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## Lagos shanties of gold and rust: The oil vandals' fortress, the hemp dealer

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2016 8:57 AM / IN [SPECIAL REPORT](#) / [COMMENTS](#)

BY BOSE ADELAJA

From time immemorial, some people see Lagos as no man's land, reason being that people from all walks of life settle there.

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Geographically, nature has endowed Lagos to be an Island as it is surrounded by water. Ships from across the world berth at Lagos ports and this enhances

commercial activities. The former federal capital has porous borders with some West African countries.

Talking about the nature of Lagos, some Nigerians, from riverine areas, saw it as an advantage to settle along the creeks. The people, mainly Ijaw and Ilaje, carry out fishing business while some are there for illicit activities like theft, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping and robbery.



Over time, these sellers began to erect structures along the bank of the creeks which are mainly shanties.

These shanties sprang up in the creeks of Majidun, Ajegunle, Isawo in Ikorodu, Agilinti, Makoko, Bariga, Agboyi, Somolu, Badore,

Ikota and Awoyaya. Later, the development extended to some other parts of Lagos that are not only riverine but also slums and swampy. The areas include Festac, Ijeshatedo, Aguda, Ajeromi\Ifelodun, Lagos West, Igando, Badagry, Ebutemeta, Iworo-Ajido, Epe, Mende, Anthony, Mafoluku, Olusosun, Mushin, Itire, Ilasa, Aguda, Okokomaiko, Lusada, Ajangbadi, Osapa London, Ijeh and Agege.

Due to the economic situation in the country, some low income earners and artisans also migrated to some of these places as cost of accommodation in the metropolis rose. Meanwhile, some others due to the nature of their, business, have chosen to reside in such areas to enable them perpetrate illicit activities.

One peculiar thing about shanties in Lagos is that the areas are stuffy, filthy, swampy and densely populated. They lack toilet facilities. Electric cables litter

everywhere. But the irony is that residents enjoy electricity services better than many organized areas.

In terms of religion, white garment churches and traditional religion structures and few mosques are common sight.

Amongst occupants of the shanties are traditional healers who attend to bone fractures, local antenatal and midwifery, personnel commercial motorcycle operators and street hawkers.

While some of the residents are there to earn a living, many engage in illicit businesses like 419, hard drug, bunkering, robbery, kidnappings and hired assassination.

At the mention of the word, "shanties", what comes to the mind of many people is that the settlements are meant for criminals but investigation into the system established that they are inhabited by the good, the bad and the ugly as you have also there artisans, labourers, traders and some who were displaced by nature.

In the course of Sunday Vanguard's visit, it was observed that some residents of the areas live there in order to shield their illicit business dealings while some others are compelled by nature.

An example is a patent medicine trader, Mr John Okeke, from Anambra State, who occupies a make-shift structure divided into a room and shop.

He pays N170,000 per annum as rent. He said he had been arrested several times when he was living at Onike\Yaba and some of his goods seized by law enforcement agents. For survival and avoidance of disturbance, he relocated to his present abode in Okoya\Ajegunle.

Another occupant, Biggy, who hails from Ilaje and deals in Indian hemp, said he is more comfortable living in the environment.

He said, "I am comfortable here much more than any part of the world." A peep into his one-room apartment at Amukoko revealed that the furniture and electronics could be estimated at over N2m. He has aides on his payroll.

Posing as a street hawker to conceal her identity, Sunday Vanguard reporter asked the Indian hemp baron how much he pays his aides and he boasted: "How much is the minimum wage in Nigeria? I can pay the salary of about 20 civil servants monthly. I have built houses in my home town Ondo State and married four wives in different parts of Lagos. I am mobile, so, not everyone that lives here is poor".

Biggy braggingly offered the reporter a bottle of iced wine which she politely rejected.

At Oko Baba in Ebute Metta, which has its literal meaning as "Father's settlement", the shanty is dominated by Ijaw and Ilaje who are fishermen and timber dealers.

Initially, the place was swampy before it was transformed; with sawdust used to fill the waterlogged area, the land was reclaimed. Today, it accommodates people from all walks of life such that the name of the shanty rings bell in Lagos State.

The system operated there varies; in some areas, rent is paid daily, weekly or monthly while in some areas, it is paid quarterly or annually depending on the location. The amount paid as rent ranges from N100 to N250, N700 and N10,000.

At Otumara, Lagos West, a mother of two, Taiwo Abegunde, said she relocated to the area about three years ago due to cultism and robbery attacks at Fadeyi\Onipanu. She said, "I used to own a big beer palour at Fadeyi until I lost



**my husband to cult attack.** One of my customers brought me here to start life afresh after I was asked to quit by my landlord for inability to pay rent,”

During a visit to Ajah, as the Sunday Vanguard reporter had a chat with some petty traders, suddenly a young man passed by and the smell of Indian hemp filled the air. The young man faced the reporter and said, “I hope you don’t mind, this is what we use to entertain our visitors).”

Another resident, simply identified as Abbey Isaga, said he relocated to the place due to high rent in Lagos metropolis “I relocated here when life became unbearable in town, my goods were seized twice at Idi-Iroko and life became so tough”.

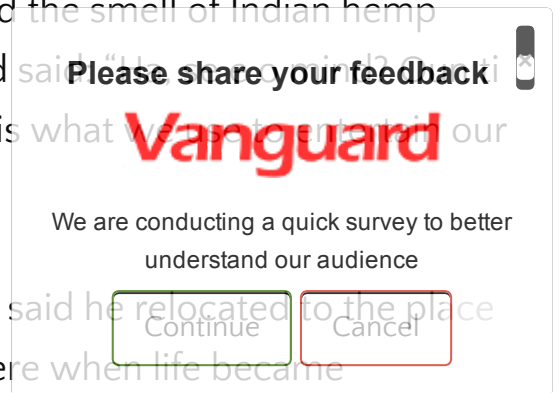
At Majidun, Ikorodu, a traditional physiotherapist, Rire Emmanuel, said he grew into the business started by his parents.

Sunday Vanguard met with some of his patients who confirmed his competency. One of them, a vehicle accident victim, Johnson Ajayi, said he had been an in-patient with him for the past six months.

He said, “I am recuperating seriously, my leg would have been amputated if not for this man, the charges are reasonable compared to the orthopedic hospitals in Lagos.”

At Agilinti in Agboyi-Ketu area, a traditional gynecologist, Madam Priye Esther was seen attending to ante-natal issues and some of the patients said that was where they were delivered of their babies at low charges, stress and less risk.

One of them Saidat Opaleye said this was her fourth delivery.



She said, "I have been delivered of four children in this place; it is cheaper, safe and no waste of time. All they need is government support for traditional medicine. They are doing well; afterall, they have been in existence before the advent of general medicine."

In the course of this reporter's visit to Makoko, a church founder, simply identified as prophet Moses, said he preferred to run his church in the riverine area than upland. He said, "Prayers are quickly answered in the riverine than any other place".

Next week:

We will take you into the new Lagos of Gov. Ambode and his developmental strides and why he insists he can transform the shanties.



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