

Money Making Rituals and Superstition in Nigeria

Written by Leo Igwe

Monday, 21 January 2013 09:00

Early this month, the police in Kogi State arrested a 46 year old man who murdered his 4-month old son for ritual purposes. According to the report, the man on the fateful day quietly moved the baby around midnight from the mother's bedside while she was deeply asleep. He killed the child and hurriedly buried him. The ritualist is right now in police custody while investigation continues. On several occasions in the past, the police have often arrested and prosecuted people for ritual killing and related crimes. But this criminal practice continues. Is prosecution really the answer- the *only* answer-to this savage crime? I do not think so.

In Nigeria, the belief in ritual money is very strong and widespread. The belief is entertained both by the educated and the non educated, by people of all faiths, and by those who indulge in ritual killing and sacrifice of human beings and those who do not. Modern education in science and logic has not succeeded in eradicating the belief. The existence of relevant laws have not stopped people from carrying out money-making rituals. The belief in ritual money, often seen as self evident has driven people across the country to kidnap, murder and mutilate other human beings including their family members. Children have targeted and murdered their parents and grandparents for rituals. Parents, as in this case, have used their children or housemaids for ritual purposes. What happens is that people who desperately want to get rich consult a local medicineman or witchdoctor. The charlatan then directs the client to procure, among other things, some human body parts; sometimes the head, private organs, the liver or breast, for a ritual sacrifice. Sometimes witchdoctors ask for the human embryo or the body part of a particular family member-one's father, mother, sister or child- for sacrifice.

When ritualists cannot kill by themselves they commission others to do so on their behalf.

In some situations where those commissioned cannot kill, they go to cemeteries and dig up bodies and use their body parts. In November, more than 100 bodies were desecrated in a cemetery in Porto Novo in the republic of Benin. According to the report, "The grave robbers cut the heads off the bodies and also stole some internal organs".

The witchdoctors use the body parts to perform some sacrifice or to prepare charms, concoctions or magical substance that will purported make the client rich or make him experience a financial breakthrough. The time has come for Nigerians to take a critical look at money-making rituals and the belief in ritual wealth. The practice of ritual killing and the money-making rituals are based on deep-seated superstitions which the structures and institutions in our society have refused to challenge and debunk. Until these irrational beliefs are dispelled, the savage act of ritual murder will not stop. The prosecution of ritualists will only

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drive the practice underground as is often the case. Prosecution should go with education and public enlightenment.

There is no evidence that the sacrifice of a human being or the use of charms prepared with human body parts could make anybody rich. I challenge anybody who thinks otherwise to come forward with proof or evidence. I challenge any witch doctor anywhere who thinks he can carry out an effective money-making ritual to come forward. For a long time people have been deceived, misinformed, misled and exploited by these occult doctors. People have been brainwashed with baseless beliefs that lead them to commit atrocities.

How long are we going to keep entertaining the belief in ritual money based on hearsay. Nigerians need to be supplied with proof and hard evidence for ritual wealth. This is because the belief is sending many people to their graves and others to jail. The belief is turning children against their parents and parents against their children. There is an urgent need for proactive measures to combat this cultural scourge. Sadly the bloody act of ritual murder continues. The irrational belief persists. And the bogus claims by witch doctors, most of whom are desperately poor and miserable, that they have the power to make people rich through magic and ritual sacrifice continue to motivate people to commit criminal and atrocious acts. No doubt those who murder, conspire to murder or kidnapp for money rituals or for any prupose at all should be arrested and prosecuted. But more importantly, there is a need to put in place a public education and enlightenment campaign to reorientate the mentality of the people. Ritual murder starts in the mind and any initiative to stop it must involve programs to change the mindset. The belief in ritual money is a deep seated cultural belief and traditional belief particularly when they are rooted in the supernatural die hard. But they die anyway. In this case, there is need to take measures to ensure that the belief in ritual money dies and that the practice of money-making rituals stops.

Nigerians need to be educated to know that ritual money is a hoax. That money-making ritual is a sham. That witch doctors who claim to have powers to perform money-making rituals are charlatans. Nigerians need to understand that no ritual sacrifice of anything or anybody; a human being, an animal or insect; can make anybody rich. No charm prepared with any human or animal body part can give one a financial breakthrough. In fact Nigerians need to be told that charms are practically useless and lack the potency of protecting people or enhancing their fortune as widely believed.

Before any Nigerian contemplates going to a witchdoctor for money rituals, he or she should first ask, why is the witch doctor not rich himself? If he can make me rich why can't he make himself or his friend or family member rich? If the ritual money is good for me why is it not good

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for him, for his friends and family members? At home, in market places, in schools, colleges and universities, people need to be told that getting rich or becoming wealthy has nothing to do with ritual sacrifice or the use of charms. That the money ritual narrative of a human head vomiting volumes of cash in the bedrooms of rich people is a myth and has no basis in common sense or in reality. That getting rich is a factor of education, hard work, acquiring skills, discovering and developing one's talent, excelling in one's profession and other common sensical and confirmable means of generating income.

Leo Igwe is a skeptical activist from Nigeria and a former representative of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. Currently, he is researching African witchcraft accusations at the University of Bayreuth in Germany. He is partnering with the JREF to respond in a more organized and grassroots way to the growing superstitious beliefs about witchcraft throughout the continent of Africa.