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“My Daughter Was Sacrificed by My Mother”: Women’s Involvement in Ritually Motivated Violence and Murder in Contemporary Africa

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“My Daughter Was Sacrificed by My Mother”: Women’s Involvement in Ritually Motivated Violence and Murder in Contemporary Africa

Abstract

Ritually motivated crimes are grave crimes that continue to plague contemporary Africa. Occasionally, victims abducted for ritual purposes are discovered and set free. Fresh or decomposing bodies are spotted somewhere, often with missing parts taken by the ritual killers who killed the victims. Some missing persons in the continent are presumed to have been abducted or killed by ritually motivated criminals. Although ritually motivated crimes take different forms, most of them involve brutal acts of violence and murder. The barbaric manner in which these criminals attack or slaughter their victims creates fear and panic. Traditionally, men commit serious crimes involving brutal acts of violence and murder. However, this has changed in recent times as many women currently engage in violent crimes and murder. Thus, researchers in criminology and criminal psychology have paid increasing research attention to women’s involvement in serious crimes. The African magic industry attracts both men and women as clients, witchdoctors, and ritualists. Like male witchdoctors, the female witchdoctors equally dispatch human body hunters and kidnappers to find victims. Women patronize witchdoctors with the full awareness that human parts would be used in the preparation of the charms or concoctions they seek. Women work independently or as accomplices to males who abduct, attack, or kill those targeted for ritual purposes. While women’s involvements in different types of violent crimes and murder are well documented, women’s participation in ritually motivated violence and murder has been overly neglected in academic literature. This article aims to bridge this vital gap. It explores how women actively participate in ritually motivated violence and murder in different capacities in contemporary Africa and calls for research to establish motivations and modus operandi specific to women in these serious crimes.

Keywords

Ritually motivated crime, ritual, sacrifice, magic, witchdoctor, body part, women.

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“MY DAUGHTER WAS SACRIFICED BY MY MOTHER”: WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN RITUALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE AND MURDER IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Ritually motivated crimes are grave crimes that continue to plague contemporary Africa. Occasionally, victims abducted for ritual purposes are discovered and set free. Fresh or decomposing bodies are spotted somewhere, often with missing parts taken by the ritual killers who killed the victims. Some missing persons in the continent are presumed to have been abducted or killed by ritually motivated criminals. Although ritually motivated crimes take different forms, most of them involve brutal acts of violence and murder. The barbaric manner in which these criminals attack or slaughter their victims creates fear and panic. Traditionally, men commit serious crimes involving brutal acts of violence and murder. However, this has changed in recent times as many women currently engage in violent crimes and murder. Thus, researchers in criminology and criminal psychology have paid increasing research attention to women's involvement in serious crimes. The African magic industry attracts both men and women as clients, witchdoctors, and ritualists. Like male witchdoctors, the female witchdoctors equally dispatch human body hunters and kidnappers to find victims. Women patronize witchdoctors with the full awareness that human parts would be used in the preparation of the charms or concoctions they seek. Women work independently or as accomplices to males who abduct, attack, or kill those targeted for ritual purposes. While women's involvements in different types of violent crimes and murder are well documented, women's participation in ritually motivated violence and murder has been overly neglected in academic literature. This article aims to bridge this vital gap. It explores how women actively participate in ritually motivated violence and murder in different capacities in contemporary Africa and calls for research to establish motivations and modus operandi specific to women in these serious crimes.

KEYWORDS

ritually motivated crime, ritual, sacrifice, magic, witchdoctor, body part, women

DUE TO THEIR NATURE, ritually motivated crimes are not frequently witnessed by bystanders like other types of serious crimes. Most people hear these as tales, which may be verified through the few people who saw them or the law enforcement agents who investigated them. With Nigerian prison statistics as an example, 11,661 offenders were admitted into the prison for armed robbery and 7,172 for murder compared to only 255 for cult/ritual offenses in 2013; 10,249 and 8,560 compared to

179 in 2014; 4,867 and 2,658 compared to 153 in 2015, respectively (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Despite combining statistics for cult and ritually motivated offenses, both are still far less than those for armed robbery and murder. It is worth stating that the statistics above on robbery do not include all types of robberies but “armed robbery” only due to the seriousness of the latter. Nigerian armed robbers are mostly armed with guns, move in groups, and are very brutal to their victims. Although there could be some differences in the statistics in the crimes mentioned above in other African countries, Nigeria serves as an example to illustrate how uncommon ritually motivated crimes are compared to other serious crimes.

The nature of ritually motivated crimes and the selfish motives of the perpetrators have meant that they attract significant media attention, which tends to be interpreted by some people to imply that these acts are prevalent when the reverse is usually the case. These crimes are committed in different ways. For example, the victim may be kidnapped, killed, and his/her body part or fluid harvested for a ritual believed to solve the particular problem faced by someone who ordered the ritual or whose name the ritual is conducted (Agazue, 2015; Burke, 2000).

However, these crimes do not always involve kidnapping. Cases of instant murders of the victims by body part hunters on the road, their homes, and other locations occur (see Agazue, 2015; Israel, 2009; Schühle, 2013) without being kidnapped or abducted. Schühle (2013) observed that most of the attacks on albinos in Tanzania take place in family compounds: “The killers enter the victim’s houses and see no need in abducting the people with albinism” (Schühle, 2013, p.11). In March 2017, ritually motivated criminals invaded an Islamic school in Tungan Magajiya village in Niger State (Nigeria) to draw blood from five boys without abducting them (Vanguard, 2017).

Further, these acts do not always involve the murder of the victims; rather the targeted body parts may be cut off or the bodily fluid drawn without an attempt to kill the person. While some victims may survive such attacks, others may die from shock, pain, or blood loss. Death is highly likely when an internal organ is needed as a result of the loss of a vital organ and the severity of pain and amount of blood lost by the victim.

Ritually motivated crimes are complex. Some cases do not require any form of attack on the victim by the perpetrator. For example, a person may steal bodily fluid, such as semen, menstrual blood, or other genital discharges that would end up with a witchdoctor or be used for a ritual prescribed by a witchdoctor without any attack on the person. Cases involving women in the sex trade who sell condoms containing their clients’ semen to witchdoctors or their affiliates will be drawn on to illustrate this pattern in the main body of this article. There are also cases involving Internet fraudsters who steal underwear and used menstrual pads belonging to their intimate female partners to gather genital discharges without any physical violence or murder of the victims. The theft of underwear is not restricted to Internet fraudsters or those who are intimate to the victims. The cases of stolen semen and underwear are beyond the scope of this article.

Abduction in ritually motivated crimes is likely when the perpetrator feels unsafe to obtain the body part or fluid from the victim at the location the perpetrator finds the victim. Abduction is more likely when internal organs are needed, which means that the perpetrator requires a substantial amount of time to extract such organs. However, a perpetrator may also accomplish this in the victim’s home when the former has no concerns about an intruder.

Abduction is most likely in cases of human sacrifice because the physical presence of the victim is needed as the sacrifice is being conducted. Human sacrifice is a kind of ritual murder because it involves using a human being who is most likely to experience death for the religious ritual of this nature. Practices, however, differ. For example, in some cultures, and depending on the nature of the sacrifice, a person may be buried alive. This is discussed in depth in the main body of this article. Some may not require a live burial but the removal of a body part or fluid while the person is alive. This is the case with child sacrifice trending in Uganda and South Africa in recent years. Fellows (2013, p.8) defines child sacrifice as "the harmful practice of removing a child's body parts, blood or tissue while the child is alive." This will be discussed further in the latter part of this article.

These cruel acts are committed by both men and women. Generally, females' involvements in crime were "almost completely ignored" by social scientists, criminologists, lawyers, and penologists (Simon, 1975) until the 1970s when serious discussions on gendered nature of offending began to emerge in criminological literature, correctional programs and policies (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). Since then, academic literature comparing male versus female patterns of crimes has been increasing. Academic reports on female involvements in almost all types of violent crimes, such as assault (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Feld, 2009; Herrera & McCloskeyb, 2001; Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2008), robbery (Borzycki, 2005; Borzycki & Fuller, 2014; Miller, 2010; Miller and White, 2004; Muozos and Borzycki, 2003; Otu, 2003; Steinberg, 2011) and suicide bombing (Bloom, 2007; Pounds, 2014; Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006) currently exist. These reports also exist on murder (Birch, 1993; Serran & Firestone, 2004; Smith & Cooper, 2013) and multiple murder (Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2003; Messing & Heeren, 2004; Myers et al., 2005; Perrini, 2013; Wilson, 2013). These violent crimes and homicides have been extensively studied. Scholars have also studied some of them as subcategories, such as "domestic violence" by women as a subcategory of violent offenses by women, "child murder" as a subcategory of female-perpetrated murder and more.

The literature above on female violence and homicide has offered good insights into the differing motivations of the offenders of these crimes concerning gender. They provide estimates of the ratios of female involvements compared to males' as will be demonstrated in the main body of this current article. Most importantly, they have uncovered the gendered patterns in these crimes, which are helpful to investigators to build investigative hypotheses and psychological profiles of potential offenders. Unfortunately, one can hardly find academic literature on women's participation in ritually motivated crimes despite how cruel these acts are.

Although not all ritually motivated crimes involve violence, most of them do, and they are among the most severe forms of violent crimes and murder. Many of the incidents involve extreme acts of brutality or savagery. For example, some human sacrifices require that a person must be alive and conscious as a ritual requirement while ripping off the person's heart, lung, or kidney. Such brutal murder of a human being for selfish reasons makes these acts a kind of evil. Women get involved in ritually motivated violence and murder in many ways. Thus, this current article aims to introduce their engagements in these crimes to academic literature. Like other severe acts of violence and murder mentioned above, it is necessary to estimate the number of women engaging in these serious crimes and understand their motivations and *modus operandi*. The current article aims to inspire research to bridge these existing gaps.

Ritually motivated crimes are not well defined. Different authors may refer to the acts with different terms. Therefore, it is necessary to examine some of these definitions and understand any issues they may pose to understanding these crimes. I will do this under the following subheading. After this, I will demonstrate the patterns in these crimes. Then the perpetrators' motivations will follow after that. Since women's involvement in this type of criminal violence and murder is the main focus of this article, I will review the academic literature on women's patterns of violence and homicide to assess how their participation in ritually motivated violence and murder correspond with their involvement in other violent crimes and murders. The author will conclude that while some of the female perpetrators of ritually motivated crimes are accomplices to males, women are also capable of executing these violent crimes alone or in the company of other women.

DEFINING RITUALLY MOTIVATED CRIMES

It is necessary to define ritually motivated crimes for the sake of clarity. Child sacrifice has been previously defined, but that is only one of the crimes constituting ritually motivated crimes in general. Further, the definition is limited to the sacrifices requiring children. Adults are also victims of what is known as "human sacrifice" (see Essien, 2010; Udoye, 2011). It is also possible that child sacrifice in certain cultures may not often follow the procedures highlighted in the definition by Fellows (2013). Other types of sacrifices exist, such as the live burial of human beings (Udoye, 2011). These practices are not always defined, but they all constitute what the natives refer to in different names, such as medicine murder, occult ritual, ritual violence, ritual killing, ritual murder, human sacrifice, and possibly more. These constitute ritually motivated crimes.

There are different views regarding the terms used to describe crimes of this nature. Schühle (2013, p.11) faulted journalists and politicians using the term "ritual killings" and "human sacrifice" to describe ritually motivated attacks on albinos in Tanzania, arguing that "it is misleading to label the attacks on Tanzanians with albinism 'ritual killings' for the attacks do not have a specific meaning, are neither performed by initiated people nor directed at a specific audience." She added:

The general pattern of the attacks shows that the act itself is a means to an end—to obtain body parts which are deemed necessary in money-making magic—and not an end in itself as a ritual would be (p.11).

Schühle concludes that the killings "can only be called *hit and run medicine murders*" (italics in the original) (2013, p.12). Although the term "ritual killing" does not capture the incidents totally for attacks that do not always lead to death, I still consider the word "ritual" appropriate. It is more suited to call them "ritual attacks" than "ritual killings" because the victims are often attacked (e.g., hacking off a hand) without being killed. Even if the victims are killed, attack would normally come first; thus, ritual attacks still capture the act better than ritual killings. However, Schühle (2013) rejects the term "ritual" entirely because attackers cut the body parts and leave without engaging in any kind of ritual at the scene.

There are three problems with Schühle's (2013) position. Firstly, the term "medicine" in her definition is too restrictive. These body parts are hunted for reasons more than medicinal purposes. Schühle (2013) acknowledges that these attacks are motivated by witchdoctors' theory that albinos' bones are potent in making wealth following magic potions. Therefore, it is surprising how Schühle chooses such a restrictive

term in her definition despite her awareness that the body parts are not necessarily used for medicinal purposes. Secondly, her preferred definition "*hit and run medicine murders*" obscures the fact that the body hunters do not always target the victims for murder but to take their body parts. Schühle also acknowledges this with some examples drawn from attacks on albinos whose hands had been hacked off without any intention to murder them.

Thirdly, Schühle's (2013) rejection of the term "ritual" contradicts her words that witchdoctors inspire these attacks due to the belief that magic potions made with an albino's bone can make their clients rich. This suggests that the witchdoctors would need to conduct rituals with these body parts on behalf of whosoever demands this religious service. The Collins (n.d.) online dictionary defines ritual as "a religious service or other ceremony which involves a series of actions performed in a fixed order." Similarly, Hans H. Penner, a professor of religion at Dartmouth College defines ritual as "the performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or by sacerdotal decree" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). The witchdoctors who order these body parts conduct rituals as defined above. The body parts are not cut off by the body hunters to eat or to keep. Even if they must eat or keep them, they must conduct a ritual first because it is through the ritual that they invoke the magical or supernatural benefits believed to be inherent in the body part. Often, the body hunters are not the end-users of these body parts; instead, they hunt them to sell or for those already contracted them to obtain them for ritual purposes, including witchdoctors.

Depending on the type of religious ritual, the beneficiary of a religious ritual does not necessarily have to be present or partake in it directly. In Catholicism, for instance, Masses are booked by people who are not present. Many adherents book Masses for the miraculous healing of a sick person at home or hospital and neither the person who booked it or the ill person partakes at such Masses. People can also send in prayer requests in word of mouth to the priest or written requests in papers placed at the altar without personal presence. Pentecostals also do the latter. The pastor or priest then conducts the religious "ritual," such as reading a relevant biblical passage and praying with these requests in mind in the absence of the person who requested them or the beneficiaries of such rituals. Therefore, I consider the term "ritual" (e.g., ritual murder, ritual attack, etc.) as a suitable term for describing these incidents, including human sacrifices.

However, as previously noted, not all the incidents involve murder, violence, or even attack on the victim. The use of semen from condoms for ritual purposes, the use of menstrual blood or other genital fluid for the said purpose with or without the person's knowledge or consent are all crimes connected to the rituals of this nature. Thus, I consider it more appropriate to refer to these activities as "ritually motivated crimes" collectively. I will use this term to refer to these crimes collectively throughout this article. However, I may also use the words "ritually motivated violence" or "ritually motivated murder" when referring to violence or murder, specifically.

THE MOTIVATIONS FOR RITUALLY MOTIVATED CRIMES

Ritually motivated crimes in contemporary Africa are linked to the belief that rituals done with a human part will enable the person in whose name the ritual is conducted to become wealthy, receive protection, healing (Agazue, 2015; Bukuluki, 2014), acquire special medicine, prosper in politics or business (Burke, 2000), receive a special blessing, conceive a child, conquer an enemy and to become successful in other ways (Agazue, 2015). People believe that the rituals can bring sexual conquest to those who desire it (Berry, 2019). People conduct the rituals or sacrifices to

appease or pacify the gods or ancestors (e.g., Agazue, 2015; Essien, 2010; Fatokun, 2016; Udoye, 2011).

The ritual can be initiated to solve virtually any problem of which a witchdoctor, ritualist or shrine priest believes that human blood must be shed or a human body part or fluid must be used for the purposes of achieving maximum potency. The ritual is done to solve problems “magically.” For example, the beneficiaries of these rituals may expect wealth without working to earn money. They believe they can win a political election without engaging in sufficient campaigns or meeting other necessary victory conditions. People believe that they can conceive a child with a ruptured womb, in menopause, or with other biological conditions that would make conception impossible after this type of ritual is conducted. While the idea of a snake kept in a secret room vomiting money to its owner sounds very weird and unnatural, many Africans believe this myth. It appears in conversations among Africans who regard this as one way through which ritually motivated criminals desperate for wealth earn their money after conducting a ritual involving a human body part or fluid or with a full human being in the form of human sacrifice. This is only one of the examples of this magical phenomenon.

Human sacrifice in Africa connected to appeasing or pacifying the gods or ancestors (e.g., Agazue, 2015; Fatokun, 2016; Essien, 2010; Udoye, 2011) was practiced by many African tribes in the past. In Nigeria as an example, this was a reality in Igbo (Agazue, 2015; Udoye, 2011), Yoruba (Fatokun, 2016) and other cultures. The sacrifices were also made for the empowerment of powerful shrines, oracles, and charms (Udoye, 2011). With the Igbo religion in its traditional sense as an example here, live humans were sometimes buried following the installation of powerful shrines with the belief that such sacrifice would make the shrine potent (Udoye, 2011).

However, killings for such purposes are no longer commonplace in many parts of Africa due to changing attitudes and widespread Christianity and Islam, which forbid such practice. For example, in Igbo land, such sacrifices were culturally acceptable before the advent of Christianity (Agazue, 2015; Udoye, 2011) but are currently seen as unacceptable and barbaric. Nevertheless, killing to appease the anger of the gods has not entirely disappeared. For instance, a relatively recent incident occurred in Enugu (Nigeria) where both old and fresh human skulls were found to have been sacrificed to idols (Essien, 2010). Such barbarity could be secretly perpetrated by the minority who are determined to keep their religious tradition alive. In parts of Africa where Christianity and Islam have become professed by most residents, finding shrines or totems that are still maintained is difficult. Where they are held, the shrine priests have become flexible by using animals in their sacrifices.

However, using animals for such sacrifices is not entirely new; instead, animals are used more widely in contemporary times as the use of human beings is frowned upon. This flexibility is one borne out of civilization and the condemnation of human sacrifices by many; otherwise, the traditional priests are not entirely satisfied with the use of animals since the acclaimed potency of animals in the sacrifices cannot be equated to those conducted with humans. This partly explains why some defiant shrine priests can still engage in human sacrifice secretly (see Essien, 2010; Fatokun, 2016) despite the wide condemnation of such acts by many. The substitution of human flesh and blood with the animal ones by many traditional priests lately is due to the significance of blood in expiatory sacrifices in the context of African traditional religions, whereby blood is believed to have “both propitiatory and purifying power” (Fatokun, 2016, p.76).

Although human sacrifices for the appeasement of gods or deities were common in Africa in the past, it cannot be concluded that this practice was universal in the continent, considering the different cultures among dozens of countries and hundreds of tribes in the continent. For example, in interviews of traditional healers in Uganda, they described the prevalent child sacrifices in Uganda in present times and human sacrifices in general as culturally prohibited, suggesting that the child sacrifice in the country is a new practice (Bukuluki & Mpyangu, 2014). Although child sacrifice is only one part of human sacrifices, certain cultures might have endorsed them in the past.

Certain sacrifices are believed to be potent when a very close family member or an intimate partner is used. Agazue (2015) has detailed numerous cases of individuals who killed their parents, parents who killed their children, husbands who killed their wives, and people who killed their siblings for this purpose. Witchdoctors determine who should be killed for the ritual or sacrifice. A family member, for example, may be demanded when the witchdoctor believes that the ritual or sacrifice can only be potent with a genetically-related person. An intimate partner may be requested when a witchdoctor comes up with a theory connected to sexual intimacy as a potency source.

Several characteristics are considered in these sacrifices or rituals, such as age, gender, virginity status, and others (e.g., a pregnant woman, an albino, or a hunchback). The hunt for virgins by ritually motivated criminals is connected to the idea of "purity" in these rituals. That is, the belief that certain rituals can only be potent when conducted with persons who have not committed certain "sins" (e.g., sexual immorality). This makes children more vulnerable since the chances of finding sexually pure persons are higher in children than in adults. Victimization of virgin females for ritually motivated murder in contemporary Africa has received media attention, but that of virgin boys is hardly reported. It is worth acknowledging that boys are also targeted for their suspected virginity status. The brutal murder of an 11-year-old boy, Ishmael Mensah Abdallah in Kasoa, Ghana in April 2021 stands as an example. Two Ghanaian teenagers, Felix Nyarko (aged 16) and Nicholas Kini (aged 18), murdered Abdallah after a witchdoctor, Charity Mensah, they consulted after seeing her advertisement on television asked them to bring her the body of a virgin and cash (Ghc 5000) so she could conduct rituals to make them rich.

The widespread targeting of albinos in Tanzania, Burundi, Malawi, Swaziland, and Mali has been previously described. Their victimization is connected to a theory by witchdoctors that magic potions made with the bones of albinos are potent in making wealth (e.g., see Schühle, 2013). Thus, their body parts are often trafficked across borders as they fetch vast sums of money (Berry, 2019). The targeting of hunchbacks in Nigeria was due to the belief that the "hunched back contains what in the spiritual realm should be as valuable as gold in the physical world" (Agazue, 2015, p.28). A person requiring a ritual to conceive a male child or protect a male child may be offered a ritual with a male child. Fellows (2013) has documented a male child's sacrifice for a woman desiring a male child in Uganda. Arguably, suppose a person or a couple desiring to conceive a male who will grow up to become "tall" approaches a witchdoctor for a ritual to achieve this dream and the witchdoctor comes up with an idea that the ritual will require a tall male. In that case, a hunt for tall males for ritual purposes will start.

Sometimes, witchdoctors demand that the person to be used for a ritual be brought to them alive. Rather than killing the person in the community and body parts collected and sent to the witchdoctor, the person is abducted and presented to the

witchdoctor alive. This is because some rituals may require that the person dies in the process of the ritual. In some cases, the victim must be presented alive to enable the witchdoctor to examine his/her body to determine whether or not the person meets some specific criteria for the ritual or sacrifice. This is why some of those abducted and taken to shrines are released or have the opportunity to escape after being declared unsuitable for the particular sacrifice or ritual. An abducted child named DM presented to a witchdoctor for a ritual in Uganda described how he was declared unsuitable for the sacrifice because his body was scarred, suggesting that he had shed blood, nullifying the planned ritual (Bukuluki, 2014). This allowed DM to escape.

Similarly, two Nigerian high school pupils presented to a female witchdoctor for a sacrifice were rejected by the witchdoctor who declared them unsuitable for the ritual she planned to conduct (Vanguard, 2014). A commercial transport driver arranged the students' abduction after they boarded his vehicle on their way home from school. They ended up in a forest where they were presented to an elderly female witchdoctor who, according to the male pupil, Dooyum Moar, aged 13, rejected them for not meeting the ritual requirements after assessing them (Vanguard, 2014). The witchdoctor then commanded her servants to take the pupils away and kill them, but the pupils escaped when the witchdoctor's servants engaged in a heavy argument.

Although DM and the two school pupils all escaped, not all those who were declared unsuitable could escape or be released. Some may still be killed even after finding them unfit to prevent them from revealing what they had seen. The witchdoctor asked her servants to kill the two pupils after declaring them unsuitable (Vanguard, 2014), probably for this reason, but the pupils were lucky to escape. DM might not have been abducted in the first place if his scars were visible to the abductors and the abductors understood what this meant for the ritual. Child sacrifice practitioners also spare children with other types of body marks. For example, academic reports (Bukuluki, 2014; Bukuluki et al., 2017) on child sacrifice in Uganda show that piercing and circumcision of children have increased in the country as protection from child sacrifice victimization. This has led to a boom in the piercing business and pains and injuries resulting from this practice on children (Bukuluki et al., 2017).

However, some pierced and circumcised children have been used for sacrifices as noted by Peter Sewakiryanga, the executive director of Kyampisi Childcare Ministries, a Kampala-based charity organization working to stop human sacrifice (Global Press Journal, 2017). Thus, what can be said is that for certain sacrifices, pierced or circumcised children are not needed depending on the requirements for such sacrifices. The ritualists or witchdoctors may spare a pierced or circumcised child in the same way a girl who is not a virgin may be spared when conducting a sacrifice requiring a virgin. However, the pierced child or the non-virgin may still be sacrificed if such status does not apply to the particular sacrifice in question.

While some rituals or sacrifices require that a living person be killed and his/her body part or fluid be used, others may require the body part of a dead person. This has led to removing body parts from corpses in recent times (Masoga and Rugwiji, 2018). The media has reported exhumation of dead bodies by the perpetrators of this crime in recent times, including the involvement of mortuary attendants in the sale of the body parts of the corpses under their custody (Orijo Reporters, 2014; The Guardian, 2016a).

PEAK SEASONS FOR RITUALLY MOTIVATED CRIMES

Peak seasons for ritually motivated crimes usually occur during political campaigns and elections, and also festive seasons (e.g., Christmas). Missing persons and the discovery of bodies linked to ritually motivated criminals are more often reported during such seasons. Most of the *Orange Farm Killings* and disappearances in South Africa in the late 1990s took place during festive seasons. The *Orange Farm Killings* refer to the discoveries of headless bodies of two children and the disappearance of 11 other children during the period, whom authorities believed were killed for ritual purposes (Newton, 2009). Authorities produced 26 cases of missing persons, of which 13 of them involved children after searching missing person dockets (Newton, 2009).

Witchdoctors' claims that their clients can "get rich quick" once they pay for these rituals or sacrifices have meant that those desperate to showcase their wealth, or receive respect or protection during festive seasons rush to witchdoctors for these rituals during these seasons. Festive seasons are seasons of celebration when a category of people often try to show off that they are wealthy or have joined those seen as living the "dream." This partly explains why these ritually motivated incidents commonly occur during such seasons.

Similarly, the belief that a ritual can lead to winning a political election has also contributed to politicians patronizing witchdoctors. This has meant that political campaign and election periods are peak seasons for ritually motivated crimes. Media reports in many parts of Africa are awash with these crimes during political campaigns and elections. Academic reports also support this link and the involvement of politicians in these crimes (Ellis, 1999; Israel, 2009; Kaunda, 2018; Salisbury, 2012).

Ellis (1999) details the infamous cases of ritually motivated crimes connected to the Liberian political elites. He described the case of James Anderson and Allen Yancy, the sons of leading officials of the True Whig Party in Liberia who received death sentences alongside five others for ritual murder in 1979 as the "most notorious case of ritual killing used for political purposes ever to be made public" (Ellis, 1999, p.254). He also detailed several ritually motivated crimes involving top and junior political office holders and government officials in Liberia. More recently (2015), violent protests erupted in the Ganta region of Liberia after a cyclist was killed in a suspected ritual murder just a day after the body of a 13-year-old girl believed to have been killed for ritual purposes was discovered (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2015). The Ganta residents blamed politicians and businesspersons for the murders (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2015).

As in Liberia, politicians are equally believed to be among the key players in ritually motivated crimes in Swaziland to improve their chances of winning elections (Salisbury, 2012). The situation in Zambia where politicians are suspected of engaging in human sacrifices "to enhance their chances of winning elections" and the fears, which the citizens have to live with during political elections, are detailed by Kaunda (2018, p.72). A series of child abductions linked to ritually motivated murders in Ivory Coast occurred before the country's political elections in 2010 (Reuters, 2015). A senator was arrested in Gabon in 2013 after a ritual murderer of a twelve-year-old girl identified him as the person who contracted him (Reuters, 2015).

In Nigeria, politicians are often suspected of ritually motivated murders and disappearances linked to these particular crimes during political campaigns and elections. The Nigerian press constantly reminds citizens to be careful during political campaigns and elections. Friends and relatives often remind their loved ones to be cautious during these periods to avoid being murdered for ritual purposes. Politicians

were among the ritually motivated crime suspects investigated by the Kenyan Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) following the increases in these crimes in the country in 2019 (Kenya.co.ke, 2019).

The so-called *War of Lions* in Northern Mozambique also had a political dimension (Israel, 2009). The *War of Lions* refers to incidents in which six people were thought to have been wounded while 50 others were believed to have been killed by lions in Muidumbe, a rural village in Northern Mozambique, between July 2002 and May 2003. However, the supposed lion attacks took a different turn when some survivors revealed that human beings disguised as lions attacked them with knives. Furthermore, someone accidentally encountered a group of men inside a bush who were being trained to roar like lions and hack people with knives while wearing lion skins and paws to disguise their human appearances. The bodies of the dead victims of the attacks were also found with missing eyes and other vital organs, which indicate ritual murders. People believed that the attackers were sponsored by some powerful politicians interested in human body parts for ritual purposes.

FEMALE PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE AND HOMICIDE

The perception of women as “more peaceful and less aggressive or warlike than men is a familiar one to most of us” (Alison, 2004, p.448). Across histories and cultures, women are known to commit less criminal violence and homicide. Many reports also suggest that when women ever try to engage in these crimes, they more often employ softer methods than men. Australia's National Armed Robbery Monitoring Program (ANARMP) found that female armed robbers were softer than their male counterparts, and hence, posed less risk to their victims and society in general (Borzycki & Fuller, 2014). The female armed robbers were more opportunistic and took fewer risks during their operations than their male counterparts (Borzycki & Fuller, 2014). They focused on soft targets and less secure locations and also used opportunistic weapons, considered to pose fewer risks to their victims (Borzycki & Fuller, 2014).

Men are known to kill women, including children at a greater rate than women kill men at home (Serran & Firestone, 2004). The number of women in the U.K. engaging in mugging, stabbing and contract killing are not many (Prison Reform Trust, 2003). Female serial killers are not as brutal as are their male counterparts; the former's preferred method of killing is usually through poisoning (Gurian, 2011; Wilson, 2013). Women's preferred method of serial killing has meant that they are not often viewed as morally wicked like their male counterparts (Wilson, 2013). Britain's notorious prolific female serial killer, Mary Ann Cotton, who murdered 21 persons in the nineteenth century, was notorious for using arsenic on her victims. Female solo serial murderers are likely to prey on adult relatives by poisoning them, while their “partnered” counterparts prey on strangers and may use a combination of weapons (Gurian, 2011). Further, the solo female serial murderers have lower victim counts than their partnered counterparts, and the former kill within specific locations (e.g., victim's home or workplace), while the latter kill across different locations (Gurian, 2011). While solo female serial murderers commit their crimes with “purpose-oriented motivations,” their partnered counterparts have “pleasure-oriented motivations” (Gurian, 2011, p.39).

Traditionally, most female perpetrators of violence and homicide do so in self-defense (Belknap & Melton, 2005; Belknap et al., 2012; Kethineni, 2001; Melton & Belknap, 2003; O'Keefe, 1997; Pratt & Deosaransigh, 1997; Robert, 1996; Serran & Firestone, 2004; Wilbanks, 1983). Other female perpetrators of violence and homicide

who are not acting in self-defense are said to be accomplices to male offenders (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe, 2006; Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2013; Messerschmidt, 1993; Messing & Heeren, 2004; Miller, 2010; Perrini, 2013; Smart, 1977; Steffensmeier & Alan, 1996; Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2008), experiencing mental illness (Arora et al., 2017; Bloom & Covington, 2008; Eriksson et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2007; Koenen & Thompson 2008; Mariano et al., 2014; Taylor & Bragado-Jimenez, 2009; Treplin et al., 1996) or under the influences of intoxicating substances (Bloom & Covington, 2008; Crimmins et al., 1997).

Although women are known to engage in less risky offenses and use less violent methods than men, less involvement by the former is not always due to empathy or deliberate attempt to cause less harm; rather, it is sometimes a matter of practicality (Agazue, 2021a). Women commit fewer crimes than men due to their inability to demonstrate the physical strength required to commit certain crimes (Steffensmeier & Alan, 1996). The poor physical strength may contribute to the lower rates of crimes they commit and the less serious nature of their offenses compared to those committed by men (Steffensmeier & Alan, 1996). Both real and perceived vulnerability may restrict solo roles by women and rather encourage subordinate roles or accomplice to men since women do not possess sufficient physical prowess and muscle required to commit certain serious crimes, protect themselves, enforce certain contracts and recruit or manage criminal partners (Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2008; Steffensmeier & Alan, 1996). Due to weaker muscles, female robbers most often target female victims but would consider male victims when working with a man as a co-robber (Miller, 2010).

While the above patterns are noted, ritually motivated crimes seem to be one of the few crime types whereby women adopt both the established female patterns and also male patterns as will be demonstrated in the critical discussion section below. For example, while women serve as accomplices to men in the hunt for victims to be used for rituals, women on another hand, work as witchdoctors who slaughter people brought to them for rituals or sacrifices.

WOMEN AS THE PERPETRATORS OF RITUALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE AND MURDER

The African sorcery and magic industry attracts women just as it attracts men. Women serve as witchdoctors, sorcerers, or ritualists who use human body parts or fluids to prepare concoctions or charms for their clients. Women patronize witchdoctors, knowing that a human being would be harmed or killed to provide acclaimed remedies to their problems. Women instigate violence and murder for the rituals needed for the magic they demand as clients or prepare them as witchdoctors or ritualists. Women also participate in sourcing out the human body parts used in preparing the concoctions or charms.

Stories of women securing human body parts for witchdoctors in Africa are not uncommon. For instance, among the seven persons arrested by the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in Oyo State in 2014 for possessing severed human heads were three women (The Trent, 2014). In April 2014, the Ogun State Police Command in Nigeria arrested two women and three men with a fresh human head and several other human body parts (The Nation, 2014). A 52-year-old man who happened to be one of the eight captives set free by a mob who discovered a ritualist's den in Lagos (Nigeria) stated that his wife arranged his kidnapping (The Guardian, 2016b). However, it is not clear from the report whether or not the wife knew that the husband would be used for a ritual.

A mother of four was caught in Lagos (Nigeria) in June 2014 with her neighbor's child stuffed in a suitcase as she took the child to a ritual killer who also worked as a neo-Pentecostal pastor (The Guardian, 2016b). A would-be child sacrifice victim in Uganda who later escaped from his captives stated that his uncle sold him to two men and women and after bargaining, his uncle and a woman grabbed him by his neck and bundled him into a car through the car window (Bukuluki, 2014). Following reported disappearances of people in Lagos and its environments (Nigeria) in 2014, police detectives went undercover as buyers of human body parts after suspecting that the disappearances were connected to ritual murders. The detectives led by their commander, Abba Kyari, were able to buy a human head from a 54-year-old grandmother, Sukuratu Salami, at the cost of one hundred and twenty thousand Naira (Orijo Reporters, 2014). Police recovered more body parts from Salami's house following a search (Orijo Reporters, 2014). Although a graveyard attendant who dug bodies from graves and sold them for rituals was a member of Salami's gang, police disclosed that "most of these bodies are fresh" (Orijo Reporters, 2014), that is, those found with Salami, suggesting that not all of them were from graves.

In 2004, a woman was caught in a bush in Delta State (Nigeria), decapitating a four-year-old boy so that she could send the body out for a ritual (Igwe, 2004). Suspected ritual killers with a female accomplice snatched an eight-month-old baby and a three-year-old child from a 32-year-old nursing mother, Alice Nkwo, after they drove to her house around 4 am and broke into her home in December 2012 (Information Nigeria, 2013). In Osenase, Ghana, a 32-year-old woman, Humu Iddrisu, lured her friend, Esther Dzakah, to a pastor who attempted to use Dzakah for rituals (Peace FM, 2019). A concrete block was smashed into the victim's head by the woman and her pastor in an attempt to kill her before her right forefinger was cut off.

What appeared as the most publicized ritually motivated murder of a woman in Nigeria in recent years was instigated by a woman. This was a rape and brutal murder of a microbiology student of the University of Benin, Uwailla Omozuwa, inside a church in Benin City where she was reading alone at night in May 2020. A gang of young men stalking the victim tracked her to the church, where they raped her and bludgeoned her to death with heavy objects, including a fire extinguisher. After the police arrested the suspects, they confessed that a woman identified as Mary Ade hired them with one million Naira to murder the victim for ritual purposes (Nigerian Tribune, 2020). Ade reportedly asked them to wipe the victim's genitals with a handkerchief to collect her genital fluid after the murder so that she could use it for a ritual to enable her business to flourish (Nigerian Tribune, 2020). Ade, however, denied the allegation but the prime suspect in this crime had maintained his words at follow-up interviews several months later.

In Zimbabwe, a new type of ritually motivated crime has emerged, pioneered by a group of women nicknamed "sperm bandits." These women reportedly drive around with hidden weapons, specifically targeting male hitchhikers whom they rape at gunpoint to collect their semen for ritual purposes (The Herald, 2014). Their modus operandi is described below:

The women, usually moving around in groups driving private cars, offer lifts to unsuspecting male hitchhikers. Once in the car, and after driving for a long distance, the women pounce on the man before administering some potent drugs to tranquilize him. The women then gang rape the hapless man and harvest his semen (The Herald, 2014).

One of the male victims of these women provided an anonymous account of his experience on a national television in Zimbabwe in July 2011. He described being assaulted and drugged by three women who offered him a lift in Harare before being forced to have sexual intercourse with each of them:

One of the women threw water in my face and they injected me with something that gave me a strong sexual desire. They stopped the car and made me have sex with each of them several times, using condoms. When they had finished they left me in the bush totally naked. Some people gathering grass helped me by calling the police, who took me to hospital to deal with the effects of this drug that I had been given, as the urge to have sex was still there (BBC, 2011).

Another man to whom three women offered a lift was given a soft drink laced with drugs that lured him to sleep in the car only to regain consciousness in a dark room (City Voice, 2017). The women stole \$120 he had with him before forcing him to engage in sexual intercourse with them, but when he refused, they pulled out a pistol and threatened to shoot him, which eventually led to him having sexual intercourse with the women (City Voice, 2017). Police found 31 condoms full of semen in possession of three women they arrested at a roadblock after picking up a man between Gweru and Harare (City Voice, 2017). These women armed themselves with guns, which they use to threaten their victims to have intercourse with them after picking them up (City Voice, 2017). They also drug the victims (City Voice, 2017). Both female-only groups (see BBC, 2011; The Herald, 2014) and male accomplice groups (see Express, 2017; The Sun, 2017) exist.

The case of Nigerian women in the sex trade selling their customers' condoms to witchdoctors has been previously described. The officials of the Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEFB) in Nigeria found some of the 104 commercial sex workers they arrested in the city in 2011 carrying condoms filled with semen in their bags (Codewit, 2011). An official of the AEFB commented on the practice of securing the condoms as follows:

It is a recurrent thing here. We find condoms with sperm when we search their bags. The necks of the condoms are tied to prevent the contents from spilling and are carefully wrapped in toilet tissue (Codewit, 2011).

The practice of securing these condoms from spillage indicates that it was not a case of the prostitutes possessing used condoms in their bags for disposal; rather, they preserved them for a purpose. It is also worth noting that these prostitutes meet their clients in brothels and hotels where bins exist to dispose of such materials had they wanted to do so. A prostitute who identified herself as Joy admitted to media correspondents that her colleagues secured the condoms for the sale of their contents to witchdoctors in addition to other explanations she offered:

She [prostitute] would tie the neck of the condom to avoid spillage and carefully hide it away. ... Sperm is a very hot thing [i.e., in high demand] for people, who use it for medicine. I don't know how much they sell it because am not into that kind of line. But I know that a lot of girls do it and they make so much money from it. I don't want to carry somebody's blood because I don't know what the juju priest will do with someone's sperm. I only do ashawo (prostitution) business. I don't sell sperm (Codewit, 2011).

However, this act by the Nigerian prostitutes hardly involves violence or homicide. Nevertheless, violence connected to semen acquisition in Nigeria occasionally occurs. For example, in a video interview published on KBC Africa in November 2020, a Nigerian male sex worker, Kelvin Akparanta (a.k.a. *Akpuruka*), describes violent women hunting for semen as one of his greatest fears in his profession. He told his encounter with a woman in Abuja (Nigeria) who paid him two hundred thousand Naira for sex in a hotel, but after the sexual intercourse, the woman demanded the condom from him with an offer of one million Naira. When Akparanta declined the offer, the woman pulled a gun and forced him to hand over the condom at gunpoint, but Akparanta described himself as well determined never to allow the woman to use his semen for a ritual. Thus, he swallowed the condom despite the gun pointed at him. Consequently, the woman did not allow him to leave the hotel, telling him that he could only go after another sexual intercourse and the handing of the condom. Akparanta was lucky to escape from the hotel room later with the help of the hotel staff.

Another known group of women in ritually motivated crimes are the wives of witchdoctors who partner with their husbands in their profession. In Masaka (Uganda), a court case described by Bukuluki (2014) shows how a witchdoctor, Mr Umar Kateregga and his wife Ms Mariam Nabukeera, murdered a twelve-year-old boy in a child sacrifice ordered by their client. In a country report on human rights practices submitted to the United States Senate and House of Representatives by the United States Department of State (2011), several people arrested by the Ugandan police in connection with child sacrifice are detailed and women were also included. A female witchdoctor, Charity Mensah, was at the center of the news on the ritual murder of Ishmael Mensah Abdallah by two Ghanaian teenagers previously described. A male witchdoctor, Solomon Adjololo was also involved in this incident but it is not clear from the reports who was the leading figure in the ritual business.

Some women patronize witchdoctors with the full awareness that those conducting the rituals would use human body parts to prepare their concoctions or charms. Some examples below involve incidents in Uganda where child sacrifice had been a social problem. These examples come from interviews conducted in Eastern, Western and Central Uganda by Fellows (2013). Fellows interviewed a 27-year-old woman who confessed to having used children's teeth prescribed by her witchdoctor to enable her to get out of poverty. Two women were involved in these acts; the woman who used the teeth and her sister-in-law who suggested the practice. However, it is unclear whether or not the latter knew the procedure would involve a human part. It is also unclear whether any of them knew how the witchdoctor would procure such teeth.

Another Ugandan woman also confessed to having used a male child's genitalia, which her witchdoctor prescribed to her as a solution to conceiving a male child, while another woman confessed to having consumed a boy's genitalia with the hope of solving her habit of urinating in bed as prescribed by a witchdoctor (Fellows, 2013). The latter woman was directed to the witchdoctor by another woman who knew about this practice. A witchdoctor in the Buikwe District of Uganda also described how "a woman Member of Parliament who wanted to retain her position" personally met him in January 2011 to demand human body parts (Fellows, 2013, p.44). A specialist ritual killer who confessed to the killing and mutilation of no less than 23 children also described the case of a female client of a witchdoctor who (female client) happily patronized his service and was satisfied with it (Fellows, 2013).

Female witchdoctors are all over Africa and perform these rituals or sacrifices just like their male counterparts do. Two high school pupils (a boy and a girl) in Benue State (Nigeria) who were spared slaughter in August 2014 for not meeting the child

sacrifice requirements were presented to a female witchdoctor (Vanguard, 2014). Below is part of Fellows' interview with a man about his witchdoctor mother who (the mother) specialized in preparing concoctions and charms with human blood and body parts, particularly those of children. The man was asked the following question about her mother's role as a witchdoctor engaging in human sacrifice: "What potions did she make and how did she make them?" (Fellows, 2013, p.37; bold and italics removed by me). He answered as follows:

I remember when this lady came in, mother asked her ... the sex of the child she wanted and she said she wanted a boy and she mixed blood in the pot and told her to drink it when I was seeing and then she asked me to jump over her so that she may give birth to the child (Fellows, 2013, p.37; italics removed by me).

This man happily helped his mother in murdering other people's children for sacrifices, but he suddenly changed his mind when his own mother used his own daughter, that is, the witchdoctor's granddaughter, for a sacrifice. When asked "Do you believe in mutilating people?" (bold and italics removed by me), he answered: "I used to but am now against it because it happened to my daughter" (Fellows, 2013, p.38). When asked to describe the situation, he narrated the following:

Oh ... that bad day! Whenever I recall that day, sorrow fills my heart, my daughter was sacrificed by my biological mother! (...) my mother acted as a devil to take part in sacrificing my daughter (...) (Fellows, 2013, p.38; brackets in the original; italics removed by me).

The involvement of neo-Pentecostal and syncretic pastors in ritually motivated crimes in contemporary Africa is increasing. Cases abound of these pastors engaging in ritually motivated crimes, particularly murder, with the belief that this would enable them to attract more followers and make more money. As an increasing number of women currently work as pastors in neo-Pentecostal churches in different parts of Africa (Ademiluka, 2017; Akintunde, 2010; Alidou, 2019; Hackett, 2017; Mapuranga, 2013; Soothill, 2007), they engage in acts, which the male pastors have been known to practice. Sadly, some dubious ones engage in ritually motivated crimes for the same reasons previously described, that is, the belief that the rituals can make them successful. For pastors, success includes becoming famous, attracting more congregants who can make more donations or offerings to their churches, and more. Some pastors double as ritualists who conduct rituals with human body parts for their clients. Female pastors, sometimes called "prophetesses" who work independently or with others, exist in the continent. In February 2021, Anambra State Police Command in Nigeria raided a place where they arrested two women, Chidi Felicia Nwafor (aged 80) and Rejoice Raymond (aged 39) and rescued three children from them. The photos of the children were gory to behold. The children appeared battered with their bodies full of blood. Police also confirmed that one of them had a broken arm, further noting that fetish substances, concoctions, blood-stained canes, and other items were recovered from the room where the children were deliberately harmed (Daily Post, 2021). The media circulated information that the women were in the ritual business of pounding children to make charms for wealthy people, such as politicians. While the current author could not establish the authenticity of this claim, what seems believable is that the women used children for rituals.

An incident involving a live burial of a one-and-half-year-old boy, Yaw Adobaw in Brakwa Awoyom, Ghana stands as another example of the involvement of prophetesses in these grave crimes. Three adults were involved in this incident and they included a prophetess, Ama Nkasah, and both parents of the child, Paul Adoba and Maame Ataa. The Central Regional Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Irene Oppong, stated that Adobaw's parents explained that they consulted the prophetess for help after the child was unable to walk at his age and the prophetess convinced them that the child was spiritually possessed by the gods of a local river and needed to be returned to the river gods ritualistically to prevent future births of children possessed by the river gods (Modern Ghana, 2021). Traces of blood were found in the mouth and nostrils of the boy's body after it was exhumed by the police (Modern Ghana, 2021) suggesting that he was not simply buried alive, but rather the violence might have also been meted out to him in other ways as part of the ritual, before the live burial.

This case, however, seems exceptional among the incidents described above in the sense that it was not conducted for the selfish motives (the quest for money or success) prevalent in most ritually motivated crimes. Adobaw's parents seemed afflicted due to the boy's disability. Nevertheless, the incident still qualified as a ritual murder because the child was not simply killed for being disabled. His parents aimed to prevent the spiritual possession and consequent disabilities of their future children. Unlike normal cases of filicide committed to eliminating unwanted children believed to be spiritually possessed or have spiritual comrades (see Agazue, 2021b), Adobaw was ritualistically murdered. This could be another type of child sacrifice that has not attracted sufficient academic attention. I consider this a sacrifice because the prophetess and Adobaw's parents buried him ritualistically and part of the motives was to prevent the river gods from possessing other children to be conceived by the parents. In other words, Adobaw was sacrificed to the river gods with the belief that sacrificing him will save other children from disability.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN RITUALLY MOTIVED CRIMES: A CRITICAL DISCUSSION

As can be seen from the series of incidents described above on women's participation in ritually motivated crimes in different parts of Africa, their involvements range from a partnership with men in the hunting of semen and body parts to solo involvement in some of these, including participation as witchdoctors and ritualists. Though as evil as they seem, some of these activities are not necessarily criminal violence or homicide (e.g., the cases of prostitutes selling their clients' semen or using them for ritual without the clients' awareness). The following discussion will focus on the part of the crimes requiring violence and murder to demonstrate the extent to which the women's acts correspond to or deviate from the existing patterns of female violence and homicide.

Some of the cases analyzed in this current article support the idea of women being accomplices to men in serious crimes and murder. For example, the case of the survived Ugandan child sacrifice victim involved both men and women. Similarly, the adoption of the eight-month-old baby in Nigeria involved both men and a woman. Women were accomplices to the men arrested by NSCDC in Nigeria for possessing severed human heads and those arrested by the Ogun State Police Command in Nigeria for possessing fresh human skulls and other body parts. Mariam Nabukeera served as an accomplice to her witchdoctor husband in the ritual murder of children in Uganda. Although these women worked with men, it remains unclear who the prime offenders were and who the accomplices were. While it was evident that Nabukeera

was an accomplice to her husband, one cannot be certain whether other women caught with men were assisting the men or were acting in the same capacity with them.

The notion of male accomplices often suggests that women help male perpetrators, often viewed as the prime suspects. Often, these women are said to be under some pressure that made them do it to avoid trouble by the male offender, such as cases involving intimate partners (females) who may live in fear of their lives should they fail to obey their male partners. This assumption obscures the fact that a woman may be a prime suspect instigating a man to help her commit the crime. The male accomplices are often presumed innocent but under pressure by men to commit the crimes. This claim has come under scrutiny in more recent times following the increasing involvements of women who make personal decisions to get involved in brutal acts of violence and murder on their own or with other women and/or men. With the increasing involvement of women in terrorism as suicide bombers, shooters and more, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2019) suggests that the idea of "male accomplice" when it comes to serious crimes by women does not always apply to terrorism since these women sometimes plan the attacks and execute them with or without men.

Men have stronger muscles (Miller, 2010; Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2008) than women and, in most cases, greater skills needed to execute certain crimes. Thus, some women could recruit men to help them out due to the former's possession of stronger muscles and skills but end up being regarded as accomplices to men when they are, in fact, the masterminds of such crimes. The grandmother, Sukuratu Salami, who sold a human head to undercover police officers in Nigeria, had male gang members. Still, she was never an accomplice because she did extensive market research on the business independently, including approaching a human body parts dealer to request supplies after becoming aware of the costs and high demand for human body parts for rituals (see Orijo Reporters, 2014). Nevertheless, Salami's involvement in the violent aspect of this crime, if any, is not clear from the report. For example, it is unclear whether she had been involved in any murder or violence against anyone.

Women are known as instigators and arrangers of serious crimes executed by men (Duramy, 2010; Simon, 1975), and this also applies to some of the ritually motivated incidents previously described. For example, the rape and murder of the Nigerian microbiology student, Uwaila Omozuwa, was instigated by Mary Ade. Some women worked together with men in ritually motivated crimes previously described but cannot be presumed to be male accomplices considering their respective roles in the crimes. Humu Iddrisu lured her friend to her pastor to use her for a ritual in Ghana. Similarly, the Nigerian mother of four abducted her neighbor's child independently and was on her way to send the child to her neo-Pentecostal pastor for a ritual when she was caught. Both women acted on their own. Even if the ideas came from their pastors, they were not under any duress to entertain their pastors' requests if they were not criminally minded because the pastors were not with them during the deception and abduction.

Cases of women acting on their own or as gang members with fellow women in ritually motivated violence and homicide also abound. For example, the woman caught in a Nigerian bush decapitating her four-year-old son for ritual purposes acted independently. The semen hunter who forced Kelvin Akparanta to hand her condom at gunpoint was a solo offender. She planned her crime and went equipped with a gun to enable her to carry it out. The ritualistic live burial of Yaw Adobaw in Brakwa Awoyom, Ghana was instigated and planned by a woman, Ama Nkasah who used her

religious authority as a prophetess to convince an afflicted couple to bury their child alive. Although a man (Adobaw's father) was involved in this act, this was not one of the serious crimes involving men and women in which the woman could be said to be an accomplice to the man. In this murder, both Adobaw's father and mother were under the authority of Nkasah they obeyed as their prophetess. Nkasah was, therefore, like other female ritualists described above, who though worked with men, were the main persons planning the murders and giving orders to be obeyed by the men who were under their authority as experts in the profession.

No men were involved in the ritually motivated violence against children by Chidi Felicia Nwafor and her female accomplice, Rejoice Raymond, in Nigeria. The eighty-year-old Felicia tortured and attempted to murder the three children with her thirty-nine-year-old daughter, Raymond. The three children were "bought" from a female social worker, Sabina Izuorah who was later declared wanted by the police after she escaped on hearing about the arrests of Nwafor and Raymond (Channels, TV, 2021). Izuorah was a staff of Social Welfare Department, Ihiala, Anambra State (Nigeria) whom the public relations police officer, Haruna Mohammed described as "a notorious child trafficking kingpin who has been on police wanted list for child trafficking, child stealing and forgery" (Channels, TV, 2021). The officer further described Izuorah as follows:

the suspect was involved in unlawful adoptions, using forged police reports, forged authorisation letters from the Ministry of Women Affairs and sworn court affidavits, to sell children stolen from all parts of the country to her waiting customers, both within and outside Nigeria, including a recent attempt to smuggle out two children (a boy and a girl) allegedly stolen from Niger State since 2018 (Channels TV, 2021).

Female witchdoctors are another example of women's involvement in the violent murder of people for gain. A female witchdoctor requested the school children abducted by a commercial transport driver in Nigeria. The female witchdoctor who sacrificed her granddaughter in Uganda is another example. While female perpetrators of serious crimes are often said to be accomplices to males (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe, 2006; Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2013; Messerschmidt, 1993; Messing & Heeren, 2004; Miller, 2010; Perrini, 2013; Smart, 1977; Steffensmeier & Alan, 1996; Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2008), the female witchdoctors and ritualists do not meet any criteria of women working as accomplices to men. These women are professionals in their magical industry and even employ men who work for them as human body hunters.

Again, the idea that female perpetrators of serious crimes are mentally-ill (Arora et al., 2017; Bloom & Covington, 2008; Eriksson et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2007; Koenen & Thompson 2008; Mariano et al., 2014; Taylor & Bragado-Jimenez, 2009; Treplin et al., 1996), intoxicated (Bloom & Covington, 2008; Crimmins et al., 1997) or acting in self-defense (Kethineni, 2001; Melton & Belknap, 2003; Pratt & Deosaransigh, 1997; Serran & Firestone, 2004; Wilbanks, 1983) does not apply to these incidents. These women cannot act under psychosis when they always know what they want and request for them in their right minds, including advising their clients correctly as the magical industry requires. Intoxication and self-defense seem irrelevant as these are well-calculated criminal acts, which are well-coordinated over several years or decades with several groups as organized criminal gangs, such as body hunters, magical clients, and others.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored women's involvement in ritually motivated crimes in contemporary Africa. The article has also offered explanations regarding why ritually motivated crimes occur in contemporary Africa. People are victimized due to witchdoctors' theories that rituals made with human parts or sacrifices conducted with human beings can solve many problems bothering their clients. Thus, people are attacked or killed to provide the resources needed for these rituals or sacrifices. The article has demonstrated that just like men, women are also active in these crimes. They participate in different ways, from hunting for human body parts to kidnapping, demanding magical services offered with human body parts, and serving as witchdoctors who send others to kill or kill by themselves those abducted for the said purpose. Thus, the female players in these crimes do almost everything men do.

The involvement of female witchdoctors in the human sacrifices and other women in the kidnapping and decapitation of victims challenge the idea that female aggression is less risky and less violent than male aggression. Other cases of violent murders above involving women as solo offenders and all-female offenders also challenge the idea that women are not attracted to criminal violence and murder in the absence of helping a male offender or due to other circumstances, such as intoxication, mental illness or self-defense. The current article suggests that women are capable of brutal acts of violence and murder just like men. These women have the skills to plan and execute these violent acts against persons and, in many cases, violent murders on their own when they have the opportunity.

Unlike the male actors in these crimes who have been extensively studied, female perpetrators have not received research attention. Therefore, this article is a wake-up call for researchers to explore females' motivations for these serious crimes and establish any gendered patterns in the crimes. Researchers can establish such motivations through qualitative interviews of female suspects and convicts regarding their reasons for engaging in these crimes. The criminal justice authorities have processed several women who have been involved in these crimes, and some of them can be found in prisons in different parts of Africa, including those released back into the communities. Some of the cases described herein the involvement of the police in arrests and prosecutions. Therefore, prisons and police records can serve as valuable resources for researchers to recruit these participants.

Some known female witchdoctors and perpetrators of these crimes, such as those whose activities were analyzed by Fellows (2013) live in their respective communities. Fellows aimed to establish the prevalence of child sacrifice and the perceptions and demographics involved in Uganda. Researchers can design new studies aimed at establishing the reasons why women engage in these serious criminal activities. Although the cases involving women presented above show an overlap with men's motivations, a comparative study of male versus female motivations can be conducted once female perpetrators are interviewed. It is only after this that one can determine whether or not there are gendered motivations and modus operandi in these crimes.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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