



I Dance Ala-Igbo

Chikwendu P. K. Anyanwu*

I dance Ala-Igbo
The land of many dances.

Be it the vibrant hip rocking
Of Nkwa Umu Agbogho;
The systematic body swaying
Of Abigbo men's dance -
I dance Ala-Igbo.

Be it the slow, proud, pet- seeking steps
Of Ugo-na-chömma;
The fast trotting steps of Nkponkiti,
I dance Ala-Igbo.

I dance on the road
With the gorgeous and threatening steps
Of Mmanwu dance.
I dance softly and friendly into every home
With the acrobatics of Ulaga dance.

When I dance Eshè and Nwokerobo
The deaf hears the sound of my brass waistband.
In the exciting steps, twists, and leaps of Atilogwu
The eyes of the blind begin to stare.
I dance Ala-Igbo,
The dance of many instruments.

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Be it the titiro-tiro of the two eyed Oja
To which I leap,
Leap like an innocent calf;

Or the shiki-shiki of Osha - gossips of little beads
To which I shake,
Shake like a twig
Dancing out the accusations of the wind,
I dance Ala-Igbo.

Whether I bend to respond with my whole body
To the kele-nke-diri-ge of syncopating Igbogbo,
Or stand erect and nod my head
To keep the deep, steady, mellow beats,
From Udu, the tubby, chubby easy lady,
I dance Ala-Igbo.

However it pleases me
I can dance
As far as Nkwa is doing its work
In the comity of instruments.

I dance the different sounds
Of her many instruments.
I recognise each,
Doing its own thing
Its own way,
Yet, I recognise the rhythm
That carries them along in one great dance.

I see in the different beats of her instruments
The generous heart of Igbo dances
That welcomes every step that wants to dance.
Different steps, my people; one rhythm,
Let's dance Ala-Igbo.

Part II

I dance all her dances -
Joyful and painful;
And I feel very proud for they make me
The centre of attraction.

But some men think that I am a woman
Because I rock my hips to everyone's delight.
For that reason I dance the Bende War dance
Let them see the awesome vibrations of a man's breasts.

Ready for action!
See my machete!
See the heads on my head!

'cause men have made me to shake:
I dance,
In fury;
And close my mouth with frond.

This is not the time to talk:
To plead,
To ask;
Or wait to hear your word.

My blood is boiling hot:
It boils,
So hot;
I feel its time to act.

Ala-Igbo!
Obodo dike!
Eke n'egwurugwu!
It is you I dance.

I hear the Ogene from the town crier
I wake up and attend the meeting of Umunna.
I hear the warning sounds of Ikoro
And we do what Amala said,
to keep our land safe.

So I danced,
 So I used to dance,
 Syncopating freely at will.

If I danced in the night
 The sun rose, smiling.
 If I danced in the light,
 The sun delayed its setting.

Part III

Once upon a time,
 Men began to forsake the dances of our land
 And the instruments of our dances
 For artificial sounds crossed the oceans
 To turn our men round and round
 As a woman turns akara in the frying pan.
 They followed the sound of metal trumpets
 Broke the Ele-mmiri, the natural tuu-tutuu....
 No more the expressive gestures
 Evoked by the sweet dialogues of Ngelenge
 Since the ivory keys found a seat in the obí.
 On these keys, men play' discord,
 And tell us it is chromatic.
 Because we knew nothing of this instrument,
 Whatever they played was music from the masters.
 So did Lugard play in our land,
 With all the tremulous discords
 And we called him Lord;
 And Zik danced - wide legs
 Across those rivers that gave the tune
 For the chromatic Nigeria.
 Poor Zik! His trousers were torn, no tailor.
 The notes are still chromatic, still crying.

I dance Ala-Igbo
 Not spreading my legs so wide,
 Not to lose my costume,
 My beauty, my dignity, my pride.

Come, sound Uhe! Sound Ikoro!
Call my people: 'Come home!'
Arise Okokondem!
Call them to dance - dance together
The tune of peace - Ala-Igbo, Biafra
Whatever it means,
As far as it is the place of the rising sun.
Machine guns cannot give us the sound
After all, our daughters dance other lands.

I was born with a dance.
That's the dance of my heartbeat.
I love you when you dance your own dance.
Why will you not love me when I dance my own dance?

Everyone is born with a dance.
And no one can dance the dance that is not his,
Except on borrowed feet.
How come other men dance their own dances
But wouldn't let me dance my own dance?

My dance is Ala-Igbo
The land where the Sun begins to smile
On Lugard's discordant notes.
Hoping that one day,
Men will know and uphold the difference
Between the face of the rising sun,
And the face of the setting sun.

And I proclaim my dance day and night
For a city set on a hilltop cannot be hidden.
Dance what you like.
Dance to compromise.

I dance Ala-Igbo.
The only dance that sets my life free.