



QUEST FOR WEALTH AND POWER IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY: MODELLING RELIGION AS AN INSTRUMENT IN ADDRESSING THE MENACE OF KILLING HUMAN BEINGS FOR RITUAL

Ishaya Brunu & Laiyau Joel Pani

Lecturer, Department of Christian Religious Studies, Taraba State University, Jalingo

ishayabrunu@gmail.com; panij Joel495@gmail.com

Abstract

Killing of human beings for ritual sacrifices in the quest for power, wealth and protection has affected Nigeria in numerous ways, with a toll on the socio-cultural and communal relations of the people. Thus, this work, "Quest for Wealth and Power in the Nigerian Society: Modelling Religion as an Instrument in Addressing the Menace of Killing Human Beings for Ritual," attempted to proffer a solution to the perennial menace of ritual killing. The study discovered that ritual killing for wealth, power and protection in Nigeria is growing at an alarming rate, and the factors motivating it were extreme poverty, unemployment, desire for political power, wealth and protection. These have negatively affected the social cohesion and mutual relations of the people. On this basis, the study offered the following recommendations; Religion, through Christian Association of Nigeria, Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, Jama'atu Nasril Islam, should create empowerment programmes to help eradicate poverty; liaise with the government and security agents, by way of lobby and pressure, to ensure the safety of the citizens. It should also preach hard work, patience and moral sanctity of the society.

Keywords: Church, Ritual Killing

Introduction

Since the fourth republic, which began in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed serious security challenges that threatened its continued existence. These challenges that range from drug abuse, human trafficking, banditry, Cybercrimes, terrorism, advanced fee fraud, kidnapping, among others, have continued to pose serious concern for national development (Jegede, 2014). These threats to national security have been made complex by the killing of human beings for ritual. Thus, the upsurge in the killing of human beings for ritual in recent times has witnessed new forms of threat to lives and security in the Nigerian internal security architecture. According to Agara and Pojwan (2015), ritual killing has registered its name as a major security threat in Nigeria, and the widespread dimension of it, is generating anxiety among the citizenry. Thousands of innocent Nigerians across all ages have been killed, and their body parts used for ritual sacrifices, for either political power, protection or for money, among other things (Akinyemi, 2017). These developments are serious threats in the overall advancement of society for social cohesion.

The rate at which people are being killed, and incomplete bodies are abandoned in most cities in Nigeria, has been alarming in recent years. Hardly a week will pass by without news on the media of a missing person or an incomplete human body found. Just recently, five dead bodies of human beings were seen littered on some streets of Jalingo. For instance, on the 20th May, 2023, in Jalingo, about five dead bodies were found littered across the streets. Two dead bodies were seen at the Jalingo Flyover Bridge, one at Dinyavo-Mile six, one at the Market area and the other at Sabon-



Gari. Cases of individuals caught with human body parts continuously flood the media. There are so many other cases of missing children across the length and breadth of Nigeria unreported.

Jimoh (2018) avers that the actual number of people murdered for money rituals is not known, owing to the lack of systematic data gathering on issues relating to the killing of human beings for ritual. Similarly, academic investigations that explore this area are relatively scant. Therefore, it is difficult to present figures and illustrate how pervasive the phenomenon is (Adama, 2015). However, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2022) avers that there have been over 9,000 cases of ritual killing reported to the police in the last two decades or so. This figure, as uncertain as it may look, is scaring and thus, capable of affecting the human psyche.

Therefore, it has become a regular event as hundreds of people across the country have lost their lives to it. According to Ajijah (2015) the people who kill for ritual purposes go about in search of human parts such as tongues, heads, breasts, and sex organs, as demanded by the witch doctors, juju priests and occultists, who require such for sacrifices or for the preparation of magical portions. In contemporary Nigeria, the killing of human beings for ritual has taken a new dimension. Ayegboyin (2009:18) describes the scene as the “reign of the ritualists”. Many diverse means are used to capture people with evil intentions to use them for rituals. Many of those captured for such purposes are long gone, but there are a lucky few who live to tell the story of their encounter with the ritualists (Adama, 2015).

There are all sorts of stories of various techniques of capturing people to be killed for ritual purposes. Some people disappeared while picking items set as a trap by the ritualists. The upsurge of such traps is usually during festive periods. It would therefore seem obvious that in Nigeria, ritual killers are more prevalent at certain seasons of the year, like the weeks leading to Christmas or Sallah, and during political and electioneering processes. It is generally believed that people engage in the sacrifice of human beings to get power, protection, or money, to spend at such periods. There are some known cases of people who killed their wives, husbands, mothers, or even their children, for money-making rituals (Gbinije, 2014). This crazy desire cuts across all geographical boundaries and social strata.

The consequences of ritual killing are unimaginable, and all these have contributed to the socio-cultural deterioration of the society. With these recurrent incidences of killing human beings for ritual in Nigeria, one is forced to contemplate why such brutal and barbaric act persists, despite the frantic efforts that have been put in place by the government to curb them. Thus, the continued killing of human beings for ritual purposes calls for great concern by all stakeholders. This paper, therefore, sets out to look at the role of Religion in curbing the menace of the killing of human beings for ritual in Nigeria.

Historical Evaluation of the Ritual of Human Sacrifice in Nigeria

The killing of human beings for ritual in Nigeria can be traced to the pre-colonial era. In pre-colonial African societies, human beings were offered for ritual sacrifices to deities. This



occasionally includes not only human beings but most often animals (Iheriiohanma, 2009). And, the type of victim for ritual sacrifice differs from one case to another, depending on the purpose of the sacrifice and the society involved. The selection of victims for ritual sacrifice also varies from one society to another. In some societies, violators of curfew, declared for ritual order, become the victims of such ritual (Akinyemi, 2017). This is the more reason why strangers mostly fall victim to ritual sacrifice, since they are not aware of such a curfew declared, for a ritual order. In this case, guards that enforce such ritual order will capture the victim and present them for sacrifice. In some societies, the killing of a slave was another form of ritual sacrifice. Ayegboyin (2009) observes that human sacrifice is the highest and the most expensive ritual sacrifice that most societies resort to, in times of national disaster, to appease certain divinities or purify the land.

In the western parts of Nigeria, Agara and Pojwan (2015), observe that the Yoruba have a ritual tradition that includes using human beings for sacrifice before any military expeditions are embarked upon. On his part, Ayegboyin (2009) avers that using human beings for ritual was not out of a lack of respect for human life, but a personal philosophy of life, that it is better to sacrifice individual life for the good of the community, than for the community to perish. However, there has never been a general acceptance of human sacrifice in Africa, because the people often frown at it (Ashanti, 2009). The practice of human sacrifice for juju, magical powers, witchcraft, and other fetish purposes was outlawed across the African continent under the colonial regime (Browne, 1935). These practices have been criminalized in the Nigerian penal code, as a measure to assist the colonial masters in establishing a favorable political, economic and social order (Daily Times, 2014).

However, as the urge for political power, special protection and wealth accumulation grew among those in politics, businesses and other forms of activities in human endeavours, especially among the elites, as well as among some of the masses, who aspired for improvement in their fortunes, killing of human beings for personal ritual, developed at the expense of communal ritual. For instance, a story was told about how a mother in Bali, a town in Taraba state, lost her three kids to ritualists. According to the story, the woman hired a motorcycle rider, who takes her kids to school and brings them back at closing time. But on that day, she waited until evening and the kids never came back. On further search, the mutilated dead bodies of the kids were found at a riverbank with missing vital body parts. This and other incidents are telling. In Mutum-Biyu, Gassol Local Government Area, it is also submitted that two persons went missing, only for their decomposing bodies to be found after three days, with some vital organs of their bodies missing.

More so, Adeniyi (2014) posits that the killing of human beings for ritual activities, especially money and political power, has become sophisticated in modern times. It has expanded beyond mere killing of human beings or severing human parts, to the dangerous stage of using female underwear. Ajijah (2015) tells a story of a lady who lost her sister, days after visiting her male friend for the weekend. She explains that days after her sister returned home, she started complaining of scratches in her private part, only to later discover that her pants were not complete, alleging that her partner must have stolen one for ritual purposes.



More so, age bracket or gender sensitivity no longer exist for the victims, as organized groups, most especially among the youth, have mastered the arts of stealing, buying and selling of female underwear to support ritualist activities. Adama (2015) recounts that at the Federal University, Wukari, for instance, students woke up in the morning to the realization of the fact that five female students could not find their pants, which they had put on the line to dry the previous night. It was prayers and God's intervention that saved them. Four days after their pants were missing, the victims started experiencing some strange changes that included nightmares and rashes on their private parts. This development, according to Jimoh (2018), further reinforced the proliferation of private ritualist consultants and practitioners, who have the knowledge and mastery of using female underwear or human body parts for money ritual or making of amulets for protection.

Factors Fueling the Killing of Human Beings for Ritual Sacrifice in Nigeria

The increased rate in killings of human beings for ritual across Nigeria in recent years has been an issue of grave concern. The factors fueling it are:

Firstly, extreme poverty and unemployment have been identified as factors motivating ritual killing. Nigeria is a country bedeviled by multidimensional poverty, unemployment, and insecurity. The wave of its socioeconomic challenges and their impact are widely felt by the people. The astronomical hike in prices of commodities, the unprecedented inflation rate that the country has seen at least in the last two years or so, are obvious excruciating disasters. Numerous observations and reports have demonstrated that a significant number of Nigerians live below the poverty threshold. Most people in Nigeria do not have access to portable drinking water, good medical and health care facilities; as such, they find it more challenging to survive. For instance, the National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reports, have consistently revealed that poverty in Nigeria is growing at an alarming rate. Jimoh (2018) avers that the World Poverty Clock reports that 87 million Nigerians, or around half of the country's population, live in extreme poverty, and that the number of Nigerians falling into abject poverty grows approximately by six people every minute. This particular report indicates that Nigeria tops the list of the world's poorest nations, despite her enormous human and natural resources. In fact, Nigeria has been designated as the poverty capital of the world.

Thus, the disastrous economic situation, decaying infrastructure, and the unfavourable business environment have made it very difficult for many of the private businesses, including small and medium-scale enterprises (SMSEs), to survive (Agara and Pojwan, 2015). For most of these SMSEs to survive in such conditions, cutting down the staff strength and increasing the prices of their goods and services are the order of the day (Akinyemi, 2017). The Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria (MAN), according to Jimoh (2018), reports that between 2015 and 2017, more than 200 private manufacturing enterprises have either closed or relocated to neighboring countries, owing to Nigeria's economic conditions. These figures are too alarming and a disaster to the country's economic development.

As a result of these ugly scenarios, it has become difficult for graduates to get jobs. It is also challenging for those who acquired vocational and entrepreneurial skills to put them into practice



and earn a living (Jegede, 2014). The various prospective determinants and legitimate means of having a good and prosperous life, such as education, skills, talents, and employment, among other things, appear to be irrelevant in recent years (Iheriohanma, 2009). Thus, many people have learned the hard way, to the extent that they go to any length to put food on the table and fulfill other basic needs of life. In this regard, many people engage in criminal activities such as the killing of human beings for money ritual, to meet these all-important needs.

Secondly, the desire for unmerited wealth, political power and protection has also accounted for the prevalent rate of killing of human beings for ritual. It is a common fact that Nigerians attach value to power, protection and excessive acquisition of wealth. The source through which the wealth, power and protection are acquired is often not a major concern. Excessive desire for wealth and primitive accumulation of properties are social syndromes that cut across all the cultural groups and social classes in Nigeria. Iheriohanma (2009) avers that the accumulation of unmerited wealth has become a general way of life in Nigeria and young people are being socialized in this way unconsciously. In the same vein, Jegede (2014) asserts that the volume of fortunes such as mansions, vehicles, and expensive outfits that one has or how extravagant one is, defines his or her influence in society. Success in contemporary times is often associated with a person's wealth and material possessions. Jimoh (2018) thinks that the current trend can be regarded as the new catch-22 syndrome. This trend is spreading fast because an individual who has a lot of money, and sometimes extends his or her hands to other members in the community, is recognized as successful.

In this regard, many young people grow up to have a high regard for an extravagant lifestyle. This strong desire for wealth has become an obsession that makes an average person think only about money as an end, but not the means to an end. This has gone to the extent that, how to buy the latest vehicles and a luxury mansion, and spray money at public functions, are the dreams of an average youth (Adama, 2015). Unfortunately, despite the high level of poverty and unemployment in the land, the society still expects people to be successful and hence, capable of footing bills for themselves and others. For instance, Iheriohanma (2009) submits that parents and family members often expect that their children, who are often without a specific and genuine source of income, will take them out of poverty or at least provide for their basic needs.

Consequently, this excessive obsession with political power, protection, and money, fueled by societal pressure, has pushed many people to engage in all kinds of illegal activities to get rich. It is the opinion held by many people that most politicians make the sacrifice of human beings to get political power, have access to the public treasury, to engage in graft. This is evident in the enormous diversion and misappropriation of state resources and the unimaginable illicit enrichment among public office holders (Ajijah, 2015). The excessive desire for wealth undoubtedly remains a major social issue that fuels other social problems, confronting both young and old people in Nigeria today (Gbinije, 2014).

Implications of Human Sacrifice on Socio-Cultural Cohesion and National Integration



The disastrous impacts occasioned by the growing threat of killing human beings for ritual sacrifice in Nigeria is glaring. This is so, because there is no definite hotspot of operation and there are usually no targeted victims in most cases. And, there is also no profile of the perpetrators so that the survival of the victims can, at least, be curtailed. Killing human beings for ritual sacrifice has become a major source of fear for many, because of the fate that mostly befalls the victims. Gbinije (2014) posits that most victims of human sacrifice can turn mad, die, and become poor, deformed, or a walking corpse. And, the fear of the threat posed by ritualists has continued to undermine national integration and socio-cultural cohesion.

More so, it also has the potential of turning people to engaging in jungle justice. Jegede (2014) posits that at the community level, there is a growing vigilance and active responses of people against ritualists. In this way, many suspects have been apprehended and handed over to the police. In other instances, they met with jungle justice, and this is another emerging source of grave concern for security management. An incident happened in 2009, in which three persons suspected to be ritualists met with their sudden death in Baissa, Kurmi Local Government Area. It was the case of three persons who were said to be diplomats, going to Cameroon through the Abong borders. Along the way, they stopped to inquire for direction at Mararaba, in Donga Local Government Area, but the boy whom they asked him for direction, accused them of taking his penis for ritual purposes. These persons were chased and killed at Baissa. On this and other occasions, it has been shown that killing for ritual has become a visible threat to national security, as people often take the law into their own hands.

Killing of human beings for ritual sacrifice has also severe ties between families, to the extent that most families cannot account for their lost or missing loved ones. Ashanti (2009) opines that most persons reported missing are usually not found, and the bodies of a few that are eventually discovered are dumped either on the roadsides, bush paths or uncompleted buildings, mutilated and their vital organs removed. The governments at both the federal and state levels have responded to this threat with legal criminalization of killing for rituals and general policing. A series of arrests and trials of suspected ritualists have been recorded. Nevertheless, the threat of killing human beings for ritual remains undeterred, and has not gained enough attention, thereby creating a condition of widespread feeling of danger, harm, and horror, which is a potential threat to national and social cohesion.

The Way Forward

The following recommendations can help religion to play a vital role in addressing the challenges of the killing of human beings for ritual sacrifice in Nigeria:

- i. Religion, through the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, should insist and assist the government to design and effectively execute sincere policies to eradicate poverty. Money ritual and other ritual killings will become less appealing when there is a conscientious effort at poverty alleviation. The government should create job opportunities for the ever-growing number



- of its jobless population. Religion should also come up with empowerment programmes to assist her members in the form of soft loans to start businesses, to genuinely earn a living.
- ii. CAN and JNI should serve as active watchdogs to ensure that democracy in its true sense strives. Because it is in an atmosphere of legitimate representation, transparency in public space is made open. This would no doubt ensure that government returns to the people, and the notion of winner takes it all is removed from politics. As a result, ritual killing will become less appealing among those who want to acquire political power by all means.
 - iii. More so, CAN and JNI should anchor her sermons on the value of hard work, love, and honesty. In addition, they should routinely organize workshops and symposia, in collaboration with the government and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), so as to sensitize the public on the rewards of love, honesty, and hard work. The ethic of hard work should be promoted as against unmerited fame, favour, power, and wealth.
 - iv. CAN and JNI should pressure the government to review its security architectures, adequately fund and equip the police force, and other sister security agencies, that are saddled with internal security duties, for the protection of lives and properties of the citizenry. There should be regular patrols and surveillance of identified dark spots of criminal activity. This is so because improving the mechanism of human security architecture will help in reducing the menace of killing human beings for sacrifice.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of ritual killing for wealth, power, protection and the like has reached fever pitch in Nigeria. It has hit a heavy blow on social cohesion, national integration and socio-cultural development. It has also caused fear among the people, especially as they go about their daily activities, in these challenging periods of national economic shocks and devastation. All efforts by Nigerian security agencies seem not to be working out the required remedy needed to curb it. It would rather appear obvious that each day brings a changing dynamic, with a new paradigm shift, that presents an even more challenging phase. The involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations and other non-state actors seems not to be yielding results. Thus, if a Religion that anchors its mandate on peace, social inclusion, and the salvation of the human soul is to be anything meaningful in Nigeria, it should show itself capable of playing a vital role in all aspects of human beings. It is on this basis that this study examined the phenomenon of killing for ritual killing in Nigeria and proposed ways in which Religion can help in curbing it.

References

- Adama, J. T. (2015). *The craze for wealth among Nigerians*. Retrieved October 27, 2018, <http://www.thetidenewsonline.com/2015/09/02/the-craze-for-wealth-among-nigerians/>
- Adeniyi, E. (2014). *Money...power...reasons ritualists are on prowl*. *Nigerian Tribune Newspaper*, April 14, 2014. Vol. 438, 12
- Agara, J. J. and Pojwan, M. A. (2015). "Eradicating extreme poverty in Nigeria: An appraisal of Millennium Development Goal One" (MDG 1).



- Ajjah, A. (2015). "Angry youth burn 7 suspected ritualists in Benue", Premium Times, February 11, 2015.
- Akinyemi, D. (2017). *Desperation to become rich was all over me, says man caught with seven human skulls*. Retrieved September 3, 2018, from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/11/desperationbecome-rich-says-man-caught-seven-human-skulls/>
- Ashanti, K. F. (2009). "Blood", in *Encyclopedia of African Religion* edited by Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama. California: Sage Publications, Int. 2(3)56-70.
- Ayegboyin, D. (2009). "Sacrifice" in *Encyclopedia of African Religion* edited by Molefi Kete Asante and Ama mazama. California: Sage publications Int., 2(3)34-41.
- Browne, J. (1935). "Witchcraft and British Colonial Law". Africa: Journal of the International African Institute 8(4): 481-487.
- Daily Time N. G. (2014). "Ritualist Disguised as lunatic Discovered with Human Tongues in Ibadan" The Trent, March 26, 2014.
- Gbinije, B. (2014). "Politician, Voodoo and Power" Vanguard, December, 21, 2014.
- Iheriohanma, E. B. J. (2009). *Socio-structural pressures and the challenges of survival and crime committal in Nigeria*. Journal of Social Sciences, 21(3),167-175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2009.11892767>
- Jegade, C. O. (2014). *African indigenous religious rituals and magic in Ibadan politics: Issues for the democratization process in Nigeria*. International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 6(2), 42-48.
- Jimoh, A. (2018). *Kwara police arrest couple, others with 11 human skulls*. The Nation. Retrieved November 21, 2018, from <http://thenationonlineng.net/kwara-police-arrestcouple-skulls/>
- National Bureau of statistics (NBS) (2015). "Gross Domestic Product (GDP)". Report Quarter 1. Abuja FCT.