

The Economy of Sex in Nigeria

By Abiola Rasag

Nigerians love sex. Sex is our national indulgence, the one appetite poverty never killed. If anything, poverty feeds it. Down on the street, sex is cheap. But climb the ladder, and the price flips. Up top, sex stops being cheap and becomes very expensive. It is expensive because reputation is involved, and reputation in Nigeria is gold. A senator's reputation. A general overseer's reputation. A managing director's reputation. These men are not paying for pleasure alone. They are paying for something more valuable: silence. Welcome to the clito-economy. It runs on discretion, and discretion is the most expensive commodity in this country. The real business is secrecy. High-class prostitution in Nigeria is a discretion trade. The oga does not want his nude moving from a bed to his wife's WhatsApp group. The pastor does not want a headline titled "Man of God spotted at Lovina Hotel with mystery woman." What they are buying, above everything, is a guarantee that the night ends in that room and nowhere else. This is why a prostitute with the strongest reputation for keeping her mouth shut charges more than the one who posts encounters on social media. The arrangement cuts both ways, too. Mutual exposure keeps everybody honest. Clergies are not spectators in this economy. Some are among its most faithful customers, because their fall is steeper than anyone else's. A man who prophesies on Sunday cannot survive Monday's gossip. A married celebrity cannot afford private chats appearing on Twitter.

An Imam, traditional ruler, CEO, politician, billionaire, senior government official, or respected family man may have far more to lose from exposure than from the cost of the encounter itself. So, the premium escort is not merely selling sex. She is selling confidentiality. And confidentiality is expensive. That is why, in clito-economy, the bigger the client, the more valuable a prostitute capable of keeping quiet. Everybody protects everybody because everyone's survival depends on everyone keeping quiet. It is almost a cartel of silence. The truly successful ashawo understands something fundamental: You are not being paid only for what happens in the bedroom. You are being paid for what never leaves the bedroom. No Instagram hints. No "guess who I met last night?" No secret photograph for evidence. No blackmail. No name-dropping. Nothing. Suddenly, the astronomical fee begins to make sense. This also explains how some of Nigeria's mysterious "big girls" operate. We all know the stereotype. Nobody can explain precisely what she does. Her Instagram bio says: Entrepreneur | Lifestyle | Beauty | God First. Her core business? Nobody knows. She owns a Range Rover. She flies business class. She spends three weeks in Dubai. Nigeria's Clito-economy is far more diverse than our hypocritical public morality allows us to admit. There is another interesting phenomenon. Why do big boys always seem to know big girls? The high-class escort in Nigeria often functions less like a lover and more like a banker who happens to be beautiful. She launders money. She moves drugs. She fronts as a

respectable businesswoman while running errands for men who cannot be seen doing their own dirty work.

An escort who moves comfortably around politicians, businessmen, celebrities, fraudsters, diplomats, oil dealers, and other wealthy clients may become useful for purposes that have nothing to do with sex. She becomes a connector, a courier, confidante, fixer, and a social bridge. And in criminal networks, this kind of proximity is vital. This is where the Clito-economy overlaps with darker economies. Money laundering, fraud, drug trafficking, influence peddling, and asset concealment. A business with conveniently vague cash flow can potentially provide cover for money that needs an explanation. Suddenly somebody who yesterday was described merely as somebody's "girlfriend" becomes Managing Director of three companies. Look closely at the boutiques, the spas, the restaurants that open in Ikoyi or Banana Island with no clear capital source and no real customer base to justify the rent. Some of these places are not businesses at all. They are washing machines. Dirty money



from a senator, a drug baron, or a fraud boy goes in, and it comes out looking like turnover from a fashion line or a wellness spa. Look around. The politician knows the influencer. The dealer knows the actress. The fraudster knows the socialite. The nightclub owner knows everybody. The big boy dates the big girl. Everybody somehow lives inside the same tiny ecosystem. It is often presented publicly as romance. "My king." "My queen." "The love of my life." But sometimes what looks like a love story is essentially a commercial alliance. The man provides money, access, accommodation, vehicles, travel, and social status.

The woman provides companionship, beauty, access to her own network, social legitimacy, discretion, and sometimes other services. Both parties understand the assignment. Some of these women also move product, quietly. A well-dressed woman checking into a five-star hotel with designer luggage does not attract the same suspicion as a girl on an okada. She has access on both ends, to the men who supply and the men who consume, and that access is worth serious money to whoever controls the pipeline. Nigeria does not have a prostitution problem. Nigeria has a trust problem, and prostitution is simply where that trust problem has found its most profitable anchor. When institutions refuse to hold anybody accountable, and when keeping quiet becomes worth more than the service itself, the market will always find a way to price the silence. In Nigeria, it found the clito-economy, and business is very good. That is the Clito-economy. A vast informal marketplace operating beneath our public morality, powered by poverty at one end, wealth at the other, hypocrisy everywhere, and secrecy holding the entire structure together.

Abolaji Rasag is a Social Commentator and realist