



Nigeria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 12 September 2014

Information regarding the practices of Juju in Nigeria. Is there evidence that children with disabilities are sacrificed because of their condition. Is hanging a feature? Any information regarding cutting the victim's face or body to give tribal marks in preparation for the sacrifice.

In a 2004 article published on the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry website, (paragraph headed “Superstition), Nigerian human rights advocate and humanist Leo Igwe states:

“Nigeria is a society where most beliefs are still informed by unreason, dogmas, myth making, and magical thinking. In Nigeria, belief in ghosts, juju, charms, and witchcraft is prevalent and widespread. Nigerians believe that magical potions prepared with human heads, breasts, tongues, eyes, and sexual organs can enhance one’s political and financial fortunes; that juju, charms and amulets can protect individuals against business failures, sickness and diseases, accidents, and spiritual attacks. In fact, ritual-making is perceived as an act of spiritual fortification.” (The Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (June 2004) *Ritual Killing and Pseudoscience in Nigeria*)

An Immigration and Refugee board of Canada response to a request for information on the prevalence of ritual murder in Nigeria states:

“According to various sources, ritual killings in Nigeria are performed to obtain human body parts for use in rituals, potions, and charms. The Lagos-based newspaper *This Day* explains that ‘ritualists, also known as headhunters, ... go in search of human parts at the request of herbalists, who require them for sacrifices or for the preparation of various magical potions’. Similarly, the Abuja-based *Daily Trust* indicates that human body parts are brought to herbalists who perform the rituals. Such rituals are reportedly motivated by the belief that they can bring power and wealth to an individual. Sources also indicate that charms are believed to make a person invincible and protect them from business failure, illness, accidents, and ‘spiritual attacks’. According to Lagos-based newspaper *the Punch*, ‘many’ Nigerians ‘have been made to believe’ in the effectiveness of such rituals. The *Daily Trust* indicates that ‘many experts’ attribute the prevalence of ritual murder to the ‘continuing belief among many Nigerians, ... even educated ones, in the supernatural’. Similarly, an article published by *Sahara Reporters*, a Nigerian ‘online community of international reporters and social advocates’, states that the belief in the power of ritual murder ‘is very strong among the local population [of southern Nigeria] including people of different faiths and educational backgrounds’ and not only among ‘traditional fetish illiterates’.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (20 November 2012) *NGA104218.E – Nigeria: Prevalence of ritual murder and human sacrifice; police and state response (2009-2012)*)

A fact-finding mission report published by the Landinfo Country of Origin Information Centre of Norway, in a section titled “The “Juju” Issue” (section 4.4), comments on the exploitation of juju beliefs by human traffickers as follows:

“The traffickers’ use of juju religious rites and rituals to ensure that female trafficking victims feel obliged to pay off their debts to avoid possible supernatural consequences is often mentioned as a particularly Nigerian aspect of trafficking. Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) explained that NAPTIP has raided one of the shrines in Edo to stop this, and that witness protection has been given to some ‘juju-doctor’ who have cooperated with NAPTIP and exposed traffickers.” (Landinfo Country of Origin Information Centre (May 2006) *Trafficking in Women – Fact-finding trip to Nigeria (Abuja, Lagos and Benin City) 12-26 March 2006*, p.15)

See also article from UK newspaper “The Independent” which states:

“Rita says she has no choice but to carry on working. Before she left Nigeria, she swore an oath of loyalty to her traffickers in a traditional religious ritual, a practice I was investigating for Channel 4’s Unreported World programme. She promised to pay back the cost of her transportation to Europe and offered up her soul as collateral for the debt. When she arrived in Italy, she was told she owed her traffickers €50,000 (£44,000), as well as extortionate living costs, including €300 a month in ‘rent’ for the right to solicit from her particular patch. ‘I can’t escape this unless I pay,’ she says. ‘Africans have very strong charms that can destroy someone in the twinkle of an eye.’ Nigeria’s human traffickers are using black magic to trap thousands of women like Rita into a life of sex slavery in Europe. Eastern European gangs use violence to coerce the women they transport, but the ‘madams’ at the top of the Nigerian trafficking chain don’t need muscle – they have juju on their side. It is a form of ritualised extortion that allows Nigerian women to be both perpetrators and victims of the exploitation.” (The Independent (7 April 2011) *The curse of ‘juju’ that drives sex slaves to Europe*)

This article also states:

“Juju has been practised in West Africa for centuries, and it would be hard to find anyone in Edo who is prepared to say they don’t fear it. Believers say invisible spirits govern the earth and control every aspect of human existence, and nothing can be hidden from their scrutiny. The spirits can be called on to protect people, but they can also destroy them.” (ibid)

A BBC news report, in a paragraph headed “Juju rituals” states:

“Juju, sometimes known as voodoo or magic, is a significant part of West African culture which is particularly prevalent in the Edo state of Nigeria, alongside other religions such as Christianity. Dr Hermione Harris from the School of Oriental and African Studies explained Juju involved the manipulation of spiritual powers and was feared because of the harm this could bring. ‘If someone’s ill, they die or there’s some misfortune in the family, it is thought someone is working against them, they’re using the power of Juju to put a curse on them,’ she said. Associated with Juju are rituals which could be the invention of an individual practitioner who can make a lot of money when people go to them with their problems. Girl A endured a ritual in which

she was stripped and cut with a razorblade so her blood could be collected. Her body hair was shaved off and she was forced to lie naked in a closed coffin for hours. She then had to eat a raw chicken heart. Girl B was taken to a river where she was told to eat white clay, had a rock passed from a priest's mouth to hers, was given black soap to wash with and a raw chicken's egg to eat. Dr Harris, who appeared as an expert witness at the trial, said: 'The rituals they underwent, which were particularly terrifying, were to instill a maximum amount of terror and imprint on these two very vulnerable young women that they mustn't step out of line or give any information about their experiences.'" (BBC News (7 July 2011) *Trafficked girls controlled by Juju magic rituals*)

An article from the Mail Online states:

"Dozens of women are being smuggled into Britain as sex slaves every year under the threat of black magic curses, it was revealed last night. Police are increasingly concerned at the threat of international trafficking rings who target vulnerable and poor African women. They believe that 'close to all' the 160 Nigerian victims rescued last year had been subjected to sinister rituals aimed at terrifying them into submission. Many were taken to witchdoctors who cut them, rubbed black powder in their wounds and threatened them with death if they ran away from their captors. In some cases young women were forced to sleep in coffins, drink chicken hearts soaked in alcohol or 'sacrifice' intimate items." (Mail Online (7 July 2014) *Women are being smuggled into Britain as sex slaves by trafficking rings under the threat of black magic curses*)

A GlobalPost article states:

"In fleeing her madam, Benjamin is the exception. Magic spells have great power over Nigerians — compelling them to do things they would never otherwise consider. According to Nigerian authorities, across Europe tens of thousands of Nigerian women are bonded to sexual servitude — not with chains, but via juju, an ancient form of West African magic. The women typically travel to Europe willingly, after being promised lucrative jobs. But as a precondition to their sponsor, each woman swears an oath administered by a traditional priest, vowing to repay a large sum for their passage, or face death." (GlobalPost (12 February 2013) *Nigerian shamans and traffickers use juju magic to force women into prostitution; Traditional magic, not force, compels thousands of women to work as prostitutes in the West*)

A Sunday Times article states:

"When Ama was offered a chance to work as a domestic cleaner in Britain she saw it as a route to a better life. She would have to borrow £50,000 to pay the 'agents' but would earn £300 a week, enabling her to pay £150 towards her debt and still be able to send money home. 'I was happy,' she said. But Ama's happiness was short-lived as she was dragged into a nightmare world of witchcraft, mutilation and, when she finally made it to Britain, forced prostitution. "First she had to swear an oath to pay back the cost of her passage to England. Then she was taken into the bush by a juju priest, or witchdoctor, for a grisly ritual practised widely in west Africa. The priest stripped her, bathed her in goat's blood, cut her head and chest with razor blades, and pushed black soot into the open wounds. He took snippets

of her hair, finger nails and 'private' hair which he placed in small jars. The ritual was used to take control of Ama's mind, soul and sexuality. Afterwards, she was forced to swallow a bitter liquid mixed with blood. By drinking it, she had signed a covenant of silence and was warned that if she told anyone what was happening to her, a thunderbolt would strike her dead. Like many in Nigeria, Ama was terrified of the power of juju." (Sunday Times (8 September 2013) *Juju traps terrified girls into sex slavery*)

A Daily Star article refers to a much-publicised case of alleged human sacrifice as follows:

"The baffling Torso in the Thames case was launched after a macabre discovery in September 2001. A man walking across London's Tower Bridge had spotted an orange object floating slowly downriver. He alerted police and the Met sent its marine search squad to investigate. They found the torso of a black child, with a pair of orange shorts covering the stumps of his legs. Headlines flashed around the world and in the absence of firm clues or a positive identification, police named the boy Adam. But detectives were determined to get to the truth. Forensics experts studied the victim's bones and found he was aged between four and seven and had come from the Yoruba plateau in Nigeria. Detectives flew to West Africa to visit schools and look into any missing children cases but the trail ran cold. Postmortem tests on pollen in Adam's lungs suggested he had been in the UK only a matter of days. A potion made from ingredients used in African ritual magic was also discovered in his stomach. All the clues pointed to a bizarre human sacrifice." (Daily Star (16 March 2014) *Headless boy was dumped in Thames after voodoo sacrifice; Murder Mystery: Shocking Find Sparked £1m Manhunt Torso In The Thames*)

An article from UK newspaper The Times states:

"Decomposing bodies, skeletons and emaciated kidnap victims in chains have been discovered in an abandoned factory complex in Nigeria. Six people have been arrested in connection with the dungeon which was discovered in Nigeria's third city Ibadan, and has been dubbed a 'House of Horrors' by locals. Police believe the site was being used as human harvesting factory to meet demand from local witch doctors for scarifices, or to supply body parts used in black magic rituals." (The Times (25 March 2014) *Human body parts factory is discovered in Nigeria*)

This article also states:

"Black magic ritual sacrifices happen frequently in Nigeria, and bodies are often found by roadsides, missing eyes, genitals, or organs." (ibid)

A Mail Online article states:

"Some victims of kidnapping in Nigeria are often tortured or sacrificed in black magic rituals. Local media have also reported cases of human body parts being sold across the country, especially in the southern region, for ritual purposes. In urban centres, including the nation's economic capital Lagos, corpses are often found by the roadside with some of their vital parts missing, especially eyes and genitals." (Mail Online (24 March 2014) *Bound in chains*)

next to corpses, Nigerian kidnap victims found in House of Hell where they were due to be sacrificed in black magic rituals by human organ traffickers)

The 2013 US Department of State country report for Nigeria, in a section titled “Persons with Disabilities”, states:

“Persons with disabilities faced social stigma, exploitation, and discrimination, and relatives often regarded them as a source of shame. Many families viewed children with disabilities who could not contribute to family income as liabilities and sometimes severely abused or neglected them.” (US Department of State (27 February 2014) *2013 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Nigeria*, p.42)

A document published by the UK-based charity Stepping Stones Nigeria, in a section titled “Children with disabilities” (section 5.1)

“The Committee has previously identified the prevalence of discrimination against children with disabilities, both within the family and within society in general in Nigeria. This discrimination is exacerbated if children with disabilities are also stigmatised as witches. Unfortunately, children with disabilities are particularly likely to face this type of stigmatisation. Certain medical conditions, because they are not properly understood, are often considered to be evidence of witchcraft. For example, there is a high prevalence of autism in Nigeria, yet this condition is not widely acknowledged. In consequence, the particular behaviour of autistic children is often interpreted as witchcraft. There is a fundamental need for education about conditions such as epilepsy, bedwetting and autism, and regarding physical disabilities, as well as programmes of support for parents of these children in order to overcome the links between disability and witchcraft stigmatisation.” (Stepping Stones Nigeria (December 2009) *Witchcraft Stigmatisation and Children’s Rights in Nigeria*, pp.34-35)

An recent article from the Nigerian newspaper Punch states:

“Three children, who are siblings, have escaped being lynched by some youths who accused them of witchcraft. The victims— Masters Shedrack Esin, 14; Israel Esin, 10; and Miss Miracle Esin, seven — became objects of attack after their father, Mr. Etim Esin, was killed by some unidentified persons on Monday morning in Unyenge, Mbo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. Etim had also been accused of witchcraft by the residents, who insisted that he wanted to use the witchcraft to kill a resident of the area.” (Punch (12 September 2014) *Residents accuse children of witchcraft*)

An article from the Nigerian newspaper Leadership quotes the secretary general of NAPTIP as follows:

“The secretary general of NAPTIP, an organization that has been in the forefront on the fight against child trafficking, prostitution and other related issues, Simon Chuzi Egede on his part said, ‘witchcraft is a real system belief that is rooted in popular mentality of our people with its origin in African traditional religion and its varied attributes or ancestral worship, rituals, beliefs in mermaid, magic a spirit reincarnation and voodoo. When a child is accused of witchcraft, their fate is sealed. The child is subjected to all manner of abuse ranging from stigmatization, discrimination, ostracism; sever beating, cutting

and starving. Others are burns, poisoned, rape, abandonment, brutality, tattoos, murder or being buried alive.” (Leadership (10 December 2011) *Nigeria: 'How I Became a Witch'*)

A press release from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in a paragraph headed Protection of Vulnerable Groups, quotes High Commissioner Navi Pillay as saying:

“On a less positive note, women and children are bearing the brunt of a number of harmful traditional practices in Nigeria. In the case of children, these include forced early marriages, and – in at least two states – hundreds of children have been tortured, lynched, burned, mutilated, beaten, ostracized, abandoned, raped and even murdered after being accused of witchcraft. According to UNICEF the children who are at particularly high risk of accusations of witchcraft and demonic possession are those who have lost one or both parents, suffer from physical or mental disabilities, or show unusual talent.” (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (14 March 2014) *Remarks By The High Commissioner For Human Rights At A Press Conference During Her Mission To Nigeria*)

A Cable News Network (CNN) report states:

“A crowd gathered around two brothers and their sister. Tears streamed down their mother's face as she cast out her children from the family, accusing them of causing the premature deaths of two of their siblings with black magic. ‘I am afraid. They are witches and they can kill me as well,’ she sobbed. Taking his time to talk to the mother, Sam Ikpe-Itauma, an imposing man wearing a ‘Child's Rights & Rehabilitation Network’ t-shirt, has come to try to rescue the three children. ‘If we are not here there's a possibility of them being thrown into the river, buried alive or stabbed to death,’ Sam said.” (Cable News Network (CNN) (28 August 2010) *Children abused, killed as witches in Nigeria*)

A Punch article states:

“However, a majority of persons with disabilities in Nigeria almost always have a raw deal in terms of acceptance, access and respect for their rights. Our society has yet to come to terms with the fact that there is ability in disability. In Nigeria, many families discriminate against members who are physically or mentally challenged. They are hardly shown any love and care. Instead, they are cursed, insulted and tormented for bringing ‘bad luck’ to the family.” (Punch (12 December 2012) *Plight of persons with disabilities in Nigeria*)

A Leadership article states:

“People living with Disabilities in the country are often treated as second class citizens. In Nigeria, they are discriminated against in work places, schools and even in religious places. They lack good access to quality education, work, shelter and sometimes relationships. An estimated 22million people are said to be disabled in Nigeria. Some are born that way, and with the rising cases of terrorism and insurgency in the country, it has led to an increase of people with disabilities. Like in the case of the Nyanya bombing which took place in Abuja in April, most of the survivors lost their arms and limbs putting

them in the disabled bracket. Also, road accidents, wrong medical diagnosis and sometimes failures to immunize children against diseases like Polio can lead to disability in children. It is pertinent to note that a nation with 22 million disabled people, the country had no legislation protecting the rights of the disabled in the country. People with disabilities are often treated like beggars in Nigeria as they go through untold hardship everyday as they are hardly accepted and integrated into the society.” (Leadership (5 May 2014) *Senate’s Lifeline For People Living With Disabilities*)

References to tribal marks being preparation for sacrifice were not found among sources available to the Research and Information Unit.

A Cable News Network (CNN) report refers to the custom of tribal marking as follows:

“In a dark room, the High Priestess used her ceremonial knife to cut two teardrop scars beneath her baby grandson's eyes. As baby Enitan cried out, the marks ran red with blood. It took only a few moments, but scarred him for life. In her small mud-brick home in southwest Nigeria, priestess Ifaponle Ogunjinmi performed the Yoruba tradition of giving tribal marks to the youngest member of her family. ‘The tribal mark is to identify the family,’ Ifaponle said. ‘Everyone in the family must have it.’” (Cable News Network (CNN) (21 July 2010) *Tribal scars custom drying up in Nigeria*)

This report also states:

“Though facial scars can be found across Africa, they are becoming increasingly restricted to people in the rural regions. The Nigerian government has moved to outlaw the practice, but many states have yet to approve the law. Many human rights organizations argue that the scarring of children is abuse and have often associated the practice with female genital mutilation. However, regardless of their efforts, facial scars are becoming harder to find for a different reason -- displacement of old ways by Western influence. ‘Our grandfathers, who made tribal marks compulsory for everyone have died,’ Ifaponle said. ‘In the modern world, many fathers don’t allow any marks on their children.’” (ibid)

A Leadership article states:

“Though, markings are done on the face mostly for the purpose of ethnic identification, not all marks on the face are for the purpose of identifying an individual as belonging to a particular ethnic group. There are other reasons for facial markings; some are associated with spiritual or religious practices.” (Leadership (5 March 2011) *Nigeria: Tribal Marks - Our Lost Heritage*)

This article also states:

“Apart from spiritual and religious purposes, facial marks are given to certain people for the treatment of illness especially children. In this case, traditional healers do incisions on the children's face or body to treat them for ailments like convulsion, pneumonia and measles.” (ibid)

A Voice of America News report states:

“It is commonly believed that the marks themselves have health benefits. Many young adult Nigerians say they were marked because they were sickly children, and will only mark their own children if they become ill.” (Voice of America News (31 July 2012) *Nigerian Parents Mark Children's Faces for Safety*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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