

NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST: PIUS ADESANMI AND THE COMPLEXITY OF A NATION IN PROGRESS

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ABSTRACT: *Over the years Nigerian writers have consistently sustained the relationship between literature and politics. They perceptively engaged this connection since the colonial era, with the stages of the nation's political development at the centre of the discourse. The reason is not farfetched; literature is a reflection of the environment in which it evolves. A writer's ideology is shaped by the society and bears witness to its humanity. As imaginative as art is, it is the expression of a larger background: every work of literature signifies a time, place and people. An indication of the importance of art in the society is exposed in the way literature has remained part of the progress of man and his surroundings. Thus, one of the fundamental arguments of literature in exploring this relationship is to establish the fact that Literature and politics are intrinsically tied. Therefore, this paper investigates the concept of national and sustainable development in Pius Adesanmi's NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST. It explores the use of satire to create political awareness and national memory. Furthermore, this paper scrutinizes the growth of Nigeria's democracy and the commitment of successive leaders. It arrives at the conclusion that NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST provides evidence that retention of national memory guarantees hope for a recovered Nigeria of the future and attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.*

KEYWORDS: NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST, Sustainable Development Goals, Nigerian Literature, Politics, Satire, Memory.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the Millennium Development Goals programme, the United Nations 2015 Report shows that in spite of its success story in the fight against poverty, there is persistent disparity and irregular improvement across nations of the world. The MDGs achievement is overshadowed by the noticeable gap between the rich and the exceedingly poor. There is evidence of soaring concentration of poverty in many countries of the world at the conclusion of the MDGs.

The outcome of the 2015 Report emphasises this truth; many people in the world today are persistently under pressure because of the challenges of insecurity, gender, economic, and socio-political inequality. The United Nations rolled out another 15 year programme-Sustainable Development Goals to take on more areas and improve on the short fall of the MDGs. Formulated in 2012, Rio+20, the point was to create a number of goals that are globally germane to the three aspects of sustainable development which include environment, social and economic. The SDGs cover 17 point development plan expected to change the world by eradicating poverty permanently in the year 2030. According to Ban Ki-MOON, the vision is practical since MDGs results reveal that governments understand how it can work. He however notes the most important keys to achieving the SDGs to be "an unswerving political will, and collective, long-term effort." This is a demanding task on the part of those nations

that did not accomplish most of the MDGs. The United Nations expects to accomplish all 17 goals of the SDGs by affecting lives of genuine recipients.

Nigeria as well as other African countries could not meet the target of the MDGs. The country still battles with lack of political will to transcend such policies of development to reality. The Report reveals that in 2011 practically “60 percent of the world’s one billion extremely poor people lived in just five countries.” The countries are Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, China and Democratic Republic of Congo. Although the MDGs recorded improvement in maternal mortality for Sub-Sahara Africa at a reduction ratio of 49 percent between 1990-2013, under five mortality “five times faster during 2005-2013 (6 million) than 1990-21995 (12.7 million), issues of pregnancy and child-birth related deaths are still on the increase. Malaria is still a huge issue of concern as more children in Nigeria are not sleeping under the mosquito treated nets. In addition, there is a noticeable lapse in the provision of adequate security as 42,000 Nigerians became homeless because of arm conflict in 2014. The Report further discloses that of the 2.1 million fresh HIV infection recorded in 2013, three countries in Africa: Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda have half of the 75% recorded in 15 countries. Therefore, the scourge is still endemic in Nigeria and some other parts of Africa.

The failure of the MDGs programme to achieve the expected result in Nigeria is as a result of the inability of the leaders to show commitment in the implementation. Thus, the issues raised in Pius Adesanmi’s *NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST*, are some of the sources of the disappointing outcome of the MDGs in Nigeria. When government show political will against established system where the development of the nation is mainly in blueprint, Sustainable Development Goals would be accomplished.

Satire and Nigerian Literature

Satire is one of the devices of literature that heightens its aesthetics. It is used to ridicule in a way that the real meaning is hidden in derision. The function of satire is to draw attention to those conditions in the society that militate against human development by engaging the public. Satire has gained wide definitions and scope over the years because of its nature. It’s been described as the “the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticise people’s stupidity or vices.” They treat serious issues in humorous and incongruous manner that call for serious consideration. This technique is as old as art and has effectively been used by such writers like Chaucer, Jonathan Swift, and George Orwell. Of the three types of Satire in literature, Political Satire is more direct in its scrutiny and offers security for writers especially in a hostile environment.

In Nigeria, Achebe’s post-independent novel, *A Man of the People*, is a sarcastic expression of the disenchantment caused by the leaders that took over from the colonial rulers. Chief Nanga’s actions symbolize the corrupt and divisive propensity of the politicians. They lack sound political ideology with political parties that are morally bankrupt. Strangely enough contemporary Nigeria is replete with the same political abnormalities in Achebe’s fiction. Soyinka’s *A play of Giants* is another example of how literature, history and politics work together for the purpose of correcting ills in the society. Soyinka satirizes African dictators as Idi Amin of Uganda, Macias Nguema of Equatoria Guinea, Mobutu Sese Seko of Congo and Jean Baptiste Bokassa of Central Africa Republic who dragged their countries through untold hardship. They had little or no knowledge of politics, finance and international relations. In contemporary Nigerian literature, satire is a dependable tool many writers are using to portrayal

the nation's political degeneration. Helon Habila's *Measuring Time*, Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday* and Obinna Udenwe's *Satans and Shaitans* are some recent works that satirise the sense of hopelessness and terror those in government let loose on the society.

Nigerian writers utilize the connection between politics and literature to explore their responsibility in the society. Rene Wellek (1982:26) describes it as "part of man's created reality" when he observes that the connection between literature and the society cannot be severed as long as there is somebody who watches, crafts and conveys his findings to others. Chinua Achebe (1964:157) in a lecture titled "The Role of the Writer in A New Nation", stresses that it is unthinkable for "a serious writer" to be unconcerned by any issue "which calls his full humanity into question." Achebe was addressing the key argument at that time which was black humanity in the literature of the West. In that lecture he challenged the first generation of African writers to reposition Africa in their works by proving that the people were a cultured and decorous society before the invasion of Europe. Achebe's lecture and the central morals it proposed still resonate with what is expected of today's writers. It is sad to note that after the independence of many African states, the literature is still characterised by one form of struggle or the other against bad political leadership.

At present the contemporary Nigerian society is engaged in another kind of debate that is centred on the nature of the nation's democracy after decades of military rule. The literature bemoans the emergence of eccentric politicians that imitate their post-colonial and the gluttonous military counterparts in pillaging the nation's wealth. In 2009, Nigerians exercised their political might through the ballot. However, it did not take long before the people realised that in Nigeria democracy is neither for the people nor by the people; that right is wrestled from them by the political class. While the colonizers trampled on the cultural dignity of Africa, Nigerians today are faced with another form of denial. Their leaders lack the ability to advance the progress of the country like other African states. Nigeria is stagnated in the quagmire of the leaders' culture of greed and recklessness. Democracy in this sense has failed as political leaders entrench kleptocracy to the detriment of national development. Accordingly, contemporary Nigerian literature engages this political dysfunction and disconnect with the people. The literature is as solemn and entertaining as the prevailing conditions of the Nigerian society.

***NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST* and the Complexity of a Nation in Progress.**

Pius Adesanmi in *NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST* offers the world and indeed Nigerians a panoramic view of their chequered democratic evolution. It is a literary representation of politics in Nigeria the writer said is to make the reader "engage critically with the depressing condition of Nigeria." The book is typical in its depiction of the convergence of events, people and policies that have hindered the advancement of Nigeria as a nation. He succeeds in painting the picture of a nation at the brink of collapse and expresses his "desire to preserve memories of the subject matters they treat." His concern however is that people will begin to remember the events that put them in this situation. Memory is a powerful factor that determines man's capacity to retain information of his past. Political memory engages a nation's collective memories in view of her recent political and social expectations. People rely on their political history to be able to reconnect in a fresh perspective past government's policies, indexes of development and concept of nationhood. Since memory can be influenced, particular and demonstrates a people's history, there is need for it to be commemorated.

Halbwachs (1925) first explored the concept of Memory as a field of study when he investigates man's reaction to events originating from his surroundings. He stipulates that personal attitude to society is a product of a person's contact with groups and the entire society. He further establishes that as a result of social transformation, memory on its own is a progression, and constantly demonstrates how the past is altered. This salient observation is crucial because there is a tendency for events of the past to be blurred and contrast with the present. The result is that over time future realities can be distorted. Tokin, (1992) affirms that Memory in any human discourse examines the connectedness of the shift in social debates, traditions and aspirations. It essentially deals with the way individuals will commit to memory their past.

Consequently, *NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST*, calls for national memory and provides a compass for remembrance from some of the political events that are sources of the nations underdevelopment. The book through satire investigates the intersection between literature and politics, especially the nation's democratic leadership from 2008 to 2014. The substance of *NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST* is part of the endemic problem of leadership the country is facing today. Divided into four parts, *NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST* satirises some actions of the governments of former presidents of Nigeria, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The book opens with a serious indictment on the nation's sluggish development which reveals lack of political ideology on the part of the leaders. This part covers the last stage of the government of Late Yar'Adua and the early phase of Jonathan's first tenure. Adesanmi attacks what he termed 'negative civilization' policy of Yar'Adua who in 2008 announced the government's intention to construct one million latrines. The significance of the declaration is that it came on the day the whole world marked World Water and Sanitation Day.

That tells a lot on the development of the 'giant of Africa' in the 21st century. The book demonstrates how political system in Nigeria denigrates institutions. The tradition in Nigeria is that political leader and their families to travel abroad for one medical care or the other. Yet, every year government appropriates huge amount of money for the health sector to cover infrastructure and manpower expansion of the sector. The bad news here is that political leaders in Nigeria have contagious distrust for the nations' healthcare delivery. This suspicion is traced to past military leader Ibrahim Babangida who on countless occasions travelled abroad to seek medical treatment. He satirises this attitude by calling for a Memorandum of Understanding between the foreign countries that treat the leaders to avoid clash of interest. The partition of Nigerian ailments among these countries, America, Britain, France, and Germany he asserts will enable Nigerian leaders serve their people better.

In view of the fact that a government policy driven by its motivation can misrepresent reality and affect people's proper interpretation of their past, the proceedings of the National Assembly during screening of the presidents' nominees for ministerial positions, are one of the examples of political misrepresentation of reality. Screening of political nominees is observed to ascertain their qualification and capacity to assume the designated offices. An analogy between the American Senate screening and Nigeria shows that American senators are fearless in carrying out their duty. However, in Nigeria what is of utmost importance is not probity and competence of the persons involved. The legislators allow ethnicity, "big men", "stakeholders", and chieftains" influence their decision. They prefer "take a bow", a term that exonerates the nominees from the test and an escape route, to the rigours of proper screening. Their ineffective enforcement of the correct proceedings of their office has consistently robbed Nigerians of competent leaders. Furthermore, Adesanmi explains this omission as one of the main reasons

there is continuous duplicity in form of “multitasking”, a position where one person is recycled throughout a government. The book further examines the underutilized functions of Legislative Aides in Nigeria. The Wikipedia defines Legislative Aides as:

Staff who work for a legislator by monitoring pending legislation conducting research, drafting legislation, giving advice and counsel and making recommendations.

The Nigerian Legislative Aide is a glorified domestic servant to the lawmaker and members of his household. Their job at plenary and outside is to hold mobile phones, newspapers and handbags of the lawmakers. Monitoring legislation, conducting research, drafting legislation and making recommendations are functions way beyond legislative aides in Nigeria.

One of the functions of literature is to help the people regain memory of their past and be able to envisage a new perspective for the future. *NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST* achieves this by exposing the systemic disguise Nigerian political leaders assume to plunder the nation’s wealth with impunity. There is no system of accountability and the leaders are justified in their actions simply because they are leaders. It is imperative that Nigerians remember that in other countries, leaders like Barrack Obama are accountable to the people. In “Obama for Local Government Chairman” Adesanmi uses the 5.5 USD tax declarations in 2009 by President Obama and his wife, to highlight the level of corruption in Nigeria’s three tiers of government. The book indicates that Nigerian politicians loot the treasury of the federal, state and local government while the electorates suffer. The administration of the third tier of government has become one of the select positions political leaders covet. The rural dwellers are ignorant of their rights; therefore for the politicians it affords them easy access to public fund.

The inability of Nigerian leaders to establish effective plan of action for uninterrupted progress of the nation is the basis for the criticism. For instance, Adesanmi condemns the 10 billion naira for Nigeria’s 50th birthday approved by President Goodluck Jonathan in 2010. His decision echoes those of other past leaders who also squandered money in celebration instead of making history through reforms and programmes to strengthen the nation’s democracy.

Part Two of the text mimics the biblical narrative style to ridicule some national events and the individuals whose actions or ineptitude from 2009 to 2013 set the nation on the brink of destruction. Through the use of innuendo and allusion he presents the characters that were active participants in the governments and who exercised untold influence on the presidents. There is a representation of the ignoble days of James Ibori in the government of President Yar’adua and the persistent ploy Aondokaa as the Attorney General of the federation employed to foil his arrest and prosecution by EFCC and a British Magistrate Court. Ibori, Victor Attah and others at the time were accused of misappropriating \$38 million belonging to their states in a bogus deal in one of the nation’s telephone companies, V-Mobile. As the highest legal personality and an authority in the country, Aondaokaa absolved Ibori and his cohorts of any crime:

And it came to pass that Aondokelech the Tivite saith unto his troubled bride: fear not. I am with thee. No weapon formed against thee by thine enemies shall prosper (83).

President Goodluck Jonathan’s rule also paraded men who were more interested in lining their pockets at the expense of the growth of the country. Cocooned by all manner of greedy men and a party that thrives on sleaze, his government could not take Nigeria out of the conundrum of underdevelopment or poverty. In “King Jona’s Legion”, Adesanmi ridicules these men:

And king Jona, who still hath found no healing for his torment and was kept bound in chains and in fetters by Orontolum, Reuben, and Renokrim, rushed out and fell down before the Master, with a loud voice saith: "O Master of Ocean and Earth and Skies, what have I to do with thee? I beseech thee, torment me not" (109).

"Balaam's Ass" evokes the same poignant feeling Wole Soyinka's *A play of Giants* arouses in the reader. Soyinka uses the play to investigate the leadership of four former African heads of states and concludes they are ignorant of political reason. In the same vein the gathering of Nigeria's former heads of state for the nation's fifty one year anniversary underlines the level of their complicity in the under development of the nation. To Adesanmi the gathering provides them the ground to continue enriching themselves at the expense of the poor masses:

And all the old kings present were greatly pleased with the words of Badamasi the Minnarite, who spake for all of them. There Aremus of the tribe of the merrymakers to the West unto whom it was given to rule the land of Sodom two times; there was Yak the Warrior who was sorrowful that the land of Sodom hath a great problem of too little knowledge about how to use so much skekkel; there was Shehulem the herdsman who said yes unto every words uttered by his fellow kings; there was Shonekum, also of the tribe of the merrymakers, who sat only for on one buttocks on his seat near Shehulem the Herdsman; and there was Buharus, also of the tribe of the cattle rearers, who hath begun to dislike the ways of the old kings but still fellowship with them. And the old kings rejoiced and saith with one voice unto King Jonah: Give us a great feast on the back of the people of Sodom (113).

That Nigeria is a nation in progress after fifty five years of independence is not an understatement. The whole system of governance is filled with corruption and irregularity. Electoral bodies in Nigeria are extremely fraudulent and compromise the democratic process. The leaders that continually emerge in the past sixteen years of democracy are selfish as in the post-colonial and as rapacious as their military predecessors. The book exposes this incongruous nature of Nigerian politicians aptly in "Open Letters to Godot." Every student of literature knows one or two things about the theatre of the absurd and Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. Theatre of the absurd sabotages reason and delights in the unforeseen as well as the reasonably unattainable. Samuel Beckett presents *Waiting for Godot* in the manner of all Absurd plays; the events are nonconforming to the acceptable style and the characters are strange. There is no clear division of events, a ploy he uses to show the meaningless of human existence and man's struggle to make something out of this chaotic space. Godot is a character that never appears in the play even when the other characters waited endlessly for his arrival. Their progress depends on Godot's appearance yet his identity is not revealed till the end of play.

Nigeria is indeed a theatre of the absurd where unconventional style of leadership is a tradition. Adesanmi like Beckett expresses his disappointment in the state of the nation where leaders are bereft of progressive ideology. They refuse to conform to the culture of democracy and hibernate in their well protected web of self aggrandisement. Through the mode of letter writing he identifies the men and women who in one way or the other failed to take Nigeria to a better place than they met her. Their position in government was sources of embarrassment and they served without definite strategic development plan. Some of the characters in this theatre of the absurd include Ndi Okereke-Onyiuke, Iyiola Omisore, Chief Bode George,

Farida Waziri and Ahmadu Alli. Therefore, anticipating deliberate change from leaders like these men and women is indeed as waiting for Godot and a mirage.

Adesanmi appropriates a phrase from William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* "The World Is a Stage", as the title of Part Four and final segment of the book. Through the use of animated dialogue and flawless descriptive power, he sustains the idea of Nigeria as the stage where dramatis personae - politicians play out their shameful roles in partitioning the wealth of the nation among themselves. It is on this stage that they hatched the plan "to send all ...outgoing PDP governors to the retired governor's pension home that is the Senate." He exhibits his creative competence by allowing the reader to hear the characters speak. He clones their mannerism so well that they are believable. Through the drama technique he explores the dimension of the political intrigues politicians engage in order to curry favour.

CONCLUSION

NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST, is a true Nigerian narrative for its observation of all the nuances of prevailing impediments to the nation's political development. 'Naija' is the exotic argot invented to represent the Nigeria of the future. The nation has failed to fulfil the aspirations of many with her widespread problem of unemployment, tribalism, corruption, and poverty that have defied solutions from different governments. "Naija no dey carry last" explains their creativity for survival which has also made many Nigerians turn to criminality. In this sense Adesanmi's *NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST* is concerned with the criminal ingenuity of the political class and how it affects the nation's growth. Of more concern to him is the subservient and complacent attitude of the people in condoning this outrageous behaviour of their leaders. Adesanmi derides them for doing nothing to liberate themselves from bad leaders. He insists Nigerians like Balaam's ass should know the "moment to sit, move no more, and say no when the oppressor would ride it to certain death at the blade of the sword (116)."

In addition, *NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST*, addresses the conviction that Nigerian leaders lack the drive towards sustainable development of the nation. Successive leaders in Nigeria emerge without clear definition of what, how or when their blue print for national development would be made concrete. The country is ruled by fluidity of political ideologies that do not yield effective development. The World Bank describes sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" Nigerian leaders do not plan for the future as every government pursues its own idea of development which does not last long. This attitude leaves many policies and programmes as the MDGs and SDGs unattended. Consequently the infrastructure landscape of the nation is littered with abandoned projects and dilapidated mega structures that gulped billions of Naira. The success of the SDGs depends on how well Nigerians remember who and factors that contributed to the failure of the MDGS. Thus *NAIJA NO DEY CARRY LAST* is a literary monument that will ensure retention of national memory and a solution to the quest for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

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