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## A NIGHT OF HELL IN FARASIME

— 3rd November 2017

- How policeman turned border community to a land of grief

By MUSA JIBRIL

**ON** Sunday, October 22, a gunslinger fired two shots and terminated two lives. Two young men were cut down in their prime, their death plunging their respective families and communities into mourning. Weeks later, the families are still smarting from grief, and the community still in the throes of sorrow for both victims were men with prospects.

One of the men, in particular, is a study in grief. Two things made his death pathetic, three makes it a sad tale: Had he lived 11 days more, he would be 30 years of age on November 2, another two months, he would have laid the foundation of a house he had long wanted to build, and just four days more he would have given his newborn son a name. And one more—his next album already in the studio would have hit the airwaves soon. So, it was while his corpse is cooling in the mortuary, the community gathered to christen his unnamed son Abraham. So much grief, so much shattered dreams.

This is the pathetic obituary of Solomon Hunga alias Shigon, a rising musician, who lost his life on a day that can be described as 'One Night of Hell' unleashed by a villainous character noted for scorched-earth attitude on Farasime, Nigeria's community on the edge of the border with Benin Republic.

### How it started

The tragedy's central characters included Mohammed, an alleged police intelligence officer and his two victims, Timothy Boyun alias Don't Talk and Solomon Godonu Hunga alias Shigon. The tragic plot has no twist: A fire broke out on Saturday night and the community had sent an SOS to firefighters, from both countries. The Nigerians—true to type—delayed but the Beninese arrived promptly and crossed into the Nigerian territory but were stalled from entering the scene by a cement blockade erected by Mohammed. Out of desperation, elders of the community ordered the barricade removed and the fire was put out.

However, their action brought upon the community the wrath of Mohammed, who backed by a group of soldiers in army fatigues and unmarked green Hilux, from Ibereko barrack, stormed the community to demand answers for the dismantling of his pillars which were meant to check smuggling activities. He reportedly demanded an immediate replacement. Cowed by his notoriety, the chief and people had pleaded to give them till the morrow to fix it. What happened next in that twilight hours remained shrouded in mystery. In a moment of madness, villagers alleged the cop cut loose two bullets from his pistol that struck the two men dead.

### Portrait of a rising star

If you stayed long in Farasime, chances are that you will hear his music filling the airwaves in Egun. Solomon Hunga alias Shigon is the closest thing to the community's popular musician. Because he sang in Egun, the language of the people of Badagry and nearby areas of Benin Republic, his popularity spread across the two countries. With the release of his album in 2016, everyone agreed he was on the threshold of a dazzling career.

Shigon, whose father died 15 years ago, grew up in Agada, Imeko-Afon Local Government area of Ogun State and trained as a blacksmith before he went to live with an older relative in Farasime. After apprenticing as an electronic repairer, music gave him a good start to life. Becoming the choirmaster at the Methodist Church, he founded a group that provided entertainment at social events. Then fame came calling and fortune began to trickle in. In 2016, he released an eight-track CD titled GBENInoNKPO. His music produced entirely in Egun language, enjoyed massive airplay in Badagry and Cotonou and furthered his fame far and wide. Buoyed by the success of his debut album, the late musician entered the studio for his sophomore LP, due for release in December.

When all the bits and pieces are put together, what appears is a tapestry of a man on the verge of greatness and prosperity when he was slain—that is the anger of the community.

### A community in anger

To know how deep the grief cut into the soul of the bereaved is to visit Kese, a lay-by community nestling against the lagoon along Igbaji-Owode road in Badagry West, Lagos. This is where Shigon hailed from.

When *Saturday Sun* visited on Saturday, October 28, the community appeared at first desolate, filled with a resounding silence. The air smelled of sadness. His family was located at the Agosu Quarters, in a peasant abode.

"I am sorry, I will have to take you to our elders," said a young man visibly inebriated with grief. It turned out he was the younger brother of the deceased. We ended up under a shed, which offered reprieve from the scorching sun. In few minutes, the news went round. In a jiffy, the community gathered there, all speaking in an admixture of their native Egun and Yoruba. The vibe was of strong emotions. Anger. Sadness. Frustration. Shigon's death was not a family's tragedy but a communal calamity, and the trauma, raw, and running deep. The community agonized at having being robbed of their illustrious son.



#### Shigon's last moment



In an atmosphere of sorrow, family members tried to reconstruct the last hours of the deceased's life. His cousin, Comfort Hunga, a hairdresser and trader, who took him to Farasime six years ago, was visibly tormented by her recall. "I was in my living room when I heard my husband's quick steps ascending the stairs and he burst into the room, saying, 'you are here while your brother is dying. He has just been shot'."

She was still dazed by shock as she recounted their last discussion, a day before his death. "He was on a bike and I called out to him to see me when he returned. But he didn't. The next day, Sunday, we met in church. He took the Bible readings in Egun while someone else read the Yoruba version. When it was time for thanksgiving, he was the one who sang. After the service, he apologized for not coming back to see me. I told him this: 'Your child is a special child. The day he was born, there was a fire outbreak. The third day, when they brought him home, a wire caught flame. Try and divine his path, as our elders do, so you can know what type of child he is.' He promised to do that on Monday. Then I asked him about preparation for the naming ceremony. He said it will be as early as 7 am and on a low key."

She disclosed the unbearable part of the tragedy. "He was the star of our family. If he was allowed to reach the peak of his rising, and he became prosperous, there was no way the prosperity wouldn't rub off on me. That is a great sadness for me. I brought him to Farasime so that our family can break the cycle of poverty. And by God, he was on his way to greatness."

The father figure in the gathering was Kehinde Hunga, a middle-aged man, who also concisely reconstructed the last hours of Shigon's life.

"The day his wife gave birth he came to inform us. He brought drinks and invited us to Farasime for the naming ceremony. He also informed us he was coming to lay the foundation of his house when the year ends."

The family's version of the tragedy he gave was a poignant narration with disturbing revelations.

"We were called as soon as the incident happened. By the time we arrived there, soldiers had cordoned off the area and were beating people. We learnt the wounded had been rushed to a hospital inside Cotonou." Then the most damning part of the tragedy-- "But Mohammed followed them there, and told the hospital not to treat them because they were thieves. The Beninese, not wanting to meddle in Nigerian affairs, refrained from treating the duo who consequently bled to death."

He narrated the exchange between the chairman of Badagry West Local Government and Mohammed for his side of the story. "He denied that he fired a shot, that they were killed by the indigenes."

Amos Jesuyan Hunga, Shigon's 26-year-old brother said, "The last time we saw was Friday, he called me on phone about the naming ceremony. We discussed about our mother who lives in Agada. Every end of the year, we organise some foodstuff and take it to her. That was our major point of discussion."

His wife, now a widow, had the last interaction with him. "He came late from church that Sunday and apologized for not giving us money earlier in the day. I told him I had already cooked his meal. He took the mat outside and asked me to bring his food. Just then, someone called him to come and fix his light for him. He went to do the work, as he came in, the community bell rang summoning people, and he went out immediately. That was the last I saw of him. It was in the morning of Monday, I heard the full details of what befell him," said Mariam Hunga.

Shigon never had the opportunity to conduct a naming ceremony for his son. The family and the church did that.

Most pathetically, he never left a name for the new born. "On Saturday morning, we discussed the name for the child. We could not agree on one. So we postponed it till the next day, Sunday. If he had lived one hour more, that was what we would have discussed. He came in and a few minutes later they called him out, to his death," said his widow.

To name the child, the responsibility fell on Comfort Hunga, who raised his late father. Comfort Hunga gave the rationale for naming the child Abraham. "Abraham is a great name. I came up with the name based on my last discussion with his father. In prayer, when Christians found themselves at crossroads, we invoke the God of Abraham, and God often responds to such prayers."

*Saturday Sun* also tried to get in touch with the family of Timothy Boyun, the second victim. The promise to grant an interview by Pastor Bonyun of Undivided Church, elder brother of the late Timothy, did not materialize due to his busy schedule.

#### The triggerman

Now, what about Mohammed, the man who pulled the trigger? Efforts made by *Saturday Sun* to learn more about him were spurned by people. No one was willing to talk. Getting people to talk about him the first day was akin to squeezing the juice out of stone. Eventually, bits and pieces put together threw up an ugly portrait. Alleged to be a Nupe man, Mohammed was described variously in nasty terms – Reckless. Bully. Arrogant.


"He is a man who took lives at whim. Just four months ago, he kicked a man who eventually died from the wound," a man alleged.


It is said that he has been living in the town for donkey years. The best estimate was 25 years. The rest about him is murky.

"A police intelligence officer."


"No, he was dismissed long ago," another offered.

 e is fronting for one Commissioner of Police."

 obbody wanted to go on record. Even off record, people were suspicious. A man ventured "How do we know you are not an informant sent by Mohammed to eavesdrop on us?"

 At the time of going to press, efforts are still ongoing to reach him for his side of the story.

 **Communities' response**

 According to Kehinde Hunga, the local government chairman had called a meeting between the communities affected, namely Owode, Farasime and Kese, and pleaded for calm, to get the corpses back to Nigeria and then decide on the next course of action.

"We have not taken any action. We are awaiting doctor's report. We have not decided yet. But we hope government for once will be responsive."

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