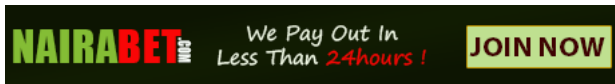


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## Cabs of fear: Oyo residents' tales for the Micra (/cabs-of-fear-oyo-residents%E2%80%99tales-for-the-micra)

March 27, 2016



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In the city of Ibadan, many commuters now dread boarding Micra cabs as a result of the increasing stories of kidnap for rituals allegedly linked to the now popular cab brand. OLUWATOYIN MALIK and TADE MAKINDE report series of events surrounding the Micra taxis.



(<http://tribuneonlineng.com/sites/default/files/micra3.jpg>)

SUKANMI, a young man in his late teens, sullen-faced, joined a group of young men three Tuesdays ago at a location in Ibadan, Oyo State and immediately cut short their discussion when he said: "Brother Ope, won ma ti gbe Biola lo. (Brother Ope, Biola has been kidnapped).

Biola was his neighbour from Iseyin. He had sent Sukanmi a text message that the Micra car that he had taken to Alomaja on the outskirts of the city had veered off the route after the front seat occupier had pulled a gun on them, threatening to kill the three passengers at the back, if they did not do as instructed. He had sent the text message before the captives' phones were forcibly taken from them by their captors.

One of the young men asked Sukanmi to call Biola's number right before them to confirm if it was a crank text message or not. But he couldn't reach his neighbour. Confused Sukanmi did not know what to do, so he had come to Ope. He asked if they should inform the police, but Ope merely shrugged. "I am sure he will find his way home," he replied.

They did not report the incident at any police station.

Somewhere at Amuloko also on the outskirts of Ibadan in January, another Micra cab driver was on the prowl in a neighbourhood. Outside of an apartment, he saw a playful little girl all alone and swiftly "kidnapped" the one and a half year old toddler. He was said to have driven off in a blinding speed. The dust he raised caught the attention of a man who called other neighbours. An investigation later revealed that the mother had been busy watching a movie at home and had not noticed that her daughter had crawled out of the apartment. "No amount of wailing has brought the baby back," Yinusa Adejo, a neighbour told Sunday Tribune.

For a long time, Biola went missing until penultimate Sunday when he showed up alone at home. Nobody knew what happened to him and how he had got back home. "It was obvious that something terrible had been done to him,. One minute, he would ask for food; another minute he would just be mumbling. He would ask for eba one minute and start singing, or telling those around that he was seeing blood in another minute," narrated Sunkanmi.

From what the young man eventually told his relatives before he finally became incoherent few hours later, he said that he had been taken to Delta State where the two other kidnapped fellows were killed right before his eyes.

He said that the ritualist had told his captors that he (Biola) was not suitable for the ritual they were set to carry out and should be let loose. Biola also told his people that he was in another realm by that time as all he could smell around him was blood. There were many headless bodies lumped together in a big ditch he was said to have revealed.

Lately, in the city of Ibadan kidnap stories woven around Micra cab drivers have become common place, creating fears in the hearts of those who still commute from one place to another in the small-sized Nissan product. Parents have not stopped to drum it in the ears of their children that they should not board Micra cars to school or market. The fear of young men driving Micra cabs is the beginning of wisdom for many.

Known for its fuel efficiency, demand for the car soared almost as it got to the shores of Nigeria. It has displaced VW Golf 3 car as a means of transport in the city. With five litres of fuel, a driver said he could get to Lagos before buying more fuel.

"For a transport man, that makes economic sense," Bashir Adejo, a driver said.

The small size makes it easy to manoeuvre even in tight areas. The drivers' brashness on the road, however, infuriates other road users while most passengers are now only concerned about their safety following reports and rumours that the brand of taxi is now used to kidnap innocent commuters.

An old man, Dejo Salami, who could not understand the incessant urge of young Nigerians to make quick money said: "Most of us the old drivers are now losing customers, as many have stopped riding in Micra. We have heard reports of kidnaps for ritual purposes, but it still doesn't prove that drivers are ritualists," he said.

Another taxi driver, Dola Adebajji, admitted to Sunday Tribune that he had not only heard about allegations that Micra cab drivers are now largely fingered, but had also been to both Iyaganku and Eleyele police stations several times where he found many Micra cabs parked there. "It is not for me to say that young guys are responsible for the reported killings and kidnaps, but many old drivers like us are worried about the rate at which young boys, and even girls, are looking for money these days. I don't know why patience has become scarce among our young ones. They want to make easy and quick money and are ready to do anything to make it.

"My colleagues who are driving Micra cars are complaining that the negative impression that has been created among commuters is not helping matters, as they are not getting customers like they used to. Everybody is now wary of young boys behind Micra wheels. That is not good for this business.

But men are not the only ones desperate for money. I gave a woman a ride one day and she told me that most men who have 'roaming' eyes are getting punished by some girls who use juju to extract money from them. Most ladies out there are into unworthy ventures of getting money. These are hard times, but I don't believe one should resort to taking another's life for quick wealth," he said.

As Biola slid into what Sunkanmi said was "madness", the family has decided to send him to the village where they believe he could be cured as his case needs spiritual attention. "We don't believe that the young man can get cured, if we don't take him home for treatment," he said. It's not all gloomy though as the police have consistently done their best to curb the growing menace of kidnaps either for rituals or extortion. Some members of the criminal gangs operating as commercial cab operators have fallen into police net as they have been arrested by the Oyo State Police command.

In one of the cases, members of a robbery syndicate which relocated from Lagos State to Ibadan and specialised in robbing members of the public by pretending to be commercial cab operators were arrested by the anti-kidnapping squad of the command.

Disclosing this to Sunday Tribune during the parade of the suspects, the state Commissioner of Police, Mr Leye Oyeade, said that the arrest was based on information received from a strategic partner.

"The anti-kidnapping squad of the command went to the hotel where members of the syndicate lodged along Ijokodo/Apete road and arrested three of them namely Femi Mapo (47), a Ghanaian, Samuel Kofi Addo (55) and John Erochukwu (46).

"When searched, charms, laptops, phones and the syndicate's operational vehicle, a Nissan Primera with registration number CM 452 LSR were recovered from the suspects. Their confession revealed that they relocated from Lagos to Ibadan recently and had duped many people," he narrated.

#### The union we end this menace —Fele

In a recent report, Oyo State Chairman of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Alhaji Taofeek Oyerinde a.k.a Fele, said the problem with the Micra vehicles is that they are not only from Oyo State; but also from Ogun, Osun, Ondo and other states. "We need a backing from law enforcement agencies to tackle this menace," he said.

He added that "the union is doing all it can to bring an end to this. We need agencies' support in fighting this crime because we can't do it alone."

#### We are still mapping out other strategies for more arrests —Oyo CP

Speaking on what the Oyo State Police Command had been doing to curb the activities of criminal syndicates using Micra taxis to commit atrocities, Mr Oyeade said that it had mostly depended on information from members of the public, while adding that a number of arrests made had been of 'one chance' suspects.

According to Oyeade, "since I came on board we have been trying to manage crime from the perspective of community partnership and it has been working well. Police cannot work without input from members of the public.

"With information processed into intelligence, we have been able to arrest members of this syndicate coded as 'one chance'. The method is that an unsuspecting commuter would board a cab unknown to him or her that other occupants who would have come in at different points belong to the syndicate.

"They would start a story line and one thing would lead to the other. They would thereafter dupe the person. The most popular is the dollar story. As I said, we have arrested a number of them but we still need more information."

He also pointed out that 'one chance' is not peculiar to Oyo State. "What is popularly called 'one chance' happens in all parts of Nigeria. But in Oyo State, we have mapped out a strategy to know where the incidents are prevalent.

"With the statements of victims, we use the information to go to areas mentioned. We are also going to start using a strategy that will help in arresting them, but I will not want to disclose it. Our records have shown that we have arrested suspects in connection with 'one chance'."

The police commissioner noted that Micra vehicles are being operated under the purview of National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), saying that he had mapped out a programme to reduce the incessant reports of its use to commit crime.

He disclosed that motor parks would be made sectors, so that Micra taxis operating within the area where a motor park is would be registered, with the details of its owner and driver taken.

"We will ask them to have a leader who will interact with our policemen with sensitisation programmes arranged for them. If we have their records, we will be able to manage them and their operations effectively.

"Those that are not duly registered would be encouraged to do so. Through that, the aliens among them would be marked out and driven away. Also, those on record can be monitored. The same thing will be done for commercial motorcyclists.

"If we are able to put them in sectors, we will give them different colours of aprons which would be numbered. For example, if anyone commits havoc and the victim is able to identify the driver or okada rider as wearing blue apron with number 5, and we know that blue apron is for Oluyole, then we would look for the name on Number 5. That way, we would be able to identify those using Micra and motorcycles to perpetrate crime."

In spite of this concerted effort by the police to arrest the criminals using Micra as their convenient getaway vehicle, the stories surrounding the cab persist and have continued to grow. This for the people of Oyo State, the fear of Micra... is a sound lesson on safety.

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