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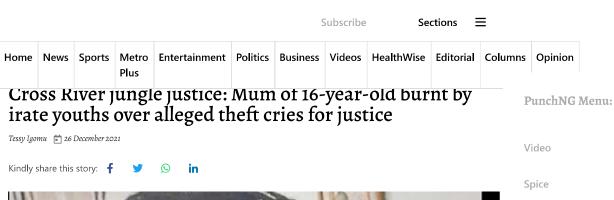
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Anthony's mum

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Like the 'Aluu four,' where four undergraduates were set ablaze by angry villagers, a 16-year-old was wrongly accused, brutalised and had iron inserted into his anal part before being burnt to death by irate youths in a village in Cross River State. With his assailants at large, and the police, as well as the state government, claiming ignorance of the killing, his distraught mother fears that the case might go into oblivion like many others in the country yet to get justice, **Tessy Igomu** reports

As the sun dipped below the horizon on November 19, 2021, life suddenly took an ugly turn for Anthony Okpahefufe, a 16-year-old, living with his grandmother in Cross River State.

On that day, life was snuffed out of the senior secondary school student in the most brutish manner by an irate mob in Alifokpe Yache, an agrarian community in the Yala Local Government Area of the state.

Like bloodthirsty vampires, the assailants, mostly youths, bayed for the blood of Okpahefufe, whose only crime was being friends to two teenagers that allegedly robbed a grocery store on a local market day known as Ogidi.

PUNCH Investigations learnt that Okpahefufe, who was at home helping his grandmother, Helen Ibu, with chores when the robbery took place, was beaten to a pulp, dragged to the market square almost naked and dehumanised by having a rod passed through his anus.

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It was learnt that despite pleas from his grandmother and a priest in charge of the village catholic church, Patrick Orem, to spare the teenager's life, the mob wrapped Okpahefufe and the two unnamed young men in petrol-soaked tyres and set them ablaze. It was further learnt that the perpetrators never left the scene until the bodies were burnt beyond recognition.

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However, weeks after Okpahefufe was murdered without trial, *PUNCH Investigations* gathered that feeble attempts were allegedly made by the police to bring the perpetrators to book.

Discreet investigations showed that while only a police post was sited in Alifokpe Yache, there was no single police presence. This was the same for the eight surrounding communities, while the Yala Police Division is quite some distance away.

Pauline Eromosele is Okpahefufe's mother and she resides in Lagos. When she was traced to a secluded part of Ajah, our correspondent met a broken, distraught woman. She was in pain and deeply mourning Okpahefufe whom she described as "the son of my youth."

The woman, who struggled to keep her two female toddlers in check, had an unkempt appearance, sighed intermittently and consistently exhaled deeply throughout the interview.

A broken mother's desperate cry for justice

Pauline's experience is not one any mother would ever wish for. It took quite an effort for her to narrate the events that led to the gruesome killing of a son she described as an embodiment of talent.

She said the loss of Okpahefufe brought with it a crippling sense of loneliness and misery of insomnia.

"He was quiet and had great plans for me. He was an obedient son and ensured that my mother never lifted a cup without his assistance. Anthony was studying hard to take his final secondary school examination," she said in a raspy voice.

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her murdered son from the Cross River State Governor, Ben Ayade; Inspector General of Police, Usman Baba, and well-meaning Nigerians.

Though the killing of Anthony took place in Cross River State, Pauline painstakingly recalled the raw details of his murder as recounted by her aged mother, whom the teenager lived with from age five.

The grieving mother told our correspondent that her son's father, Anthony, whom he was named after, died when she was six months pregnant. She recalled suffering throughout the pregnancy and being abandoned by everyone, including Anthony's family members.

Pauline said as soon as her son turned five, she took the most difficult decision to leave him in her mother's care and relocated to Lagos, to get a job to fend for them.

"Life in the village was hard, so I had to leave for Lagos. My mother struggled to take care of us. The pain of losing my son is too much to bear. My heart is shattered. I suffered to have Anthony. No one helped me. All the elders in the village and his father's family members abandoned me. Now, they have killed him because he didn't have anyone to fight for him," she said, shuddering with sobs.

Killed for no reason

Pauline said on that ill-fated day, she got an alarming call from her mother around 6.30pm, that an angry mob stormed the compound, overpowered her and dragged Okpahefufe away.

She revealed that her mother was beaten and stripped naked by the youth as they tried to take away the frightened teenager. Pauline said the old woman ran after them and watched helplessly as they brutalised and later set her grandson ablaze.

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She told our correspondent that it was at the village square that her mother learnt about the robbery.

Pauline said her son was not present at the scene of the robbery but claimed that the youth, allegedly led by the store owner, (name witheld) insisted on having him killed because the alleged thieves were his friends.

She said, "My mother told me that they passed a rod through his anus and burnt him alive with the other two. He was not given the chance to explain himself. My mother became hypertensive after seeing how they killed her grandson. She is traumatised. It is only God that is keeping her alive."

PUNCH Investigations learnt that after the killing, the youth denied family members access to Okpahefufe's remains and allegedly went ahead to bury them in a primary school.

The battered and bloodied face of the teenager as he pleaded for mercy in the hands of his attackers as well as the grisly scene of the incident was well captured in pictures made available to *PUNCH Investigations* by Pauline in Lagos.

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The culprits are well known

Pauline said her son's killers are well known in the village and claimed that one of them was her brother-in-law, (name witheld).

"My step-sister. My mother told me that while they were beating Anthony (Okpahefufe), the man said he should tell them where he gets all the nice clothes that he wears if he is not a thief. That was a man that should ordinarily protect my son. I usually buy clothes for my son and mother in Lagos and parcel them to Ogoja, where they are picked up. The week that he was killed, I packaged clothes to send to them," she said.

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Pauline reeled out the names of those allegedly involved in the murder of her son, as sent by her mother.

She said, "My mother identified some of the perpetrators and the police have their full names."

PUNCH Investigations learnt that apart from the owner of the shop that was allegedly robbed, others are at large.

Exploited by the police

Pauline revealed that when the matter was reported at the Police Area Command Headquarters in Ogoja by Okpahefufe's grandmother and a relative, the policemen told them to fund the investigation.

She said, "My mother couldn't report the matter that day to the police because she was very weak from the beating she got from the youth. When she did, the police requested N30, 000, claiming that their vans were faulty and that they needed two vans to arrest the suspects. I also paid for copies of pictures taken at the scene of the murder.

"The police went to the village and arrested two brothers of one of the culprits. The officers said they were directed to the first house at the village entrance and that if they had gone inside after making the initial arrest, they might be attacked on their way out.

"Since then, they have refused to return to the village and mandated the elders to produce culprits. The elders were only able to take the shop owner to them and since then, no other person has been arrested. The police have continued to demand money from me. I paid for the upkeep of the two young men in detention. I have spent all that I have on this case already. Nigerians should help me to get justice for my son."

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	uline said she was told by policemen investigatir ne Cross River State Police Command Headquarto		Special Features	
Okpahefufe alo	When Pauline, who is now married to a man from Edo State, was asked why she did not take Okpahefufe along to live with her in Lagos, she said she brought him in 2016 but that her husband was not favourably disposed to it.			
	it tavourably disposed to it.		Interview	

I was stripped naked - Grandma

When a call was put across to Okpahefufe's grandmother, Helen, she was overcome by emotion. The elderly woman confirmed that she was beaten and stripped naked by the youth.

She said, "My husband and other villagers begged them to leave him alone but they refused. My grandson is not the type that wanders around and doesn't keep friends. I have not recovered from what happened. I have been having severe pains in my stomach. I can't eat or sleep because I keep seeing the crying face of Anthony. Those that killed my grandson can run but can't hide from the wrath of God."

One of the victims held my white cassock with bloodied hands pleading for mercy – Catholic priest

The priest in charge of Mater Ecclesiee Catholic Church, Alifokpe Yache, Patrick Orem, witnessed the bloodcurdling incident and described Okpahefufe's death as unfortunate.

He said as of the time he was alerted and got to the market square, Okpahefufe and one of the boys had been killed, while the remaining one held onto his white cassock with bloodied hands and pleaded for help.

"I was shaving around 6pm, when a parishioner came to tell me that some thieves were caught in the market. I thought it was a minor case. Around 9pm, someone came to tell me that two of the thieves had been killed and that the youth were about to kill the third. I quickly dressed up and went to intervene as a concerned cleric. I didn't want any other life to be wasted.

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"To my greatest shock, I saw the corpse of two young boys and Anthony was one of them. When the remaining boy saw me, it was like hope rekindled. He held my garments with his bloodied hands and begged for his life to be spared. I pleaded and preached to the angry youths to leave him but they refused.

He added, "They told me to go to my house and that the place was not a church. The boy was clinging to me and they were dragging him. I appealed with them to take the case to the elders and they asked me if it was the elders that told the boys to steal."

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served, so that people will realise that they should not take the law into their own hands.

Jungle Justice in Nigeria

Mob action, better known as jungle justice, is not new to Nigeria. It has become a silently accepted norm with victims alleged to have committed crime violently killed without fair trial by the mobs.

All it takes, in most instances, is for an individual to raise the alarm about theft, kidnap attempt or any other crime and a crowd, which balloons with time, would beat the accused to stupor and set the person ablaze.

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Sadly, this barbaric act of being the judge and the jury, which had brutally cut short many dreams, was linked by experts to Nigerians losing trust in security agencies and suppressed, chronic anger of the people towards an exploitative political system.

A clinical psychologist with the Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital, Yaba, Olawunmi Oluwatosin, said society, culture, level of exposure and educational background could trigger mob action.

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"People take the law into their own hands. Some uninformed or uneducated people tend to think irrationally or make wrong decisions without investigating or trying to pass information to the right people that can manage it. Our culture and upbringing also go a long way. Some individuals come from homes that are not informed enough and they might have seen the way their parents manage situations. They learn and tend to act the same way. A home that is not well cultured or has enshrined good home training, you definitely can't expect anything from there. If you see anything different, probably the environment has played a role in it. Also, due to past experiences, people tend to take the law into their own hands. Peer influence is another factor."

Another psychologist with Family Wellness Therapy Centre, Lagos, John Odutemu, said failure of the justice system, which leads to loss of trust; repressed memory, economic disparity and social class difference influenced the willingness to participate in crowd violence.

He said, "People have different perspectives about law and what it has done for them. The possibility of someone who has been denied justice in the court of law to take the law into his own hands if he sees someone that perpetrated a similar crime is high. Most times, those from a comfortable background and with a good economic base don't get involved in mob trouble.

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In several instances, innocent people have fallen victims to jungle justice and except in the case of the 'Aluu Four,' where justice was served, many families still reel from the pain of losing their loved ones, either due to inability to fund the case or the perpetrators were able to grease the palms of law enforcement agents.

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Offences that usually lead to jungle justice include witchcraft, kidnapping, blasphemy, murder, adultery, rape, sodomy, armed robbery and theft.

According to Nigeria's Constitution, section 36 (5), every person charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed to be innocent until proven guilty.

There are documented cases of such despicable and inhumane acts across the country, but the infamous "Aluu four' that took place on October 5, 2012 in Rivers State, shocked Nigerians.

It involved four University of Port Harcourt students; Ugonna Obuzor, Chiadika Biringa, Lloyd Toku, and Tekena Elkanah who were beaten, doused with gasoline and set ablaze.

The students had gone to Omuokiri Aluu, in the Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, to collect money being owed one of them by Bright, an indigene.

Sadly, they were falsely accused of being thieves, stripped naked, beaten, wrapped with car tyres and burnt to death at a dumpsite.

Several people were arrested in connection with the crime and on July 31, 2017, four years and nine months after the horrid incident, the Rivers State High Court sitting in Port Harcourt, sentenced to death a police sergeant, Lucky Orji, David Ogbada and Ikechukwu Amadi, for their active involvement in the murder. Four suspects were discharged and acquitted.

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Other unlucky victims

On September 23, 2021, criminality was taken to shocking dimension when a Chief Superintendent of Police, Kazeem Abonde of Operations Department, Lagos State Police Command, was gruesomely murdered by a mob on Ajao Estate. He had led a team to enforce restrictions on commercial motorcyclists popularly called *Okada* riders.

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been heard about the matter since then.

Five years after the Zonal Head of the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority, Bakare Olatunji, was battered to death in Apapa, Lagos, by suspected hoodlums, after the death of a *motor boy* allegedly knocked down by the agency's truck, the two persons apprehended in connection with his death have yet to face justice.

Most concerned Nigerians fear that unless perpetrators face punitive measures commensurate with their crime, more people will be killed through jungle justice.

Perpetrators must be charged with murder - Lawyer

A lawyer and immediate past Head of Department of History, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State, Tunji Ogunyemi, said those who burnt Okpahefufe and others to death were guilty of murder and must be charged by the state accordingly.

"Even if they are justified on the ground that the teenager committed the alleged crime, for which they don't have any evidence, the fact that they took the law into their own hands makes them guilty of murder. The law doesn't have any other way to describe it other than that they committed murder," he added.

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Ogunyemi explained that on every murder, it was the state that got offended and not family members. He noted that Okpahefufe's killers committed a serious infraction on the laws of the land by murdering a Nigerian citizen.

"Those involved must be apprehended. It must become a state matter. When it does, even the mother of the victim can't withdraw from the case even when those involved beg her. She cannot stand on the premise that they can't bring back her son to hand off the case."

The Associate Professor of History, said mob action was a violation of a victim's rights under sections 33, 34 and 36 of the Nigerian Constitution which guaranteed an individual's rights to life, dignity of the human person and to a fair hearing.

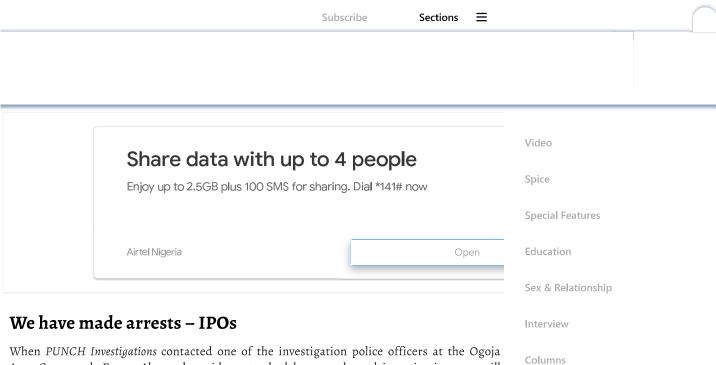
He further said that the case could be prosecuted, adding, "Those who went to that house have names. What should be done is to proceed against one or two persons and others at large. Any crime investigation officers handling the case must not muddle it up by saying a group of people, because such is not recognised in criminal law. Just identify like one or two and say and others at large, and immediately, the law would be activated against the two.

"Under our criminal justice system, you can't prosecute a mob, but it is possible in all the French speaking African countries. Who do you apprehend when it is said that a mob killed the young man, which is usually the defence in our court? Our law doesn't have a way to punish a mob. If you use a broom to kill a mosquito, which among the sticks would you accuse of carrying out the killing?

"Even if those apprehended were just watching when the victims were killed, the fact that they did nothing to stop it makes them culpable under conspiracy. Conspiracy and actually committing the act has the same punishment under our law. It is punishable by hanging. Even if those that committed the murder are below 18 years, they are detained until they are

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When PUNCH Investigations contacted one of the investigation police officers at the Ogoja Area Command, Enang Abeng, he said arrests had been made and investigation was still ongoing. He revealed that the division was waiting for further directives. He refused to comment further and directed our correspondent to the police spokesperson in Calabar.

Another IPO, Inspector Abraham Agboju, said since it was a murder case, it was likely to be transferred to the state command in Calabar.

Asked if Okpahefufe's mother was under any obligation to pay before the case could be transferred to Calabar, he said, "If there is need, she would have to pay."

Paternal family reacts

Earlier, Pauline told our correspondent that relatives of Okpahefufe's father had done nothing about the unfortunate incident and that one of the brothers, Abru, said the matter should be left to God.

When Abru was contacted, he said the family was not interested in pursuing the case, noting that they were saddened by the development.

He said, "We are still mourning. He was the only child of our late brother. The entire family is unhappy. None of us were at the scene, we were only told. Some of those involved have been on my neck and have been saying that I am involved in arresting people. We are not happy."

Family took matter away from our jurisdiction – Yala LG chairman

While confirming the incident, the chairman of Yala Local Government Area, Fabian Ogbeche, claimed that the matter was taken away from his domain by Okpahefufe's family.

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He was reluctant about discussing the matter and said he was not disposed to discussing security matters on the phone. He insisted on having our correspondent travel down to Cross River State.

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local government, the family should have reported it first to the divisional police station because the divisional police officer reports to me first as the chief security officer. I want you to travel down so that I can present facts and every other thing to you physically, not on the phone."

Ogbeche later sent the DPO's contact across, noting that the officer was in a better position to respond to questions on the incident.

When contacted, the DPO, Ini Johnson, said he cannot comment on the case as it was being investigated by the Area Command.

We will get to root - Cross River commissioner

The Commissioner for Local Government Affairs, Stella Oreme Odey, said she was not aware of the incident and only heard about it for the first time. She, however, promised to get to the root of the matter.

She added, "I was taken aback by the news. It's actually my local government but I didn't get any information regarding it. It is sad. If it is true and we don't act, the issue of jungle justice would become the norm. We don't want that to happen. The court is there, the police are there."

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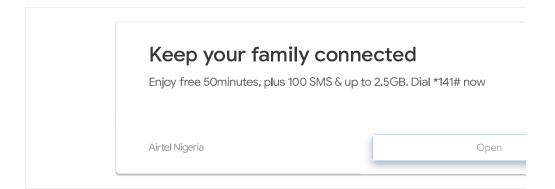
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Those involved will face the law - Govt

The Cross River State Government described Okpahefufe's killing and the others as horrifying and detestable.

The Deputy Chief Press Secretary to Governor Ben Ayade, Linus Obogo, said they were unaware of the incident but promised to ensure that a detailed investigation was carried out to ensure that those involved face the full wrath of the law.

He said, "Until you brought it to our attention, we didn't know such a heinous act of jungle justice ever took place. That being said, the government will swing into action to find out what led to the commission of the dastardly act and ensure that those behind it are held to account. There is no way the government will allow people to take the law into their own hands to perpetrate criminality.

"It is quite sad, horrifying and detestable and we abhor such gruesome resort to barbarism and primitivism. We will stop at nothing to get to the root of the matter and deal with the situation to ensure such acts of hooliganism don't recur in future. No one has the right to take the life of his fellow man, no matter the provocation."

Youth leader keeps mute

When the youth leader of Alifokpe Yache, Oko Alifo, who Okpahefufe's grandmother claimed also witnessed the killing, was contacted, he promised to call back. He said he was not in a comfortable place to speak. He never responded to subsequent calls. Our correspondent later

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our correspondent. A text message was sent to her mobile to remind her of her promise around 6.10pm on Monday. As of the time of filing this report, she had yet to respond.

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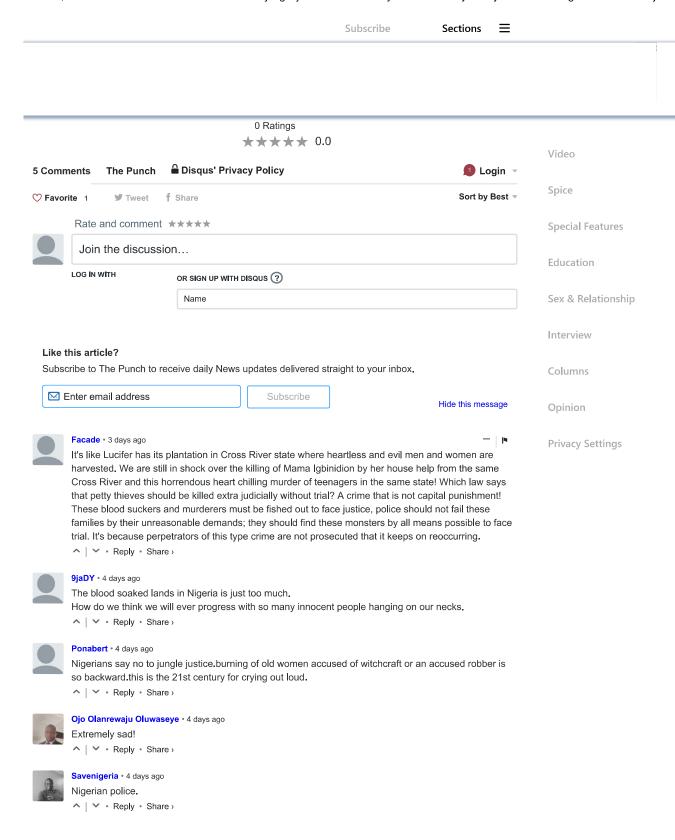
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