
**ENDLESS JOURNEYS, ILLUSIONARY DESTINATIONS: A PSYCHOANALYTIC
READING OF SUEMO CHIA'S *ADAN-WADE KOHOL GA* (THE STORY OF ADAN-
WADE)**

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ABSTRACT

Life on earth is often depicted in literature as a journey from the cradle to the grave. The journey motif therefore is crucial in understanding the growth of characters as well as the shift in spatial and ideological locations embedded in a work of art. This paper discusses the incessant journeys embarked upon by the protagonist in Suemo Chia's novel, *Adan-Wade Kohol Ga* (The Story of Adan-Wade) which destinations have invariably resulted in unfulfilled wishes. This idea echoes the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan in which the psychological growth of an individual from infancy to adulthood is likened to a journey of discovery of the world order that limits his desires. It explains the loss of the idyllic bliss of childhood by individuals and their inability to retrieve it as they journey into different destinations or aspirations of life. The novel proves that life is a farce, an illusion we engage in but get no fulfilment or recompense for the loss of pre-oedipal wholeness.

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INTRODUCTION

Man's quest for material progress and general fulfilment in the midst of a very challenging universe has led to his frequent and unending travels from one place to the other. While we demonstrably enjoy relative material comforts as we develop with time, it is debatable whether we really have the internal or eternal satisfaction we crave for. Human life is hence inherently illusionary with its challenges, limitations and unfulfilled wishes. We eventually succumb to death which marks the cessation of life or ultimate doom for the individual.

Human life and activities, often captured in whole or in slices as a journey motif, is the main preoccupation of literature. Charles Nnolim says from the earliest novels in Western literature, it has been in the nature

of the novel genre to record the protagonist on a journey in quest, as he goes forth on a search – sometimes of treasure, often of a father figure (152). These two aspirations are in fact what Terry Eagleton describes as the basic instincts of life that cannot be controverted by the fragmentation of post-modern philosophy:

There are basically two kinds of activities which keep the human species going, one of them to do with material production and the other with sexual reproduction. Without these two stories, human history would have ground to a halt and postmodernism would have nothing to be posterior to. And both of these stories have been chronicles of ceaseless warfare. (341)

Otoburu and Akpan both admit that one of the most exploited frameworks in African literary writings is the journey motif especially in novels which have female and children as protagonists. They say these journeys do not only move characters from one physical location to the other but they indeed seek to satisfy a certain consciousness in the “quest for the ideal autonomy” (29). Hence as Onukaogu and Onyerionwu explain, most African novels present a tapestry of perilous journeys with extreme hardship and hurdles to demonstrate the near impossibility of attaining complete bliss:

In making extreme hardship an integral part of these journeys, one could argue that the writers and of course the oral traditions that produce the stories, want to impress on the children's audience the relatedness of the journey of life to the journeys in the stories. (48)

There is therefore an essential metaphorical link between living ones life and travelling. There is also an irrevocable sense of fatalism that hangs on humanity in association to insatiable desires of life and ultimate death. For as Bertens explains Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's idea of an infant growing up in society, the once idyllic world of infancy in which boundless bliss exists, is lost as the child enters the symbolic order. Bertens quotes Lacan specifically as saying that the loss of this state engenders desires in the human mind which are never met, except by temporary substitution through various human material or emotional accomplishments. (162) Kumar equally captures the desperation of human beings on a journey of self-fulfilment in life in the following words:

Different people select different ways and means to increase their sense of

happiness. To some people, meditation can help them focus on the present movement rather than worry about the future. For some others, a pleasant life might be champagne and a sports car. There are people who focus on the things that really matter to them like setting goals in the areas of their life they want to improve; marriage, parenting, self-fulfilment and they work on those goals with specific steps. And there are some human beings who believe in what their imagination dreams. Insights gained from Harvard studies on contentment indicate that habits are like financial capital. Forming one good habit today is an investment that will automatically give out returns for years to come. (171)

Although, thinkers like Kumar share a positive view about life's journey and in fact develop a fixed template for running a successful lifestyle, the fact that life itself is beset with physical and emotional setbacks and eventual death, renders it illusionary. We are perpetually on the move in our various aspirations in life, yet we are unable to fulfil our desires and fathom the world in its entirety. Peter Childs describes our world as continuously in a state of flux in which there is a perpetual movement from one spatial or ideological state to the other; “continuous creation and destruction; and ultimately the state of radical antithesis.” (14) It is this illusionary view of life propelled by the psychoanalytic thought about unfulfilled wishes of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan that motivates this study of Suemo Chia's Tiv Classic, *Adan-Wade Kohol Ga* (The Story of Adan Wade) which literally and symbolically means “Adan Wade has failed to make it.”

Like Freud, Lacan's ideas are based on his

observation of the psychological development of the infant into adulthood. Both of them talk about the three stages of the polymorphous perversity in infants – the oral, the anal and the phallic sexuality as well as the Oedipus complex and the creation of the adult being. Lacan on the other hand talks about the three concepts of Need, Demand and Desire that roughly correspond with the three phases of a child's development, namely, the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The early stage of the infant is regarded as very blissful as the baby is in a world of fullness and completeness. This is the Real State when the child possesses the primal sense of unity, where there is safety and security and the child experiences no absence or lack. This is also the pre-verbal stage which lasts until the child reaches between 6 to 18 months of age.

Consequently Lacan believes the development of the child enters the second stage called the Imaginary Stage when the baby-blob starts distinguishing between itself and everything else and also shifts from having needs to having demands. Its awareness of the separation from its mother creates an anxiety or a sense of loss to which it demands to return to the state of original fullness and non-separation it enjoyed in the Real. The ego is built at this stage before we enter into the third and last stage of adulthood called the Symbolic stage. Here we acquire both the culture and language of our society as we completely lose our unity with the primal state of nature. This is the pre-oedipal stage of bliss, when we also experience a split between our conscious and unconscious processes of our minds. Mary Klages explains that Lacan's world of adulthood witnesses not only how we suppress our pains, wounds, desires and pleasures into the unconscious process of our mind, but how we consciously strive to wear the illusion of the stable unified whole in order to convince ourselves that we lack nothing:

Thus in entering the symbolic order – the world of language – we are entering the

world of loss or lack. We have left the Imaginary order, the world in which we had the illusion of fulfilment and control. We now inhabit a world in which others have needs, desires and fears that limit the ways in which and the extent to which we can attend to our needs, desires and fears. There is no illusion of sustained fulfilment here, no more comfortable fantasy of complete control. This new world is one in which there are rule we must obey and restrictions by which we must abide.

On the basis of Lacan's psychoanalysis we shall now discuss the journeys of Adan-Wade in Chia's novel in line with the physical/abstract or the materialist/spiritual structure identified earlier by Eagleton and Nnolim as the two major experiences of journeys of life.

DEPARTURE FROM THE REAL

The novel, *Adan Wade Kohol Ga* is a story of migrancy. It explores the fears and frustration of life in the Tiv society, how it feels to be manipulated by local beliefs and betrayed by family and friends. Adan-Wade, the main character of the story is forced to migrate from one physical location to the other to survive.

Set in the 1930s and 40s in Tivland under British colonial rule, the novel creates a picture of a society caught in the fear of both the known and the unknown. Their hitherto respected religious practices are desecrated by the colonial masters and their agents without due punishment. There is also the intimidating presence of the Hausa majority ethnic group of Northern Nigeria to which the British colonial hegemony is transferred. Internally, families and kindred groups are exposed to the competitiveness of money capitalism and acquire the tricks of manipulating the sacred spiritual instruments of *Swem* and *Kor* to with-hunt their rivals. The story therefore explains the predicament of the individual in this vortex of a rapidly transforming Tiv society from the innocence of communal living to aggressiveness of individual heroism.

While this state of affairs embodies a

disturbing loss of faith in both the Tiv indigenous ways of life and the invading European traditions, it is indeed, the inability of the ordinary individual in the society to wade through their combined forces and fulfil his/her life ambition that keeps him/her shifting from one space to another. There are individual determinist moves but society stoutly represses them. The super-ego is firmly in charge through the traditional norms and the repressive agents of the colonial government, thereby bringing to a premature end any individual initiative. None of the characters of Suemo Chia appears to be successful. Their journeys of life end in frustration and sadness. A sense of fatalism embodies the main character, Adan Wade, who, like an Aristotelean tragic hero, falls in the end principally because of hubris; but his fall is also in active connivance with his hostile environment dominated by psychic forces.

The fact that Tyohdzuah Akoso's English translation of the novel is titled *The Story of Adan Wade* alone underscores the dominance of this hero in the landscape of Tongov and Ikyurav-Tiev where a large part of the story is set. The story of his itinerant existence is predicted by his father even before he is born. His birth in Wade's household, coming shortly after his father's death as a result of imputation of guilt of fratricide is indeed a welcome relief for his mother, Tagude. He is brought up in Tongov where he spends his blissful infancy and early adolescence. However, he soon realizes the hostility his community has for him, not just as a citizen, but one whose mother has inherited the *imborivungu*, the family totem of success in Tiv culture. This realization launches him into the symbolic world of adulthood, in which he has to consciously take a decision to either confront the psychic forces of hostility like his father did or flee for his dear life. This first trip in quest for fulfilment is undertaken after his mother's symbolic death marking the Lacanian separation from the primal mother. Adan Wade therefore embarks on a journey of self-discovery away from the parental

influence.

Since the adults had all deserted the compound for the feast, Adan-Wade decided to seize the opportunity and flee. He put on his briefs, his only item of clothing, and headed off. He burst out at the main road that passed by their compound and which main road went as far as Ikyurav-Tiev. The main road was commonly known as the cattle route for the Fulani drove their herds along it to wherever it was that they took the cattle. Motor vehicles used to ply the road but not any longer. Now the road was used mainly by cattle, pedestrians and people riding bicycles. (54)

Suemo Chia's description of the road Adan-Wade follows into exile is very significant as indeed he presents it as an ancient passageway for animals and humans as well as a thoroughfare for technological inventions like bicycles and automobiles. It exemplifies the importance of a road in the rite of passage in life. In Soyinka's works for instance, the Yoruba god of Iron, Ogun superintends over the roads and is reputed to be both destructive and creative. Muduakor describes Ogun as being "extremely vindictive when he is offended, but forgiving as soon as he is placated with rites and offerings (198). In his popular play, *The Road* Soyinka describes the deadly realities of this important facility in our infrastructure. In his poem, "Death in the Dawn", he tells how the poet-persona escapes death but how the killing of "dawn's lone trumpeter" had adequately assuaged Ogun's thirst for blood.

Similarly, Ben Okri depicts the road as a hungry and vivacious supernatural force. We are introduced to the road in the very first sentence of the novel, *The Famished Road*: He says, "In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world" (3) which means that the

road is linked with the river and they both have the potential for destruction and restoration of life. These are two major routes of transportation that have been available to humanity for a long time.

The third and most recent route of transportation is air, to which Soyinka equally harbours a feeling of tragedy, in spite of the comfort of aviation. He expresses this foreboding in the book, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* where he resists following his sick friend to the airport to be air-lifted to Germany.

I shrugged, unmoved. My mind was already made up. Into the earth-hugging ambulance, yes, but to follow and watch him being loaded into the winged counterpart, taking off into the same ozone that had swallowed Femi forever – out of the question! I shrugged “I am not coming with you” I accompanied Femi virtually into the plane and he vanished forever. This time, 'No.'. (13)

The road, the river and the air (described by Soyinka as the ozone) are therefore associated with destiny, with what lies in store for one in life's journey and the paradoxes of human existence. Adan-Wade's road is strewn with both pleasant and unpleasant encounters that teach him lessons as well as reinforce his knowledge of the world generally. The road leads him to the bank of river Loko which is infested with crocodiles and has no bridge for pedestrians or motorists to cross. Although, he meets a set of three boys who help him to cross the river, he learns more about the mystery of the crocodiles which were really the manipulation of human beings with sinister motives:

The crocodiles, it was said, used to stay at points where people crossed the stream,

caught and fed on human beings. But there was another version of this story. This version had it that the Loko crocodiles were not the reptiles that every one knows but human beings who used to perpetuate the evil of trapping people from under the water. If the kinsmen pointed someone out to them, they would abduct the person as he crossed the Loko. Even if the person was crossing using a canoe, they would overturn it and kill the person. The story of the crocodiles at Loko was known all over. So there were many people who would not cross the Loko for fear of being attacked by the crocodiles (55)

It is ironical that this idea of human beings using metaphysical powers to hurt their fellow men is what leads Adan-Wade to flee his community. A series of deaths that were seemingly caused by natural causes were explained as caused by specific individuals. His father is killed by the “kor” for causing Abum's death even though had died of snake bite. Tagude, his mother dies ostensibly because of injuries she sustains when a tree trunk collapses on her, but the interpretation is that her rival, Abagye had taken her revenge on account of Tagude's retention of the *imborvungu* totem. It is a culmination of several acts of physical and metaphysical hostilities that leads Adan-Wade to flee his village and come to Ikurav-Tiev, his maternal village. However, right on the road to his expected sanctuary of freedom, he meets similar or more potent cases of human dexterity in manipulating spiritual forces to cause havoc to fellow human beings.

The author therefore demonstrates that the road to exile is equally beset with positive attributes too. Adan-Wade encounters the benevolence of three youths who help him cross the Loko river and also celebrate his survival with him at the Amaafu market,

which is also a symbolic feature on the illusionary road to freedom. The market is depicted as the melting pot of the good and the bad things of life, from where individuals come to buy or sell:

In the market, Adan-Wade saw many things that attracted him and others that surprised him. There was so much noise and people were doing different things as they pleased. People were lively but Adan-Wade did not know for what reason. People were drinking, singing and enjoying themselves so Adan-Wade at first believed that a drinking place was all pleasant activities. Be he then saw some of those drinking, bragging, insulting one another and even fighting. At this point it was his belief that aggression and pride went side by side with drinking. There were others in the market who were gorgeously dressed and going about majestically. And yet, there were those who wore tattered clothes and were going about begging for arms. People were selling various things while others ere buying.
(60)

Adan-Wade on his part, picks up music as the most beneficial item he could find in the market. He watches the beautifully choreographed dance troupe in the Amaafu market and is very delighted about the performance. He decides to start a career in music, specializing in blowing the trumpet. His mastery of the trumpet distinguishes him in exile at Ikurav-Tiev. The land of his sojourn is equally steeped in wizardry and witchcraft beginning with his maternal grandfather, Ageva, who had once being

accused of causing Adan-Wade's mother's early barrenness in order to reinforce his powers and material acquisitions. The author however, describes Ageva's witchcraft as a benevolent one as it sought to protect upright people but destroyed those who were evil. Ageva therefore uses his spiritual powers to bless and nurture his grand-son into a vibrant youngman that is attractive to the girls and dexterous in hunting, dancing and farming.

Just when Adan-Wade thinks he was having the best of life in sojourn, he discovers that he does not really belong to that society anymore. His mother's people wilfully deny him of his rightful share of his earnings because he is thought of as a stranger. His great talents are neglected while he is also excluded from confidential discussions on matters of the community. The author demonstrates the prevalence of patriarchal influence over the African society to the extent that Adan-Wade's escape from Tongov to Ikurav-Tiev is merely a misadventure back to the pre-oedipal stage of the mother's care. However, he is already in the adult world where all authority comes from the father figure. His journey to his mother's people is a pyrrhic victory and he faces the reality of getting back to the basics to face his people. The author captures this philosophy so well in a song Adan-Wade composes in his return to Tongov land:

If an orphan is raised

In the mother's place

Let him return to his clan

Mother's place is good in youth

In adulthood it is bad. (74)

These are the thoughts of someone whose hopes of survival at his maternal home have been dashed. Unpleasant circumstances have caused his inevitable separation from the bliss of motherhood which had been the main objective of the trip in the first place.

The return of Adan-Wade to Tongov land from exile brings a sense of temporary relief

to both him and his kinsmen. For a brief moment, he feels fulfilled with his people. His music career flourishes, just as his material wealth rises through the instrumentality of the *imborvungu* totem he inherits from his parents. His fairy tale marriage to the beautiful but disputed Shidoo soon becomes his albatross leading to the conspiracy of his kinsmen to cause his downfall.

The Imaginary and the Symbolic

The next trip that Adan-Wade makes from his home clan, Tongov is to Jos after he has been forcefully conscripted by the agents of the colonial administration to work in the tin mines. He is again betrayed by his clansmen who feel aggrieved by his resourcefulness and progress in material acquisition as well as his successful marriage to Shidoo, the most beautiful lady in the area. Even his father in law Agena becomes hostile to him because Shidoo's marriage had frustrated his plan of sacrificing her unblemished daughter to establish a shrine "that would make him prosperous and have a great personality" (104). Adan-Wade's second trip is therefore a forced one masterminded by his clansmen who feel his eminent success and boasts were too oppressive for them to bear. And like the Biblical Joseph, they find a more benevolent way of getting rid of him:

To be conscripted to go and mine tin was a disaster people prayed not to befall them. Many who went never returned but died in the work So Adan-Wade's brothers were as good as sending him to his death when they swore to his conscription. It was the surest way to halt his ambition to be forever better than them. His father before him had been better than them and mistreated them, they would not allow history to repeat itself.

(118)

The journey to the Tin mines starts on foot from Tongov to Gboko, and then by lorry to Makurdi and finally by train from Makurdi to Bukuru, near Jos where the mine sites were. He ends up as a hero of sort in the mines camp:

His Tiv brothers were very happy with him for demonstrating such solidarity. He, too, was proud of himself for being an energetic young man. But he was even happier that he had the opportunity to deal with the Hausa. He now realised that with such great strength still in him, it meant that the kinsmen had not tampered with his being. (163)

For the mastermind of Adan-Wade's forced journey to the mines of Jos, it turns out to be an illusionary outcome. Adan-Wade and all those who are conscripted in that set are subjected to hard conditions but are safe, hare and hearty. It is during this journey that he learns from Kunde Ager about the evil of British colonialism and the subsequent superior disposition of Hausa ethnic group over the Tiv on account of the British support.

The failure of Adan-Wade's second journey to break his spirit or kill him as intended by his kinsmen actually sets the tone for his final and most definitive journey in the novel. Adan-Wade becomes better educated about the politics of his country as he meets and mingles with people from other ethnic nationalities at the mines. His knowledge of the cultures and languages of other ethnic groups like the Hausas, Ibos, Shou-Shou, acquired at the mines also prepares him for the most tedious part of his journey of life. He plots his route of escape carefully away from the familiar rail tracks but is confronted by wild beasts and an impregnable river along a lonely road. He survives them all.

It is significant that hallucinations and dreams play an important role in setting Adan-Wade forth on the last lapse of his journey. After six weeks of hard labour at the mines, Adan-Wade falls in a trance in which he sees the image of his wife, Shidoo walking towards him with splendour. As he physically responds by attempting to hug her he realises she is not there. This hallucination is followed immediately by a more disturbing dream in which Adan-Wade sees his wife trapped on a tree and a wolf waiting at the foot of the tree to devour her. He hears her cry and he attempts to rescue her, but an eagle descends and sweeps her off from him. He then becomes helpless.

In Freudian psychoanalysis we know that the unconscious process of the mind is the site where desires, hurts, feelings and fears an individual accumulates over the years, domicile. In this case, Adan-Wade harbours the trauma of his society's hostilities since the loss of his mother and has made frantic efforts to regain his self esteem through hardwork and marriage to the beautiful Shidoo. Both desires of proof of his manliness and love of Shidoo are threatened. Michael Ryan, explains that the conscious society or the super-ego represses these efforts in such a way that results in distorted forms:

The struggle between unconscious instincts and desires on the one hand and the force of repression exercised by the ego on the other results in the displacement and distortion of unconscious contents as they strive for expression. They consequently gain representation in neurotic or in dreams instead of in more direct forms. (35)

This dream therefore predicts the illusionary end of the journey Adan-Wade is about to embark upon. He is not deterred. He acquires charms or talisman powers from Mallam Salihu Mainageni at Ibi to fortify his dream of a successful return. He also acquires more knowledge about the Tiv people as he listens to the wise Anzamber Kuma his benefactor on the way. He returns home finally bustling with strength and confidence but, alas, a snake had bitten his pregnant wife, Shidoo, two days earlier. She dies just as he steps into his compound.

It was with regret that she said, "Oh my God! Adan-Wade my husband, you left your wife without a protector so you shall return to find her no more! With these words she sighed and began to groan but stopped soon afterwards those who had gathered around her were dumbfounded. There was nothing they could do. They could not even cry. They just sat there in silence. (209-10)

With those solemn words, Adan-Wade's journey in quest for the salvation of the life of his dear wife comes to a void. He also loses the quest for supremacy over his people, in spite of his great talents and possession of the *imborvungu* totem.

Conclusion

Suemo Chia's novel is much about the growth of the Tiv nation as it is also about the growth of the individual as exemplified in the character of Adan-Wade. As his society grows, Adan-Wade is compelled to shift from one spatial or ideological position to the other in quest for fulfilment in life.

The first lapse of Adan-Wade's journeys which takes him to his mother's people symbolizes an individual's early affinity with its mother as a primary caregiver. This is the

Real stage of a child, the pre-verbal phase of its life in which all its desires are met and he wallows in the blissful custody of the mother figure. The second lapse of Adan-Wade's journey corresponds with the imaginary stage of an individual's life in which he starts recognizing the difference between itself and the rest of the people around him, when he also develops the conscious process of its mind distinctly from the unconscious thereby forming its ego. In the case of Adan-Wade, he is not only overwhelmed by his personal success in music or material accomplishments, but develops a superior complex after winning the hand of Shidoo in marriage.

And because Adan-Wade's wife was very pretty, it was taken that none of his agemates could match his gallantry. None of them had a wife that could compete with Shidoo's shapely physique. Even more importantly, Shidoo was not just physically beautiful; her soul too, was beautiful. Her husband thus began to talk arrogantly of her beauty as surpassing that of any woman. He let her excitement run off with him and therefore began to grow horns regarding his actions and ideas. (23)

The development of Adan-Wade's character traits logically leads him into confrontation with the norms of society or the super-ego. His society represses him by conspiring and conscripting him into forced labour at the mines in Jos with an intention of terminating his life. He survives it non-the-less.

The third lapse of his journey from the mines back to his village at Tongov

represents his coming into the full realization of the symbolic order of life. From this point on, his desire is conditioned by the initial sense of having lost the primary oneness or wholeness with his society. His life remains unfulfilled without the love of his life, Shidoo, and the serenity of his ancestral land. He fortifies himself both intellectually and fetishily to come back and retrieve his lost bliss. However, he comes to meet the tragedy of the complete loss of his world. Suemo Chia, in his novel, *Adan-Wade Kohol Ga* is in essence agreeing with the template laid by Freud and Lacan to the effect that the journey of life can only lead to unfulfilled dreams or illusionary destinations.

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