

## THE YOUTHS, THE VICES, AND THE PANACEA

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### Preamble.

Let me start this write-up on an optimistic note given the fact that as Muslims we are in an enviable position regarding what we should do and the methodology of doing it. Literally, we have been spoon-fed in the Qur'an, a book of guidance that is replete and full of injunctions about what to do as well as "the how" of it. I am making reference to the notion of "no issue under the sun has been left untouched in the Qur'an" (Q.6: 38). We are also informed that in some instances, minute details of methodology are provided (Q.16: 89). Against this background, we can express a sigh of relief about the treatment of the youth related issues. Though we may rely heavily on the Qur'an for guidance, the societal stereotypes on the youths' matters cannot be completely jettisoned. The thrust of this write-up, therefore, is to take a critical look at the behavioural practices exhibited by the youths these days such that may appear at a glance repugnant but normal on the point of view of the youths-the actors. Our objective is to use the facilities available in the Qur'an to remedy the negative aspects of such practices. But what behavioural practices are we talking about and what is the definition of the youth?

### THE YOUTH

With the United Nations (UN)'s definition of youth, we can save ourselves of the agony of going through a chain of semantics regarding what or who constitute the youth. The Secretary General of the United Nations in his reports presented to the General Assembly in 1981 and 1985, defined the youth as young adults with the age brackets of 15-24 years. This is, according to him, without prejudice to other definitions from member states. There are synonyms such as teenager, adolescent, and young adults that share similar characteristics with youth. Adolescence, for example, is a transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood. Generally, an adolescent is any person between ages 10 and 19 or between ages 12 and 20 in some societies. Axiomatically, young adults exhibit certain psychological and physiological changes as a process of maturation. They experience and exhibit traces of doubt, uncertainty, ability to fix it, hopes and aspirations. Their reactions to some societal norms can be positive or negative. Whenever their reaction to a societal norm is negative, they are considered

rebellious. History has it, for instance, that one Bode Thomas, a young brilliant lawyer of Yoruba extraction was, sometime in his heydays, demonstrated youthful exuberance to a traditional ruler in the defunct Wester region of Nigeria at a public function, possibly one Ala'afin of old, he instantly suffered the repercussion of his youthful exuberance. His action was considered rebellious and he paid for it. The youthful exuberance can be in the form of dress code like crazy jeans or speaking in codes or eating habits which are considered unusual in the society. Behavioural patterns such as these are involuntary out-bursts by the young people who will demand freedom of action in the society.

## **THE VICES**

We must draw a line between a set of behavioural patterns that are involuntary out-bursts and the other set of actions that are premeditated and very destructive not only to the society but to the youths themselves. While the former is involuntary and can be outgrown with the passage of time, the latter is sustained as the youths grow into adulthood and that is what is termed vices. A vice is an abnormal behavioural pattern that is premeditated and destructive with permanent injuries. While it is normal, for example, for the youths to carryout rallies and demonstrations expressing their opinion and pouring their feeling over an issue that concerns their welfare, it is absolutely objectionable if they resort to destruction amidst the demonstrations. The destruction of numerous luxurious buses during the END SARS protests was an unjustifiable method of expressing a grievance. Crass-avarice for materialism that got some youths involved in ritual killings is a vice that is utterly condemnable. Youths should know that there are uncountable means of making money without resorting to ritual killings. The manipulation of internet to steal money from the source, that is, from unsuspecting people's bank accounts is another vice designed lately by the youths as a means of fulfilling their ambition of getting rich quick. Furthermore, many techniques of cheating in public examinations had been designed by the youths. These include but not limited to using communication gadgets to cheat during examinations, writing answers on their bodies, using mercenaries outside the examination halls with a third person as a conveyor of the prepared answers to the end users, circulation of the leaked examination papers, and the involvement of the invigilators. Some of the latest vices include the JAPA syndrome which is the act of

travelling abroad with or without valid travelling documents, child trafficking, and commercial sex work.

While vices such as listed above are committed at the individual levels, youths have recently organized themselves into syndicates such as Boko Haram, Bandits, kidnappers for ransom, and rapists all of which unleash nefarious harming activities on the society. The latest reports from the mass-media (Daily Trust 27/7/23 p6) also revealed the emergence of other terrorist groups known as Marlian and Mafia. Is there any external factor propelling the youth to indulge in the vices highlighted above?

## **THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR**

Could youths have taken the vices as a way of life on their volition or there are aiding and abetting factors that induce them? A critical examination of the environment in which the Youths domicile may provide a clue to a plausible enhancer. Environmental influence is a well-known factor that can shape, direct or influence human behaviour positively or negatively. Axiomatically, the type of food one consumes, where and how one sleeps, the atmospheric condition in the neighbourhood, the type of parenting, and the stereotypes in the community can make one behave in a particular way. For example, is there possibility of two children – one living in the Alasalatu area of Mushin and the other one living in Lekki phase I or Victoria Island is there any possibility of both of them behaving differently as typical to their environment? Does the tropical African environment have any influence on the behaviour of an average African person compared to the influence of the temperate European weather?

Obviously, the Nigerian youths groan under the influence of multiple environmental factors that shape their behavioural pattern. A child that goes to the school bare footed and trekking while his mate in the same class is brought to the school in a luxurious car, may form an opinion about wealth and its acquisition. The reckless display of wealth in large volumes at social parties which the youths witness almost on a daily basis will wet their appetite not only for wealth but also for the volume of money they aspire to possess as well as the means of acquisition which could be by orthodox means or by sharp practices such as ritual killings. The intriguing questions are, who provided the youths with the idea of ritual killing? Who prescribed to them the materials for ritual killing and who is the mastermind

of the procedure of the concoction? As the youths are blamed for the vices, it is ironical to find the elders or elites involved in the stages of committal. Some elders as professionals aid and abet in perfecting the vice of ritual killing. On the other hand, is there a way by which the government's actions or inaction induce the vices. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the unemployment rate among persons with post-secondary education was at 8.0 percent in Q2 2023 and it was 7.2 percent among youth aged 15-24 in Q2 2023 (Sunday Tribune 22Dec. 2023). The same edition of Tribune reported that the Federal Government vowed to return 15 million out-of-school children to classrooms by 2027. The two cases of unemployment rate and the out-of-school children simply suggest that the government actions or inactions created idleness/indolence for the youths thereby making them a workshop for the devil. Still at the official level, the youths are not unaware of the fraudulent practices at high levels of governance and economy in the country. The cases involving both Mrs. Diezani Allison Maduekwe, the former minister of Petroleum and Mr. Godwin Emefiele, the former CBN governor who had both, at different times, robbed the nation of huge amounts of money are well-known to the youths. The Abacha loots is a well-known case to the youths who are not oblivious of complicity of the legal system in the whole scenario. For example, in all criminal cases, the nation's legal system is protective by using different methods and legal terms such as concurrent dispensation which will reduce a twenty weeks jail term to two weeks. All the period spent in the police custody can as well be deducted from two weeks all of which gives the criminal the license to escape the full wrath of the law. Another one is Plea-Bargain which allows a criminal who had embezzled one hundred billion naira to pay a token of 500 million naira to the government and walk away with N99.5 bl. To temper justice with mercy is another ploy usually devised by counsels to secure protection of criminals. This was invoked in the case of a 37-year-old farmer, Joshua Agboma, who was sentenced to life imprisonment by an Akure court for defiling his neighbour's 6-year-old daughter; his counsel, A.Y. Aliu pleaded with the court to temper justice with mercy, noting that no case of improper behaviour had ever been brought against the defendant. He further pleaded the court to discountenance the medical report (Saturday Vanguard July 29, 2023 p35). The situation is so precarious that all the anti-corruption agencies such as Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) have been incapacitated to stem the wave of corruption since

their inception because according to Tunde Babawale, the Provost of Anti-Corruption Academy, “ All the sectors have been found culpable and found to be highly corrupt, the legislature, the Judiciary, and the executive all of them have been found to be corrupt. Can the anti-corruption agencies arrest and punish their masters? A situation where the funds for local government direct from the federation account are cornered by the state governors under the guise of joint account, how can any Local Government Chairman carry out the development at the grassroots in a manner that positively impact the youths? How can there be development that will positively impact the youths when the project funds at the constituencies are diverted to private pockets by the legislators? Shockingly, the illicit role played by the law to protect criminals is thus expressed by Akin Oyebode, a Professor of International Law quotes an adage to the effect that “the law is a necessary and useful tool in the hands strong and powerful for the enforcement of their will against the poor, weak and defenceless”. (Law and Nation-Building in Nigeria, Selected Essays 2005 p. 14). Dysfunctionality is the right word to describe the situations highlighted above when dysfunctionality is defined as the state of lack of control, *laissez-faire* attitude and absolute freedom to act according to one’s whims and caprices.

## **THE PANACEA**

The logical deduction from the foregoing is that the vices exhibited by the youths cannot be treated in isolation given the fact that the atmospheric condition of the community can influence their behaviour. Therefore, the solution cannot be but multidimensional beginning with the society which constitutes the enabling environment. If a normal behaviour is expected from the youths, their immediate and larger societies must be made conducive. According to a popular Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) “every child is born in his true nature (*fitrah*-Islam), but his parents inadvertently make him a Jew, a Christian or a Magian”... (Sahih Bukhari 1358). The obvious implication of this Hadith is that a child cannot, by his choice, develop into a cult, kidnapper, rapist, yahoo-yahoo, armed robber, bandit, terrorist, ritualist, thug, etc. Given the fact that he came into this world Muslim, innocent, and peaceful behaving otherwise is as a result of the influence of his micro and macro societies. What kind of micro and macro societies did the youths under investigation grow up?

## **MICRO SOCIETY**

The family unit, the micro society, is the component and confederating units that constitute the macro society. Invariably, the health of the macro society is predicated upon the health of the family unit. And to build a normal family unit, the process begins at the point of selecting a spouse. The prospective suitors usually watch out for four qualities in a prospective spouse. These include beauty, wealth, family background, and religion. The Prophet, however, recommended religion as the prime factor to be considered. In other words, of all the four attractions, religion ranks the highest because the suitors are supposed to select a spouse who as a future mother can impact on the children positively. The holy Qur'an is replete of injunctions regarding the indices of building a normal family out of which a normal macro society will emerge. Babies should be breastfed for two years which has implications for the physical and emotional stability of the baby as he grows into adolescent as well as adulthood. Children should be taught how to observe salat at a very tender age and should be enforced at age ten. Parents are supposed to pick an exemplary parenthood format from the life of Prophet Luqman (AS) in terms of training children on the path of piety, goodness to parents, courtesy, modesty, respectfulness, humility, observing regular salat, obedience, perseverance, and patience (Q.31: 13-19). Parents are obliged to provide children with relevant skills to make a living in this world and moral probity to manage success in preparation for the hereafter. Parents must strike a balance between training the children for good life in this world and good life in the hereafter.

There are two factors that are responsible for whatever vices youths may exhibit. Incidentally, the two factors are external to the youth. If the family unit is defective such as failing to play the essential role during the formative years of the child, the child will grow into a violent adolescent and subsequently into a wasteful adult. Axiomatically, the children in the formative years cannot train themselves and any vacuum created at that level of upbringing cannot be remedied by any other agent. The practice of transferring the parental care to a nanny or to care givers of any description cannot substitute for the biological parental care. The second factor

that leave a deep negative impression on the child as he grows into adulthood is the current affairs as displayed by key stakeholders/key players in the society. Cultism that has become a norm at all levels of education in Nigeria was picked up by the youths from adults who constituted themselves into Ologboni cult, Eye Fraternity, and the-likes. The frequency of looting the public funds, the volumes of the loots, the prosecution of the criminals that usually end up in mysteries are all brought to the notice of the youths. The youths are aware that the annual budgets that are usually presented in billions and trillions by federal and state governments are mere annual rituals for which no one renders any accounts of the intended projects before another budget is presented. The youths are aware that while the political class emphasises democracy development which gulps trillions of naira, the act of nation building is reduced to a project in progress. The extravagant life-style displayed by the political class is well-known to the youths, The youths witness almost on a daily basis the quadrennial syndrome other-wise called spray at social parties (*sowanbe*). The youths are mature enough to know that no hard-earned money could ever be disposed that way. The youths are aware that there are many special advisers as the number of ministers. For example, there are special presidential advisers on education, external affairs, humanitarian affairs, political landscape, budget affairs, internal affairs, etc. The youths are aware that there are special schools for the children of elites as against another set of schools for the common people. The uncontrollable inflation that is induced by the government policies is biting hard on the youths. So, the vices that are of grave concern to us all, cannot be completely blamed on the youthful exuberance. The micro and macro societies cannot be absorbed of the blame as both of them play a part.

## **THE WAY OUT**

Is the family unit which constitutes the component parts of the larger society ready to provide the normal parenting when the normal parenting is defined as giving the children adequate attention at the formative years? In America, I saw a situation whereby a parent (mother in this case) followed the child to the school in order to observe the classroom activities for her to complement the school activities at home. That I witnessed as I was on the Fulbright fellowship in the Findlay University and the Ohio State University USA. I also witnessed in London that a woman will stay at home looking after the growth of the child to a certain level when she can go back to her career. Unfortunately, as Nigerians, the aspects of the American and

British life-styles that we find appealing are democracy development, promotion of music and entertainment, creation of celebrities, and holding seminars and retreats for show. The appetite of the Chinese children is wet by the love of technology to the extent that by the time of graduation, he/she is all-ready dreaming of what to invent.

As Nigerians, are we ready to purge the larger society of the habits that impact negatively on the youth? Are we ready to stop blaming the youth for the vices that are actually induced by the adults' behavioural patterns? Are we ready, for a change, to start emulating the positive aspects of the American and British lifestyles as against the prophane aspects of the Western life?

### **MUSLIMS AS A MODEL**

More importantly, Muslim can evoke the Qur'anic injunction which describes them as the best of all nations by experimenting with the Islamic imperatives of child-upbringing. By so doing, they can earn the appellation of *khayr Ummatin*, the best of nations (Q.). On the other hand, a word for the youth. An armed robber once confessed at the point of his execution by firing squad that one day on his way to work, a passing-by vehicle splashed dirty water on him that got him soaked. He got annoyed and vowed to get rich by any means, hook or crook. Very soon, he got initiated into an armed robbery gang when he started making money. A few years later, luck ran out of him as his gang was apprehended by the law enforcement agents and all members of the gang were sentenced to death. When he was at stake, he narrated his story as to what dragged him into the gang. He, therefore, advised the youths to be patient. In contrast, the daughter of a military driver to a military head of state one day experienced a similar situation as a passing-by vehicle splashed mud on her from head to toe. Her problem was compounded by going to school without shoes on her feet. But to all that, she resolved to break the jinx of poverty and never should her children experience what she was going through. She studied hard and graduated to become an expert. On one occasion, she found herself on the high table as a special guest speaker to address a gathering on HIV/AIDS. Incidentally, the other special guest speaker happened to be the daughter of the former military head of state to whom her father was a driver. In her opening remark, she made reference to how her father used to be a driver to father of the other speaker. But both of them are now equal as against the

relationship between their two fathers. Right now, she is a senator of the Federal republic of Nigeria. Her name is withheld (Channel Tv). The youths can pick a role model between the two characters. In other words, coming from a poor family background is not enough a reason to resort to ritual killing, or armed robbery, or yahoo-yahoo.

## **CONCLUSION**

A cursory look at the socio-political landscape in Nigeria, beams the light on the youths as they are neck deep in nefarious activities of catastrophic consequences not only to them but also to the society at large. Ironically, the youths may be found as victims of the crisscross environmental influences that are overwhelmingly cohesive to them. In the circumstance, what the youths require is a rescue operation and humanitarian assistance because they are not actually the architects of the web of the vices in which they are caught. What they really deserve is empathy. Muslims can play a leading role in the fight against the vices. Instead of curative measures, the vices require preventive measures. Muslims can be proactive by means of activating the series of training guidelines contained in the Qur'an. On the other hand, the elders whose lifestyles provoke in the youths such inclinations that turnout to be hazardous activities must reshape their lifestyles. On a final note, while it is true that Allah (SWT) commanded His servants to be prayerful and promised them of granting their requests, issues such as seeking solutions to the youths' vices are not matters of prayers. Theologically, Allah (SWT) has put the solution to issues such as vices in the change of attitude. He (SWT) will not change whatever condition in which you may find yourselves until you change your mindset because the condition you want to change is the product of your mindset (Q. 13: 11).