

Just Human

We live in a strange world

By Chidi Nkwopara

The people of Ohaji/Egbema LGA of Imo State are predominantly farmers. They pride themselves as "the food basket of Imo State". They were right until the advent of the huge petro-dollar came from the petroleum as it reversed everything in the area. The once very peaceful and accommodating people somersaulted. Militancy, cultism, armed robbery, gross disrespect for culture and tradition, as well as arms peddling have since taken centre stage in the oil rich communities, Ohaji/Egbema. Peace, stability and development naturally took flight, as every other person in the area now try to outshine the other in criminal acts. Several communities in the LGAs have had one form of serious crisis or the other. Most of them sadly resulted in brothers taking up dangerous weapons to kill, destroy, maim, loot properties and rape, even widows, mothers and young girls.

The most recent is the gruesome murder of Uzoma Ezenji, a native of Umukpoche Village, Ohoba, on June 22, 2009. He was shot, burnt and thrown into a disused deep colonial well, allegedly by youths and some men from Umugologo and Alaka towns. There are six towns in Ohoba autonomous community. These

are Umukpo, Eziam, Umukpoche, Umugologo, Alaka and Umunwanyi. There is some measure of discontent in towns that feel, and rightly too, that all the traditional and public offices are skewed in favour of Alaka and Umugologo where the royal father, Eze P.O. Anyanwu, comes from.

Investigations showed that the town union President, Cajetan Ekeruo, is from Alaka. The President of Ohoba Youths Movement is from Umugologo. The Co-ordinator of the community vigilante group is from Umugologo. The position of Traditional Prime Minister, which some claimed was the exclusive preserve of Umukpoche people, was confiscated and given to Chief Ozuruigbo Nokaa from Umugologo.

Similarly, the office of the Palace Secretary, handled by Chief Nicholas Nduwuba, was removed from him by the royal father and given to his immediate younger brother, Nze Cyprian Anyanwu. The town's Chief Security Officer, Chief Godspower Nwanorim, is an Umugologo son. The Chairman and Secretary of Ohoba Council of Elders, Elder Augustine Ukwenga and Nze Jonas Onyiriuka respectively, are from Umugologo village.

Having firmly grabbed power, youths from Umugologo

and Alaka became loose. In a six-page distress letter dated June 27, 2009, addressed to Imo State Commissioner of Police (CP) and signed by four sons of Umukpoche, including Mr. R.A. Odunze, a retired deputy superintendent of police, the people gave a graphic account of the ugly happenings in their area.

The people grieved that during the Ohoba versus Dennis Ugwuegbu crisis, the youths of Umugologo and Alaka burnt buildings in every other town except in theirs. The petitioners put the scenario more succinctly.

"On 2nd May 2007, during a traditional marriage ceremony at Umukpi, Umukpoche, by Mr. Ezekiel Ohiri, the cult leaders launched an attack and destroyed canopies, plastic seats and tables worth thousands of Naira. Guest and visitors fled for their lives", the CP was told.

On 27th December 2007, the same cult boys attacked Umukpoche and Umunwanyi villages. Severe damages were done on buildings and personal properties of Umukpoche people. In this incident, no life was lost but all the people who were wounded, stayed long in the hospital before they were discharged.

These hoodlums again attacked Umunwanyi and Umukpoche villages May 11, 2008. They shot indiscriminately, harassing innocent citizens, forcing them to scamper into safety. Several people were attacked with dangerous weapons.

The CP was similarly told that on May 17, 2009, Matthew and Oriaku, Ezi Ugwuegbulam Ekeruo and Amarachi Amadi waylaid Nkemjika Nwanedi at Umugologo and gave him a machete cut on his head. Friday Nwaneri, who accompanied Nkemjika on that trip from Ezuma to their Umukpoche home, was equally wounded. *Saturday Vanguard* gathered that Nkemjika was first admitted at Saint Jude's Hospital, Ohoba, and later transferred to the Federal Medical Centre, Owerri.

"This matter was reported to the Ohoba Police Station that same day of

Imo community burns man alive

* Police indicted

occurrence and later to your office on 20th May, 2009, but till date, no arrests were made. The Eze and the town union President swept the matter under the carpet as usual, despite calls from many quarters to arrest the culprits", the people told the CP.

On May 20, 2009, Nkemjika's father, Mr. Augustine Nwanedi, sent a petition captioned, "Attempted Murder", to the CP. He gave a narration of the attempt on his son's life and gave names of suspects. The report died an unnatural death as no action was taken by the state police command.

"I reported this matter to the Ohoba Police Station but till date, the culprits who parade the town with their matchets, guns etc, have not been arrested. I therefore appeal to you to use your good offices to arrest and prosecute these militants in Ohoba", Nwanedi pleaded.

The traditional ruler of Ohoba, Eze P.O. Anyanwu had a view on the sordid attempt on Nkemjika's life. He said that nobody in his right senses is happy about security problems engineered by youth restiveness and exuberance in the community.

"Those concerned in this dastardly and unlawful act have been reported to the police to face the full weight of the law. Whoever starts any trouble will face it single handedly. The police know what to do in the circumstance. Let us stop taking the law into our

hands. Let us help to arrest the culprits and teach them the lessons they refused to know, rather than perpetuating criminality", the royal father stated in a letter to Augustine Okpo and Sylvester Nwaneri.

On May 18, 2008, elders of Umukpoche and Umunwanyi wrote to Eze Anyanwu, complaining about the regular attacks unleashed on them by the youths of Alaka and Umugologo. After giving several instances of the unwarranted attacks, the elders stated: "We plead with you to use your good

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identified the spot. On very close observation, the marks on the ground proved that the deceased was dragged and it ended near the deep well. Blood stains were found on the concrete works of the well. Suspicion heightened that the dead may have been dumped into the well.

The villagers hired a water pumping machine, moved it to the well and started draining the well. Even those who initially claimed that no life was lost in the ugly incident were shocked beyond description, when the body of the deceased was discovered. One of the residents was lowered into the well. He tied a rope round the neck of the deceased and those waiting round the well pulled the corpse out. The police was there as the bizarre drama unfolded!

A careful observation of the dead man's body revealed that he was partly burnt before he was thrown into the well. Part of his roasted body peeled, especially his two legs. The corpse was later moved to the morgue of the Federal Medical Centre, Owerri, for post mortem examination.

Eze Anyanwu confirmed these ugly incidents in a telephone interview. He confirmed the death of Uzoma Ezenji, even as he claimed that the police were yet to make any arrest.

"Cultists from both sides caused the mayhem. I urge government to arrest them. The sad thing is that each time we complain, the police simply tell us to arrest the culprits and hand them over. The police have obviously not done enough to stem the tide", the royal fumed.

He denied that he set up a group called "The Peacemaker", which later transformed into a cult group. Eze Anyanwu could not however explain how the positions in his community were largely skewed in favour of his Umugologo town and Alaka. He only said that the police command have stationed their men to keep the peace in the area.

Spirited efforts made by *Saturday Vanguard* to get Mr. Linus Nwaiwu, the Police Public Relation Officer's comment on the issue failed as he was said to be planning the burial of his father. The Commissioner of Police, Mr. Aloy Okorie, could equally not be reached. His personal assistant, who identified himself as Dominic, a deputy superintendent of police, picked the call. When told why the call was made, he said: "I am not in a position to confirm or deny the story. Get across to the PPRO. The Commissioner of Police is very busy now and cannot talk to you."

That was the end of the story from the police angle as nobody reached *Saturday Vanguard* thereafter at the time of going to press. It is equally not clear if the police are making any effort to apprehend the rampaging cultists in Ohoba. Until this is done, the security situation in that community will remain fragile and unsafe.

offices to intervene on this before things go off hand. Enough is enough. Umukpoche and Umunwanyi are not weak. A repeat of this type of attack or molestation for no just cause may lead to a catastrophic condition, which no one can calculate its consequences."

There was however a sad twist in the matter after about one month when Nkemjika was discharged from hospital. There was jubilation on his return because the rumour mill was agog that he was dead. One Leonard, alias, Okpo from Umugologo, went to Umukpoche market square, boasting that nobody was in a position to touch anybody from either Umugologo or Alaka.

Nkemjika, who obviously felt taunted and insulted, rushed from where he was and gave Leonard a cut with the machete on his head. In a retaliatory move, Umugologo and Alaka youths, who were allegedly led by Matthew Oriaku, marched down to Umukpoche. They destroyed buildings and properties. When hostilities died down, stories went round that Mr. Uzoma Ezenji had been shot on the allegation that he destroyed the louver blades in the President General's house.

The orgy of destruction continued in the morning of Tuesday, June 23, 2009. Many stores and vehicles were burnt. Houses and properties were either destroyed or looted. To worsen the matter, the attackers denied that anybody was killed and they did everything to cover their tracks. But it was not for too long.

The gruesome murder would have remained a mystery if the two boys who tried to help Ezenji into safety did not insist that they were eyewitnesses. They narrated how they abandoned the corpse of their compatriot and