

THE NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

ISSN: 0331-4111

E-ISSN: 2736-075X

Volume 21, No. 2 (November, 2023)

DOI: 10.36108/NJSA/3202.12.0250

Male Circumcision: A Neglected but Institutionalised Way of Value Orientation in Indigenous Ngas Society, Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract

In this paper, the researcher discovered that prior to the contact between the Ngas society and the Western civilisation, the society like any other African societies had their institutionalised ways of inculcating its values to the younger ones. Through this medium, the younger boys were trained and taught the cherished cultural beliefs, goals, traditions and values of the society. However, this contact had negative consequences on the way these cultural values are passed down to the young Ngas boys because new methods of learning were introduced based on the Western model. This study also hinges on the application of anthropological and ethnography survey guided by in depth interview and Secondary sources of data. The researcher used both the qualitative and quantitative Methods of data analysis and interpretation of the data collected. On the results and findings, the researcher discovered that Vwang as an institution of value orientation is as old as the Ngas society. The young boys learned under the tutelage of traditionalist instructors and care givers. The training helped the boys to develop and take responsibilities in the society either socially, politically, religiously or morally. The paper argued as part of its recommendation, that the government should reviewed the present curriculum content in our primary and Secondary schools just as the case of the Universities so that they will also have 30% of the local content which will reflect the culture, tradition, history and values of their respective societies.

Keywords: Circumcision, institution and value orientation (Vwang), masquerade (Wong)

Introduction

According to scholars like Israelites (1993) and Sibiya (2014), the practice of male circumcision has its root among the ancient Egyptians dated back as far as many thousand years. Since then, it has spread like a wild fire across many

cultures, traditions of the world. The male circumcision is practiced for many years. Some of the reasons are anchored on religion, traditions, health issues and of recent the case of Human Immunodeficiency virus and its consequences and complications (WHO, 2007). However, scholars like Lauman & Masi (1997) and Schenker & Gross (1997) observed that among the Jews, followers of Judaism and Muslim Faith the practice of male circumcision was for religious purposes because it was seen as a divine injunction which is a sign of purity. This corroborated with what is found in the book of Genesis 17 when God told Abraham: "This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep; every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you." In Africa, male circumcision has socio-cultural reasons, which is a socialisation process that equipped the boys with the needed societal values and goals in their respective communities. For example, among the Massi people in Kenya and Tanzania, male circumcision is seen as educational programme where the lads are taught ethnic culture, history and religious tenets as they acquired the full status of members of the society. For the boys to be fully incorporated into the wider society, they require some forms of discipline and courage that is obtain under the knife for them to have honour and prestige among members of their families and the entire society.

What is male circumcision then? The definition of the concept is as varied as the opinion of scholars from varied societal background, the period in which they lived and the socio-cultural views. According to Hopkins (2012) male circumcision means the surgical removal of the foreskin, a flap of skin that covers the tip of the penis. While for Sibiya (2014) it is the non-therapeutic ritual removal of the penis foreskin of a male person undertaken as part of the rite of passage from childhood into manhood. Based on these two views male circumcision involves the removal of the physical skin on top of the penis which include experiencing some pains, shedding of blood and isolation from public view. After the passage experience the individual is allowed to take responsibility in the society like marriage, religious, and socio-economic activities which hitherto he was prevented from.

The period of male circumcision is usually charged with a lot of anxieties, expectations, fears, pains, happiness and joy both from the side of the boys, their parents, relations and the entire members of the society, it is an ordeal that the boys and the entire community look up to with great concern. According to Gomos (2019) one can equate the period of male circumcision to that of the Western school system where children of the same age grade are assembled together and isolated from the public view with the intention of teaching and inculcating in them societal values as techniques for their future survival. While Neiers (1979) observed that the primary objective of the traditional society is to enable the boy fit properly into the society and to handle all responsibilities given to him by the society successfully. Thus, after the initiation, the child politically is moved away from the state of being passive appurtenance to a state of taking active part as member of the society. Socially,

he is upgraded as a matured person and belong to the same age grade with his mates. Religiously, he become closely associated with the family or ethnic ancestors. As noted by Laye (1981), what the initiators learnt was expected to be kept within themselves to guide them on the sort of behaviour befitting a man such as cultivating the virtues of truthfulness, honesty and loyalty to older members of the society, neighbours and responsibility toward God. The experience gathered by the boys were not expected to be shared with the uninitiated nor the women. Thus, the art of secrecy is strictly observed as was the custom. This training produced well behave and discipline young persons within the African traditional societies. It inculcated in them communal and cooperative spirit as well as courage to defend their territorial boundaries.

Pre-colonial African set up had well established institutions of value orientation which has served them for more than thousand years before contact with the Western cultural values. Through these institutionalised ways of value orientation system African children were well disciplined, the security, political, social and economic of their societies were well established. Despite their contributions, these institutionalised ways of value orientations are no longer put into use today. Rather, the Africans choose to rely much on the Western ways of value orientation to achieve their development. The challenges are that some of these Western value orientation institutions handed over to Africans have little or no correlation with the practical aspect of the African ways of life that enable them make a useful living out of them. It has reduced African cultural values, self-preservation and things they might contribute to world civilization. For example, Western education as an institution of value orientation have graduated many youths through acquiring certificates but there are no corresponding job opportunities. Hence, there is high rate of unemployment and underemployment. The influx of foreign cultural values have also resulted into tensions, conflicts, insecurity, immorality, corruption and sometimes open war which makes governance difficult because of the lawlessness in the society. For example, what is happening within the last ten years in the North East, North West and North Central parts of Nigeria where political induced religious conflicts, kidnappings, banditry, herder/farmers conflicts are taking place on a daily basis.

According to Okpilike (2012) African values such as honesty, humility, loyalty, hard work, truth and respect to elderly persons have been undermined by Western value system. These values which are essential ingredients of the African society, are gradually being adjudged as uncivilised ways of life. Materialism has taken the place of honour and hard work. Respect for traditional institutions and age has also diminished. There is a breakdown of social discipline, communal and corporative social life all in the name of civilisation. The capitalist tendency of Western value transmitted through social Media platforms such as radios, television, WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook etc. have corrupted the communal and cooperative spirit of the people to the extent that parents complaint that they can no longer ask their

children to do any form of service to them without the children asking for remuneration. Thus, they have become avenues for youth's rebellion against the old social orders, rush for materialism which has corruption, fraud, embezzlement, impatient, bribery as it's by product. It is in line of this that the researcher attempts to explain, what is circumcision as an institutionalised cultural value orientation in traditional Ngas society? How was this cultural value orientation put into use? What is the impact of this value orientation on the society? What are the lessons to be learnt from this traditional institution in Ngas society today? The essence of this research is to find out circumcision as an institution of cultural value orientation before contact with the Western society, to assess how circumcision as an institution of cultural value orientation was put into use, to examine the impact of the institution of cultural value orientation and finally to identify the lessons to be learned from the institution.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted two theoretical frameworks, namely; the Afrocentric social theory and the social action theory.

The Afrocentric social theory was developed by Mole Kete Asante in the 80s. It was primarily developed to reduce the dominant Eurocentric paradigm that led to the destruction of Africans from their experiences, history, traditions and cultural values. The theory is used to explain and understand the problem been discussed from the African world view and not from the view point of the Western world. This theory as a guiding road map assists the researcher to analyse and understand issues from the privilege position of the African history and from the gamut of African experiences under modernity. The theory further seeks to remove Africans from the mentality dominated by the Western knowledge and its hegemonic practices, and anchored it on the African knowledge and wisdom which is supported by African history, culture, traditions, and spirituality, social, economic, psychology and experiences.

The usage of this theory is very important since the advent of European colonialists all information about the African continent and its people has been articulated from the European perspective as a deliberate way of strangulating and submerging the African world view. Therefore, there is strong need for the liberation of the African mind from that of the European political hegemony and legacy of the colonial knowledge system. According to Gatsheni (2018), observed that as a result long period of modernity, enslavement, colonialism and globalization, African people have been portrayed as object of development within the ambit of the Eurocentric historiography. Colonialism destroyed the old African social order and introduced false trajectory that objectified them as backward people who cannot ordinarily act on their own and as people without history, tradition, religion and culture. The Africans themselves have not help issues as they perpetually remained colonial subjects who rely on the colonial library to understand themselves and further aggravated their dislocation and backwardness. It is therefore the goal of

Afrocentricity to create knowledge about African world view and at the same time project Africans history, experiences, traditions and practices. Not only that, but to place African culture at the centre to promote African peoples as subject and directly challenge Eurocentric views on Africa. Thereby liberate African peoples from the domination of Western ideas. It also the task of Afrocentric social theory to project African culture, beliefs, tradition and to re write African history.

Based on these goals, the researcher deliberately used the theory to bring to the knowledge of the public that before contact with the western world, the Ngas society was having its way of socialising or inculcating its new members with their accepted values. This institutionalise ways of value orientation through the male circumcision can best be favourably compared with the modern formal school system introduced by the Europeans. Also, that the value system originated out of the Ngas culture, tradition, beliefs and history was/still relevant to the Ngas people because it brings group consciousness, cohesiveness and responsibility in matters of social welfare, peace, stability, respect, morality and self- independence to the people. Afrocentricity brings out clearly to the academic field the important areas contributed by Africans to world civilisation which were here hitherto neglected by European scholars. In addition, the approach of Afrocentricity can be used to resolve contemporary challenges that are made by African scholars.

The social action theory on the other hand has its background from the works of scholars like Max Weber (1922), Robert Maclver (1931) and Talcott Parsons (1937). As observed by Weber (1922), the goal of any sociological analysis is the interpretation of action in terms of its subjective meaning. Weber (1920) in one of his most important works "Economy and society," said "sociology is a science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences." He went on to define social action as any action carried out by an individual and which the individual attached subjective meaning to it. Gomos (2021) noted that social action is not an accidental phenomenon but comes into play when thought process is involved between the stimulus, an actor and their consequent response. Hence, he concludes that any action taken by an individual that does not involve thought process cannot be defined as a social action. Thus, when an individual carries out a social action, he is not only doing it for the fun of it but is a deliberately being done to meet the needs and expectations of the society. That explains why social action theory states that people create society, institutions and structures. Based on this, therefore, human actions are directed by meaning. Parsons in his contribution acknowledged that action theory is a basic form of social life which has four characteristics, namely, an actor, the act must have a goal, where the act occurs should be separated from the ends that it aims to accomplish and norms and values exist for the actor which guide his/her choice of means to the desired end.

The social action theory is used here to explain why male circumcision as value orientation institution was established *and still used up till today*. The Ngas people did not use the system for the mere fun of it but because of the meaning and significance they attached to Male circumcision which was/is seen as the ideal way of value orientation such as morality, courage, honesty, toughness of mind are passed from the old generation to the younger generation. The practice, despite hostilities and open war against it, it has continued to thrive over hundred years of confrontation with modernity. The Ngas people knows the significance of male circumcision as an institutionalise way of value orientation as insiders but for an outsider he/she may look at it with disdain, fetish and uncivilised tradition.

Methodology

In carrying out this research work ethical issues in social science research were religiously observed, participants were freely allowed to willingly participate, their consent were sought, they were given their respect for anonymity, they were assured of confidentiality and that no harm would be done to any one of them.

In this research work, the researcher used the social survey research design method. The study adopted two methods of sampling techniques such as the purposive sampling and cluster sampling. In the area of purposive sampling, the researcher first selected the villages namely Ballang Shipang, Vel and Dilla where the Male circumcision is still well practice. Time constrained was a problem and the Villages are mostly dominated by the Catholic Church mission who have liberal theology toward the tradition and culture of the indigenous people unlike the protestant churches that adopt hostile attitudes toward African culture, tradition and values. Secondly, the purposive sampling method was used to select key informants such as the chief priest and the care givers who are experts and custodians of the people tradition and culture. Hence, they know what is going on and have first-hand knowledge about the community.

While the cluster sampling method was also used, to avoid the challenges of compiling all the list of people that made up the population of the study; people were group into sub-Villages, then a list of participants in each Village was obtained. Based on this, the researcher sampled out the population of study based on the calculated sample size through the use of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table formula for determining sample size for easy reference. This is done in proportion to the total population of registered people in each Village. After that the people were randomly selected based on their cluster. Ballang Shipang had 50 as registered people and using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) the sample size was 44 people, in Vel Village, it has 25 people and using the same Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table formula, the sample size was 24 were selected and lastly in Dilla there were 45 people that registered, hence, using the same table formula, 40 people were selected. Therefore, $44+24+40 = 108$ people were selected for the purpose of this research work.

The data collected was analysed and interpreted using the descriptive tools such as textual and tabulation presentation. Also, content and thematic tools of qualitative data analysis was used after the transcription of the recorded responses from the key participants through the process of in-depth interview. For quantitative data, the questionnaire administered and returned on 108 respondents through cluster sampling techniques selection and were analysed through the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social sciences) statistical method. The essence is to help the researcher summarise the original data that is manageable but can still maintain its original form.

The in-depth interview schedules with pre-planned questions was used as a guide during the interview process, which were administered directly to the participants. Questions were asked through face to face discussions, answers were written down and tape recorder was used to also record all the answers to avoid loss of memory. Also, passed recorded video cassettes of circumcision ritual was carefully watched and studied. The unstructured aspect of the interview was used to supplement or seek more clarification on grey areas that deals with the masquerades (WONG) that were not captured on the structured interview schedule. The structured interview guide captured the three main research questions and objectives of the research work. The usage of the interview method was particularly useful because of the literacy levels of the respondents.

Also used by the researcher was the secondary source data. Data that were collected by other scholars through primary sources and were used for their own research work. Sources of the secondary data include books, journals, textbooks, reviews newspapers, websites, diaries, letters and video cassettes record. Secondary data source is very important because they enable the researcher who did not participate in the events in which the author is writing about to acquire some knowledge too.

Discussion

The data collected were analysed and interpreted by using the content and thematic tools of qualitative data analysis after the transcription of the recorded responses from the key informants through the process of in-depth interview. While for the quantitative data, sss were used to analyse the data collected from the questionnaires administered and returned on the 43 respondents through cluster sampling techniques. The essence is to help the researcher sum up the original data to maintain its original flavour. Here too the secondary data sources were also analyse and interpreted

What are VALUES?

Meaning of value	SA	A	UD	SD	D	NR
Accepted behaviour	42 (38.9%)	45 (41.7%)	6 (5.6%)	8 (7%)	5 (5%)	2 (1.8%)
Building blocks that build a dynamic society	46 (43%)	44 (41%)	4 (4%)	6 (6%)	2 (2%)	4 (4%)
Set of human beliefs that serve as a road map toward peaceful coexistence of people in the society	50 (46%)	45 (42%)	2 (1.8%)	4 (3.7%)	5 (4.6%)	2 (1.9%)
Cultural practices that guide human interaction in the society	56 (52%)	44 (40.7%)	2 (1.8%)	3 (2.7%)	2 (1.8%)	1 (1%)

Source: Author field survey, 2023

Table 1, it has to do with the values that are popular among the Ngas people. The following responses were collected for the view that values are accepted behaviour: 38.9% (n=42) strongly agreed, 41.7% (n=45) agreed, 5.6% (n=6) were undecided, 7% (n=8) strongly disagreed, 5% (n=5) disagreed and 1.8% (n=2) did not respond. While the respond for value as a building block that build a dynamic society, 43% (n=46) strongly agreed, 41% (n=44) agreed, 4% (n=4) were undecided, 6% (n=6) strongly disagreed, 2% (n=2) disagreed and 4% (n=4) did not respond. For the option that values are a set of human beliefs that served as a roadmap toward peaceful co-existence of people in the society, 46% (n=50) strongly agreed, 42% (n=45) agreed, 1.8% (n=2) were undecided, 3.7% (n=4) strongly disagreed, 4.6% (n=5) disagreed and 1.9% (n=2) did not respond. While for the meaning of value as a cultural practice that guide human interaction in the society, 52% (n=56) strongly agreed, 40.7% (n=44) agreed, 1.8% (n=2) were undecided, 2.7% (n=3) strongly disagreed, 1.8% (n=2) disagreed and 1% (n=1) did not respond.

One of the researcher participants observed that society without value is bound to have confusion among its citizens because they served as a roadmap or guide to how members of the society behave and define what is useful, desirable, good and cherished. People's values mould the attitude and determine the best way members of the society behave or conduct themselves for a peace and development to be achieved in the society. Hence, values are achieved through sanctioning of members. For example, members who adhered to the values of the society are positively rewarded but violators are negatively rewarded.

According to Okoye (2023), values are set of human beliefs upon which characters, behaviours and attitudes are built, peoples standard for measuring what is good and acceptable within the society that concern ideals such as discipline, justice, respect, patience, hard work integrity, patriotism, faith in God and country. These are the building blocks of a strong, virile and dynamic society. To Oninyama and Oninyame (2002) values are that aspect of cultural practices, actions or objects that have high esteem and cherished to the extent

that the society would not only want to preserved, but they are transmitted from one generation to another. Nigeria as a country has its core values as stipulated in Chapter ii, section 23 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which states that: the natural ethics shall be discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism.” People’s values explain the types of attitudes which specify member’s behaviours. If a community values honesty it will try to encourage its members to adhere to it. However, if the group values hard work, it will encourage, support and reward hard working people **within the** society and punished lazy people. Schaefer (2002) observed that values are what the society considered good, proper, worthwhile, desirable or bad, worthless, undesirable and improper

What is an institution?

Meaning of institution	SA	A	U	SD	D	NR
Place set up and guided by rules and regulations	50 (46%)	38 (35%)	4 (4%)	8 (7%)	5 (5%)	3 (3%)
Place founded for a specific purpose like schools, hospitals and so on	46 (42.5%)	40 (37%)	6 (5.5%)	8 (7.4%)	5 (4.6%)	3 (3%)
Structure of the society that intends to meet the needs of its members	52 (48%)	45 (42%)	3 (2.7%)	4 (3.7%)	2 (1.8%)	2 (1.8%)

Source: Author field survey, 2023

Table 2 deals with the meaning of an institution. Based on the responses gathered from the participants on institution as a place set up and guided by rules and regulations 46% (n=50) strongly agreed, 35% (n=38) agreed, 4% (n=4) were undecided, 7% (n=8) strongly disagreed, 5% (n=5) disagreed and 3% (n=3) were no response. On the issue that institution are places founded for a specific purpose like schools, hospitals and so on 42.5% (n=46) strongly agreed, 37% (n=40) agreed, 5.5% (n=6) were undecided, 7.4% (n=8) strongly disagreed, 4.6% (n=5) disagreed and 3% (n=3) did not respond. Whereas, on institution as a structure of the society that intends to meet the needs of its members 48% (n=52) strongly agreed, 42% (n=45) agreed, 2.7 % (n=3) were undecided, 3.7% (n=4) strongly disagreed, 1.8% (n=2) disagreed and 1.8% (n=2) did not respond.

Many of the participants accepted that an institution is an establishment or social structure set up by a society for the transmission of its highly esteem and cherished values. For instance, African traditional religion, traditional education (male circumcision), and the family system. This social structure continued to exist despite hostility, blackmailed and suppression by the Western values because of the important function they played by helping the society to survive. As observed by Okoye (2023), an institution is an

organisation or establishment that is particularly involved with education, public service or charitable work. According to Okpilike (2002) education is a process through which a society open its life to all the people within it to enable them take part in it in order for the individual to acquire its values which it would have them live a successful life. Hence, the Ngas people set up the male circumcision (Vwang) as an institution for the purpose of training, equipping and building its youths with the right values, characters, behaviour and attitude for the smooth running of the society.

Vwang (male circumcision) as an institution of value orientation:

Institution of Value Orientation	SA	A	UD	SD	D	NR
Place where young boys were kept for some period of time away from their parents and societies	52 (48.1%)	43 (40%)	2 (1.8%)	4 (3.7%)	3 (2.7%)	4 (3.7%)
Young boys were operated and received training from elders who are custodians of the culture on the needed cherished values of their societies	48 (44.4%)	51 (47.2%)	3 (2.7%)	2 (1.8%)	1 (0.9%)	3 (3%)
Young boys were taught the secrets of their respective societies and the way to commune with the ancestral spirits	55 (51%)	42 (39%)	2 (1.8%)	4 (3.7%)	2 (1.8%)	3 (2.7%)
The Vwang institution of value orientation involves different stages of engagement	50 (46.3%)	48 (44.4%)	4 (3.7%)	1 (0.9%)	3 (2.7%)	2 (2%)

Source: Author Field Survey, 2023

Table 3 is concern with Vwang as an institution of value orientation. Based on the information collected from the participant that institution of value orientation is a place where young boys were kept for some period of time away from their parents and society 48.1% (n=52) strongly agreed, 40% (n=43) agreed, 1.8% (n=2) undecided, 3.7% (n=4) strongly disagreed, 2.7% (n=3) disagreed and 3.7% (n=4) did not respond. While on the issue of young boys were operated and received training from the elders who are custodians of the culture on the needed cherished values of the society, 44.4% (n=48) strongly agreed, 47.2% (n=51) Agreed, 2.7% (n=3) were undecided, 1.8% (n=2) strongly disagreed, 0.9% (n=1) disagreed and 3% (n=3) did not respond. For the issue that young boys were taught the secrets of their respective societies and the way to commune with the spirit of their ancestors, 51% (n=55) strongly agreed, 39% (n=42) agreed, 1.8% (n=2) undecided, 3.7% (n=4) strongly disagreed, 1.8% (n=2) disagreed and 2.7% (n=3) refused to respond. Lastly on the area that the Vwang as an institution of value orientation involves different

stages of engagement, 46.3% (n=50) strongly agreed, 44.4% (n=48) agreed, 3.7% (n=4) were undecided, 0.9% (n=1) strongly disagreed, 2.7% (n=3) disagreed and 2% (n=2) did not respond.

Many of the participants viewed the Vwang (male circumcision) as a unique institution of value orientation in indigenous Ngas society. To them it can be practical be equated with the formal modern system of education where children from various families and societies were gathered together to learn under the tutelage of their teachers. The differences is that while the teachers in the modern school system received monthly salaries those in the indigenous societies were not paid money but some form of reward like honour, drinks and food were given to them. On the issue of syllabus, yes, there exist because the elders who trained the young boys planned ahead what to teach the boys and as soon as he covered it, it marks the end of the training and the boys were graduated.

Laye in his famous book titled “**African Child**” published in 1981, gave an elucidate account of the experiences he had when growing up in his traditional Guinea society as a male child. Tracing all the huddles he had to pass through before reaching an adulthood as a real man in pre-colonial African society. The tradition of male circumcision was not only restricted in Guinea but a common process of socialising male children to adulthood in pre-colonial African societies. Among the Ngas people the institution where young boys are transformed from childhood into adulthood is known as **Vwang** (male circumcision). Vwang rite in an undiluted Ngas society was a must for all young boys because it was done as a way of purifying the individuals which now qualify them to move away from childhood to adulthood. The Vwang rite can be rightly compared with the Christian ritual of baptism or the modern Western type of educational system where a child is expected to go through to acquire new lease of life which then usher him into the wider society. This enables him to take higher forms of social responsibilities, commune with ancestral spirits and know all the secrets of the society he belongs to. However, with the encroachment or influx of Western cultures, tradition and values, the African society no longer hold itself and sustain its independence, hence, falling apart as a pack of cards thereby giving way to new social order with its ways of doing things. According to Achebe (1958) in his famous book titled “**Things Fall Apart**” he wrote that; “Turning and turning in the widening gyres the falcon cannot hear the falconer; things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.” With Western civilisation today, the **Vwang** tradition rite is fast fading away but it is still practice in some remote rural villages as remnant of the once cherished Ngas ways of life and civilisation. The **Vwang** ritual is carried out in four different stages, namely, the preparation, the separation, the actual circumcision rite and the rite of incorporation into the community.

a) **Preparation stage**

The period of **Vwang** (male circumcision) is usually between the months of October to February. This is the autumn/winter or harmattan dry season period. This period is highly favoured because is usually cold and dry which helps to quicken the healing process of the wound after the operation. The choice of the season shows how the Ngas people use their sense of science such as observation and experiences as they were very closed to nature to know which part of the year is most suitably for the **Vwang** operation.

When the period is closed it is incumbent on the chief priest to discuss with the Ngolong and called the attention of parents who have prospective boys with regard to the big incoming ceremony. Sometimes the information is passed secretly to avoid women and the young lads. The essence is to make each village or family prepared the boys who have reached the age of circumcision which is between the ages of eight (8) and ten (10). After that, the boys are then assembled in each of the villages. The information is hidden from the boys to avoid them running away because of the painful and sorrowful experiences that goes with the ceremony. For the women to prevent any of them who might have witchcraft power from tempering with the healing process of the wound. However, in some communities the town crier makes the announcement public. Here the young prospective lads are fully aware of what would happen and are always encouraged by their parents and relatives on the need to be men, courageous and not to shame the family or clan.

b) **Separation stage**

After identifying the boys, the date/day is fixed and the boys are assembled and taken to the bush at the same time. They are usually guided by elders and the person who will circumcise the boys. One of the study participants stated that the period of separation between the boys and their parents takes between 30 days to 90 days depending on how fast the healing process last. Also, the researcher gathered that there was no guarantee that all of them will come back alive because if the wound developed complications it might result to the dead of some of the boys.

c) **Circumcision proper stage**

The circumcision operation usually take place inside the shrine. The boys are kept at some distance places from the shrine and are called one after the other. Inside the shrine there are stones arranged for the boys to sit on and a hole is dug beneath the stone. The essence of the stone is for the boys to seat on while naked and his penis faced the direction of the hole. Before the operation the boys are required to fast the night before the operation. They entered the shrine with their eyes closed. This was to prevent them from seeing what is inside the shrine and also make it difficult for them to

know the chief operator. While going inside the shrine according to one of the study participants-

The elders will instruct the boys that when the masquerade pinched or touched them they should not cry or show any sign of fear but should be courageous and manly in their action. The pinching of the masquerade is the cutting off of the foreskin on the penis. As the boys entered the shrine, they are guided by their guidance to walk respectfully and sit on the appropriate stone meant for the operation. While sitting on the stone the boys are held firmly by a strong person especially those that are fearful. But those that are brave, courageous and strong at heart are left freely to submit themselves for the operation. The operator is called **GoVwang**. What he used in the course of the operation is a small knife called **chuk sak keh** (barbing knife).

Source: Study participants Male/IDI/NGas Community/Plateau State

According to one of the study participants, “before the operation the boy was told that if he cried the masquerade will swallow him. Whatever, that is going to happen with him, he must endure the pains and also not to show any sign of fear or weakness but must be courageous.” Once the boy is seated with the help of strong men holding the boys, the **go Vwang** will remove his special knife out of his bag, move forward the boy and began his operation work which is the removing or cutting of the foreskin on top of the penis. Once the foreskin is removed blood will gush out freely into the hole dug on the ground. The bleeding helps to remove the dirt or sin that was inside the mind of the boy and also purify him. The bleeding of the blood is reduced through the use of leaves of a plant called **Nting gung** or mahogany oil called **Mwer-teng**. The leaves of the **nting-gung** served as a local bandage then a robe cut out of **nting bong** plant is used to tie the leaves of the **nting –gung** round the wound on the penis. The leaves are usually soft, neat and has the potency of healing wounds quickly.

Once the operation is carried out successfully, the boy is sent out of the operation/theatre room through another exit door so that other boys waiting within the first door will not know. In the course of the operation some unlucky boys might die as a result of pains and sometimes complications from the wound. Once that happens, according to a participant:

It would be alleged that the boys had open their eyes to see the ancestors, hence, the witch tempered with their wounds or some forms of infections. Hence, the wound cannot be healed and the boy would die and buried inside the shrine. In that case nobody would give any report on such boys to their parents and the parents would only discover it when they cannot see their boys

returning with others. They will cry and mourn but nobody will be held responsible. The parents or the community would come to know that they have been consumed by the masquerade. (*Male/IDI/NGas Community/Plateau State*)

In the night after the operation, the masquerade will visit the boys with the aim of testing their manhood by frightening them through trying to catch them. The boys will be scared but is done to test their courage and to separate the fearful from the fearless people. When that happened, the elders would say that the masquerade has urinated on the boys. The boys will experience some form of itching all over their bodies. The elders would then go to the nearby riverside and fetch water in an open calabash or jar **tul**, get some leaves obtain from the plants around, dig them inside the water in the calabash or jar and splash it over the body of the boys. By this simple act, the elders are cleaning the urine which the masquerade has poured on the body of the boys.

While in the bush the boys will remain naked until such a time that their wound will be healed. The recuperation period varies on the body of each person. At their point the boys are caution not to eat things like groundnuts or any fatty meat as eating them will slow the process of healing their wounds. Boys with good body within a period of 4-5 days will heal but those with poor body it will last between 5-10 days with the help of a local nurse. However, on few occasions some might take up to 30 days before they get over the healing process. While the unfortunate ones will die because of excessive loss of blood or complication and those whose wound have been tempered with by the witches their wound will not heal as each morning the point of the wound will be bleeding fresh. When the care givers find out that the wound is not healing for that long such a boy will be killed and buried in a shallow grave in the bush. When such happen, the elder will say that the masquerades have eating the boy **wong-se**. The chief priest or the care-giver will not give any report to the parents of the boy or boys.

d) Initiation stage

This is the most interested part of the **Vwang** ritual. At this stage the young newly circumcised boys who have passed successfully the huddle of childhood to manhood are taught or exposed to the hidden cultural values of their respective society's things like courage, integrity, honesty and secrecies that were hitherto kept away from them because they were seen as children and women. According to one of my participants he said, "it is better for someone to die with his ideas than sharing it with a worthless uncircumcised boy or woman." As Laye a citizen of Guinea in his book titled "The African Child" published in 1981 observed that these teachings are usually centred on outlining the sort of conduct befitting a matured man such as to be straightforward, cultivate virtues that could help in making an honest person and fulfilling all responsibilities towards God, parents, superiors and all manners of people within and outside the society. These

were core values that reflected the vision and mission of their respective societies. Also, Milasi (2006) noted how young girls from Krobo ethnic group in Ghana were taught the art of cooking, adopt the stature of women and how to please their husbands when they eventually got married. When they undergo the initiation successfully, they are publicly declared as matured and thus ready for marriage. Among the Maasi ethnic group who are found in Kenya and Tanzania, initiation elevates an individual from childhood to adulthood. For the boy to be initiated he must prove himself to the community. The boy must show some signs of maturity through carrying a spear, being exposed to cold weather, herding large herd of livestock or killing of a lion or any dangerous animal. The boys were circumcised to become warriors. Once the boys become warriors, they resume responsibility of security for their territory

e) **Incorporation stage**

Upon the completion of the circumcision and initiation rites, the chief priest, care-givers and elders in the bush would send words to the villages. One of my participants told me that the boys are usually taken too far away from their own villages. Reasons being that, to make it difficult for women to trace. For him his village is **chi-ching** but he was sent as far as **Manget** village. These messages were sent particularly to families whose children have successfully undergone the ritual process. The content of the message to the communities and parents will include the day and time of the arrival of the newly ordained men. Before they leave the bush, the matured boys will receive clean skin barbing but will still be naked. On their way they will meet other matured boys waiting for them. To stop women from seeing their nakedness, they are escorted by the masquerade who will be shouting **shalomoooooooo, shalomoooooooo**. On reaching the Village the elders who were at home will receive them into the shrine. In the shrine the newly circumcised adults would be asked to open their eyes to see the masquerade. When they open their eyes they will see the **rip-yil or rip-pipang** (daughter of the soul) dancing with the masquerade. While in the shrine the newly circumcised adults would be served food.

At the end of the ceremony, each parent or guardian would enter the shrine and picked his hero. The new matured members of the community are given cool bath by their fathers or any elder of the family, bodies rubbed with oil and their nakedness were covered with local woven cloth called **bente**. Each family or clan will give their children a special drink called **yin-chilm**. The **yin-chilm** varies from family to family or clan to clan hence, member of another family or clan cannot partake in another family or clan **yin-chilm**. During this period of celebration uncles of the boys from their maternal site come with different gifts such as goats, grains, hoes, money etc. parents of the boys will prepare local beer **mos** and foods which are shared with their neighbours, well-wishers and friends who

come to share the joy with them. There will be lot of dances organised both from the side of the father and the mother. The maternal uncles apart from the gifts of food and drinks they present things like bows and arrows to the new matured men as a symbol of manhood.

As the new men return home, their old characters, behaviours, attitude, and world view toward life would have undergone radical transformation which now placed on a high social position in the society. They left their villages to the bush with boyish attitudes and behaviour but upon return home, they are now men who have imbibed the rich socio-cultural values of the society. This rebirth allows them to hold respectably titles, responsibilities and new social status in the society. They are equally, allow to be heard when it comes to decision making in the society, to take wives since they have private huts and farms allocated to them by their parents.

Due to Westernization and modernisation Vwang ritual is now restricted in rural areas where African traditional Religion is practiced but completely out fashion in the towns and semi-towns because the people are either Christians or Muslims. The acceptance of the new faiths have made the people to completely abandon traditional ways of life and their cultural values. This has resulted in cases of high rate of indiscipline, bad manners and misdemeanour among the youths today in Ngas land. Thus, making researchers and lovers of cultural values to remember the past with nostalgia feelings.

Results and findings

Male circumcision **Vwang** is an old institution of value orientation in Ngas land. It is conducted under the strict supervision of the ancestral spirits **wong** with human instructors and care givers. These instructors were elders who have vast knowledge and experienced on how the society work both spiritually, socially and physically. It is these categories of people who were charged with the responsibility of training, drilling, caring and moulding the character of the next generation. The teachers were not paid salaries but were well respected by the society unlike the teachers of nowadays.

The experiences gathered by these boys under the tutelage of their teachers helped to bring out the real men in them. Throughout these periods, the boys learned the core values of the Ngas society which were courage, honesty, truth, trust, transparency, patriotism, integrity, selflessness, braveness and the need to always put the interest of others before taking any action. That explain why the Ngas as a person when put into position of leadership is very conscious, considerate, tolerably or human toward others when taking any critical decision. This spirit makes them not to be self-centred but generally dispose toward the welfare/interest of other people. The period prepared the boys toward independent adulthood life challenges. The knowledge, education and wisdom acquired through this process are very relevant and related to practical life realities in their respective environments. With such knowledge the young

men were equipped with traditional secrets of warfare, medicinal, and moralities. Hence, could easily defend their territories against external or internal foes.

Socially: All the boys regarded themselves as age mates or classmates since they graduated the same year in spite of their differences in days or dates of biological birth. The year of circumcision becomes a reference point to know who your age mates are. This is very important because the art of writing and documentation was not developed in those days. It is common to hear people asking **yi vwang nu mon-wuna** (is our year of circumcision with you).

Politically: They are qualified to talk and be heard with authority, they take traditional titles, hold positions of responsibilities, participate actively in decision making within the society and settled disputes between members of the society. They were exposed to the hidden secrets of the society such as techniques of warfare, boundaries of the society, mystical powers and leadership skills to secure their lands against external foes. If this training were still in practice the rampant cases of killing, abduction and land grabbing by the unknown gunmen would not have been possible.

Economically: members become more determine to survive through sheer hard work by toiling the land, rearing of animals, commercial activities, controlled of economic trees and engaging in other entrepreneurial ventures. The Ngas man frown at laziness, idleness and extravagant spending. He hates begging or depending on others, as doing so, means a form of enslavement to the rich.

Religiously: They are officially introduced to the living death ancestral spirits. Hence, they are free to visit them as and when due, they can served them with food and drinks as well as worship them with due respect. They now served as intermediary or intercessors between the living death ancestors and other members of the society.

Morally: They become conscious of what they say or the type of discussion they engaged in with the uninitiated and women. They are now more discipline, honest, transparent and straight forward when making statements and decisions. They hardly contaminated themselves with issues such as adultery, falsehood and corruption. Their “yes” become their “yes” and “no” stand for “no”.

Conclusion

This research work has disproved the views held by some Western scholars and their African collaborators that Africans before contact with the Western world did not have means of institutional value orientation or educational system. As revealed through this work, the Africans had well developed

institution of value orientation and through it cherished values, cultures and traditions were passed from one generation to the other. The neglect of this institutionalised ways of value orientation as a result of accepting or imposing the Western ways has devastated negative consequences on the lives of the Ngas people such as lack of respect for elders, the get rich quickly syndrome that gave birth to corruption, armed robbing, kidnappings, banditry and business with human beings. These negative consequences have equally slowed down the rate of development in the society. Though it is still practice in some few rural communities but has very little and no impact.

Recommendations

The paper recommended that the present curriculum content used in primary and secondary schools in Ngas society should be reviewed to reflect Ngas cultural values. Just as the use of the mother tongue is use in teaching pupils in the primary schools. It is partly to resolve these challenges that the National Universities Commission is reviewing the current curriculum with the Code Name Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards which allows Universities to review their programmes with 30% local content that reflect the culture, tradition and values of their societies.

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