

A major road in Bariga during raining season

A refuse dump site within Shomolu community

Scary part of Shomolu

It is the heartbeat of the Mushin area of Lagos State. Apart from its business strength, it is also a place where rascality, hooliganism, touting and cultism are order of the day and the residents live in perpetual fear. **IFEOLUWA IDOWU** x-rays the lifestyle in Shomolu

Shomolu, popularly known as the hub of printing press in Lagos State is also known to be a typical ghetto. Area boys are lords of the area. They rule, govern and dictate the tune to which the dwellers dance. It is the master's wish! Even government authorities seem to revere them in their world; they are just in control of the Shomolu environment.

Apart from the aforementioned that Shomolu is known for, it is also known to produce street urchins and prostitutes as well as some very successful people in the society. Pornography, betting, lotto and touting are order of the day in this area.

Cultism, which is in different factions is known to be most vicious cultism in Lagos State. The trend now in Shomolu/Fadeyi is that once they killed their prey (a human being), they cut off the head and take it round the whole streets of Shomolu and Fadeyi to tell rival cult groups or family members of the murdered victim that they have done their best or got justice.

Despite all these description, they live their lives simple and momentarily. For them, the slogan is 'take life as it comes, turn to it the side it turned to you.' Almost on every weekend, they are always in ankara uniform for parties. There is hardly any weekend that there is no party in Shomolu.

But that does not prevent them from fighting, destroying and disturbing the peace of their environ-

ment.

Recently, a fight broke out between two rival cult groups over a lady known simply as Bashirat (not real name). Bashirat is a girlfriend to a member of one of the cult groups; she is a nail painter and a local make-up artist. Fair in complexion, gap toothed, busty, huge and well shaped, indeed, she is a beauty to behold and a trophy worth fighting for. She also belongs to a local dancing group in the area.

Bashirat was said to be dating the leader of one of the cult gang and at the same time, dating a member of another faction of the cult gang. The cat was, however, let out of the bag when there was a central festival. The two men wanted to lay full claims to her, dance with her and really pamper her as the babe of a leader or of a real active man.

The alarm blew at the party and that led to deadly clash of four cult gangs, two fighting each directly, the other two taking sides. The fight led to many securing injuries and few dead. Bizarrely, three heads including that of Bashirat's other boyfriend (a member of the other fraternity) were severed off their bodies. The cultists didn't stop at that.

They took the severed heads round the vicinity to serve as

warning to others. Eventually, Bashirat fled the area, abandoned her flourishing business and family members behind.

Similarly, another fight broke out between two factional groups barely two weeks after the Bashirat saga. This time, it was about leadership tussle and betrayal of trust. One group-Eiye fraternity claimed to be superior to and more deadly than the Alora fraternity. During their clash in the area, about eight people were reported dead and two heads were severed off their bodies and dragged on the ground around the vicinity. The two groups became sworn enemies; as such, no peace in that vicinity. Even the police had tried in several ways to restore sanity and discipline but all efforts proved abortive.

According to Mr. Basit Sodiq, who has been staying in Shodimu Street of Shomolu for 40 years plus, the transformation started just a few years ago. "Normally, they were just touts, but now, they are cultists. Not that they weren't cultists then, it has all just gone from bad to worse. In fact, it has become bold and bizarre. Some years ago, we would just be outside, and we would suddenly see boys run past. Few minutes later, the people pursuing them would pass with guns.

Sometimes, they would shoot into the air and we would all run into our houses or hide wherever looked safest at that moment. Unbeknownst to us, that was the beginning of die-hard cultism in Shomolu as it is also called. And after a while, we started hearing about the Aye cult, the Eye (bird) and Alora. On this street, it is Aye that rules. And let me tell you, if the guys on the other

side of the canal should dare come here, they won't leave here in one piece.

They are now sworn rivals. Part of the nightmare for us comes to the open more when you are doing something like getting new equipment for your shop, or roofing your house. They would all come out of their hiding place to demand for money. And if you do not give them anything, well, the result is best imagined.

This house next to ours was roofed just two months ago; they collected N50, 000 before they allowed the owner to roof his house. There are surely guys who are territorial and protect their streets and the people, but they are no match for the powerful cults. It is now a battle of weapons and not fists anymore," Mr. Sodiq narrated.

Another resident (a couple) who pleaded anonymity and have been living in Shomolu for 39 years on, explained in details what the cultist represent and stand for.

According to the couple, the most known cults are the Aye-Axemen, represented by a coffin, an axe, a knife and a drop of blood. They wear the colours black and white and a black beret. This cult is based on hierarchy, starting from the number one person, who is called Strongman; the number three is the sharpshooter. The Aye and Axe are reportedly very private and quiet.

They are not lousy at all. They recruit new members mostly based on recommendation, after which they test the member. They are also known to be an enlightened group. This is one of the groups that have deeply penetrated the streets of Shomolu.

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