

Kidnapping for Rituals: Article of Faith and Insecurity in Nigeria

by

Samuel Oyewole
samueloyewole47@yahoo.co.uk
Department of Political Science
University of Ilorin, Nigeria

Abstract

This study interrogates the threat of kidnapping for ritual in Nigeria, a subject that has not received sufficient academic attention, and its socio-political and economic underpinnings have largely been overlooked in state responses. Relying on available public data, this article examines the phenomenon and its motivations and implications for security, and the efficacy of state responses, and possible ways forward.

Keywords: Africa, faith, kidnapping, murder, Nigeria, religion, ritual, sacrifice, security

Introduction

Nigerians are highly religious people. The Gallup International (2012) ranked Nigeria as the second most religious country in the world, based on a survey that shows that 93 per cent of her population tended to be religious. Religion plays an important role in the politics, economy and security of Nigeria as a nation. The Nigerian politicians understand this position and are obediently observing a non-writing code of a Christian-Muslim ticket in a political contest. This arrangement has gone a long way to reduce religious tension in the federation. Nigeria has witnessed a series of religious conflicts since the 1980s. There are frequent incidents of Christian-Muslim conflicts, and recently Islamic fundamentalists are proliferating in Nigeria. Certain religious doctrines and rituals are often manipulated to encourage violent conflict. A recent example is the campaign of terror in the Lake Chad region by the Nigerian based Islamist Boko Haram, which has killed over 23,000 people and displaced 3 million people (Oyewole 2015a).

The subject of faith and security in Nigeria has generated a growing academic attention. Nigeria is estimated to have a population of 48.2 per cent Christians, 50.5 per cent Muslims and 1.4 per cent others (PFRPL 2006:85). Based on this demography, “other religions” such as the African Tradition Religions (ATRs) have received insufficient academic attention, and their security implication has remained underexploited (Nwolise 2013; 2012). However, many of those who publicly indicated that they are deeply committed to the practice of Christianity or Islam also incorporate elements of “other faiths” in their daily lives (PFRPL 2010:4). The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (PFRPL) find out that about 11 per cent of the Nigerian population believe in the protective power of sacrifices to spirits and ancestors (PFRPL 2010:4). This suggests that the relevance of “other faiths” is underestimated. The religious-security nexus in Nigeria cannot thus be fully understood without paying attention to other faiths and rituals, and their implications. Ritual killing, which is a tradition in some parts of Africa, and kidnapping for this purpose is a subject of faith that is less understood in the religion-security nexus in Nigeria.

Kidnapping has emerged as a major security concern in Nigeria, and the fate of the victims is generating a growing attention (Oyewole 2015b; 2016a &b). There has been over 4,000 cases of kidnapping reported to the police without any traces of the victims in the last decade (NBS 2013). It is suspected that the majority of these victims were abducted for ritual rather than ransom or any political objectives. Kidnapping for ritual involves killing or severing the body part of abducted persons for the purpose of using it as an object of ritual sacrifice aim to acquire ritual-money, favour, fame, success, power and protection. Nevertheless, this phenomenon has received little academic or policy attention. Thus, this study examines the patterns, threats and the socio-political economy underpinning of kidnapping for ritual in Nigeria. Beyond the legal-policing measure, the dominant government response that has proved insufficient to contain this threat, this study observed that the phenomenon is an article of faith that cannot be easily wish away unless committed efforts are taken to address the socio-political economy underpinnings in society.

Kidnapping in the Framework of Ritual Sacrifice

The concept of kidnapping for ritual in Nigeria and other part of Africa can be deconstructed as a nexus between kidnapping and ritual sacrifice. The act of kidnapping is described in Section 364, Chapter 77 of the Nigerian Criminal Code Act of 1990 as “unlawfully imprisons of any person in such a manner as to prevent him [or her] from applying to a court for his [or her] release or from discovering to any other person the place where he [or she] is imprisoned, or in such a manner as to prevent any person entitled to have access to him [or her] from discovering the place where he [or she] is imprisoned.” The act of kidnapping is one of the offences against liberty under the provision of this Act. Therefore, it can also be described as unlawful seizures, detains and deprives of personal liberty of a person against his/her will.

There are different forms of kidnapping that can be observed in Nigeria. The growing concern to understand the behaviours of the captors vis-à-vis the fate of the hostages have necessitated some recent studies to define kidnapping in Nigeria based on the distinguish characters of the perpetrators. Thus, kidnapping in Nigeria has been identified with perpetrators such as bandits, ritualists, fraudsters, baby factories, insurgents, sea pirates and terrorists (Oyewole 2015c: 2-4). Kidnapping in Nigeria is generally motivated by ritual sacrifice, and economic or political enterprises (Osumah and Aghedo 2011:277). Extant literature on kidnapping in Nigeria has been dominated by concerns for the incidents motivated by ransom and political ends (Aghedo 2015; Badiora 2015; Onuoha 2014; Osumah and Aghedo 2011; Oyewole 2015c; 2016a).

The activities of ritual killers have accelerated the threat of kidnapping in Nigeria. Kidnapping for ritual is unique. The process often involves victims that are charmed and made unconscious by the abductors at the point of capture. More victims die rather than survive their experience after being abducted for ritual. This experience can turn victims mad, dead, poor and deformed, and some as mobile corpses (Gbinije 2014). Although there is a growing record of atrocities in the hostage handling behaviours of militant groups in Nigeria; these actors are often restrain by their strategic, political and economic interests (Aghedo 2015; Oyewole 2015b & c; 2016a & b). However, perpetrators that kidnap for ritual have little or no restrain that can be understood with any conventional paradigms. Kidnapping for ritual is an unlawful seizure of a person in order to kill and/or sever part of his or her body for the purpose of ritual sacrifice.

Ritual is a set patterns or prescribed procedures and orders for carrying out religious actions or ceremonies (Shujaa 2009). Sacrifice is a vital aspect of every religious ritual (Stebbins 2010). This involves giving up something of value for the sake of something that is of greater value (Ayegboyin 2009:583). Human sacrifice is a blood sacrifice that involves killing of a living creature as a ritual offering to a god or spirit, usually in expectation of a return in the form of good fortune, whether generalised or as the granting of a particular prayer (La Fontaine 2011:4). Some of the objects of sacrifice for this ritual are whole or severed parts of human being, such as the head, genitals, breasts, eyes, intestine, arms and legs as well as exhumed dead body or its severed parts. Ritual sacrifice can be said to be designed as a “faith strategy” to acquire money, wealth, success, fame, favour, greatness, power and protection from dangers.

Human sacrifice and related ritual practices and kidnapping for that purpose are prohibited in Nigeria. The Section 201(c) of the Nigerian Criminal Code Act of 1990 makes it a punishable offence for anyone to “makes or sells or uses, or assists or takes part in making or selling or using, or has in his [or her] possession or represents himself [or herself] to be in possession of any juju, drug or charm which is intended to be used or reported to possess the power to prevent or delay any person from doing an act which such person has a legal right to do, or to compel any person to do an act which such person has a legal right to refrain from doing...”

Section 210(f) of the Act criminalised anyone that “makes or uses or assists in making or using, or has in his [or her] possession anything whatsoever the making, use or possession of which has been prohibited by an order as being or believed to be associated with human sacrifice or other unlawful practice.” Section 210(e) further prohibited the “possession of human remains which are used or are intended to be used in connection with the worship or invocation of any juju.”

Background to Ritual Sacrifice in Africa

The origin of kidnapping for ritual in Nigeria and other part of Africa can be traced to the pre-colonial era. Many pre-colonial African societies have offered ritual sacrifice to the deities, and for some, this occasionally include human sacrifice. The kind of victim for ritual sacrifice varies from one case to another, depending on the purpose of the sacrifice and the society. Likewise, the processes and means of selecting victims vary according to society. In some societies, a curfew has to be declared and the victim of the sacrifice is expected to have violated this ritual order. This is the reason why strangers/immigrants mostly fall victim of ritual sacrifice in some communities. In this case, the victim will be captured by guards that enforce the ritual order. The killing of slave was another form of ritual sacrifice in some other societies.

Human sacrifice is the highest and the costliest ritual sacrifice that the community resorted to mostly in times of national disaster, to propitiate certain divinities and purify the community (Ayegboyin 2009:584). For instance, Adefila and Opeola (1998) observed that the Yoruba in South-western Nigeria have a ritual tradition that included human sacrifice (mostly the enslaved) before any military expeditions between the 11th and 19th centuries. Human beings were mostly offered not out of lack of respect for human life, but rather because a personal philosophy of life maintains that it is better to sacrifice individual life for the good of the community than for all to perish (Ayegboyin 2009:584). Notwithstanding, there has never been a general acceptance of human sacrifice in Africa and there are some situations where this kind of ritual has been offered to the deities in a defiled form of African religion (Ashanti 2009:127).

Human sacrifice by private individuals or a group of individuals outside the communal ritual is never approved in African tradition. Ritual in African tradition constitutes collective statements of continuity and unity that function to express a communal definition through group participation (Shujaa 2009:575). Private sacrifice that involves human victim is a defile ritual in the African tradition. This is against the believed sanctity of life and communality of society in Africa (Bell 2002). Amadi Okerefor, the chief priest of Umuohoko community in Imo State revealed that this practices constituted ritual murder in Igbo tradition, and anyone found guilty were automatically banished from the community (*The Sun* 2013). Ordeal is the popular way of prosecuting this kind of cases in African tradition (Browne 1935; Hund 2000). The Yoruba people have the *Ogboni* cult as a mechanism to regulate private rituals and checkmate abuse of public rituals (Idowu 2005). The Akan of Ghana also have anti-witchcraft movements such as the Sakrabundi and Aberewa during the pre-colonial and early colonial eras (Parker 2004).

The practice of human sacrifice, witchcraft, juju, magical powers and ordeals were outlawed across Africa under colonialism (Browne 1935). These practices have been criminalised in the Nigerian penal code since 1916. The Witchcraft Act was also adopted in Zambia in 1914 and in South Africa in 1957. This policy measure was intended to assist the colonial/apartheid system to establish a favourable political, economic and social order in Africa (Ekeh 1975). Therefore, the criminalisation of human sacrifice and other rituals that are harmful to life succeeded in eliminating this practice in the African public realm. On this basis, state and legal systems in Africa have been built on the simple assumption that this article of faith does not really exist. However, this article of faith has survived criminalisation from the state and adapted to the colonial and post-colonial environments in Africa (Hund 2000; Kohnert 2003; Smith 2001).

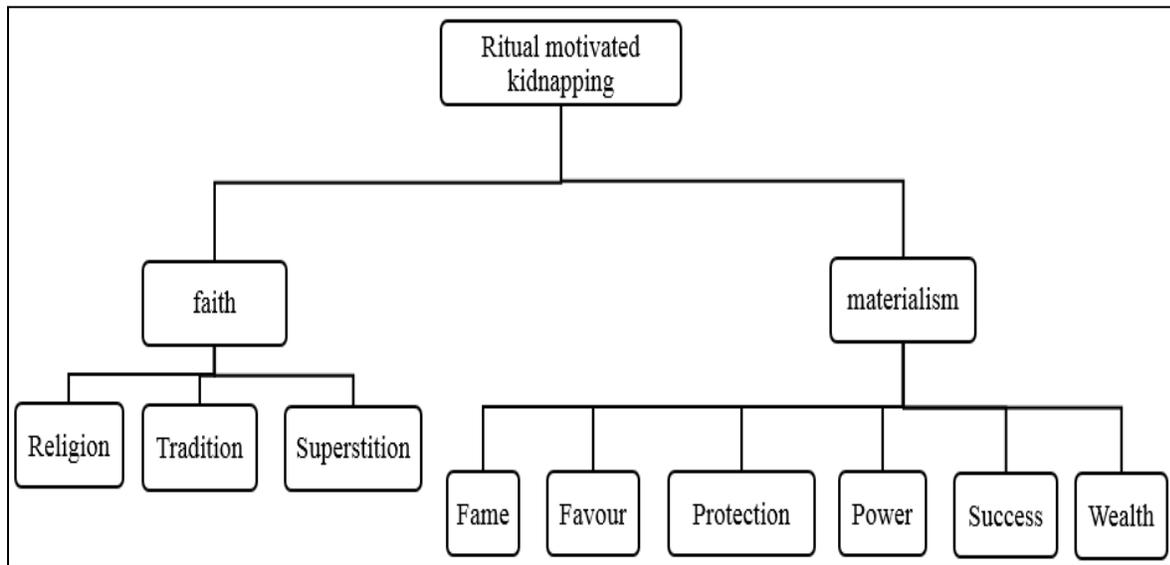
The pre-colonial and colonial adventure of the European powers in Africa encouraged the development of individualism at the expense of the communality in the latter (Ake 1981; Otite 1978). Private ritual thus became a common option for the upper class in society as a pattern of state-citizens relations emerged in favour of some African rulers friendly to the Europeans who had a strong desire for regime security in pre-colonial and colonial African states (Ekpo and Omoweh 2001). The desire for special protection and wealth sustenance grew among those in the business of enslaving people, and other economic elites. And some of the masses also aspired for improvement in their fortune resorted to private rituals. These unlimited quests for power, fame, wealth and protection in Africa in pre-colonial and colonial societies encouraged private ritual at the expense of communal ritual. This development was reinforced with the spread of new public faiths, Christianity and Islam, and the criminalisation of many public ritual practices in Africa.

The enslaved were the dominant victims of private ritual that involves human sacrifice in the pre-colonial era, because this kind of ritual was only common among despotic kings, army commanders and wealthy slave traders. However, the abolition of the slave trade and slavery by the colonial powers and the criminalisation of ritual killing have driven the practice to the underworld. The children have been major victims of ritual sacrifice in Africa (Reader 1999:558). This is the antecedent of what is now known as *gbómo gbómo* (child kidnapping) in south-western Nigeria. Ritualist activities have become sophisticated in Nigeria in modern times as it has expanded beyond child kidnapping, and age bracket no longer exist for the victim as organised groups and strategies in kidnapping have emerged to support ritualist activities. This development is reinforced with the proliferation of private ritualist consultants and practitioners with the knowledge of using humans or human body part for rituals.

Motivations for Ritualist Kidnapping in Nigeria

Ritual motivated kidnapping in Nigeria cannot be fully understood outside the very believe system that underpin the ends. Many observers have wondered why people can be so heartless to defiled civilise norms through kidnapping and killing of fellow human being for ritual. There are many reasons behind ritual motivated kidnapping in Nigeria. These can be broadly consider under the typology of faith and materialist motivations (see figure 1). Faith is very important in the phenomenon of ritual kidnapping, which has flourished under certain material condition.

Figure 1: Motivation for Ritual Kidnapping in Nigeria



Ritual sacrifice and kidnapping for this purpose are anchored on a “faith strategy.” This is the belief in ritual sacrifice as a means to acquire material or worldly things such as fame, favour, power, protection, success and wealth. There are three forms of faiths in this context. There are people that believe in this strategy as a matter of their religion, while many believe in it as part of their tradition, which others consider as superstition. The line between the classes of faith and their relationship with the desire for ritual materials is difficult to draw in practice, although it is significant for the purpose of clarity of analysis that these factors will be considered separately.

- **The Faith in Kidnapping for Ritual**

Nigeria is a deeply religious society; where life and death, good and bad, success and failure are largely accepted as destiny and supernaturally determined. This is a popular article of faith among Christians, Muslims and ATR worshippers in Nigeria (Al-Sha'rawii nd; Ositelu 2002:137-9; Oyedepo 2005). A particular survey by PFRPL (2006) shows that many Nigerians are of the view that faith in supernatural power is more important than hard work, education, fate, government policy, personal contact and parents' economic situation for someone to be successful economically. Furthermore, a significant number of Nigerians believe that magical potions prepared with human heads, genitals, breasts, tongues and eyes enhance political and financial fortunes; and that juju, charms and amulets can protect individuals against business failures, sickness and diseases, accidents, and spiritual attacks (Igwe 2004 cf. PFRPL 2010:4). This article of faith is one of the religious rituals, traditions and superstitions among the adherents.

There are many observers that believe the problem of ritual killing and kidnapping for this end in modern time cannot be disconnected from the ATR's rituals (Igwe 2004; Smith 2001). The ATR worshippers and shrines have been most frequently connected to ritual killing and related kidnapping in Nigeria. This is evident from testimonies of survivors and reports on security details. For example, an 18-year-old Miss Ladi Okoro was abducted by ritualists along with seven other victims in Abuja on March 6, 2013, once revealed that they were charmed in a public transport and later they ended up in a shrine, where they were presented to the ritual practitioners, before their miraculous escape (Afisunlu 2013). In February 2014, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) arrested two herbalists and four other suspects with a severed human head with dripped blood, calabash, charms and other items in Iware, Oyo State (Olaitan 2014). And in March 2014, a herbalist was also arrested in connection to the attack and removal of Mrs. Zainab Mohammed's eyes by three suspected ritualists in Kukshi, Bauchi State (Gbadamosi 2014).

The way ritualists and their operative bases are often depicted make them hard to distinguish from ATR worshippers and shrines. Consequently, many ATR worshippers and shrines have been subjected to violence by members of the public based on suspicion (e.g. Balogun 2013). However, there is a need to be very careful in generalising this ritual with ATR. Many ATR worshippers have distanced themselves from this ritual. One herbalist, Jimoh Akanji was once reported to have stated that money ritual actually exist and highly demanded by many clients who need to be advised against it as evil and forbidden by *Eledumare* and *Ifa* (Adeniyi 2014). Furthermore, a prominent *Ifa* priest, Chief Ifayemi Elebuibon was reported to have rejected the idea of ritual killing in contemporary African religion. Elebuibon argued that "Jesus Christ sacrificed himself, same for Ibrahim who wanted to slaughter Ismaila, but was replaced by a ram from Allah. *Orunmila* [in the Yoruba tradition], too, in *Otu Ife* wanted to kill his son, but a goat was sacrificed instead of him. Hence, ritual killing has been abolished" (Adeniyi 2014).

Beyond the ATRs, this article of faith has been adapted into Christianity and Islam by some believers of these faiths. There is a popular case of the pastor of Holy Family Ministry that was identified as the sponsor of Rosemary Chukwu who abducted a 7 year-old Emmanuel Emeka for ritual in Ikorodu, Lagos State, on June 25, 2014 (*The Sun*, 2014b). There is also a case of a Quranic teacher named Mohammed Saheed from Ilesa-Baruba in Kwara State who requested a kolanut that is placed in the mouth of a dead woman for three days from a client. However, the plotters were subsequently arrested for ritual murder of his 36-year-old lover, Kafilat Lateef (Malik 2013). Saheed was interviewed after this incident and said, “I told him what our forefathers used to do with kolanut from the mouth of an elderly dead person...” (Malik 2013). In view of this, this article of faith is not a religion to this set of people, but a tradition.

Finally, many observers consider this article of faith as a superstition. One of the arguments of the disbelievers is that the ritual is not scientific as no practitioners have ever acknowledged it publicly. Apparently, no herbalist will support the idea publicly to avoid being prosecuted. But only a few herbalists have ever consider or resulted to materialist-rituals personally. Hence, consider the case of an herbalist identified as Soji Akodiya, who was apprehended in connection to kidnapping and ritual killing of Rilwan Amuda by Muyideen Salaam and Nuru in Badagry, Lagos State, in July 2014. When a reporter asked Akodiya “why he looked so haggard and tattered when he could have make money-ritual to take care of himself;” he “looked at the reporter, smiled sheepishly and said, ‘you will not understand’” (Vanguard 2014). Many other observers believe that this ritual is a superstition based on their strong Christian and Islamic backgrounds. However, Akanji, who is a herbalist, noted that money-ritual among others really exist, but he believe that no one can kill to live, the consequence of this ritual is that the spirit of those that were killed would continue to haunt the perpetrators till they die (Adeniyi 2014).

- **The Material Ends of Kidnapping for Ritual**

Ritual sacrifice and kidnapping for this purpose are anchored on the belief that they satisfy a certain need of the perpetrators. Consequently, kidnapping for ritual is flourishing in Nigeria amid widespread of poverty and inequality, insecurity and political alienation. Nigeria has a challenging socio-economic and demographic indicators that make this crime attractive to people (see table 1).

Table 1: Nigeria: Selected Socioeconomic and Demographic Indicators.

Population	162,471,000
Crude death rate	14.1
Life Expectancy at Birth (years)	52.3
GNI Per Capita (US\$)	1,440.0
Population below International Poverty line (2\$/day) (%)	84.5
Dependency Ratio (%)	86.1
Share of Income Held by Richest 10%	38.2
Share of Income Held by Poorest 10%	1.8

Source: *African Statistical Yearbook* (2014).

Many people have been attracted to perform money ritual or assist ritualists with kidnapping because of poverty. About 84 per cent of the population or over 137 million people in Nigeria are leaving below the international poverty line of U.S.\$2 per day (see table 1). This is significant in the case of a 35 year-old Muyideen Salaam who was reportedly arrested in July 2014 for kidnapping and ritual killing of a 13 year-old boy identified as Rilwan Amuda (Vanguard 2014). The accused person worked in a video club as an apprentice at Aketegbo community in the Seme Badagry area of Lagos, where he earned ₦1, 500 (about U.S.\$8) per month. Muyideen revealed to newsmen that he joined his friend to make money ritual after his wife left with their two children, when feeding became difficult for him (Vanguard 2014). Mr. Udo Mbakara was also reported to have drugged and abducted his two nieces before he beheaded them, and sold their heads to ritualists for N1 million each in Calabar, Cross River State in 2010 (*The Sun* 2013).

Power is another major benefit that many believe can be gained through ritual sacrifice that entails human blood or body-parts. There are politicians who believe that charms can make them powerful and transport them into powerful positions (Vanguard 2014). Hence, the politics of Africa is largely amoral, democratic norms are violated with impunity and the state is run for the selfish interest of the few (Osaghae 1994). Hence, ritual is one of the means to attain and maintain a position of power in many African nations (Nwolise 2013; Smith 2001). This point is evident from a series of testimonies of suspects who have been linked to politicians. For example, the suspect that was arrested for kidnapping and removing the two eyes of a 7 year-old Umar Mamman in Sokoto on October 31, 2006 was reported to have revealed to the court that his sponsor was a prominent politician in the state (el-Kurebe 2011).

There are indications that many businessmen and women are also undergoing rituals for favour, connection, wealth and protection (Igwe 2004; Nwolise 2013; Smith 2001). Hence, a four men gang was apprehended in 2014 by a local vigilante group for kidnapping and ritual killing of a 35 year-old woman Ngozi Eze in Enugu, for a sponsor that was willing to buy her private part for ₦600,000. The suspects were also reported to have identified names of many politicians and businessmen in the state as their customers (Oji 2014). Some preachers have also undergone rituals for fame, wealth and protection. On December 30, 2013, a 12-year-old Bose Ogoja was abducted and strangulated by 18-year-old Ikechukwu Friday for a pastor that promised to pay him ₦100, 000 for her faeces at the point of death in Badagry, Lagos State (Akinkuotu 2014).

Kidnapping for Ritual and Insecurity in Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the leading hotspots of kidnapping in the world, thus, it accounts for about half of the kidnapping incidents in Africa with thousands of incidents recorded annually in the last decade (Oyewole 2016a). There is also a growing record of foreigners being kidnapped in Nigeria and transnational kidnappings by armed groups (Oyewole 2016a). The trend of kidnapping in Nigeria attracted international concern when Boko Haram abducted 276 female students in the town of Chibok in Borno State (Nigeria) on April 14, 2014. This incident generated nationwide protests against Boko Haram terrorism and the inadequate responses of the Nigerian security operatives. The protests spread from Nigeria to Bangladesh, Britain, Canada, France, Ghana, Germany, India, Pakistan, Portugal, South Africa, Togo, the U.S., among others (Oyewole 2015b; 2016b). The solidarity campaigns on the social media, especially Tweeter (with millions of tweets) and Facebook was also global (Oyewole 2016b).

Though kidnapping in Nigeria has generated wide attention in general, the focus of attention has been dominated by kidnapping for ransom or political ends by insurgents, terrorists and syndicates. The phenomenon of kidnapping for ritual has generated more apprehension in Nigeria than the attention devoted to it by journalists, scholars and policy makers within and outside Nigeria. On December 10, 2013, hundreds of women went on rampage in a protest at the Enugu State Government House on the allegation that no fewer than 11 women were killed for ritual by suspected ritualists and chief priests of different deities in quick succession in Enugu-Ezike communities (Agbo 2013). A series of protests and riots were also recorded in response to this phenomenon in Malawi and Zambia in 2016. The horror discovered in Soka, an evil forest that serve as den of kidnappers and ritualists in Ibadan metropolis, have remained one of the dominant images that is associated with kidnapping for ritual in Nigeria since 2014.

Kidnapping for ritual is unique and there are widespread fear of its threat in Nigeria, where there is neither definite hotspot of operation and targeted victims, nor a profile of the perpetrators and the survival of the victims are least guaranteed. Other forms of kidnapping have definite areas of operation: politically motivated captors in Nigeria are largely organised and concentrated in the conflict theatres such as the Niger Delta and the north-eastern regions of Nigeria (Oyewole 2016a). The perpetrators are well known militant, insurgent and terrorist groups. The targeted victims are always ideologically significant to justify the perpetrator's demand for policy ends or ransom. Many syndicate groups have developed around these theatres to exploit their victims (Aghedo 2015). The victims in this context can regain their freedom to a large extent with the payment of ransom by relatives, a rescue mission by the security operatives or policy concession to the perpetrators by the state (Oyewole 2016a). These general survival strategies have little significance to the understanding of the fate of victims of kidnapping for ritual in Nigeria.

Ritualist can be anyone located anywhere. There are several cases where the perpetrators are acquaintance of the victims as family, friends, neighbours, co-workers or clerics. In 2010, there was a case of 23 year-old father, Patrick Eno Onen who abducted his eight month-old twins from their mother and killed them for ritual in the Ndayi community of Cross Rivers State (*The Sun* 2013). Again, a 30-year-old man identified as Chukwudi was reported to have beheaded his 56-year-old father, Michael and drank his blood for ritual in the Egwudinage Obegu community of Eboyin State on April 1, 2014 (*The Sun* 2014a). There are many other cases where perpetrators are not related to the victim, but are public transport operators, clients and passers-by. A lucky 10-year-old survived kidnapping by ritualists in Igbagbo, Lagos State, and recalled that she was abducted together with 10 fellow passengers by some public bus operators after a white handkerchief was used to make them unconscious (Balogun 2012).

There is no age bracket, secluded sex, status or geo-political limits in target selection of victims by perpetrators of kidnapping for ritual. No one is too young or old, rich or poor, far or near for ritual motivated kidnappers. A gang of five men was reported to have invaded a medical centre in Irona Quartres of Ado-Ekiti in the Ekiti State capital, demanding day-old babies on March 15, 2013 (Salawudeen 2013). In the cover of the night, suspected ritualists were reported to have abducted no fewer than 11 children of less than four-year-old in Isiagu, Eboyin State, in quick succession in 2014 (*The Sun* 2014a). However, age never save the 80-year-old Mrs. Olu Omotayo from the ritualists that removed her private part in Akure, the Ondo State capital on May 15, 2014 (Uzodinma 2014). Status does not also save the 20-year-old Agwan Ozoro, the daughter of the Special Adviser to the Nasarawa State governor on Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, from ritual motivated abductors on February 26, 2015 (Ogenyi 2015).

Kidnapping for ritual has become a major source of fear for many Nigerians because of the fate that mostly befall the victims. The victim can turn mad, die, become poor, deformed or a mobile corpse (Gbinije 2014). A report by *The Sun* (2013) pointed out that about 90 per cent of recent cases of missing persons were not found and the bodies of a negligible number that were eventually seen were dumped either on the roadsides, bush paths or inside gutters, mutilated and their vital organs removed.

More than 20 human skulls and decomposing bodies were reportedly found at Kilometre 15 on the Aba/Azumini Highway, Abia State in 2014 (*The Sun* 2014a). In March 2013, there was a case of Isaac Olakunle who was arrested in Ilesha, Osun State, for killing his patient named Femi for ritual. The victim was dismembered in such a way that his bowels and thighs were severed from the rest of his body, with parts of the intestines dangling (Ige 2013).

The government of Nigeria at the federal level and in some states have responded to this threat with legalistic criminalisation and general policing. The police and the civil defence have been at the forefront of the war against ritualists in Nigeria. A series of arrests and trials of suspected ritualists and associated kidnapping syndicates have been recorded. However, the threat of kidnapping for rituals remain undeterred in Nigeria. The police remain weak in capacity for real time situations, which is very crucial to deter or counter the threat. There have been little commitment to investigate incidents, search and rescues victims or adopt a pre-emptive policing, which involves the search and destroy of dens of ritualists and kidnapping syndicates in Nigeria. Alas, there is a series of popular allegations where arrested suspects were released by police, as a result of corrupt inducement or order from above, without trials. Even when suspects are charged in court, the cases are often unnecessarily prolonged with a series of appealing. And moreover, cases that indict politicians and their associates often die natural deaths.

Against this background, ritual killing and kidnapping has become a dichotomy between objective and subjective security. Security can be said to be objective when there is physical safety and absence of danger or threat, while subjective security can be referred to as the confidence or condition of feeling safe from harm or danger (Nnoli 2006). The objective and subjective securities are connected to state and human security perspectives respectively. It is from the so called objective perspective that kidnapping for ritual has not gained sufficient attention; although the phenomenon has created a condition of widespread feeling of danger, harm and horror in Nigeria. Due to this gap in the conceptions of state and human securities, there has been a growing resort to self-help among citizens in Nigeria. At the level of family, children are raised with the fear of strangers, who can be ritualists or kidnappers. There are also widespread belief across religions that prayer is the only resort for victims and their relatives.

At the community level, there is a growing vigilance and active responses of people against ritualists and kidnappers in Nigeria. In this way, many suspects have been apprehended and handed over to the police or met with jungle justice— the latter is another emerging source of concern in Nigeria. At least two mad persons were killed and 11 other injured in late March 2014 in Ibadan, following the news of a madman that was found with four human tongues (*Daily Time* 2014; Waheed 2014). Seven suspected ritualists were also set ablaze in Naka, Gwer West municipal in Benue State in February 2015 (Ajijah 2015).

On September 17, 2014, a group of villagers (about 89 persons) in Kamba, Kebbi State, killed four persons, burnt two police vehicles and nine motorcycles because the police rescued Adamu Gaya, who was attacked on the allegation of ritual murder of a young girl (Ojukwu 2014). This and other occasions have shown that kidnapping for ritual has become a latent threat to security in Nigeria, and making people to lose confidence in state security and due process of the law.

Conclusion

Kidnapping for ritual has emerged as an important security threat in Nigeria. This criminal act has proved difficult to prevent through policing, given the insufficient knowledge of the hotspot, and the prospective perpetrators and the victims. Weak capacity in real time situation awareness and insufficient commitments to policing has undermined state response to this threat. It's difficult to deter the threat given the challenges of investigating the spiritual dimension of the crime by police or prosecute a suspect under the conventional legal system. It is often quite difficult to prove to a reasonable extent to a court that someone was made unconscious with a charm or there is a mobile corpse that is working for a suspected ritualist. Although these cases may have little appeal in the western tradition imposed on Africa through colonialism, they are day to day concerns for the people. This informs the conflicting conceptions of security in Nigeria.

The phenomenon of kidnapping for ritual can be better understood as article of faith. It is deeply rooted in the belief that magical potions prepared with human heads, breasts, tongues, eyes, and genitals can enhance one's political and financial fortunes, and protect against all forms of dangers. This belief system has flourished in Nigeria and other parts of Africa amidst widespread poverty, insecurity, political alienation and ritual traditions. Although there is no general acceptance of human sacrifice in African tradition, there are some evidence to support its existence in some pre-colonial African societies. However, the respect accorded to the sanctity of life in the ritual tradition by community in ancient time distinguished it from the callous killing to advance the selfish interest of perpetrators in modern society.

Beyond a committed measure to improve legal-policing response, there is a need to accept the problem as an article of faith that cannot be easily wished away by the state, unless efforts are committed to address the socio-political economy underpinning in the society. Money-ritual and syndicate kidnapping for ritualists will become less appealing when there is a commitment to poverty eradication, employment opportunities and human security. Democratisation and transparency in the public space will also return government to the people and make ritual killing less appealing among those that want to serve the people. On this basis, the ethic of hard work can be promoted against unmerited fame, favour, power and wealth sourced from rituals. Improvement in human security will also reduce the appeal of ritual protection in Nigeria. This array of policy measures will reduce the appeal of kidnapping for ritual and the faith that underlines it as a practice, and will improve the policing capability of the state to counter its threat.

References

- Adefila, J.A. and S.M. Opeola. 1998. "Supernatural and Herbal Weapons in 19th Century Yoruba Warfare," in *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, edited by Adeagbo Akinjogbin. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Plc.
- Adeniyi, Emmanuel. 2014. "Money...Power...Reasons Ritualists are on Prowl," *Nigerian Tribune*, April 14.
- Afisunlu, Feyi. 2013. "How Ladi Okoro escaped from ritualists' den in Abuja," *Daily Post*, March 8.
- African Statistical Yearbook*. 2014. Tunis: African Development Bank Group.
- Agbo, Dennis. 2013. "Ritualists kill 11 women in Enugu-Ezike," *National Mirror*, December 11.
- Aghedo, Iro. 2015. "Sowing Peace, Reaping Violence: Understanding the Resurgence of Kidnapping in Post-amnesty Niger Delta, Nigeria." *Insight on Africa* 7(2): 1–17.
- Ajjjah, Andrew. 2015. "Angry youth burn 7 suspected ritualists in Benue," *Premium Times*, February 11.
- Ake, Claude. 1981. *A Political Economic Of Africa*. England: Longman Group Limited.
- Akinkuotu, Eniola. 2014. "Teenager kills 12-year-old girl for money ritual," *Punch*, January 8.
- Al-Sha'rawii, M.M. nd. *Al-Qadaa & Al-Qadar (Fate & Destiny)*.
- Ashanti, Kwabena Faheem. 2009. "Blood," in *Encyclopaedia of African Religion* edited by Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama. California: Sage Publications, Int.
- Ayegboyin, Deji. 2009. "Sacrifice," in *Encyclopaedia of African Religion* edited by Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama. California: Sage Publications, Int.
- Ayoola, Eric Olayinka. 2014. "How ritual killings can be stopped in Nigeria," *Peoples' Daily* [special report] April 20.
- Badiora, Adewumi Israel. 2015. "Regional differences and developmental implications of security challenges in Nigeria: The case of Kidnapping." *African Security Review* 24(1): 55-62.

- Balogun, Ishola. 2012. "How girl, 13, miraculously escaped from ritualists, 10 others used for rituals," *Vanguard* October 20.
- Balogun, Wole. 2013. "Traditional shrine or den of ritualists?" *The Sun* September 27.
- Bell, Richard H. 2002. *Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues*. New York and London: Routledge
- Browne, J Orde. 1935. "Witchcraft and British Colonial Law." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 8(4): 481-487.
- Daily Time NG. 2014. "Ritualist Disguised As Lunatic Discovered With Human Tongues In Ibadan," *The Trent*, March 26.
- Ebhomele, Eromosele. 2015. "Families Sell Albinos to Ritualists," *PM news*, January 28.
- Ekeh, Peter. 1975. "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17(1): 91-112.
- Ekpo, A.H. and D.A. Omoweh. 2001. "Political Economy of Africa Security." In *Beyond Conflict Resolution: Managing African Security in the 21st century* edited by Akindele, R.A. and E. Ate. Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA).
- el-Kurebe, Abdullah. 2011. "I was hired to pluck out eyes of 11-yr-old boy': Confession of suspected ritualist in Sokoto." *Vanguard* February 22.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. 1990. Criminal Code Act, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria.
- Gallup International. 2012. *Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism 2012*. Gallup International Association.
- Gbadamosi, Saliu. 2014. "Devil's messengers: How 3 men plucked the eye of a cripple for money." *Nigerian tribune*, March 16.
- Gbinije, Bobson. 2014. "Politicians, voodoo and power." *Vanguard* December 21.
- Hund, John. 2000. "Witchcraft and accusations of witchcraft in South Africa: ontological denial and the suppression of African justice." *The Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa* 33(3): 366-389.

- Idowu, William. 2005. "Law, Morality and the African Cultural Heritage: The Jurisprudential Significance of the *Ogboni* Institution." *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 14(2): 175-192.
- Ige, Oluwole. 2013. "Horrible story of prison inspector turned herbalist who murdered his psychiatric patient for rituals," *Nigerian tribune*, March 16.
- Igwe, Leo. 2004. "Ritual Killing and Pseudoscience in Nigeria." *Skeptical briefs*, 14(2).
- Kohnert, Dirk. 2003. "Witchcraft and Transnational Social Spaces: Witchcraft Violence, Reconciliation and Development in South Africa's Transition Process." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41(2): 217-245
- La Fontaine, Jean. 2011. "Ritual Murder?" Interventions Occasional Paper Series #3, Open Anthropology Cooperative Press.
- Malik, Oluwatoyin. 2013. "She went in search of love but found death instead: Story of widow killed by her lover for money ritual," *Nigerian tribune* February 10.
- NBS. 2013. *Annual Abstract of Statistics 2011*. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).
- Nnoli, Okwudiba. 2006. *National Security in Africa: A Radical New Perspective*. Enugu: PACREP
- Nwolise OBC. 2013. "Spiritual Security: A Case for Academic Research Focus on it Dimensions." *Ibadan Journal of Peace and Development* 2: 1-20.
- Nwolise, OBC. 2012. "Spiritual Dimension of Human and National Security." A Faculty Lecture, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, April 26.
- Ogenyi, Esther. 2015. "Daughter of Nasarawa State Governor's aide beheaded by suspected ritualists," *Daily Post*, March 9.
- Oji, Chris. 2014. "4 suspected ritualists arrested after a mutilated body was discovered in Enugu community," *The Nation*, April 2.
- Ojukwu, Emmanuel. 2014. "4 people die in Kebbi after police rescue foreign national suspected of being a ritualist," Police Press Release, Abuja: Force Headquarters, September 17, 2014.
- Olaitan, Kemi. 2014. "NSCDC parades six ritualists with human head," *National Mirror*, February 10.

- Onuoha, Freedom. 2014. "The Evolving menace of Baby Factories and Trafficking in Nigeria." *African Security Review* 23(4): 405-411.
- Osaghae, Eghosa. "Amoral Politics and Democratic Instability in Africa: A Theoretical Exploration," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 4(1): 62-78.
- Oshitelu, G.A. 2002. *The Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.
- Osumah, Oarhe and Iro Aghedo. 2011. "Who wants to be a Millionaire? Nigerian Youths and the Commodification of Kidnapping." *Review of African Political Economy* 38(128): 277-287.
- Otite, Onigwe. 1978. "Issues in African Socialism," in *Themes in African Social and Political Thought* edited by Onigwe Otite. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Oyedepo, David O. 2005. *Exploits of Faith*. Canaan Land: Dominion Publishing House.
- Oyewole, Samuel. 2015a. "Boko Haram: Insurgency and the War against Terrorism in the Lake Chad Region." *Strategic Analysis* 39(4): 428-432.
- Oyewole, Samuel. 2015b. "When the Safe Return of Hostages is no Longer Taken for Granted: Terrorism and Atrocities against Hostages in Nigeria." *The Counter Terrorist: Journal for Law Enforcement, Intelligence and Special Operations Professionals*, 8(2): 57- 61.
- Oyewole, Samuel. 2015c. "Armed Non-State Groups and Hostage Handling Behaviours in Nigeria." An Msc seminal presentation in the Department of Political Science, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, March 3.
- Oyewole, Samuel. 2016a. "The Fate of Hostages: Nigeria's Conflict Theatres in Comparative Perspective," *African Security Review*, 25(2), 193-207.
- Oyewole, Samuel. 2016b. "Rescuing Boko Haram's Schoolgirl victims," *New Zealand International Review*, 41(1), 25-28.
- Parker, John. 2004. "Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Aberewa, 1889-1910." *The Journal of African History* 45(3): 393-420.
- PFRPL. 2006. *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals*. Washington DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (PFRPL).

- PFRPL. 2010. *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.
- Reader, John. 1997. *Africa: A Biography of the Continent*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Salawudeen, Sulaiman. 2013. "Ritualists storm birth centre," *The Nation*, November 18.
- Shujaa, Mwalimu J. 2009. "Rituals," in *Encyclopaedia of African Religion* edited by Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama. California: Sage Publications, Int.
- Smith, Daniel. 2001. "Ritual Killing, 419, and Fast Wealth: Inequality and the Popular Imagination in Southeastern Nigeria." *American Ethnologist* 28(4): 803-826.
- Stebbins, Morgan. 2010. "Sacrifice," in *Encyclopaedia of Psychology and Religion*, edited by David A. Leeming, Kathryn Madden and Stanton Marlan. New York: Springer Science +Business Media LLC.
- The Sun*. 2013. "Murder for money... Victims of ritual murders tell their stories." February 17.
- The Sun*. 2014a. "Ritualists invade Ebonyi." June 21.
- The Sun*. 2014b. "Ritualists' den uncovered in Lagos church." June 26.
- Uzodinma, Emmanuel. 2014. "Ritualists kill 80-year-old 'lunatic' in Akure." *Daily Post*, May 16.
- Vanguard. 2014. "How I killed, drained teenager's blood for money ritual – Suspect." Special Report, July 12.
- Waheed, Adebayo. 2014. "Fake Preacher Arrested With Human Skull in Ibadan." *Leadership*, March 28.