Research Article

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Reading in Waithood: Silence and Hope in Self-Published Narratives About Lagos Hustling

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Abstract: This article reads two narratives that were self-published on the now defunct Nigerian free-to-use reading and publishing platform Okadabooks as addressing the theme of waithood. The narratives center on young adults in Lagos, who struggle to get out of a life of precarity. They are read as interpellating a reader who like their protagonists is stuck in waithood. Waithood has been defined by Alcinda Honwana as a prolonged period in someone's life in which they wait for opportunities to secure a job, to start a family and to take on the responsibilities associated with adulthood. Because of this contextual frame, the texts are caught in a bind: they tacitly promise the reader the arrival of a brighter future for the narrative's main character, but ultimately do not represent this moment of arrival since the texts themselves are written from within waithood, a point from which the mechanics of upward social mobility are difficult to imagine. This means that there is a silence at the centre of the narrative, a crisis of representation. This article argues that this silence should not be understood as "lack" or the absence of a missing component, but read as an affordance that structures a specific mode of reading. As with reading practices shaped by Pentecostal traditions and motivational rhetoric, both widespread in Nigeria, this mode of reading centres on what is unknown and unsaid, which is understood as a threshold to hidden meaning and to hope, rather than as an absence of meaning.

Keywords: Nigerian literature; precarity; Pentecostalism; reading practices; self-published literature; waithood

This article studies a number of self-published literary texts about ordinary people's struggles to make it, or at least to survive, in Lagos, Nigeria. The texts were published

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online, presumably by the authors themselves, and belong to what literary anthropologist Karin Barber famously describes as the "class of unofficial art forms which are syncretic, concerned with social change, and associated with the masses", not because the individual texts are popular with these masses, but because they come out of and represent their everyday life (Barber 1987, 23). As far as it is possible to tell, they are not particularly successful in terms of downloads, views or comments. I have chosen these texts, as examples of "the great unread" in Nigerian self-published literature, precisely because they do not stand out in terms of circulation, form or how they deal with the subject matter (Cohen 1999; Moretti 2000a, 2000b). They are in other words more or less randomly selected from a corpus of self-published, short prose texts about lives of hustling in Lagos.

The texts are concerned with individuals' situatedness in an obliquely complex economic system, but they are also about the future that follows after poverty and hustling in their protagonists' story arcs. This future is characterised by a happier and more economically comfortable life. However, there is a silence at the centre of these texts that, arguably, itself takes on meaning: while the narratives are about escaping a life of economic hardship, they also present themselves as instruments of their authors' and implied readers' attempts to lift themselves out of such circumstances. However, the chains of cause and effect that allow the protagonists to lift themselves up from poverty are glossed over or avoided altogether.

My main argument here is that the texts are both *about* and *emerge from* a mode of being that is characterised by "being stuck" economically and in life. While the texts explore this as a mode of being, they do not represent it as the effect of the workings of an economic system. This gap in the chain of cause and effect paradoxically provides a possibility of deliverance from poverty. I argue that though, or rather because the text does not rely on connections between economic causes and their precarious effects in protagonits' lives, between ideas about how the economic system can be "worked" and protagonists' resultant success, this silence at the centre of the text is a source of hope. However, this possibility of eliciting a sense of hope from these texts requires a specific form of reading that has much in common with Pentecostal reading practices, insofar as these centre on the unsaid and unseen, which connects the reader with a spiritual reality beyond the semantic surface of the text.

1 Making-It Literature on Okadabooks

Lagos is "unarguably the most financially viable state in Nigeria today" and therefore naturally a centre of domestic migration (Agunbiade et al. 2021, 129). The annual growth of Lagos's population is currently estimated to be 3.71 %, which makes it the

fastest growing megacity in the world (DESA 2011, 8). This development is explored in a profusion of texts, written by non-professional Nigerian writers and self-published online on such spaces as now defunct Okadabooks and its successors.[1] While these texts cannot be seen as belonging to a unified genre, they have in common that they are about people who struggle to make it out of the precarity of Lagos's informal economy. Protagonists learn the hard way that Lagos is a cruel place where most people's dreams fail to come true and friendly strangers are few and far between, but the protagonists eventually and inexplicably escape the hustle and become wealthy. However, as stated above, Lagos as a place of dreams, struggle and personal tragedy is not only the setting of the texts: this literature is "shaped by the African everyday life from which it emerges" (Harris 2018, 2).

Okadabooks was an online platform and app that provided readers with a broad range of literary texts, from canonical African Writers Series titles and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels to contemporary fan-fiction, love poems and religious pamphlets. Most texts were self-published and typically roughly edited both typographically and in terms of language, with automatically generated covers and no ISBN-codes or copyright information. Anyone could upload a document on Okadabooks and have it automatically turned into an ebook that others could read either for free or for a price set by the author – in most cases somewhere between 100 and 1000 Naira (USD50c and 2.50USD) (Hållén 2018a, 37, Hållén 2018b, 87). Provided that the reader had access to a digital device, Okadabooks made literature affordable to a segment of the Nigerian population that struggles to afford printed books, and particularly novels. Its readers could find books on Yoruba cuisine, parenting, effective leadership strategies, and how to buy and sell cryptocurrency, and content providers could tag their texts "Health & Living," "Business & Finance," "Religion and Belief," "Memoir," "Non-Fiction" and "Educational". If these categories are an indication of the demand from the users of the platform, it is a fair assumption that many readers came to Okadabooks not only to read stories, but also to look for information that can be useful in their pursuit of a better life.

The texts discussed in this article can in terms of length be described as pamphlets and deal, in different ways, with the same themes. Seyitola Adams's *The Diary of Lagos Hustler* (2018) is presented to the reader as a memoir about the authors' struggles to make it in Lagos, a struggle that ends happily in economic success. Patrick Eniya's *My Lagos Hustle* (2018) is a fictional narrative in which the unnamed

1 Okadabooks went offline on 30 November 2023, following an announcement earlier the same month. Most of the work that lead to this article was done before and immediately after the platform became defunct, and was made possible by the use of screen dumps that were saved on a hard drive for personal use. An earlier version of the present text was originally meant to be one in a series of articles about Okadabooks.

protagonist arrives in Lagos and after a long struggle and a number of stints in jail becomes rich and starts a family. In both texts Lagos is represented as a place where social mobility is possible, if extremely difficult to achieve. As in Nollywood cinema, the city is a place of ambition, glamour, and danger (Haynes 2016, 61). In the two texts – and this is one of the main points I want to make here – urban reality and the economy on which it rests remain oblique and ultimately incomprehensible to the protagonist as well as narrator and therefore also the reader. As in Nollywood cinema, "the lure of Lagos" consists to a large extent of "wealth in the most tangible, desired forms", but though Lagos is the place where wealth can be pursued, how exactly one acquires it is a central problem which the texts ultimately do not address (Haynes 2007, 140).

In "Corresponding with the City: Self-help Literature in West Africa" (2006) Stephanie Newell identifies a central paradox in West African self-help pamphlets: the self that the texts produce is pushed toward a bright future by his or her own ambitions, helped by the author's guidance, but the outcome of this journey is at the same time "determined by the invisible hand of fate" (20). "Often taking the name of God," Newell writes, "the hand of fate extends into the most intimate areas of readers' personal lives in West African texts, appearing to withdraw the very possibilities represented by 'self-help' literature as a genre." There is a similar paradox at the center of the texts discussed here: while they seem to invite the reader to have faith in the idea that endurance and hard work eventually leads to economic success, they do not represent the cause and effect relation between work and success. In other words, the representational effort in the text is not focused on showing how someone's work and determination, little by little, bring him or her closer to material affluence and general well-being. Instead, the time in the character's life that precedes their eventual deliverance from hardship makes out the narrative proper, and in it the central representational component is verisimilitude: the pre-success narrative of city life is used to describe the dangers and frustrations of the urban "hustle."

I read Adams's and Eniya's works as essentially being about the main character's struggle to leave a precarious life behind and secure a life of economic stability and material comfort. The texts explore the complexities and dangers of an urban environment characterised by competition and precarity. Neither of the texts were particularly popular on the Okadabooks platform – they had fewer than 50 downloads. They were in other words in themselves not evidence of their authors' economic success. This in combination with the lack of any detailed information in them about what a transition from poverty to wealth looks like makes it reasonable to assume that the authors have not yet made this same transition themselves. The form of the text itself is another indication of this. The works in question seem to have gone through a very basic editing process – the graphic layout was at times rough and

there were frequent linguistic mistakes such as misquoted Bible verses and ungrammatical sentences. Needless to say, the point here is not to paint the authors as bad at their craft, because such mistakes are arguably frequent in most unedited manuscripts – but that they indicate an under-resourced production process. Thus, as Ashleigh Harris and I have argued in the context of flash fiction published on Okadabooks, the texts "do not simply or only represent a social reality; rather, their materiality … emerge[s] out of that sociality" (Harris and Hållén 2020, 15). Based on both their materiality and how experiences are dealt with in the texts, it can be assumed that the authors and the intended reader are more familiar with the life of precarity than the life of affluence that comes after it in their protagonists' narrative arcs. The works can thus be conceptualised as belonging to what Ranka Primorac has referred to as a "literariness of crisis" – a system of literary reading and writing that as a response to economic precarity and failing infrastructures allows "for the possibility that texts may be directed towards *instrumentalist* as well as aesthetic ends and purposes" (Primorac 2014, 576. My emphasis).

2 Waithood as Rhetorical Situation

Adams's and Enya's texts are examples of a kind of contemporary Nigerian writing that emerges from and engages with a mode of inhabiting the African metropolis that in ethnographical and sociological literature about urban life in the Global South has been referred to as "waithood," or with related terms like "timepass" and "stuckedness" (Honwana 2012; Jeffery 2010; Stasik et al. 2020). Waithood can be described as a stage in life for millions of urban Africans (and people elsewhere), which is distinct from both childhood and youth on the one hand and from adulthood on the other. In *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change and Politics in Africa* (2012), Alcinda Honwana explains that waithood is "a portmanteau term of 'wait' and '-hood', meaning 'waiting for adulthood' (Honwana 2012, 4). People stuck in waithood are evidently not children – they are in fact often in their thirties or even older – but they are not "recognized by their culture as able to partake in the social responsibilities of adulthood", since they are unable to secure a steady job (Honwana 2012, 4, 171). This means, at least for young men, that they are unlikely to be perceived as eligible for marriage and to start a family. However, in academic literature, modes of waiting in urban Africa are rarely seen as a sign of people's passive acceptance of their lot in life, because as Michael Stasisk et al. point out, waiting can often be productive (Stasik et al. 2020: 2). To wait is to try to get by while being always on the lookout for opportunities that might present themselves. Honwana writes that:

> Unable to rely on their elders or their governments, [young unemployed Africans] must develop coping strategies for themselves. In view of the impossibility of obtaining work in the formal economy or support for entrepreneurial ventures, young people see themselves being pushed to the margins, eking out a livelihood in the informal economy. (2012, 58)

Thus, from an economic point of view, waithood takes the form of a prolonged and perhaps endless "period of experimentation, improvisation and great creativity" and a readiness to "identify, explore and try to maximize whatever opportunities arise" in order to improve one's situation (Honwana 2014, 35). As indicated above, in this article waithood is not only used to refer to the precarious forms of inhabiting the city that are represented in the text, but also to refer to the material context out of which the text emerges. So while representation of waithood can be seen as a plot device that brings with it certain narrative affordances – opportunities for the text to speak of deception, heroic determination, near misses, catastrophic failures and ultimate success – it also produces the text itself, as the rhetorical situation from which it is articulated.

As a rhetorical situation, something can emerge from waithood because it is oriented toward the future (Dobler 2020, 12). One waits *for* something, which might be only vaguely defined, and it is in relation to the future moment in which that something will happen or arrive that someone's trajectory through time takes the form of waiting. In other words, waiting is "a particular engagement in, and with, time," where "for a period, short or extended, an individual or a collective finds itself placed in a situation where what is hoped for or anxiously anticipated has not yet been actualized" (Bandak and Janeja 2018, 1). Bandak and Jenaja write that according to the philosopher Gabriel Marcel, in instances of what he sees as passive forms of waiting "there is a general feature of confidence in the outcome," while in situations in which the outcome is less certain, modes of waiting that are based on hope and thus "generative of action" are required (Marcel 1967; Bandak and Janeja 2018, 3). It is primarily this active form of waiting that happens in the Lagos represented in the texts discussed here.

In her autobiographical text *Diary of a Hustler*, Seyitola Adams refers to the activity she does while waiting for the future to come, her endless walking in search of an opportunity to make money, as *wakawaka*. The word (from English "walk") refers to wandering through the city, so that one is there when or if an opportunity presents itself. The Lagosian who has to *wakawaka* are on "a constant pragmatic search for alternative structures of opportunity", because though "employment is scarce … 'work' (beyond labour production) is made everywhere" (Thieme 2018, 537, 539). Wakawaka and related modes of inhabiting the city then can be understood as playing the crucial role of structuring horizons of expectation. Attempting to define what waiting is, Gregor Dobler connects it with a specific form of passivity, which

enables certain forms of agency. He writes that whatever it is we wait for "until its time comes, we might be able to create the right conditions for it to happen, but we cannot actively bring it about" (12). In other words, when what we *can* bring about happens, we do not say that we have *waited* for it to happen.

3 *My Lagos Hustle* – Unexpected Plot Turns and Silence

Patrick Eniya's *My Lagos Hustle* begins with the protagonist waking up as he arrives in Lagos having crossed the country from Calabar, close to Nigeria's eastern border (n.p). We never learn his name but the protagonist is sometimes addressed as Egbon, a Yoruba honorific, which I will use as his name here. Though it is never stated directly, we can surmise based on his birthplace and such things as his predilection for certain dishes that Egbon belongs to the Efik ethnic group. Though Lagos is a multi-ethnic city, he is in other words a long way from home both geographically and culturally, and arrives in Lagos with few possessions. However, as is emphasised at several points in the story, Egbon does have one thing going for him: he can speak English. In the text, this means that he can speak standard Nigerian English besides Nigerian pidgin. This is his only resource and while it is not the reason for his eventual economic success, which inevitably awaits at the end of the story, it shapes the life he builds for himself and his family.

Having arrived in Lagos, Egbon begins to wander the streets since he has nowhere to go. His plan is to find his friend Abdul, but he doesn't know how to locate him. He meets a seemingly friendly old man in the street who offers him a place to stay. It soon turns out that the man has an ulterior motive and that he gives destitute, homeless people a spot in an overcrowded room in exchange for whatever possessions they have to their name. He demands that Egbon parts with his only valuable possession, a watch that once belonged to his father. The old man is just the first of many people who seem friendly at first but turns out to take advantage of Egbon. When he finally finds Abdul, he learns that Abdul has become a criminal, whose scheming and recklessness lead to Egbon being imprisoned, but after an intervention by a mysterious, high-ranking policewoman he is let go. He returns to the old man who takes pity on him and offers Egbon to come live with him and a young servant woman, Bola. Egbon now turns to hawking, selling Gala sausage rolls to people stuck in traffic, and teaching the local kids English.

The mysterious policewoman who comes to Egbon's aid is another person whose inexplicable readiness to help turns out to be part of a nefarious scheme. She offers

Egbon work, but it turns out that he has been made the fall guy in a drug operation. Months go by and Egbon spends them making friends in jail, where he is eventually visited by one of the policewoman's daughters, who wants to make things right and has her mother pull strings for Egbon. Exactly what she does we never learn, but Egbon is finally released from prison and again returns to the old man and the young woman, Bola.

The unexpected twists and turns continue until the very end of the story, and indeed into the last paragraph which brings us up to the present day. In the last chapter, Egbon is suddenly contacted by his mother who says she is coming to Lagos to see him. Egbon immediately makes preparations to receive her, which includes making Bola cook *afang* soup for dinner. Since Bola is Yoruba and therefore cannot be expected to be able to cook the Efik dish, Egbon is surprised when her attempt turns out perfect. Egbon's mother too is impressed by Bola's cooking, beauty and politeness and demands that Egbon marries her. Egbon thinks that "it wouldn't be a bad idea, you know? I could teach [Bola] a few things and get her back to school". The old man, who Egbon has taken to prophetically refer to as "Baba" (father), walks in and recognises Mama as his wife who ran away 26 years ago and it is revealed that Baba is Egbon's actual father.

The series of unexpected events is mirrored in the form of the text, because at this point in the story, which is coming to an end, we learn that what we are reading is a frame tale. The temporal focus of the narrative now shifts from the eventful dinner to the narrator's present: Egbon, now older and more deserving of the honorific, sees his son off at the airport and turns directly to the reader:

> I watched his plane zoom off as I drove home to the warm embrace of my darling and beautiful wife Bola, her cooking skills even became better with age, her respect and love for me is beyond words. She's truly the 'perfect wife'. My parents had since died and I was lucky to have spent valuable time with both of them. I have also learned a valuable lesson about life and what it means to leave your comfort zone to pursue your dreams, albeit in the right way and not be in a hurry to get rich quick. My story is just one of the many Lagos stories you must have read or heard, but never get too comfortable where you are, always strive to be better than what and who you already are. I would never have met my dad and my beautiful wife Bola if I had remained in Calabar, and yes, I own one of the biggest schools in Lekki and [I am] also a major investor in the Gala company. (n.p)[2]

2 All quotes have been carefully checked against the original passages. Linguistic mistakes and what appears to some readers as mistakes in cited passages will not be further discussed or pointed out, since the texts are written by writers to whom Nigerian English is most likely a second language, since the texts have by all appearances not gone through a professional editing process, and since Nigerian Pidgin arguably has a substrate influence on the texts.

It makes sense that Egbon becomes a school owner and invests in a sausage roll company, since he has throughout his waithood taught the local kids English and since he has sold Gala sausage rolls in the street, but this does not explain how he comes into the money required for either of these investments. Because Egbon emphasises the importance of perseverance, we can guess that this is what made it possible for this prosperous future, the narrator's present, to arrive. The moment when Egbon becomes economically successful is effectively concealed behind the temporal shift from the time he tells his son (and the reader) about and the narrative present in which he, in Bola's arms, looks back at his life. Instead of this moment the reader is told that mobility can bring with it opportunities – a lesson his now Canada-bound son has taken to heart.

The unexpected and inexplicable turns in Eniya's story are typical for Okada-books stories about protagonists stuck in waithood. They are interesting in this context for two reasons: One is the fact that neither Egbon's lucky breaks nor his misfortunes seem to be "earned". The text does not create a foregrounded balance between effort and gain or between characteristics or actions that would serve to portray Egbon as a good person who is rewarded for his moral fortitude. He does not win Bola, for example, because he has paid her attention and been kind to her before he realises that she is an attractive young lady with exceptional cooking skills. Likewise, though Baba eventually takes pity on him, he is a man who evidently preys on destitute, homeless people and thus arguably does not "deserve" winning his wayward wife back.

The other reason why the unexpected turns in the story are of interest here is that rather than explicating how and why a life in precarity might turn into prosperity, they further mystify this transition. Apart from the insistence that mobility is linked to opportunity, the narrative is not concerned with explaining the seeming arbitrariness of good and bad fortune. The unexpected plot twists thus serve to accentuate the incomprehensibility of economic reality since the way out of waithood comes not from work, struggle or entrepreneurial efforts but unexpected luck, and hope (see Barber 1982, 436).

This absence of representation of the mechanics of the shift in Egbon's life is similar to the "silence" at the centre of the popular Yoruba plays that Karin Barber studied in her seminal article on reactions to the influx of petro-capital in Nigeria in the 1970s. She showed that, in the logic of popular Yoruba theatre, wealth was conceptualised as either well- or ill-gotten. The ostentatiously displayed material signs of wealth that suddenly became obvious almost everywhere during the country's oil boom cannot, after all, come from the wages or profits of 'honest work' in an economy like Nigeria's in the 1970s – powered by oil but otherwise consisting mainly of production of and trade with staple food commodities – so it must come from somewhere else. Ill-founded wealth was represented as generated through

violent crime or through black magic rituals involving child abductions and blood sacrifice, but the plays did not offer representations of wealth accumulated through honest means, which however does not mean that there were no good wealthy characters in the plays. Thus, Barber showed that there is a 'silence' at the centre of these texts, which "surrounds the figure of the good rich man. What the texts cannot speak of is the real foundation of his 'honest' wealth: for in doing so, they would be forced to reveal that this foundation is hardly more solid than that of the robber and the magician" (1982, 448). One way to read this is that representation of the actual inner mechanics of the economy only becomes relevant in the case of wealth accumulated in honest ways, while metaphor and analogy are the preferred modes of representation in the case of morally problematic wealth accumulation, since this form of economic ambition is what the audience is encouraged to reject. The obvious paradox, then, is that while there are no moral obstacles to representations of honest forms of wealth accumulation, there are limitations to what can be said about them since it is generally not known how they work. Someone who does know is not likely to choose to eke out a modest living in the Yoruba travelling theatre circuit, or for that matter be in the audience of theatrical performances in the street or the village market.

This logic, or its basic components rather than metaphorical representations, has remained prevalent in the wider Nigerian society since the days of the oil boom and subsequent crisis. Unearned and mysterious wealth, and the occult or brutal means by which it is acquired, has been a staple motif in Nollywood cinema since its early days (Haynes 2007, 145). It is also, however, at the centre of an even more ubiquitous and pervasive regime of meaning-making in southern Nigeria, namely Pentecostalism and other forms of evangelical Christianity. In her book *Political Spiritualities* (2009), Ruth Marshall explains that "a growing public obsession with evil occult powers" spread in Nigerian Pentecostal communities in the 1990s and contributed to a "crisis of representation" and the unmooring of "signs and their referents" which happen in times when the unscrupulous enjoy the comforts and security that come with wealth, while others are stuck in precarity and waithood (Marshall 2009, 9).

As readers, we do not learn how Egbon's luck turns around, nor why. Eniya in other words cedes the opportunity to craft an ethical sub-narrative within Egbon's life story. The twists and turns in his life are not aligned with a system (cosmic, divine or economic) in which the individual is rewarded for his or her suffering and good deeds. Instead, the narrative is oriented toward hope of the arrival of a future, seen from the moment of suffering, in which the waiting and suffering ends. This moment of the arrival of the future is central also in the Seyitola Adams's e-pamphlet *Diary of a Hustler* (2018).

4 *Diary of a Hustler* and the Arrival of the Future

Like Patrick Eniya's story, Seyitola Adams's *Diary of a Hustler* is structured around retrospection. It consists of 10 chapters, four of which focus on the author's past, the hustle that preceded her eventual success as a businesswoman. Having been scammed by con-men and having put in long hours in low-paying jobs, she eventually starts an online retail business. "Now," at the time of writing, it earns her a substantial and steady income, according to the author/narrator of her text. The moment when her business suddenly takes off, though the events are passed over quickly, divides her narrative into a past and a rhetorical present. In the later six chapters, Adams offers advice and motivational words to readers still struggling to get somewhere in life. She does this as someone who has allegedly moved on from a period of waithood.

Adams thus speaks from a vantage point in her future, a future that can be the reader's. This, however, becomes a rhetorical problem in the text, because why, Adams asks, would someone who has seen success and no longer is stuck in life bother to offer advice and encouragement to those who are still in waithood? She writes:

> Hmm…that's the same way a master to an apprentice might feel, or your lecturer in the university. […] Have you ever for over several years called or search for them to say thanks you for their efforts? […] Except those with the fear of God and alive conscious will be pricked to do the needful. Also, my advice just as the bible says when you help don't expect reward in return rather look up to God to reward you (Matthew 6). (n.p)

This rhetorical move is directed toward the intended reader, who presumably reads her book hoping for guidance from an authoritative voice. It can be read as an indication that by reading the pamphlet, the reader is on the right track in his/her search for a way out of waithood.

Adams's is not only a rags-to-riches story but portrays a mode of being in the world, and in the Nigerian mega-city, that is not only a theme that many readers will know from experience but a position from which stories are told. In the preface, the reader is introduced to the heroine who gets out of bed to stand in front of the mirror to motivate herself to go out in search of a way to make much-needed money. She walks up and down the city's streets and visits countless shops in the hope of convincing their owners to invest in the "posture correcting" ladies' underwear that she is selling. This representation of hustling – the constant search for opportunities and the seemingly endless series of disappointments – serves to interpellate the reader who can presumably identify with the central subject at this point in her life. The preface introduces us to the heroine thus:

> The blasting alarm of my phone chased sleep off my eyeballs but my head could still feel the effect of its hammering sound, banging into my skull. I rested my aching head against the wall close to me and grabbed my head tight; as though it would fall off if not taken care of. After participating in the morning prayers, I penned down my plans for the day:
>
> #Step out by 9am
> #Visit malls 9:30am
> #Visit hospitals 11am
> #Visit supermarkets 4pm
> #Introduce my products to a 'friendly' face 6pm (n.p)

The last item on this list stands out by being a wish more than anything else: she hopes to have presented her products to at least one non-hostile person before the day is over. "Note my emphasis on the word friendly," she writes, "the rejection rates seem to have risen more than that of acceptance." She tries to remain hopeful, however, and stands in front of the bathroom mirror, "singing" motivational phrases like "no one can make me sad" and "I am going to make massive sales today" before she grabs her backpack and heads out into the streets. The following chapter begins with a dialogue between herself and a shop clerk, which is unpromising from the start. She is interrupted by another customer for "45 minutes" without having stated her business in the shop and eventually leaves without having made her sale even though she gives the sympathetic clerk her best sales pitch. The fact that the passage is drawn-out and focused on the long delay before she can get down to business serves to foreground the frustration that comes with the realization that individual success, as Stephanie Newell writes, is "a near impossibility" in the face of Nigeria's "extreme economic … constraints" (Newell 2006, 21). This part of the narrative then underscores the fact that there is very little a person can do to get ahead in an adverse economy, but also the necessity to keep hoping for a better future to arrive.

As implied above, it is on this notion of the arrival of a brighter future that the rhetorical authority of the motivational discourse in the text relies, because it is as someone who has been delivered from waithood that Adams's encouragement and advice gain currency to the reader. Therefore, throughout the text she looks back on her period in waithood from the other side of the turning point in her life. She writes that:

> It took all those years for a purpose to be identified, I was being prepared. Looking back now, the stress, the pangs of hunger, the leanness, the compulsory strolls, the rejections, the failures, the persistence, the continuous rise and fall, all this shaped me for a better future I had no idea of. (n.p)

It is from her vantage point in this "better future" that the "compulsory strolls" and rejections become meaningful and accrue a value. Adams does not present her

walking and her daily struggles as connected with her better future in terms of cause and effect. Her walking does not lead her to her better future, but in fact gets her nowhere economically. Instead of shaping her future, it shapes *her for* this future.

While the turning point in Patrick Eniya's *My Lagos Hustle* is hidden behind the shift between the main and the framing narrative, Adams's central moment is passed over matter-of-factly in the middle of a chapter – so matter-of-factly that the turning point is hidden not behind a temporal shift in the narrative but the special purpose word *voilá*. Finding herself jobless and without prospects after dropping out of university with little to show for her efforts, she gets lured into a series of pyramid schemes and later into a situation where she is expected to scam susceptible marks. She decides to get out when she realises that what she does is not "godly" and she remains unemployed for a long time to the increasing chagrin of her parents and fiancé. She eventually finds a job "marketing" products online and later at "a popular mobile company". This gives her the stability she needs to come up with a plan for her own online retail business, which she starts some months before quitting her job. It is slow going at first, and at times she is forced to return to the streets to find customers, but she decides that online retail should be her main focus and soon she is making good money.

> I returned back online, pissed and angry. This made me to know that what might work for an offline merchant may not work for me. So I went back to my scribble book to pen down why other merchant sold more than I did and what business gimmick were being played. *Voila*, I found it and began to apply such tricks (I mean modus operandi). The items I bought began to decrease as more sales were made; smiling to the bank became the norm. (n.p, my emphasis)

She admits that she still occasionally has periods where business is slow and that she encounters problems that she has to find a way around, but from this moment on she is no longer waiting for the future to arrive. She does not reveal what her "tricks" are and attaches little importance to them, as if it is not really her change in strategy that is the reason for her sudden success. As in Eniya's text, the arrival of the future is as unexpected as it is inexplicable. It finally arrives, and thus makes the long wait, which at this point has constituted the bulk of the narrative, meaningful.

After the arrival of the future, Adams does not write directly about her life and work, so it remains unclear how much her business expands and how much her material circumstances improve. Instead, the style of the text shifts from a narrative about her struggles to instructional discourse: motivational rhetoric and business advice. She looks back at moments in her life and explains that it is necessary to go through the struggle that precedes success, because "there is a time in life, when your dream is so afar off … because you haven't taken steps neither have you overcome challenges. Yes, challenges are good; they help sharpen your sword for the battle ahead". From the point of view of her narrative arc, however, the sharpening of the

sword coincides chronologically with the "battle" for material wealth – they both "shape" the individual for the future to come.

4.1 Silence and Reading for What is Beyond the Text

The texts studied here are not self-help literature, although it could be argued that they make use of some of that genre's central tropes and rhetorical figures (see for example Hållén 2018a; Newell 2006). As argued above, these texts do not offer the reader information about what one must do to find a way out of waithood, even though waithood itself is the context that is represented *and* the context of production. Instead, it can be assumed that they offer the reader something else, namely a sense of connectedness with a future that has not yet arrived.

Because of the inability of the texts to explain why some are ultimately successful while most are not, any attempt to interpret them can either understand this silence as just that: 1) a failure to demystify the mystery at the centre of the text; or 2) an element in a specific kind of meaning-making process. It is possible that the first way to understand this paradox over time has made the second reading possible, as readers have stopped expecting answers from the texts they read. In any case, if we choose the latter alternative, the absence of representation of the arrival of the future, of concrete advice (in the case of non-fiction) and a character's epiphany (in fiction), can be seen as gesturing toward something beyond the text that cannot be revealed through literary language. Adams's and Eniya's texts allow for the possibility that there *is* or *could be* a time and a place where everything will align, as it were, and where waithood ends. Agency is thus transferred from the author to the reader, whose reading in itself – not the search for information but the act of reading – becomes part of what Adams calls *wakawaka*: directedness toward the future. Like *wakawaka*, reading then becomes a kind of paradoxical active passivity in the waiting for the arrival of the future.

While the text is in a sense *of* and *about* a life of precarity and waithood, this life in itself is arguably not the primary concern of the text or what the intended reader engages with when reading it. The texts do invite the reader to identify with the particular forms of precarity and the suffering that their central subjects endure, and with the vulnerability of jobseekers to Ponzi schemes and predatory businesses. However, more than this, they offer the reader a specific mode of engaging with the text, which presupposes a deficit of meaning at its centre and ultimately takes the form of hope.

I wish to put forward that this mode of engaging with the text bears a trace of religious reading practices, particularly practices that are common in Pentecostal and other charismatic Christian contexts, which are widespread particularly in the

Southern half of Nigeria. In an article based on fieldwork among members of the Redeemed Church of God, a Pentecostal church in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ in Nigeria's Youruba dominated South-West, Jesse Davie-Kessler describes two modes of reading the Bible. She found that new "Redeemers" were taught a hermeneutics focused on information contained in the Bible, a presumably transparent message about how to lead a righteous Christian life. They were told that "scripture is unchanging and fundamentally true" and that it teaches the believer "a fixed set of actions and attitudes" (Davie-Kessler 2016, 5). However, for more seasoned members who had been "purified" by studying the rules laid out in the Bible who thus no longer needed the kind of moral instruction given to new members, reading in itself – rather than the words that were read – became "a portal" to the Holy Ghost (Davie-Kessler 2016, 3). So, a hermeneutics that rests on a view of language as transparent and that focuses on internalizing meaning gradually becomes less important than a mode of reading where meaning is secondary to the act of reading itself.

This form of reading seems to also centre around a silence in the text, like the kind of reading that Adams's and Eniya's texts invite, for if the Bible contained the meaning the believer needs in order to become connected with God, Bible reading would become redundant once its message is understood. What allows the believer to use the Bible to "fuse" the human and the Holy Spirit is then arguably the fact that there is something that cannot be articulated through text – that cannot be reduced to semantic meaning (Davie-Kessler 2016, 5). The texts discussed here, as I read them, also invite a hermeneutics that, though on the surface secular, allows for a transition from meaning to reading, and a conceptualization of reading that is intimately connected with hope. In contrast to the moment of transition between waithood and the future, hope is represented throughout the narratives discussed above. Thus, while there is a central silence in the text – a meaningful hole where the transition from rags to riches would be – the inner mechanics of the narratives instead project the concept of hope, which is directed toward the narrative future and the readers' future. If the texts are about and emerge from precarity and waithood, as I have argued, they represent and invite a mode of reading that is firmly grounded in the concept of hope.

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