that gap. This study is anchored on Oral Tradition Theory as its major theoretical framework. Oral Tradition Theory is associated principally with Milman Parry in the 1930s and was further developed by Albert Lord in 1960 through the publication of *The Singer of Tales*. The theory emerged from Parry’s studies of oral epic composition and was developed to explain how oral poets compose, preserve, and transmit literary material without reliance on writing. It was propounded to challenge the assumption that literary creativity depends solely on written tradition and to establish that oral performance possesses its own sophisticated structures of composition, memory, and artistry.

The theory was propounded primarily to account for the structural principles underlying oral compositions and to validate oral traditions as legitimate literary systems with aesthetic and cultural significance. It also sought to show that oral expression functions as a medium for preserving history, transmitting communal values, and sustaining cultural identity. This theory is relevant to the analysis of the present study because Maria Ajima’s *My Inene, My Grandma* is deeply rooted in oral literary traditions. The selected poems employ repetition, chant-like structures, praise invocations, storytelling patterns, indigenous expressions, and rhythmic patterning. For example, the recurring refrain “My Inene, my grandma” in *My Inene, My Grandma* reflects formulaic repetition associated with oral performance, while *Arias for the Marias* mirrors oral praise chanting through repetitive naming patterns. The theory therefore provides an appropriate framework for analysing how Ajima adapts oral techniques within written poetry and how these features contribute to meaning, memory, and cultural preservation.

This study also draws supportive insight from Postcolonial Theory. The theory is largely associated with Edward Said through *Orientalism* (1978), and was further developed by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986). Postcolonial Theory emerged to interrogate colonial domination, challenge imperial representations, and reclaim indigenous voices, histories, and identities in formerly colonised societies. Its relevance to the present study lies in its usefulness for analysing Ajima’s use of indigenous language, cultural imagery, and representations of African womanhood as acts of cultural assertion. The indigenous expressions in *My Inene, My Grandma*, the celebration of ancestral identity, and the affirmation of communal values can be read as resisting cultural erasure and reclaiming indigenous consciousness.

5. Orality in *My Inene, My Grandma* and *Arias for the Marias*

The presence of orality in Maria Ajima’s *My Inene, My Grandma* is most pronounced in the poet’s use of repetition, rhythmic patterning, chant-like structures, and embedded storytelling techniques. These features collectively simulate the performance-oriented nature of African oral tradition. The use of animal figures recalls the African trickster tradition, where animals function as symbolic agents through which moral lessons and social values are communicated.

In *My Inene, My Grandma*, repetition serves as a dominant oral device. The recurring phrase “My Inene, my grandma” appears at multiple points in the poem, functioning as a refrain that anchors the narrative and reinforces emotional attachment. This repetitive invocation mirrors the structure of African praise poetry, where the subject is repeatedly addressed and celebrated. The effect is both rhythmic and performative, suggesting that the poem could be recited aloud in a communal setting.

The poem also exhibits strong storytelling patterns, another hallmark of orality. As can be seen in the last seven line of stanza 1 below:

...To tell us stories,
A good story teller,
She always had a good tale to tell;
Folktales of hares and rabbits,
Elephants and lions,
Scorpions and ants,
Hunchbacks and boatmen.

This directly evokes the tradition of folktale narration, a central component of African oral literature. The enumeration of animal characters reflects the didactic and entertaining nature of oral storytelling, where animals often serve as symbolic figures in moral instruction. This narrative insertion transforms the poem into a layered text that not only describes the grandmother but also re-enacts her role as a custodian of oral knowledge.

Rhythm and musicality are further enhanced through parallel structures and descriptive sequencing. For instance, the lines “Sang like a bird, Jumped like a squirrel, Wiggled her feet like a nimble cat” in stanza two create a patterned progression that mimics oral performance. The use of similes drawn from nature contributes to a flowing, almost song-like quality, reinforcing the auditory appeal of the poem. Additionally, the insertion of indigenous expressions, “Iyeka, onkam, enwa..., iyeke Ihuka, anyilehi ikpanwepeka...” in stanza two introduces a tonal and phonetic variation that heightens the musicality of the text. These lines resemble chants or incantations, suggesting a performative context in which meaning is conveyed not only through semantics but also through sound.

Similarly, *Arias for the Marias* demonstrates a pronounced chant structure through its repetitive naming pattern. The sequential listing, “Maria Egbe Jennifer, Maria Egbe Ohenwam, Maria Egbe Omenka...” in the poem creates a rhythmic cadence akin to a litany or invocation. This structure reflects communal naming practices and evokes the oral tradition of praise singing, where individuals are celebrated through repeated mention of their names and attributes.

The repetition of “Maria Egbe” acts as a unifying refrain, while the variation in the accompanying names introduces a dynamic rhythm. The predictable yet flexible structure allows for expansion, as indicated in the line “More Marias on the way coming,” (line 15). This suggests that the poem can be extended in performance to include additional names in the generations to come. This openness is a defining feature of oral texts, which are inherently adaptable and participatory.

6. The Representation of Memory, Ancestry, and Intergenerational Relationships in *My Three Little Chaps* and *The Trust of a Child*

Memory, ancestry, and intergenerational continuity constitute major thematic concerns in Maria Ajima’s *My Inene, My Grandma*, revealing the poet’s deep engagement with familial bonds and cultural inheritance. In African literary imagination, memory often functions not simply as recollection but as a means of preserving history, identity, and communal values. As Abiola Irele observes, “...memory in African literature frequently serves as a medium through which the past remains active within the present” (74). This understanding is central to Ajima’s poetry, where memory becomes a vehicle for ancestral presence and generational continuity.

In *My Three Little Chaps*, memory is mediated through affectionate recollection and intimate observation. The speaker recalls moments of childhood with a tenderness that transforms ordinary experiences into enduring cultural memory. The opening lines below justify this position:

*My three little chaps,
Marching gayly to school,
Smart and sprightly looking*

This establish a celebratory tone that frames childhood as a site of promise and continuity. Yet beyond the immediate portrait of children lies a deeper concern with lineage and inherited identity. This is particularly evident in the description of Junior's smile as seen the lines below:

"It bears the hallmarks of all your forebears (line 22)
From time immemorial". (Line 23)

This lines are significant in its explicit invocation of ancestry. The child is not represented as an isolated individual but as the embodiment of ancestral continuity. The phrase "from time immemorial" stretches identity beyond the present into an expansive historical and genealogical dimension. This aligns with John Mbiti's (1969, p. 108) well-known argument that "...in African thought, the living remains deeply connected to both ancestors and future generations in a continuum of existence..."

Ajima further represents intergenerational relationships through the figure of the grandmother in the poem. Josh is remembered following "Grandma round the house," (line 5&6), pointing at landmarks and engaging the world through her presence. This depiction emphasizes the grandmother as mediator of childhood experience and transmitter of cultural orientation. The domestic space becomes a site of informal education, where observation, companionship, and affection facilitate generational bonding.

Moreover, the poem foregrounds memory not as static nostalgia but as active preservation. The poet's recollections of each child, their gestures, cries, smiles, and temperaments, function as acts of inscription, preserving fleeting moments and memorial impulses against time.

The theme of intergenerational relationships is developed more explicitly in "The Trust of a Child", where the relationship between child and parent is presented as foundational to human development. The opening metaphor, "The trust of a child, Is like a hook on a strong wall," (1&2), immediately frames the parent-child bond as one of dependence, stability, and support. The metaphor is deeply suggestive, positioning parental figures as the structures upon which the child's world is anchored.

The poem repeatedly emphasises the formative role of parents in shaping identity. Lines such as "The parent is the mirror of life the child copies" (line 20) and "Parents are important soils of life" (line 23), portray parents as both models and nurturing grounds for growth. These metaphors evoke indigenous conceptions of relational identity, where personhood emerges through familial and communal structures rather than individual autonomy.

Ancestry is also implicitly present in "The Trust of a Child" through the idea of replication. The assertion that "the expression on our faces are exact replica of that of our parents" (line 21&22), suggests not only biological inheritance but the transmission of habits, values, and identities across generations. Here ancestry is represented as living continuity, inscribed in both body and behaviour.

7. The Reflection of Indigenous Aesthetics in the Selected Poems

A major strength of Maria Ajima's *My Inene, My Grandma* lies in its deployment of indigenous aesthetic principles that are deeply rooted in African cultural consciousness. Rather than presenting beauty as detached formal ornamentation, these poems embody aesthetics that are cultural, ethical, and communal. One prominent indigenous aesthetic principle in the selected poems is symbolism. In *My Inene, My Grandma*, the grandmother functions not merely as a personal figure but as a symbolic embodiment of ancestral wisdom, feminine strength, and cultural continuity. She is represented as farmer, hunter, dancer, storyteller, and adviser in the king's court (stanza 4). These multiple identities elevate her from an individual grandmother to a symbolic cultural archetype. Her farming of "the king crop, yams" (line 39), is particularly symbolic. In many African cultures, yam signifies fertility, sustenance, prestige, and communal wealth; thus, the grandmother's relationship with yam cultivation symbolically associates her with life-giving abundance.

Likewise, her pipe, "wooden or clay pipe (ihiko)," (line 25), carries symbolic significance. It is more than a domestic object; it signals tradition, elderhood, and indigenous lifestyle associated with African culture. Such symbolism accords with Soyinka's (1985, p. 12) view that "African artistic representation often invests ordinary objects with layered cultural and spiritual meanings". Through these symbols, Ajima encodes cultural memory within poetic imagery.

Animal imagery is equally significant as an indigenous aesthetic device. In describing the grandmother in *My Inene, My Grandma*, the poet writes she "Sang like a bird, Jumped like a squirrel, Wiggled her feet like a nimble cat." (Line 19, 20, 21 & 22). These similes are drawn from the natural environment and they reflect indigenous aesthetic sensibility in which human life is imaginatively linked to the natural world. Rather than relying on abstract metaphors, Ajima draws from familiar ecological imagery, grounding poetic beauty in local experience.

Imagery across the poems also demonstrates this indigenous orientation. In "My Three Little Chaps", the image of children "marching gayly to school" (line 2) evokes innocence and vitality, while the phrase "sparkling eyes like stars" (line 14) draws on cosmic imagery to celebrate childhood wonder. Such imagery is simple yet resonant, reflecting an aesthetic that values emotional immediacy over excessive abstraction. Even the child's "sweet African smile" (line 21) is not merely descriptive but culturally evocative, linking physical expression to ancestral heritage.

Similarly, "This Native Love" derives much of its aesthetic force from culturally grounded imagery. Love is figured "like a wave, Sweeping me over," (line 2&3), suggesting emotional intensity through natural metaphor. The phrase "this love is just

native” (line 8) itself is aesthetically significant because it transforms indigeneity into an emotional and cultural value. Love is not universal in abstract terms but specifically rooted, culturally inflected, and therefore distinctively meaningful.

Functionality is another important indigenous aesthetic principle, is also evident in the poems. African aesthetics often assume that art should perform social and ethical functions, not merely entertain. This is clear in “The Trust of a Child,” where poetic beauty serves moral instruction. The metaphoric language – “Parents are important soils of life” – is aesthetically evocative, but it also teaches. Similarly, the folktale references in *My Inene*, *My Grandma* are not decorative; they signal the educative role of storytelling.

Rhythm and performative patterning further contribute to indigenous aesthetics in the collection. The chant-like repetitions in “My Inene, My Grandma” and “Arias for the Marias” echo oral performance traditions where sound, repetition, and audience participation are part of aesthetic experience. Here beauty is not confined to visual textuality but extends to sonic and performative dimensions. This corresponds with indigenous aesthetic systems in which literature often overlaps with music, dance, and ritual performance. Across the selected poems, simplicity itself emerges as an indigenous aesthetic value. The diction is largely accessible, direct, and unpretentious, yet deeply evocative. This simplicity aligns with oral-derived aesthetic forms where clarity and resonance are often valued above obscurity.

8. How Does Maria Ajima’s Poetry Bridge the gap between Oral Tradition (OT) and Written Literary Forms in Contemporary African Literature?

One of the most significant accomplishments of Maria Ajima’s *My Inene*, *My Grandma* is its successful mediation between oral tradition and written literary expression. Rather than treating orality and writing as opposing modes, Ajima’s poetry reveals them as complementary forms capable of enriching one another. Through this synthesis, the collection demonstrates how contemporary African poetry can preserve oral heritage while operating within the conventions of written literature. This confirms Walter J. Ong’s (1982, p. 11) argument that writing does not eliminate orality but often absorbs and transforms oral features within literate forms.

A major way Ajima bridges this gap is through the textual recreation of oral performance. In *My Inene*, *My Grandma*, repetition, rhythmic sequencing, praise invocation, and embedded folktale references, reproduce features associated with oral storytelling and praise poetry, yet they are carefully structured within written poetic form. The repeated refrain “My Inene, my grandma” functions like a performative chant, while simultaneously serving as a structural device that organises the poem. This dual function illustrates how oral techniques can be aesthetically adapted within written literature.

The storytelling segments in the same poem also demonstrate this synthesis. References to folktales involving “hares and rabbits, elephants and lions” invoke oral narrative traditions, but their placement within lyric poetry transforms storytelling into written poetry. What would traditionally be a performed narrative becomes embedded within a written lyric mode. Ajima also bridges orality and writing through the preservation of oral speech patterns within written language. The indigenous expressions inserted in “My Inene, My Grandma” retain the tonal, performative, and communal qualities of spoken discourse even as they appear in print. Their presence suggests that writing can preserve oral voice rather than silence it.

“Arias for the Marias” offers another striking example of this bridge through its adaptation of oral chant structures into written poetry. The repetitive naming pattern resembles oral praise recitation or communal invocation, yet it is arranged with deliberate poetic economy and structural balance characteristic of written verse. The poem thus inhabits a space where oral litany and modern lyric intersect.

Another dimension of this mediation lies in the blending of oral simplicity with written complexity. Poems such as *The Trust of a Child* employ the directness, proverb-like wisdom, and moral clarity associated with oral traditions, yet beneath this apparent simplicity lies carefully constructed metaphor and thematic layering. The image “The trust of a child, Is like a hook on a strong wall” (line 1&2) carries proverbial resonance while functioning as literary symbolism. Here oral wisdom becomes literary metaphor. This duality is perhaps the clearest indication that Ajima’s poetry occupies an intermediate space between oral and written modes.

9. Conclusion

This study has examined the deployment of orality and indigenous aesthetics in Maria Ajima’s *My Inene*, *My Grandma*, demonstrating that the collection is deeply rooted in African oral traditions and indigenous cultural consciousness. Through the application of Oral Tradition Theory, supported by insights from Postcolonial Theory, the study has shown that Ajima’s poetry is not merely a written artistic production but a continuation and reimagining of oral literary heritage within contemporary African poetry.

The analysis established that elements of orality such as repetition, rhythmic patterning, chant structures, naming and praise invocation, and storytelling techniques are central to the poetic construction of the selected poems. The study also revealed that Ajima’s use of indigenous language and culturally specific expressions serves both aesthetic and ideological functions, enhancing poetic texture while affirming linguistic and cultural identity. The analysis demonstrated that themes of memory, ancestry, and intergenerational relationships occupy a significant place in the collection.

The study equally established that indigenous aesthetic principles, particularly symbolism, nature-based imagery, functionality, and praise forms are deeply embedded in the poems and contribute to their cultural rootedness.

A major finding of the study is that the interaction between orality and indigenous aesthetics contributes significantly to the construction of cultural identity in the collection. Closely related to this is the finding that the collection successfully bridges the divide between oral tradition and written literary forms, showing that contemporary African poetry can preserve oral resources while engaging modern literary techniques.

The study concluded that Ajima's poetry embodies a productive fusion of oral tradition and literary modernity. Through this fusion, the collection preserves indigenous knowledge systems, celebrates communal memory, and reasserts African cultural identity in contemporary poetic discourse. The study thus affirms that orality and indigenous aesthetics remain enduring and dynamic forces in African literature, and that *My Inene, My Grandma* stands as a valuable contribution to that tradition.

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