
ORALITY AND OJAIDE'S GLOBAL VISION: A STUDY OF *I WANT TO DANCE*

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ABSTRACT

No art work emanates from a vacuum as artists harp on happenings around them to produce their works. As such, creative writers often engage social reality in order to project their understanding of the society through reconstruction of artistic materials. Oral art forms which encapsulate a people's way of life provide the aesthetic residue which is transposed by artists to make comment on contemporary social practices. This paper considers Ojaide's transposition of oral traditions in projecting a universal vision in his poetic collection, *I want to Dance*. The poet is seen as an ideologue whose work bears imprint of a revolutionary as anchored on the theory of dialectical materialism. The paper concludes that there is a symbiosis between art and society as art seeks to rid the society of social doldrums.

Introduction

Joel Adedeji [1983:134] captures a rather embracing scope and definition of what constitutes oral tradition thus:

Oral tradition is that complex corpus of verbal or spoken art created as a means of recalling the past and based on the ideals, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of the peoples. It is acquired through learning or imitation and its of the peoples is to condition social action and foster social interaction.

The scope of oral tradition according to Adedeji has such typology as literary and historical which include poetic genre, oral formulae, narratives. This goes further to include riddles and lyric poems. In his two books, *My mothers poem {1994}* and *African orature and human right {1991}* as reviewed by Adeleke Adeeko under the title: "Theory and Practice in African Orature" Micrero Mugoout lines a rather functional thrust of the oral tradition as expressing

Both the society's negative and positive qualities; its strength and challenges, its justice and injustices, its realities and ideals. The productions and performances advocate in various ways both the basic rights {of the rule of law, fair play justice} and those that pertain to subsistence and material survival (work, fair compensation, freedom from want, healthy living)

From the foregoing, oral tradition or the verbal art is both functional and formal which characteristics in turn define a wide spectrum of social interactions of its users. As cultural aesthetic, oral tradition aggregates the common ideals and existence of respective ethnic groups Jones(992) maintains that writers of African background who adopt oral art forms do not only succeed but that it helps them project their ideas, themes and visions which are global and wider in application and concerns.

Ojaide's volume lends itself to investigating social vices which contradict the principle of equality social well being respectively. *I want to dance* manifests a radical transposition of the oral art forms with which the poet registers his protest against perpetrators of ills in the society. The collection catalogues such social vices as corruption, inhumanity, women abuse, exploitation, maladministration, use of brute force among others. The poet says these acts are symptomatic of oppressive tendencies, leadership ineptitude, neo-colonialism, dictatorship and corrupt regimes all over the globe. It is the radical stance that portrays him as an ideologue of Marxist leaning. Silone (1968:123) likens the poet's stance to the willingness of post-independence African radical writers who have come to take up the challenges of nation building, confront social problems and leadership crisis faced by the continent. This view is corroborated by Jones in his editorial article: "Modernity and Roots" (1992) in his observation of the inspiration drawn by African writers from the oral resources.

The ethnic background offers them the metaphor for their vision. What the writers see around them as they survey their political and social mismanagement, corruption, violent upheavals and general misery. It is interesting that in looking to the future, some of the most hard-headed {writers} take backward glance at the cohesion which characterized small ethnic societies. This is not in the best of them mere stagnant nostalgia but a search for an ethic nurtured within a small idealist community and spread by means of a moral revolution throughout the nation and more widely.

Thus, the aesthetics which informs the volume *I want to dance* is reflective of Marxist tenets, a dialectical investigation of social reality as experienced in major parts of the globe. In his poetry, Ojaide does not only expose the ills observable in the polity, he points out the distabilising effect of these contradictions and the need for social re-engineering.

Ojaide, Art and Dialectical Aesthetics

Ojaide subscribes to two schools of thought that a writer should put art at the service of the party and that the ultimate vision of a revolutionary in order to move himself forward is to reveal the moving social forces and portray his characters as expressions of these forces. The 'party' in Ojaide's case is the metaphor for the nation, his native land and by extension the globe as a whole. The poet's conception of the art shares Osundare's idea of honest cognizing of human existence and influencing 'the way others cognize and segment human experience' (1994). Eagleton (1990) and Caudwell (1937) in their interpretation of Marxist theory view art as ideology and that art forms share significant relationship with the forms of society. Other literary theorists like Marcuse (1978) believe that aesthetics and politics are symbiotic as art points to a better world. Lukacas (1964) marries these conceptions when he insists that Marxist aesthetics and art have greater things in common. He based his conclusion on the fact that Marxism is a realistic theory which stipulates truthful representation while literature goes beyond the surface in revealing social reality and societal contradictions.

The above conceptions agree with Marx's and Engel's ideas that all forms of culture function as society in relation to its economic organization. While art is typically held as capable of penetrating socio-dynamic of the society that produces it, Shusterman (1964:275) gives a broad overview of these positions.

The Marxist's view of art follows from the Marxist theory of the relation of superstructure and base. In general terms, the basic principle is that art, like all higher activities, belongs to the cultural superstructure and is determined by socio-historical conditions, in particular economic ones. It is argued that a connection can always and must be traced between a work of art and its socio-historical matrix, since art is in some sense a reflection of social reality.

A background knowledge of Marxist theory will help illustrate better and enhance our understanding of the thrusts of Marxist aesthetics. Jostein's narrative, *Sophie World* (1995:296) provides rudimentary analysis and interpretation of Marxist theory in a broader sense. According to him, Marxism is the existential philosophy, a philosophy of action and of change which thrives on the theory of dialectical materialism or historical materialism. In Marxism, dialectical materialism is the constant interaction between the bases and the superstructure. The theory stipulates that political events are due to the conflict of social forces arising from economic conditions. The material, the economic and social relations are referred to as bases while the superstructure consists of what Althusser (1971:143) called the ideological State Apparatuses, ISAS. These are the law, art, religion, morals, philosophy and science. Marxist theory holds that historical changes occur as a result of material change as affected by economic forces. That it is the material essence that influences the way of thinking and ideas propounded by the society. This translates to mean that the superstructure or the ISAS reflect the bases of the society. However, this reflection or representation of social reality, historical changes and societal contradictions are brought about by the relationship between what Marxist theory identifies as the three levels of the bases. These are condition of production, means of production and ownership of production.

In African context, the conflict had been between feudal lords, the Aristocrats and their subjects. With the coming of colonialism, it was between the colonial masters and the colonized; and now the conflict is between neo-colonialists, the oppressors within and their fellow African. Justifying the relevance of Marxist aesthetics to African writings in painting myriad of problems bedeviling the continent, Ngara (1990:8) maintains that "Marxist Criticism is capable of unveiling the ideology: it is capable of revealing the ideology of the text whether it is overtly or implicitly expressed". According to Ngara, Marxism is not only a global vision seeking to encompass the entire field of humanity but that it takes in its stride the totality of human history. He emphasizes:

A Marxist analysis of African Literature cannot turn a blind eye to the problems attendant on Africa's encounter with Europe....Marxist aesthetics thus illuminates African lives. Only a Marxist inspired analysis

can give us sufficient insight into the wide spectrum of ideological stances adopted by such a large number of writers.

Ojaide's works are produced within the context of dialectical vision. Marxist aesthetics stresses the importance of situating a work of art in the socio-cultural context of its production to help comprehension of the work. This agrees partly with Lenin's rejection of art for art sake. Also, Ojaide's treatise in his volume shares Marxist's resentment of alienation. As a humanistic theory, Marxist aesthetic conception of human being detests the contradiction of alienating labour from product. A survey of Ojaide's themes and motifs in his poetic volumes reveals a visionary engagement that is universal. In coming to terms with his global ideas, the poet locates his vision within a more embracing human science as impinged against a social order which dominates or colours Africa's painful experience in relation to world polity. Obafemi's rhetoric but probing comment highlights better the poet's vision for his beleaguered race by painting the gory picture of socio – economic and political life of Africa.

But where specifically, does our society stand in this precipice? Can we participate in universalist notions of politics, economy and culture? Africa which stands uniquely out in the post-colonial world is presently plagued by drought. It is war – ravaged and refuge – prone. Africa's typifying features today are starvation, disease and poverty. In view of all these, what boundaries, what borders can we draw for society? The post-modernist predilection towards universality of the world order requires critical attention and sober discourse. (Obafemi 2001,p.2)

Ojaide has several volumes to his credit which register him as an undoubtedly established poet. His thematic preoccupation reflects issues and concerns that are global in nature. To Ojaide, humanity is the same recognizable through or exhibiting traits that are common denominators as belief system, feelings and faith. All over the world, certain fundamental principles are preached or canvassed which humanity aspires to attain. These are freedom, equality, egalitarianism, good governance, democracy, love for one another, patriotism and peace. One significant theme which runs through all his collections is Ojaide's concern for the oppressed, the deprived and the under-privileged, the common man on the street who falls victim of class struggle, capitalist isolationist and commodification practices and baleful political leadership aura. In pursuance of his global crusade, Ojaide seeks to expose to the world the arrest of his native land through heinous practices. He equally seeks the sympathy and support of the world in condemning and the eventual stamping out of all dictatorial and exploitative socio-political syndicate hibernating on his land. Since the Niger Delta, Nigeria and Africa are integral part of the globe, the inhabitants are human beings and supposed world citizens whose situation should be salvaged and rescued from dehumanizing living conditions and socio – economic suffocation brought upon them by commerce mavericks and greedy cabal in governance. This he puts across through retrospective reflections on the historical circumstances that characterize Africa's exploitative capitalist phase. The poet lampoons those unpatriotic elements who preside over the continent's monumental wastage and political setback. It is against these elements who masquerade as leaders that Ojaide demands justice as he calls for a total annihilation of the pejorative system and possible

overthrow of the cabal in the cloak of neocolonial overlords. He declares this global mission unequivocally in his collection, *I Want to Dance*.

Today, I offer you the healing song
that raises the fowl from its broken legs,
releases the deer from its wound into the wilds
& turns the disabled bee to work on its wings.
I fill the song with draughts of miracle herbs –
take as many deep breaths in your wakeful hours
& at night, as guest of sleep, you will travel far
to leave behind for good stifling discomfort.

Think of your love and let the blood warm up.
The world smiles and shares out blessings –
the correspondence raises from bed to street!
Today I offer you only the healing song. (p. 29)

The pathetic spectacle of the Niger Delta represents the class struggle employed by the poet in the world polity. Africa, the poet's continent perhaps experiences the darker aspect of history in her socio – economic and political movement and evolution.

When day broke
On the Niger, the Delta
Still disrobed and bleeding –
The robbers had neither removed
All the loot nor sheathed daggers
But the cry of the wounded
Stifled by massive storms
Drew a column of silence. (p. 46)

I Want To Dance as a Global Gong

I want to Dance encapsulates a vision that is global in nature. The volume is made up of 51 poems and divided into three main sections. It is a catalogue of the poet's personal observations of the society. The lines are evocative lyrics which are laden with images, wits, parables, aphorism, proverbs, and symbols with which the poet interprets and gives meaning to the socio-economic and politico – religious beats of the globe. The collection contains poems that are linked together by the vision of the journey archetype. It is an account of the wanderer – poet who navigates eastward and westward to comb the habitat of man. The poet's artistic searchlight is beamed in all nooks and crannies of both his birthplace and the rest of the globe. The poet provides an insightful explanation of his thematic focus in the preface.

I want to Dance is an individualized metaphor of the human condition. The collection is a song in three segments. There is movement from one emotional state to another in a journey that sometimes takes from the west to east and at

other times from night through dawn to day. The quest thus has its spiritual importance.(p.6)

The volume which has a more universal appeal structurally and thematically is *I want to Dance*. In arriving at the thematic focus of the volume, the poet provides a useful and insightful preface in his words which serves as the basis for critical review of the collection. What mostly illuminates the global undercurrent of the volume is aptly captured in Ojaide's statement which though seems rendered in the literal sense; it has its far reaching literary symbolic implication. As Ojaide states, each segment is a passionate experience which defines an emotional state that catapults the poet-persona from one emotional state to the other. Ojaide reveals "most of the poems were written in 2000-2001 in Nigeria, the United States, and during and after travels. And that regardless of where ever the god of songs gives him cause to sing". (p.6.) Thus the collection remains memories of the poet's travels. These travels as Ojaide says are both "real and imagined because it is appropriated from another artist which covers wide range of areas, climes, cultures and places". He emphasizes that the travels which are to the red Sea, Italy, Morocco, Baghdad, Jerusalem and Santa Maria, assume symbolic importance and evoke historical and social events at home." (p.6.)

Thus the aesthetic which informs the volume is spread and covered in the three main segments which are as well interwoven. Ojaide says the poetic volume is divided into three main sections with each section containing an idea but unified in the poet's global dissection of socio-political and cultural milieu all over the world. Each segment, the poet states is a passionate experience which defines an emotional state as the poet moves from one polity to the other gathering experiences and knowledge. But this emotional state he adds has its contextual fixation with the attendant socio-political beats. The collection, though global in form, Ojaide says its structural pattern and stylistic development are rooted in oral resources which have permeated all of Ojaide's poetry works published before it. These oral artistic forms are conveyed by the use of images of spatial and cosmic organisms and laced with spiritual beings.

In the opening poems, recurring images of bird, moon, stars, sun, ocean, river, plants, and others symbolize the natural and supernatural dimensions of the quest. The vigil denotes expectation of the arrival dawn, a bridal face that is in kind of epiphany. The bird becomes for the poets, both bride and the sea-goddess indicative of barely love and fulfillment in various manifestations. The quest thus has its spiritual importance. (p.6)

But these images are employed by the poets to paint local myths and symbols which portray not just personal experience but are instances literarily concocted to present fear, agony and joy in different endeavours as discordant realities in different climes. Ojaide sings of the universe whose experience or historical movement is fraught with discordant social beats. His native land, he concludes is enervated by dislocation and disorder arising from oppression, exploitation and struggle. The land, the referential tadpole the poet says does not only bear

the brunt, it aggregates the suffering and loud cry of its inhabitants who are subjected to various deprivations and socio-economic miseries.

There's barely a career without highs and lows,
and you have had quite a number of songs.

You are not robber, rapist, or murderer but are derided for covering up for them.(p.62)

The land is the material base of agrarian production. Its destruction means the destruction of life. The land is encroached, seized and then trampled upon by the colonial masters, exploitative oil magnates and then the enemy within, the indigenous colonialists who don the cloak of leaders. The poet says they all are fraternal pals whose accord yields nothing good for his land. He likens the cabal to the proverbial slothful 'Tobi' 'the rich one who sleeps'/'when everybody else is out working?' Or 'the women who conceived the night of hyena' and 'coming to terms in the vicinity of the snake'. He predicts that just as Tobi is dragged to the market place and made to dance to the drums he beats without anyone pitying 'the thief who boasts of wealth'. So also 'no one will escape the storm of tears gathering strength'/'in the season of mourning fear death by drowning' (p.60). Using the MamiWata Myth, a pidgin coinage commonly used in the riverine area of the Delta, Ojaide says in antics and approaches, the plunderers of his nativity then and now gain entry and win the hearts of their bemused agents through deception and bait. What they present is façade spectacle just as MamiWata woos her preys through her charming image. She lures her sympathizers and admirers diving to save her only to get drowned themselves.

If MamiWata makes a home
of your Island, present her
bouquets of proud flowers; but
beware of the turbulence around
for she surrounds herself
with swirls, swirls and swirls.(p.53)

It is against these hyenas hibernating on the social arena of the poet's continent that he engages in poetic warfare around the globe. In a rather incantatory tone, Ojaide sings of his redemptive mission, obviously he is undoubtful of safety as he navigates the murky water.

Virulent the current, the calabash drowns not:
the water – lily dances on top of turbulence.
Let the field flame with blood,
The warrior will cut his way home: a victorious chief. (p.29)

Icons, Images and Meaning – Making

The poet achieves the objective of his quest by deploying images, icons and symbols as metaphors for his flight and mobility to places and as luminous rays on social ills, setback and breakthrough both his place and the world at large have experienced. One umbilical chord, Ojaide says ties the world together except that social realities assume different colourations. That the rich and the poor; the weak and the powerful; government and its

citizens, man and woman, the colonized and the colonizers, exploiters and the exploited are all actors in socio-political arena. Their actions underline the standard of living and political freedom or otherwise of the world inhabitants in their respective entities. Images of flight and companionship on one hand, aura of worship, service delivery and echoes of travels on the other pervade the atmosphere of performance in the volume, *I want to Dance*. Ojaide's global vision is captured by the tripod lens which anchors the aesthetic leaning of the collection as the poet – persona traverses the land, the firmament and the sea in navigating the universe. He is the 'seeker' looking for the 'hidden gift', 'murmuring to the height a name' and looking out to 'the vast horizon' (p.15). The land, the firmament and the sea are symbolic freight or carriage for the navigating poet.

Traversing the vast universe,
I wear my favourite's feather
the parrot's staying power in the sky
carries it across mountains and oceans
let me arrive, a welcome guest.(p.37)

In accomplishing his global task via poetry, Ojaide immerses himself in the traditional performance style. He decks himself in an attire typical of a poet – masquerade and clears his throat with alligator pepper as he steps to performance at 'town's gathering place'.

I who daily dance the mask decked with feathers
raise arms to embrace the messenger from afar – the bird
wants for a nest the swaggering tower
I carry on the head and perches for the season.

The mask symbol confers on the performing artist mythical and ancestral status – as the Aridon prototype. He is faceless and elusive, the masquerade whose vision is of spiritual and universal clime. Ojaide hints at this facelessness when he refers to his fraternal companion, the song bird as being faceless to depict modesty. 'The voice I hear from across the world must come from the muse that declines recognition – the ultimate modesty.'(p.33). Ojaide's muse is the god of performance symbolized by the god sent songbird. The songbird is the metaphor for the poet's creative sensibility. The bird archetype is employed here to portray a mobile poet – singer who could fly anywhere and several parts of the globe to render his performance and sing in the hearing of the world. Cast in the mode of a bird – singer, Ojaide sings to the world to cure it of social malaise and imbue it with the spirit of love and patriotism. He is a singer whose song, like an energetic bird pacing up and down the universe, travels far and near rousing the dead in spirit and conscientising and energizing the acolytes. He is not stationary but rather he moves to and fro combing the nooks and crannies of the world exposing social beats and accompanying tunes in the perception of the inhabitants.

My muse is a bird of proud plumes and deep voice of
flavours it perches no where pedestrian and nobody
can shoot it down.(p.17)

The song is more than a vocation to the poet. He is a poet – missionary whose vision is global thus turning himself to a global errand – poet, a cantor who must chorus to the hearing of all the social reality in his native land. Truly, poetry as a universal art is a vocation and devotion in which all devotees like Ojaide commit themselves in their quest to address the world plethora issues, concerns and problems. Shunning pseudonym and sycophancy, to the world service Ojaide pledges his commitment and loyalty since through poetry he could offer enduring service to humanity.

I won't choose gold over bronze
in the weaponry offered me
to defend the kingdom of songs
nor promote white over black in the race to capture a butterfly
or embrace the rainbow's arms.

Looming large in the poetic collection is the three-in-one image of the songbird, the river goddess and the mask-decked singer. The poet-persona devolves into three significant images whose service are harnessed at vantage and critical points in the course of rendering services during journeys. On one hand, the persona decks himself in the image as he chooses while on the other hand, he requests or relies on the services of the others in the context of performance. Thus, the triad image of the songbird, the sea goddess and the mask decked – singer presents a spectacle of a possessed poet – persona. Ojaide sings of the bird carved for him by Owena which brings 'multiple births of praise songs'.

In the morning a bird by the shore
looks at the Ocean
in the rising sun
The waves dance in, breaking out
The bird beats its
wings, summons
The Spirit of the deep water
& takes off into
the skies to sing
above waves and beach –
mongers(p.19)

The bird image is symbolic in many ways: it is the icon of wisdom, knowledge, memory and clairvoyance. It is the mythical fountain symbolizing the spirit of the ancestral Aridon, the Urhobo god of memory, retention and performance. In the songbird, the poet finds comradeship and companionship as he engages in his daily worship. The bird becomes a dependable ally and soulmate whose presence and artifice enliven the poet's performance; from this companion he draws vitality, bravery and inspiration.

A bird flies into the open house of words
where I am cloistered by command of the caste.
In the town's gathering place I will have
to open the gift that Aridon wrapped for me,

delivered by the bird become companion.
To the bird that raise the song I sing
I first give abundance before I ever taste
of the sweet berries that fall into my lot.(p.11)

On the other hand, the poet is possessed by the mystical aura of the songbird. The poet is in the bird and vice – versa. The songbird is a metaphor for flight, mobility, freedom and beauty. Since the songbird is a free agent, which cannot be shot down, it flies in all directions touching the sea and the skies. It is a thing of joy and inspiration to the poet to be able to fly all over the places with a missionary zeal. The overall motive here is the poet's crave for universal freedom, equality and justice.

My bird dips feathers to deepen their colours
and sips draughts that fill melodies with flavours,
the gods breathe winds to steer the wings
to over fly the red zones of wicked djinns.
Let every perch be on hospitable ground
where there will be ululation for the bride
my bird is a bride of the entire universe,
welcomed by strangers, family and friends.
Let me reach the farthest on wings of one
whose fate of feathers touches mine.(p.38)

With *I Want to Dance*, Ojaide sees poetry performance as a call to which he devotes his time and energy. The engagement is both spiritual and vocational. The art is a daily worship; a soulful exertion and communal inclination committed to uplifting humanity by correcting social imbalances. In many ways the import of the performance vis-à-vis the role of the artist in the society is significant. The image of the artist looms large as a performer. The poet assumes the role of an errand boy in the service of his community and by extension the universe. He is the link between his community and the outside world, hence his self-imposed or forced exile. He is the artist – missionary, the preacher, the crusader, the activist and public commentator. His is the preferred and revered communal gong which chronicles the history and aspiration of his people. The forerunner charting a path to freedom of his native land.

They must be watching me;
ancestors from astral towers;
relatives from the top of the family tree;
townsfolk from the main market;
friends from frequent letters;
witches from their coven night stand;
ladies from photos of opportunity;
passersby from their proximity.
They watch my every move
which I must report upon return

even if I implicate myself
to corroborate their multiple visions.(p.85)

Ojaide's song indeed is for the bruised and bleeding Delta, his birthplace, Nigeria nay Africa and the rest of the globe. His is the healing song, of exorcism and cleansing.

The Journey Motif as Poetic Mediation

An object or a person is said to be in motion when it is not at rest, or he is displaced with time and place. The journey motif in Ojaide's collection echoes a notion of journey archetype that is found in poetic works of Wole Soyinka's *Idanre and other poems* (1967) and Okinba Launko's *Dream Seeker on Divining Chain* (1993). It is a mediational role in the world polity through poetry. Such vision is propelled by a poet who is in motion or movement from one location to the other and at different times. In *Idanre and other poems*. Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron embarks on a journey from heaven to Ire, his eventual abode during which he accomplishes a lot by exhibiting his traits, prowess and emotions. So also does the Ifa incarnate symbolized by the poet-diviner embarks on voyage of discovery as portrayed by Osofisan. The common notion or their meeting point is the search for knowledge and wisdom, the quest for world order through mediation and social vision. Thus journey here is akin to motion which in the words of Ogunjimi (1992:50) "is an inherent element of dialectics as opposed to inertia and informing revolutionary aesthetics". Ogunjimi contends further that 'journey artifice or its corollary', 'metaphor or motion, articulates the regressive-progressive method in the dialectics of growth and development'. The journey or social quest in Ojaide's *I Want to Dance* is spiritual, social and aesthetic in nature. It is an intellectual, psychological inner probe or physical movement from one state to the other.

Ojaide's vision is a global one as the titles revolve around social realities in the world polity. The poet – persona engages in visionary voyage by traversing both the physical and cosmic landscape in his quest to drum his music in the hearing of the world.

I string the Kora
to serenade the moon
from first appearance to fullness.
I want to wake the world with cannonade
to behold her crowned with moonlight.(p.14)

In embarking on the journey, Ojaide employs the services of cosmic elements like the sun and the moon whose luminous rays serve the traveler either during the day or through the night. He declares his reliance on the services saying 'I keep company of the two with whom I light \a bonfire that opens up another world\in which the glowing moon embraces us'.(p.12)The poet's journey takes place mostly at night ending at dawn before taking off at night again. The poet uses the symbols to accommodate the night metaphor in reinforcing the dialectics in world social beats. The night travel is an allusion to night performance in the traditional setting by masquerades and story –telling–events. Masquerades are known for moonlit night performance especially when it involves exposing prevalent social vices and the

perpetrators in the society. The poet's native land passes through its night period for the morning to come. Personifying the night, it is the poet's refuge, platform, coverage and protective fortress, as the journey involves air, land and night.

Heal my wounds with starlight
raise my voice with your silence
wash my sores with waves of dew
lift my heart to the highest clouds
freshen me with your sea – breeze
save me in your vassal forest.
Night, I need you as I need love
without you there's no morning.(pp.63-64)

The journey is a metaphor for activism, struggle and nationalism. It is a cyclical journey as the poet persona moves to and fro his nativity and other places of sojourn around the globe. It is through this voyage that Ojaide conveys his sense of mission and global vision.

Memory, take me to the wetlands
of the beginning, loyal providers;
take me to crosscurrents of the delta that unite the creeks to the deep – minded sea;
let me dip into the herb – dark waters
I want my voice to flow as a full river
whose currents ripple through the body
to challenge the soul with great depths.(p.37)

The enormity of Ojaide's mission is underscored by the unfriendly terrain in which he operates. The arena is prohibitive as the songbird wriggles through political chaos and socio-economic strangulation to perch for its performance. Invariably it is his self-imposed mission of cleansing the land of the debris using the night's cover. The mission pitches the poet against forces whose exploitative tendencies bedevil his homeland. Their activities are not only corrosive, they are ready to crush the poet. But for the recalcitrant songbird, his muse, a metaphor for freedom and beauty, he sings with bravery and courage.

River bird
singing from a reed in the tide
your tenuous hold deters not
I laud your courage for fearing
neither suppliant reed nor tide
about to sweep off your feet
stilts with which you hop around
your song will outlive a fickle fate.(p.18)

Thus, the performance requires self – sacrifice as it is fatalistic. In the night performance, the poet – persona engages in endless vigil as the journey takes through the night to dawn on cyclical stasis.

And the wonders of the vigil come in a vision:

the sun sets
and rises in the eye of the wanderer
who tears through woods and clearings of distance.
He seeks what will keep him awake dreaming.
He cares not if the world laughs at his tall encounters
Or brands him mad for what he seeks and knows not.
And so he ford night to the eastern shoreline, half – drowns from the turbulence and
depth of daylight
to keep a tryst with the muse, a bird of surreal stock.(p.16)

The sun and the moon are spherical depicting the cyclical journey of the poet. The roundness is a metaphor for one Universe, hence the poet identifies certain universal social acts. The rising and setting of these cosmic forces have dialectical implications for different entities making up the globe.

I wait, far – easterner, for the sun to return without fail with its ball of heart warning
fire,
I wait for the sunbird to dip into the ocean
and come out with brighter plumes than ever,
pilgrim that beckons on the Wagoner,
I am still handicapped by a capricious tongue
I will ride in your wheel of light
until shadow gives way to body,
till a face rounds off bridal contours.

The journey chronicles the socio – economic and political phases of the world in different beats. With the journey, Ojaide reaches out to present antithetical world as he juxtaposes social realities practised or experienced by sectarian entities that make up the globe. The cyclical nature of the journey has varied connotations: For a part of the globe especially the poet's homeland, it is a journey from sovereignty to colonialism, and neocolonialism; a journey from a state of plentiful to a state of hunger and starvation, from serenity and communalism to chaos. It is a community in the throes of transition. Enraged by the continent's internal chaos and disruptive political order, Ojaide asks rhetorically

Do you blame the rat
for tying up elephants
of Africa and India
by whatever spell
and looting wealth
to prop itself into
a world power?(p.27)

For another part of the world, the journey connotes growth and independence as they journey from infancy to adulthood: a journey from a state of want to a state of abundance; from autocracy to democracy. Thus, from Italy to Britain or Jerusalem, the clime is either

desert, Lakeland or Island. The poet says hardwork, perseverance and discipline are core values and imperatives for nation's growth. Upon visiting Italy, the poet had expected to see 'domed cathedrals, frescos and flocks of Saints'. But now in the lake region, pre Alpine every inch, what he sees are

...So many people
with mindful hands
cut their own course out
of austere rocks.
They tunnel stone
into highways, with
persistence perspiration
till mountains to yield
barns of abundance.(p.73)

While Jerusalem is

A desert
green from
faith of sweat.(p.78)

Britain and its paucity of landmass is captured under the title "The size of manhood".

The poet says inspite of Britain's size of landmass,

They learnt from birth
the frugal science of arts,
a habit of Industry
since God denied them
abundance of land
and not of mind
they stretched the Isle
into a big world.(p.72)

It is a different stroke for the poet's homeland and continent. The title 'I want to Dance' captures the picture of a nation suffering paralysis. Ojaide uses the parable of a disabled priestess confined to a wheelchair to illustrate a nation whose socio – political framework has been weakened. In spite of the priestess disabled state, she is roused to action by Papa Wemba's flavoured voice as she exclaimed "I want to Dance". The poet says Africa wishes to dance to world beats of social growth, political maturity and freedom but for her state of immobility. But hope is not lost as the priestess persona still dances to the rhythm of life.

With Papa Wemba, flavoured voice
pulling everybody off their seats,
the Spirit of dance possessed her.
"I want to Dance" she cried and,
steering wheelchair to dance floor.
...limbs for long atrophied from
thieving strokes and comatose sell wake.(p.45)

Using wits and aphorism, Ojaide likens the journey of her nationhood to the metaphorical millipede race which is applauded by everybody for arriving safely at a way station. The poet frowns at the celebration of every moment of seeming breakthrough especially a change of government. The poet says the land has been badly bruised with scars all over and that the coming of a new government rather than give relief only poses fear of the unknown. But the citizens are quick to praise new heads inspite of the uncertainty surrounding the emergence. These leaders are birds of identical feathers flocking together as cabal breed their kinds.

The millipede arrives at a way station
without losing one of its thousand legs.
And that raises a mammoth applause
and bonfires that will piecemeal consume
a century whose ripeness is everybody's fear.
The snake lost its tail and grew a second head!
We prepare for the wake of a worrisome warrior whose offspring boasts of breaking
his record
if we celebrate the hatching of toxic eggs,
we must prepare against poisonous birds
whose droppings will burn the air we breathe.
Is arrival all, after the dynasties of nightmares?
The world vibrates with cannons and carnivals because the millipede arrives at a way
station without losing one of its thousand legs
though a dark mushroom hangs overhead.(p.44)

Ojaide laments the pitiable state of his homeland in the hands of successive governments of his country in both military and civilian garb. The Niger Delta, known for its caste system and fishing – farming heritage has been subjected to various exploitations the practice which destroys the agrarian life, occupation and communal sharing of the people leaving them in misery and starvation. This pathetic condition courts the attention of the songbird as he relishes painfully and nostalgically the glorious past.

In a year of flood, we indulged our appetites
We, fishermen,
wiped out the farmers tears –
one family, the festival of songs went on.
A bird from the east sang in boat loads to berth.
it brought multiple births of praise songs.
The waters will always provide our needs.
Now my bird won't open its mouth,
except to sing.(p.18)

This merchandising exploration is orchestrated by multinational oil and gas companies, the Ogiso's personification, the Urhobo tyrannical ruler. The mythical Ogiso, the tyrannical ruler of the old Benin was responsible for the forced exodus of the Urhobo people from Benin to their present day Niger Delta. The despot in history was notorious for sacrificing his subjects

whose scars of freedom I must wear
to range freely a citizen of the nation
and not a mere paper constitution (p.66)

Ojaide condemns the abuse of women in all forms. Seeing through the moral strength of a female friend and bitter expression of women writing from fez, the poet registers his resentment of abuse and inhumanity meted out to the women race. Women trafficking is a universal social vice and should be rejected all over the world. This is the poet's sermon in his epithet to a feminist Professor who epitomizes morality. Ojaide praises his friend and school mate for standing against sex exploitation and raising her head among men.

With barbed words, you smacked
the goddess of all the nubile girls:
you revered no full – breasted tyrant
who sold women, pleasure to men
you wore no livery of Soweï, whose
Sande league of initiates capitulated
before petty patriarchs – slaves or
spouses, their sharing made no excuse.
At schools you were leader of boys
today a feminist professor
You are the new leader of the girls.(p.54)

Inhuman treatment meted out to women in Africa comes under Ojaide's poetic tirade. The title 'Women writing Africa in fez' captures women struggle for liberation from the strangulation and denigrating practices perpetrated by men. The struggle obviously is a resonance of the Aba women riot or the type led by Queen Amina of Zaria. The amazons which the poet calls them are infuriated by unsavoury condition which their men put them. The poet says the oppressive rule, bad leadership, exploitation and cabal's appropriation of the nation's wealth are serious crimes that could spark off universal liberation movement and popular uproar as typified by the women gathering to revolt in fez.

The women league revise griots songs
they write Africa on volumes of finery
they move for centuries with deep hurt.
Now they suppress fright, as they do
who must fight through barricades
to seize back their robbed treasures.(p.58)

CONCLUSION

The volume captures Ojaide's global and materialist vision within the framework of oral aesthetic transfer. In a rather parabolic mode, Ojaide explores global order with the attendant appropriation of the material wealth. The poet whips up global sentiment against corrosive exploitation with a view to condemning the actors. It is in this connection that Ojaide probes the unsavoury socio – political arrangement of his birthplace. The poet craves

for a new order, which promotes equality, freedom and justice through the political apparatuses. Indeed Africa loves to dance to the world beats of socio-economic breakthrough and political freedom and maturity but for her state of incapacitation occasioned by bad leadership over the years. To Ojaide, there is hope for Africa even in her disabled status.

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