



THE METROSection

Fury of the vengeful mob

• Death of two friends in a Lagos suburb sparks off wanton destruction



• Njoku

ALIVE, the two friends were inseparable. In death, they travelled together. Their death sparked off one of the fiercest mob actions in recent times in Lagos State.

Ikechukwu Njoku, 25 years old and his friend, Onyeka, on Sunday, January 14, 2007, died in controversial circumstances that has pitched their relations against their alleged killer, Chief Paul Emenike Nzelibe, owners of Emex Group of Companies of No. 82, Ijesha Road, Surulere, Lagos.

But Nzelibe, who is currently in detention at the State Criminal Investigation Department, Panty, Yaba, Lagos, however denied any involvement in the death of both young men. He particularly denied shooting Onyeka during the milieu that led to his death.

Nzelibe claimed that Njoku's death was deliberately used by hoodlums in the area to attack him, loot his property and set his three-storey residential house cum company headquarters at Ijesha Road, and three vehicles ablaze.

The pains of the duo's death linger in the memories of their relations and friends who are demanding for justice.

Njoku was from Mbaire in Imo State. His long stay at Ijesha had endeared him to many people from other ethnic groups and was known to be hardworking and humble.

His father died a few years ago while he was still in secondary school. Being the only child of the mother, Mary, who has since re-married, made the bond of love between son and mother very strong.

Due to insufficient finance, Njoku could not further his education. Rather, he took to menial jobs of off-loading goods from containers for several importers at Ijesha.

He worked regularly for Nzelibe as a casual hand. The company imports vehicle spare-parts and other goods, which are warehoused in the company's headquarters.

Njoku's death along with Onyeka started on Friday, January 13, 2007, after some members of the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) allegedly tortured him.

Mourning Mary narrated that sometimes in December last year, her son's employer, Nzelibe, imported some goods which Njoku and his friends helped to off-load.

"This was not the first time Njoku would off-load containers for Chief Nzelibe. He (Njoku) also worked for all other importers in the area. None of them ever accused my son of stealing.

"But that job in December, a few days after Njoku and his friends had off-loaded the goods and were paid off, Nzelibe accused them of stealing some of the goods. They were consequently arrested and remanded in the cell at Itire Police Station on the orders of Nzelibe."

She continued: "A few days after, Nzelibe travelled to his state and asked his junior brother to handle the matter. But we were able to get them released on bail. When Nzelibe was informed of their release, he came back to Lagos. Instead of using the police to re-arrest them, he decided to use members of the OPC in the area.

"On Saturday, January 14, about five members of the OPC came for Njoku, invited him to their camp where he was tortured. They wanted him to confess to stealing some of his boss' goods", Mary said.

She narrated further: "Despite the torture, my son denied stealing anything and also informed them that the police had already investigated the matter and set him free.

"Rather than leave him, they continued torturing him, broke his right leg and stuck needles into his genital organ.

"When they discovered that Njoku was about dying, the OPC members abandoned him in their camp and ran away."

The grieving mother continued: "Fortunately, while they were looking for the two friends, information had already reached Onyeka and he went to the OPC camp for clarification. To his surprise, he found Njoku slumped on the ground, bleeding profusely.

"Out of fear, Onyeka rushed home to inform us about my son's condition and we all went there and carried him home. We bought some drugs to treat him.

"At 5.00 a.m. on Sunday, Njoku started vomiting blood and died shortly after.

"Onyeka, who was with him over night, raised alarm and that morning, the youths in the area, including some



• The burnt building



• The burnt warehouse

By Seye Olumide

importers endeared to Njoku, carried his corpse and headed for Nzelibe's house. They wanted, from what they were saying, Nzelibe to literally eat the corpse of Njoku because he (Nzelibe) caused his death using the OPC members.

"Onyeka, who was so infuriated, led the group that carried the body of Njoku. When they got to the house, it was locked. The angry irate youths demanded Nzelibe to come out to take Njoku's remains.

"For over 20 minutes, Nzelibe did not come down. The mob started throwing stones at his building. After a while, when Nzelibe could not bear it any longer, he emerged with a double-barrel gun at the window and shot at Onyeka. Onyeka slumped and died instantly. Nzelibe continued to shoot sporadically at the mob until they all ran away", distraught Mary said.

She continued: "The commotion in the neighbourhood attracted a team of policemen from Itire Police Post who condoned off the building, as the mob re-grouped for a showdown with Nzelibe and his family.

"The intervention of the police and some military personnel saved the situation and Nzelibe was arrested", she recollected.

She then added: "The body of my son and his friend, Onyeka, have since been deposited at the mortuary. I want to plead with Nigerians and the police authorities to ensure that justice is done."

Refuting the allegations, Nzelibe told *The Guardian* at his detention cell in Panty that contrary to Njoku's relation's story, the young man and his cohorts were arrested and tortured by members of the vigilance group who caught them sometimes in December when they came to rob his (Nzelibe's) warehouse.

According to him, "I travelled to my home town in Anambra State on Wednesday, December 26, 2006, for the New Year, which coincided with my uncle, Simon Amaiju's burial.

"On Tuesday, January 2, 2007, I received a phone call from one of my clients, Mr. Arinze Obidike, that thieves were attempting to break into my warehouse, but the night guards on the street and area chased them away. I had to rush back to Lagos.

"On January 9, a woman who claimed to be the mother of Njoku, with the son, came to my house. The woman begged me to forgive Njoku, confessing that the son was one of those who came to steal from my warehouse. She pleaded with me not to take the matter to the police to enable her treat the injury the son sustained while being

beaten by the vigilance group, who foiled their plans. In anger, I ordered them out of my office", he said.

Nzelibe added: "But on Sunday, January 14, when my son went down to wash my car in preparation for church, he noticed that four of my cars had been vandalised by a group of hoodlums who surged into my premises.

"I immediately ordered him to run to Mushin Police Station to report. By the time I came out, I saw some hoodlums carrying a dead body. They carried dangerous weapons. They were demonstrating and shouting that Njoku had died where he was being treated of the injury he sustained when the community night guards chased them away from stealing in my premises. The mob said that I must bear the responsibility.

"I was shocked and before I knew what was happening, they started looting my warehouse and set my building ablaze.

"At this point, I took up my double-barrel gun for which I have a licence and shot severally into the air to deter the rampaging mob from killing me, my family members and my other tenants.

"Fortunately, a team of policemen from Mushin came, but they were overwhelmed by the mob until after a reinforcement. It was after this the police were able to rescue my family and I from the wrath of the mob that had already brought another dead body to join that of Njoku, making them two.

"No sooner the police left with my family and I than the mob started looting my house, carted away all my property and those of my tenants and set my three cars ablaze with a part of the building", he said.

Nzelibe added: "At the end of the destruction, property worth over N171,000,000 had been looted and damaged in my compound.

"When I was smuggled out of the place with my family by the police, we were initially taken to Mushin Police Station for protective custody. But to my amazement, on Monday, January 15, I was transferred to the State Criminal Investigation Department Panty, and kept in the cell on a murder investigation where I am still detained."

The spokesman of the state Police Command, Deputy Superintendent Olubode Ojajuni, confirmed the incident. He said that two people were recorded dead during the fracas on Sunday, adding that investigation was still going on, on the matter. He also confirmed the retrieval of a double-barrel gun from Nzelibe.

The police image-maker pleaded with residents of the area to allow peace reign, promising that justice would be done in the end.

Briefs

Aro hospital bags award

THE Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Aro, Abeokuta was one of the recipients of a National Award for Excellence at the 50th National Council of Health meeting on Thursday, January 11, held at the Sheraton Hotels and Towers, Abuja.

The chairman of the National Council on Health and Minister of Health, Prof. Eytayo Lambo commended the excellent services rendered to the nation by the hospital.

The Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Aro, was nominated as the most deserving in the category of the Federal Orthopaedic Hospitals and the Federal Eye Hospitals.

Reacting, the Provost and Medical Director, Dr. (Mrs.) Taiwo Adamson, said it is a testimony and appreciation to the founding fathers of the institution, such as Prof. Thomas Adeoye Lambo, Prof. Tolani Asuni, and the others who came after them.

She thanked the National Council on Health for the award and the honour.

Lagos spends N1 billion on wastes monthly

ABOUT N1 billion is spent monthly by the Lagos State government to tackle environmental problems, including refuse and flooding.

During a presentation on: "What the Lagos State is doing to improve our environment and avoid further degradation" at the January edition of the monthly breakfast forum of the Nigerian-South African Chamber of Commerce, (NSACC), the state Commissioner for the Environment, Tunji Bello, disclosed that the state at present generates about 300,000 metric tonnes of waste monthly.

Besides the subsisting Private Sector Participation (PSP) programme of the administration, the commissioner revealed that the state was also upgrading its three existing waste disposing sites into properly engineered landfill sites and was also creating an enabling environment for the setting up of "wastes to wealth facilities" by private companies, as part of new measures to address the problem.

"The state had also embarked on the construction of six transfer loading stations for waste sorting and re-use to reduce turn-around time and decongest the designated waste disposal sites," he said.

On flooding, Bello disclosed that the state government was arranging for a \$120 million World Bank loan for drainage management in the state.

He said the state had also started developing drainage channels in blighted areas in Lagos East and West while capacity building training was being organized for environmental managers and operators, particularly at the local council level.

Surveyors hold investiture

THE investiture of the 19th President of the Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors, Mr. Francis Oluwole Adetola and the induction of 2006/2008 Executive Council of the institute holds today at the Civic Centre, opposite 1004 Estate, Victoria Island, Lagos at 5.00p.m. The Minister of Federal Capital Territory Mallam Nasir el-Rufai would deliver the keynote address while Lagos State Deputy Governor, Femi Pedro will present the goodwill message.