

Metro

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As cultists lay seige to Odogunyan, Lagos suburb

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CULT-RELATED activities have been on the increase in Odogunyan, a suburb of Ikorodu, Lagos State in recent times. Sadly enough, the dastardly acts have resulted to death of some people in the community. Concerned residents and indigenes have thus, called on the State Government to act on the ugly trend before it gets out of hand.

In fact, our reporter gathered that as it is, residents of the area literally do no longer sleep with both eyes shut due to activities of members of secret cults, which they describe as gradually toeing the line of dreaded Boko Haram insurgency. For instance, recently, two

youths, Onyebuchi Igwe and Debo were beheaded with their hands cut off by suspected cult members.

The deceased who were suspected to belong to a rival cult group, were killed on Sunday, August 18, 2013.

According to sources, their assassination was retaliation for the murder of another cult member, Michael Agbo, who was killed in place of his brother on August 6, 2013.

Also allegedly killed in cult-related activities in the area were one Matthew Atule, known as Atundu, and Sunday, an upcoming artist. They were said to have been murdered late last year. These activities by the cultists have made residents of the community live in constant fear. This is especially as their menace has assumed alarming dimension recently. The hoodlums have become so daring that in such areas as Tenibegiloju and Ojuemuren streets, their activities have become pronounced, thus, creating nightmare to residents.

Our reporter was told that the streets in the locality have become havens where the cult members reside and are at ease in carrying out their nefarious engagements. In an encounter with our correspondent, a resident who pleaded anonymity said; "It is saddening that the Odogunyan I used to know those days has totally changed following the emergence of these hoodlums in the streets.



•Governor Babatunde Fashola

I have lived here for over 17 years and it is sad that the peace we experienced those days is no more.

"In those days, people used to sleep outside their houses with all their family members till around 1am, 2am or even 3am, especially when there was power failure. But these days, you dare not try to stay outside your compound by 10pm. It is this bad. "Some days ago, I was returning from my place of work when I was accosted by these hoodlums at about 7pm in the street, where I was beaten severely after I attempted running upon sighting them. They collected my phones and everything I had on me that day. Till now, those boys still roam the streets and nothing is being done about this. It is sad."

Another resident who also pleaded anonymity for fear of being attacked posited that the sudden turn of events in the community may be as a result of the tertiary institution, Lagos State Polytechnic Ikorodu that is located close to the community.

When asked on his feeling about cult-related activities in the area, a resident in Ojuemuren Street said, "It is disheartening that the situation is worsening daily. We no longer live in peace in the community. We can't walk freely anymore. We can't put on some kind of clothes for fear of these cult boys. We can't go to some places. "Worse still, we can't even

worship freely in our churches and mosques anymore. You are walking on the street and suddenly, before you know it, you see people running and what you hear thereafter are gunshots, and the whole community is held hostage by these evil people that have been terrorizing the land.

"They have also taken opportunity of this unhealthy development to rob and also molest women. And the most annoying aspect of the situation is that the Police seem unable to help at such moments. "We had had times where these cult members engaged in a gun battle with operatives of the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), who had tried assisting the police. At such moments, the entire community had been held spell bound for the whole day as these boys had taken over the streets.

"Few days after Onyebuchi was murdered, some group of cult members stormed my neighbour's compound where it was said that they had gone in search of one Benue boy, but did not see him there. Even without meeting their target, they reportedly destroyed properties worth thousands of naira. You could imagine what would have happened if he was caught there. "These and more are the plights of the residents in this area. We don't have peace anymore. Our lives are not secure.

"The situation in Odogunyan needs urgent so-



•Umaru Manko, Lagos Police Commissioner

lution and we plead that the State Government comes to our rescue. Our business activities have been halted. Our friends are being killed and our houses rampaged by cult gangs. The landlords in the area are not doing anything to solve this problem despite the outcry of the residents. Not even the Local Government Chairman has addressed the situation.

The Baale of Odogunyan is not saying anything in respect to this. We need the State Government to come to our rescue because our lives are being threatened daily." Also speaking in the same vein, a young man who did not want his name on print obviously for fear of reprisals said he has been threatened severally by one of the cult groups to be part of them which he has refused.

He said three different cult groups exist in Odogunyan. They are *Ayee*, *Alora* and *Eiye*, the Yoruba name for a bird. He added that these cult groups bearing Yoruba names have defined members and exist with strict rules and regulations.

"For each of these cult groups, there are laws guiding them and any of the members who break any of the rules are disciplined severely. They have distinct apparels which must not be put on anyhow and by anybody. Their colours are red, white and black. They have their logos on these clothes that differentiate each from other cult

groups.

"They have designated locations for their meetings and specific areas in the community where they occupy. As such, no member from a rival cult dares to cross the lane of another; otherwise, the person is beaten severely or even killed. Besides, you get to know them by the way they speak, using specific slangs; the way they walk; their dressing; their hairdos. And the alarming part of this is that for each of these cult groups, there is a junior group and female groups who spy on the activities of the rival cult groups."

A market woman who also craved anonymity lamented that the situation has become such that these cult operatives walk freely on the streets and are not afraid of the police. She added that there had been times when some of these boys were arrested by the police and were released the following day.

She added; "We can no longer sell our products. Even the popular market in Ojuemuren street where business activities boomed before, now shrinks due to the ugly turn of events. Residents who can no longer bear these activities are now relocating to other places. The police alone cannot do this. They are trying their best but we need the military men to come to our rescue."

"It is unfortunate that the Army Barracks is just close by and all these evils are happening with us".