

THE ROT IN LOUIS EDET HOUSE

By Festus Adedayo

Sometime in the early 2000s, at the cusp of Tafa Balogun's glory as the Inspector General of Police, an oil magnate from a Southwest riverine area was arrested. He was travelling into the state capital from his riverine part of the country. It was at nocturne. The oil magnate, who moved like an Oba, was in a convoy of cars. Inside the car was a Falange of private security persons. They were armed to the teeth with sophisticated weapons. It was obvious that this Oba-like man was into oil bunkering as well. At a checkpoint, the police stopped the convoy and subjected it to a needle-search scrutiny. Alarmed at the weaponry in transit at that unholy hour, the policemen promptly radioed the state headquarters which ordered that the oil magnate and his convoy be brought. From there, Abuja was contacted. Tafa Balogun then ordered that the oil magnate be flown to meet him at Louis Edet House. By the time the police finished wedging the fear of God into the magnate's heart, he had turned into jelly. His face deadpan, the late IGP, who was notorious for his obsession for automobiles, made his demand. The latest BMW SUV was the atonement to set him free. Left with no choice but to succumb to this extortionist gambit, the oil magnate promptly had the IGP's choice car wheeled to Balogun's secret Lagos automobile mart-looking car deposit centre. Miffed by this extortion, my source told me the oil magnate immediately ordered same car for himself. Less than a year after, a state governor, who Balogun helped bury his rotten corpse, got a demand of two Mercedes Benz automobiles from the police top brass. His Secretary to the State Government got the order to take the newly purchased cars to the IGP's vehicle assembly point. He later told his governor boss, "You would think you were in a car mart." I recommend to you a copy of Wale Adebawale's *A Paradise for Maggots* (2010) for details of how Tafa Balogun's lustering police career ended in ignominy. Inside this epiphany, you will encounter how Balogun, not minding his elephant size, went on all fours to plead with rookie police officers to let

him off the EFCC hook and how a low-rank police officer, Nuhu Ribadu,

made a total mess of him. Balogun died almost unsung a few years after. You would imagine that successive IGPs would learn a huge lesson from Balogun's fall and not wear such ignominious apparel in future Oro cult festivity. No, they haven't. To underscore why man should outgrow the facts of his fall, Yoruba use the fire insect (Ìpín) as illustration. Ìpín sings the flesh and my people say no animal on earth should wear that same cloth it sheds (Kò s'éranko tó jé f'aso Ìpín bo'ra.)

For almost an eternity, the rot in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) has engaged Nigerians of diverse strata. Being the son of a policeman, I am a stakeholder and also a victim of the rotten system. Theories have been propounded to articulate the rot. Policing literature is replete with all sorts of explanations. The rotten-apple thesis seems to be the most dominant. This theory, in the words of Carl Klockars, ("The Idea of Police": 1999), holds that if we want to resolve the rot in the police, its top hierarchy must "carefully (screen) applicants for police positions, pursuing defective officers aggressively, and removing them from their police positions before their behaviour spreads throughout the agency." There are other allied rot theories of police force like the meat-eating theory and grass-eating theories. While Meat-eaters are the rapacious and brutal police officers who "aggressively misuse their police powers for personal gain," grass-eaters accept bribes or other avenues for corruption.

Today, the police have this notorious acclaim of a hopelessly corrupt and abusive institution, an agent of violence that is manifestly evil. It is also said that the innumerable police roadblocks and checkpoints in Nigeria, rather than being crime clean-up centers, are more of enablers and instruments of corruption and barefaced human rights abuses. I once wrote about how, in the 1980s, at a police checkpoint in Ilesa, today's Osun State, a police constable by the name

Ifeanyi suggested to my late father that a vehicle owner, inside of whose car loads of cash were found, should be murdered. My father stylishly sidestepped Ifeanyi's suggestion and got the man to leave urgently. The rotten-apple theory especially has been knocked severely as explanation for and antidote to the cancer-like metastasis of rot in the Nigerian police. Extortion through arbitrary detention and in some cases, arbitrary execution of detainees is rife in the



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Thomas Barker and David Carter (1986) in their book, 'Police Deviance' rammed home the death knell. They said: "The 'rotten apple' theory won't work any longer.

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not just the individuals in it — because corrupt police are made, not born." In Nigeria, this even sounds true and also, alien. To control corruption and arbitrariness in the Nigerian police, we should look at the police as an organization and not the individual. In any case, finding a honest Nigerian policeman is akin to, in the words of Bongos Ikwue, searching for a virgin in a maternity ward.

Apart from the above theories, other factors have been adduced for the rot in the Nigerian police. First is the colonial legacy of Nigerian police. It is summed up by the Human Rights Watch Report of 2010 which states that, "The primary purpose of the colonial police was to protect the British economic and political interests. The police accomplished this objective through the often brutal subjugation of indigenous communities that resisted colonial occupation. The use of violence, repression, and excessive use of force by the police has characterized law enforcement in Nigeria ever since." The second albatross of current decadent NPF and the rot within it is what is called the military legacy. The long years of military rule are seen as responsible for the marginalization and poor funding of the force. It is said to be responsible for the coercive psychology of the police, too. Corruption seems to be the least of the vices in the Nigerian police. The vices range from brutality, coercion, to human rights abuses. Daniel Agbiboa, in his "Policing Is Not Work: It Is Stealing by Force: Corrupt Policing and Related Abuses in Everyday Nigeria" Africa Today, Vol 62 No 2, said that, historically, the remuneration of police lower ranks and its personnel in entirety, has been appalling. It is such that most Nigerian policemen are in the margins of extreme poverty. Today, an average policeman receives less than a dollar per day or \$30 per month.

A 2008 report of the Presidential Committee on Police Reform reported that fewer than 10 percent of all police personnel in Nigeria are housed in police barracks "and even a lesser percentage can claim to have personal dwellings that they can call their own and look forward to retiring into. As a result, the police have some of the most dysfunctional families among occupational groups in the country. Even where barrack accommodation is provided, the facilities are dilapidated one room buildings, often with no toilet facilities. Many police personnel have been reduced to begging in order to meet their subsistence needs." It is the conclusion of most reports on the police in Nigeria that its impoverishment is a significant factor in the general climate of popular discontent in the police and is the parent of abuses and corruption in the force. The only means of survival for many of the policemen in Nigeria is extortion. It is a common way for its lower cadres to supplement their meagre incomes.

Some weeks ago, I was at the notorious and infamous Ibadan police station called Iyaganku. I was counsel to some persons accused of electricity theft. There, I confirmed that anyone judging the policemen we see outside by their outward manifestations is the proverbial man who accuses the knock-kneed of wobbly foot-dragging. The fault is actually from the foundation. The police station is the picture of the rot. At Iyaganku, I saw dirty, crumbling police residential houses which were probably built six decades ago. On ropes tied to balustrades were hung unpleasant-looking clothes. Broken glass panes were replaced with sooth-stained woods. Its roads, which apparently once bore tars, looked like bombed streets of Mogadishu. It was a

terrible neighborhood to behold. The whole place stank like the inside of Death's hovel. When I moved closer to one of the residential houses, I couldn't believe what I saw. Broken sewage and gutters had a tribe of maggots brimming out of them like traders in a night market. Police children ran over one another as they playfully encircled these ponds of rot, dead to the colony of germs and diseases lurking around.

Conversely, fat-stomached officers walked about Iyaganku police station. Their rotund, overfed bellies were apparently proceeds of illicit graft earnings. The officers looked like bloated bedbugs. They seemed to be scanning every entrant into the police station as a scientist scans an object just fallen from Mars. No one needed to tell you they were scanning for the next victim to drain their blood. Then compare them to junior officers dressed in multi-layered uniforms with shoes whose only resemblance to others' is the black colour. Some had missing uniform buttons and torn breast pockets. It suddenly occurred to me: how can anyone expect a sane police from this tribe of frustrated persons who live in this place?

A recent interview which went viral, granted by ex-Lagos Commissioner of Police, Fatai Owoseni, eventually burst the bubble. So also did a viral video of a retired police officer, a Superintendent of Police, who after 35 years in service, was paid a pittance of N2m as retirement allowance. "When I joined the Nigeria Police in 1984, my first posting in 1985 was Sagamu (Ogun State)" Owoseni began. According to him, in the station where he was posted, there were stationed there Land Rover vehicles and lorries belonging to the police. Any policeman being posted out would be conveyed by vehicles. There was a fuel dump, like a filling station and mechanic workshop belonging to the police. This was where all spare parts were kept. The DPO had a safe containing information money to give informants. Two pairs of uniforms and brand new shoes were given yearly to junior rank policemen while officers, though bought theirs, had them highly subsidized. They were imported from England. "It was such that soldiers befriended police officers and gave them money to purchase police shoes for them," Owoseni said. "Policemen being posted out of their stations were given 28-days allowance money in lieu of notice. Hotels in the neighborhood befriended DPOs so that they could let posted policemen lodge with them. There was money to feed inmates in the cells. It was the police with dignity that we met."

Now, it is as if government is deliberately punishing the young policemen, Owoseni said. "It is from these paltry salaries that those policemen buy their own uniforms. If you gather ten policemen now, they will wear different uniforms and different standards. There is no standard again. As they are collecting their salaries, they are deducting money to buy fuel for police vehicles, if there are vehicles at all. There are no more rain-capes, nothing. How do you treat men like animals and expect those horrible behaviors associated with police to be absent? Today, if a policeman dies, his burden is left to his family. His police colleagues would gather money to bury him," he lamented. Owoseni said a police DPO gets budgetary allocation of N30,000 for a quarter. As a retired Police Commissioner, Owoseni said his monthly retirement salary is N70,000. When you compare what Nigeria pays soldiers who also have the fortune of sitting atop the trillions of Naira budgeted for insurgency, you will weep for the Nigerian police.

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There is no doubt that Kayode Egbetokun, the Inspector General of Police, is sitting on a house of rot. When you see the IGP, with his beautiful police uniform and shining shoes, know for a fact that under this facade is a tribe of maggots festooning him all over. After the retired Superintendent of Police in the viral video shook the country to its nadir with that shocking revelation, Egbetokun claimed he was not aware of the retirement payment fiasco. It was a lie from the pit of hell. He was. In fact, his volte-face revealed the underbelly of the force.

It is said that the various billions of Naira voted for infrastructure upgrade of police stations and barracks get filched by an unholy trinity of federal legislators, police commission and police top brasses. Successive police IGPs have been content with corruptively enriching themselves from graft and extortion and retiring into wealth thereafter, rather than bothering about the rot inside of which the police institution is trapped. Unfortunately, any discussion of the issue of welfare by the police is considered as threat to national security.

As Yoruba say, it is how you present that is the measurement of reactions to you (Irinisi ni isonilojo). A people is appraised by the quality of their police. If the present government does not bypass the maggots-brimming police institution and carve a future, as well as a better image and look for Nigerian policemen, we should all be prepared to stand up to it. You may not queue on same political thoughts with Omoyele Sowore. You may even not like his brashness. However, Sowore's call for protest on July 21 against Nigerian police deplorable state is protest for a good country. The El Dorado we all construct in our minds of a great Nigeria can never come to reality if we continue to be surrounded by a tribe of maggots. That is what the Nigeria Police Force is. The NPF collapse is a metaphor for Nigeria. This country cannot continue to sell sands as it does and not collect pebbles as payment.

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