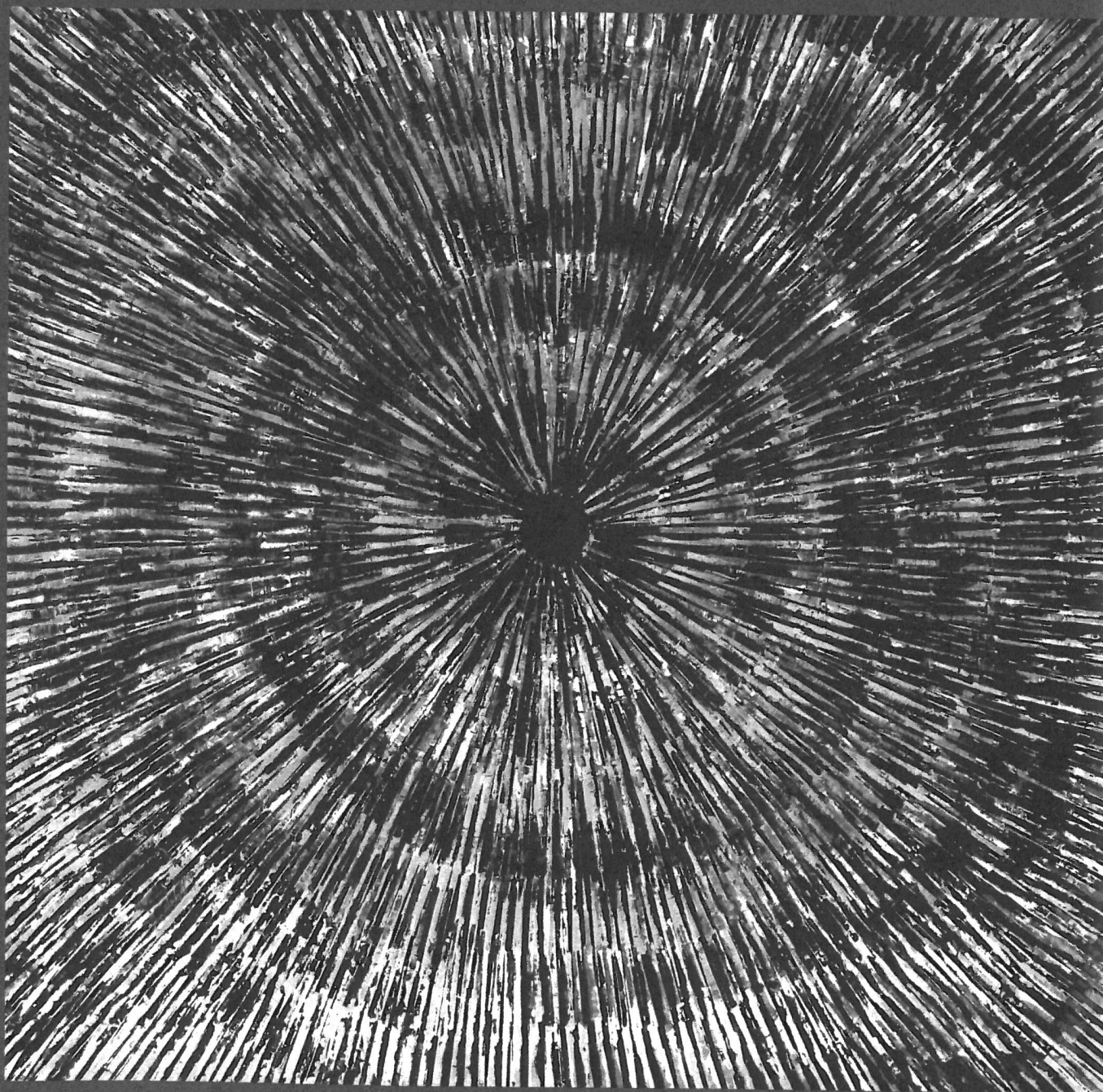


OLA

# IN PRAISE OF GREATNESS

The Poetics of African Adulation



TOYIN FALOLA

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgments xi

PROLOGUE | PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE'S MEDICINE 3

1 | GREATNESS 45  
Biographies, Heroism, and Memory

2 | TRIBUTES 75  
Orality and the Poetics of Praise

3 | HOMAGE 95  
Conversational Mapping of Words

4 | "HEAVENLY BEINGS" 113  
The Dead in the Consciousness of the Living

5 | PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS 175

6 | LIVING LEGENDS 209

7 | LITERARY FIGURES 235

8 | POWER OF LANGUAGE 277

9 | YORÙBÁ ETHNOGENESIS 311

10 | FEMALE IMAGINATION 353

11 | SUCCESS FOR WOMEN 389

12 | CULTURAL HIGHWAY 435

13 | FOLKLORISTS AND CULTURAL BROKERS 479

14 | INSTITUTIONAL BUILDERS 515

15 | GIANTS OF THE NATION 563

16 | FUTURE OF THE PRESENT 641

17 | PROTESTOGRAPHY 697

18 | IMAGES OF CULTURES 757

19 | PAINT, BRUSH, AND WORDS 795

20 | PEOPLE ARE MY GARMENTS 863

21 | ENLARGING GREATNESS 899

EPILOGUE | THE RETURN OF THE SPIRIT 937

Bibliography 971

Index 1001

Africa; President of the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA) from 1998 to 2002; and Director of Makerere Institute of Social Research from 2010 to the present. In these institutions, his objective has been to develop and ingrain a culture of academic training that allows for critical thinking in his students.

Mamdani has continued to pay the price of living on two continents to be able to train the next generation of African scholars. This explains his continued engagements at Makerere Institute of Social Research where he trains Ph.D. students and conducts policy oriented research that are particularly focused on re-introducing the lost cadence and culture of anti-discipline in higher education research and training. One of his lasting legacies to knowledge production in Africa is showing the importance of trans-disciplinarity in engagement with the study of Africa. Contrary to the dominant logic of enforcing the boundaries of disciplines, Mamdani has shown that societies can be studied across disciplines.

The brilliance of Mamdani's intellectual inquiry has supplied many practical options to our predicament. Similarly, the continued marginalization of Africa in the global system of accumulation, the contradictions of growth without development, the continued crisis of governance, the increasing disillusionment of the majority of the citizens with democracy as a form of government, the rise of populist regimes in developed countries and the resultant retreat from any modicum of commitment to our shared humanity make his wisdom to be particularly pertinent at this critical juncture in the history of our continent. The iroko and the baobab has offered us a big shed of protection.

### **NIMI WARIBOKO**

#### **THE MANY PS OF A POSSIBILITARIAN**

Like the psalmist in the Bible, my heart, too, is composing a good matter as I speak of the things that I have made touching on my friend, Professor Nimi Wariboko. Indeed, my tongue feels like the pen of a ready writer as I speak of this phenomenal transdisciplinary scholar and lively thinker of global renown whom I refer to as a man of many parts: a professor, philosopher, political theorist, Pentecostal pastor, and, overall, a possibilitarian. When I describe him as a possibilitarian, I mean this man embodies the very essence of the Pentecostal principle: the philosophical thought that captures the capability of humanity to overturn staleness and staticity to launch fresh and exciting possibilities that ultimately guarantees human flourishing. "Human flourishing" is a phrase you frequently encounter in all his writings, and it is no surprise that this singular goal haunts his mental consciousness. Human flourishing is where his calling lies; his ethical, human, and intellectual

callings all revolve around the goal of lifting the human race beyond its limitations. Professor Wariboko exudes the attitude of radical openness and possibilities in all of his intellectual exertions such that they percolate his scholarship, social activism, personal principles, and interpersonal relationships.

I have known him for many years, and one thing about him has been consistent: the ability to see possibilities through seemingly intractable situations. If you are a Nigerian, and you are constantly confounded by the many challenges of our continent, you will implicitly understand why Professor Wariboko's creative thinking and possibilitarian outlook on life is an invaluable resource. As someone who is constantly being challenged to produce solutions, both abstract and practical, to the challenges of Africa, I know that there are times I have despaired and have even been pessimistic. But Professor Wariboko? Not at all. No matter how dark the night seems to be, or how gloomy the situation is, the light in his heart—and in his head—never goes out. I am not describing unfounded optimism neither am I suggesting that he treats mere positivity as an end in itself. His possibilitarianism is one that is driven by genuine passion and enthusiasm that all human situations can respond to the Pentecostal principle of a rupturing that produces fresher, stronger, and better beginnings. His philosophy is one that is founded on the conviction that the dry bones can come back to life if they come in contact with the breath of life.

He has spent a bulk of his life and career forging that pneumatic force of life that will raise dry bones through hard work and original philosophical thought. His intellectual activism is spread out in the multiple books, journals, and multiple other materials he has written over the years. He has propounded great and innovative strategic ideas in many lectures which he has given to different audiences that range from his peers to politicians to policy makers. He is such a prolific scholar. He has twelve published monographs, four co-edited volumes, and more book-length manuscripts under review with different university presses. He also has multiple published papers and chapters in edited volumes, and an endless stretch of lectures all which he has either delivered or will be delivering in different parts of the world.

Known globally as a transdisciplinary scholar and thinker, Professor Wariboko is one of the greatest human resources to have ever come out of Africa.



Professor  
Nimi Wariboko,  
ink on paper,  
Dr. Kazeem Ekeolu

His scholarship has been highly influential in and out of the academy, stretching from the areas of Christian social ethics, economic ethics, African social traditions, Pentecostal studies, and philosophical theology. He describes himself as someone who loves to unfold, refold, enfold, and energize past and present ideas and hopes in relation to the possibilities of future human flourishing. I think of him as a genius, an intellectual wizard with the gift of what the Yorùbá call "ojú inú." It literally translates as "the inner eye," but it also means possessing the ability to see beyond the surface, to be able to imagine, to connect things that seem disparate, to penetrate through the material layers of a phenomenon and see what others do not immediately see. With this gift, he has done quite a lot: from working out path-breaking ways to imbuing us with profound understanding of African economic history and corporate management, to proposing ideas on political development in Africa.

In his book *The Principle of Excellence: A Framework for Social Ethics* (2009), he created a framework that will support a social and ethical liberation through making a case for excellence. He plumbed through works of scholars from different intellectual traditions and disciplines to offer new meanings for excellence as a social behavior that can guarantee human flourishing. He makes a case for excellence as a moral imperative that offers a clearing site where human creativity can be rehearsed and performed for our societies to actualize their potentials. This book is a provocative consideration of excellence beyond the ideals of virtue, superiority, or some act of eminence or distinction. Excellence, he argues, should not be merely considered as an attainment of singular or individual goals but as an organizing principle that undergirds social progress and the habit of development. He suggests ideas on how modern societies can be bolstered by the tailwind of creativity and excellence that involves the participation of all members of the society. The book speaks to both developed and modern societies and the ones in embryonic stages of development as well.

Another one of his highly provocative works that shows that Professor Wariboko is never afraid to depart from the path of conventional thinking is *God and Money: A Theology of Money in a Globalizing World* (2011). The book is a challenge to global powers to do more than make mouthy commitments to the rise of developing economies through an inclusive or leveled global monetary system. This book investigates the anthropology of money through a theological analytical framework. Money is not just a means of exchange, but it is relational as well. This theo-ethical power of money, he argues, has totalizing and imperializing repercussions for weaker world economies that do not have enough shield from the dominance of other world powers. Wariboko thus calls for a global currency that is not tied to a nation state as means of value exchange or as reserve currency. This book is an important challenge to readers, thinkers, and policy makers to consider



foundational ethics underlying the powerful structures that benefit them but leave emerging economies gasping for breath behind them.

Another one of his books that takes on the global financial capital is *Economics in Spirit and Truth: A Moral Philosophy of Finance* (2014). This book does not just confront the systemic structures, it empowers people at a more individual level to challenge the logic of the system that treats them like things to be used. Wariboko deftly breaks down the complexities of global finance without infantilizing the reader using the example of Jesus who taught theology using simple parables. Having shown the reader how the system needs us to act so we can continuously conform to the logic of its machinery, he introduces the ethics of antifragility that can free us from shackles of late capitalism. This book advocates means by which the “care of the soul” can strengthen us to take charge of ourselves so that we do not become endlessly subsumed into an economy of use by structures built by global powers and principalities.

Readers would have noticed that Wariboko’s works on economic principles and financial capitalism are imbricated with theology. This is because he is not only an economic ethicist but also a theologian schooled in some of the finest traditions of the discipline and the practice. He not only attended the big-league schools, his thirst for knowledge drove him to do amazing things, such as completing his doctoral program at Princeton in a mere two years. He also completed his Master of Divinity program at Oral Roberts University in Oklahoma while he was the senior pastor in New York juggling spiritual and administrative responsibilities to boot.

Wariboko combines his erudition with the liveliness and pragmatics of African Pentecostalism. Some of his books on Pentecostal studies, such as *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit* (2012) and *Nigerian Pentecostalism* (2014), constitute some of the most radical thinking on the Pentecostal movement as a social, cultural, political, and ideological force that can change our society. I mentioned his possibilitarian attitude earlier as a Pentecostal principle. Indeed, the Pentecostal principle was the ethical methodology he developed in *The Pentecostal Principle* to show us a transformative operative principle of worship. He defines the Pentecostal Principle as “the capacity to begin” because “no finite or conditioned reality can claim to have reached its destiny.”<sup>27</sup> The Pentecostal Principle is a challenge for us to think and stretch our minds; to rupture the finite and open ourselves to the endless possibilities out there.

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27. Nimi Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1 and 2.

Professor Wariboko has not only transcended disciplines in his research, he has traversed various fields in his career. He started out as a journalist and deputy editor in Nigerian financial and business magazines. He moved to corporate banking where he became a manager and head of corporate banking, and from there he moved to New York where he became an investment manager on Wall Street. He resigned from his lucrative job as a Wall Street banker to answer the call of God on his life. He served as pastor of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Brooklyn, New York, for thirteen years. When he founded the parish in 1998, he had thirteen members in attendance at the first service, but they steadily expanded into five churches. He was also the Senior Pastor of the Providence Branch of the church for another two years where he supervised churches in Rhode Island and Vermont. He has consulted for financial organizations and acted as a strategy consultant for various national organizations. As an academic, he has also been equally successful. He rose steadily from lecturer to assistant professor to associate, finally to professor and now holds a professorial chair. His career has witnessed a meteoric rise, and this is not totally surprising. He is so prolific a scholar that the academic system has had no choice but to promote him quickly because he fulfilled expectations for every position he occupied quickly. Even more amazing is how he has managed to combine his academic career with pastoral calling while, at the same time, he consults for financial organizations while at no time lagging behind in any of these responsibilities. What a great man!

If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for,  
he isn't fit to live.

— Martin Luther King Jr.