

Who killed Alex Ogbu?

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The late Alex Ogbu with wife Francisca and daughter

There have been conflicting reports over the killing of a journalist, Alex Ogbu, while covering a protest in Abuja. His family and friends alleged that he was felled by police bullets, but the police said he fell and hit his head against iron. *NICHOLAS KALU reports*

When Mr Alex Ogbu left for work on January 21, 2020, little did he know that he would not see his wife and two-year-old daughter again.

A journalist and one of the founding members of *Regent Africa Times Magazine* and *Regent Africa Online*, Ogbu died under very controversial circumstances during a protest by members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) on said day. It was around the popular Berger Roundabout in Abuja.

There was the usual pandemonium as the police tried to contain the protesters. According to witnesses, gunshots rang out, there was pandemonium, and after the dust had settled, a motionless body was discovered on the ground. It was that of Ogbu, who was on duty to cover the protest.

Ogbu's friends and family members alleged that he was killed by a policeman's bullet. But some policemen at the scene claimed that he fell and hit his head against some hard object during the melee.

According to the FCT Police Command, the police had restored calm around the area after the violent protest. The police claimed that the protesters had gone violent, attacking innocent citizens and police operatives with dangerous weapons.

The statement, signed by the spokesman for the Command, DSP Anjuguri Manza, said: "As a result of the unfortunate incident, one person who sustained an injury and was rushed for medical attention has been certified dead by doctors on duty."

As parties await the outcome of the autopsy on the corpse by the National Hospital, Abuja, family and friends of the fallen journalist are still struggling to come to terms with the sudden death of their loved one.

They are said to be praying and hoping that there would be no cover-up and that justice would be served in the end.

For the late Ogbu's widow, Francisca, it is a period of emotional and psychological trauma. The family's breadwinner is gone. Her situation is made worse by the blame game over who was responsible for her husband's death.

Francesca, who is an N-Power volunteer, said she needs a paying job to enable her take care of herself and her little daughter. The N-Power engagement, she said, cannot pay the basic bills.

Mr Shola Akingboye, Publisher/Editor-in-Chief of *Regent Africa Times Magazine* and *Regent Africa Online*, described the late Ogbu as an old friend. Akingboye said the late Ogbu stood for objectivity and that he never practised what he described as “guerrilla journalism”.

Akingboye expressed concerns over alleged shoddiness in the investigation of the circumstances surrounding the death of his colleague.

In a chat with *The Nation*, he said his association with Ogbu dated back to 2009 when the deceased was the Editor of the defunct *African Herald* Newspapers. He said he and the deceased teamed up to establish their publications in 2018.

Akingboye said Ogbu's death has created a vacuum in the lives of many, particularly members of his family and his professional colleagues.

He deplored the buck-passing over the man's death, saying the initial report was that Ogbu was felled by police bullet while in another breath, the same police claimed that he fell and hit his head against iron.

“Meanwhile, in setting the record straight as a team of journalists, we put up our team to gather eyewitness accounts at the scene. Some of those who spoke confided in us that the police shot Alex in the head.

According to them, he was capturing the use of live ammunition by the policemen on the protesters on his mobile phone when he was shot by the police.”

Akingboye said he accompanied some relatives of the dead journalists to examine his corpse at the morgue. “The big hole in his head leaves much to questions if iron could pierce into a human skull with such a wide-open wound akin to that of a bullet hole.

In order not to preempt their investigations however, we advised Alex family to allow for the release of the result of the autopsy conducted on him before we take further actions on the matter.

But I hope the police authorities would come out clean on the autopsy report. The family has no financial capacity to hire an independent pathologist. We all have to rely on anything they give us.”

Ogbu's widow told our correspondent that the police have been apologising to her, but maintained that such apologies would not help her situation in any way.

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She said: “The police should take responsibility. They have just been saying sorry. Is it that I kicked my leg or I fell? I am tired of their apologies because that is not the solution.

The police would never admit it is their fault. If not, I would have loved some form of closure and admittance to what has happened.

“At least, let them own up by saying ‘Oh we went for a raid and mistakenly shot your husband. We are sorry. Take this and try and see what you can do with this to survive. If they take responsibility, it would offer some kind of closure to me.”

She, however, said she’s waiting for the autopsy result, which ought to have been released before now. She is irked by claims that her husband fell and hit his head and died.

“We initially read that he fell and hit his head. That is what the police at Utako was saying. They were probably thinking it is something they can get away with.

I don’t know how it is possible to cover up a bullet wound by saying he slipped and fell. How can a mature man fall and die like that, when he did not have a stroke. One policeman was saying maybe he had epilepsy. There is nothing I have not heard,” she said.

Meanwhile, the FCT Council of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) has expressed sadness over the death of Mr Ogbu, and demanded an in-depth investigation into the circumstances that led to his tragic death.

Chairman of Council, Emmanuel Ogbeche, in a statement, said it seemed to have become a pattern for journalists covering protests in Abuja to be targeted, with tragic outcomes.

The statement said: “It is heart-rending to know that yet another journalist was felled in this seeming unending orgy of bloodletting in Abuja and other parts of the country.

We at the NUJ are now asking if this is a pattern where journalists become victims in the legitimate pursuit of their profession as reporters?”.

Ogbeche recalled the tragic death of another journalist, Precious Owolabi, some seven months ago. Owolabi, a youth corps member attached to Channels Television, was cut down in his prime while covering protests by the same Shiites.

The NUJ chair said: “We demand that the FCT Police Command commence an investigation into this death and ensure that the officer(s) involved in this killing faced the full weight of the law.

The police should know that any investigation without the inclusion of the union and the National Human Rights Commission will amount to an exercise in futility.

“The NUJ will hold the police hierarchy responsible if justice is not served in this matter. We will ensure that if the Nigerian state fails as it has continued to demonstrate, we will explore diplomatic channels to ensure that those who harass, intimidate and kill any journalist under any guise are made to bear the brunt of such objectionable conduct.”

According to Ogbeche, a society that makes a victim of journalists cannot make much progress as journalism thrives in an environment of safety, stability and sanctity of the rule of law.

But the FCT Command said the matter was still under investigation.