

RELIGION, HUMAN LIFE AND MORALITY: A CASE OF THE PERENNIAL RITUAL KILLINGS IN GHANA

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Abstract

One of the plethora of challenges facing Africa is recurrent ritual killings/murders. Although Africans crave for a philosophical worldview that protects human life and advocate for good moral values in society, they are now caught up in the quagmire of perennial ritual killings which is an affront to their moral disposition. The case in Ghana, a sub-Saharan African country is not different. Ritual killing in this sense refers to the situation whereby human beings are killed for money making or other overt purposes such as getting vital human organs for sale. For some time now, Ghanaians have experienced cases of ritual murders which calls for critical attention. Three cases in point have been examined in this study and the Akan philosophical view on human life and morality has been used as the basis for discussion. This is a qualitative study which employ sphenomenological method through in-depth interviews to solicit views from participants in Kasoa in the Central Region of Ghana to find out if there is a convergence between religion, morality, and ritual killings in Ghana. It was contended that religion in itself is not a causative agent of ritual killings. Thus, religion does not promote or contribute to ritual killing or social malaise in the general sense. Instead, it is the abuse of religion that has the potential to contribute to social deviant behaviours such as ritual killings in Ghana. This assertion was premised on the basis that most of the perpetrators of manslaughter crimes attached ritualistic propensities to their ill-fated acts which were orchestrated by religious charlatans. The study conclusively recommended that Ghanaians in particular should go back to their roots and engage with their former sense of community that brought them together as one people. Through this, they shall see the grave difficulty in harming members of the same community through ritual killings.

Key words: Human life, morality, religion, ritual killings, sense of community.

INTRODUCTION

There are divergent views regarding the concept and philosophy of human life and morality within African indigenous societies. A report by the “United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC)”,¹ showed that the manslaughter cases in Africa increased far beyond the global average in the year 2019.² The

¹AT Editor. “Report: African Homicide Rate Far Higher than Global Average”. Accessed September 7, 2022.

<https://africatimes.com/2019/07/08/report-african-homicide-rate-far-higher-than-global-average/>

² AT Editor. “African Homicide Rate”.

increase was also far above the rates recorded in Europe or Asia.³ Sadly, this situation has not changed yet. It is very alarming and indubitably unacceptable since African philosophical thought gives greater premium and value to human life and morality.

It should be stressed that in African indigenous societies where religion seems uncompromisingly, “inseparable from culture and notoriously linked up with almost every human

³AT Editor. “African Homicide Rate”.

endeavour”,⁴ discussion on human life and morality cannot be overlooked. Nonetheless, the most alarming fact still remains that throughout the world, although people claim to add value to human life, they are most often in the business of harming others. In certain parts of the world, there are incidences of suicide bombing, manslaughter, shootings with the gun, domestic violence, to mention but a few. Ghana has also registered an unimaginable rise in ritual killings which has unfortunately claimed several lives of the Ghanaian people. The current study refers to ritual killings as the situation whereby human beings are killed for money making or other overt purposes such as getting vital human organs for sale. These barbaric acts, for me, have human life and moral connotations and therefore, need our candid attention.

Within the last few decades, several efforts have been made by African philosophers and other scholars to establish unrelenting thoughtful consideration to African human life and morality. A number of them have ventured into debating on the relation between morality, religion, state, or tradition, but have not critically examined the religious dimensions to the ritual killings in Ghana. However, anecdotal reports from both print and electronic media have cited some religious activities as contributing to the abuse of human rights in Ghana based on the widely-held notion that rituals could be performed to boost the material resources of individuals through the use of human parts. It is in the light of this that this current study sought to find out whether there is a convergence between religion, morality, and the ritual killings in Ghana situating it within the Akan indigenous context since the claims about religion, human life, and morality are also exemplified in the experience of the Akan people in Ghana. Furthermore, I support Godson Ahutor’s claim that “the Akan people’s experiences and philosophical thoughts on human life and morality, generally, reflects the worldviews and practices of other ethnic groups in Ghana and for that matter, indigenous societies in Africa”.⁵

Methodology and Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

To achieve the goal of this study, the researcher, through a qualitative approach and adopting the phenomenological method examined three cases of ritual killings in Ghana, i.e. ritual killings by the two teenagers in Kasoain the Central Region, the Abesim ritual murder in Bono Ahafo Region, and the **allegedly killing of an Okada⁶ rider at Awutu Bontrase in the Central Region of Ghana**. Although the study was limited to Ghana, suffices it to say that apart from what is happening in other towns as far as the subject matter is concerned, the data was obtained from Kasoa in the Central Region of Ghana.

The justification is that Kasoa has records of ritual killing incidences in recent times and therefore, adequate data could be

gathered from study participants in this area who are direct witness of the phenomenon under study. Techniques of data gathering included newspaper reports and in-depth interviews with opinion leaders in Kasoa who were purposively selected but requested to be anonymous to provide comprehensive knowledge about the phenomenon under consideration. Finally, a cultural analysis of findings was adopted because the study focused on the Akan cultural understanding on human life and morality.

The Akan Understanding of Human Life

A.D. Frimpong(2011) defines ‘the Akan’ as “the ethnic name of the Twi-speaking peoples of the Guinea Coast of West Africa”.⁷ According to Paul Appiah-Sekyere(2018), “the Akans are made up of a number of tribes in southern Ghana which have come together to form an ethnic group”.⁸ Appiah-Sekyere(2018) discovered that:

The Akans are very predominantly found in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions. A larger majority of Akans are also spread in the Western and Eastern regions, the whole of Central region except the Efutu and Awutu districts around Winneba. There is a small area in the Northern part of the Volta region which constitutes the Akans. The Akans in Ghana mainly include the Asante, Bono, Denkyira, Twifu, Assin, Wassaw, Sefwi, Akwamu, Akwapim, Akyem and Adansi. The main language of the Akans are Twi and Fanti.⁹

More importantly, there are so many unique identities of the Akan people in Ghana. For example, John Abedu Quashie(2002) acknowledged that “the colourful kente cloth, which is Ghana’s trademark in the outside world, is Akan”.¹⁰ Likewise, Quashie(2002) surmised that, “if Ghana were to have her own *lingua franca*, it will almost certainly be Twi, one variant of the Akan language”.¹¹ The Akans “are basically agricultural communities, however, there is some fishing on the coast”.¹² This assertion was ardently substantiated by John David Kwamena Ekem(2009) who opined that, “the geographical location of these Akan-speaking groups is conducive to farming, hunting, and

⁷Frimpong, A.D (2011), *Purity and Impurity: Menstruation and its Impact on the Role of Akan Women in the Church*. VU Research Portal, pp.1-62.

⁸Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2018). *On Human Life: Traditional AKAN Ethical Perspectives*. *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* Vol.1, No.2, pp.24-32.

⁹Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2016). *Traditional Akan Ethics and Humanists Ethics: A Comparative Study*. *Advances in Social Sciences Journal* Vol. 3, No.6, p.110.

¹⁰Quashie, J.A. (2002). “*Caring for Akan Marriages: A Critique of the Approach to the Pastoral Care of Marriages by Selected Christian Organisations in Ghana*”. An unpublished Thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Theology, School of Historical Studies, p. 28.

¹¹Quashie, J.A. (2002), p.28.

¹²Quashie, J.A. (2002), p.28.

⁴Ahortor, G. (2012). *Exploring the Intersection of Religion, Health and Disability in the Ghanaian Experience*. *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* Vol. 6, pp.101-117.

⁵Ahortor, G. (2012), p.101.

⁶Okada is a terminology used for motor bicycles in Nigeria. This term is also very popular in Ghana for the same usage.

fishing”.¹³ Ekem(2009)mentioned that the Akans “have in common many political, social, religious, and cultural institutions, though there are local variations”.¹⁴The “Akan ethnic group outnumbers the other ethnic groups in Southern Ghana”.¹⁵ Kasoa, the present study area is part of the Akan ethnic group and the people speak *Fanti* language.

As far as the Akans are concerned, “respect for the sacredness of human life has a cultural anthropological background”.¹⁶In this regard, the Akans in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa attach great premium on human life. Consequently, they place a lot of importance on issues “of fertility, preservation, and continuity of life”.¹⁷Thus, as far as the indigenous Akans are concerned, reverence for human life is so fundamental in their culture that they always ensure that every member in their community adheres to such norms.¹⁸In the words of Peter K. Sarpong(1988), even during wars, when an enemy is killed, the Akans consider it as an indictment against human life and for that matter, “after the war, one has to undergo spiritual ablution to purify oneself”.¹⁹Thus, human life is so precious to the Akan person and anything ill done against the personhood of any indigenous Akan person irrespective of age is seriously abhorred.

K.Appiah Kubi (1983) amply gave a description of the indigenous Akan understanding of personhood:

The human being (whatever be its stage of development) is essentially composed of the body, the corporeal matter that we see, called *honam ne mogya* (literally, flesh and blood), the *okra* - an element that may be translated into English as the soul, then the *sunsum* which is the spirit, and a few other elements not easily known to the ordinary mind. God gives *okra* (the soul) and the *honhom* (the breath of life). The *honhom* (breath of life) accompanies the *okra* (soul) enabling one to breathe as a living human being. Since the *okra* is that part of the human being which comes directly from God, when the breath of life leaves the person, the *mogya* dies, and it is this part of God, namely, the *okra* which returns to God for judgment.²⁰

¹³Ekem, J.D.K. (2009).*Priesthood in Context*. Accra: SonLife Press, p. 27.

¹⁴Ekem, J.D.K. (2009), p.27.

¹⁵Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2016). *Traditional Akan Ethics and Humanists Ethics: A Comparative Study*. *Advances in Social Sciences Journal* Vol.3, No. 6, p.110.

¹⁶Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2016), p.110.

¹⁷Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2016), p.110.

¹⁸Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2016), p.110.

¹⁹Sarpong, P.K. (1988).*African Theology: A Simple Description*. Accra: Cabo Publication, p.37.

²⁰ See Appiah-Kubi, K. (1983). “The Akan concept of Human Personality”. In E.A. Ade Adegbola (Ed.), *Traditional Religion in West Africa*. Ibadan: Daystar Press, pp.295-264; See also Sarpong, P.K. (1974).*Ghana In Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian culture*. Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, p.37.

What is more, indigenous Akan culture appreciates the divine involvement in the creation of human beings. According to Appiah-Sekyere (1983):

Such belief system is transmitted to younger generations and those yet unborn “through proverbs, witty saying, *ananse* stories and the like. One of such proverbs is *Obi rekra ne Nyame no, na obi myina ho*, literally meaning, when each human being was receiving his/her *okra* (soul) from God, there was no other human being present. Thus, there is an element of direct connection between the Supreme Being (God) and the life of the newly born person who absolutely becomes an integral part of the whole complex reality that cannot be fragmented. This means that human life has God’s divine elements (the *okra* and *honhom*). Therefore, anything done in relation with human life logically has a bearing on God.²¹

This anthropological disposition is also championed by the other ethnic groups in Ghana who add value to human life and thought. Hence, in Ghana, abortions, ritual killings, and suicides, are serious crimes. This notwithstanding, there are some particular issues of murders in Ghana which can be considered as threats to human life. It is unfortunate that Ghanaians who believe in the paramountcy of the reverence for the inviolability of human life and morality are found culpable to these atrocious practices. Why do we continue to experience high rates of moral decline in our Ghanaian societies if we so much cherish human life?

The Synergy between Religion and Morality

Debates on whether morality has anything to do with religion continue to rant and rave. There have been major contentions as to whether morality relies entirely on religion or vice versa. However, to add to this debate, and most especially in discussing ritual killings, permit me to look at some definitions of religion and morality.

Understanding Religion

It is quite difficult to find a well-rounded definition of religion or morality due to everyone having different perceptions of both of the words. However, an attempt would be made to look at a few of the definitions that have emerged. Etymologically, “the word religion comes from the Latin word *Re-Ligare*, meaning, ‘to bind’ or to ‘connect’”.²²When ‘*Re*’ is added to ‘*Ligare*,’ they become *Re-Ligare*, meaning to ‘re-bind’ or ‘re-connect’.²³ It is based on this that Emmanuel Kelechi Iwuagwu(2018) defines religion as “a system of beliefs and practices that admits a binding relation to a

²¹Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2016), p.110.

²² G. Trimble, “Definition of Religion – The Real Meaning of the Word Religion,” Accessed July 14, 2022.

<https://www.gretrimble.com/meaning-of-the-word-religion/>

²³ Trimble, “Definition of Religion”.

supernatural Being or beings”.²⁴Hence, religion involves “the relationship between humankind and a deity or divinity”.²⁵

Likewise, M.D. Regnerus and A. Burdette(2006)refer to religion “as the belief in and worship of a god or gods or a set of beliefs concerning the origin and purpose of the universe”.²⁶In other words, religion involves a relationship between humanity and God or gods or spirits.²⁷Regnerus and Burdette (2006) believe that “religions vary in their cipher and beliefs but all depict their relationship with their deities”.²⁸They further ascertained that “each religion has a specific set of code and adherents base on these codes to control their moral values as well as their behavioural pattern”.²⁹

Similarly, for Mark Stibich, “religion is a set of organised beliefs, practices, and systems that most often relate to belief and worship of a controlling force such as personal god or another supernatural being”.³⁰ Stibichbriefly explained that:

Conversely, there are many different understandings of what religion is, and not all religions are centred on a belief in a god, gods, or supernatural forces. Religion often involves cultural beliefs, worldviews, texts, prophecies, revelations, and morals that have spiritual meaning to members of particular faith. Different types of religions exist worldwide. These include the major world religions that are widespread globally and the less famous belief systems. Some of these are monotheistic (the belief in a single god) while others are polytheistic (the belief in multiple gods).³¹

Although not exhaustive, the various types of religions include Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and African Indigenous Religions (AIRs).

Understanding Morality

As far as morality is concerned, there are several definitions depending on which perspective the individual is arguing from. For example, Kwasi Wiredu (1992) observed that:

Morality in the strictest sense is universal and essential to human culture. Morality is simply, the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interests of

the individual to those of others in society. Morality does not just refer to the conformity to the requirements of the harmony of interests, but also the conformity to those requirements which is inspired by an imaginative and sympathetic identification with the interests of others even at the cost of a possible curtailment of one’s own interests.³²

Wiredu(1992) claims that “morality has a link with the society”.³³He explained that “although the fear of punishment from the deities may focus people’s mind on the path of virtue, it is not this that creates the sense of moral obligation”.³⁴ For instance, “the fear of arrest can deter a robber, but if the robber has a sense of morality in the first place, he would not conceive of the idea of robbing”.³⁵

Kwame Gyekye’s (1996) position on the subject matter seems to be in support of Wiredu (1992). Gyekye (1996) perceives morality as “a set of social rules and norms intended to guide the conduct of people in a society”.³⁶He tersely elucidates that:

The rules and norms emerge from and are anchored in people’s beliefs about right and wrong conduct and good and bad character. Morality is social, arising out of the relations between individuals; if there were no such thing as human society, there would be no such thing as morality. Because morality is essentially a social phenomenon, it can emerge only in a human society in which there is an overriding concern for harmonious and cooperative living consideration for the interest of others and hence, a sense of duty to others, are intrinsic to the meaning and practice of morality. Morality is not determined by religion, rather society itself. In Akan moral system (or African moral system generally), good or moral value is determined in terms of its consequences for humankind and human society.³⁷

Similarly, Iwuagwu (2018)succinctly reasoned that:

If we contend that there can be no morality without religion since morality is intrinsically a part of religion, it is assumed that a religious person is essentially a moral person and that a moral life may not be possible without religion. If this assumption is upheld, it will mean that with the multiplicity of major religious denominations, the world will be a better place. Though there may be no definitional connection between morality and religion, and their concerns, preoccupations, and constituent elements may differ, morality and religion are

²⁴Iwuagwu, E.K. (2018). *The Relationship Between Religion and Morality: On Whether the Multiplicity of Religious Denominations Have Impacted Positively on Socio-Ethical Behaviour*.*Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Vol.6, No.9, pp.42-53.*

²⁵Iwuagwu, E.K. (2018), p. 42.

²⁶Regnerus, M.D.& Burdette, A. (2006). *Religious Change and Adolescent Family Dynamics*.*The Sociological Quarterly*Vol. 47, No.1, pp.175–194.

²⁷Regnerus, M.D.& Burdette, A. (2006), p.175.

²⁸Regnerus, M.D.& Burdette, A. (2006), p.175.

²⁹Regnerus, M.D.& Burdette, A. (2006), p.175.

³⁰ Mark Stibich, “What is Religion?” Accessed July 15,2022.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/religion-improves-health-2224007>,

³¹Stibich, “What is Religion?”

³²Wiredu,K.(1992).“*The Moral Foundations of an African Culture*”. InP. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (Eds.),*African Philosophy Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, p.306.

³³Wiredu, K. (1992), p.306.

³⁴Wiredu, K. (1992), p.306.

³⁵Wiredu, K. (1992), p.306.

³⁶Gyekye, K. (1996).*African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, p.55.

³⁷Gyekye, K. (1996), p.55.

complimentary in forging a better society. If they synergise their efforts, the world will be a better place. Religion needs morality to promote a better society just as morality may need religion to promote its principles. Religion and morality are therefore complimentary and not exclusive.³⁸

There is yet another school of thought that believes that religion has a link with morality but not the society or tradition. This is conceivably the most common putative stance in the debate about the synergy between religion and morality. According to Iwuagwu(2018), “all religions have well-structured value frameworks with its dos and don’ts which are meant to guide the socio-ethical behaviour of its adherents”.³⁹It is this “value frameworks that outline what is right and what is wrong; they are contained in oral traditions and holy books and are interpreted and taught by religious leaders”.⁴⁰It is believed that those who support the close affinity and semblance between religion and morality premise their argument based on these underpinnings.

In the first place, A. G. Leonard (1966) reasons that “Africans are truly and deeply religious; they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously, and sin religiously”.⁴¹Undeniably, many scholars have re-echoed the fact that “Africans are *notoriously*,⁴²*incurably*,⁴³ and even *in all things*,⁴⁴ religious people”.⁴⁵ Appiah-Sekyere(2016)wrote:

The Akans and Africans are engrossed in religion in whatever they do - whether it is farming, fishing, or hunting; or simply eating, drinking, or traveling. Religion, gives meaning and significance to their lives, both in this world and the next. Religion is, therefore, part of an everyday life of the Akan or African. Religion so deeply permeates all the spheres of their (Africans) lives that it cannot be distinguished from non-religious aspects of life. In the African traditional life, there are no atheists, and that the African cultural heritage is intensely and pervasively religious.⁴⁶

This attribution of religiosity to the African peoples, though a general one, can also be said to be true of Ghanaians. In writing on Akan morality, K. A. Opoku (1978) amply observed:

³⁸Iwuagwu, E.K. (2018), p.52.

³⁹Iwuagwu, E.K. (2018), p.52.

⁴⁰Iwuagwu, E.K. (2018), p.52.

⁴¹Leonard, A.G. (1966). *The Lower Niger and Its Peoples*. London: Frank Cass, p.54.

⁴²Mbiti, J.S. (1989). *African Religions and Philosophy*(2nd rev. ed.). Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, p.1.

⁴³Parrinder, E.G. (1969). *Religion in Africa*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp.28-29.

⁴⁴Idowu, B.E. (1962). *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longmans Group Ltd, p.146.

⁴⁵Parrinder, E.G. (1969), p.54.

⁴⁶Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2016), p.111.

Generally, morality originates from religious considerations, and so pervasive is religion in African culture that the two cannot be separated from each other...Thus, morality flows out of religion, and through this, the conduct of individuals is regulated, and any break of the moral code is regarded as evil and punishable...And this system has one desirable ideal-social harmony and peace for the good of man and society.⁴⁷

The Kenyan scholar, John S. Mbiti (1989), in support of the notion that morality flows from religion contended that;

One should view morality as an authoritative code of conduct directly sanctioned by superhuman being (god, deities, and even ancestors). The moral code is not autonomous, but its autonomy is derived from the creator God, hence, any breach of the moral code would accordingly be an offence against God and his instruction. There is in existence and operation, numerous taboos and prohibitions in African societies. These taboos and prohibitions, which have their source from religion, are instituted to shape the moral lives of the people belonging to that society. Taboos and prohibitions such as, stealing, pre-marital sex, murder, incest, having sexual intercourse in the bush, adultery, and suicide were viewed with serious concerns, and offenders were seriously punished not by man as such, but predominantly by the gods and the ancestral spirits. By this, the divine (gods and ancestors) inflict drought, infertility, and sicknesses on the life of the offender and the entire society. Hence, the fear of the punishment by the gods kept every native African in check and all strived to live good moral lives.⁴⁸

Ritual Killings in Contemporary Ghana

For some time now, ritual killings have been the order of the day particularly in Ghana and some parts of Africa. Sadly, there has been an astronomic rise in ritual killings especially amongst the youth as young as 15 years murdering human beings for ritual money-making intentions. According to media reports from both print and electronic media,

In the last few years, two teenage boys allegedly killed and buried an 11-year-old boy at Lamptey Mills which is a suburb of Kasoa, Ghana. Some eyewitness account suggested that the suspects lured the deceased into an uncompleted building and hit his head with a club. The boy was killed instantly, and subsequently buried in the building. Another eyewitness account indicated that the suspects intended to recover the body the following day for the supposed rituals. The mother of the deceased in an interview with pressmen said she was awfully shocked that teenagers could commit such a loathsome

⁴⁷ Opoku, K.A. (1978). *West African Traditional Religion*. Singapore: FEP International Private Ltd., p.152.

⁴⁸Mbiti, J.S. (1989), pp.1-2.

crime against her son. Some residents in the area confirmed that a fetish priest that the suspects had contacted had told them to bring human parts for rituals.⁴⁹

In a similar development, Ghana was hit with another shock in Abesim, a suburb of Sunyani in the Bono Region. It was reported by the media that:

Police in the Bono Region discovered body parts and a dead body in the home of a sports commentator in the Sunyani Municipality who was suspected of trading human parts. Shocking details that emerged after his arrest indicated that the suspect has human parts of one of the deceased persons in his refrigerator. One of the deceased was found cut to pieces in the refrigerator, whilst two other deceased persons were found in other rooms of the suspect's home. Sadly, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Headquarters team investigating the Abesim murder case also discovered a place where the main suspect, allegedly, buried the intestines of one of the victims. The intestines were buried in a cocoa farm at Abesim which the police exhumed for pathological analysis and forensic examination in Accra. The police in a statement indicated that two sharp cutlasses with bloodstains used by the suspect to commit the crime were also retrieved from the scene.⁵⁰

In commenting on these two developments, Yaw Obeng Manu, in a newspaper report suggested a need for Ghanaians to "check our religiosity and upbringing".⁵¹ Manu remarked:

The suspect must definitely have a religious background and I can't understand why he did that. With all these happening, I think it is time our religious leaders get involved and bring back the fear and regard for human life. Incidents like ritual killings by the youth for wealth are uncharacteristic of us as a people. If the suspect, a 28-year-old man, was courageous to kill his fellow humans, it clearly shows a moral decay in our country. This development is sad and hence, we need to bring back morality.⁵²

What is more, the police arrested a twenty-two (22) year-old man for allegedly killing an "Okada" rider at Awutu Bontrase in the Central Region of Ghana. The accused person and a couple of friends hired the deceased, to deliver a service from

⁴⁹ Nyabor, J. "How Two Teenagers Allegedly Killed, Buried Friend for Money Rituals". Accessed September 5, 2022, <https://citinewsroom.com/2021/04/kasoa-how-two-teenagers-allegedly-killed-buried-friend-for-money-rituals>

⁵⁰ Nyabor, "Two Teenagers".

⁵¹ Manu, Y.O. "Abesim Ritual Killings: Moral Values, Religious Leaders Blamed". in *Happy Ghana*, Accessed September 5, 2022, <https://www.happyghana.com/abesim-ritual-killings-moral-values-religious-leaders-blamed/>.

⁵² Manu, "Abesim Ritual killings".

Awutu Bontrase to Mfadwen. They are alleged to have killed the Okada rider, stole his motorcycle, and planned to use his body for rituals. Anecdotal reports indicated that the suspected killers had told some friends that "they would kill someone for money rituals to blow and buy a luxurious car before the close of Awutu Awubia Annual Festival in the year, 2022".⁵³

Following these unfortunate developments, it suffices to pay much attention to the details given by suspects who have been caught so far in such heinous crimes. The reference to rituals for money are so lucid and ostensible. This intelligibly shows that religion has a role to play in this matter because of the ritualistic connotations to the killings. More so, religious practitioners were allegedly cited as the major architects of this unfortunate phenomenon. This predisposition was advocated by some of the present study participants through an interview. One of the study participants who was a traditional leader observed that "religion in a way has directed people towards God, but at the same time taken people away from Him".⁵⁴ He succinctly maintained that "religion is a contributing factor to the rise of ritual killings because religion has given chance to fake practitioners who hide behind it and ask people to bring human parts for rituals".⁵⁵

Similarly, another study participant who is a Christian in one of the prominent historic mission churches in Ghana, emphatically, noted that "religion has failed to check how religious practices are observed, with particular reference to the emergence of fake pastors, mallams and fetish priests/priestesses on the Television stations in Ghana who give false hope by hiding behind religion and demanding the obvious from their victims".⁵⁶ She disclosed that "such charlatan practitioners of religion claimed they had the power to multiply moneys and hence, they openly display it on the social media and on the national television stations".⁵⁷ This claim was corroborated by the police prosecutor in the ritual murder case at Kasoa who conjectured that:

The two suspects who allegedly killed the 10-year-old boy were inspired after watching a spiritualist on TV. One of the suspects, was pressured by the claims made by a spiritualist he watched on television in Ghana who said he could make people instant millionaires. After contacting the spiritualist, the victims were instructed to provide a human being and an amount of money for rituals to be performed to make them rich.⁵⁸

⁵³ Kwafo, E.N.Y. "Young Man Arrested in Connection with The Killing of Okada Rider at Awutu Bontrase". Accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1170060/cr-young-man-arrested-in-connection-with-the.html>

⁵⁴ Interview with a traditional leader in Kasoa in 2022.

⁵⁵ Interview with a traditional leader in Kasoa in 2022.

⁵⁶ Interview with a female Christian research Participant in Kosoa in 2022.

⁵⁷ Interview with a female Christian research Participant in Kosoa in 2022.

⁵⁸ Nyabor, J. "Kasoa Ritual Murder: Teenagers Were Inspired by Spiritualist on TV – Police". Accessed September 7, 2022.

It is in the light of this that one of the study participants who is a Christian cautioned that “just as religion can make and unmake us, Ghanaians must not become religious fanatics but must apply reason to whatever they do, as far as religion is concerned”.⁵⁹

Almost all the study participants in this present study agreed that as Ghanaians, we are not living in accordance with our indigenous tenets and beliefs. They upheld the view that as Ghanaians, we must be thoughtful with our indigenous moral values that were bequeathed to us by our forebears.⁶⁰ One study participant ferociously lamented on the grave disrespect we have for our African values in recent times.⁶¹ He noted that if Ghanaians and for that matter, Africans cherish their hard-earned moral values and ethos, ritual killings in Africa, and particularly, Ghana, shall be a thing of the past.⁶²

Conversely, there were some of the study participants who saw ritual killing as a wider social problem rather than a religious one. They contended that religion in itself doesn't promote or contribute to ritual killing or social malaise in the general sense. At worst, it is the abuse of religion that has the potential to contribute to such social deviant behaviours such as ritual killings in Ghana. They reasoned that Ghana is dominated by Christians, in respect of the religious divides, and there is no Christian doctrine nor doctrine of any kind attributable to the other major religions in Ghana that support ritual killing.⁶³ Thus, substantially, the three major religions (Christianity, Islam, and African Indigenous Religions-AIRs) in Ghana are known to proscribe ritual killings. It, therefore, becomes paramount to distinguish the subject of abuse of religion resulting in such deviant behaviours from religion itself being a contributing factor to ritual killings in Ghana. A study participant aptly re-emphasised this claim:

No religion in truth ever preaches anything ritualistic concerning murder. It is purely the love of money that is causing this in my opinion. There are quacks parading themselves as traditional priests who will 'scam' people into believing they can make them rich through human sacrifice. Indeed, the devil is a make-believe artist so, definitely, it might be a plausible opportunity to get some money but never long-lasting as we know the devil's ways. Ritual murder has always been a part of us, to punish people through spiritual means for wrong or envy, physically killing and harvesting parts for supposed sacrifices.⁶⁴

<https://citinewsroom.com/2021/04/kasoa-ritual-murder-teenagers-were-inspired-by-spiritualist-on-tv-police/>

⁵⁹ Interview with a male Christian research participant in Koso in 2022.

⁶⁰ Interview with research participants in Koso in 2022.

⁶¹ Interview with a traditional leader in Koso in 2022.

⁶² Interview with a traditional leader in Koso in 2022.

⁶³ Interview with study participants who are Christians in Koso in 2022.

⁶⁴ Interview with a study participant who is a Christian in Koso in 2022.

This study participant further contended that the so-called religious leaders or practitioners are in a minority who rely on the gullibility and greed of society to make this an industry.⁶⁵ According to him, “no proper prophet/pastor, traditional priest/priestess or Mallam will endorse such obnoxious practice”.⁶⁶ For him, it is a few bad ones with leverage due to the pressure society bears on getting rich/setting scores who engage in such acts. The study participant further admitted that religion definitely plays a role because it is a key factor in this chain but the major nuance is the love of materialism. In this sense, society can be empowered to decipher what is fake/untrustworthy and genuine. It therefore, becomes important to segregate the values and doctrines of religion from the socio-economic and political dynamics that cause a society to abuse the sound teachings and values of religion.

Similarly, some study participants did not mince words as they amply posit that “money has blinded our moral eyes and devoured our souls...the conscience of the world has sunk”.⁶⁷ In this sense, it is argued that the wanton love for material things across the globe is to blame, fueled by the get-rich-quick syndrome of the youth. These have resulted in the perennial ritual killings in Ghana. This assertion was verified by a study participant who in commenting on the ritual murder case in Koso, attributed the unfortunate occurrence to the get-rich-quick syndrome which has engulfed the youth in this contemporary times.⁶⁸

According to this participant, the youth are enticed by the charlatan religious practitioners who claim to make the victims amass wealth within the shortest possible time. A research participant supported this as he remarked, “ritual killing is intrinsically linked to the love of material and physical things over academic or spiritual accomplishments”.⁶⁹ This participant observed that there is more respect for such ‘successful’ people, rather without question.⁷⁰ In this sense, everyone is striving for such, and even the church is not spared of this materialism. This, for him, has ultimately led to the lack of spiritual role models either in society or church.⁷¹

Furthermore, a study participant who is a Christian bewailed over the too much marketing of such services of quick money making on our Television (TV) stations and airwaves. He disclosed that the rate at which our TV and radio stations are choked with some ritualists advertising on the airwaves for ritual monies under the watch of successive governments in the country is so alarming.⁷² As a matter of fact, the youth are lured into some of these objectionable activities as a result of the activities of these ritualists. Killing human beings for ritual monies have

⁶⁵ Interview with a study participant who is a Christian in Koso in 2022.

⁶⁶ Interview with a study participant who is a Christian in Koso in 2022.

⁶⁷ Interview with traditionalists in Koso in 2022.

⁶⁸ Interview with an opinion leader in Koso in 2022.

⁶⁹ Interview with an opinion leader in Koso in 2022.

⁷⁰ Interview with an opinion leader in Koso in 2022.

⁷¹ Interview with an opinion leader in Koso in 2022.

⁷² Interview with a Christian study participant in Koso in 2022.

unfortunately become a norm in Ghana and part of the African continent which must be addressed.⁷³

Towards a Fight Against Ritual Killings in Ghana

In critically assessing the situation at stake, the fact still remains clear that in the Akan worldview, human life is so much cherished. It is maintained that:

Life is the highest gift of God to humanity. Anything that undermines, hurts, threatens, brings disgrace, and destroys life is not accommodated, but is frowned upon since it affects the very foundation of the entire community. The Akan view about human life and the value that is attached to it perhaps derives from the indigenous belief that humanity is a creation of God. This is expressed in the Akan maxim, *Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma; obi nyeeasasebameaning*, all men are the offspring of God; no one is the offspring of Earth. Another maxim indicates, *Onipa na oma onipa ye yiye*, that is the beneficence of man depends upon man.⁷⁴

There are countless number of indigenous Akan proverbs which express how much Akans in Ghana abhor being nefarious to one another in the community. Examples include:

Se wo to aduro bone a, ebika w'ano, which literally means, if you employ bad "juju" on a neighbour, the repercussions will invariably affect you. Thus, living morally detestable life within an Akan community has its direct repercussion. Whatever good or bad one does, has a direct impact on one's life. Likewise, a traditional Akan proverb says, *Dee wo bedua no na wo betwa*, which literally means, what you sow is what you reap. Thus, if one sows death for another person, one will definitely reap death.⁷⁵

These and many others show how the Akan is totally inclined to protecting human life and maintaining good moral values in the society. In this regard, ritual killings as far as Akans and for that matter Ghanaians are concerned should not be part of our society. Killing people for religious purposes and also to acquire wealth is a bad practice which must be stopped.

To curb this menace, this current study suggests we go back to our roots as Africans and also borrow from the Akan concept of 'sense of community' which when practised effectively, will prevent Ghanaians from killing one another for ritual purposes. D. W. McMillan and D. M. Chavis (1986), explain that a 'sense of community' is a feeling that members in a community belong to one another; a feeling that each member matters in the group and finally, having a shared faith that the needs of each member of the group or community will be met when the group is so much

committed to one another.⁷⁶ Mbiti (1989) reasons that with a high sense of community, "the individual owns his/her existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries".⁷⁷ For him, the individual is a significant member of the community, therefore, the society has an onerous task of ensuring the upbringing of the individual that will enable him or her fit well into the society. Therefore, the community must collectively create an enabling environment that will help in the nurturing of the individual.

Growing up as a child, I witnessed such a sense of community expressed within the members of our extended families and others living in the same indigenous Akan community. For instance, after preparing their meals, everyone brought their share and the entire household sat and ate together. Every food is eaten by the significant others to express the sense of unity and togetherness. More so, when a child is at fault, every elderly person in the community can discipline the child and later on bring to the parents who would intend show appreciation to their neighbour for disciplining the child on their behalf. Meanwhile, the situation has changed in recent times and the end result is what we are witnessing today. Killing one another can be a thing of the past if the young and the old live harmoniously as one community. By this, they shall see the grave difficulty in harming members of the same community through ritual killings.

Moreover, religion as it is, can play a pivotal role in curbing this menace instead of being a catalyst for charlatan practitioners in promoting ritual murders. It should be underscored at this point that the current study supports the notion that it is not religion per se which is contributing to the menace of ritual killings in Ghana but the charlatan practitioners hiding under the guise of religion are the perpetrators themselves. Some so-called prophets or men and women of God in the Christian denominations are found culpable in the act of engaging people in getting quick wealth, ending up in ritual killings. Some fake traditional priests and priestesses are also in the limelight demonstrating how they can assist people to amass wealth within a twinkle of an eye. Most of these evils are perpetrated by these fake religious practitioners, who have contributed immensely to the recent killings for money in Ghana.

It is therefore recommended that the government of Ghana ensures that the activities of such religious groups are well regulated. There should be a censure on ill-rated radio and Television programmes to check the activities of some of these charlatan religious leaders who have implicated religions into such obnoxious acts of ritual murdering. Additionally, political leadership should be positioned better to address this canker and perhaps see the urgency to declare this menace as a crisis situation in the country which requires corporate attention. Lastly, frantic efforts are to be made by religious groups in the country to educate its adherents on how to avoid some of these ritual killings. It will be more prudent for churches, mosques and shrines and all other religious groups in

⁷³ Interview with a Christian study participant in Kasoa in 2022.

⁷⁴ Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2016), p.30.

⁷⁵ Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2016), p.30.

⁷⁶ McMillan, D.W. & Chavis, D. M. (1986). *Sense of Community: A definition and Theory. Journal of Community Psychology Vol.14, No.1, p.16.*

⁷⁷ Mbiti, J.S. (1989), p.106.

Ghana to teach their adherents about some of these ill-starred practices in our society. Churches, Mosques, and the Shrines should be adopted as significant places for teaching adherents of those faiths about the cherished African philosophical values as far as human life and morality are concerned.

Conclusion

It has been established from the foregoing that ritual killings have been one of the bellyaching challenges facing Africa in general and Ghanaians in particular. Unfortunately, Africans who crave a philosophical worldview that protects human life and advocates for good moral values in society are now caught up in the web of serial ritual killings. Three cases in point have been examined in this study and the Akan philosophical view on human life and morality has been used as the basis of our discussions.

In exploring this current trend of ritual killings in Ghana, this study realised that religion in itself is not a causative agent of ritual killings. It does not promote or contribute to ritual killing or social discomfort in the general sense. Instead, it is the abuse of religion that has the potential to contribute to such social deviant behaviours such as ritual killings in Ghana and Africa. This was premised on the fact that most of the perpetrators of ritual killing crimes attached ritualistic reasons emanating from charlatan religious practitioners to their unfortunate acts. It is therefore maintained that if Ghanaians and Africans indeed appreciate their moral values, cherish human life, and maintain their sense of community, pervasive ritual killings within Ghana and the African continent (a religiously inclined continent) shall be a thing of the past. To this end, all stakeholders are being entreated to be on deck to help ameliorate this canker which has eaten into the fabric of Ghanaians and Africans in general.

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