

## The Philosophical Perspective of the Poems of Maria Ajima: The Instance of *Cycles*



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**ABSTRACT:** Philosophical writings and poetic rendition are both human endeavour that are universal in outlook as well as specific to indigenous societies. They are insightful discourses that contribute to learning, knowledge and sustained intellectual development of a society's human resource. Philosophy and poetry exist in Africa's complex of cultural mechanism and provide the foundation as well as the sustenance of Africa's indigenous knowledge reservoir. African literature and its poetry specifically, portray perspectives of life from the experiences of the African writer who most times functions as the voice and intellectual conduit of his society. A Poetic vision of life is committed in a rendering that is philosophic and depicts shared experiences of the members of a society. *Cycles* by Maria Ajima is a collection of poems by a Nigerian writer. The poems provoke the reader to confront daily life issues by redressing them from the standpoint of logical reasoning, stark presentation and an existential position. The paper surmises that in this collection of poems the writer combines the aesthetic mode with a philosophic outlook that is essentially African to situate poetry as an indigenous enterprise that advances intellectual development.

### INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is conceptualized as an area of study that makes inquiry into the origin of knowledge and its value. As a study and approach to life it questions and attempts to provide logical conclusions to human existence, other species and existence generally. Poetry as an aspect of literature allocates to its area of inquiry a limitless terrain, that allows poetry to take on and discuss any subject thus encompassing questions of life and existence.

### Situating Poetry and Philosophy

The etymology of the word philosophy is located in Greek civilization. It is recorded that the Greek version of the word, Philosophia was invented by Pythagoras. The two Greek words; Philo and Sophia translates as the love of wisdom. Within a context the love for wisdom means thinking and asking questions in the bid to acquire knowledge. Philosophy "seeks to understand and explain our experience of the world." (Anjov p. 2) It is a rational, conceptual and systematic inquiry into the affairs of man, the universe and its workings, to engage in the act of philosophising, the thinker must proceed in an ethical and rational manner. He must deploy certain methodological; tools to enable him arrive at some logicity of the thought process to which he proposes.

Beyond the articulation of the origin of the word, philosophy originates and is practised in all human cultures of the world. Anjov insist that "whenever we think of philosophy either as a way of life or a study of reality, no culture can be seen as having a monopoly of wisdom, knowledge and power" (p.3) In Africa as well as other human societies, philosophical reasoning is practiced because in all of human life, there is a desire to know and be informed, there is a questioning and an attempt to rationalize and explain about life and existence. Philosophy permeates the existence and activities of man. In more systematic sense philosophy exists as an academic discipline which is studied in its broad branches but in no specific order as aesthetics, metaphysics, epistemology logic and ethics. Philosophy involves and dwells on thinking above all else and the philosopher is a thinker and inquirer of knowledge.

Articulated criticism with established foundations in Platonic thought viewed poets and their craft as misleading society. It is argued by Plato that philosophy articulates established truths while poetry can be a subjective indulgence of the poet, but Plato in a contradictory manner exempts Homer and stands him out as an example to be emulated. Aristotle, also a classical thinker and Plato's student laid the classical treaties that connects poetry, the epic, narratives and tragedy. And the string that holds all of these discourses in as systematic bond is the deployment of logic, aesthetics and ethical parameters. In this seminal statement Aristotle establishes the latent connection between poetry and philosophy:

I propose to speak not only of poetry in general but also of its species and  
their respective capacities; of the constituent parts of a poem; and likewise  
of any other matters in the same line of inquiry. Let us follow the natural  
order and begin with first principles p. 2316

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Armstrong also adopts a position that seeks to close the gap between poetry and philosophy. He argues that in situating poetry and non-poetic forms that are tended to non-fiction and reality “the difference is not between fiction and non-fiction,” there are no strait jacket distinction but what the poet does is to infer from the “causal relationship” between the real and unreal; their intermingling and influences on each other and thus project about what may or has happened. (p.1)

The literary artist and philosopher are humanistic scholars whose preoccupation is to make rational sense of human existence. Rene Descartes posits that man searches and questions his existence essentially by the activity of thinking and reasoning this was a fact that Descartes found was impossible to dispute, thus he concluded that man is a thinking being. Consequently, Zator; (39), Tughemba(49) re-echo the logic that caused “Descartes (to arrive) at his philosophical Dictum: “I think, therefore I exist” (cogito ergo sum). To be alive means to un avoidable think about life and the happenings in it.

It is buttressed that poetry lends itself to association with philosophy because poetry cannot be pinned down to one and a specific definition. The concerns of poetry move from subjective rendition to the intellectual, social and public realm; its subject matter is limitless. Poetry is recognised and identified by its aesthetics; regimented arrangements or not, the musical systemization of alliteration and assonance, rhythmic order or un-rhythm, parallelism and refrains these all add up to create lyrical tones or poetry that reads like prose. Beyond these, poetry’s subject and concern is wide and universal. Being creative in nature poetry and an its thematic concerns can be examined from a philosophic position. In Literature which poetry is part of and in philosophy, human liberty and expression and the right to question are upheld. Abubakar explicates that:

literature (poetry) and varied ways of its study are sustained by a philosophic outlook, ... This is because since Aristotle, Literature is predicted on the idea that real life does not speak for itself, and it cannot have any meaning or sustain a cognitive interest until it is bestowed with a significance and emplotted into a meaningful structure of narrative (36)

This point by Abubakar had been made earlier in history when Brooks quotes Eliot as saying that: The poet is committed “to turn the unpoetical into poetry and to fuse the matter of fact and the fantastic” (4) Analytical treaties and methodological reasoning are undertaken by philosophers as polemical writings but the same philosophers; be they of western and American descent, like, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Waldo, Emerson, Voltaire, Donne and Eliot or Africans like Cesaire Brutus, Nyerere, Nkrumah, Soyinka, Okri and others deploy the fictive and aesthetic mode to give free rein to their thoughts, imaginations and feelings where they are unhindered by the rules of factual presentation of events, where the poetic licence operates.

It is of note that the works of African writers was incorporated into the Western Literary tradition as Commonwealth literature. Subsequently these writers renounced the normenclature of an appendage and charted an African philosophical discourse within which the histories and literatures of formerly colonised people is re-read and written. African thinkers and writers are determined in the reasoned pursuit of knowledge. Their works are inter-wined as criticism, philosophical treatises, massive creative production. These perspectives and disposition to the intense and unending search for knowledge obliterates whatever demarcation may have been between poetry and philosophy.

Poetry exist as a foremost genre that is as ancient as the creation of man. Every society owns its poetry as such poetry cannot be narrowed down to a particular definition. Still some definitions of poetry, offered by indigenous writers are suited to the purpose of this paper. Toryima Emma Jenkwe posits “that poetry mirrors the whole spectrum of societal life, its history, its beliefs, traditions, changing moods, frustrations, hopes and aspirations, rituals, day to day functions, its individuals and so on.”(Quoted in Ajima p.1) Ojaide describes “poetry an art that attempts to comprehend life to make human beings be at peace with life; or to be so moved as to offer changes from bad to good. Ajima sums up that “poetry can deal with any subject matter of life because its raw material is life, and as life is infinitely varied, so poetry is of different kinds and voices.” (p. 11) In Africa, oral poetry as well as its written traditionall together are society’s artistic artefact woven into the fibre of daily living and for ceremonial and academic purposes is deployed in the form of wise sayings, proverbs and aphorisms.

### African Philosophical Thought and World View

African philosophical thought has undergone an evolutionary process. Early philosophical thought was shrouded in terms like “collective consciousness, simplicity of the state of nature and differential mentality.” (Ogunmodede p. 19) This however were Eurocentric descriptions of ethical values and existence. The responses to the stereotyping of African mentality led to an African consciousness of articulating her discourses, and indigenous philosophical methodologies began to evolve.

The challenge before African philosophers became to reconstruct and recollect, reposition and re-write African cultural values and epistemologies the Africa past was largely in pre-literate forms. It has been posited with examples that African philosophical thought pre-dates Western civilization. Ogunmodede declares that “African philosophy existed long, long ago (p.37). This statement aims to debunk assertion by Western scholars who denied that Africans were incapable of “rigours, logical, systematic and coherent reflection on reality.” (Ogunmodede p.40) Parrinder quoted in Ogunmodede posits that the “act of philosophising is a universal one which all groups of men engage in. Descartes famous quote has universal application to humankind. African writers have argued that philosophical thought began in Africa starting in Egypt not in Greece; Athens as Western writers have increasingly propounded.

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“Imhotep of 2800 B.C. is named as the city of the first philosopher and not Thales of Greece of the 6<sup>th</sup> c BC. In the text. *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy* George Granville Monah James posits that ancient Egyptian Philosophical elements were woven around a “complex religious system, called Mysteries. (P.5) quoted in Anjov) He insists that the major pillars of Egyptian philosophy were stolen by Greek philosophers and appropriated as the beginnings of philosophical thought. Ogunmodede foregrounds that from ancient times African philosophers have queried “the essence of existence or life itself –whether God exists or not. They have sought to explain the phenomenon of material change and development in their societies” (p.41) That the ancient and early part of African philosophical thought was not documented in written form does not obliterate its occurrence and existence from pre-literate age. (Cheik Anta Diop quoted in Ogunmodede 42 ‘The African Origin of Civilization.’ Ogunmode explicates that the “History of African Philosophy must begin with the history of Egyptian philosophy” (p.43) It is submitted that part of why philosophical thought remained in oral form was because “it was a taboo for the initiates to commit into writing the wisdom from the gods”(43) Again what was put in written form of hieroglyph (writing consisting of symbols and sign) was destroyed by attacks and conquest from Persian, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and subsequently Europe. From the Egyptian centres of learning, ancient reasoning centred on cosmology, Anthropology and Theology. Consequently, the rest of pre-literate Africa had a system of organized life; art, ethical values, customs and logical thought that were passed down through generations in the form of “proverbs, adages and maxim” p. 56 Therefore African creative art in visual, oral gestural form pre-dates the written tradition and have remained as a stabilizing and sustaining of African cosmology, customs, norms and values. African poetry as part of African art has been a systematic tool for comprehending the African existence. From traditional society, the poet has acted as the informant of his society. Beginning from the 1930s contemporary African philosophers began to actively articulate Africa through their own philosophical treatises. Poems such as Aime Césaire’s “Return to my Nativel and,” David Diop’s “Africa My Africa,” and such movements as Negritude and nationalist activities were all determined attempts at reinstating an African philosophy of life.

Therefore, a methodological beginning has been to define and situate the practice of African philosophy. African philosophy has been defined as “what belongs to...possessed...or owned by African;...what pertains to...the peoples and continent or Africa...” (Aigbodioh p.77) Aigbodioh extends that African philosophy is “an aspect...of the academic discipline of philosophy...which is put in place (conceptualised) by African scholars...” Omoregbe cited in Aigbodioh defines African philosophy as an ancient practice. He situates the “yesterday” of African philosophy as “the fragments of philosophical reflections, ideas, and world views transmitted to us through the formulas of wise sayings through proverbs, stories, socio-political organisations mythology, through doctrines and practices” even for his “today” African philosophical thoughts still encompass” deep philosophical reflections. (P.78) He situates early African philosophers as the contemporaries of Greek philosophers like Socrates and Plato and German philosophers such as Descartes, Kant and Hegel. This to establish that African philosophy is a historical antecedent even though it was not captured and articulated as an academic discourse before contemporary era. In the attempt to establish a historical basis and continuity, Akin Makinde dates African philosophy from its unwritten phase to contemporary period. (Quoted in Aigbodioh 78). The African philosopher works within the ambit of his world and environment to seek, inquire and rationalise about the essence of material and metaphysical existence.

From the experience of colonial contact, African philosophers became more articulate and intellectual. This began around the in the 1920s, when Africans who acquired Western education began to question and challenge the legacies and relics of colonial domination. African intellectuals, these are: Aime Césaire, Franz Fanon, Julius Nyerere, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo others writers; are Denis Osadebey, Chinua Achebe Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, and Ngugiwa Thiongo belong to what Chimakanan classifies as the “literary school,”(2) these deploy the creative, fictive and aesthetic mode to erase and re-write African history and experiences, thus contemporary African philosophical thought aim to not only debunk European assertion but to explore and query the “traditional beliefs, interpretations of the African world” also socio-political circumstances and how they impact on the lives of African people. (Okolo p.95).

The African philosopher works within the ambit of his world and environment to seek out and inquire, to rationalise and to pursue about the essence of material and metaphysical existence. Okolo describes an exercise in African philosophy as philosophising in the African context or on African experience. (97) In a systematic sense he defines African philosophy as:...an activity of reason, a systematic coherent inquiry into the African experience; the African world and how the African conceives and interprets this being in- the- Africa world

### **Narrative Structure of the poems: *Cycles***

The collection *Cycles* contain many poems; numbering fifty-five. The paper examines the underpinnings of the poet’s experiential but rational thoughts on aspects of life that are tended to be examined with philosophical reasoning and closure. These are inspiration about the art of writing, metaphysics, ethical questions, existential living and the pain of death. The text is driven by philosophical underpinning viewed from cultural values and experiences as lived and known in Nigeria and Africa at large. Most of Ajima’s poems are un-stanzaic. She also adopts the free verse method that allows her the freedom of a prose-poetic form. She turns lyrical and if she likes becomes rhythmic in some parts of the poems. In most of her poems there is always the undertone of lyricism; some of the

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poems run as a long song. This is heightened by the use of repetition and refrain and also the appropriation of some words and ideas as motifs that are consistently used to achieve the effect of foregrounding her perception and message.

The paper attempts to allot to the poems a plot and structure. The collection of poems opens with an observation of nature and life. The poems; the "Muse;" "It isn't simple"; "Under compulsion to write;" "Acknowledgment;" "Time of the Muse;" "Spirit of Fire;" "Dreams;" "To be Mysterious;" "ANA '88" are all a celebration and dedication to the art of writing, the experiences of the artist and the role of the Muse. On page 12 of the collection is an interjection with a poem on the cosmic environment titled "In your Taste Buds Only." "The next set of poems are poems of lament, these are, "Lady Nigbe My People," "The Self Proclaimed Innocents and Second Generation," "Fickle Mistresses-We," "The Beautiful ones had Sprouted." In the following poem on page 27 titled "Three Old Ladies" (InemeOshole, Orechi and Inyangbe, Ajima foreshadows her pre-occupation with the female as a unique being. The poem also provides a pip into the poet's youthful memories and personal life where the three old ladies were reservoir of the wisdom that shaped her. Subsequently, "A Mother's Prayer" (imperfect me) "The Laurel of Life" "A Mother's Love" are poems that explore the emotions of a woman as she relates with her children. The following poems are: "She is Majestic but does not know it," "Birth" "The Infant's Battle," "The Unknown Guest." These poems explore deeper ties between mother and child(ren) especially in the attempts to trace and make sense of the mystery of conception. The poems "Let Me Tell You All About Love," "Your Eyes Refuse to Understand" describe the emotions and state of a woman (supposedly) who experiences unrequited love. In the poems on pages 39 -42 titled, "The Human Cry," "The Groping Man," "Tensions," "In the days of Gloom," the poet observes the futility of life especially as viewed from an existential position. On page 45 continues another set of poems "Sweet Melody of Songs," "The Sound of Music" "Judging" "Fear of Death," "Death" Shattered Dreams" "Tomorrow" "Bring Back Yesterday" "Give Thanks" "Sometimes I Wonder" These poems find the poet on a continuous existential, epistemological and metaphysical plain.

### Philosophical Underpinnings of some of the Poems

The poem "Circles" opens the collection titled *Circles*. The poem establishes the philosophical tone of most of the poems in the collection. The poem expresses and marvel at the cyclical nature of time, seasons and events. Nature reproduces herself by perpetual repetition of certain fixed forms. The definite article "The" conveys the specifics of nature's many features that are cyclical, these are:

The flowering plant

The ageing tree

The flowing stream

The blowing air

Most importantly "Man the higher being too" all things in nature age and wither but the cyclical nature of recreation continues. There is no stagnation; old things pass away, their young and replacement are replicated and the cycle continues. "so much of a much more." The poet's repetition can be explicated that the many seasons result in the passage of so many years. The dense use of the quantifier "so much," much more, is so much more of a much more" emphasises abundance and the inescapability of what is the circles of time. Time in its cyclical nature is of existential concern to man. Even though from logic the process of ageing is determined by time and man understands that ageing will happen through circles of time, he does not possess the powers to intercept or change the seasons as they move in their circular orbit with a certainty. The poet as the voice of her generation and society accepts with a resignation that all of nature is "Cycles all seasons round" (Ajima 1).

Cycles as a philosophical concept is foregrounded in another collection; *Speaking of Wines...* published in 1998, two years after *Circles* was published. The poem "In Times Like This" (pp.37-43) is rendered in the format of a dramatic dialogue going on amongst the metaphoric icons of "Times," "The Prophets," "The Royals" "The Plebians" "Power" and "Oracles." The poet assumes the stance of deep but rational reasoning and interrogation. The tone is staccato in nature. She rides on a litany of logical phrases which she uses to situate "cycles" as an inescapable entity that clutches at man's yearning for permanence. The poem reiterates that, life as a natural process is devoid of permanence. Thus:

"Nature abhors imposition/The only permanent thing/ Are cycles/cycles of change...cycles of life/The very fate of man" (p. 42). As a collection and as a poem, *Cycles* become a motif that is emplotted as an existential philosophy where there is no permanence only seasons of change that go round in their cyclical orbit. These are captured in the poems as phases of reproductive life, the art and processes of writing, the concept of love and its many nuances and the attempts to understand human existence.

The Poems of The "Muse" and "Time of the Muse" are epistemological poems. In poetry the muse is known as the source of knowledge and inspiration. Poets reverence the muse as a metaphysical force that must imbricate and inspire the poet. It is understood from the poetry of African writers that the muses they call and depend upon are their ancestral bards. African societies are guided and controlled by her cosmic world which the Muse of poetry is a part of She relays on images from nature, to chart a tortuous path even for the interested and gifted writer. She goes thus:

It is easy to dip into the stream and fill the pot.

(yet) The path is strewn with thorns

The banks are slippery



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Broken pot litter the path. "The Muse"(p. 2)

Uncertain and dangerous objects line the path to writing; "slippery steep slopes;" "Lies the snake cunning master." In this poem, the poet demonstrates the tentative experience of a writer just stepping out. "In Time of the Muse" demonstrates that the poet is sufficiently imbued with knowledge from the goddess of poetry. And has found her rhythm of writing which is night time, because "day time closes a chapter on them," and kind of leaves her experiencing a writer's block until it is night time again. (7)

Contemporaries of Ajima whose poetry is steeped in traditional African lore also demonstrate that the muse (s) The god of poetry is the inspirer of poetic creativity. Tsenongo in his poem "Invocation to the Muses" in an almost desperate cry calls on the muses; "Sacred Spirits oh!h allowed powers! (To) Possess, Dominate and intoxicate his thought and tongue" (5). For this poet, he has to be completely owned and taken over by the muses for his inspiration to come forth. The relationship he shares with the muses is an inseparable one. Abain his poem "My Muse" describes a possessive and mysterious encounter with the muse. He renders this through various images drawn from the religious realm to the erotic and to cosmic encounters. In the cosmic realm therefore the Muse(s) are the guardian spirits of wisdom, knowledge and a rational ordering of poetic creativity and knowing.

In "ANA '88" (p.11) the poet-persona describes her indoctrination into the 'cult' of writers, poets and sages. Her pilgrimage is made to the "land of the sages." Ochieng Odhiambo quoted in Anjov posits that: "a sage is wise; he has insight, but employs this for the ethical betterment of the community." (p.95) In this poem, the study of knowledge; the epistemology of poetry as an ancient and functional art that is the conveyor of cultural values is foregrounded. Examined from the empiricist angle of epistemology, African poetic tradition is empirically established, it is a long standing tradition of singers, bards, narrators, orators and writers. Empirical knowledge is said to be "knowledge that is tested or has passed the test of experience, observation and experimentation." (Inja p. 25) The poet appropriates the imagery of African traditional religion, and the processes of initiation rites which are in themselves ritual poetry. The site of worship and indoctrination is the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA); the body responsible for approving writers and their works. Here, the poet is tested and assessed by the forebears of the art whom she imbues with attributes that stand them out as the "gods" of the art. She uses the icons of traditional religion symbolised by high priestess, gods, the sages and the initiate who also becomes a sage; a sapient- sound in the art of poetry. The feat is accomplished through a process of refining as a goldsmith does but this time as a "wordsmith" refines words. As sages who undergo a process of refinement poets are society's philosophers who write art for its sake that is: "Of the wordsmith" as well as for its commitment as "objects of peace or war"(p. 11)

In the poem "In Your TasteBuds Only" (p. 12) Ajima takes her place among metaphysical poets. The 18<sup>th</sup> century literary critic, Samuel Johnson first coined the term "metaphysical poetry" in his *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets. (1179-1781)* Included in the anthology are prominent metaphysical poets; John Donne and Andrew Marvel. Johnson's anthology is not the universal standard of assembling metaphysical poets and poems it is specific to English poetry of British stock. A metaphysical poet is one who broaches questions that bother on the relationship between the material and supernatural world and queries how man grapples with an understanding of the world beyond his material reach. Casano lists some of the commonly occurring metaphysical questions as: "Does God exist? Is there a difference between the way things appear to us and the way they really are? What is the difference between reality and perception?"

Casano posits that metaphysical poetry uses "strange imagery, ...paradox and contains extremely complicated thought" (p.1). In this poem, the paradox exists between the title of the poem "In Your Taste Buds Only" and its subject matter. There is no direct relationship between the title of the poem and its metaphysical stance. The poem captures the illusion that the sky is near to the earth. "The sky seems so near" is almost everybody's imagination but as the poet affirms it is an "illusion" (p.12) It gets farther – And farther away/The nearer you go". The relationship between the material environment that man inhabits is also the source of his limitation when compared to the cosmic elements. The illusion albeit deception that the sky is near raises questions about distance especially when viewed with the naked eyes.

In the "Beautiful Ones had Sprouted" (For Dele Giwa) pp.20-26. The poet addresses the ethical challenges in her country, Nigeria. In this long poem spanning seven pages. Ajima adopts an expansive form where she initially indulges the senses and imagination of her readers by treading on the pattern of a faulty filial relationship of mutual distrust between fathers and their sons. And hypocrisy and fear by the fathers that their sons will find out about their wickedness. This is captured in the poem thus:

while the fathers/Took sly looks sideways/To see/If the Honey/They had fed the sons/  
Had made them sleepy/But the son/Always returned the look/Straight and sharp/For he knew/  
That a sly old fox/Could get up for old tricks. (p.21).

In the metaphoric family set up, the mother, always, in the background but full of insight foresaw the doom that will befall her son. "But she was constrained/ by age old tradition/ To keep sealed lips. Oh my son!/she cried out silently/In anguish."(p.22) In the latter pages the poet's tone changes from a descriptive to a lament. There is sacrilegious murder, the fathers kill the sons and bath in their blood, shamelessly. The poet uses this metaphor to condemn the immoral and corrupt nature of the nations' leaders. Her tone is now lyrical, urgent as well as, elegiac and revolutionary, as she mourns the murder of Dele Giwa( a radical journalist killed in cold-blood by a letter bomb in 1986) . She calls for an outright condemnation and overturn of the obnoxious system that cuts down her young in their prime because they have the courage to speak against the immorality of their leaders. In torment she cries: Will you succumb

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to the terror/ will you be shackled forever/will you not break out. The poet-personae longs for “the land of justice” In her desperate cry she invokes ethical standards that have their basis in Christianity. This search for justice from ethical institutions is an attempt to garner universal condemnation against unjust practices.

As an African poet-philosopher, Ajima celebrates her society’s cultural assert; music and dance. In this poem the writer deploys the indigenous resources of African culture known as folk philosophy, that collection of values and beliefs that are shared by members of a common descent. Anjov elucidates of folk philosophy that:

Every culture of a people has within it certain cultural beliefs, values, assumptions categories which are philosophical in nature...The values...are traced to traditional societies before the advent of colonization. They remain so even after these societies had interfaced with modernity” (p. 67)

In “The African Dancer” Ajima deploys an ancient form of poetry, the panegyric to describe the aesthetic moves of an African dancer. Without obvious reference to an opponent, it is established that the African dancer is unequalled: “He has rhythm/ He moves right/ He fits the Tune’ The flair is inborn.” (p. 54). The poet’s studious description insinuates that a bad dancer does not follow the rules of dance and so he will be un-rhythmic, will take the wrong steps and will also be out of tune with the music. The African dancer is presented as a type and he epitomises other African dancers, because “the flair is inborn,” it is a natural attribute of other African dancers.

In a series of poems, the poet addresses existential concerns. These are “The Human Cry,” “The Groping of Man” “Tensions” “In the Days of Gloom” “The Sound of Music.” The poet deploys the philosophic principles of existentialism to examine the challenges of being. Prominent existential philosophers are Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus and Simone De Beavoir. Among several definitions Ozumba defines existentialism as:

a body of thoughts whose emphasis is based on the facts of human existence, the composite evils of the world, the reality of human relationships, the fact of alternatives, choices, freedom and the overbearing attendant responsibility (p.70)

Existential themes address the meaning of life or lack of meaning, its absurd and futile nature. Ajima addresses man’s desperate search for meaningful life in “The Human Cry.” (p. 40) In the poem, man’s attempt to attain excellence is captured in artistic output in the form of writing and painting represented by the icons of the “pen” and the “brush,” “In that Stroke of the pen/In that stroke of the brush.” Still the poem ends on a pessimistic note; man cannot attain perfection because he is “searching the wrong ways” The groping of man is pessimistic, beginning from its title the poem treads on the absurdist plain which is influenced by atheistic existentialism. Extreme existentialism as witnessed in the writings of Albert Camus seems to influence this poem. Camus practicalised the absurd philosophy of life in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Like the legendary Sisyphus who endlessly rolls a boulder up a hill only for it to roll back again, man fails to grope through mountains “but has only succeeded,/ In groping around mountains.” Futility and meaninglessness are heightened by the opaque and negative images of man walking “In a fog, in a mist. Failing to look ahead.”(p.41)

The poem “In the Days of Gloom” is influenced by theistic existentialism. Theistic existential philosophy was prominent in the works of Soren Kierkegaard whose existentialism has a religious lining. He viewed that man must maintain a relationship with his creator in order for him to attain a meaningful existence in material as well as spiritual life. The poet –Protagonist cries “Lord/ Revive my Spirit.” (p. 43)

The poet takes on the universal subject of love. Her reflections on love are encapsulated within the many types of love that are known to exist. Sol establishes that “the ancient Greeks in their pursuit of wisdom and self-understanding” were able to discover many varieties of love. (p.1) Early Greek Philosophers especially Plato and Aristotle articulated that there exist eight different types of love. These manifestations of love are imbedded in all human relationships as such they are applicable and practised in African societies. Maternal love that a mother showers on her offspring is exemplified by the following poems: “A mother’s Prayer” (imperfect me) (p.29) “The Laurel of life” (p.30) “A mother’s Love” (p.31). These poems celebrate storage also known as familiar love, that is love that exists in kinship relations, especially between parents and their children and in this instance between a mother and her offspring. In this poem, the author explores the loving relationship between a mother and her children dating from when they were little. She projects the future of their relationship as one that will endure especially when the children assume the responsibility of caring for their mother. The poem retains aspects of pragma or enduring love (one of the eight types of love); which is nurture in time through understanding, tolerance and sacrifice.

The poem “Let Me Tell You About Love” is imbricated with many types of love These are: Ludus or playful love which is representative of the early stages of a romantic relationship that leads to Eros. Sol describes that early stage as “the fluttering Heart” (p. 5) From the poem it is understood as “When being with you makes everything fall in harmony. Within the same poem, the poet captures the pragma- Enduring love when she forecloses that “...these feelings remain permanent and cannot be weathered.” (Cycles p. 36)

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In “Two Lovers Past” (p. 37) and “Your Eyes Refuse to Understand”(p. 39) The poet’s rendition on love cannot be fitted into the eight classifications of love that are universally accepted. Obetetukudo in his treatise on love, provides the number nine type of love that caters to the un-idealicsituation in love relationship. He calls it Realitas, he insists that “this a type of love that faces the reality of the situation”(p.1) These are instances of emotional trauma and unrequited love. In “Two Lovers Past,” The Poet-personae captures the unfortunate love situation as “the unconsummated love that was...for the love unfulfilled” (p.37) The opening statement “Why do you turn your face away/ with angry eyes at me/when you know I love you so much” sets the tone as well as mood of “Your eyes refuse to Understand.”(p.39) The rest of the poem is a lament of disappointment by one who is scorned in love. The other poems are also patterned onphilosophic in quiry of some sort. They all still portray and emplotin creative form the many aspects of live in the form of a continued search for meaning to existence and the many question that bewilder man in daily living.

### CONCLUSION

African poetry is located within the matrix of African philosophical thought and knowledge system. It is difficult to cut a clear line between poetry and philosophy because they are interwoven and inseperable within an African cosmic world view that is conditioned by her culture, art, history especially within a global setting of ever changing phenomenon in which African writers, critics and philosophers are challenged to continually define, distinguish and project an African identity and values. It is within this intricate complex that the African, indeed Nigerian poet deploys the aesthetic medium to re-examine philosophical truths, logic and ethical values of her society. Ajima like most other African poets demonstrate commitment to the art of poetry as well as the utility value that poetry serves in her society. She invokes its content value as a reservoir of ancient knowledge. Ajima uses her craft to portray a world view that is personal as well as a shared experience with members of her society and country.

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