

Appraisal of Capitalism as the Bane of Ritual Killings in Nigeria

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Abstract:

In recent times there has been an upsurge in ritual activities in Nigeria. Most of these rituals are related to the desire for sudden wealth. These activities have led to, or are alleged to have been responsible for, sudden deaths, removal of human body parts, sudden disappearance of many and the recent activities of Yahoo and Yahoo Plus. It has created a lot of tension and insecurity in the land. Those with much wealth without any visible means of living are easily suspected to be money ritualists. However, a new trend is what the research resonates as ‘cultural euthanasia’. This is a trend whereby young persons who must have experienced the pain, suffering and stress of poverty decide to engage in ritual activities with a pledge to be made rich between 10 and 15 years, and then they can die. In its methodology, it explored both the primary and secondary sources. In its theoretical framework, it adopted the functionalist theory as well as the ethical theory. The study therefore attributes the rush into this activity to the much value placed on the capitalist system as against the communal life of the Africans, and the reinvigoration of the African life is then seen as the solution to these challenges.

Keywords: rituals, wealth, contemporary, cultural euthanasia

Introduction

In the shadows of our society, a sinister trend has emerged, luring vulnerable individuals with promises of quick wealth and power. Ritual killings, often fueled by superstition and greed, have claimed countless lives, leaving families shattered and communities traumatised. Almost on daily basis, social and conventional media are replete with stories and videos of gruesome murders in the name of rituals for money. These killings are not just isolated crimes; they represent a

deeper rot within the societal fabric, where desperation, ignorance, and misinformation collide with terrifying consequences. The perpetrators are not always the stereotypical cultists portrayed in folklore; they can be neighbours, acquaintances, or even respected members of society who have fallen prey to the dangerous allure of quick success. Experts warn that the pursuit of easy riches, often glamorised in popular culture and social media, can be as deadly as it is illusory. Victims of ritual killings span across age, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds; some are kidnapped, while others are deceived under the guise of help, love, or employment (Frankfurter, 2015; Kleinfeld, 2016).

Greed and the quest to live a luxurious lifestyle not minding the sources of wealth has pushed this generation into unwarranted provocation of attempting to use every means whether legal or illegal to acquire wealth at all cost. Peer influence and unnecessary comparison, has led the youths into ritual killing to live affluent life over a short period of time. It has been observed that human quest for material things has long been driven by the desire for quick and sudden wealth (Anderson et al., 2015), but the recent uprising in the quest for fast gain through illegal routes has become very worrisome in recent times in Nigeria and the world beyond. Among these paths, the ritual fast-money practice known as ritual killing or yahoo and yahoo plus has gained particular notoriety in Nigeria.

Ritual killing including yahoo plus refers to ritualistic and occultism procedures believed to produce sudden wealth, often linked to blood rituals, human sacrifices, the use of vital human organs and other sinister spiritual acts (Bunker, 2016). Its spread has intensified moral and social decadence and deterioration, normalizing consumerism over core Nigerian traditional values of diligence, honesty, and communal living.

This scenario was painted in the bible in the first letter of St Paul to Timoty (1 Timothy 6:10) warning that, “For the love of money is the root of all evil. The verse underscores how an unchecked craving and unhealthy appetite for wealth can lead people down through the fastest destructive paths and cautions against the corrupting force of greed. It offers a critical lens for interrogating the harms ritual money has caused, framing the practice as a moral deviation with

social consequences. Understanding ritual killing for sudden wealth requires attention to its historical roots, cultural meanings, and religious implications. Historically, the Nigerian culture abhors any form of human killing, the nation from every traditional perspectives upholds that privileged hard work, integrity, and lawful means of wealth creation can lead one to legal prosperity and not sudden wealth without the legitimate source of that wealth. Contemporary pressures have disrupted this ethic. Peer influence, media exposure, and globalization have combined to increase reliance on illicit strategies.

One of the basic objectives of research is to solve a problem, basically problems that are persistent and challenging. In Nigeria today, like most countries in Africa and some countries of the world, the challenges and upsurge in insecurity fueled by various factors is rising to an alarming stage. These challenges have resulted to fear, destruction, under-developments, inflation and even the loss of human dignity. However, this paper is essentially focused in the Nigerian nation where a sudden but gradual insecurity has resulted in apprehensive lives by many Nigerians. Such insecurity could be traced to activities such as kidnapping, banditry, arm robbery, cattle rustling, organ harvesting and the activities of some forms of pseudo-religious practices.

More worrisome is the rise and activities of what is generally term ‘Yahoo’ or ‘Yahoo plus’. This is usually and mostly practiced by both young boys and girls, who indulged in most unwholesome practices in order to acquire wealth. It is no longer news that most of our young ones sent to tertiary institutions and even those who had not attain such are all co-opted into this practice. There is no single day gone by that the media will not report about the activities of these groups. Most of these young ones drive flashy cars, purchase massive lands, build houses and live luxurious lives without any meaningful source (s) of income (Okoh, Albert, Nganwuchu, Umeokoli & Okeke, 2025).

Studies have shown that the ritual killings are not merely criminal acts; they are also a mirror reflecting the malfunctioning of the society, such as economic decay, moral erosion, and cultural confusion (Kleinfeld, 2016; Lee, 2017). It is also observed that ritual killings are a symptom of deeper societal issues, including poverty, inequality, and lack of access to education

and job opportunities. Sunstein, (2015) opine that the crime of ritual killings rob the nation of its youth, tear families apart, and perpetuate a cycle of fear and mistrust that is difficult to break.

Sunstain, (2025) further posited that a holistic approach is necessary, combining law enforcement with education, economic reform, mental health support, and cultural dialogue.

Ayonrinde, Stefatos, Miller, Richer, Nadkarni, She, Alghofaily and Mngoma, (2021) found that the sudden disappearance of human beings, mostly ladies, the decapitated bodies of young girls and the sudden destitute lives of many young ones are all evident in social and printed media. According to Chukwu, (2015) there are ongoing serious security raids across the nation to apprehend such culprits. Even more worrisome is the act of some of these young ones, who must have experienced the pains, sufferings and stress of poverty, taking steps to engage in various ritual activities in order to break the bondage of poverty from their families.

Bensman and Gerver, (2019) found that such people pledged to be made rich between 10-15 years and there are willing to die as long as they live flamboyant lives within this period and help members of the family live above poverty lines. This is what this paper refers to as '*Cultural Euthanasia*'. the bane of these get-rich-quick syndrome is traced to capitalism. The paper adopts both primary and secondary sources in its methodology. The paper will focus on two main theoretical frameworks; the functionalist and ethical theories.

Conceptual clarifications

Rituals: the Holman Bible dictionary describes rituals, sacrifices and offerings as the physical elements that worshippers bring to the deity to express devotion, thanksgiving or the need for forgiveness. It is in line with this that Ekeopara, (2011, 116) sees oath taking as a form of ritual treaty specially designed to ensure transparency in dealing with one's neighbour...

Wealth: the google dictionary refers to wealth as an abundance of valuable possessions or money or a plenty supply of a particular desirable thing. The Holman Bible Dictionary sees wealth as a physical resource God gives humans to control and the human tendency to lift those resources to replace God as the center of life (1991,1400).

Cultural Euthanasia: According to Davies, (2024) Cultural euthanasia refers to the deliberate or gradual destructions, suppression or disappearance of a people's cultural identity, including language, customs, values and traditions. The term is metaphorical, comparing culture to a living organism that can be purposefully "put to death".

Capitalism: the Webster New Collegiate Dictionary sees capitalism as an economic system characterized by private or cooperative ownership of capital goods by investment that are determined by decisions rather than by state control and by price, production and the distributions of goods that are determined mainly by competition and free market.

Principles of capitalism

Capitalism is an economic system built around private ownership and market-based exchange. There are various types of capitalism but these shared principles are virtually the same. These key principles include:

- a. Private property: in this respect, things are owned by individual and control by individuals. It could be cars, farms, houses, equipment, etc.
- b. Free market/voluntary exchange: the economic decisions are usually based on the transactions between the buyers and suppliers. Factors such as the period, demand and supply and of course the economic power at that time.
- c. Competition: competition often determines the prices of goods. It also encourages efficiency fair prices as well as innovations.
- d. Profit motive: for any business establishment, the main goal and purpose is profit. This only main goal is what drives business men and women to take risk in investment.
- e. Limited government intervention: Government plays minimal roles in the people's business, especially when it comes to pricing. The businesses are allowed to operate freely except when it comes to enforce laws, maintain order or protect property rights.
- f. Consumer sovereignty: since the consumer goes for what they want and need, it is their preference that determines the goods to be produced, because it is what they need that manifest in what is sold in good numbers out there.

- g. Capital accumulation: capitalism encourages individuals and corporate organization to invest in order to increase its wealth development. This investment could be material or immaterial.
- h. Wage labour: in this respect every aspect of service is treated as a commodity with expectation of wages. It means there is no room for command services without any expectations for reward.
- i. Voluntary exchange: transactions of goods and commodities are done very freely and willingly between the merchants and the buyers. Everyone leaves with a confidence of benefitting.
- j. Innovation and entrepreneurship: capitalism, having profits as its focus also strives for new ideas and often times take high risks with hope of great profits.

The Concept of Cultural Euthanasia

Davies, (2024) further observed that Cultural Euthanasia refers to many and some basic alterations in the lives of a given people. It could be in the values, traditions, morals, materials and immaterial things or even in some basic aspects of their lives. An online source examines critically what cultural euthanasia is all about. The following therefore are considered the implications of cultural euthanasia as well as its causes and effects. As we look critically at its effects, clear examples can be seen in the native Americans today and more so amongst the Africans, where there is a rapid decline of the indigenous religious beliefs and practices, which is today replaced with colonial and western values, languages, religious practices and social systems. This is what Onah, (2023,17,18) pointed out:

Subsequently, a plot was hatched, which is to replace her old and ancient education system, her culture and make the Africans think and believe that anything that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, including their religion, Appreciation of foreign goods, life styles, instead of the locally made goods and culturally acceptable values.

Let's carefully examine the aforementioned facts about cultural euthanasia.

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1. Loss of language: Indigenous languages disappear due to discouragement, legal restrictions or preferences for dominant languages.
2. Suppression of tradition: traditional practices, beliefs, arts and rituals are replaced, discouraged or outlawed.
3. Assimilation policies: government or dominant groups may enforce assimilation progress that push minority groups to abandon this identity.
4. Displacement: migration or forced removal from ancestral lands disrupts cultural continuity.
5. Education system: schools may promote dominant cultural values at the expense of indigenous knowledge.

Causes

1. Colonialism
2. Globalization and modernization
3. Forced assimilation
4. Political oppression
5. Religious conventional movements.

Effects

1. Loss of intangible heritage (stories, music, rituals)
2. Identity crises among communities
3. Breakdown of social structures
4. Historical amnesia

Ritual Killings in Nigeria

Ezenwa, (2017) however observed that over the years, the spate of ritual killings in Nigeria has been reported in a very alarming rate. These ritual killings manifest itself in various ways such as organ harvesting, yahoo and yahoo plus, kidnapping and various other unlawful means of accumulating wealth or material possessions. This is different from witchcraft, as pointed out by Edet (2016, 41), while witches are usually employed for productive and positive purposes.

There is hardly any day or week that passes by today in Nigeria without one issue of ritual killings or the other. In a conference organized by the Most Rev. Dr. Owen, Nwokolo, Bishop of the Diocese of the Niger as reported by Tribune online newspaper of October, 26th 2025, it was

reported that the conference was essentially organized by a foundation under the bishop called ‘Golden Health Confluence’ and it was aimed at addressing the “greed material possessions” in the 21st century Nigerian society. Peter Obi, the one-time Governor of Anambra State and the Presidential Candidate of 2023 Nigeria elections was quoted to have pointed out thus,

Money is just a fragment of true wealth, which is defined as resting on integrity, character ad purpose. Reckless pursuit of money destroys both character and community. A nation that rewards dishonesty losses integrity.

Daily post online newspaper, October, 26, 2025 reported a case of the arrest of a purported twenty-year old herbalist, Amaechi Okwokenye and his elder step brother over the alleged adoption and murder of a suspected internet fraudster, Friday Liberty, aged 22 in his shrine at Owa-Aladima in Ika North East Local Government of Delta State. In Kwara State, a 25-year-old man named Alfa AbdulRahman Bello was reported to have confessed to killing a 24-year-old final year student (Hafsoh Lawal) whom he met on Facebook with the motive to do “osholelajoo owo (money ritual)”, as reported in Guardian Newspaper.

Fisher, (2022) reported that in 2022 in Ogun State, a case of four young men (three teenagers and one 20 year old, were arrested after they confessed beheading 20 year old woman as part of money ritual (Premium Times). In Enugu, there is the report of Okute money ritual killings (Nsukka Amaeze, reported November, 2024) incident said to have occurred September, 2024. A young man was reported to poisoning and killing his mother, grandmother, sister and nephew after being introduced into an Okute money ritual, (Sahara reporters). The same is true of Ebonyi state where dozens of suspects were paraded in October, 2024 including individuals linked to alleged Organ harvesting and ritual killing (Punch newspaper). This is just a few of the many instances that cut through the length and breadth of Nigeria.

The case(s) of under-aged boys and girls, tertiary school students and even secondary school students living in affluence, buying and driving expensive cars and even building mansions toady in our villages, communities and towns are all evident before us. In a recent oral interview

(12-10-2025) and interactions with the following persons (Boniface Ihieje, Skiddo Ogar, Odey Eba, Fedelis Iyaji, Matthew John, Alice Joseph Iyaji and Matthew Wogor) in Okpoma, Yahe and Okuku. It was observed and agreed that most of these young ones have left trails of pains and sorrows in their families after such sudden wealth. Situations such as sudden death of family members, disappearance of close associates, fire or some sudden and mysterious disasters etc occur in various communities as a result of the sacrifices that are to be made to the deity with whom they are initiated into and from where they got their sudden wealth from.

Okpalike and Ugah, (2021) found that one may therefore wonder what maybe the reasons for this craze for sudden wealth; this research posits the answer on capitalism- the survival of the fittest, where money or any other material wealth is exalted above integrity, sincerity, hard work and any other such virtues that are noble. This is so because; society today tends to reward corruptions more than hard work. When a society pardons its criminals faster than it rewards its heroes, it teaches the next generation that corruption is not a crime but a career. This is the bane of the Nigerian nation. This situation has resulted to a situation that this research work has termed “cultural euthanasia” and this term in this research is used technically to describe an act of one’s decision to get into ritual practices, with the idea of getting rich quick, live a flamboyant lifestyle and knowingly agreeing to die young but as a rich boy/man.

In an interview with a young man (12-9-2025), let us call him Joseph Ibu (not his real name), he queried why a man should be born into a poor family and then live and die a poor man? To him, such is not a man. Joseph asserts that he was born into a very poor family, grew up under poverty but have decided to break the story of poverty in his family and so he decided to go into the rites of “cultural euthanasia” at the age of 26 years and to live as a wealthy man, and die 21 years after. When asked what will be his joy in dying so young, he retorted, “the joy of my family who will no longer endure or experience poverty will be his joy”. When questioned about eternity, he retorted like an agnostic, “who knows whether God exists or not”(Nkongolo, 2016; Diaconescu, 2017).

The story with Joseph above is a very common story in many communities in Nigeria. As earlier mentioned, the principles of capitalism encouraged private properties, profit motives, capital accumulation amongst others. This therefore results in the struggle to accumulate wealth. This trend therefore posits the wealthy to be outstanding and respected in the society. Unfortunately, our institutions today tend to reward these seeming wealth and integrity. Chieftaincy titles, honour, best positions and recognition are often the lots of the rich, not minding the source(s) of their wealth. This could be in the community, religious place of worship or recognition of such people by celebrities. The political class is not to be exempted from this craze for wealth, which have driven many young ones into “cultural euthanasia” either as individuals or using their fellow beings as such (Philpott, 2016).

The way forward

The research in all its analysis have placed the recent development, especially on the quest for material wealth as the Holman Bible Dictionary defined it, as the physical resource God gives to human to control and the human tendency to lift these resources to replace God as the Centre of life. There are certain things that must be rekindled in the Nigerian society that will bring about the restoration of human and economic development that leverage on our collective humanity.

The first thing this paper considered is the restoration of the ethical values of the sanctity of human lives as against the present value placed on material wealth and as against human life. Just as Ugwu (2004, 57), death is feared everywhere, the perennial problems which it presents, not only to individuals but also to societies makes it all the more mysterious. Africans therefore, do not joke with matters of death, nor treating such with levity. Everything and anything must be done to avert death and defend one from dying. No wonder Onah, (2023) has posited thus,

It is the lack of this basic ethical life of the African continent and its people that has led to all manners of ills, such as corruption, ritual killings, yahoo yahoo, prostitution... indecent dressing, kidnapping and all manners of ills today are traced to capitalism- the survival of the fittest.

The sanctity of life amongst the Africans is so highly priced such that communities often protect themselves and their kinsmen by going into treaties, oath taking and even marriage with a pledge never to shed the blood of one another. Sometimes, such treaties could expand as far as a whole clan. The preservation and enforcement of this treatise is anchored on the fact that the ancestors are believed to be directly involved in such agreement and will act swiftly against anyone or group who violates the terms of this treatise. That is the point encapsulated by Owete and , Iheanacho (2009,124) when they affirmed that;

The ancestors keep close watch on the living as police- custodians of law and order. They punish or reward people according to the level of their conformity with the laws of the land. The living fear the departed, yet have high affection for them as well as call upon them during disasters, celebrations and gathering for one purpose or the other

The second important consideration as the way forward is the re-entrenchment of the communal life of the African people. This communal life of the African people was the miracle, the unbelievable and magnificent glory that dazed the colonial masters in their exploratory venture in 1835 as pointed out by Onah, (Year please), quoting Lord Macauley's report to the British parliament on the 2nd of February, 1835. (2023, 9)

I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief, such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values coming from people of such caliber, that I do not think we should see in this country, unless we break their backbone of this nation, which is spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore I propose we replaced her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Africans think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them to be, a truly dominated nation (Lord Lugard address to the British Parliament, 2nd February, 1835)

A careful perusing of the above quotations will indeed identify who the Africans were, what turned the table and why Africans are where they are. The religious life of the people, their educational ways of life, encouraged the communal ways of life just like the Kibbutz system amongst the Jewish people, as against “the win and take it all” or survival of the fittest concept of capitalism. The communal live advocates and strongly believes that if it is good for one, it is good for all”. That is the point raised by Richardson as cited in Kunhiyop (2008, 20) when he affirmed that;

The community is the central concept in African ethics, , the central experience of African morality. The idea, ‘we’ and ‘us’ is entrenched in African right from childhood, so that as they grow, they know that they belong to and must function within the community in which they are rooted... individualism is abhorred in traditional African society.

It is this spirit of communal life that established and increased the early church, as the Bible affirmed; “they were all together sharing things in common and the Lord added to the church those who were being saved” (acts 2:44). Capitalism is against the spirit of religion. It is these communal lives of the Africans that led many communities to pick the brightest and communally trained such child abroad often by harvesting the community palms and thus using the proceeds to train such a child, with the believe that once it is good for one, it is good for all. It is this same communal spirit that encouraged communal farming, where members of a given community take turns in cultivating the farms of their members; it is this same communal spirit that causes members to look out for one another’s welfare and well-being. No wonder then, that on the 2nd of February, 1835, there were no thieves, no beggars”.(Shreeve, 2015).

It is the research outcome that it is this spirit of a winner takes it all, which has plunged the Nigerian society into a very serious crisis in its economic development, leveraging on our collective humanity.

The third point that must be reinforced is parental control. It is unfortunate that the Africans are fast fulfilling the predictions of Lord Macaulay. In the traditional African society, parents are encouraged to train their children in proper manners, know of their whereabouts and the source(s)

of income. Parents and the entire kindred must guide against any source(s) of wealth that is questionable and that may bring the family into disrespect. The children on the other hand are proud of the family lineage and will guide against anything that will dent their image. (Oliver Onah oral interview – 10-09-2025).

Flynn, (2018) also averred that another very important way forward is to review the ways awards and recognitions are given through reviving the traditional institutions. One critical aspect of most African society is the high regards and respect accorded traditional rulers as representatives of the Ancestors. Leveraging on these critical roles, Africans are very careful in the selection of who becomes a king. For example, among the Yala people of Cross River State, a thief or one with ignoble character, a descendant of a slave or a greedy person or glutton, even if such is from the lineage of the throne can and will never be allowed to ascend such throne, (Dennis Ogar oral interview. 8-10-2025). Such sanctity repose on the king the moral and upright spirit of leadership and therefore can sanction any wrong doing in his domain. A situation whereby capitalism is the order of the day, where position of leadership can be bought or influenced by how much bank rolling that has been made, it sets up the entire society on the path of downward economic development and negatively affects the collective humanity of the nation.

Last but not the least, is to re-integrate the traditional education into the western education system with a very strong emphasis on the ethical values of the African people, nay the Nigerian nation, which is that wealth without integrity and sanctity of life is an abomination. Just as this paper runs into conclusion, a disturbing report came on the news media about two disturbing scenarios. The first was the report of students, who beat their teacher to death in Oyo state for daring to stop them from gambling in the classroom during school hours (McKay & Whitehouse, 2015; Daily Post, November, 10, 2025).

The second disturbing scenario is that of a 12-year-old boy that was kidnapped and killed by his 18-year-old cousin identified as Tega Emajuwa at Obagie community, Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. This incidence was on the 16th of September, 2025. It was reported that vital organs of late Emiliano were reportedly harvested (Leadership Newspaper 10-11-2025).

What is the import of this scenario? It rests squarely on the spirit of capitalism- the survival of the fittest. It has destroyed the bond of students/ teachers' relationship, it has even disrobed the sanctity of a family relationship, to such an extent that a cousin can and will be willing to kill his very own.

Conclusion:

From the research so far, it is evidently clear that there is an urgent need in Nigeria, most especially to re-appraise its religion, humanity in the face of economic development and our collective humanity. This, to this research must be reintegrated in such a way and manner that capitalism with all its antecedent evils will not be allowed to destroy humanity and economic development of the nation. The principles of capitalism in various ways, encourage and sustains this negativity. It is therefore the position of the research that the Nigerian nation must revert to its cultural norms if it must realize its potential and the way forward is to leverage and emphasize the values and sanctity of life, the need to revert to the communal lives of the African people which is religious (Christianity and Islam) and which is still being upheld to day in Israel under Judaism. The way awards and recognitions are given must also be revisited and last but not the least, the need to re-integrate the traditional education into western education system with a very strong integrity and sanctity of life is a critical foundation of life.

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Personal Communication

S/n	Names	Date	Place of Interview	Age	Status
1.	Oliver Onah	10-9-2025	Calabar, Cross River	53	Youth Leader
2.	Denis Ogar	8-10-2025	Lecturer, University of Calabar	65	Medical Doctor
3	Boniface Ihieje	12-10-2025	Olachor-Okpoma	56	Chief
4.	Ogar Skiddo	12-10-2025	Olachor-Okpoma	55	Youth Leader
5.	Odey Eba	12-10-2025	Okuku-Yala	30	Student
6.	Alice Joseph Iyaji	12-10-2025	Ugaga- Yala	25	Student
7.	Matthew Wogor	12-10-2025	Jos, Plateau State	48	Clergy
8.	Vincent Bayo	6-10-2025	Uyo, Akwa Ibom State	50	Lecturer
9.	Yahaya Yusuf	9-9-2025	Abuja (Online interview)	48	Bussiness Men
10.	Idajor Ode	11-08-2025	Otukpo (Online Interview)	31	Farmer