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# Authority Stealing

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## *Anti-Corruption War and Democratic Politics in Post-Military Nigeria*

Wale Adebani

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS  

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*For*

*Chief Gani Fawehinmi—the one-man jurisprudential squad  
against the excesses and inanities of power;*

*and*

*Dr. Bala Muhammed—the radical motif of an egalitarian society which  
he pursued survives the bloody motives of his assassins.*





*'Few people dey fat with big money, and the rest dey hungry...'*

—Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, 'Army Arrangement'

*... we cried against the massacre of innocents  
the sasswood parties of the machiavelis of state  
prowling bemedalled, with rod and staff  
and barrel-chesting the next headline  
to outmarch lootery in a propaganda of loot  
O we had to ask for the impossible ...*

*this whole country, man, is one happy roadblock  
your moral opposition just another good in the trailer  
overtaken by the trickster gods of the roadblock ...  
while princes of loot pass overhead in private jets...*

—Odia Ofeimun, '... the UNSAYABLE TO BE DONE'  
(*Dreams at Work and Other Poems*)



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# Series Editor's Preface

The *Carolina Academic Press African World Series*, inaugurated in 2010, offers significant new works in the field of African and Black World studies. The series provides scholarly and educational texts that can serve both as reference works and as readers in college classes.

Studies in the series are anchored in the existing humanistic and the social scientific traditions. Their goal, however, is the identification and elaboration of the strategic place of Africa and its Diaspora in a shifting global world. More specifically, the studies will address gaps and larger needs in the developing scholarship on Africa and the Black World.

The series intends to fill gaps in areas such as African politics, history, law, religion, culture, sociology, literature, philosophy, visual arts, art history, geography, language, health, and social welfare. Given the complex nature of Africa and its Diaspora, and the constantly shifting perspectives prompted by globalization, the series also meets a vital need for scholarship connecting knowledge with events and practices. Reflecting the fact that life in Africa continues to change, especially in the political arena, the series explores issues emanating from racial and ethnic identities, particularly those connected with the ongoing mobilization of ethnic minorities for inclusion and representation.

Toyin Falola  
University of Texas at Austin



## Foreword

# Nigeria's Eliot Ness

Eliot Ness and his world-famous prohibition era group of law enforcement agents, ostensibly called 'The Untouchables,' achieved legendary status in American popular culture soon after the publication of the book by the same name in 1957. A phenomenal success, this police thriller celebrated Ness's crime fighting escapades and inspired both a TV series and, later, an Academy Award-winning movie, further cementing Ness and his crime fighting colleagues as enviable American icons.

It helped a great deal that after years of setbacks, Ness's protracted efforts to put away Al Capone—then America's most visible, fashionable, and successful gangster—on tax evasion charges finally yielded fruit, resulting in a lengthy sentence for the heretofore 'invincible,' notorious, 'scar-faced' crime boss.

Clearly, the Ness legend is one of the most romanticised examples of the life of crime-fighting available. In reality, those that choose this life face a dire prospect: one fraught with danger, intrigue, assassination attempts, murder and other vile and despicable conspiracies and obstacles. The Ness story is particularly instructive for those of us from 'leaner shores' because it reminds us that even the world's greatest economy and democracy has struggled with demons of corruption.

In its more than fifty years of existence, Nigeria has had its fair share of corruption, mediocrity, political ineptitude and ethnic bigotry; factors that have conspired to rob that potentially great country of its rightful place amongst the comity of serious, advanced nations. Half a century of broken promises, systems and dreams have left this once 'beacon of hope of the African continent' a shambles. What has been missing in this West African nation's history is a concerted effort to develop checks and balances and produce Eliot Ness-like figures determined to keep criminality, in all its forms, at bay.

One of the great achievements of the Obasanjo administration—and there were few indeed—was the appointment of Nuhu Ribadu as the chairperson of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). With this appointment—albeit for a brief period of four years (from 2003 to 2007)—Nigeria, for the first time in its history, had in Ribadu a version of Eliot Ness. Ribadu set to work immediately, determined to turn around Nigeria's beleaguered reputation as a 'den of thieves, replete with corrupt, uneducated political thugs and business hooligans.'

In this book—a critical biographical analysis of the life and times of Ribadu—by Wale Adebani, one of Nigeria's promising young writers, we find a well-crafted documentation and analysis of Ribadu's remarkable journey as a crime-fighting chief.

Adebani is particularly successful in drawing a sympathetic, humane portrait of Ribadu. His literary tapestry succeeds in painting Ribadu as a warm, kind and generous, quiet soul, who patiently worked against the odds and through the most difficult challenges without losing his cool. The reader will find him or herself applauding the many indictments and convictions achieved during Ribadu's tenure, and later cringing at the extent of

debauchery that has enveloped Africa's most populous state. Adebani's writing appears most fluent and concise when he tackles head-on the corrosive nature of political decadence and corruption, and the multifaceted vision employed by Ribadu and his contemporaries at the EFCC to rid the nation of this cancer.

Wale Adebani has produced a salient document depicting an important crusader for justice, a patriot and scholar whose dedication to honesty and fair play deserves much attention.

Professor Chinua Achebe, author of *Things Fall Apart*, is  
David and Marianna Fisher University Professor and  
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## Preface

### ‘You Be Thief!’

*‘You be thief/I no be thief,  
You be rogue/I no be rogue,  
You dey steal/I no dey steal,  
You be robber/I no be robber...  
Argument about stealing,*

*Somebody don take something wey belong to another person...?’*

[‘You are a thief/I am not a thief; You are a rogue/I am not a rogue;  
You steal/I do not steal; You are robber/I am not a robber ... ; Argument about  
stealing; Someone has taken something which belongs to another...’]

— Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, ‘Authority Stealing’

‘Tafa, you are a t-h-i-e-f. Ole!’<sup>1</sup>

For a minute the highest ranking police officer in Nigeria, the Inspector General of Police (IG), Tafa Balogun, didn’t know what his boss, the president, was talking about. He was not totally taken aback though, because he was familiar with President Olusegun Obasanjo’s capacity for crushing banter.

As he drove towards the Aso Rock Presidential Villa, the IG could not have suspected what was in store for him.

You begin to feel the majesty of postcolonial power once you drive into the Three Arms Zone in Asokoro — so named because it is the area of the city that contains the three estates of the realm, that is, the executive, represented by the Presidential Villa; the judiciary, represented by the Supreme Court; and the legislature, represented by the National Assembly Complex.

The imposing Aso Rock — after which the Presidential Villa is named — is itself the very metaphor of power. Rising to nearly 400 meters above sea level and soaring in the background of the Three Arms Zone, the rock is, perhaps, a symbol of the impenetrability of unaccountable power in Nigeria — particularly the continuous victory of that form of power over every attempt to fully democratise and put it to egalitarian uses in Nigeria.

The name of the rock, Aso, in the language of the ‘aboriginal’ people, Asokoro, means ‘victory.’ The Asokoro area of the city was named after the indigenous people who were resettled away to create space for the new capital city more than two decades ago.

The past three occupiers of the Presidential Villa — namely military president General Ibrahim Babangida, who moved the seat of power there from Lagos in 1991, Head of the Interim National Government, Chief Ernest Shonekan, who Babangida imposed on the country when he left office, and General Sani Abacha, who seized power from Shonekan barely 84 days after Babangida handed over power — never left the Villa honourably.

Babangida was disgraced out after he lost his gamble with history in August 1993; Shonekan was kicked aside by the soldiers who asked him to resign the illegitimate power his predecessor handed over to him; and Abacha died in ignominy after taking Nigeria down the path of a Banana Republic.

Yet, the ascension of power by the three represented a victory of sorts of evil over the forces of good, democracy, justice and equity. The present occupier of Aso Rock Villa, President Obasanjo, who was barking at the IG was the heir to this legacy of irresponsible and illicit power. Obasanjo had promised, as he assumed office, to redeem that *power*.

Balogun was still trying to figure out what manner of a cruel joke he was participating in as President Obasanjo, in his famed rustic manner, barked accusations of theft at him—again.

The president could be joking, Balogun must have thought again for a moment. A few years earlier in London, the president, then a retired general and former military head of state who had recently been released from jail, was visited by one of his erstwhile younger officers, himself a recently retired general. When asking the younger retired soldier, who had made a corrupt and blinding fortune from public office in the late military years (and would later hold one of the highest offices in the democratic dispensation), to take him to lunch, Obasanjo added in Pidgin English, *'because I hear say you thief well well.'*<sup>2</sup> The younger general only laughed off the allegation, putting it down to the capacity of his former boss for raillery, which sometimes bordered on the impolite. At any rate, for the younger general, accusations of corruption constituted one of the items for elite banter. But for students of society, such stories about corruption—as the distinguished political anthropologist, Akhil Gupta,<sup>3</sup> concludes from his study of narratives of corruption in India—point to 'something tremendously important in social life.' Gupta argues further that 'the phenomena of corruption cannot be grasped apart from, or in isolation from, narratives of [such] corruption.... [Because] In a culture with a rich tradition of oral storytelling, perhaps one reason why stories about corruption are the most popular of the everyday narrative arts might be that the actual exchange of money and favors is sometimes secret and illicit. The experience of corruption on the part of all parties involved occurs in a field *overdetermined* by stories about such acts, stories whose re-iterability enables the participants in that particular social drama to make sense of their actions.'<sup>4</sup>

Balogun, too, must have heard this story; so, he probably thought President Obasanjo was on one of his many jocular attacks.

'Tafa, you are a big t-h-i-e-f,' President Olusegun Obasanjo bellowed again.

This time the police chief knew that this was not good-natured humor. The president looked serious. At any rate, the grave countenance of Obasanjo's self-effacing but highly powerful Chief of Staff, Abdullahi Mohammed, himself a retired major-general, indicated to Balogun that something serious had happened.

The septuagenarian spy-master, Mohammed, once the head of the intelligence community during Obasanjo's first stint as head of state (1976–1979), is one of the most respected soldiers in a country in which soldiery had become almost synonymous with grand larceny and absolute irresponsibility in public affairs. Rightly suspicious of the disparate collection of members of the dominant, cross-ethnic national elite who recruited him to be president, Obasanjo had insisted on Mohammed taking up the office of chief of staff to the president, which coordinated every important activity in the presidency, including the president's, and national intelligence. Mohammed was the one who had

placed an emergency call to Balogun to come to the Aso Rock Presidential Villa from the police headquarters.

When Mohammed and Balogun were ushered into the president's office, Obasanjo, not known for presidential niceties, bellowed his anger over the just uncovered grand corruption of the man who was the chief civil law enforcer of the federation. As the president pointed to the documents in front of him, the proof of Balogun's corrupt practices, confirming several millions in accounts in both local and foreign currencies, multimillion naira real estate holdings and others, Balogun knew that he was in deep trouble.

He thought this could only be settled on a personal, ethno-cultural level. Therefore, his whole, bulky, six-foot frame came crashing down to a prostrate position. Beyond the humility and adoration that prostrating generally constitutes in African cultural practice, Balogun's act was far more symbolic for all three arms-bearing men—retired and serving—present, who were all of Yoruba ethnic stock. In the specific cultural context, the police chief's sprawling on the floor was indicative of personal submission and humiliation, in the hope of preventing a worse—that is, public—humiliation.

On the floor and pleading for mercy was the man who, when he took over as the nation's top cop three years earlier in 2002 had announced an eight-point agenda with the credo of 'Operation Fire for Fire.' He wanted to convey the 'determination' of the Nigerian Police Force under his leadership to combat crime. The chief crime fighter was now fighting imminent public exposure as a criminal-in-chief.

As Obasanjo fumed over the sleazy details of the IG's alleged corruption, the man begged in his native tongue for forgiveness. After much pleading, the president said the best he could do for the beseeching man was to allow him to retire immediately. Therefore, Balogun was ordered to go back to his office, write his retirement letter and send it immediately to the office of the chief of staff. Balogun thanked the president profusely and left the Presidential Villa.

As his siren blared through the streets back to Louis Edet House, the multi-story headquarters of Nigeria's federal police force in the Central Business District, Balogun must have been tempted to ask his police wards to turn off the noise. The silence, at best, that would surround him in the weeks ahead must have been on his mind. When he arrived at the police headquarters and took the lift to his office, little did the 21st Inspector General of Police know that the elevator—which worked on this day—was what triggered the humiliating end to his 32-year career in the police force, which began in May 1973....

\* \* \*

The burly, dark and tall man would have woken up with a start if he had dreamed of such a day. It would have been a nightmare from which he would have awoken to the 'normal' life of power and plentiful material resources to which he had become accustomed and which he had come to personify. No one, at least no one in his station in life, with such awesome powers of state violence, had been so derided as a thief in the manner he had just experienced.

Or perhaps it is better to say that even when intra-elite wrangling resulted in accusations of theft against someone of such consequence and as highly-placed as the police IG, the accusations were usually ignored in the formal channels of law and order. The accused were never prosecuted. At any rate, who else typified the dominant, even if deeply flawed, structures and institutions of law and order as this 'big bully' did?

Nevertheless, Tafa Balogun, the recently retired Inspector General of Police, woke up this particular morning feeling very well. His 'voluntary' retirement was suddenly announced

on Monday, January 17, 2005, and in accepting his retirement notice, the federal government, according to Chief Ufot Ekaette, the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, thanked Balogun for his ‘past services to the country.’ Whether he was forced to retire—as the press first hinted, or he retired of his own volition—as the government tried to persuade the public, that morning, Balogun rested in his house, thinking of what next to do to occupy his time for the rest of his life.

He was stupendously rich in every critical sense of the word. Cash in millions of dollars registered in important vaults around the country in his soon-to-be odious name, real estate in the most prime of prime areas that would humble even an accomplished investor with its value, varied stock in blue-chip companies, state-of-the-art cars . . . name it!

The exquisite indulgences that percolate, if not define, the life of the super-rich lay in front of him for the rest of his life. Which of the options of supreme indulgence couldn’t he choose? Golf—which, for the most part, is the luxury of the rich and largely jobless in the post-colony—was only one option to fill his lazy mornings and cram his cool evenings. Maybe polo. But that would not recommend itself to one so heavy with excess flesh. Horses are nothing if not long-suffering and strong, but no discerning horse would risk its ancestral strength under the weight of this man-mountain.

Or perhaps politics, the path that seemed, particularly in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, to beckon every petty criminal—convicted or yet-to-be-convicted. Political office has held an unusual allure for felons of all shades and colours in Nigeria since the military handed over power in May 1999. It started with convicts who were pardoned to be able to take over power in a dented pact between *militricians*, that is, military-politicians, and their allies, the civilian politicians. As Nigerians were to learn, many who would ordinarily have rotted in jail for crimes ranging from drug-pushing, money-laundering and even armed robbery, were now governors, legislators and other key officers of the state. Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz,<sup>5</sup> in their treatise on the informalisation and personalisation of political power and the state in the continent, insist that *Africa works*, even if it works on the logic of criminality. Disorder, in the dark and cynical prognosis of the two Africanist scholars, is a veritable political instrument in the continent.

What would work for one of the most powerful federal police chiefs in Nigeria’s history in his post-retirement life must have weighed on his mind that bright morning in late January 2005. He had got all the resources that he would need for any kind of comfort. But as he relaxed his frayed nerves that morning, Balogun must have been repeating in his mind, in President Obasanjo’s husky voice and Egba-accented English: ‘Tafa, you are a t-h-i-e-f, you are a t-h-i-e-f!’

Still, as they say in his culture, Obasanjo ‘had humiliated Tafa within the household and not in public.’ Such private shame is of little value to a class whose collective hands are totally soiled. In a logic that was all too reminiscent of the way business was conducted in Nigeria before one troublesome man came to town with his new agency, the IG had been spared any form of public embarrassment. He couldn’t be allowed to go down in public, given how many would risk going down with him. True, the usually alert print media in Nigeria were awash with stories of why Balogun was sacked, but what mattered most to Balogun on that day was that those who had the power to put him through the formal public process of legal restitution and humiliation had forgiven him and asked him to go and sin no more.

But his freedom was not to last: the unspoken pact did not hold for too long....

‘I can change your lives, please. Let me settle you and let’s settle this. I can make you rich for life.’

Balogun was pleading with EFCC’s officers, some of them rank and file policemen who were so junior to him they would ordinarily have been at attention, hands raised in salute while he passed by and ignored them. As he pleaded with the EFCC operatives led by the cheerless but highly effective Ibrahim Magu, a Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP) and later Head of the EFCC’s Economic Governance Unit, for a deal to end his arrest and possible prosecution, Balogun couldn’t come to terms with the totally unprecedented experience that he was having.

Shortly after his compulsory retirement, Justice J. Awokunlehin of the Federal High Court, Lagos, granted an interim order to the EFCC to freeze a total of N2.7 billion traced to Balogun in five different banks. This was not long after Balogun announced to the media upon his retirement that, ‘I have come and I have served. . . . Like an actor, I have played my part. Now, it is time for me to quit the stage and rest.’

He couldn’t imagine that there would be no rest for him for many months.

Late in the evening on Easter Monday, March 28, 2005, armed with a warrant of arrest, EFCC operatives arrested Balogun in Lagos and drove him to the Awolowo Road office of the EFCC.

Immediately after his arrest became public, his lawyer, Dr. Tunji Abayomi, issued a public statement denying that his client was guilty of any of the multiple crimes that the commission was accusing him of. Declared Abayomi, ‘[Tafa Balogun] is free of the charges proclaimed against him.’

In a statement full of invectives against the EFCC, Dr. Abayomi stated, ‘No one need be disturbed by the harassment, intimidations, proclamations of guilt, arrest, detention or prosecution by the EFCC. The organisation set up under a single vindictive authority takes pleasure in using power anyhow and in anyway. This is why scores and scores of citizens remain detained by EFCC in utter abuse of the Constitution and the norms of human liberty. We only need to visit the offices of EFCC to see that behind the high profile cases is a terrible decay covered up by individuals who should not have been given such powers.’<sup>6</sup>

Balogun’s counsel went on to say, in the unusually caustic release, ‘It is characteristics [sic] for government in developing nations to arrest people anyhow including millions that have been freed as innocent by the courts. The wound of the current harassment of Mr. Tafa Balogun would soon be healed by the proof of his innocence in an impartial court. It is the discharge of the burden of the proof by the state that should preoccupy us. Not the careless, unwarranted and unjustified abuse of authority by EFCC.’<sup>7</sup>

Continued Abayomi, who was also the president’s lawyer, ‘Mr. Tafa Balogun maintains this position for the benefit of doubt. He entered the police honourably, served at various departments effectively and retired with compliments from government. If now, in spite of all his commitments to the nation, he is being subjected to the current irritations, then, in the same way he defended Nigeria as Inspector General of Police, he will defend himself as an ordinary citizen of Nigeria entitled to the due process of law. The nation should not assume his guilt, not at all, but should demand adequate proof before an impartial tribunal notwithstanding the disturbing and noisy proclamations of guilt against him by EFCC. Mr. Tafa Balogun will be defended and may we as his counsels begin the defence by stating unequivocally [sic] that he is free of the charges proclaimed against him. Let us insist if only for the sake of all of us on the balance of justice.’<sup>8</sup>

On March 30, Abayomi told the press that he was denied access to his client after waiting for six hours.

But Nuhu Ribadu, the EFCC chairman, dismissed Abayomi's accusations against the commission: 'I want to assure all those who believe that [the] EFCC has anything against him [Tafa Balogun] that no such thing exists.... We are only carrying out our official responsibility as our mandate stipulated. The commission has been investigating other people accused of economic and financial crimes.... So, this [arrest] is one of those assignments.'<sup>9</sup>

Ribadu used the opportunity to further sell the significance of the anti-graft campaign to Nigerians: 'People should see this war as necessary for all of us and for our country. It is not a government thing. Every Nigerian should be proud to earn a decent living. There is more dignity in honesty and labour than in filthy wealth. We should not destroy our children, our tomorrow and our integrity because of our mad rush for riches.'<sup>10</sup>

\* \* \*

It was bad enough that a chief of police would be forced to retire because of corruption—the very thing that had largely defined that office for some of his predecessors who got away with their own sleaze. But to be arrested by his former 'boys' after he had retired peacefully, and to be subjected to the ordeal of 'you have a right to remain silent ...' was the most wordless affliction that Balogun ever dreamed of.

Indeed, it was unprecedented in the history of Nigeria. For the nation's number one police chief to be arrested for corruption and then arraigned publicly before a court—without a violent change of government or a bloody revolution—was unthinkable. But many members of the elite and indeed, most Nigerians, were yet unaware that indeed a 'bloodless revolution' was already abroad.

There was a tacit understanding between Balogun and Obasanjo that, despite the load of evidence on the former's graft, he would not be prosecuted after retiring from office. The top echelon of the EFCC had disagreed with this tacit understanding, but had initially been shooed off the plan to prosecute Balogun by the president. Perhaps the president knew something that the EFCC officers didn't know, or pretended not to know, which persuaded the president not to embark on a public humiliation of Balogun over the sources of his stupendous wealth. No one was sure. But the newspapers had hinted that his retirement might have something to do with the EFCC investigations of the Fountain Trust Bank, where it was discovered that the former IG had logged no less than N1 billion.

The former IG must have pondered why the president, knowing what he knew, would allow him to be arrested and questioned, as he sat in the EFCC cell in Lagos the first night of his arrest in April 2005. However, while in detention in Lagos, Balogun refused every request by the EFCC operatives to make a statement. Later, he was transferred to the nation's capital in Abuja. While detained there, he again refused to make any statement.

Perhaps Balogun thought that once his friends in high places got to know of his arrest and humiliation, they would persuade, if not the EFCC boss, then certainly the president, to let him off the hook. The president would not run the risk of Balogun 'singing,' would he? But when it became apparent to Balogun that the president would not intervene and that the EFCC boys were intent on taking their offering beyond the mosque, as they say in his culture, Balogun began to say a few frightening, perhaps, threatening words.

'If I decide to say anything,' Balogun warned the 'overzealous' EFCC agents, 'this government will fall. Please, leave me alone.'

They would not leave him alone.

As a trained lawyer, he knew that all that should rationally matter now was his day in court. He would be in court the next day, April 4, 2005, the EFCC operatives told Balogun. Therefore, it was in his interest to make a statement over the allegations which the operatives had disclosed to him. The allegations would be read to him formally in the open court the next day. At that point, the retired IG decided to make a statement...

\* \* \*

Over 100 policemen, some of them on duty, some curious to catch a glimpse of the unprecedented spectacle that was going to be enacted, showed up in and around Court 3, Maitama, Abuja, as Balogun was brought to answer charges of corruption. As if the shock of having a former IG appear in court on corruption charges was not enough spectacle for Nigerians present in court and those who were to later read the reports in the local and international newspapers and watch the proceedings on television, the former IG, the bulky man who once personified law enforcement in Nigeria, was brought to court in handcuffs. The whole world took note.

Many people concluded that ‘this young man,’ Nuhu Ribadu, and his EFCC looked set to change the dark and disappointing history of Nigeria which revolved largely around corruption.

\* \* \*

Some months before Tafa Balogun lost his commission, that is in late 2004, Nuhu Ribadu, the crusading Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and a Deputy Commissioner of Police, who had been seconded to the EFCC a little over a year earlier, had visited the police headquarters at Louis Edet House, Garki, for some business. He needed to see one of the top ranking police officers, a Deputy Inspector-General of Police (DIG), whose office was on one of the highest floors of the building. He made for the elevator area only to be told that the elevator was not working.

‘Why?’ he asked his colleagues who came around to greet him.

‘*NEPA don carry light,*’ a police officer volunteered in Pidgin English. There was power outage by the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), the sole national electricity company, which most Nigerians still call by its old acronym, NEPA (National Electric Power Authority). Sickened by the incapacity of NEPA over the years to generate sufficient megawatts of electricity and distribute and supply power to homes and businesses regularly, Nigerians had dubbed the company Never Expect Power Always. NEPA was one of the most significant public symbols of the rank corruption that had defined governance in Nigeria, particularly in the preceding two decades. On a few occasions in its unwholesome history, NEPA had even shut down the whole country with the ‘systemic collapse’ of its distributive capability, leading to national power-outages.

When it changed name to PHCN, NEPA got even worse. Now, Nigerians jokingly emphasise the ‘Holding’ in the new name of the company, or sometimes exchange it for ‘Hoarding.’ Given this reality, most citizens, corporate and individual, rely more on power generating sets than on PHCN. Even PHCN’s offices boast of their own power generating sets.

‘What about the generator?’ Ribadu asked the policemen around. He knew that the police headquarters—like all such major public buildings—had a giant generator.

He was told that the generator had broken down some time ago. Rather than ask further questions, the athletic anti-graft czar took the stairs. For another physically unfit

person, the climb to the sixth floor of the police headquarters would have been tasking. At any rate, Ribadu was so furious about what he had been told that he didn't even realise when he arrived at the second-to-topmost level of the building.

What he witnessed in the office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) he had gone to visit was even more shocking to him.

The top cop, his host, had taken off his top uniform and was left only in his undershirt and trousers. It was mid-afternoon and the tropical heat was blazing outside with high humidity. Without any electric fan, let alone an air conditioner working, the DIG and his staff were left to blow some air with whatever they could find. When the man could no longer cope with the heat, he decided to take off his shirt. By the time Ribadu arrived in the office of the DIG, he was already muttering unpleasant words to himself in his native lingo. *Shege!*

Ribadu enquired from the DIG what was going on. The man responded that the problem was actually not the generating set, as Ribadu had been informed downstairs. The problem was that there was no money to buy diesel to power the generating set. Ribadu was nonplussed.

Where was the problem? The police couldn't get its subvention from the national exchequer or was the fund insufficient for the purposes it was meant to serve?

'No,' the ranking police officer shot back and then spoke conspiratorially. The police force had received its entire subvention from the government, but no one knew what had happened to the money for diesel, like many other specific votes, under the current Inspector General, Balogun. There was simply no money to fuel the generator that day and that happened from time to time.

'Kai!' the EFCC boss muttered the common Hausa exclamation under his breath. So the IG was also suffering heat and discomfort in his office?

'No,' he was told. There was a small generating set which served the penthouse office of the Inspector General, so that he would not have to suffer the heat and discomfort like every other person in the huge police headquarters.

At this point, the EFCC had discovered, through its Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), that Tafa Balogun had about N2 billion naira in his private accounts. How could this man be stealing so much money and not even ensure the barest civilised environment in the headquarters of the police force of one of the richest nations in Africa? What the EFCC had discovered in its preliminary investigations into the financial status of the IG was a staggering amount, which qualified him for membership in the 'concert of medium public rogues,' the unofficial group of highly placed people who had helped turn Nigeria into a haven for corruption. Yet it was only a fraction, even if a big one, of what Balogun had allegedly stolen — as Ribadu later discovered.

As Ribadu left Louis Edet House that day, he vowed to himself to carry out a greater investigation of Balogun, whose stupendous wealth, yet to be fully accounted for by the preliminary EFCC investigation, was open knowledge in the circles of power in Abuja. Ribadu assured himself that by the time his investigations were complete, Balogun would go to jail for his crude greed.

\* \* \*

It was now exactly four years after Balogun was brought to court in handcuffs in Abuja. The date was Friday, April 3, 2009. Nuhu Ribadu had been forced into exile after surviving an assassination attempt which came more than a year after he was kicked out of the



EFCC by the new president, Umaru Yar'Adua, the dour former governor of the desert state of Katsina. Yar'Adua had been imposed on the country in controversial and scandalous circumstances by the departing president, Olusegun Obasanjo.

Ribadu and I were walking the streets of Berkeley, California, in the United States. He was attending a conference at the University of California, Berkeley, which ranked fourth in the US at that time and second in the top ten natural science universities in the world. At this point Ribadu had become the toast of the anti-sleaze world over the tremendous achievements that he recorded as Nigeria's anti-corruption czar. He was hosted and feted around the world.

I came to see Ribadu from Davis, California, where I lived and worked at Berkeley's sister university. We were looking for a place to have lunch. As we walked through the streets Ribadu spoke with almost childlike passion about his commitment to social change in Nigeria....

Later that evening, we were at the hall for one of the panels of the Third Annual Reva and David Logan Investigative Reporting Symposium that Ribadu was attending. Before the afternoon panel started, there was a documentary on global corruption that was shown to the audience. While the documentary was running, Nuhu kept telling me that even though the matter was about international bribery on the arms trade between Saudi Arabia and Britain, 'somehow Nigeria's name would feature.' Although I muttered some agreement, in my mind I thought he was stretching things. How could arms trade between Saudi Arabia and Britain and its connection to the international bribery law in the US connect with Nigeria?

'You cannot talk about corruption without mentioning Nigeria,' Nuhu insisted, as if he suspected what was going on in my mind.

It was a 55-minute documentary by Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) Frontline called *Black Money*. He was going to be proved wrong, I thought, as the documentary ran to an end. Then about sixteen minutes to the end of the documentary Nigeria came up. The biggest fine imposed by a court on an American corporation for bribing foreign officials, that is half a billion dollars, was imposed on KBR, a subsidiary of Halliburton, for bribing Nigerian officials up to \$180 million. The Chief Executive of KBR, Albert Jack Stanley, pleaded guilty to a two-count charge of conspiracy to violate the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. He was sentenced to seven years in jail. Stanley admitted that between 1995 and 2004, he helped to funnel \$182 million in bribes to government officials in Nigeria in exchange for contracts worth \$6 billion to build the liquefied natural gas facilities.

The documentary was followed by a panel discussion led by Lowell Bergman, the famous anti-bribery activist and journalist. David Fanning of PBS Frontline, Peter Gardiner, a whistleblower on the BAE Systems bribery scandal involving the British company and the Saudi royals, David Leigh of *The Guardian* (UK), and Oriana Zill de Granados of PBS, were members of the panel.

After the session, the PBS Frontline crew wanted to do some recording with Nuhu, so we had to go to another building which the producer thought was fitting for the shots.

They wanted Ribadu to walk along the pavement of the building so they could shoot this and use it in the short documentary they were making on him. The producer showed him where and how to walk.

As the recording went on, the camera woman, a young American lady, was obviously impressed with Ribadu.

When they were done, she came to him and said in typical American candour, ‘You’re so tall and handsome. It looked like a fashion catwalk.’ She giggled; Nuhu laughed heartily.

Well, I thought, except that the male models often show some muscles. Our man didn’t have a lot of them.

When we went back into the hall to prepare for the next session of the conference, we found Orono Douglas, Vice President Goodluck Jonathan’s Special Assistant, there. Douglas, Ribadu and I exchanged pleasantries.

Douglas was in the US on some assignment but took ill, even passed out, he revealed. He had to stay much longer than planned. He complained about how much he had to pay to buy a set of drugs regularly from the US. I shared my experience at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, when I fell sick in 2007.

‘If only we had a good health care system in Nigeria,’ some other Nigerian who joined the conversation stated.

Ribadu added that the problem was linked to that of corruption.

\* \* \*

As we walked back to his hotel room, Ribadu went over what would have been if he had been allowed to complete the anti-corruption war in Nigeria or if he were allowed to consolidate the process and then hand over in the near future to someone within the EFCC system who was as committed and as competent as he, most probably, Ibrahim Lamorde.

‘The image of Nigeria was beginning to improve with what we did,’ he said. ‘Compare that to under Umaru Yar’Adua.’

He was silent for a few seconds and then stated, as if he was in dialogue with himself, ‘It is time we rewrote our history.’

But he was actually continuing the conversation where we had left it off much earlier, as we walked back to his hotel.

‘We can change that country, Wale.’

We were relaxing in his hotel room now. It was late evening in Berkeley.

He looked at me for a while and perhaps ruminating on his self-imposed exile, which began a few months earlier, Nuhu added, ‘We cannot abandon Nigeria to them.’

He stopped, got up and went into the restroom.

When he came out, he had changed into a long white top called a *jalabiyya*, common among Nigerian Muslims. He took a little while in the restroom, so I assumed that he had performed wudu (ritual ablution) in readiness for the Muslim Maghrib, or sunset, prayer.

He excused himself to pray while I read a magazine.

He stood erect, head down, hands at sides and started the prayers.

In praying in the Islamic tradition, you are supposed to put the world behind you. I was wondering if Nuhu had put his country behind him, at least temporarily, as he prayed.

*‘Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar. . .’* [‘God is great, God is great, God is great. . .’]

I abandoned the magazine and tried to write down a few questions and issues that popped into my mind.

After a while he moved on to *Fatiha*, which he recited aloud. As he was coming to the end of the prayers, he went prostrate, with his hands on his knees, touching his forehead, nose and palms to the ground.

‘... *Allahu Akbar*.’

When he was done, he rolled up the mat and put it back in the wardrobe. When he spoke, it was apparent that he remembered where he terminated our discussion or, more precisely, the expression of his thoughts.

‘I will still have the opportunity in the near future. If I had only a few more years, I would have fixed things in that country.’

He sat down, fidgeting with some items on the table. I was quiet. ‘If you solve the problem of corruption, Nigeria will be on the rise to become a great country. We can still do it.’

I was silent, still. He then looked at my face to see if I shared his enthusiasm, hope and certainty.

I had betrayed my immediate doubts.

‘You think it is impossible, *ko*?’

\* \* \*

‘Corruption narratives are steeped in many of the qualities of epic stories,’ advances Akhil Gupta. Such qualities include ‘heroism; debasement; the fall of humans from the path of virtue; resoluteness; the overcoming of impossible odds and the making of super-human sacrifices; and the providential actions of an unknowable deity, which could be anyone from the ... minister to the ... magistrate.’<sup>11</sup> As Daniel Jordan Smith<sup>12</sup> attests, stories (complaints) about corruption are ‘the national pastime’ in Nigeria. ‘[The] Stories range from the large scale to the mundane, but the archetypal narrative focuses on how the country has squandered its rich natural resources.’ Pointing to a continental pattern, Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan<sup>13</sup> emphasizes the everydayness of corruption narratives in Africa: ‘At the everyday level, there is scarcely a conversation without hostile or disgusted references to corruption.’ This leads Smith<sup>14</sup> to conclude that ‘corruption has become the dominant discourse of complaint in the postcolonial world, symbolizing people’s disappointments with democracy and development, and their frustrations with continuing social inequality.’

There are many narratives in this book through which I attempt to capture these different qualities that dramatize the challenges of state-building, rule of law, justice, equity and social progress in a typical postcolonial state such as Nigeria. In the two years in which I focused almost exclusively on carrying out research for this book, I adopted different methods of research which included interviews, library-archival method and (participant and non-participant) observation. Nigeria’s effervescent news media, which are permanently energized by stories of corruption<sup>15</sup> (in which they are also often implicated)<sup>16</sup> constitute critical sources of information for this book. Journalists’ reporting is ‘part of public culture,’ and, therefore, also constitutes part of ethnographic data.<sup>17</sup> They also provide valuable perspectives on elite mentality.<sup>18</sup> For about two decades before I started working on this book, I was a public affairs journalist in Nigeria, during which I reported or commented on, witnessed or was privy to, an avalanche of information that forms the background of this book.

Written in a narrative style, this book attempts to tell the (his)story of Nigeria through the prism on an anti-corruption ‘war’ led by a crusader, Nuhu Ribadu. The dynamics of this war portray, as well as betray, the contradictions which are inherent in the very conception, constitution, existence and sustenance of Nigeria—both at the level of the

state and society. I intend to use this book to argue that by *telling* the story of corruption in Nigeria — like many postcolonial states — we can *tell* much of the story of the country. This is because corruption stories reveal not only a lot about the *actual* mechanics or the driving force of the country, they also reveal what *overdetermines* the structures and agencies of governance and everyday life in Nigeria. Often, it is through corruption that people *encounter, experience* or *see* the state in Nigeria. As Daniel Jordan Smith states, ‘For Nigerians, the state and corruption are synonymous.’<sup>19</sup> Corruption largely determines how Nigeria *works*; for whom, or against whom, it *works*.

The book attempts to show how a country with such an abundance of human and material resources was turned into the laughing stock of the entire world by its thieving elite, and one man’s courageous battle to reverse that history. It chronicles the story of Nuhu Ribadu, arguably Africa’s most courageous and most successful anti-corruption czar, who, as Head of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) established under the President Obasanjo administration (1999–2007), redefined the history of the investigation and prosecution of official corruption and economic crimes in Nigeria. The book places the anti-graft exploits of Ribadu on a larger canvass of the crisis of nationhood in a country in which public office is regarded as an ‘eatery.’ It focuses not only on corruption in the highest places in Nigeria, but on its linkages to cross-national corruption in Nigeria, the United Kingdom, and other parts of Europe, United States, South Africa, Dubai, etc. It also chronicles the major Advance-Fee Fraud (otherwise called, in Nigeria and around the world, “419,” “Nigerian Syndicate,” “Nigerian Crime”) cases which were investigated and prosecuted in Nigeria.

The major subject of the book, Nuhu Ribadu, is an anti-graft campaigner of international renown, celebrated as much in Washington and London as in African capitals, such as Monrovia, Cairo, and Addis Ababa. His work has been praised by the US Congress, the British Government, the European Union, as well as leading international media such as *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, the *Economist* of London, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Frontline* (US Public Broadcasting Service), BBC, etc. The *Christian Science Monitor* described Ribadu as one who ‘has come to represent integrity and rule of law in [a] corruption-plagued country,’<sup>20</sup> while the *Economist* declared him a ‘doughty fighter of corruption.’<sup>21</sup> *Frontline*, the anti-graft series on the US Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), concluded that, ‘In a country whose ruling class has shamelessly plundered hundreds of billions of dollars in oil profits, Ribadu’s record also made him a national hero — not to mention the great hope of many outside observers.’<sup>22</sup>

At a point Ribadu was lucky to escape assassination after he was removed from office by the powerful politicians he investigated and prosecuted. From the courtrooms in London to Dubai, from the offices of anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism agencies in United Arab Republic and South Africa to those in the United States and Switzerland, the reverberating effects of the investigations and prosecution by Ribadu’s EFCC of corrupt public officials, money-laundering criminals and international fraudsters were felt. Ribadu led the unprecedented (under democratic rule) investigation and prosecution of a sitting vice president, former heads of state, (former) state governors, head of the federal police force, billionaire-business men (Nigerians and foreigners) and major foreign companies involved in the bribing of senior government officials in Nigeria. This book contains the intricate details of all of these investigations and prosecution.

The paradoxes of anti-corruption war in a state-society that fundamentally operates on the logic of graft and sleaze are examined in this book, particularly in the context of how the Ribadu-led war unraveled based on the backdrop of the politics of corruption and the corruption of politics.

# Acknowledgments

The idea of writing this book came out of the endless discussions and debates about Nigeria and the major actors in the country in the offices of editors of one of Nigeria's leading newsmagazines *TheNEWS*, Babafemi Ojudu and Kunle Ajibade, in Ogba, Lagos. I was just completing my book on the history of *TheNEWS* magazine when Ojudu and Ajibade mentioned the possibility of doing a book on Mr. Nuhu Ribadu's era as the Chairman of Nigeria's anti-graft agency, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). With President Umaru Yar'Adua's dubious removal of Ribadu from the EFCC and the temporary triumph of the anti-Ribadu forces and the coalition of the corrupt, the commission's story under Ribadu became a far more compelling one to write. It is as much a story about corruption and the travails of democracy—which, following Nigeria's late iconoclastic musician, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, I call 'Authority Stealing'—as it is the *story of Nigeria*.

However, this narrative—as always—is complicated. Social process is not always a straight story. I have written this book in a way that will be interesting not only to an academic audience, but also to a non-academic audience. I have used a narrative style which is informed by scholarly analysis. I admit that this is an unusual style, but it is one that I believe is needed to tell this important story.

In accomplishing this task, so many people were kind to me, sharing their time and space with me. Some made other sacrifices to facilitate the process of research and writing. First, I thank Nuhu Ribadu who was very kind and considerate as I followed him, both literally and metaphorically, across three continents: Africa, North America and Europe. Over a period of almost two years, I interviewed him formally, chatted with him casually, and shared high-quality gossip with him about power and the powerful in Nigeria and elsewhere. We spoke over the phone many times and met in all sorts of places across the globe as he lived his life in exile—between airplanes and hotel rooms. I also thank his most considerate wife, Zara, who is a study in spousal endurance and dignity.

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