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She has suffered in one of the crudest manifestations of sheer gluttony, if not the crudest. She is caught in between two worlds; the mundane world which sings to her only songs of sorrows and a world of rage, retribution which explains her courage while the interview lasted.

More like a moving zombie, she balanced herself on the chair with a questioning look which surrounds her world as though a death sentence had been passed on her; of what use is living when her husband has been killed over six plots of land bought by his sweat? Of what use is living, when suddenly she becomes the father and mother of five children with nothing or no support? Of what use is living, when in the face of obvious innocence, the law has decided to wave its wand against her? Of what use...when the omo oniles have decided to take life out of her living?

Sheer corruption, mere injustice

In Lagos, the commercial hub of Nigeria, it is common to see or hear of a group of young men gather at construction sites demanding unaccountable levies and fines. Right from the day a potential landowner shows interest in possessing a piece of land, he begins to pay to land grabbers popularly called *Omo Onile* (the children of land owner).

With a larger percentage of the state covered with water, the struggle to annexe the little existing space gets fiercer and bloodier by the day.

Plots of land in modern Lagos could be acquired through two major means: either from the government which are usually formal, secure and very expensive, or from families which are relatively cheaper. However, the disadvantage of buying from families, who usually have an *Omo Onile* structure is that while you pay once to acquire land from government, you continue to pay to hold the *Omo Oniles* off your land even after being issued a receipt.

The payment starts with the *Omo Oloko fee* (children of farm owner fee) after a buyer has been issued a receipt for his land. From there, he goes on to pay the foundation fee, first decking fee, second decking fee, third decking fee, roofing fee, fence fee, transfer fee, receiving of form fee and the payment goes on, on and on.

Should a land owner decide to bring sand, cement and other building materials to his land, he has to pay before it is allowed and in general, the payment depends on the area in question and level of compassion of the selling family; the amount ranges from thousands, millions to hundreds of millions.

Defiance or threat of legal action would not in any way intimidate an *Omo Onile*. They employ every means to making sure that they receive 'their lawful money'

from would-be-buyer of their lands. Intimidations, evictions, attacks are some of the ready instruments they used in driving home their demands.

More often than not, an *Omo Onile* attack leads to deaths, deaths of innocent people. Such was the case of Pastor Chinedu Okoli who died on the 12th of April 2015.

We paid, paid and paid, yet no receipt

When it was still a family of seven, Pastor Chinedu Okoli and Wife Nneka Okoli lived with their children in a rented apartment at No. 109 Glory Estate, Isheri, off Ijegan Ikotun, Lagos.

The family had saved up to purchase 6 plots of land in which husband and wife had planned to situate their church; Christ is The Deliverance Fire Church but the *Omo Onile* would not allow the dream to live.

Struggle with *Omo Onile* didn't all start in Isheri, the family had started the church ministry while in Ago on a plot of land purchased in 2005. The church blossomed and enjoyed good membership until sometime in 2010 when *Omo Onile* came to lay claim of ownership to the land. Stating that they are acting under the authority of a king, the occupants were asked to vacate the land.

After several physical and diabolical assault on the land, the couple sought the help of the police who were able to settle the rife. The land was later sold and the proceeds invested in purchasing six plots of land at N2, 650, 000 (\$5699, at N465 to 1 Dollar rate) from Idowu Asho family in Adejojo Area of Alimosho Local Government of Lagos State.

The drama started right at the point of issuance of receipt. Since the land was purchased to construct buildings for the church, the couple decided to write the receipt in the name of the church.

Upon lawyer's advice that the name be changed since the church was not registered, the couple decided to approach the Idowu Asho family to request for another receipt written in Mr. Okoli's name. They were however dazed to sub-consciousness when the representative of the family requested for N500, 000 (\$1075) in order to issue another receipt.

In a grim voice, fighting back hot tears Mrs. Nneka Okoli recounted the series of events that preceded the murder of her husband.

"Our first agreement was to pay N400,000(\$860) for a plot making N2,400,000 (\$5161) for the six but after we had already paid, they called us and said it is N500,000 (\$1075) for a plot, we pleaded and they allowed us pay N250,000 (\$538) more.

"We instructed them to write the receipt in the name of the church. Some days after we collected the receipt, the lawyer came and ask us if we had registered the church, we said no, so he advised us to use either of our names instead. The lawyer called them to change it for us and they agreed. We returned the receipt with the hope that they will issue another in my husband's name but that was not the case, after one week, they told us that to get a new receipt, we must pay N500, 000 (\$1075).

The couple offered to pay N100, 000 (\$215) but the family declined, insisting on the initial amount. After several attempts to convince them, they decided to let the receipt bear the church's name. After this, the couple were requested to pay N400, 000 (\$860) for the survey, N800, 000 (\$1720) for job card and N500, 000 (\$1075) for the family receipt in which they paid promptly.

However, the couple was dealt another blow when the family in connivance with their 'trusted' lawyer and some 'self-acclaimed' estate



• A plot of the land fully developed to a storey building and fenced

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agents withhold the receipts. 'For three months, my husband kept going to meet them, yet they didn't give us.' She said in a shattered tone.

The struggle continued until early 2015 when Pastor Okoli fell sick, got bed-ridden and was unable to go out. Worried they may lose the land if laxity is entertained, Mrs Okoli kept visiting the agents and the family. The pestering yielded a result, the family receipt was issued but the survey and receipt for job card were still in their custody. Not even a plea visit to the palace of the Oba of Isheri would change their mind.

The heaviest blow was finally dealt on the couple in March 2015. All the while they had been struggling to get documents for the land, they did not visit the location. So, on this fateful day, they decided to go to the location. Alas! Construction work had commenced fully on the plots.

Swindled by Police

When the daunting reality continued to be unbearable, the couple resorted to legal action against the Idowu Asho family and the conniving agents. They contacted a lawyer, John Aroh who decided to render his services free but requested N700, 000 (\$1505) to prosecute

the case; N500, 000 (\$1075) to contact the police and another N200, 000 (\$430) to pay an officer who would fast-track the case.

Even at the offer of N200, 000 (\$430), the lawyer declined to render his services. Thus, the couple headed for the Nigeria Police Force investigation Department, Alagbon, Lagos State.

Mrs Okoli recounted the experience with the police: "When we got to Alagbon, they told us to make a statement, we did and they took information about the land. They told us that they have to write a petition. They informed us that even though we have a lawyer, they have to write the petition their own way so that it would be attended to in Abuja."

The couple were told that the petition will cost N50, 000 (\$108) and that they will also take 'something' for the service rendered for that day. Mr. Okoli gave the police N5, 000 and two weeks after, precisely on the 12th of April 2015, he breathed his last.

The Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Dolapo Badmus, noted that it is not the duty of the police to write petitions on behalf of anybody.

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not the duty of the police to write petition. Tell me the name of the person that signed it? If you (the reporter) are asked by the police to pay for them to write petition, will you?" she questioned.

Several attempts to get further clarification were abortive as calls and messages put through to her were neither answered nor tended to.

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NEWS

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