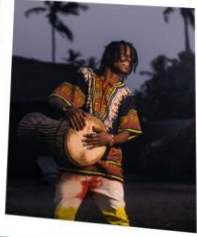


# LOGUE.

THE UNEXPECTED VOICES  
of CITY MASQUEREDS



OMOGBOLOHAN Bello

# **LOQUE.**

**THE UNEXPECTED VOICES  
OF CITY MASQUERADES**

**Ọmọgbóláhàn Bello**

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First Edition

*for my father, Àrẹ̀mo (Horse Stud Son),  
all your words were sacred temple songs*

*and*

*for my mother, Kẹ́misọ́lá  
an ethereal city of holy flames*

*"Tread softly because you tread on my dreams"*

- W. B. Yeats

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# Appreciations

My special thanks to *Olódùmàrè*, creator of the Universe, and my *orí*, the deity who will never leave. I am also grateful to my ancestors, those who have come and gone before me, because all their knowledge is intrinsic to what I understand as being human.

I am grateful to my father and mother, for life, a place to call home and an exemplary life where I have learned about midnights and candles. I am also grateful to my siblings, *Agboṣlá*, *Tẹ̀wọ̀gbọ́lá*, and *Tọ̀míwá* whose fascination with my work is both amusing and inspiring.

I am indebted to *Adéjùmòkẹ*, soft morning songs, on whose wings I visit my salvation.

I am grateful to friends *Débọ́lá*, *Nifẹmi*, *Everest* and *Michael* who have encouraged me to go the extra mile to show the world my thoughts, regardless of my perceptions of skill.

I am also grateful to *Olúwáfikáyọmi*, keen eye of moonlights, whose advice has been an invaluable contribution to this document.

I am grateful to *Dr K.F Kúṣọlátì*, MD, and *Prof. E.R Aiyede*, whose admonition and encouragement have kept me awake at night, thinking about tinkering.

I cannot express how grateful I am to everyone who has put their faith in me, even when I doubted myself. Thank you all.



# What is Logue?

I hear voices and I meet frequently with words. Each of whom have poured their souls into my ears as they squeeze through the walls, gates and crevices of my mind. I have developed a relationship with each word and at their behest, I have placed them delicately, side-by-side, as I try to show them my utmost respect.

I learned that my father, like I, endured this uncanny fascination with words. I believe this was an impregnable sign to devote myself to poetry. So, I write because I am compelled to hold on to an intrinsic part of myself.

In Yorùbá mythology, our ancestors visit us as masquerades. I find this phenomenon to be very fascinating. My belief in a robust connection between my ancestors and the earth beneath my feet makes me understand that all the words that visit me are the divine chord, tethering me to humanity.

My writing process and my fascination with masquerades has inspired the “Logue”. Each poem here is a collection of series of monologues and dialogues collecting themselves as whispers singing in my pen.

Thank you for embarking on this journey with me.

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# Prologue

## **Incendiary Libations**

(Incantation song for ancestral religions)

Every time I court a hard beverage, a small oak is lynched, yet, its carcass makes love to my lips. Seductively, it places its finger on my lips, calling my upper lip redemption and naming my lower lip a revelation.

Its wingless death forces the choristers of Aljannah to take a pause from music. In this great silence, I encounter the psalms of perdition reminding me

that only the great Ìrókò knows where my ancestors were born, and the road they travelled as they left to become customers of new markets; only the soft brown earth around its feet catches my descent.

As the son of man, I came out of the waters with the subtlety of libations flowing into the earth; each centimetre of air measured by my nostrils is an interpretation of life,

as the splitting of seconds into pillars that keep the firmaments far above us; as a road travelled by my kin; and as the triumph of laughter in the darkness.

So, every time I pour the spirits into my cup, I serve some into the earth with my right hand to pacify the spirits of my ancestors, and,

because alcohol sets one's soul at ease, I pray they are tranquil in their resting spaces between sand and air.

## **Intravenous Introspections**

(a ritual song for lost souls)

You do not find yourself when you place your feet on dust and tar. The journey begins when you find yourself in reflective circumstances.

First, you must confront your mother, the Earth, for she is the road responsible for my journey through languid fortunes.

You must also confront your father, the solemn hands of creation, for their meticulousity cannot feign ignorance of your anguish.

Then, you must confront your personal god, the idol, who has pillaged your fertile back for its fruits, and planted instead, tense rivers.

Finally, you must confront your shadow, whose unrighteous mimicry is the inflammable flatulence that the blacksmiths use to forge demons.

## **Is that the thing tigers do? Or how do you see race?**

Is it the colour of his skin or the colour of Husain bolt's gold medals fleeing the scene?

Only the policeman pulls off this heist; he picks a black man's rights and buries it deep within his baton.

His solemn oath is that black men have committed the greatest unrighteousness against nature. Their black skin stains the soil beneath their feet; skin that dares

mimic the luscious brown of his dear mother earth.

I agree with his verdict. What is there to like about a man whose skin was humbled by the sun?

## Morning Songs



## **On God.**

When you grow up without starry nights, you want to count all the stars wherever you see them.

On some days, the nights are swept out from under me and I lie in limbo, wondering if the demons have set their clocks to commence communion.

The cleric says that my good fortunes are in my bag, and that I can pluck them to service my destiny like a bag of chips servicing my teeth.

When I ask for the reason that I am oblivious of this, she says that perhaps I have kept my ears in my pockets and defenestrated my eardrums.

## Catharsis

When the sun set over the shuddering hills of Ìyìn-Èkìtì,  
I found the Egúngún laughing at the children of bridges  
consigned to oblivion.

Their laughters rang a warning in the old tongue,  
“The river who forgets its yesterdays is soon relieved of its  
tomorrows”

## Springtime in Ìbàdàn

When you look up,  
on spring mornings in Ìbàdàn,  
you catch a glimpse of the fragrance  
of lost empires  
in your nostrils, and  
as her neckline melts  
into the soft gloom of cloudy skies,  
history manifests  
through the rusty crowns  
of her brown roof ridgeline.

## Pagan

On your palms is the mating dance of mellow woodwind chords and the eternal flames of perdition. Each clap of your fists is an ill-fated miracle.

Your tongue is a riverbed of enchantments planted in the old language. Listen,

your voice is the sauntering audacity of freedom.

You are not of the beloved; your beard is not bedraggled by the shame of your youth.

You have been baptised by the water and wine of solemn righteousness. See, the cloud gates of perpetuity have parted;

you are now the beloved son of pleasure on the road to redemption.

The ghosts that haunt your dreams fulfil the promises of pilgrimage. Look!

your father has betrayed paradise to keep vigil over you,

yet you declare the teachings of the pilgrims to be  
blasphemy; transgressions on reality.

Your soul is halved into three unequal pieces in divinity.  
One bridge connects your friends to Jerusalem and Mecca  
while your lips obfuscate the road to your ancestry.

Your infidelity is your badge.

## **Your Genitals do not Define You**

You are, first,  
child of Mother Earth,  
born of Olódùnmàrè, eye of the universe.

You voyage through time and space, limitless

You are,  
a song,  
terrifying to touch, a terrier,  
burning the sun's sandals,  
painting the shores of the seas,  
and every knicker.

You *colournize* continents and personate the metaphysical  
components of God

You are at once,  
spirit, flesh;  
soul, body;  
fragrance, mist;  
rain, dew, fog,

You are,  
war and love songs;

strength and cowardice;  
warm rubber and cold steel;  
fire and rain water;  
magma and ash,

Your sexuality doesn't define you,  
child of Mother Earth,  
neither does the colour of your skin,

Your translations are transcendental,

You are a never to be completed work of art.

## Ankara

This is a remedy for the pain,

Woman,

your creation is a haze, intoxicating as the fermented  
flowers of creation.

Your intricacy is beset with torrid optic offending curves,  
fluorescent as carnation on clay cast days.

You resemble the continent you adorn, as she cowers in  
trepidation, her veins overrun by the agony of diseased  
nations that once blossomed only in her womb.

You hide the secrets of the universe when you stand in  
insubordination to defy the depraved deities of damnation.

On your patterns lay the first and last verse of eternal  
poetry, instructing demons to throw flared nostrils at  
tarnation.

Your form is embodied in the turbulent capes of human  
expression that softly strangle the Okada man as he strings  
his way through the interiors of ìbàdàn.



You stand out as history slapping shapes into the present.

The edges of your beautiful wrappers are stained by the muddy grit of Ọjà Ọba, yet, they weave intangible elements into the fabrics of the cosmos.

Your feverish patterns are the language of long forgotten nomads.

Each thrust of your feet into the earth falls pregnant with the possibility of new civilisations.

## **My lover is a Sin and Your adultery is not**

I see how your eyes scream at my breasts.

I know your loins contemplate wild fires when the strings of my bra sneak out of the reaches of my blouse.

You want to have your hands on my breasts milking soft gasps from my lips.

Your tongue is desperate for the crown of my nipples and the wet palette of my tongue, I can see it. It is written clearly between the wrinkles on your forehead.

Your mantra is that you love me, possibly more than the creator does; you regret that you met your wife and you wish that you met me instead. Or that you had waited for me,

but I don't understand because I was only 8 years old when you got married 10 years ago. Can you wait a decade for someone whom you haven't met?

I trust that you do not lie so I do not disbelieve.

Now you have begun to bite at my heels, and throw the rod my way because you have learned that my wants are not made for you, my heart has been designed for another. My loins melt steel when she runs her hand down the curve of my back.

Why do you whisper in hallowed voices, in crevices and in admonition?

Now you are my father, brother and pastor.

- concerned about hell's fire cooking my soul's skin.

Now you spit gospels in tongues:

"What you're doing is wrong".

"You're engaging in carnal sins".

"Those are the things that can lead you to hell, you have to be very careful!"

"Haven't you heard of Sodom and Gomorrah?"

## **Colonial Mentality**

White,

the colour you associate with your Hebrew god's purity is  
Ọbàtálá's only clothing.

Black,

the colour you associate with your Hebrew Devil's sins is  
the colour of your skin.

# Photographs

## Youth

I mourn every photograph of my youth feverishly as I would a deceased relative. I would ask them “Who were you?” as they ask me “Who *ARE* you?”

I am frightened to look into the brown eyes inside the all their faces as their lips - stoic and unwavering - whisper questions of the innocence and folly of youth into the back of my neck, and I wonder if the depth I taste in my lungs was born with me.

I am frightened to look at them as I fear looking into the mirror because I am afraid the truth would sweep the light from my eyes and the earth from under my feet.

I mourn because I do not remember the person I see. How could they be me if I am no longer me (I am somewhere in between myself and my father)? Was I a man before I became a boy?

I mourn every photograph of my youth feverishly as I would a deceased relative. One whom I loved dearly but remember nothing about.

## **Mother, I do not know your Oríkì**

but,  
written behind your eyes  
are the secrets to divination.

**Nkem, I am no longer breathing.**



## **Discipline**

Auntie,

what will I gain from breathing, if you don't use my tears to mop the stiff stairs of our home?

## **Iyàwó Ọlá Ọmọ Ọba**

That soft smile you gifted the world  
in the Polaroid you gave me (last time we touched)  
mimics  
the opening symphonies of God's voice  
at the dawn of creation.

# The Broken Orchestras

## **Acirfa - Son of A Gun**

*Mezzo Forte (very loud)*

You are a loaded gun with no trigger, cocked, aiming at no one in particular. You're a not the soft wind tickling noses with affection.

You are wise and revered, an old mother with sagging breasts who shows all the other mothers how to interpret the tears of their infants, yet your immortality is a mistake.

It was you who left the stove ablaze with all its fiery affections;

the name of your youth is a failure to adhere to promises.

Your breasts are left sordid with the romanticisation of unwitnessed history.

## **Airegin - Daughter of Despair**

*Forte (loud).*

You are not the seed of tranquillity, Airegin.

You were born smashing into a rock,  
your head is the melting point of silk irons, velvet swords  
and steel voices.

Your mother was born on the run,

her mother's left knee touched the ground as she stood  
with her right - *ikúnlẹ̀ abiyamọ o.*

At your birth, your mother danced around bullets running  
helter-skelter. You were shed from your mother's belly  
with the speed a rock uses to shed its children.

Your cries could not break into this world because the  
whispers of this world are a thousand decibels thick at  
night and a hundred thousand kilojoules during day.

You tried to sing to your lover a love song but it sounded  
like bullets forcing themselves into the air and settling rifts  
in the afterlife.

Your voice is a steel chain clogged in the waist of a bicycle.  
How can you sing anything other than shrill battle cries?

I'd have no mercy on you Airegen, you desolate despicable  
daughter of destruction whose sons sing sin songs of silent  
soliloquy.

## **Emoh**

*Piano (soft)*

Home has now come to mean scandalous newspaper headlines

forcing flirtatious looks at me while I wonder if things would end in sardonic laughters

or ironic tears. That is what Nigeria is now -  
questions cradling your lips  
as your mind begs for a reprieve.

The tyrant has asked for justice  
while the noose lies loosely  
on his brother's neck. Yesterday  
he pleaded for amnesty for his own head. In his plea,  
he reminded us that  
home is where your brethren live.

Live, leave, leaf, lift.

I tend to hear leave,  
when men ask me how the tendrils of the landscape would  
live if there are no sons of farmers  
occupying the lustful radiance of sunlit fields.

Our president's head has fallen off his neck.

The king's men cannot decide if humpty is dead or if only  
his mind strayed out  
of his body. Yet the kingsmen force feed us the myth that  
we are unbreakable as the resolve of waves at high tide.  
They tell us waves don't drown; waves open a window to a  
never seen world.

Widow, window, windows

The sage asks me from out of the flat 53-inch window  
seated on the floor of my room;  
if all birds nest in the sky,  
how will the widow nest if she insists on grounding her  
children?



## Broken Alliterations

Hey Siri, is there a song that sounds like home?

#NowPlaying: Mozart - Requiem

Darling,

The last voices the dead hear before they are lowered into the catacombs in Mother Earth's womb are written with faint quills, strong hands and ink-jars of tears.

Maps have no way of knowing which way home is, the same way stray hearts stay apart as forlorn songs desperately trying to recreate the lonely faces of God.

Do you remember that night when your tongue broke the whip on my back?

I wept.

## Love-Deities and Magic

## telegrams 1&2

1. I don't think your vices are bad; I think you're a form or art in the sense that if I was alive for generations, you would remain timeless as DaVinci and Picasso.

2. If you were to ask me what my favourite colour is; I would not say red or blue or yellow or black; I would say you; all your shades front and back, because even when your eyes are unclear as foggy mornings in Èkìtì, your skin is a subtle manifestation of God

## **ebullience of songs**

I'm holding a fertile flame,  
an ebullience of songs;  
strong as the Sky by day, and  
gentle as the oceans by night.

Beneath my feet  
is the murmur of dark skies;  
splitting the earth into:  
inertia on my left foot,  
and troubled winds on my right foot

I have plucked the flowers in Yemoja's hair  
and I have borrowed the chest width of Ọ̀bàtálá,  
yet, you do not see my songs  
and you do not listen to my anthems.

I'm holding a fertile flame,  
an ebullience of songs;  
my fingers have burned,  
and my throat has become an inferno.

## **fɔłáwɛwó**

You are  
an  
addiction,  
as  
compulsory  
as a  
sun-sated  
noon sky.

You are  
a  
magnet,  
for eyes;  
or body;  
or soul –  
as an  
illicit  
inebriation

You are  
a  
flowerbed  
of fantasies.

## **eden.**

When you smile  
on a dust parched afternoon  
your face  
is the swollen reprieve  
of bowels filled to explosion –  
a thousand kilojoules  
of laughter shock my Adam's apple.

When tyrant tongues  
hold days hostage  
and force nights to swallow  
sweeping tides of grief,  
your voice is  
the warm fury of  
milk and honey.

## Simple Songs (1-14)

i.

Your heart is a jailer,  
and I am unwilling to be set free.

ii.

Your heart is a fountain,  
and its enchantments are  
the love letters of Eros.

iii.

Your heart is a gun,  
and its synopsis is  
my beatitude and my demise.

Iv.

All your words are  
carefully sequenced  
symphonies of sweet songs.

v.

Your smile  
is a dialect of  
heavenly laughters.

vi.

You breed horses in my belly;  
each horse rides seamless  
as warm golden sunsets.

vii.

Your hands are a trigger;  
with every touch,  
I become a gun.

viii.

Your voice is the heart of galaxies,  
every decibel is broken as angel songs  
illuminating dark skies.

ix.

Your body is the temple  
reverberating the hallowed  
hymns of Gaia.

x.

Your tongue warehouses  
violent incendiary rhythms  
of love percussions.



xi.

Your body is the addictive substance  
that I consume as it consumes me

xii.

Your eyes open up the gates of heaven  
as the hosts bow in adulation

xiii

Your kisses are  
the sweeping tides of Atlantis  
immobilising my knees.

xiv.

Your eyes burn bright blue  
as complete combustion, and  
my heart is laid to waste as a pile of wax

# Logue

## **of tongues.**

Whilst seeking God  
I am accosted by 3 prophets –  
one of the Hebrews,  
one of Arabia, and  
one of my ancestors.

The Hebrew prophet tells me  
he has translated God tongue –  
from the tongue of his ancestors  
to my borrowed English tongue  
and even to the tongue of my fathers  
(and every other tongue on earth)  
but still, I must learn  
the strange tongues of God.

The Arabian priest tells me  
that God's tongue is best not translated  
to my new English tongue  
nor to the tongue of my ancestors  
(and every other tongue on earth)  
so, I must learn  
the strange tongue of God  
(which is the tongue of his forefathers –  
for myself and for God).

The priest of my ancestors tells me  
God's tongue needs not be translated  
to my new English tongue  
or any other tongue  
so, I needn't learn  
any strange tongue for God  
all I need know  
is the tongue of my progenitors,  
I must speak the language of the elders

Whilst seeking God  
I am accosted by 3 prophets,  
they promise  
eternity  
paradise, and  
solutions.

Whilst seeking the face of God  
I am a stranger, lost  
in parlance

## **at the Palm Trees of Unìbàdàn.**

Somewhere in Ìbàdàn. – in freedom town,  
a room painted by lactation  
melts into the mouths of adults,

a boy holds a white lantern hostage  
above decades of scholarly souls,  
drinking fearfully like maidservants  
sipping the master's wine.

His prayer is to regurgitate  
Exact duplicates of time  
in geometry engineering, science and art  
and exactly not duplicates of time  
in geometry, engineering, science and art.

Not so far from him,  
a throng fraternizes with darkness  
throats, breasts and drums and wine.  
Their hands stampede dead cells  
and their throats swell rapidly  
(as power generator motors)  
from the rigorous dance of the palm wines.  
Their feet raise no dust in the pantry,  
their fog choruses in frog choruses

“lòfẹ̀ lòfẹ̀ lawa n do wọ̀n (x2)  
Awọ̀n ọ̀mọ̀ Idia ti araye fowo do  
Lofe lofe lawa n do won x2”

Somewhere else in freedom,  
a pair molest the darkness  
while worshipping an internally fired screen.  
They romance through passes, strengthened fore cortexes  
And an orange blink at the base of Toshiba  
“it’s a goal...”  
Blank  
Now it’s hot, their bodies reject the weather as the music  
Beckons to their effect  
“Lofe lofe lawa n do won...”

Concurrently,  
the first light goes dim,  
the music beckons to upturned cheeks  
and  
“Lofe lofe lawa n do won...”  
He rearranges his dunlops grudgingly  
While his cheeks are kept abreast  
Of the fog chorus.  
“let me sing a little before dawn”

It's midnight now  
And all the boys lie face up in their beds  
And their eyes anticipate the government's light power  
While they plead with angry bellies  
And swollen skulls  
As their thoughts caress  
The ambience of fluid darkness  
Their odd chorus plays  
As sense mixes with intoxication  
"My grade point average keeps dro...  
Lofe lofe lawa n do won..."

## **dancing devils of high definition**

You make sense of the Devil because he is your friend.

why have enemies, when you can have friends?

woe betides you

if you don't love the devil

as you love your father

You break bread with the man

because you are convinced his heart is a musician – like  
yours

His teeth also tell talks of convincing melodies –

Don't mind them jo, you are the same

But his soul will become withered

And his heart will fail

Because he is the master not architect of his destiny

And woe will betide you

If you don't love the man

As you love the devil

You break your eyes and ears for angels –

To see their signs and listen to their songs. And

To hear the butchery of all your yet slain demons.

Your heart throttle de-elevates to capture your battle  
ready amens

But as their trumpets desist from coloring your eardrums,



your demons return to force you to sing an unknown and  
soundless song of despair  
But woe will betide you  
If you don't love your demons  
As you love the man

You break your hands up at the elbows  
To fight the gods; old and new  
Because you were taught  
That they only see you  
When your fingers poke their arseholes  
And their eyes wither with cloud dust  
Whenever you kiss frequent indignation.  
But the gods won't matter  
Neither will they answer  
Because you made them with soil under your feet  
and the wood your cut in your palms,  
And the foolhardy reasoning in your chest  
But woe betide you  
If you don't love your gods  
As you love the angels

You make sense of the devil  
Because he is your friend  
Why have enemies –  
When you can have friends?

Woe will betide you  
If you don't love the devil  
As you love your gods

**fires.**

Because  
the first night  
was cold  
and  
devoid of light,  
we asked the gods  
for an anxious reprieve

They sent us  
warmth and shadows.

## Lie, Mahmoud, Lie

Take the truth far from us, Mahmoud,

Tell us about our father's loins,  
and the virility that accompanies the age of gerontocrats

Take the truth far from us, Mahmoud,

beg our hands to clap  
when our faces twist  
with the rubble of *incomplete promises*

Take the truth far from us, Mahmoud

Hide it underneath the baskets  
of Remi Raji's harvest of laughters;

Take the truth far from us, Mahmoud

every utterance you make  
disguises itself as a broadcast of the basketmouth

Take the truth far from us, Mahmoud

Perhaps you do not know

the circus does not laugh because it is the joke

Take the truth Mahmoud, we don't need it

## Epilogue

## Sufjan (Thunderstorm)

If your birth  
is the epicentre of the storm,  
be careful about  
the healing you give;

If your lungs  
hold tempestuous songs,  
fasten your belt to  
the breeches of the wind; and

If your breasts  
are the apples of capricious lust,  
preclude your mortality from sin

because  
where thunderstorms may undress cities,  
only death disrobes shadows

## Masquerade Song

Masquerades dance in my dreams, and each time their feet touch the ground, I hear the mother drum tell me the origins of myself.

You're welcome, did you come well?

The biggest masquerade then slides into the air graciously as his backflip melts into a front flip. I am not startled nor amazed by their colours.

It is the familiarity in their eyeless faces that startle me.

How do I find a face I don't know to be familiar?



## About the Author

An offspring of the “good morning people”, Omogbolahan believes he is a passenger in time collecting samples of experience across the universe. He is a positively pessimistic nomad of sorts who thinks he is not yet accustomed to what it feels like to be a living, breathing man. For him, his works are less of writing and more of listening.