

# Rage of hoodlums who murdered bus driver

Three suspects operating as touts at Oje market-park in Ibadan are now at large following the assault and death of a bus driver. The deceased's parents are agonising, even as an accomplice in the attack has been detained by the police, who say that they are close to catching the suspects, writes AKINWALE ABORISADE

**F**OR Mr. and Mrs. Raji Onaolapo of Atipe area of Ibadan, Oyo State, the memory of the tragedy that struck on Aug. 5, 2010 would linger in their memories for the rest of their lives. That day, their son had eclipsed as their beloved son, Afees Onaolapo, died in their arms on their way to the hospital.

The couple had wailed agonisingly as the hospital attendants wheeled the remains of their son to the morgue. They said life was unfair to them as their hope was cut short with the death of their son, whom they had slaved to nurture with the sweat of their labour. Mother and father had hoped that young Onaolapo would one day put a smile on their burdened faces. They also assumed that their late son would outlive and bury them when they eventually die; but the reverse was the case.

At 10 pm that day, when many were still on their way home, and the motor park still bustling, as Onaolapo drove his bus in, some hoodlums swooped on him, asking him to give them money. But he turned down the men, namely Adekunle Bello, aka Apase, Tunde Awu aka Awu and Dada Oju-Awo.

He defied their entreaties and paid no attention to their threats. About N100 would have doused the rage of the touts, but the deceased was apparently said to be unwilling. His reason, according to the prosecution witness, who is also a bus conductor at the park, Afees Rasaki, was that he had no petty cash to dole out as he had to render the day's account to his employer.

His explanations to the touts fell on deaf ears. They insisted that he must pay his 'dues'. For being heady, they pounced on him, beating him seriously. Members of the Road Transport Workers Union of Nigeria, who were still around with other people from nearby, tried to caution the suspects, but they were bent on teaching the driver the lesson of his dear life. They continued until the young man slumped.

But the rage of the suspects was far from over. It was alleged that someone from the crowd had praised the boys' bravery for teaching the young driver, whom he described as recalcitrant, a lesson. The man,

who was said to be praising the hoodlums later came out of the crowd and walked shoulder-high to the attackers, who were identified as his friends. His name is Saheed Raji, an employee of Ibadan North Local Government, who was formerly operating a commercial bus in the area.

Following Raji's comment, members of NURTW who gave an eyewitness account to the police said that one of the attackers sat on Onaolapo's belly. At that point, the deceased began to gasp for breath until his parents arrived. They later took to their heels.

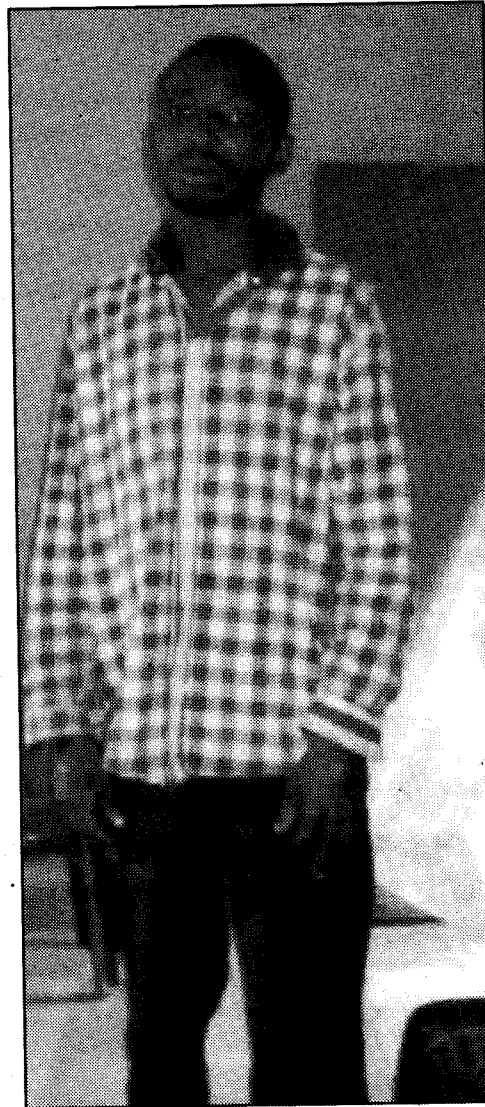
Rasaki said that he got to the scene while the assault was ongoing. According to him, the deceased had struggled to free himself since the hoodlums had over-powered him but he could not escape. When the attackers had left, Rasaki told SUNDAY PUNCH that he rushed up to the deceased who was still crying in pain.

He said, "The boy that they killed was my friend and a colleague in that we used to work together. Most times, I would be conducting while he would be driving. I was not there when the fight started. On getting to the scene where he was assaulted I stood there looking helplessly because I could not intervene. Those men are older than I am and they are known to be very dangerous so I could not confront them."

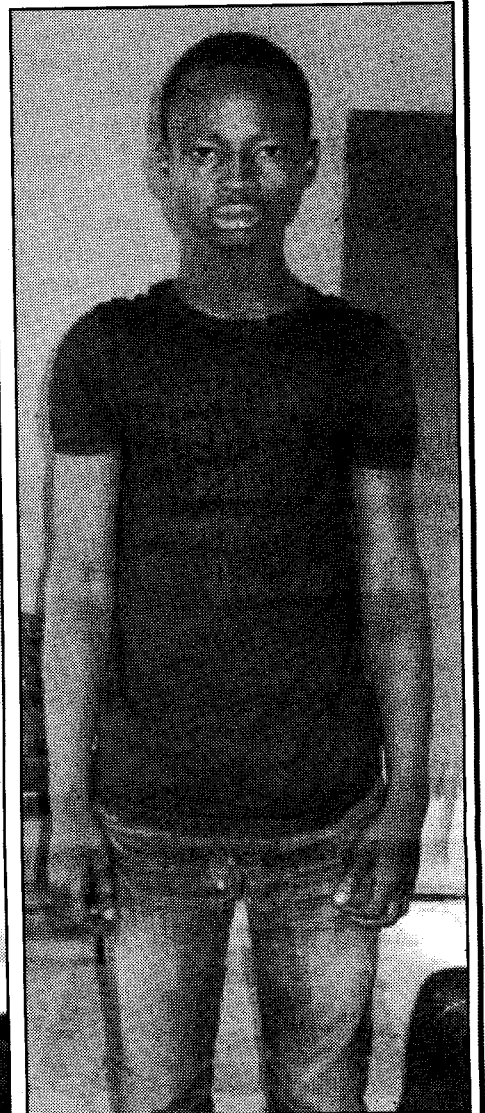
"When they left I quickly ran up to him and poured water on him. His parents later came to the spot and we rushed the boy to a nearby private hospital on a motorbike. There was no open wound on him so blood was not coming out. Some people said that he had been beaten with a charm, but I did not see it. I just saw them beating him."

When they got to the hospital, the nurses on duty advised that they should take him to another hospital for comprehensive healthcare. But they were again turned back at State Hospital, Adeoyo, where they were asked to take him to the University Teaching Hospital. It was confirmed there that the young man had died. The news of Onaolapo's passing filtered to Oje early on Friday. The hoodlums, who were said to have hitherto run to Raji's house, again disappeared when the news got to them. They advised Raji to lie low somewhere pending the time that the matter would die

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•Rasaki, suspect



•Raji, prosecution witness

down.

Raji, who was later apprehended by the police, told our correspondent that though he was not involved in the assault of the deceased; he ran because he was afraid that the police could link him to the crime. The Divisional Crime Officer of the Agugu Police Station, Mr. Ayoola Olawole, said that Raji should have mediated between the deceased and the three suspects who are known by many at the park as his friends, but failed to do so.

The DCO said, "Rather than quell the fight he encouraged the hoodlums to beat the poor boy. Perhaps the deceased had offended him. He was quoted to have said that he would give them full backing for the consequence."

The police said that investigation showed that the hoodlums were famous in the area for terrorising and extorting money from motorists. It was also gathered that the suspects had been accused of a similar offence last year in which a life was said to have been lost. They however wriggled out of the case as they could not be directly traced to the death of the victim.

Available intelligence reports also indicated that the suspects were lying low at Kara Market at Oje area of the city. But it was difficult to track them down because the traders were afraid of reprisal by the group. It was learnt that the father of one of the suspects had last year accused the executive of Kara Market association of betraying his son in a murder case. This makes it difficult for the

police to identify the suspects who were said to have mingled with the traders.

Raji, who denied having close rapport with the suspects, said that they (Apase, Awu and Oju Awo) were just his acquaintances. He said, "I knew them before I was employed as a driver at the local government council. As a driver they used to demand money from me and that is all. I always oblige them because they were dangerous and I did not want them to assault me for turning them down."

"That night when they beat the boy I had retired home after I returned from work. I went out to buy pap and turkey at a shop close to the park when they started fighting. Although I witnessed the fight I did not instruct them to beat the boy as the union members (NURTW) alleged."

But he could not explain why he bolted away with the suspects after the incident. Raji and the hoodlums were said to have initially fled to the house of one of their friends named Lukman, aka Korondodo. However, he allegedly turned them down when he got word of their case.

While the main actors were said to be at large, Raji is now at the detention waiting for justice to take its course on him. The Police Public Relations Officer, Ms. Olabisi Okuwobi, said that the case would soon be transferred to the State Anti Robbery Squad for further investigation. She said that the police would not give up until the fleeing hoodlums were arrested and made to face the law.