

Shotta' - the image re some males in Jamaica

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De facto leaders are often able to mobilise communities to come to their defence. In this file photo, supporters of Christopher 'Dudus' Coke demonstrate in front of Gordon House, the seat of the country's Parliament. The demonstrators say Coke had stepped into the void left vacant by their elected leaders and is doing a good job of providing for the community. - file

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The parishes of Kingston and St Andrew comprise many inner-city communities whose residents have many social and financial challenges.

In these cramped urban spaces, you will find illiterate and dispossessed youth, teenaged fathers and mothers, mothers with many children for many fathers, massive unemployment, dilapidated tenements, overcrowded shacks and an abundance of guns and ammunition.

Invariably, everybody is very loyal to either of Jamaica's two main political parties. And while there are many decent, law-abiding citizens in these communities - some totally estranged from the ethos and sensibilities of inner-city life - there are also many who are rooted and grounded in a lifestyle replete with criminal activities.

Among them is the 'shotta', the focus of today's article. The bloody flare-up in west Kingston last week prevented me from meeting with the intended subject who incidentally was born and bred in west Kingston, and is nothing like the elements who valiantly challenged the security forces for several days.

The 'shotta' is brought up to be a cold-blooded, gun-toting, trigger-happy mercenary. He's not socialised to be a journalist, lawyer, doctor, educator, accountant, mechanic, etc. He is taught to be a womaniser and father of many 'yutes', though he himself might not know his own father.

Dr Herbert Gayle, urban anthropologist, violence expert and lecturer at the University of the West Indies, Mona campus, in his thesis on trans-Atlantic homicide (2007), says 'shottas' are most likely between ages 15 and 25, did not complete secondary school and have no father or constant male supervision. He says, "Of every group of young murderers I study, three-quarters of them have no father."

The 'shotta' thrives because he's revered on his turf. Women love him and young boys want to be like him. This sort of demagoguery is not confined to Kingston and St Andrew's inner-cities.

'Shottas' idolised

Throughout the length and breadth of Jamaica, the 'shotta', 'gallis' and woman-beater is well respected and idolised. The well-behaved, upstanding youth who pursues an education or career is not the role model in many quarters anymore. This pride of place belongs to the 'shotta'.

Accompanying this glorification of the 'shotta' is the murderous minds which some of us possess. Some people just talk about killing others as if it were a passing fancy.

There is little or no reverence for life in some quarters. And we just love to hate.

Hatred is a human condition that is so pronounced among a set of people who sing, "*Eternal Father bless our land*" at every opportunity we get, but it seems as if Eternal Father has blessed us with a great amount of hatred.

From the baby sucking its mother's milk to the dying elderly, malice is second nature to some of us. And the pathetic part of this loathing is that, for the most part, there is no basis for the hatred.

We hate people we don't even know - people we see on TV, people we hear on radio, people we read about. We hate people because of how they look, walk, talk, for what they have and don't have, what they stand for or against. And like cancer, this hatred has been eating away at our creativity, ability to unite and build, social and civil responsibilities, personal and professional development, and, by extension, our contribution to national development.

Out of this hatred comes the desire to kill. Even people who claim to be religious talk about killing with such ease. The 'shotta' whose power rests with the gun, finds it easy to pull the trigger because he's brought up in a society where he's surrounded by talks of killing the informer, the gay man, the 'bowcat', 'Joe Grind', any man who diss him, etc. Then he's used as a pawn in political games of chess.

Real change necessary

Why then are we shocked at the current state of affairs in the country? The monster we have created is now wreaking bloody havoc on our lives.

William Shakespeare is long dead, but the following lines from Macbeth, one of his more popular plays, are still relevant today: "*That we but teach bloody instructions, which being*

taught, return to plague the inventor. This even-handed justice commands the ingredients of our poisoned chalice to our own lips."

The events unfolding in west Kingston might just be an effort in futility if concerted efforts are not made to shatter the negative image and expectations of the country's youth by the education system, single mothers, absentee fathers and the political directorate through the annihilation of garrisons and the implementation of social intervention programmes.

Let's see then who has the political and social will to do just. Who will declaw this wicked tiger?

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