

LAGOS metropolitan

M a i n l a n d . I s l a n d s . P e n i n s u l a

Monday, May 29, 2023

www.lagosmetropolitan.com

Vol. 1 No. 1

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A New Dawn Beckons

**Bola Ahmed
Tinubu
Assumes
Nigerian
Presidency
Amidst High
Hopes and
Challenges**

On May 29, 2023, Nigeria will witness a new dawn as Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the candidate of the All Progressives Congress

(APC), is sworn in as the country's new president. Supporters of Tinubu anticipate his presidency with great promise, hoping for a brighter future under his

leadership. However, as Nigeria stands at this pivotal moment, several challenges and controversies cast a shadow on Tinubu's ascent to power.

Tinubu's supporters see in him a beacon of hope, envisioning a Nigeria that can effectively tackle poverty and rampant corruption, especially

within the public service. The promise of Tinubu's government lies in its potential to address these pressing issues and uplift the lives of ordinary Nigerians

who have long suffered from these systemic problems.

Tinubu takes over from the incumbent Muhammadu Buhari, who faces allegations of

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Senate rushes bill to raise government borrowing hours to inauguration

Just days before the inauguration of Bola Tinubu as president, the Nigerian Senate modified a law on Saturday to let the federal government to borrow additional money from the central bank.

The modifications, which were approved at a special session, will enable the government to boost its overdraft at the Central Bank of Nigeria from 5% to 15% of revenues from the previous year. The modifications had been agreed on Thursday by the lower House of Assembly.

Anaemic economic growth, record debt, and declining oil production

are all things Tinubu inherits. One of the major problems he will face upon taking office on Monday is double-digit inflation, which has devastated savings and incomes.

The largest economy in Africa has seen its spending significantly surpass its income, causing growing deficits.

The government has repeatedly exceeded the 5% limit while using the ways and means overdraft facility from the central bank to close the gap.

President Muhammadu Buhari, who resigned on Monday after serving the maximum of two terms, was supposed to sign the amendment bill as soon as Sunday.

The Senate and House of Assembly accepted

Buhari's proposal to convert a central bank

overdraft of 23.7 trillion naira (\$52 billion) into

long-term debt earlier this month.

Cakasa Ebenezer Foundation harps on children's access to education, healthcare, and opportunities for personal growth ...celebrates children as a reward of life

Mr. Barnabas Olise, Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer of Cakasa Nigeria Company Limited (CNC), has called on parents, guardians, and educators to recommit themselves to the task of developing the next generation.

Olise made the appeal during a two-day event held by the Cakasa Ebenezer Foundation (CEF) in Lagos in honour of the 2023 Children's Day Celebration for the children of Mushin.

The CNC Project Manager, Engr. Evans Agboson, represented Olise at the event.

Olise was overjoyed to reach out to the kids of Mushin and share in the joy of recognising the inherent greatness, innocence, and beauty that they represent.

"In contemplating the significance of this event, my thoughts gravitate towards a timeless African proverb that encapsulates the essence of our gathering: 'Children are the reward of life.'"

"These words hold profound wisdom and encapsulate the immense value that children bring to our lives, families, and communities."

"They remind us that the future of our society lies in the hands of these young souls, brimming with dreams, curiosity, and untapped potential."

"Today, we come together to celebrate not just the children in our midst but also the profound responsibility that we, as adults, bear in nurturing and guiding them towards a bright future."

"It is through initiatives like this that we acknowledge and embrace the importance of investing in our children, providing them with a platform to express themselves, and empowering them to become the change-makers of tomorrow," Olise said.

The CEO made the point that children are a blessing for everyone, not just their parents.

According to him, their laughter, creativity, and unfiltered perspectives infuse vitality into our world.

He said that children remind us to find joy in simple pleasures, to view the world through innocent eyes, and to believe in the possibility of a better future.

"Our children are the torchbearers of hope, and it

is our collective responsibility to ensure that their flames burn brightly."

"Through Cakasa Ebenezer Foundation, we have committed ourselves to making a positive impact in the lives of children."

"We believe that every child deserves access to education, healthcare, and opportunities for personal growth."

"It is through our various initiatives, such as providing scholarships, adding value to existing structures within schools, and organising events like this that we strive to create an enabling environment for our children to thrive," Olise said.

He said the two-day event is a testament to the unwavering commitment of CNC to the well-being and development of children.

Peter Obi asks supporters to keep calm and be hopeful

Nigerians have been urged to maintain peace and follow the law, according to Peter Obi, the Labour Party's (LP) presidential candidate for the general election of 2023.

Just 24 hours remain till Bola Tinubu, the president-elect, is sworn in.

The LP flagbearer asserts that the outcome of the election will ultimately be decided by a court of law in due course. He also urged Nigerians to contribute to the advancement and development of their nation.

The unity, peace, and security of the nation come before all other considerations, according to Obi, who is reported to have made this statement at a gathering in Kaduna State.

He said, "We must continue to live on the path of peace, religious harmony, ethnic harmony,

coexistence, that is the most important thing for now."

"Let's have a peaceful, quiet Nigeria where government will concentrate on caring for the sufferings of the people."

Despite the problems with the most recent general elections, he stated, Nigerians must cooperate peacefully to address the common problems of insecurity, poverty, education, and other crucial facets of the country's existence.

Senator Datti Baba-Ahmed, the presidential candidate for the Labour Party, also spoke at the event. She urged the incoming government to address the high rates of youth unemployment, poverty, and insecurity, particularly in the Northern region, noting that those were the very important issues that required urgent attention.



The cutting of the cake to mark the two-day Children's Day celebration organised by Cakasa Ebenezer Foundation (CEF) for school children in Mushin..

Arts

In the realm of artistic luminescence, *Biyi Bandele*, the Nigerian-born maestro, graced the world with his boundless creativity until his departure on August 7, 2022. With his ink-stained fingers, he crafted poetic symphonies on the stage, breathing life into iconic works like "The King Must Dance Naked," a raw and visceral exploration of power and vulnerability, and his soul-stirring adaptation of Chinua Achebe's masterpiece "Things Fall Apart," which captivated audiences with its poignant portrayal of cultural collision. Through the written word, Bandele bestowed literary gems upon us, such as "The Man Who Came In From the Back of Beyond," a mesmerizing journey through the labyrinthine corridors of the human psyche. It was on the silver screen that his visionary lens cast its magic, as he transformed Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Half of a Yellow Sun" into a cinematic masterpiece that resonated with the echoes of a nation torn apart by conflict. Biyi Bandele's timeless contributions to the arts continue to reverberate, a testament to his genius, as his spirit finds solace among the celestial constellations, forever inspiring generations to celebrate the power of storytelling and embrace the rich tapestry of African narratives. Before his demise, he spoke to *Olatoun Williams*.

You are an Egba man, from Abeokuta in the South-West of Nigeria. How did you come to be born and bred in Kafanchan in the North of Nigeria?

My grandfather on my dad's side was an engineer with the Railways. He started with the Railways when the lines were being built from the South-West of Nigeria to the North. My dad and his siblings were born in Minna and Zaria. But my grandfather was a proud Egba man and liked to cite the names of famous people like the Kutis, Wole Soyinka, who come from Abeokuta. He sent all his kids back there for their education.

And what was it like being raised in Kafanchan?

We grew up speaking many languages: Yoruba, English, Hausa and Tiv. I also spoke the language spoken locally in Kafanchan. It wasn't that I was particularly gregarious, you learned these languages by osmosis; they were part of the air we breathed. Kafanchan was very cosmopolitan. I remember going to Abeokuta for the first time after growing up on Abeokuta mythology and not understanding a word anyone was saying! I spoke Yoruba but they only spoke Egba which I didn't understand at all. No-one spoke pidgin, the only English I

heard was Standard English. I only got something like the cosmopolitan Kafanchan experience when I came to Lagos in the early 1990s.

Your grandfather had a sad and ironic part to play in your father's conscription into the army to fight in World War II. Tell us about that.

Running off to fight in World War II was an act of rebellion for my dad because he had fallen out with his dad, my grandfather. He joined a special force of the Nigerian Regiment called The Chindits who were commissioned to fight in Burma. When my grandfather died suddenly in 1945, my dad thought the news was an April Fool's joke because he heard it on April 1st. When he realised it wasn't a joke, the death was so shocking to him, he had a nervous breakdown. That combined with the stress of fighting in Burma. It was harrowing. They had to kill people! He was flown back to Nigeria in a straight jacket.

How and when did you start writing?

Three things turned me into a writer. Witnessing my father after the Burma campaign was a major factor. As I said, he was psychologically badly affected by the experience. He suffered from flashbacks and became

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African Luminary: The Enduring Legacy of Biyi Bandeale

- A Journey through Storytelling, Theater, and Film



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The Enduring Legacy of Biyi Bandele

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violent. I remember my mother picking me up in the middle of the night once when I was a baby and saying, 'He's started again. Let's go to your grandmother's.' But when he was ok, my Dad was a charmer and a great dancer! From the age of about six or seven, he regularly took me to the library. That was a major contributor to my development as a writer. I discovered magic in that library. And my Dad was a great storyteller. That helped. He was a nutter. His idea of a party trick was to bring out live scorpions. He thought that was funny. Even as a kid, I knew it wasn't.

In Burma Boy, the lead character, Ali Banana, suffered from a nervous breakdown. In what other ways did your father's experience of World War II, inform Burma Boy?

The only similarity between Ali Banana and my father is the nervous breakdown. Ali Banana is fiction, total fiction created for comic relief. I had another character in development based on my Dad but the character was dead! I realised then that I hadn't known my Dad as well as I thought. He told all these stories but they weren't autobiographical at all. They weren't personal. To a large extent, Burma Boy was made possible by stories we were told from friends of my Dad who had also been in Burma. That helped significantly in developing the book.

I was thinking about Ali Banana's breakdown recently when I adapted Burma Boy for the stage. It will be on next year, 2019. People were upset by the way I ended the book – with a nervous breakdown. I tried a different ending but it didn't work. The breakdown was the only truthful way I knew how to end it.

In what way, if any, did you use Burma Boy as a tool of political engagement with your readers?

My daughter was born in 2002. I phoned a family friend who lived in Jos. I asked her to go to Kafanchan to break the news of Temitayo's birth to my mum. She got there to discover my mum had just died. I got news that my mother had died, three days after she was born. I spent that period of time see-sawing between these crazy emotions: insane happiness because of my daughter's birth and feeling grief, being really hit hard by my mum's death. I was very close to her.

I looked at my daughter and saw that she wouldn't know her grandparents on my side. Her grandfather, my dad, died when I

was 14. I wanted her to know about them so I decided to first write about her grandfather. And at some point I want to write a book about my mum. So, back to your question, the motive for writing Burma Boy wasn't political, it was personal.

In the book, did you in any way address the fact that your dad and the Nigeria Regiment and the Kings Rifles, all these Africans, were fighting a war that had nothing to do with them?

When it was in script form, I remember showing it to people who read it and said, 'These Africans who went to Burma to fight someone else's war, they should be angry'. With the benefit of hindsight, if I was going to write it that way, you know, impose my own views on the characters, then they would be angry but my dad wasn't angry at all. Burma was the proudest thing he ever did in his life as far as he was concerned. He would have been outraged with anyone who told him to be angry. He thought he was fighting Hitler. Burma Boy was well received but it would have been even better received if I had played that game of saying they were pissed off because they were going to fight someone else's war. But it would have been a lie.

So you wouldn't term any of what you have written political writing?

I am a very political writer but I don't go throwing slogans around. When you write, you take a stand. Whether you call yourself a 'political writer' or not, writing is political.

You have adapted the novel for the stage and we look forward to seeing it next year. What about a TV adaptation?

I had meetings with a broadcaster here in the UK after the publication of the book. I was interested in getting him to adapt Burma Boy for the TV. Eventually at one of the meetings, an executive producer asked me if I'd seen Lawrence of Arabia and expressed his love for the film. I agreed that it was a great film. A few days later, I understood what he was alluding to: a white guy going to save the Arabs from themselves. In Burma Boy, there is an Englishman, Brigadier Orde Charles Wingate, who created the Chindits, a specialised force trained to penetrate behind enemy lines. The Nigerian Regiment was part of that force. Basically, the executive producer would have been happy to produce a TV adaptation with Wingate in the role of the



Film director Biyi Bandele speaks to the cameraman during the production MTV Shuga episode 4 Television series in Lagos on April 13, 2015. Shuga is a television soap opera, the first two seasons commissioned by MTV Networks Africa in collaboration with several NGOs and government as part of multimedia campaign to educate youths on HIV, safe sex and teen pregnancy. It touches on material and child health, family planning, gender-based violence, and women empowerment. AFP PHOTO/PIUS UTOMI EKPEI

protagonist.

I'm astonished! Is that kind of imperialism still alive in the UK?

I was shocked then, but I wouldn't be now. We're in a post-Brexit world. Brexit has opened my eyes. People pretend. Well, they don't pretend. Sooner or later they tell you what they think.

The Burma Campaign has been rightly termed the 'least documented and most brutal theater' of the Second World War. There's your own impressive and important recording of it, but what are your thoughts on other efforts to memorialise the 12th Battalion Nigeria Regiment who fought so courageously and resourcefully with the Chindits?

I don't know of any other efforts to memorialize the Nigeria Regiment but that doesn't mean they don't exist.

What about Barnaby Phillips's book, Another Man's War?

Barnaby came to interview me when I was living in Notting Hill Gate with a camera man. During the long interview, he saw a copy of Burma Boy on my bookshelf. Then, about three years later, he called me to say he was doing a documentary about a man called Isaac Fadoyebo who had fought in Burma. He had basically been inspired by my book. I loved the documentary. He later converted it into a book

which I haven't read but I know there are parallels between his character, Isaac Fadoyebo and my fictional character, Ali Banana.

Barnaby's book is more of a history book. He provides a detailed account of the Burma campaign but I felt, ultimately, that in his own book, the Burma Campaign served to a large extent as a window onto Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial history. It is very broad in its focus.

When I started writing Burma Boy, initially, I was so overwhelmed by the wealth of history out there, I thought I wasn't going to write the book. When I started writing it, it was going to be about everyone; the Nigerians, the East Africans, about everybody! But as I was writing, I realised it didn't have a focus, a centre. And then I remembered why I wanted to write it, it was to be about my dad. Then I said, ok, just go for the small focus.

It was a brilliant and powerful book, Biyi. The way you captured the ferocity and intensity of the Burma episode. I remember it well. Congratulations.

You use surrealism liberally in your art. Brixton Stories comes to mind, The Man Who Came In from the Back of Beyond and Burma Boy. A scholar I admire, Jen Westmoreland Bouchard, believes the surrealism in your art represents your sense of

'diasporic unbelonging' and in her well-viewed essay (Academia.edu), she compares your literary art with the visual art of celebrated artist, Yinka Shonibare, because of this striking and common feature. Your thoughts?

I have never heard that before. Yinka Shonibare is a friend of mine and I'm a big fan of his work but it would not have occurred to me in a million years to think that there are similarities in our work. I don't reject that description. I'm just saying it wouldn't have occurred to me.

What about 'diasporic unbelonging'?

I was having a conversation with my daughter a few weeks ago. I said to her that at some point in my life, I've been an insider-outsider but at most points, I've been an outsider. I wasn't complaining, I was just trying to describe myself to her. Where I was born, in Kafanchan, was home. I knew no other place but my surname was Thomas (Bande-Thomas) and as soon as people knew my first name and my surname, they knew I came from a Christian home. Immediately, I became an

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Advocate



Yemi Orija: Emptying out the jailhouses for free

By Joy Essien

Hardship, rising costs of living and the need for self-survival often reduces compassion. According to American psychiatrist, Judith Lewis Herman, “after a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert.” The plight of the downtrodden and those who suffer injustice can be ignored or forgotten as other people scramble for survival. This describes aptly, the predicament of some of the 75, 000 people who are locked in prisons across Nigeria, who, according to the World Prison Brief (WPB). While many are in jail for offenses they have created, 69.4% are stranded in prison for motley reasons from arrest for loitering to fights and inability to perfect bail conditions that would lead to freedom, according to the WPB. Others lack awareness of their rights when dealing with the judicial system, or do not know about legal representation. Those who may know cannot afford it. As a result, they await trial for many years, while others have died without even going to court.

Amid this confusion, one woman's compassion has offered hope to those marooned within the Nigerian justice system. Early in her career, Oluyemi Orija (nee Adetiba), a young youth corper and law graduate, witnessed first-hand, how lack of knowledge and resources led some citizens on a merry dance into prison over issues that could be settled locally. “The first time I entered a courtroom after my call to bar, I saw a man who was charged for fighting with his neighbour in spite of the fact that no one was injured or property destroyed,” Oluyemi explains. Studying both the complainant and the accused, she summed up their situation. “From the charges, these guys were below the average. When you look at the ranking of economic life in Nigerians, they are at the bottom.” As such they did not think of legal representation. This made a strong impression on Oluyemi. “I was so bothered about this, I got back to my office, wondering is this even possible? I discussed with my principal. He said worse things happened.”

Shortly after her national service in 2013, Oluyemi saw another instance of injustice at play in court. A man was charged to court for breaking a crate of eggs while arguing with a woman who prepared and sold noodles in the community. The pair had argued and pushed

themselves about. They ended up at the police station. Recalling the incident, Oluyemi says, “The woman wasn't interested in him going to prison or anything. All she wanted was her money because that's her means of livelihood as well, but the guy couldn't afford it – at the time, it was like N900 for a crate of eggs, he just couldn't afford it”. They ended up in court. In Court, the magistrate ordered that the man be remanded in custody as he could not pay. Oluyemi continues: “They read the charges and the next thing the magistrate did was to remand the guy in prison, and I could not fathom that. Someone was about to go to prison for N900! I stood up to say that I would represent the man for free.”

Moving swiftly, the young lawyer persuaded the court to help. She appealed to the people in the room to end the case by raising money for the trader who was uninterested in pursuing a case. “Can't we all just contribute N900 and give to this woman”? I asked. She stressed that this would set one person free instead of increasing the number of people already incarcerated.

Persuasion worked, and a contribution beyond N900 was raised on the spot. “We contributed almost N5, 000 for the woman” who left the court joyfully. The young man was admonished and encouraged to be patient and then he was sent home.

For Oluyemi, the joy of sparing one person from prison was fulfilling. Thus, the seeds of activism began to grow within the young lawyer's soul. The seeds birthed Headfort Foundation in 2018 as a charity law firm that offers pro bono support and legal services for prisoners.

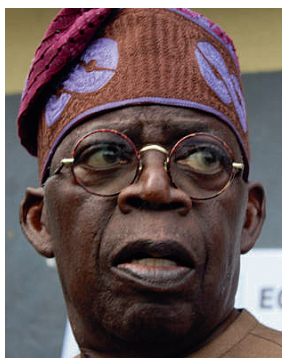
Starting out by establishing a law firm, Headfort Chambers, Oluyemi Orija searched for clients but her passion soon led her to pro bono work. “Starting out with the law firm, I had just a secretary. While we were struggling to do our cases and look for clients, in 2018, I told my secretary that the time was right to do what I have always wanted.” They started at the male wing of Ikoyi prisons in Lagos, where they immediately took on 40 cases and made progress within 3 months. That set her foundation in motion as, “the guys we helped were giving my numbers to other inmates. They were like, this lawyer will help you. She won't collect money, call her”, says Oluyemi. Headfort had to recruit volunteers to manage the volume of work. Wistfully she recalls

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A New Dawn Beckons *Cont'd from page 1*

non-performance in key areas such as insurgency and high-level corruption. Nigeria has also experienced its worst foreign exchange decline since independence, with the naira exchanging at a street rate of N760 to \$1. However, the Buhari administration can boast of achievements in various sectors, including infrastructure development, rail and road networks, air and seaports, energy, housing, water resources, ease of doing business reforms, digital economy, identity management, oil and gas, solid minerals, agriculture, social investment, poverty alleviation, education, health, fiscal policy, trade, monetary reforms, and investment initiatives.

Despite the promise, there are concerns surrounding Tinubu's presidency. The elephant in the room is the allegations of vote-rigging that marred the highly contentious presidential election held on February 25th, 2023. The opposition candidates, Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), have taken legal action to challenge the election results at the presidential elections tribunal. One of the key issues before the tribunal is the manipulation of votes during the collation process, where declared



Bola Ahmed Tinubu

figures allegedly differed from those transmitted by the Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) to the iRev system of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). These allegations raise doubts about the legitimacy of Tinubu's victory and pose significant hurdles to his incoming administration. Another challenge stems from persistent drug trafficking allegations that have

followed Tinubu throughout his political career. These allegations trace back to a forfeiture of \$460,000 in the 1990s, reportedly linked to drug-related offences. Peter Obi, one of the opposition candidates, has referenced these allegations in his court deposition. While it has been argued that this matter may not hold up in court, it creates a perception problem for Tinubu that he must address to establish trust and credibility.

The international community has approached Tinubu's inauguration with caution, given concerns about the overall transparency and fairness of the elections. The United States, for

instance, has decided to send a low-level delegation to the event. Such reactions from foreign observers underline the need for Tinubu to address these concerns, uphold democratic principles, and actively foster strong diplomatic ties to secure international support and cooperation during his presidency.

Despite these challenges, Tinubu enjoys strong support among Nigerians, particularly among the Yoruba southwest region. Recognised as a master strategist, he is adored for his leadership during his tenure as the governor of Lagos State from 1999 to 2007. His supporters see him as key to the success of

Lagos and believe in his ability to replicate that success on a national scale.

As Nigeria embarks on this new chapter, the hope for positive change and development remains high. However, the success of Tinubu's presidency will depend on his ability to navigate the legal battles challenging his victory, address the concerns of the international community, and implement effective policies to tackle poverty and corruption. The Nigerian people eagerly await the tangible outcomes of Tinubu's administration and will closely scrutinize his actions as they yearn for a brighter future for their nation.

Developing a young lady's sense of purpose



By Isoken Nwabunka

Richard Leider, a life coach and purpose expert, declares that "genuine purpose points to the end of a self-absorbed, self-serving relationship to life." When you have achieved true clarity on your purpose in life, you will be able to communicate that purpose to the entire world.

I must be candid; it took me quite a while to get to such a point. However, when the time was right, I could conveniently announce my calling to the world.

Was I unsure in the beginning? Perhaps not. But after being instrumental to

empowering over 700,000 women-led microbusinesses through Grooming Centre, and still counting, there is no doubt about what my true calling is – equipping and helping find their purpose in life.

To be sure, I am a child of Providence. Life happened very early in life for me in Benin. I lost my medical doctor father at the early age of nine. My mum, a petty trader and butcher, did not allow me to wallow in self-pity. Instead, she introduced me into hawking, and admonished me to keep at it, for in it lay the substance of my future. I would ever be grateful to her for such an early introduction into business. Before I eventually left for Lagos at 19, I would engage in other endeavours before being 'forced' by the circumstance of my mother's failing sight to leave for Lagos.

Incidentally, life in Lagos, in 1986, began with hawking. With my school certificate, I had looked for work all over Lagos but found none. So, rather than stay idle, I opted to hawk Elephant Detergent at

Mile Two. Work came after that, me working as a sales girl in a fire safety company, then a cosmetics firm, before I ventured out on my own.

On my own, I sold printing supplies, before venturing into the sale of jewellery. I also sold motor spare parts before I settled down to running a beauty salon.

It was the influence of my husband, Dr. Godwin Nwabunka, at the time an international development consultant, that not only got me to return to school to improve myself but to take up financing microbusinesses. Here, I found my niche.

Microfinance? Let me smile a bit. My journey in self-discovery is at very core of my advocacy today. Simply, how can I help young ladies make it?

The things one strives for each day—the things that make you excited to get out of bed—comprise one's life-purpose.

Insight into one's life's greater meaning, direction, and motivation can be gained

through the cultivation of a sense of purpose. Some people find their calling in life through the work they do. Others find meaning in fulfilling their social obligations. Some people look for it in their religious or spiritual practices. It is possible that some people will find their life's meaning in each of these areas.

Everyone has a different purpose, and the road they choose to take may look different from the one I choose. Furthermore, one's life's meaning can evolve and change as one does, reflecting the weight they place on different things and the way their priorities shift over time.

When contemplating one's life's meaning, the following questions may arise:

- Who am I?
- Where do I belong?
- At what point do I feel complete?

In the minds of some, the pursuit of one's life goals can sound like nothing more than a selfish or self-centred endeavour. Real meaning, however, comes from tapping

into one's unique talents and sharing them with the world, whether that's through the creation of beautiful music for the enjoyment of others, the enablement of friendships, or the spread of happiness.

Several ladies I have come across, have confided in me that they feel lost and unsure of their future. Among the minority that do have an inkling, most have trouble having enough faith in themselves to take action.

Many women cannot speak for themselves, do not ask for what they want, and put others' needs ahead of their own. What is really going on? I may be wrong but I sense self-doubt and lack of confidence, but there's more to it than that, in my opinion.

Many of these women, I believe, have never learned to prioritise their own needs.

Am I advocating selfishness? Surely not! What I'm saying is that everything will work out OK if one figures out how to manage one's worries. The things we worry about the most prevent us from moving in the direction

of our goals.

So let us sort out our worries first, then we can move on.

Are there things we worry about that are beyond one's control? As the Bible puts it in away, time and chance will change all those, but let us focus what our priorities are in life.

Mine has been a long-winded journey. I know that many do not have such patience. But I desire to help girls and young women get to discover their life-purpose as early as possible because as the saying goes, time waits for no one.

Are you between the age of 12 and 21? Are you confused about your life-purpose. Let us engage. Let me help you on this life journey of self-discovery. Again, as the saying goes, a stitch in time saves nine.

Mrs. Isoken Nwabunka, Executive Director, Grooming Centre, and Founder, Isoken Nwabunka Foundation, is a mentor for young ladies.

Buzz

I don't know how life does it but, it keeps throwing us these precious, unifying and inspiring moments every now and then.

The entire weekend stood still. We got the same feeling last year when Tobi Amusan did us proud breaking records in the 100 meters athletics and packing every gold medal available. At that time, we really could do with such cheerful news cos the news across the country was bleak.

Before Hilda Baci, let's go a few years back. It was 2006. And that year, it was a Dance-athon. Dancers were divided into groups. The plan was to create a Guinness World Record for longest dance. Kafayat Shafau (Kaffy) led her team to break the Guinness Book of World Record for longest dance party.

I watched on television and saw how other groups kept walking off the dancefloor after some hours while Kaffy kept pushing and motivating her team mates who were exhausted to keep on. Her energy was insane. Then they broke the record and walked off the dancefloor, leaving Kaffy as the last man standing. She continued solo for a few more hours before she stopped. History was made. First Nigerian woman. Guinness Book of Records.

Kaffy with big dreams, went on to change the face of dance in Nigeria. And has remained in our faces ever since. She created The Dance Workshop in 2017, a convention that trains and mentors professional dancers. Kaffy inspired many. I had a friend who worked her NYSC to Lagos at the time, so she could attend Kaffy's dance school. She was that much of an inspiration.

Success has a blueprint. Before the dance-athon, Kaffy had been paying the price in obscurity, clocking in the hours doing dance rehearsals at the National Stadium, Lagos and was spotted by "someone" one day at an event.

Same way it is with Hilda Baci. I mean, one can't just wake up one day and decide to take up the challenge of cooking for 96 hours if they weren't a chef, passionate about cooking and in her case, born into a family of cooks. Her mom is the owner of

Calabar Pot. Her sister too, is a chef.

There's the saying that if your dream does not intimidate you, then it's not big enough. By 4am at about 86 hours on the 3rd day, Hilda was exhausted, dozing on her feet but still pushing through. But for the Nigerian fans present who kept supporting and cheering, I must commend everyone who showed up, even in the rain, they remained. The Nigerian spirit was so beautiful to watch. We are not as divided as we think we are. No, we are not.

There is a life lesson here. Chris Rock told a story of how his car broke down on the highway and he came down and started waving for cars to stop and help him. No one stopped. Then he got tired and started pushing his car by himself. People saw him and saw a man who needed help and stopped to lend a hand, pushing with him.

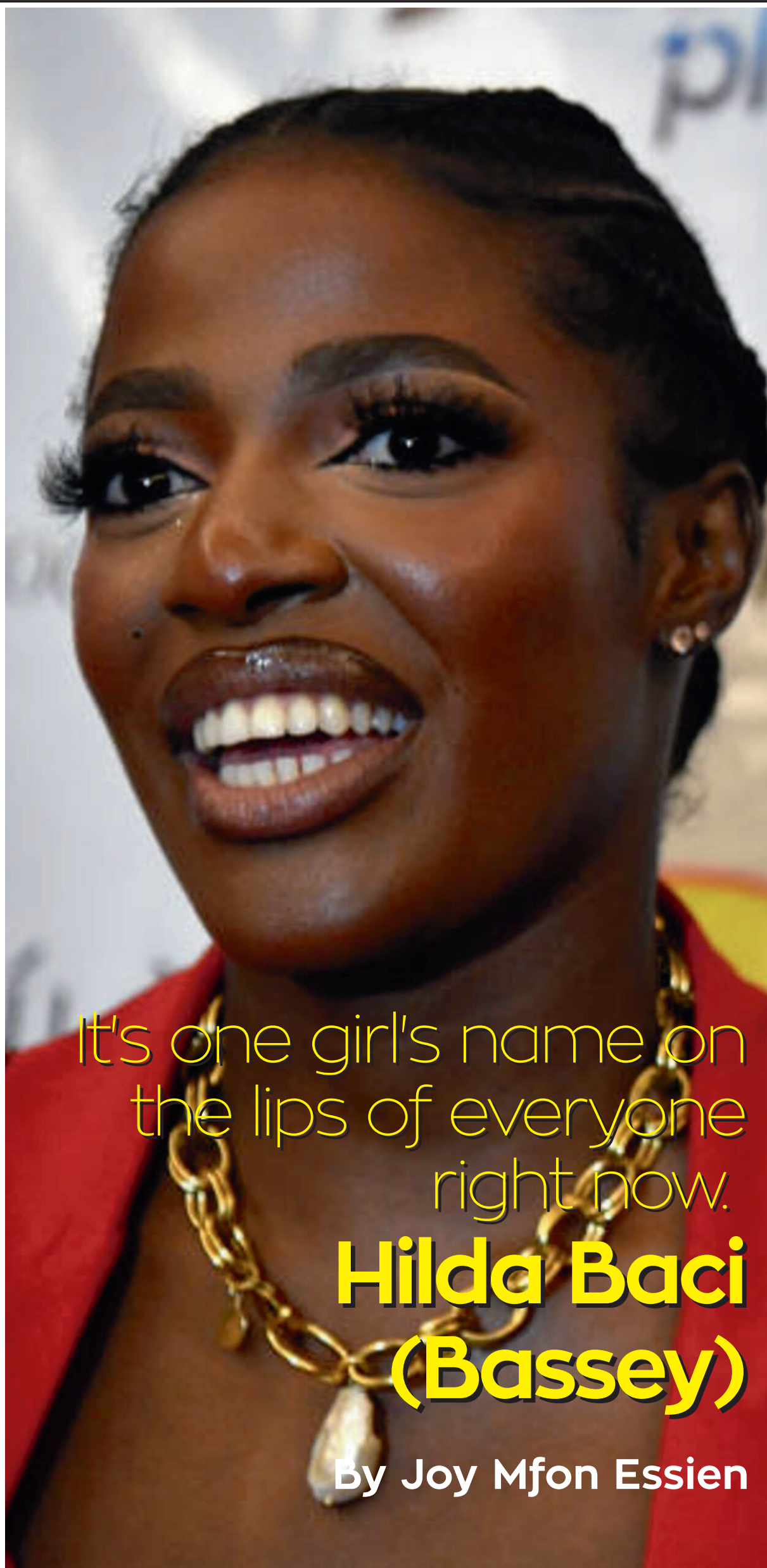
Until you start pushing that dream in your heart, no one will help you. People will only show up when you start.

She had a dream in her heart. Probably got turned down by some brands she approached too. But she showed up regardless. And then, everyone showed up for her. From Nollywood to the music industry to the skit makers and then ordinary Nigerian. Even politicians showed up. Our Vice President phoned in too.

Am I allowed to be sectional? Allow me just this once. I am happy an Akwa-Ibomite is the one breaking this record. We've held it down for decades as best cooks with the most delicious soups. Edikan Ikong is even rumored to get us married quickly. Once a man eats it, he's all yours. Lol. An Akwa-Ibomite with the full package, if you know what I mean. *Winks.

If breaking the stereotype was ever a person, it would be Hilda Baci. With this new record, we can finally get out of this competition in Nigeria and as gods that we have become with this new status, we become kingmakers and crown your winners henceforth. Hilda Effiong Basseyy has done us proud. It's a win for everyone.

Second Nigerian woman in the Guinness Book of World Records. It's Nigeria to the world, baby!



GETTY IMAGES

It's one girl's name on the lips of everyone right now.

**Hilda Baci
(Basseyy)**

By Joy Mfon Essien

Emptying out the jailhouses for free *Cont'd from page 8*

Cont'd from page 8

that, “We needed more people to volunteer because we had no money.” Today, Headfort Foundation has 200 volunteers comprising lawyers, social workers, graphic designers, web designers and IT specialists. The foundation also has photographers and videographers within its team.

Headfort Foundation offers a diversified portfolio of services arranged to meet the needs of its various clients. One of its main projects is the Lawyers without Borders Project. Having built its reputation over the years, Oluyemi says the foundation is now recognised in the legal system. “ Our lawyers are at our mobile offices within the court premises. They take cases of inmates. The wardens

and the magistrates refer clients to Head Fort as it has built its reputation over the years. The foundation offers mobile law offices within Magistrate Court premises. Manned by volunteers, the mobile offices are well furnished and able to provide representation to people charged to court without legal representation. "We have one at Ogba Magistrate court. We also have one in Abeokuta, Ogun State. We have another one at the Ebutte Metta magistrate court. We have lawyers stationed in those offices, and they take cases of inmates as they are brought for their cases. If they don't have a lawyer, the wardens refer them to us, Oluyeremi adds.

According to Oluoyemi,

Headfort wants to have offices nationwide. "The vision is to be in all courts and all states of Nigeria. However, we are just in four right now. It takes money to construct, to fix the office and for monthly operations but the benefit is that we are not paying for rent or electricity. The court supplies us with electricity."

Beyond legal support, Oluyemi and her foundation provide support to ex-prisoners through its Ex-Inmate Support Initiative. Citing the example of two female ex-prisoners interested in education, Oluyemi explains how the project works. “We have someone who is at the open university. We recently paid for the NECO registration of another young lady after she

came out of prison last August.” The foundation provides help to a former inmate who is currently running a business. Others are supported with their health. Oluyemi explains that these activities are funded by donors. “We are working on having partnerships with other organizations and we have people who are interested in teaching ex-inmates a diverse set of things, skill acquisition, technology and all that,” says Oluyemi.

Other projects by Oluyemi's foundation include Lawyers Now Now. In line with modern times, Lawyers Now Now is an app that can be accessed through platforms such as Google Play store and App Store. Motivated by the

aftermath of the End SARS protests, Headfort launched the app promptly in response to the difficulties people encountered during the protests. “It was very easy for people to get medical care, but Legal Aid was very tough,” says Oluyemi. This prompted the design of an app to enable “people meet pro bono lawyers through their mobile phones,” she adds. “The way the application works is like Uber; I am here, and I need a driver to take me somewhere. So, from where I am, I can say what the situation is and why I need a lawyer and I am immediately connected to a pro bono lawyer nearest to me.”

She elucidates: “The application takes them off the app to either WhatsApp or to call, so lawyer and client are

now linked. They have each other's mobile numbers. We are just an intermediary linking volunteer lawyers, pre-registered on the app."

Headfort believes that citizens who end up in prison are oblivious of their rights and ignorant of the law and its processes. Thus, its new project, My Rights, My Freedom aims to educate people. "Having done this work for three years, we realise what the problem was; a lot of people would not have gotten into prison but for the way they manage the situations from the beginning," Oluynemi says. "People are unaware of their rights; they are not aware of the rights available to them at the police station." She gives an example: "We've seen people append their signatures to statements they did not write, statements about which they have no clue. We have seen someone who was arrested because he had a landlord-tenant issue. When we got his statement, we saw armed robbery and he was unaware – he had never seen the statement, but he just knew that when he got to the police station, they gave a gun to hold. He held the gun; his photograph was taken and that was it. He did that not even knowing the implication of what he is doing because he is uninformed.

Delving further into the matter, Oluyemi explains that language can pose a problem. “Again, we know that language is a barrier. Anyone who is talking about human rights on TV will speak English and majority of these people who are our beneficiaries, that we have seen, cannot understand.”

Quick thinking by Headfort foundation resulted in adaptations. Under this project, we have translated Chapter Four of the Nigerian Constitution which talks about fundamental human rights into Yoruba, Hausa, and plain English. We will move from one local government to another in Nigeria, educating people about their rights and importantly, what they should

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Advocate

Emptying out the jailhouses for free *Cont'd from page 11*

be demanding at the police station.

Citing an example of a former client, who she met while he was serving his term, Oluyemi expands her thoughts on the consequences of ignorance: "I know a man who died in Ikoji prison because he pled guilty to a charge he wasn't guilty of – it is not like he wasn't guilty but it is a civil case. It was him taking a bike on hire purchase, the agreement was there, it was obvious but then the issue occurred, the police advised him that when he gets to court, if he should just plead guilty, the court will simply reprimand him or give him community service and let him go but he was convicted and sentenced to five years imprisonment. The first time he met me, the first thing he asked was, 'are you Yoruba? I said yes, he said, ' please, e je ka so Yoruba (let's speak Yoruba) because it is that English that brought me here.'

He did not spend two years of his term before he died in prison, so we have seen crazy things. If he was aware or if there was a lawyer in court that day, if he had just been lucky to meet a lawyer or to have been sat with and had his rights explained in a language he understood..."

Interestingly, Oluyemi says this problem is not limited to the uneducated or the illiterate. "I tell you there are a lot of master's degree holders in Nigeria that have never stepped into the courtroom. They don't know what goes on in court, so when they are in court, they are anxious, they are scared."

Shedding light Oluyemi goes on: "I have seen a man who was a claimant, he brought someone to court and when it was his turn to give evidence in court, he was practically fidgeting, and even asking to be excused to go use the toilet. So, the courtroom is not a place to joke, it is a place for serious business and people are not just comfortable because they have never been there, so they take advice from any idiot that offers it. We have seen fake lawyers giving advice but if they are opportune to learn

about your fundamental human rights in languages you understand, I believe some people in prison would never have ended up there."

One aspect of the judicial process over which people suffer injustice is bail. We ask Oluyemi about the system and what sustainable methods exist to engage people awaiting trial rather than being remanded in prison for years? Oluyemi walks us through the process as it currently exists. Explaining that the law allows for bail to be granted in certain cases, Oluyemi says it is the procedure of granting bail that is problematic. "When you are charged for a bailable offence, you will be granted bail, she begins. "It is one thing to grant bail; it is another to perfect the bail conditions. The situation we have at hand is that magistrates grant stringent bail conditions that are almost impossible for defendants or inmates. They are not putting the reality of the individuals into context; the reality of the individuals that come before them as defendants. Citing an example of a young Okada rider, Oluyemi explains further. "a young man left Borno State and came to Lagos because of Boko Haram. He became an Okada rider. For whatever reason, maybe in the past week, the police arrested him and because of that...(the reality is in most cases, when you have your money, even if you are going in the opposite direction, the police will collect your money and let you go), because this guy is at the bottom of the pyramid he cannot afford the bribes demanded by the police. So, he will go to prison and 50% or more of inmates are poor people. We rarely see a rich guy who has been granted bail that would not perfect his bail. But these guys (Okada riders) have no family ties in Lagos State because they came to Lagos for security, for greener pastures, whatever you call it. Now he is brought before a judge and the judge grants bail conditions, saying two family members must stand for him as sureties and the two family must be taxpayers in the

state..."

Oluyemi explains that the technicalities of the bail system work against the poor. "Some of the judges go as far as saying it must be by a civil servant of level 13, 12 or 10; some say you must have landed property in Lagos before you can be a surety. These make the bail conditions stringent for the defendants." Where they are unable to meet the conditions, "they will continue to be in prison. When you go to court, the judge will say, 'I have granted him bail. So, it is like we are deceiving ourselves. That is the way I see it.'" explains Oluyemi.

She believes some judges "sidestep the concept of bail. "Adding that bail does not exonerate a defendant and wonders why the conditions are steep?

Oluyemi quickly clarifies that not all cases are bailable (murder, rape and armed robbery included). She explains that not all cases are bailable and that accused persons remain in custody while on trial. However, she explains that it would be useful for those cases to be judged promptly. "What you have is that the police charge someone with a murder case, knowing that the magistrate does not have authority to attend to the case. The man is there for one year or two, awaiting DPP advice. So, imagine that! " Stating the challenges lawyers face in this area, Oluyemi quotes a further example of a client who in jail since 2009. "Up until now, the trial has not even started. Why? The case has been moving. First, he spent about three years at the magistrate court. The man was eventually charged to the High Court. There the case has been moving from one judge to another. It is either the judge has been transferred, or the judge has retired, or something has happened to the judge. It has been moving since 2009 but nothing has happened with that case. The guy is currently at Ikoji prison. That is why there are a lot of people in prison. There are a lot of bottle necks in our justice system, and

it is just unfortunate."

To support clients who find themselves stuck due to bail conditions, Oluyemi's Headfort foundation has a programme named Bail the Indigent. Stressing the need for this project, Oluyemi explains, "for some clients who do not have family members we also pay people called professional sureties, (this is what they do for a living), they can stand in and we use them. We pay them and have them stand in for bail for some defendants."

Digesting all this information about the correctional system it becomes pertinent to ask if the system is working to purpose? Oluyemi Orija believes it is work in progress. "We are work in progress. The major challenge is congestion, and that congestion is not under the control of the correctional facility itself. If you go to a Nigerian prison, you rarely see wardens maltreating inmates. If you see anyone torturing or maltreating anyone it would be an inmate who is claiming to be the boss, because he has been there for longer years." These situations are not particularly under the control of the wardens. Imagine at Ikoji we have about 3,000 inmates. You ask yourself how many wardens are there? Perhaps we have less than 100. Look at the ratio, how do you say 100 persons, and those 100 will not be on duty at the same time...how do you say those, say, 50 persons for instance, want to rehabilitate 2000+ people?"

She adds that the expectations of the current correctional system and the law are impracticable for now. "The international standard is, you go to prison, you are reformed. They believe you commit a crime, and they are trying to say, you should not have stolen this thing, they give you behavioural change courses and all that, then you come out to the society as a better person. That is what the prison is meant to do but the reverse is the case, and you will not blame the wardens. We will not forget the aspect of corruption. Some of these guys who are lords in

prison are rich, they are inside the prison and control the outside world."

Additionally, "some wardens answer to them – (like they buy food for them as they will not eat food that is sold in prison). If you look at the reality of our situation it is hard, it is impracticable for us to do or to get to the stage that the law is envisaging, but it is a good one because the law sees the future and we are hoping that we will get there. That is why I said it is a work in progress. Changing the name from prison to correctional facility is something. I have a good relationship with some of the officials – the prison officials and I know the name is sinking into their psyche as to what the prison should be."

She suggests this name change is fostering change at the female wing of the Kirikiri prisons. "I can categorically say that inmates are being reformed because of the way they are treated." Describing the atmosphere, Oluyemi says that officials view the inmates differently, "they do not see them as criminals or prisoners. The women are dignified, they treat them well, they address them well, they dress neatly, and the prison is not particularly congested. Three hundred women are in female prisons, and you rarely see at any time where they are way beyond 200". She suggests this population management makes reformation possible compared to the male wing.

Conversing with this versatile and enthusiastic professional is a pleasure. Points of discussion pop up along the way, making her an interviewer's delight. As the conversation winds down, it is amazing, how a young woman's dreams have flourished over the past 10 years.

Looking back, Oluyemi traces her empathy and interest in justice from watching her father settle community disputes. "I come from a small village, and I love the way people treated my father with respect as he settled

community problems." Young Oluyemi discussed this with her father who encouraged her to become a judge because of her compassion. "He said to be like him, I would have to study law so that I will be a judge and administer people's cases."

Oluyemi is aware of the risks that come with her role as an activist. "Some people tell me I should be scared for my life; they say I could be arrested. I hear discouragement and I am not oblivious of the reality of my country. I know all of this is quite possible but at the end if we are all fidgeting and not talking, then the future is weak." She says her team approaches the police civilly. At the police stations, we contest for our clients employing the threat of using social media and the press which the police would rather avoid. "We are not castigating you but if you do not do the right thing, we will use the press. Some Lagos police stations already know Headfort, and they are like, 'if it is their case abeg, release them. We have a good collaboration with the Ministry of Justice in Lagos State.

Aside from pursuing justice, Oluyemi Orija, who credits her husband with support for the Headfort dream, has a vision for future generations and desires that her children also pick up careers in law. Why? "Law exposes you to other aspects of life, I can see life as a pastor; I can see life as an engineer. I can see the life of a whole business, a company and how it is being run. When it comes to your personal life, law helps you to protect yourself because you are already exposed to the danger to which Mr A was exposed to because of negligence or a carefree attitude. It is going to be hard for anyone to dupe me now. There is a trait peculiar to lawyers. We are meticulous. We are very detailed people; we are very meticulous, and I love that trait. When I pick up a book, I am looking for faults, if I am reading any document, I am looking for the problem. Law exposes you to other aspects," says Oluyemi Orija.

The Enduring Legacy of Biyi Bandele

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outsider. I didn't speak Hausa with an accent. I spoke Yoruba with an Hausa accent but I didn't know that until I got to Grammar School in Abeokuta. The kids called me'mullah'. They took the mickey out of me a lot. It was done in love – I was like a mascot – but it still made me feel like an outsider. (laughter) Then many years later, I moved to the UK...You know, because of my outsider status, home is everywhere for me. Home is where my daughter is. Here. That's home.

Fascinating perspectives, Biyi...
Quite often when I tell people about my life, they say, wow, you should be in therapy. I've come to the realisation that my idea of what's normal doesn't coincide with other people's notions of normality. I wouldn't have my life any other way. It's a richer way of being.

That's beautiful, Biyi! But you now see why someone – an informed person – would compare your artistic expression to Yinka Shonibare's? Think of the Diary of the Victorian Dandy. An African man is not who you would expect to find in that position – it's a real surprise – but he looks so completely at home!

(Laughter; from Bandele)
Winning the International Student Play script competition led to your migration to the UK in 1990 and – effectively – launched your career in theatre. Since then you've written and staged many including: Rain, Two Horsemen, Marching for Fausa, Brixton Stories, Oroonoko.

Share up to three of your most memorable moments from

your theatre practice in the UK.
I did a stage adaptation of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart in the late 90s. It was an unexpected success. Chuck Mike, an African-American, who taught me at University of Ife, directed it. It opened as part of the London International Theatre Festival and at a theatre in the West End. Kids from an inner-city black school came to see the play. There's a scene when Okonkwo goes to kills his son after a deep love relationship built into the drama ; one of the kids, a little boy, about 14 years old- he'd never been to the theatre before – jumped on stage and attacked Okonkwo! I don't know how it happened, whether he thought it was really happening or whether he was just caught up in the moment. (laughter). We had to stop the play.
Another memorable moment

was during the opening night of Marching for Fausa. It was my first major play and my first at the Royal Court. Annie Hasseldine directed it. An amazing woman. Two members of the cast had had a tiff off – stage which they carried onto the stage. They started beating the hell out of each other in a scene which contained opportunity for improvisation which is how Annie directed it. Actors who weren't in the scene had to come on the scene to separate them. I was dying in the audience! Annie turned round, grabbed my hand, saw me shaken and said, 'Biyi darling, the audience doesn't know it's not in the script'. She was right! The audience spontaneously broke into applause because it was so real! (laughter)

By migrating to the UK in the 1990s, you escaped the

onslaught of the military years didn't you?

No. I didn't escape. I travelled back to Nigeria every year and experienced my own run-in with the military.

Oh, tell us about it!

During Abacha's rule, Wole Soyinka was wanted dead or alive. He had to escape, so he jumped on a motor bike and found his way to the UK. Just before coming home one time, I saw Prof. He had a request. He asked if I would visit a colleague of his and bring back a document for him. I agreed.

The document was on a floppy disk. Someone must have tipped off airport security because they stopped me and took me to an underground room at the airport. There's a whole network of underground passages in the airport. Because Wole Soyinka was a wanted man, I realised

what I was doing, taking the document to him, was dangerous. I put the floppy disk in my shirt pocket deliberately – hiding it in plain sight. They searched me, put me through an x-ray machine. I had taken the floppy out of my shirt pocket and put it on the desk in front of me – again hiding it in plain sight. The security men interrogated me about Soyinka. I said, yes, I'd seen him. He had come to see my play at the Battersea Art Centre. When they asked what we discussed, I told them "We discussed the play". (laughter)

Did they rough you up?

No. They were very polite and very friendly. Hyper- educated. They were just trying to catch me out. They eventually let me go with apologies, about half an hour before my flight was due to take off.

What happened to the floppy disk?

It was still on the table, untouched.

So hiding it in plain sight worked!

Well, yes... It was only after sometime in the air that my hands started shaking. That was when I realised what I'd just lived through! (laughter)

At least you had the floppy disk! Did you feel like a hero?

No. I was scared s*****! I didn't feel like a hero. (laughter)

Tell us a little about studying Drama at University of Ife in the 80s.

(laughter). Ok. There was a girl, I was absolutely in love with her. She was studying English. I was studying Drama. The Drama department was next to the university zoo so they called it the zoo. That tells you what they thought of us, the drama students. She liked me, and she told me she liked me but she made it clear she could only go out with me if I changed to Law! (laughter)

The military dealt a death blow to the arts in Nigeria, so what happened to your peers who studied Drama with you? You migrated to the UK and remained very visibly in the field, but what were their own outcomes?

The military dealt a death blow to the entire system. My friends went into various fields like advertising, business. Some went into academia.

Between the year 2000 – 2002, you were the Judith E. Wilson Fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge here in the

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The Enduring Legacy of Biyi Bandele

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UK. What was returning to an academic setting like after so many years of practice? Share some of that experience with us.

It was great! At the high table where we ate every day, we had amazing conversations with some of the brightest human beings on earth: physicists, mathematicians. I loved being there but I also realised that I was an artist not an academic.

What's the main difference?

Well, when I read an essay and someone goes to great lengths to legitimise everything they write by citing this person or that person, that's academia. Artists, we go out on a limb which means quite often we are so wrong but when you're right, we create something new. I lectured in Drama but I was given the freedom to do things in my own way. I was invited to stay on and I was tempted to...

You're a natural teacher then?

I love teaching but I was turning towards directing round about that time and I knew that if I stayed on at Cambridge, the directing wouldn't happen. The ideal scenario for me would be to teach and retain an active theatre practice. There's a security in the predictability of an academic environment which is conducive to sanity unlike the kind of free-lance work I do in which there are no givens. It demands far more energy.

Let me give you an example. Recently, I was hanging out with a film maker friend of mine, Akin Omotoso, here in London. In May when I was in New York, I had spent time with him and his sister, Yewande. I was telling him about my new film and he was surprised. He said, "You didn't mention this to me in New York." I told him it was because in May, I didn't know I was going to write it! It's a crazy way to live! (laughter)

Your detour into films has been a glamorous affair.

It wasn't a detour! I wrote my first screen play in 1992. I'd come to live in London in 1990. This was more or less a year after my first stage play was put on. I've been writing plays and screenplays for a long time.

I remember Bad Boy Blues. Clive Owen starred in it didn't he?

Yes, he did. But before Bad Boy Blues I'd written a screen play which Danny Boyle directed called Not Even God Is Wise Enough.

How did you get into directing?

I didn't know I was interested in

directing until I met Danny Boyle at the Royal Court (Sloane Square) where he'd started as a stage-hand. There was nothing abstract about the way he did things. After working with him on Not Even God Is Wise Enough, I started getting commissions to write screen plays. I was working with directors who were not good directors compared to Danny and I thought I could direct better than they did. Especially when I saw things being done the wrong way. I'd complain to Danny who told me to stop complaining and go do it myself! But it was extraordinarily difficult as a writer to tell people I wanted to direct. I'm black and I'm Nigerian. I think that had a lot to do with their reaction. When you are black, everything you do is a statement. For me, I wanted to do it and discovered I loved doing it. I had this joy being on the set you know. I've heard of writers who suffered nervous breakdowns when they were trying to direct.

That's incredible! Why would they suffer nervous breakdowns from directing?

If you're a director, you're working with lots of people and you have so many days to shoot the film. People are coming up to you constantly asking for your opinions. And these opinions have consequences. Real consequences. Some people are paralysed by having to make decisions because being held responsible for consequences terrifies them. But I love it.

So you owe your transition from writing stage plays to directing films entirely to Danny Boyle?

No. As a Nigerian artist, it became urgent for me to direct films because where my plays were being performed in major theatres across the UK and at selected theatres, including Broadway, in the US, I've never seen a play of mine performed in Nigeria. At some point in the near future, I will publish a collection of my plays in Nigeria. It hasn't happened yet.

You adapted Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Orange Prize winning novel, Half of a Yellow Sun, for the screen. Tell us about your choice of that book

I read it in 2005, the year it was published. I had been trying since 1998 – 9 to adapt Chinua Achebe's Girls at War. I'd been working on the title story. It wasn't going anywhere. Then I read Half of a Yellow Sun and fell in love with it and when I met Chimamanda, I was excited to learn that one of her major inspirations was Girls at War. At

that point, I knew that I wanted to direct it myself.

Who were the main investors in Half of a Yellow Sun?

Because I was a newcomer to film directing, fund-raising took a long time – six years. The BBC was originally involved but they pulled out when it became clear I was going to direct it. They didn't think I was right for it. In the end, the main investors were the BFI (British Film Institute) in the UK and various Nigerian investors in Nigeria.

How was the film received? Was there anything specific people found remarkable about it? There's always something people take away.

We were invited to 40 festivals worldwide. The reception was phenomenal. I would go to the cinemas about ten minutes before the film finished for the Q & A sessions and find people in audiences weeping. But there was some negativity from people who thought it was wrong to tell a story about privileged people on a continent where there is so much poverty. My response to that was to say that that's the only story about Africa that you guys tell: African people dying of hunger. When the film first came out, I knew that it worked and then I would read stuff people were writing and I would think, that that's not the film I made.

I read in an earlier interview you gave that you were fascinated by the two sisters in the book. Could you shed light on that fascination?

Yes, I had been trying to get a short story by Chinua Achebe, Girls at War to the screen. I mentioned that earlier. There's a character in the story called Gladys and she had this friend. I'd been trying to make a movie about them but didn't happen so when I came across Chimamanda's book which had two sisters in it, it was an opportunity. I felt that that was where Chimamanda's heart really was – with those two women. And for me they were the most amazing thing which made me fall in love with the book. They were the most finely realised characters in the book. I didn't have to change any line of dialogue.

The house-boy, Okonkwo, whom I had on the screen, needed to be toned down. Without that he would have sounded like a caricature. He was interesting, a great literary device but I wasn't making a literary work, I was making a film. You know, if someone else wants to make a film adaptation of the book, they can make theirs

about the servant but what drew me to the book were the sisters. When it first came out, it rated 3.5 on IMDb. Now it fluctuates between 6.5 – 8.5. It has taken on a life of its own. People respond well to it. I'm proud of it.

Tell us a little about Shuga, the MTV series advocating about HIV/AIDS. You went on to make that after Half of a Yellow Sun.

Shuga was a whole new form of education for me. MTV wanted my advice. They showed me an episode of Kenyan Shuga, the one with Lupita Nyong'o. I was blown away by the simplicity of it and I hadn't seen anything like it in Africa. They said they wanted to do the same thing in Lagos. I said I would love to do that. I had read articles about HIV which showed the HIV prevalence rate as very high in Nigeria. Something the leadership of the country doesn't seem sufficiently concerned about.

The agencies and projects involved in AIDS control are mostly funded by PEPFAR (US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief) or the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation rather than our own government. But the bulk of the funding needs to come from our own government. It's our problem not theirs. I tried to make it not too strictly about HIV/AIDS though.

I saw one of the episodes of Shuga. It was really polished and the story-line was very engaging.

You know if you're targeting teenagers you can't just be preaching at them, we had to entertain them.

Now tell us a little about the film, Fifty, which you also made. That was Mo Abudu, the founder of Ebony Life TV's debut as a producer of full length feature films.

I wouldn't have done Fifty if I hadn't done Shuga. Mo sent me the script of four women turning fifty. It was very Nollywood, melodrama after melodrama. But I saw that these women are the generation of the parents of the kids in Shuga and I felt it would be interesting to see if I could make a film about them on their own terms and see if it could be as fun as Shuga. That was the challenge that got me pressing in. I think Fifty was better than any episode of Shuga. It opened at the London Film Festival to a long standing ovation. Mo sold it to Netflix.

I really enjoyed Fifty. Ireti Doyle stole the show as that wild-child mum. She must have

really enjoyed playing that role. (laughter) She was amazing.

You describe yourself as a Nigerian Film Maker, not as a Nollywood Producer. Share your views about Nollywood.

I'm very proud of Nollywood. I say I'm not a Nollywood producer the same way not every Indian filmmaker is a Bollywood film maker. Satyajit Ray was not a Bollywood film maker. He was an Indian film maker.

Can you explain the distinction?

Nollywood on several levels is pretty much the way Hollywood was in the early 20th century. Prospectors recognised that the gold rush wasn't going to make them any money and that the real gold was in entertainment. The early pioneers were businessmen. They had no idea about directing etc but they started putting stuff together anyway. By the 1920s, Europeans had entered the arena with a more academic approach to film making. They codified everything and came up with a lexicon of cinematography. Russian and German artists started making independent films and gradually superseded the businessmen who had been just knocking films together. Nollywood right now is full of people like them making films for business rather than craft. But not every practitioner shares my opinion. Daniel Oluwa who made a film I love called 'Taxi Driver Oko Asewo'. He is very proudly Nollywood. I prefer to call him a Nigerian filmmaker though because he's brought in craft.

You arrived in the UK in 1990 on the wings of your British Council International Play-Script victory. Since then, your career has been non-stop forward movement. What projects are you working on now?

I'm working on two films. One film has a private investor as executive producer. It's called Area Boy. It's set in Oyingbo in Lagos.

It's loosely based on the life story of the notorious armed robber, Lawrence Anini. The other film, which is being developed with the BFI, is an adaptation of Wole Soyinka's prison memoirs published in 1971, The Man Died.

Such a great title!

Yes, you couldn't come up with a better title.

At the Coven
[Ihria Enakimio]

*Distant flames light up the skies
In tiers like vultures
presiding over the dead
witches sit in congress
as in an Amphitheatre
to formulate
algorithms
for a feast in due
season*

*It is planting season
when seeds are laid out
to die
to give birth in harvest
season*

*It is the chosen who
make the rules
inheritors of the blood
when hunter and
hunted shall meet
lock horns in the game
of death*

*A eunuch may sing
songs of fertility
But the harem is the
kings*

*Kings are born, not
made*

*The feast is for those
who sit at table
From the forest over
the hills,*

*air borne smoke of
flesh*

*roasting over wood
fires*

*Cries of hunter and
game mingle*

*forge a haunting
symphony of rhythms*

*Melody is not its object
Just how much blood
will be let*

*like vultures watching
over the dead*

*witches sit in congress
at the coven*

*The game is sheared,
the hunter is spice*

*And the feast was
never in doubt*

*Only how loudly the
dirge*

Forever in our Hearts

CHIEF (MRS)
JOY OBASI
EGBE
1934-2022

YOUR
CHILDREN



Backpage

The Old Order Changeth...

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance."

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-4).

For Nigeria, this is a time to take stock; a time to dispassionately critique where we are coming from and where we are headed. One had refrained from passing a definitive verdict all these days because, as in a soccer match, a last minute goal was still a possibility. Now, the match has ended and chroniclers are at liberty to start laying the building blocks of history.

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new, And God fulfils Himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world", wrote Alfred Lord Tennyson in his famous poem, *Morte d'Arthur*. When Muhammadu Buhari mounted the saddle in 2015, a two-term tenure of eight years looked like eternity. Now, the man who ascended the throne in a blaze of glory is crawling back to private life thoroughly demystified.

Shortly after the swearing in ceremony of May 29, 2015, those of us who had covered Major-General Buhari's first intrusion into governance in 1984 expected that competence, discipline and transparency would be the hallmark of his tenure as a democratically elected president.

In the first two weeks, motorists noticed that police checkpoints had been dismantled nationwide. Everyone was scared that Buhari's broom would sweep away all crooked people from public office. But after two weeks and people saw that it was business as usual, checkpoints started rearing their heads again and the people slowly but surely returned to their riotous ways.

It turned out that Buhari was overrated, overhyped and that the expectations of the public from the new 'messiah' were, therefore, unrealistic. Once his health problems were



Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari (2ndL) speaks with Asiwaju Bola Tinubu (2ndR) after listening the national anthem during the Bola Tinubu Colloquium at the Eko Hotel & Suites in Lagos, on March 29, 2018. Buhari is attending the 10th Colloquium organized to celebrate the Leader of the All Progressive Congress (APC) Asiwaju Bola Tinubu's 66th birthday. / AFP PHOTO / STEFAN HEUNIS

sorted out by his foreign doctors, it was thought that he would swing into action and intervene in many areas of national life. But no such thing happened as Buhari was content with reigning as a monarchical president rather than a political leader.

The underside of that monarchical posture was that Nigeria was on auto-pilot. Each minister became a lord unto himself. But for a few times when the office of the secretary to government intervened, there was no central coordination of policy initiatives. As far as the public could see, the president was content with appointing his ministers and leaving them to their own devices.

More than any other president before him, Buhari displayed a lack of cerebral capacity to think through various national problems and proffer solutions. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the vexed matter of nomadic herdsmen destroying farms. While forward looking people suggested that the federal government assist the herders to set up ranches so that the primitive system of roaming the wilderness in search of pasture for grazing would become a thing of the past, Buhari was more interested in establishing grazing routes from the desert to the ocean so that the herdsmen could roam freely.

In terms of style, Buhari's limited exposure and narrow circle of friends made it difficult for him to understand

how to deploy contemporary tools to effect desired changes.



By Wole Olaoye

Many people felt that he was arrogant, but I think what they mistake as arrogance is actually a recoil into his shell for, in the immortal words of Abraham Lincoln, "It's better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid than open it and remove all doubt."

Buhari will be remembered for many infrastructural projects, especially the revamping of the railway sector and the completion of the second Niger bridge. But the jury is still out as to whether the borrowings – highest level of borrowing since Nigeria became independent in 1960 – were judiciously expended.

Nigeria's total public debt stock as at 2023 is N46. 25 trillion. This excludes another estimated N27. 55 trillion 'Ways and Means' loans from the Central Bank and additional debt envisaged in the 2023 annual budgets of States and the Federal Government. There are claims that many of the projects being executed are overvalued when placed side by side with similar projects in other parts of the world.

Under Buhari, corruption

rained like confetti. Public officials used to pilfer millions of Naira; now under Buhari, they stole billions in plain sight. One of the examples of profligacy often cited is the opaque way the Ministry of Aviation has been going about the establishment of Nigerian Air – from the 'unveiling' of the logo in London to the opaque partnership with Ethiopian Air (which made local airlines head to the courts). Then came the N1.7 billion consultancy fee for the design of the second runway in Abuja and the N12 billion expended on acquiring 10 fire fighting trucks without competitive bids.

The ownership structure of Nigeria Air is shrouded in secrecy. The minister had disclosed that Ethiopian Air owns 49% equity while Nigeria owns only 5%. So, who are the other shareholders? Indeed, what is the authorised share capital of the airline? What equity did the other unnamed stakeholders contribute?

Also, the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) has called for the immediate reversal of the concessioning of the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja and the Mallam Aminu Kano International Airport, Kano. "Why borrow and spend public money to upgrade the airports only to hand them over to private concerns in the name of a concession?" the centre asked.

"It is also disheartening to understand that the total amount of money that this

airport is accruing to government is \$700m for Abuja and then \$97.4m for Kano", said CISLAC. "Put together, it is about \$800m and Nigeria is receiving a concession fees or upfront of less than \$10m, that is, only \$7m for Abuja and \$1.5m to be given for Kano." Apparently, Sirika has treated the aviation sector like a family inheritance.

The incoming administration will have its hands full with many ghostly projects. Mercifully, the proposed borrowing of additional \$800 million to "cushion the effects of the proposed removal of petroleum subsidy on the poorest of the poor has been shelved. Like the COVID palliatives and the feeding of absent school children during the COVID scourge, it would have been another phantom bazaar.

In the eight years of his reign, Buhari cut the picture of a standoffish leader who was doing us a favour. He didn't brook criticism and seized every opportunity to congratulate himself. Only recently, he proclaimed: "I have run a good race".

The way to assess any administration is to weigh the quantum of resources available to it. Dollar for dollar, Naira for Naira, we could have achieved more mileage with the resources available in the last eight years with more prudent management. For the government to give itself a pass mark, its standards must be very low indeed.

The outgoing administration made some gains on the security front but neutralised its gains by employing double standards in dealing with terrorists, bandits, armed herdsmen, tribal warriors, etc. The impression was given that some people could not be prosecuted no matter their crimes.

The Buhari administration must however be commended for its achievements in the war against narcotics. The NDLEA under Brig-Gen Buba Marwa (Rtd) has rediscovered its mojo. Also, the Nigerians In Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) under Dr. Abike Dabiri-Erewa has performed creditably as a trusted link between the country and its citizens abroad.

Unfortunately for the administration, all the lofty economic goals earmarked at the onset of the regime were stultified by a combination of voodoo economics and sheer incompetence, especially with regard to how the central bank has managed the monetary policy and caused untold hardship to the generality of the people through its planlessness.

The attempt to introduce new colours of Naira notes in the run-up to the last elections must rank as one of the most brainless moves ever made by any government since Independence.

All in all, Buhari has satiated his longing to serve as a democratically elected president of Nigeria. He shares the distinction of leading Nigeria twice – as a soldier and as a civilian – with General Olusegun Obasanjo. His military adventure had ended on a sour note when he was overthrown in 1984. His return as civilian president was supposed to be a golden opportunity to show what the country missed when he was overthrown. But alas, the verdict over eight years is anything but rosy. He has said he can't wait to return to his farm in Daura. For once, Nigerians are in agreement with him. They, too, can't wait!

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