

# The State and unresolved murders

By Edwin Madunagu

that the man he succeeded, Pope John Paul I (Albino Luciani), had one of the shortest reigns (just 33 days). In the course of a chat I had with a group of acquaintances on the main world event of the time - the death of Pope John Paul II - I had cause to tell them that Pope John Paul I, the "Smiling Pope", was murdered, not by outsiders (like the man who attempted to murder John Paul II in 1982 in the Vatican) but by insiders (like Judas Iscariot in the story of Jesus Christ). The discussion ended there, but I cannot now say whether the ad-hoc group dissolved abruptly on account of what I said, or because their free time was up.

*Third encounter:* A visitor to our library, a female, offered me one of the apples she had just bought from a hawk. As I stretched my hand to take it from her, she assured me that it was not an "Abacha apple". You will recall that when General Sani Abacha, Nigeria's military ruler, died in office on June 8, 1998, rival accounts of the circumstances surrounding what appeared to many people as sudden death were leaked to the press. One of these accounts was that late in the night of June 7, 1998, General Abacha was sighted in his guestroom, in Abuja, being fed on apples by two women who looked like foreigners. When he was sighted again, in the early hours of June 8, the women were gone, and the general was lying in the bed, foaming. The military ruler was dead!

Three murders. Each, a Head of State; each widely and strongly suspected to have been murdered by powerful groups within the state apparatus; each murder officially unresolved, even when abundant material appeared to have been accumulated to resolve it. I had long shared the conviction of many people that each of these three deaths was a murder, and that each of them illustrates the complexity and deadliness of this institution called the state. Just

as the state literally wages battles against the enemies of the ruling classes and fiercely protects their interests in several other ways, it also wages battles against itself: factions against factions. At certain moments, these internal battles take the forms of civil wars, assassination, or coup d'etat. I am looking at the three listed murders again, starting with the murder of General Sani Abacha. I proceed by means of questions.

What factions of the Nigerian ruling blocs and the state could have had interest in the death of General Sani Abacha? What could these interests possibly be? And how were the conspirators able to get at the general? Now, although many social forces were against Sani Abacha, not many would be desperate enough to have considered assassination, and of the few which could have thought of assassination, only a small fraction could have had the will to make the attempt. But to answer the questions directly: Sani Abacha's intransigence on the question of succession was progressively weakening the capacity of the ruling blocs to reach agreements with opposition forces and the "international community".

Instead of giving out something in order to retain something that was still substantial, Abacha was risking almost everything by manoeuvring to retain everything. Much was at stake, and the powerful people who stood to lose most were also the closest to him physically. They also had the easiest access to him. Beyond that, they were the ones to manage the situation to be created by the Head of State's death. These forces decided that General Abacha must die. And he died.

The mention of the murder of Pope John

Paul I led me back to the 1985 - book titled *In God's Name: An investigation into the murder of Pope John Paul I*. The book was written by a well-known investigative journalist, David Yallop, and published in London. Before that book, Yallop had established a reputation as a committed investigator into high-profile acts of injustice, or miscarriage of justice, or cover-up. When the reign of Pope John Paul I, Albino Luciani, who was elected on August 26, 1978, ended suddenly during the late evening of September 28, or the early morning of September 29, 1978, some people in the Vatican requested Yallop to investigate the murder of the "Smiling Pope", especially the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the Pope's body. The time of death and the cause of death had both been officially declared "unknown".

After a four-year research, Yallop came to the conclusion that the Pope was murdered by some powerful forces in the Church who were seriously disturbed by the Pope's liberal and substantively reformist stand on many issues including freemasonry, corruption and fraud, (especially in the Vatican Bank), and birth control. The Pope was expected to pronounce some decisions on some of these issues and make some major changes in the Roman Curia (the bureaucracy) on September 29. The groups which were threatened by the Pope's impeding actions were also the closest to him physically. They decided he must not see the morning of September 29, 1978. And so it was.

The Vatican dismissed Yallop's book as "infamous rubbish", which took "fantastic speculation to new levels of absurdity". Yallop then asked to be proved wrong on just two simple questions of fact: the identity of the person who found the Pope's body and the papers the Pope was holding

in his hands when his corpse was found. I am not aware of any response. In the view of *The Economist*, which intervened in the debate, Yallop's book had two strengths: "It brings up to date and tells well the story of how the Vatican has conducted its financial affairs. The portrayal of the hitherto little known John Paul I is also excellently done...an engrossing and disturbing book. It reflects no credit on the Vatican that its spokesmen affect to view the charges with contempt and ignore the questions raised".

Of all the sources of information - literally in their hundreds of thousands - on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, United States of America, on November 22, 1963, I pick out the book *High Treason: Assassination of President Kennedy and the new evidence of conspiracy*, published in 1989, authored by Robert J. Groden and Harrison Edward Livingstone. The heavily-documented, densely annotated 562-page book said: "The evidence now surfacing indicates that the elected President of the United States was overthrown by a powerful cabal within the government, backed by radical right-wing financial and industrial interest".

Why was the President killed? He was killed because those who killed him thought he was becoming a "dangerous liberal". This reactionary evaluation was based on the following pieces of "evidence": First, he had ordered the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to terminate its attempt to assassinate Fidel Castro and/or overthrow his government; when his orders were ignored, the President ordered the physical dismantling of the training camp and arrest of the operators. Secondly, the President had begun the complete withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. The wealth, power and careers of several people in the "powerful cabal" grew from the Vietnam war, and were sustained by it. When this group became apprehensive of the possible reelection of the President, it decided that the man must die. And he died.

THE reflection is a product of three separate encounters I had on the same day. It was a few days after the funeral of Pope John Paul II.

*First encounter:* President Fidel Castro of Cuba was recently reported by the international media to have protested to the rulers of America over the presence of a well-known anti-Castro terrorist in America. A veteran and well-known international assassin, the man almost as old as Castro himself - was reported to be moving about in America virtually a free man and, perhaps, even an official guest of some state institutions. Castro alleged, or rather repeated his allegation, that the man in question had a high-powered commission to assassinate him, and had in fact unsuccessfully attempted, on several occasions in the past, to carry out the contract. It was this news item that I discussed one late afternoon with a neighbour.

My neighbour and I were united in condemning the presence of the veteran assassin in America. In answer to one of his questions, I gave a summary of what I know of the long history of assassination attempts on Fidel Castro since 1959. There had, perhaps, been as many attempts to assassinate him, as there had been to overthrow his government. Most of these attempts, and the plots behind him, emanated from America and were inspired, sponsored and coordinated by powerful groups in America. He was still chewing this information when I added that one of the murderous groups in pursuit of Castro was also responsible for the assassination of the famous American President, John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. I concluded, to drive home the point, that the two projects - to liquidate Castro and eliminate Kennedy - were linked. My neighbour and I agreed to adjourn the discussion.

*Second encounter:* Pope John Paul II had one of the longest tenures as Roman Catholic Pontiff (1978-2005). The irony is