



# Menippean Satire in Postcolonial African Literature: A Reading of Pius Adesanmi's *You're Not a Country, Africa*

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In *You're Not a Country, Africa* (2011), Pius Adesanmi employs Menippean satire to show the contradictions that inhere in the African continent. The Menippean satiric method includes the interrogation of mental attitudes, the querying of inhumane orthodoxy as well as the re-negotiation of philosophical standpoints of persons, institutions and nations. This form of satire resembles the innuendoes and moral inclinations of some Nigerian folktales. This similarity largely informs Adesanmi's imaginative dexterity in attacking ineptitude and shortcomings of the interrogated space. Indeed, with the combination of Menippean ridicule and the narratology of African folklore, the satirist, Adesanmi, is methodologically equipped to inveigh against the recklessness in Africa and to promote rectitude therein. This study, therefore, examines the constituents of Menippean satire such as multiple viewpoint, discontinuity, humour, and mind setting as preponderant elements in Adesanmi's *You're Not a Country, Africa*. These constituents have a distinct interface with the allegory and didacticism of African folklore all of which enable Adesanmi to foreground the need for renewal and rebirth in a promising continent.

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## Introduction

In reshaping the often misrepresented and manipulated history of Africa, cultural critics like Lewis Nkosi in *Homeland and Exile* (1965), Chinua Achebe in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (1988) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in *Homecoming: Essays in African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*

(1972) are a few examples of fiery satirists who demonstrate great intellection in re-focusing the distinctive cultures of Africa and in rebuking the inhumanity of certain aspects of Africa's socio-cultural and political experiences. In their various polemical submissions, these critics show sheer doggedness in intellectualizing the condition of Africa with the aim of highlighting theoretical frames which, perhaps, will preserve the future of Africa. But the dimension of satire that Pius Adesanmi deploys in *You're Not a Country, Africa* (2011) is poignantly cerebral because he effectively uses the Menippean form of satire to query inhumane value systems, to renew the mindsets of readers and to offer subtle panaceas to the average and decaying existence of the African continent.

Named after the Greek Cynic philosopher Menippus (3RD century BC), Menippean satire is an intellectual work of intense scrutiny and pontification which is marked by humour, irony and innuendoes. Like other forms of satire such as "Juvenalian Satire" and "Horatian Satire", the Menippean form is stylized by the satirist to register personal views on diverse human existential crises in social, political and religious experiences. The Menippean form of satire is an appropriate satiric style for Adesanmi's *You're Not a Country, Africa* not only because the method of narration and the thematic preoccupations align with the features of Menippean satire but also because the author attacks institutionalized establishments within and outside Africa in a bid to free the readers of being enslaved to certain inhumane ideologies as well as to renew the mindsets of Africans. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Menippean satire is "a form of intellectually humorous work characterized by miscellaneous contents, displays of curious erudition, and comical discussions on philosophical topics" (Baldick, 2008, p.178). *The Encyclopedia Britannica* defines it as "an artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to bring about improvement" (Kniper & Lotha, 2010, p.476). Curiously, the definitions offered by *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* and *The Encyclopedia Britannica* are somewhat circumscribed in that they do not carry the distinctive history of Menippean satire. In an excellent M.A thesis entitled *The Characteristics of Menippean Satire in Seneca, Lucianus and Erasmus* (1999), Daynath de Silva points out that little is even known about Menippus:

The date of his birth is considered to be around 300 B.C but knowledge of Menippus is scarce and indirect and much of his attitude to life comes indirectly through the Syrian satirist, Lucianus of Samosata, who often imitated him and introduced him as a figure in several of his dialogues. (1999, p.14)

A Roman writer called Varro later expanded the usage by imitating the few sample satires that remained in the lost works of Menippus. In addition to its intent of rebuking false mental attitudes therefore, Menippean satire is characterized by the mixture of prose and verse; the deployment of allegories and humour and the unabashed attack on organized institutions in politics, culture, civil service and other formal systems as enunciated by de Silva. De Silva adds that:

The background spirit of Menippean satire is the Spirit of the Cynic philosophers and just like the Cynics, the writers of Menippean satire ridicule or rather scoff at institutions, philosophers, intellectuals, material goods and worldly aspirations. (1999, p.16)

This style became exemplary in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966). In modern times, Mikhail Bakhtin (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics: Polyphony and Unfinalizability*, 1972) and Northrop Frye (*Anatomy of Criticism, Four Essays*, 1957) are notable figures in the revival of the term.

For Bakhtin, Menippean satire was not exclusive to the Greco-Roman intellection but continued during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Reformation, though in different forms. Revisiting the idea of Bakhtin, de Silva (1999) further reveals that humour, freedom of plot, philosophical inventions, mystical-religious elements, moral-psychological experimentation, violation of established norms of behaviour, scandal scenes, sharp and oxymoronic contrasts, "prosimentrum" (mixture of prose and verse) and the bent towards journalism are features of the Menippean satiric form. This view is sustained by Howard Weinbrot (2005) and the duo of Brancht Branham and Marie-Odile Goutlet-Caze (1996). Evidently, in Adesanmi's *You're Not a Country, Africa*, some of these Bakhtinian types of Menippean satire such as "humour", "scandal scenes", "moral-psychological experimentation" and "sharp and oxymoronic contrast" abound. Frye, preoccupied with the taxonomy of literature in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, mentions that Menippean forms of satire are "the digression of air, of the marvellous journey, the digression of spirits, of the ironic use of education, the digression of the miseries of scholars, of the satire of the philosophus gloriosus" (1957, pp.311-312). Thus, for Frye, Menippean satire is chiefly an attack on mental attitudes. Referring to Frye's polemical perspective, de Silva emphasizes that "[...] the writer of the Menippean satire describes pedants, hypocrites, bigots, and incompetent representatives of various occupations" (1999, p.100). Frye's notion of Menippean satire is, like Bakhtin's, to cure any anomaly of the intellect and the inhibiting conundrum of average existence as well as to foreground established codes of behaviour.

## **Bakhtin, Frye and Adesanmi: Theoretical Intersections and Departures**

The theoretical framework of this discussion rests principally on the polemics of Mikhail Bakhtin and Northrop Frye. Bakhtin's and Frye's critical positions are appropriate in foregrounding Adesanmi's satirical intents in querying inhumane orthodoxy, renewing the minds of Africans and non-Africans and unveiling the distinctive and utilitarian aspects of Africa's worldviews.

In *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics: Polyphony and Unfinalizability*, Bakhtin holds that Menippean satire is not exclusive to Greco-Roman literati. Philosophically, he sees it as closely linked to his idea of "polyphony" (Bakhtin, 1972, p.17), which is humankind's method of comprehending reality through multiple structures. To him, Menippean satire has been in existence right from the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance and the Reformation periods of literary history. It may be in different form, but it is not a copyright of Greece and Rome. Inferably, therefore, Menippean satire equally has its variant in African culture, which Adesanmi has sufficiently explored to foreground his intents.

In addition, Bakhtin describes the world that Menippean satire inquires as a “carnival”, that is, a place replete with disorderliness, incoherence and pandemonium (Bakhtin, 1972, pp.189-203). Similarly, the reality portrayed in Pius Adesanmi’s *You’re Not a Country, Africa* is also full of social, political and cultural topsy-turvy. In a related sense, Bakhtin holds that Menippean satire features “scandal scenes” (1972, p.4) which, of course, are plenty in Adesanmi’s *You’re Not a Country, Africa*. There are myriad examples of scandals in Adesanmi’s narratives. To Bakhtin, Menippean satire interrogates all violations of proper human behaviour which are typically scandalous.

Next, Bakhtin emphasizes that Menippean satire is concerned with philosophical questions and contemplations. The intention is to query and subvert any inhumane orthodoxy. Closely linked to the art of interrogation is the creation of alternatives. Certainly, as queries are being put forward, there are also speculations of newer ways of doing things. To Bakhtin, Menippean satire is a useful critical tool in renewing and re-focusing the minds of readers to see alternative patterns of reality. Meanwhile, Adesanmi is equipped with the variant of this in the Yoruba cultural worldview. The writer calls this the “Ifa corpus” (Adesanmi, 2011, p.159), divination through critical questioning.

Like Bakhtin, Northrop Frye interprets Menippean satire to mean the kind of literary style which interrogates “the digressions of air, of the marvellous journey; the digression of spirits, of the ironic use of education; the digressions of the miseries of scholars...” (Frye, 1957, pp.311-312). In *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, the Canadian critic reveals that the chief premise of Menippean satire is to query human “digressions” in history (“marvellous journey”); in religion (“spirits”); in education (“ironic use of education”) and in human civilization (“miseries of scholars”). Evidently, these areas are Adesanmi’s foci in his satirical essays.

Furthermore, Frye classifies each piece of literature based on what it imitates. While making an attempt at taxonomy and definition of Menippean satire, Frye philosophically suggests that the themes are the contradictions of politicians, the hypocrisy of religious bigots and the manipulators of history.

While Bakhtin and Frye respectively contextualize and exemplify their positions on Menippean satire on the works of Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Milton and so forth, they do not address writings outside the Western Classics. This discussion shall therefore extend the rich theoretical positions of both thinkers to the non-fiction of a prominent African writer, Pius Adesanmi, and explore how he deploys queries and questions to renew the mind of readers with respect to the African continent.

The foregoing theoretical views about the origin and critical advancements of Menippean satire do not make this satirical style of writing exclusive to Western intelligentsia. Sharp oxymoronic contrast, ironic presentation of scandal scenes, and the subtle foregrounding of didactic standpoints are similar hallmarks of African myths and folktales. In defence of this, Adesanmi postulates:

To understand what I believe is going on here,  
you must be willing to suspend your subscription  
to the explanatory authority of all the Euro-philosophical  
and Americo-modern analyses...let the African world view  
offer an explanatory grid for these things. The African  
world view I have in mind here is Yoruba, my primary tool  
of analysis (2011, p.179)

In other words, there is an African variation of Menippean satire with which Adesanmi can “offer an explanatory grid for...things”. The variations are not actually overt, rather we have Adesanmi drawing parallels in worldviews and visions as he satirizes the bigots, pedants, scholars, and politicians within and outside Africa. Thomas King (1990), using certain aspects of North America as examples, foregrounds the view that if indigenous knowledge is stressed and intellectualized, it can become locally usable and universally acceptable:

For the Native reader [...] in addition to the usable past that the concurrence of oral literature and traditional history provides us with, we also have an active present marked by cultural tenacity and a viable future which may well organize itself around major revivals of language, philosophy, and spiritualism. (King, 1990, p. 570)

Adesanmi’s “usable African past”, derived from his Yoruba culture, is part of the “explanatory grid” of his own version of Menippean satire in *You’re Not a Country, Africa*. Specifically, the author combines his Yoruba satirical “tool of analysis” with some of the core features of Menippean satire that Bakhtin and Frye enumerated. We can derive, therefore, that Adesanmi questions retrogressive values, renews readers’ minds and offers subtle panaceas in *You’re Not a Country, Africa*. These tripartite elements from the rigorous intellect of Adesanmi are portrayed in humour, irony, multiple perspectives and, sometimes, allegory. Adesanmi’s African mode of Menippean satire is reminiscent of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s remark that:

Satire takes for its province a whole society, and for its purpose criticism. The satirist sets himself certain standards and criticizes the society when and where it departs from these norms. He invites us to assume his standards and shares the moral indignation which moves him to pour derision and ridicule on society’s failings. (Ngugi, 1972, p.55)

Adesanmi is adept in using his Yoruba “tool of analysis” as a distinct cultural mechanism of interrogation and, combining it with the multiple perspectives of Western Menippean satire, employs it to reveal the inanities of certain African and Western ideologies.

Divided into four parts, *You’re Not a Country, Africa* contains thirty-one satirical essays that reveal the complexities of Africa in the face of cultural bankruptcy, moral degeneration, civil disturbances and international misrepresentation. While the task of Adesanmi is to intellectually attack the unrepentant bigots, the misplaced academics, the carnal politicians and even the disoriented civilians with Menippean modes of satire, the author is preoccupied with using the didactic elements of his folkloric Yoruba tradition like the use of proverbs, the incorporation of “Ifa corpus”, the deployment of aspects of mythology and the apologia for communality as panaceas to the battered present and past of Africa.

## Menippean Satire and Questionable Values

Bakhtin and Frye concur that Menippean satire is employed to question the values of persons and institutions. The latter is emphatic in enumerating the targets of the Menippean satirist: pedants, hypocrites, bigots and incompetent representatives of various occupations. Similarly, in Adesanmi’s Yoruba culture, the intention of the

satirist is to use language to confront an inhumane status quo. Replete with humour, language is characterized by allusions, allegories and proverbs. Beyond this, Adesanmi draws from the Yoruba philosophical standpoint to inveigh against the follies and foibles of the community. Adesanmi's cultural standpoint, which distinguishes his own Menippean satire, is succinctly captured thus:

Whenever I'm invited to reflect critically on the condition of the state in Africa using Nigeria as an example, I always love to unpack the philosophical underpinnings of *orile ede*, if only to illustrate how and why Nigeria's project nationhood was doomed from the very beginning and why we need to revisit those beginnings, and correct so many errors of the rendering, if we are to stand any chance of renegotiating our way out of the current stasis to genuine nationhood. (Adesanmi, 2011, p.224)

Adesanmi's Yoruba tool of Menippean satire, "*orile ede*", is defined as "[...] how Yoruba express the geographical and political categories of country, nation and state" (Adesanmi, 2011, p.224). The writer, in other words, draws from the "philosophical underpinnings" of a cultural ethos to query the socio-religious and political anomalies in the quotidian experiences of his Nigerian community. Whatever is different from the "origin, fate and destiny" (p.225) of the articulated philosophies of the Yoruba like the production of and dissociation from the Other and the endorsement of absolutisms (pp.231-237) should be tackled and jettisoned because they are "errors of the rendering" (p.224). In order not to be "tone-deaf to the memories logged in their cultures" (p.230), Adesanmi advises that "Questions. Questions. Questions" (p.37) should be asked if Africa is serious about removing acute retrogressions in all spheres of existence. Using the Menippean satire of interrogation of value, Adesanmi advances the view that progress is far-fetched without questions. Questioning is the bedrock of civilization and progress. He argues that "From the ancient times to our days, the philosopher has always been the man or woman who doubted, who queried, who relentlessly said no" (p.156). Accordingly, Adesanmi, drawing from the utilitarian parts of his Yoruba philosophy, conceives of the Menippean satirical method as an embodiment of questions and queries which aim at interrogating the motives of institutions. Similar to the interrogative styles of Menippus, Epicureans and Stoics in the Greek 3rd Century BC, Adesanmi queries the values in the cultural (race), religious, social, educational and political experiences with local and global references.

With respect to culture, Adesanmi queries the double standard of the Western elites whenever they profile the African continent as a black race. For instance, in "Don Williams: Fragments of Memory" (p.10), Adesanmi, armed with philosophical interrogations, chronicles his love for country music but wonders why African artists are despised:

How do you love the art and hate its creator on account of his or her colour? How do you admit that a work of art by a black artist is pure genius while believing that black people have no genius? (p.13)

The satirist uses the foregoing questions to reveal other African cultural values despised by Western intelligentsia. The question raised by Adesanmi is a Menip-

pean style of satire which is the querying of organised cultural institutions that are responsible for the creation of values. The author reinforces this notion in “Of Cats and Catritude” where he opines that “in my more than a decade of circulation in Euro-America, I’ve had to learn to listen to the West and know when it summons me to perform any of my identities” (p.73). To him, the cultures of Africans are under perpetual negotiation from “North American institutional establishment” like the universities that have endorsed France, for instance, as the only “producer of original thought” (p. 76). This is exemplified in “Accent Wars” (pp. 82-85) where the encounter between the writer and a Scottish racist reveals the disdain of the West for the food culture of Africans. Although Africans travel far and wide, there are cherished aspects of African cultures like food, courtesy and communality that should be respected by European hosts. Adesanmi sustains this view in “The Boy from Ghana” (p.88) by adding that “a tree trunk may spend twenty years in the river but it will never become a crocodile. There will always be the artillery of the West’s stubborn image of the Other to remind him of his savage origins” (p. 92). In these two essays, the Menippean satirical temper of querying past and present institutions is deciphered in the way Adesanmi views the inhumane impact of Western cynicism against African cultural values:

On my way home, I thought about my three-month-old daughter. What will I tell her, how will I react when she is older, goes to school, here in Canada, and returns home one day to ask me about tribesmen from Africa? (p. 93)

Adesanmi observes that when the West focuses any attention on Africa, it usually carries racist intention. Discussing extensively on the worthlessness of Western intervention on HIV/AIDS in “Africa, Vanity Fair, And the Vanity of a Cover” (p. 94), the satirist queries the self-absorbed motive of Western media:

By now your mind should be approaching the obvious question: what are three American billionaires doing on the cover of such an important magazine when the special and ‘historic’ issue is devoted exclusively to Africa? Vanity Fair is, no doubt, telling us that sending its radar on a fishing expedition across the vast expanse of Africa, it could not find three or even a single African worthy of gracing the cover. (p. 95)

To Adesanmi, it is “inconceivable that a special issue of Vanity Fair on any of these three countries [France, Japan or China] would carry three American faces on its cover” (p.96). This idea is strengthened in “I, Sarah Baartman, Invisible!” (p.105) where the satirist reveals the hidden ideology of Western temperament towards Africa’s cultural values: “After all, as seasoned academics in the United States, you both know that exclusions tell much louder stories than inclusions” (p.108). African cultures are being silenced by Western hegemony to the extent that it is becoming the norm to accept everything coming from France, Britain and America. “You will admit, from what you now know from my own story, that I am quite used to being silenced, being disappeared” (p.108), Adesanmi submits.

The Menippean mode of satire does not only ridicule the obvious, it also brings to the fore the excluded and the dominated. For instance, Adesanmi queries how

African women are being marginalized in the mainstream of feminist dialogue:

Could it be that you imagined that voices of the African American women you selected adequately speak for those of their continental sisters? Possibly. If this is the case, I must tell you that African American women cannot be made to stand in and speak for continental African women... Could it be that you are simply unaware of the considerable body of African feminist intellection right there in your neck of the woods in the US academy? (p.109)

Adesanmi's satirical attack against Western elites recalls de Silva's notion of Menippean satire where the critic opines that the central theme of Menippean literature "is that the world is replete of men and women with questionable values. Delusion as well as illusion are rampant [...] nothing is what it seems to be and appearances seem to have triumphed over reality (de Silva, 1999, p.16). These people of questionable values operate in what Bakhtin (1972) calls "carnival" and "scandal scenes". For Adesanmi, Western elites are a product of a long history of self-serving manipulators and scandal-scene creators, within and outside the continent of Africa.

In the area of religion, Adesanmi in "Dewdrops of Memory: Isanlu and the Islam of My Childhood" (2011, p.17) queries how Christianity has incapacitated his Yoruba traditional belief system:

Of the scores of Isanlu rituals and traditional festivals my maternal grandfather told me about as a kid, I met only the Ogun, Sango, Egungun, new yam, and a handful of other festivals, and they were all in intensive care at the hospital because of life-threatening injuries sustained from contacts with Christianity. (p.17)

In this essay, as well as in "Why I Will Not Emulate Jesus" (p.242), the satirist employs the Menippean style of interrogation to reveal the contradictions of following Western religious systems to the detriment of the Sango, Ogun and Egungun festivals of his Nigerian heritage. Humorously, Adesanmi reveals how his traditional belief system "devised ways of dealing with Christianity" (p.18) by showing the ritual elements in both:

The new yam festival became part of the annual harvest and thanksgiving activities on the calendar of every Christian denomination in Isanlu, especially my local parish of the Catholic Church [...] In Isanlu, you took the first and choicest yam harvest from your farm to the Christian altar. (p.19)

The quality of good leadership from Jesus of Judeo-Christian tradition is also decipherable in the acts of certain gods and heroes in Adesanmi's traditional African religious system as shown in "The Myth of the Good Yoruba" (2011, p.231). With copious references to the ideal patterns in the Yoruba worldview of inclusiveness rather than the production of "otherness" (p.231), the writer condemns the myopic vision of those who create stereotypes. The satirist balances this essay with the worrisome absolutism of the Christian narrative in "Why I Will Not Emulate Jesus" (p.242), where he argues "that those who invest in the production of otherness are often blind



and deaf to the intrinsic humanism of their own cultures” (p.237). This statement underlines the thrust of “Why I will Not Emulate Jesus” (p.242) where Nigerian political leaders, for instance, take Jesus as a referential archetype of Good whom they hypocritically enjoin their followers to emulate.

Politics and governance in postcolonial Africa are dominant subjects in Adesanmi’s Menippean satirical narratives. For instance, the author queries the politicization of oppression in “We, the Colonized” (2011, p.41) by intellectualizing that the exclusivity of oppression to a region is capable of breeding sets of elites who take advantage of certain historical happenings of colonization/oppression:

When oppression is transformed into a sacrosanct territory, the implacable spectre of Orwell emerges in which a people’s oppression is perceived as being more equal than all forms of oppression. When a people derives its sense of history, memory, and identity from such an exceptionalist formulation, the articulation of other forms of oppression competing for narrative space is felt as either a threat, an invasion of sacrosanct territory, or mockery of one’s specific, unequalled historical particularity. (p.48)

Adesanmi queries the politics behind the projection of oppression by redefining power to mean the negotiation of the exclusivity of oppression. He asks: “how do you narrate Palestinian suffering without appearing to water down the dominant Jewish narrative of suffering?” (p.48). Certainly, the socio-political unrest in the African continent and the rest of the world stems from the “territorialisation of oppression” (p.49). For the satirist, the “constant tensions between specific ethno-cultural groups and the state in Africa” (p.49) are borne out of new ways of personalizing the experience of oppression. Furthermore, political leaders use the historical fact of oppression to create new myths of engagements with the Other. Whether within the politics of Africa or in international politics, words such as “militants”, “infidels”, “natives”, “terrorists”, “revolt”, “rebellion”, “riot”, “mutiny” and “uprising” are created and recreated to ward off threats to the idea of sovereignty even when the leadership is fast failing. This query is unfurled in “Britain, Hiss-Hiss-History, And the Ni-Ni- Niger Delta” where Adesanmi contends that the

higher up you are on the ladder of oppression and historical transgressions, the more impecunious your vocabulary becomes in terms of your capacity to describe, name, and engage your victims. (pp. 192-194)

Political leaders find new labels to describe nationalists and activists who intend to query the inhumane status quo of postcolonial oppressors:

Strange descriptions dignifying such events with names like decolonisation, liberation struggle, freedom struggle and wars of independence would enter the picture only when the native decided to seize the narrative through the pens of African nationalists. (p.195)

This trend continues in post-independence Nigeria, for instance, with political elites reinforcing the European conqueror’s style of governance:

If you remove the fact that the Nigerian people today are dealing not with European conquerors but with much deadlier internal colonisers, our condition replicates the essential features of the Native American situation in terms

of the loss of the struggle for meaning. (p.200)

The loss of national meaning in the political sphere is a function of the continuation of the colonial style of political leadership.

In his polemical analysis of Menippean satire, de Silva (1999) contends that the motif of Menippean satire is cynicism (p.16). Adesanmi's cynicism against the educational system is his way of interrogating the space. The writer queries the professoriate in the university system by using rich allegories such as 'Professor Errand Boy', 'Professor Nutin Spoil' and 'Professor House Nigga' in "Professing Dangerously: An African Professoriate in the Eyes of a Country Boy" (2011, p.27). The satirist attacks the educational institution by revealing the ways in which professors and other highly lettered Nigerians are used to propagate a military agenda and other functions unbecoming of high-profile academics. With reference to two dictatorial archetypes, the satirist observes that the "combined effect of Babangida's and Abacha's assault on the professoriate was to erase the halo, aura, and ideal that society had invested in those persons" (Adesanmi, 2011, p.34). The newer political parties also contribute in defiling the noble profession. "This purulent political institution", Adesanmi adds, "benefited immensely from the demystification of the professoriate by the military" (p.35). The professors, in Frye's words, are embroiled in "the digressions of the miseries of scholars" (1957, pp .311-312).

Western postmodern thought still sees Africa's form of education as backward. For instance, while narrating the African worldview, North American institutional establishments expect African critics to draw compulsorily on Claude Levi-Strauss, Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard for theoretical inspirations. Therefore, in "Of Cats and Catritude", Adesanmi faults Western perceptions of African scholarship:

The most problematic consequence of this new politics of knowledge production and new ways of writing Africa has been so surreptitious in its workings that very few African intellectuals are mindful of it. Part of the long-term project of postcolonial discourse has been to question narratives – Western and African – that are deemed to fix Africa as a permanent unchanging victim of the West and its violent modernity.  
(2011, p.77)

One of the handmaidens of the colonial enterprise is the Christian religion. The satirist decries how other African belief systems have collapsed under the hegemonic influence of Euro-Judeo Christianity. Similar to the postcolonial dimension to modern politics and its attendant Eurocentric imitations, religion in Africa, Nigeria as an example, is motivated by the greed of self-serving capitalists who have mastered the arts of culturally and psychologically exploiting their adherents. For instance, in "Dewdrops of Memory: Isanlu and the Islam of My Childhood" (2011, p.17), Adesanmi employs the Menippean form of satire to ridicule the contradictions of Christian proselytization and wonders: "Why have the educated elite from this part of Nigeria pretended thus far that they can do nothing about this nonsense for which they all, without exception, must be held responsible" (p.26). Similarly, in "Violence Against Women in Nigeria: The Internet as Amebo" (p.169), the materialist and capitalist enterprises of Christian priests such as Chris Oyakhilome and other "purveyors of Pentecostal hyper-prosperity" (p.171) are revealed in the way in which

the “Founder General Overseer” (p.170) is seen as the archetype of divine prosperity that others must follow. Religious institutions, the targets of Menippean satirists, are among the numerous retrogressive agents of developing societies like Nigeria.

## Menippean Satire and Renewal of Minds

In using Menippean satire to renew the mindsets of his readers, Adesanmi states:

I tried as hard as I could to disentangle Africa:  
to present it to them as a diverse geography of  
some fifty-four countries as opposed to the  
homogeneous, singular basket of savagery that  
America had woven into their imagination. (p.69)

Adesanmi’s philosophical queries are intended to shift paradigms and to renew the mindsets of people who have been largely misguided by false narratives. This is in consonance with Howard Weinbrot’s (2005) submission that Menippean satire uses language, historical and cultural periods, or change of voice to oppose false orthodoxy (p.38). In the same vein, Adesanmi uses Menippean satire to renew the mindsets of readers on matters of civility, belief systems and arts. This intellectual task is captured in “Philosophising Africa: Responsibilities” (2011, p.154), for instance, where the satirist delineates the importance of thinkers in charting developmental paths for their countries. Specifically, he reasons that the task of changing the society or the mindsets of a people “implies the acquisition and ordering of knowledge in order to generate desired realities and narratives” (p.154). While Adesanmi deploys the Menippean satirical style of querying organized institutions by “restlessly” saying “no” and doubting all inhumane “modalities of experiencing the human” (p.156), the ultimate end is to change the mind of readers to see the values inherent in African culture like “Ifa” divination:

If you know what the Ifa corpus is all about,  
you will understand that all Yoruba artists,  
writers, and thinkers have ever done is to continuously  
amplify, interpret and reinterpret the holistic gamut of  
experience lodged in the corpus. (p.159)

There are abundant utilitarian forms of knowledge in the Yoruba belief system. In “Oota” (p.3), the satirist, in spite of his exposure to Western Christian/Catholic tradition, has a strong belief in the worldviews – health, spiritual and intellectual views – of his Yoruba religious belief system. Against Western Christian practices, he allows his paternal grandmother to perform some rites on him:

I let her do all that. I endure all the incisions, drink all  
the concoctions because I no longer believe that those  
things are pagan or idolatrous practices as I was taught in  
Catechism years ago. (p.9)

The Christian hegemonic practice of seeing healing only in Judeo-Christian forms of prayer and communion should be unlearned in order to see and experience the healing/therapeutic properties inherent in the “Ifa corpus”. “Ifa corpus” divination, among other things, incorporates multifarious queries and dialogic approaches to bewildering issues such as the nature of one’s existence, the crowning of kings,

marital conflicts and other crossroads of life. It involves sustained questionings and self-appraisals: a style which recalls Bakhtin's multiple structures called "polyphony" (1972, p.72). But by embracing non-African belief systems like Christianity, Islam and democracy, for instance, African leaders become co-suppressors and co-oppressors of Africa's religious structures (Adesanmi, 2011, p.79). The agenda of contemporary Europe (Britain, France, Spain and Portugal) to recolonize and to re-enslave Africa will enjoy more success when their belief systems are embraced by African intellectual elites.

In Adesanmi's view, collectivism, humaneness, magnanimity and courtesy are integral to the Yoruba belief system. When political leaders fail to honour their responsibilities or when they exploit Christianity or Islam to loot the treasuries and store the commonwealth of the people in foreign reserves, they are simply foregrounding the agenda of Western ideals:

As long as Nigeria is peopled mainly by selves alienated from the accommodationist and pluralistic humanism of their own cultures, as long as these lost selves refuse to listen to what their cultures have to say about the validity of the multiple roads leading to the market of spirituality, Nigeria will never know peace (Adesanmi, 2011, p.151)

Adesanmi notes that Islam and Christianity are potent weapons in the hands of Western supremacists in keeping Africa under mental slavery. Africans must change their mindset to see the significant potentials in their spiritual cultures:

Recovery of the self implies an unconditional acceptance of the fact that everything you need for the accommodationist efflorescence of your humanity is logged in your culture and whatever version of Christianity or Islam you embrace must accept and respect those values, not condemn them. (Adesanmi, 2011, p.153)

The writer calls our attention to the fact that Africa has its own mythological patterns that are inventive, humane and utilitarian. They are encapsulated in what he succinctly delineates as the "Ifa corpus" defined earlier:

Because I consider the Ifa corpus as complete a philosophy as can be, because I read it and see in it a people's genius in history, myth and science in their attempts to make meaning out of primordial chaos, it follows that I do not invest in French existentialism or phenomenology because I believe that French philosophy has anything to say that I have not encountered in my forays into Ifa corpus; I do not read German idealist philosophers because I foolishly believe that they have anything to say that Ifa corpus didn't spell out more brilliantly centuries before them. (Adesanmi, 2011, p. 160)

Africa has its own "explanatory grid" (p.179), derived from diverse cultural practices and which are sufficient as basis of invention, breakthrough and spirituality. In "The Voice of Mutallab, The Hands of the Dead" (p.178) and "The Myth of the Good Yoruba" (p.231), the satirist deploys the Menippean methodology of seeking to renew the minds of the readers by querying organized religious institutions and then presenting alternative worldviews which serve as new belief systems. For instance,

Adesanmi reveals that African consumers of Western arts (music, literature, dance and so forth) should be wary of their heroes and mentors:

'Have you heard the news? Don Williams is a racist!' Don Williams a racist? We were crushed. In our young minds, it was simply unthinkable that our hero could be a hater of black people. (p.13)

This style of disrupting the status quo in order to re-orientate the readers is reminiscent of Howard Weinbrot's intellection of Menippean satire in *Menippean Satire Reconsidered: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (2005). Emphasizing constant cynicism against inhumane established orders, Weinbrot argues that progress is ensured when the Menippean satirist's critical disposition is directed towards texts and sub-texts of European and African cultures and politics (p.28). This disruptive technique, as deployed by Adesanmi, is used to re-conscientize the readers and the perceivers of the African continent.

In "Professing Dangerously: An African Professoriate in the Eyes of a Country Boy" (2011, p.27) Adesanmi highlights intellectual profiles of Nigerian literary thinkers and lyricists who stand shoulder to shoulder with their Western contemporaries. Similarly, in "Accent Wars" (p.82), he narrates his encounter with a Euro-American who mocks the eating habits of two Africans. The Westerner finds it strange that Africans are "civilized" enough to know how to wine and dine in the European tradition:

All it took was just a fraction of a second [...] for us to notice those ominous movements of facial muscles that are very often the loquacious abode of the unsaid and the unsayable [...] the rapid flicker of the eyelids; the slight quiver of the eyebrows; then the smile and the statement that gives everything away: 'Hey, they serve a nice breakfast here, don't they? Different from African food, eh?' (Adesanmi, 2011, p.85)

Another purview of Menippean satire is in the area of civility. In "We, the Colonized!" (2011, p.41), Adesanmi redefines the phenomenon of oppression to mean an experience which any race – white, black – are forced to go through in historical times. The author reawakens the minds of the readers to the fact that oppression is common to any people who are victims of imperialist domination. He explains that "we were not only united by a common colonial experience, we also faced essentially, the same enemy – English-speaking whites" (p.42). Adesanmi reveals that the Québécois people of Canada, for example, share the same tortured history of colonial oppression with Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Gambia:

The entire universe of meanings Africa had given to me until then was suddenly threatened [...]. It was one thing to read a Tunisian thinker analysing Québec in the registers of colonial discourse analysis, and another thing entirely to sit a few inches away from someone I considered a privileged white man and listen to him unite Africa and Québec as co-victims of the West and white Europeans. (p.43)

Adesanmi is also preoccupied with the task of resetting the minds of the international community about Africa. In "Makwerekwere" (p.54), he reveals how one gets "tired of the ritual of explaining to charmingly ignorant interlocutors that there is a fundamental distinction between the Africa they see on CNN and the real Africa" (p.55). Adesanmi expatiates on the idea that the pictures of oppression and civil

violence in Africa have entered the subconscious minds of even the blacks to such an extent that they fear one another:

Here was I, a black man, looking anxiously for  
white faces to feel safe from black violence in an African city!  
[...] I had dismissed insinuations that I could be scared of 'black  
violence' in South Africa! I reluctantly came to the realisation  
that I was far more affected by the oppression of the image than  
I had been willing to admit. The image of the post-apartheid  
black condition in South Africa is constantly constructed in the  
Western media around the problem of violence. (p.57)

With Menippean satire, Adesanmi seeks to change the stereotyping of Africa as a domain of oppression, a false image constantly exaggerated by the Western media. For instance, in "Going to Meet Black America" (p.61), the author says he tries "to disentangle Africa: to present it to them as a diverse geography of some fifty-four countries as opposed to the homogenous, singular basket of savagery that America had woven into their imagination" (p.69). The use of the internet and social media to denigrate Africa through the choice of images has a long history even before the desecrations of Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Similar to the pontifications and cultural apologies of Adesanmi, Chinua Achebe in "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (2016) offers a counterattack against Conrad and all other misinformed receivers of Africa.

Furthermore, Adesanmi reasons that renewal of reality begins with the renewal of methods. In "The American South as Warning to the Nigerian North" (p.185), the author criticizes a segment of Nigeria where the residents assume that they are destined for leadership at the expense of other regions. Adesanmi argues that the "northern leadership [...] is too moribund to think beyond oil and too weak to think beyond narrow class interests" (2011, p.191). The northern region should re-orientate their minds by "developing the vast agricultural and mineral potentials of Arewa land" (p.191). The northern part of Nigeria needs a renewal of method which includes "a brand-new generation of sufficiently dissatisfied northerners forty years old and below [...] to take radical stock of things" by changing the false orientation of "the old and current guard of the northern elite" (p.191).

One of the high points of Menippean satire is the rejection of average and selfish mentalities. Hence, in "Project Nigeria: The Struggle for Meaning" (Adesanmi, 2011, p.198), the satirist points out that Nigeria as a nation does not have "a foundational national myth" (p.200) and that is why leadership and followership embrace sheer corruption, carnality and mediocrity. It is disheartening that Nigerians see Nigeria

[...] as national cake – which in fact means accepting  
defeat in the struggle for meaning – and proceed to  
devote strategic civic struggle to the creation of more states  
and local government areas to better access the national cake!  
(Adesanmi, 2011, p.202)

Civic struggle must be devoted to the creation of meaning and not the looting of the nation's wealth.

## Adesanmi and the Menippean Template for a Newer Africa

This study has examined how Pius Adesanmi deploys certain features of Menippean satire to communicate the ethos and contradictions of Africa within and outside its borders. The Menippean satiric form is a veritable method of narrating the dilemmas of the maligned and maladjusted continent called Africa. Although fashioned after Western literary approaches from Bakhtin and Frye, Adesanmi has reworked the Menippean form with patterns of Yoruba culture (“Ifa corpus” as example) to query inhumane orthodoxy and to make readers unlearn retrogressive ideas of racism, neo-colonialism and marginalisation which characterized colonialism and are now sustained by most African elites and leaders.

In addition, this study has advanced the richness of Menippean satire in the non-fiction category of African scholarship as revealed in Adesanmi’s *You’re Not a Country, Africa*. The Menippean form of satire has been used as a communicative tool in the genres of poetry (David Musgrave, 2014) and the novel (Dieter Fuchs, 2019). Meanwhile, little attention is paid to the application of this invaluable form to the non-fiction category. For instance, critics such as Jose Laners (2000) and Amy Friedman (2020) have respectively improved the readership and reception of Irish and Indian writers by using aspects of Menippean satire as theoretical tools. But there are scant critics who have deployed this tool to reveal the originality of African literary scholarship, especially from Nigeria. Hence, Menippean satire suffers from a paucity of interpretation/application in African literature. Therefore, this study has advanced the applicability of Menippean satire not only as a rich historical genre but as a potent tool of cultural communication as distinctively exemplified in selections from Pius Adesanmi’s 2011 work.

Furthermore, armed with the narrative principles of Menippean satire - humour, allegory and conversational language - this study demonstrates how Adesanmi suggests panaceas to the contradictions occasioned by mismanagement, neo-colonialism, racism and bigotry. Some of these panaceas include a conscious rejection of mediocrity and constant creative use of indigenous systems of knowledge. According to de Silva, “Menippean satire often offers a solution, subtle as it may be, namely, that the simple, natural, ordinary common life is the best and finally, the only solution” (1999, p.16). The “simple, natural, ordinary common life” is the best solution to the mismanagement of the continent of Africa. The simple life proffered in *You’re Not a Country, Africa* is the type that draws from the distinctive values of culture; that is sensitive to nationhood and communal feelings and that is determined to ask for responsible leadership.

Lastly, this study reveals that Africans should not project the phenomena of oppression and colonialism as peculiar only to Africa. Numerous world populations have passed through the stage of tormenting and turbulent encounters with white settlers. Africa should be more progressive by embracing enterprise, excellence and hard work through the appropriation of the values in its distinctive cultures.

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