

# This god called Adedibu

(UPDATED!)

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*By Okey Ndibe*

It behooves Nigerians to condemn evil wherever in their nation it rears its hideous head. When in July of 2003, Chris Uba, a young man with more money and political connections than he had common sense, marshalled a contingent of 200 police officers, led by a now deceased Assistant Inspector-General, to abduct Governor Chris Ngige of Anambra, Nigerians from all over the country expressed their indignation. Uba's action, which many saw as sponsored by Aso Rock, was perceived by many commentators as likely to jeopardise the nation's poorly fledged attempt at democratic governance. Even from within the ruling PDP, many voices called the abduction by its proper name, treason, and called for Uba and his accomplices to face the full fire of the law. But the president, in one of the most shameless acts of his scandal-plagued presidency, browbeat the party into mischaracterising the impunity as an innocuous domestic quarrel.

A combination of apathy and moral cowardice in some quarters enabled President Obasanjo's cant to be the last word on Uba's affront. Rather than insist that Uba and co had a case to answer, the hierarchy of the PDP as well as other political actors permitted themselves to be bamboozled by presidential power.

Some Nigerians began to minimise the event as "the business of Anambra state." In response to one column in which I held the president complicit in the sordid event, a correspondent waxed with mockery: "Well, if you Igbo cannot put your house in order, you should not blame the president for exploiting the greed of some Igbo politicians." Some were simply incapable of grasping that the assault on Anambra was a form of incipient rehearsal, the testing ground for an odious monster being groomed to violate decency and democratic values.

The Igbo say that when a sacrilegious act goes unchallenged for a year, it is elevated to a way of life, a settled custom. Realising that Nigerians could stomach high doses of shame, Uba and his sponsors ramped up their treasonous acts. They suborned an Enugu High Court judge to rule that Ngige had resigned from office, no doubt an assured entry in the annals of infamous rulings. Next, the coalition of evil inflicted a three-day wholesale spree of destruction on Anambra state. Uba and his guardians wished, through this conceit, to leave the impression that Anambra had descended into anarchy, thus clearing the path for the president to impose a state of emergency and hand the state's treasury to vampires. Ngige, who has acquired a

charmed reputation as a quintessential survivor and legendary outwiter of Abuja, used uncommon cunning to thwart the nefarious agenda.

Even so, because they went unpunished, the perpetrators of mayhem in Anambra had succeeded in selling lawlessness as an attractive, profitable creed. It would no longer be unimaginable for a self-described political godfather, disenchanted by the poor returns from his so-called political godson, to employ naked violence in bringing the rebellious godson brutally to heel. Clearly, the scandal of Anambra is underwriting a similar tragedy playing out in Oyo state. That state, home to the pioneering University of Ibadan, is witnessing a reign of terror generated and spread by a man whose education is as rustic as his moral bonafides are uninspiring. Lamidi Adedibu, a man who unabashedly revels in the belief that power proceeds from a caravan of thugs, fancies himself the sole installer in office of Governor Rashidi Ladoja. Impatient with his political "son's" parsimoniousness in spoiling him with the spoils of office, Adedibu has sworn to rusticate the governor. And he is, it is clear, in deadly earnest.

After a week in which police officers and armed thugs loyal to Adedibu engaged loyalists of Governor Ladoja for several hours in a deadly gun duel, the residents of the state can no longer be strangers to the hell once uniquely inhabited by the people of Anambra. There are telling similarities between what happened in Anambra and what is unfolding in Oyo. Just as Uba exhibited hubris in the face of massive public condemnation, Adedibu

has taken to beating his chest. Both godfathers are ill-educated, and neither has been associated, even by their most invertebrate supporters, with any noble values. Both men appear actuated by the greed for lucre. The police, mobilised to actualise the illegalities in Anambra, are at the centre of the blight in Oyo. In short, in both cases, the Nigerian Police Force has lent itself as a farcical instrument, a willing tool in schemes capable of torpedoing the (already weakened) fabric of law and order. I believe that the most tragic similarity is, to put it mildly, the questionable role of the presidency and the ruling party's officials.

The war in Oyo is very much in a nascent stage, and may prove just as bloody and destructive as Anambra's by the time the unseemly drama plays out. As in Anambra, it appears we have here an inelegant feud over public funds. In interview after interview, Lamidi Adedibu has been forthright in articulating his main grudge, the governor's reluctance to be financially generous to the godfather and his thugs. Not once has Adedibu complained that he was being owed on a contract he'd completed for Oyo or for any legitimate services rendered. No, the Adedibus of Nigeria have come to believe that they are owed stupendous chunks of public funds on account of "installing" a governor in office. So confident are these men about their entitlement that Uba, in an access of misplaced heroism, gave a public confession to rigging the elections in Anambra. In a nation where iniquity enjoys a fast track to consecration, the confession did not tempt the police to arrest the self-incriminated law breaker.

In the aftermath of his confession, a ruling party that has never met a criminal it didn't love, elevated Uba to its Board of Trustees. Then an administration whose loud actions rebuke its hypocritical verbal posturing on corruption bestowed an oil bloc on Uba. With such stupendous rewards given to the errant Uba, why should Adedibu not feel called to borrow Uba's tactics? Several days after Adedibu's armed "forces" sent Governor Ladoja scurrying away to some hiding place, the man who is styled as the "strongman of Ibadan politics" basked in his notoriety. Interviewed on Osun state television, the politician who would make a compelling case study in the political uses of thuggery, was swearing that the governor's removal was both inevitable and irreversible. One headline in The Guardian told the story. Adedibu, screamed the headline, "Says Ladoja must go".

Adedibu, according to the paper, imperiously boasted that "We are going to impeach [Ladoja]. There is no going back. We are certainly going to remove him." Ordinary mortals may well wonder where Adedibu got the confidence to underwrite such imperatives. The man apparently didn't wish for us to be plagued by the mystery, so he provided an answer that was at once revealing of his psychology as well as illumining of the recourse which men like him, driven by motives that are eminently open to question, make to divine determinism. Adedibu told his television interviewer: "God put him there and God will remove him. I am in full control...He has nobody with him. All the lawmakers at the

National Assembly are with me. (Sic) Majority of the state lawmakers are with me. He is alone. He is fighting with everybody. He is fighting with the traditional rulers, the market women, the drivers, the workers, the market women. By the will of God, I put him there and I will remove him." Adedibu then revealed that he was already vetting more than 1,000 names of possible successors to the governor he is threatening to oust.

On the face of it, Adedibu may seem content to stay within a role as God's factotum, the handmaiden used by divine force to enthrone Ladoja in office. Yet, on some deeper register, the "godfather's" utterances seem calculated to invite us to behold him, not as mere agent, but as godhead. In a polity that professes an interest in incubating democratic habits and values, one man is empowered to publicly proclaim that he alone is maker and unmaker of political careers, that he alone can enthrone and dethrone a governor at his own whim.

Would Adedibu be so bold if, like Uba, he wasn't certain that his actions enjoyed presidential sympathy if not approval? Would he breach the law and threaten public order with such effrontery if he didn't have Abuja's nod as well as a complement of police officers to abet his activities? The question of his use of thugs was raised in the televised interview. Adedibu, wrote The Guardian, told his audience that "that nothing (sic) can stop him from using thugs, saying all (sic) were part of politics." Asked what the president thought about his use of violence, his response was remarkable for its innocence and candour: "There was a

time former Governor Lam Adesina reported me to the president that I was causing problem in Oyo State. And the president needed to come to Ibadan where he invited me and about seven others for a meeting on this issue. And the president asked me that at 76 what legacy would I leave behind with hooliganism. I told the president that I already have a legacy and that is why he came to Ibadan. I told him that I will continue to cause problem and you will continue to see me as relevant."

The Daily Independent of Tuesday, December 27, provided some corroboration for Adedibu's account. Hosting Adedibu at a communal event in his hometown, President Obasanjo described the man who has instigated bloodshed in Oyo as "a force to reckon with both in Ibadan and the whole of Oyo State." The president's constitutional mandate is to uphold law and order. By admiring a man like Adedibu, the president not only betrayed his oath of office, he raised disturbing questions about the location of his soul vis a vis the mess in Oyo.

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Okey Ndibe is a novelist, poet, political activist from Yola, Nigeria. He is the author of *Arrows of Rain*, a critically reviewed novel published in 2000. Ndibe relocated to the United States in 1988, where he founded *African Commentary*, a magazine described as "award-winning and widely acclaimed." Ndibe is also a published poet, and a former associate professor of English at Bard College at Simon's Rock. He currently teaches fiction and African literature at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. Okey Ndibe is finishing his second novel titled *Foreign gods, incorporated*.

#### Speaking Engagements

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