

This boy murdered farmer over kola nuts

DAYO THOMAS reports on the mind-boggling murder of Lekan Oduola, a.k.a. Baba Lekan, by some teenagers over their attempt to steal kola nuts in a Sagamu, Ogun State

IN a world that is in a hurry in its embrace of violence and the loss of values, murder hardly makes news. Not even to the men of the Nigeria Police Force, who daily confront this bestial act. But many who heard about this particular murder story could only but hold their breath. The manner of execution was striking. It was gory, horrible and ugly.

To some, it is symptomatic of the death of moral values in the land; to others, it is just a sign of the end time. But no matter where the pendulum swings, the murder of **Mr Lekan Oduola**, alias **Baba Lekan**, has become a giant puzzle, whose pieces daily give way.

Some events in life simply defy simple logic and unnecessary rationalisations. And the gruesome murder of **Baba Lekan** in his private farm on May 8, 2007, fits perfectly into this odd category. Surprised! Yes, but that may not sufficiently capture the mood. Shocking, perhaps, comes near when describing the circumstances that surround his death.

It is one death that leaves a sour taste in the mouth of many in Moro, the village where he was killed and Sagamu, where he was living before this fatal day. Even the men of the Police Command, who witness absurd stories on a daily basis, were dazed, especially when 18-year-old Sunday Niyi, the alleged leader of the killer gang, was apprehended and brought in. "What is happening to our world?" was what echoed from the mouth of one of the officers handling the case.

When Oduola, a farmer, woke up on this fateful day to embark on a trip to his farm, he had no way of knowing that his destiny had already been determined by a group of teenagers, who claimed he was always around in his farm, whenever they wanted to go and steal kola nuts in a neighbouring farm. Even some villagers who saw him early in the farm and he promised he would attend a village meeting scheduled for the following weekend, did not know that he would not fulfil that promise.

The level of work already done by Oduola indicated that he had been in his farm for about three to four hours before he was murdered. He worked in the farm, not knowing that some teenagers led by Niyi, were already ahead of him and doing what they knew how to do best – stealing kola nuts. Possibly, they were early in the farm to ensure that they finished their trade before **Baba Lekan** would come. But the man who never joked with his farming business was at work early too. It was a dilemma for these alleged killers, who had parked enough kola nuts and needed to escape, but couldn't do that without a big price. Though they had an option of dropping the bags of kola nut and going home empty handed, they considered the time and cost of fuelling the two motor bikes which they had brought.

Even dropping the bags was not a logical option for this group, considering the fact that the man had caught them several times and had warned them against such acts. The option was also a remote possibility because none of the boys or their fathers had a farm in that region, so it would have been difficult justifying their mission in that farm. So, getting the head of **Baba Lekan** was the most convenient thing for these teenagers at that point, and they did not have any problem doing that; it was done in horrible way.

The gripping silence that enveloped Moro after the cruelty was understandable; it was a dark moment of human tragedy. Such a murder was not only a rarity in the village, everybody, including the village head, **Oba Orelaji Olukoyi**, became a prime suspect as the men of the Ogun State Command moved in its crack team in a bid to unravel the cause of the murder. The men of the command initially had one assignment: to locate the whereabouts of **Baba Lekan**, who left his house for the farm with a promise to return. It was a tough order as there was too much tension in the village, said our police source.

The mission was made more difficult as the man had some leaves covering him, which made the search somewhat demanding. "It was God that did the job for us," the police source confessed. "When we got to the farm, we had no clue whatsoever."

When **Baba Lekan** was finally discovered, it added another burden to the job of the detectives. The man had been brutally killed and the culprits must be unmasked. The frantic search continued and the search light was beamed on **Niyi** (and his



•The late **Baba Lekan**. Inset: **Niyi**

group), who has since made some fruitful confession.

Niyi might be a young man, but he is a boy that cannot be understood easily. Even the slang that issue from his mouth revealed the contents of his inner mind. In less than three minutes, **Niyi** made three contradicting statements. But one thing is obvious: he seems to know so much about the man and the killing, more than he is willing to confess. "I don't know who killed the man," he first stated. But he also claimed he saw the man prostrate in his farm and ran to the wife to inform her of what happened. But he could not answer what led him to the farm in the first place, since his parents' farm was not located there.

Niyi knew he had a difficult case in his hands and he was ready to wriggle out. Trust **Niyi**, with his creative mind, he later said it was one **Abudu** and **Musibau** that killed the man. With a straight face he said, "I was going to the farm to give medicine and food to my ailing father, and when I got to the farm I saw that someone was killed. And immediately I saw it, I quickly went and reported to his wife."

He later added, "**Abudu** and **Musibau** used to go the farm to steal kola nuts and my Dad had even caught them in the farm before. And I advised my Dad to leave them, that I will deal with them. Later, the two of them told me that there was a man who was always blocking them whenever they wanted to go and steal kola, and said they would kill the man. I warned them that they must not kill anybody in this village. They now said they would kill me too."

The final confession was that he saw **Musibau** and **Abudu** in the farm when they were killing the man, but he did not participate in the killing. "It was the boys that used cutlass to cut the man's throat, but I did not do anything. I saw **Musibau** pushing the man down, and **Abudu** used cutlass to cut the man's throat, but I did not do anything," he later said.

Ever since, peace has become alien in Moro and the home of **Baba Lekan** in Sagamu. The sight of a stranger has become a constant threat as his wives ran away when they were told that this reporter was around to interview them.

The man's son, **Mr. Kazeem Oduola**, is yet to believe his father's death, even as the man's burial place at his No. 20 **Ademosun Street** in **Sabo, Sagamu**, formed an imposing island in front of his house. He narrated his last moment with his Dad the day he was killed. He told this reporter that his father's last wish was to buy a mobile phone, which he meant to buy the following day. He described his late father as peace loving and wondered why he was killed.

The activities of the gang that allegedly killed his father is well known to **Kazeem**. He said, "I know those boys. One of them called **Niyi** even entered the same bus with one of our neighbours that day. And when they were arguing in the bus, the boy, **Niyi**, threatened to kill the man and his wife. So, the man's wife was even telling me the story that day, but I did not know they had even killed my father."

The Police Public Relations Officer, Ogun State Command, **Femi Awoyale**, a Deputy Superintendent of Police, said that the police was working hard to ensure that all that were linked with the killing was brought to book. He said, "We have made some arrests including the prime suspect, **Niyi Sunday**, and we will arrest all that are connected with the murder and promptly take the case to the court."