

# Tragedy at a christening

• Breadwinner shot dead at party

• Baby's father arrested and detained

• Mother goes into depression, ferried to village for medical help

**Ayodele Ale**

Taibatu Oyetunde sat in a one-room apartment at 23, Ogundola Street, Bariga, Lagos, surrounded by sympathisers. She was yet to come to terms with the death of Mukaila, her husband, who until his death was a petrol tanker driver.

"I still can't believe he is dead, because he was not sick," she lamented as she gazed intently at the ceiling of the room.

Her shock and disbelief were shared by her co-tenants who also found it difficult to believe that Mukaila was dead. "Even as his body was being taken to Ibadan for burial yesterday (April 11, 2008), I thought I was dreaming. I saw him a few hours before he was killed," a middle aged woman in the room lamented.

Taibatu recalled that Mukaila was sitting in the apartment with her and some of their children in the evening of March 29, 2008 when he reached for the wardrobe, changed his dress and departed for the christening of a new born baby in the neighbourhood.

"It was already getting late, so I insisted he should not go. But he also insisted on going to the party," Taibatu recalled. Unfortunately, he had hardly settled down at the Adifase Street venue of the party when a fight erupted. What began as a verbal exchange between some of the guests soon degenerated into an afay in which broken bottles and other dangerous weapons were freely used.

Policemen were drafted from the nearby Pedro Police Station, Shomolu when it looked like the the situation had got out of control. Ismaila was allegedly hit by a bullet fired by one of the policemen.

Those that were later arrested and detained at the police station included Mukaila who had already sustained a bullet wound.

Although his condition continued to deteriorate in the cell, Mukaila was said to have been left unattended to. The following day, the news went round that Mukaila had died. "I was wondering why he did not come home. I tried in vain to reach him on the telephone until midnight. That was when he told me he was coming. Thereafter, I could not reach him again," Taibatu recalled.

The following day, she left their two children, Toheeb (6) and Jamiu (2), at home and moved out to look for her husband. She, however, could not obtain any useful information as all her husband's friends said they did not know his whereabouts. "But I noticed that people were gathering in groups and would stop talking as I approached them," she said.

After Taibat had worried about her husband for hours, a co-tenant told her that her husband had been shot and taken to the police station, but she did not know whether he was alive or dead. An aged relation of Mukaila known as Alhaji



• Mukaila's widow and children

Owonikoko was said to have headed for the police station and demanded to know Mukaila's whereabouts.

At the police station, he learnt that Mukaila had died in police custody. But he insisted that the policemen at the station must produce Mukaila alive because he was in good health when he left home.

Owonikoko proceeded to inform some traditional chiefs in Bariga, prompting their intervention in the matter. But the situation was compounded by the refusal of the police to release the corpse to family members.

"It was a difficult situation because even though the police told us that he was dead, they did not allow anyone to see the corpse or tell us where it was taken to," a relation who sought anonymity said.

While the family members spoilt for a showdown, the traditional rulers tried to pacify them. The police eventually yielded to the demand to release Mukaila's corpse as they released same to the family members on April 11.

"That was the day that we got to know that he had all the while been kept in the mortuary of Isolo General Hospital," the relation said. "You should have seen the corpse. It smelled badly and had maggots. Those of us who took the corpse to Ibadan for burial had to cover our mouth and nostrils. In fact, because of the bad condition of the corpse, it was decided that his wife should not see it."

Taibat said the police owed the family



• Mukaila

an explanation on how her husband died in their custody.

"Some of those detained with him said my husband did not look like someone who was struggling with death when he was taken out of their midst in the cell. They said they thought he was being taken to the hospital for treatment and that they were surprised to learn that he had died," said Taibat.

Efforts made by our correspondent to speak with the family that christened their child proved abortive. The mother of the new born, whose husband, Seun, was said to have been detained that night, was said

to have developed depression the following day.

"I think it was a result of her husband's detention. We learnt she has been taken to her village for treatment," a man in the neighbourhood said.

*Saturday Punch* gathered that the policeman who allegedly shot Mukaila had been detained by the police authorities. However, the spokesman of the Lagos State Police Command, Mr Frank Mba, would not confirm the arrest of the policeman when our correspondent called him on the telephone. "The matter will be investigated," he said.