

*Omoluabi: The Biography of
Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola
Gov State of Osun Nigeria
With Special Foreword by
His Royal Highness, Oba
Lamidi Olayiwola Adeyemi
III, Alaiyeluwa Alaafin of Oyo
Nigeria By Moshood
Ademola Fayemiwo, PhD &
Margie Neal-Fayemiwo,
Ed.D.*

OMOLUABI

by MOSHOOD ADEMOLA FAYEMIWO
and MARGIE MARIE NEAL-FAYEMIWO

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BIOGRAPHY OF OGBENI RAUF AREGBESOLA GOVERNOR STATE OF OSUN NIGERIA

With Special Foreword By

**HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS OBA LAMIDI OLAYIWOLA ADEYEMI III,
ALAIYELUWA ALAAFIN OF OYO NIGERIA**

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such an astonishing pace during this period, pointedly between January and June 1998.

**THE DEATH OF SANI ABACHA ON
JUNE 07, 1998**

•

Gen. Sani Abacha signed his own death warrant, precisely on December 8, 1997 the day retired Gen. Shehu Musa Yar'Adua was killed inside Abakaliki prison, in present-day Ebonyi state. The northern political mafia supported Gen. Sani Abacha against the June 12, 1993 political struggle to the hilt. They inveighed against the inviolability of June 12, 1993 presidential election victory of Chief Abiola and lobbed all inconceivable criticisms against virtually all pro-democracy activists and organizations, at home and abroad. But in early 1998, members of the *Kaduna Mafia* were jolted by the unbelievable poisoning of the godfather; retired Gen. Shehu Musa Yar'Adua on the orders of a man they thought was as one of them: Gen. Sani Abacha. Suddenly, top members of the northern Hausa-Fulani political mafia had a whiplash that, Sani Abacha didn't have the overall interests of the northern Hausa-Fulani establishment at heart.

It was no secret the political ding-dong and kabuki being played by Shehu and Sani over power. The anticipation among the top brass of the *Kaduna Mafia* was that, both men would settle their political differences for the overall benefit of the larger Hausa-Fulani interests. But Sani Abacha took it far. He orchestrated the death of one of the leading lights that the Hausa-Fulani had ever produced in modern Nigeria, He murdered the *Tafida* and immediately after the murder of the head of the *Kaduna Mafia* in December 1997, leading members of the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy: emirs, religious leaders, mullahs and the power brokers began holding nocturnal meetings across the length and breadth of northern Nigeria. The Musa Yar'Adua family of Katsina is one of the most prominent feudal families in northern Nigeria. It was not

by accident that President Olusegun Obasanjo handed over to another Yar'Adua; Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2007. These family members, with others are "*the owners of Nigeria*" to borrow the words of a northern Nigerian political analyst.

When you hear of the *Kaduna Mafia*, the mafia is real. These are a group of northern power brokers made up of; retired military generals, elites, emirs, intellectuals, mullahs and business men. It is a shadowy group, who are, to quote Dr Bashir Ahmed Ikara, "...a group of conservative people who regard power as their heritage in Nigeria." Ikara, now late, was a professor of English at Bayero University, Kano, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and other numerous teaching appointments. He said these influential power elites considered it their birthright to rule Nigeria using northern Nigeria as launch pad but "*the fact of the matter is that ordinary northerners have nothing to show for this long domination and are simply clamoring, like the rest of the country, for honest government.*" And for any Nigerian leader; a northern Nigerian head of state for that matter, to orchestrate the murder one of the leaders, if not the foremost leader of the mafia was a grave and great concern. In all the nocturnal and subterranean meetings held in late 1997 and early 1998, the consensus among the northern political mafia was that, Sani Abacha too must forfeit his own life for killing retired Gen. Shehu Musa Yar'Adua. But how would the murder of the wily and stubborn general and head of state be carried out? Another military *coup d'état* was altogether ruled out, because it would be bloody and nasty.

Suddenly, the military wing of the *Kaduna Mafia* came on board and suggested the exploitation of the Achilles' heels of Gen. Sani Abacha: women. The Babangida military wing knew the lifestyle of Sani Abacha. These various groups had distinct reasons for pooling resources together to get rid of Sani Abacha and they did exactly that on Monday June 08, 1998. There were clues to the under-handed moves of this shadowy mafia in Abacha's demise. For example, by mid-

summer of 1998, the subterranean moves by the shadowy *Kaduna Mafia* and their military wing to get rid of Abacha had been perfected. As a matter of fact, a magus of the mafia, Prof. Jubril Aminu, former vice-chancellor of the University of Maiduguri and influential minister of education and petroleum resources under Gen. Ibrahim Babangida was mandated to telegraph the certain and inevitable death of Sani Abacha to Nigerians in a coded language. A top and knowledgeable U.S. diplomat stationed in Nigeria during this period, but now in Washington DC informed the authors how the head of the military wing of the *Kaduna Mafia*, now retired Gen. Ibrahim Babangida orchestrated the plot in concert with other members. *“After five years of carefully kept silence under Abacha, Babangida began making statements a couple of weeks to Abacha’s death (that was June 1998) few weeks to Abacha’s death,”* the go-to-diplomat disclosed. *“I think those were unambiguous signals about the need to bring military rule in Nigeria to an end. Gen. Babangida’s sudden change of behavior seemed very unusual at that time, but in retrospect now, it seems they (referring to the Kaduna Mafia) may have expressed a powerful tide that was already moving against Abacha, and aimed to sweep him away, if necessary.”*

Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba man, and a fellow Egba man as Chief MKO Abiola and *“... a man the northern power-brokers could do business with,”* to quote Gen. Ibrahim Babangida in an interview with *The New York Times* was penciled down as head of state, so Nigeria as a nation could move forward. In late 1998 after the death- (murder) - of Chief MKO Abiola on Tuesday July 7, 1998; (the same *Kaduna Mafia* murdered Abiola too) and after Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar unfurled a genuine political transition to civil rule program, which culminated in the handing over of power to elected representatives on May 29, 1999, leading pro-democracy agitators and leaders began to return to the country from exile.

Whatever has a beginning must and surely have an end. Gen. Sani Abacha underestimated the resilience and resolve of the Nigerian people. He thought that killing his political opponents and filling Nigerian prisons with political prisoners would dampen the resolve of the Nigerian people to determine their political affairs, but the dictator was sorely mistaken. On Saturday May 29, 1999 Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola was appointed as commissioner for works by Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, the governor of Lagos state following the de-militarization of Nigeria and the election of Asiwaju Bola Tinubu as governor of Lagos state. With benefit of hindsight now, the rise of Sani Abacha as an army officer to seizing power with the concomitant national psychosis he inflicted on a blighted people for five agonizing years was a tragedy of gargantuan proportion. Abacha was not supposed to rise to the position of an army general according to recommendations of his military instructors in 1971, the same for Gen. Idi Amin Dada of Uganda. But unfortunately and tragically, both became heads of state of their nations through military coups.

As Gen. Colin Powell (Ret.), former chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and U.S. Secretary of State once disclosed about the murderous imbecile; *“Abacha had the worst CIA bio I’ve ever read, and I’ve read lots of them.”* Mr. Powell was one of Abacha’s teachers at the military academy during Abacha’s short training here in California, the United States. Mr. Powell called the dictator not to seize power in the fall of 1993, but the wily general ignored his former military instructor.

Gen. Babangida single-handedly planted his neighbor, Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar as head of state following the murder of Sani Abacha in June 1997. *“Abdulsalam and I went to school together,”* Babangida disclosed. *“His home was next to mine. Our parents knew each other. We are not really related, but we are very close, having been together for about 49 years.”* Babangida had prevailed on his near-kinsman six months earlier in 1998 not to resign from the Abacha military junta. The godfather had a job for one of the members of the

Kaduna Mafia. Lt-Gen. Jeremiah Useni, the minister of the federal capital territory (FCT), Abuja was the most senior army officer, who should have stepped into deceased Abacha's shoes in 1998, but the *Kaduna Mafia* plotted and orchestrated its *manfiki* led by retired Gen. Ibrahim Babangida to plant Abdulsalam Abubakar on Nigerians.

The fact of the matter was that, the *coup d'état* plot engineered a year earlier on the necks of Gen. Oladipo Diya and his fellow Yoruba army officers was a well-calculated and choreographed artifice to get Gen. Oladipo Diya out of the way of succession so that he would not step into Sani Abacha's shoes as soon as the *Kaduna Mafia* got rid of the evil tyrant in 1998. There were fears among the oligarchy and the Babangida Group that Gen. Oladipo Diya as new head of state would be favorably disposed to actualizing the June 12, 1993 presidential election victory of Chief MKO Abiola. Consequently, Diya and his Yoruba generals had to be taken out of the way via a phantom *coup d'état* orchestrated by Gen. Ishaya Bamaïyi, the then chief of army staff so as to clear the way for the *Kaduna Mafia* to axe Gen. Abacha and bring in Gen. Abubakar.

In addition, the *Kaduna Mafia* had already decided six months earlier in 1998 that Chief MKO Abiola would also be murdered so, to use the words of one of the Mafioso; "*Nigeria could move forward.*" It was also the plan of the mafia to bring back retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo as "elected" civilian president as a sop to the south-western Yoruba people on their "loss" of Chief MKO Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential election voided by Gen. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. During this time, Gen. Obasanjo was still in prison, completely oblivious of events outside the prison walls. These self-styled "*owners of Nigeria,*"-not more than a handful of individuals- decide the destinies of the rest nearly 200 million Nigerians. When Prof. Jubril Aminu told *The Punch* newspapers that Nigerians should not be alarmed about Abacha's self-succession bid, rather they should be concerned

about what would follow thereafter in 1998, he was talking in coded language as a member of the shadowy *Kaduna Mafia*.

In the fall of 1998, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida flew from Minna to Abeokuta, Ogun state to hold a *tete-a-tete* with the just-released former head of state; Gen. Obasanjo. He presented the agenda of the *Kaduna Mafia* to Gen. Obasanjo and gave three reasons the latter should accept to become an “elected” civilian president. First, he had been sent to prison by deceased Gen. Sani Abacha. That was a stain on Obasanjo’s military record. Even though pardoned by Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar, there was the possibility that Gen. Obasanjo may not be able to attend the national council of state meeting as a former head of state. The second reason advanced by Gen. Babangida in convincing Gen. Obasanjo to return to power in 1999 was that, the Yoruba people would feel cheated and rightly so aftermath of Abiola’s murder, if a northern person became head of state. The *Kaduna Mafia* trusted Gen. Obasanjo and had decided that Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo was the one Yoruba man; “*the Kaduna Mafia could do business with.*”

Finally, the Minna-general told Gen. Obasanjo that, he should not bother himself about money for electioneering campaign. The *Kaduna Mafia* would reach out to the America’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to provide cash to rehabilitate the just-released retired army general and former head of state and also the financial war-chest he needed to contest the 1999 presidential elections. In 1999, millions of American Dollars were funneled through the late Mr. Robert McNamara, former US defense secretary and later president of the World Bank to the presidential campaign of retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo and the army-financed and mafia-backed People’s Democratic Party-PDP. Retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo was “elected” and sworn in as president of Nigeria on Saturday May 29, 1999. Nigeria, the most populous black nation on earth had been pulled out of the edge.

The death of Gen. Sani Abacha in summer 1998 was indeed a game-changer in the struggle for political participation and constitutional democracy in Africa's most populous nation. Abacha thought he had figured out everything and there was no stopping his self-succession plot as virtually all the political parties had adopted him as their sole presidential candidate. But Fate intervened and he died. It was indeed a surreal moment in Nigeria's political history. Even though the symbol of the political struggle; Chief Moshood Kasimawo Olawale-MKO-Abiola also died, there was no turning the hand of the political clock backwards and it was foreword march to constitutional democracy. The voice of the Nigerian people was loud and clear: It was time for the military to pack and go. Democracy must return to Nigeria. Consequently, Abacha's successor; Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar announced a transition-to-civil rule program which terminated in May 1999. The death of Abacha breathed a sort of fresh air into Nigeria's political ambience.

Many of the politicians that went underground came out of the shadows and argosies of them that fled into exile returned in droves. A breath of fresh air descended on the Nigerian political landscape. Political parties and activities revved up. The ordinary people and the Nigerian masses were now in the driver's seat. So it seemed. Throughout much of the half-a-decade- (November, 1993-June 1998) - Sani Abacha locked down Nigeria; thick awe that could be sliced with a *Panga* knife stalked the land. A coup master himself; every political analyst and commentator had reached the near-unanimous consensus that Abacha would not be removed via another military *coup d'état*, because of the near impossibility of the adventure in the first place, and its remote success. But more importantly, Abacha had succeeded in painting the June 12, 1993 political crisis as power struggle between the largely Hausa-Fulani Moslem north and southwest Yoruba people. The pan-Nigerian mandate Chief MKO Abiola received at the polls showed the overwhelming desires of all Nigerians;

Hausa-Fulani, Ibo, Yoruba, Efik/Ibiobio and the rest ethnic groups in Nigeria to do away with tribalism and religious sentiments. Not minding the fact that Chief MKO Abiola, a Moslem chose Ambassador Babagana Kingibe as his running mate; a Moslem too; Nigerians were just fed up with the military and wanted an end to jackboot dictatorship. Consequently, Chief MKO Abiola garnered majority votes in all the geo-political areas of Nigeria and history has recorded it that the June 12, 1993 presidential elections was the freest, fairest and most transparently-conducted presidential election in the history of Nigeria.

The death of Gen. Sani Abacha paved the way for a return to civil rule once again, courtesy of his successor; Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar who announced a return to constitutional democracy. Sen. Bola Tinubu returned to Nigeria like other political activists and top players of the June 12 political struggle. He decided to contest the Lagos state governorship election under the defunct Alliance for Democracy-AD, the most organized grassroots political movement in the southwest that gave deceased Sani Abacha sleepless nights the most during the pro-democracy and demilitarization years. It was Providence that brought Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola and Sen. Bola Tinubu together preparatory to the 1999 governorship election in Lagos state. According to Ogbeni in an interview with the authors: *“Sen. Tinubu and I met somehow and he asked me to be his campaign manager in 1999 and I accepted the offer.”* But Asiwaju Tinubu explained how they both met and how the meeting crystallized into cementing political families of immense proportions; *“...it was in 1991 when I was running for the Lagos west senatorial district ticket of the Social Democratic Party.”*

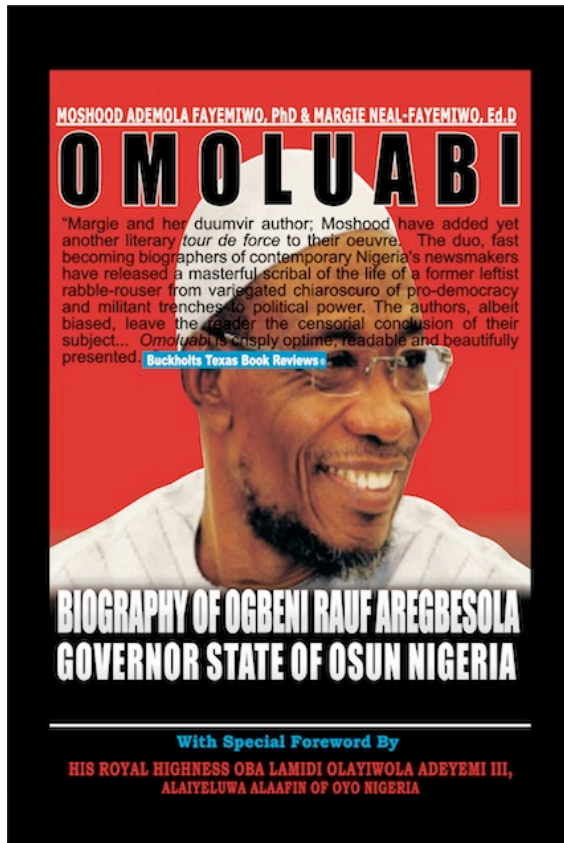
As earlier disclosed, Ogbeni Rauf had contested as one of the defunct SDP delegates in 1991 during the diarchy that Gen. Ibrahim Babangida tinkered with during this period, but Rauf lost that delegate election by one vote. At the same period, Mr. Bola Tinubu was testing the political waters and had decided to

run for a senatorial seat in Lagos. He chose Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola as his campaign manager and Ogbeni delivered as Tinubu won and became a senator in 1992 alongside Mr. Tokunbo Afikuyomi and Mrs. Kofo Bucknor-Akerele as the three senators representing Lagos state in the ill-fated military-civilian diarchy operated by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida with Sir Michael Otedola of the defunct NRC as governor of Lagos state. In that ill-fated political experiment, Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola also attempted to represent Alimosho Federal Constituency at the House of Representatives under the defunct SDP but lost the bid; however, he was able to deliver for Sen. Tinubu and as Asiwaju recalls; *“What struck me most about him was his frankness and openness...his obvious leadership qualities and his contribution to the emergence of the defunct SDP is a lesson in party politics.”*

In 1999 when Sen. Tinubu threw his hat into the governorship race under the banner of the defunct Alliance for Democracy –AD- he remembered the young man who helped him to win his senatorial seat seven years earlier and made him his campaign manager once again. According to Asiwaju, *“When I decided to run for the office of governor, I wanted a man of integrity, intelligence, hard work and experience in the realm of politics. My mind immediately went to Rauf and I invited him on board my campaign team as chief of general staff. Without doubt, his contributions made the difference in my emergence as the party candidate and the subsequent victory of the party.”* Drawing from his own experience the previous years to become a congressman and although he couldn’t succeed, Ogbeni Rauf was able to triangulate the various political mines at the local and state levels among the various contestants jostling to win the party primaries of the defunct AD in 1999.

As the director-general of the Bola Tinubu Governorship Campaign Organization in Lagos state in 1999, Rauf made do with little resources and was able to defeat formidable political opponents of Asiwaju in the party primaries; the likes of late

Chief Funsho Williams, Prince Ademola Adeniji-Adele, Dr Wahab Dosunmu and a host of others and ensured Bola Tinubu coasted home to victory. Asiwaju Bola Tinubu went ahead to win the governorship election and was sworn in on May 29, 1999 as Lagos state's third democratically-elected chief executive.



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