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## Ran out of Gas? Naija na Helele Fuel Subsidy Removal Jokes Reflecting Government's Dive Toward Market Governance in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Nigeria is one of the world's largest oil producers having rich oil resources in many parts of the country, some yet to be harvested. In spite of her position in the oil industry, Nigeria's oil products are either not sufficient for domestic use or are too exorbitant for the general populace. The absence of a present as well as questionable governance have been subjects of vociferous debate creating the heated impression of Naija na Helele! Coupled with dwindling economic fortunes, the rise of feudal politicians, the banality of liberal democratic practice, the increasing uncertainties, and acts of violence, have created disempowerment, identity loss, and new decorations of exclusion involving both the familiar and strange leading to Nigeria government's dive toward the market governance. The move toward market governance has generated various forms of resistance or reflection, the joke culture being one of such forms. This work, using the incongruous juxtaposition theory, interrogates the production and performance of verbal and digital jokes and the implications of the government's move to other sources of revenue generation, thereby reversing the state's provision of social services and necessitating the 'ran out of gas' jokes. The finding is that the market governance may sound messianic being invested with a transparency to transform the oddities of the moment but its practice, like that of liberal democracy, has the enthralling potential of the contemporary consuming passions, of eroding and not endorsing, and of stasis not metamorphosis.

**Keywords:** *Gas, Capitalism, Neoliberalism, Government, Market governance, Nigeria*

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### 1. Introduction

In contemporary Nigeria, the jokes about ran-out-of-gas now fill up the laughter tanks of cynics, critics, and the ever-critical civil society more than the several other conundrums of hardship and insecurity of various kinds. Gas in this paper includes all forms of oil products refined for mechanical and domestic uses. The paper may refer to other synonyms of gas such as fuel, premium motor spirit, or petrol, all taken as one product under the purview of the jokes in discourse. Certainly, the many Nigerians that ran out of gas cannot run out of laugh because laughter is the new 'premium' spirit that disengages the Nigerian from the arrears and present predicaments of unimaginable proportion. The person that will run with laughter will not run into the quagmire of out of gas quandary because such a person can never be weary of the heavy weight of an absence. While gas powers vehicles, engines, and other equipment, laughter can improve and fill up, like an oil tank, one's distorted mood and set one on the right medical path of healing or respite. The absence of oilfield

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(offshore and inshore) solutions creates in its absence joke-way solutions, funnily initiated by the very civil society who, overwhelmed with the dialectics of still life, generates ways of breaking the wall of the “plagues of the ‘new world order,’” (Jacques Derrida 91) and of “Times of monstrous chimeras” (Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eye 2*) to reclaim, sardonically, the despicable appurtenances pushed into civil society by insidious forces of modernity.

If one has heard the disturbing news about the inexistence of civil society or its ontological passivity under contemporary feudal fiefdoms, as Comaroff and Comaroff say, the civil society increasingly “known primarily by its absence, its elusiveness, its incompleteness, from the traces left by struggles conducted in its name,” (40) the civil society itself had heard worse about the collapsing state, particularly its “new spectral reality” (Negri 9) which is why Žižek suggests, marginalities of different kinds do not, for obdurate structural reasons, often come together in enduring “rainbow coalitions” (127). Whether the cooperative antagonism and suspicion between the state and the civil society will provoke synergistic understanding through the reinvention of modernity or expand the compartmentalization of the two generating even greater civil strife is puzzling and uncertain.

At the heart of this injurious divergence is the state-led drift to the market necessitating “the corn modification of new areas of social and natural life by capital” (van der Walt 274), the reliance on corporate sensibility and entrepreneurial dexterity thereby abandoning the Keynesian model of rendering services. This drift to the market may sound as a mass suicide of modernity, something like killing one’s parent, but it marked a global shift from post socialist practice to a new economic paradigm, that of non-human creation of value necessary for human survivor. In fact, non-human ideas, modes of operation, and capital have taken over the control of the human, even determining how humans would live life, thus overturning the supremacy of humans over ideas, objects, animals, and other living or dead things in its environment.

The capacity of the government to gain control in the face of embarrassments of various kinds such as insecurity, poverty, inflation and several others is reliant upon its strong hold to economic governance in which case it strives to protect a credible hold onto a secure economic viability and environment. When the code of market governance is ignored or not based on sound analytical judgement, predictability, and consistency, then it changes the ethical valence and invade the territoriality of suspicion, even resistance. This is the point Nigerians have found themselves-the state continues to engage in their excruciating impunity in governance and thickening hegemony of power while singing the gospel of “patriotic capitalism” (29) or the civil society to fight the state, what Aijaz Ahmad calls “the terrain on which actual class conflicts take place,” (318). This is the citizen state where an opportunity offers itself for the reflection of government’s plunge toward market governance through the creation and production of jokes. The perceptive global trend has manifested at the national level and the jokes may show whether the nation-state is no longer existing or there is less government or the explosion of jokes signal the re-entering into governance by the citizenry, another way.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theory used in this study is the incongruous juxtaposition theory. The theory is most apt in this research because of the bisociative view where two consistent yet incompatible characters are brought to critical discourse. The abrupt shift in relationship between the state and its citizenry, on the one hand, and the endless but fruitless song of market governance by state actors attracts, on the contrary, an explosion of joke responses thereby creating what Giseline Kuipers calls “a humorous clash” (455). In the dive to market governance by the political actors, the civil society manufactures a humour territory of action to reply to the operations of the state. “Humour regime” (Kuipers 63) therefore is incongruously juxtaposed with the “patriotic capitalism” from state actors. There exists the state’s reliance on market governance and the civil society’s reprisal of jokes to reflect the state of things in society.

Incongruity is something that is startling, absurd, out of the ordinary, weird, or bizarre. The incongruity point of view focuses on the mental adjustment required to realize that a specific statement made during a conversation, an account of a circumstance or occurrence, or something observed in the real world prompts us to modify our preconceived notions about what is being portrayed. It should entail an interpretation that not only differs slightly from our original understanding of the event or its description, but actually contradicts it. Schopenhauer quoted in Morreall states:

In every suddenly appearing conflict between what is perceived and what is thought, what is perceived is always unquestionably right; for it is not subject to error at all, requires no confirmation from without, but answers for itself. Its conflict with what is thought springs ultimately from the fact that the latter, with its abstract conceptions, cannot get down to the infinite multifariousness and fine shades of difference of the concrete” (Schopenhauer in Morreall 160)

James Beattie describes the incongruous idea of humour as “two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them” (320). The thing that is incongruous has to be

conventionally unsuitable yet acquiring a coordinated relation with another. The dive to market governance by the state actors propels the removal of fuel subsidy and in contrastive association, the jokes from the civil society sarcastically resists the market proclamations. The incongruous collide in meaningful ways.

### 3. Methodology

This study undertakes a qualitative research method that involves the use of verbal and media texts to generate in-depth insights into the knotty issue of government's recourse to market governance in the face of dwindling economic fortunes against the jokes on the perceived bad governance due to the abrupt removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. The research is a phenomenological one in which case the joke texts are collected as main data to help interpret the government's action of seeking market ways of solving socio-economic challenges in the Nigerian society. Thus, conversational jokes and media jokes data are randomly selected to help investigate the incongruous phenomenon between the state and the citizenry. The observation method, the focused group method, digital media method, and the secondary research method were employed in generating the data. The combination of content analysis, textual, thematic, and discourse analysis was used to fully understand the language use, thrust of the jokes, media and verbal text practices, and the interpretative patterns and layers of meaning and discourse of the jokes. This way, it is hoped the study will be more flexible, create real world contexts, throw more meaningful insights, and generate new ideas in the investigation of the government's move to market governance and civil society's deployment of jokes as counter discourse.

### 4. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the jokes arising from the oil subsidy removal due to government's recourse to the policy of market governance in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- i. To identify the verbal and digital media jokes that relate to the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria
- ii. To analyse the meanings and miasma communicated by the specific joke texts
- iii. To appraise the implications of contemporary remedy of market governance by the government of Nigeria.

### 5. Jokes and the Nigerian Society

The joke can be found within the domain of the comic even in its critical, rule breaking, aggression, and ugly manifestation. Fischer states that 'A joke is a playful judgement,' (Fischer quoted in Freud 51.) and that 'If it is concealed, it must be uncovered in the light of the comic way of looking at things; if it is noticed only a little or scarcely at all, it must be brought forward and made obvious, so that it lies clear and open to the light of day . . . In this way caricature comes about.' (Fischer quoted in Freud 45.). In a playful way comes the caricature when things are brought to 'the light of day.'

Jean Paul reiterates that "Freedom produces jokes and jokes produce freedom", not only entertainment but also that "Joking is merely playing with ideas." (Quoted in Freud 24). Jean Paul also states that 'Joking is the disguised priest who weds every couple.' Thus, every reality in society is put to joke use to produce itself or produce freedom of sort.

Even though joke's prime aim is in deriving pleasure, probably being an art inspires the generating of other concerns perhaps fixed in the space of subjective bases of jokes. Dispositions to joking also involve other elements such as memory, intellect, cultural and other contexts, and imagination, which coincide with joke making. The fact that liberal democracy is hotly contested in Africa and other parts of the world, the abrupt transition between social values to market values is increasingly scrutinized through jokes and other platforms, and other drawbacks and corollaries of resistance such as end bad governance, poverty, inequality, insecurity, civil strife, consuming geist, and living at the edge, are subjects of vociferous debate. The jokes after these challenges and prospects brighten up the otherwise gloomy picture of the citizenry. Thus, joke creation is another way of historicity, a way to write Nigeria with Nigeria in Nigeria through the insidious strokes of incongruous juxtapositions of jokes. Within the pitfalls are jokes accompanying them, in whispers to screams, there are jokes for such shows of reality, and all contemporary forms of contextualization of the market and subaltern suffering, jokes are the incongruous divergence and assemblage for evaluation. A Joke may be an irritation to many, especially the ones it attempts to dislodge, what Freud sees as an expression of the unconscious in a rational space. For the state or leaders generally, this is most true in functional location of jokes as political agitation professed by Bergson in *Le Rire*, where he evaluates laughter as mobilizing one community to destroy the other, what Jurgen Brummack described as "aesthetically socialized aggression" (275). These statements show that both political mobilization and social aggression work together

In Nigeria, jokes do not just emerge, like in Europe and America, to derive pleasure, but come within contexts and socio-historical loci. The jokes are thus integral to the realities in time and space that individual and group freedom, derived from democratic flair in Nigeria over the last twenty-five years (1999-2024), civic freedom from the dispensations

of human and work rights of the United Nations Charter, the ever surging developments of technology that inspired platforms of free expression such as the social media and freedom derived from inspiration of a freer press also articulated in the expressions of the people through the press, all ginger the joke reports, assessments, reprisals, resistances, and various reaction of daily happenings in the Nigerian society. This effective use of freedom to create and enact jokes as a result of the free press freedom is very unlike that reported in the United States by Blanc and Dundes (in 1986 First Prize: Fifteen Years 43) that “political jokes are relatively rare in the United States.... One reason for this is the existence of a more or less free press in America. U.S. citizens are free to write letters to the editors of their newspapers and to participate actively in radio call-in shows to express their dissatisfaction or criticism of local, national, or international politics. Generally speaking, it is possible to voice political opinion in a variety of public forums without fear of reprisal from individuals who enjoy political power. Oral political jokes are a kind of folklore which tends to thrive in areas of the world where one finds totalitarian regimes accompanied by strict censorship. The relationship seems to be one of inverse proportion: the more repressive the regime, the more political jokes there will be.” In Nigeria, with the free press, and the social media, political matters are not fully conveyed in the formal medium of the press but on individual and group expressions in the social media and the joke medium. Jokes are therefore made on political matters affecting the nation, especially on policies that are considered detrimental to the welfare and growth of the individual and society. The total removal of fuel subsidy has lowered the standard of living of the people, increased the burden of responsibility without concomitant provision by the state of remedial measures, and generally subjected the people to untold and undeserving forms of hardships and deprivations that warrants the creation and performance of jokes on fuel subsidy removal. Just as the removal of fuel subsidy has a relation in the jokes following it, the society manifestations and experiences are reflected in the creation and production of jokes as a kindred spirit, albeit incongruously.

## 6. Naijá Na Helele (meaning Nigeria is incredible)

The word ‘helele’ has series of meanings across countries of the world. The Urban Dictionary describes ‘helele’ as ‘anything good that can happen to you or someone’ (<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=helele>). The focal adjective is ‘good’ which means that ‘helele’ applies to things good happening to one. This dictionary is written by all who are interested in providing meanings to words and expressions. It is however in the category of the social media where opinions thrive. The meanings given in this dictionary may be taken as personal opinions and not cultural facts or contexts (the word is written by erikndaveforever October 14, 2007).

Helele has been a family surname for families in Scotland, Britain, and Ireland. Other names of this nature include Helle, Hefele, Helmle, Heller, Hell, Melle, and Halle (ancestry @ <https://www.ancestry.com/name-origin?surname=helele>).

“Helele” is a song from the Zulu language of song by South African singer Velile Mchunu and Danish percussion duo Safri Duo. It was released on May 7, 2010 as the only new single from Safri Duo’s Greatest Hits album. The song was the official trailer song for the 2010 FIFA World Cup broadcast on German television channel RTL and Switzerland’s Schweizer Fernsehen and Television Suisse Romande in the months of June–July of that year during the 2010 Bydgoszcz Hit Festival in Poland (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Also in South Africa, The Living Room Choir produced a musical titled “Helele Mama” as a South African Mbube (Lion) song, a song which explanation varies. To some, Helele Mama means (Hail Mother or Oh Mother); helele in this case means “Hello.”

The Hawain version of the word is “helele’i” and the English interpretation as “travel.” The word thus means many things to different people depending on the cultural conception and linguistic implication and relationship.

In Nigeria, the term has come to be one strong word for the expression of wonder, charisma, and delight in a thing, mostly good, but could be equally on the odd side of expectation. The recent Pidgin Conference titled *Naijá na Hélélé: Nigerian Pidgin in the global, local and in-between contexts* hosted by the University of Ibadan, Nigeria on 02 - 05-Oct-2024 translates ‘helele’ to mean ‘incredible.’ The country Nigeria and its doings are ‘helele’ or incredible.

The newly created Pidgin dictionary explains, however, that ‘helele’ means ‘exceptional.’ The words far-fetched,’ ‘absurd,’ and ‘unbelievable’ have kindred spirit with the word ‘incredible’ in Nigerian linguistic and cultural contexts; and the words ‘excellent,’ ‘extraordinary,’ and ‘special’ are associated with the word ‘exceptional.’ The word ‘helele’ therefore suggests a character that swaps between the absurd and the special and the in-between contexts. It is in this dual character, such one shown by Chinua Achebe’s character, Ezeolu in *Arrow of God*, whose face has two sides, the knowable and the unknowable sides, that the Nigerian Pidgin word ‘helele’ may be drawn. Thus, whether within the absurd character or the extraordinary one, Naija (Nigeria) is ‘helele’ and the in-between contexts may stand as the reactions such as found in the jokes on the removal of fuel subsidy.

## 7. Fuel Subsidy Removal

Government in Nigeria instituted subsidies to represent social services rendered to its populace. Petroleum products were one of such services that the government regulated its price to help in the purchasing power of the people. The fact that Nigeria has been the seventh largest oil producing country in the world, holds a significant oil reserve, and aspires to regulate price fluctuations in the market to alleviate the cost of living were some reasons for the decision. However, the rising inflation brought about by International Financial Institutions' policies such as deregulation, the plague of corruption in the diversion of the subsidy funds and inefficiency on the payments of the subsidy, and the plunge in fiscal deficits and budgetary strain caused the call for the removal of the subsidy, hence a few persons were benefitting from it.

Proponents of the call for the removal of subsidy argue that the government would save and redirect the funds earned to facilitate critical infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and other social programmes. They argue that such a decision would encourage private sector investment in the oil sector and promote government efficiency in governance.

Even though the opponents of subsidy removal, nevertheless, raise concerns about the potential damaging brunt on the poor and vulnerable in society, and that removing subsidies would lead to a momentous upsurge in the prices of petroleum products, which would have a dropping effect on the cost of transportation, food, and other essential goods and services, which would exacerbate poverty and inequality in the country, the government went ahead on May 29, 2023 to completely remove subsidy on fuel products in Nigeria. Since subsidy removal was started in 1988 by the regime of Ibrahim Babangida, it has been implemented and reversed several times as a result of protests by the civil society against the fuel price surge. From Ibrahim Badamesi Babangida in 1988 to Muhammadu Buhari in 2016, fuel subsidy removal met public backlash and was either reversed or partially reinstated. The issue of subsidy removal has been an ongoing debate in Nigeria until the new administration of President Ahmed Bola Tinubu, on May 29, 2023 Inaugural Speech at Eagle Square categorically stated "subsidy is gone. Subsidy can no longer justify its ever-increasing cost in wake of dying resource" (Tinubu Inaugural Speech). Economic considerations, social implications, and political factors are integral to the discourse on the knotty issue of oil subsidy removal in Nigeria. The joke lore has, in the wake of the removal, found a subject for the creation and performance of jokes on the fuel subsidy removal not only to show its artistic relevance to contemporary discourse but to reflect on the daily concerns of the Nigerian society in its 'helele' moves of the absurd and the special dual character.

## 8. The Plunge to Market Governance in Nigeria

Due largely to the weakening economy, the government of Nigeria has become torpidly involved in market governance in which system relies on investors to fully participate in the running of institutions. Nigeria is now into market-based corporate governance system in which the obligation of governance rests on corporate management sensibilities. The dynamics of changes, especially the market forces, influence management of government and decisions of governance. Investopedia opines that "market-based corporate governance system is derived from common law. It is one of several corporate governance systems that have developed throughout the world. Since markets are the primary source of capital, investors have the most power in determining corporate policies. Therefore, the system relies on capital markets to influence corporate management" (<https://www.investopedia.com/>). Government's application of the Agency Theory implicates on the market governance hence the possibility of maximizing an opportunity drives interest useful to governance and prestige. It is this market governance that leads to the capitalist university and the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. With market governance is market driven exchange rate, speculative activities, and probably create market distortions. The jokes understudy are barometers of measuring Nigerian government's dive toward market governance.

## 9. Ran out of Gas Jokes

Fuel subsidy removal jokes have been performed in Nigeria since its serial announcement and implementation in the 1980s. The jokes have, however, never been created and told daily with the creativity of transforming older jokes from within Nigeria and other countries, with consistency of applying the impact of the fuel subsidy removal to the performance of jokes, and with determination to have a voice, as it is now told beginning with May 29, 2023 when subsidy on petroleum products were removed completely thereby giving room for all sorts of survival calculations from the civil society.

Each joke performer, now in the rage of millions of people because of the number of Nigerians affected by the removal of fuel subsidy, tell a joke with particularity to personal or group circumstances faced, and in sarcastic, unpleasant, and

apprehensive mood to the point of creating a sick streak to it. In fact, the total removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria has generated a corpus of jokes with sociological significance hardly ignored as some individuals equate the removal to death in metaphoric terms. To many Nigerians, this period serves as a customary period for mourning and lamentation since the removal of fuel subsidy has not made much impact on the standard of living, if anything worsened it, and joke making has come to be one of the social outlets for expressing the disgust of the total removal of fuel subsidy and the ensuing suffering thereto. The jokes in this study were gathered from verbal conversations and in the media especially nairaland and naijabookofjokes sites.

The very day of announcement of the removal of fuel subsidy May 29, 2023 was the very day of the vibrancy of the creation and performance of jokes on the removal. Some of the jokes may seem governmentally rebellious or discourteous but such jokes may be “time off” from the everyday constraints on how we speak” and that “Jokes are in one way or other breakers of social conventions about the use of language” knowing that “such breaches are very central to joking” (Davies 1). Also, according to Mindess, it is “a frame of mind, a manner of perceiving and experiencing life; It is a kind of outlook, a peculiar point of view, and one which has great therapeutic power” (2010 p.41). The state actors may view some of the jokes with condescension but they are part of the breaking of taboos in society to express an equally bizarre experience in society. Such jokes circumvent sanctioned styles of expression. This joke told in a reaction to President Tinubu’s call for a Youth Conference in his Independence Day Broadcast, October 1, 2024, to discuss issues affecting the youth in Nigeria instead of demonstrations on the streets and public squares:

**Joke 1: Between Dialogue and Protest.**

What is the difference between a dialogue and time wasting?

They are time bomb twins waiting to explode more anger protests!

This joke told by a student in favor of the against-confab-group and to fuel subsidy removal and the hardship-prone approaches of government reform suggests that the confab drives at time wasting that may eventually lead to more explosions of protest in the manner of the end bad governance protest in August, 2024 Nigeria. For the youth ready to play a role in the confab, in incongruous context, is the joke poser below which places the dialectics of functionality of such a conference. Between the youth ready to go for the confab and the one against the conference is the joke:

**Joke 2: A Youth and Another Youth.**

Youth 1. What role are you about to play in the confab?

Youth 2. Dialogue!

Youth 1. Stupid! Ask for the role of results!

The Nigerian trade union, called Trade Union Congress (TUC) calls the fuel subsidy removal as “a joke taken too far” the day after the pronouncement of fuel subsidy removal (Vanguard May 30). This shows that even as the removal of fuel subsidy has come to stay, as repeatedly affirmed by the president, the union leader sees it as a ‘joke.’ Thus, the removal of fuel subsidy which brought about the creation and performance of jokes is itself a joke to suggest that jokes and reality stand at a threshold of fiction and reality. Time alone will tell whether the jokes or the subsidy removal, seen as a joke, would qualify as reality or joke, for whichever is regarded by the two parties as a joke.

For visitors in Nigeria, the hospitality of Nigerians is never in doubt. This hospitality includes internal members of the Nigeria family, a kindness which is done daily as individuals and groups visit other families. With the scarcity of resources brought about by the removal of fuel subsidy, the Nigerian family is seen in the following joke to be unwaveringly generous, as ever:

**Joke 3: A Family and a Visitor.**

Host: What do I offer you?

Visitor: I’ll take fuel.

Fuel is the rare gift in contemporary Nigeria, and rare things are offered to visitors during visits. Instead of food or water that should be the delight of a visitor, it is fuel that is requested by the visitor, obviously because the fuel may only be bought elsewhere at an exorbitant price. A gift, whether as water or fuel, is still a gift, and visitors wish for rare gifts that fuel is, now. The emphasis on ‘fuel’ gift offer instead of food or water underscores the exorbitant nature of fuel, even as the visitor may be aware of the necessity, even exorbitant price, of food or water.

Every family is aware of the scarce but important role fuel plays in the lives of the people, including the fact of generating a consciousness for its presence or not. Actions of individuals may be as a result of the presence or absence of fuel as the next joke expatiates.: A parent advises the child going to school to be careful in a special way.

**Joke 4: A Parent and the Child.**

“Please watch the road more carefully now because drivers are only watching their fuel gauge!”

The fact that drivers may be full of sight, mentally prepared, and ready to drive is immaterial as far as the availability or otherwise of fuel in their tank determine. The central concern is the ‘gauge’ reading fuel meter instead of the road worthiness or sharp sight of the driver concerned. This centrality to the existence or not of fuel underpins other concerns too, such as thinking more about the fuel than the car itself as the joke below testifies:

**Joke 5: A Mechanic and his Customer**

Mechanic: Oga go home! Don’t worry your car is safe at our workshop.

Customer: I know my car is safe, but what about the fuel in my tank?

The scarcity of fuel shows also its value to individuals such that metaphoric compares may be made between fuel and love. The joke to follow testifies to this assertion:

**Joke 6: A new love toast.**

A guy tells his fresh friend the new love toast: “You are my Fuel Subsidy.”

Fuel subsidy equates the cost of love for one. However, a boyfriend’s wish may be thwarted by the scarcity of fuel as the next joke affirms.

**Joke 7: A Boyfriend and Craziiness**

A boyfriend tells his girls “I really want to drive you crazy but fuel is costly”

Driving in a car is difficult when there is fuel scarcity as much as driving a girl crazy with social provisions and pleasure which are equally scarce in periods of poverty arising from fuel subsidy removal. The image of a stolen social facility is enacted again in the following joke.

**Joke 8: A Stolen Car and the cry over its lost Fuel.**

A car was snatched at gunpoint today and the owner was screaming **My Fuel My Fuel!**

For a person to cry over a loss of fuel when the car itself is snatched tells the extent of the sarcastic impression given to listeners and readers of the text. It is difficult to say which situation is less painful between the one who lost his car but cry over the loss of his fuel and the one who bought a costly car but treks due to the inability to fuel the car. The next joke relates the bitter experience of a new car owner, a Lexus car for that matter.

**Joke 9: A Lexus Car and a Legsus Trek**

A man bought **Lexus** yesterday but is now driving **legsus!**

Lexus car may be bought but filling the tank with gas to drive becomes difficult thus making the new car owner to use ‘legsus’ (the leg) to trek to his destination. The coinage ‘legsus’ equals the brand name ‘Lexus’ to showcase the power of nature and of the human over that of technology, especially in times of hardship such as the ‘out of gas’ situations in Nigeria.

Thinking of expensive things cannot be substituted by Nigerians especially during social periods of relaxation. Taking a girl out to a relaxation spot by a boy is vital as filling up fuel in a gas station, as the next joke shows.

**Joke 10: A Sweetheart Spot and a Filling Station.**

Girl: Sweetheart, please take me to somewhere expensive this weekend.

Boy: Okay, Let’s go to the fuel filling station.

And

**Joke 11: On a Car Air Condition and a Fresh Air Condition.**

Baby: Please put on the **car Air Condition**

Guy: Don’t you think we should have a **breath of fresh air** instead?

**Joke 12: Fuel Removal and Boko Haram**

Breaking News: Fuel subsidy removal: Boko Haram claims responsibility.

Boko Haram and Federal Government are seen to be synonymous in this joke as with other jokes elsewhere. The disaster and destruction caused by Boko Haram insurgency competes constructively with the sufferings caused by the removal of fuel subsidy.

**Joke 13: Fuel and its Safety.**

Public Service Announcement: You can deposit your fuel at First Bank, Zenith Bank, GTB or any bank close to you.

The safety of fuel becomes necessary in the wake of its scarcity and cost. The Central Bank of Nigeria, through its subsidiary banks held money for some tedious months in the run up to the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. People suffered in the name of a change in the Naira currency, especially some denominations as finding money returned to the bank for a new one became hectic. Since the banks are capable of keeping safe the property of Nigeria and that keeping money beyond the reach of politicians may evade election manipulation, it may well take care of its fuel for safe keep and also keep the emotional explosions of Nigerians. This is a sarcastic joke not to be taken literally but rooted in the historic deep suffering of Nigerians only a year ago.

It is significant to note that what reforms led to the removal of fuel subsidy is not without its gains for the Nigerian people except that priority is placed on the overwhelming deprivations of the people. The picture of 'good,' in terms of adjustments made in the face of deprivation, also follows the reform in the socio-economic fabrics of society. The following jokes are typical examples.

**Joke 14: Breaking News.**

Bicycle sellers report high rise in sales

The alternative of fuel to reaching destinations is trekking, which shows good health and wellbeing.

**Joke 15: Witches and Wizard Full of Subsidies**

Public Service Announcement: Witches and wizards will carry passengers at night at affordable prices.

Nigerians, and indeed Africans, are in the habit of allocating functional presence and influence of witches and wizards in the daily lives and activities of citizens. The abrupt removal of subsidy on fuel is at the distaste also from witches and wizards as their members and prospective initiates stand the risk of some sort. They have announced that they still maintain normal prices (did not remove subsidy) on their transportation and other service products.

The dynamics in society arise from social, economic, political, and ideological transformations reflected upon daily experiences. There are dialectics between the good and the bitter and that whenever one thing stands another also stand. This explains the ambivalent nature of humanity and its ways as experiences unfold. The presence of fuel subsidy is the absence of it with their concomitant conundrums. The following joke, also found elsewhere and told with different meanings in mind, demonstrates to this claim.

**Joke 16: Out of Gas and the Bee.**

A man was driving down the road and ran out of gas. Just at that moment, a bee flew in his window.

The bee said, 'What is the problem?'

'I'm out of gas,' the man replied.

The bee told the man to wait and flew away. Minutes later, the man watched as an entire swarm of bees flew to his car and into his gas tank. After a few minutes, the bees flew out.

'Try it now,' said one bee.

The man turned the ignition key and the car started right up.

'Wow!' the man exclaimed, 'what did you put in my gas tank?'

The bee replied, "BP"

The 'BP' here may stand for many meanings separate to users. It may be Bee Pee or in the Nigerian situation, in my impression, 'Blood Pressure' which certainly arises from the quagmire of the 'ran out of gas' phenomenon.



## 10. Conclusion

This study concentrates on the jokes arising from the sudden removal of oil subsidy as a result of economic downturn which inspires state actors to nose-dive toward market governance. The jokes studied reflect not just the entertainment of the people but a sarcastic tinge of power relations, decision making and its consequences to the people, and a lenient resistance against a democratic governance that manifests anguish more than contentment. Thus, the jokes are used to showcase the cautious antagonism between the self, on the one hand and between the political actors and the citizenry. With the self is an objective self-critique but with the political actors is a sarcastic stereotyping that leaves scars of great magnitude. The study also identifies the plummeting to market forces as responsible for the sudden withdrawal of fuel subsidy that leads to untold sufferings and the jokes thereto. The study also evaluates that the creation, proliferation, and performance of jokes in recent times from 1999 onward has opened up vistas of assessing Nigeria's democratic journey, socio-economic practices, and leadership accountability in Nigeria. This study is one tiny slice on the study of jokes reinventing governance and citizenship relations and actions but has provided a diffident basis for facilitating future research in this direction.

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