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## Bridget Agbahime: One brutal murder and millions of accomplices?

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By Ugoji Egbujo

The guillotine would have been benign. Her age didn't evoke any restraint. She was 74. The autopsy, if they didn't forget to do one, must show a thousand fractures. They were not in a hurry. Nothing could deter. They were bent on helping God. The coveted strike was the skull smashing one. Then the lifeless mangled body would be left for the feeble's kicks and perhaps a spatter of sputum.

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To trade cruelty for righteousness must be many a sinners' delight. Her cries were an abomination, she was beyond redemption. Her execution had become a sanitary duty. Her husband ran around, for justice and mercy. And found treachery and bigotry. He knelt, and cried, and grappled, and flailed hands, in supplication.

The hawk had clutched the chick, entreaties were useless. Once the mob gathered satanic momentum and sang praises to God, it was finished. Two lives snatched. One mutilated corpse and a forsaken ghost bequeathed.

The market didn't convulse. Filth has been swept away by religious fervor. Haven't they always been warned about their mouths, and what they may bring upon themselves? Sometimes, never-do-wells come in handy, clean the gutters. The nation pretended that the killing in Kano was an aberration. And feigned a moral outrage. A fleeting moral outrage. The police ran to the scene with ceremony but without forensic ideas.

They habitually attend such events to "prevent the breakdown of law and order". The nation must be bigger than one dispensable life. Then next, an effusion of platitudes of irresponsibility—"the killers would be fished out and brought to book". The stricken family is left aghast, too weak to cry.

This murder appeared inoculated against the epidemic of weariness and shoddiness that cripples criminal investigations. Intense publicity should count for something. This scandal is vertiginous. Big politicians had latched on and played to the gallery of national unity. Nothing is spared their opportunistic fangs. Selfies with the man, from whom life has been wrenched out, were thrown around without mournfulness. Then they equivocated about religious intolerance. And went away with their bags of glory.

Some men were quickly paraded in a dishevelment that matched the goriness of the act. The suspects had been arrested, we were told. It was so routine no one

cared to follow up. And the need to fabricate anything didn't really exist. The police come late to crime scenes and pick up passersby. But this wasn't the sort with the prospect of winged suspects. The suspects should be permanent features of that market.

The corpse was put out of sight unceremoniously. The burial of a commoner. And Kano carried on as it did after Gideon Akaluka. If She were a minister's wife we would have had a martyr. And the police would have conjured real suspects and admissible confessional statements. But she was anobody's nobody. It's unlikely the market cared to mourn her. Many in Kano aren't convinced a blasphemer doesn't deserve summary death.

The police concluded their meticulous investigations and sent in their watertight case file that should bring to book. The case file was so wretched the Attorney General described it as worthless. That absurdity didn't spark a riot. The Attorney General, without any squeamishness, asked that the suspects be set free and the Judge complied. They are innocent. If the chief law officer of Kano has any professional honour left in him, then he should come to the woefulness of his failure. He owes the world a coherent explanation of the ridiculousness of the Agbahime murder investigation.

The police were handed a bread and butter case of aggravated murder garnished with many potential witnesses. Homicides can go unsolved, but this execution after a protracted mob trial, at a market square, is very soluble. The toothless will crack it at first bite. But the police are now tongue-tied. Not even the minimal courtesy of letting the public make sense of this fumble. If Kano claims civilization, and I think it does, then the open lynching a 74 year old innocent grandmother should be an intolerable abomination. So the police and the community cannot come to such an abysmal failure. And cannot relapse into equanimity.

Public offices in Nigeria are cushy. No great expectations, no scrutiny. So the Commissioner of Police in Kano fails so tellingly and remains in his office without embarrassment. The victim must have been dragged from one Pontius Pilate to another and then to a Golgotha. She wasn't taken by a sniper. How can't the police find a sober heart, a righteous witness, overtaken by the repugnance of this atrocity?

But without any tidy witness protection mechanism, how would anyone testify against a dutiful soldier of God in a town where Hisbah, the moral police, do not allow Guinness trucks to ply the roads without pretending to be waste trucks? Hisbah, they say, is a creation of the law. That is the problem. Hisbah is a legal confusion. Hisbah is a partial rejection of the constitution and its guaranteed freedoms. Boko Haram is the very apotheosis of the arbitrariness Hisbah represents. Hisbah chases and breaks bottles of beer, other uniformed vigilantes on same moral cause lend their hands at bringing blasphemers to justice.

"Those who killed the woman are not Muslims." Agreed, they may be pickpockets. They could be depraved but they killed for Islam. Moderate Islam must stand up to the extremist variety. Islamophobia is now rampant and must be contained. But if we are committed to that philosophy then we must take one more step.

We must emphatically tell all who witnessed Agbahime's lynching but have refused to testify, that they are not Muslims. It is patently un-Islamic to witness a grave crime like the gruesome murder of an elderly woman and retire into conspiratorial silence. Accomplices to murder are murderers. But who will tell them? Who will speak the truth, boldly? Who will say it before this case grows cold and moldy like others.

Boko Haram should be a cautionary tale. The cheer leaders of religious fundamentalism become victims even before they have had time to take off their costumes. When Boko Haram sprouted, it received watering in tacit encouragement and sympathy from many high quarters. Theories were churned

out to prevent its demonization. Today the Northeast is desolate and the Country has been bled into recession.

Religious extremism is extremely dangerous. If Nigeria will burn, it will be set ablaze by a religious inferno. If Nigerians have no faith in the country it is because the country cannot protect lives and property, cannot promote equity and justice. If the police cannot solve any other murder, they must crush this murderous effrontery. The federal government must find urgency.

This case has a potentially corrosive effect on national unity. Any impunity that can invite violent reprisals must be suffocated. The failure to find and hang the murderers in Kano is sacrilegious.

Kano needs to be exonerated. That community must scream- “not again!” Not after Gideon Akaluka. A 74 year old innocent woman can’t be so brazenly butchered in public, without consequences. Kano is not a centre of barbarism. They must show collective repugnance at this unspeakable atrocity and the tendency that seeks to legitimize it. But you can’t even find any anger anywhere. Days after we were told we no longer have any suspects, no one has bothered to address the public.

So you must ask; just how many accomplices are there in this matter? Five million?