

Uneasy Double Attachment: Homeland and Exile in Olu Oguibe's *A Gathering Fear**

Senayon Olaoluwa

Summary

This article reads Olu Oguibe's *A Gathering Fear* (1992) as an exemplification of the dilemma exiles are confronted with in their relationship with countries of destination and homeland. The article mainstreams the outsider discourse and the contradictions of exiting homeland because of its dystopian conditions only to be faced by situations for which exile becomes less liberatory than baleful. To do this, the article highlights the military repression of the mid 1980s and early 1990s under General Babangida in Nigeria, and associated manifestations of dictatorship not only in the despot but also in his wife whose first-ladyship aggravates state oppression in femininity. Considering that a feeling of alienation in the exile ironically underscores homeland nationalism, the article concludes that nostalgia sustains in migrants thoughts of homeland and desire for return.

Opsomming

In hierdie artikel word *A gathering fear* deur Olu Oguibe (1992) voorgehou as voorbeeld van die dilemma waarvoor uitgewekenes te staan kom in hul verhouding met die land van bestemming en hul geboorteland. Die artikel beskou in die besonder die buitestaander se diskoers oor en die teenstrydighede van die geboorteland wat die uitgewekene as gevolg van die distopiese toestande aldaar verlaat, net om dan gekonfronteer te word met situasies waarin die ballingskap as minder vrymakend en veel meer vyandig ervaar word. Die artikel lig die militêre verdrukking onder generaal Babangida in Nigerië in die middel 1980's en vroeë 1990's uit asook die gepaardgaande manifestasies van diktatorskap wat nie net deur die despoot self uitgevoer is nie, maar ook deur sy vrou wie se status die verergering van die staatsonderdrukking van vroue verteenwoordig het. Die artikel neem in aanmerking dat 'n gevoel van vervreemding in die pas aangeneemde land ironies genoeg nasionalistiese gevoelens oor die geboorteland versterk en kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat hierdie nostalgie by migrante die gedagtes oor hul geboorteland en 'n begeerte om terug te keer, aanmoedig.

Olu Oguibe's *A Gathering Fear* is set against the backdrop of General Ibrahim Babangida's dictatorship. He took power in August 1985 after staging a palace coup against the regime of Major Generals Mohammed Buhari and

Tunde Idiagbon, of which he was Chief of Army Staff.¹ Babangida's regime would be remembered as the one during which there was so much windfall from the sale of crude oil.² But the said windfall was not to benefit the nation as this would not be accounted for. Babangida's reign was also reputed to have witnessed perhaps the greatest level of bloodshed both within the military ranks and the civilian population. The siege mentality created by his regime, and the level of corruption it indulged in, led to a series of coup attempts in the military. The most controversial of this, however, was the Mamman Vatsa's alleged coup plan. The controversy which trailed the execution of this poet-General, as well as others alleged to have plotted the coup, is still very much a matter of national opinion. It was therefore not possible for literary creativity, especially poetry at that time to ignore the despicable phenomenon into which military dictatorship, personified by Babangida, had constituted itself. Poetry at this point became a potent counter-weapon with which Nigerian writers engaged the regime. For all other forms of resistance appeared to have led to arrest by the dictatorship. It was because of this intractable success of literature in "speaking truth to power" that Ojaide, in *The Blood of Peace*, for instance, says:

Neither bullets nor other savages can arrest words
that have already been aired –
paper is witness to the lone-mind

These words file out on the dirt of road
to stop nerve-wreaking waves of despots;
they are the charms worn before battle.

(“Before our God”, 28)

A Gathering Fear specifically gets across as a work whose emergence is in the spirit of “daring the beast” (Brown 1995: 58). It was indeed a moment articulating a desire to thrive against the military dictatorship of Babangida whose pattern of rule, going by the typology of Laura Chrisman (2004: 188), falls into the category of “dominatory formation”. Indeed, the regime threatened the sense of belonging of the people, as the professed spirit of nationalism and patriotism, which the military claimed informed their intervention, was only to the extent of protecting the “interests of the bourgeoisie”, [and] necessarily sacrificing or “ignoring” the interests of the “subaltern groups”

-
1. Although Oguibe had initially published “A Song from Exile” as a separate volume, its inclusion and arrangement in *A Gathering Fear* shows how it bolsters the argument that exile is a direct consequence of the hostility of home.
 2. It took years later before Nigeria could experience such windfall again, which has now been succeeded by an economic recession owing to glut in global oil supply and Niger Delta insurrection and vandalism of oil installations.

(188). Naturally this situation does one thing to the nation: it threatens its collectivism and the myth that sustains such collectivism. Nonetheless, the poet begins with an affirmation of confidence in the idea of the nation despite all odds. Therefore, the persona declaims:

I am bound to this land by blood
That's why my vision is blurred
I am rooted in its soil
And its streams flood my veins

(“I am Bound to this Land by Blood”, 11)

Here is an unequivocal declaration of a commitment to the space of the Nigerian nation, not least because in this collection both land and nation are used interchangeably. It is an expression of a strong belief in the existence of the nation despite the ugly experience of its recent history; an experience which then had threatened the nation with total disintegration. The Nigerian Civil War was the said experience. Although his ethnic group, Igbo, suffered most during this war as it was branded the secessionist group, the trauma and the humiliation of defeat did not preclude identification with the subsequent re-integration process and aspiration of a united nation. Besides, his poetry resonates within the context of that generation of Nigerian writers whose milieu of birth and growth witnessed, one way or another, the devastation of the war and the subsequent determination to prevent a repetition of such apocalypse, having witnessed both “the horror and the passion” of it. (Brown 2003: 101). The fervour of expressing confidence in the idea of the nation thus became for the poets an attempt to denounce the brinkmanship and suspect patriotism of the political elite, as well as nationalism of the past which resulted in the war. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the expression of faith in the idea of the nation attests to the reflection on the understanding of the nation as an entity that informs the collectivism of a people. For this reason, there is usually an articulation of a resolve at the collective level to endure difficulties and challenges, no matter how grievous the trauma of history, in order for a nation to survive, although it must be added that this is for as long as each nation lasts. Regarding this Ernest Renan (1991: 19) says:

A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past. It is summarized however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life.

Beyond the above, the opening lines of the poem bring up the metaphor of the nation as a land, territorialised entity, and one that presupposes a rootedness. In other words, although the mapping that resulted in nations were informed

by capitalist tendencies and especially in Africa where they were done without the consent of the people themselves for whom indigenous collectivism would become history,³ people who find themselves in this whimsical situation have often taken it upon themselves to respect and recognise “the spatial partitioning of territory” that follows (Malkki 1999: 55). They do this in a bid to adjust to the challenges that the formation of a new sense of identity demands of them, just as it requires the reinvention of a new sense of memory, as memory itself is known to be amenable to constant revision (Nora 1998: 635). Yet it is necessary to note that this knowledge of the conception of the nation can only be understood and regarded in a qualified, rather than absolute sense. The need for this clarification stems from the understanding that the collective invention and reinvention of myths of nationalism and collectivism with respect to the nation hold water only as long as there is a consensus – no matter how uneasy that may be – despite the people’s disparate cultures and histories. Such consensus is to respect the spatiality forced upon them by the designs of capitalist modernity.

Therefore, Oguibe affirms the link that he has with the nation by virtue of his birth in the land whose main insignia, “blood”, strengthens his sense of nationalism and the awareness of his rootedness in the soil. This also strengthens the metaphor of the nation as an arborescent essence. Because of the rootedness precipitated on birth “blood” or the bloodshed in the Civil War for the nation to remain one – for “blood” in this context assumes an indissmissible ambiguity – a vision is reaffirmed which is essentially territorial. It explains why “my vision is blurred”. Put another way, the sense of belonging rules out the suggestion of transcending its frontiers for the purpose of coping with the pressing existential problems with which he is faced.

Yet as a poet, a sense of alienation pervades Oguibe’s consciousness in the metaphoric sense. But his sense of alienation is set off by the passion to simultaneously identify with the “sweat ... of the men”, fellow men whose “million feet ... plod/ The dust of streets” that make up this land with which he identifies (16). The manner of identification with the rest of the people is reminiscent of what Walter Benjamin (2004: 22) regards as the metaphor of the lone rag picker on the street and whose vocation and condition find comparison in the solitude of the vocation of a poet. Although Benjamin’s analysis is immediately in reference to the peculiar art of Baudelaire, there is a sense in which this finds semblance in Oguibe’s poetry. The difference

3. Lisa Malkki attempts to explain away this condescending act of mapping on the part of the imperial powers when he says: “That the world should be composed of sovereign, spatial discontinuous units is a sometimes implicit, sometimes stated premise in much of the literature of nations and nationalism” – “National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees” in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (eds) Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson. USA: Duke University Press, 1999, p. 54.

however is that his identification is not with only one rag picker, but with the “million feet” the headship of a military tyranny has trampled upon so much so that they form part of the “refuse” on the streets. The people have all been subjected to the same kind of dehumanisation; their sorrow therefore becomes the poet’s. It is a society in which the majority is deprived of mirthful smiles as the “toil” in which they engage fetches them little or nothing. One can guess, and rightly too at this point, that the same sense of nationalism which defines the vision of the poet, is very much in force in the attitude of these million faces for whom living is nothing but existence in “pain” and “agony”. The poet’s expression of solidarity with the multitude is in such a manner that makes him “bear the mark of the masses on my brow” (11). This is a depiction of the consolidation of the capitalist legacy of the colonial days and on which the political nationalists had built earlier. For here is a situation whereby the personalities engaged in labour have no cause for joy or excitement because the proceeds of what they do, do not accrue to them. They have become “owners who are owned” by the state. What follows is an outburst of hysteria that testifies to the desperate condition of the land and the prospects of bloodshed: “I see rivers of blood And I see nothing but blood”, I see blood on the statue/ Of the Immaculate Mother . . . I see puddles of blood . . . the grasses wither in this deluge of blood” (12). The pervasiveness of this macabre scenario is justified by the fact that not even the statue “of the Immaculate Mother” is spared: it is as blood-stained as any other thing mentioned. This is nothing but an indication of the overwhelming injustice in which everyone is implicated. It is a system that upholds the oppression of the powerless of all categories. Nonetheless, the poet expresses at the end of it all his unwavering resolve to sing about everything there is to the land and remain bound to it (13):

My pictures are the colour of dust
And I sing only of rust
I have swum in the flood
And I know better
For I am bound to this land
By blood.

Having succeeded in painting the general picture of a land in turmoil, Oguiibe proceeds in the subsequent poem “The Triumphal Entry” to locate and identify the author of the sordid theatre created in the land. It is, however, important to comment on the significance of the title both in terms of the corresponding and contradictory congeries of images that follow. It is indeed an effort in tracing the genealogy of “postcolonial melancholia” (Gilroy 2004). Colonialism was to be surely and effectively prosecuted through the cultural agency of Christianity. In its wake was the sidelining of indigenous collectivism and spirituality, and a magnification of an exotic religion whose

triumphs through its many myths attest to the triumph of colonialism itself.⁴ It would be recalled that the curious logic of colonialism was explained away then in terms of the benefits of the civilisation that it was ready to offer the colonised. The civilisation was, to be sure, consummated with sentiments of the light and salvation inherent in the altruistic and vicarious life that Jesus led. It was a burden of morality and obligation to which he was committed so much so that even when he made the “triumphal entry” to Jerusalem on a donkey – as scholars and Bible believers put it – he remained no less humble. “The Triumphal Entry” therefore reminds one of the avowed sense of humility and responsibility evident in the sentiment of “the white man’s burden” for which Europe claimed to have sent the best of her own to enlighten and civilise the dark continents of the non-white humanity in the name of colonialism. It was through this avowed but dis-credited means that the West made a “triumphal entry” into Africa shielding away in its narratives the haughty and predatory angle to the mission. At this juncture it is necessary to subscribe to Isidore Okpewho’s (1988: 203) bill of revisionism to which mythology is amenable. So if, as Bronislaw Malinowski explains, “myth acts as a character for the present-day social order ... and supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values” (cited in Brennan 1990: 45), it is also for this same reason that one must take a critically “retrospective” look at the myth of the “triumphal entry”.

First, the myth acknowledges that there is an aura of humility which pervades the narrative of the birth and life of Jesus. T.S. Eliot’s “Journey of the Magi” attests to the situation of his birth as being that of “a temperate valley/wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation” (1983: 109). But this same incarnation of the king through his birth would adumbrate a feeling of apocalypse where “these kingdoms/ [are] no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation” (110). The destruction that accompanies this birth and adumbrates the subsequent consequences are found in W.B. Yeats’ “The Second Coming” in which the understanding of the coming attempts to place the world within a planetary frame, subjecting it, as it were, to the forecast of a macabre dance by which “Things fall apart” as “mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (cited in Albright 1990: 235). The particular extent of the impact of this “anarchy” is what Achebe captures so inimitably in *Things Fall Apart*. But of all, William Blake, though once designated by Eliot as “mad” (Barnes 1967: 165) for his critical and unpopular comments on the shielded side that completes the duality of Jesus’ identity, was the most explicit in achieving the needed balance in the depiction of the Christ figure. In his uncompleted poem titled “The Everlasting Gospel”, Blake interrogates popular assumptions about Christ’s humility, pointing in the end to certain traits in the attitude of

4. Nonetheless, African cultural practices have survived in many forms, not least because of the adoption of what Bruce Berman calls “conservative modernization”.

Christ that could also make him pass for the opposite of the lamb or a combination of both humility and pride.⁵ This in a sense interrogates the missionary humility narrative that may have attended the prosecution of colonialism.

The haughty exercise of power which underwrote the dehumanisation of the colonies became inherited by the bourgeois class to which power was relinquished. Since the military elite also formed part of the elite, it should be understandable why Oguibe's reflections navigate the power relations of the colonial past to show how they inform the pattern of power relations in the postcolonial context. This is why the present texture of power relations in the postcolonial encounter can be said, for that matter, to be coextensive with the traumatic days of colonialism. It also explains why the picture of the king painted in "The Triumphal Entry" is wide apart from what one finds in the Synoptic Gospels. But rather, it is more attuned to what one finds in "The Everlasting Gospel" and in the Millennial Reign as evinced in the Book of Revelations. For this was what colonialism made of Africa and what it made of the postcolonial leadership, especially the military:

I see your majesty resplendent
 Upon the throne of God
 The beast at your feet
 I see your gold-sandalled feet
 On the spines of men
 I hear the creak of ribs
 And the radiance of your laughter
 Lights the recesses of heaven
 With the blaze of ten suns
 I see the hands of men
 Whose sweat has robed your feet
 In garments of gold
 And in the shrivelled distance
 I hear the howls of dogs
 The bay of a mule driven to heat
 I hear the sound of the bayonet
 Through the marrow of the womb

*The king has not come on the back of a mule
 His path paved with branches and leaves
 The king has come in the dazzle of butts
 Garlands of toilet paper bedeck his neck
 The King has come with a split-toothgrin
 The King comes riding on the bones of men*

(14)

With the metaphor of the king "with a split-toothgrin", there is no doubt that here is a direct and undisguised accusation of the many atrocities wrought by

5. See T.R. Barnes 1967: 163-165.

Babangida's high-handedness and autocracy. During the reign of Babangida, the gap-toothed General's image was common in poetic and literary composition, as a way of linking his image to the despotism of his regime.⁶ On account of this, it also becomes clear that the collective sorrow and passion of the people which the poet-persona shares in "I am Bound ..." is a handiwork of military dictatorship personified by the General.

From this stage on, the remaining parts of the poem lay out as product of a traditional African poet whose verbal weapon of sarcasm and ridicule is intent on exposing the folly and betrayal of a collective trust on the part of the autocracy. "Triumphal Entry II", for instance, is an eloquent interrogation of both the present and the past with respect to the questions of history. Again, the memory of the Civil War comes to mind in the list of random mention of burning issues affecting the country. So: "Blessed is the mortal/ And the councils of war". Not only does this call to mind Okigbo's prophecy about the war in "Path of Thunder", it also affirms the notion that such harrowing memory hardly goes into oblivion. But beyond memory, Oguibe's criticism of state visits and the vanities of such culture also indicts the complicity of the West especially Britain as a colonial power. The fact that the series of "blessings" also extend to the "Queen of England" goes to justify this assertion. Ordinarily for a "majesty resplendent/ upon/ the throne of God", one would expect that a similar, if not the same radiance would be ascribed to his subjects; but here they are: "The poor, the hungry". Yet "Blessed are the travellers/ Without travelling shoes" (15). The same imagery of paradox runs through the parody of Christian mass in the last two segments of the poem. The evidence of this paradox resides in the understanding that the same king who "comes riding on the bones of men" is the same that is being implored to bless all, including "the poet and his gun" (16). But at the end of the poem nobody is at a loss concerning the non-performance of the regime. The ultimate revelation is nothing but promises that are never fulfilled:

And blessed are we that prostrate at his feet
 Blessed are we who are blessed to see
 The stream of sirens and the gleam of his grin
 Blessed is the cloud of dust he leaves in his wake
 Blessed are the shards of his million promises
 Blessed is he that cometh in green
 Blessed
 Is his name.

(17)

6. Many Nigerian poets were inspired by the many grins of Babangida, a gap-toothed General, particularly because underneath those grins was a merciless and ruthless character, which ironically did more to intimidate and frighten the people than assure them.

Nonetheless, the above only plays a prefatory role as seen in “Who would Listen to the Poet?”, another piece in five segments. The poet in the first part takes a bow before older poets and declares his desire: “I want to speak to the leaden crown” (20). With the licence obtained, the second part of this poem becomes the exposition of the cesspit of a military regime and the overwhelming impact it has on the citizenry. Appropriating the rhetorical formula of an oral poetic chant, the piece in the continued tempo of sarcasm reels off the praise names of the military leader and succeeds in demonstrating the terror his image conjures up in the minds of the citizens. The only explanation for leading the life of “The jackal that laughed his way into flock” (21) is that: “A people’s leader must be tough as a cord/ His heart must be hard as a block of iron” (21). Also he is expected to be the “Stout one who rocks the foundation of the earth/ Stocky one who defies the cry of all [and] Warlord in the time of peace” (21). The foregoing no doubt confirms Oguibe’s grasp of the values of African praise poem traditions. Especially associated with institutions of monarchy and other forms of power-related institutions, the praise poem tradition is nevertheless an artistic medium for articulating the grey areas of an institution of power as well. To be more explicit, even when a court poet is essentially taken in to sing the praises of the king, the room his vocation allows for ambiguities, ensures that he can also project simultaneously the resistant voices of the defeated and the naked flagellation of critics (Brown 1998: 94-96). But Oguibe is better situated in this collection as belonging to the category of “those well outside the domains of public power” but who, nonetheless, exploit the artistic riches of African expressive forms for the exertion of possible transformation on “social conditions and power relations” (Gunner 2004: 6).

The General’s activities call for further exploration in this sequence. The praise singer describes him as the General about whom “We hear word of quick sentence/ And swift executions/ In moments of idleness” (22).⁷ The stanza ends with “Even Ogun slaughter his own”. Certainly there is a sense in which the stanza is indebted to Soyinka’s “Idanre”. As an epic poem that celebrates the Yoruba god of iron with respect to the duality of his personality as an incarnation of both creativity and destruction, the sarcasm in Oguibe’s verse becomes more incontrovertible. Truly, “Ogun slaughters his own” in

7. The most shocking of the myriad executions during the regime of Babangida was that of Major General Mamman Vatsa, who was also a poet of note in the second generation. To date, the execution remains the most controversial for lack of evidence to justify such killing. The peak of the efforts to prevent his execution as well as that of other alleged plotters was evinced by the intervention of three of Nigeria’s foremost writers, Chinua Achebe, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo and Wole Soyinka. Although they got an assurance from Babangida that the plotters would be spared, they were eventually executed. (See Wole Soyinka’s *You must Set Forth at Dawn*).

“Idanre”, but the destruction transcends the mean banality of state terrorism as in the case of the General’s command. This is because Ogun’s excited destruction of his own subjects eventually results in a creativity which ensures continuity. It is indeed an instance in the bounteous regeneration of a land cleansed from the desecration of previous seasons. Therefore, “Containment and communion, seed-time and harvest, palm/ and pylon, Ogun’s road a ‘Mobius’ orbit, kernel/ And electrons, wine to alchemy (Soyinka 1981: 85). There is however an absence of this delicate balance between necessary destruction and creativity in the personality of the General. Any wonder then that his thirst is quenched by “tears of broken men” and his pride fed with the “sight of famished children”. His autocracy is defined by how “He sets up councils and muffles them”. What is worse, he has also appropriated those sly qualities of the chameleon that in the mythical age lost his credibility with humanity.⁸ Consequent upon this fact, the poet’s engagement of the General in praise performance is one that can best be described as intent on speaking truth to power and removing whatever masks of charisma with which he holds the nation in thrall. The picture painted so far of power and its exercise through an autocratic headship can be said to conform to what Zaltzman regards as the crippling of the psyche and the enforcement of a collectively submissive psychology of a people held spell-bound to the erotic allure of a charismatic power (cited in Scarfone 2006: 815). But where such “binding” exists, Scarfone explains, “unbinding” becomes the “real winner”, and if so, this is what Oguibe has set to achieve concerning the reality of a power relation in which the “grins” of a “gap-toothed” General tend to blind the people.

The insanity and the vapid atmosphere already created and which maintains an alterity between the General and the masses is further aggravated and defined by a delegation of part of his oppressive essence to his wife called “First Lady”. This is the preoccupation of the third segment of the poem.⁹ Still adopting the structural formula of Yoruba praise poetry, the poem opens with an insight into the psychology of the First Lady which is comparable to the powers of *Iyalode* in traditional society:¹⁰

-
8. See Stephen Belcher, *African Myths of Origin* (London, Penguin, 2005), p. 245.
 9. Such was the power of Mariam Babangida as First Lady, and she did not pretend to be circumspect with drawing attention to herself.
 10. The “Iyalode” in Yoruba monarchy is the most powerful of female leaders. Her presence is for the purpose of checks and balances along gender lines. This way, she protects the interest of women and the oppressed generally by the infusion of feminine tenderness to the dispensation of power and authority of the monarchy. However, Mariam Babangida’s mien contrasts with this office of the Iyalode as her office only does more to swell the ranks of oppression already made formidable by her husband. For further exposition on

We hail you, Iyalode
Aya roro joko lo [the fierce lady of the home]
Mound of earth that props the house
Yet speaks louder than the owner of the house....

(23)

Again, the allusion to the powers and values of the *Iyalode* within the Yoruba power structure cannot be said to conform to the original essence. For the *Iyalode* is expected as the first of women's leaders to liaise with the monarchy to ensure that power and authority are dispatched and tempered with some measure of tenderness in order that a balance – which would ensure sustainability and credibility of the state – is achieved. The contrary is the case in the instance of the General's self-appointed *Iyalode* whose presence on the power pitch only goes to swell the ranks of oppression already made formidable by the General. Measured on the template of common good, the General's *Iyalode* is obviously deficient. It therefore explains why the injustice which defines her personality cannot help but bring back memories of the Civil War in which the evils perpetrated against one region by the rest can hardly be forgotten in a hurry. One such was the Asaba Massacre which the poet remembers thus:

I remember that day how
In a village by the River
Men were rounded up and like roosters
And slaughtered in the square
Her own father was among them.

(23)

The horror, injustice and extremism of a war crime of this nature perpetrated against a civilian folk remain condemnable. The values of such repressed memory for artistic invention and preoccupation with the present cannot be disputed. This is why concerning the repressed, Dominique Scarfone (2006) says:

The repressed *does* carry a form of temporality, but that it evades *chronological* time. In other words, the repressed is what lies outside the past-present-future-categories in which thoughts and feelings wear away by combining with others of their kind and being worked through into newer thinking and affect.

(832)

the role of the *Iyalode* among the Yoruba, see Bolanle Awe, "The *Iyalode* in the Traditional Yoruba Political System," (ed.) Andrea Cornwall, *Readings in Gender in Africa*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press; Oxford: James Currey, 2005.

It is interesting how the “thoughts” of the injustice of the Civil War of which the *Iyalode*’s father was a fatal victim have worked “through into newer thinking and affect” of the oppression and injustice of the *Iyalode*. The extremism of her flamboyance which is an extension of military praetorian living is evident in her sense of dress. She does not only adorn herself with the most expensive attires of various kinds – from “smooth silk” to “adire”, “sanyan” – but also steps out in “Fifty lengths of akwete/ [which] sweep the path behind ...” Beholding her therefore is beholding the “The true wealth of our land” (24). The evidence of injustice subsequently lies in depriving others of good living. The bourgeois proclivity of *Iyalode* saps the land entirely dry and forbids even the labourer to enjoy the wealth of his sweat. The poet’s sympathy therefore lies with the masses. His intervention is evident in his demands on behalf of the oppressed millions; that is, the agitation for the people’s right to some measure of dignity which would not in any way counteract the First Lady’s pleasures:

We do not need your charity
 Benevolent one
 We only ask that who works harder
 She also eats better
 We say that the boat that took your children away
 Should also have a place for our own
 That the eagle may perch
 That the kite may also perch

(25)

This kind of vicarious supplication, rich in proverbial innuendoes and bardic wisdom of the oral poet, is an attempt to engage with power and redress an autocratic injustice made worse by the complicity of the General’s wife’s insensitivity to the pains of an entire land. But how can all this be addressed when both are intoxicated with power? Unlike in the mythical moment of Ogun’s folly during which the goddess Oya warned of the danger inherent in such folly (26), the General’s wife has refused to warn her husband on his insensitivity to the travails of the nation. Or how can the hunger in the land be alleviated when the intoxication of the General is also comparable to the Igbo deity Anukili who once upon a time became notorious for depredation? “Anukili harvested where / He had not sowed / He ravished farmlands / And stripped yam barns”. From this point on, in the fourth sequence of the poem, hope for the land has already begun to dim. In the fifth and last movement of the poem, the autocratic essence has assumed an overwhelming proportion, for Anukili has transformed into “Kabiyesi”. Within this context, the import of the word “kabiyesi”, a Yoruba honorific for addressing the Excellency of a king, becomes that of “the king or queen whose action nobody can question”. It is significant to note that by alluding to various mythical figures of power in describing the actions of the General and the First Lady, Oguibe

shows how power corrupts and extends the frontiers of such corruption. It is against this increasing gale of oppressive “binding” of the land in despair and hopelessness that the title poem, “A Gathering Fear” opens. What follows is an adumbration of exile.

What is encountered in the title poem can rightly be described as the climax of state activities and exercises that run counter to the sustenance of the nation. When the eight-part poem opens, it is clear that the nation has begun to tilt towards the precipice. If at inception, Babangida’s coup back in 1985 had any rays of hope in the minds of the people, such had been totally obliterated few years into his rulership. The fear of disintegration and the crisis that would precede such preoccupy this poem. Taking cognisance of history, exile well becomes one of the fall-outs of the crisis. The fervour with which the poet declaims his attachment to the land has decreased because those telling tropes of what makes a nation are disappearing fast. What is written across the land is the exaltation of a ruler’s personal ambition over the will of the rest of the people. In such a situation it is doubtful whether the idea of a nation as a collectively recognised cartographic entity can still hold much water. Indeed, the people are known, like Rena would put it “to have done great things together” (Nora 634), but as things stand currently, it is not certain whether they are prepared “to want to do more”.

The worrisome signals are evident in the first part of the poem, showing what happens when leadership is driven less by the ethos of responsibility than by personal ambition:

The demented set his hut on fire
And stood aside to watch the ashes of his life
The child is set again on a path of death
And my fear returns to me

(31)

The reign has become that of an apocalypse, the annihilation it is likely to breed is enormous in the estimation of the people. This is why it is comparable to the memory of the Civil War. The implication of this is that the same brinkmanship of the civilian and military class that devolved into the war is at play again under the despotism of Babangida. The long standing battle that has always existed between the artist and the state here appears to be awarding victory to the state because the wish of the state appears to be on the ascendance. When this happens, especially in the form it takes in the socio-political background to this work, Oguibe himself says: “we (artists) have even greater reason to be doubtful ... we are simply saying what we see, for it is seeing and not saying, our people say, that kills the elder. It is hearing and not heeding that will kill the child” (Brown 1995: 59-60). Saying therefore becomes a burden of responsibility in “A Gathering Fear”. It is an attempt to expose all there is to the machination of the state against the people on the one hand, and on the other, an attempt to interpret the implications. By pro-

verbally telling on “the child [that] is set again on the path of death”, the generally pervasive metaphor of the “abiku” child – which many Nigerian writers, the most famous among whom is Ben Okri, have explored – comes into the picture again. For the mischievous spirit-child who is destined to be born as severely as it is prepared to die before attaining consciousness, the trauma and instability it brings on its parents can be rightly linked to a dangerously treacherous and vertiginous point to which Nigeria is pushed in the march once again towards the carnage of the Civil War. This is what the poet means when he says “These clouds now hurrying back/ Heralding the clap of thunder / We’ve walked this path before / Memory lies ahead wriggling in her pain” (31). The “path of thunder” has also come to appropriate every other form of crisis in the nation’s history. Unfortunately, when memory “wriggles” in pain, this is of no concern to the autocratic regime. But the sanity of the poet, while the nation is under the headship of “the demented”, is not in doubt. This is because he lives up to Nietzsche’s model by which he is able to “burn” the past into himself and make it available to all as a warning (Rose 1998: 179). In this case, the conscious embeddedness/internalisation of the past becomes one way by which one is able to take on the challenges of the future, knowing that it is natural for the past to repeat itself, even if not in absolute variables of sameness. For thoughts of exile, bloodshed and destruction that the memory of the war provokes, the poet warns the autocratic figure in power and all others that might want to be involved in prosecuting another macabre dance akin to the Civil War (31-33):

Whoever recalls the rampaging bull
Rumbling talks crunching bone in dust...
Let him watch these seasons
Let him tread softly
Into this dance
Of masquerades.

At another level, it is important to remark that Oguibe’s poetry is significant in the way it resolves the question of the possible exile that may result from an African writer’s use of English. The observation stems from the poet’s conscious attempt to reconcile the apparent linguistic drift through the privileging of African mythological resources as well as other African verbal art forms which all come together to give his poetry a unique flavour and texture. Thus, while he may have alluded to the Christian mythology of the Triumphal Entry, he has however domesticated it in a way that speaks to the immediate reality on the ground. Moreover, by invoking African myths like those of Anukili, Iyalode, among others, Oguibe demonstrates how a meta-phoric liberation and return from cultural exile can be garnered, even where the medium of expression is patently foreign.

In the third part of the title poem hope dims more and more as “In a land of mad men/There’s only anguish and pain/ While silence paves the road/ To the

commoner's grave" (35). The subsequent segment sings of nothing but the broadcasting of "seeds of terror"; nevertheless, "the Horsemen gallop at breakneck". The fifth part indicates the drastic decrease in the chances of redemption from the treacherous situation: "Generals/ Sergeants/ Warlords/ feed on blood". Having held up the nation to their whims and caprices, the nation has obviously become helpless. Perhaps the only redemptive path yet to be trodden would be the way backward. This is the argument in the sixth part:

The only way forward
From here is backward...
Ah!
Death knocks at the door of this nation...
Death has seized this nation in his grip
And there is no way forward...
I see the ashes of a great city
I see the ruins of a great lie...
Ah!
There is no way forward
But through the Bloodriver.

(39)

The above is a sad commentary on what relations of power can produce in the postcolony. It is no longer refutable at this juncture that the poet and the people he speaks for have become disillusioned with the governing system and concept of the nation. And with the metaphor of "horsemen" and their "glinting swords" in the last part of the poem, going by the structural arrangement of the collection, it is already clear that the way backward, which signifies loss of faith in the nation, would induce all manner of escape strategies. One of these strategies of escape is exile, which one finds in "A Song from Exile".

Basically, "A Song from Exile" illustrates what Timothy Brennan (1990: 63) calls "the contradictory topoi of exile and nation" in the writing of the Third World. Explaining this further, he contends that the situation is pathologised as emanating from a fusion "in a lament for the necessary and regrettable insistence of nation-forming, in which the writer proclaims his identity with a country whose artificiality and exclusiveness have driven him into a kind of exile". The stark reality that results from this condition is "a simultaneous recognition of nationhood and an alienation from it". In other words, there is a necessary break, on the part of the poet, from the physical fixity of the nation's spatial order that limits him to it as homeland. The spatial tenacity nationalism has imposed on him all along has suddenly come under critical scrutiny. Certainly, the grounds on which he keeps faith with such fixity are no longer as profound and compelling. There is now a realisation of some kind of incongruence between the avowed commitment to

homeland and the benefits which such avowal offers. Therefore, extending his “vision” beyond the “blurred” horizon of homeland becomes necessary. For him, like any other modern African artist, such decision calls to mind the precedent set by African oral artists of mythical ages. To shed more light on this, Andrew Smith (2004:247) illustrates the precedent with Okri’s recollection in *The Famished Road* that “the old storytellers were the first real explorers and frontiers people of the abyss”. However, it is needful to go further than this in order to identify the limits to which such semblance can be drawn upon. For Okri goes beyond the precedent set in antiquity to identify the “first universal golden age” to which contemporary times hark back. Nevertheless, Smith is quick to add quite perceptively that, the absolutism of such observation on the part of Okri “would not always have been plausible; the idea of migrancy as a name for human being is sustainable only because of specific historical or ideological shifts which we need to understand” (247).

Needless to say, it is already evident from the foregoing that exile is no longer a reserved privilege of the artist. Rather than this, it defines the entirety of contemporary humanity. The way each region responds to this challenge is however determined by its peculiarity, how it is calibrated by those “specific historical and ideological shifts”. But first the pervasive nature of the phenomenon of exile raises the question of how this has come to be a defining feature of our time. Again, Smith’s response answers to why this is so: “A first key alteration is a growing uncertainty over nationalism” (24). Specifically, much as this is so on a global scale, the postcolonial world’s vulnerability stems primarily from “the tenacious hold on power of parasitic local elites”, and in fusing with “Euro-American hegemony”, which illustrates the “link between the loss of hope in anti-colonial nationalism and migration” (247). It is perhaps for this that Brennan sees exile as the antithesis of nationalism (Brennan 1990:60), although one must quickly add that exile can also foster a desire for restoration of a national homeland. The crisis of leadership especially which devolved into military intervention in the wake of nationalist governance at independence has particularly done much in contributing to the loss of confidence in the idea of the nation. It is truly regrettable that the confidence reposed in anti-colonial nationalism, which produced independent governance, could give way so soon. What this creates in the artist as well as the people for whom he assumes the role of a mouth-piece is nothing but a feeling of “melancholia”. In this context melancholia assumes a cumulative dimension in the sense that the post-colonial victim of exile does not only mourn over the nation fabricated for an imperialist end by the West, and which has suddenly lost its attraction and confidence, he also mourns over that preceding, old, mythical order that was decimated by colonialism. The mourning extends diachronically this far even if it has to be conceded that the epistemological and ontological order in pre-colonial Africa was never an absolutely closed up essentialism (Izevbaye 2004: 472). Therefore, in yielding to exile, there is an illustration of the pragmatism of the

mourning and melancholia that follows. Conceptually Khanna (22) reveals further that “given that the concepts of mourning and melancholia concern loss and the manner in which loss manifests itself, they are also bound to the notion of temporality – the loss of something in time and how one is affected by that in the present and for the future”. As explicated in the foregoing, the specificity of temporality in the analysis of mourning and melancholia in this section of Oguibe’s collection is crucial in that it serves to highlight the hostility generated in the homeland in the era of absolute dictatorship and the implication it has for the victims of such dictatorial rule. The situation as seen in the previous sections of the collection justifies the assertion that, in contemporary times especially:

Exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; and that like death but without death’s ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography.

(Said 2001:174)

This tearing away from homeland and its realities constitute the preoccupation of “A Song from Exile”. The first painful impression registered on the mind of the exile is nothing but that of an outsider:

I stand at the gates
Stranger and outsider
I have journeyed away
From the sea into the desert
The charm has crossed rivers
The tongue is blunt
The songster has journeyed
Without his voice
So, here I stand
In a strange land
Among a strange people
A lone rooster in grassland

(59)

As Susan Suleiman (1998: 3) intimates, “all travellers are outsiders somewhere”, but it is possible to argue that the sense of alienation an exile from a former colony has in a destination like London is particularly traumatic. Ordinarily for exiles from former colonies of Britain, some measure of reception should be expected from the former colonial power. But the reality on the ground does not allow for this. This is because “postcolonial melancholia” is not exclusively limited to the former colonies. In a way, it can be termed the ironic multiplier effects which Europe’s domination of the colonies have in turn on the former colonial powers. Just as there is a dissolution and devolution of former existing ontological and social structures

in the colonies, the colonial powers today are faced with the Herculean task of preserving an authentic Europe from miscegenation. The said miscegenation arises as citizens of the former colonies are currently resolved, in view of the realities of postcolonial loss of faith in the ideals of the postcolony, to migrate to the West, a situation that has in recent years enabled the immigrant literature boom (Folarin 2016). The “impurities” which this resolution breeds is evident in the impossibility of maintaining the old social and racial absolutism. Another effect is the erection of exclusionary and narcissistic structures for the maintenance of some purity. Talking about Britain specifically as the destination in this poem, her postcolonial travails are as enormous as they are overwhelming. But this inundation from the former colonies around the globe is only to the extent of the reach of her powers in the colonial era. According to Paul Gilroy in *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Britain currently has to fight over the unstoppable incursion of American culture and its superimposition on the attitudes of British youths. There is also a painful agony over the rate at which British “traditional vowels are painfully Australianized” (2004: 115). The African dimension to the scenario is the instance of the privileging of an “out of Africa” dimension to a Windsor Castle celebration in 2003 (116). Gilroy gives an all-embracing answer to the passion and pressure to which the former colonial power is being currently subjected:

I want to propose that it is the inhuman political body of the immigrant rather than the body of the sovereign that comes to represent all the discomforting ambiguities of the empire’s painful and shameful but apparently nonetheless exhilarating history. The immigrant is now here because Britain, Europe, was once out there; that basic fact of history is not usually deniable. And yet its grudging recognition provides a stimulus for forms of hostility rooted in the associated realization that today’s unwanted settlers carry all the ambivalence of empire with them. They project it into the unhappy consciousness of their fearful and anxious hosts and neighbours.

(100)

It shows already that the choice of the “songster” to transcend the boundaries of his homeland to Britain will be met by much hostility. The envisaged respite which informed the choice of exile might continually remain elusive. The projection of the body and personality of the migrant as an ambivalent incarnation will certainly not allow for the needed welcome. What is more, Gilroy reveals again that “when race becomes an issue a melancholic tone becomes audible” (114). For the African exile therefore the risks of exile are so high as to deny him/her the least reception where the former colonial power struggles to keep above the water of racial essentialism.

But the above notwithstanding, the poet has given in to the thought of exile and is armed with weapons of memory: “I stand at the gates/ Cold and alone/ With the soil of my land/ In a leather amulet/ With photos and the hair / Of

the woman I loved/ A coward fled home/ And the battle front” (59). The whole idea of taking along the “soil of my land” and the “photos of the woman I loved” is significant. On the one hand, Malkki notes that the symbolic act of taking a part of one’s soil on a journey especially a forced one for that matter, is for the purpose of keeping such land in remembrance as a revered homeland (55). On the other hand, as Roland Barthes reveals “the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch ...” (Hirsch 1998: 419). But beyond this, it is important to remark that the memory empowerment that these instruments provide are primarily for the purpose of offsetting the deficiency that results from a forced break from a previously avowed spatial fixity. It is indeed a gesture in recuperating memory for “inventing homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases – not in situ but through memories of and claims on places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit” (Malkki 52). So the poet, having been thoroughly overwhelmed by the vulnerability to drift from a homeland, where he has distanced himself from the cry of the millions of the oppressed people, goes about now “drenched to the bone/ With my rage and shame” (60). The consolation that memory provides appears refreshingly redeeming: “There is only memory/ To cuddle for warmth”. However, the question that is of the essence in the remaining parts of the poem is, to what extent can the treasures in the kitty of memory adequately make up for the physical loss of touch with homeland?

In the second segment of the poem, the trauma borne is nothing but that of the compromise on social interactions. The moral and epistemological structures of African civility have suffered attenuation, if not contempt in a strange land where fellow Africans/ Nigerians slug it out with survival. They are preoccupied with the survival imperative to the extent that those highly held values by which the homeland is defined are no longer worth respecting. The struggle, to be precise, is essentially capitalist and for the most part unsympathetic to the social courtesies of homeland. So, on the streets of London, the poet sees the impatience and desperation of fellow migrants. The externalisation of these feelings betrays an attempt to conform to an existing dominant social order in Britain. This order expectedly spurns the social values of home. It is a kind of compromise in hybridity which does not how-ever live up to the commendable ideals of the concept. It rather betrays the flipside of hybridity in which case its “mechanisms ... stall and misfire in the face of what is typically referred to as ‘cultural difference’” (Smith 252). This is why:

On the streets, I see my countrymen...
And everyone is hurrying past
Hurrying, looking away
No word passes between
No sign of our common kin
No elder’s blessing to his child
The blood erupts in me

UNEASY DOUBLE ATTACHMENT: ...

Our blood
And I wonder
These men
And women
With their gazes to the ground
Do they also carry
These needles in my heart?

(61)

Clearly, the experience captured about exiles on the streets of London dramatises another way in which we come to terms with what has been termed “the trauma of modernity” (Warwick Research Collective 2015: 81), especially with respect to dislocation and the subsequent struggle for integration and survival in strange climes where such desires remain for the most part elusive. The succeeding parts of the poem are preoccupied with the sorrows and occasional joys of exile. They constitute veritable reflections on the experience of exile. The third part for instance illustrates what Antoinette Burton (2003: 1) calls “the inadequacy and the indispensability of the nation”. That is, if the previous explorations in the condition of home reveal a hostility that pushes potential exiles beyond the borders, “A Song from Exile” shows the deficiencies associated with yielding to the option. In a sober reflection, the poet asks rhetorically: “And who says there is peace /Away from home? Or honour/ Or pride/ Or a sense of clan?” (62) The initial allure of exile, having paled into a sordid reality of non-productivity, especially for a poet who is the voice of the oppressed, results in an epigrammatic musing on the phenomenon:

The exile is cotton seed on the wings of the wind
A grain in the drifting sand-dunes of the earth
He is like the waters of a river coursing endlessly
Through forests and mountains into the jaws of the sea
Where it is lost forever.

(62)

The opinion of the above lines attests to the assertion that “the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever” (Said 173). Moreover, the knowledge of his exile is a reminder of the pretension that is at the base of the conferment of absolute responsibility on artists and intellectuals generally, as there are moments they fail to live up to this expectation. In other words, the assumption that they speak for the masses is not without its limitations. In the case of the poet under study here, the very fact of his exile, which means a conscious spatial removal from his immediate point of responsibility as a mouthpiece of the people, illustrates the limitations of the brief of representation that we tend to identify with artists. Thus, while there are no questions about the representative roles of artists in every given society, such roles must however be limned in qualified terms.

The fourth and fifth parts dwell on the effects of the repression of “exile’s private pain”. The enormity of the pain is best assessed when the sense of insecurity of exile contrasts with the assurance of home. While “the walls crumble” in exile, “they are going up at home”. But since the poet has adopted the fantasy of dreams and dreamlands, it is no surprise that the conditions at home have mercurially transmuted into scenes of trauma where the oppressive forces at work are incarnated in the marauding devastation of a sea rage. In the sixth part, the capture of his mother in the dreamland by agents of state torture and repression opens up the crucial question of the space-in-between within the discourse of exile. In his essay “Home, Exile, and the Space in Between”, Isidore Okpewho (2006: 68-69) has the following to say on the concept:

I believe that many scholars (*and many others outside the fold of scholarship*) who have lately relocated to the US (*and to the rest of the West*) would agree with me that whether or not we are directly affected by these tragedies frequently reported from Africa, they generally have the effect of painfully deferring our cherished hopes that sanity would someday return to our land of origin. Worse still, every time such sad tidings come from home, it is hard to avoid a certain sense of guilt about the fate of those we have left behind. We are lucky enough to have escaped the depressing (*and repressive*) conditions back home and found a safe haven here, where we have an opportunity to raise our children and pursue our professions. But while we may not be directly responsible for those acts of social and political mismanagement by which our leaders deny our people the basic rights and securities of life, we cannot help feeling that in fleeing our countries we have left our relatives and friends to their devices in increasingly insufferable conditions.

(my italics)

It is the increasing sense of “guilt” which the poet bears that heightens the tempo of self-excoriation that is pervasive in this poem. For, having watched helplessly in the dream-bondage the capture and torture of his own mother in the homeland in the sixth part of the poem, the seventh part cannot help but bring back, in an ambiguous way, memories of the oppressed of various categories. His empathy is with the imprisoned and condemned of “Gashua” and “Kirikiri”.¹¹ Such empathy extends to motherhood and the trauma of widowhood and childlessness that first played out during the war among Biafrans. It goes without saying that it is still being played out in the aftermath of the war after the country became integrated again to face the challenge of nationhood. Therefore, when the poet declaims “A Prodigal sings your pain,

11. These are notorious prisons in Nigeria: they are often perceived as sites for squashing state opposition.

mothers” (68), the ambiguity this line bears cannot be denied.¹² The substance of the empathy for those left behind assumes a panoptic dimension in the eighth and last part of the segment. The concern of the exile is no longer exclusively for the condemned and the traumatised mothers, but also for the entire homeland together with its landscape. No matter the disappointment of the past which informed the option of exile, the grandeur of the analogy of the nation as an arborescent allegory conquers the suspicion that alienation breeds:

Love is the stalk that holds the leaf to the tree
 Without it the leaf falls and is trampled underfoot
 Love is the hope that holds the climber to the trunk
 It is love that holds me to you and your own.

(69)

The empathy, having developed into love for the people and hatred for the state’s divisive forces, spreads through the land as one formidable essence – “from Lagos to Kano”, that is, from the South to the North of the country. It is about love for the young men and women of the land, the rivers and the various seasons which compare with the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of the land – “one kilometre is another language”:

I love the grass
 I love the sky
 I love the pat on the shoulder
 I love the blood in my veins
 I love that land
 I love her
 I love...
 But
 Where is your love
 Nigeria?

(70-71)

Subsequent poems in the segment, one way or the other, are replete with the pains of the unrequited love of homeland and the challenges posed by the

12. Given what the author has personally experienced in the post-Civil War years, to say that he suffers from a crisis of confidence in Nigeria will not be out of place. The Igbo who constituted the major ethnic group of Biafra while the nation lasted, still like the author, suffer betrayals from the rest of the nation. This untoward manner has a way of making one torn between the defeated and now extinct Biafra and the post-war Nigeria. In one of the concluding remarks in his essay, “Lessons from the Killing Field”, Oguibe argues: “For in conquering Biafra, Nigeria has raised a generation with uncertain loyalty and legacy of hurt and betrayal, a generation without nation, my generation: Biafra’s children.” *Transition* 77, (1997-1998), 86-99, p.98.

inadequacies of memory with which the poet tries to assuage the traumas of alienation. "Summer Song" is an instance of such poems. The fantasies and excitement generated by the approach of summer in Britain are, for instance, inadequate to erase his sense of sorrow. The burden of conscience that borders on the space-in-between with respect to the people left behind is enormously overwhelming. This is why amidst the excitement of "Covent Garden" and "speeches at Hyde Park" he will still be identified by others as constituting a curious sight. And when asked to confirm his vocation, he can only answer with a bombshell: "yes, a poet of wounds. A man of constant sorrow/ driven from his homeland/ severed from his kind". Nevertheless, the primacy of his attachment to home is not in doubt; for he imagines that when he dies in exile people will be shocked, should they open up his "breast", to "find within"

the barb
The flag, a map of my country
And a sea of boiling tears.

(74)

Besides, the above lines return the discussion to the inspiration of nationalism that can be drawn from a condition of exile, an issue hinted at earlier on in this essay. That is, much as the dystopian conditions of homeland act as a vector for exile and transgression of individuals beyond the borders of the space that constitutes the site of their primordial identity, the distance that inheres in the condition of exile can also fire up the spirit of nationalism in a displaced individual. The remark in itself also hints at the irony that surrounds the question of the initial disillusionment with homeland which induces exile on the one hand, and on the other, the impossibility of absolute separation of exiles, as in this case, from the nationalist sentiments that sustain the idea of the homeland or the nation. Therefore, whether located as space-bound, or unmoored from the physical constraints of the nation, the apprehension of exile in Oguibe constantly keeps nationalism within view, the limitations notwithstanding.

Related to the question of nationalism is commitment. Like nationalism, there is a sense in which the distance that is forged between homeland and the country of destination can lead to a severance of the commitment an artist has for his home country. Much as this is true, Oguibe's poetry demonstrates how distance from home can be made up for through reflections on and responses to the developments at home. The concern that is shown for the homeland in this collection, even during moments of schizophrenic fragmentation occasioned by dreams, goes to bear out the level of commitment by which the poetry is animated.

The pain of the thought of homeland, moreover, rings further through the poem, "For you, Nigeria". In this poem, segmented in four parts, the pains ring through the vignettes of horrors of home. The song composed for Nigeria is nothing but a dirge. It is a song that orchestrates the travails of the oppressed

of various shades: “the coal diggers, tin miners, taxi drivers rig workers”. The address to homeland in part is that of warning against human waste. Avoiding this must have informed the choice of exile. The waste is perpetrated, one is reminded, by “thieves [who]/walk around in/Uniforms”. It shows why he is not able to flinch away from issues at home when he says of homeland: “You are a burden, Homeland/You are a crown of thorns” (96). Although Homi Bhabha (cited in Smith 249) argues that there is “no necessary or eternal belongingness”, there is a sense in which this assertion can be applied only in qualified terms with relation to *A Gathering Fear*. This is because by yielding to the allure of exile in the first place, the poet appears to have challenged what Smith (249) calls the “‘old’ foundations” of the fixity of homeland and the inviolability of the attachment to it. Nonetheless, the kind of migrancy that Oguibe espouses here is far from that which Smith proposes as interrogating “ancestry and geography” especially. Truly he belongs, as confessed in one of his essays, to that group of Nigerian artists and writers who were caught in the vortex of migration to the West in the 1980s.¹³ Such migration does not rule out the possibility of return. Therefore, much as the collection itself could be said to be autobiographical in a way, it nevertheless speaks for millions of Nigerian and African migrants who strongly believe in the necessity of return to the homeland, no matter the allure of diaspora. The concluding lines of the collection, “for you, Nigeria IV” attest to this observation. It does not matter if the return is in the form of a cold, still corpse; return necessarily completes the trajectory of exile:

And if my years be blown
 Away in distant lands
 Like dry millet
 In harmattan wind
 I want to be buried
 In a free country
 Among my people
 Among my own people
 Besides my ancestors...

And as I trail the echoes
 Of the valley of death
 Among you let it be said:

*There was beauty
 In his heart
 And the Homeland
 Was his song.*

(100)

13. See Olu Oguibe, “Finding a Place: Nigerian Artists in the Contemporary Art World”, *Art Journal*, (Summer)1999(31-41), p.31.

Therefore, although homeland may be inadequate, it nevertheless remains for Oguibe indispensable, if not for anything, but for its metaphysical significance. Caught between enthusiasm and reluctance to express his/her nationalism, the exile lives in a limbo, hoping for improvement in the homeland, no matter how long that takes. This much is so even when the paradigms of homecoming are increasingly shifting to favour the rendition of homeland as a mobile, rather than a fixed category.

* **Acknowledgement**

This essay is an aspect of the author's doctoral thesis conducted at the Department of African Literature in the University of the Witwatersrand.

References

- Albright, D.
1990 *W B: The Poems*. London: J.M. and Sons.
- Awe, B.
2005 The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System. In: Ed. Andrea Cornwall, *Readings in Gender in Africa*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press; Oxford: James Currey, pp. 196-210.
- Barnes, T.R.
1967 *English Verse: Voice and Movement, from Wyatt to Yeats*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Belcher, S.
2005. *African Myths of Origin*. London: Penguin.
- Brennan, T.
1991 The National Longing for Form. In: Ed. Homi K Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 44-70.
1997 *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, D.
1998 *Voicing the Text: South African Oral Poetry and Performance*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, S.
1995 Daring the Beast: Contemporary Nigerian Poetry. In: (Ed.) Abdulrazak Gurnah *Essays on African Writing (2)*, London: Heinemann.
2003 Still Daring the Beast: Niyi Osundare and Contemporary Nigerian Poetry. In: Abdu-Rasheed Na'Allah (ed.) *The People's Poet: Emerging Perspectives on Niyi Osundare*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, pp. 97-113.
- Burton, A.
2003 Introduction: On the Inadequacy and the Indispensability of the Nation. In: Antoinette Burton (ed.) *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1-23.

- Chrisman, L.
2004 Nationalism and Postcolonial Studies. In: Neil Lazarus (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 183-198.
- Folarin, T.
2016 Against Accessibility: On Robert Irwin, Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Imbolo Mbue's "Behold the Dreamers" Online: <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/accessibility-robert-irwin-chinua-achebe-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-imbolo-mbues-behold-dreamers/#!>> 20 September 2016.
- Hirsch, M.
1998 Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile. In: Susan Rubin Suleiman (ed.) *Exile and Creativity*. USA: Duke University Press.
- Izevbaye, D.
2004 West African Literature in English: Beginnings to the Mid-Seventies. In: Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi (eds) *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* (Vol 2). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 472-503.
- Khanna, R.
2004 *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*. USA: Duke University Press.
- Malkki, L.
1999 National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees. In: Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (ed.) *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. USA: Duke University Press.
- Nora, P.
1998 Introduction to *Realms of Memory* Volume III. In: Pierre Nora (ed.) *Realms of Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. ix-xii.
- Oguibe, O.
1992 *A Gathering Fear*. Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1992.
1997-1998 Lessons from the Killing Fields. *Transition* 77: 86-99.
1999 Finding a Place: Nigerian Artists in the Contemporary Art World. *Art Journal* 58(2): 31-41.
2002 Connectivity and the Fate of the Unconnected. In: David Goldberg & Ato Quayson (eds) *Relocating Postcolonialism*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing.
2004 Exile and the Creative Imagination. *Chimurenga* (6): 22-26.
- Okpewho, I.
1988 *The Heritage of African Poetry*. England: Longman.
1999 Introduction. In: Isidore Okpewho et al. (eds) *The African Diaspora*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
2006 Home, Exile, and the Space in Between. *Research in African Literatures* 37(2): 68-73.
- Renan, E.
1990 What is a Nation? In: Homi Bhabha (ed.) *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, pp. 8-22.

- Rose, N.
1998 *Inventing our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Said, E.
2001 *Reflections on Exile*. London: Granta Books.
1994 *Representation of the Intellectual*. London: Vintage.
- Scarfone, D.
2006 A Matter of Time: Actual Time and the Product of the Past.
Psychoanalytic Quarterly LXXV: 807-834.
- Smith, A.
2000 Migrancy, Hybridity, and Postcolonial Literary Studies. In: Neil
Lazarus (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary
Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 241-261.
- Soyinka, W.
1981(1967) *Idanre and other Poems*. London: Methuen.
2006 *You must Set Forth at Dawn*. New York : Random House.
- Suleiman, S. R.
1998 Introduction. In: Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. *Exile and Creativity*.
USA: Duke University Press.
- Warwick Research Collective
2015 *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-
Literature*. Liverpool University Press.

Senayon Olaoluwa
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
samsenayon@gmail.com