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Against the Predators' Republic

Political and Cultural Journalism, 2007–2013

Biodun Jeyifo

PROFESSOR OF AFRICAN AND
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For
Jahman Anikulapo, Akin Isola, Eddie Madunagu and Niyi Osundare,
who, from the first column, were unstinting in their encouragement.

And for
Akin Adesokan, Kunle Ajibade, Kayode Komolafe, Dapo Olorunyomi
and Chido Onumah—

I look at them and I am confident that the torch will be
passed to future generations.

Contents

Introduction	xxv
Series Editor's Foreword	xxix
Part One · Fundamentals of the Predators' Republic	3
Talakawa Liberation Courier 1	
Yar' Adua Will Be Different from Obasanjo, But Will the Difference Matter?	3
Talakawa Liberation Courier 2	
And Just Who Are the Nigerians? (1)	4
Talakawa Liberation Courier 3	
And Just Who Are the Nigerians? (2)	6
Talakawa Liberation Courier 4	
Supreme Court — of Restitution?	8
Talakawa Liberation Courier 5	
Legislature of Social Cannibals? — “Let God Be the Judge”; or “We No Go 'Gree!”	10
Talakawa Liberation Courier 6	
Beyond the Legislatures, a Mandarinate of Social Cannibals: “Bush Allowance” on a Monumental Scale	12
Talakawa Liberation Courier 7	
On the ‘Wealth’ of Nations — Emergency Plutocrats and the Ghost of Adam Smith	14
Talakawa Liberation Courier 8	
The Business of Government Is Not Business, It Is Favouring a Dozen Businessmen and Pulverizing the Poor	16
Talakawa Liberation Courier 9	
Exactly Who Are the “Talakawa”? and What's in a Name, What's in a Column?	18
Talakawa Liberation Courier 10	
What Kind of Country Is This? — Nigeria, Africa and the Millennium Development Goals	20
Talakawa Liberation Courier 13	
Grandiose Technocratic Fictions and Bitter, Harsh Realities: The Governor, the President and the Naira	22
Part Two · The Predators' Republic in Its Diverse Expressions	25
Talakawa Liberation Courier 14	
A Beached Whale in Shallow Waters: Widespread Dire Poverty and the Geo-ethnic Restructuring of Nigeria.	25
Talakawa Liberation Courier 15	
A Federation of Looters or A Free People's Federation? — Out of the Shallows Into the Depths	27

Talakawa Liberation Courier 16	
Sovereign National Conference or Sovereign Conference of Nationalities: Humpty Dumpty's Great Nigerian Fall	29
Talakawa Liberation Courier 17	
Moving Beyond the Two-Legged Tripod: A Utopian Postscript on Meditations on the People's Federation	31
Talakawa Liberation Courier 28	
The Uncompromising Constitutionalist as a Born Again Revolutionist?	33
Talakawa Liberation Courier 30	
Seven Lean Years Followed by Seven More Lean Years: Further Thoughts on an Undeclared Condition of Depression	35
Talakawa Liberation Courier 31	
Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread (1)	37
Talakawa Liberation Courier 32	
Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread (2)	39
Talakawa Liberation Courier 33	
"The Young Shall Grow" — Deo Volente, God Willing, Insha'Allah? (1)	41
Talakawa Liberation Courier 34	
The Young Shall Grow — Deo Volente, The Lord Willing, Insha'Allah? (2)	42
Talakawa Liberation Courier 35	
The Young Shall Grow — Deo Volente, The Lord Willing, Insha'Allah? (3)	44
Talakawa Liberation Courier 36	
Between Justice and Charity: A Columnist's Bitter Dilemma	46
Talakawa Liberation Courier 38	
For Comrade Governor Adams Oshiomhole — From the Corridors to the Seat of Power	49
Talakawa Liberation Courier 39	
Being in the Corridors of Power — In a Kleptocratic, Rentier State.	51
Talakawa Liberation Courier 47	
Poverty and Savage, Miasmatic Violence: Notes on a Bitter Anniversary	53
Talakawa Liberation Courier 96	
Rigging Elections Not Credibly but Messily, 'Areaboyly': Memo to Adele Jinadu (1)	55
Talakawa Liberation Courier 97	
Rigging Elections Not Credibly but Messily, 'Areaboyly': Memo to Adele Jinadu (2)	57
Talakawa Liberation Courier 98	
Rigging Elections Not Credibly but Messily, 'Areaboyly': Memo to Adele Jinadu (3)	59
Talakawa Liberation Courier 99	
Rigging Elections Not Credibly but Messily, 'Areaboyly': Memo to Adele Jinadu (4)	61
Talakawa Liberation Courier 108	
Internal Colonialism in the Niger Delta? — Memo to All Progressive Nigerians (1)	63
Talakawa Liberation Courier 109	
Internal Colonialism in the Niger Delta? — Memo to All Progressive Nigerians (2)	65

Talakawa Liberation Courier 110	
Internal Colonialism in the Niger Delta? —	
Memo to All Progressive Nigerians (3)	67
Talakawa Liberation Courier 111	
Internal Colonialism in the Niger Delta? —	
Memo to All Progressive Nigerians (4)	69
Talakawa Liberation Courier 112	
Internal Colonialism in the Niger Delta? —	
Memo to All Progressive Nigerians (5)	71
Talakawa Liberation Courier 115	
The Great Bank Robberies of Our Time:	
What Sanusi Is Not Telling the Nation (1)	73
Talakawa Liberation Courier 116	
The Great Bank Robberies of Our Time:	
What Sanusi Is Not Telling the Nation (2)	76
Talakawa Liberation Courier 117	
The Great Bank Robberies of Our Time:	
What Sanusi Is Not Telling the Nation (3)	78
Talakawa Liberation Courier 118	
The Great Bank Robberies of Our Time:	
What Sanusi Is Not Telling the Nation (4)	80
Talakawa Liberation Courier 126	
Reverend Jasper Akinola and the Ritual Shaming of	
Our Kleptocratic Rulers	83
Talakawa Liberation Courier 128	
Specters of the Failing State: the Bandits Are Here;	
the Bandits Are Coming (1)	85
Talakawa Liberation Courier 129	
Specters of the Failing State: the Bandits Are Here;	
the Bandits Are Coming (2)	88
Talakawa Liberation Courier 130	
Specters of the Failing State: the Bandits Are Here;	
the Bandits Are Coming (3)	90
Talakawa Liberation Courier 132	
Household and Neighborhood Mini-Municipalities:	
The Unquantifiable, Epiphenomenal Costs (1)	93
Talakawa Liberation Courier 133	
Household and Neighborhood Mini-municipalities:	
The Unquantifiable, Epiphenomenal Costs (2)	95
Talakawa Liberation Courier 141	
Against Babangida's 'Second Coming': The "Convenient" and	
the Fundamental Objections	97
Talakawa Liberation Courier 142	
Against Babangida's 'Second Coming': The "Convenient" and	
the Fundamental Objections (2)	99
Talakawa Liberation Courier 143	
Against Babangida's 'Second Coming': The "Convenient" and	
the Fundamental Objections (3)	101

Talakawa Liberation Courier 144	
Aftermath of the ‘Barawo’ Zoning Formula: The Two Interlocking Levels of an Unfolding Crisis (1)	104
Talakawa Liberation Courier 145	
Aftermath of the ‘Barawo’ Zoning Formula: The Two Interlocking Levels of an Unfolding Crisis (2)	106
Talakawa Liberation Courier 146	
Let’s Call Them Chief Ministers or Regional Administrators, Not <i>Governors!</i> (1)	109
Talakawa Liberation Courier 147	
Let’s Call Them Chief Ministers or Regional Administrators, Not <i>Governors!</i> (2)	111
Talakawa Liberation Courier 148	
Let’s Call Them Chief Ministers or Regional Administrators, Not <i>Governors!</i> (3)	113
Talakawa Liberation Courier 150	
Finally, Jonathan Speaks Out On the PDP: Two Skeptical But Hopeful Reflections	115
Talakawa Liberation Courier 158	
Elections 2011: <i>Who</i> Are These People and <i>What</i> Is This Ruling Party?	118
Talakawa Liberation Courier 159	
Privatization and Logics of Efficiency and Inequality: PHCN at a Critical Turning Point (1)	120
Talakawa Liberation Courier 160	
Privatization and Logics of Efficiency and Inequality: PHCN at a Critical Turning Point (2)	122
Talakawa Liberation Courier 169	
Welfarism in a Rentier State: Governor Fayemi’s Real and Symbolic Challenges	124
Talakawa Liberation Courier 172	
On the Eve of the Elections: An Unconventional National Profit and Loss Audit (1)	127
Talakawa Liberation Courier 173	
On the Eve of the Elections: An Unconventional National Profit and Loss Audit (2)	129
Talakawa Liberation Courier 176	
Peripheral ‘Agbero’ Capitalism and the Elders: The Roots of Our Youth Crisis (1)	132
Talakawa Liberation Courier 177	
Peripheral ‘Agbero’ Capitalism and The Elders: The Roots of Our Youth Crisis (2)	135
Talakawa Liberation Courier 184	
7 Out Of 10 Raised To The Power of 2: For Siji Adelugba, “Eternal Teenager” (1)	138
Talakawa Liberation Courier 185	
7 Out Of 10 Raised To The Power of 2: For Siji Adelugba, “Eternal Teenager” (2)	140
Talakawa Liberation Courier 194	
For National Sovereign Conferences That Are Truly Sovereign: Post-Election 2011 Reflections (1)	143

Talakawa Liberation Courier 195	
For National Sovereign Conferences That Are Truly Sovereign: Post-Election 2011 Reflections (2)	146
Talakawa Liberation Courier 196	
For National Sovereign Conferences That Are Truly Sovereign: Post-Election 2011 Reflections (3)	149
Talakawa Liberation Courier 220	
A Tale of Two Subsidies: RMAFC and the Vastly Eroded Tax Base of Expenditure	152
Talakawa Liberation Courier 229	
Popular Protests, Boko Haram and General Muazu’s Law and Order Patriotism (1)	154
Talakawa Liberation Courier 230	
Popular Protests, Boko Haram and General Muazu’s Law and Order Patriotism (2)	156
Talakawa Liberation Courier 231	
A People’s Probe of the Oil Subsidy Cartel: Memo to the NLC, TUC and ASUU	159
Talakawa Liberation Courier 232	
Sanusi and the “Marshall Plan” Demand for the North: An Undeclared National Conference? (1)	161
Talakawa Liberation Courier 233	
Sanusi and the “Marshall Plan” Demand for the North: An Undeclared National Conference? (2)	164
Talakawa Liberation Courier 234	
‘Kunya’ Unlimited: The Slippery Slope of Regressive Neocolonialism	166
Talakawa Liberation Courier 235	
Boko Haram Precipitates an Extraordinary Gathering in the North	169
Talakawa Liberation Courier 237	
The Sovereign National Conference: The Bottom Line in Human and Moral Terms	171
Talakawa Liberation Courier 238	
The National Assembly’s Mega Bonuses — Biopsy of a Dying Extractive Social Order	174
Talakawa Liberation Courier 249	
Violence in the Land: Azazi, Buhari and the Violence on Which They Are Silent (1)	176
Talakawa Liberation Courier 250	
Violence in the Land: Azazi, Buhari and the Violence on Which They Are Silent (2)	179
Talakawa Liberation Courier 251	
Violence in the Land: Azazi, Buhari and the Violence on Which They Are Silent (3)	182
Talakawa Liberation Courier 252	
Violence in the Land: Azazi, Buhari and the Violence on Which They Are Silent (4)	184
Talakawa Liberation Courier 253	
Awaiting 2015: Are ANPP, ACN, CPC, APGA and LP Different from the PDP? (1)	187

Talakawa Liberation Courier 254	
Awaiting 2015: Are ANPP, ACN, CPC, APGA and LP Different from the PDP? (2)	189
Talakawa Liberation Courier 255	
Awaiting 2015: Are ANPP, ACN, CPC, APGA and LP Different from the PDP? (3)	192
Talakawa Liberation Courier 258	
From transmogrifications like these come more transmogrifications — or restitution	195
Talakawa Liberation Courier 266	
The First, Second, Third and Fourth Republics: Critical and Prospective Notes (1)	197
Talakawa Liberation Courier 267	
The First, Second, Third and Fourth Republics: Critical and Prospective Notes (2)	200
Talakawa Liberation Courier 268	
The First, Second, Third and Fourth Republics: Critical and Prospective Notes (3)	202
Talakawa Liberation Courier 269	
The First, Second, Third and Fourth Republics: Critical and Prospective Notes (4)	205
Part Three · The Predators’ Republic, Africa and the World	209
Talakawa Liberation Courier 11	
The Wretched of the Earth Revisited — What’s Driving the Millennium Development Goals?	209
Talakawa Liberation Courier 12	
What’s Driving the Millennium Development Goals? (2)	211
Talakawa Liberation Courier 18	
‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Capitalism: the Truth of Our Perpetual Infrastructural Crisis (1)	213
Talakawa Liberation Courier 19	
‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Capitalism: the Truth of Our Perpetual Infrastructural Crisis (2)	215
Talakawa Liberation Courier 20	
‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Capitalism: the Truth of our Perpetual Infrastructural Crisis (3)	217
Talakawa Liberation Courier 21	
The Largest Award in the World — Unhappy Is the Land that Has a Need for Heroes	219
Talakawa Liberation Courier 23	
Offshore ‘Confessions’ of Yar’ Adua and Jonathan — Is Truth For Export Only?	221
Talakawa Liberation Courier 29	
National and Regional Economic Depression in a Period of Global Recession?	223
Talakawa Liberation Courier 30	
Seven Lean Years Followed by Seven More Lean Years: Further Thoughts on an Undeclared Condition of Depression	225

Talakawa Liberation Courier 37	
The “Protected” Greed of the Capital Markets: Shining Light on Impenetrable Darkness?	228
Talakawa Liberation Courier 43	
Labour Day and Earth Day — the Deep Cultural Roots of Workers’ Struggles (1)	230
Talakawa Liberation Courier 44	
Earth Day and Labor Day — the Deep Cultural Roots of Workers’ Struggles (2)	232
Talakawa Liberation Courier 48	
Poverty Never Stands Alone: The Terrible, Bitter Lessons from South Africa (1)	234
Talakawa Liberation Courier 49	
Poverty Never Stands Alone: The Terrible, Bitter Lessons from South Africa (2)	236
Talakawa Liberation Courier 55	
Are There No Good Things to Say about Your Country, Nigeria? (1)	238
Talakawa Liberation Courier 56	
Are There No Good Things to Say about Your Country, Nigeria? (2)	240
Talakawa Liberation Courier 57	
Are There No Good Things To Say About Your Country, Nigeria? (3)	242
Talakawa Liberation Courier 62	
The Global Race to the Bottom as the Shadow Economy Unravels (1)	244
Talakawa Liberation Courier 63	
The Global Race to the Bottom as the Shadow Economy Unravels (2)	246
Talakawa Liberation Courier 64	
The Party’s Over, Now Comes the Hangover — A Bitter Postscript	248
Talakawa Liberation Courier 65	
Why Obama Will Win — the View from the Marketplace of Culture (1)	250
Talakawa Liberation Courier 66	
Why Obama Will Win — the View from the Marketplace of Culture (2)	252
Talakawa Liberation Courier 67	
Nigeria’s Absence in the G20 Crisis Summitry: The Alibi of “FSS 2020” (1)	254
Talakawa Liberation Courier 68	
Nigeria’s Absence in the G20 Crisis Summitry: The Alibi of “FSS 2020” (2)	256
Talakawa Liberation Courier 82	
Re-branding Nigeria — Akunyili, Lost Between the Surd and the Absurd in Our Government?	258
Talakawa Liberation Courier 83	
The 419 Chronicles and the Global Capital Pool: Amos Tutuola’s Visionary Critique (1)	260
Talakawa Liberation Courier 84	
The 419 Chronicles and the Global Capital Pool: Amos Tutuola’s Visionary Critique (2)	262
Talakawa Liberation Courier 85	
The 419 Chronicles and the Global Capital Pool: Amos Tutuola’s Visionary Critique (3)	264
Talakawa Liberation Courier 86	
The 419 Chronicles and the Global Capital Pool: Amos Tutuola’s Visionary Critique (4)	266

Talakawa Liberation Courier 87	
The 419 Chronicles and the Global Capital Pool: Amos Tutuola's Visionary Critique (5)	268
Talakawa Liberation Courier 88	
The 419 Chronicles and the Global Capital Pool: Amos Tutuola's Visionary Critique (6)	270
Talakawa Liberation Courier 89	
Global Capitalism and Corruption without Borders: Memo to Transparency International (1)	272
Talakawa Liberation Courier 90	
Global Capitalism and Corruption without Borders: Memo to Transparency International (2)	274
Talakawa Liberation Courier 91	
Global Capitalism and Corruption without Borders: Memo to Transparency International (3)	276
Talakawa Liberation Courier 92	
Global Capitalism and Corruption without Borders: Memo to Transparency International (4)	278
Talakawa Liberation Courier 93	
Global Capitalism and Corruption without Borders: Memo to Transparency International (5)	280
Talakawa Liberation Courier 94	
The Limits of "American Wonder": A Non-Conforming Resident's Postscript	282
Talakawa Liberation Courier 95	
The Limits of "American Wonder": A Non-Conforming Resident's Postscript	284
Talakawa Liberation Courier 114	
'Felabration' Before Broadway: Authentic Recognition, Not 'Re-branding'	286
Talakawa Liberation Courier 119	
Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid of Millennial, Postmodern Capitalism (1)	289
Talakawa Liberation Courier 120	
Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid of Millennial, Postmodern Capitalism (2)	291
Talakawa Liberation Courier 121	
Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid of Millennial, Postmodern Capitalism (3)	294
Talakawa Liberation Courier 122	
Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid of Millennial, Postmodern Capitalism (4)	296
Talakawa Liberation Courier 123	
Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid of Millennial, Postmodern Capitalism (5)	299
Talakawa Liberation Courier 124	
Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid of Millennial, Postmodern Capitalism (6)	301
Talakawa Liberation Courier 125	
Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid of Millennial, Postmodern Capitalism (7)	304
Talakawa Liberation Courier 149	
"The People Are the Government": A Beacon of Hope from Port-of-Spain, Trinidad	306
Talakawa Liberation Courier 165	
Nkrumah and Ghana in the Great African Impasse: "A Little to the Right, A Little to the Left" (1)	309

Talakawa Liberation Courier 166	
Nkrumah and Ghana in the Great African Impasse: “A Little to the Right, A Little to the Left” (2)	311
Talakawa Liberation Courier 167	
Nkrumah and Ghana in the Great African Impasse: “A Little to the Right, A Little to the Left” (3)	313
Talakawa Liberation Courier 168	
Nkrumah and Ghana in the Great African Impasse: “A Little to the Right, A Little to the Left” (4)	315
Talakawa Liberation Courier 178	
The Social Tropisms of Work, Love and Dignity: Random New Year Reflections (1)	318
Talakawa Liberation Courier 179	
The Social Tropisms of Work, Love and Dignity: Random New Year Reflections (2)	320
Talakawa Liberation Courier 180	
SAP Comes to the Rich Nations Club: Lessons for the Global South, Lessons for Our World (1)	322
Talakawa Liberation Courier 181	
SAP Comes to the Rich Nations Club: Lessons for the Global South, Lessons for Our World (2)	325
Talakawa Liberation Courier 182	
Political Tsunami in Egypt: Reversing a Gross Deficit of Individual and National Dignity (1)	327
Talakawa Liberation Courier 183	
Political Tsunami in Egypt: Reversing a Gross Deficit in Individual and National Dignity (2)	330
Talakawa Liberation Courier 200	
Things Could Be Far Worse, Compatriot! — Nigeria and the Myths of Capitalist Postmodernity (1)	332
Talakawa Liberation Courier 201	
Things Could Be Far Worse, Compatriot! — Nigeria and the Myths of Capitalist Postmodernity (2)	335
Talakawa Liberation Courier 202	
Things Could Be Far Worse, Compatriot! — Nigeria and the Myths of Capitalist Postmodernity (4)	337
Talakawa Liberation Courier 207	
For the Record: The China-Africa Connection — A Scholar’s Perspectives (1)	340
Talakawa Liberation Courier 208	
For the Record: The China-Africa Connection — A Scholar’s Perspectives (2)	342
Talakawa Liberation Courier 212	
National, Sovereign and Personal Debts: Contemporary Capitalism at Its Most Absurd and Unjust (1)	345
Talakawa Liberation Courier 213	
National, Sovereign and Personal Debts: Contemporary Capitalism at Its Most Absurd and Unjust (2)	347

Talakawa Liberation Courier 214	
National, Sovereign and Personal Debts: Contemporary Capitalism at Its Most Absurd and Unjust (3)	350
Talakawa Liberation Courier 215	
The “Servant Leader” at Harvard: Interrogating Gradualism in Contemporary Naija Politics (1)	352
Talakawa Liberation Courier 216	
The “Servant Leader” at Harvard: Interrogating Gradualism in Contemporary Naija Politics (2)	354
Talakawa Liberation Courier 217	
On the “Occupy Wall Street” Movement: Some Speculative Notes in Solidarity	356
Talakawa Liberation Courier 218	
Seven Lean Years; Seven More Lean Years: Commentary at the Edge of Bitterness	359
Talakawa Liberation Courier 219	
Seven Lean Years and Seven More Lean Years: Commentary at the Edge of Bitterness (2)	361
Talakawa Liberation Courier 226	
‘Ghana Must Go’ and the Euro Crisis: Some Lessons for Africa and the World (1)	363
Talakawa Liberation Courier 227	
‘Ghana Must Go’ and the Euro Crisis: Some Lessons for Africa and the World (2)	366
Talakawa Liberation Courier 270	
Obama’s Victory as People’s Victory in a Divided, Plutocratic Nation	368
Talakawa Liberation Courier 271	
Obama Won In America and He Won in the World: What About It?	371
Talakawa Liberation Courier 272	
Obama Versus Romney 2012: Some Lessons from the Unfolding Epilogue	373
Talakawa Liberation Courier 275	
Obasanjo An Election Monitor? — The Cynical, Delusional Opportunist as An Ironist	376
Part Four · The Ruins of Religion and Education in the Predators’ Republic	379
Talakawa Liberation Courier 22	
Life Imitating Art? — ‘Holy Ghost Fire’ as Etteh and Nguroje Fall	379
Talakawa Liberation Courier 40	
Poverty and the Shame of the Occult Economy — The Nigerian Case (1)	381
Talakawa Liberation Courier 41	
Poverty and the Shame of the Occult Economy — The Nigerian Case (2)	383
Talakawa Liberation Courier 42	
Poverty and the Shame of the Occult Economy — The Nigerian Case (3)	385
Talakawa Liberation Courier 45	
The Christ Complex in Our Society: Distortions of a Troubled Vocation (1)	387
Talakawa Liberation Courier 46	
The Christ Complex in Our Society: Distortions of a Troubled Vocation (2)	389
Talakawa Liberation Courier 59	
God of Suddenly? — Scattered Reflections on a Hallucinatory Reality (1)	391

Talakawa Liberation Courier 60	
God of Suddenly? — Scattered Reflections on a Hallucinatory Reality (2)	393
Talakawa Liberation Courier 61	
Living, Relaxing, Worshipping & Trading in the Same Place: A Nostalgic Postscript	395
Talakawa Liberation Courier 139	
Witches, Mosquitoes and Jet Planes — Poverty and the Social Locations of Mystification (1)	397
Talakawa Liberation Courier 140	
Witches, Mosquitoes and Jet Planes — Poverty and the Social Locations of Mystification (2)	399
Talakawa Liberation Courier 191	
Cloven Tongues: The Day of Pentecost in Nigerian/African Tertiary Education (1)	401
Talakawa Liberation Courier 192	
Cloven Tongues: The Day of Pentecost in Nigerian/African Tertiary Education (2)	404
Talakawa Liberation Courier 193	
Cloven Tongues: The Day of Pentecost in Nigerian/African Tertiary Education (3)	407
Talakawa Liberation Courier 222	
Prayer Warriors and Lives Lived Unceasingly as Prayer: Scattered Reflections (1)	410
Talakawa Liberation Courier 223	
Prayer Warriors and Lives Lived Unceasingly as Prayer: Scattered Reflections (2)	412
Talakawa Liberation Courier 224	
The Risen Christ: Scattered 'Iwalesin' Yuletide Reflections, 2011 (1)	414
Talakawa Liberation Courier 225	
The Risen Christ: Scattered 'Iwalesin' Yuletide Reflections, 2011 (2)	417
Talakawa Liberation Courier 50	
Will the Last Person to Leave Please Clear Out the Slums on our Campuses? (1)	419
Talakawa Liberation Courier 51	
Will the Last Person to Leave Please Clear Out the Slums on our Campuses? (2)	421
Talakawa Liberation Courier 52	
Will the Last Person to Leave Please Clear Out the Slums on our Campuses? (3)	423
Talakawa Liberation Courier 53	
Will the Last Person to Leave Please Clear Out the Slums on our Campuses? (4)	425
Talakawa Liberation Courier 54	
Philosophy in the Sports Stadium: Postscript in Praise of D.F. and Others	427
Talakawa Liberation Courier 69	
UMYA's Rebuke of U.I. — Far Beyond the Kettle Calling the Pot Black (1)	429
Talakawa Liberation Courier 70	
UMYA's Rebuke of U.I. — Far Beyond the Kettle Calling the Pot Black (2)	431
Talakawa Liberation Courier 157	
Across the Generations: Teaching the Young — and Learning from Them	433

Part Five · The Arts, Language, Culture, Nollywood	437
Talakawa Liberation Courier 75	
Will Nollywood Get Better? Did Hollywood and Bollywood Get Better? (1)	437
Talakawa Liberation Courier 76	
Will Nollywood Get Better? Did Hollywood and Bollywood Get Better? (2)	439
Talakawa Liberation Courier 77	
Will Nollywood Get Better? Did Hollywood and Bollywood Get Better? (3)	441
Talakawa Liberation Courier 78	
Will Nollywood Get Better? Did Hollywood and Bollywood Get Better? (4)	443
Talakawa Liberation Courier 79	
Will Nollywood Get Better? Did Hollywood and Bollywood Get Better? (5)	445
Talakawa Liberation Courier 80	
Will Nollywood Get Better? Did Hollywood and Bollywood Get Better? (6)	447
Talakawa Liberation Courier 81	
Will Nollywood Get Better? Did Hollywood and Bollywood Get Better? (7)	450
Talakawa Liberation Courier 152	
In Provisional Praise of Wazobia 95.1 FM: Reflections on Mass Culture Without Massification (1)	452
Talakawa Liberation Courier 153	
In Provisional Praise of Wazobia 95.1 FM: Reflections on Mass Culture Without Massification (2)	454
Talakawa Liberation Courier 154	
In Provisional Praise of Wazobia 95.1 FM: Reflections on Mass Culture Without Massification (3)	456
Talakawa Liberation Courier 155	
In Provisional Praise of Wazobia 95.1 FM: Reflections on Mass Culture Without Massification (4)	459
Talakawa Liberation Courier 161	
In the Prison House of English?: Memo to Professor Charles Nnolim (1)	462
Talakawa Liberation Courier 162	
In the Prison House of English?: Memo to Professor Charles Nnolim (2)	464
Talakawa Liberation Courier 163	
In the Prison House of English?: Memo to Professor Charles Nnolim (3)	467
Talakawa Liberation Courier 164	
In the Prison House of English?: Memo to Professor Charles Nnolim (4)	469
Talakawa Liberation Courier 174	
English Is Still a Foreign Language in Nigeria: The Word from Abiola Irele (1)	472
Talakawa Liberation Courier 175	
English Is Still a Foreign Language in Nigeria: The Word from Abiola Irele (2)	474
 Part Six · Tales, Parables, Reveries, Prose Poems, Haikus	 479
Talakawa Liberation Courier 74	
It's Good To Be Alive, Even In a Country and a World Like Ours — Four Existential Tales and Canards	479
Talakawa Liberation Courier 113	
Three Parables for Nigerians 'Older' Than Their Country (For Gani Fawehinmi)	481

Talakawa Liberation Courier 127	
Yar' Adua and the African Dilemma Tale: An Osofisan Dramaturgic Scenario	484
Talakawa Liberation Courier 131	
Patriotism, Democracy and Fractured Storytelling in and around Wale Okediran's Tenants of the House	486
Talakawa Liberation Courier 137	
Impunitism, the Systematization of Impunity: A Celestial Interview with Maurice Iwu (1)	489
Talakawa Liberation Courier 138	
Impunitism, the Systematization of Impunity: A Celestial Interview with Maurice Iwu (2)	492
Talakawa Liberation Courier 151	
"Penultimate Week" As Infinity of the Penultimate: A Fantasia in One 'Act'	494
Talakawa Liberation Courier 170	
Parables of a Great Catastrophe Foretold: Nigerian Elections 2011 (1)	496
Talakawa Liberation Courier 171	
Parables of a Great Catastrophe Foretold: Nigerian Elections 2011 (2)	499
Talakawa Liberation Courier 186	
Haiku and 'Aiku': Fortifications Against Death [For Akin Isola, Eddie Madunagu and Niyi Osundare]	502
Talakawa Liberation Courier 187	
Days of 'Refusal' and 'Deliverance' Before and After Elections 2011: A Reverie	504
Talakawa Liberation Courier 188	
Days of 'Refusal' and 'Deliverance' Before and After Elections 2011: A Reverie (2)	507
Talakawa Liberation Courier 189	
With What Mouth Shall I Say It? — Prose Poems on Naijapessimism and Naijafuturism	509
Talakawa Liberation Courier 190	
With What Mouth Shall I Say It? — Prose Poems on Naijapessimism and Naijafuturism (2)	512
Talakawa Liberation Courier 197	
Survival Tips for Corruption and Desolation on a Colossal Scale: Three Prose Poems, Two Haikus	515
Talakawa Liberation Courier 198	
'Country Hide' & 'Country Seek': the Nation and its Fragmented Sovereignties (1)	518
Talakawa Liberation Courier 199	
'Country Hide' & 'Country Seek': the Nation and its Fragmented Sovereignties (2)	521
Talakawa Liberation Courier 203	
On the Mendacious Metaphysics of Good and Evil: Two Reveries, Three Haikus	524
Talakawa Liberation Courier 204	
The Unflappable Mien of Goodluck Jonathan: the Symbolic Body Language of Governance?	527
Talakawa Liberation Courier 205	
Aso Rock 'Exhorlamentations': Three Prose Poems, Four Haikus	529

Talakawa Liberation Courier 206	
Is Sanusi's Populist Activism the Indirect Product of a Popular Linguistic Solecism?	532
Talakawa Liberation Courier 228	
'Kunya' and 'Diya' — Oil Subsidy in the Saga of 'Country Hide' and 'Country Seek'	534
Talakawa Liberation Courier 236	
The Persistence of Vision and the Illusion of Motion — A Parable, A Reverie	537
Talakawa Liberation Courier 242	
Democracy and Its Dividends: A Poem And A Prose-Poem	539
Talakawa Liberation Courier 243	
Why Go By Air, Not By Road? — Journeying Through Our Unequal World (1)	542
Talakawa Liberation Courier 244	
Why Go By Air, Not By Road? — Journeying Through Our Unequal World (2)	544
Talakawa Liberation Courier 245	
Why Go By Air, Not By Road? — Journeying Through Our Unequal World (3)	547
Talakawa Liberation Courier 256	
When Life Itself Is One Long, Long Prayer: Short Reflections in Prose Poems & Haikus	549
Talakawa Liberation Courier 259	
The Human and Infrastructural Hardware of Intellectual Capital: Two Contrasting Profiles	552
Talakawa Liberation Courier 260	
We Are Going, Going, Going — But Where To And Who Are "We"? (1)	555
Talakawa Liberation Courier 261	
We Are Going, Going, Going — But Where To And Who Are "We"? (2)	557
Talakawa Liberation Courier 262	
We Are/Not Hallucinating, Compatriot: Fragments And Prose Poems In Meditation (1)	560
Talakawa Liberation Courier 263	
We Are/Not Hallucinating, Compatriot: Fragments & Prose Poems In Meditation (2)	562
Talakawa Liberation Courier 265	
What Will Become of Nigeria in the Long Run? — Three Scenarios	564
Talakawa Liberation Courier 273	
The March of the Dispossessed in Our Predators' Republic — A Reverie in Prose Poems	567
Talakawa Liberation Courier 274	
The March of the Dispossessed in Our Predators' Republic — A Reverie in Prose Poems (2)	570
Part Seven · Tributes, Commemorations, Memorials	573
Talakawa Liberation Courier 71	
For Seinde and Dumni Arigbede: Making Haste Slowly for Human Equality (1)	573

Talakawa Liberation Courier 72	
For Seinde and Dumni Arigbede: Making Haste Slowly for Human Equality (2)	575
Talakawa Liberation Courier 73	
For Seinde and Dumni Arigbede: Making Haste Slowly for Human Equality (3)	577
Talakawa Liberation Courier 102	
‘The Seed from Which the Dawn Takes Flesh’: For Omafume Onoge, 1938–2009 (1)	580
Talakawa Liberation Courier 103	
‘The Seed from Which the Dawn Takes Flesh’: For Omafume Onoge, 1938–2009 (2)	582
Talakawa Liberation Courier 104	
‘The Seed from Which the Dawn Takes Flesh’: For Omafume Onoge, 1938–2009 (3)	584
Talakawa Liberation Courier 105	
In Defense of Complexity, Robustly but Conditionally (1)	586
Talakawa Liberation Courier 106	
In Defense of Complexity, Robustly but Conditionally (2)	589
Talakawa Liberation Courier 107	
In Defense of Complexity, Robustly but Conditionally (3)	591
Talakawa Liberation Courier 135	
The Class in Power and the Government in Power: Remembering Claude Ake in These Dark Times	593
Talakawa Liberation Courier 156	
The Vast, Uncharted Spaces of Grief: For Bamidele Thomas, 1945–2010	596
Talakawa Liberation Courier 221	
Hands Full, Your Cup Runneth Over — For Femi Osofisan in Retirement	598
Talakawa Liberation Courier 264	
Home Is Where Heart And Mind Take Root and Sprout: For Chuck Mike @ 60	601
Part Eight · Modernity of and in the Rich and the Poor Countries	605
Talakawa Liberation Courier 101	
“ <i>And Dog Sadi</i> ” — The Digital Revolution and My Mild Bouts of Dyslexia	605
Talakawa Liberation Courier 134	
Being There for the Call, All the Time — Confessions of a Bemused Consumer (1)	607
Talakawa Liberation Courier 136	
Being There for the Call, All the Time — Confessions of a Bemused Consumer (2)	609
Talakawa Liberation Courier 239	
Transistorization and Miniaturization: Fables of Modernity and its Discontents (1)	611
Talakawa Liberation Courier 240	
Transistorization and Miniaturization: Fables of Modernity and its Discontents (2)	614
Talakawa Liberation Courier 241	
Transistorization and Miniaturization: Fables of Modernity and its Discontents (3)	616

Talakawa Liberation Courier 246	
Modernity and Neurosis — Theirs And Ours (1)	619
Talakawa Liberation Courier 247	
Modernity and Neurosis — Theirs And Ours (2)	621
Talakawa Liberation Courier 248	
Modernity and Neurosis — Theirs And Ours (3)	624
Talakawa Liberation Courier 257	
Soilless Agriculture and the Dilemmas of “Earth” in Our Location within Modern Life	626
Index	633

Introduction

To Toyin Falola must go both the praise and the blame for the infliction of this volume on the reading public. I had been writing the weekly newspaper column, “Talakawa Liberation Courier”, that supplied the materials for this collection for about eight years when one day Toyin wrote me to say that he was “addicted” to the column and asked if I might be interested in having the output to date published. My first and immediate answer was “no thank you”, explaining further that for now and the foreseeable future, I was more than happy to keep writing the columns without a thought whatsoever to having them collected and published. Toyin’s persistence is the result that is this volume. In retrospect now, I am thankful to him for pushing me to take on the awesome task of collecting and preparing my writings for the column for publication.

As indicated in the dedications page, Jahman Anikulapo, Akin Isola, Eddie Madunagu and Niyi Osundare were instant with their praise and encouragement, long before other friends and colleagues whose views and opinions I greatly cherish also expressed their admiration for the column. Jahman was my Editor at the *Sunday Guardian* whose enthusiasm for the column probably surpassed my own. It is with very fond memories that I recollect the special attention that he and his staff invested in the sustained and regular appearance of the column, often against the disinterest, the disinclination of the paper’s management that was driven by both ideological and commercial considerations. Indeed, I regret that it has not been possible to include in this volume the often brilliant and inspired artwork that provided an incredibly rich expressive texture to the contents of the column. This lasted for almost three years. I keep hope alive that someday, those artworks will themselves be published in a volume dedicated specifically to them.

Akin Isola (aka “The only Honestman in the World”) was from the very beginning perhaps the greatest devotee to the regular appearance of the column. As much as he apparently was engrossed by the contents of what I wrote in the column, he was full of praise for *how* I wrote, the very choice and flavor of my prose. Indeed, I confess that the tenor of his praise and encouragement nearly went to my head. “Why”, he asked me, “had the ‘writer’ been hiding behind the ‘academic’ all these decades?” Isola more or less announced the emergence of that “writer” and followed this “annunciation” with a prediction that one day the “writer” would emerge fully, totally obscuring the “scholar”. Well, we shall see!

The encouragement of Eddie Madunagu and Niyi Osundare was of a distinct and unapologetic ideological and intellectual character. They insisted that “we” needed a voice, a platform in which the continuity of the perspectives of the radical and progressive intellectuals that had been so visible, so dominant in the 70s, 80s and part of the 90s in Nigeria and the African continent could be carried to the present and the future. And they thought that my column could or indeed would be an important chain in that link. I confess that this line of reasoning accorded well with my own motivations for starting the column, but it was a definite boon for me to have received that positive validation from these two major figures among the most prominent progressive and radical public intellectuals of my generation.

In a way, the last two sentences of the preceding paragraph should suffice to give the reader of this volume a sense of the motivations, the passions and the hopes that inspired

the writing of the weekly column that serves as the composite source of this collected and published version. But in writing this Introduction, I have decided not to leave this issue of what the column was about to the power of mere suggestiveness. Rather than this, through both the titles that I gave the collection and the eight sections or “parts” of the volume, I hope to give the reader a sort of cognitive map that would provide a path of comprehension through the volume, without in the least standing in the way of the reader’s right to come to her own judgment on the value of the book. With this in mind, I now give a very short explanation of both the titles to the book and its parts and the reordering of the contents of the book away from their original chronological sequence.

The title of the book being so vigorously suggestive, I suppose that the only gloss that is needed on it is the fact that the I borrowed the savagely critical appellation, “The Nigerian Predator’s Republic”, from Eddie Madunagu, a term he used, in my recollection, only once or twice in his own journalistic writings. For reasons obscure to even myself, that phrase stuck in my mind and this may be the reason why, though Eddie had not given any elaboration to what it meant, I found myself using it repeatedly, endlessly in my column. Then with the invitation to have the writings in my column collected and published came the “illumination” that is reflected in the titles I have given for the collection as a whole and for each of the eight parts of the volume. This needs an explanation.

The extreme antithesis or contradiction between “predators” and “republic” is not unknown in modern political history. For instance, for nearly a century after its independence the United States was a “slave republic” in which, at least until the great Civil War, no heartfelt and widespread moral and social discomfiture was felt about the antithesis between “slave” and “republic” in the national body politic of America. Another example could be made of the fact that for centuries after the Industrial Revolution in Europe overthrew the reign of the feudal aristocracy and instituted modern democratic rule, extensive and horrific exploitation of workers and the underclass poor existed side by side with the “democracy”. These examples do not of course provide a historical rationalization for the conjoining of extreme predatoriness with the “democratic” republic that succeeded military autocracies in Nigeria at the turn of the new century and millennium in 1999. I merely bring them into the discussion here precisely in order to provide a historical and theoretical context for confronting predatoriness in contemporary Nigeria in its many direct and indirect forms and expressions, together with both its defining local realities and inevitable global connections. One other reason for drawing attention to these antecedent American and European examples may perhaps be an unconscious one: in time, “slave” was uncoupled from “republic” in America and extreme exploitation of workers was delinked from “democracy” in Europe. One day, hopefully sooner than later, “predators” will be separated from “republic” in Nigeria. Definitely, this is what I seek to imply in the emphasis that I place on the word “Against” in the title of this volume.

It remains for me to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that I have rearranged the chronological order in which the columns appeared into eight sections, each with a title that gives the reader a sense of the themes, the issues and the modes of expression that went into the tremendous labor of writing the column unflinching each week for the six years covered by the contents of this volume. I have not completely abandoned chronology since, in each of the eight sections, I have rigorously followed the order in which the columns first appeared in print. Still, I would strongly advise the reader that beyond the first two sections respectively titled “Part One— Fundamentals of the Predators’ Republic” and “Part Two— The Predators’ Republic in its Diverse Expressions”, it is completely unnecessary to read the contents of this volume in a sequential order. In other words, with

these first two sections out of the way, any of the other sections can and perhaps *should* be read as the reader sees fit or inclined to do.

I cannot bring these introductory remarks to an end without sharing with the reader two “revelations” that occurred to me as I reread the contents of those weekly columns between the years 2007–2013 in preparing this volume for publication. These “revelations” are both distinct and yet interconnected. First, is the “revelation” that I was bearing witness to, and recording terrible things that were happening in virtually all areas of Nigerian corporate and collective existence and doing so with a rage and despair that were simply unbearable largely because the voices, the forces of opposition to the predators’ republic seemed so weak, confused and fragmented. Today, I am personally thankful that the rage and the despair did not drive me to manic-depressive psychic and emotional wastelands; and that somehow, I resolutely kept my sights fixed on a time when things would be different in Nigeria. I realize now and I am deeply gratified that in the process of writing those weekly columns I created a careful record of things that perhaps one day will seem simply beyond belief. In the pages of this book names, dates, occurrences and developments are meticulously identified, together with citations that give them textual authentication and perhaps, permanence.

Here is my second “revelation” — as I wrote the weekly columns, I was in fact trying to achieve a much needed self-clarification about affairs and happenings that were either too easily conducive to clichés and sensationalism or, at an opposite end, defied easy comprehension. In this respect, I would argue that in many of the materials in this volume, I was challenged by realities, events and trends that were far more baffling, far more complex than many of the texts that I had found the most challenging for interpretation in my professional work as a teacher, critic and theorist. Definitely, training and experience in my professional work helped a lot, but only up to a limited extent. I did not read, and could not have read the “Nigerian Predators’ Republic” like an open book, even where such a book was written by one of the world’s greatest writers. In other words, in the very act of writing my weekly column, I was “reading” our predators’ republic as a subject, a participant deeply embroiled in what I was “reading”. This is endemic to political journalism and doubly so for radical, activist journalism that is, pervasively, the *métier* of the materials collected in this book.

It remains for me to say that beyond making corrections of the errors that are inevitable for all columnists who must write to meet externally imposed and non-negotiable weekly deadlines, I have totally resisted the temptation to re-write any of the items that are in this volume. This was not easy, but I was successful in my resistance, taking comfort in the realization that far from being a freshly written book, this is a book that proudly bears all the marks of its being-in-the-world at a time and a place that hopefully, recent developments in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, have begun to consign to a past, even if we cannot yet take that “pastness” for granted.

Biodun Jeyifo
Ibadan, Nigeria and Cambridge, MA, U.S.A.
August 12, 2015

Series Editor's Foreword

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

