

## The Abacha Saga

### Irony & Hypocrisy

We are largely hypocritical in this entire Abacha bashing scenario. Don't get me wrong; I agree with investigating and carrying out appropriate punitive measures against the family of late General Sani Abachi. But one has to wonder why, in the midst of so many bigwig thieves, we are passionate about tackling this one.

Abacha has never been the problem with Nigeria; he is a symptom of a larger problem. Many would argue that he stole the most of any dictator. So what? A thief is a thief and his crime is that he has no respect for what doesn't belong to him. If one steals more, it is not because he is worse than the other but that his powers and influence give him access to more. Before Abacha, there were many VIP thieves in Nigeria and to this day they continue to strut the land like demigods. If you doubt it, review our long list of chieftaincy title holders and national award honorees.

Many of us self-righteous accusers of Abacha are thieves ourselves; we are just not stealing as much as he did because we don't have access to as much. This includes landlords, entrepreneurs, civil servants, policemen, roadside mechanics, academics, pastors, customs officers...the list goes on. For those stealing 100 naira, would they not take a million if they had the means and authority? We can't expect to resolve the larceny of the likes of Abacha when many of us are fellow thieves.

Then there are those whose complaints are merely circumstantial. We don't complain when the celebrity rogue is a friend, loved one or family member. We wouldn't complain if we gained from the depravity of the Abacha regime (as so many did). We only complain when we are not beneficiaries!

We also can't expect to resolve the problem when we fume over certain thieves but revere others. There are several complaints about the outrageous salaries and related financial perks enjoyed by our modern-day lawmakers. But those complaints are often done by cowards hiding behind a fake identity on some blog or social media. In their presence, we grovel before the same lawmakers and shower them with real and imaginary titles.

One also has to wonder about the friends, colleagues and other affiliates of the much hated Abacha. Actually, one doesn't have to wonder (wander?) too far. They are all

around us, living large and enjoying the fruits of grand theft and power abuse. Is one of them not Senate President? Attend some high-table event and you'll be likely to spot a few more being inundated with accolades.

Yes, it is necessary to do something drastic about the alleged millions (billions?) that the Abacha family stole from Nigeria. But we should go after every other crooked big shot, the same way we are quick to react with venom against common street thieves. No form of kleptomania should be tolerated, whether the culprits are past military dictators or modern civilian politicians, dress style notwithstanding. We cannot be selective and we cannot talk from both sides of our mouths, condemning some and accepting (even idolizing) others. We also need to honestly examine ourselves, for if we are like them then we are not in any moral position to accuse them, punish them or demand that they change. We can't change anyone or a system if we haven't first changed ourselves. Such hypocrisy is not viable!

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