

AN INTERVIEW WITH EEDRIS ABDULKAREEM, A NIGERIAN AFRO HIPHOP STAR ACT, ON HIS RETURN FROM “EXILE” AFTER THE JAGAJAGA ISSUE WITH OLUSEGUN OBASANJO, NIGERIA’S EX-PRESIDENT

My name is Eedris Abdulkareem. I’m a musician, an Olympic torchbearer, a youth icon and a true Nigerian. After the president, I’m the second citizen of this nation and I think I am a good Nigerian ‘cos all I do basically is to be able to use what I have to add values to the other persons’ life. And all I do is music, as you know music is a universal language. It travels across the world to its consumers and touches lives with the speed of electricity. So my name is Eedris Abdulkareem. I’m a Nigerian. I schooled in Kano state. I was born in Kano state, my mum is from Ogun state and my dad is from the north. My primary school was in Kano state, Mei Quarters Primary School from there to Army Day Secondary School. *I be soldier boy o*, from there to Bayero University where I studied Mass Communication. Then graduated to the street.

When did you come into music?

Ehm, actually I will like to say since 1987 but professionally 1996 when *Remedy* kicked off.

We used to know you as Remedy. Why did you drop the name?

(Smiles) How did you know me to be Remedy?

(Laughs) Okay, well let me answer your question.

Actually, when I used to be in Kano, I went by the name Mr. Remedy because I believed I always have the solution to everything no matter how difficult it was. I don’t think there is any problem that cannot be solved. So I went by the name Mr. Remedy and when I got to Lagos, I found out that music industry in Lagos was not exactly what I expected. Most people basically listened to fuji, juju and the Ajegunle style of music, so I felt like ‘No, I do hip-hop so its time to take the music industry to the next level.’ You know, infusing Fuji, juju and all these things make it our own music. So I had the opportunity to meet with Kenny Ogungbe one on one after we did “*shako mo*” and he was like “Eh! What is the name of this group?” Remedy? It just came and I said *remedy*. “Yeah remedy.” That’s how I met Tony and Eddy and since then, everything has being fine and then we decided to go solo, to do our solo career and then come back in the nearest future, which is very soon.

There is so much opportunity and what we actually wanted to do is to be able to encourage a lot of people that, “look, you can do your thing if you have talents”, you know what I mean. You must be a group for life, go out and explore your talent and come back at the same time as a group and still do your thing. So we decided to go solo and do our project. I mean, a solo project, one on one. So, we decided to do solo projects. Then, Tony made it on his own. Eddy is doing it on his own and I am doing my own thing on my own and everything is fine. Today we have a lot of followers: the Plantashun Boiz, P-Square. D’Banj, ... you know. The hip-hop family is growing now. So basically, that is what it is now. You know I’m the pioneer of this thing, an elder statesman in this game. I believe the best thing we have done is to be able to bring up the hip-hop to come and stay.



We heard that you have left Kenny's music?

My deal was off I signed a contract and my contract *don finish* so I had to leave because I had responsibilities. There are so many artistes who are looking up to me and if I don't take the right step I would regret it and would never be happy and they'll never forgive me.

Your new album, *The King is Back*, it reminds one of the issue on Jagajaga. Why did you have to run away?

Basically, I went under ground because in a country like ours, where everybody, most people, seventy-five percent of people are fake, they like to lick peoples' ass, *shey you understand* and I fail not to do that because the Quran says, fear my people just me not anybody else, so I decided to fear God and then after which I understand that I have a responsibilities from the nineteen million people that voted me to represent them at the Olympic torch relay, as soon as I got into Nigeria, what I needed to do was to see the situation on ground and talk about it the way it is and God gave me an inspiration and "Jagajaga" came up. That moment was the moment I supposed to be making my money because I was also talking about sexual harassment and even Obasanjo loved it then. So what I should have done was *omo men, fi "Jagajaga" yen le for now* but my conscience would not let me, it wasn't all about the money I wanted to gain my merit first before money so I came up with Jagajaga and then after the song, it wasn't up to a month, my feedback or what I expected from the president was for the president to comment about it which he did and I was very happy about that. My message got to the president (for God sake who am I for the president of the nation to talk about me don't you know that I am a great person) so the president made me a superstar and I am very happy about that. When I sang "Jagajaga" it wasn't that I hated the president at the moment or I did not like him as a person but you know I think most people around him were not given him good advice that he needed to make sure that he add values to the life of Nigeria positively so he went ahead and took it.... you know if I was the president what I would have done basically was to invite the boy, hey come here, why would you sing a song like that why? What is the problem? *Okay, e Jagajaga abi? You wey no say e Jagajaga how you know say we fit repair am make e no Jagajaga again*, that is what I expected of an intelligent president you know, so, but you know *Baba. Al- Amdullilah Robi Al-almeen* but today everybody now knows that *omo nkan ti Eedris so, se eti ri, ohun niyen o, naa him be dat*, in life nothing freaks me men, nothing! You know what I mean? So, that is for Jagajaga and I am happy that the music is all over the place.

What was your reaction when the song ceased airplay?

You can't stop the music that is already on the air, can you? You can't, in fact the more you try to stop it that is when the people listen to it so people will go get it!

But the president was against it

I think he loved it.

Rumor had it then that you ran away to Ghana

Well, I did not. I was in Nigeria. What I needed to do basically was ehm...it was the same time that the 50Cent issue came up. So, I needed to travel all over the world, you know I needed to tell people my own side of the story. When I found out that my own Nigerian press could not even represent me and they were all at the airport when this thing happened. Some of them really showed love – lovely guys – let's talk about the way it was truthfully, *but omo wetin you expect now in a country wey jagajaga?* You write something, *your chief editor go check am, omo kinni yi, ah! A le ko be o, e twist e, ejo ti to ri Olorun, e ma ba ise je fun mi o jare*. So you don't have a choice, so it happens we must respect Nigerian press, we must empower Nigerian journalists, we must not look at them like beggars, we must give them all that respect. Look, in America you don't mess around with a journalist, you don't mess around with a star but you know some people, *they don buy some people so now a lot of people go com work for the people wey dem buy*, so its crazy men. So my point is, you must respect Nigerian press that way, they will never collect any kind of bribe from anybody to write some kind of bullshit, they will always do their work the way is supposed to be.

Yes, that was about the same time the 50 Cent palaver came up... but you later performed with him in Abuja. How did that happen?

After the performance, you know, it was big surprise because most of the multinational that have the project they believed that we are the big mafia in this country. Nobody fight multinational but have you forgotten that you cannot fight the microphone man. No matter how you are big as multinational, you cannot fight the microphone man. The microphone man that everybody listens to, people want to listen to him you understand what am saying so, if you say okay, because you are a multinational, you can not take your fault because if I am Nigerian breweries, what I would have done is this, okay I am bringing a show of this magnitude together. Two months ago (earlier), Wyclef came then he added values to our music's industry featuring Faze, 2face in his album and he did not come with anybody guard. He was on his own. He came to show us love now their percentage of market shares increases. Nigerian Breweries capitalizes on that and they wanted to do the same thing, but I think where Nigerian Breweries made mistake was because of the client that represented them. I had a deal with the client and said whatever you are giving 50 Cent, that is what you are giving me – my performance fee – you are paying 50 Cent 1.6 million, *that one no be my problem*, give me five million naira per show, thirty million is cool for me. If you are giving 50 Cent an executive suite, I want my room *dey* opposite 50 Cent's. So when 50 Cent *dey come out of him room, make him dey see, say who dey for this room. As him bodyguards dey for him gate (door), make him dey see my own bodyguards. So make in dey ask, who the fuck is that guy? Who be dat guy? Make dem tell am say that one na Eedris Abdulkarim o, that one na Mr. President friend. That one na big boy for this town o.* Do you understand me? And we had an agreement, they first said no, *we no fit, I say make una take your thing dey go, I no dey interested*, so we had an agreement, five days to the shows my bank manager called me, Eedris your account has been credited with so, so, so amount of money from Nigeria Brewery. I said *ehn ehn* I called all my bands *say una don hear so?* They said, two days to the show, I called the guy, *oh boy*, you have not given me my contracts. Where are you? He said *no vex Eedris, 50cent and his crew, dem dey for Abuja.* We have to take care of that. You have your room in Nicon Nuga, everything is ready, everything is set, I said no problem I got into the plane, and *I just dey, for my seat in business class.* That's what I agreed on. And I was chilling, waiting for 50cent and his crew for two hours, forty-five minutes you won't even believe it, the marketing managers of the same brand came into the plane, *dem go sit down for economy class. Ehm* the brand manager came into the plane, went to the economy class. The CEO, *wey dem sack*, Chief Odumegwu came into the plane and he went to sit at the economy class, then I greeted everybody and after 50cent and his crew came in, he said young buck and the other guys was like, *yo, yo*, "who the fuck was sitting on that seat! The other guy was like I don't know, I don't know, shit motherfucker African, shit men! Let's do this shit, let's get back to New York City men! Shit African I don't even trust this plane men, this mother fucking thing is gonna crash us men. *Na the things wey dey yawn be that, and dem dey laugh.* My brother, see all my Nigerians brothers –the artistes – *na so dem dey* (he mimicked sealed mouth) *dem no dey look up o. I was like no be me dem dey talk to, no be my problem, make anybody no come meet me for where I dey, come look for my trouble! You understand so*, the guy just came up, he was like "yo, you gotta get out of that seat. That is 50 Cent's seat!" "What?" I said, "do me a favour, we don't speak 'fuck' in African. I don't know what 'fuck' is all about. My name is Eedris Abdulkareem. I sold 4.6 million copies in a pirated country. (sic) I am supposed to sit here. And tell 50 Cent to come sit because I am his greatest fan. I will like to meet and ask him about the American industry. I'm supposed to sit here and if you are not convinced enough, I think you should get down and ask the organizers."

Then the guy go down, im no know say the person wey him dey talk to na... (Laughs, raises finger to head) So he went down and I say what's wrong, I looked through the window *na him I see Tade, the client for Nigerian Breweries do like this* (he throws hands in the air, gesticulating I don't know).

I say na the biggest mistake of una life na him una don make so. Then he walked back to the plane as soon as he just come near me he said "hey you gotta get the fuck out of that seat, I ain't gonna tell you for the last time" before I look, *the guy don hold me for neck, I come jammed the plane. I com say now, we go kill*

ourselves for here. I picked my phone, I called my Ecomog crew make dem dey come. Make dem first block the airport with "molue". Then I called the commissioner of police, MD Abubakar say baba you dey for Kano so? See wetin dey happen o and this is na wetin I wan do right now o. I have been humiliated in my country and I would never want any shit, none of these people is going free because I know they do this intentionally. So I called Charly Boy, I no know se na fag I called. "Hello PMAN president, your responsibility is to fight for my right. I have been humiliated. Where you dey? Where im dey, he carried hand put for head (on phone), say "hey food don come" because him and Nigerian Breweries get problem. As he just land gbua. "Where the hell is 50 cent? Get the hell, the hell out of that... why would you like to humiliate my... He (50 Cent) said, "I am sorry they never told us they have artistes in the plane. They told us they are all workers. I didn't know the guy was an artiste. Please, tell him to come and have a handshake with me. Let's just get to Port Harcourt and play the same show." I said, "your great grandfathers were taken away as slaves five hundred years ago. I have pride. I have culture. Walk with your legs and come and talk to me. Then I go know say you be true African. If you don't do that, you aren't going anywhere". Then, Odumegwu now walked up to me. Odumegwu was like, "Eedris, it is enough, please." I said, "excuse me sir, I don't know who you are." He said, "You don't know me!" I said, "I'm serious. I don't know who you are." He said, "I'm Odumegwu. I'm the CEO." I said, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself sir? You are putting a show of this magnitude together, what you should have done is have an artistes' pally three months ago. Ask us how it is going to be, common men, we are talking multinationals now. You are business men." You know why that is like that? Most artistes do not really believe in what they have. And they are not united. And they fail to understand that they are too cheap for what they are doing. You must not be cheap for what you are doing. You have forgotten, it's not Americans that are drinking this beer. They are Nigerians. Person don shack, shack well well him wan watch Eedris wey go play Jagajaga. "Na 2Face I wan watch now." "Ah, na Tony Tetuila I wan watch right now." This people would come from America and they would perform for only thirty minutes and dem don enter their car. They don go back. Then Charley Boy was like ehm, ehm "Eedris, don't worry. I'll take care of the situation." And he collected sixty million Naira cheque. He gave it to his boys. Won lo cash e immediately. Then he moved immediately to Abuja. I no know se he don carry dem 50 Cent go drop for airport (international). Dem 50 Cent don ja back go America. 50 Cent said, "No men, I'm scared of that guy men." I blocked the whole airport. So the following day, press carry am. No be Nigerian Brewery? Won ti fun everybody lowo now. Na wetin we just dey talk "Eedris AbdulKareem slapped 50 Cent gbua." "Eedris Abdul-Kareem did this one, gbhee." "Eedris Abdul-Kareem did that one, gbaa." So common husbands and wives and kids wey dey for house would say, "Why would he do a thing like that self?" "What's wrong with this guy self?" And God is watching you all. God dey watch una? Una dey blacklist this boy, una never know anything. They believed I ain't gonna make it again. Say I be mafia. Say I be biggest mafia in the game. So I said, "ok, I know what I'm gonna do." So I sat back and relax. I went to my account, I had twenty one million naira. I carried all my boys, all my band, my wife, my kids, straight off, European tour. Germany, France and as I dey go those tours, I was dropping a package of blueprint of what happened between 50 Cent and me and companies in Germany (Germans hate Americans like shit!), France (French don't like Americans), they gave me support. And my new album, this na Nigerian album o – The King is back. My international album is called Six Levels. Now after I finished all that, I made sure three, four, five of my boys became citizens. You know, they have their "pali". They are strong. Kilo and co, and you know, beautiful, I've done well. I just came back to Nigeria, you know, released an album for them, my people. To tell them what's up. To tell them where we've been to and that's it. The shock was how did 50 Cent come to Nigeria again. And how come me and 50 Cent were on stage together and how come the multi-nationals were not aware about that and all of a sudden they were just in

their houses with their wives and families and they just saw me and 50 Cent, is the biggest shock now! So tell me who be mafia?

On the album, you did a collabo with Rugged man whom you were reported to have issue with.

Well, for Rugged man, what I discovered is that ehm, when I was coming up with my songs and I was doing my thing, I found out that people can not stop talking about me, I think ehm, Rugged man is my brother and am happy that he made it through me. If he had not talked about me, he wouldn't have made anything so because he talked about Eedris, today he's a star which means Eedris is a great guy so he should be very thankful to me and apart from that ehm, he's in my new album, he's my friend, he's my brother so it's all about Nigeria. That's what it is.

And about Lakareem Entertainments?

You know, I have Lakareem entertainment; we have affiliation in Germany, in Spain, in Holland and in Italy. You know what I mean, and we have backups from French Government in Nigeria and ehm, we have three new artistes, one is "One Kilo." He is a dwarf, the other one is "Kool Kid," that is Rashida's brother and we have another one called Lady Jamall from Kano state and we will be releasing their album in the market in the next three month. We are taking this industry to the next level, my brother how would you feel if we have approximately 150 million population in a country like ours and with 50 million purchasing power and ehm the multinationals are making so much money, consumers' profit after tax and the consumers' benefits it is so crazy that you cannot even find anything and you look at the situation whereby in the industry, everybody is listening to music. Take the music out of the radio and TV, what will happen to the people for one week? Now, if that is the fact so from the head of those who actually made the industry, I don't want to call names, I am a changed man, you know, *I for don call plenty names* you know, from the head of those people who actually made this industry, how come they have not done everything possible for the government to regulate the industry? It is because of their selfish interest, do you understand me? And the business is so big, it is international. Now I look at some of them still recording their songs as professional as they are, then still take their jobs to marketer, *Alaba boys*. Is that not embarrassing? All we need in this industry is very simple; we need a tax force like NAFDAC that will regulate our industry. NAFDAC was test run and it was successful. So what we needed is to take advice from NAFDAC and NAFDAC will *chill* and say, "ok, let's go to the presidency since you have given me, you know, a blueprint report of how much money Nigeria musicians are making on one album. For God's sake, one pirate makes 250 million naira, *just dey go, he go build himself house, do everything, chill, maintain*, nobody is saying anything about it. Most of these multinationals like banking industry are regulated? How come the music industry is not regulated? It can never be regulated because those people have messed it up. My right is what I have been fighting for; that you have to respect these Nigerian artistes. For God's sake, who are the people drinking this beer, who are the people eating this biscuit, who are the people making this phone calls? They are not Americans, they are Nigerians. Then you will take 1.6 million dollars to an American artiste to come here and feature sex, drugs and how many gunshots in his body and the Nigerian artiste who would promote that song for the next one hour on stage, you pay him three hundred thousand. So I created standard for myself. I don't want that! If you don't give me what you are giving 50 Cent, what you are giving Ja Rule, then take your shit! Is there anything bad about that? Am I a bad person? I create standard for myself, and that is what I want.

This is the point I made to 50 Cent. To me, the American industry, their elders have regulated the industry for them. In my own aspect, our own elders, people *wey dey there before us, no regulate the industry for us*, and I am here to regulate the industry. That is simple, and I know what to do but don't want to talk about it.

Still on your new album, you have a track titled "Promise Land". What does "Promise Land" connote?

Promise land is Kastina state. Promise land is where Yar' Adua came out from. There is a big documentary on that. There is a big concert on that and there is a lot that we are putting together for the promise land project, in which the French government is involved. So, I said listen to my song, I talk about Yar' Adua.

Yar'Adua yayi aiki. If you listen to the lyrics very well, sit back relax. He has already heard the song. So I used this song to celebrate and award Yar'Adua for a very good job. Whether you like it or not, he has empowered the rule of law in this country. He said that if you guys find out that I did not win this election, take me back to Katsina state, it is enough for me. If you take Yar'Adua off, whom do you want to bring in there? Tell me.

Why this noise about president Yar' Adua?

Yar'Adua is a lecturer. Yar'Adua is a chemistry teacher and if you look at all teachers, they are disciplined, no matter how it is, they are very disciplined and if you go and check Yar'Adua profile, you will find out that that man actually left approximately nine point something billion naira in Kastina state account. The man did not borrow any money from World Bank. The man did not do anything stupid, why? He just wanted to prove a point and to God be the glory, Obasanjo elected him, believing that he will play game with him but he is not that kind of person. Yar'Adua is a man of principle, look at Yar'Adua, Yar'Adua doesn't go to Nikon Noga, Yar'Adua doesn't go to event, Yar'Adua is with his *meiguard*, and his *meiguard* is with his radio, they are listening to BBC, Yar'Adua is a simple man, I now found out that okay, I think this is an opportunity now to let people understand that the power of music is so big. I am going to tell people about who Yar'Adua is, I am going to promote Yar'Adua, I am not sing praising him but I am giving him an award and this is what am *gonna* do, and am changing the music industry and that's what I did in my album.

About your late wife...

(Cuts in) No, she wasn't my late wife, my late girl friend actually. She was the person that actually let me get to where I am today because when I was in school back in the Federal College of Education, she came to my place everyday. She was the first girl I had that would come to me and said what would you like to do, what would you want, what would you want God to do for you? I would tell her that I wanted to get out of this country. I wanted to go to USA. I believe if I got to Europe I would be able to make things happen and she would say to me that don't you believe you will go. I would say, "Yes I believe. I would go someday." And all of a sudden after a year and half she just walked up to me, it was my birthday and said, "eh, happy birthday baby" and she gave me a present. I was like "what's good about the birthday". So I took the present and I just dropped it somewhere inside. Then a week later she called me and said, "have you opened your present?" And I said no. She said she knew I was not going to open it, that she's coming right away. She got into the house. She opened the present and gave me a passport, (with) visa, ticket and BTA worth \$350 to travel to Spain! Can you imagine! At the age of eighteen. So what came to my mind was "but where did you get the money from? How would you do a thing like this, did you sleep with anybody?" You know, I was confused. But all she said to me was, "you trust me, you know you love me, I believe there is so much about you which you don't really know about yourself and I know you are going to make it when you travel. Just forget about anything you want to ask me right now. You have only three days before this visa expires, you have to go." What! Damn it. I went back home. I told my mum. My mum was so surprised she was like what! She couldn't believe it. She came to the house. I was like "I was leaving men". I went to Animu Kano Airport. It was still like a joke. I am talking 1994, you know. When I got to the airport, check all my ticket and I was in the plane. I was aboard, *men*. Then, like six hours later I was in Spain. I was like "What! This is my dream". It was cold and I was wearing a short and a T-shirt and I said, "*goddamn*, what am I going to do, what is going to happen?" And first thing I said was, "today is Friday, thank God it's Friday. I need to go to a night club, no matter how it is I need to go to a night club". So I told the taxi man that, "can you take me to a night club?" He said, "night club?" I said, "yeah, night club, dance." He said, "Oh disco?" I said, yes. He took me to a disco club. There is a street in Madrid. This place is strictly nightclub. So I was trying to look for where I can just perform, meet with the DJ. I believe that if I can do that I will get a place to sleep. First thing, survival you know. So when I got to the club, I met with a DJ and I was like "What's up man, my name is Eedris Abdulkareem. I'm from K-town city. Can you give me an opportunity to perform? You know. He said, "You are from K- town." I said, "Kano city". He said "where is Kano?" I said from

Nigeria. He said, “I ‘m sorry man, we can’t give you opportunity to perform. If you want to perform, you have to come next week and book against the week, I just got into the town, I told him, “I don’t know anybody, you are a DJ, I’m an MC. I believe you can help me. Listen to my songs.” And he listened to my song. Anywhere I want to go to, basically what I do is make a research about that place and make a song. I wrote a song called “*Macusplace*” in Arab meaning “no problem”. So, he listened to the song and he said “this is good, I like this. Please give me five minutes.” In five minute, I picked up the MIC, there was so much crowd in the house and everybody was drunk, alcohol! I was like *ope o*. I picked the microphone, performed like *crazy*. In the next fifteen, twenty minutes, I was still performing and I looked at the DJ and said yeah, thanks for the opportunity and the DJ was “like go on man”. I performed for like thirty minutes and I went to handover MIC to DJ and he said, “talk to the crew man, I will not like you to go. You like drink something?” And he brought champagne and he said, “Will you like to take this?” And I said, “ No, thanks” He said “cool, just relax”. After fifteen minutes, he walked down to me and said someone would like to see me. I went in, it was the manager of the club that wanted me to meet some VIP and we went to the VIP and met a guy who said, “Hey guy, how are you doing?” And I said I was fine. He said, “here is my card, try to see me” and I said “I don’t know anywhere, I just came into this state today.” And he said, “Whao, what’s going to happen to you at the moment. I’m a solid BMG VIP person.” I was like “God, God, what is this?” This is nothing like *Remedies* and it was like “why don’t you join us and have a drink and I said, “No, let me be with the DJ.” They *hooked* me up with a girl; she was like Mariama Benji Benzano. I have to go to her place to stay, beautiful studio. Then, every weekend this girl would give me hundred dollars without working. Without doing anything she would give me 100 dollars. I wanted to call *Naija* to call my girl but I said, let me relax. After two, three months, I made nothing less than three thousand dollars because there was food, nothing to spend on. I didn’t know what the guy wanted to do with me. Then one day he called, “how are you doing, I’m sorry you haven’t seen me. I’ve been very, very busy checking things out. Finally I have spoken with the CEO of Sonny-BMG in Europe. We are ready to take you back to Nigeria where you come from. We’ll do a documentary about you, then bring you back to Europe so that you can release your album in Europe.” I said yeah. I was so happy and then, I was “*omo* man I have to take two hundred dollars from this money let me just go out and enjoy myself,” you know because there is so much people who gain in Europe everything just happen in a day. People have been in Europe for fifteen years, “oh my God.”

As soon I got to the place where we play basketball, one Arab guy just called me (You know, I had just started to understand Arab language.) The guy just called me, “hey Eedris, this guy is a Nigerian and he does not have a place to stay.” Then, I asked him, “*you be Nigerian?*” He said yes, “which part of Nigeria?” He said from Anambra. I said “*Onyingbo*” He said yeah, my brother. I said “come, I get a place where you can stay”. You know, that was the biggest mistake of my life. What I should have done was that... (That’s not my house, for God’s sake.) I didn’t know police were trailing this guy so as soon as we got into the apartment, police just burst into the place, I was handcuffed immediately, he was handcuffed too, they popped a liquid stuff into my mouth and at the same time in his mouth, after like two minutes, I was feeling uncomfortable and I threw up all the food I ate, he threw up too, I found out they were trying to wear hand gloves, trying to find something from the food, I didn’t know what’s that all about, and they said you drug Nigerians, I was like *drug ke* what the hell are you talking about I just brought this guy in, I don’t know him before. Then we were taken to the police station, at the police station, I called Sonny BMG to let him know what was going on, and he was like you? No, no, no, we don’t deal with that. There is nothing we can do about that. So, I was repatriated.

The funniest thing about the game was that as soon as I got back to Kano state, you know one has to come and face another problem here in Nigeria, already the girl was waiting for me, I didn’t know how she got to know that, *that thing still dey baffle me till today*. I believe that girl was an angel you know, she came to the airport, I was like everything is fine, how did you know I was coming back, she said forget it. When we got into the car, she just moved and we got to the house, we went straight to a hotel and she said “chill, chill,

Michael Jackson will be waiting for a competitor.” I said, “I don’t sing the same kind of music with Michael,” she said, “you don’t know the kind of person you are, they might line you up with him.” A week later she died. And everything was like messed up. I didn’t know what I was going to do. Every time I slept, she’s always in my dream. I even made fun with her in my dream, my life couldn’t be complete without this girl. I said to myself “no.” She had shown me how to be a man, I got to move on and do this myself. Straight I left for Kastina, Kastina to Sokoto to Niger, Niger to Acapel. I wanted to go back to Europe by road. Acapel to Soruku, to Bengali. I spent closely to forty three days in Libya, *na 911*, nine eleven with big jerry can you know we carry the jerry can round the vehicle, *you have garri, kulinkuli and water* you understand so we got to somewhere then everybody felt you are like *pafuka* as the driver said we have missed the road and I said what will happen, the guy was like “we better get the road or we all die here.”

See what the guy was trying to do to find the road. That was when I learnt that...the guy brought out his rosary and went ahead like 500 meters, then we were reading Psalm together and he was reading the Quran from the beginning of Quran to the end. People were praying. That was when I knew that *boy this na survival of fittest, some people don jass themselves up* different thing I don’t know anything. I was like what the hell is this, then after the guy *don read the Quran finished, he go carry the sand, throw am go up and after*, the sand still went down straight, then after like 5 to 8hours then we now saw, what was this thing called, a typhoon, that’s when I saw sand rolling in the air, it just rolled like this, then the guy was like this is this the road. *I say whao*, what the hell is this? On our way, we saw skeleton of different people on the road with Nigerian passport, Ghana spread by the side of the road, I now said why? *Iru life wo leleyi I come talk to myself I say my mama no kill person, she no do bad to any person, nothing, so I go survive.*

All of a sudden the guy was like in another thirteen hours we will be in Bengali. At Bengali, everything, *small food wey we have don finish, everybody dey struggle for survival.* Then I went up to one person, *the guy dey make tea, if you see the water wey the guy dey take make tea, e brown pass this floor*, so I don’t have choice, I have to drink, I was like my brother please give me some tea, he said *I dey hear. If na French you want talk, talk am make I hear, I dey hear anything you want talk, I say my brother abeg I don dey for dis for road for the past forty five days, I no get anything to eat, just give me small tea and bread. Even the bread, flies, dust full am.* You know what the guy told me? *He say ha omo, you dey hear Yoruba?* I said yes, he said “*omo lucky for the winners, e ku iroju for the lossers nibi to wa yi o*” *Lucky for the winner, e ku iroju for the lossers? Ha! I don dey here for the past four years, na only small, small thing wey I dey try to put together to make me live where I dey, dis place wey you dey na final for me, you don dey here, we are together, you are welcome I no fit do anything. Ha! I come began dey waka all around the camp, I come dey listen in the midnight.* Everybody put on their candles. Then you look into a tarpaulin, you see like seven people. Then there was a woman reading future with card, you know I was going through the camp that night, you see naked people doing different kinds of things and I said, whao which life is this? Next morning some people were coming in from Libya and all they have to do is to take their base to Tukuru before going back. And all of a sudden, I just saw my table tennis coach (because I represented Nigeria in all African games 1985. I represented Nigeria alongside champions like Yinka Majekodunmi, Funke Oshinaike, Atanda Musa, Yomi Bankole and so on.) I just saw coach Akin. I was like *na lai (never).* Coach Akin *leleyi ke.* I called, “coach Akin, coach Akin.” He just turned and said, “come, Eedris, *Eedris ni yi now!*” *Moni e.*” *"Talo gbe e wa si route yi? What are you doing here?" Moni, "coach America le wa. Ki le nse nibi bayi."* He said, “*omo ni bibayi ni mo wa o. Tripoli ni mo wa o ti mo ti wa n pa itu, mo n pada lo Naija ni o. ma so fun anybody. Talo gbe e wa si route yi? Who bring you to this route?*” I said “coach, *emi naa ni lati survive.*” “*Iwo omo kekere yi, survive? Come here, come here.*” *He just carry me go where him bigs boys dey, na VIP won ti se ounje, rakunmi la nje o, camel, baba camel, cook am well with em flour, won ma wa ro flour yen bi semo yen won npe ni banku.* “You know, you have to go back to Nigeria, this is not your route at all. *Moni, "eh what the hell is this?"* Then he said to me, “take this two thousand dollars, you have to go back to Nigeria immediately.” *I said, " egbon Nigeria? Mo ti de Libya tan."* He said “no,

this people are wicked you cannot, you cannot, this is illegal, traveling now.” I say, “*okay mo ti gbo , mo gba two thousand dollars, bayi mo head off*, straight to Benghazi. I wanted to see my dream. *Bi a se de Benghazi bayi*, it wasn’t up to six hours, then the Arab were like “batia, barura” “entre Nigeria vies, entre Ghana vies, if you have Nigerian passport stay this side, Ghana Passport this side, *na in dem look my passport then say this way na in dem put me inside the car, put me inside moto straight with my small bag straight to Zansul*. Zansul cell, go and ask or go to the Internet, Zansul cell is like this [Jumps off his seat to describe the height of the cell against the wall with his hand over his head]

Libya! Gadaffi, they are bad people then [the interviewer wants to cut in] I never finished o. Then I was there first day, second day, third day, the fourth day, the fifth day, I was dying *I don give up, I say men, if I die here make I die here but I know say it’s all about music and it’s about this girl, you know omo men forget it*. In the midnight I just hear somebody speaking Yoruba, *for inside Zansul!* “Taju, Taju, ah! Taju? Taju ti won den npe o dahun. Moni “*ha Taju ni mo ngbo yi ke, Taju? ta lon je Taju ni be yen?*” *Bi mo se pariwo niyen, “omo mio mo eni tio’n je Taju o, wo Eedris ni oruko temi nje men, abeg my brother help me, I won die for here.” The guy was like “wetin you do?” I say, “I no do anything.” He say, “you carry cocaine?” I say, “I no carry anything.” “Wetin you dey do, where you dey go?” I say, “I be musician.” He say, “you get any proof?” I say, “the bag wey dem collect I get one CD there, I sang one Arab song called “mofishmefila”. He say, “where the bag dey?” I say, “he dey with those people.” The guy na informant to Libyan police. So they went to check my bag, I no see dem, they just... after like thirty minutes, I don even believe say the guy don go, thirty minutes later, won kan wa pelu awon police yen, “You? Music? “Mafishmefila?” Alahu akbar “Al-amdulia” Na im dem just open the cell. Mo fi ori gbale ni gboa!* From there, we just moved straight to his house. *When I see food, I wan rush the food the guy say, “hey, no, no, no.” The guy say I go die, the guy com warm water for me with lime, I com take that on for like three days, then I come eat. The guy na Christian, he com pray, he com tell me say you are a great man o but God say make him tell me say this no be my way, say make I go back to Nigeria I go become the biggest star, I go travel all over the world. I was like ehen, he remove two thousand dollar and gave me. He said, “I will take you to the Ecomong, you will fly to Niger from Niger make you dey go.” I collected the cash, I carried my bag then he took me straight, when we reach where we go fly, na him I comot for line, na him I go enter motor dey head up to Tripoli, I no hear word, na for raod na him I see when the Libyan police shoot like three, four Nigerians. Nobody tell me I com come back, com meet the guy. The guy com tell me say, “I say this road na mad road,” say I no fit travel this road, say I be talented guy, say him don watch me, him don hear all my music, say him don see everything he say e good say I get this kind of experience, he say make I go back to Nigeria.*

Then from Kano, I now moved to Lagos to form Remedy. So I was in Yabatech watching Eddy performing. I was like hey, *O boy com here* I want to do a solo career but let’s do a group thing and let’s move on. Then we went to AIT, looking for Kenny Ogungbe and D1. I was like if I just see anyone of them *I no say men, story don end*, you know. So the first person I saw was Zolaso to start with, he now took me to the library so D1 just come in and I was like, “*eeh! D1, yo! Finally I don meet you, yo!*” Then the guy just looked at me like this, then he asked Zolaso and said, “*who the hell is this? Why do you just bring people into the studio like that, take this guy out of this place?*” Men, I felt discouraged, I was like what am I going to do. I just went, then Steve Kadiri came back to me and said, “*how far? Have you seen Kenny?*” I said, “*no, just D1. O boy, the guy just asked us to get out men.*” He said, “*eh come.*” The guy just took us to Kenny. “*I will never forget Kenny in my life.*” You know when I got to Kenny. Kenny was like, “*where is the song?*” He played the song and was like wao! This is interesting what is the name of this group? Remedy. No this is going on air right now! And that was it.

You did not tell us the name of the lady?

Rashidat, Rashidat Marshall, Oh! Sweet memory, her brothers, three of her brothers are with me. One is here with me, two in Europe now. They live with me, I take them everywhere. They are talented. Their album will be out soon. *Kool Kid* is one of them, he is right here. She was my inspiration.

I can see wedding ring in your hand, how are you coping with your new wife?

As a Muslim basically, ehm, everything that I do I believe is what Islam ask me to do and that is what I have to do. I wouldn't have been where I am today if am not married because I wouldn't have learnt couple of things. Islam says get marry and I will add values to your life and favour you. You know my wife is the best thing that has ever happened to me, with my kids, you know what I mean, and then I get to understand that I have more responsibilities just not my wife and my kids only are my responsibilities, everybody that works with me and at the same time the Nigerian youths, I mean if approximately fifteen million Nigerian youth will nominate me to represent them at the Olympic torch relay and make me an Olympic torch bearer, you know what that stand for? Olympic is talking about unity and togetherness. You know what I mean? And peace, and if I am the only young man among Prof. Pat Utomi, Dora Akunyili, Segun Odegbami, Larry Izamuje, we were all together in Egypt by that time. And they asked me, "how did you get here? How did they nominate you?" I said my song "Mr. Lecturer", it talks about sexual harassment. I am with you guys. So, I am an icon and madam was like anything you want in Nigeria, tell me I will do it for you, and Pat Utomi was like anything you want, just tell me I will do it, I love you and since then, I roll with the big boys and I try to sit back, relax and do what is right. I'm an icon. I have responsibilities. A lot of people are looking up to me, but that doesn't mean that when I suppose to fight for my right, I won't fight for my right.

What is the name of your wife?

Sekinat

She's from where?

She's from Africa

Which part of Africa?

You know that is one of the problems we have in this country, if you go to America and said eh where are you from he will say I'm from the US, that is the problem we have in this country, an Igbo man no go give another man job because E be Igbo man, Yoruba man go talk say this, this, this, Hausa.... so she's from African, if you ask me where I am from, I will tell you I'm from African (smiled)

How many kids do you have?

Al Amdulillah Robino Al-Ameen, I have two, God has been very wonderful to me

Their names

Ramatullahi and Nimotallahi, so their Yoruba names are Titomi and Tolani.

But as a Muslim, you can have more than one wife. Why are you sticking with one?

I try not to make mistake, I hate to disobey Allah even when I drink and smoke I feel like *omo men* but my heart still go for Allah so I don't want to make a mistake while I bring children into this world and they grow up without being responsible so let me marry a Muslim. The same religion will guide us to love my own principle. So the religion will guide us through then we will be able to make the best out of ourselves.

A rumor has it that your dad is from Osun and your mother from Ogun but you claim north.

My dad is from Africa. My mum is from Africa. *Abi? I no be oyinbo. Abi?*

Why did you choose Kano?

I told you I'm from Kano? *You wan make I lie for you? Una no dey take truth.* So let's start saying that we are Africans. Let's stop saying I'm from Ogun. I'm from ... That is the problem we have. And that's why we have problems in our polity. That's letting Africa down. It's because of where are you from, where are you from? We are from Africa. I swear this country will be "*hum nwah*" (be great). I swear. We are from Africa.

Who is your favourite artiste?

Eedris Abdul-Kareem

Apart from Eedris

Fela Anikulapo Kuti. That's all.

What do you have to say about piracy?

What can I say? Nothing. The pirates would keep making more money if we don't regulate the industry.

What do you have for your fans out there?

Thank you for believing in me. Thank you for the love. Thank you for the time that you've waited for me. You know, some people even said that *he no get anything to say again. Say nothing, e don finish. Kennis Music don finish am. Nigerian Breweries don finish am. Obasanjo don finish am. E no go fit make am again. Kpa kpa di kpo kpo, gba. Rara ko le ye won oo. Na the song be that. Men, I'm back. The king is back. Come take wetin belong to me.* In fact, *that space still dey there. Nobody fit take am.* For the past three years. Imagine, okay now. The game is just beginning *o.* Tell everybody. *The game just dey start.* We are bringing in professionals to come and change this industry for real!

We are into couple of projects. You know. I mean we just get an endorsement. You know what I mean, from the police. We are trying to educate people through music. As you know, music is the only tool to get across to people. We want to educate people about what the police is all about. What police stands for and that is, "*Police na your friend*" is the project. Two, "Promise Land" is a project on its own. Three, if you listen to the album, there is a track, "Peace in Niger Delta", in which me, Asari Dokubo and Festus Kiyamo are partners. Four, there is "Do You Really Care" which is talking about people living with HIV/AIDS and you really have to show them love. Five, "Millennium Development Goal", *nobody know wetin dem dey call like that "MDG"*. We need to educate our people in the songs. They are all projects, not just songs. It is not okay, *omo mo ti korin, dem call me for shows, kin gbo. I get show for Eedris for so so place, your money na five hundred thousand. No, I no dey that level. Na projects dey on ground, Projects.* Then we move around, add values to the lives of the people. Like we are giving scholarship to police children. We have given about twenty-five scholarships from Lakareem Entertainment and we are starting from next week. (Interview is conducted on Saturday 24 May 2008.) Don't worry we will invite you.