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# MAMA EKEHUAN

*...a tale from the nest of artistes.*

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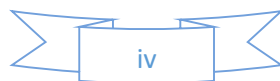
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## DEDICATION

All students, alumnus and staff of University of Benin, particularly, Ekehuan Road Campus, Benin City.



*...a tale from the nest of artistes!*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

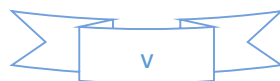
I'd not have done this if not for reliable men that stood for me. This is a reality today because of:

**Pharm Diego**, my immediate elder brother. Maybe you've forgotten but I recall you saying "you should be writing a book now." Those words have inspired this little book, one in many more to come.

To **Emmanuel Ujiadughele** and **Emmanuel Aleogho**, thanks for contributing to the success story. The latter did the cover design while the former was part of the editing.

**Daniel Ehiagwina**, thanks for your timely recommendations.

Also, I can't do without appreciating Aunty **Esther Wright Nwogwonuwe**. Your words of encouragement have triggered hope in me. Thank you!



## ABOUT THE BOOK

**Mama Ekehuan** is a compilation of stories during the writer's stay at the University of Benin, Ekehuan Road, Benin City.

These are real life stories although some of them are grossly exaggerated to drive home the message.

And being the mother campus of the elite school, there won't be a more befitting name for the book written to mark three years of graduation for the Mass Communication students set of 2010.



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## MARACANA: WHERE STARS ARE BORN

When the whistle's shrill cry signaled the end of a steamy humid afternoon in Benin City, to welcome the late afternoon's warmth, and the sun prepared to rest from its day's journey, one could sense *Maracana's* excitement as her children heed the referee's call to come play on its bald turf.

The football, pitch named after the famed *Maracana* stadium in Brazil, is the football coliseum in Ekehuan campus of the University of Benin, where reputations are carved on grass and sand.

When I gained admission to study in UNIBEN, and realized that my department was situated at Ekehuan –birth place of the university, now off campus to its mother campus at Ugbowo –my countenance fell like a flat tire; and the gallant structures, lecture halls, sports complex and various top class pitches shared in my disappointment.

But upon hearing tales of the football artistry that was the norm at *Maracana*, my mindset was reconfigured. I longed to witness the skills, water-tight defending as well as the scintillating goals that characterized football duels on that bald tuff. I was eager to bask in the eccentric atmosphere that would definitely be generated by spectators who made *Maracana* the theatre of dreams for many.

However, I was soon discovered that playing in *Maracana* was tougher than getting a shirt in the defunct Real Madrid's Galaticos. Since everybody claimed to be a mega football star from home, it was on this pitch you'd prove your mettle.

But then, before you got a chance to do that, you'd have to appease the principalities and cabals that controlled the only football field in UNIBEN's first campus. Being



selected to play was not a matter of defending like Gannaro Gattuso, showing awe-inspiring dribbling skills like Jay-Jay Okocha or making scoring look easy like Lionel Messi. Mba!

As much as you'd have loved to show them your *kpai number*, there were some “bros” who must stamp your request; give you the go ahead.

In my 100 level, I still recall *freshers* trooping to *Maracana*, donned in multi-colored boots and jersey only to be told, “Heys, come out”, when they were already getting their groove on.

And then, you'd wonder if you had played badly to be yanked off from the field. If you're like my friend, who wanted to prove obstinate by asking, “Why I go comot? No be now you just dey come”, then be ready to buy beer for some “bros” after being lambasted and drowned in verbal assaults.

The tales from *Maracana* wouldn't be complete without the various departmental games -AMAGA for Mass Communication, TASA Games for Theatre arts and NAFAAS for Fine Arts as well as the Dean's cup. If you're keen on showing how well you played the beautiful game, these competitions were a good platform.

Winning any of these tournaments was good but the holy grail of football in Ekehuan, the Dean's Cup (meant for the Faculty of Arts), was the peak of football glory. If you'd not won it, you ain't started yet.

I remember *Maracana* for hosting epic battles among the three major departments in Ekehuan. The encounters were always intense, and when a winner emerges, they chant and brag “Na we get Ekehuan” –a right fully deserved.

Some local teams that come to Ek City, hoping to steal some of the glory they've heard about, never left without receiving a baptism of fire from the Ekehuan All-Stars, which was known for its mesmerizing style of football that never failed to thrill the fans, even those who were on the opposite side.

As I reminisce on the beautiful display of skills, “bone-cracking” defending from the likes of Hacker and Pandiani; jaw-dropping goals from Alfred and his likes; the sideline commentaries as well as trophies lifted aloof, kissing the blue skies from the Maracana, I'd say that indeed Maracana is a theatre of dreams where stars are born.

## "BROS, I HAIL OOO!"

The other day, with the sun blazing with an intensity that could bake bread, I was strolling on the tarred road that ran from the library to the front of the Female Hostel, Ekehuan campus, UNIBEN, when I was jolted back to reality by a usual sight –this time with a pint of the unusual.

I stepped closer and saw a student with his well-starched and ironed attire lay on the hot-as-oven road, ostensibly *boboing* another student.

He didn't mind the eyes that drilled holes in his back while he *boboed* the student in front of the female hostel.

"Bros, abeg your boy still dey ground! Make I stand up?" he asked rhetorically, grinning from ear to ear.

A visitor may have thought the student had gone bananas but for the initiated, it was 'normal level' to *bobo*

I was in Hall Three one time when I heard this:

Student A: Bros I hail ooo!

Student B: Ah! Baba na me hail you pass. I still be your boy ooo!

Student A: Me? No na, bros! No go shange am for me na. You na my master now. Make you just touch your boy for back, abeg.

Student B: (Bends his back). Bros, how you wan come kobe me nau? My oga bless me. Just touch my back so I go get courage!

*Bobo* –the act of flattery– is etched in the hearts of UNIBEN students. It comes in different shades and forms. It goes by many names –*washie, domo*, etc.

While walking through the hostel corridors, doses of *bobo* flew around like arrows of the gods –lighting the rooms with humor. Some of the *boboist* statements included: "see smoke dey comot for your head", "boss, if I no clean your shoes, rats fit vex chop my eligibility oo" etc.

No one was exempted from this trend and it seemed that the degree of *bobo* you got was proportional to your influence- academic, spiritual, social, political, economic- and popularity among students.

In fact, Hall three boys can demoralize you with their *arrow* if you like go carry Zig Ziglar dey meditate as you waka pass them

The other day, a 300 level student was returning from reading and just like Usain Bolt, his 100 level friend, ran to him saying: "Baba, make you just touch my books, abeg. I no say if you touch am, I no need read them! My A's don sure be that!"

Unfazed by this familiar act, the 300 level student just beamed a smile at him, shaking his head while other students added 'salt and paper".

If you were a *spirikoko* or campus fellowship leader you would hear a student saying: "just lemme touch your shirt and tap from the anointing make so that my book go dey open when I dey read, bishop."

Perhaps, the most sycophantic statements of all times have to be: "Your boy still loyal, boss. My oga, make I just dey wash your plate, abeg!"

## SHOWERS OF BLESSING

"Hold am, hold am ...." the voice bellowed from the bald road leading to Back Gate.

To confirm I wasn't dreaming, I jumped from my pint-sized Mouka foam, opened my door and what I saw was not different from what I knew.

The final year students had finished their exams –graduating from the university after some long, four, five years riddled with strike action –and were being poured water to mark the end of a journey; a phase in their lives.

This is (was) a seasonal ritual by students to celebrate their graduating colleagues in tertiary institutions across Nigeria.

For the Ekehuan Road Campus of the University of Benin, it was the same tale at the end of every academic year.

The carnival had begun –just like other sessions, some final year students were "forming don" only to be hauled onto the ground – in front of the Margaret Ekpo Hostel.

If people were awarded for their organizational prowess, then some students would have gotten several degrees.

We had those who were "*area fathers*" in that –the way they mobilized boys for it, yearly, beats the political deftness of the Nigerian *Jagaban*. The accuracy of his bowl of water puts Michael Jordan's punt in the kindergarten.

The "water pouring" was done in an aptly organised way –some were fetching water, wrestling final year students to the ground while others were expertly splashing water on them as if they have been in school learning for 11 years.

In fact, the sound of the water – scooped with a bow from buckets – was as loud as the trumpets that caused the fall of the Biblical Jericho walls; at other times, it sounded like a thunderbolt when it landed on someone.

As the "water pouring" began to die away with the sun's rays dimming at the speed of light, it became a free-for-all show (students splashed water on one another and threatening "to deal" with the next batch of final year students when they dropped their pen).

## LOVE GUTTER: THE ROMANTIC WEMBLEY

They sat in pair. The sun had already slept and I barely saw the road. But as I walked closer, I saw more legs. I heard the bedroom kind of voice. They were many and came in different directions.

My mind was flooded with thoughts. "How on earth can people be comfortable in a gutter with smelly water running?"

I stood there, lost in what looked like eons.

People stood like traders haggling prices at the Onitsha Main Market. Some of them sat facing each other, their eyes piercing through their souls. Others lay like sacrifice on the tarred floor solving some equations.

Don't think anything. Me, I know nothing. I still dey bath for stomach! I thought I'd seen all.

"Wait first! Ehn? Wetin I dey hear so?" I mumbled.

"O babe! Tell me me what you wantu!" the voice echoed. "Nne, witatu you, my life go sour like vinegar! Gimme your ruv lemme spoil you."

Me, I kuku walked past the gutter. What's my own sef. If you like be there promising Iphone when your garri is waiting for you in Hall 4.

It's like there were using this guy's picture to fan in his village.

When the girl will tell you to take her to June 12, my brother, you'll know you came into this world with nothing and you'll leave with nothing.

My Hall Four brothers that took "big big" books, carry cardigan, and giant cooler for night class, hope you guys knew that your village people were fanning fire with your picture?

I wonder how a gutter became the best place to "jack."

For those that played their "league" in bus stops, dark corners, empty faculties, and the almighty *ebelebo* tree in Hall 2, hope you guys won enough laurels?

As a *Jambito* then, I never knew *Love Gutter* was the Romantic Wembley of Uniben.



...a tale from the nest of artistes!



## TESTIMONIES OF ASUU STRIKE

The bus arrived after a long wait and the journey began - after six months of face-off between ASUU and FG. In no time, we were in Benin; Ekehuan Road Campus.

With my Echolacc box clutched to my left hand, the bald turf of *Maracana* welcomed me to Ekehuan Road Campus of UNIBEN. While I opened my room's door, goose pimples sprung from my skin like an electric shock.

The room oozed of dead rats, lizards etc. The floor and wardrobe were hosts to rats and dust particles. Since the room's lighting was bad, I flung my bag to a corner and 'jived' to a friend's room where I passed the night.

While the early sun's golden rays pierced the windows, the day's journey started. When I left the room, I saw familiar faces but surprisingly, I didn't remember their names.

'Guy, how you dey now?' came the voice.

I was mute, trying to recall his name; my memory failed. I goofed. Why wouldn't I after six months?

Although the day went fine, I soon discovered that familiar faces had become unfamiliar - there was a 'big difference'. Some ladies had become 'rounder' with calabashes in their bellies and the guys? Hmm. They were fresher than the succulent tomatoes at the Oba Market while those who were as thin as broom stick had become "blown" like flour added to dough.

As someone jokingly said, "anyone wey no add after this strike, no go fat again!"

It is often said that when two elephants fight, the grass suffers. In this case, the grasses were many.

I was in a class later that night. The chairs and desks were crying, "PLEASE, COME AND CLEAN ME OH. I AM DIRTY AND MY FRIENDS ARE BACK." One of the black boards had a topic, discussed on: 28-6-2013, written on it.

Later on, I was in my Campus Fellowship's store where cobwebs had become the wallpapers, the musical instruments had dust as their covers and the grasses outside were as tall as an iroko tree.

I wasn't surprised when some students testified in church about the ASUU/FG rift. Some had become tailors, conductors, student workers, shoe makers etc.

As we battled to attend classes, do assignments, and study, a guy asked me: "How dem they spell 'IS' that year, abeg?"

While Nigerian universities flunked their arms open - after six months - the testimonies of ASUU strike(s) are indeed with us!

\*This is a personal account of the 2013 industrial action by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). It lasted from April to September. I was on the Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) then at the Nigerian Observer, Benin City.

## NIGHT CLASS: THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

It felt like yesterday. I had woken up around 5:00 am from my pint-sized hostel bed. That's my second day in school.

There he was. Book in hand, cardigan wrapped around his dainty body, as he staggered like a drunk to his room.

I wondered what someone could have gone out to do by then. Later, I was told it's night class.

Night class is one of the Ten Commandments in Nigerian higher institutions.

You can't spend four years or more without experiencing it. There, you meet different shades of people – the good, bad, serious, scholars etc.

In night classes, these sect of students have their motives – not all came to read as you'd think.

For every typical session in a night class in UNIBEN, you'll find:

### a. *The Sleepers*

These ones three-fold mission is to sleep, doze and snore away.

When you see the mountain of books they come to class with, you'd be hailing them, "scholar," thinking they'd cover the course outline.

Once they come to class, drop their books on the desk, you'd hear them sing in different tunes – even better than the angels.

The anointing could be heavy for the desks to bear, so they fall to the ground.

When it comes to farting, these ones had PhD! “Your own is finished” if you sit next to them!

There’s a special group among them. They would be looking at their books but are already in their village fetching water in the dream!

They normally come to class to feel among. The most annoying will be their roommates hailing them “scholar!” in the morning. Only if they knew!

I comot hand for their matter when I once met one of them. I tapped her and told her she had been snoring.

She rebuffed it and told me she wasn’t sleeping but only meditating! I wanted to borrow thunder that had been doing press up at Oshodi Under Bridge that day. Unfortunately, no one had the one they were not using! What!!!

However, I loved the slumbers among them. Their determination and doggedness is second to none.

You’d see them shake and twist their necks as if they’re convulsing. The day had already taken the better of them but how dem fit call them “scholar” if they no go night class?

#### *b. Movers*

I can’t say they steal. They only come to class to pick things, based on shopping levels.

Drop your phone or valuables close to them and watch how fast they’ll fly away.

#### *c. Chykers*

When I saw some persons in night class, I needed nothing to convince me that “no be book dem come read.”

They’d chase everything on shirt, even to their hostels, and whisper sweet nothings to tingle their ears.

“Babe, you’re the only stew in my rice,” I heard on one of such classes. Stew ko, tomato ni!

d. *Foodie*

First time I saw them, I was like “What’s that?” Chewing gum, *guguru*, groundnut, sweets, biscuit, Viju Milk, Lacasera and a cooler of jollof rice all in a big back pack. And you said that one came to read?

One minute they throw groundnut into their mouth, the next one, they open the biscuit wrap. They made you feel you’ve not eaten for days.

Their mouth always moved. They chewed and made unimaginable sounds.

They’re the mobile *bukas*

e. *Call Agents*

The way they made calls could leave you guessing if their fathers owned a telecom firm.

Once in class, they’d hop from one call to another – all part of the reading ooo!

f. *Lookman*

Another name for them is observer. They know who came, left and how they did that!

They often seek attention pacing up and down. They can read in Basement, Faculty and Public Admin hall at Ekehuan the same night, hailing people “guru”, “scholar” – distracting them!

g. *Preachers*

“I will not take much of your time” was their go-to line. After all, the message must be preached to all nations.

h. *‘Married’ Students*

They come together, gist in class, cuddle and then go back. At other times, they even go to dark corners in classes to finish off.

Or when power supply is out, God don butter their bread be that!

i. *Jackophites (the MVPs)*

These carried big text books. They’d *jack* till the day broke and you’ll be like “How does this one do it sef gan? I cannot come and go and die, biko!”

j. *Moon Walkers*

They always wore hose, jacket, hand gloves, head warmer and one kain shoe. You’d think they just came back from the moon!

One of their sub-group is the fashion people. These ones left you asking “Is there a beauty pageant going on here?” They’re especially ladies with make up on fleek!

k. *Arrow guys*

They’re just there to yab. They’d not leave the class without a victim. Hall 3 boys, una well done ooo!

## 1. *The Mobile Cinemas*

Like their name, they watched movies, played games and charged phones. Their noise was from hell.

Hope you don't want to ask which one I belonged to then?

## "HELLO, YOUNG LADY!"

If there's anything I cherished about Ekehuan, it was being served with a different slice of hilarious and unusual delicacies of comments. Ekehuan, with her theatrics, is the epicenter of all of artistic displays.

**Bobo** had become accepted as a way of life on this satellite campus of UNIBEN and this one I am talking about, gained ground especially among occupants of the Male Undergraduate Hostel.

The **Ekpolites** (females) would say that it was not so in the beginning when access to the Male Hostel was as simple as ABC; the game had changed; the tide, never the same.

As the sun bakes the earth, some daughters of Ekpo will sashay with their "Mary Kayed" faces and Brazilian hair to see the sons of Mandela in their hostel.

However, while the **Ekpolite's** heart leapt with joy and sang melodiously that she had succeeded in her adventure, a voice louder than the **vuvuze1a**, would glue her feet to the ground.

Just like a lion waiting for its prey, "HELLO, YOUNG LADY! IS IT 4'0 CLOCK YET?" came the voice from the famous Block B room 111 –the porters' room –puncturing the silence while the **Ekpolite** crossed the imaginary but known boundary.

While this went on, an ocean of eyes would drown the **Ekpolite** and like a child learning to walk, she would sidestep to another direction saying, "I thought it was 4' O Clock, sir". It was about then that the arrow boys of Ekehuan will throw their spears, echoing "Hello, young lady."



At a point, *Hello* became an anthem in Nelson Mandela Hostel. The porter who espoused it no longer did the “*arrowing*” when an Ekpolite crosses the border point because the copyright had been sold to the *Mandelaites*, who used it to bring back to reality any *Ekpolite* who stepped beyond her boundaries!

## GBEDU ON THE HIGHWAY

People walled the road like ants to their hills as the bluish Ahuja horn speakers sang, "Buy your bible here. #200, #200! You wey wear green! I dey see you but you no dey see me!"

I was a fish out of water. I had just gained admission into the University of Benin and it was my first time in that part of town.

It was a Thursday morning. The sky was sad and the trees danced to the whistling tunes of the wind.

Like other pedestrians, the growling black sky had sent me taking cover under the eaves. But soon, the sun started laughing and I strapped my bag like a baby to my back, dribbling past the defence lines of "**Brother, God go bless you!**" along the road.

The road was walled by yellow buses with red and black stripes while the conductors hung on them like vultures waiting to feast on carcasses, screaming, "**Ringo. Ringo! Hold your change ooo!**"

I was now in Benin, the ancient city of the Oba; right in its heartbeat.

Within the twinkling of the eyes, I was in a "**tuke tuke**" and as the car engine hummed, the driver's "30, 30 naira with change. Hold your change ooo", provided the needed backup to the song. The bus should have been with its ancestors but it looked like they too have upgraded. How can they accept this "**cabu cabu**" that's dancing "**shoki**" on the road?

My eyes wandered (inside) the bus. The chair cover wouldn't let a tailor go if one sat on it. The door had a special language for opening it. Only the driver or conductor knew it. Most of the windscreen was covered with Tarpaulin.

It was then I saw speakers which graced the four corners of the vehicle; one was as large as *Olumo Rock*. I wondered what they were for. Music? Not in this kind of bus begging for retirement after years of meritorious service to Benin people.

"*Oya oya nak am akpako ooo. Oya Nak am akpakoooo!!*" thundered out of the speaker fixed to the boot. I thought a bomb had gone off and I was in heaven humming, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!"

Passengers in the bus told the driver to "reduce am ooo" but he was on another planet. Instead, he jacked up the decibels and asked us, "una no dey enjoy am?"

As if they were "*pressing his buttons from the village*," a passenger began to tap his feet. Soon, he started nodding his head like agama lizard. I turned left and right, front and back, other passengers had fallen under the anointing of Terry G's ministrations.

The driver was cruising the high way, throwing wads of crisp naira notes at *Olokpas* who wanted to put asunder what Terry G had joined. Like a head that cannot reject music, I tapped my feet, joined the missionary movement.

While this happened, the world seemed dead to us. We were slain by Bro. Terry G's anointing. Our noise had magnetized men with the jackpots. They had overtaken us and packed on the road. (Uselu road by God is Good Terminal).

"Are you all mad?" an officer with red-shot eyes wielding a rifle, bellowed. Before we opened and closed our eyes, *koboko* began to "Nak am akpakoooo eeh", spoke in other tongues on our backs.

Then, I opened my eyes. Someone had tapped me.

"You've been singing in your dream, Emeka!" he said "Please wake up, it's day break. Meet me at the farm!"

"Ehn, farm ke!" I queried myself.

I made the sign of the cross, touched my shirt and it was like someone drowned in Ikpoba River.

Thank God it was all a dream. If not, wetin I for talk say happen to me for Benin?

## MOVING SCULPTURES: THE KORO' CONNECTION

At first, I thought my eyes performed “*tuumbo-tuumbo*” (guess work) on me when I saw it. It seemed unbelievable that what I saw, while retiring to my room after lectures, had turned into another thing; e be like cinema!

It was a cool night and the gentle breeze caressed my body as I walked on the outstretched tarred road that ran through *Ek City* when I was rudely brought back to 'reality'!

As I inched closer, the sculptural piece stepped backwards, bent its body sideways; deeper into the pitch dark night, and separated into two.

"This lecturer is wicked ooo! See the kain assignment when e give us," a voice echoed from the split artwork.

“But you know that your background of study in chapter six, hmmm chapter...?” Tony replied.

Both cuddled like *oka* (maize) and *ube*, doing *lovuu nwantiti*, at the famous *Mama Ekehuan* artwork.

In the voice of a popular musician, I said, "I'm seeing things!"

As I trudged back to my *cubicle*, I began to ruminate, like a goat chewing dry forage, on what I had seen and hoped it was one of those imaginary sparks that often drowned my mind.

Although my mouth was open as a lamb on its way to the slaughter, the first time I saw it, these love-peddlers perching on different artworks – an obvious advantage

you get studying in an artist-oriented environment –are a regular menu served at the Ekehuan campus community, UNIBEN.

From the *Library Annex, Engineering* block and *Education*, to the dark patches behind the *Ekehuan Administrator's* block, *koro* had sprout like weeds in a newly-burnt farmland!

As days turned into months, the erection of more sculptural piece had provided these Romeos and Juliets more *koro* to play their *lovuu nwantiti!*

As it stands, since the *Elusojian*, Solomon, had already created the impression, sculptures might as well be moving –all thanks to the **KORO CONNECTION!**

Or, my friend, what would you call sculptures that moved at night?

## "ENJOY YOURSELF"

While students busied themselves like ants, preparing for class, shouts of "I don come ooo! Enjoy yourself!" rent the air.

From Block C in the Male Undergraduate Hostel to Block F in the female abode, there was nothing more life-saving than it.

Missing the early morning steaming *moi-moi*, wrapped in banana leaves was akin to missing a final paper as an undergraduate. Popularly known as "Enjoy yourself", the *moi-moi* from Oba's town, was a first aid tool that quenched the fire of early morning pangs of hunger.

When the *lye* doesn't come as expected, students' faces wriggled in anxiety with their trademark question, "enjoy yourself don come?" This delicacy was no respecter of age, levels or social class. It was the flagship breakfast and can come in different combos.

If you're rich as *Dasuki*, you'd get a loaf of bread from "Iye Success" or "Mama Oghale", cut it open and insert your hot "enjoy yourself" into it. I bet you'd be singing "this world is not my home." It takes you straight to Broad Street in heaven.

But if you didn't get a share from *Dasukigate*, you can never go wrong shoveling "enjoy yourself" into your mouth with a basin of "G4" (*Garri* flakes) winking beside you. You'd not know the wonders of life until you return from class in the blazing sun to "Enjoy yourself" with a sachet of freezer-imprisoned UNIBEN water. It's more than orgasmic. You'd speak in different tongues –Esan, Ibibio, Kalabari, Nupe etc!

There's no greater temptation than your roommate(s) wrap(s) of *Enjoy yourself* smiling at you on a table while the aroma pierces your nostrils. "Father, lead me not into temptation" would be your prayer then.

I remember "with egg #50; no egg #30" and I laughed, wondering how many souls "*Enjoy yourself*" has saved.

If you're in Ekehuan Campus of UNIBEN and have not tasted it, then, you definitely need a touch of those wrapped puddings.

But before I continue, lemme go "enjoy" myself with this sweating water and *garri* staring at me!



## VOLLEY BALL COURT: EKEHUAN'S MT. CARMEL

“Lege braga dosh! Isca baro ...ro di! Holy Ghost!” the husky voice sounded. “Ka le ro bo do su zi ka! Ma ge do sh!”

“Father, this GP must rise!” a voice came from the far corner. “You must do something in my case! Any power, from my village, holding it, what are you waiting for?”

As I stepped closer, the voice became many – they spoke in different tones – depending on the individual.

That was my first experience with the Volley ball Court – the Mt Carmel of Ekehuan Road Campus.

From Monday to Sunday, especially at night, diverse shades of people troop to commune with their Maker.

One needed not to be a “pastor” before they made it an abode.

It was the home of the prayer warriors. Campus fellowships made it their slaughter labs.

When the school gates opened its arms to receive students, the place is often empty at night.

But as the exams drew closer, you’d find it hard to book a space there.

Students trooped there, with different cases, seeking solution – a result they often get.

Even in the rain, the tree which walled the Volley Ball Court covered people with their arms.

It was not just the home for prayers. The Thespians used it for rehearsals. When I first came to school, I saw people in shorts file out from there. I thought I was in a dream until I was told they went for rehearsals.

The Volley Ball Court, as I was told, is still the home of prayers in Ekehuan Campus. It is what the Sports Complex is to Christians in Ugbowo Campus.

I miss it dearly!

## COOLER MINISTRY

As students marched aimlessly, my observant eyes caught some people standing under the eaves of one of the billboards mounted in front of the hostel.

It was a cool evening in school that day as I strolled around to relieve myself of the pressure from academic activities.

I found myself opposite the entrance leading to the female hostel, reliving another episode of what has been dubbed, "**COOLER MINISTRY.**"

Within a twinkle of an eye, a young lady whose beauty was blinding, catwalk from the female hostel with something in her hand.

It piqued my curiosity and I decided to do follow up with my zoom lens from the **Public Admin** block where I sat.

The way she carried it and the anxiety written on the faces of the boys who waited for her under the eaves of the billboard, told me "no be ordinary nylon be this! Somebody is doing a ministration!"

My prophecy came to pass when God pushed the guys to my direction with power supply now cut off.

"O boy, I dey heech badly. Open this thing may we chow am here, no dey look Uche face!" one of the guys said, while spit drooled from his mouth.

Don't even say, "see as them dey shake for food!" If you're a student and Ekehuan Campus in particular, then don't think your case is different.

Cooler ministrations are a spiritual and very important something. Or how can a sister minister to your need without a cooler of steaming noodles heavily hedged by oil-dripping fingers of dodo and "obstacles"?

The thing is, you have to know that not all persons were called into the ministry.

But then, there's something I did not understand ooo. When a guy who can't boil water for his "dying" friend or give a spoon of rice to his famished roommate(s) is suddenly transformed into a chef – to host his babe – then you know that what I'm talking is a serious something.

I can't forget those times emergency calls or SOS calls went from Nelson Mandela hostel to Margaret Ekpo and before you knew it, "Come to the front of girls hostel" will be the reply.

Some guys even had a timetable for the cooler ministrations pasted in their hearts. And if it was not the rumors of being held spell-bound by a sister's ministrations that you've become blinded to green lights from others, then it could be that another figure eight was enchanting you with her ministry gifting.

This instance made some men forget where their "hotplates" were. They now joined those (you know them... let me not talk ooo) who had "**Mamas**" that brought daily three square meals. Some positions sha (the bishop will understand this one \*wink\*).

I'm even told the cooler ministry has a higher order where the minister goes to cook and do the ministrations in the guy's room/hostel.

Hmmm! What do I even know sef!

Anyway, if you're in UNIBEN and had a "sister" (*mama*) that didn't do cooler ministry, is that one a sister/mama?

## OFOLOBASEMENT

It was my first day in school and the clearance for *freshers* had begun in earnest.

As I dribbled through the forest of legs at UNIBEN'S *Main Gate*, the melodious echoes from the car park caught up my attention.

The drivers, wheeling their cars forward –to occupy spaces left by cars that had departed –were bellowing "*OFOLOBASEMENT*." This they did to get passengers going to their route.

I was heading to the *West Wing Basement* –one of the landmark buildings in school – but like many *freshers*, I was like a fish out of water when I couldn't hear any of the drivers calling out for people going to my destination.

Almost frustrated, I asked a student, who looked like a *staylite*, how I could get to the *West Wing Basement*. He pointed to the direction/line where the drivers had been shouting, "*OFOLOBASEMENT*." I got to my destination and alighted.

However, as I waited for my online registration, one question kept pounding my innocent mind: "Where be *OFOLOBASEMENT*?" My mind raced north, east, south, and west, searching for the answer to this question that bugged my mind.

As time wore on that day, I walked up to a *staylite* and asked, "Abeg, bros where be *OFOLOBASEMENT*? I go like go the place?"

He burst out in laughter with a look that said: "this one na confirm jambito". "There's no place called *OFOLOBASEMENT*. The drivers meant to say that they were taking you through Hall Four –Law Faculty –Basement!"

"What?" It was more than a surprise too. My Benin drivers had compounded my woes. The way they were rapping the names of the route lost me. As I spent years in the Oba's Town, this happened in different routes. Ring Road was pronounced "Ringo, Ringo!" Till I graduated, that experienced never left my mind.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Area father:** An influential individual. One who dictates how things are done.

**Arrowing:** When a group of students, normally in their hostel flyovers, start abusing and teasing fellow students, especially ladies, passing by.

**Bobo:** It's an act of flattery. The person being flattered is usually addressed with glowing words.

**"Brother, God go bless you!"** The phrase used by beggars at the popular Ring Road in Benin City to beg for money or gifts.

**Buka:** A local food canteen. **Bukas** is the plural.

**Cabu cabu:** In Nigerian pidgin expression, a taxi cab. It might mean it is not registered.

**Cooler Ministry:** A term used to describe female students, in rare occasions, their male counterpart, preparing and taking food to their male friends.

The meals are usually packaged in food flasks/coolers. It is mostly done in hostels across Nigerian tertiary institutions.

**Cubicle:** An enclosure, originally meant as store for students, in school hostels. It's later converted to rooms. The occupants are seen as influential since the competition to be allotted the space is stiff.

**Dasuki:** He was a former National Security Adviser and served during the Goodluck Jonathan presidency. Dasuki is being accused of mismanaging a \$20 billion arms procurement fund as the NSA.

Nigerians now use it to jokingly refer to someone who is stupendously wealthy.



**Dasukigate:** It refers to an arms procurement deal which resulted in the siphoning of \$20 billion through the office of the then National Security Adviser, Colonel Sambo Dasuki. This happened during the government of former President Goodluck Jonathan.

**Ebelebo:** Almond Tree/fruit.

**Ekpolite:** An occupant of the Margaret Ekpo hostel, one the undergraduate female hostels at the University of Benin.

**Elusojian:** A coinage for Elusoji Solomon, the author's course mate at the University of Benin, also a story teller.

**Enjoy yourself:** A popular name for moi-moi sold by two women at the Ekehuan Road Campus of the University of Benin.

**Freshers:** A freshman in the university.

**Garri:** Cassava flour, popular in West African countries like Nigeria, Togo, Benin, and Ghana.

**Guguru:** A Nigeria snack/cookie. It is a dried brownie corn made by using a hot fry pan and dried raw corns.

**Hello, young lady:** It was the phrase used by one of the hostel 'porters' at the Ekehuan campus, University of Benin to call the attention of a female student sneaking into the male hostel at an odd hour. The phrase was popular during the 2012/2013-2013/2014 academic session.

**Iye:** A respectful term for an elderly woman; a mother in Benin and most parts of Edo State.

**Jack:** To study; read.

**Jagaban:** An influential person. A former Lagos State Governor, Ahmed Tinubu is popularly referred to as the Jagaban!

**Jambito:** A first year undergraduate student in a Nigerian tertiary institution. They are easy to spot through their dressing, behavior and they mostly ask questions.

**Koboko:** Nigerian term for a whip, used mostly by parents and teachers for disciplining erring kids.

**Koro:** From Yoruba, now used by many Nigerians to mean corner, usually dark. An isolated place where unprintable things can happen.

**Lovuu nwantiti:** Showing of affection by lover. It's a popular Igbo term to describe love birds and the affection they show themselves.

**Main Gate:** The main entrance of the University of Benin, Ugbowo Campus, Benin City.

**Mama:** In Nigerian tertiary institutions, she is a member of a Christian campus fellowship, usually in charge of welfare or the females. She exhibits motherly traits, and has a large heart.

**Mandalaite:** An occupant of the Nelson Mandela undergraduate male hostel at the Ekehuan Road Campus of the University of Benin!

**Maracana:** The lone football pitch at the Ekehuan Road Campus, University of Benin. It's named after the famous Maracana stadium in Brazil. It is the campus' Wembley.

**Moi-moi:** A Nigerian/West African food made from steamed ground beans. Served in parties, it can be taken with rice, pap, custard, plantain etc or even eaten alone.

**Ofolobasement:** A malapropism for the "Hall Four –Law Faculty –Basement" route at the Ugbowo Campus of the University of Benin.

**Olumo Rock:** One of the landmark tourism destination in the country. It is a mountain located at the heart of Ogun State, Abeokuta.

**Pressing his buttons from the village:** A phrase, humorously used for an unknown force causing someone to act in a certain/abnormal way.

**Ringo! Ringo:** The term used by taxi cabs to describe the popular Ring Road in the heart of Edo State capital, Benin!

**Spirikoko:** A religious person. One who often goes from class to class preaching the gospel. At other times, he might be a leader in one of the Christian campus fellowship.

**Stalite:** Informal word for a returning student in a Nigerian university.

**Tuke tuke:** A taxi cab.

**Tuumbo-tuumbo:** Guesswork.

**West Wing Basement:** One of the most popular building at the Ugbowo Campus of the University of Benin.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Emmanuel Egobiambu is a creative writer, digital journalist, and editor who helps people craft flawless contents.

A graduate of Mass Communication from the University of Benin, Emmanuel has published hundreds of stories across mainstream and digital media such as Goal.com, Ynaija.com, and Guardian Nigeria among others.

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