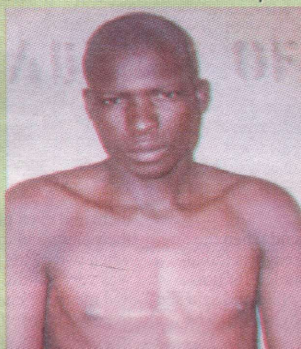




• Overview of Galma River that kills swimmers in Zaria

Galma: Zaria river that kills young boys

■ Drowns 10 in 6 months ■ Fishermen, farmers, residents speak



• The victims, the late Aliyu Garba (left) and Mustafa Ibrahim

From Abdullahi Hassan, Zaria

River is one of the major prominent rivers in Zaria. It is located within the outskirts of the ancient city about three to four kilometres North-East and five kilometres to the industrial area of the historic town.

The river is used for farming and fishing as common business for most local residents of the area. For those coming from Kano to Zaria, the Galma or Zabi Bridge is the last to cross over.

But the most sad and pathetic thing about the Galma River is the frequent claims of lives, especially those of young boys who always go there for swimming. It is estimated that no fewer than 10 persons have died within six months this year in the river.

According to a source, more than 20 young men had died in the river in the last two years while swimming.

The question on the lips of natives was why was it that only boys who come to swim the river are victims, and sometimes their corpses can't be found.

The residents of the area have divergent views about this mysterious occurrence. Most of them believe that the river is devilish.

Some of them disclosed that many years back people used the river for spiritual activities, especially at the evening or in the night while some others were of the opinion that the deaths were just mere accidents, which occurred because the boys lacked adequate swimming techniques.

Recently, two young boys died in the river while swimming and their corpses were later recovered by fishermen.

Mallam Muhammad Garba, the father to one of the deceased said: "My son Aliyu Garba died in the river, he was 15 years old. Though I was not at home when he left for Galma River together with his friends, but when the incident happened I was informed on phone that Aliyu died in the river.

"I came back and met his corpse, I reliably gathered that Aliyu used to go and swim with his friends, even on the fateful

day, he told his friends that he will swim for longer time. He was swimming and talking, but suddenly his friends stopped hearing his noise, and later called fishermen for his rescue. But when they removed him, he was dead already."

Garba said that the death of his son was a shocker and, therefore, urged the concerned authorities to stop people from swimming in the river.

"It is over, I learnt my son is the tenth among boys that lost their lives this year in the river; only God knows how many it will be if the situation continues like that."

Similarly, Alhaji Ibrahim Yunusa, a businessman residing at Tudun Wada, who also lost his son recently in the river said: "My son Mustafa Ibrahim was 22 years old, he died at the same dangerous spot in the river. According to his friends, he always goes to the river with friends to swim after school hours, which I have never known. On the fateful day I was coming from office, his mother called me to tell me that Mustafa was in hospital, he was drowned in the river, thereafter, I rushed to the said hospital and discovered that he had died already.

"It was painful and sad the way my son died, he was the eldest and I had so much confidence in him, please the government should ban swimming in that river."

Also speaking, Mallam Ibrahim Musa, a resident of Dakace, the closest neighbourhood to Galma River said: "It is true that young boys always die in this river, I believe that there are Jinns (devil) in the river, in fact, our parents used to tell us to be careful not to swim in it, but these days children don't listen to their parents."

He said that the river has two sections, which are hard to cross over in those days, pointing out that the most dangerous was the one close to the bridge.

"There was an area in the river that some times you could see fire or smoke without fire coming on the top of the water, I was a small boy by that time and I saw it myself," he said.

A 70-year-old man, Malam Tukur Mohammed Tukum, and resident of Gyetlesu Area, said: "Let me tell you that young boys

died because they always swim in an area where ritual activities takes place, in fact, as at present there are people who use the Galma River for their Juju practice, so how can you escape from devil when some people invited him. The river is a devilish river and the attraction for sacrifice are the young boys.

"We have told parents severally that they should warn their children from swimming in that river, but it appears they did not listen, so there is no escape route."

Idris Balarabe Tanimu, a fisherman at Galma River said: "You see no fisherman has ever died in this river. It is true that more young boys always die here. I think they are dying because of their inability to swim.

"The young boys always swim around the reservoir tank or water pipeline area which has high volume of water and the boys cannot contend the pressure of the water coming from the area, so they die during the process of trying to get out.

"I have been fishing in the river for 25 years since I was 20 years old, and moved round the river, but I have never come across any mysterious thing, so I don't want to believe that there is devil in the river."

He, however, admitted that there are people who visit the river for different purposes which may include ritual activities, but argued that does not mean the deaths were as a result of ritual activities in the river.

But Malam Bala Na Bala, a farmer in Galma River for 50 years said: "Rivers are usually home of all devils, Galma River could not be an exception. I have been doing farming in this river for many years, but it was only recently I have been hearing about deaths of young boys in the river, although in the past our parents used to warn us not to swim or farm in this river perhaps because of the devilish activities or any danger."

He confirmed that ritual activities were common in the Galma River, pointing out that presently a man has constructed a house and is living in the river, go and ask him what he is doing there?

Looking at the occurrence, a social welfare officer to Zaria Local Government who does not want his name mentioned said: "It is true that we have received reports about the death of 10 young boys in Galma River. The matter is before the state government and investigation on the frequent death is ongoing already."

He, however, denied the rumour that the Galma River was being used for ritual purposes, noting that "the state government is presently constructing a dam with reactivation of water treatment plant in the river, how could it be surrendered for such ugly activities? Nobody has ever reported death among engineers or constructions workers.

The officer blamed parents for being responsible for the deaths of their children by allowing them to go to swim there. "My department has been warning parents not to allow children to swim in the river, but the warning was in vain".