



The Nigerian Dreamers

*A Collection of Poetry, Stories
and Interludes*

by Jane Efavwu

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TEAM

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the Nigerian Dreamers. The ones who don't sleep, the ones who are still sleeping and the ones who have slept to wake no more.

-APPRECIATION-

Thank you for picking this book up to read. Before we get into it, I have to appreciate the amazing people who made this possible. I'd like to appreciate my family for their constant love and support throughout the process of creating this book. Thank you for the love, laughs and life you gave me. After starting this book in my tiny apartment in Lagos, I would later head home to finish it in the most comfortable and familiar place I could ever be to write this with a clear mind. I couldn't imagine writing this book and adulting at the same time. Going home made it easy. Thank you, my people. If it's one thing that I do, it's to make sure that our name lasts forever as Daddy intended it.

Shout out thank you to my friends, colleagues, neighbours and partners who served as my unofficial team members cheering me on, supporting me with their resources and just being there when I needed someone to talk to. Thank you for checking up on me when it seemed like I was MIA and nowhere to be found. At some point, I wasn't going out, posting on social media or replying messages because I was taking this project a bit too seriously and going through my own life struggles as an adult but you all reminded me how important it was to breathe, take it easy and laugh a little. You're all irreplaceable and I love you guys!

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Lastly, I'd like to thank God for life. I still can't believe I'm writing my own book at such a time in my life. I can't tell you how much of a full circle moment this is for me but God knows it all. I'm thankful for strength, grace, favour and skill that I only found out I had during the course of this project. I'll never be the same person I was before I started this project and that's because God showed me how far I can go and how much I can grow. This is just the beginning.

Thank you everyone!

-INTRODUCTION-

If you're reading this, it's my first book as a writer and I'm glad to have you on this journey with me. This book is part of my deliverables for my artist commission on the New Narrative program organized by the British Council. The program focuses on pushing new narratives of Africa and the United Kingdom based on the views and interpretations of artists living and working in these continents.

It's an invitation to see what goes through my mind as a young Nigerian woman living in modern day Nigeria. I will tell you the things that have happened to me and my fellow Nigerians and how these things have affected the way we see the world around us. You can contrast these stories with anything you must've heard about us from any part of the world that you may be reading from. This will prove that the way we see ourselves is way different from the way the world sees us which is why you have to hear our stories from us directly.

This journal will feel like walking into a café on your street and meeting some young Nigerians having coffee and sandwiches who give you the real tea on what they go through in their daily lives as citizens of the country. I know books are a form of media but the stories here are free from any media propaganda. If anything, it's filled with real life agendas that thrive in our society; some that we observe, some we will come to learn more about, some that we unknowingly participate in and some we have no control over. I mostly call it a journal because of the shape, size and type of stories written in here; you might as well have picked up my diary to read. It's that raw. I have my stories in here as well. I have been

through my fair share of troubles and writing this journal has been therapeutic for me. I'm sharing stories that I've never had the space to tell anyone and you get to read it here first hand.

Like everything that happens in Nigeria, this book is infused with a healthy amount of humour and irony; enough to keep you going without distracting you from the point. You will laugh, stop to think, grab a drink and continue reading again. It's a light but honest read which has been crafted to take you on an experience that will definitely leave you wanting more. I can relate because I want more too. I want more for myself, my fellow Nigerians and for you, my reader. I'll end this intro here so you can get what you came for. I'll see you at the end. E go be.

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1st Agenda

-OPENING PRAYER-

At a party.

MC does a mic check. Taps mic twice. Taps again

Clears throat

"We are gathered here today to talk about-"

"DJ, please bring it down. Ushers, please control the crowd. Before I start, if your car is the green jalopy with plate number NIG 234LG blocking the exit, please step out to repark. NIG 234LG? Where e dey? Na you? Abeg epp us repark. Thank you."

"Now, it's time for the opening prayer. We are gathered here today to-"

Sudden gunshots from unknown gunmen (They haven't done their NIN yet)

"Wait, where everybody dey run go? Why are you running? Can someone explain to me like I'm five?"

MC under muffled breath

"Which one be dis one again? I never collect my balance o."

MC spots a crying toddler and raises his voice

"Ushers! Sorry, whose baby is this?

DJ, off the mic!

Do you know your mummy's number?"

Meanwhile, somewhere behind the event's chaos

Caterer 1: "Ah! you've messed up the recipe. We were supposed to make eba and now, there's sand in the garri. Look at! There's even rice in the sand. How manage?"

Guest 1: **cavesdropping** "That must be the recipe for the national cake. The ushers said it would go around if everyone maintained decorum."

Guest 2: "Really? I thought we paid the maintenance fee already."

Now, the radio is playing. Of course, the radio is always playing. Maybe, even playing us sometimes.

"A vote for transformation is a vote for progress. A vote for progress is a vote for change. A vote for change is a vote for-

Toddler throwing a tantrum as MC fidgets with confusion

"Wait, wait, we'll find your mummy. Give me your hands."

Scene goes dark and toddler whispers

"Who off light?"

-1st INTERLUDE-

Still in the dark

Guest 3: "Leave them! Let them shoot! Let them shoot!"

Guest 4: "Put on the light! Where's my baby?"

A body drops to the ground

Guest 4 screams

"Has anyone seen my baby?"

Another body drops to the ground

Guest 5 sings

"Solidarity forever!"

More bodies drop to the ground

The gunmen remain unknown. Maybe it's because they still haven't done their NIN registration but unlike the rest of us, their sim cards haven't been blocked yet. They still make the calls and call the shots. But why start with violence when we can start with violins? Unity isn't always uniform so what's unity to a man in uniform? How did we get here? Who gave the order? Who ordered the grave? How did cavemen get buried in their own caves? When did their cave turn to a grave? Since when did that become the price for being brave?

2nd Agenda

-HOW DID WE GET HERE? -

“Ah yes, I know the place. Very popular street. As you're going now, take your second left, go straighttttttt, take your first right then another left again. You will see a green road they call Independence. The road is bad and they're fixing it; don't pass that road. Just keep going straight down. Then, you'll see another road called Pre-Independence. When you get there, just ask the bike guys and they'll direct you.”

It was at that time I realized that I couldn't use Google Maps for this journey so I decided to get down from the cab to talk to the people.

“Please end the trip.”, I said.

This entire thing started as a short trip down memory lane for me. I can't tell you how we got here because I can't even believe we're here and that must be the same for everyone on this ride. Since we got here, it feels like we've been making movements but we've not been moving. People are tired and they're leaving. Getting off the bus, getting on a plane and getting out of here. The entire country feels like we're in some crazy movie. I mean, we're in the West and there's truly a million ways to die here but this is not that movie. Here, no one is cutting the scenes. This means the actors have been acting for days, weeks, months and well, years. So, I get it if you think this place doesn't feel real.

But, we're here now. When I got off the ride, the cab sped off immediately as evening approached like a child eager for some sweets. What to do? We're here and there are no sweets to share.

We can swap stories, hold each other while we weep and cover each other while we sleep but no sweets here. The sweets you think you have, have ants in them. Don't mind me though. That's protein.

Angry Nigerian in the background: Wetin consine hungry man with classes of food? Food dey di class? Wetin dis one dey talk?

I said we could swap stories. Who wants to go first?

-CLASSROOM INTERLUDE-

Teacher: "I said we could swap stories. Who wants to go first?"

Students: "Aunty, me! Aunty, me! Aunty, pick me!"

Teacher scans the room and notices a student in the corner giving a blank stare to a blank page in front of them. She points to the student

Teacher: "You! Let's have you!"

Selected Student: "But...But..."

Teacher: "The floor is yours. Quiet everyone!"

3rd Agenda

-GBAS, GBOS AND GREATEST GBO GBO-

I sat with a student who attends a federal university in Nigeria and we talked about how life has been for them in the past three years since they got an admission. This student and their mates have spent three years in the university but have barely scratched the curriculum of their second year. From the ups, downs and battling the system's clowns, this is Gbas, Gbos and Greatest Gbo Gbo.

Me: When did you get into school?

Them: If I can remember, I got into school in the year 2019? Yes, 2019.

Me: So, that's like three years now?

Them: Yes, three years. Long ass years.

Me: How have you been in school for three years and you're still in your second year?

Them: That's the problem. Due to these periodic stoppages and then, COVID. I got in in 2019 as this naive fresher...

Me: What month in 2019?

Them: February. I got in in February. In Nigeria, when you get an admission into the university, you're happy especially as someone who didn't get in on the first try. You're very happy. It's almost as if you've achieved something of a serious magnitude.

We both laugh

Them: You know? At that point, it's like you've gotten the whole

world. I had a problem with my admission but I got that sorted. I attended classes for like two weeks...

Me: What was the problem with your admission?

Them: JAMB had changed the subject requirements for the course I initially registered for so that affected me during my clearance. I got that done, attended classes for two weeks in February before COVID-19 came along and we were all asked to leave the premises.

**JAMB- Acronym for Joint Admission Matriculation Board, an examination and regulation body in charge of organizing qualifying exams for Nigerian students who are graduating or have graduated from secondary school. Passing the JAMB exams with a stipulated cut-off mark means automatically qualifying for post-JAMB exams which are written in your university of choice.*

Me: Wait, but the COVID lockdown was in 2020?

Them: No, I got admission in February 2019 but I resumed school and started attending classes in February 2020. It was due to some delays.

Me: Tell me about these delays.

Them: It was the ASUU strike. I had seen my admission online in 2019 but I couldn't start school until the following year because the Nigerian government was owing lecturer salaries and a union strike is usually the only way to get them to pay up.

**ASUU-Acronym for Academic Staff Union of Universities, an independent body of teaching staff which manage, lecture, govern and preside over Nigerian Federal Universities. It consists of lecturers, assistant lecturers, professors and doctors who teach different courses in different universities across Nigeria.*

Me: So, when in 2020 did you actually resume?

Them: February.

Me: February again? That's a whole year from when you got an admission.

Them: Yes.

Me: That's ridiculous.

Them: I got in by February but I had to go back home again due to the announced COVID-19 lockdown. Going back home, everybody thought it was going to be a one-month thing. Two months passed and we were thinking we'd go back in the third month. Six months passed and we were still hoping. Before we knew it, the year was ending and we were still at home.

Me: By this time, you were still at 100 level, in your first semester and you've barely started classes?

Them: Yes. I just dey school for mouth basically. I had attended classes for just two weeks. That was the only actual learning I had done.

**100 Level or 1L- Used to refer to the first year in any Nigerian University. If you spend three years in the University, by the fourth year, you should be in 400 level or 4L.*

**For mouth- A slang in Nigerian pidgin used to mean 'just for talks'. People believe that talk is cheap so when you say something for mouth, it means you're just talking without backing it up with action. For example: These politicians promise us better electricity but we know it's just for mouth.*

Me: For two years?

Them: Yes.

Me: How were you feeling during these times of delay from the 2019 ASUU strike to the 2020 lockdown? What was going through your mind at the time?

Them: In 2019, I didn't feel it so much. I was still attending my JAMB tutorials since my fees hadn't expired yet but 2020 was when it hit me. I felt boxed in like my life wasn't even moving. I don't think I was the only one who felt that way. At that point, everyone was going through it.

Me: Were you talking to your friends or course mates at the time? How were they feeling?

Them: All of us were talking and people were contemplating doing legal and illegal things for money. It was very crazy. I felt like I was in between 'what should I pick and who should I follow?' at that point.

Me: Why do you think people were considering doing legal and illegal things for money?

Them: Because that was the only point. There was no money at that time. Everyone was just at home. You just feel useless when you're just at home doing the same thing every day.

You wake up in the morning, take a shower, brush your teeth, eat, see what's happening on social media, watch TV and see how the pandemic is going, whether you're going to resume anytime soon. Soon, night falls, you go back to bed and repeat the whole thing the next day. Nothing changes. People were looking for ways to learn some handwork that will earn them money. Everyone started learning sewing and barbing; some even started learning and trading in forex while others started doing illegal things like yahoo.

**Yahoo- Nigerian slang for internet fraud.*

Me: When did you come back from the lockdown?

Them: It was a year after we were asked to leave school. It started in February 2020 and I think we got back to school in January or February 2021; either of those two months. When I got back, I found that a lot of people had changed. After the break, it was either you changed for better, for worse or you didn't change at all.

Me: When you got back in January/February 2021, how long did it take before you wrote your first semester exams?

Them: The school curriculum for a semester is four months. So, let's say I resumed in January, the entire semester ran for four months until I wrote my first exams in April, then I had a break that was barely up to two weeks before I resumed for the second semester. The rush was mad at that point.

Me: They were rushing you and your mates due to both the ASUU and COVID 19 delays?

Them: Yeah, it was just constant rushing. If you could not keep up at that point, you might suffer it because your grades will go down.

Me: Could you explain the rush? Give me a picture of what it was like.

Them: Okay. When we first resumed after the lockdown, it was just online classes. We weren't going for classes yet. I was just in my room attending classes on this Google Classrooms app where each student had their own classroom email and password. Some classes were videos while some were just notes and their breakdown followed by a summary column. After that, you could ask your questions.

Me: How effective was this learning process?

Them: It affected some people. For me, I can easily understand

some things by reading a few times but some people found it hard to learn that way since it's not what they are used to. They had to read several times and get explanations from people who had already understood it perfectly. It affected those people.

Where I know it affected me a lot was Maths. You can't actually read Maths. It's not like psychology or philosophy that you can just read and if you don't understand it, you can Google it. With Maths, you have to know formulas, when to apply them and how to get your answers so that needed some actual tutoring. I enrolled for a tutorial class in school but that didn't help at all so I ended up doing it all myself. Maths was a three-unit course and I couldn't afford to mess up.

The tutorials didn't help because we were too many in the class. Everyone wanted to pass Maths and the lockdown seemed to have made everyone's brain soft when it came to complex calculations like that so the pressure was on. At some point during the lockdown, people gave up on reading and studying because there was no end in sight. Why are you reading? School started to look like a scam. The tutorials didn't help me because we were too many in the lecture hall and the tutor focused all his attention on the people in front because they seemed to be the 'smart kids' who arrived first before everyone. At the end of the day, I just stopped going after I had paid in full.

Me: How much did you pay?

Them: I paid 6,000 naira for two courses till the end of the semester. I think I stopped at the fourth or fifth week. I mean, what's the point? I come here every time and I don't learn anything. It was almost like I came to watch the tutor teach everyone else when I could be making progress on my own. Time was running out. I had to meet the smarter kids to put me

through. I ended up getting a C in the course. In the department, that was a W because everyone was failing Maths. My friends were hailing me and calling me sáná; that's what we called the smart kids in my school. But by my own standard, I could've done better for a three-unit course. I just had to let it slide and be thankful. It's been tough.

**Sáná pronounced as Shanub- A Yorùbá slang which directly translates to 'use/ put light or fire'. It means to put light or fire on something to make it lit or perfect. In this context, Sáná means a person who comes with all the fire to light up their grades; a smart kid.*

Me: So, when did next semester start?

Them: They gave us a two week break but I added another extra week for myself because I can't comman kill myself. So for me, it started by the ending of May.

**Can't comman kill myself- A slang in Nigerian pidgin used to express one's passion to put in work, deliver or show up without actually stressing or 'killing' one's self.*

Me: And then it lasted till?

Them: August.

Me: So, you wrote your second semester exams in August?

Them: I wrote my exams in September. Yeah, between September and October. Then I went home in October.

Me: From October till date, what has the journey been like? Any other strikes?

Them: Yes. Second semester in first year was when Aishat Adesina, a final year student of Foreign Languages, died and that caused a huge uproar on campus. It was due to the fact that the

school health centre wasn't competent enough to take care of her. I asked around and I heard that when she went there at around 8 a.m. or 9 p.m. at night, she was supposedly unconscious but she wasn't attended to by the staff she met. This negligence led to her untimely death.

Me: When was this?

Them: It was when we were writing our second semester exams in October. We had to pause the exams to go home because there were serious protests and riots in school. As students, we have a way of standing up for things like this. Everyone knows we don't take such things lightly. The Vice Chancellor couldn't handle the matter as well as some other matters and rumour has it that that's what allegedly led to his impeachment.

The student riots for Aishat's death were serious; it was even happening in the city. Within the campus, students were carrying banners, singing solidarity anthems and being dispersed by campus security. Due to the disruptions, the VC had to ask students to vacate the premises. That's how we went home in the middle of exams.

Me: Can you give me a proper timeline between when news of her death broke out and when everyone had to leave campus?

Them: I was preparing for an exam on the day I heard. That was a Friday, I remember. I went to read for an exam I had the next day. Exams had started so this was at the ending of September. That was when the news started gathering rounds and the riots started. People started telling their own health centre stories about how they've gone there with serious health issues but didn't get attended to on time. I had also experienced the health centre's incompetence first hand.

I've seen how they delay and push the responsibility on each other. "Nurse xyz, come and do this", the nurse won't even budge so they'll push it to another person. All this while, the sick student is just there waiting while their condition is getting worse. This was their mode of operation at the time. Now, I think they've adjusted a bit due to Aishat's death and the pressure it brought. You know say na until when pesin die, na when dem go open eye say dis tin wey we do no make sense. So, all these happened and we had to go home again.

That Friday evening, the school authorities had announced that all students should leave the hostel. They didn't want to see anyone in the premises. That was their way of telling us to go home. I think Aisha had died on Thursday evening and by Friday morning, the news was everywhere. That evening, everyone was asked to go home. The riots were intense and the school authorities were scared of vandalization of school property by the angry protesters. For me, I left school the next week on Monday or Tuesday.

**You know say na until when pesin die, na when dem go open eye say dis tin wey we do no make sense- An expression in Nigerian pidgin which when translated to English means, "You know, it's when someone dies from a problem caused by the system, that's when everyone decides to sit up and fix the problem."*

Me: So in all of these, second semester exams have been paused?

Them: Yeah. Imagine preparing for this big exam that is a departmental course and this just comes out of nowhere? Now, we're just home and the urge to read is dying again.

Me: Omo! All these in the first year? I'm sorry because that's so crazy.

Them: **Laughs**

**Omo-* A Yorùbá slang popularly used by Nigerians to express anything from shock, disappointment, surprise, excitement, confusion and any other emotion the speaker may be trying to communicate depending on the context.

Me: For me, I hate that when we started this interview, you talked about how when you got into school, you felt like you had achieved the biggest thing ever so for you to be in the first year and all these crazy things have happened? Before we get into the rest of the year, how were you feeling in this period regarding everything?

Them: I was exhausted. I kept wondering when I would finish first year and if this was what school was really about. It's like everything was just playing with us. Come and do school, then we go and suddenly, we have to go home again. When would all this end?

Me: Do you believe that you or your course mates were ever depressed? Because this is just school, not personal life issues, inflation struggles or any other struggles that you all must be going through as young Nigerians?

Them: At that point, I was depressed. I felt really sad. I thought about how I should be in my second year and I'm just stuck. Especially when you compare yourself to your mates in private universities or those schooling abroad, you just feel really bad. I have a friend that was attending lectures via Zoom during the lockdown. She finished a whole semester, wrote exams in her house and went on holiday. Hearing those types of things just made me ask a lot of self-doubting questions. But then you remember that it's not just you in the system and you're not going through it alone.

I just have to thank God for life at the end of the day but at the same time, it's not something that I pray that anyone should experience.

Me: I feel you. When did you get back to school after everyone was asked to leave?

Them: I got back to school in December.

Me: December?

Them: Yeah, we spent the whole of October and November at home based on the school's order.

Me: You didn't know how long you were going to be home for?

Them: We didn't know. They just told us to go home till further notice. It was called off by the ending of November. I resumed by the first week of December.

Me: From the ending of September to December? After all these, you're still in the middle of writing exams?

Them: Yes. When we got back to school, the general OT was that we had exams so we just jumped right into it. No time to chill, talk or catch up. Just dive in immediately because we had to finish the exams that December before Christmas.

Typically, our exams aren't clustered together. We do a paper and we won't have another for like two days before we do the next one. But that time, I resumed on a Thursday and that Saturday, I had a paper. We finished before Christmas and went home for the holidays.

**OT- Street slang for the English word, orientation.*

Me: So, you finished in December, went home for Christmas and got back in January 2022. From January till now as we speak in April, what has it been like?

Them: January to April? We're currently on another strike again.

Me: Ah!

Them: **Laughs** We're on another strike again o.

**Ab!* - A Nigerian expression used to shock, surprise or disappointment depending on the context.

Me: Wetin dey go on for here? Wetin dey sup?

Them: It was in January when we started hearing rumours of another strike. Nobody paid attention to it. After all that we've been through? Must be a silly rumour or a bad joke. We spent the first week in school and by the second week, the gist started flying about another strike. We were still having classes but the lecturers under ASUU weren't teaching us again. That was when it started looking like we might be going on another strike.

**Wetin dey go on for here?* - A Nigerian pidgin expression which means, 'What's going on here?'

**Wetin dey sup?* - A Nigerian pidgin expression which means, 'What's happening?' or 'What's going on?'

**Abeg-* A Nigerian pidgin expression used to mean 'please'.

Me: Who was teaching you guys?

Them: The folks under CONUA. It's another association of lecturers in our school other than ASUU. I think they have different people paying them. Maybe the state or something but not ASUU.

Imagine offering nine courses but only having classes in one course because eight of your lecturers are under ASUU and you have to stay for that one because it's Maths which is a three-unit course so you can't go home? You're just burning transport fare to go to campus for one class and sometimes, it might not even hold. The ASUU strike had been on for a short while but we remained in school for that one course. Sometimes, the lecturer wouldn't show and sometimes, he'd just teach us for 30 minutes and then leave. He eventually asked if we should suspend the class till the strike was over. That was how we ended up suspending the class and accepting the strike.

**CONUA- Acronym for Congress of Universities Academics; an association of lecturers from five different Nigerian universities which emerged in 2019 following cracks in ASUU.*

Me: What else was happening in school at this time? What was it like?

Them: Everyone was on strike. People had started going home. Some people didn't even stay for the Maths class because they didn't have enough money and the whole thing wasn't profiting them. Some people are collecting 5,000 naira per month for allowance from their parents and you want them to use it to attend just one class? People started giving up and going home.

On the last day when the lecturer suggested the suspension, I could count how many of us were in class. A course that is taken by two departments of over 200 students each yet we were so few in class. The man just freed the thing and gave us the go ahead to go home if we wanted. That's how we all started going home. This was in February which was a month after we resumed for the year.

Me: How were you feeling at this time? You had just gotten back from Christmas break and there was a 2-month strike before then and now, this?

Them: You know how you just want to scream loudly into your pillow? That was my feeling.

Me: I can only imagine. So, you got back in March and this is April. You're not home for Easter, you've just been home since.

Them: Yup. This is the first Easter I'm spending at home courtesy of ASUU. Those are all the delays I've faced so far. It's just a lot and I don't wish it on anyone. There are going to be delays but then, this is a lot. You know? All you want is to just get in, get a degree and get out but look at. I'm even tired of saying I'm studying this course and I'm tired of the course itself.

Me: I can understand you because you've gone through an ASUU strike as an intro to the university life, a pandemic, a lockdown, a riot, an internal school-mandated strike and now, you're in the middle of another ASUU strike.

Them: Even with this strike sef, there are some other things happening in the school. You know I mentioned earlier that the VC was impeached? Yeah, they appointed a new VC but this new person isn't an indigene of the state just like the last one. I think they just managed the last one because maybe, he could be the right man for the job. This new person not being an indigene again caused another uproar in the city. The people there are quite tribalistic. They want their own people filling in such key positions so they can stand out on their own land. That caused another uproar in school and there were protests.

Me: Wait, when was this?

Them: This was in February this year when the strike had started and I was waiting for my friend before we went home in March.

There was a protest happening outside school regarding the affairs in the school. The protests extended into the school premises and we all saw it. There was this viral video of women dressed in white dancing and parading in the premises around Oduduwa Hall; people said that was their own way of claiming territory and enforcing boundaries.

Meanwhile, I heard the next indigene of the state who could've filled in the position wasn't even in the top five of the ranking. He was rumoured to be like number seven out of all the candidates for the job but that's not how it works. He isn't qualified according to the job requirements. Anyways, I hope it gets resolved before the ASUU strike gets called off because that could be another internal strike again on its own. If ASUU calls off the strike and that still hasn't been resolved, we're not going anywhere o. That one would be our own personal wahala.

**Wabala- A slang in Nigerian pidgin which means problem or trouble.*

Me: When dem sing say problem e no dey finish, na una dem sing am for?

Them: I say school don tayya me like dis. Me, I don tayya. I don dey talk am. Plus other personal things again, I'm really tired. We could be here for another year; it's just vibes at this point. I'm just taking life as it comes.

**Problem e no dey finish- A line from a popular song by Nigerian singer, 1 da Banton.*

**Tayya- A word in Nigerian pidgin which means tire or tired depending on the context.*

**I don dey talk am- A Nigerian pidgin expression which means "I've been saying it since."*

Me: I'm so sorry about all that has happened. I hate this for you. You get into school planning how your life will go, when it'll end so you can just graduate and live your life and all these just pops up from nowhere. Things you cannot control. It's really terrible. I'm so sorry. This country just finds a way to crush dreams.

Them: Yes, it does o.

Me: In the meantime, what have you been doing for yourself to cope with constant ups and downs?

Them: I didn't used to watch movies due to my terrible eyesight but right now, I try to watch movies to take my mind off things. I play video games a lot now. I go to my friend's place, we laugh, we gist, we talk about life and those things help you not overthink what's going on in your own school because now, you're rubbing minds with other people who are experiencing the same things so you realize you're not alone or yours isn't so bad plus social media, of course.

Me: I'm so sorry. I think about it and all I can say is I'm sorry because...

Them: It's deep. It's very deep. It's not something you can sugar-coat, it's deep.

Me: It is o. Because these things happen all the time or because so many things are happening in Nigeria at once, it's easy to just forget these things, how they matter and impact everyone. If you don't isolate these things and look at them separately, you won't get how big of a deal it is.

It's easy to just generalise and say "Nigeria is crazy", but let's pick out the points; let's isolate it because it's crazier than you think it is. How are students still in their second year when they've been in school for three years with no carryovers whatsoever?

You've barely scratched the surface of the second school year and there's another strike again. You've been in the first semester since January and you've not done anything or gone anywhere.

Them: We've not done anything yet. I've barely resumed. I just did one course before I had to go home again. And that one sef, I don't have full knowledge of it. I just dey go class make I just show; anything I grab, I grab. There's no ginger and there's nothing to motivate me anymore.

Me: When exactly would you say your ginger for school died?

Them: It died this year when we started hearing rumours about another strike. I thought it was a joke because it can't be. Then you start to see the signs that show that the strike has started, with or without your acceptance. Like, this thing is happening again? I'm in a football team in school where were preparing for semi-finals and this ASUU thing came up and everyone had to go home. School brings us together for a lot of things so when strikes like these happen, tournaments stop, friends go home, classes stop and everything is just on hold.

Me: What would you like anybody that's reading from outside the country to know about being a student in Nigeria?

Them: I won't advise them not to come to Nigeria. Just don't say you have big dreams and you want to achieve them in Nigeria because things just don't go according to plan. Things just aren't going well. I think when the Gen-Zs start taking over, things will get in place. I believe so. But for now, this country is nothing to write home about and we're just on God here.

I don't think school is something I can give up on because I care about football and school is the only opportunity for me to belong to a school team and play in a tournament. I don't think anyone should give up on school because the extracurriculars

matter too. I can say this is what I achieved in school despite school being stressful; I improved in passing, heading, running and I'm more fit; that's my own victory. At least, my coach can vouch for me. Have an extra-curricular. If you can talk, join the debate team; if football or volleyball is your thing, join those teams. We're at a point in Nigeria where school can only get you so far but I don't think it can carry you till the end.

If I went to school for the sake of knowledge, education or a first-class degree, I'd be more depressed. I'm just here to be awarded a degree and win a lot of trophies at college, state and the federal level. As long as I don't get an extra year and I pass with a good enough grade that justifies all my suffering, I'm good.

**The author would like to note that at the writing and publishing of this interview, the 2022 ASUU strike is still on and the subject and their mates are still at home awaiting an update. These are also very political times as the 2023 elections are upon us with banners and propaganda going up everywhere in the country.*

Please note that voting for the very people who create these problems and promise to solve them as a way of "getting into power" isn't wise. Don't do that. Instead, shine ya eye and use ya sense. Get your PVC, stay hydrated, and get ready to use your PVC to design your own future.

-OMO-



Medium: Vocals on paper

Description: This is a waveform art of the word, OMO, a Yorùbá slang popularly used by Nigerians to express anything from shock, disappointment, surprise, excitement, confusion and any other emotion the speaker may be trying to communicate depending on the context.

Artist: Jane Efagwu

Year: 2022

4th Agenda

-IS THIS A SAFE SPACE? -

That's a good question. One day, sometime in 2017, I was going to work at the magazine company at Opebi, Ikeja, where I did my mandatory Industrial Training. It was a six-month program where I went to work every day, five days a week, for six months. I can't remember what month it was when I was on my way to work and I almost got kidnapped. At the time, I was living at Ikorodu and working at Ikeja which was quite the distance. This meant that I had to wake up early to make it to work on time unless I'd be stuck in traffic and I had to leave the office very early as well or else I'd still be stuck in traffic. On the day of the incident, it wasn't even 8 a.m. yet when I resumed at the office for work. There was no one there except one guy who lived in the area and got to the office way before everyone else did. As we greeted each other, he could tell that I was visibly shaken. He asked what happened that morning and I tried to narrate it as best as I could.

Every day, I entered the Bus Rapid Transit popularly known as the BRT from my bus stop at Agric after which I would stop at Maryland bus stop where I'd enter a bus heading to Opebi/Allen. I'd drop at Opebi and walk right into my office beside Sweet Sensation. That was what I did every day and nothing strange had ever happened. However, that day was different. I had dropped at the Maryland bus stop but I couldn't catch a bus. I waited for a bit and no one pulled up. I was contemplating walking further down the bus stop when this cab rolled by and started hailing passengers to the same place I was headed.

“Opebi Allen! Opebi Allen! Opebi Allen!”

“That's me”, I thought. What a relief! I hated standing in public for that long. I skipped over and got into the back of the cab. Apart from the driver and a male passenger in the passenger seat, there was some guy at the back seat where I had just got in and he was about to pay and get off. Nothing out of the ordinary. The only thing I noticed was that as I entered, none of the other passengers at the bus stop got in with me. We continued into Mobolaji Bank Anthony Way where I noticed that the driver had stopped calling passengers as enthusiastically as he was doing before I got in.

We passed a thick line of passengers in front of the Mobil filling station and he didn't try to hail for passengers. The passengers we saw didn't try to board the cab either; no one budged on both sides. I was still the only passenger in the cab when I was started to getting a little suspicious. Didn't this guy want to make money from the early morning rush? As I pondered, the passenger in front said he wanted to stop and get off. This was in front of the Army Cantonment on MBA Way. The driver parked, the passenger got off and I moved to the front seat.

The passenger paid the driver who dropped the money in his stash under the radio and made to leave when I suddenly noticed that the money that was paid wasn't in Naira. It was some foreign currency that I'd never seen before. I pointed it out to the driver and he looked confused. This was when he called the passenger back. He had already started strolling away but he wasn't too far from the car yet. I could see him in the side mirror. When he heard us, he strolled back to ask what the problem was. The driver explained by saying that the money paid wasn't in Naira so he couldn't accept the payment. The passenger who couldn't speak English or pidgin replied saying that that was all he had as he was coming from a neighbouring country. The driver and I asked how

he entered Nigeria and made it to Ikeja, the capital of Lagos, with no Naira? The passenger started to explain but by this time, the driver had started to raise his voice saying he just wanted his money. I was in the passenger's seat right in between the both of them looking from side to side and wondering what was going on. At a point, I took the driver's side and I started to ask for his money from the passenger who seemed confused as well.

We were all arguing about Naira or paper when this red car pulled up from behind us and blocked the cab in a confrontational manner. An unknown man got down from the car and started hitting the bonnet of the cab, screaming at me to get down immediately. I was visibly confused as to who the guy was while I also wondered what kind of morning I was having. He saw my puzzled expression to which he continued even louder. I got scared, grabbed the 100 naira which I had already paid for the ride from the driver's stash and hopped out of the car. When I got off, he continued screaming at me, asking if I didn't know these guys and their tactics. By this time, the entire MBA Way was staring at us including buses on their way to Opebi and traffic on the other lane heading back to Maryland; everyone was staring. I replied by saying I didn't know them and I had just entered the cab from the bus stop. From my explanation, he could tell that I was truly unaware of what was going on. My perplexed look prompted him to break down the situation so I could get the message. He looked me dead in the face as he revealed that these men in front of me were not actually driver and passenger. Instead, they were a team of relentless kidnapers who he busted almost every day, on that same road and at that same spot because no matter how many times he did it, they still found their way back. My ears tinged from being slapped with this new information.

After he said that, there was a silence amongst the four of us. Everyone was looking but two people were plotting. As this man moved closer to where I was standing on the sidewalk, the 'passenger' who had pretended like he couldn't speak proper English jumped into the passenger seat where I just got out from, slammed the door hard while him and the 'driver' sped off like criminals do in action movies. But this was no movie. I was still looking dazed when this man continued by saying that he had been monitoring them for a while now so he had come to know their usual routes, tactics and victims.

He asked if I didn't notice that I was the only one in the car and they didn't pick anyone else after I entered? Unknown to me, the cab was being observed since I was picked up and out of curiosity as to what the kidnapers might be up to so early in the day, he followed them all the way here. Their strategy was simple. The currency argument we were having would've peaked, the 'passenger' would've been asked to get back into the car since he couldn't pay and the 'driver' would've sped off. Not to Opebi or Allen Avenue but to their den in the middle of nowhere. No matter how much I would've protested, they would've kept driving and I wouldn't be able to jump out or get off. That would've been the end for me.

I asked how he knew all that and he answered that he was a retired official who used to work in the force. As a way of keeping active in retirement, he monitored that Way personally so he knew everything happening there. I was assuming that since we were in front of the Army Cantonment, he was probably a retired Army officer. That's why the kidnapers were so scared. I had so many questions but I was so shocked that all I could say was a heartfelt thank you to which he advised that I never enter unmarked vehicles no matter how much of a hurry I was in. I simply nodded,

said another thank you and started strolling down the sidewalk.

A *dánfó* passed by and the conductor asked if I was going to Opebi. This time, it had real passengers. I said yes, got on and that was how I finally got to work that day. News of the incident broke out in the office that day and my co-workers came to sympathise with me. Some started offering their own stories of the people they knew or heard of who went out and never came back again. It was scary because as an intern, I wasn't given an office ID card so no one would even know where to trace me to. My school ID card was the only thing I had and that would take them all the way to Benin City when my home and work were in Lagos. It would have been long. I could've disappeared just like that. My parents would've waited all day for me to get back, preparing their usual where-have-you-been scolding but they'd never see me. When people asked, they'd say she dressed up, went to work and never came back. My siblings wouldn't have a big sister anymore. They wouldn't even know where she disappeared to. My parents wouldn't know what to say. Their baby girl would be gone. It broke my heart to think about it.

The day had ended with me safe at home but I still had so many questions to ask. How did they still manage to get back on the road after that man was able to bust them consistently? How did he know them so well? How did they know him so well? Why were they so scared of him? Why didn't they just stop coming there every day? Where would I have been taken to? What would I have seen there? What would have become of me? What would my parents have done? When would everyone find out that I was missing? Would I have made it back? Will this happen to me again tomorrow? Can I really stay safe like my colleagues advised? Is this a safe space?

Guess What?

5th Agenda

-THIS IS NOT A SAFE SPACE-

I still haven't told my parents what happened that day. They'd find out for the first time while reading this book. I came back home that day like it was just another day at the office. I told my sister and she was sad. She was really scared; I could hear it in how she looked at me as we talked that evening. I don't know how my parents would've reacted but the next day when I was leaving for work again, their minds wouldn't be at ease. I escaped those kidnapers and my colleagues said I was lucky but you know who needed this 'luck'? Bamise Ayanwole.

In March 2022, Bamise Ayanwole, a 22-year-old fashion designer boarded the state-owned Bus Rapid Transit aka BRT from Chevron to Oshodi on her way to see her sister who lives in Ota, Ogun State for the weekend but never arrived at her destination. Her friends and family held an online and physical search for her until her lifeless, naked body was found somewhere on Lagos Island about nine days after her disappearance. #JusticeForBamise became a trending hashtag with several Nigerians expressing disbelief at how insecure the state-owned public transportation system really is. Some reports say the driver of the bus she entered was solely responsible for her murder, others say the driver collaborated with kidnapers to kill her but with the kind of justice system we have, we would never know who really murdered Bamise, why they did or what punishment they would face.

To put it in context, the BRT is everyone's preferred means of public transport because of how fast and safe it used to be. My parents would always tell us to only enter the BRTs when we went

out but when news of Bamise's death broke, my mother called and she didn't have anything to say. I could tell that she felt defeated by the system. She just told me to stay safe and mind where I went to. School children, pregnant women, aged members of the population and everyone else uses the BRT system but even that isn't safe. You might want to argue that Bamise was alone on that bus but you know who wasn't alone? The passengers on the Kaduna train which was bombed in the same month.

Imagine boarding a train to a neighbouring city less than three hours away and getting attacked by “unknown gunmen” in the middle of your ride? Unbelievable? Well, that's just another Monday evening in my country. According to The Guardian, the attack came just two days after these same “unknown gunmen” attacked the Kaduna airport and killed a security guard. See the pattern? In 2014, about 276 girls were kidnapped by armed men of the Boko Haram terrorist group from their hostels in the Chibok Government Secondary School for Girls in North-Eastern Nigeria. As discussed in the third agenda of this book, education in Nigeria sometimes feels like a scam because tell me why parents would strive so hard to send their kids to school only for them to be kidnapped by terrorists in the middle of the night? A government owned secondary school for only girls? Shouldn't that have one of the highest levels of security in the state?

In Nigeria, when you say something is state or government owned, most people won't take you seriously. Whether it's transportation or education, there's a strong pattern of the government disappointing its citizens when it comes to protecting or providing. Imagine the shock on the face of the protesters during the 2020 #ENDSARS protests when men in army uniform opened fire on them without warning? With the

most notable massacre happening at the Lekki Toll Gate, the peaceful protests turned bloody once state owned security arrived at the various protest grounds around the country. How do you respond to a protest on police brutality with more police brutality? Is that the duty of protection? Is that where taxpayer's funds go? To buy bullets that can sustain long hours of shooting at innocent protesters and fuelling vehicles that cart away with dead bodies in the middle of the night? Where are these shooters when the actual terrorists attack railways and secondary schools in the middle of the night? Since when did peaceful protests become a crime for which the price to pay is death on the spot?

The Nigerian government doesn't protect its citizens. It protects its interests. It's sad because Nigerian lives don't matter anywhere. Not in Nigeria and not outside Nigeria. No one cares. Till today, there has been no justice for Bamise, the passengers on the Kaduna train, the Chibok girls of which over a hundred of them are still missing, the innocent protesters killed during the #ENDSARS protests and so many other Nigerian citizens who the country has failed to protect. No investigations, no real arrests and no real justice. Instead they count on us to forget and move on with our daily lives until another massacre happens. They count on us to only remember these problems when it's time for elections so they can promise us false solutions to the problems they create.

These politicians and their families don't use public transport, regular air lines or attend state-owned schools so they are usually unbothered by the fact. During the #ENDSARS protests, Femi Otedola's daughter, DJ Cuppy, took to Twitter to show her support for the movement. She said she was doing that despite being warned not to get involved in the protests. Coming from a family known for its political affiliations, the stand was seen as a

brave one by those who saw it as such. It begged several questions. How are the people who represent us able to avoid using public transportation, government owned education or interfering in nationwide protests? How are they able to solve problems within these sectors if they aren't even familiar with the concepts? How do they believe in police brutality or insecurity when they use private security?

This is why most people want to emigrate from the country. This is not a safe space. If an overloaded trailer doesn't land on your vehicle and explodes, "unknown gunmen" could pull up and make themselves known or you could experience some form of police brutality that could end your life on the spot. Making it back home is now a thing of luck, grace and prayers. The insecurity problem in this country has made most people become heavily religious which in turn gives way for religious extremism. Security we pay for and should hold the government accountable to has now been left solely to supreme divine beings because the government only protects their interests and not the citizens themselves. You can't make this up.

Insecurity breaks my heart. It claims thousands of lives every day and there's no visible end to it all. In fact, people here are now desensitised to the constant loss of lives. That girl died? Okay. Those people got robbed? That's not new. Those kids got kidnapped? The hashtag will trend and it'll die soon. Not all deaths are reported by the media yet look how desensitised we already are. But I don't blame anyone. At some point you can't keep up anymore. Everyone I know, including me, has invented some kind of bubble they live in to protect their mental health. Consuming that amount of bad news regularly isn't healthy. They'd just rather remain in this bubble where they can function properly without losing their minds totally. That's where we're at

right now. In this state, anyone would take any form of false promises of peace and “problem solving” just to feel sane again.

Do what you have to do but understand this. No matter how sane you feel, never get too comfortable. This is not a safe space.

-AIR THE VENTS-

Welcome to Nigeria where
Only God can save us
Fuck your faves really
Those are not your saviours
Always asking favours
Like cheap, unpaid labours
I'll save my good morning
Those are not my neighbours!
Our labour shall never be in vain?
I've been labouring all my life
Find labour in my veins
We've been chained all our lives
Find ice in our chains
Clap the fish for swimming
Joys you found rice in your grains
Greed stained our white
We pretend when we
Take pride in our stains
The horse on the coat has gone lost in its reins
It's how we went back to nothing
But nothing was the same

6th Agenda

-KNOCK, KNOCK, BREAKFAST! -

She had been sharpening knives to execute special menus designed by different restaurant managers when she finally decided that she was going to leave the country to sharpen her skills abroad. Going to culinary school was the dream for those who valued the fine art of cooking and presenting a meal. She had a dream of becoming one degree hotter but the education system in Nigeria was a mess. There were no official degrees in culinary arts; just short courses which would never give her the desired knowledge or even award a degree. After a little research, she decided she was going to Canada for school.

She was referred to an agent through a friend and they kickstarted the process together. The agent advised her on the kind of school to apply to; it had to be one that awarded the degree and also readily accepted international students without any stress. She was glad to be working with the agent because she didn't know a thing about travelling abroad let alone applying for school overseas, getting in, paying for tuition, accommodation and all of the other aspects of the process. As we talked, she revealed that she had never communicated with her chosen school directly. The agent handled everything. He only informed her about milestones, deposits to be made and the amount of time they'd have to wait for applications to be approved. She knew it was a risk to give one man all that power and at some point, she started to doubt him. Sometimes, he wouldn't pick his calls or reply to his messages for a stretch. That scared her. Later, he'd be back online explaining how busy he was and she'd be calm again.

It was one of those schools where she didn't need to write any actual exam to get in. She was applying for an undergraduate

degree and the school recognized Nigeria as an English-speaking country. For the course she was applying for, she was going to use her SSCE results to apply since she had a pass in English and other subject requirements. She had to clarify that she had already gotten an undergraduate degree in her country which would explain how old she was. It was a simple process. She emailed the necessary documents and had to wait for a short while. Then, an email came in. She had been admitted to her chosen university in Canada!

**SSCE- Acronym for Senior Secondary Certificate for Education; a secondary school leaving certificate exam organized by West African Examination Committee (WAEC) in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Gambia. It is written by students who are graduating from senior secondary school and about to enter university.*

It was time to apply for the Canadian student visa and that was when it got tricky. The process of applying for the school had drained her financially that she had to take several weeks to gather funds to apply for the visa. It took a while but she did it. The agent had said they'd have to apply through the Canadian embassy in Ghana for easy approval. For the country and the type of visa she was applying for, she didn't need to do any actual interviews either physically or remotely. All they wanted was the payment for the visa application and some documents; one of which would be a bank statement and a declaration of assets owned in Nigeria. An extended relative was supposed to provide these documents for her to use but he wasn't in the country at the time. What to do? Time was running out. Her agent told her not to worry. He was going to get it for her because that's what agents do; they get things done. But it was going to cost her extra. He initially gave her a quote for one quarter of a million naira to help get the statement. There were a lot of palms to grease, he

said. She didn't have up to that amount of money. 150,000 naira was all she could afford and he'd just have to work with that. The account in question had to have a balance of about 20 million naira for it to be considered eligible for the process. When he said he could do it, she believed him because as an agent, it wasn't the first time he was running student visa for his clients. She wasn't sure how it worked but she knew that many times, agents had contacts in banks who knew top customers with bank account statements that were heavy enough to support the cause. He'd just have to cut some players a piece of the pie and they'd let him in.

Now, when he got the statement, he didn't show her. According to the agent, the account was confidential even to her as a way of protecting the owner of the account. She didn't verify if the account was an active one with enough money and a recent deposit, withdrawal or payment activity but she didn't press for it. He just obtained the account and sent it along for her visa application process; all he showed her was the receipt for the visa application. Anytime he sent anything to the school or embassy in her name, she would receive emails to confirm her submission, stages or approval so she'd know he was sending the documents for real.

This is how her visa was processed. Soon after, she got a mail from the embassy. It was a rejection mail. To them at the embassy, the account submitted showed that she didn't have enough funds to see her through her school and stay in Canada. They also said that the absence of notable assets on her application showed that there was no reason why she would want to come back to Nigeria once she was granted the visa. It was based on these reasons that her visa could not be granted. She could pay tuition after she was sure she had gotten her visa but she had already paid an acceptance fee for her school and this meant she'd have to forfeit

the admission. The entire process had cost her over 700,000 naira including the 150,000 naira for the account procurement and the 250,000 she paid for the agent's service charge. This does not include the cost of data, airtime or the time she spent waiting in between milestones to get feedback from the school or the embassy.

She might have taken a loss but she still wants to get that degree. This time around, she's considering the United Kingdom. She heard that the UK is now more accepting towards international students. One of the reasons why she pursued Canada was because as a woman, she really wanted to be away from family members and their gender agenda. She wanted to be free to live and explore the city. It's why she was pursuing and paying for the entire process alone. But with the UK, she has siblings and family members who are willing to support her especially after they heard how the whole Canada thing went. She even mentioned that she already found a school in the UK and is about to email them to make enquiries on their application process and their international student policy.

We talked about what she'd do differently this time. There would still be a middleman helping her process the applications but this time, it would be a family member in the UK or a close friend; not a total stranger. Like she said, she knew the entire thing was a risk. She was aware of the possibility that it could be a go or a no so when she received the rejection mail, she had prepared herself for it already. This doesn't mean that it didn't hurt. It hurt very bad. She resolved that it was either she tried again when she had more money or she continued working at her day job. It's one thing she was thankful for; that she didn't quit her job or do something dramatic with the hopes that she'd be leaving the country soon.

She was able to get back to work to raise money for her next travel project. She'd like people to know that leaving the country doesn't have to be a do or die affair. You don't have to put all your eggs in some basket abroad. These things never really go according to plan. Putting all your hopes and quitting your job just to leave the country is not a good idea. There's life beyond emigration so please, don't stress yourself. If it will be, it will be. If not, e go be.

7th Agenda

-WE MOVE! -

It must've been some years ago when he decided to leave the country for good. It was a trend at the time like the baggy jeans and squatting in pictures. People were leaving the country in droves and there were people making a living out of the people leaving the country in droves. "It was all happening in Benin City", he recalls, "I didn't even tell my mum I was leaving because I didn't want her to freak out." He wanted the better life and at the time, he was convinced that it wasn't here in Nigeria. He wanted to see the world, own it, make money and put his family on for life. Where would he go? The answer was simple- Italy. Way before the American or Canadian dream, there was the European dream. But you couldn't sleep through this one.

It was a long story; we were still talking when dinner arrived but to move smoothly from Nigeria to Italy, you had to have guts and of course, money. Lots of money. There were several hands to be moistened and the walk was long. People who embarked on the journey couldn't bring any bags or luggage to keep all that money. The solution was to convert the money to some foreign currency with value.

They kicked off the journey by travelling from Benin City to Kano. It was on that road from Benin that the first set of hands were moistened. The policemen at the checkpoints knew where they were going so to avoid wahala, just "give dem something." The bus trip ended at the outskirts of Kano where they would link the men on bikes who would drive them through a narrow desert at night. This narrow desert would connect them from Kano to Niger. For context, the bike men in the North do a madness on

the wheels. Fast and furious where? These men were flying. “You can't fall off the bike o. Nobody go see you cos na night we dey move. Na full speed until we reach Niger.”

The trip from Kano to Niger took a whole day. Getting to Niger, they boarded tiny Peugeot and Corollas which would take them from Zinder to the Agadez region, an area of Niger situated in the Sahara Desert. At Agadez, he had to pause for a break. Money and logistics could either speed up the process or slow it down. Some people spent a month or two in Niger trying to gather more money by working or receiving funds from their loved ones at home while some moved on immediately after a day or two. It all depended on your personal “connections” on the journey but either way, there was a departure date for every city they had to get to.

The “connections” were big Alhajis who owned travel vehicles, knew the roads, the distance and the obstacles they would encounter. They picked days like Mondays or Tuesdays when the desert would be calmer to move on to Libya. For this part of the trip, they made use of Hilux cars because of their strength in ploughing through the rough and sloppy terrains in the desert. The drivers would cut wood from a tree grown in the desert and fasten the wooden planks to the back of each car so passengers could hold on to as they navigated the desert. He would later spend two weeks in the desert due to a faulty vehicle which overheated from lack of water and the harsh weather conditions. According to him, there were just two wells in the desert; there was one he called the first well which went as deep as 80 metres. Locals would fall inside while fetching water with jerry cans and their bodies would decay in the well. People who would fetch water from the well would see body parts like hairs, fingers and toes; it was tough. Their car would later be towed by other cars

headed to the same place and that was how they made it out of the desert.

He remembered the desert as a place with its own soul. Some passengers would wander off from the camp where the drivers and other passengers were fixing the car because they thought they heard someone call their name. Some would say they saw a family member or a close friend and they were going after them to see what they needed. These mirages led some people to their untimely deaths in the desert. It was part of the road show. Only the strongest and the most focused people survived. You could tell that several people from former camps had made those mistakes before; the desert was littered with skulls, skeletons and bones of people who had fallen for the desert and its tricks. Some other people had fallen from their Hilux as the drivers sped through; the drivers were known to move very fast and never stopped even when any passenger fell off. The drivers would zoom off leaving those passengers stranded in the desert. One of the passengers on his own Hilux fell off and the passengers behind called the driver's attention. After much ado, the driver came down, whipped everyone at the back with a cane before he finally went to pick the fallen passenger.

For some people, the trip from Agadez to Libya took about three to five days; he had a friend who got to Europe in two weeks. For him on a faulty Hilux, it took about two weeks to get to Libya. Getting to Libya was a milestone and from there, another set of payments were required to continue the trip. They arrived at a place called Downtown. Here, it was a matter of payments and participation. Even when you had paid, you couldn't move until the driver had other passengers who had paid too so everyone can be loaded into a cab that will take them to Tripoli, the capital, where they'd meet another set of connections to settle payments

for the next part of the trip across the Mediterranean Sea. However, this wasn't the case for him.

The trip from Benin City to Libya had cost him a lot. He didn't have enough to proceed with the others so he arrived at Quatrun where he said he lived in a place called the Ghetto which was run by Nigerians like himself. They would ask what you came to Libya for and how long you'd be staying. This was how they charged you for your stay. The ghetto was an open space similar to a church ground with tarpaulins and tents for refugees and immigrants to stay. It costs about two to five dinars daily and they accepted lodgings on credit because of their type of clientele. He could stay there for a whole week without paying until he got paid on the seventh day and continued the cycle. As for getting a job in Libya, that was as easy as living in the ghetto.

He described the Libyans as people who were willing to pay for any type of domestic labour. In a typical Libyan home, there was always stuff to be done like doing the dishes, cutting the grass, painting the walls, washing clothes, escorting home owners to the market, loading their vehicles with the supplies, following them home to assist with offloading them or even demolishing and rebuilding an entire house from scratch. At the time when he was there, the Libyan economy was very stable so the Libyans would pay cash for anything as long as it made their lives easier.

Everyone who needed work would come to a place called Shogun which was a work ground where refugees looking for jobs would gather, waiting to be approached and picked by their new employers. Anyone who could do any domestic work could get money back then. According to him, life in Libya was so good, he almost didn't want to continue his trip. The cost of living was low and the quality of living was very high; the Fanta in Libya was

different from the one at home. It tasted like real orange with all the sweetness of the juice in the bottle but it didn't even cost as much as it did back home. He believes that Gaddafi set Libya up in a progressive manner that made it convenient for Libyans and refugees who came there to work, live or pass through to Europe. Life was sweet in Libya but it wasn't safe.

Gaddafi's death meant that some parts of the country were unsafe for anyone, especially black immigrants and refugees or black Libyans. Gun violence had started becoming a problem at the time; even 10-year olds had guns and they weren't scared to test it, especially on black people. A lot of black people were chased from Tripoli to Sabhā following Gaddafi's death but according to him, the black people in Libya mostly resided in Ubari where he would come to work as a refugee doing odd jobs to survive for the next four weeks. To survive, he had to constantly be dressed in dirty clothes to avoid attention or being mistaken for a black American. An altercation between a black and a white Libyan at a filling station would launch a new war against blacks in that part of the country and he had to flee to Tripoli.

Moving through the city as an illegal immigrant wasn't the same as moving like a citizen. For everywhere he had to go, he had to be smuggled by connections who would receive him in every city he landed; if not, he'd be arrested by Libyan police at checkpoints for not having his papers. The connections would then show him the ghetto and the working ground in that area. At Tripoli, he worked for a week before he realised what he thought was enough money to carry him through his trip. He had found a job at a car wash which was one of the best places to work as an immigrant because it came with an apartment to stay. The car wash owners known as the Mudis owned some of the vehicles and boats used to smuggle

immigrants around Libya and to Italy. Even the owners of the Ghettos had connections that could help you in continuing your trip. It's just that going through agents or middlemen was more expensive and riskier so most immigrants tried to meet the owners of the vessels themselves. By this time, it was summertime in August which was seen as the best time to cross the oceans because the waters would be calmer. This is why he was determined to move before the end of August. After that month, it would be a different weather which would be unfit to make the trip. Some people moved through Tripoli but he went to Zuara; a coastal town which would connect him to Tunisia to make the trip faster.

The boat men doubled as meteorologists as they scrutinized the weather before they made every trip. They would come out on the beach to assess the skies and the waters to see if it was smooth enough for travel. Sometimes they were right and other times they were wrong; no one knew the weather like that. The sea always seemed calm when at shore but no one knew what would happen in the middle of the sea. Eventually, they decided on the day to move. As usual, the party set out before the day was bright. They usually got on water by about 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. but on his departure day, they set out at about 4 a.m. based on the boat men's predictions.

They were in the middle of the ocean when they heard something that sounded like an explosion. Their boat had started to leak, water was flowing in and the vessel was sinking slowly. There were about 170 passengers on the double decker boat. There were Eritreans, Nigerians, Libyans, Egyptians, Togolese and many more people from other countries on board. Among these people, there were even pregnant women, nursing mothers and families with little kids. Passengers on the lower deck started

scooping water out of the boat back into the sea. The connections just wanted their money and didn't bother to check the condition of the boats before they set sail. On a strong boat, he said, they would have made the full trip to Italy by themselves. But this wasn't the case. It would be about 13 hours after setting sail from Libya before they saw a rescue ship owned by the Italian government. This was around 6:30 p.m. that evening. He said that this was how a lot of people made it to Europe because most people's boats gave way in the middle of the ocean and they either saw a rescue ship or they didn't.

When the rescue ship arrived, they asked to know who the driver of the boat was. They knew of illegal immigrants using the sea to get in and they wanted to arrest the man in charge. The passengers all cooperated to explain that it was a team effort which had no leader, just one goal. The Europeans didn't press as they took all of them on board. It was during lunch time the next day that they arrived in Italy. They were taken to Reggio Calabria where they were body searched to prevent illegal items like fire arms, bombs or hashish from coming in. Gang leaders back in Libya used illegal immigrants to smuggle contrabands to Europe; the immigrants who agreed to do so wouldn't have to pay for their boat fares, they would just be told where to drop it off or who would come pick it up. It was pretty straightforward. At that time, the rescue mission was usually broadcasted on the local news or on CNN and BBC so the recipients knew the connection had arrived and would go wait for them in the city. When the Italian immigration police caught anyone with these items, they'd be arrested or deported immediately.

The rest of the passengers had their vital information like name, age, date of birth and their thumbprint taken. From Reggio Calabria, they were divided into groups and sent to different parts

of the country to go live in refugee camps where they would be given a resident permit valid for six months until it was time to get a lawyer and present their cases to an immigration judge in a high commission who will decide if they stayed in the country or if they were kicked out, based on the reasons they provided for wanting to leave their various countries. If the panel saw reasons with you, they would grant you asylum. If you weren't convincing enough, you'd have to get another lawyer, get your story right and try again. The lawyers and the trips to the commission were sponsored by the Italian government who also provided daily breakfast, a monthly allowance of €75 and healthcare for any of the immigrants who fell sick in the refugee camp; in some camps where they weren't serving breakfast, the monthly allowance was about €150 to €170. From that, you could decide to get a lawyer who wasn't a government lawyer. According to him, that would cost about €150; it all depended on you.

He finally got asylum granted to him when he was on his third lawyer. But by this time, he had already been asked to leave the refugee camp; that was what they did if you didn't get your asylum on the first and second try. In rebellion, he had broken their laws regarding travelling for a long stretch of time by leaving the camp for over a month. When he got back, he had to move out of the camp to figure out life on his own. As at the time of writing of this story, he has since left Italy to settle somewhere else in Europe but he's constantly travelling to see the world and its culture which he says is truly fascinating.

I asked if he'd do it all again to which he replied that he would. He would do it for the adventure, the thrill, the different things he learnt and the different people he met. Although, he wouldn't advise anyone to do it in current day Africa and Europe because their experiences would be very different from what he had. It's a

risky journey and not everyone would make it to the other side. The trip changed his life and he never saw the world the same way again. Now, he feels like there's nowhere he cannot go. Whether boats or borders, it doesn't matter. "Nobody can stop us when we move.", he laughs.

8th Agenda

-THE GENDER AGENDA-

This is one agenda people don't get tired of pushing. As you're reading this, your gender might orientate you to what you should think of the agenda itself and that's fine. For me as a Nigerian woman living and working in Nigeria, my gender is definitely one thing that is sometimes a problem for me as I navigate the world in front of me. From my position as the first-born girl in my family to being a woman trying to build a career, people seem to think that my life should be built around the fact that I have a vagina.

I put out a tweet where I said that as a woman, if I wanted to be angry every day of my life till I die, there are enough reasons for me to be. During my house hunting journey, I found out that some landlords do not rent their houses to young unmarried women. Even if the women had their complete money for rent and other bills, they said they won't be able to make rent the next year and would have to move out eventually. They also said that these women might have to resort to bringing in male guests as a way of making rent for the next year. You fight to move out of your family house, you fight to get an apartment even when you have your money complete, you fight to hustle in whatever male dominated field you find yourself, you fight harassment on your way to or back from work, you fight your family members who think you're wayward for living alone and keep asking when you'll get married, you fight to be left alone when you're at the gym or at a restaurant; you just keep fighting until you can't fight anymore.

A colleague of mine was stopped by the police on her way out and they asked her to come down from the cab for a search. One officer proceeded to “search” her by putting his hands up her dress as asked her if she was going to give him some. The “search” went on for minutes and she couldn't protest; the other officers present were laughing at the whole thing and had rifles on them which could've been loaded. The wrong reaction could easily lead to something else. This is not a safe space and police brutality is a big thing over here but when you're a woman here? You face both police and societal brutality. She had to endure the roadside harassment and when they were done, they told her they couldn't find anything and she could go back into her cab. Imagine stepping out from your house and on your way to your destination, you casually encounter harassment like it's traffic on the highway?

Society is seen as genius because it starts to push the agenda very early in life. From when your parents find out you're going to be a girl; their reactions could set the tone for what your life could be. I spoke to someone who worked in the hospital who confirmed that expectant fathers would storm out of the ward when they found out their wife was having a baby girl. The mothers would be left crying or heartbroken and would suddenly start to feel a way about the pregnancy because by then it would be too late to terminate it. You haven't even been born yet but the misogyny is already waiting for you. When you're born, your future is already being planned by your family before you can even utter a word. In some cultures in this country, girls are even betrothed as soon as they're born or while they're toddlers. They grow up as someone else's property and must never deviate from that path. Whether they go to school, what school they go to, how far the school is, if they ever get a job, what kind of job it is; everything is determined by their family or their husband's. No say whatsoever.

Even when girls are allowed to go to school, it doesn't end. There are schools where it's an unofficial rule that girls can't be class prefects. They can only be assistants. The boy would be the prefect and the girl would be the assistant. Whether or not the boy was qualified, he had to be class prefect and the girl had to assist. Some classrooms had assistants who were more efficient than the people they were assisting. I don't know who wrote the rule but everyone followed it religiously. It doesn't end at being assistants either. Young girls in school would be harassed by both female and male teachers just because they were girls. The male teachers would sexually harass these girls while the female teachers who were aware would either slut shame these girls or try to “break their wings” by banning certain hairstyles and accessories so the female students don't look as “attractive”. What a huge mess!

When you get back home and your uncle or any other male guest is visiting, you're told to cover up even when you're wearing the same shorts and singlet your brother is wearing. You don't get it because you can't see the harm in what you're doing that you have to cover yourself so tightly when anyone is around. The entire thing baffles me. Why are we letting people we don't trust into our homes? If they are bad people who could possibly harm or rape your daughters, why are they in your homes? If you wouldn't trust them with your money or your diamonds, why would you trust them with your daughters?

The sad part is that covering up still doesn't stop women from getting harassed. You think I'm lying? Ask the women wearing hijabs and abayas if they never get harassed or raped because they're all covered up. They will tell you the truth. Men are useless predators and the only reason why they can get away with their rubbish is because we live in a society that makes it easy for them to get away with their rubbish in the first place. Men don't get

punished for harassing women or being rapists. No one believes women when they say they've been raped or harassed. There are no rules and no punishments. Just stupid advice and dumb traditions. You think the hijabis are lying? Ask the babies in swaddling clothes. They can't talk but I'll tell you this. There was a story making rounds in our neighbourhood some years ago about a working mom who would leave her baby girl with her brother to babysit. She'd come back every time to notice some kind of vomit by the side of her baby's mouth. Ladies and gentlemen, tell me why she dropped her baby off one day, forgot to pick something, and went back in only to find her brother putting his penis in her baby's mouth? Babies suck on anything you put in their mouth whether breasts, feeding bottles or their own fingers. Her brother took advantage of that and used her baby to get his daily orgasms. Of course, she was so furious when she found out. Her baby girl had cum in her mouth every day and she didn't even know. Who would she tell? Who would believe her? Who would serve justice? Did she have the money to chase justice in this corrupt society? Won't they call it a family issue and brush it to the side? She was losing her mind. Her baby hadn't even begun to talk yet and society was already putting words in her mouth.

The gender agenda is one that is pushed extensively by the Nigerian society whether we like to admit it or not. From before you're born till the day you die, your life as a woman in this country is mostly dictated and almost planned out. For men, it is certainly not the case and so most of the time, they can't relate. We need to collectively do better because while we're pushing the agenda, the agenda is pushing us back. According to *The First Political Order: How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide*, a book written by Valerie Hudson, Donna Bowen and Perpetue Nielsen, societies that treat women badly are poorer and more unstable. This finding came from the research they carried out on

about 176 countries which showed that patriarchy and poverty go hand in hand. They are not wrong. Take a good look at the society we're living in as Nigerians and tell me if you don't see how poor and unstable we are. Nothing is moving and it's because we keep running this dead agenda over and over. It's time for some actual change and I'm not talking about money. I'm talking about one that can actually buy us a future. Dead the gender agenda.

-DEAD THE GENDER AGENDA-



Medium: Vocals on paper

Description: This is a waveform art of the statement: "Dead the gender agenda"; a declaration which captures the author's opinion on the concept of a gender agenda in the Nigerian society and the world at large.

Artist: Jane Efagwu

Year: 2022

9th Agenda

-ENJOYMENT MINISTER'S SPEECH-

Listen, I know I've talked a lot about how chaotic, insecure, depressing and unfair Nigeria can be but Nigeria is a very sweet place too. Yeah, I said that. It's filled with good vibes and that's what makes the bad vibes hurt even harder because this could easily be one of the best places to work and chill in the whole world. If you want to work, you can work and if you want to flex? This is the place for you. Everything happens here. The work, the deals and the parties. If you want to work hard and play even harder, then Nigeria is the place to be; especially my city, Lagos.

Growing up in Lagos put a different energy in my life and I'm thankful to my parents for that. I mean other cities are nice because they're peaceful, organised and quiet but that's not my city. It's hot, crazy and everybody is trying to make the next naira in the next minute. The days are hot but the nights are even hotter. The nightlife in Lagos? Unparalleled! Doubt me? Pick an evening and go for a cool stroll around your side of town. You could even get a cab and go for a quick drive. There's a lot to see, a lot to talk about, a lot to eat and a lot to drink. The city comes alive in the night time and it gives a new meaning to what it means to be alive. The lights are bright, the air is cool, the drinks are stiff (the Long Islands in Lagos are very long), the food is exciting, the music is very good and everyone just wants to have fun. We can worry about funds the next day.

My favourite place to hang out, apart from the hotels, malls, clubs and rooftops, has to be anywhere beside the water. You can find me by the pretty beaches, the beach houses where I can watch the water and the offshore serviced apartments that are only accessible

by boats or yachts. I've been to a number of beaches and despite the fact that they're all by the water, each one gives a different vibe. I don't know how they do it but each beach isn't like the next beach down the road. It's different. The water in every beach has its own soul. You can listen to it and it'll tell you things. It reminds me of how small I am in this world and yet how big and blessed I am to be able to admire the roaring of the oceans without getting swallowed.

Several centuries ago, I'd probably be on a ship across those waters headed to some country I don't even know but right now, life is different. I'm living in a different time where I'm creating a different narrative on what it means to be African and I feel so blessed. It's one of my favourite things about going to see my family in Ikorodu. I take the boat from Victoria Island and during the 30-minute ride, I'm just awed by God's awesomeness. The ocean never dries up or loses its attitude. It stays wild and free as it invites you for a breezy ride. It connects me to my people and myself. I believe that I have an ocean inside of me which is why I connect to it very deeply. We could stare at each other all day and never get tired. Sometimes, I'm jealous of the boat drivers because they get to see and feel that every day. Must be nice.

Nigeria is home for me and one thing about being home is all the good food you get to enjoy. Listen, Nigerian food is one of our biggest exports as a country. If you're on Nigerian social media, you must've come across the ever-going Jollof wars between Nigeria and other countries. Even though Jollof rice originated from the Wolof Empire (aka the Jolof Empire) which spans across Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania, the battle is always on between other African countries to prove who has the best Jollof rice. As you can tell, Nigerians are always on the forefront of these conversations and while I haven't had Jollof from other countries

yet, our versions have a very special place in my heart. My mother's Jollof rice taught me the meaning of balance and the beauty in colours. The Jollof rice from Ìyá David at our old neighbourhood in Freeman on Lagos Island taught me the power of spice and the need for patience. The first batch of the day would only get ready by noon and my mom, siblings and I would have to wait but it was worth every minute. The Jollof I cooked as a student in the university taught me the beauty of simplicity and the strength of management. I have since tasted different versions of Jollof from different households and restaurants and I haven't even left the country to try other continental variations yet. That's the power of food. It's one language I would always understand no matter what.

On our streets in Nigeria, food is one language that everyone speaks. From the àkàrà sellers who get the ball rolling in the early mornings to the puff-puff vendors who keep our hustle going through the day and the sùyà men from the North who bring all the smoke and spice to our nightlife, street food has a whole identity here. The food on the streets in the mornings are different from the food on the streets at night which shows that while there is a right time for everything, there's also the right meal for every right time. My love for food grew to new heights when I worked at a rooftop restaurant and bar where I met so many amazing people who came in to grab a bite or have a drink. The language of food and a good drink has brought me closer to some of the most amazing people I've ever met. We've swapped stories and shared laughs over different bowls of food and I've made friends who trust me for life because of my personal recommendations off the menu which was a hit that had them coming back for more. You can always find me where the good food is. That's where the good vibes are and it's only good vibes over here.

Should I talk about Nigerian music? Man, I might never end this book. The music right now is something serious. We are dominating and the range is showing. For your hustle during the day, your turn up at night, quiet times with your lover or when times are uncertain, there's a Nigerian song for everything. Nigerian music is selling out the O2 Arena in London back to back in three days, Madison Square Garden in New York and making everyone around the world pay a little extra attention. We're at the Grammys, MOBO's, MTV's and our music is playing as soundtracks to movies on Netflix, Amazon Prime and Disney. Back home, everyone is beaming with pride. We're all proud to be Nigerian because of the music. The radio is drunk on hits and the hits still won't stop coming. There's a soundtrack for every point in my life and most of the time, there's a Nigerian song playing in the background. The music brings an orientation on what it is to be Nigerian in this day and age and how we're all navigating the times. The sounds are chill, uplifting, goose-bumping, body bouncing, fresh, captivating, innovative and just down right awesome. Every week, we're fed with a pour of new music which refreshes our soul and refills our love for the culture. Everyone is happy on music release day because we know we're about to be fed good. Music is food for the soul and when we combine Nigerian food and Nigerian music, it's a recipe for good vibes and a sound experience. Literally.

No one does art like the Nigerians. I promise you this. I mean, if you're reading this book, you should know that by now. The way we look at the world and interpret it into our work is one of my favourite things about us. Our sense of humour and our use and invention of mediums to tell our stories is a very special talent for us. You might not know us but through our art, you'll come to know our story and why we are who we are. Our exhibitions in our major cities like Lagos, Abuja, Benin and Port-Harcourt are

attracting tourists from all over the world. We're also exhibiting in museums across the world in major cities like London, Los Angeles, New York, Berlin and Paris. Our films, books, art pieces and collections are on high demand and are being bought at top dollar. The world is watching us and taking notes which make it such a beautiful thing to be Nigerian right now.

I'm very proud to be Nigerian because I'm coming from a generation that is changing the narrative on what is to come from Nigeria. Our fashion, hospitality, business, food, music and creative industries are forces to be reckoned with and the entire world is aware of that. There are a lot of things that could be better like security, education, economic and financial policies, representation, internal and foreign affairs so it's not so hard to live and thrive here. I really wish it was better and young people weren't leaving in droves to go start up in some other country because Nigeria seems like a place where we'd have the most fun and make the most funds at the same time.

My dream is that this country becomes a place where sleep isn't so hard. A place where dreams actually come true. I hope it becomes breathable and liveable for all of us who would like to breathe and live here without being so pressed to leave because let's face it- emigration is very expensive and whether legally or illegally, it isn't for the weak. It costs a lot of money, time and sacrifice to leave your country of origin to go settle in another country entirely where you know no one and you know nothing. It's easy to say but in real execution, it's a risk. I did a documentary on the topic and it taught me a lot of things. People are tired of the struggle that it takes to live here. They wish they didn't have to go through the process but sadly, they are left with no choice. It's a risk they are willing to take if it assures them sanity, security and stability in their lives. No one deserves to live in a country where none of

those things are guaranteed; country where anything can happen at any time. We all deserve better and I hope we get it soon.

Till then and even then, never forget to enjoy yourself.

Yours for Enjoyment,
The Enjoyment Minister.

10th Agenda

-CLOSING PRAYER-

Prayers are very important because they are a form of communication with the supreme divine. When you pray, you tap into a higher source to fill you up with what you may be lacking. You release to receive but the thing is, you can only receive when you believe. When you don't believe, there's a disconnect. Think of a switch that has been turned on but the cable hasn't been plugged in. That's how you look anytime you pray without belief.

Belief is a very strong part of human connection. Believing in something drives you to the finish line even while you're still taking your first steps. To believe is to give life to something or someone. You put so much life into it that it starts to breathe on its own. Belief changes our attitude towards our problems. By believing in what we're working towards, we connect with the supreme divine to create the life we pray for. You see, God made us in their own image which means we are gods ourselves. We're made of the same creative force that drives the oceans, forests, skies, mountains, seasons and everything in them. There's no need to be scared of those things when we have a little bit of all these things in us and some more. This is why we have dominion over other things in our ecosystem.

Naturally, we're all creatives because we were created by the biggest creative in the world. Even when we sit still in an empty room, we're still creating; cells, thoughts, movements, emotions, vibrations and excretions are still being produced and reproduced. When we die, our bodies decompose to nourish the ground from where we came. This is how trees and flowers come to grow. We have a lot to offer even in death; that's how powerful we are.

We've been praying for a better country which offers a better life but have we been creating that country by ourselves? Are we actively praying for some things while actively creating some other things? As gods on earth who can create anything, why is creating a better life together such a big problem? Why are we still praying for the same thing that we prayed for at Independence when we're over 60 years in the game? If we can create anything, why do we keep creating problems, confusion, agenda and propagandas? Why do we pray every day but things stay the same? There's a disconnect.

We have tapped into the power of the divine to collaborate and communicate with us to solve our problems but we've also tapped out of our own powers as gods on earth. We believe that because we're humans, we're only capable of mundane things like breathing, eating, drinking, giving birth and "committing sin". Maybe, some of us don't believe that we can do better for ourselves or our country. A lot of people here don't know the power they have. They believe that some strange thing like a strike of thunder has to happen to show that a solution to our problems has arrived and all our prayers have been answered. That's wrong. Tapping into the highest creative force in the world without wanting to create anything for yourself will be frustrating. We can see that everywhere around us. Here, the cable is plugged in but there's nothing to charge. The tap is on but there's no bucket to fill. Just a lot of water pouring on the floor, wasting away.

Maybe I'm wrong and everyone is aware of their power but agenda like religion, ethnicity, gender, social or financial class which are also created by human beings have prevented anyone from actually chasing anything for the greater good of the country. Everyone is simply trying to secure a life that promotes their agenda. Most people don't care about the next person if the

next person isn't their person. They don't care about the world so far as their own little world is safe and functioning. They'd rather tap in to their abilities to create a world that benefits them and theirs. Everyone else would have to figure it out on their own. You can call it safe or you can call it selfish. It works for them and it keeps them away from the stress of fighting for the greater good.

As Nigerians united in one country, none of these approaches can work for us as we chase a better life for our beloved country. We're a country of diverse religions, ethnicities, genders, social and financial classes so to get what we really want, we must embody the true meaning of unity and faith because that's the only way we can get peace and progress or those would just be some words on the coat of arms which might as well just be a dusty coat in an old show glass that everyone sees but no one wears. I don't know if we're ready to come together and get it done but I know that nothing would change if we don't ever come together as one. If jealousy, hatred, religious fanaticism, gender-based violence, corruption, social and financial discrimination continue to dominate as they currently do, we might be here for a while. Nothing will change and nothing will move. The only thing moving will be time.

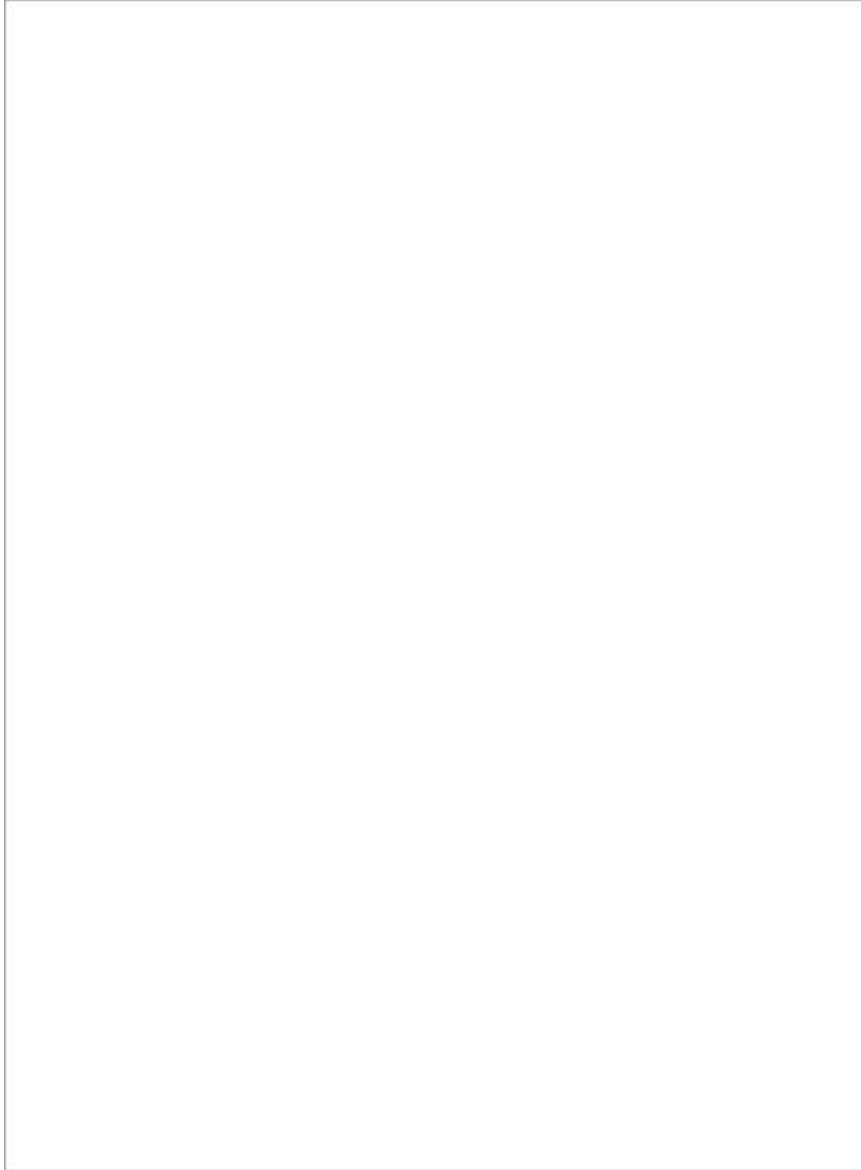
It's time we look at ourselves to understand what we really want. Our abilities to create our desired country is boundless and continues to grow to new heights but our personal agenda continue to deride this potential. We're tapped into the source of creativity but we're not even ready to create what we're asking for. If we think it's such an impossible thing to create, how would God come through for us? Do we leave it for God because of how impossible it is or because of how impossible we've made it? Until we get it together as gods on earth, we can't really connect to God in heaven. This means that the prayers won't work unless we do.

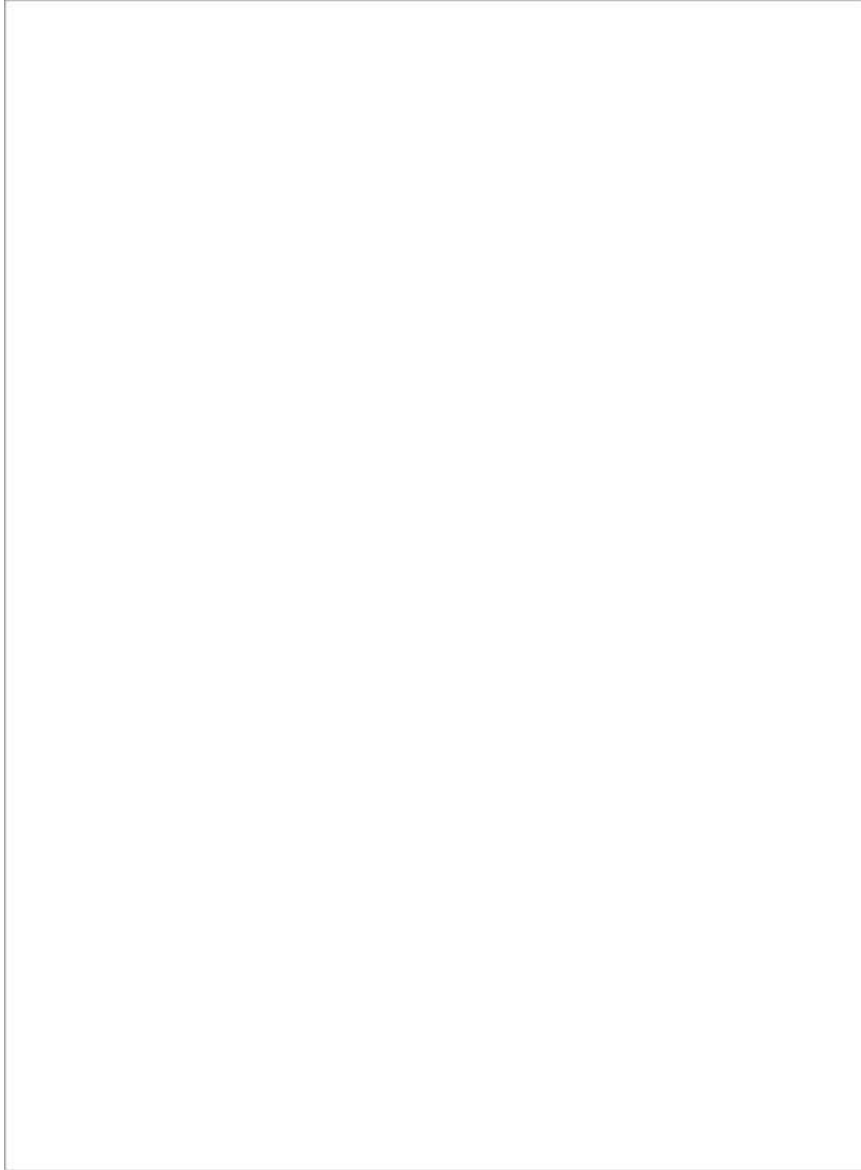
There's no space for opening or closing prayers when we're the only ones that can open or close our problems by ourselves. Closing prayers don't matter when our agenda has already closed us from answered prayers. Let's get it together by coming together to get it. When we do that, it will feel like even God came down to lift us up from our struggles. Till then, it's always going to be one agenda after the other, one dream after the other until sleep becomes a problem and we can't dream anymore. Help yourself. Answer your own prayers. Tie your favourite wrapper around your neck and be your own superhero because no one is coming.

This is how it will start. This is how all our problems will end.

-TAKE UP SPACE-

No matter what you've read so far, your dreams are very valid. Here are some pages for you to write your dreams, ideas, thoughts or even push your own agenda. Go on, take up space!





■ About the Author

Jane Efagwu is a 23-year-old writer born and brought up in Lagos, Nigeria. She attended the University of Benin, Benin City where she obtained a Bachelors degree in Mass Communication. She writes and edits poetry, articles, fiction and non-fiction, promotional copies and songs.

She is one of the 12 recipients of the New Narratives Artist Grant sponsored by the British Council of which she presented The Nigerian Dreamers and her documentary, Jápa, as deliverables.

Jane also has a Medium page where she shares some of her work from time to time. When shes not writing or editing, Jane loves to visit restaurants, cinemas, beaches and art exhibitions. The Nigerian Dreamers is her first book.

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