

PART II. CORRUPTION, NIGERIA, AND THE MORAL IMAGINATION

FOUR. MORAL ECONOMIES OF CORRUPTION

Nigeria's recurrent scarcity of petrol is a perennial struggle for members of its middle classes, and indeed for anyone who owns a motor vehicle. Although Nigeria is a major oil producer and has a number of oil refineries, the latter are frequently in disrepair, or domestic supplies are disrupted by unrest in the Niger Delta. Even when it has a sufficient supply for domestic consumption, distribution is a real problem. Petrol stations, which sell fuel at the official price, do not receive a supply adequate to remain open at all times. Considerable quantities get diverted to the black market. Anywhere one goes, the roads are dotted with tables laden with small plastic containers of petrol, with larger jerry cans of it underneath. This black-market petrol is usually at least twice the price of that in filling stations, and it is often adulterated, causing problems for any car habitually fueled with it. Even in normal circumstances, finding petrol at filling stations can be a challenge. Most stations stand empty, with an attendant or two selling oil and other maintenance supplies, sometimes with a couple of cars awaiting the next tanker truck. It is useful to know a station owner, who can tell you when a consignment is due. Ideally, one arrives at a station when the tanker truck is still refilling the station's reservoir, before too many other drivers have noticed the station has petrol. Especially if scarcity is bad, lines can get very long indeed. Of course, if one is friends with the

owner—or can make arrangements with the workers—it is possible to jump the line, though this must be done carefully. Tempers are often short.

The worst period of scarcity I have experienced personally was in Kano in 1996, when petrol was desperately scarce, and that on the black market was very expensive and very bad. One would need to get in line days before a tanker was due, and fights were common. One particular frustration was that petrol was much more readily available in Kaduna state, just south of Kano but too far to be feasible simply for refueling. Soon thereafter Kano state's military governor, Colonel Abdullahi Wase, was killed in an air crash and a new governor assumed office. The scarcity ended abruptly. The late governor had become unpopular well before his death, and stories about his corruption abounded. During the scarcity, rumors often blamed him personally, saying he (and sometimes other prominent collaborators) had diverted Kano state's supplies of petrol, exporting them to Niger Republic. Whatever the truth of these stories, they found corroboration in other rumors, especially of discoveries made after his death: of a fleet of minibuses belonging to the late governor in his ancestral village that had been found packed with ₦50 notes; of vast sums that had been hidden various places around his house.¹

The truth or falsity of these rumors is not the subject of this chapter, nor is it an evaluation of given officials' competence or integrity. Instead, my interest here is in how official conduct was evaluated socially. Colonel Wase has faded from memory, except for a hospital and a road named in his honor. While complaints about his corruption were rampant during his tenure, they are now eclipsed by complaints about his two civilian successors,² Rabi'u Kwankwaso and Ibrahim Shekarau. Corruption discourse is densest about the present and the most recent past; it tends to concern people who are still politically active. My only conversations about government malpractice during the colonial period have been with scholars, highly educated people, and NEPU and PRP activists. Similarly, the First Republic is remembered as a time of relative rectitude, though people are usually most nostalgic about the politicians from their own areas. Northerners admire the Sardauna of Sokoto and Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa. Westerners often idolize Chief Awolowo, and easterners Dr. Azikiwe. General Buhari's reputation for integrity has largely drowned out stories about missing oil money or outrage at political repression, but this may change across the course of his presidency. Many remember even the Abacha regime with a certain fondness, considering it now to have been more honest than its civilian successors. This is not simply historical amnesia enabled by the passage of time. Outrage over corruption is among other things a symptom of contemporary political relationships. Discussion of the relative merits of

Governors Kwankwaso and Shekarau also are manifestations of political loyalty: Kwankwaso and Shekarau have always represented rival parties. The latter defeated the former's attempt at reelection in 2003, served two terms, and in 2011 was replaced by his predecessor.³ Colonel Wase, whatever his failings, is outside contemporary political contests. To the extent that discussions of corruption express contemporary loyalties or themselves accomplish political aims—that is, to the extent they are illocutionary or perlocutionary—Colonel Wase is irrelevant at this late date. There is a widespread consensus that almost anyone in office will violate bureaucratic norms. This is inevitable, even necessary and admirable. Politicians are expected to steal money and to grant illicit favors to friends and family. Outrage comes about when it gets out of hand. In Kano in 1996, most of my acquaintances agreed Colonel Wase was behaving outrageously. What norms were being outraged? What did it mean to violate the norms, and how did and does popular outrage manifest itself?

Norms in the Corruption-Complex

Nigerian dramas of petrol scarcity, like daily discussions about state-level corruption and the microstrategies one could use to respond to it, were the backdrop to my starting a set of oral history interviews with small-scale farmers in a small town called Ungogo near Kano, about the history of their interactions with state officials. As a result, I had a wide variety of conversations—formal interviews, informal chats, late-night conversations over beer—about the frustrations of dealing with people acting in an official capacity, inside the government and out. These discussions covered a broad time span, ranging from contemporary events to ancestors' long-ago experiences. Practices one might call corruption were a key feature in almost all of these stories. Stories of fantastic macrolevel corruption abounded; the governor's alleged minibuses were the tip of a corrupt iceberg. Interactions with bureaucrats almost always resulted in demands for bribes. Travel was complicated by the demands of police who needed to be bribed at roadblocks. University admissions often could be achieved from personal connections—which could make education difficult for the ill connected—and provided instructors with substantial numbers of ill-prepared (but well-connected) students.

Contemporary complaints about corruption echo stories from the past, such as the trials of Sani Kacako or the injustices trumpeted by NEPU, and thus oral histories of corruption map well onto the documentary record, even when that record is fragmentary or elliptical. During the colonial period, officials who measured farms for tax assessment demanded bribes. A farmer

who could or would not bribe the surveyor might find himself listed as having a much larger farm than he actually possessed and thus liable for much more tax than he could afford to pay. Ward, village, and district heads could exercise a certain amount of discretion in distributing the burden of taxes or in levying tax rates on particular farmers. While this enabled them to adjust the burden to account for individual disasters, it also allowed them to inflate particular assessments, either to absorb the revenue directly or to bring tax bills above what particular farmers could pay, which would result in their farms' confiscation.

Farmers' oral histories of tax assessment often turned into catalogs of extortion. Annual assessments were often at five shillings or more over the level set by the state. Hostile officials drove farmers off their land through inflated tax bills or confiscated livestock as interim payment and later pretended to have received nothing. Other taxes were levied on adult men, and officials extorted additional money by categorizing young boys as adults or by levying taxes on men who had died. These stories were all from the memories of elderly people, or were told by younger men recounting what their elders had experienced. The land tax itself was abolished in 1979 when the PRP government under Abubakar Rimi came to power in Kano state, and so people's contemporary experiences with corruption take somewhat different form.

Discussions of local courts and official systems of dispute resolution placed at least as much emphasis on the bribes extorted from litigants as they did on juridical mechanisms themselves. Judges and territorial heads acting as dispute mediators were known for supporting the claims of those who paid the most, or those who were already clients. Some of these practices were systematic: officials inflated the absolute incidence of tax and then skimmed the excess. Others were particular: improper tax bills presented to specific unfortunates. Alkalai have great discretion over which witnesses to believe and which to impugn, which testimony to allow to be supplemented with oaths and which to let languish unsubstantiated. Prevailing in court is therefore a matter of marshaling a variety of resources, of which the "true" facts of the case are often less important than money and political standing. It is an article of common wisdom that one should avoid going to court as much as possible. In part this is because of people's disinclination to air their dirty laundry in public, but to go to court is to risk massive financial losses, as bribes and other forms of extortion grow to dwarf any potential gains from victory. In cases of inheritance, when surviving relatives are unable to agree on the proper division of estates, it is not uncommon to take cases to court but to conceal from the judge the full extent of the estate, so that any extortion misses the really valuable things.⁴ Given the local government reforms that transformed the ad-

ministrative apparatus of the old districts into today's LGAs, the number of officials whose favors one might need to curry has multiplied, even as the issues involved have shifted.

Descriptions of what might be interpreted as improper practice depended very much on individuals' relationships to particular officials. Thus, for example, one fairly conservative religious scholar who had close ties to the village head and was also sympathetic to the emirate government (represented in Ungogo by the district head) admitted that revenue officials sometimes committed malpractices, reminiscing that giving them a ram could result in a reported plot substantially smaller than it was in reality. The village and district heads, however, were both too pious and too well educated to stoop so low. Illegal practices were a product of their naïve trust: "They could not know because they believed in [their subordinates]." When malfeasance was brought to their attention, it was quickly corrected.⁵ However, the village head was (in this man's opinion) less reliable than the district head, and he could be bribed, assuming the bribe was attempted carefully and sufficiently large. The village head, he said, was less likely to intervene in the process of surveying but rather tended to become involved in instances of dispute, particularly in a dispute over inheritance. He was adamant, however, that district-level officials, whose social standing and religious credentials were considerably more impressive, were not involved in such tawdry affairs. This insistence on the uprightness of the district head was somewhat extreme, but it was not uncommon among those sympathetic to the emirate establishment.

By contrast, people who had been members of NEPU and the PRP, Aminu Kano's left-wing northern political parties, saw official malpractice in terms of a class divide between talakawa and the masu sarauta, with the interests of the caliphate aristocracy gradually being taken over by NPC, and more generally the northern political elite. The actions of subordinates were ultimately less important than those of high-level officeholders. The thrust of this critique helps to explain why the repression of NEPU in the 1950s was so savage. While the political accommodations between emirate officials and British colonial officers had previously tended only to censure as corrupt or incompetent people who were in trouble from their political superiors, NEPU focused on the responsibility of the very most senior members of the political hierarchy. As Northern Nigeria moved from a system dominated by this colonial caliphate to one in which caliphal officials were subject to the interests of NPC politicians, NEPU criticism threatened this emergent accommodation.⁶ But class-based critique had its limitations. Although these parties did indeed prove important for exposing and ameliorating government corruption, politicians

who gained office under their aegis have proven little better. For activists, the problem with political life is that commoners are oppressed, by the political elite, the rich, and members of the old aristocracy. In that regard, higher officials like *hakimai* are guiltier than lower-ranking ones like *dagatai*. In effect, therefore, there is no consensus on *who* is corrupt, even when everyone can agree on the fact that corruption has bedeviled Nigeria for decades.

The politicization of memory stems in part from local politics. But the memory of particular individuals' actions is only partly determined by political ideology or religious conviction. Just as significantly, someone's evaluation of past action stems from that person's position in the complex chains of patronage and clientage that subtend much of economic and political life. The rich and powerful gain prestige and political support through the largesse they are able to give clients. A person in need is therefore well advised to ingratiate him- or herself with a protector, who may be able to help out with employment, cash for medical and other crises, places at school or university, or just about anything else for which influence might be required. The protector gains prestige and a follower. Influence and largesse are not cheap: acquiring them can require diverting public monies to individual ends. Nonetheless, it would be difficult if not impossible for even the most technocratic politician to become politically prominent without being able to produce such patronage. Common sense in Ungogo would have it that relations with state officials are intrinsically problematic and that it is wisest to make sure that officials know little about one's affairs. Political sympathies, friendship, and patronage loyalties lead to differing assessments of who is oppressive and why, but a sense that contact with the state causes problems permeates popular discourse about interaction with the government.

Consider again Sani Kacako, the village head of Kacako who was deposed in 1924 and who was discussed in chapter 1. As is most often true in cases where the government dealt with improper conduct on the part of officials not being considered for deposition, these records are extremely elliptical. A careful reading reveals a telling logic to his deposition. In the final analysis, Sani's problem was that he failed fully to establish himself as client of the district head. Sani's documented troubles started with his failure to collect all of the tax his registers listed as payable. After several attempts at revision failed to eliminate his liability for the shortfall, Sani claimed he was being forced to collect it twice over from certain unfortunates. When, instead of paying up, the taxpayers abandoned their farms and left Kacako, the district head did not relieve Sani of his responsibility for the taxes but rather demanded he make good the shortfall from his own funds. But, as is clear both from oral testi-

mony I collected and from the scandals NEPU publicized during the 1950s, emirate officials were fully capable of pursuing absconding farmers. In this case they chose not to do so. The village head was squeezed in a manner not entirely unlike that of his taxpayers. This reconstruction of a fraught set of negotiations is speculative: when recorded by colonial investigators, practices that violated the basic norms of colonial governance could be acknowledged only circuitously. Excessive candor would acknowledge flaws at the heart of colonial political accommodations. The micropolitics of these negotiations therefore remain invisible. The district head and his son were under pressures of their own, as attested by the facts that the son was investigated for this crime and that the district head was deposed the following year. Even if Sani did not receive satisfaction, his tormentors were not completely invulnerable. One reason the district officer gave for not reinstating Sani was the fact that his successor was already in office, which would make Sani's position invidious should he be restored. The implication was that the new village head already had powerful patrons—the new district head, or perhaps others in the emirate hierarchy. For this reason, the case could not be resolved in Sani's favor.

For a somewhat more desperate instance of lack of patronage, consider the case of an old man I shall call Malam Balarabe, who was in his seventies when I knew him in Ungogo during the late 1990s and early 2000s, just before his death. He lived in desperate poverty there, along with his wife.⁷ Balarabe had inherited no land from his equally impoverished father, and as a young man during the 1940s supported himself as a wage laborer working on other people's farms. By delaying his first marriage, he was able to save up enough money to buy a small parcel of land and take up farming for himself. He managed to support himself and pay his land tax through cultivating his farm and continuing in wage labor. During this period he also managed to get married. After a few years, he took an extended trading trip that lasted some years and in the interim left his farm in trust with his "brother," a patrilateral cousin. When Malam Balarabe returned to Ungogo, his cousin, who had assiduously cultivated ties with the ward and village heads, refused to return his farm. Balarabe had witnesses willing to testify that he had only lent the farm to his cousin, which is a recognized form of land tenure that comes with the expectation of the farm's eventual return. However, Balarabe did not think a court case feasible or wise.⁸ He could not afford the expenses, both institutional and extralegal, of a court case, and he feared deepening the hostility of his cousin's powerful patrons. His hard-won farm lost, Balarabe returned to supporting himself through wage labor. The ill will of the village head proved enduring, and he was unable to get allocated a farm through the head's good

graces. Instead, he devoted himself to trying to find farms officials “did not know about.” After several years of cultivating ties to prominent men around Ungogo, Balarabe did manage to get an even smaller plot than he had before. Part of his challenge was that he was attempting to establish himself as a respectable farmer at a highly politicized time. Although his search for a new farm was taking place at a moment of infrastructural improvements in the village—a school and clinic were being built, improvements made to sanitation, and so forth—land pressures were becoming more intense, and patronage was increasingly being accorded to followers of the NPC. For those not as well connected with the majority political party, matters were grimmer, despite the fact that the period was one of relative prosperity overall. Balarabe eked out an existence on this farm, his solvency always imperiled by tax bills assessed by officials unimpressed by his local standing or his potential utility to themselves. The village head regularly inflated Balarabe’s tax bill, sometimes with dire consequences for his very poor family. Even in the time after the land tax was abolished, Balarabe and his family lived with the constant danger of economic disaster.

Malam Balarabe’s dispiriting biography is extreme; few others in town were so poor or so put-upon. Nonetheless, his description of official actions was not unusual. Official self-interest and a tendency to ignore the theoretical legalities of administrative procedure were commonly accepted as typical government procedure. The case of Malam Balarabe and complaints about government officials more generally did not tend to be couched in technocratic idioms of deviation from institutionalized norms of bureaucratic office. To the extent that people offered a negative evaluation of official action, they tended to call it “oppression,” *zalunci*, which has a connotation of being *bad* but is also naturally to be expected from those who hold office—with an important exception: people were happy to describe contemporary Nigerian politicians as “corrupt” or as thieves and to emphasize specifically their diversion of public money. That is to say, for the most part, vocabulary that emerged directly from concepts of corruption tended to be applied to politicians and bureaucrats in the modern state apparatus. (The one partial exception to this is that revenue surveyors were regularly described as receiving “bribes.”) In Hausa the conception of official *zalunci* maps onto the basic linguistic distinction between *masu sarauta* and *talakawa*.⁹ “*Masu sarauta*” means literally “possessors of office,” but this only refers to titles within the constitutions of the Hausa states, emirships, and subordinate positions. Modern political office would only be called a “*sarauta*” figuratively. Although many *sarauta* are heritable or inhere in particular lineages, the basic distinction between commoner and aristocrat is a sim-

ple question of whether or not one has been appointed to office. “Talakawa” also has an implication of poverty, although factually not every talaka is poor. The structural relationship between masu sarauta and talakawa is very often, perhaps normally, one of zalunci. Those in power are expected to exercise this power with a degree of ruthlessness. However, there are other qualities that can temper the zalunci talakawa suffer from their superiors. Many have ties of patronage to some officeholder. Moreover, in this Muslim area, anyone who wishes to be a good Muslim must behave well, provide charity, and avoid oppressing others and making them suffer unnecessarily. So although zalunci is to be expected, it is also normally restrained by other forces, which the skillful or lucky talaka may use to his or her own benefit.

Such constraints are more than attempts to live by a set of religious or social codes, although the moral prescriptions of Islam are a very important set of principles many attempt to live by. But in terms of daily life, the more important social constraints are conceptualized affectively: behavior (generosity, oppressiveness, ostensible gestures of clientage) is the overt manifestation of personal qualities and particular emotional states. Thus, one of the most important qualities any person can demonstrate is *hankali*, [good] sense, which does not just imply a capacity for assessing situations sensibly but indicates appropriate comportment and not being carried away by turbulent feelings. A person who has *hankali* knows what he or she should do, and does it. A subordinate person should display *kunya*, modesty, which is both an emotion and a mode of comportment: averting one’s gaze from the superior person, speaking respectfully, not using the name of a person with whom one has a name-avoidance relationship. Appropriately respectful behavior is not a matter of great subtlety; to show respect for a very important person such as an emir, one would ordinarily prostrate oneself while greeting him, and such bodily demonstrations of respect exist along a continuum of a handshake between equals to complete prostration.

These embodied affective and emotional strictures emerge from local moral discourses evaluating individual behavior, and as such they are much more likely to come up in discussions of official “oppressiveness” than in those on more recent or more national-level “corruption.” Even here the distinction is not absolute. One version of the explanation of Emir Sanusi’s deposition is that it emerged from a chill in relations with the Sardauna of Sokoto caused by Sanusi’s arrogant behavior during his tenure as acting governor of the Northern Region. The truth or falsity of this story is beside the point; it is unnecessary to psychoanalyze the Sardauna or other members of the political elite to determine the *true* cause of the emir’s deposition. The prominence of Sanusi’s arrogance in

the stories of his deposition, their emphasis on greetings, postures, and patterns of silence, are not necessarily signs of what happened but rather of how bad comportment can create vulnerability, can displace one from the chains of patronage and accommodation that allow continued tenure in office. The findings of corruption in the Kano Native Authority were only the proximate cause of Sanusi's deposition—they were not exceptional—the key is his vulnerability to such charges in the first place. Certainly, the predominance of stories of his disrespect in the oral histories of his deposition demonstrate its salience in popular memory. Hankali is a two-way street. Just as subordinates are expected to comport themselves appropriately, so are superiors. And a key part of that obligation is not to treat subordinates badly. Doing so is zalunci.

Zalunci is more than just bad behavior caused by turbulent emotions or by a failure to control one's actions as a sensible superior ought. It is an absolute evil that deserves condemnation by everyone who admits it has occurred. Officials' quotidian oppressiveness is also testified to by people's emphasis on the nakedly extractive quality of taxation, which surpassed the universal lack of enthusiasm with which people regard paying taxes. Their word choice here was instructive: in addition to talking about taxes' being "collected" (*karba*) or "paid" (*biya*), people often talked of taxes being "cut out" (*yanka*) or "pulled out" (*cire*). Sometimes even giving up one's farmland was not sufficient to avoid tax bills. Migrating into Kano city was insufficient, for the sufficiently ill connected could find themselves pursued and dunned for back taxes. Those still unable to pay were often beaten. For the most part people did not describe any extorted payments, however extralegal, as "bribes" (*rashawa*, *cin hanci*), or the oppressive state of affairs as "corruption" (*baci*), although as suggested above, particularly the term *cin hanci* did come up when describing the revenue survey in particular. From this, one can discern two overlapping conceptual systems that coexist in northern Nigeria, both of which negatively evaluate particular official malpractices but which condemn them in quite distinct ways. Zalunci is a failure of morality, a demonstration of bad character, an inability to control one's emotions. Corruption is a technocratic failure to abide by the norms of office and an inability to observe the distinction between public and private. Particular individuals subsist in overlapping but divergent domains, each of which describes and interprets official conduct. The matter is further complicated by the third conceptual system described in the introduction, that of 419. But since it did not come up explicitly in these contexts, it can be bracketed for the moment.

Ideas about appropriate conduct on the part of state officials are complex and somewhat contradictory. While a good and upstanding official should not

be oppressive, he or she should also have largesse available to redistribute to a following of clients—sums far beyond what officials could expect to gain “legitimately” from their state salaries. This depends on an internal contraction. *Zalunci* is undesirable but also necessary; how else are officials to get the wherewithal to be “big men”? The revenue for patronage must be extracted from someone. But the conception is also distinct from a notion of corruption, which implies a certain kind of pathology in the state, even if one might appropriately describe the oppressive conduct of a state official as being “corrupt.” But while “corrupt” behavior is antithetical to the functioning of government, *zalunci* emerges directly from it.¹⁰

The distinction between *zalunci* and corruption is neither absolute nor developmental: discourses about the desirability of officials’ abstaining from oppression are not gradually giving way to those about the desirability of technocratic rationality. Rather, various aspects of the political logic of *zalunci* have been incorporated into the political history of corruption. They coexist, interpenetrating, and provide a means for evaluating political behavior. Both are modes of understanding similar phenomena, and the logic of northern Nigerian political culture simultaneously demands and condemns *zalunci* and corruption. Languages of *zalunci* and corruption are inflected by class, access to Western education, and orientation toward the institutions of the contemporary state. They are intertwined, sometimes parallel and sometimes perpendicular. But the intricate economy of these two modes of understanding is key to the dynamics of government practice, and malpractice. That is, a language of *zalunci* surely inhered in the political culture that was incorporated into the structures of the Nigerian state through the process in which emirate governance became a part of the colonial government and then was incorporated into (and was gradually replaced by) the bureaucratic structures of federal Nigeria. The political culture of Western governance had its own set of descriptions for government malfeasance and its condemnation. A language of *zalunci* and a language of corruption enjoyed a common subject matter. They were sometimes uncannily similar and sometimes oddly divergent. But the practices of malfeasance that are currently understood as “Nigerian corruption” required both normative systems as conditions of possibility.

The perception of official actions as unfortunate but normal is neither limited to farmers with little Western education nor applied only to the domain of traditional government. A highly educated friend with a professional, public-sector job, someone who has been eloquent in condemning corruption in government and Nigerian society, one day surprised me by going on at length about his desire to gain government office in order to provide for his children.

Failing such a job, he wanted to be given a government contract. Public works are generally assigned to contractors, but many of these contracts are handed out because of one's proximity to government officials and do not reflect any actual capability to fulfill the assignment on the part of the original contractor. Getting a contract therefore is a lucrative opportunity to get paid by the firms that will actually perform the services, which can recoup their money (and then some) with substantial cost overruns. My friend saw nothing hypocritical in the disparity between his political beliefs and his ambitions; it is an imperfect world, and life is full of compromises.

He was hardly alone in this. Nigerians have long been eloquent in attacking government corruption in these familiar terms. A relatively early example was future prime minister Tafawa Balewa's famous 1950 speech before the Northern House of Assembly. Balewa's call for a commission of inquiry into malpractice by the native authorities was resolutely technocratic in emphasis. It cited "the twin curses of bribery and corruption." Tafawa Balewa went on to argue: "Native Administration servants have monetary obligations to their immediate superiors and to their sole Native Authorities [i.e., emirs]. It would be unseemly for me to particularize further but I cannot overemphasize the importance of eradicating this ungodly evil. *No one* who has not lived among us can fully appreciate to what extent the giving and taking of bribes occupies the attention of all degrees to the exclusion of the ideals of disinterested service. Much of the attraction of a post lies in the opportunities it offers for extortion of one form or another."¹¹ Chapter 2 detailed how Tafawa Balewa's speech helped to consolidate the Northern People's Congress in power by replacing the personnel of the native authorities with holders of office in the secular state. A dual focus on electoral appeal (as against the class challenge offered by NEPU) and on consolidating political power undergirded Tafawa Balewa's proposal of reforming the native authorities. The problem, according to him, was not Nigerians who had political power per se but rather the specific personnel of the native authorities. Politicians such as himself and his confreres in the NPC could staff a government that would not succumb to those sins. The irony was the overlap between the NPC leadership and the aristocracy, the masu sarauta and their relatives. Although Tafawa Balewa himself was a commoner, the party was aristocratic. Ultimately, Tafawa Balewa was advocating a slight change in personnel (not entirely unlike the shift that occurred at colonization, when existing officeholders were replaced by others eligible for the same offices) and a transfer in administrative authority from the organs of emirate governance to institutions responsible to ministries that would shortly be taken over by Nigerians. The problem as framed in this speech was bribery

and patronage. If the issue were actually curbing practices that affected the talakawa, Tafawa Balewa's prescriptions for change were remarkably limited. The personnel of the NPC could be trusted more than native authorities because they were members of a new political class, despite their intimate ties with the old. New forms of political comportment would follow from a new, "modern" mentality.

Tafawa Balewa anticipated the theoretical moves social scientists would make across the next two decades, positing corruption as a developmental stage susceptible to administrative solution. As corruption became an administrative matter, avoiding it was largely an issue of constitutional adjustment and exhortations to good behavior. In a subtler way, Tafawa Balewa's critique implicitly developed a new departure in the moral evaluation of official conduct, one which simultaneously engaged tropes of zalunci (or at least of oppression) and of technocratic corruption, mediated by a developmentalist contrast between the suffering of the oppressed talakawa and the bureaucratic crimes committed by their rulers. Tafawa Balewa proposed a disjuncture in modes of moral evaluation. The problem with the emirate authorities was their autocracy and venality, only exacerbated by the "helplessness" of the talakawa.

Political opinion in the sixty years since Tafawa Balewa's time has consistently condemned political patron-clientage and the malpractices of the elite, even while discussions of malpractice have often been conducted in regionalist idiom, as outlined in chapters 2 and 3. The critiques leveled at the Nigerian leadership as a whole demonstrate remarkable continuities with Tafawa Balewa's invocation of technocratic modernity. But to the extent one can find a consistent condemnation of patronage politics, its rhetoric has grown ever more apocalyptic. Thus, for example, in 2005 a columnist for Abuja's *Daily Trust* wrote a fascinating response to the arrest and trial of Mustafa "Tafa" Balogun, a former inspector general of police, accused by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission of stealing ₦17.7 billion in 2002–4. The writer, Adamu Adamu, began by suggesting Balogun was noteworthy precisely because his crimes were *not* exceptional but rather symptomatic of the behavior of the entire political elite, which he framed as an ironic parallel to the neoliberal emphasis in recent years on privatizing state companies: "For Nigerian people there is no armour against thievery. It seems set to go on unchecked in all the top places. And the result of all the thievery has succeeded in privatizing Nigeria more than the combined efforts of the National Council on Privatisation. . . . Thievery had itself privatized not just a few government-owned companies and parastatals but everything with which it came into contact. It had virtually privatized the whole of Nigerian society—every nook, every corner and every

straight line, if there was one.”¹² The only difference between Balogun and his erstwhile colleagues, Adamu argued, was that the latter had not been placed on trial. The government had become a farce: “Doing one thing, preaching another and pursuing a different third. It is as if the assignment for government is to pretend to please, and, in reality, confuse and to finally perplex.” For Adamu, all that had been public—not only the institutions of the Nigerian state and parastatals but public goods like oil revenue—have been diverted into the private hands of its rulers. Thievery would naturally result in “privatization” through politicians’ patrimonial refusal to observe distinctions between public and private, which suggests Adamu’s critique is conventionally technocratic. But his choice of “privatization” also invokes neoliberal reforms implemented in Nigeria since the start of structural adjustment that sought to privatize Nigeria’s dysfunctional parastatal companies. Instead of ingeniously replicating technocratic narratives, therefore, Adamu signals a complex stance of acceptance and critique. In doing so he suggests a crisis going beyond material misconduct, bringing into question foundational paradigms of technocratic modernity.

The parallels and divergences between Tafawa Balewa and Adamu are instructive. Both implicitly pose a model of technocratic governance, in which patrimonialism does not distort government function and in which public resources are not diverted to private hands. Both posit that the governments of their day had fallen far short of that model. Where Tafawa Balewa’s “ungodly evil” suggested a difficulty that might be overcome (in his case, by transferring responsibility from native administrations to a Northern People’s Congress administration), Adamu posits a bleak landscape where every bit of Nigeria has already been stolen. There is an interesting claim implicit in Adamu’s use of the rhetorical equation of “thievery” and “privatization.” The latter is a consequence of the former, but one might discern a somewhat different stance from Tafawa Balewa’s position. “Thievery” might seem an obvious equivalent to Tafawa Balewa’s “ungodly evil,” “privatization” implies something different.

The one optimistic note Adamu strikes is that the looting of Nigeria’s public goods “has effectively done away with tribalism.” The spoils of this massive thievery increasingly are divided by political families. This is achieved through alliances between them, and these transcend ethnic boundaries. Adamu’s pessimism captures a general sense of crisis well known to anyone in Nigeria, a sense that the Nigerian government has reached a state of utter paralysis and is unable to do anything on behalf of the Nigerian population as a whole. There is a sense that the economic situation is increasingly desperate, and there is a nostalgia for the leaders of the past—including even the kleptocratic Sani

Abacha (though, interestingly, not Ibrahim Babangida, whose interventions in Fourth Republic politics perhaps preclude sanitizing his record). This begs the question of *why* this sense of crisis is so pervasive, and of when the crisis began. What standards have been violated, how, and when? When did malfeasance in office stop being simply an ungodly evil and become critical, privatizing every nook of Nigerian society? To what extent does this disenchantment reflect a more brutal disengagement from the ideals of technocratic modernity, and what might be the consequences? These are good questions but cannot be answered directly. While there is no question that much greater amounts of money are being stolen in the early twenty-first century than were being stolen in Tafawa Balewa's time, when there were no oil revenues, there is very little way to estimate anything like the precise percentage of GNP being diverted improperly from public to private hands.¹³

Tafawa Balewa and Adamu are noteworthy for their resolute inattention to the political pressures that might have driven officials toward behavior they condemn as corrupt. This is not unsurprising, given the contexts in which each man operated. Neither one could expect much sympathy for the political plight of the big man or aspirant big man, either from the impoverished masses for whom even an inadequate public-sector salary would be an improvement or from national and international public actors invested in the appearance of bureaucratic rationality. Especially in the period during which Adamu wrote, it would be difficult to justify the diversion of public revenues simply as a kind of culturalized public spiritedness. Tafa Balogun did not need ₦17.7 billion (U.S. \$130 million at exchange rates prevailing in 2005) to redistribute to a following or to bolster his police position. But beyond arguing that the diversion of public money might be motivated by incentives beyond pure perversity and greed, urgent questions can be posed about how to conceptualize what seems to be genuinely a mounting sense of crisis. In this regard, Adamu's bringing basic processes of economic regulation into question implies a crisis in the moral systems regulating political life.

Moral Economies of Corruption

The conceptual complexes around the terms "zalunci" and "corruption" are different, but they exert similar normative force. Ideas about officials' oppressiveness and their corruption take as a baseline a set of principles about ideal official action: it should be beneficent and in the people's interest. It should abide by a set of external strictures, religious principles or the norms of bureaucratic office. However, any realist expects many officeholders to fall short

of these ideals; the real world is not ideal. The norms indexed by “zalunci” and “corruption” structure a set of arguments about how to evaluate people’s actions. These arguments within popular discourse are obvious instances of what has come to be termed a “moral economy.” That term has been at the center of very important discussions about how groups of people exert power through moral suasion, and it has been particularly influential in debates about violence and rebellion. Famously applied to issues of corruption in Africa by J.-P. Olivier de Sardan, analyses of moral economies are potentially useful in explaining how the conceptual systems of the corruption-complex both constitute the conditions of possibility for material practice and also suggest the constraints placed on it by systems of social regulation. One challenge, however, is that analysts of moral economies have used the term in different ways, and thus it is first necessary to bring various scholars insights more precisely into conversation with one another.

“Moral economy” is the term E. P. Thompson famously adopted to describe the social logic of riots over the price of bread in eighteenth-century England. For Thompson, it was “a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community.”¹⁴ In his account, bread riots had resulted from ordinary people’s furious sense that the price of bread violated the most basic moral structures of social distribution. It was no coincidence they occurred at this point in the development of market capitalism. Until this period, the price of bread had been determined by a set of communal mechanisms that had a degree of popular legitimacy. As a result, sellers could be popularly perceived as moral even when food prices were very high. The advent of market mechanisms eroded this older system of valuation. Prices rose in response to supplies of wheat and the demand for bread, which was often unrelated to reasons ordinary people found compelling. When people could not afford food and the reasons for high prices were abstract, they responded with violence.

Thompson’s account has been vastly influential, not least because it provided a way of thinking about evanescent collective decision making. At the center of his account of causation was the emergence of market mechanisms, a transformation Karl Polanyi had called the “great transformation.” Until that point, as Polanyi put it, “Man’s economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets. He values material goods only in so far as they serve this end.”¹⁵ Polanyi substantiated his claim of a great transformation through a set of magisterial case studies, ranging from the ancient world to

precolonial Dahomey. These uncovered an “archaic” mode of valuation common to traditional societies that radically circumscribed market mechanisms in the interest of other social values.¹⁶ Polanyi’s evidence for this transformation emerged from the case studies. This poses a difficulty. His empirical claims have not held up well; the cases were more heterodox than he asserted. As a result, it would not be safe to assume that a transition between moral economies and market economies has been a universal feature of human history. The distinction between “traditional” and “modern” societies remains elusive.¹⁷

To his credit, Thompson insisted his remarks were meant to apply specifically to eighteenth-century England, and thus could argue from evidence of traditional norms specific to that context.¹⁸ A stark division of the modern from the premodern was not entirely comfortable for analysts of present-day peasant societies, but the concept of moral economy was powerful. It was famously extended to instances of peasant resistance in James Scott’s *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*. Scott argued peasants are most likely to resist economic exploitation when they are left with too little to reproduce socially. Peasant rebellions emerge when farming families are left with too little to survive. What matters is not the absolute scale of what is taken but rather how much remains. Peasantries were famously averse to economic risk, which made them reluctant to embrace new agricultural techniques out of worries over subsistence. This made peasants the bane of development planners, but Scott’s description of their moral economies implied they could be the populist heroes. He provided a principled way of extending the notion of a moral economy beyond eighteenth-century England. More important, he dispensed with a romantic view of the pre-capitalist past. The peasant was not archaically tied to traditional social systems but rather was rationally attempting to ensure familial survival. Didier Fassin notes another important distinction between the two paradigms. Thompson’s account was of how concrete behavior was socially evaluated: merchants’ decisions over pricing could set off violence. Scott by contrast was concerned with moral systems: his object was less actual uprisings than their conditions of possibility.¹⁹ Moral economy became detached from a particular temporal or geographic conjuncture, allowing it to be applied anywhere a peasantry existed. The formulation retained a Polanyi-influenced opposition between peasant economies and capitalist ones. It also, as Janet Roitman has argued, reified an opposition between “culture” and “economy” sustainable only through dubious developmentalist assumptions.²⁰ Thus, although the absolute opposition between modern and traditional (or peasant and capitalist) is unsustainable, moments of eruption demand scrutiny, because they suggest a clash between

normative systems that can be elucidated by critical attention to how they exist in their historical contingency.²¹

An approach for doing so is suggested by a somewhat different formulation of moral economy coming out of science studies. In a study of how early modern scholarly communities established and policed norms of evidence, Lorraine Daston suggested the answer was through a moral economy, “a web of affect-saturated values that stand and function in well-defined relationship to one another.”²² This usage is much broader than those describing spheres of production and exchange. Daston’s expansion of moral economies beyond the contexts of violence and immediately economic transactions is most useful. Communities sit in judgment of activities of all sorts. As Fassin pointed out, while this expansion of the concept of moral economy into wider cultural domains reflects a need to analyze the social negotiation of complex normative codes, there is a danger of losing the political urgency of earlier formulations. Daston’s depoliticizing emphasis disentangles the moral economy from a particular stage in what is imagined to be a universal sequence in the evolution of market forces. A moral economy can be conceived as how somewhat discrete social groups (English working classes, peasant communities, scientific communities) exert normative force on their members. But aside from reading mechanisms ad hoc from the cases such authors have discussed, it is not clear how an analyst of moral economies should go about looking for their means of exerting moral force.

A useful suggestion can be read from John Lonsdale’s slightly different formulation. His essay on the moral economy of Mau Mau examines the historical emergence of the Kikuyu ethnic group as a unit of colonial governance, which he argues was also the process that constituted it as a community capable of exerting moral authority.²³ Colonial policies of land alienation and settler demands for African labor were implemented through policies of indirect rule that placed “traditional” chiefs in charge of local administration. These chiefs had to negotiate hotly contentious issues like the allocation of land and grazing rights. Because their authority emerged from their alleged grounding in “tribal tradition,” ordinary people were able to get land rights only through making claims on the basis of membership in lineages and clans under a chief’s authority. Not only did this system give these identities and memberships a new political salience, the chiefs’ status as Kikuyu chiefs also brought the “Kikuyu tribe” into being as an immediately relevant category of identity, in which access to the means of making a living was negotiated. Ethnic identity became a basis for claiming entitlement to critical social goods. The colonial era brought into being the ethnic group as a new kind of moral community and mode in

which people imagined themselves as social actors. Lonsdale thus provides the precise converse of the other discussions of the moral economy. Where Thompson, Scott, and Daston provide structural accounts of the conditions that can bring a moral economy into being, Lonsdale's history of a distinctively Kikuyu moral imagination cannot be disentangled from the specifics of Kenyan history, which provides a more detailed account of the mechanisms that might allow a moral economy to function. This intricate portrait of how political debate and contests over resources were refracted through the culturalist lens of emergent Kikuyu ethnicity is one of a specific moral economy in action. Lonsdale's portrait of the ethnic group as a moral community with its own distinctive dynamics retains precisely what is useful in Daston's culturalist account while also maintaining a politicized awareness about the urgency of allocative decisions and yet expanding this beyond the immediate context of market relations and surplus extraction that concerned Thompson and Scott.

A provocative suggestion for how to maintain this synthesis was advanced by J.-P. Olivier de Sardan, who proposed to “refer” to the notion of moral economy as formulated by Thompson and Scott as a way of identifying “certain *social norms* widely represented in modern Africa, which ‘communicate’ with or influence the practices of corruption.”²⁴ Olivier de Sardan advocated studies of what he terms a “corruption-complex”—in a usage very different from mine—which includes “a number of illicit practices, technically distinct from corruption, all of which none the less have in common with corruption their association with state, parastatal or bureaucratic functions, and also contradict the official ethics of ‘public property’ or ‘public service,’ and likewise offer the possibility of illegal enrichment, and the use and abuse to this end of positions of authority.”²⁵ For Olivier de Sardan, the corruption-complex is distinctively postcolonial and all-pervasive in government even though corrupt practices are also widely condemned. They are considered legitimate and even necessary by their perpetrators, and their moral evaluation depends entirely on the social location of the evaluator. The account depends on a structural logic not entirely unlike that proposed by Daston. Olivier de Sardan insisted his account was not culturalist, which would imply romanticizing (or vilifying) a reified figure of “African culture.” At the same time he claimed the corruption-complex emerges from socially embedded forms of patron-clientage. This is not unreasonable, but it imports a particular form of culturalist analysis even while denying it has done so. Olivier de Sardan's key insight is that the analytic concept of moral economy is potentially applicable to cases like that of corruption in northern Nigeria. Collectively, then, Daston, Lonsdale, and Olivier de Sardan discard the old traditional/modern apparatus

on which Thompson and Scott depended for a rather subtler suggestion that consensus and dissensus are human universals and that the complex patterning of debates over the appropriate and inappropriate are at the center of all mechanisms for social regulation. That is perfectly reasonable, but is it more than a somewhat convoluted truism?

Even more than their ability to focus attention on the cultural negotiation of distributive questions, paradigms of the moral economy may solve a conceptual problem: by concentrating on riots and uprisings, Thompson and Scott take as a point of departure instances in which the moral economy was outraged. But that creates a circular argument. It implies the moral economy is known in and through its abrogation. Bread riots happened when market prices diverged from the levels societal consensus deemed just. We know about the consensus because the riots took place. Peasants rebel when they do not have enough food to survive. We know about that ethos because we know the rebellions occurred. Under somewhat similar circumstances, Paul Ricoeur said he preferred the term “hermeneutic” to “circular,” and there is something to be said for it here. Nonetheless, is moral economy more than a heuristic device? If so, how can it be known in Nigeria when despite omnipresent discontent at the ubiquity of corruption there have not been uprisings directly targeting it?²⁶ Eighteenth-century bread riots and peasant uprisings are almost the obverse of contemporary Nigerian disquiet over corruption: the violence in Nigeria today is only indirectly targeted at official malfeasance.

The paradigm of the moral economy as a “web of affect-saturated values,” as Daston suggests, poses a significant challenge, since these values are somewhat abstract. How should one conceptualize this web of values? The issue is clear enough in a bounded scholarly community, but if one wishes to extend it to an entire society—especially one so diverse and divided as Nigeria—“values” implies merely a collection of truisms, which often are difficult to apply because ambiguous and somewhat contradictory. One should not be oppressive. One should not deceive. One should not steal. One should be generous. One should show appropriate modesty and deference to one’s superiors. Everyone can agree on such principles in the abstract, and even apply them in more detail: governors should not steal money. But there is more to it than that. Such principles do not combine into a workable code of conduct, nor do they provide the sort of accountability a scholarly community does its members. A moral economy is more than a system for applying moral condemnation, and discourses of “corruption” are more than a specific means of negotiating public life in Nigeria. The concept of moral economy and the Nigerian corruption-complex go together, but how? Applying the condemnatory label of “corrup-

tion” can discipline those who violate a shared set of norms, but the sociology of its applications is complex, and it always has been. For this reason, the Nigerian corruption-complex goes beyond a historically and culturally specific deformation of bureaucratic accountability. For one thing, it has limits. There is an emergent sense of crisis, a sense that something has gone very wrong in the Nigerian polity. That sense of crisis has been omnipresent ever since the First Republic, and it was even found during the fairly optimistic ethos that prevailed during the Murtala and Obasanjo military government preceding the Second Republic.

Since the presidential election of 2003, I have been struck by a nostalgia that has emerged for the Abacha regime of the 1990s, in large measure out of a conviction that the economy during the Fourth Republic has been worse than it was under the military and that corruption is more prevalent now than it was before. For example, I was chatting one evening in 2008 with a friend, a man in his forties who was highly educated but who had never secured a stable job. I first met him when Abacha was in power, and at that time he was not a fan, blaming the head of state for both the brutality and the rapacity of the regime. But on this evening (and it was a point he repeated many times subsequently) he said that really things had been better back then. There was not as much disorder on the streets, and people were not as desperately poor as they are now. I objected that, despite the considerable inflation that had taken place, incomes had also gone up. Why was it, I asked, that even salaried people who seemed objectively in better circumstances than they had been a decade previously thought things had become worse? Part of the difference, my friend suggested, was in how much more overt consumption was now among government actors. Even if a broader swath of the population is benefiting—at least to some extent—from Nigeria’s potential riches, there is something maddening about having a tiny minority’s disproportionate access to that wealth flaunted before all. And Abacha did not do that, at least not to the same extent. Nostalgia for Abacha is of a piece with a tendency that is well established in Nigerian political culture to invest earlier regimes with virtues almost in direct proportion to their temporal distance, and even more in proportion to their continuing political relevance. Thus during the Abacha period, everyone but apologists for the regime agreed that it was the worst military government ever. Its corruption dwarfed that of the Second Republic. The Babangida regime was similarly suspect, but the Buhari government was remembered with fondness, both for its relative lack of corruption and for its wars against indiscipline and against women, both considered increasingly problematic in the troubled social context of the 1990s, when chaos infected all aspects of

public life and women had become increasingly wanton.²⁷ The Murtala regime was remembered with the greatest nostalgia as the epitome of governmental rectitude, though very few people have personally reminisced to me about the Gowon regime or the First Republic, except to the extent people have been nostalgic for the relative economic prosperity of the oil boom, which began under Gowon. Regarding the First Republic, the most common response to its leaders, at least from northern Muslims, has been a rather abstract admiration expressed for Ahmadu Bello and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Old NEPU and PRP activists felt differently, as did many Tijanis, who respectively tended to sympathize with Aminu Kano and Emir Sanusi. These complications to the side, the general sense is that matters get worse and worse.

The irony to this is that—as I argued with my friend—economic times have somewhat improved under the Fourth Republic. Public-sector employees received substantial increments under the civilian regime, and friends of mine from all walks of life are notably more comfortable than they were during the 1990s. Other than this slight anomaly, a general consensus that the Nigerian government grows worse and worse, under civilians and soldiers alike, might be considered somewhat compelling evidence for the proposition that practices of corruption are genuinely getting worse in absolute terms and that this is systematically eroding governmental legitimacy. Indeed, people's disinclination to credit the government for any improvement in living standards might be taken as evidence for an increasing outrage at politicians' violation of some absolute standard to the moral economy of corruption. In this regard, my friend's intuition that the problem is with the greater visibility of politicians' consumption suggests a part of what is at stake. The difficulty is that this is both impressionistic and inferential.

Is it possible to apply the notion of moral economy in some more precise way? Lonsdale's account of the moral economy of ethnicity is suggestive. Perhaps the conclusion is that one should look specifically at the historical emergence of particular public moral communities. Given that the Nigerian corruption-complex emerged through the intersection of a host of culturally specific modes of conceptualizing political community and patron-client ties, the extent to which the moral economy of corruption can be treated as one thing depends on how those discourses function as a disciplinary mechanism, a process not adequately comprehended by calling it either a "norm" or a "value." "Corruption" emerged as a political performative through its use as a justification for official condemnation of officeholders, as a strategy for achieving discrete political ends. Ordinary people do have deep-rooted ideas about how to evaluate official conduct, but these ideas are applied in complex, shift-

ing ways. To the extent that condemnations of zalunci or deception or corruption reflect moral principles, they are always contextually dependent.

Malam Balarabe, for example, had a sophisticated political critique of the official structures that had made his life so very embattled. Like the NEPU activist he had been in his youth, he saw his travails in terms of a class divide between talakawa and masu sarauta, but unlike his more Marxist comrades, he saw that divide as instantiating a relationship of zalunci and for that reason a moral outrage. Balarabe was also a realist. Not only was he forced to make compromises in order to find patronage; he also recognized that left-wing politicians who attained office—the PRP during the Second Republic, the SDP during the abortive Third Republic—were inclined to steal money. Ultimately, he said, “it’s necessary.” A lot of people ask them for things, and they need respect. The challenge of the various intellectual systems comprising moral discourses within the corruption-complex is compounded by the problem of understanding the operation of a moral economy. An adequate account of this, then, would examine carefully the ways in which corruption discourse is applied to specific situations. What are its rules of formation; what manner of social work is being accomplished by discussing “corruption” (zalunci, deception) in the first place? It should be clear from part I of this book that discourses of corruption have accomplished a complex set of political ends across Nigeria’s colonial history. Those discourses have changed with the institutional history of government, shifting paradigms of corruption itself (e.g., the move in Western technocratic thinking from Liberal reform and notions of crime prevalent in the early colonial period through the precipitation of Weberian paradigms in the 1960s and 1970s that resulted in the technocratic notions prevalent in global civil society today), the dramatic history of Nigeria’s informal political structure, and changing trajectories in the rewards officials could reap from holding office. The discourse of corruption itself is a window onto this much more complex process through which corruption has been both constrained and enabled, and which today generates such a pervasive sense of crisis. To conclude this chapter, therefore, I shall consider one particular discussion of corruption as a means of thinking through the nature and the limits of the moral economy of corruption.

Taking Corruption Seriously

In order to trace how the moral economy of corruption can function, one must pay attention to the locations in which it is articulated, and some of the structural logic of the discourse itself. Nigeria has long possessed a dynamic civil society.

Even in periods of government repression (as during Sani Abacha's military administration, 1993–98, when journalists were regularly attacked and jailed), there has consistently been a freewheeling, very critical press, both domestic and expatriate. The press has a long history, from a small start along the coast in the early years of the twentieth century to the present day, when newspapers from a variety of perspectives are published in cities across the federation. In recent years, print publications have been supplemented by the Internet; electronic mailing lists, bulletin boards, and weblogs have extended debates yet further, and each has its own denizens, customs, and rules.²⁸ None is a transparent window onto a Nigerian moral economy, but for precisely the same reason, much of what is written provides insight into how such economies function. As an example of how this happens, consider one element common to much public discourse, speculation over the *real* motivations behind particular events and public decisions. What did particular officials intend, and what does this reveal about their characters? What might initially appear to be a kind of psychohistory is actually more profound and is indeed analogous to localized debates over the moral uprightness of village and district heads, and of LGA officials. At a national level, in the press and electronically, the analog to these debates often traces the conduct of officials in regional and ethnic context. The ultimate conclusions are not limited to an explication of the logic of patronage but instead are a way of claiming the official is moral or immoral and of positioning the writer in relation to the subject.

A similar trope is that of revealing the true story. Many events in Nigerian history are somewhat shadowy. It is not always possible to know what happened or when, and much political discourse is devoted to filling in the gaps. When Colonel Wase was killed in 1996 and petrol returned to Kano state's filling stations, there were many rumors about who precisely was involved with diverting the state's petrol allotment elsewhere and therefore was now maneuvering to cover up complicity. Nigeria's byzantine politics generate endless potential for rehearsing and retelling conspiracy theories, in no small part because a number of conspiracies undoubtedly take place. Elite groups from particular regions (like the group of northern officials who became known as the Kaduna mafia in the 1970s) *have* worked systematically to safeguard their individual, collective, and regional interests at particular moments in history, and stories therefore circulate about the role these groups have played in orchestrating particular incidents or thefts. These stories circulated endlessly, through a variety of media. They are a depiction of the moral economy of corruption, an account of how moral decisions were made, and a primary mechanism through which the moral economy functions.

To give one relatively simple example, General Abacha's death came as a surprise. He was taken ill and died suddenly on 8 June 1998. He was immediately succeeded by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who was the chief of defense staff; the new head of state quickly began a transition to civilian rule. But why did Abacha die? Was his death natural, and if not, who was behind it? The story quickly circulated that Abacha had not been alone when taken ill; instead he had been consorting with women. The common elements of the stories I have heard most often involve prostitutes (two, three, and six are the frequent numbers), and they are usually supposed to have been Asian (typically Indian or Filipina) as a result of the general's fears that Nigerian women might attempt to cast spells or otherwise poison him. Sometimes the general is supposed to have taken an overdose of Viagra. Sometimes someone (one of the prostitutes, an army officer, a bodyguard) substituted a poisoned pill. Sometimes the "true" story is revealed not to involve prostitutes at all: General Abacha's enemies enlisted a former girlfriend to seduce him as part of an even more sinister plot. Trusting her and seduced by her beauty, the general did not notice when she introduced poison into his Gulder (a brand of beer) or gave him a poisoned Viagra.

The truth of the story and its variations is less interesting than the issue of what makes the story's various elements interesting, compelling, worth passing on.²⁹ By itself, the story does not involve corruption in the sense of General Abacha's misuse of office. But the structural logic of the story is nonetheless one of Nigerian political corruption. The question of *who* was responsible (army officers, government officials, other powerful men; the women are almost always faceless agents of others) provides a map for the moral evaluation of specific officials and classes of official: Was General Abubakar involved in the plot, or its innocent beneficiary? Does the complicity of officers whom Abacha had sponsored earlier in their careers indicate something bad about them, or something good? Telling or retelling the story is also a means of positioning the speaker in relation to the various actors involved. The "truth" about events in the past is compelling precisely to the extent that some retain present-day relevance. In addition to the implications for the living of their culpability in Abacha's death, the stories position the head of state himself as an actor, receiving or not—deserving or not—the loyalty of his subordinates. The "truth" of the story, and the endless variations of its details, are a way of creating and re-creating the moral terrain on which government actors function, and their organic relations with Nigerian society more broadly. Similarly, Abacha's having been poisoned, either literally or magically, does not just indicate the culpability of whoever did it. Someone as powerful as Abacha, and

as powerfully destructive, is also easily understood as participating in magical practices himself. Tropes of magic and of sexual license position the story's tellers in relation to their evaluation of Abacha's conduct in office. Anyone who might occasion others' jealousy might fear magic, but those who commit widespread injustice are most likely to be described as fearing it.

In the end, stories about Abacha's death and narratives of corruption more generally are the means through which the moral economy functions. Both barometer of public sentiment and means of perpetuating or enforcing it, discussions of corruption are the way in which officials are subject to popular sanction. This web of culpability and innocence, the discursive positioning of current speakers in relation to past political figures, is thus more than a way of evaluating governmental corruption; it is the manifestation of political relationships themselves. In Nigeria, the oral economy of governance has become a moral economy of corruption.³⁰ While it is tempting to conclude such stories ultimately are a symptom of a more profound moral economy, that is not my point here. Such a conclusion would be powerful, suggesting that a sufficiently comprehensive and subtle reading of popular stories at any time would reveal whether officials had violated the moral economy—explaining perhaps that outrage over the cement armada and other instances of corruption in Yakubu Gowon's regime led to the coup that brought Murtala to power. Perhaps that could be done and moral economies described in a way that avoids circularity. Here I attempt a more modest claim, that an attentive reading to corruption discourse provides a window onto the moral economy of corruption, but only to the extent it reveals “corruption's” career as a political performative.

Let me demonstrate the point through a reading of the seven-part essay the poet Odiya Ofeimun published in the newspaper *Vanguard* in 2003. To conclude this chapter, I shall consider this remarkable work. Setting aside its insight into what has happened in the past, what is currently wrong in Nigeria, and how it might be fixed, I shall instead consider how Ofeimun's essay reveals the logical structure of Nigerian corruption discourse *and* how that logical structure provides a useful window onto the interior logic of the Nigerian state. Entitled “Taking Nigeria Seriously,” the essay is an analysis of the impasse the country has reached under the Fourth Republic. Reading it is not meant as an indication that the Nigerian corruption-complex is one and indivisible and can be uncovered through attention to Ofeimun alone. In some ways mine is a paradoxical choice given the start of my account in the northern emirates. However, Ofeimun's piece is one of the most insightful, most rhetorically dense pieces of writing on these topics that I have seen, and it has a quite unusual historical scope. While vernaculars of “corruption” necessar-

ily inhere in specific communities, Ofeimun addresses a pan-Nigerian public, even if his mode of address is more localized. My exercise here is not one of cultural explication, nor is it an attempt to evaluate the truth or falsity of any of Ofeimun's empirical claims. Rather, it explores Ofeimun's text as a political performative, one that operates within a moral economy of corruption. Neither right nor wrong, Ofeimun's account simultaneously imagines a political future—attempting to describe and thus create a Nigeria that can be taken seriously—and intervenes to define and transform the moral politics of the Nigerian national community.

Ofeimun begins the article by lamenting the crisis of Nigerian universities before pivoting to a more general critique. The problems of Nigeria's cash-strapped, chaotic universities parallel a more general problem of political pedagogy: "Ours, at is happens, is a country being tutored to her death by foreign debt collectors, technical assistants and consultants, whose gain in management experience is our loss." He summarizes a report published in 2002 about human rights abuses in Nigeria, which lists "death penalties; judicial and ritual killings; assassinations; arbitrary arrests, assaults on the freedom of the Press and freedom of association; political unrests; strikes by the Police; non-payment of salaries and pensions; injudicious impositions on the educational sector and abuse of academic freedom; assaults on women and children's rights; brazen corruption and the disregard and abuse of the rule of law; and ethnic and communal conflict." He suggests the problem stems from a cynical move on the part of Nigeria's leadership, which attempts to inculcate a "pervasive feeling of hopelessness." Even a small portion of the money looted from Nigeria would be sufficient to ease its current woes. That Nigeria's troubles receive extensive coverage leads to a deadening effect on the body politic, in which all progressive change appears impossible. "The situation is worse than Thomas Hobbes' state of nature where life is nasty brutish and short; and where you have to eat someone or you are eaten. To be fair, the state of nature seems superior to the sheer barbarism of the current state of our society. Whereas those in the state of nature know what they are in for, nobody knows what rules are supposed to apply in our own civil jungle because those who make the rules do not obey them." The solution to this impasse, Ofeimun argues, is to "take Nigeria seriously," by which he means that Nigerians must consider the well-being of the entire polity as their point of departure rather than consider only the interests of some subsection.

Ofeimun's outline of the problem is provocative. Like many commentators, he suggests that the country's problems stem from lawlessness on the part of government officials. This is manifested both in monetary terms—the country's

wealth has been systematically stolen, and what is not diverted by corrupt practices was paid as debt service³¹—and in the extralegal means through which politicians systematically stifle political dissent. Ultimately, however, these ills are a symptom rather than a cause. The failure to take Nigeria seriously boils down to a failure of the national imagination. The politicians of the Fourth Republic operate only within their own sectional interests, and even grassroots political pressure takes place in local contexts. With even dissidents failing to take Nigeria seriously, there is little hope for progressive change. Ofeimun's diagnosis is useful not so much because it is right, nor even because it eloquently expresses frustration and rage. Where others have condemned the effects of political sectionalism and the inadequacies of Nigeria's leaders, Ofeimun's formulation is novel in diagnosing the problem as a failure to imagine the nation. Politicians represent a narrow constituency or themselves only, rather than understand themselves as stewards of the country as a whole. The formulation is more interesting than a simple critique of the contemporary politics of culture. Read as a series of propositions, Ofeimun provides a familiar criticism of Nigerian political elites as both greedy and shortsightedly communalist. To the extent he offers a historical narrative, his account is undercut by an uncritical adulation of Obafemi Awolowo. However, the true brilliance of the essay lies in its rhetorical structure. His contribution to a Nigerian moral economy comes through very clearly when one examines the non-transparency of "Taking Nigeria Seriously," which demonstrates both the power and the limits of the moral economy of the corruption-complex.

In the body of the essay, Ofeimun examines what he terms Nigeria's "identifiable regions," which he lists as "Arewa [North], South West, South East, Middle Belt, and South South."³² Ofeimun introduces the analysis by stating it will move through these zones systematically, identifying the "peculiar mode of selfishness and parochialism that have made it difficult for them to take Nigeria seriously." Provocatively, the actual text does something different. The Middle Belt is largely ignored (though it is mentioned in the sections on Arewa and South South). His story is one in which the northern aristocracy attempted to dominate the federation by systematically underdeveloping the south while only deepening its own regional misery. Meanwhile, the south was unable effectively to resist because the Igbo were determined to dominate the small ethnic groups near their own homeland while resisting Yoruba power. In outline, this is nothing new and would represent a pedestrian southwestern communalist view of Nigeria's ills.

In many ways the account of the South West is the most interesting. The analysis is structured around an opposition Ofeimun draws between President

Obasanjo and Chief Awolowo, by any reasonable measure the two most significant political figures the region has produced, and who are frequently contrasted with one another in popular discourse. For Ofeimun, they are almost precise opposites. Awolowo was the guiding figure of progressive southwestern politics for decades. Obasanjo was and remains a stalking horse for the elites of other regions, an “objective” Yoruba politician who “bargained for national offices by showing to people of other nationalities that they were not on Awolowo’s side.” Ofeimun’s account proceeds from this opposition, as a tragic fall from grace. Awolowo is presented as an inspirational figure, one of the very few politicians ever to take Nigeria seriously. His political platform, Ofeimun avers, was based on a developmentalist vision in which federalism would allow Nigeria’s ethnic groups to realize their own cultural potential while progressive social policies (universal primary education most notably) would bring them together in harmonious modernity. The first betrayal of this promise came even before independence, when he was prevented from becoming prime minister by British and northern machinations, and by Igbo cowardice. Under the First Republic Awolowo’s southwestern base was then fractured by other Yoruba, who served outside interests and at the same time inaugurated a southwestern provincialism. After Awolowo, the dynamic has continued as other progressive southwestern forces attempt progressive reform but are forced to make the same accommodations. In contrast to Awolowo’s failure, Obasanjo’s success came as a result of his taking power as a military leader only after assuring northern leaders he would not disturb their regional privileges. He made precisely the same accommodation when he gained the PDP presidential nomination in 1999. This unfortunate route to power forced Obasanjo to reward his extraregional patrons with political appointments and the spoils of the state. Even if he had shared Awolowo’s progressive goals, these political accommodations would have made them impossible.

This cannot be taken as an unproblematic representation of southwestern Nigerian history, though it is equally uninteresting to dismiss it as propaganda from an Awolowo partisan. I will return later to the portrayal of Awolowo and focus here on the many ironies to how President Obasanjo is portrayed. Here he is an almost antinomian figure, the fulfillment of a Yoruba politics of compromise pioneered by the Western Region’s premier, S. L. Akintola, during the First Republic. Corruption and sectionalism go hand in hand: the rapacious demands of the political bosses Obasanjo was forced to accommodate in his bid for the presidency have led to continued looting of the state during the Fourth Republic. Government dysfunction can be attributed to its president’s political base, and continued ethnic tension—even if not directly his

fault—was nonetheless enhanced by his role in perpetuating the old politics. Obasanjo found the only successful route a Yoruba could take to power, but this was at the cost of undermining his own regional bona fides as well as his government's competence.

Ofeimun's discussion of the north lacks the complexity that structured his account of the west. Despite glancing references to "the horrid exploitation and repression that had hitherto been [the peasantry's] lot and against which Northern radicals fought many epic battles" and an acknowledgment that "Bala Usman and Balarabe Musa [were] among the best minds that Nigeria produced in the twentieth century," Ofeimun's story is a fairly straightforward depiction of northern reactionaries. The amalgamation of Nigeria conjoined southern Nigeria with a region dominated by aristocracies fearful that development or change would erode their power. By preventing progress the masu sarauta maintained their power, at the cost of deepening the north's disadvantage vis-à-vis the south. After 1970, class antagonisms in the north were ameliorated by oil revenue. For Nigeria as a whole this was a mixed blessing because this dependence on revenues of southern origin exacerbated the north's desire to keep control of the south because of the north's poverty and need for revenue. The zero-sum quality of Nigeria's ethnic politics is the direct result of this northern-aristocratic strategy of national domination-cum-class privilege. More damningly, even northern progressives fail to take seriously the claims of Nigeria's regions. Ethnic groups reified categories imposed by colonialism or, almost worse, national policy rewarded ethnic demands articulated through violence and riots at the expense of reasoned dialogue. This discussion of the north is structurally the antithesis of that of the west. Far from the Awolowo/Obasanjo polarity, northern political thought is represented as almost uniform. Even northern leftists tend to see the south in instrumental terms, as a resource for achieving their own ends. If the history of the west is a morality fable, a story of temptation and fall, the north appears as a hell that threatens to engulf the whole country. With even its progressive forces irremediably tainted by their failure to take Nigeria seriously, the north symbolizes a compromised political community no true patriot could ever accept.

Ofeimun's account of the southeast is if anything even more provocative. As with the west, the history turns around a historic figure, but in this case only one, Dr. Azikiwe, and he is neither as heroic as Awolowo nor as villainous as Obasanjo. In this account, the failure of southern progressivism during the First Republic was largely a result of Azikiwe's cowardice and his hope to dominate the entire south. The NCNC's decline from being a southern nationalist party to being largely an Igbo party was the consequence of a set of unfortunate

strategems. Ofeimun's narrative posits Yoruba goodwill defeated by the inadequacy of Azikiwe and his Igbo supporters. The majors who perpetrated the coup in January 1966 are portrayed as heroic, largely because of their supposed ambition to place Obafemi Awolowo in charge, but Ofeimun explains they lost control to more provincial Igbo superiors. Ofeimun then makes a rhetorically powerful if logically tenuous transition, suggesting through juxtaposition that contemporary problems of electoral lawlessness emerge from precisely the same cowardice, a Machiavellianism undercut by timidity. Ofeimun ascribes the peculiar state-level coup through which the governor of Anambra state was kidnapped and forced to write a letter of resignation after falling out with his state's political boss. In the ensuing scandal and debate about the incident, a variety of charges of electoral irregularity affecting the governor's own election emerged.³³ This section has received much unfavorable comment from Igbo interlocutors, but what is really interesting here is how similar the analysis is to Ofeimun's description of the southwest. The lack of a figure as heroic as Awolowo is morally (if not historically) mitigated by the majors' purported ambition to make Awolowo head of state. Indeed, what separates the east from the west is a failure of leadership, something that might be overcome if only Igbos could be convinced to follow worthy leaders, even if of another ethnicity.

Most provocatively of all, Ofeimun devotes a considerable portion of his entire essay to the subject of the South South, which he terms the "deprived goose" of the federation. Under this rubric, however, his attention is not so much on the specific plight of the Niger delta peoples who occupy the empirical South South zone. Rather, he explores the multiple failures of ethnic reconciliation. While he does consider certain aspects of South South politics, particularly those involving the reluctance of Fourth Republic PDP governors to embarrass their president by making too-great claims on national resources, for the most part Ofeimun elides questions of the delta peoples, those of the old Mid-Western Region (also in the South South zone but who have had rather different experiences within the federation), and those of the Middle Belt as minority issues common to all. To some extent, the Mid-West escaped the travails of the delta peoples and the Middle Belters because of their earlier regional autonomy, which Ofeimun ascribes to the good graces of Obafemi Awolowo. Being a "deprived goose" would appear to place these areas outside the antinomian logics that otherwise suffuse Ofeimun's account. Reading his essay nearly a decade after it was written suggests that Ofeimun would now be forced to revise this aspect, especially with the presidency of the South South's Goodluck Jonathan.

The text's power is not in its provision of a transparent account of Nigeria's troubles, nor indeed because of the acuity of its political analysis. For while the notion of taking Nigeria seriously is compelling as a form of political critique, Ofeimun's analysis is neither systematic nor evenhanded enough to succeed in its own terms. However, the very non-transparency of Ofeimun's rhetoric offers something far more compelling. Ofeimun is too deliberate a stylist for his reliance on Obafemi Awolowo as a heroic figure to be read simply as a set of propositions about the historical politician. It is true Ofeimun served as Awolowo's private secretary; his admiration for his mentor is as clear as his practical gratitude for Awolowo's patronage. And it is undeniable that Awolowo is a compelling and admirable figure—though that may be partly the case because of the very limited periods he directly wielded power. But in treating Awolowo as progressivism's unblemished tribune, Ofeimun is not simply engaging in hagiography. The clue to Ofeimun's method lies exactly where he is least historically convincing. The plaster saint version of Awolowo is an unlikely compliment to the man from so deliberate a writer. Ofeimun's excesses suggest something else. Thus, he insists that Awolowo's role in the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and the foundation of the Action Group was not a careerist ploy appealing to Yoruba communalism—even creating an ethnic Yoruba party at the cost of a united nationalist front against colonial rule was a disinterested gesture because of Awolowo's taking Nigeria seriously. Ofeimun's "Awolowo" bears little resemblance to the politician, and the history of his career less to the strategies of a real-world political actor. Exactly at the moment when Awolowo was most clearly engaging in a politics of regionalism, Ofeimun claims he was at his most universal. Even politically motivated ethnogenesis becomes in this telling a strategy for pan-Nigerian political community. The audacity of this argument cannot mask the consequence, which is that Ofeimun's "Awolowo" becomes a figure of pure critique and renunciation. Ofeimun's "Awolowo" never had base motives, never acted except in Nigeria's national interests. He only failed when the machinations of others were too great. The account avoids any taint of Yoruba nationalism itself because it is always already critiqued by the example of "Awolowo."

This is not a realistic account of history or a prescription for political change. It is, however an almost uniquely powerful demonstration of how discourses of corruption can be applied in criticism of the body politic. Critique is not by itself either a politics or a policy, and in the end Ofeimun's essay is not just unconvincing because of his romanticism about Obafemi Awolowo. What is ultimately unconvincing about the essay is that he is able to exhort Nigerians to take Nigeria seriously, but in the end this is portrayed as an act

of will, a simple case of deciding to do so. And in this it is no different from technocratic exhortations to prevent corruption. Take Nigeria seriously, take honesty seriously—what’s the difference? At this juncture, it would perhaps be useful to try to bring together some of the strands Lonsdale so usefully spun out for Kikuyu identity.

Ofeimun’s Awolowo is a utopian figure whose purpose is to suggest the contours of a Nigeria that *does* take itself seriously. And at the same time, it is the most explicit engagement I have ever found with the proposition that corruption has its own moral economy. Where most acknowledge the fact through denial (“corruption” is the quality of my enemies, but everyone knows compromise is a necessary part of the world, and that’s what my friends and patrons do), Ofeimun does not use his condemnation of “corrupt” or cowardly politicians primarily as a means of signaling support for those within his patronage network—even if that is the ultimate effect of Awolowo’s apotheosis. This Awolowo has as a point of departure that Nigeria is to be taken seriously, that the welfare of all depends on strong local ties, creating a political community cultural strand by cultural strand, where the welfare of one community is never ultimately subordinate to another’s. In this formulation, what is wrong is not specific material acts per se but rather their being undertaken without regard for *Nigeria* as a whole. This is a vision of corruption in which means and ends need never be incompatible, but where neither can serve as excuse for the other. It is very much a form of critique—entirely a political performative—but its end is not to situate Ofeimun in a position of patronage and obligation or to privilege a network of his allies. Such aims are subordinate to the denial that such particularistic interests can ever be indulged before the Nigeria he has taken seriously. The clue to this subtle distinction lies in those moments Ofeimun must explain Awolowo’s actions that might appear to be morally compromised: his seeming to engage in Yoruba sectionalism, his implication in coup plots, his various political compromises, the financial dealings that received unfavorable comment from the Coker Commission. Where others would deny or justify, Ofeimun lays bare the mechanism of the moral economy. Judging Awolowo’s actions as legitimate or illegitimate, he argues, is possible through only one metric, that of his having taken Nigeria seriously. Corruption or lack of corruption does not reflect a system of norms or a system of values independent of this larger, more all-encompassing question.

Less relevant than the *details* of his exoneration of Awolowo is the fact of his insisting on them. For Ofeimun the possibility of taking Nigeria seriously depends on understanding how politicians have not done so, building their careers on and feeding the interests of only a portion of their entire constituency.

The problem is not one with politicians alone, for as long as Nigerians' political imagination is rooted in sectional interests, Nigerians will be incapable of achieving the kind of national rootedness that will allow them to demand accountability from their rulers. Only through a commitment to the national project will true democracy be achievable. And in that project, corruption will be eliminated. Ofeimun's romantic portrayal of Obafemi Awolowo, especially in his somewhat cavalier dismissal of the possibility that the findings of the Coker Commission were anything other than a plot against Awolowo by the NPC-dominated federal government, makes his account too easy to dismiss. Ofeimun's lionization of Awolowo as nothing but a progressive icon leaves his account open to the accusation that it is a defense of Yoruba sectional interests recast as an account of Nigerian universalism. This would miss the crucial lesson in his text.

Ofeimun's text is unusual in that it admits that Nigeria is plagued, in an almost biblical sense, by corruption but does not ascribe it to individual greed and the moral failure of cupidity. Many commentators recognize that corruption has a moral economy—some degree of malpractice is legitimate, but this has been far exceeded by the country's rulers. The brilliance of Ofeimun's contribution is that he has recognized the argument's analytic limits, its essential circularity, and located corruption in a broader political dilemma. He indicates why corruption is dysfunctional and suggests what might possibly ameliorate it. The corruption-complex (in my sense rather than Olivier de Sardan's) is not just individual "corrupt" acts; it is also the moral terrain on which they are condemned and is not by itself good or bad. The institutionalization of corruption discourse as a mode of conducting political battles, as Obafemi Awolowo learned so painfully in the early 1960s, demonstrates that the material and logistical problems arising from the diversion of state resources to private pockets and other consequences of material corruption are both driven by politicians' social circumstances and only very partially reflected in the discourses that excuse or condemn them.

Ofeimun is one of the very few people to understand that this cycle of obligation, action, and condemnation is not in itself the source of Nigeria's problems, nor of the intuition many now have that the country is in a state of crisis. Elite rapacity is a symptom rather than a cause. The failure to take Nigeria seriously not only encourages politicians to act for narrow sections of the country rather than in the interest of all; it also impedes ordinary people's ability to assess these actions. If one is always inclined to excuse the actions of one's confreres, it is impossible to hold leaders to account. By coupling this insight with his quasi-utopian veneration of Obafemi Awolowo, Ofeimun

also suggests how Nigeria might move beyond its current problems. The secret does *not* necessarily lie in refraining from all material malpractices. It is in expanding one's focus of intimate identification to comprise all Nigeria. I am not certain that as a practical program this is more realistic than simply exhorting officials not to steal or attempting to create new systems of incentives to preclude corrupt actions. Nonetheless, the basic point that sectional competition and competition over national resources resulted in ratcheting up the absolute incidence of material corruption does suggest that anything to dampen the tendency would be helpful.

Ofeimun's careful lack of attention to litigating the details of particular corruption accusations points to his innovative stance on the moral economy of corruption. Ideally officials would not engage in malpractice, but the persistence of patron-clientage makes eradicating patterns of conspicuous consumption and redistribution a daunting project. But is it necessary? Ofeimun's political program inheres in his idealized figure of Awolowo, and it is noteworthy that portrait does not emphasize his status as some sort of ideal-typical bureaucratic officeholder. What if the ultimate problem with Nigerian political institutions was their dependence on a constitutive logic that presupposes disinterested, rule-bound, impersonal exercise of office? Might a different model of governance prove less dysfunctional? The only clue Ofeimun provides is in his suggestion that such officials should not be particularistic in outlook. Nonetheless, it is a powerful—and extremely innovative—vision. In the end, his essay does not just provide a portrait of how the moral economy of corruption exists and perpetuates Nigerians' suffering. It also provides a vision for what an alternative form of political community might entail. But the details of that alternative require looking in a different direction entirely.