



Nigeria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 14 February 2014

Are ritualistic or sacrificial killings of one twin known to prevail in Lagos, Nigeria by a parent with traditional/animist beliefs from the Yoruba region in Nigeria who has been appointed village chief? What, if any, domestic protection is offered by the state with regard to sacrificial killings committed by the parent of one of their children? To what extent is the state willing or able to prevent this from occurring? Do domestic laws make this activity illegal? Would a Muslim (living in Lagos, in Southern Nigeria where Muslims constitute a minority) or woman encounter barriers in accessing such protection, if available from the state? Does the state offer any form of internal protection for persons at risk of such behaviour?

Information specifically referring to the sacrificial killing of twins in Lagos was not found among sources available to the Research and Information Unit.

For background information on Yoruba beliefs regarding twins see article published in Twin Research magazine which, in a section headed “Twins in Yoruba Society”, states:

“In traditional African societies, twins were considered of preternatural origin and raised emotional reactions oscillating from fear and repugnance to hope and joy (Leroy, 1995). In ancient times, the Yoruba used to reject and even sacrifice newborn twins (Leroy, 1995). Strangely enough, historical scales were tipped so that twins are nowadays not only well accepted but welcomed, their birth being an occasion of great rejoicing. A feast will be organised for the whole community and even for neighbouring villages if the twins are the children of a prominent member of the tribe (Chappel, 1974; Stoll & Stoll, 1980). It is believed that twins are able to bestow happiness, health and prosperity upon their family. However, since they can also bring about disaster, disease and death, they will be treated with all due respect, loving and care. Their upbringing is therefore far more permissive than that of other children (Twin Research (April 2002) *Yoruba Customs and Beliefs Pertaining to Twins*, p.134)

A written statement submitted to the UN Human Rights Council, in a section headed “The infanticide of the so-called “witch children” in Benin”, states:

“In Northern Benin, especially amongst the Bariba located mostly in Borgou and Atacora, as well as in Nigeria, children whose births are considered abnormal are considered witches and are then killed or abandoned by their parents.” (UN Human Rights Council (25 February 2011) *Written statement submitted by Franciscans International (FI), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status*, p.3)

A document published by UNICEF, in a section titled “Twins – Sacred monsters” (section 3.4), states:

“In many African societies, the birth of twins, as with all births considered ‘abnormal’ (‘badly born’ child witches or albinos), is generally surrounded by a complex system of representations and rituals. Because ‘twins are creatures belonging to the supernatural,’ writes Luc de Heusch, ‘in the same way as albinos and all kinds of other abnormal children’ (2000: 145), their birth is always marked in some way. It becomes sacralized because of its abnormality and thus concerns the whole community. Twins are often thought to be mediators between the visible and invisible worlds. The interpretations surrounding the ‘abnormal’ birth of twins vary from one society to the next, and sometimes even within the same group. In order to understand these diverse interpretations, it is first necessary to understand how these societies perceive the world, their cosmology, mythologies, social order, the past and the present. On the subject of the birth and status of twins, anthropological studies reveal a wide variety of socio-cultural representations and social behaviours. The birth of twins can be interpreted in a positive way – although this is rather rare – or can lead to rejection, abandonment or infanticide immediately after birth. It appears that the birth of twins is considered a joyful event among populations in West and Central Africa, where twins are revered as gods, whereas in the south and east, the social response is clearly less welcoming.” (UNICEF (April 2010) *Children Accused of Witchcraft: An anthropological study of contemporary practices in Africa*, p.30)

Regarding Nigeria this document states:

“In Nigeria, for example, twins are special beings that can fly, use their power for antisocial aims, and cause illness and misfortune (Masquelier, 2001). In addition, it appears that certain changes have occurred in the representations of the power of twins. As with albinos, the presence of twins is more often explained in terms of misfortune, and consequently they must be punished. Again in Nigeria, in 2007, twins were called witches by villagers who expressed their anger and fear by saying, ‘Take them away from us, they are witches. Take them away before they kill us all. Witches.’” (ibid, p.32)

An article from UK newspaper The Observer states:

“In a nearby village The Observer came across five-year-old twins, Itohowo and Kufre. They are still hanging around close to their mother's shack, but are obviously malnourished and in filthy rags. Approaching the boys brings a crowd of villagers who stand around and shout: 'Take them away from us, they are witches.' 'Take them away before they kill us all.' 'Witches'. The woman who gave birth to these sorry scraps of humanity stands slightly apart from the crowd, arms crossed. Iambong Etim Otoy has no intention of taking any responsibility for her sons. 'They are witches,' she says firmly and walks away.” (The Observer (9 December 2007) *Children are targets of Nigerian witch hunt*)

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on ritual murder in Nigeria, in a section headed Prevalence (section 2), states:

“According to *This Day*, ritual murders are ‘a common practice’ in Nigeria. This statement is partially corroborated by the Sahara Reporters article, which states that ritual murder is common in southern Nigeria. The *Daily Trust* writes that ritual killings continue to be practiced in Nigeria and have become more prevalent since 1999. Similarly, a 2012 *Daily Independent* article states that ‘in recent times, the number of ... brutal murders, mostly for ritual purposes and other circumstances, involving couples and their partners has been on a steady progression’. In contrast, a research associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London who has researched and written on Nigerian religions stated in correspondence with the Research Directorate that, while ritual murder does occur in Nigeria, it is not a ‘systematic practice’. (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)*)

See also section of this document headed “State Response (section 4) which states:

“According to the research associate at the University of London, ‘there is no recognised, institutionalised response [to ritual murders] from police or state’. The research associate added, further, that because of corruption in police and state institutions, ‘any action or inaction wouldn’t necessarily be transparent’. In October 2012, the Governor of Zamfara State, in response to ‘reports of incessant killings and disappearances of persons,’ especially children, reportedly warned ‘ritual killers and cultists’ in a public address to leave the state, adding that they would be subject to the death penalty if found guilty of murder.” (ibid)

In a section headed “Enforcement of Legislation and Prosecution” (4.1.1) this response states:

“Information on prosecutions for ritual murder was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. According to Leadership, the number of unsolved cases of ritual murder is ‘troubling’. The Punch indicates that many victims of ritual killings disappear and are never found. Newspapers report that, in December 2011, a man was sentenced to death in Kano for killing and beheading a woman in 1992. The murder was reportedly performed for ritual purposes. Sources report that a former information commissioner of Jigawa State was convicted in January 2010 of the ritual killing of two children and sentenced to life imprisonment. However, he was reportedly acquitted in 2012 due to ‘lack of direct evidence or proof’.” (ibid)

An article from the Lagos-based newspaper *This Day* refers to reports of the killing of twins in the Abuja Federal Capital Territory as follows:

“Away from the hub of civilisation in Abuja, a neighbouring dry and dusty community on a string of semiarid topography within Kwali and Kuje area councils has become infamous for its centuries-old traditional practice of killing twins and children whose mother dies at childbirth. The Bassa-Komo-Gbajingala indigenous clan in Abuja will no doubt be on a very close public scrutiny for a long time to come. The agrarian clan with a lifestyle built around subsistence farming, fishing and hunting has a cultural belief that loathes multiple births by its women just as the death of a woman during childbirth

naturally puts the life of the baby born by such women on 'death row'. Last Friday this reporter walked through the various communities where the practice still exist for several hours and truly there are signs that the birth of a twins in these community is a risky adventure by its women as it is considered a bad omen. Likewise, the death of a woman at childbirth exposed such children born alive to the practice that makes them a sacrifice to a god generally referred to as Tuwa." (This Day (10 April 2013) *Nigeria: Abuja Communities Where Twins Are Born for Sacrifice*)

An article from Nigerian newspaper Daily Post states:

"The Federal Capital Territory Administration on Tuesday instituted a Ministerial Committee to probe the alleged practice of infanticide, particularly killing of twins, by some communities in the territory. The Honourable Minister of State for FCT, Oloye Olajumoke Akinjide, who inaugurated the Committee, said the alleged practice of infanticide was of national and humanitarian concern to the Administration. 'The FCT Administration received the report of such primordial cultural practices with serious concern and considers the development unacceptable and totally reprehensible considering the time and age in which we are. After preliminary investigations, we came to the conclusion that the report may not be altogether unfounded. In the same vein, we became apprehensive that besides the communities already reported on, that there might still be others whose cultural practices, in so far as the welfare of the child is concerned, have not kept pace with civilized standards,' she stated." (Daily Post (17 September 2013) *FCTA probes killing of babies in Abuja*)

An article from Nigerian newspaper The Sun states:

"Imagine yourself visiting a community called Basa Komo in the FCT and all of a sudden, you come face-to-face with a crowd. You move closer and are confronted with a helpless infant, struggling to set himself loose from the grip of community leaders, who want to bury him alive. This scenario is not from a Nollywood film or a best selling novel. It happens today in a community in the nation's FCT. In Bassa Komo, it is abomination to be born a twin, or a mother dies within three months of a baby's birth, or a child grows upper teeth first or is born with defect. These are all faults of the baby or babies involved. All these, to the people of the community, are signs that such babies were fabricated in the factory of the devil and are themselves evil. Such offences by the evil baby or babies are punishable by burial alive." (The Sun (27 March 2013) *Bizarre: 40 FCT towns still kill twins*)

An article from Lagos-based newspaper Vanguard, in a paragraph headed "Taboo", states:

"Our source began his story: "I work for Christian Missionary Foundation in the North Central of Nigeria., I am here because I was posted here and our aim is to reach out to the unreached in Abuja. I have been here for the past five years. My mission here is to stem infant mortality. In this village, they believe a woman is not supposed to give birth to more than a child; so they kill one of the children at birth if they are twins and leave the other because twins are a taboo to them. They also kill single babies if, at the point of birth, the mother dies. Initially they were not giving us the children, but a woman with a strong heart for her children would come to us and say, 'I cannot

accept this, I don't believe this child is a witch'. So, some of them bring the children to us. When a woman brings her child to you at the point of death, you won't be able to say no. You see innocent child about to be killed, you won't be able to say no. Some of them bring their children to us and say, 'look they want to sacrifice these children'. We live among them. 'As they deliver twins, they don't waste time to bring them to us because they imagine the evil that can befall them. So how do they kill these children? They poison them. You will see a child is eating but terribly ill, they use spiritual means to poison the child. Sometimes the child dies instantly. It is a spiritual thing, you see a woman gives birth and within seconds the child dies.'" (Vanguard (11 May 2013) *Shocking: Abuja villages where twins are sacrificed*)

A report from the International Business Times on the death of newborn twins in Lagos states:

"Police in Nigeria are on the hunt for the mother of newborn twins who were dumped in a canal in Lagos. According to reports, the babies, who had died, were spotted by passersby in the filthy rubbish-filled waterway. Locals claimed that the children were dumped by an unidentified woman just days after they were born." (International Business Times (20 December 2013) *Nigeria: Newborn Twins Dumped in Lagos Canal*)

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on certain ritual practices, in a section titled "State Response to Ritual Practices in Chieftaincy", states:

"The Senior Lecturer at Obafemi Awolowo University said that anyone caught practicing human sacrifice would be 'severely dealt with'. The Professor similarly indicated that he believes that if a ritual practice, such as human sacrifice or blood rituals, is public, the perpetrators will be arrested. He added that this applies if the perpetrator is a chief, although some chiefs are well connected and may be friends with heads of police, governors, bankers or others, and may be able to bribe their way out of being arrested. According to a 15 May 2000 article on P.M. News Nigeria, a newspaper distributed in Lagos, 'five prominent Chiefs and indigenes of the area' of the Obokun local government in Osun state were arrested following the alleged ritual murder of a High Chief. Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The Professor said that locals generally do not accept ritual practices like human sacrifice and blood rituals, and would take measures against their own king if they think their king would bribe his way out of any state intervention for ritual practices." (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (5 November 2013) *NGA104602.E – Nigeria: Prevalence of ritual practices, such as human sacrifice and the drinking of blood, upon initiation to chieftaincy or during chieftaincy in Yorubaland; state reaction to ritual practices in chieftaincy, especially the respective state ministries of chieftaincy affairs; prevalence and consequences of refusing a Yoruba chieftaincy title*)

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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