Twitter Thread by Olaudah Equiano®



Olaudah Equiano®
@RealOlaudah

1995 ‘coup’: How Obasanjo, Yar’Adua, Gwadabe were maltreated — Ex-EFCC chairman.
A former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mrs. Farida Waziri has given a fresh insight into the 1995 alleged coup during the Gen. Sani Abacha regime.

Ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo, the late General Shehu Musa Yar’Adua, Col. Lawan Gwadabe and Senator Chris Anyanwu were all tried and ended up in jail on the strength of the allegations against them.
Yar’Adua died in the Abakaliki Prisons while serving his term.

Mrs. Waziri believes there was something dubious about the alleged coup and the caliber of names linked with the plot made it questionable.
The former EFCC boss in her newly released memoir Farida Waziri: One Step Ahead recalls how she and a former Chief of Staff,...

General Abdulrahman Dambazau watched Obasanjo confidently rubbish the allegations leveled at him by Colonel Bello Fadile during the trial.
The book is about her life as a spy, detective and anti-graft czar. She said when she complained to a former Inspector-General of Police, the

late Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie that charges were being framed up against the suspects, he responded thus: “there are things beyond our power to control or influence.”
She described a former head of Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), Col. Frank Omenka as a psychopath who...

used to dance to Makossa music after torturing suspects.
The extracts read in part: “After 1976, my view about coup d’états was conservative. A coup, whether bloody or not, is a piece of a nasty conundrum and I’d rather ponder about it from a safe distance.

But as Commissioner of Police B Operations (B/Ops), there was no way I could stand aloof from the current situation.
”I was appointed into the legal team that was to work with the Special Investigative Panel (SIP) on the trial of the suspected coup plotters.

Retired Colonel Joseph Akaagerger, a former governor of Katsina State, led the legal team, while Major General Felix Mujakpero, a very nice gentleman, headed the SIP.
“The SIP was to convene at Alexander Avenue in lkoyi.

I decided to visit the location days before the start of proceedings. The intention was to familiarise myself with the environment in which I would no doubt be spending the next few working weeks or maybe months.
”Ikoyi was a quiet, beautiful suburb of Lagos with tree-lined...

avenues framing elegant colonial houses set on large generous grounds. “I went around the house and covered the grounds, including the BQs- a colonial legacy, dwellings set away from the main house for domestic servants. What I saw at the Boys Quarters filled me with unease.

“A detachment of soldiers was busy digging up the floors. In one room, they had dug out the tiles and were putting in hooks all over the now exposed earthen floor. In another room, the floor had been excavated creating a pit that the soldiers now proceeded to fill with...

refuse from the dustbin, the smell was pungent and unbearable, is it where the suspect will stay, why make it unhealthy, I asked them, but there was no response.
”Later, I realised only the junior suspects remained there. The panel commenced sitting, and work began in earnest.

The legal team didn’t participate in the interrogations, but its members witnessed some of the proceedings through a one-way glass window. “Not all the interrogations occurred in the open.
”Some took place in the reconstructed Boys Quarters.

Others progressed outside the premises at obscured locations, and there was no doubt that the interrogators employed torture. The suspects often returned in bad shape, with swollen faces and bruised bodies. Some of them could hardly walk.

“Colonel Frank Omenka was the chief interrogator. Many things had been written about Omenka by those who crossed his path. I can only add a few annotations. Omenka was harsh in his methods. He loved his job. He enjoyed the misery he inflicted on suspects.

”I hold the conviction that he was a full- blown psychopath. He had a record player in his office. After a vigorous interrogation session during which he was in a good mood, he’d go to his office and dance to loud Makossa music.

If you happened to come into his office at that time, he would invite you to dance with him.
”I always declined. “Given the political climate at the time, we knew our task was a delicate one from the outset. An air of palpable paranoia hung over the proceedings, particularly,...

when a young officer who was initially on the investigative panel, Captain Musa, suddenly appeared one day in manacles as a suspect. We never found out how his connection.
”But the lesson was passed. “We kept to ourselves for fear of being implicated.

It was a delicate situation for many of us on the legal team because we were familiar with quite a few of the detainees. Their approach was telegraphed to us by the loud clanking of their manacles that gave us ample time to take cover and thus avoid any accidental meetings."

Mrs. Waziri recounted her observations and interactions with some of the high-profile suspects. She said: "Observing some of the detainees was somewhat disturbing, and for years, I was haunted by what I saw in their eyes. It was a look that defied verbal description, a look of...

naked despair. Even before interrogation, they had already resigned themselves to death.
"However, I broke my own rule. I couldn't help but sympathise with a few of the suspects. For instance, Chris Anyanwu was a friend, a popular journalist, editor and publisher (and...

senator years later).The least I could do was to encourage her to eat and keep her spirit up. I urged her to write all she knew about the incident truthfully.
"Truth, I thought, always holds a glimmer of hope. "I also knew Colonel Lawan Gwadabe.

I would usually greet him whenever I saw him. He was a fine and outstanding officer, a brave man who showed no fear despite his ordeal at the hands of his interrogators.
"For some unfounded reasons, his interrogators had the conviction that he was involved in the coup plot, and..

they were determined to break him and extract a confession out of him by any means.
"Though held on the premises, he was frequently taken out to undisclosed locations for torture. "On one occasion, he was taken out early in the morning.

They brought him back the following morning a complete wreck, unable to walk.
"Upon orders from above, he was sent to undergo physiotherapy before his next interrogation could begin. On another occasion, they administered the so-called "truth pills" on him and the drug triggered

a cardiac arrest that left Gwadabe unconscious and threw his interrogators into a panic.
"The process came to a forced stop as they made frantic efforts to resuscitate him. They could not bear the thought of him dying because their mandate was to extract a confession.

On that score, Gwadabe defeated them. They could not break him. Their frustration became apparent at a meeting of the SIP.
"They claimed to have reliable intelligence that "what Colonel Gwadabe cherished most in this world is his wife."

They would love to bring her in for 'questioning' to compel Gwadabe to cooperate.
"What a diabolical suggestion! I was seized by righteous indignation. It was clear by then to other dispassionate observers and me that Colonel Gwadabe was falsely implicated for reasons other than

being a part of the alleged coup.
"Now, they were suggesting giving the brutish Colonel Omenka the discretion to interrogate (a euphemism for torture) Gwadabe's wife to coerce a confession out of the man. "Gentlemen, we cannot stoop this low," I protested.

“We all know that no soldier planning a coup involves his wife. First, men don’t trust women to keep secrets.
“Secondly, the soldier knows his wife would be too terrified and would do anything within her power to prevent his involvement.

Everyone knows the deadly consequences of a failed coup. Wives are always the last to know what their husbands have been up to in this regard.
“They do find out just like any other member of the public, from the early morning broadcast and on the pages of the newspapers.

We cannot and should not co-sign the detention and possible abuse of an innocent wife, just to get at her husband.
” Mercifully, there was a unanimous agreement. The idea was dropped.” She added that the accuser given a script to implicate a former Chief of Staff, Supreme...

Headquarters, Gen. Shehu Musa Yar’Adua later admitted that it was the State Security Services (SSS) which gave him a script to act. She said the written report given to the accuser was later found hidden in the ceiling of the home of the accuser, She said: “I also had contact...

with General Shehu Musa Yar’Adua.
“He was Chief of Staff, Supreme Military Council when General Obasanjo was head of state from 1976 to 1979. He was brought in looking unsettled. I studied him through the one-way glass window.

He sat quietly in the room, nervous and chain-smoking, wracked intermittently by fits of cough.
“When I had the opportunity, I entered the room and politely said to him, “Sir, why are you doing this to yourself? It seems smoking is not good for your health.”

He gave me a wry look. “If you were in my shoes, what would you do?” he asked.
“If I were in your shoes, I would be praying,” I responded. “As an observer of most of the SIP sittings during the trial of General Yar’Adua, I had the conviction that he was falsely implicated.

The witnesses arranged against him could not substantiate their claims.
“For example, the chief accuser who claimed he attended the coup meeting in Yar’Adua’s lkoyi home couldn’t identify the house when driven around the neighbourhood.

Neither could he identify critical places, where clandestine meetings allegedly occurred with the general in attendance. His claim that about fifty (50) guests attended a dinner in Yar’Adua’s sitting room was proven false.

“When taken into the general’s home, he found a living room that could barely accommodate twenty, not 50 visitors. He had lamely changed his statement to “I was standing by the window.
“Caught in a web of lies, he later confessed that an SSS operative gave him a written report,

with the instruction to copy the information about Yar’Adua’s involvement in the coup.
“When completed, burn the book,” that was the instruction according to him. We found the book hidden in the ceiling of his home. The accuser was handcuffed and subsequently tried.

"After reviewing the evidence, the legal team agreed on reasonable felony for Yar'Adua. The basis was that he might have known about the coup, but it could not be proved. We drafted charges for a treasonable felony & closed for the day. "The next morning began on a dramatic note.

"Others were seated by the time I arrived. I found them in a pensive mood. My jovial greeting drew solemn responses. My offhand question 'have we finished for the day' drew murmurs. My file laid face down on the table. I turned it over & got a shock.
General Yar'Adua's indictment

had changed to treason. I could hardly contain my anger: "What is this? Didn't we all agree yesterday on treasonable felony?" "None of them replied.
They sat in subdued silence. I was so upset for this blatant interference with judicial due process that I dropped the file...

and abandoned the morning session.
I went home and told Ajuji, my husband, what happened. Just be careful was all he said. That was hardly satisfactory to me.
"I headed to the Force Headquarters to complain to the Inspector General of Police, Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie.

"We know what is happening," he said. "Sometimes, there are things beyond our power to control or influence." "So it was that General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua was sentenced for treason.
Sadly, he died in prison." She described Obasanjo's appearance before the SIP as the "most climatic

experience" because of his composure and brilliance.
She said: "The most climatic experience of the whole affair, for me, was my encounter with General Olusegun Obasanjo.
When rumours circulated that the former Head of State was in custody as one of the conspirators, those of us

in the legal team didn't know what to make of the new development.
"We all knew Obasanjo for his outstanding qualifications. He is a post-colonial senior officer of the Nigerian Army, a hero of the Nigerian Civil War with the 3rd Marine Commandos.

He was the Colonel who accepted the surrender of Biafra from General Philip Effiong, at the ceremony that ended the Nigerian Civil War in January 1970.
Above all, he is a former Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

"It seemed something was not right for two fundamental reasons. First, General Obasanjo was a superior military officer to all those at the helm of the current government.
Second, most of the officers with whom he allegedly conspired were not even commissioned into the Nigerian

Army when he was a ranking officer. "The situation was strange and unprecedented. No one could tell where it headed. The atmosphere at the premises in Ikoyi was tense.
We had mixed emotions of excitement, anticipation and fear.

"Our feelings were at fever pitch when finally, Gens Obasanjo and Yar'Adua arrived. Observing them through the one-way glass mirror of the interrogation room, I intuited a hidden agenda.
As I mentioned earlier, Gen Yar'Adua was nervous and looked troubled and sometimes angry.

Obasanjo, on the other hand, was unruffled. Calm and composed, he exuded an air of quiet dignity and confidence.
I found his reaction intriguing. He endured the interrogations with the same character with which he entered the premises.

Though his file did not come down to the legal depart, we observed some of his interrogations. “A session remained vivid in my mind. Gen Abdulrahman Dambazau & I observed the proceeding through a CCTV system.
We marveled at his brilliance, intelligence and forensic skills.

It was a particularly grueling session. “Obasanjo was brought in early in the morning. His interrogation lasted till dusk
Without the aid of notes or any other external props, he defended himself, reeling off facts, figures, dates, appointment schedules & myriad of other details.

When he took his turn to cross-examine his chief accuser, Colonel Bello Fadile, the general, in our opinion, destroyed the veracity of the accusations leveled against him.
At the end of the session, General Dambazau and I looked at each other and in unison concurred, “This man is

innocent.” “One even after an interrogation session, it was getting late, & Obasanjo, a diabetic patient, was waiting for his meal of beans from his farm in Ota.
There was a delay in getting it to him. He was in a great deal of discomfort as his blood sugar level began to drop.

Feeling sorry for him, I approached the senior officer and offered to dash home, not far, to prepare a meal of beans for him.
The officer smiled and said nothing.
I missed the message. Another officer pulled me aside and cautioned me about getting involved with the detainees, to

avoid getting implicated.
What if you prepare food for him & something happens? “The legal team ultimately sentenced Gen Obasanjo to death; sentence was commuted to 30 years in prison; & the transitional government of Gen Abdulsalami Abubakar pardoned and released him from jail.

He subsequently became the democratically elected President of the Republic of Nigeria. “In later years, whenever I think of the events of February 1995, particularly about the two generals, I try to find answers to some riddles of life.

2 retired army gens, good friends with similar career trajectories, both accused of treason, both sentenced to death, they came to divergent endings. One did not live to tell the story; the other lived to rise to the highest office of the land by popular means— the irony of life.

Yar’Adua probably felt the premonition of death.” In what appeared a clear verdict, the former EFCC chairman described the alleged 1995 Coup as dubious. She said: “The alleged coup of Feb 28, 1995, it happened in the second year of General Sani Abacha’s reign as Head of State.

There was something dubious about it. Historians called it a phantom coup. In other words, a conspiracy by the powers-that-be against selected targets critical of the state of the nation. “Well, I have no opinion about that.

However, the calibre of names associated with the plot made it questionable, especially when the likes of retired Generals Olusegun Obasanjo, former Head of State, and Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, former Chief of Staff, Supreme Military Council, were alleged alongside high-ranking...

officers such as Brigadier Lawan Gwadabe who in all probability were the least likely candidates for mutiny."

Culled.
#Nigeria
#NigerianHistory