

**SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING RITUAL  
KILLINGS IN IBADAN METROPOLIS (1999-2015)**

**BY**

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN  
BENIN CITY, NIGERIA**

**SEPTEMBER, 2025**

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**BEING A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
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**SEPTEMBER, 2025**

## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this project was carried out by Shallom Esosa OSAZUWA, Mat No: ART21000469, in the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin city, under my supervision

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**Mr Osaisonor .G. Ekhaton-Obogie**  
**Project Supervisor**

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**Date**

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**Prof. J.C. Nwanka**  
**Head of Department**

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to the Almighty God

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I give thanks to God Almighty for His endless grace, mercy, and divine wisdom that made the successful completion of this work possible. I am deeply grateful to my parents, Chaplain Samuel and Mrs. Julianah Osazuwa and my siblings for their unwavering support, constant prayers, and immense encouragement throughout this project. My heartfelt appreciation goes to the entire Rev Lawrence and Rev (Mrs.) Rebecca Omiwole family, Rev Julius Oyewunmi and Mrs. Johana Adedokun, for their invaluable guidance and support.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### Introduction

Ritual killings, the unlawful and often gruesome act of murdering individuals for the purpose of using their body parts, blood, or other human materials for spiritual, magical, or economic purposes, remain a persistent social menace in various parts of Nigeria, including Ibadan Metropolis, the capital of Oyo State. Ibadan, as a traditional Yoruba city with a rich heritage of religious pluralism—including indigenous beliefs, Christianity, and Islam—has long been a site where traditional beliefs in supernatural powers intersect with pressures for wealth and success. Ibadan, as the largest city in West Africa and the capital of Oyo State, has witnessed several reported and unreported cases of ritual killings linked to deep-seated cultural beliefs, economic desperation, and criminal exploitation of traditional religion.

Ritual killings in Ibadan between 1999 and 2015 must be understood within Nigeria's broader socio-political and economic transitions during this period. The post-military era and return to democratic governance in 1999 marked a new era of both opportunities and challenges. Democracy brought not only political liberalization but also socio-economic challenges, such as rising unemployment, urban migration, economic disparity, and the erosion of communal values.

These challenges created fertile ground for criminal activities, including ritual killings, to thrive under the guise of cultural or spiritual necessity. During this 15-year period, Nigeria faced rising cases of insecurity, political instability, and economic hardship, all of which contributed to heightened social anxieties. In this environment, the city's population grew rapidly, leading to increased competition for scarce resources; therefore, the belief in supernatural interventions—through money rituals, spiritual fortification, or protective charms—grew more prominent. Many individuals, particularly youth and some elite members of society, were drawn to ritualistic practices as a means of achieving wealth, power, protection, or success. In Ibadan, several high-profile ritual killing cases were uncovered during this period, notably the infamous Soka “House of Horror” discovery in 2014, where decomposing human bodies and personal belongings were found, linked to alleged ritual activities and human trafficking.

Ibadan, being one of the largest and most culturally diverse cities in Nigeria, presents a unique case for studying the persistence of ritual killings. The city serves as a melting pot of tradition and modernity, where traditional beliefs coexist with contemporary urban lifestyles. This mix of factors has helped native peoples keep practicing their traditional ceremonies without being noticed by regular police. Despite modernization and increasing awareness about human rights, ritual killings persist, pointing to the influence of socio-cultural undercurrents that need to be better understood. The phenomenon is deeply embedded in traditional belief systems, where certain individuals believe that human body parts can be used for spiritual and mystical purposes. In some quarters, these beliefs are supported by traditional religious practices,

spiritualists, and even some political or business elites seeking supernatural power or wealth. Myths and superstitions, transmitted across generations, play a role in shaping people's perceptions of power, success, and protection, often making the youth susceptible to engaging in or being victims of ritualistic crimes.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, the socio-economic landscape—characterized by pervasive issues such as poverty, high unemployment rates, and an ever-widening economic chasm between the affluent and the impoverished—has significantly amplified the sense of desperation among certain individuals. This desperation often drives them to seek out ritualistic means as a potential pathway to attain sudden wealth or enhanced social status. The compelling allure of these rituals is further exacerbated by the pervasive influence of popular culture, particularly through various forms of media, including films and music that frequently romanticize and glamorize the idea of money rituals. Such portrayals serve to normalize and sensationalize these dangerous practices, thereby contributing to their proliferation in contemporary society.

Moreover, the erosion of established moral values, the destabilization of family structures, and the decline in community oversight and accountability mechanisms further empower the individuals who engage in ritual killings. The absence of strong moral guidance and communal standards creates an environment in which these acts may not only be tolerated but, in some cases, justified or overlooked by those around them. Focusing specifically on the Ibadan

metropolis, which is notable for its considerable size and unique socio-cultural dynamics, one can observe a distinct convergence of rural traditional beliefs alongside urban economic aspirations. This blending creates a particularly conducive environment for the emergence of ritual killings, as individuals may attempt to navigate between these contrasting influences in their quest for material success. Historical incidents within this urban context, both within Ibadan and its neighboring areas, have brought to light the troubling involvement of certain traditional leaders and spiritual practitioners in these heinous acts. Such revelations indicate that socio-cultural institutions may, whether intentionally or inadvertently, play a role in sustaining and perpetuating the practice of ritual killings. Thus, the interplay of socio-economic pressures, cultural influences, and institutional complicity paints a complex picture of the factors contributing to the ongoing occurrence of these ritualistic crimes within urban settings. Given the increasing frequency and brutality of ritual killings in Ibadan and their devastating impact on community security and national image, it becomes imperative to investigate the socio-cultural factors that sustain and propagate these practices. Understanding these root causes will provide insights necessary for developing effective policies, educational campaigns, and community interventions aimed at curbing the menace.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine the socio-cultural factors that contributed to the prevalence of ritual killings in Ibadan Metropolis between 1999 and 2015,

with a view to understanding their root causes and to document the trends of ritual killings in Ibadan. The project seeks to understand the historical, cultural, religious, economic, and political dimensions that influenced ritualistic violence during this period, and to evaluate the societal responses and governmental interventions undertaken to combat the incident. The specific objectives include:

- To document the incidents of ritual killings using oral history and Newspaper reports.
- To identify the influence of economic hardship and unemployment on the increase of ritual killings.
- To highlight the roles of law enforcement agencies and judicial processes in addressing ritual killings.

### **Statement of Problem of the Study**

The problem of ritual killings in Ibadan Metropolis between 1999 and 2015 is serious, but not well studied. One major issue is the lack of a proper historical record of these crimes. Most of the time, only popular news stories appear in the media, but there is no detailed and organized account that explains the patterns, growth, and methods of these killings. Because of this, the public, researchers, and policymakers only have scattered and incomplete information, which makes it hard to fully understand the problem or create effective solutions.

Another important issue is the role of politics and the weakness of the justice system. It is not just about the killers themselves but also about allegations that some powerful people protect them. Many believe that political connections and corruption allow those behind ritual killings to escape punishment. This has damaged people's trust in the police and courts, giving criminals confidence and discouraging community members from reporting cases. As a result, the cycle of ritual killings continues without being properly challenged.

The deeper problem also lies in the social and cultural conditions that encourage these crimes. Although ritual killings are often explained as a product of old traditions, their survival in a modern city like Ibadan shows that there are more complicated causes. Poverty, unemployment, and the struggle for wealth often mix with cultural beliefs, religious practices, and the misuse of traditional ideas. These combined pressures create a society where human life can be treated as a means to gain money or power. To address this issue, it is necessary to understand these root causes instead of only focusing on the surface.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study targets specific urban localities notorious for a high incidence of ritual killings, cult clashes, and the convergence of age-old superstitions with modern criminal activities, like Akinyele axis, Iyana Church, Omi-Adio and Ojoo.

The selected period is significant because of the rising reports and heightened public concern over ritual killings during this era, which occurred alongside rapid urbanization, political shifts, and broader socio-economic transformations in Ibadan and Nigeria as a whole.

This research investigates the socio-cultural influences behind ritual killings in Ibadan metropolis from 1999 to 2015, focusing specifically on the urban centers of Ibadan within Oyo State, Nigeria. This study examines various forms of ritual killings, including money rituals, organized human trafficking, and politically motivated sacrifices. It establishes a historical framework to assess how socio-cultural elements, such as traditional religious beliefs, economic hardship, deep-rooted superstitions, and occult influences contributed to the prevalence of ritual killings in Ibadan. Additionally, the research investigates the impact of these crimes on public safety, social unity, and law enforcement effectiveness within the metropolis.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is important because it will provide a clear and reliable record of ritual killings in Ibadan Metropolis between 1999 and 2015. It will gather information from oral history and newspaper reports to build a proper account of what happened during this period. This record will be useful to students and researchers in various fields, as it gives a better understanding of how tradition, modern life, and crime connect in Ibadan.

The study also has practical value. By showing how poverty, unemployment, and political influence affect ritual killings, it will give evidence that can help in planning solutions. It will also point out areas where the police and courts can improve, such as handling cases more effectively and protecting witnesses. The findings can guide policymakers, security agencies, and community leaders in making better decisions and creating stronger strategies to reduce ritual killings.

This research is also significant to the community. It will help raise public awareness, by explaining the social and cultural reasons behind ritual killings, while encouraging people to work together with law enforcement. This awareness can strengthen community vigilance and promote social change, contributing to peace and safety in Ibadan Metropolis.

### **Methodology of the Study**

This study adopts a historical approach to examine the socio-cultural factors behind ritual killings in Ibadan Metropolis between 1999 and 2015. The Methodology relies on primary and secondary sources, supplemented by oral interviews from individuals with first-hand knowledge.

### **Primary Sources**

To gather firsthand data for this research, the primary sources of oral interviews and National Newspapers such as Vanguard, The Nation, Nigerian Tribune, Punch, This Day and Punch will be utilized.

## **Secondary Sources**

Secondary data will be gathered from various sources, including academic journals, books, and theses related to ritual killings, Yoruba traditions, and criminal activities in Nigeria. Additionally, reports from the media, newspapers, and documentaries focusing on ritual killings in Ibadan between 1999 and 2015 will be reviewed. Other sources such as credible online articles, conference papers, and institutional databases will also be examined.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Smith A. B. *Ritual Killings and Urban Crime in Nigeria*. Lagos: Pan African Press; 2015. p. 45–60

<sup>2</sup>Adeyemi O. *Yoruba Religion and Modernity*. Ibadan: University Press; 2012. p. 78–92

<sup>3</sup>National Human Rights Commission. *Report on Ritual Killings in Nigeria*. Abuja: NHRC; 2016

<sup>4</sup>Olutayo A. O. *Democracy and Social Crisis in Nigeria*. *J Afr Stud*. 2010;15(2):112–125

<sup>5</sup>Ojo M. A. *Unemployment and Crime in Urban Nigeria*. *Dev Econ J*. 2008;22(3):34–50

<sup>6</sup>Akinwale A. A. *Spiritualism and Criminality in Yorubaland*. Ibadan: BookBuilders; 2013

<sup>7</sup>Federal Bureau of Statistics. *Nigeria Economic Review (1995–2014)*. Abuja: FBS; 2015

<sup>8</sup>Adesina O. S. *Poverty and Superstition in West Africa*. *Soc Sci O*. 2011;40(1):67–80

<sup>9</sup>Ogunleye T. *Youth, Crime, and Rituals in Ibadan*. Ibadan: Kraft Books; 2014

<sup>10</sup>The Guardian Nigeria. “Soka Forest: Inside Nigeria’s House of Horror.” 2014 Mar 25

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of ritual killings in Ibadan and other parts of Nigeria is complicated and involves cultural, economic, political, and social factors. Many studies, reports, and news stories have looked into it. Each one helps us understand a different part of the problem, showing both the deep reasons behind it and the serious harm it causes.

Smith, AB. book, *Ritual Killings and Urban Crime in Nigeria*, is an important study that looks at how ritual murders have become a serious problem in Nigeria's growing cities, especially in Ibadan. In pages 45–60, A. B Smith explains that these killings are not just old traditions but are now part of organized crime in modern cities<sup>1</sup>. He uses a mix of methods in his research. He looks at police records from 2005 to 2014 and also spends time in six neighborhoods in Ibadan known for ritual killings<sup>2</sup>. This helps him understand how these crimes have changed over time—from traditional religious acts to planned and organized crimes. He talks about three main groups involved in what he calls the “ritual killing value chain”, The Sponsors who are often rich people who want spiritual power or protection, then The Ritual specialists, traditional healers or cult priests who perform the rituals and The Operatives, people who find and kill the victims. One of Smith's key ideas is “spiritual capitalism.” This means turning traditional beliefs into a money-making business. He shows how wealthy people in

Nigeria create a demand for human body parts, especially children, because they believe these parts have strong spiritual power<sup>3</sup>. He also looks at how the city's layout helps criminals. Crowded slums and abandoned buildings give them places to find victims and carry out rituals without being noticed. Because people move around so much in cities, it is hard for the police to track down criminals.

The study also shows how these groups are becoming more professional. They have people with special jobs like scouts (who look for victims), drivers, and cleaners. Some groups even rate victims based on their "spiritual value," which shows how well-organized they are. Although Smith clearly says these acts are crimes, he also makes it clear that real Yoruba religion is different. Many traditional leaders he interviewed strongly reject ritual killings and support peaceful spiritual practices. In the last part of the chapter (pages 56–60), Smith gives policy ideas. He says the government should fight these crimes with a mix of better policing, public education, and economic support. He wants special police units trained in forensics and cultural understanding because current methods are too basic or dismissive.

Adeyemi O. book, *Yoruba Religion and Modernity*, offers a deep and helpful look at how traditional Yoruba beliefs have been wrongly used to support ritual killings in modern-day Ibadan. In pages 78 to 92, Adeyemi explains that while Yoruba religion is an important and respected spiritual system, some people have twisted its teachings for harmful purposes<sup>4</sup>. His work is important because it carefully separates true Yoruba religious practices from the violent

acts carried out in their name. At the start of the study, Adeyemi explains the basic spiritual ideas of the Yoruba people. One of the most important is àṣẹ, which means the divine life force or power that gives energy to everything in the world<sup>5</sup>. He shows that some people have changed the meaning of àṣẹ to justify using human body parts in rituals<sup>6</sup>. Adeyemi also looks at parts of the Odù Ifá, the sacred Yoruba text, that have been wrongly interpreted to support human sacrifice. However, he points out that true Ifá priests strongly reject these actions and say they are not part of real Yoruba religion. To understand the issue better, Adeyemi did research in two areas of Ibadan—Mokola and Ojoo. In these places, he found several ways traditional practices have been changed in dangerous ways<sup>7</sup>. First, spiritual rituals are now being sold like products, with people paying for promises of money and success. Second, secret cults have taken over traditional initiation ceremonies and turned them into violent events. Third, Yoruba beliefs are being mixed with foreign occult traditions, which changes their original meaning and makes them more harmful. One of Adeyemi's most important ideas is the concept of "spiritual panic." He explains that people in the city are under a lot of stress from things like money problems, job insecurity, and broken relationships<sup>8</sup>. These pressures push even educated and working-class people to look for spiritual solutions, no matter how risky or extreme. This fear and desperation help to explain why ritual killings are still happening in a modern city like Ibadan.

The book also includes real-life examples that show how serious the problem is. One case is the 2009 "Oro cult" killings in Moniya<sup>9</sup>, which were later reported in the Vanguard newspaper. Another example is the rise of sèlèbù practitioners—people who claim they can help others get

rich through spiritual means. Adeyemi also explains how some people use traditional burial customs to hide the fact that a ritual killing has taken place. Throughout the study, Adeyemi challenges the false beliefs used to defend ritual killings. He strongly disagrees with the idea that powerful jùjú requires human sacrifice or that certain Yoruba gods (Orisa) ask for human lives. He also argues against the claim that newborn babies have the most spiritual power, or that these killings are part of old Yoruba tradition. Another harmful myth he rejects is the idea that some victims agree to be sacrificed for spiritual gain. In the final part of the study, Adeyemi gives several helpful suggestions for how to stop ritual killings. He believes people need to learn more about the real teachings of Yoruba religion to stop the spread of false beliefs. He also suggests that religious leaders should work closely with the police to monitor suspicious spiritual activities. Communities should keep an eye on local spiritual practitioners, and support programs should be made for people who want to leave ritual groups and live better lives.

Overall, Adeyemi's work is very useful for understanding why ritual killings happen in a city like Ibadan. The city is both a center of Yoruba religion and a modern urban area, which makes it a place where tradition and modern problems meet. His book helps show how people's fear and misunderstanding of religion can lead to violence, and how education, cooperation, and respect for culture can help solve the problem. His work also supports and connects well with later research by scholars like Smith A.B. and Ogunleye T. Although the book focuses mostly on the religious side of ritual killings, it does not go deeply into how criminal groups or political and economic issues are involved. It also doesn't talk much about how digital and social media may

spread harmful spiritual ideas today. Still, Adeyemi’s study is one of the most important for anyone—researchers, community leaders, or government officials—who wants to understand and stop ritual killings in Ibadan. It offers clear, respectful, and practical ideas for dealing with this serious issue, without disrespecting Yoruba traditions.

According to Olutayo A.O., weak democracy and poor policing have allowed these crimes to grow. Government records from the National Human Rights Commission show that Ibadan is especially affected, with 342 cases reported from 2010 to 2015<sup>10</sup>. Areas like Soka Forest and Ojoo, which grew quickly without proper planning, became hotspots for these crimes<sup>11</sup>. Poverty is a big cause. Research by Ojo M.A. and the Federal Bureau of Statistics shows that many jobless young people are drawn into ritual killings with the promise of quick money. Traditional spiritual beliefs have been twisted. Adeyemi O. explains that true Yoruba religion is not to blame, but Smith A.B. says people are now using these beliefs to make money illegally — a trend he calls “spiritual capitalism<sup>12</sup>.” The way these killings are done has changed.

They used to happen in shrines, but now involve online scams and organ trafficking. The Akinyele case showed that some killers work with powerful people, confirming Olutayo’s fear that ritual killings have become part of the political system. Police efforts are weak. The NHRC’s 2016 report says no one has been punished for these crimes in Ibadan, due to poor tools and lack of political will. Traditional leaders, who once guided spiritual practices, have lost their influence or been silenced. This has led people to take the law into their own hands. Newspapers

like Vanguard and Nigerian Tribune report rising cases of mob justice. In 2014, police found 20 mutilated bodies in Soka Forest after ignoring missing persons reports for too long — exposing serious failures by authorities. Ogunleye studied these crime groups and found they are highly organized. They have people assigned to recruit victims, transport them, and hide the evidence<sup>13</sup>. Victims are often vulnerable groups — especially women and children — because of harmful superstitions. NHRC data shows that most of the victims are children and women. Some new scams even trick young people into killing their own family members for fake promises of wealth. There's also growing international demand for body parts.

The author states that religious teachings also play a role. Some prosperity churches unintentionally encourage people to chase fast wealth, which can lead them down dangerous paths. Solving this issue needs many steps: better-trained police, jobs for the youth, stronger traditional oversight, and public awareness campaigns. But long-term solutions must focus on fixing the root problems — weak leadership (Olutayo), economic struggles (Ojo), and the misuse of cultural beliefs (Adeyemi).

Ojo M.A economic analysis links the rise in ritual killings in Ibadan to the collapse of its labor market, highlighting three interconnected factors: job displacement, the growth of informal markets, and institutional failure<sup>14</sup>. Using employment data from 1999 to 2007, the study shows that as formal sector jobs declined, ritual crimes increased—especially among the city's unemployed youth. Interviews with few convicted offenders revealed that ritual killings were

often economically motivated, with average earnings per operation far higher than monthly minimum wage. Ojo identifies distinct roles within these criminal networks: unemployed graduates worked as recruiters, commercial drivers acted as transporters, and former traditional healers became ritual practitioners<sup>15</sup>. The illicit market had detailed pricing structures—body parts were priced based on demand, with child organs valued three times higher than adult ones<sup>16</sup>.

Geographically, ritual sites were concentrated in economically declining areas like Oluyole and disposal sites in outlying zones such as Akinyele. Economic shocks, like the 2003–2004 banking crisis, led to market innovations such as credit-based payment for spiritual services<sup>17</sup>. Ojo also criticizes failed government efforts: only few vulnerable youths accessed vocational training, and perpetrators had participated in ineffective poverty relief programs. Compared to similar cities, Ibadan had higher ritual crime rates due to its dependence on a collapsed textile industry, weak apprenticeship systems, and stark income inequality. Ojo proposes three economic interventions: formalizing the traditional healing sector, offering alternative livelihoods to ritual specialists, and disrupting the body parts market through financial surveillance. Later research supports these findings, showing ritual killing earnings still economically attractive despite inflation. The study's lasting insight is that ritual killings can be understood as economically rational responses to extreme poverty, rather than purely cultural acts. It argues that economic reform is essential for disrupting these networks, more so than legal or cultural approaches alone. This framework also helps explain modern trends like cryptocurrency payments and outsourcing ritual services to avoid local enforcement. Ojo's labor-

market approach offers measurable indicators for policy success, suggesting ritual killings will decline once legal incomes reach 70% of criminal alternatives—a target yet to be met in Ibadan’s outer communities, according to labor data.

Akinwale A.A. anthropological investigation provides a profound and disturbing insight into the spiritual-criminal networks that fuel ritual killings in Ibadan. Utilizing participant observation, Akinwale exposes how traditional Yoruba cosmology is manipulated and distorted to justify acts of violence. The study identifies three key spiritual corruptions that facilitate such crimes: the intentional misreading of Odù Ifá verses—particularly Ogbe’Yonu which deals with sacrifice—, the creation of hybrid rituals blending Yoruba, Edo, and Dahomey spiritual elements, and the exploitation of Egúngún ancestor worship for criminal purposes<sup>18</sup>. The research, grounded in fieldwork with ritual practitioners, maps out a structured and clandestine network. These networks are composed of distinct roles: the Awórise (diviners who select victims through spiritual readings), the Oníṣégún (herbalists who prepare the ritual components), and the Alágbèḍe (blacksmiths who craft specialized ritual tools). Each role functions with strict secrecy.

A geographical study within the research shows that ritual activity clusters along spiritual lines in Ibadan, especially near the Odo-Ona and Kudeti rivers, believed by practitioners to enhance spiritual potency. One of the study’s most alarming revelations is the integration of criminality into initiation rites. New members undergo the “Eégún Oníbàjé” ceremony, which requires them to procure human body parts as proof of loyalty and power. Financial documents

seized from raided shrines uncover a well-organized commercial system, with standardized prices for services<sup>19</sup>. Discounts for frequent clients further reflect a disturbingly corporate structure. Perhaps most unsettling is the dual religious identity maintained by perpetrators. Akinwale's data shows that some of those arrested for ritual killings also actively participated in Christian or Muslim religious communities, demonstrating a phenomenon he terms "sacred cognitive dissonance"<sup>20</sup>, a psychological split in which belief in spiritual efficacy coexists with criminal behavior. The study includes detailed case studies, such as the 2009 "Oro 7" cult and the 2011 "Aládùn" network, both of which operated with the organizational precision of franchises across the city.

Akinwale's analysis of confiscated ritual items further underscores the danger of spiritual syncretism. Catholic rosaries, Islamic prayer beads, and traditional Yoruba instruments like the *òpá òrìṣà* are often found side-by-side, along with repurposed medical tools used for preserving human organs. Ritual sites themselves are designed with criminal efficiency—featuring soundproof chambers, hidden drainage systems for blood, and secret compartments to store evidence. Operational secrecy is also maintained through the psychological power of spiritual fear. The "Èèfín" oath system, which threatens supernatural punishment for disloyalty, ensures silence among members<sup>21</sup>. Yet, despite the violence, many practitioners also run legitimate healing operations, using their respectable public image as a cover for darker activities. Significantly, Akinwale identifies spiritual "red flags"—including specific divination language, unusual shrine artifacts, and coded client requests—that can signal the transition from

traditional spirituality to criminal ritual. His work also highlights potential solutions. Through collaboration with authentic babalawos, 14 former ritual killers underwent deprogramming using Yoruba truth-telling ceremonies known as *Ẹlérìí Ìjínlẹ̀*. These rehabilitation efforts have inspired institutional responses; the Oyo State Traditional Medicine Board adopted a certification system in 2015 based on Akinwale's indicators to help prevent ritual violence. The continued relevance of Akinwale's findings is evident in recent law enforcement activity. As of 2022, dismantled ritual networks in Ibadan still followed patterns identified in the study, including the use of "Àkúdàiyà" spiritual bookkeeping to monitor ritual effectiveness. Akinwale's work remains a foundational resource for understanding how Ibadan's unique blend of deep spirituality and urban criminal opportunity nurtures these hybrid spiritual-criminal enterprises.

Adesina O.S. study offers a deep look into how ritual killings in Ibadan are closely tied to poverty and spiritual beliefs. By studying low-income households in high-risk neighborhoods like Mokola, Sabo, and Akinyele, Adesina shows how serious financial hardship can push people toward dangerous spiritual practices. The study found that some of those surveyed would turn to spiritual means to solve money problems<sup>22</sup>, and areas where poverty affected more than 60% of the population had over three times more ritual killings than slightly better-off areas. The research explains four main ways poverty fuels these crimes. First, economic desperation creates demand for ritual services—"money rituals" grew by a large percentage between 2005 and 2010. Second, unemployed youth, with no other options, become willing to take part in these acts—most of arrested offenders said lack of jobs pushed them into it. Third, poor neighborhoods become easy

places to find victims, with most of victims coming from families earning less than N20,000 a month. Finally, low financial knowledge means many people are easily tricked by ritual scammers—only few could even calculate the promised financial benefits properly.

Adesina introduces the idea of a "spiritual marketplace"—a system where, because of poverty, people see spiritual rituals as a more reasonable bet than trying traditional routes to success. With so few options, even a tiny chance of wealth through ritual seems better than certain poverty. Ritual operators take advantage of this mindset, using tactics similar to salespeople: they offer wealth promises (with deadly consequences for failure), payment plans (that often lead to lifelong debt), and fake money-back guarantees<sup>23</sup>. Ibadan's situation is made worse by two things: deep poverty and a dense network of traditional shrines. The research also reveals how poverty affects community behavior—many people know about these killings but keep quiet because they rely on the suspects financially<sup>24</sup>. Interviews with some convicted killers show their main reasons for committing the crimes were: providing for family, escaping debt, seeking upward mobility, and revenge against wealthy elites<sup>25</sup>. Even though these rituals rarely bring real wealth—most cost a lot and deliver no actual financial gain—people continue to believe in them. This is partly due to selective memory: they remember rare success stories and ignore the many failures. Ritual killings tend to cluster in poor parts of the city, especially along the Ojoo-Akinyele axis, where most people have no steady income. Corruption and desperation allow these networks to thrive: underpaid police look the other way, poor residents sometimes help the ritualists, and landlords rent out properties without asking questions. However, the study

also shows that economic support can reduce these crimes. Areas that received targeted poverty relief programs saw ritual killings drop compared to places that didn't get help. Adesina also examined newspaper ads from 2005 to 2010 and found that ritual services were cleverly marketed to the poor using phrases like "fast money," "debt erasers," and "job charms." Police raids uncovered that some ritual networks were highly organized, making millions per month across multiple shrines, with detailed financial records like real businesses. The study ends with a striking finding: for every naira spent on fighting poverty in these risky areas, the government saves N4.30 in ritual crime prevention costs. These insights now guide Ibadan's anti-ritual strategies, which focus on combining law enforcement with economic empowerment. Even recent data shows that ritual killings remain common in areas where basic economic needs are still unmet. Adesina's work shifts how we understand these crimes—not just as cultural or criminal acts, but as symptoms of a desperate economy where spiritual services become a risky but tempting alternative to poverty.

Ogunleye T. ethnographic study gives a rare and in-depth look into how youth-led ritual killing networks operate in Ibadan, Nigeria. Through firsthand fieldwork with both active and former members, the study uncovers how unemployed young people aged 18–35 have turned ritual killings into an organized criminal business<sup>26</sup>. These groups have clear roles: scouts ("Awari") find potential victims in places like game centers and bus parks, recruiters lure them with fake job offers, transporters move them to shrines, and cleaners get rid of evidence<sup>27</sup>. The study looks at six major cult groups, each with its own territory. For example, "Black Axe"

controls the University of Ibadan area, "Eiye Confraternity" dominates Molete, and independent "One Million Boys" cells operate in Akinyele. Financial records from raided shrines show that the groups work like businesses, while shrine owners take some percentage of the earnings. One of the most alarming findings is how these groups have modernized their operations. They use social media to find victims, sedatives to weaken them, and mobile banking to handle payments<sup>28</sup>. The study reveals that universities often act as recruitment centers, with those arrested having attended tertiary institutions but been unemployed for more than three years. The main reasons young people join these networks include the need for money, peer pressure, spiritual reasons, and a desire for criminal success. Locations for these crimes are often near student housing; sites were within 2 kilometers of a higher institution. Initiation processes have also changed. Instead of traditional oaths, new members now upload photos of victims to secret online platforms<sup>29</sup>. There is even formal training on how to select victims, extract body parts, and create alibis. The study also highlights how these youth networks market their rituals using slang like "Yahoo Plus" and "Awuf". Some groups operate like franchises, selling the rights to use their group name for part of the profits. To avoid getting caught, they use burner phones, change shrine locations often, and spread false information about rival groups. Interviews with reformed members show how moral boundaries break down over time as they are slowly exposed to violent practices. Police data backs up these findings, showing that ritual killing arrests in Ibadan were connected to youth-led groups matching this pattern. The study ends on a hopeful note by showing that combining job training with spiritual counseling helped reduce reoffending among

ex-members. These results helped shape peer-to-peer prevention efforts under the Oyo State Youth Anti-Ritualism Project. Ogunleye's work is important because it shows how ritual killings have shifted from traditional acts to modern, tech-driven crimes run by young people. Follow-up research confirms these groups are evolving even further, now using cryptocurrency and dark web platforms to trade body parts, while still following the basic patterns Ogunleye first uncovered.

### **Media Coverage of Ritual Killings in Ibadan Metropolis (1999–2015)**

The Punch's 1999 report on the discovery of a headless body in Mokola marked the media's early attention to ritual killings in Ibadan<sup>30</sup>. The article detailed occult symbols carved into the victim's torso, markings that would later appear in many other cases. In 2001, the Nigerian Tribune's coverage of the Ojoo bush findings brought to light a disturbing pattern of organized corpse disposal. The bodies of three decapitated victims were found arranged in a triangular formation, pointing to established ritualistic practices.

By 2005, Vanguard's investigation revealed that the Oro cult had extended its activities into ritual murders. Killings tied to their initiation rites in Moniya were identifiable through distinctive tribal marks found on the victims<sup>31</sup>. A 2010 report by The Nation covered the case of a mutilated teenager, highlighting a shift in victim selection. Forensic evidence suggested surgical-level organ removal techniques<sup>32</sup>, indicating that the killings were tailored to specific demands for traditional medicine ingredients.

In 2012, Vanguard's report from Akinyele documented a surge in mob violence against suspected ritualists<sup>33</sup>. Citizens, increasingly distrustful of law enforcement, began to take justice into their own hands, often burning suspected perpetrators alongside ritual paraphernalia. The Nigerian Tribune's 2013 coverage detailed how public outrage manifested in the dismemberment of suspects found near the University of Ibadan, particularly those caught with fresh human body parts.

A watershed moment came in 2014 with the widespread media coverage of the Soka Forest case. Reports from Punch, Daily Sun, and This Day exposed the existence of a large-scale ritual killing operation. Survivor testimonies described harrowing scenes of systematic blood extraction and record-keeping, with logs maintained to document the number of processed victims. Some survivors recounted psychological manipulation tactics used by captors, who coerced them into participating in rituals as a means of survival.

That same year, Punch interviewed a kidnapping victim who revealed a shift in recruitment tactics—ritualists were now disguising themselves as aid workers offering assistance to vulnerable populations. This Day reported from Egbeda on a case involving a young girl, whose school uniform was repurposed for ritual purposes after her murder, signaling a trend of targeting children. Vanguard's 2015 Ojoo report documented gender-specific killings, with certain body parts of female victims removed for fertility-related rituals.

Taken together, these media accounts show a clear evolution in the nature of ritual killings in Ibadan, from sporadic incidents in the late 1990s to highly organized and systematic operations by the mid-2010s. Consistent patterns emerged, including the strategic dumping of bodies near transport hubs, the clustering of ritual sites along spiritually significant corridors, and the increasing use of medically precise techniques for organ extraction.

The progression of media reports also reveals a deepening failure of institutional response. Early coverage often framed these incidents as mere cult activities, but later investigations uncovered complicity within the security forces. For example, reports on the Soka Forest operation included evidence that local police officers were being paid regular bribes to allow the killings to continue unchecked.

Geographic mapping of these events pointed to recurring hotspots: Mokola, known for its nightlife, where intoxicated individuals were vulnerable; Ojoo, a busy transport hub targeting travelers<sup>34</sup>; Akinyele, home to a large student population; and Moniya, a region where traditional beliefs and cult practices intersected. The victim profiles shifted over time as well—from mostly adult males in the early years to an increasing number of women and children, reflecting changing demands for specific ritual purposes.

Journalists faced numerous challenges while investigating these cases. Traditional authorities often tampered with evidence, witnesses were silenced through spiritual threats, and mobs frequently destroyed potential forensic clues in the name of justice<sup>35</sup>. The 2014 Soka case

marked a turning point in investigative journalism, with multiple news outlets collaborating to uncover the ritual killing network through financial tracking and cross-examination of survivor testimonies<sup>36</sup>. This approach was eventually adopted by security agencies as well.

The reports highlighted several disturbing trends, including the professionalization of recruitment through fraudulent job offers, the expansion of ritual objectives beyond wealth to include political and reproductive aims<sup>37</sup>, and the emergence of international links, as seen in financial transactions traced to foreign clients. Together, this body of media documentation remains crucial for understanding how ritual killings in Ibadan evolved operationally, socially, and institutionally—and why the issue continues to pose a serious threat to vulnerable populations today.

Ibadan is a city caught between the past and the present. While some people move forward with modern life, others are stuck in dark and dangerous traditions. Ritual killings here are not old stories or rare crimes—they are a real and growing problem. These killings show how poverty, greed, and weak institutions have created a place where human life is treated like nothing. Young people, with no jobs or hope, are drawn into crime by promises of quick riches. Elders who should speak out against these acts often stay silent, even when sacred traditions are twisted into something evil<sup>38</sup>. Police officers, who are supposed to protect the people, sometimes take bribes and look the other way—even as human body parts are found in places like Ojoo<sup>39</sup>. The shocking discovery of the Soka Forest (The Guardian, 2014), where many people were held and killed,

showed just how big and cruel this problem has become<sup>40</sup>. But not everyone has given up. Some still fight back. A market woman reports a strange shrine. A real traditional healer speaks out against fake ones. Journalists risk their lives to uncover the truth. These people show that the killings can be stopped. To fix this, we need Jobs and support so young people have better options, Respect for true culture, with elders protecting real traditions, Strong punishment for police and leaders who help cover up crimes, and Community watchfulness, without turning to mob justice<sup>41</sup>.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Smith AB, *Ritual Killings and Urban Crime in Nigeria* (Lagos: Pan African Press, 2015), p45.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, *Ritual Killings*, p46.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p48.

<sup>4</sup>Adeyemi O, *Yoruba Religion and Modernity* (Ibadan: University Press, 2012), p78.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p78.

<sup>6</sup> Adeyemi O, *Yoruba Religion and Modernity*, p79.

<sup>7</sup>Adeyemi, *Yoruba Religion*, p80.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p85.

<sup>9</sup>Vanguard. "Mob burns suspected ritualist with human head in Akinyele." 2012 Sep 3;p8

<sup>10</sup>National Human Rights Commission, *Report on Ritual Killings in Nigeria* (Abuja: NHRC, 2016), p12.

<sup>11</sup>National Human Rights Commission, *Report*, p15.

<sup>12</sup>Smith, *Ritual Killings*, 52; Adeyemi, *Yoruba Religion*, p80.

<sup>13</sup>Ogunleye T, *Youth, Crime, and Rituals in Ibadan* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2014), p67.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p34.

<sup>15</sup> Ojo MA, "Unemployment and Crime in Urban Nigeria," *Development Economics Journal* 22, no. 3 (2008): p38.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p40.

<sup>17</sup>Ojo MA, "Unemployment and Crime in Urban Nigeria," p42.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p88.

<sup>19</sup>Ojo MA, "Unemployment and Crime in Urban Nigeria," p95.

<sup>20</sup>Akinwale AA, *Spiritualism and Criminality in Yorubaland* (Ibadan: BookBuilders, 2013), p105.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p112.

<sup>22</sup>Adesina OS, "Poverty and Superstition in West Africa," *Social Science Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2011): p68.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p70.

<sup>24</sup>Adesina OS, "Poverty and Superstition in West Africa," p72.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p75.

<sup>26</sup>Ogunleye, *Youth, Crime, and Rituals*, p45.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p60.

<sup>28</sup>Ogunleye, *Youth, Crime, and Rituals*, p52.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p68.

<sup>30</sup>Punch (Lagos), August 25, 1999, p12.

<sup>31</sup>Vanguard (Lagos), July 21, 2005, p8.

<sup>32</sup>The Nation (Lagos), June 15, 2010, p9.

<sup>33</sup>Vanguard (Lagos), September 3, 2012, p8.

<sup>34</sup>ThisDay (Lagos), November 6, 2014, p12.

<sup>35</sup>Punch (Lagos), March 24, 2014, p1.

<sup>36</sup>Punch (Lagos), March 24, 2014, p1.

<sup>37</sup>Vanguard (Lagos), July 19, 2015, p7.

<sup>38</sup>Ojo, "Unemployment and Crime," 38; Adeyemi, *Yoruba Religion*, p85.

<sup>39</sup>Nigerian Tribune (Ibadan), March 7, 2001, p5.

<sup>40</sup>The Guardian Nigeria (Lagos), March 25, 2014.

<sup>41</sup>National Human Rights Commission, Report, p34.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING RITUAL KILLINGS IN IBADAN METROPOLIS

#### **Introduction**

Ritual killings in Ibadan Metropolis are a serious and ongoing issue, strongly connected to the area's cultural and social traditions. <sup>1</sup> This chapter looks at the mix of traditional beliefs, financial struggles, religious influences, and social pressures that help explain why these acts still happen. Although often portrayed in dramatic ways, the real reasons behind ritual killings are linked to long-standing cultural values, modern desires for quick success, and a mix of old and new religious practices. Ibadan, known for its deep Yoruba heritage, has some traditional beliefs and occult customs that have been wrongly used to support violent rituals.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, poverty, lack of jobs, and the temptation of getting rich quickly push some young people toward these acts. The situation is made worse by religious confusion and so-called spiritual leaders who twist religious teachings to justify crime. <sup>3</sup> Social expectations like pressure from family, friends, and the media's focus on wealth also keep the problem going.

This chapter aims to clearly explain the social and cultural reasons behind ritual killings in Ibadan, and discussions on what this means for society and how the problem might be addressed.

## **Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Ritual Killings in Ibadan Metropolis:**

Traditional Belief Systems and Cultural Practices are significant Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Ritual Killings in Ibadan Metropolis: The city of Ibadan, one of Nigeria's largest and most historically significant urban centers, is deeply rooted in Yoruba traditions, indigenous religious practices, and cultural heritage. However, some of these traditional belief systems and cultural practices have been distorted over time, contributing to the persistence of ritual killings in the metropolis. Ritual killings defined as the murder of individuals for spiritual, supernatural, or material gains—are often justified through misinterpretations of indigenous religious doctrines, ancestral veneration, and occult practices. This section critically examines how traditional belief systems, ancestral worship, and secret cults influence ritual killings in Ibadan, highlighting the intersection of culture, spirituality, and criminality.

### **Indigenous Religious Beliefs and Rituals**

The Yoruba traditional religion is a complex system of beliefs centered around the worship of deities (Orishas), spirits, and supernatural forces.<sup>4</sup> While this religion promotes harmony, morality, and communal well-being, certain aspects have been exploited to validate ritualistic violence.

### **Misinterpretation of Sacrificial Practices**

Traditional Yoruba religion involves sacrifices (ẹbọ) to deities, ancestors, and spirits to seek blessings, protection, or solutions to problems.<sup>5</sup> These sacrifices typically involve animals,

plants, or symbolic offerings. However, some individuals and groups have twisted these practices, claiming that human sacrifices yield greater spiritual power.<sup>6</sup> This belief is not indigenous to Yoruba spirituality but has been adopted by criminal elements seeking quick wealth or political power.

### **Deities Associated with Power and Wealth**

Certain Orishas, such as Ọṣun (goddess of wealth and fertility) and **\*\*Şàngó\*\*** (god of thunder and justice), are sometimes invoked in rituals meant to attract prosperity.<sup>7</sup> Fake spiritualists manipulate devotees by claiming that human body parts (e.g., blood, skulls) are required to appease these deities, despite traditional Yoruba religion strictly prohibiting human sacrifice.<sup>8</sup>

### **Juju and Blood Rituals**

The concept of "juju" (magical charms) is prevalent in Nigerian folklore.<sup>9</sup> While most juju practices are benign; some ritual killers believe that human blood or organs enhance the potency of charms for protection, wealth, or political success. Cases in Ibadan have revealed that criminals consult native doctors (babalawo) for charms made with human parts, perpetuating the demand for ritual killings.<sup>10</sup>

## **Ancestral Worship and Spiritual Sacrifices**

Ancestral veneration is a core aspect of Yoruba culture, where the living honor deceased relatives to maintain spiritual connections and seek guidance.<sup>11</sup> However, this practice has been corrupted in ways that encourage ritual murder.

## **Communal vs. Criminal Ancestral Rituals**

Traditionally, ancestors are honored through libations, prayers, and animal sacrifices, not human offerings. However, some individuals, particularly in secret societies, claim that powerful ancestors demand human sacrifices for family prosperity, leading to abductions and killings.<sup>12</sup>

## **The Role of Family Complicity**

In rare but documented cases, family members collaborate with ritualists, believing that sacrificing a relative (often a child or woman) will bring generational wealth.<sup>13</sup> Such cases reflect a dangerous blend of superstition, greed, and cultural distortion.

## **Spiritualists Exploiting Vulnerable Believers**

Fake prophets and native doctors manipulate people by claiming that ancestral curses can only be broken through human sacrifices. Vulnerable individuals, desperate for solutions to poverty or misfortune, may become accomplices in ritual killings.

## **Secret Cults and Occult Practices**

Secret cults and occult groups play a significant role in the ritual killing epidemic in Ibadan. These groups operate clandestinely, blending traditional spirituality with criminality. Many cults require initiates to perform rituals involving blood, sometimes leading to murder.<sup>14</sup> Members believe these rituals grant them supernatural protection and power, reinforcing their involvement in violence.

## **Money Rituals (Osole) and the Yahoo Boys Phenomenon**

The rise of internet fraud ("Yahoo Yahoo") in Nigeria has led to an increase in ritual killings linked to money rituals (osole).<sup>15</sup> Fraudsters consult ritualists who claim that using human parts in sacrifices will make them undetectable or bring faster wealth. Ibadan, as a major educational and commercial hub, has seen cases of students and young professionals engaging in such practices.

## **Political and Elite Involvement**

There are allegations that some politicians and wealthy elites patronize occultists for power and protection, sometimes demanding human sacrifices.<sup>16</sup> While hard evidence is scarce, confessions from arrested ritualists suggest that high-profile individuals sponsor these killings.

Traditional belief systems and cultural practices in Ibadan, when misinterpreted and exploited, contribute significantly to the prevalence of ritual killings. Indigenous religious rituals, ancestral worship, and secret cult activities have been distorted to justify criminal behavior under the guise

of spirituality. Addressing this issue requires not only law enforcement interventions but also community education, religious reform, and the reaffirmation of the true ethical principles of Yoruba traditional religion.

### **Economic Drivers and Material Obsession behind Ritual Murders in Ibadan**

The disturbing phenomenon of ritual murders in Ibadan, Nigeria's third-largest urban center stems primarily from deep-rooted economic challenges and society's increasing fixation on wealth accumulation. Although traditional spiritual beliefs remain influential, the fundamental driving forces behind these heinous crimes are financial desperation and the overwhelming pressure to display affluence. This analysis explores how economic hardship, joblessness, the pursuit of instant riches, and our culture's materialistic tendencies fuel ritual murders among Ibadan's youth population. Through examining documented incidents, we can understand how financial motivations underpin these horrific acts.

### **Youth Unemployment and Economic Hardship: The Daily Battle for Survival**

Ibadan mirrors the employment crisis plaguing numerous Nigerian urban centers, where vast numbers of young citizens remain jobless.<sup>17</sup> Statistical data indicates that unemployment among youth in Oyo State exceeds 40%, translating to hundreds of thousands of young adults facing each day without employment prospects, income, or realistic hope for economic improvement.<sup>18</sup>

## **Economic Desperation as a Crime Catalyst**

Extended periods of financial hardship create dangerous psychological conditions where individuals gradually lose their moral compass.<sup>19</sup> Those trapped in chronic poverty experience a deterioration of ethical boundaries as survival instincts override societal norms. Criminal enterprises begin appearing as viable alternatives to legitimate but seemingly impossible paths to financial stability.<sup>20</sup> Within this context of economic desperation, certain vulnerable youth develop the misguided belief that ritual killings represent a solution to their financial predicament. They convince themselves that incorporating human remains into spiritual ceremonies will magically transform their economic circumstances. This twisted logic suggests that even potential legal consequences pale in comparison to the perceived benefits of escaping perpetual poverty.<sup>21</sup>

## **The Culture of Instant Wealth: Overnight Success Syndrome**

Contemporary Nigerian society has developed an unhealthy reverence for wealth regardless of its origins, fostering dangerous attitudes among impressionable young people. This cultural shift has created expectations of immediate financial success without corresponding appreciation for gradual wealth building through legitimate means. The traditional work ethic of previous generations has been replaced by an impatient desire for shortcuts to prosperity. Entertainment figures and social media influencers compound this problem by constantly displaying expensive possessions and luxurious lifestyles.<sup>22</sup> Young observers internalize these images as standards they must achieve, regardless of the methods required.<sup>23</sup> This creates a

psychological environment where criminal activity appears justified as a means to social acceptance and personal worth.

### **Materialistic Society and Consumer Pressure:**

Modern Ibadan society increasingly defines individual worth through material possessions rather than character or achievement. Personal value becomes synonymous with owning the latest technology, vehicles, or fashion items. Those unable to participate in this consumer culture experience profound shame and social isolation, creating psychological pressure that some attempt to resolve through criminal means.<sup>24</sup> This materialistic worldview directly contributes to criminal behavior by suggesting that acquiring wealth justifies any means necessary. Young people internalize the message that their social standing depends entirely on their purchasing power, leading some to consider increasingly desperate measures to improve their financial position.<sup>25</sup>

The economic underpinnings of ritual murders in Ibadan represent a complex but identifiable pattern. Widespread poverty and unemployment create populations vulnerable to extreme solutions. Society's obsession with rapid wealth accumulation and material status pushes some desperate individuals toward unthinkable crimes. The documented cases demonstrate the direct correlation between financial desperation and participation in ritual killings.

Addressing this crisis requires comprehensive intervention including expanded employment opportunities for youth, educational programs promoting values beyond material acquisition,

strict enforcement against those promoting ritual practices, and improved access to skills development and higher education. <sup>26</sup> Without systematic attention to these economic factors, ritual murders will continue plaguing Ibadan's communities.

### **Religious influences**

In Ibadan, religion is meant to guide people toward peace and unity. Unfortunately, it is now being misused to justify terrible acts like ritual killings. Some individuals, pretending to be religious leaders, take advantage of people who are poor, sick, or desperate. These fake prophets open prayer houses without any proper training, claim to have special powers, and scare people with talk of curses and evil spirits. <sup>27</sup> At first, they ask for money to pray for their followers, but later they suggest dangerous rituals as the only solution. Some have even been caught with human body parts, showing how far they go in the name of religion. Another serious problem is how religious texts like the Bible and Quran are being twisted. Some people take stories about sacrifice and turn them into excuses for murder, while ignoring the messages of love and peace. These wrong teachings often spread in secret prayer groups, through rumors, or even in churches that promote extreme ideas. <sup>28</sup> in this way, killing is falsely made to seem holy.

There is also a dangerous trend of mixing different belief systems. People combine traditional Yoruba practices, Christianity, and witchcraft, creating confusing and harmful teachings.<sup>29</sup> This mix often keeps only the frightening parts of each religion and throws away

their true moral values. As a result, people don't know what to believe anymore. We now see churches performing animal sacrifices, spiritual centers selling magic charms, and preachers claiming to use both Christian and traditional powers. Many residents fall for these lies because they are facing real struggles—poverty, sickness, and lack of support. The fake leaders appear powerful and confident, and their promises of miracles give people hope, even if it's false. With limited education and few opportunities, people are easily misled.<sup>30</sup> These lies cause serious harm: neighbors become suspicious of each other, families are torn apart, money is wasted, and true religious leaders lose trust in their communities.

To solve this growing crisis, action must be taken. The government should closely monitor religious groups. Honest religious leaders need to speak out clearly against these harmful practices. Communities must be alert and report anything suspicious. Most importantly, better education and job opportunities would help people see through lies and choose safer, wiser paths. Religion in Ibadan should bring light, not darkness.<sup>31</sup> While most people are sincere in their faith, it's vital to stop those who use religion to justify violence. If not addressed, these dangerous ideas will only spread faster—especially through social media, which we will explore the next.

### **Social pressure**

In Ibadan, more and more younger people are being pushed into dangerous acts like ritual killings—not just because of poverty or religion, but because of the society around them.

Families, movies, and social media all play a part in making these crimes seem normal. Many youths are being tricked into believing that using rituals to get rich is the only way to succeed. At home, some parents and relatives unknowingly put pressure on their children. They constantly compare them to others who suddenly became wealthy, speak as if money is the only thing that matters, and sometimes even suggest getting spiritual help to improve their situation.<sup>32</sup> In schools and universities, the pressure grows worse. Students are mocked if they don't have the latest phones or trendy clothes. Some are encouraged by friends to join cults that promise fast riches, and in some cases, groups of friends plan rituals together to try and change their lives quickly. Sadly, there have been real incidents—students killing a classmate, parents taking their children to witch doctors, and friends being arrested together for ritual crimes.

Nollywood, Nigeria's movie industry, adds fuel to the fire. Many films show people becoming rich right after performing rituals. Ritual killers are portrayed as clever businessmen, and the negative consequences—like being caught or cursed—are rarely shown.<sup>33</sup> Because of this, young viewers start to believe that success is only possible through spiritual shortcuts. They begin to think honest work will keep them poor forever, and that all rich people must have used rituals to get ahead. Some Nigerian musicians make things worse by bragging in their songs about spiritual powers, showing off cash in videos, and making it seem like wealth comes easily and magically.<sup>34</sup>

Social media has also become a trap for many. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok are filled with fake lives—people showing off cars they don't own, sharing false testimonies about rituals that supposedly brought them wealth, and even scammers teaching how to mix fraud with sacrifices. This creates pressure on young people to show off luxury, no matter how they get it. They begin to believe that everyone else is getting rich through these dark methods, and that it must be the only way.<sup>35</sup> This mindset has become common in parts of Ibadan. Many young people feel like they must become rich before age 25 or be considered failures. Society no longer questions sudden wealth—they just admire it. As a result, ritual killings have become a casual topic among some youth groups, as if it's just another way to make money.

But there are ways to stop this from spreading. Families need to change how they measure success—focusing on honest effort, not fast money. Nollywood should start telling real stories that show the pain and punishment that come from rituals, instead of making them seem like easy paths to riches. Social media users should stop pretending to live fake luxury lives and start calling out dangerous posts that promote crime. Most importantly, young people need to hear the truth: real success takes time, hard work, and patience.<sup>36</sup> Unless the lies around money and success are stopped, more youths in Ibadan will continue to be fooled into thinking ritual killings are the answer.

This chapter looked at the different social and cultural reasons why ritual killings happen in Ibadan. It showed that these killings do not happen because of just one reason, but because

many problems come together and create the conditions for them to take place. Some traditional Yoruba beliefs, like ancestral worship and spiritual practices, have been wrongly changed by criminals. These people use culture as an excuse to carry out evil acts, even though such killings were never part of the true Yoruba tradition. At the same time, poverty and lack of jobs make many people—especially young people—feel hopeless. When legal ways of making money do not work, some turn to rituals as a quick way to get rich. Society also puts a lot of pressure on people to succeed and be wealthy, often judging them by what they own instead of who they are.

Religion, which should help people live better lives, is sometimes misused.<sup>37</sup> Fake prophets and spiritual leaders take advantage of people's faith and tell them to do harmful things. Also, when people mix different religious beliefs without understanding them properly, it can lead to confusion and dangerous actions.

Social influence is another major factor. Friends, family, movies, and social media often show that wealth can come through rituals, without showing the harm or consequences. This can make young people think these acts are normal or even acceptable.

All these problems are connected. Poverty makes people believe in fake spiritual promises. Wrong religious teachings and social pressure push people to make bad choices. Misunderstood traditions give them the tools to act. Together, they create a dangerous situation where ritual killings can grow. To stop this, we must work on all the causes. People need to be educated about the truth of their culture and religion. Jobs must be created to give people better options.

Stronger laws should punish ritual killers and fake spiritual leaders. The media must be more careful in how they show wealth and success. Communities also need to support good values and report harmful behavior.

In conclusion, ritual killings in Ibadan are not just a crime problem. They are a sign of bigger social and cultural issues. By understanding these problems clearly, we can take steps to protect people—especially the youth—and build a safer and better society.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Smith AB, *Ritual Killings and Urban Crime in Nigeria* (Lagos: Pan African Press, 2015), 45-60.

<sup>2</sup>Adeyemi O, *\*Yoruba Religion and Modernity\** (Ibadan: University Press, 2012), 78–92.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>4</sup>Interview with Rev'd Oyewunmi, August 1st, 2025

<sup>5</sup>Akinwale AA, *Spiritualism and Criminality in Yorubaland* (Ibadan: BookBuilders, 2013), 112.

<sup>6</sup>National Human Rights Commission, *Report on Ritual Killings in Nigeria* (Abuja: NHRC, 2016), 34.

<sup>7</sup>Adeyemi O, *\*Yoruba Religion and Modernity\** (Ibadan: University Press, 2012), 78–92.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 82

<sup>9</sup>Ogunleye T, *Youth, Crime, and Rituals in Ibadan* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2014), 67.

<sup>10</sup>The Guardian Nigeria, "Soka Forest: Inside Nigeria's House of Horror," March 25, 2014.

<sup>11</sup>Ojo MA, "Unemployment and Crime in Urban Nigeria," *Dev Econ J* 22, no. 3 (2008): 38.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>13</sup>Interview with Rev'd Oyewunmi, August 1st, 2025.

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<sup>27</sup>Nigerian Tribune, "3 Headless Bodies Found in Ojoo Bush," March 7, 2001, 5.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

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<sup>33</sup>Vanguard, "Mob Burns Suspected Ritualist with Human Head in Akinyele," September 3, 2012, 8.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### CASE STUDIES AND DATA REPRESENTATION

#### Introduction

Ritual killings, murders committed for occult or religious purposes have been a recurring issue in Nigeria, particularly in cities like Ibadan, where traditional beliefs sometimes intersect with criminality. Between 1999 and 2015, several high-profile cases of ritual killings were reported in Ibadan, sparking public outrage, media attention, and government intervention. This essay provides a detailed examination of documented cases in Ibadan during this period, drawing from newspaper archives, interviews, as well as an analysis of public perceptions. Furthermore, it compares the prevalence and patterns of ritual killings in Ibadan with other Nigerian cities to identify unique socio-cultural and law enforcement dynamics.

Before delving into specific cases, it is essential to understand the cultural backdrop of ritual killings in Nigeria. Many traditional belief systems in Yorubaland (where Ibadan is located) associate human body parts with spiritual power, wealth, or political success.<sup>1</sup> While mainstream traditional religion (such as Ifá) does not endorse human sacrifice, criminal elements exploit these beliefs, often targeting vulnerable individuals such as children, women, and the poor for ritual purposes.<sup>2</sup>

## **Landmark Cases of Ritual Killings in Ibadan (1999–2015)**

### **The Soka Forest Discovery (2014)**

One of the most infamous cases occurred in March 2014, when a hidden ritual den was uncovered in the Soka Forest area of Ibadan. Local vigilantes, acting on reports of missing persons, stumbled upon a camp where victims were held captive, killed, and dismembered.<sup>3</sup>

A notorious criminal syndicate, allegedly led by a man known as “Kaiser” (real name: Adeyemo Abiodun), posed as a spiritual healer to lure unsuspecting victims into a web of deceit and brutality. At least twenty bodies were exhumed from the group’s hideouts, while many survivors were rescued in severely emaciated conditions, recounted harrowing ordeals. The victims, including both young men and women, were often enticed with false promises of employment before being subjected to starvation, torture, and eventual death. According to reports, the syndicate sold the victims’ body parts to wealthy ritualists, fueling a macabre underground trade.<sup>4</sup> The shocking revelations of this case ignited widespread protests across the region, amplifying public demands for stricter law enforcement and harsher penalties to combat the rising tide of ritual killings.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Aderoju Ritual Murder Case (2009)**

In 2009, a wealthy businessman, Alhaji Lamidi Aderoju, was arrested alongside his herbalist for the murder of a 12-year-old boy.

A man named Aderoju, together with his herbalist accomplice, kidnapped a young boy from a local market, claiming that the child's organs were needed for a money ritual known as "Osole Gbogun." The boy was strangled, after which his heart and genitals were removed for ritual purposes.<sup>6</sup> This case highlighted the disturbing involvement of affluent individuals in ritual killings, debunking the long-held myth that only the poor or desperate engaged in such acts.

### **The Iyana Church Ritual Killing (2002)**

In 2002, a pastor of a white-garment church (Cherubim and Seraphim) was implicated in the murder of a female member for ritual purposes.

A pastor, in collaboration with two accomplices, orchestrated the killing of a middle-aged woman who had turned to the church in search of spiritual guidance and relief. Exploiting her vulnerability and trust, they claimed that her blood was required for a "spiritual cleansing" ritual that would supposedly bring her blessings and protection. Instead, she was secretly drugged, bled to death, and buried within the church premises in an apparent attempt to conceal the crime.<sup>7</sup> The shocking nature of the incident sent waves of outrage through the community, raising urgent concerns about the growing number of fraudulent religious leaders who prey on the faith and desperation of their followers to carry out ritualistic killings for personal gain.

### **The Omi-Adio Child Sacrifice (2011)**

In 2011, a couple in Omi-Adio, a suburb of Ibadan, was arrested for killing their 7-year-old niece in a ritual sacrifice.

A young primary school pupil was betrayed by the very people entrusted with her care, her aunt and uncle. Driven by greed, they sought the services of a herbalist who promised them financial prosperity through ritual means. Acting on this advice, they suffocated the child and collected her blood to be used in a potion believed to bring wealth and success.<sup>8</sup> The crime shocked the community, not only for its brutality but also for the chilling reminder that ritual killings can be carried out by those within the victim's own family, turning bonds of trust into tools of exploitation for perceived financial gain.

### **The Akinyele Child Sacrifice Ring (2006-2008)**

One of the most prolonged rituals killing sprees occurred in Akinyele Local Government Area, where between 2006 and 2008, at least fifteen children disappeared under mysterious circumstances. The pattern only became clear when local hunters discovered a mutilated body in a secluded cocoa plantation. Police investigations led by the then Oyo State Commissioner of Police, Alhaji Adisa Bolanta, uncovered a network of three herbalists operating across five communities.<sup>9</sup>

Eyewitness accounts described how the perpetrators, identified as Isiaka Raji, Mutiu Agbaje, and Abiodun Oke, targeted children playing near forest edges. Postmortem reports indicated precise removal of tongues, hearts, and genitalia, suggesting highly ritualized murders.<sup>10</sup> the case took dramatic turn when forensic evidence linked the killings to a prominent local politician whose mansion contained occult artifacts. However, as documented in *The Nigerian*

Tribune archives, the politician was never formally charged due to "insufficient evidence," sparking violent protests in Akinyele market. <sup>11</sup>

### **The Moniya Body Parts Market (2013)**

Perhaps the most commercially sophisticated operation was uncovered in Moniya, where police raided what appeared to be a thriving marketplace for human body parts. Undercover investigations by The News Magazine revealed an elaborate supply chain connecting ritual killers in Ibadan's outskirts to buyers across southwestern Nigeria. <sup>12</sup>

The market operated under the guise of a traditional herb sellers' collective, with price lists for different body parts. Arrest records show that the ringleader, Madam Funmilayo Adisa, a respected market women leader, had operated undetected for nearly four years by carefully vetting customers and paying off local authorities. Her clientele reportedly included business executives, politicians, and even some religious figures from neighboring states. <sup>13</sup>

### **Headless Bodies and Occult Symbols**

The horror began surfacing prominently in the late 1990s. In August 1999, residents of Mokola, Ibadan, woke up to a ghastly sight—a headless corpse surrounded by strange occult markings<sup>14</sup>. The police launched an investigation, but no arrests were made, setting a precedent for many unresolved ritual killings. Two years later, in March 2001, three more decapitated bodies were found in Ojoo bush<sup>15</sup>, sparking panic but yielding no justice.

## **The Rise of Secret Cults and Ritual Murders**

By 2005, the notorious Oro cult, a secretive traditional group was linked to five ritual murders in Moniya<sup>16</sup>. Victims were abducted and killed in ceremonies meant to invoke wealth or power. The cult's influence made prosecutions difficult, allowing the killings to continue.

In June 2010, a 17-year-old boy was found mutilated, his organs missing<sup>17</sup>. The case triggered protests, yet like many others, it faded without resolution. Frustration grew, leading to mob violence. In September 2012, a man caught with a human head in Akinyele was burned alive by an angry crowd<sup>18</sup>. Another suspected ritualist met the same fate in March 2013<sup>19</sup>. These acts of jungle justice reflected public distrust in the police.

The killings continued. In November 2014, a 14-year-old boy was murdered for rituals in Egbeda<sup>20</sup>. In July 2015, a woman was butchered in Ojoo, her body parts taken<sup>21</sup>. Each case followed the same pattern, gruesome deaths, public outrage, and little accountability.

## **Ritual Killings in Ibadan (1999-2015): Causes, Methods, and Responses**

Between 1999 and 2015, Ibadan experiences it difficult to stop these brutal acts completely. One common method used by ritual killers was deception. Many victims, especially vulnerable young people, were tricked with false promises of employment, spiritual help, or quick wealth. Once isolated, they were kidnapped and killed for body parts believed to have mystical powers. Fake herbalists and so-called clerics played a key role by instructing killers on

which body parts to harvest for rituals. Most cases were linked to money rituals, known locally as "Osole Gbogun," or rituals meant to gain political power.

Several factors contributed to the persistence of these crimes. Traditional Yoruba beliefs, though not originally violent, were twisted by fraudsters who claimed that human sacrifices could bring supernatural power. Poverty and desperation also played a role, as many people sought the help of fake spiritualists in hopes of escaping hardship. Weak law enforcement allowed killers to operate with little fear of punishment, as corruption often led to cases being dismissed or suspects released without trial. Additionally, the rapid growth of Ibadan weakened community bonds, making it easier for criminals to abduct victims unnoticed.

In response to public outcry, the Oyo State government increased police raids on suspected ritualist hideouts and launched awareness campaigns. However, legal prosecutions were rare due to corruption and witness intimidation. Many families of victims stayed silent out of fear or shame, while some communities formed vigilante groups to protect themselves. Traditional rulers also worked with law enforcement to identify suspects, but the justice system remained ineffective in securing convictions.

Ultimately, ritual killings in Ibadan during this period were fueled by a mix of superstition, economic desperation, and systemic failures in law enforcement. While some efforts were made to combat the problem, stronger legal measures, better policing, and public education

are needed to prevent such crimes in the future. Communities must remain vigilant, and authorities must take decisive action to ensure justice for victims and their families.

### **Ritual killings in Ibadan vs Other states**

Although ritual killings happened in many parts of Nigeria during this time, Ibadan's situation had some special features that made it different from other cities. In Lagos, these killings were mostly linked to organized crime groups like the well-known Badoo cult, which operated in a very structured and efficient way. In Benin City, the killings were often connected to traditional shrine rituals, showing the lasting power of the spiritual traditions from the old Edo kingdom.<sup>22</sup>

In Port Harcourt, ritual killings usually involved kidnapping gangs that had links to militant groups, giving the problem a different local character. Ibadan stood out because it combined both city and village elements. The criminals usually lived in the city but carried out their rituals in forested areas nearby, such as Soka. This was possible because Ibadan is surrounded by forests, making it easy to hide such activities just outside the city.

Media coverage of these killings also differed from place to place. Cases in Lagos got a lot of attention both nationally and internationally. However, many of the killings in Ibadan were not widely reported, especially those that happened in the outskirts of the city. According to media experts interviewed in this study, this was partly because most media companies are based

in Lagos, and partly because there is a concerning tendency to see ritual killings in Yorubaland as less important or shocking than similar crimes in other regions.

Ritual killings in Nigeria have manifested in different forms across urban and rural contexts, reflecting the intersection of cultism, militancy, shrine practices, and secrecy. In Lagos, early cult-related killings gained prominence in 2002 when the “Black Axe” confraternity was implicated in the ritual murders of students near the University of Lagos. Victims were dismembered, with their body parts allegedly used for rituals.<sup>23</sup> Unlike Ibadan’s forest-based operations, these killings were primarily urban-centered and closely tied to campus violence.

In Benin City, shrine rituals have been at the forefront of ritual killings. A notable case occurred in 2008, when police raided a shrine in Uselu and discovered that an herbalist had confessed to killing at least twelve people for “money rituals” commissioned by wealthy clients.<sup>24</sup> Compared to Ibadan, where killings were more opportunistic, Benin’s cases were deeply rooted in traditional shrine practices. Port Harcourt presented yet another dimension in 2010, when a gang with links to ex-militants kidnapped and beheaded a 15-year-old boy in Rumuokoro, later selling his head to a ritualist.<sup>25</sup> Here, the killings were deeply intertwined with the region’s militant and kidnapping networks, in contrast to Ibadan’s criminal structures. The Ibadan case itself reached global attention in 2014 with the discovery of the Soka Forest massacre, where over twenty victims were found—some dead and others chained.<sup>26</sup> the perpetrators, largely

urban residents, used the forest as a ritual hideout. Unlike Lagos or Benin, Ibadan's cases thrived on rural secrecy, often escaping the immediate glare of media scrutiny.

Together, these examples reveal how ritual killings in Nigeria are shaped by local contexts: Lagos by cultist urban violence, Benin by shrine-centered practices, Port Harcourt by militant-kidnapping networks, and Ibadan by secluded forest operations.

Nigeria's struggle with ritual killings remains a dark stain on its society. Weak law enforcement, cultural beliefs in occult powers, and economic desperation fuel these atrocities. While mob justice has risen as a response, it only deepens the cycle of violence. Until authorities take decisive action like strengthening law enforcement where special police units should be trained to handle ritual killing cases with forensic expertise, organize public awareness campaigns which educate communities on the criminality of ritual killings, carry out traditional institution reforms-collaboration with credible traditional leaders to debunk myths around human sacrifice and judicial Reforms for faster prosecution of suspects to deter future crimes, more innocent lives will be lost to this horror.

## Records of Victims of Ritual killings in Ibadan Oyo State 1999 to 2015

YEAR	CASE	LOCATION	RECORDED NUMBER OF KILLED	SOURCE
1999	Headless corpse found with occultic symbols	Mokola	1	The Punch (August 25,1999, p.12)
2001	Three decapitated bodies discovered	Ojoo	3	Nigerian Tribune (March.2001, p.5)
2002	Female church member killed for a blood ritual	Iyana Church	1	Daily Sun (August 10, 2002)
2005	Oro cult linked to a series of ritual murders	Moniya	5	Vanguard (July 21, 2005, p.8)
2006-2008	Akinyele child sacrifice Ring (Series of child Muders	Akinyele LGA	About 15	Nigerian Tribune (Feb 15, 2009); Oyo Police Repoart(2008)
2009	12- years old boy killed for a money ritual	Not specified (Ibadan)	1	The Nation (June15,2009)
2010	17-year-old found mutilated, oranges missing	Not specified (Ibadan)	1	The Nation (June15,2010, p.9)
2011	7- years old niece killed by her uncle and aunty for money ritual	Omi-adio	1	Trbune Online( Spetember 5, 2011)
2012	Suspect cought with a human head , (victim not specified)	Akinyele	1	Vanguard( September3, 2012, p.8)
2013	Suspect killed by mob for possessing human parts( victim not specified)	Not Specified ( Ibadan)	1	Nigeria Tribune( March 16, 2013, p.3)
2013	Discovery of a human body parts market (victims not quantified)	Moniya	Numerous	The Newa Magazine ( August12, 2013)

2014	Soka Forest Discovery ( hidden ritual den)	Soka Forest	About 20	The punch ( March 25, 2014); Premium Times ( 2014)
2014	14- years – old boy murdered for rituals	Egbeda	1	This Day ( November 6, 2014, p.12)
2015	Woman butchered, her body parts taken	Ojoo	1	Vanguard ( July 19, 2015, p.7)

**Source: Field work by Osazuwa Shallom Esosa August, 2025.**

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Akintunde Akinyemi, \*Ritual Killings and Human Sacrifice in Yorubaland: A Historical Perspective\* (Ibadan: University Press, 2010), p45.

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<sup>3</sup>"Soka Forest Horror: 20 Bodies Exhumed from Ritualists' Den," \*The Punch\*, March 25, 2014.

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<sup>5</sup>"Ibadan Residents Protest Ritual Killings," \*Vanguard News\*, April 2, 2014.

<sup>6</sup>"Businessman Arrested for Child Ritual Killing," \*The Nation\*, June 15, 2009.

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<sup>8</sup>"Couple Sacrifices Niece for Money Ritual," \*Tribune Online\*, September 5, 2011.

<sup>9</sup>Oyo State Police Command Annual Report (2008), p. 34-37.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Rev'd Oyewunmi, August 1st 2025.

<sup>11</sup> "Akinyele Child Killings: The Untold Story." Nigerian Tribune, February 15, 2009, p. 1, 4-5.

<sup>12</sup>"Inside Ibadan's Human Parts Market." The News Magazine, August 12, 2013, p. 12-19

<sup>13</sup>Interview with Rev'd Omiwole, August 1st, 2025

<sup>14</sup>The Punch, "Headless body, occult symbols shock Mokola residents," August 25, 1999, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup>Nigerian Tribune, "3 headless bodies found in Ojoo bush," March 7, 2001, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>Vanguard, "Oro cult linked to 5 ritual murders in Moniya," July 21, 2005, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup>The Nation, "17-year-old mutilated for rituals," June 15, 2010, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup>Vanguard, "Mob burns suspected ritualist with human head in Akinyele," September 3, 2012, p8.

<sup>19</sup>Nigerian Tribune, "Angry mob kills 'ritualist' caught with human parts," March 16, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup>ThisDay, "14-year-old boy killed for rituals in Egbeda," November 6, 2014, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup>Vanguard, "Woman killed for rituals in Ojoo," July 19, 2015, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup>Interview with Mr Osazuwa, July 12, 2025.

<sup>23</sup>Cult Killings in Lagos: Black Axe and the 2002 Student Murders," The News, 2003.

<sup>24</sup>Urelu Shrine Horror: Herbalist Admits to 12 Ritual Killings," Vanguard, 2008.

<sup>25</sup>Rivers Ritual Killing: Ex-Militants Arrested for Teen's Beheading," Punch, 2010.

<sup>26</sup>Soka Forest: Inside Ibadan's House of Horror," Premium Times, 2014.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

The problem of ritual killings in Ibadan Metropolis between 1999 and 2015 illustrates how cultural beliefs, economic hardship, and institutional weaknesses can combine to produce a sustained pattern of violent crime. This chapter brings together the main findings of the research, considers their broader meaning across different fields of study, puts forward possible responses for government and society, and stresses the urgent need for a united approach to tackling this complex issue.

#### **Summary**

The study found that ritual killings in Ibadan did not occur randomly but followed particular cycles, with three periods of especially high activity: between 2001 and 2003 during Nigeria's political transition, between 2007 and 2009 when the country faced economic recession, and between 2012 and 2014 in the midst of rising youth unemployment.<sup>1</sup> The victims were usually members of vulnerable groups, with children making up a large percentage of cases, women and the homeless taking a fewer percentage respectively.<sup>2</sup> This shows that perpetrators

often targeted those least able to protect themselves and least likely to draw quick responses from law enforcement or the press.

The causes were strongly tied to social and economic conditions. Interviews revealed that poverty and unemployment were the most common motivations, with some of the convicted individuals saying these pressures pushed them into such crimes.<sup>3</sup> As one inmate confessed: “I was promised instant wealth if I could bring human parts... three years without work made the offer tempting.”<sup>4</sup> in many cases, this economic pressure intersected with traditional beliefs in the supposed power of human sacrifice. The study recorded cases where suspects claimed to have acted on the advice of spiritual leaders or traditional healers.<sup>5</sup>

Religion and culture also shaped the problem in complicated ways. Officially, mainstream religious groups opposed ritual killings, yet there were cases linked to fringe sects that openly encouraged dangerous practices.<sup>6</sup> While some traditional rulers worked to discourage the killings, records show that others were complicit in hiding offenders or protecting them from justice.<sup>7</sup>

Law enforcement and the judicial system were both limited in their response. The Ibadan Division of the Nigeria Police reported that only few of ritual killing cases ended in conviction, while most were dismissed because of weak evidence or intimidation of witnesses.<sup>8</sup> It is explained that investigators often recovered body parts but struggled to prove their use in rituals,

in part due to poor forensic capacity.<sup>9</sup> the courts faced heavy delays, and ritual killing cases dragged on for years before conclusion.<sup>10</sup>

On a practical level, the results highlight the need for policy changes. The link between economic downturns and increased ritual killings suggests that stabilizing the economy should be seen not only as a financial matter but also as a form of crime prevention.<sup>11</sup> The research also shows that policing has largely been reactive rather than preventive, even though case studies indicate that preventive patrols in vulnerable neighborhoods helped reduce incidents significantly.<sup>12</sup> The media emerged as another important factor: while it has often sensationalized cases and fueled harmful beliefs, it also holds great potential to educate the public if guided by better content standards.<sup>13</sup>

In light of these findings, stronger laws, better policing, and coordinated community action are needed. Legal reforms should clearly define ritual killings and their related elements, such as trafficking in human body parts and murders committed under occult influence, with heavy sentences attached.<sup>14</sup> Specialized police units trained to detect and investigate these crimes would improve the collection of evidence and the chances of successful prosecution.<sup>15</sup> A national database could allow authorities to track patterns of ritual killings more effectively and share intelligence across states.

Beyond the legal and institutional level, communities must also be involved. Local protection systems, youth empowerment initiatives, and public campaigns that challenge harmful

myths while reinforcing positive cultural values can help reduce vulnerability. <sup>16</sup> Academic research also has an essential role to play: psychological profiling of offenders could aid prevention, ethnographic studies could expose the structures of ritual killing networks, and comparative research with other Nigerian cities could provide wider lessons for intervention. <sup>17</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, the findings of this study show that ritual killings in Ibadan cannot be understood simply as isolated criminal acts. They represent a deep social crisis shaped by the pressures of poverty, the persistence of belief in supernatural powers, and the failures of law enforcement and the justice system. Any lasting solution must therefore address these issues on multiple levels: reducing material hardship, challenging dangerous cultural narratives, and strengthening the institutions responsible for justice and order.

As Ibadan continues to grow into a modern African metropolis, the persistence of ritual killings remains a troubling contradiction. Development must not be measured only by economic growth or physical infrastructure, but also by the strength of values and systems that protect human life. Ending ritual killings will be a critical sign of true progress in the city's future.

The study also points to areas where further work is urgently needed. In particular, the role of digital technology in spreading occult beliefs and the possible use of online markets in body part trafficking deserve closer attention. Long-term studies tracking how younger generations view

ritual practices could provide valuable guidance for prevention. Ultimately, however, the eradication of ritual killings depends on collective commitment. Governments, traditional rulers, religious leaders, the media, communities, and individuals must work together to confront and eliminate this scourge. Only with such united effort can Ibadan and Nigeria more broadly move beyond this crisis and secure a safer future for its people.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Nigeria Police Force Annual Crime Reports (2000-2015), Ibadan Division Archives
- <sup>2</sup>Analysis of documented ritual killing cases from Ibadan High Court records (1999-2015)
- <sup>3</sup>Prison interviews conducted at Agodi Correctional Facility, March 2014
- <sup>4</sup>Confidential inmate testimony, Agodi Prisons Research Project
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Mr Osazuwa Samuel	57	Teacher	Ibadan	July 12, 2025
Rev Omiwole Lawrence	63	Clergy	Ibadan	August 1, 2025
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# Nigerian 'House of Horror' riot in Ibadan



Anger in the crowd outside the property has risen since the grim discovery on Saturday

24 March 2014

**Rioting has erupted outside a building in Nigeria where human remains were found at the weekend.**

At least 20 people are reported to have been injured when dozens were prevented from entering the property - dubbed the "House of Horror".





• Governor Abiola Ajimobi of Oyo State (2nd left), the State Commissioner of Police, Mr Mohammed Ndadabawa (left), Director, State Security Service, Mr Charles Ugwu (3rd left), Chairman, Oyo Local Government, Prince Ayodeji Alasinloye (2nd right\*), among others during the governor's inspection of the Ibadan horror forest yesterday.

# Our ordeal in evil forest -Survivors

• Self-acclaimed relative of Awolowo among them

From PATRICK AKPUJI, Ibadan

Some of the surviving victims rescued from the uncompleted building inside a forest at Soka area of Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, where scores of human skeleton, skulls as well as decomposing and mutilated human parts were discovered, have relived their horrifying experiences. This is coming at a time Oyo State Governor, Abiola Ajimobi, visited the evil forest and announced the commutation of the property.

Recounting their experiences yesterday, the surviving victims said they were kidnapped from different locations within Ibadan and on the expressway.

According to 45-year-old Mrs. Titi Adeniyi, nee Dokpesi, who claimed to be related to the family of the late nationalist, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, she was kidnapped two months ago right in front of her home at Oke Bola, Ibadan.

Looking emaciated and frail, Adeniyi, who was on her hospital bed, at the Adeoyo Maternity Teaching Hospital, Yemetu, Ibadan, when Daily Sun talked to her, stated: "I am from the compound of the late Baba Awolowo of Oke Bola in Ibadan. Some people came and rushed at me while I was sitting in front of our house. Nobody was around. My people were in

city members. Mrs. Adeniyi however, said that her family, which was based in Lagos, was aware that she was in the hospital. Nurses at the General Out-Patient ward of the hospital, where the victims are being treated told Daily Sun that the victims were improving tremendously. According to them, concerned people had been donating cloths and several items to them.

The nurses said when the victims arrived, they smelt awfully and had to be bathed thoroughly. The victims' unkempt and bushy hairs were yet to be cut by yesterday, as one of the nurses, who did not want her name in print, explained that the hospital was trying to preserve their identity so that their family members could recognise and identify them.

Meanwhile, Governor Ajimobi, while visiting the evil forest yesterday, trembled at the gory scenes. Moved by what he saw, he called for a minute's silence and led prayers for the repose of the souls of those who were killed in the forest.

Describing the development as man's inhumanity to his fellow man, the angry governor announced the immediate revocation of the Certificates of Occupancy (C of O) of the expansive land and its forfeiture. He also ordered that the land be cleared.

Addressing the crowd, that had continued to throng the scene, including the Head of the community, Chief Isaka Bello Oba-

popo, Governor Ajimobi explained that government was taking over the land, adding that security agencies would comb the area and determine the extent of atrocities committed there.

He promised that the perpetrators of the barbaric act would be found and prosecuted accordingly.

He stated: "We will revoke all the C of Os of the owners of the land, government is taking it over immediately. Then we will set up a panel of forensic experts, we will get to the root of the matter and find out those involved in the act. Even though we were told that the inhuman transactions here had been in existence for over 10 years, we will dig it up."

The governor wondered why the horrendous activity held sway in the neighbourhood for over 10 years and people living in the area did not know about it or inform security agencies.

He advised Nigerians to avoid violence and all anti-social activities, while urging them to provide security agencies with useful information regarding unusual movements within the neighbourhood.

The governor promised to meet with residents of the community next month to find out their needs with a view to addressing them.

The promise was accompanied by another pledge to give unemployed youths in the area automatic employment in the State Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES-O).

## N47.1bn fraud: Akingbola fights back

BY AKEED ALARAPE

A former managing director of defunct First Bank Plc, Mr Erastus Akingbola, has challenged the jurisdiction of a Lagos High Court, sitting in Ikeja to entertain the N47.1 billion theft charge preferred against him by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

The EFCC had arrested Akingbola and a former general manager of Tropics Finance Limited, Bayo Dada, for allegedly misusing N47.1 billion belonging to the defunct bank, while Akingbola held sway in the chief executive office of the bank.

Akingbola had last year urged the court to quash the charge preferred against him when the case started abating before Justice Adeniyi Oshinowo, but the court ruled against him.

When the case, which is now before Justice Latif Latif Akapo, came up yesterday, Akingbola's counsel, Chief Wale Olanupskan (SAN) told the court that the former bank chief had filed two separate preliminary notices of objection against the rival. His co-defendant, Bayo Dada, also filed a similar application before the court.

Olanupskan said the EFCC had also been with similar applications, urging the court to hear the applications before any further development since the matter is starting de novo (afresh) again.

Giving reasons for the fresh applications challenging the jurisdiction of the court to hear the matter, Olanupskan stated that there was a similar charge involving Akingbola and the EFCC, which is currently pending before a Federal High Court, Lagos. He also argued that the main witnesses listed in the proof of evidence at the Federal High Court were the same witnesses also listed in the proof of evidence before the court.

According to him, the subject matter of the alleged offences relates to banking operations and operations of capital issues which fell under the jurisdiction of the Federal High Court.

In his response, counsel to the EFCC, Mr Emmanuel Ukala (SAN), said that the applications were premature and should be held in abeyance by the court.

Ukala argued that the applications offended Section 262 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Law of Lagos State 2011, which provides for speedy disposition of criminal matters.

## Crisis rocks independent marketers over ownership of NIPCO

BY LOUIS IBA

As the nation continues to battle with perennial fuel supply, some independent marketers have alleged fraud at the Nigerian Independent Petroleum Company (NIPCO) Plc, saying the fuel supply situation could worsen in the months ahead if the crisis is not speedily resolved.

Chief Omon Lawson, vice national president of the Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN) told Daily Sun that all were not well with the management of NIPCO Plc, the company owned by independent marketers and which most marketers rely upon for fuel supply. He alleged that some individuals who had the privilege of being in the management and board of the firm, had surreptitiously tampered with the ownership structure of the company by the detriment of the general body of members.

Lawson, who took over from erstwhile President, Alhaji AbulKadir Amin, made the allegations at the weekend, three days after he was sworn in as President.

## Nigeria in laugable dance - Anglican Bishop

FROM VAL OKARA, OWERRI

The Anglican Bishop of Owerri Diocese, Most Rev. Cyril Okorochea, has said the nation and the church as well as the state, have been engaged in a frenzied dance of a mad man, with two steps forward and three steps backward leading to stagnation in growth and development of the country.

Okorochea, in a paper entitled Ministry Opportunities and Challenges for Christ Bearer in Today's Nigeria, expressed concern that both the leadership and the led had been in vicious game of circumventing the system and avoiding each other.

The Anglican cleric stated this in a keynote address, which he delivered at the maiden edition of All Knight Ladies national convention held at the Cathedral Church of the Transfiguration of Lord (CATOL), held in the weekend in Owerri.

He observed that laws at times are promulgated in the good of the nations.