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Comedy on the Cusp of Plurality: Gbenga Adeboye and the Context of Social Critique in Nigeria

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"Ní'jọ́ a bá kú là ń d'ère, èníyàn ò sunwọ̀n láà'yè"
[No one is worth anything while alive; we are only deified after death]
— **Yorùbá proverb**

[A] critical theory of society not only diagnoses the pathologies of modernity, reflecting upon the experiences of injustice motivating various social movements, but also attempts to offer a positive alternative to prevailing forms of social domination and political injustice.
— **Robert Sinnerbrink** et al (2006)

This essay situates the under-theorised comic-critical oeuvre of the late Nigerian comedian and social critic, Gbenga Adeboye, within the context of social critique in Nigeria. As the legitimate precursor of stand-up comedy in Nigeria, Gbenga Adeboye combined satire and comedy into a powerful social criticism of the social foundation of the Nigerian state. Through his songs, comedies, satires and social homilies, Gbenga Adeboye was a formidable subaltern voice who not only spoke for the masses, but was firmly situated within the cracks of subaltern existence. In this essay, I made a distinction between the comic art of Adeboye and his critical oeuvre. But, there is also a case to be made for what I call the comic-critical efforts of Adeboye that enabled him to speak truth to power and its misuse in Nigeria. This makes him different from most of his successors whose comedies were caught up in the allure of commercialism. However, I argue that Gbenga Adeboye's subaltern position constitutes a critical limitation of his significance as a critic of the Nigerian predicament. This is because while he committed his entire comic-critical art to understanding Nigeria's plural challenge, he was also caught up in the ethnic chauvinism that was at the very heart of that unruly plurality.

Keywords: Social criticism; Gbenga Adeboye; Fela; Comedy; comic-critical; Subalternity; Nigeria; Satire; Postcolonial

Introduction

It will not be apt to say that Gbenga Adeboye (1959-2003), the late Nigerian ace comedian, satirist, musician and social critic, has been under-theorised. He has not been theorised at all in the same manner that the full weight of theory has been brought to bear on the social-critical oeuvre of, say, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. Since his death on April 30, 2003, the memory of the late comedian has been preserved only by fellow entertainers rather than intellectuals. Social criticism in Nigeria is usually associated with notable names like Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, the late eccentric Afrobeat maestro; Gani Fawehinmi, the late legal luminary and social crusader; Wole Soyinka, and so on. Yet, there are so many critical others who have remained incognito in intellectual circle but have also uniquely contributed to unearthing the cracks in Nigeria's social foundation. We have in mind folk musicians like Ayinla Omowura, Yusuf Olatunji, as well as some of the stand-up comedians who are now flourishing after the demise of Adeboye. This essay will argue, on the contrary, that Gbenga Adeboye not only occupies the same social-critical context that threw up those Nigerian intellectuals have decided to study; his comic-critical oeuvre provides a critical compass by which we can understand that postcolonial context.

As a satirist, musician and comedian, Gbenga Adeboye constitutes a unique case study because he combined in himself two formidable components of social criticism—music and comedy—mixed with an incredible linguistic dexterity with words, knowledge of the Yorùbá culture and a mimic mastery of almost all Nigerian languages. This alone gives him a wide base with the subaltern population in Nigeria than any other social critic who either appeals to the intelligentsia or achieves a larger-than-life, but distanced, status. Wole Soyinka and Gani Fawehinmi would be critics like that. Both seem to champion the cause of the subaltern but in ways, and with a language, that go right over the heads of the masses. In other words, Fawehinmi and Soyinka *speak for* them. Gbenga Adeboye communicated in the subaltern voice because he was arguably one himself in spite of his fame.

And this, we will argue, constitutes his basic critical limitation. Gbenga Adeboye makes more impact in social criticism with the obviously comic dimension of his oeuvre than those in which he actually went out of his way to intervene in Nigeria's predicament. In the latter, he betrays a crude, almost infantile, and even prejudiced understanding that eventually undermined the breath of his native intelligence and insight—guarded by a beautiful semantic acrobatic—into the Nigerian situation.

The idea and context of social critique

The objective of any social criticism is usually the attempt to interrogate and correct a practice, belief or idea that seems to have some form of harmful effects on the administration of the human society. Thus, for instance, we can critique a piece of music or literature or fashion or social practice that contains negative messages inimical to the wellbeing of the society. In other words, social critique aims at the uncovering or diagnosis of social pathologies and consequently marshal "a reflexively redeemable norm (or series of norms) against which the validity of a given social practice can be assessed" (Sinnerbrink et al, 2006: 4).

Consider Plato and the organisation of the ancient Athenian society. As at the time he wrote the *Republic*, Plato had already abandoned the hope of a political life for philosophy. This disillusionment with politics was borne out of the death of Socrates, his teacher, at the hand of the Athenian government. The *Republic*, in this sense, can be taken to be a form of critique levelled against the Athenian state and its declining ethos. Socrates was accused of polluting the minds of the youth who were being challenged, through the famous Socratic interlocution, to rethink their ideas and ideals. The end of

the existential drama was that Socrates was forced to drink the poisonous hemlock. Plato was devastated.

At his trial, Socrates made the famous "gadfly argument":

> And now, Athenians, I am not going for my own sake, as you may think, but for yours, that you may not sin against God by condemning me, who am his gift to you….I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state and all day long and in all place am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. You will not find another like me, and therefore I would advise you to spare me.

When Socrates ended his rhetorically outstanding speech to the Athenian jurors, he had established his reputation as a social critic. Josiah Ober sums up Socrates' credential:

> But by [the end of his speech, and in spite of his knowledge of the rhetorical conventions of Athens and the audience expectations,] he has not aligned himself with the democratic norms embraced by his fellow citizens. Instead, he has proved that his own political convictions are drastically at odds with popular views, and that his irritating, idiosyncratic everyday practice of examining his fellow Athenians (and finding them painfully wanting in wisdom), followed necessarily from his convictions. He has demonstrated that he is, by his own lights, a patriotic citizen who cares deeply about the good of his *polis* and one who consistently acts in what he sees as his city's best interests; but he has also shown that, in light of his own definition of patriotism, Socrates must be regarded as a uniquely patriotic Athenian. Moreover, given the problematic current condition of the *polis,* for Socrates "doing good" means acting as a social critic: questioning fundamental Athenian beliefs in conversations held in public and private spaces of the city (2003: 5).

Socrates' case, as Ober argues, could be taken as establishing an "ethics of social criticism" because Socrates considered his task, though contrary to the popular expectation, as a dimension of *doing good* for his fellow Athenians and for the state. Social criticism is therefore sustained by the ideal of social hope or of social salvation in spite of the dangers of suppurating pathologies (Kern, Laux and Pruisken, 2017). Social critique confronts the present and its predicament in order to envision an "emancipated future" (Sinnerbrink et al, 2006: 7).

This connection between social criticism and the notions of the good and of hope immediately places the idea of critique right in the midst of the age-long task of practical philosophy saddled with the responsibility of fashioning a socio-political arrangement around which the good life can be provided for the people. Social critique is therefore always in search of means, mores and methods to push forward the frontiers of meaningful existence in the society. For Jeffrey di Leo, it is essentially "an optimistic, life-affirming approach" (2019: 8). It signals the possibility of politics in its true classical sense as the art of good government (Viroli, 1992). Indeed, we can elaborate the idea of social critique as having its provenance in the transformation of the language of politics, between 1250 and 1600 in Europe, from politics as the art of good government to politics as the reason of state. When this language changed, subtly at first and then later brazenly, government was no longer concerned with ruling the state according to reason and with justice. Rather, it became a study in how to successfully police and dominate a people. This transformation reached its most frightening apogee with the reproduction of the idea of the modern state in Africa.

It should be noted here, parenthetically, that social critique—the intellectual child of social theory and political philosophy—had and still has a lot to engage with. This is because the transformation of the language of politics to *raison d'état* was a theoretico-practical move made ready for the widespread transformation of modern society via industrialisation, the emergence of the nation-state, capitalist transformation of social relations, and the realignment between state and civil society, all in the nineteenth century (Rundell, 2003: 13). It is in this sense that social critique becomes a form of revolutionary framework for redirecting the trajectory of society back to the art of good government.

In this sense, social critique shares in the two senses of a revolution, both as a longing for a past form of social organisation (*à la* the 1776 American Revolution) and a desire to rebuild the society anew (*à la* the 1789 French Revolution).

To achieve its practical purpose, social critique must necessarily surmount the barriers of negative social manifestations that defy normative expectations about the progress of society. It does this primarily through dissent and contestation clothed in anger and outrage (Macamo, 2011). Anger and outrage are emotions which become socially meaningful within the context of the violation of normative expectations existing within what Macamo calls the "moral frames" of society. In other words, "this framework binds the actions of different individuals into amoral frame that enables them to interpret whatever occurs in interaction approvingly or disapprovingly" (ibid: 45). This recognition of a moral framework allows Macamo to elaborate the collective nature of social criticism or contention around the activities of social groups rather than individual critics. In other words, his elaboration of social criticism, within the space of contention, makes it a species of what MacAdam et al call "contentious politics" (2004: 4). Although he articulates a critique of the western notion of protest within the theoretical ambit of social movements, his objective is not to enunciate the place and role of an individual critic vis-à-vis that of a social group in the restoration of social order. Yet, his critique of the idea of social movement and its provenance in Africa offers us a neat heuristic framework to interrogate the utility of social criticism in Nigeria.

A social critic occupies an unenviable site in the social context. She, like Socrates, may decide to stand alone and face the wrath of a social framework already compromised. She may also be recognised as someone with the capacity to speak for or re-present the claims of those under the chains of domination. Finally, such a social critic may speak right from within the subaltern base itself. In this case, her voice is coextensive with that of the subordinated. But then, how does a social critic achieve this normative desideratum? What, within Macamo's register of social movement, makes an act of social contestation an act of social criticism? Where is the social critic coming from? Where is she going? How does she stand with respect to others? To answer these questions, we will appropriate Michael Walzer's insight into the condition for the possibility of social criticism, and then move on from there.

The significance of Walzer's contribution lies in his understanding of the relationship of social criticism to morality or moral argument within a society and the interpretative framework by which individuals come to the understanding of their society and to the idea of the right thing to do. Or, the implication we can draw from the theory that social criticism derives its critical edges from the condition motivating moral assent or disapproval. A social critic approaches her task from the perspective of interpretation. In other words, for the social critic, the interpretive path to criticism is much more adequate, rather than the need to discover the moral world. This is because interpretation allows us to judge what is already there—the social practice and the moral arrangement waiting to be interrogated. Interpretation becomes necessary in this context because the moral world, according to Walzer, lacks a design procedure:

> Morality, unlike politics, does not require executive authority or systematic legislation. We don't have to discover the moral world because we have always lived there. We don't have to invent it because it has already been invented — though not in accordance with any philosophical method. No design procedure has governed its design, and the result no doubt is disorganized and uncertain. It is also very dense: the moral world has a lived-in quality, like a home occupied by a single family over many generations, with unplanned additions here and there, and all the available space filled with memory-laden objects and artifacts. The whole thing, taken as a whole, lends itself less to abstract modeling than to thick description. Moral argument in such a setting is interpretive in character, closely resembling the work of a lawyer or judge who struggles to find meaning in a morass of conflicting laws and precedents (1985: 19).

It is this moral morass that the social critic confronts; it is what turns contestation into social criticism. Put in other words, when we do social critique, we are attempting to confront actually existing morality. Or, as Walzer puts it: "The critique of existence begins or can begin from principles internal to existence itself" (1985: 20).

Moral argument originates from the question: What is the right thing to do? This question is not as straightforward as it appears. This is because it calls our attention to the relationship between a global, thin morality that associates us with other humans by the fact of their humanity, and a local, thick morality which binds us with particular nation, culture or situation. However, as Walzer has argued, the force of that question resonates more within the local context of morality than the global. In other words, the right wording for that question is: What is the right thing *for us* to do? This question serves as the occasion for us to step into the untidy moral context and initiate a moral discourse which requires interpretation. According to Macamo,

> Moral argument addresses the question concerning what the right thing to do may be. In order to answer this question individuals have to consider the society in which they live, the means individuals have at hand, the opportunities open to them and many other structural aspects that constrain or enable action. According to Walzer, the answer has to do with the meaning which the way of life of a given community has to individuals. At the end of the deliberations individuals have to be able to say what the right thing to do is as far as they are concerned.... Social criticism, therefore, represents the different positions which individuals articulate and express in moral debate. Such positions reflect different understandings and interpretations of social order and the place which different individuals should have in it (2011: 54).

No doubt, this understanding of moral argument as interpretation raises a serious problem of how to agree on a theory which we take to be better than others. If there are several interpretations of a given moral order, which constitutes the correct one? We may not be able to answer this question, if by "correct" we mean a *definitive* interpretation to which everyone will assent. What differentiates one interpretation from another, says Walzer, is the *quality* of that interpretation, not its kind. We want to argue that the task of social critique is to hold up an interpretation of a moral order that is qualitatively compelling to other interpreters. However, there is a condition for the possibility of social critique that must give us pause. Social critique requires a measure of distance that makes such criticism possible in the first place. How then does the critic achieve that distance given that she is equally part of the "social" that invites criticism? Can she find a social Archimedean point? The figure of the critic that appeals to our expectation is that of the dispassionate, detached social critic that stands in judgmental distance to the rot in the society and unleashes her strictures without let. However, Walzer sketches a model of the social critic that is consistent not only with his understanding of "thick morality" but also his idea of moral argument. This more familiar social critic is, for Walzer,

> the local judge, the connected critic, who earns his authority, or fails to do so, by arguing with his fellows — who, angrily and insistently, sometimes at considerable personal risk (he can be a hero too), objects, protests, and remonstrates. This critic is one of us. Perhaps he has traveled and studied abroad, but his appeal is to local or localized principles; if he has picked up new ideas on his travels, he tries to connect them to the local culture, building on his own intimate knowledge; he is not intellectually detached. Nor is he emotionally detached; he doesn't wish the natives well, he seeks the success of their common enterprise. This is the style of Alexander Herzen among nineteenth-century Russians (despite Herzen's long exile from Russia), of Ahad Ha-am among East European Jews, of Gandhi in India, of Tawney and Orwell in Britain. Social criticism, for such people, is an internal argument. The outsider can become a *social* critic only if he manages to get himself inside, enters imaginatively into local practices and arrangements. But these critics are already inside. They see no advantage in radical detachment. If it suits their purposes, they can play at detachment, pretend to see their own society through the eyes of a stranger… (1985: 33-34).

The pertinent question now is how this connected critic would encounter the postcolonial Nigerian state and its social pathologies. How do we situate the connected social critic within the unique social pathologies that define postcoloniality in Nigeria?

Encountering the Nigerian State

When we encounter the Nigerian State, in the real sense, we are encountering an absentee state that is simultaneously present and absent in our daily lives. The state's omnipresence derives from its inaugural imperative of order and domination, necessitated, as we noted earlier, by the transformation of the language of politics away from the art of good government to the science of domination. In Africa, this subjugating imperative became essential not only in the colonial geometry of power, but also in what Clapham calls "the policy of state preservation" (1985: 114) by African national leaders who were desperately bent on inheriting the colonial state structures rather than interrogating its provenance and value vis-à-vis the legitimate agitation of the people for socio-economic meaningfulness. Thus, the national question, rather than the social one,

> …provides the raison d'être of governing elites and the base from which their power derives. The more successful they can establish their position as gatekeepers…the stronger is their brokerage position, the better are the bargains they can strike on the one side or the other, and the greater the 'commission' they can extract in terms of personal benefits or freedom of political action (Clapham, 1985: 114).

The absence of the Nigerian state is an absence of responsibility and responsiveness arising from the state's loss of legitimation which usually stems from an internal dynamics mediated by what has been called a "normative condition of reconciliation" (Menkiti, 2002: 36) that propels the people to an unforced loyalty to the state. However, in the case of the Nigerian state, as well as most other states in Africa, its pursuit of the policy of state preservation promotes an external requirement by which a form of mechanical unity is imposed on the heterogeneous but unyielding constituents in Nigeria. This essentially constitutes the Nigerian state as "a space devoid of normative meaning" (ibid: 37). The policy of state preservation is a ploy to deny politics to Africans. Yet, existential dynamics of living in Africa gives the people the necessary motivation to encounter the state from various perspectives.

The interesting thing about the encounter is its paradoxical nature. In other words, the people find various means and ways to confront the Nigerian state, yet the modes of confrontation are conditioned by the Nigerian state itself. In the introduction to their book, *Encountering the Nigerian State*, Obadare and Adebanwi raise a poser:

> If the state is constituted as the ultimate power in society, how, following Foucault's…insight, do we understand the processes by which this power itself also constitutes, or forms, its subjects, providing the very conditions of the existence of the subjects and the trajectories of their desires and aspirations? If the state as the ultimate power forms its subjects, then the state is not merely what is opposed by elements, say in civil or political society, but strongly what they also depend on to authorize and actualize their existence…. What do people think of the state, and how do they act out their imagining of the state in their everyday existential materialities? (2010: 2)

Ekeh and Mbembe popularised the idea of the "publics" as a unique reaction to the dominance of the state in Africa. From the primordial public of Ekeh which is involved in a dynamic game of undermining the civic public which the state attempts to build, we come to the more robust "publics" involved in continuous efforts to "rewrite the mythologies of power" within a context where the postcolonial subject bargain with state power in a "conceptual marketplace" (Mbembe, 2001: 108).

What Mbembe calls "the *commandement*"—a specific imaginary of state power as an instrument of subjugation—generates excesses and magnificence. It is around these two factors that corruption and the personal appropriation of public offices obtain their rationality. To escape the permanent possibility of poverty in the postcolony, both the government functionaries and the masses become part of a framework of meaning that allows them to come to grip with their existential condition. How does this work, especially for the generality of the people? How do they come to term with the normative and developmental absence of the Nigerian state?

Nigerians operate within what Geertz calls culture as a web of significance which they have spun themselves and which helps them discover "who they think they are, what they think they are doing, and to what end they think they are doing it" (1999: 13). It is therefore within this meaning-making framework of culture—conditioned by religion and commonsense—that Nigerians attempt to make sense of the Nigerian society and its vicissitudes. In a broad term, we can argue that the Nigerian predicament generates for an average Nigerian a fundamental problem of suffering which is, from a perspective, unjustified. For Geertz,

> The vexation here is the gap between things as they are and as they ought to be if our conceptions of right and wrong make sense, the gap between what we deem various individuals deserve and what we see that they get… (1973: 106).

Thus, within their religious and commonsense perspective, the first order of business for Nigerians is not to deny their suffering, but to make it sufferable. Making it sufferable obviously cannot be within their original normative structures and guidelines which had been challenged. Therefore, second, they use their commonsense. This concept, within the Geertzian theoretical model, involves not only using one's senses, but "keeping them open [and] using them judiciously, intelligently, perceptively, reflectively [especially in] *coping with everyday problems in an everyday way with some effectiveness*" (1992: 224. Emphasis added).

Thus, when confronted with the suffering the Nigerian state inflicts on its citizens, the average Nigerian wises up and takes "sensible" decisions and steps on the basis of the realities s/he is facing! (Adebanwi, 2017). It is within the complex dynamics of existence that Nigerians can speak harshly to the corrupt officials in the corridors of power while at the same time partaking of the social pathologies thrown up by the dynamics of corruption and suffering. It is also this context that motivates social criticism in Nigeria and the comic and critical oeuvre of Gbenga Adeboye.

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Gbenga Adeboye and subaltern criticism

For us, Gbenga Adeboye and Fela Anikulapo-Kuti both represent the model of an insider critic proposed by Walzer. Furthermore, as we will later argue, especially with regards to Gbenga Adeboye, both of them manifest the complex and contradictory dynamics involved in social criticism from the inside. Of the two, Fela has a larger-than-life status basically because of the uniqueness of his militant and ritualised music. This militant tonality, and the accompanying recalcitrant exertions of signposting it, brings home sharply and irritatingly the message so well that Fela and his music were arrested incessantly (Afolayan and Falola, 2022: 15 - 16).

Fela's stature as a social critic is much more interesting. In *Arrest the Music!*, Olaniyan outlines the relationship between that strange order issued by an army officer to his men at Fela's shrine in one of the musician's several confrontations with the government, and the political nature of his music: "a suggestive conceptual key to approaching the music of Fela and the contexts of its production, circulation, and consumption. It reveals, for

example, the peculiar character of the relations between art, specifically oppositional music, and a postcolonial African state. It is also an inadvertent homage to that part of Fela's image as a musician that is most familiar to the world: the 'political'" (2004: 1-2). Fela's response to what Olaniyan calls the "postcolonial incredible" stems from a complicated response to the social anomie which gave his virulent critique its sense. Thus,

> That response appears to most people to be utterly peculiar and paradoxical. On the one hand is his irreproachable feat of a comprehensive venomous critique of both institutions and individuals he sees as causes and perpetuators of the reigning incredible social anomie. On the other hand is his far more reproachable cultivation of an antisocial counterculture of drugs and sex and a flamboyant cult of charisma that both fed on and were part and parcel of the anomie that Fela condemned. The one, in the extensive garish tableau of the postcolonial incredible it dramatizes with all its attendant social and psychological costs, brooks no notion of the incredible present that is not a transition. The other, in its indulgent countercultural pleasures irrespective of the social cost, already implicitly votes for its enabling order. The one is transcendentalist in aspiration—a powerful exploration of the wherewithal to surmount the incredible and its rule—while the other wallows in a sustaining relationship with it (ibid: 2).

Beyond this, we want to contend that his social critique serves an elitist purpose in the sense of presenting the voice of the people to power in manners and modes that they may not be familiar with. This elitism derives from the inauguration of Fela's music in what Olaniyan calls avant-pop and the highlife and jazz genre that supported it. The argument is that Fela never successfully transited to a more popular genre, in spite of the popularity of Afrobeat.

In an attempt to give the subaltern an occasion to speak, the intellectual, or our own social critic, ends up muffling that voice (Spivak, 1995: 28; Bhagwat and Arekar, 2018). By this fact, Fela and his music and lifestyle compromise the people's subalternity. On the contrary, we want to argue that Gbenga Adeboye inscribes himself in the context where the subaltern voice is to be heard. His comic-critical oeuvres are cast in the fissure and social specificities where the people ply their trade—as workers, loafers, touts, teachers, singers, prostitutes, artisans, healers, artists, and the like, and attempt mightily to project their voice to power. His subaltern criticism resonates right within the context of what Mbembe calls the conviviality that brings the oppressor and the oppressed together within the same power configuration and the same episteme (2001: 110).

According to Chow, the attempt by the subaltern to speak is doomed since the act of speaking itself is already a part of "an already well-defined structure and history of domination" (2003: 128). Thus, within the Nigerian postcolony and the convivial logic that ropes an average Nigerian and the government official into the same rapacious pursuit that decimates the state, the subaltern suppresses her own voice. Gbenga Adeboye's subaltern criticism can be situated within the deep realm of the moral foray, querying, urging, remonstrating, judging, objecting, protesting, warning, sighing…

Both Fela and Gbenga Adeboye, in spite of the differences between them, can be located within the context of what has been called transformative politics that impinges critically on "the values, processes, and institutions associated with 'conventional politics'" (Olarinmoye, 2010: 141). Their arts give them the opportunity for transformative resistance. In this transformative politics and resistance, comedy and the comic arts fare less significantly than music in the consideration of critical tools. It has been given less than serious attention, if they have been attended to at all. Obadare confirms that "the literature on laughter in Africa [is] marked by its distinctive rarity" (2009: 224; 2010: 4). The critical attention to the significance of Gbenga Adeboye's oeuvre is the worse for it.

Gbenga Adeboye and the comic-critical art

The interest in Gbenga Adeboye derives most significantly from the relegation of comedy and the comic art to the lowest rung of interest in popular culture studies. Indeed, we can say that comedy is the subaltern art par excellence. In other words,

> Comedy has been judged as a form of low art, as a genre inferior to tragedy, as appropriate only to the trials and tribulations of the lower classes, whereas the comic has likewise been condemned for expressing taste base enough to warrant the recommendation of abstinence (Trahair, 2007: 15).

This summation of the supposed irrelevance of comic art could have been penned by Plato. In his reckoning, the laughter that is generated by comedy is a manifestation of the irrational, and hence to be discouraged everywhere in his Republic. Yet, as Lisa Trahair further argues, "…lack of attention to the theoretical basis for understanding the comic has meant that the effects of its operations remain unacknowledged and unknown" (ibid: 2). In other words, still following Plato's aversion, Nigeria is far from being Plato's envisioned Republic, and comedy is critical to our understanding of the postcolonial dynamics of Nigeria.

In Adeboye's oeuvres, we are forced to come to terms with the potential relationship between comedies, social criticism and socio-national existence and meaning (see Otiono, 2011). We therefore hope to exhume what can be called his *comic-critical* framework on the cusp of several questions: In what ways does the comic-critical emerge from within the interstice between reason and unreason; between the civil and the (c)rude? How does the comic-critical enjoin discourse as well as subversion? Or, how does it relate laughter to the buffoonery of the political machinery of domination? And how does it contest the conviviality between the oppressed and the oppressor? What roles can comedy, and Gbenga Adeboye's comic-critical art, play in the reawakening of the subaltern? What makes his comic-critical oeuvre a self-reflexive philosophy?

Specifically, the comic-critical art is located within the context of a self-reflexive philosophy within which the citizens as subalterns can challenge not only their oppressors but also their own complicity in the oppression. This, I argue, is the truly liberatory significance of comedy. To liberate, I argue that Gbenga Adeboye's comic-critical art employs an *enthymematic* capacity that leads inexorably from the pre-knowledge of the audience about their context and its dynamics to another realm of "unstated information, evidences, 'theories,' critiques, lamentations, assumptions and presuppositions" about that context (Afolayan, 2013: 168). Put in other words, comedies not only produce pleasurable feelings, they equally possess the capacity to jolt painful memories. However, the enthymematic character of the comic-critical art of Gbenga Adeboye, specifically its comic dimension, constitutes its greatest advantage as a form of social criticism in Nigeria. His jokes and social commentaries not only delight and censure, they also produce unexpected outcome that strengthens his original intention as a subaltern social critic.[1] It is however the critical component of the comic-critical, on the other hand, that undermines Gbenga Adeboye's stature as a social critic. This is because his political commentaries abandoned the enthymematic capacity for a frontal attack on the social pathologies in Nigeria. But Gbenga Adeboye was not intellectually prepared to make this confrontation; he was not able to achieve the internal coherence that would have made his comedy complements and supplements his critique of the Nigerian state.

Until his death, Adeboye was an enduring presence on the comedy and music circuit in Nigeria, and more so in the social and political imagination of (South-western) Nigerians. His comedies, which began in the 80s, became the inaugural forerunner to the

[1] Indeed, the word "delight" has a double entendre here. It derives from the Latin *delectare*, meaning to entice ironically into some unexpected outcomes.

contemporary stand up comedies dotting the Nigerian popular culture scene. He was a lone and lonely ranger at commencement. But the then Radio Lagos offered him a unique opportunity to offer the urban populace a regular subaltern staple that stave socio-economic depression off a bit. Since the word "comic" derives from the Greek *komikos*—translated as "revel"—comedy and the comic art provide one last point by which the subalterns can stay in touch with their besieged humanity.

The significance of Adeboye lies in the two dimensions of his comic-critical oeuvres: first, comedy serves an entertainment function; yet, second, this entertainment function is also inherently a political agenda that serves to confront the state formation and what Mbembe calls the *commandement*. In Adeboye's oeuvres, we hear the resonance of the subaltern's groaning as well as an incessant and locally powered diatribe against the banalities of power. His enduring popularity is a function of his deep mastery of not only the tenets of the three religions in Nigeria (Christianity, Islam and tradition African religion) as well as their scriptural tonalities, but also an in-depth understanding of the Yorùbá cultural heritage (especially Yorùbá oral aesthetics), and dexterity with the linguistic mimicry of the various Nigerian languages and attitudes. All these give him a serious purchase on the consciousness of the subaltern as well as enabling him to grasp the issues involved in socio-cultural and political happenings in Nigeria. This insinuates his oeuvres into a deeper task of what Walzer calls cultural elaboration and affirmation (1985: 34). Consider, for instance, a typical way he introduces himself: Prince Gbenga Adeboye—Fúnwọntán (literally: "dazzle them"); Alhaji Pastor Olúwo (traditional priest); MC Wonder; Jengbetiẹlẹ̀ I; Apa'gun p'ọ̀tẹ̀ of Yorubaland (grand pacifist of Yorubaland); Àbẹ̀fẹ́;[2] Amúlùúdùn of London;[3] Great Grandfather for Oduology (GGFO);[4] International Outstanding Comedian and Classical Musician (IOACCM), and so on.

In this study, we will be confronting Gbenga Adeboye's mature composition. This requires an explanation. He began his career in the early 80s as a comedian at a time when stand-up comedy was far from the social consciousness. In fact, Gbenga Adeboye, we argue, inaugurated stand-up comedy in Nigeria and heralded the coming of the more contemporary comedians like Ali Baba, Basket Mouth, I Go Die, Julius Agwu, AY and others. Gbenga Adeboye's unique status straddles the interregnum between the old non-stand-up comedians like Jaguar, Bàbá Sùwé, Lúkúlúkú, Alúwẹ, Chief Zebrudaya, and the more contemporary ones. That status gives him not only a comparative importance but also a theoretical significance into the imperative of comedy beyond its obvious entertainment value. Beyond the Radio Lagos beginning, Gbenga Adeboye matured steadily in the consciousness of his mainly south-western audience in Nigeria.

A critical analysis of his oeuvre reveals a three-fold framework made up of the strictly comedic (found variously in albums like *Different Strokes*, *Versatility*, *Stand Up Comedy Extravaganza 1*, *Asánlayé*, *London Yabis*, and *Exposure*—these comedies consist of the regular one-off jokes and the extended, episodic narratives built around the characters of "Itú Bàbá Ìta: the exploits of a rascally dandy" and "Làísì Abésùpínlẹ̀": ("Làísì who shares a plot of land with Èṣù"); the social homilies (*Stand Up Comedy Extravaganza 2*, *Supremacy*, *Pàsí Pààrọ̀*, and *Ayé Tóto*); and the political commentaries (*Ìjìnlẹ̀ Ọ̀rọ̀ Láti Orí Itẹ́ Mímọ́*, *Ọ̀rọ̀ Sùnnùkùn 1&2*). This framework also essentially demonstrates a gradual but steady progression, even enrichment, from pure entertainment to engaged socio-political commentary. This progression encompasses a singular socio-political agenda with a two-fold projection possessing an internal coherence: Nigerians are responsible for the Nigerian predicament. Nigerians, in this context, appropriately refer to the citizens in their social environment and the government. The comic-critical framework therefore serves to bring both under stricture.

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[2] Àbẹ̀fẹ́ is literally "the one you beg to love."
[3] Amúlùúdùn translates as merrymaker
[4] "Odulology" is a play on "odù" or fable.

To do this, Gbenga Adeboye deployed an awesome knowledge not only of the traditional belief system represented especially by the *Ifá* corpus, but also a deep knowledge of the Christian and Islamic scriptures, as well as a working acquaintance with Nigerian history. Religion and religious intolerance play a serious role in his diagnosis of the Nigerian situation and the parochialism of an average Nigerian. Thus, if this religious parochialism and intolerance, resulting from an absolutist appropriation of God and salvation, could be undermined, then we would have achieved much in dislodging the albatross of disunity. On the other hand, there is, as should be expected, an elite-leadership dimension to his diagnosis of the problem.

Gbenga Adeboye's take-off point for social criticism can be located in the Yorùbá ethical discourse concerning *ìwà* (character), *ọmọlúwàbí* (a good person) and specifically, *ààbọ̀ ọ̀rọ̀* (few words). The latter intersects the former in the Yorùbá aphorism: *ààbò òrò la a so fún omolúàbí, bo ba de ińu re aa di odidi* (few words are sufficient for the wise). Michael Afolayan argues that the abbreviated phrase, *ààbò òrò*, is a multidisciplinary concept that straddles education, oral tradition and sociolinguistics (2005: 166). He however emphasises the educational utility of the word and its place in the sustenance of a unique Yorùbá educational system as well. According to him,

> This form of education is better depicted in the traditional philosophical cliché, *ààbò̀ ọ̀rọ̀*, or its correspondent synonymic phrase, *ẹ̀lá lọ̀rọ̀*, that is, words in all ramifications, are puzzles and mysteries that must be unravelled in order for them to convey the desired semantic effect. The outcome of this unravelling is brevity. In essence, brevity of utterances is the theoretical framework on which the idea of Yorùbá education is anchored (ibid: 168).

In this sense, Gbenga Adeboye becomes an educator whose entire oeuvre constitutes an *ààbò òrò* comically and critically hurled at the rot not only in the Yorùbá societies in the South-west, but also in the entire Nigerian state. Thus, these ethically-charged words are not only evocative; they equally possess a compelling force. They are meant to consistently harangue us back to good character (*ìwà rere*). *Ààbọ̀ ọ̀rọ̀* is supposed to lead to some deep and troubling reflection (*àrò̀jìnlẹ̀*) that would gradually and eventually lead to the moral rehabilitation of the society.

In Gbenga Adeboye's comic-critical oeuvre, the comedy sketches take on the form of *ààbọ̀ ọ̀rọ̀* that self-reflexively engages the minds of the listeners while also entertaining them. In these comedies, we are shown several pictures of our uncouthness, compromises, illiteracy, arrogance, cruelty, contradictions, other social complexities and practices as well as the panoply of human foibles. Let us consider, for instance, two of what we can call his diasporic jokes, "Kàsîmù" and "Mr Linkoln". These two jokes are contrasts in the sense that "Kàsîmù" narrates the bumbling awkwardness of a gluttonous Nigerian who visits America for the first time. "Mr Linkoln", on the other hand, tells of a Nigerian who has been in America for so long that he hardly remembers what "home" is like. Consider "Kàsîmù" first. Gbenga Adeboye narrates that he goes for an outing in America with Kàsîmù, with the knowledge that the latter is a glutton. But on this particular occasion, even Gbenga Adeboye himself is surprised to the point of comic excess. He is asked to pray by the white hosts, and as they all closed their eyes, Gbenga sights Kàsîmù rearranging the cutleries to give himself eating advantage especially with the bigger spoons! As usual, the comic muse comes straight to Gbenga Adeboye's rescue:

> "I will like to pray in my mother's tongue."
>
> "You're welcome Benga. Go on!" One of the hosts replies, with all eyes closes.
>
> "Kàsîmù! Kàsîmù!! Kàsîmù!!!
>
> "Ẹ'mélòó ni mo pè ọ́?
> ["How many times did I call you?"— Kàsîmù signals three]

"Kò ní dáa fún ẹ!
[It will not be well with you!]

"Oúnjẹ ti b'ayé é jẹ́!
[You are so gluttonous!]

"Ṣó o mọ̀ pé bẹ́ẹ̀ náà lo ṣe ní MacDonald lánàá, tó o ń jẹ pizza mọ́ burger; tí wọ́n ní ṣé a jọ wá ni, tí mo ní mi ò rí ọ rí. Tó o ń kó creamu won s'ápò. O tún dé l'ónìí?
[You did a similar thing at MacDonald yesterday; mixing pizza with burger and stealing the creams so much so that I had to deny knowing you! You have started again today?]
"Wòó, a popo on r'owo ro'ri o, tue o!
[Incantation in the next four lines]

"Ṣọ́'ara ẹ o. Ṣé o fẹ́ tẹ gbogbo Yorùbá lọ'jú àwọn Òyìnbó ni? Wọn a sì ni gbogbo Yorùbá lalá jẹ'jù.
[Do you want to shame the Yoruba, and make us a race of gluttons in front of the whites?]

"Ẹni ó mu kọ́ọ̀pù tíì mẹ́tàdínlọ́gbọ̀n, o sì ń jà ràn-ìn-ràn-ìn lára wọn. Ǐwọ ó tun dá'míì sí'lẹ̀.
[The person that drank twenty-seven cups of tea is still battling with the stigma. Do you want to complicate the issue?][5]

"Ó dáa, tí wọ́n ò bá wá di'jú f'ádùúrà ń kọ́ nísinyìí?
[Now, imagine they didn't close their eyes in prayer!]

"Wòó, Kàsíimù, o ò ní bámi jáde l'Ámẹ́ríkà yìí mọ́ o!
[Look, Kasimu, I will refuse to go out with you any longer!]
…..

"Ju síbí ọwọ́ rẹ nì sílẹ̀ kíá, kí n má summarise èpè s'órí ẹ!
[Drop those spoons immediately before I begin cursing you!]

"In Jesus name I pray…. Amen!"

The resounding "Amen" that followed the "prayer" demonstrates that those at the table had no clue whatsoever about what just happened. It is almost certain that they were lost in the exotic spiritual prayer, and thought all was well. And all was really well when they eventually opened their eyes, and probably burst into applause at such a wonderful invocation!

The other diasporic joke—"Mr Linkoln"—narrates the pathetic story of a Nigerian practically lost abroad. His inability to come to term with his birth name antedates the contemporary identity problem amongst Nigerian youths. Gbenga Adeboye met "Mr Linkoln" several times, and according to him, "Linkoln" is taken by his—again—exotic appearance (and definitely by the faint memories of "home" and what used to be). Thus, this particular day, there is another encounter:

"Hey man! You bad, man! I love your attire! Oh guy, how're doing?"
"Not bad! And you?"
"Oh, I'm fine boy!"
"My name is Gbenga; I'm from Africa."
"Oh yeah? I'm from Africa too. My name is 'Linkoln'."
"'Linkoln'? You mean 'Abraham Lincoln'?"
"No. I mean 'Linkoln.' 'Linkoln'."
"Can you spell it?"
"Oh sure. L-É-K-A-N"
"Oh God! That is LÉKAN!"

[5] This is a sly anecdotal reference to Sir Tafawa Balewa, first and only Nigerian Prime Minister (1957-1966), who allegedly drank 27 cups of tea because he was unaware of the table etiquette of tuning the cup face down after drinking a cup of tea.

"Yeah! Linkoln Orimogeje."
"'Ori…' what? Can you please spell that surname?"
"Yeah! O-R-Í-M-Ó-Ò-G-Ù-N-J-Ẹ́."
"That is ORÍMÓÒGÙNJẸ́! You are LEKAN ORÍMÓÒGÙNJẸ́!"
"Oh boy! You bet, man! You stupid dawg! You got it right, man! You still have that accent! You drive me crazy!"
"Mr Lékan Orímóògùnjẹ́, how long you been here?"
"Thirty-four, thirty-five years."
"Thirty-four, thirty-five?"
"Yeah."
"You built any house back home?"
"No."
"Your parents still alive?"
"I don't know."
"You plan to go back home?"
"I can't say, Gbenga, I can't say!"
"You can't say? Well, Mr Lékan, from which of the states are you from?"
"'Scuse me? What do you mean 'state'?"
"[I mean] Your state; state of origin?"
"C'mon, c'mon, Gbenga! You're kidding me, you're kidding me! You think I forgot home? Nothing like that, man! I still remember vividly. I'm from Western region."
"Western region, ke?!" [Western region?]

In both jokes, Adeboye was critically concerned with the idea of "home" and the protection of its boundaries. Of course, within the context of the diaspora, "home" is the African homeland; and more specifically, "home" is the Yoruba sociocultural territory and its signifiers everywhere across the globe. This understanding of home becomes a significant item in Gbenga Adeboye's understanding of the world, and the relationship of the Yoruba to the larger national space in Nigeria.

The framework for the social homilies is equally comic-critical, with a bit of an emphasis on the critical dimension which would get more severe by the time we arrive at the political commentaries. Yet, the comedy is still not missing. *In Stand Up Comedy Extravaganza 2*, we have two representative social homilies that do justice to the multi-talented status of Gbenga Adeboye. The first is titled "Some Minutes with God", and it is a dramatised sermon combined with a translator that provides the comic relief with his atrocious and ingenious (mis)translation, code-mixing and switching, and murderous but hilarious transliteration. The translator is not only the comedian, but also the tongue of the subaltern. There are several interjections even from the "preacher" himself—represented by the exclamation, "Ehn?" and chuckles arising from the subaltern translation.

Ìṣẹ́jú díẹ̀ pẹ̀lú Ọlọ́run
Some minutes with God

A dúpẹ́ l'ọ́wọ́ Ọlọ́run tí ó múwa ní ọjọ́ òní
We thank God who let us see today.

…
Lónìí, ohun t'óun ó bá ẹ s'ọ̀rọ̀ lé lórí ni nínì tálákà lára
[My sermon concerns the poor and the wretched]
My sermon for you today is the pursue of a poor man
["Ehn?"—"Sorri, giving masses problem"]

…

Tàni tálákà?
[Who is the poor?]
Who is the suffers man?

Ẹni tí ojú ń pọ́n
[The person that is afflicted]
The man with red face
["Ehn?"—"Go on, go on…]
…
Àlùfáà ń san'ra, ọmọ ìjọ ń rù
[The cleric enjoys while the members grow lean]
The pastor belleful, member is HIV virus

Gbogbo ẹni tó ń ni tálákà lára
Anybody that is giving masses problem

Ègún Olúwa ń bẹ l'órí yín
[The curses of the Lord rest on you]
E no go better for them!
["Ehn?"—Sorri; God curses are on you]
……

Ditarónómì 24, ẹsẹ 14 si 15, ó ní ìwọ kò gbọdọ̀ ní alágbàṣe lára tí ń ṣe tálákà àti alaíní
[Don't afflict the poor and the afflicted]
E say don't hammer your worker, the poor man and the empty handed
…..

Suratul dhuha na sọ bẹ́ẹ̀ nínú Korani
Suratul mention by the pastor also say it

Sura 93 ní kí a lọ
Sura chapter 93 [verse 6 to 11]

Ese ikefa si ikankola, o ni: *Alam yegi dika faa wa*
[verses 6 to 11: Did he not find you an orphan and give you shelter and care?]
Koran!

Wawa jada ka dola faa daa
[And he found you wandering and gave you guidance]
Koran again!

Wawa ja da ka ai lan fa ji naa
[And he found you in need and made you independent]
Koran still waxing strong in pastor's mouth

Wa mo sai la fa la teni yar
[Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness, nor repulse him who asks; but the bounty of your Lord rehearse and proclaim!]

Koran landed safely and finally

In a similar track titled "Wáàsí ìjìnlẹ̀ (Dandan ni Ẹ̀san)" (Profound Sermon—Retribution is certain), Gbenga Adeboye takes on the persona of a stern, non-comic Islamic cleric with all the inflection, aggressive posturing and Koranic interjections to further address social ills.

With the political commentaries, Gbenga Adeboye enters a complex territory that challenges his reputation as a social critic. This will appear surprising since the political would seem to be just a logical step away from the social. As it were, most of the social homilies were already pregnant with political intimations. Yet, it is at this political juncture that Gbenga Adeboye's comic-critical framework abandons the enthymematic capacity of comedies and becomes blatantly confrontational. This is because these commentaries themselves undermined the objectives they were meant to achieve.

Earlier on, we made the point that Gbenga Adeboye was a patriot of some sort. His entire oeuvre is addressed to Nigerians, and his *telos* is the unity of Nigeria. He had two

rallying points for achieving that: religion and ethnicity. His appellation as "Alhaji Pastor Oluwo" as well as his scriptural understanding of the three religions, is meant to signal the possibility of their commensurability and hence mutual relationship. His home video, *Oni ni* (It is Today), preaches the same message of religious ecumenism. However, his attempt to address the ethnic dimension of Nigeria's predicament ensnares him in the same issue. This is because Gbenga Adeboye comes to the national reconciliation table with a Yorùbá ethnic agenda that is partially responsible for that predicament in the first place. For instance, in the diasporan joke, "Kàsíîmù", Gbenga Adeboye chastises "Kàsíîmù" not because of the danger of putting Nigeria in a bad light, but for the possible embarrassment to the Yorùbá race. And he does that with a poke at a Hausa who was alleged to have drunk twenty-seven cups of tea because he supposedly lacked the knowledge of British tea etiquette.

This tension between the Yorùbá agenda and the unity of Nigeria as a nation essentially defines the political commentaries of Gbenga Adeboye. We will interrogate *Oro Sunnukun* and *Ijinle Ọ̀rọ̀ Láti Orí Ìtẹ́ Mímọ́*. He commenced *Ọ̀rọ̀ Sùnnùkùn 1* with a newspaper report from one Alhaji Abdul Kásúmù from Ìlọrin calling for the dethroning of two Yorùbá monarchs—Ooni of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and Ogunsua of Modákẹ́kẹ́—over their failure to put an end to the Ifẹ̀-Modákẹ́kẹ́ crisis (1997-2000). This conflict between the two erstwhile ethnic neighbours, as well as the many others then, was a constant testimony to the conflicted nature of postcolonial Nigeria. Gbenga Adeboye therefore offers a critique of Nigerian politicians and government, using the Ifẹ̀-Modákẹ́kẹ́ crisis as a foil. He begins with a subtle castigation of the Yorùbá elders and leaders:

> Mo kọ́kọ́ ki gbogbo ẹni tó ti dásí ìjà náà láti èyìn wá pé, "Ẹ kú àtúntò o".
> [I salute all those that have been involved in resolving the conflict]
>
> Mo kí Ọlọ́lá wa tó s'ọ̀rọ̀ pé, "Ẹ ku abi."
> [I also greet our honourable who initiated the discourse]
>
> Mo sì kí ìlú méèèjì pé, "Ẹ kú làásìgbò."
> [I salute the two towns on the crisis]
>
> Mo kí Olú-ayé Àdìmúlà pé, "Ẹ kú b'Ọ̀lọrun ti pe ori."
> [I greet the Ooni of Ife]
>
> Mo kí Kábíyèsí Ogunsua pe, "Ẹ kú ìgba kádàrá."
> [I greet King Ogunsua of Modákẹ́kẹ́]
>
> Ọlọ́run yóò bawa fòpin sí rìtìrìtì ọhún láti òní lọ àti títí láílaí
> [The owner of heaven will help put an end to the crisis from now and forever]
>
> Ṣé èyin bàbá wa tí ya gbàgbé ọ̀rọ̀ àgbà tẹ́ ẹ fi bọ́ a ni?
> [Have you our fathers forgotten the words of the elders that you fed us with?]
>
> Pé: B'íná ò l'áwo, kò lè g'òkè odò.
> [That: If fire does not have a secret ally, it cannot cross a river]
>
> Iná ìjà yìí tí l'áwo ló ṣe m'ókè odò gùn tí ó re yìí.
> [This conflict sure has a secret ally, and that is why it is soaring]
>
> Ahaha, ṣe b'ọ́mọdé l'èyin ní í wo'wájú tó bá ṣu'bú?
> [Ah! Didn't you say the child looks forward when s/he falls?]
>
> Kíló wá dé tá ń sorò bí èwe?
> [Why then are we behaving like children?]
>
> Tí a à ti ẹ̀ w'èyìn wò nígbà kankan?

[And we refuse at any time to look backward as elders?]

Yoòbá, a sì f̀iná s'órí òrùlé sùn gbáà!
[And the Yorùbá practically went to bed with their house ablaze!]

Ọlọ́run má'jẹ́ k'ógun ó wọ̀'lú ni o.
[May the owner of heaven forbid war]

Àwọn ìbọn tí í mú ni gun kẹ̀kẹ́ iná d'ọ́dọ̀ Olódùmarè, tí èniyàn ò fi níí sàárẹ́ ń bẹ l'ọ́wọ́ Íbò; tí'le to'na kun keke!
[The Igbo possess terrifying armament that can destroy without a trace]

Ọrun àti ọfà tó ń kó ìfun inú ẹni mì bíi kìnìún ó ti ń retí ìjà l'ákàtà ọmọ Gàmbàrí.
[Bow and arrow are also at the ready among the Hausa]

Ọmọ Yoòbá ò ní àpólà igi lásán o.
[The Yorùbá do not even have a mere piece of wood]

Kàkà káa sì fi'mọ̀ s'ọ̀kan, ara wa la tún ń pa.
[And rather than unite, we have turned on one another]

Wọ́n wá f'ọwọ́ l'érán, wọ́n ń bá wa bu'po s'íná wa—làìlàì!
[The others are now waiting and watching, and provoking the in-fighting]

We have here the Yorùbá agenda and the ethnic comparative framework by which Gbenga Adeboye meant to pursue it. The Yorùbá are either vilified or praised based on their perceived assertiveness or lukewarmness vis-à-vis other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Gbenga Adeboye was essentially held captive by the stereotypical ethnic discourse in the popular consciousness of Nigerians. "Gambari" or "Mọ́là" (a corruption of "mallam"—the Hausa word for a teacher) is a synecdochic but pejorative reference to the Hausa, just as "ọmọ ńna" refers to the Igbo.

He identified three reasons for the Nigerian crises:

Ọ̀tẹ̀ àti ìjà tí i ń w'aye káàkiri yìí ò dédé rí bẹ́ẹ̀
[The crises around are not arbitrary]

Ìdí kìn-ín ní l'ebi tí ń pa wá;
[The first cause for these crises is hunger that afflicts us]

Ìdí kejì ni pé ó l'ọ́wọ́ ìjọba orí oyè ninú ni;
[The second cause is the complicity of government]

Ìdí kẹta l'èpè tí wọ́n ní Kábíyèsí kan gbe gbogbo Yoòbá ṣẹ́!
[The third is the alleged curse inflicted on the Yorùbá by an ancient King]
….

Ebi ti ìjọba fi ń pa'lú ni ò jẹ́ àwọn onílà ó d'áwọ́ ogun dúró….
[The pervasive hunger has stalled the end of the crisis]

Ẹ jẹ́ a ti ẹ pé 100 million ni wa l'órílẹ̀ èdè yìí,
[Let us even assume we are just 100 million in population]

T'ẹnli kọ̀kan bá gba 10 million, ká pín-in kári; séńgì tí yóò kù kòlè tán
[If each of us is given 10 million, we'll still have more than enough]

Èyi ọ̀hún ninú owó ọmọ Abacha lásán tó ni bàbá òun máá ń fún òun l'ówó oúnjẹ oṣù kan

[And I'm even referring to what Abacha gives his son as monthly allowance]

Ojúlówó àkẹ́bàjẹ́ ọmọ ọlọ́pẹ́—lahila!
[A thoroughly spoilt child, indeed!]

Ṣebí ẹ sì ti gb'owó ọ̀hun; t'ebi tún ṣe wha jẹ́ o?
[Now that we have recovered the money, we are we still hungry?]

Note two immediate things. The first is the presumption that an ancient curse on the Yorùbá race constitutes part of the Nigerian predicament. Second, the primitive economics that would enrich all Nigerians with enough monies left for some other national expenses! The second reason he gave for the turmoil in the land is, again, the familiar trajectory of government, and politicians', complicity in bad governance. Here, Gbenga Adeboye was at his acerbic best. He inveighed against the politicians and their excesses, using the combined invective strength of the three religions at his command. He especially singled out the lawmakers and the billions of naira that went into servicing their greed. They got allowances for furniture, reading, phone calls, entertainment, sitting, severance and life allowances, and even burials and religious celebrations! Gbenga Adeboye singled out Chuba Okadigbo, the late former President of the Nigerian Senate (1999-2000), for serious invective, especially for the alleged N78 million supposedly expended on Salah celebration. Here again, like the economic recommendation, we are faced with another political solution to the predicament:

B'ínú ìjọba bá yọ́ sí ìjà Modákẹ́kẹ́ àti Ifẹ̀ ni,
[If the government is indeed disposed to ending the Ife-Modakeke crisis]

Kílọ́ burú nínú pé, "Ok, ẹ̀yin Ifẹ̀: local government yín rè é, Ẹ koo'bi yi; 35 million re, ẹ wa sí i."
[There is nothing amiss in saying: "Ife, this is your local government, and here is 35 million naira. Look for more to sustain it']

"Modákẹ́kẹ́: local government yín rè ẹ́; 35 million rèé , ẹ wá sí i."
[The same goes for Modakeke]

Ṣebí yóò ku 8 million fun olókèlè bí orí àbíkú kó fi j'ágbó ní'jọ́ kan soso.
[That would still leave the glutton with N8 million to expend on eating a sheep in just a day]

Wọn ò ṣè'yun o; àpapín owó ni wọ́n ń bá kiri.
[They refused to do this; rather, they greedily shared money]

Ọlọ́run yóò jẹ gbogbo wọn ní'yà t'ó gb'óná,
[The owner of heaven will make them suffer]

Àfàìmọ̀ bí ń bá fi nnkan bí agbára ba'nu ni èpè yìí ò fi ní mú wọn.
[And this curse will surely affect them!]

At this juncture of his comic-critical oeuvre, Gbenga Adeboye had left the safe cultural turf of *ààbọ̀ ọ̀rọ̀* for the complex political landscape where more is needed for effective criticism especially in terms of adequate political knowledge. The primitive economics of the preceding narrative thus combined a ludicrous knowledge of *realpolitik* to portray him as an ineffectual subaltern critic. When we eventually arrive at the third reason for the crisis in Nigeria, Gbenga Adeboye the patriot is no longer recognisable; we now have a stark and outright Yorùbá ethnic jingoist:

Ẹ̀yin bàbá mi n'Ílé Ifẹ̀, ní Modákẹ́kẹ́, jákè jádò ilẹ̀ Oòduà o!
[All my fathers at Ile-Ife, Modakeke, and all over Yorubaland]

Moní ìdí kẹ̀ta t'ógun ò fi dúró—èpè ni!
[The third reason for this crisis is the curse!]

Ẹ gbọ́, ṣé òótọ́ ni Ọba kan bùú jọ ìran Yoòbá l'áyé àtijọ́ wípé ẹnu wa ò ní kò láìláí; ọ̀tá la ó máa b'ára wa ṣe?
[Is it true that a certain ancient king placed a curse of disunity on the Yorùbá race?]

Èmi ò bá'tàn, mi ò sì tí ì bá'rọ́bá re o.
[I certainly didn't know history, and I am not certain of the narration]

Àmọ́, bó bá jẹ́ bẹ́ è ni, ẹ jẹ a ro'nú, ká wá nnkan ṣe sí ni i.
[But if it is true, then we ought to reflect and find a solution]
…..

Bí Modákẹ́kẹ́ ló bá renti Hausa ọlọ́fà láti k'ọjú Ifẹ̀;
[Is Modakeke renting Hausa archers to confront Ife?]

Bí Ifẹ̀ ló bá renti Hausa ọlọ́fà láti k'ọjú Modáẹ́lẹ…
[Is Ife doing a similar thing?]

Ṣebí àwọn fẹ́ gbé wa jó'ná tẹ́lẹ̀ ni, k'ató máa tún f'epo rara dúró t'iná?
[Don't forget these people are already plotting our downfall]

Owó billions ti Abacha kó pamọ́, ẹ̀yin ṣe b'ó fẹ́ fi dì'bò ni?
[The billions of naira Abacha stashed away is not meant for election…]

Ó fẹ́ fi ja'gun ni, orí ló yọ wá!
[It is meant for the prosecution of war against us; we were just so lucky!]
…..
Ẹ̀wà tí ń pa gbogbo Íbò àti Yoòbá níjọ́ òní i,
[The killer beans that ravaged both the Igbo and Yorùbá the other time…]

Ṣé ẹ mọ àwé oní tírélà tó kó o wá bí?
[Don't you know the trailer magnate that imported it?][6]

Wọ́n ti po nnkan mọ́ ọn ni! Ṣebí òun nìkan ló gbọ́dọ̀ kó rice wọ̀'lú.
[Don't forget he's the only one with the import license; so he took dangerous liberty with the beans!]

Hausa kan o kú'kú ẹ̀wà l'ókè Ọya o!
[No Hausa died of beans poisoning in the North!]

Ẹ ẹ̀ jẹ á ronú!
[It is time for us to deeply reflect!]
…..
Ọmọ Íbò, wọn ní ẹgbẹ́ ajàngbara ti wọn o. Hausa ní ti ẹ̀ ò.
[The Igbo and the Hausa have their militant groups]

…
Wọ́n wá mba àwọn OPC jẹ́, inú Yoòbá tún ń dùn
[Yet, when O[odua] P[eople] C[ongress] is castigated, the Yorùbá rejoice]

Awólọ́wọ̀ ti lọ, Abíọ́lá ti kú, Ọbásanjọ́ j'oko lé òwu ìkórun.
[Awolowo is gone; Abiola is dead; and Obasanjo is sitting complacent]
…..

In *Oro Sunnukun 2*, he celebrated the end of the Ife-Modakeke crisis, as well as other ethnic clashes that dominated the Nigerian political space then. He also celebrated the impeachment of Chuba Okadigbo. Yet, Nigeria is a crisis template that is emblematic of a permanent possibility of problems. Thus, Gbenga Adeboye had to again confront, in narration, the emergence of democracy and the MKO Abiola "June 12" political saga.

[6] This is a straight reference to Alhaji Aliko Dangote, the business mogul.

Again, the tension between the national and the ethnic reared its head as Gbenga Adeboye congratulated Nigerians on the nascent democracy. His commentary on the conflict, expectedly, could only be meaningful for him within the ethnic framework. Abiola was, for him, largely a Yorùbá hero compromised by an ethno-national conspiracy against the Yoruba. In a song refrain preceding his narration of the Nigerian democracy, Gbenga Adeboye commented:

Yorùbá nìí kìí fẹ́ b'ínú
[The Yorùbá do not get angry]

Yorùbá nìí kìí fẹ́ ó yí'wọ́
[The Yorùbá do not disrupt]

Ẹ̀yà kan ń dúró dè wá ṣá
[Yet, one race is lying in ambush]

Wọn ò kọ'hun tó máa dà o.
[Not minding the outcome]

Àwọn ló lọ b'óyìnbó sọ,
[It is that race that conspired with the whites]

Tí'kú MK fi dò'hun.
[And sealed the death of MKO]

Wọ́n pa wá l'Ábíọ́lá tán, a dẹ̀ tún jọ ń sọ'kún.
[They killed Abiola, yet we mourned him together]

Bẹ́ ò bá fẹ́ k'ilẹ̀ yí pín,
[If you do not want this land to fragment]

Ẹ tètè fi'nú kò'nú;
[Then you better get into conference]

Bí a ò rí bẹ́ẹ̀, à ń tan'ra wa ni.
[If we don't, then we are deceiving one another]

À ń sún wàhálà síwájú.
[We are only postponing the doomsday]

Àwa ló fẹ́ kí Nàìjá gb'éri;
[We—the Yoruba—desire that Nigeria will rise]

Àwọn kan ń bẹ wọn ò rán'yàn o!
[Yet there are some who just do not care!]

Wọn tà wá l'ẹ́rú f'óyìnbó,
[They sold us into slavery to the whites]

Kán lè dúró sí'pò ni
[Just to satisfy their yearning for power]

And then, he followed right immediately with an exhortation on why the nascent democracy cannot afford to be aborted, especially by legislators and politicians who are concerned only with their own greed and parochial desires.

Ẹ̀yin adàlúrú, ẹ máa ṣe o.
[You that disrupt the nation; watch it]

Ẹ ma ge'jo democracy ni're, ki o ma f'eyin sa'gi o.
[Beware about truncating the nascent democracy]

Ṣé ẹ mọ̀ pé igi tí ó bá f'eyin san naa kii je'aaye mo.
[Once it is truncated, we are done for]

Àwọn asíwájú t'Ọ́lọ́run bá yọ̀nda fún wa, àdúrà ni o.
[The leaders we get is the result of prayers]

Ohun tí ò tó l'ónìí, ń bọ̀ wá pọ̀ l'ọ́la,
[What seems difficult today foretells abundance tomorrow…]

Tí Nigeria yóò padà di ìlú tó ń sàn fún wàrà àti fún oyin.
[When Nigeria becomes the land flowing with milk and honey]

Ẹ kọ ọ́'lẹ̀ kí ẹ kọ'rúkọ mi ti n di…
[Note these words, and affix my signature to it]

Ẹ fi't'àn Nigeria àtẹ̀hìnwá kọ́'gbọ́n o, táa gb'ólohun àdúrà s'ókè lé Shagari;
[Remember the Nigerian past, and our supplication against Shagari]

L'Olúwa bá fún wa ní Buhari ati Idiagbon.
[And then the Lord answered us, and gave us Buhari and Idiagbon]

L'àwọn yẹn ń bọ́'lu yó, ni wọ́n tún ń san gbèsè tí a jẹ…
[These ones fed us and paid our debts…]

L'a tún kígbe, "Olúwa, nooooo. Eléyìí ti ndi'jú mọ́'rí tún lée; fún wa lẹ́lẹ́rin-ín ẹ̀yẹ! Kanjú fo yìí ò ṣe é sunmọ́." Lahila!
[But we again cried out: "We want a smiling leader! These ones are too stern!]

Clearly, the theme of disintegration can be read as a subtle subtext in Gbenga Adeboye's ethnic chauvinism. In the political commentaries, the Yorùbá are romanticised on the one hand, and on the other, he is surprised at the reality of the divisiveness that characterised ethnic politics even amongst Yorùbá politicians. Not surprisingly, he contributed in no small measure to the divisiveness when he narrated, for instance, the "achievements" of Lam Adesina, the erstwhile governor of Ọ̀yọ́ State in *Ayé Tótó*. This was done to negate the other Yorùbá politicians—and, of course, their Northern collaborators!—who attempted to undermine them. So much then for the romantic vision of the patriotic Yorùbá race that is much sinned against!

Conclusion

To return to Walzer, a successful social critic can only hope to be effective only if she is an insider that rails against her society from within the conventional confine of that society. No Archimedean disinterestedness will guide her strictures to the heart of the matter than her own embeddedness in the social milieu. However, as we have seen with Gbenga Adeboye, being a subaltern social critic also comes with its own price. A social critic must not only be embedded to be effective, but they must also always operate with a deep suspicion of that social encumbrance that constantly threaten to swallow her in the rot of conventional corruption. Gbenga Adeboye was not that careful.

In the final analysis, it may become inevitable to conclude that Gbenga Adeboye was a veritable multi-talented social critic who gave a subaltern perspective on the calamity of governance in Nigeria. Yet, paradoxically, as a subaltern critic his social barometer only succeeds in giving us a parochial reading of the Nigerian condition that is far from enlightening. He ultimately failed to transform the subaltern position into an epistemic standpoint that drives a constructive alternative to the Nigerian predicament.

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