

My First Owambe (Posted on Facebook on November 14, 2022)

Yesterday, I enjoyed my first Owambe in Miami. It was the 50th birthday anniversary of a Nigerian woman. As we entered the event venue, Olamide whispered the following warnings to me:

- 1) Don't ask for amala. It's not on the menu.
- 2) Don't ask for alcohol. It's church people's party.
- 3) Don't bribe the DJ to play Fuji.
- 4) Don't conceptualize, contextualize, or intellectualize anything. Don't overthink or try to make sense of anything. Just sit and enjoy the moment.

The first three of her warnings are achievable. If amala is not on the menu, there is nothing I can do. I don't expect the celebrants to change their position on alcohol because of me. I'll rather drink water than taste any of those mediocre liquids called "non-alcoholic wine." The third instruction is not as problematic as it sounds. Vocals and lyrics are only a fraction of what makes Fuji, Fuji. In today's Yoruba popular music, most percussions from talking drum or sakara are Fuji sounds! If you play gospel or Islamic tungba, among other amulumala, you are playing Fuji. So, I can still have Fuji fun, by making a customized Fuji auditory meaning of most Yoruba sounds.

Unfortunately, I don't have any control over her fourth instruction. Beyond the fact that there is knowledge in everything and everywhere, some matters are so compelling to the extent that they would force themselves on the least critical thinker. So, you don't have to think about something before it begins to think you, subconsciously. You don't have to reason something before it reasons you, uncontrollably.

There is usually no clear boundary between "mundane" and "intellectual" things. What we intellectualize are basically "simple" things or "ordinary" observations that are thought-provoking, deep, and sophisticated--if we look beyond the surface, the obvious. "Ephemeral" things become permanent, solid-state knowledge when we codify or impose order on their raw or unrefined forms, and communicate them in disciplinary language to the scholarly community in conventional domains of intellectual power, such as publications, lectures, and critical debates.

For two decades, Olamide and I have enjoyed thinking through simple things and making sense of them together. I was in 300 level twenty years ago, when she followed me to Ibadan paraga joints to gather data for a Lagos-based NGO on the impact of alcohol intoxication on socialization. She would listen, patiently, as I reflect on new research ideas, even when they don't make any sense to me. She knows the subjects of my research before anyone does. So, her problem is not the habit of making sense of what most people would consider as "nonsense." She only thinks, in yesterday's case, that I deserve a good relaxation and not bother about the subtext of the party.

We returned home, and she asked me: So, what do you think about...? I stopped her immediately and said: I wasn't thinking about anything because you instructed me not to contextualize, conceptualize, or make sense of anything at the party. She was mad at me. I was so happy. I felt so Adunni—my heavenly mother.

Yours Sincerely in History,  
Isola Atoko waa gbowo nle