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Trends. Abacha's Demise: Thoughts on Death in Life

Editor

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Will the death of dictator and general Sani Abacha lead to significant improvement for the lives of most Nigerians? The Nigerian populace, diplomats, analysts, and informed citizenry throughout the world are in the process of placing their bets. But regardless of where the chips fall, one must be struck with the significance that beliefs about death have for the political life.

Belief that a physical, mental, and spiritual death surely follows life can underlie motives to stay alive regardless of moral cost--avoiding an involvement in preventing or ending or attenuating politically motivated atrocities in life that would risk death. The same belief, however, can underlie motives to risk death through living life on the edge--engaging in political and military conflict in a mercenary spirit because the material life is all there is. Beliefs in impending death through disease have motivated political leaders to the heights of wisdom and multilateral beneficence and the heights of folly and malignant narcissism as the sands of life trickle away. Belief that certain beliefs are worth dying for can make or break national character, a military force's morale, and--consequentially--preserve life. And belief that death during the attempt of killing infidels ensures an eternal life in a blissful heaven impels terrorism in a life that is not heaven.