

THE TATTOO TRAGEDY

In the history of Nigeria, there hasn't been a time where citizens' lives mattered least – not until now anyway. Gradually, Nigerian life started to mean as little as mere livestock. This insane reality birthed an unprecedented amount of death, brutality, and overall wickedness.

The government – our chosen leaders; culpable but highly nonchalant criminals deft in abusing power, lent some of it to an evil set of Policemen. They called them SARS: The Special Anti-Robbery Squad. And together, they wreaked havoc on the youth in ways that no one could ever have imagined.

It was like any other day in Lagos spring time – sunny and hot, with the atmosphere polluted with blasting car horns of angry Lagos people stuck in traffic.

“Bro how you feeling na? I'm not trying to be insensitive or anything but you should've gotten used to fresh tattoos by now o. No be today you dey draw tattoo.” His reply was a sniff and a frown.

Tolu was a rather quiet person. He wasn't shy, he just didn't like small talk. The only time I found Tolu's mouth moving a lot was when I went to the studio with him. After that first time of seeing him rap, his quietness never bothered me again.

On that day, fate was a foe in disguise. For she had given an initial hope for happiness and beauty, only to later serve us tragedy – the kind we would not recover from for eons to come.

The following accounts lack all the necessary details, forgive me. The memory is now blur. Maybe because my mind is trying to get rid of the trauma or because it all happened really fast.

It began with a Police checkpoint. Everything that followed was bloody.

“Somebody please help! Help me” Tolu was lying in a pool of his own blood. “Please give me my phone. Let me call my parents... please!” No help. No aid. No one could do anything even if they wanted to. He was crowded by three SARS officers who wielded clubs and rifles. People stood around. Some lamenting, some recording. The gunshot wound in his stomach continued to bleed.

I too was useless to him – and it will haunt me for the rest of my life. I should’ve fought. But I was scared of getting shot. *It’s better to die fighting for something than to live for nothing.* That was Tolu’s favorite quote. He cherished it so much he said it at the end of every song, every cover, and even his freestyles. It was his life’s motto. He lived for it, and it was with him until his last day. That’s the thing about values and principles. They don’t leave you no matter what you go through. They don’t change. They are eternal.

“My friend shut up! Cultists like you don’t have parents! It’s only brothers and sisters you have” one officer replied, turning to his colleagues for affirmation. “I know say your fellow cultists no fit answer you now, ehn?” another officer said, chuckling scornfully.

After about half an hour of cussing and bullying, they shoved me into the back seat and drove off.

We abandoned Tolu.

By the time we were leaving, Tolu had stopped moving. His half-naked body looked lifeless and stiff under the car. Tears streamed quietly down my cheeks. He had bled to death.

As I was carted to the station, I sunk deep into thoughts. Memories of Tolu flooded my mind, each accompanied with many conflicting emotions. I remembered the first day he stalked into my tattoo shop looking so innocent I thought he was lost. He had this aura of calmness. The kind that made you feel like everything in the world took a pause. He had a peaceful soul, and

a free spirit. He was a gift to life, but his death was an insane calamity. A gracious gift was stolen from us forever. More tears streamed down my face.

As soon as we got into the station, they led me into a small room with the only source of light being a small barred window. The room smelled bloody and disgusting but that was the least of my problems.

They stripped me half-naked, sat me down, and tied my wrists to the back of the chair. Soon, they tied my elbows too, so tight that it limited blood flow in my arms. They also tied my ankles to the legs of the chair – *Hawan Keke (The Bicycle Ride)*.

That day, I experienced the textbook meaning of torture. They beat me – with clubs as big as my clenched fist – and electrocuted me at the same time. They broke my left arm, and if not for the timely intervention of a lawyer, I would've met the same fate as Tolu.

Once upon a time Nigeria was a great nation. A people united despite their vast cultural diversity and religious beliefs. A land blessed with innumerable, valuable resource in both natural and human. Now there's only a shadow of it.

We've learnt to live with this chronic economic degradation, with this disgraceful, stenchy administration they call leadership and governing, with the nation more divided than it ever was.

We have suffered. We've lost friends, families, and many other loved ones. And we wonder when will it end? Will a day come where we will be truly happy and satisfied with the government, and as a nation? Or will this only get worse?

Epilogue

This story was inspired by the death of Obi Chinedu who was arrested, gunned down, and left to bleed to death in Ogun state just for having many tattoos. This happened on the 19th of July, 2019. We will never forget.

I am in no way connected to the victim or his family and friends, but I feel their pain.

All these people who sacrificed their lives, are our heroes. May their labor not be in vain.

Thank you.