
Port Harcourt – My Heart And My Home

Sometimes I think African countries are always in competition, on who does better than the other. The problems of countries are largely the same, no matter where they are, a location that makes trade and administration possible, the potential for opportunities, for everyone.

Port Harcourt is my heart and my home, like many other cities she is a lot of things, our airport doesn't quite work, so we have this white tent as our arrival section at the airport, sometimes we have cows on our runways that regularly cause traffic between the cows and the planes each waiting on their own turn to go. Luxury car show-rooms lined on badly maintained roads. Street harassment is slightly less rapid than the traffic we experience every hour of the day. On any given day they might either be a concert on the street or an angry mob getting ready to burn someone in the middle of the street, there is so much that is possible in port Harcourt and so much that really isn't, most of the time the difference between possibilities and impossibilities is simply about who you are. To belong in the great city of Port Harcourt you must have "class".

Way Before Nigeria became independent the Kalabari people began to come down to the state of port Harcourt from the Bonny island and established villages along the way, the Kalabari's, which are one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria have a saying that "port Harcourt will welcome anyone" but that saying is becoming less true. Many Port Harcourt residents are now being pushed out to make room for an emerging city that has been nicknamed "the garden city or the Evolved Paris" you see Port Harcourt inspires very big dreams even in its leaders and governments. The Port Harcourt state government has declared intentions for a city where poverty and poor people don't exist. You would think they would focus on eradicating poverty, but the strategy chosen focuses on eliminating the poor. Last January the governor made plans to demolish every home at the riverine slums of Njemanze, a town with about 480,000 residents, I first heard of Njemanze when the demolition started, my cousin Adeola visited in 2016, he met Agbani banner, who is now homeless and whose name solely means À ? pe gb??nàgb??nà ?y? àkókó ? y?jú meaning never think too highly of yourself. Agbani's son ruke was one of the 60 people who were shot, drowned or presumed dead in that land grab, and then in November the armies that are only used to fight wars came back to kill the people they promised to defend, and this time with guns, bullets, dogs, tear gas and fire.

My grandmother always says that the first thing we are thought to forget about poor people is that they are people. We all believe that everyone deserves a place to lay their heads, but not the people of port Harcourt! They believe that anyone who has a home at Njemanze is a criminal or has been cursed, I had a conversation with someone from Port Harcourt and he said "people who live at Njemanze stay at houses but people who live at other parts of Port Harcourt live in homes", but I don't there is one single definition of the word home, after all what is a slum? Besides a place where the "poor" decide to sleep after a long day of being treated less equally than the rest of the society. Slums are imperfect housing conditions but they are also prime example of the foundation and the heart of every city. Of course You don't need to be the "The evolved Paris" when you are already Port Harcourt. We have our own identity, our own rich high life rhythm, a child of hip hop and Afro beats, we redefine fashion, wear our stories around neck from our ears, so we never forget the voice of our ancestors, as anyone who

knows Port Harcourt can say Njemanze is often the source of the cities character without the "poor" Port Harcourt will not be known for its fashion, its endless bustling energy or even the fact you could buy a whole meal or a dog through your windows in traffic!

The factors that makes us define some neighborhoods as "slums" or in Port Harcourt speak "kèple de ajuo" meaning the poor man's land only, can be drastically improved but not without recognizing the problems of the people living there. Very often the "slums" and the people living in them are incorrectly named as the problem, whilst the real problem i think are the factors that create them; poverty, exclusion from society and very often the failures from our governments. When our government frame slums as the nation's threats in order to justify their violent acts and false evictions, they are counting on us who live in the "posh" areas of the state to agree with them rather we must remind them that the government exist to serve not only those who live in luxury but also those who clean and guard them. Our realties might differ but surely our rights don't.

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