

# Tension over murder of man on day he marked thanksgiving for his son

TUNDE BUSARI

THE sleepy community of Oba-oke in the Olorunda Local Government of Osun State woke up on Sunday, November 11, 2007 full of hope. An air of enthusiasm was pervasive on the landscape as the people set about their tasks and chores.

Just a few hours into the day, however, the most unexpected suddenly reared its ugly head out of the blues. An angry mob had set on fire a house belonging to one Kadiri Owonikoko, a prominent member of the Action Congress in the community as a reprisal to the killing of a popular youth, Tunde Ojewale. Ojewale was allegedly murdered by a gang suspected to have been sponsored by Owonikoko.

But what could Ojewale have done to deserve such a brutal death by the sword, cutlass and clubs from his assailants. The quest to get the answer to this pregnant question took our reporter to the sleepy community, which is located about 10km from Osogbo, the Osun State capital.

The first clue came from a member of the community, Lateef Olaiya. Olaiya, who only escaped from the scene of the incident by a whisker, said their assailants were members of a party, who were out to decimate their own number in the community preparatory to the forthcoming local government election in the state.

"We know them, we know ourselves in the town," Olaiya said. "That is how they do. They believe that they can win the election only by causing trouble in the town. Everybody knows them for that," he told *Sunday Punch* while narrating how the incident occurred.

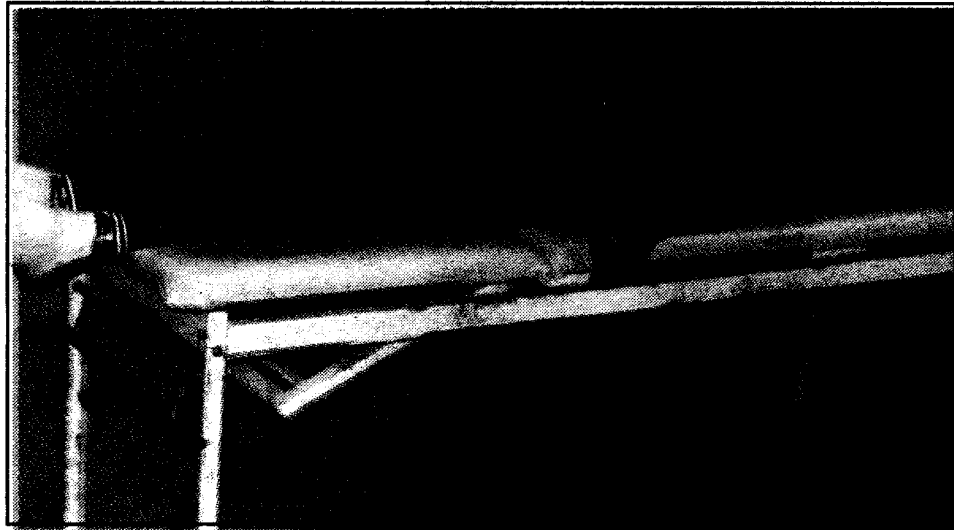
"We were three on the *okada* (commercial motorcycle) on that day. We were going to Osogbo to report one of them, Sunmoila Marindoti, who on the previous Saturday, had slapped one of my friends, Kareem Samsudeen. As we were going and reached a place we call Abe-odan, one of them, Hammed Owonikoko, just threw a wood on the road to block our way," Olaiya explained.

He added that he lost the control of the motorcycle and was actually struggling to regain his balance when their attackers, already hiding inside a store allegedly owned by Owonikoko, pounced on them with the rage of blood-thirsty men.

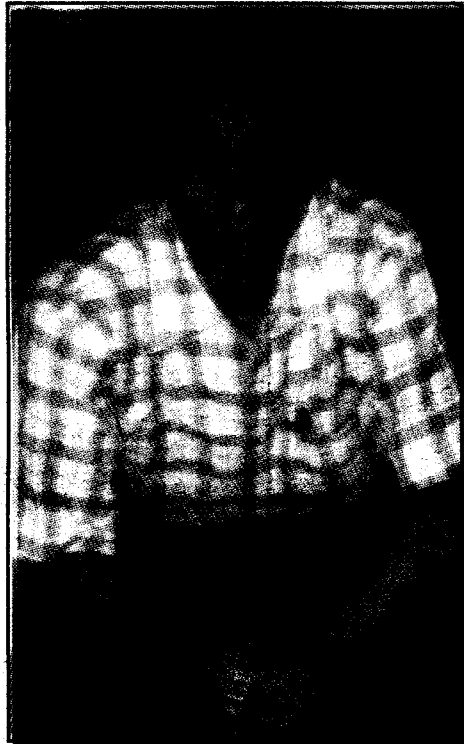
The men were indeed thirsty as they succeeded in spilling the blood of Ojewale. Ordinarily, Ojewale could also have escaped like Olaiya and Samsudeen, the third passenger, but the rampaging attackers were too much on him with Marindoti, popularly known as Lakatabu, leading the assault in the most ruthless manner. Having accomplished their mission, *Sunday Punch* gathered, the attackers, in a flash, retreated and disappeared, abandoning the blood-soaked Ojewale in a helpless state of coma.

"We quickly rushed to the spot and carried him. He was at that time still breathing. So, we carried him to Osogbo at the nearby Olomola Hospital. The doctor told us he had died on our way. So, they didn't admit him," Olaiya said.

While the corpse of Ojewale was being prepared for the morgue at the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Teaching



•Ojewale in the morgue



•...alive

Hospital, Osogbo, the news had filtered to the community. The reaction of Ojewale's people was spontaneous and swift. The residential building of the Owonikokos was the first casualty. The mob torched the house and burnt it.

That deed, according to some of them, was like a temporary balm to their wounded hearts arising from the murder of Ojewale.

The development, however, did not go down well with the traditional ruler of the community, Oba Iyiola Bakare, the Oloba of Oba-oke who told *Sunday Punch* that he was not happy with the turn of events.

"It is not a pleasant development. We were inside the palace here holding a meeting on Sunday when we heard the noise. We heard that somebody was attacked and the house of those suspected to have done it was being burnt. I am not happy about it at all. And people should not take law into their hands," Oba Bakare said.

The furious subjects had no problem with the position of their king as custom and tradition demand. Yet, they insisted that no reaction was too much in avenging the murder of Ojewale, whom they saw as a shining light among the youths of the community.

It was learnt that despite the fact that he had attained the age of 30, Ojewale, who was a farmer, still struggled to enrol at the Lagunle High School, Oba-Oke,



•....dead

where he had just sat for his Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. Most painful to the youth is the fact that Ojewale was killed the very day he observed the thanksgiving service for his new baby, born nine days earlier.

It was after the service at St. Peter's Anglican Church, Oba-oke, where he was, incidentally choir master, that he met Olaiya and Samsudeen, whom he joined on the motorcycle before the assailants came their way at Abe-odan.

The build-up to the tragedy, *Sunday Punch* gathered, had its root in the social party allegedly organised by a female AC politician the previous Saturday to the death of Ojewale. The chairmanship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party in Olorunda LG, Alhaji Ganiyu Olaoluwa told *Sunday Punch* how his supporters were attacked near the venue of the party held on Oba-oke-Ekoende Road.

"I was told that when some of my members were passing through the road where the AC woman was holding her party, they were attacked. In fact, one of them was slapped. But because we are peace lovers, my members did not retaliate. They waited till the following morning when they went to report at the police post in the town," Olaoluwa said.

The Director of Research and Strategy of Action Congress in Osun State, Mr. Sunday Akere, however, faulted Olaoluwa's

claim. He said the seed of the incident was actually sown three days earlier when the chairmanship candidate had his political rally in Oba-oke.

"The whole crisis started in the town last week Thursday during the political rally of the local government candidate of PDP. The facts are there for everyone to see. They brandished dangerous weapons and unleashed terror on the people because the people did not turn out for their rally. They were also throwing sachet water at passers-by, all to express their disappointment on the people's cold response to them," Akere said.

But Olaoluwa said he had the most peaceful rally which, according to him, was even acknowledged and commended by the state party leaders at a meeting held in Okuku, the hometown of Osun State Governor, Prince Olagunsoye Oyinlola.

"In fact, our party has dominated the whole town. About 17 AC members defected to our party at Ward 10 on the day of our rally. We are friendly to the people. The town is PDP town," Olaoluwa said.

These accusations and counter-accusations notwithstanding, the police said they would not allow anarchy in the community. The Commissioner of Police, Osun State Command, Mr. John Omoronike, in his reaction, told *Sunday Punch* of his determination to ensure a peaceful co-existence among political parties in the state.

"Politics should not and is not a do-or-die game. We should imbibe the culture of respecting divergent views. There is no need for violence. The people of the town are relations who should not have gone to such extent. The incident is unnecessary," Omoronike said.

He said that three suspected killers of Ojewale had already been arrested and are currently detained at the State Criminal Investigation Bureau. "Apart from those three, we have also arrested four of those who took part in the burning of the house," the CP said.

This, interestingly, has brought some measure of normalcy to the community. But the pains of the incident still adorn the countenance of the people. They all wore a long face when *Sunday Punch* visited them shortly before Ojewale's remains were committed to mother earth on Wednesday. The bereaved wife, Mrs. Kehinde Ojewale and the mother-in-law, Mrs. Lydia Ojewale, were inconsolable as they were besieged by sympathisers in their Awoyale compound.

Perhaps to avert a future occurrence, the Police Commissioner had on Wednesday held a stakeholders meeting of all political parties in the state. The meeting, held at the command headquarters, Okefia, Osogbo, had an appreciable turn-out of party leaders. The CP enjoined them to cooperate with the police for the interest of the state.

He advised parents not to allow their children to be used to perpetrate violence and warned that anybody caught will not be treated with kid gloves.

Akere made a similar appeal. "Parents should tell politicians to use their own brothers and children for carrying out violence," the AC man said.