

# How did Obasanjo *jazz* us like this?

**F**or the life of me, I will never understand how former President Olusegun Obasanjo does it. When you think he is done, he has just begun. I have watched in utter amusement how he has, yet again, wangled his way into the front page of newspapers on a daily basis. I don't know of any other former head of state elsewhere who has turned himself into the subject and object of national attention long after he has left power. Obasanjo is always there, always scheming, always screaming. It is his luck, I must say, but, as a mere mortal, I often wonder why some guys have all the luck.

Obasanjo, amazingly, has become a god or a saint to many Nigerians. Many politicians, commentators, journalists, activists and youths who used to criticise him are now celebrating him as our moral compass. The people he has brutalised before — such as Asiwaju Bola Tinubu and Rt. Hon. Rotimi Amaechi — go to Abeokuta to genuflect to him. Even Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, of all people, goes to Obasanjo's house to pay homage. And President Goodluck Jonathan goes to Abeokuta to kowtow to him, with two respected pastors in tow.

How does Obasanjo do it? Can anyone help me out? He has a word on every issue. He expresses his opinion so forcefully, so eloquently and so mischievously that you just cannot ignore him. He loves to criticise what he is patently guilty of. He loves to vilify anyone who does not worship at his temple. There is no accusation Obasanjo throws at anyone that he himself is not double guilty of. He has launched ferocious media attacks against most of his successors — President Shehu Shagari, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Jonathan. Only Gen. Sani Abacha pre-empted him by throwing him into jail before he could open his mouth.

Obasanjo complains about corruption and Nigerians hail him. What's his moral high ground? Can someone tell me? Has anybody ever heard about the Halliburton and Siemens scandals? The damning reports are there in the attorney-general's office. Does the name Dr. Julius Makanjuola ring a bell? Under Obasanjo, he was the permanent secretary of the ministry of defence implicated in a N421 million scandal. Mysteriously, the case was abruptly closed with *Nolle Prosequi* (no further prosecution) — the first in Nigeria's history.

Well, Obasanjo went on to set up the anti-graft agency, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), headed by Malam Nuhu Ribadu, which — in fairness — did kick the backsides of many politicians. But EFCC could not tackle Obasanjo's own corruption: from the obscene fundraiser for his private library to his shareholding in Transcorp — a company that was getting juicy stuff from a government superintended by Obasanjo. Have we all forgotten the scandalous waivers granted to all kinds of human beings, officially defrauding our treasury billions of dollars?

Does anybody remember that Obasanjo was in power for eight years and we kept importing fuel, with PDP financiers getting the contracts through local and foreign fronts? Forgotten so easily? Does anybody remember how much we spent on repairing refineries that kept “knocking” for the eight years that Obasanjo was in power? Does anybody still remember Obasanjo saying on national TV that he did not know the price of kerosene and it was “unacceptable” that it was more expensive than petrol? How does Obasanjo get away with hoodwinking Nigerians?

Do we still remember that Obasanjo did not resolve the electricity problem

for eight years? Do we still remember the “\$16 billion spent on power without results” for which Obasanjo arrogantly refused to appear before the House probe panel? Is it that we have forgotten that the damning report was killed? Do we still remember that Obasanjo did not add one coach to the railways throughout his tenure despite spending billions of dollars? Does anybody still remember how many federal highways were in terrible state for the eight years that Obasanjo spent in power? Have we forgotten the Benin-Shagamu road saga? Just like that?

When Obasanjo discusses insecurity, I cringe. From every available evidence, Boko Haram started right under his nose. If he had aborted the foetus, maybe we wouldn't be engaged in fire-fighting today. I have heard many Nigerians say, perhaps innocently, that if Obasanjo had been in power he would have crushed Boko Haram by now. Really? How well did he crush the less complex militancy in the Niger Delta? Was it not under Obasanjo that the militancy started in 2004 and flourished?

To the best of my knowledge, militants were bombing oil installations and kidnapping oil workers with ease under Obasanjo. At a stage, daily crude oil production fell to about 900,000 barrels — from the height of 2.5m. In fact, we were later told that why Obasanjo picked Jonathan as the running mate to Yar'Adua was to appease the Niger Delta. Of course, nobody was appeased. The attacks continued until Yar'Adua offered an amnesty deal. How these facts conveniently escape us is beyond my understanding.

Insecurity? Abacha's regime aside, more Nigerians were assassinated under Obasanjo's watch than at any time in our history. The abridged roll-call: Chief Bola Ige, a serving minister; Chief Marshall Harry, co-ordinator of the Buhari presidential campaign in 2003; Chief AK Dikibo, PDP chieftain and ally of former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar; Chief Uche Ogbonnaya (OGB), an ANPP senatorial candidate in Imo state in 2003; and Mr. Barnabas Igwe and his wife, Amaka, in Onitsha. The assassins were never unmasked. What is insecurity?

How did Obasanjo become our moral compass? How did he become such a highly sought-after role model? Has anybody ever managed to read the affidavit Obasanjo's own son, Gbenga, filed while seeking a divorce from his wife on the ground of incest and adultery? It doesn't matter? Has anybody ever taken time to read the letter Iyabo wrote to her father, giving graphic details of his megalomania and duplicity? It doesn't matter? Has anybody ever done a recap of the blatant rigging of elections under the “saint”? It doesn't matter?

Obasanjo pontificates on impunity and we hail him. What happened to us? Dr. Chris Ngige, as governor of Anambra state, was abducted by Obasanjo's associates. Have we forgotten the illegal impeachment of Alhaji Rashidi Ladoja as governor of Oyo state? What about the impeachment of Chief Joshua Dariye as governor of Plateau by eight out of 24 lawmakers? For three years, Obasanjo unconstitutionally withheld Lagos council allocations because of political differences. It took Yar'Adua only a few days in power to undo the impunity.

They say, ‘Oh, Obasanjo is a patriot. He has the best interest of Nigeria at heart.’ Really? Can Obasanjo look up to heavens and say, solemnly, that he had the best interest of Nigeria at heart when he was picking his successor? Such a character cannot be my own moral compass. With a moral compass like Obasanjo, though, Nigeria is doomed and damned.