

A REFLECTION ON RITUAL MURDERS IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Mogomme Alpheus Masoga
Faculty of Humanities
University of Limpopo

Temba Rugwiji
Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies
University of South Africa

Abstract

Ritual murders have recently been widespread among African societies in general. Reports of such murders have become cause for concern. African countries that are implicated in ritual killing include, but are not limited to: Botswana, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Cases have been reported of human body parts allegedly removed from the corpses. The mortiferous character of ritual killing is not unique to African communities. During ancient biblical times, it was common that a son would be offered on the altar as a sacrifice to the gods. This article is multifaceted in its form. The study problematises phenomena of ritual murders by utilising narrative research in which human sacrifice, as depicted in the Old Testament, is the focus of attention. In addition, a comparative approach is employed to demonstrate that ritual murder is not unique to Africa. The article concludes by offering some recommendations towards obliterating ritual killing.

Keywords: Ritual Murders; Human Sacrifice; African Perspective

Introduction

The historical development of sacrifices and offerings in the Old Testament (OT) is extensive (Bvunabandi, 2008:280), since they played a significant role in the Jewish religion. Although the OT does not explicitly mention that Abraham intended to sacrifice his son Isaac in a ritual which could be described in terms of *human sacrifice*, societies (especially African) who are familiar with ritual sacrifices would recognise some striking parallels between the two contexts which are separated by both time and geopolitical space. African belief systems are complex and mysterious. Numerous factors are subsumed to precipitate the killing of humans for ritual purposes among African societies. For example, one of the beliefs making the rounds among some African societies is that robbers ritualise waste/water which has been used to wash the human dead body for stealing purposes. It is believed that when such water mixed with *muti* (African magic) is sprayed into the bedroom, people would sleep like *corpses*. The potency of the *muti* would allow robbers to access the room and steal almost everything while the occupants are sleeping like ‘the dead’.

It is this legendary belief of connecting the dead/the supernatural with the living which motivates human societies all over the world to engage in ritual murder in order to gratify the gods who in return would ‘bless’ and enrich the offerer. Fontaine defines *ritual* as:

A religious performance and embodies authority; its aim is public, the personnel that perform it and, ideally, their actions, are specified and cannot be varied without weakening its efficacy. A ritual concerns the sacred and it is a truism of anthropology that it also invokes the highest cultural legitimacy, activating spiritual powers, whether they be of gods, spirits, or ancestors, in order to achieve a beneficent result (2011:2).

Among African societies, ritual murder involves removing the required body parts from the victim while the person is still alive (Labuschagne, 2004:191-206).

The main aim of this article is to explore contestations surrounding human sacrifice in the biblical text in view of similar practices in our modern post-biblical world. Particular attention will be paid to ritual practices (or *ritual killings* to be precise) among African societies¹. In order to do justice in our investigation, we will endeavour to avoid making an obvious comparison. This essay will discuss what other scholars have written on ritual killings but missed to expedite on the length and breadth of these practices in Botswana, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The article focuses on ritual murders in Africa because the study was carried out in Africa during fieldwork in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. These findings do not represent other destinations where *muti* murder is practised. However, the Vhembe District experience has motivated research on the phenomenon in other parts of Africa as well. In the final section, recommendations are made towards obliterating ritual murders in Africa.

Statement of the Problem

This article attempts to respond to the following two main problems:

1. The practical application of the Decalogue and the moral teachings of the OT (especially the Torah) are brought into dialogue in order to respond to the question of human sacrifice as depicted in the text that teaches against killing of humans.
2. Previous discussions (e.g. Hattingh & Meyer, 2016; Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016) on human sacrifice practised in the ancient biblical world have not succeeded in exploring the parallels between such ritual practices and African societies which the present investigation does.

Research Methodology

This article utilises largely *desk research* in which various contributions on sacrifice and offerings in the ancient biblical world and ritual killings among African societies are consulted. These contributions include: The Hebrew Bible, Hattingh & Meyer (2016), Etieyibo & Omiegbe (2016), Rannditsheni, Masoga & Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2016) and Mokotso (2015) among others. In addition, the researcher's personal experiences and orientation with family members of the victims of ritual murders will also be part of the data pool.

The Decalogue and Human Sacrifice in the OT

The Torah depicts Yahweh giving Moses the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue (Punt, 2011:101-114). One of the laws in the Decalogue says: "You shall not kill" (Exod. 20:13), and yet those who profess to be bound by these words do a lot of killing (Cavanaugh, 2004:510). The most fundamental contemporary threat to world peace is the conviction that

¹ However we are not unaware of the danger of "squeezing the ancient text" as Esias Meyer argues (see Meyer, 2015:1-7).

God not only does not forbid them to kill, but positively commands them to do so (Cavanaugh, 2004:510). This could be one of the reasons why scholars and also some biblical commentators do not take biblical narratives seriously; hence the unprecedented growth in the number of scholars who would like to scrap the term 'religion' altogether because it produces more confusion than clarity (e.g. Masoga, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2000).

Narratives of ritual killings are found in the biblical text (e.g. 2 Kings 6:26-29 and Lamentations 4:10. In Exodus 22:29-30 we also read that all firstborn sons of humans, including of cattle and sheep, were given to God on the eighth day after birth. The reader may also notice that reference to eight days' period is made with regards to both circumcision and sacrifice. In Genesis 17:12, God directed Abraham to circumcise new-born males on the eighth day. The question which may arise is, what is special about the eight days' period after birth in both cases? Modern post-biblical science provides some clue. A study by Holt and McIntosh (1953), among others, is quite illuminating for the present investigation. Holt and McIntosh have espoused that Vitamin K, coupled with *prothrombin*, causes blood *coagulation* which is important in any surgical procedure (1953:125-126). It is further noted that only on the fifth through the seventh days of the new-born males' life that Vitamin K (produced by bacteria in the intestinal tract) is present in adequate quantities. A new-born infant, observed Holt and McIntosh, has peculiar susceptibility to bleeding between the second and fifth days of life. Haemorrhages at this time are sometimes extensive, and may produce serious damage to internal organs, especially the brain, and may cause death (1953:125-126). Additionally, Holt and McIntosh explain that on the eighth day, Vitamin K and *prothrombin* levels are at their peak. Holt and McIntosh discovery has led McMillen (1984:93) to conclude that, "We should commend the many years of workers who laboured at great expense over a number of years to discover that the safest day to perform circumcision is the eighth..." However, while the sons had to be redeemed, the animals with exceptions had to be sacrificed (Exod. 13:1-2; 11-15; 34:19-20; Num. 3:12-13; 40-51; 8:15-19).

In Genesis 22:2, God commands Abraham to take Isaac, his only son, and sacrifice him as an offering at Mount Moriah. Human beings were also killed in Mesopotamia in disparate circumstances to avert divine wrath (Scurlock, 2006:254). The biblical text presents Abraham as having migrated from Ur of the Chaldeans in ancient Mesopotamia where he lived with his father, Terah (Gen. 11:26-32). Contemplating on the religion of his ancestors in Mesopotamia might have motivated Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to a new God, Yahweh, in Canaan. This argument is made in view of similar opinions advanced by scholars such as M Green, (1998), O'Connor (1993), Day (1989), and ARW Green (1975), whose research firmly confirm the position that human sacrifice was practised in ancient Mesopotamia, Israel and Nubia. Numerous other texts attest to the fact that human sacrifice occurred in ancient Israel. For example, the book of Deuteronomy confirms the practices of the Canaanites in which parents burnt their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods (Deut. 12:31; 18:9-12), which justified the extirpation from the land. Some kings in ancient Israel were also implicated in local rituals of sacrificing their sons and daughters which in the eyes of God was detestable (2 Kgs. 16:3; Jer. 19:4-5). The psalmist was also not unaware of what was practiced because he writes that "they shed blood of sons and daughters to Canaanite idols, and because of that, their land was detestable" (Ps. 106:38). The story of two mothers who conspired to kill one of their sons and eat the flesh (2 Kgs. 6:29) is also striking. The narrative says the women agreed that the next day they would eat the flesh of the remaining son. The next day came and the other mother refused to hand over her son to be killed for food.

The prophet Zephaniah (1:7) also pictures Judah as the sacrifice that is offered to God by the priest Babylonia (Mayhue, 1985:240). In other words, God could use even pagan kingdoms to make a sacrifice to him, Israel being the ‘sacrificial lamb’. While on the one hand Judah was mourning over their suffering as a result of the exile, on the other hand Yahweh would be gratified by the *sacrifice*.

Leviticus 27:28² commands that once something has been given to God it cannot be revoked. Human beings (sons and daughters) dedicated will remain God’s and cannot be redeemed, although according to Hattingh and Meyer (2016:642) Jephthah had the opportunity to redeem his daughter in view of Leviticus 27:1-8. Various biblical texts illustrate that children dedicated to God became either priests or prophets whose tasks were wholly serving God. For example, Hannah was unable to bear a child. She prayed for a child and promised to dedicate him to the Lord if He would give her a son (1 Sam. 1:11). When Hannah conceived and Samuel was born, she brought him to the house of the Lord in Shilo (1 Sam. 1:24-28).³ In the New Testament, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple in order to dedicate him to God (Luke 2:22).

In view of Leviticus 27:28, Jephthah vowed that if the Lord had given him victory in battle, he would in return dedicate to God whatever would come out of his house to welcome him (see also Hattingh & Meyer, 2016:642). When it happened that Jephthah was victorious over his enemies, his daughter came out first to receive him. Jephthah vowed to keep his promise by giving his daughter to God in spite of her pleading to be saved (Judg. 11:30-39). Killing in the name of God is the only type of killing that would be legitimate and justified (Cavanaugh, 2004:511). According to Cavanaugh (2004:511) the frequency of the verb *ratsach* (in English: ‘murder’, ‘slay’, ‘kill’) appears 46 times as opposed to 165 for *harag* (English: ‘to kill’ ‘to slay’). Over the course of Israelite history, we see a progressive mitigation of capital punishment, beginning with the requirement that there be two witnesses for capital sentence (Num. 35:30).

God as the architect of ritual murder is further problematised by reading the Gospels both of which present Jesus as the Son of God (Matt. 11:27; 16:15-17; Mk. 14:61-62; Luke 3:21-22; John 17:1) whom He allowed to die on the cross as an atonement or substitution for the sinful world (Gal. 3:13). Jesus as the *sacrificial lamb* (Matt. 27:46; Sandy 1991:447-460)⁴ had been abandoned by His Father, God. Hence, Jesus cried out: *Eli, Eli, lemasabachthani?* (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). Jesus being the firstborn “Son of God” (Brown, 2000:41-52; Dreyer, 2001:506-530; Hoffmeier, 1997:44-49), had to be offered to God. Apparently, Isaac, who is *abused* (Freitheim, 1995:49-57) as a prototype of Jesus, escaped in retrospect the role of the *sacrificial lamb* which Jesus had to fulfil (Puiča, 2011:77-99).

However, a new dispensation arose in the teachings of Jesus on human dignity and sacredness of human life. When Jesus commands his followers to “turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39), and “love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44), he is moving with, not against, the grain of the revelation of God to Israel, not abolishing it, but fulfilling the Law (Matt. 5:17; Cavanaugh, 2004:522). Karl Barth (1961:397-400) also remarks that with the coming of the Messiah in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, God signals that human life has been definitely accepted into the divine life, and that human life, therefore, is to be respected and protected as belonging to God.

² Hattingh & Meyer (2016) have discussed Leviticus 27:28-29 in detail.

³ For further discussion, see Hattingh & Meyer (2016:641).

⁴ See “Behold, the *Lamb* of God that takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Though it can be deduced in Genesis 9:5-6 that humans may shed the blood of humans, they may do so only and precisely in obedience to God (Harrelson, 1976-77:236; Cavanaugh, 2004:515). The shedding of human blood by another person is strictly prohibited, unless it is in punishment for killing another, a punishment mandated by God (Cavanaugh, 2004:515). God claims ownership over the lifeblood of humans. Because humans are made in the image of God, that lifeblood belongs to God, and may not be taken by a mere human acting on his/her own initiative (Cavanaugh, 2004:516). Because the killer was understood as taking possession of the victim's blood, the killer had to be executed to compensate the true owner, God (Phillips, 1983:32-35). Forgiveness of all has been achieved through the non-resistance of Jesus Christ to the homicidal intent of human beings (Cavanaugh, 2004:523). Cavanaugh (2004:514) further suggests that we are called to see that life is not ours to take, but belongs to God alone. In that regard, in Christ's death at the hands of others, death is abolished⁵. Hence, the human figure of Jesus plays a central role in the atonement and salvation of humanity (Machingura & Museka, 2016:46).

Human Sacrifice in Africa

Having discussed human sacrifices in the biblical text, we now focus our attention on witchcraft and human sacrifice (or better still, ritual/*muti* murder) in Africa. Discussing *muti* murder in view of human sacrifice as depicted in the biblical text does not in any way imply an attempt to compare the variations in ritual practices of the ancient biblical world with our modern contemporary context, both of which are separated by time, space and distance. In our effort to explore ritual murders practised by some African societies, we also demonstrate our familiarisation with ritual practices as common features among ancient biblical societies, because human sacrifice, which Hooks (2004:57-58) describes as "rituals of blood", was not unique to ancient Israel. Narratives of witchcraft and human sacrifice are not confined to a specific geopolitical location; they are found all over the world. However, due to limitation of space we have chosen to discuss selected cases including ancient Israelite societies as depicted in the biblical text and some societies in Africa, as representative examples. We will discuss ritual killing in view of witchcraft because the two cannot be separated as witchcraft tends to influence ritual murder (Fontaine, 2011:14).

Witchcraft in Africa

Witchcraft is "the use of magic powers, especially evil ones" (Ashby, 2000:1371). For Manala (2004:1492) the concept of witchcraft refers to the use by some people of evil magic powers to harm or cause misfortune to others. African and European belief in witchcraft is extensively documented (see Leistner, 2014:53-77, among others). The proliferation of the belief in witchcraft is not only widespread across sub-Saharan African countries (Cimpric, 2010), but also very disturbing. It was previously believed that these beliefs and socio-cultural practices would disappear over time, but the current situation indicates the contrary. In Tanzania for example, thousands of elderly people, especially women, have been accused of witchcraft and then beaten and/or killed (Cimpric, 2010:13).

⁵ *The abolishment* of death does not refer to the physical, but the spiritual. It is fundamentalist ideology of life sustenance through belief in Jesus Christ (see Eph. 1:7). A similar belief system of after-life is also common among most African traditional societies. For African cultural beliefs, the spirit of a person does not die forever; hence, the veneration of the dead. See Asuquo (2011:171-175).

Africans believe that a *moloi's* (witch's) identity is never obvious and that *molôi ga a bônwe ka mahlo* (Northern Sotho for "a witch cannot be seen with the eyes") (Van Wyk, 2004:1213). Following Van Wyk's account, Munthali (2005:43) reaffirms that the main aim of typical night errands is to do evil and bring death. He remarks further (2005:43) that several *vhaloi* may meet for a feast, eat human flesh and dance, and that they may wage war on one another, one group trying to steal the corn of another group. Among many African societies, disease/sickness cannot just happen; it has a cause, and usually witchcraft and food poisoning are cited. People with evil powers could cause other people they see as their enemies or who are disrespectful toward them to become sick as a way of punishment (White, 2015:2; Olupona, 2004:113). In some Ghanaian communities, especially in the Akan community, one could become sick through invocation of curses in the name of the river deity, Antoa, upon an unknown offender (White, 2015:2). The Akan community is just one illustration among numerous others across Africa in which narratives of witchcraft and cultural practices are common.

However, from an *indigenous knowledge systems* (IKS) perspective, witchcraft practised in Africa could also be regarded as a unique knowledge system which is peculiar to non-Africans. For example, one of the tenets in African witchcraft is that one can fly in a winnowing basket (*rusero* in Shona) from say Pretoria to Lilongwe/Maputo/Lusaka and back within a few hours of the night. In fact it takes several hours for a modern aircraft to travel to any of the above destinations. Another striking uniqueness is that this 'African flight' defies international aviation laws in which the *rusero* aircraft cannot be detected by a radar/satellite or digital television.

Ritual Murders in Africa

It was shown in this study that the divine (and Yahweh) influenced the emergence of human sacrifice as depicted in the biblical text (Bvunabandi, 2008:375, 377). Cultural individuals honoured the gods by giving them something to eat in exchange for potency (Bvunabandi, 2008:5). The ritual by Africans of venerating and or appeasing the ancestors by brewing traditional beer probably arose as a result of such an ideology (Anderson, 1993:26-39). In view of the philosophy explained above, it is plausible that as the quest for power to outshine one another heightened, a more complex method of acquiring potency arose. Hence, ritual killing was ignited. Ritual murder (also known as *muti* murder) refers to killing with the purpose of harvesting the body parts for use as traditional medicine or '*muti*' (Vincent, 2008:43-53). Ritual murder is a *pandemic* because of its perennial effects on the welfare of most communities (Rannditsheni, Masoga & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2016:239). It is a common practice among Africans and an acknowledged problem in the contemporary dispensation (Maganga & Tembo, 2015:17). Ritual or *muti* murders are a form of human sacrifice practised by some African tribes (Munthali, 2005:29). There are strong indications that some tribes still use human ingredients in the traditional rain-medicine which is used in the ancestral rites for rain (Monning, 1967:61). The challenge posed by the traumatic ritual murder and its phenomenon is a global problem, and in South Africa a national issue (Munthali, 2005:1).

We will discuss *muti* killing practised in the following African countries: Botswana, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Botswana

Witchcraft among the youths in Botswana needs attention. Burke explains witchcraft in terms of two words: *boloi* and *dipheko* (Burke, 2000:206-214). The term *boloi* in which an individual manipulates materials for personal gain or to harm someone, and *dipheko* as ritual murder. For Burke (2000:206), in *boloi* the youths supposedly know and do nothing, whereas the adult actions yield result. *Dipheko*, however, reveals youth vulnerability yet also provides opportunity to address it (Burke, 2000:206).

Meanwhile, Pamela Shumba's⁶ (2013) findings on ritual murder confirms that the phenomenon is rampant in Botswana. Shumba writes that machete-wielding thugs killed a Bulawayo man and then ripped out his heart in a suspected ritual killing. Shumba further pens that the dismembered remains of the victim, identified as Edmore Rundogo, were found in Maun, about 500km from Botswana's second city of Francistown.⁷

Nigeria

In Nigeria, people with mental illnesses are killed as part of ritual practices that flow from various beliefs which people hold about disability. Many people who hold negative beliefs about persons with mental illness claim that their hands are unclean (Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016:3). People living with albinism have equally become victims of ritual killings in which their body parts are sold to witchdoctors (Mswela, 2016:2; Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016:3). The killing of people with albinism is fuelled by the belief that their body parts could be used for potions that will make one wealthy and prolong one's life (see Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016:3).

South Africa

There are numerous reports of ritual murders in South Africa (Munthali, 2005:29). Unfortunately, children are not excluded because it appears they are preferred as to make a better sacrifice on grounds of their innocence (Munthali, 2005:29). According to a report by the South African HSRC, (2010:8) *muti* (*muthi*) is a term for traditional medicine in southern Africa. In a *muti* murder, body parts are removed from a living victim to use medicinally, either mixed with other ingredients or used alone (HSRC, 2010; Labuschagne, 2004:191-206). While *muti* murders have occurred throughout history in South African culture, little is known about them and little research exists on the phenomenon (HSRC, 2010:9). Rannditsheni, Masoga & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2016:239) carried out a study on ritual murders in Vhembe District in South Africa. They established that since the dawn of the South African democracy about 117 cases of ritual murders have been reported as having taken place in the Vhembe District. In our view because most of the victims "end up dead" (see Rannditsheni, Masoga & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2016:241), that on its own is an impact. Besides enduring trauma, family members have to finance the burial too. Another disturbing phenomenon is that in most cases the murderers, although known, are not arrested, or are released shortly after arrest due to lack of evidence (Rannditsheni, Masoga & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2016:242). This state of affairs explains the complexity of the mammoth task to apprehend ritual murder in South Africa.

⁶ Pamela Shumba, "Heartless...Zim man's heart ripped out in Botswana ritual murder." *The Chronicles* (5 Nov 2013). No pages. Online at: <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/heartless-zim-mans-heart-ripped-out-in-botswana-ritual-murder/> Accessed 23 August 2017.

⁷ Shumba, "Heartless ... Zim man's heart ripped out in Botswana ritual murder".

Others blame *muti* murders on Satanism. For example, Elizabeth Hamilton (2016)⁸ reports that human sacrifice, animal slaughter and child pornography are some of the terrifying claims made against Satanism (cf. Fontaine, 2011:12). Satanism is in fact a legal religion in South Africa and protected by the Constitution, like all other religions. Hamilton further states that some cults within Satanism have confirmed that they do practise ritual killing.

Swaziland

Cases of crime in Swaziland have recently included killing for ritual purposes. Three accused persons were recently charged with the ritual murder of a four-year-old girl (Langwenya, 2013:61). It is further stated that the court found that the prosecution had failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt, since the evidence of the accomplice witness on which the prosecution had relied had been discredited by the defence. The request was made following the killing of an 11-year-old albino girl who was shot dead in front of her friends and then beheaded in what police believe was a ritual murder⁹. According to Aislinn Laing, the murder is the latest in a series of albino killings in Sub-Saharan Africa, where sufferers of the rare skin pigmentation condition are concentrated.¹⁰

Tanzania

A spate of killings of people with albinism in Northwest Tanzania placed the country in the international limelight in 2007 (Schühle, 2013:27). It is believed that the bones of people with albinism were a necessary ingredient in wealth-generating magic potions and thus provoked the killings which had no precedents in Tanzania or the local Sukuma culture (Schühle, 2013:28). Hence, it is narrated that Tanzania announced a ban on witchdoctors who are believed to have been targeting the country's albino population in mistaken beliefs that their body parts can bring wealth, luck and power (Masanja, 2015:231; see also Tanner, 2010:229-236). Whether Tanzania is winning the war against ritual killing of people with albinism is yet to be known. However, it has been revealed that the Tanzanian government ordered the arrest of more than 200 witchdoctors in its effort to put an end to murder of people with albinism (Masanja, 2015:231).

Uganda

In the East and Southern Africa regions, the numbers of child mutilations and or child sacrifice seem to be on the increase (Bukuluki, 2014:2). The most recent study of child sacrifice in Uganda showed that a child is mutilated every week (Byansi, Kafuko, Wandega & Bukuluki, 2014:78). The phenomenon of child sacrifice came to the limelight in the late 1990s when the first reports of the practice appeared in the media (Byansi *et al.*, 2014:78). Child mutilation and sacrifice is not a myth but rather an emerging unfortunate reality in some communities in Uganda and other parts of Africa (Bukuluki, 2014:1). In Uganda, stories of child sacrifice have become common themes with almost all major newspapers (Bukuluki, 2014:1). Available reports suggest that in Uganda, albino body parts appear to

⁸ See Elizabeth Hamilton, "On the Hunt for Human Sacrifice: Satanism in South Africa." *The South African* (18 October 2016). No pages. Online at: <https://www.thesouthafrican.com>. Accessed 27 August 2017.

⁹ Aislinn Laing, "Albino Girl, 11, killed and beheaded in Swaziland for Witchcraft." *The Telegraph* (20 August 2010).

¹⁰ Laing, "Albino girl, 11, killed and beheaded in Swaziland for witchcraft".

be particularly highly prized, because they can be used to make potions and magic charms – luck charms – that enhance wealth (Cimpric, 2005:30). However, this barbaric ritual happens against the backdrop of the report that people with albinism in Uganda have also recently demanded a seat in parliament for a representative (Schühle, 2013:27).

Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean society is not spared either from the phenomenon of ritual killing which is devastating societies in other parts of Africa. For example, Farai Kavirimirwa¹¹ reports that villagers and pupils of Mhondoro-Mubaira are living in fear following a spate of suspected ritual killings that have taken place over the past few months. Kavirimirwa further explains that the attacks on pupils took place in Morowa village under Chief Nyamweda in December 2013.¹² Recently, 16-year-old Moreblessing Murove was fatally axed and her body parts were mutilated in another suspected case of ritual murder. Tendai Rupapa¹³ also writes about a 42-year-old Harare woman who is being interrogated on charges of ritual murder of a Grade 1 pupil in Norton. Rupapa reaffirms that Chaitwa and Garande reportedly kidnapped and killed Perfect Hunyani, whose body parts were missing when the body was recovered. Cases of ritual killing have also been heard as being practised among the Ngombe people of Zambia, who believe that a novice diviner must first kill a near relative before the basket will divine properly (Zuesse, 1975:168). Similar cases are also conveyed from other destinations such as Kenya, Namibia, Lesotho, Liberia and Mozambique (see Bukuluki, 2014:1; Mokotso, 2015:210),¹⁴ among others.

Conclusions

The essay has demonstrated the plausibility that human sacrifice was practised on a larger scale in the ancient biblical world. Parents would make a vow and offer their children to Yahweh. For example, Abraham had offered Isaac to God; Jephthah kept his vow by offering his daughter; the king of Moab offered his firstborn son as a sacrifice on the wall; others would burn their children as sacrifices to Baal; and God offered His own son as atonement for the sins of the human race. However, societies which practised human sacrifice did not consider it as a human rights violation because Yahweh (or other deities such as Baal) who created humankind commanded that such a sacrifice should be offered to Him. It was explored that many scholars attest to the assertion that offering ‘sons’ and ‘daughters’ to the gods was common during ancient biblical times.

The study explored that *muti* murder is practised by communities in African countries such as: Botswana, Liberia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It was chronicled that some body parts are harvested while the victim is still alive. These body parts include: the heart, breasts and sexual organs. It was asserted that usually the *muti* murder involves the witchdoctor, and in some cases the local traditional leaders. In some cases ritual killers targeted people living with albinism. It is believed that when human body parts are

¹¹ Farai Kavirimirwa, “Ritual Murders shock Mhondoro”. *The Herald* (03 March 2014).

¹² Kavirimirwa, “Ritual Murders shock Mhondoro”.

¹³ Tendai Rupapa, “Court denies Ritual in Murder Suspect Bail.” *The Herald* (28 April 2017).

¹⁴ Please note that we have deliberately avoided repeating continuously the same discussions on *ritual killing* which we have explored previously in this study with respect to other countries that practice these phenomena.

pounded together with other concoctions, the user becomes wealthier, while chiefs who rub human fats on their faces are feared and respected by people.

Recommendations

In an attempt to apprehend ritual murder among African societies, this project makes the following recommendations:

- The political leadership is positioned better to address the nation about *muti* murder, and perhaps consider the option of declaring the phenomenon a crisis in which every citizen is expected to participate. Stiffer jail sentences and or heavy fines like what the Tanzanian government employed as mechanisms, are positive developments.
- Whistle-blowers are invisible law-abiding citizens whose main function is to disseminate information which provides details towards the arrest of suspected ritual murderers. They should not be known and the law-enforcement institution should not mention them as their link persons.
- The traditional healing profession (including witchdoctors) should be regularised by an arm of government such as conventional medical practitioners so that in case of any mishaps, the police will interrogate them to identify one of their own as the perpetrator.
- Human rights activism against *muti* murder should be intensified. This should incorporate some members of society to participate in a solidarity campaign against the practice. The corporate citizenry may be requested to come on board by funding the campaign. The campaign can be carried out twice a year or more often, depending on the need.
- The law as enshrined in a nation's Constitution will forever remain on paper if members of society are not prepared to take action. Article 8 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights guarantees freedom of conscience, profession and free practice of religion. That is why the Church of Satan in South Africa is recognised by law. The Article further states that: "No one may, subject to law and order, be submitted to measures restricting the exercise of these freedoms". However, these freedoms should not be abused. Hence, the Charter supports the prohibition on ritual killing. Actually, Article 5 of the Charter stipulates that every individual is entitled to respect for his/her life; i.e., the integrity of his/her person.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, A 1993. African Pentecostalism and the Ancestors: Confrontation or Compromise? *Missionalia* 21 (1):26-39.
- Ashby, A 2015. Witchcraft, Justice and Human Rights in Africa; Cases from Malawi. *African Studies Review* 58 (1):5-38.
- Asuquo, OO 2011. A Rationalisation of an African Concept of Life, Death and Hereafter. *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences* 2 (1):171-175.
- Barth, K 1961. *Church Dogmatics* III. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Brown, R 2000. The "Son of God": Understanding Messianic Titles of Jesus. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17 (1):41-52.
- Bukuluki, P 2014. Child Sacrifice: Myth or Reality? *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 41:1-11.

- Burke, C 2000. They cut Segments into Parts: Ritual Murder, Youth, and Politics of Knowledge in Botswana. *Anthropology Quarterly* 73 (4):204-214.
- Buthlezi, JS 2011. *A Critical Analysis of the Doctrine of Salvation in Free Evangelical Assemblies in Swaziland: A Contextualized Theology*. MTh dissertation. South African Theological Seminary.
- Bvunabandi, S 2008. *The Communicative Power of Blood Sacrifices: A Predominantly South African Perspective with Special Reference to Epistle of Hebrews*. PhD thesis. University of Pretoria.
- Byansi, PK, Kafuko, A, Wandega, A, & Bukuluki, P 2014. Responses to Child Sacrifice in Uganda. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 41:78-91.
- Cavanaugh, WT 2004. Killing in the Name of God. *The Dominican Council* 510-526.
- Cimpric, A 2010. *Children accused of Witchcraft: An Anthropological Study of Contemporary Practices in Africa*. Dakar: Unicef WCARO.
- Day, J 1989. *Molech. A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dreyer, Y 2001. Son of God Traditions in the Synoptic Gospels: Ferdinand Hahn's Diachronic Perspective. *HTS* 57 (1&2):506-530.
- Etieyibo, E & Omiegbe, O 2016. Religion, Culture and Discrimination against People with Disabilities in Nigeria. *African Journal of Disability* 5 (1):1-6.
- Fitzgerald, T 2000. *The Ideology of the Religious Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fontaine, JL 2011. *Ritual Murder?* London: Open Anthropology Cooperative Press.
- Freitheim, TE 1995. God, Abraham, and the Abuse of Isaac. *Word & World* XV (I):49-57.
- Green, M 1998. Humans as Ritual Victims in the later Prehistory of Western Europe. *Oxford Journal Archaeology* 17 (2):169-189.
- Green, ARW 1975. *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*. Montana: Scholars Publishers.
- Hamilton, E 2016. "On the Hunt for Human Sacrifice: Satanism in South Africa." *The South African* 18 October. No pages. Online at: <https://www.thesouthafrican.com>. Accessed 27 August 2017.
- Harrelson, W 1976-77. Karl Barth on the Decalogue. *Studies in Religion* 6 (3):229-240.
- Hattingh, AJK & Meyer, EE 2016. 'Devoted to Destruction'. A Case of Human Sacrifice in Leviticus 27. *Journal for Semitics* 25 (2):630-657.
- Hoffmeier, JK 1997. Son of God: From Pharaoh to Israel's Kings to Jesus. *Bible Review* 13 (3):44-49.
- Holt, LE & McIntosh, R 1953. *Holt Paediatrics*. Twelfth edition. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Hooks, P 2004. *Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge.
- Human Sciences Research Council, 2010. Tsireledzani: Understanding the Dimensions of Human Trafficking in Southern Africa. *Research Report*. March 2010. HSRC, Republic of South Africa.
- Kavirimirwa, F 2014. "Ritual Murders Shock Mhondoro." *The Herald* 03 March.
- Khangala, PB 1990. *The Role played by Witchcraft and Ritual Murder Beliefs in Venda with special Reference to the Western, Eastern and Northern Areas, from 1979-1990*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Venda.

- Labuschagne, G 2004. Features and Investigative Implications of *Muti* in South Africa. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*. 1 (3):191-206.
- Laing, A 2010. "Albino Girl, 11, killed and beheaded in Swaziland for Witchcraft". *The Telegraph* 20 August.
- Langwenya, M 2013. *A Review by AfriMAP and the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: Open Society Foundation.
- Leistner, E 2014. Witchcraft and African Development. *Journal of African Security Review* 23 (1):53-77.
- Machigura, F & Museka, G 2016. "Blood as the Seat of Life": The Blood Paradox among Afro-Christians. *Perichoresis* 14 (1):41-62.
- Maganga, AT & Tembo, C 2015. Expounding selected Shona Novelists' Perspectives on Ritual Murder. *The Dyke* 9 (1):17-28.
- Manala, MJ 2004. Witchcraft and its Impact on Black African Christians: A Lacuna in the Ministry of the Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika. *HTS* 60 (4):1491-1511.
- Masanja, MM 2015. Albinos' Plight: Will Legal Methods be Powerful enough to eradicate Albinos' Scourge? *International Journal of Education & Research* 3 (5):231-244.
- Masoga MA 2005, South African Research in Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Challenges for Change. *Indilinga*, 4(1), 15-29.
- Mayhue, RL 1985. The Prophet's Watchword: Day of the Lord. *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (2):231-246.
- McMillen, SI 1984. *None of these Diseases*. Old Tappan, NJ: Revell.
- Meyer, EE 2015. South African Old Testament Crisis: Squeezed between an ancient Text and Contemporary Contexts. *HTS* 71 (3):1-7.
- Miladi, L 2013. Round and Angular Kyphosis in Paediatric Patients. *Orthopaedics & Traumatology: Surgery & Research* 99 (1):S140-S149.
- Mokotso, IR 2015. A sustainable Educational Response to the Recent Increased Witch Killing and Ritual Murder 'liretlo' in Lesotho: Introducing Basotho Traditional Religion in Lesotho Schools. *African Educational Research Journal* 3 (4):209-220.
- Monnig, HO 1967. *The Pedi*. Pretoria: JL van Schaik Publishers.
- Mswela, MM 2016. *A Selection of Legal Issues Relating to Persons Living with Albinism*. Doctoral Thesis. University of South Africa.
- Munthali, RC 2005. Trauma Ritual Murders in Venda: A Challenge to Pastoral Care. Masters Dissertation. University of Pretoria.
- O'Connor, D 1993. *Ancient Nubia. Egypt's Rival in Africa*. Philadelphia: University Museum of Archaeology.
- Olupona, JK 2004. 'Owner of the Day and Regulator of the Universe: Ifa Divination and healing among the Youroba of South-Western Nigeria', in M Winkelman & PM Peeks (eds.), *Divination and Healing: Potent Vision*, 103-117. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- Parrinder, EO 1956. African Ideas of Witchcraft. *Journal of Folklore* 67 (3):142-150.
- Phillips, ACT 1983. Respect for Life in the Old Testament. *King's Theological Review* 6:32-35.
- Puiča, IM 2011. The Lamb Sacrifice Expressed in Religious Art. *European Journal of Science and Technology* 7 (2):77-99.

- Punt, J. (2011). The Decalogue in the New Testament: Tradition, Ethos, and Identity. *Scriptura* 106:101-114.
- Rannditsheni, AE, Masoga, MA & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, AH 2016. Some Perspectives on the Impacts of Ritual Murders in the Vhembe District of South Africa: An Interpretative Phenomenological Approach. *Journal of Social Science* 48 (3):239-245.
- Rupapa, T 2017. "Court Denies Ritual in Murder Suspect Bail." *The Herald* 28 April.
- Sandy, DB 1991. John the Baptist's "Lamb of God" Affirmation in its Canonical and Apocalyptic Milieu. *JETS* 34 (4):447-460.
- Schühle, J 2013. *Medicine Murder Of Peoples with Albinism in Tanzania – How Casino Capitalism Creates Rumorscape and Occult Economies. CAS Working Paper Series No.2/2013*. Berlin: Center for Area Studies.
- Scurlock, J 2006. The Techniques of the Sacrifice of Animals in Ancient Israel and Ancient Mesopotamia: New Insights through Comparison, part 2. *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44 (4):241-264.
- Shumba, P 2013. "Heartless ... Zim Man's Heart ripped out in Botswana Ritual Murder." *The Chronicles* 05 Nov. No pages. Online at: <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/heartless-zim-mans-heart-ripped-out-in-botswana-ritual-murder/> Accessed 23 August 2017.
- Tanner, R 2010. Ideology and the Killing of Albinos in Tanzania: A Study in Cultural Relativities. *Anthropologist* 12 (4):229-236.
- Van Wyk, IWC 2004. African Witchcraft in Theological Perspective. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 60 (4):1201-1228.
- Vincent, L 2008. New Magic for New Times: *Muti* Murder in Democratic South Africa. *Tribes and Tribals* 2: 43-53.
- White, P 2015. The Concept of Diseases and Health Care in African Traditional Religion in Ghana. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71 (3):1-7.
- Zuesse, EM 1985. Divination and Deity in Africa Religions. *History of Religion* 15 (2):158-182.