

Cult war in open university

• Staff hacks colleague to death over N70,000 debt • Why I sent our fellow cultists after him –Suspect

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By Chioma Okezie-Okeh

Iko Danasabe, 31, is a senior clerical officer with National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Markurdi, Benue State. A holder of first degree in Public Administration, from the same university, until August 5, 2020, he used to work with Francis Atache, a junior clerical officer. But on that day, Atache, alleged to be a cultist, reportedly died in the hands of fellow cultists from a group called AYE (African Youth Employment), Confraternity.

Initially, nobody connected Danasabe with Atache's death. Nobody suspected him. But all of a sudden, events surrounding his untimely death began to unravel and his name became mentioned not once, not twice, in the course of investigation. And, that was how,

he was picked up by police detectives! In fact, investigation showed that he was not only the mastermind but also participated actively in the murder of Atache over a N70,000 debt.

Rearrest and confession

When he was arrested, at first, he refused to confess. He was taken to a magistrate court where the judge ordered him to be remanded in Markudi prison. The victim's relatives, scared that he might go scot-free petitioned the Inspector General of Police who ordered a more meticulous investigation. Upon his rearrest, operatives of Intelligence Response Team (IRT), who were given the assignment, confronted him with more credible evidence linking him with the murder. He broke down and confessed.

In his confession, he revealed that he sent his friends and fellow cultists to monitor the victim's movements and itinerary till they caught up with him at a spot, attacked and hacked him down. Further investigation revealed that both are cult members. The suspect claimed that the victim threatened that he would not pay back the debt and added that he was prepared to cause a cult war because of it. "I wanted to force him to pay," he said, adding that it was not his intention to kill the victim. But unfortunately he died in the process. Whether this explanation and grounds of plea will save him from the wrath of the law is left for time to decide.

Dansabe's story on how and why Atache was killed

But in an interview with Saturday Sun, Danasabe who hails from Taraba State and a Jukun by tribe, continued to insist that Atache's murder was not intentional. He revealed not only why he ordered the attack on him but also how he planned and executed the act. His story: "I was employed five years ago by NOUN, Makurdi Study Centre, as a senior clerical officer. Months later I applied for BSC in the same school where got my first degree in Public Administration. Francis Atache was a junior clerical officer, and worked under me. I usually generate data for students to go and pay their school fees at the bank and some of them would ask me to help out by sending cash across. I usually give him the money to help me pay. He never failed on that assignment, so I assumed that I could trust him with money.

"Sometime in June 2020, I was preparing to go to Nassarawa State on an official assignment when I gave Francis money to help me pay for monthly contribution being run by one Alhaja. Usually, after some months or years, we would collect the money back with the accruing interest. I told him that if he paid the money, they would give him a paper that would serve as a receipt reflecting my balance. When I came back, I asked for the paper

but he promised to bring it to the office the following day. But when the day came and I asked for the paper, he gave one excuse or the other. I reported him to his elder sister who works in the same office. After two days when I did not hear from her, I called her and she asked me why I gave money to Francis because he is not trustworthy with money.

“When next I confronted him over the money, he threatened to deal with me. I even reported the matter to our Director. I told him (Francis Attache) that if he wants to do confraternity war, let’s do it outside the office hour after work. Later, I reported the case to the vigilance group in our area. He begged them to give him two days. But after the two days elapsed and, in fact, after a week, I called the vigilance people to report him again. Francis came to my office the following day, after I reported him and challenged me to bring a proof that I gave him money. He made it clear to me that he was not going to pay me back the money. I was bitter because I knew at that point he was not going to give me the money.”

Because of this, the suspect, who is also a cultist, contracted the services of his fellow cult members and ambushed him at a spot in a bush, hacked him down and dumped his body nearby. But luckiy, policemen found the body when a passerby drew their attention to a foul smell oozing out from the area located close to a mainroad.

On how he was killed, Danasabe agreed that he contracted some of his cult members to monitor his movement. But he did so not with the intention of killing him outrightly but to force him to return the money. “When he asked me for proof that I gave him money, I knew that, at that point, he did not want to return my money. Since no one was there when I gave him the money, I knew that the only way to get justice was by threatening him. I contacted my closest cult members and gave them the assignment. They monitored his movement till we got a good opportunity to attack. There is a place we usually meet near one Bishop’s farm. We usually go there to smoke and relax. We got information that he was going there on August 5, 2020 to buy marijuana in large quantity.

“We considered the place a perfect spot because they sell hard drugs there and even if there was a fight police would assume that it was between miscreants and would not waste their energy investigating the matter. As soon I got a hint from my informant that he had arrived, I stormed the place with about 15 cult members. I came with an axe while some of the boys came with guns. During rival war, anything can happen so we are always prepared. I confronted him and asked him to return my money and everyone there including the man selling the weed asked him to pay his debt since had more than N70, 000 on him at that point. The seller supplies weed to several boys in Markudi town

“When Francis refused to bring the money, we started fighting. He stood up and came after me. My boys hit him with a stick from the back and he fell down. He started bleeding and stopped moving. Everyone was terrified and ran away. I ran home and took some of my clothes and left the house. I got information that police later found his body. I usually sneak in at night to pick things that I might need. Unfortunately someone alerted them and I was arrested. After some days in police detention, I was remanded in prison.”

How bail was stymied by more revelations

On August 29, 2020, as Danasabe, an inmate then at Makurdi correctional facility was called to the administrative office, he bade farewell to his friends with the hope that his bail application had been granted. Had he been released, he would have been exonerated from the murder crime in which police report indicted him. But, his excitement was cut short when he was greeted with handcuffs by operatives of Force Intelligence Response Team, out to execute a re-arrest warrant on him.

On how his re-arrest came about and what he feels about it, he said: “I initially told them that I was innocent because the only proof they had was that I asked Francis to pay me back my money. I had almost concluded plans to secure bail when the prison warders called me to come with my personal effects and handed me over to policemen again. I was shocked because I had celebrated amongst inmates that I had been released on bail. The police claimed that they had more information to confirm that I was at the scene when Francis was killed. I had no choice than to tell them the truth. I denied it initially because they didn’t have a proof. But I did not use the axe on him but a stick.”

The youngman who became a cult member many years ago also revealed how and why he chose to enlist. “I was initiated in 2009 into Aye confraternity by one Ernest,” he said. “Aye means African Youth Empowerment. It is normally for every youth to join one cult group or the other if you want respect. We still relate with other cult groups that is why I trusted Francis so much to give him such amount of money to pay for me. I only wanted to scare him as we usually do as cult members but he died in the process. I am not the one who hit him with the stick but I pinned him down on the floor while my guys took turns beating him up.”

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