

Suspicious of Occult Medicine Murders in the Context of Democratic Elections in Contemporary Côte d'Ivoire

Syna Ouattara

University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg Research Institute, Sweden
Institut des Sciences Anthropologiques de Développement,
Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

[Doi:10.19044/esj.2024.v20n2p1](https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2024.v20n2p1)

Submitted: 18 December 2023

Accepted: 18 January 2024

Published: 31 January 2024

Copyright 2024 Author(s)

Under Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0

OPEN ACCESS

Cite As:

Ouattara S. (2024). *Suspicious of Occult Medicine Murders in the Context of Democratic Elections in Contemporary Côte d'Ivoire*. European Scientific Journal, ESJ, 20 (2), 1.

<https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2024.v20n2p1>

Abstract

The article contributes to contemporary discourses on so-called occult medicine practices and the associated human murders within the context of democratic elections in Côte d'Ivoire. The study is grounded in anthropological fieldwork conducted in Abidjan from 2018 to 2020. Additionally, information on occult medicine murders from local and international media has been gathered to enrich the reflections further. The study reveals that in the prevalent public discourse, politicians are accused of employing occult medicine to enhance their power and ensure their success by collaborating with ritual specialists. The paper argues that, in everyday discourse, occult medicine murders can be perceived as being ontologically motivated.

Keywords: Côte d'Ivoire, elections, occult medicine murders

Introduction

In recent years, so-called occult medicine practices – and human murder associated with them – have become a serious issue in Côte d'Ivoire (cf. Aboa 2015; Deveaux 2018; Duhem 2018; Fancello 2011; Koenig 2014; Newell 2021; Ouattara & Wedel 2020), as in several other African countries (cf. Kohnert 2003; Max-Wirth 2016; Myhre 2017; Oduro-Frimpong 2014; Owusu 2022; Rannditsheni et al. 2018; Schühle 2013; Tanner 2010). Occult

medicine practices typically refer to esoteric or hidden healing and well-being methods often associated with mystical, spiritual, or supernatural elements. These practices may involve the use of rituals, spells, or unconventional remedies that go beyond conventional medical approaches (see Bastien 1988; Kedzierska & Jouvelet 2006; Memel-Fotê 1998; Ouattara and Wedel 2020; Traore 1983; Yangni-Angaté 2004).

In various cultures, there are beliefs and traditions surrounding occult medicine, which may include the use of herbs, amulets, incantations, animals, human blood or body parts, or other elements. It's important to note that the term "occult" in this context doesn't necessarily imply negative or malevolent practices. Instead, it highlights the hidden or mysterious nature of these medicinal traditions (cf. Cissé 1985, 1994; Gnonsoa 2007; Hellweg 2004; Kélétiogui 1978; Ouattara 2008). The most common practices associated with the occult include divination, magic, and spiritualism (also known as spiritism). There are numerous and diverse religions that have occult theologies. Occult religions are typically founded on nature-based polytheistic ideologies; their members believe they can magically intervene in the universe through specific spells, ceremonies, or rituals (Perlmutter 2003, p. 2).

A central feature of the notion of occult medicine is that it links occult forces to political power and material wealth and, more generally, to vitality and prosperity (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999). However, occult medicine is also occasionally used with lethal effect, perhaps increasingly so – as in the case of the medicine murders, the killing of human persons to harvest body parts for making and selling medicine (cf. Bernault & Tonda 2000; Fancello 2011; Masoga & Rugwiji 2018; Newell 2021; Schühle 2013; Tanner 2010).

According to numerous scholars, occult medicine practitioners believe that the efficacy of a medicinal charm or ritual is directly proportional to the value of the object utilized in its creation. Consequently, there is a prevalent notion that including human blood or body parts in ritualistic or magical medicine relates to understanding humans as the highest form of existence on earth. This perspective asserts that medicines containing human flesh and/or blood inherently possess greater potency than those crafted with non-human ingredients. Larsson & Viktorelius writes that “A possible psychological explanation [for this] is that the idea of magic is embedded in a view of a reciprocal universe, where a great reward can only be achieved through a great sacrifice” (2021, p. 4). Upon consultation with a client, the occult medicine specialist evaluates the nature of the request or supplication, determining whether the optimal medicine should be derived from leaves/plants, animals, human blood and body parts, or other objects/ingredients (see Owusu 2022, p. 6).

Although occult medicine practices have since long experienced the influence of Islam and Christianity as well as the secular heritage of colonial

and post-colonial regimes, they remain alive and active, not only in their traditional roles but also in addressing and resolving contemporary issues and problems, in rural and urban areas alike. As highlighted by Dirk Kohnert (1996), the belief in occult forces is still deeply integrated in many African societies, regardless of the educational level, religion, and social class of the people concerned. According to many Sub-Saharan Africans, its incidence is ever-increasing due to social stress and strain caused (among others) by modernization (Kohnert 1996, p. 1). Occult forces beliefs have increasingly been exploited for political purposes. They lend themselves to support any kind of political system, whether despotic or democratic. Strategic groups, notably the power elite, are prone to use it systematically in their struggle for command and control. Thereby, they are likely to add further social stress to an already endangered precarious balance of power, which makes accusations of occult medicinal practices flourish (Kohnert 1996, p. 1347).

It should also be noted that the occult medicine complex is not limited to the African continent (see for example, Bernardi Junqueira 2021; Hanegraaff 2003; Larsson & Viktorelius 2022; Wedel 2004). Growing numbers of Africans – such as migrants, refugees, and victims of sex trafficking – now live and work outside Africa, in Europe, the Americas, and Asia, bringing problems associated with these beliefs and practices – including threats of curses by feticheurs/marabouts and the fear of witchcraft – with them (see Geldenhuys 2019; Lo Iacono 2014; Nagle & Owasanoye 2015; Siegel & De Blank 2010). Furthermore, experts in occult forces rooted in Islamic knowledge and tradition – commonly called ‘marabouts’ – travel between West Africa and Europe, the United States and Asia. They offer their knowledge to a West African diaspora population and a local clientele that also includes non-Muslims (cf. Gemmeke 2009; Kuczynski 2002; Parish, 2018). In an effort to negotiate their expert status publicly, occult medicine specialists mediatize and advertise their services on social media, in printed press, and in radio and television shows – both in Africa and abroad. The article aims to contribute to contemporary discourses on occult medicinal practices and the associated human murders within the context of democratic elections in Côte d’Ivoire.

Method

The paper is grounded in a qualitative study, leveraging insights from anthropological fieldwork carried out in Abidjan spanning the years 2018 to 2020. A set of semi-structured interviews was conducted with 10 relevant individuals, consisting of 6 males and 4 females. The interviewees represented a diverse range of professionals, including academics such as criminologists and sociologists, as well as human rights defenders, investigative journalists, and parents of pupils. The selection of participants was either directly

facilitated by the researcher or recommended by other professionals, based on their expertise and knowledge in areas such as child welfare, crime, and ritual murder.

The criteria for selecting interviewees was their interest or active involvement in combatting and prosecuting criminal activities, as well as safeguarding children's rights. All interviews were originally conducted in French and later translated into English by the article's author. The participants provided their consent for the interviews to be recorded. Following the recording, the interviews were transcribed and subjected to a manual analysis conducted by the author. This analysis included an immersion stage preceding the synthesis phase, which relied on identifying prevalent themes in the material. Thematic content analysis was then applied to the collected data to better understand the significance of the respondents' statements within their respective contexts.

The primary sources of information about this elusive yet very public subject is gossip and rumors (radio *trattoire*), conspiracy theories and urban legends, and news reports in conventional media, television, and, increasingly, internet and social media. Thus, in addition to the conducted interviews information on occult medicinal practices has been gathered from local and international media to deepen my reflections. Furthermore, understanding and knowledge of the topic spring from the author's own background as a native Ivorian who grew up in the country's urban and rural environments. As a professional anthropologist he has carried out several research projects in his native country as well as in neighboring West African countries (Mali and Guinea). As a native Ivorian he has thus studied familiar phenomena from a relatively "alien" academic and professional perspective.

Occult medicinal practices in Côte d'Ivoire

The use of occult medicine is not limited to the treatment of illness or other physical ailments. It is used for any number of purposes; ambitious politicians use it to gain or stay in power, businessmen to accumulate wealth and status, street peddlers to earn a modest living, and the spurned lover to regain his/her partner's affection (see Kélétiogui 1978; Ouattara 2008; Touré and Konaté 1990).

In Côte d'Ivoire, as in most African francophone countries, in popular discourse, occult medicine practices are often described as "doing a work" (*faire du travail*) or "doing medicine" (*faire du médicament*). People frequently turn to occult medicine specialists who are deemed capable of interpreting and manipulating these invisible forces. They may seek specialist knowledge to determine whether the root cause of their misfortune is occult in nature or because they seek magical protection and healing. In cases where occult medicine experts use their special powers to bring order to a chaotic

world, they attract large audiences (cf. Adou 2022; Bassett 2003; Gnonsoa 2007; Koenig 2014; Newell 2021; Touré and Konaté 1990; Ouattara 2008; Ouattara and Touré 2020; Ouattara and Wedel 2020).

A social space where the use of occult medicine is rapidly growing is the internet. Cyber-crimes – internet scams of all sorts – are becoming a lucrative criminal activity in Côte d’Ivoire and West Africa in general, where so-called “grazers” or *brouteurs* are suspected of operating in collusion with reputed *feticheurs* and *marabouts*. There also circulate rumors that *brouteurs* are involved in child killings to harvest their organs for medicine and blood sacrifices, presumably to become successful in their criminal activity and protected from detection (see Adou 2022; Koenig 2014; Newell 2021).

Occult medicine murders in Côte d’Ivoire: types and profile of perpetrators

According to a Lecturer/Researcher at the Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Côte d’Ivoire, the majority of occult medicine murder cases involve an intricate network of stakeholders organized across three levels: (a) ‘occult medicine specialists,’ including fetishists, marabouts, or self-appointed pastor-prophets, who play a role in instructing clients about the required body parts for occult medicine or even selling them; (b) clients who pay the killers to acquire the necessary body parts of the victims if the occult medical specialist does not provide them; and (c) the murderers—referring to those who are paid to carry out the actual killing of the victims and harvesting their organs (Interview conducted by article author in Abidjan, 2019).

The most frequent occult medicine murders in Côte d’Ivoire are murders linked to: (1) elections, (2) cybercrime or “grazing,”; (3) social or economic promotion, (4) trafficking in human organs, and (5) sports competitions (see Bazare et al. 2017; Fancello 2011; Koenig 2014; Newell 2021; Ouattara 2008; Touré and Konaté 1990). One of the central factors in occult medicine murders is that the perpetrators often act under the guidance of someone who gives advice on how to proceed.

In Côte d’Ivoire, this person may be a “fetishist” (*féticheur*), *marabout*, or self-appointed pastor-prophet who has the trust of his clients. In Côte d’Ivoire, election periods and government reshuffles are favorable times for occult medicine specialists to coach politicians by offering them their services and medicines. Ritual sacrifices or medicine murders multiply on the eve of electoral deadlines (cf. Guibléhon 2011; Touré and Konaté 1990). Below, I present some contemporary discourses on occult medicinal practices – and the human murders associated with them, unfolding in the shadows of democratic elections in contemporary Côte d’Ivoire.

Suspicious of occult medicine murders in the context of democratic elections

In Côte d'Ivoire, anxieties about medicine murder typically occur during political upheavals, in view of the fact that occult medicine murders seem to increase in number during electoral periods in the country (cf. Aboa 2015; BBC News 2015; The Japan Times 2015). One of Aboa's sources in Abidjan also remarked, "These are mystical and occult practices [...]. This is about black magic, and they need these human sacrifices to get money and power" (Aboa 2005). In 2015, a year when Côte d'Ivoire had a presidential election, more than 24 children were kidnapped and killed across the country within a period of two months before the elections. Most of the bodies of the victims were mutilated, and several body parts were missing. Ivorian authorities deployed around 1,500 police, soldiers, and gendarmes as part of an operation aimed at stopping these killings and identifying the culprits (cf. Aboa 2015; Abidjan.net 2015; BBC News 2015; The Japan Times 2015). On January 27, 2015, Ange Aboa reported in Reuters that "Many Ivorians suggested that the kidnappings were possibly connected to ritual killings orchestrated by corrupt businessmen and politicians. These individuals allegedly employ body parts in ceremonies believed to bestow supernatural powers."

There was also a wave of similar occult medicine murders on the sidelines of the 2006 and 2010 elections (BBC 2015). The Minister of the Interior at the time reported to BBC News on 29 January 2015, "We have these ritual crimes, and we know very well the type of criminal who commits them in other countries. They do it to get power and money." On January 27, 2015, Reuters reported that:

At least 21 children have been kidnapped in Ivory Coast since December [2014], and most have been found dead with their bodies mutilated, authorities said, in a wave of ritual killings some residents fear may be linked to upcoming elections. [...]. Many said the kidnappings were likely linked to ritual killings by corrupt businessmen and politicians, who used body parts in ceremonies supposed to confer supernatural powers. [...]. Presidential and possibly legislative elections are scheduled to take place toward the end of the year in the world's largest cocoa producer and the economic motor of francophone West Africa. A spate of child abductions was recorded ahead of elections in 2010. The kidnappings have led to calls for action from the U.N. children's agency UNICEF, which urged authorities to do everything possible to quickly identify those responsible.

A school manager in Abidjan reported to the BBC News on 29 January 2015, “We have been more vigilant. We have taken the names of all accompanying children. And security has been reinforced at the entrance.” A father in Abidjan expressed his fear to BBC News in the following terms: “I am really afraid because this could happen to us too. I have taken measures; I have talked to the maids and to those working in my house. I told them not to leave my son alone” (BBC News 2015).

In 2018, the year of municipal and regional elections in Côte d'Ivoire, national and international media outlets reported that more than 40 children had disappeared in the country in less than two months. On April 4, 2018, the journalist Stéphanie Aglietti published an article in *Libération*, a French daily newspaper, titled *Côte d'Ivoire: A Supposed Resurgence of Ritual Crimes Creates Psychosis*.

In July 2019, the corpses of 25 infants were discovered in sachets at the Gagnoa municipal cemetery in west-central Côte d'Ivoire. Local and international media suggest that the children might have been murdered by a network that deals with human blood and body parts for “magical” purposes—occult medicine murders, in other words (see BBC News 2019; RFI 2019; Paris Match 2019). According to one of my respondents, a sociologist at the Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Abidjan, “some politicians ritually bury live animals [e.g. chickens, cows, dogs, goats, sheep] and even human beings as a symbolic way to bury their opponents and their chances of winning the elections, in order to have an advantage over them” (Interview in Abidjan, 2019). In 2018, during the campaign of the municipal and regional elections for example:

[...] in Korhogo, four gravediggers were sent to dig a grave. When they arrived at the cemetery, they saw two gravediggers digging a grave and walked over to them. The two gravediggers then started to run away. However, the four gravediggers were able to catch one of them. They found a five-year-old girl alive, wrapped in a white fabric next to the grave that the two gravediggers were digging. They uncovered the child and took her as well as the gravedigger they caught to the police. The gravedigger told the police that they were sent by a *marabout* to bury the five-year old girl alive. The police informed the city prefect and decided to arrest the *marabout* in question. However, this case was closed without follow-up (Interview in Abidjan, 2019).

In Côte d'Ivoire, one of the occult medicine murder cases that caught the attention of national and international media was the case of Bouba, a four-year-old boy. He was kidnapped on February 24, 2018, in Abidjan and found two days later, slaughtered, drained of blood, and buried. The Ivorian police reported that it was a young jeweler, who had killed the four-year-old boy on

the advice of a *marabout*, to become wealthy (see Aglietti 2018; Deveaux 2018; Duhem 2018; Lauvergnier 2018; Le Parisien 2018; Tounkara 2018). On January 27, 2018, Radio France Internationale (RFI) reported that: "According to a police source, five members of an organized criminal group have been apprehended, and two have been referred to the prosecution. The marabout is still at large" (my translation).

In the face of these disappearances of children, which had increased since the beginning of 2018, President Alassane Ouattara promised a strong response: "I have given firm instructions that our defense and security forces be deployed on the ground to protect all populations" (RFI 2018, my translation). Several media linked the case of Bouba to upcoming municipal, regional, and senatorial elections scheduled for 2018 (see Aglietti 2018; Lauvergnier 2018). One of my respondents who works at the National Human Rights Commission of Côte d'Ivoire (CNDH-CI) stated:

The high number of ritual murders and the disappearance of children reported in the media keep people in a state of stress, especially when it comes to the safety of their children who have to go to school every morning. Schools are taking new precautions in light of the recent kidnappings, including asking parents to pick their children up from inside the school, encouraging school bus drivers to drop children off closer to home, and telling unaccompanied children to walk home in small groups. There are fears that these ritual killings are linked to upcoming elections later this year. Legislative elections are more likely than presidential ones to result in this type of murder, since there are more seats to be filled and therefore more candidates (Interview in Abidjan, 2018).

Another respondent summed up the problem rather well in the following quote:

It is always the same, as the election approaches, the ritual murders increase. It is a lucrative business for *marabouts* and other occult medicine specialists. During pre-election periods, they come to Côte d'Ivoire from the whole sub-region. Sometimes, they fly here in business class, to sell their services to politicians (Interview in Abidjan, 2020).

These accounts above illustrate well that for most people, these occult medicine murders are politically motivated. In most cases, it is believed that politicians are behind these occult medicine murders. In the course of the electoral season, a range of discourses has been spreading about electorally motivated occult medicine murders in Côte d'Ivoire. The increased frequency

of reported murders at times of elections seems to support this link between murders linked to occult medicine and the political struggle.

Discussion

The article emphasizes that understanding murders associated with occult medicine requires consideration within a broader framework encompassing sociocultural, economic, and political factors alongside ontological ideas related to supernatural forces. Throughout the electoral seasons in Côte d'Ivoire, various discourses emerge concerning occult medicine murders motivated by electoral considerations. The findings from the study indicate that: (1) In ongoing discussions, a consistent theme emerges, connecting medical practices to instances of harm to individuals in the lead-up to each election in Côte d'Ivoire (cf. Lauvergnier 2018); (2) in popular discourse, politicians are often accused of harnessing occult medicine to strengthen their influence and ensure their ongoing success, often with the assistance of occult medicine specialists, (3) in many instances, there is a prevailing belief that politicians are connected to occult medicine practices – and human murder associated with them, (4) the primary victims of ritual murders in Côte d'Ivoire are children.

Numerous scholars have emphasized a recurrent theme during electoral seasons in sub-Saharan Africa: the notion of an "invisible hand," occult power, or a secret society manipulating the dynamics of power (cf. Bernault & Tonda 2000; Duhem 2018; Newell 2007; Sanders 2003; Sarkisova-Kouamé & Kouamé 2019). Sarkisova - Kouamé Vlada & Caummaueth- Kouamé Reine (2019:14) highlights that:

In sub-Saharan Africa, presidential elections are always organized with the assistance of marabouts or *féticheur*. Moreover, there is the allocation of ministerial portfolios or government reshuffle. Even coups are planned and carried out only after consultation with the "workers" of the invisible world (my translation).

The engagement of individuals in occult medicine practices is frequently rooted in their cultural or spiritual beliefs, as they seek healing and well-being through methods that may deviate from mainstream medical perspectives. This observation is consistent with findings from previous works (Hellweg 2004; Kélétigui 1978; Newell 2022; Ouattara 2008), which have delved into the cultural and spiritual dimensions of such practices. These studies collectively highlight the diverse ways in which individuals draw upon occult medicine, influenced by their cultural backgrounds and spiritual orientations, as an alternative approach to address health and well-being concerns.

According to several scholars, murders that involve the practice wherein parts of the victim's body are removed for making "medicine" to strengthen politically, professionally, or economically those who use it, the use of the term "ritual murder" is misleading. The killing of the victim is not in itself ritualized. In this sense, the use of the term "ritual murder" is incorrect (see Kuper 2006; La Fontaine 2011; Minnaar 2003; Prinsloo and Du Plessis 1989). This view supports that of Prinsloo and Du Plessis (1989), who argued for a distinction between "ritual murder," when a victim is sacrificed for the benefit of the whole community, and "medicine murder," where a victim's body parts are harvested to make magic potions that individuals use for selfish reasons (1989, p. 617).

Aligned with Adam Kuper (2006), we can classify the murders discussed in this paper as "medicine murders", as people are killed so that their body parts can be used in magical concoctions that are supposed to guarantee strength, courage, and political success (Kuper 2006, p. 1). Jean La Fontaine (2011) also emphasized that the acquisition of body parts does not always require killing. Some unfortunate victims have been left alive after limbs have been severed (La Fontaine 2011, p. 9). However, in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, we can speak of occult medicine murders because the victims are killed (see Aglietti 2018; BBC News 2015; Fancello 2011).

Regarding the occult medicinal practices and associated human murders that resurface every time there's an upcoming election in Côte d'Ivoire, an Ivorian political leader reported to *Jeune Afrique*, a French-language pan-African weekly news magazine, on March 5, 2018, explaining, 'We live in a society where the belief persists that making human sacrifices can influence election results. The idea is that to stay in power, you have to sacrifice a human being' (Duhem 2018, my translation). According to Perlmutter (2003: 30): "The significant ideology behind sacrificial ritual is that blood consists of life force energy [...]. In specific occult worship, bloodletting or imbibing blood from a victim represents the assimilation of raw power". For a more in-depth exploration of the association between blood and life force energy, refer to additional sources (Cissé 1985; Jonckers 1976; Mellott 1984; Nabofa 1985; Wise 2006).

The study has brought to light a disturbing revelation that the primary victims of ritual murders in Côte d'Ivoire are children. This vulnerability is attributed to their physical inability to defend themselves against attacks. Moreover, a number of studies indicate that a deeply unsettling belief exists that certain occult medicines attain heightened potency and efficacy when crafted with ingredients derived from young victims. A prevailing perception among some 'occult medicine specialists' is that virgins embody qualities of cleanliness, purity, or even magical essence. There is a widespread belief that rituals or medicines stand a significantly higher chance of producing the

desired effects if a virgin or items directly associated with a virgin are incorporated (see Ashforth 2005; Owusu 2022; Perlmutter 2003; Tanner 2010). As a result, individuals seeking wealth, protection, power, longevity, and other aspirations through spiritualists may receive instructions from occult medicine specialties to engage in acts such as sleeping with virgins or providing sexual fluids or body parts of virgins as integral components of the rituals necessary for fulfilling their requests (Owusu 2022, p. 25).

However, as Dirk Kohnert (1996) points out, unfortunately, a significant portion of Western development experts perceives these occult medicine practices as mere manifestations of irrational or "primitive" behavior, leading them to overlook the need for addressing these issues professionally using established scientific methods. Some might believe that the process of modernization, investing in human capital and education, and exposure to the supposedly European culture through development aid would automatically resolve these problems (see Kohnert 1996, p. 15). However, as this study demonstrates, this assumption is flawed.

A fundamental understanding of the role played by the occult medicine practices and the ontological framework that deems it real holds crucial practical significance for aid workers and development initiatives throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. This importance is highlighted by the challenges encountered during the two significant Ebola epidemics in West- and Central Africa over the past decade and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic in Africa as a whole (Saba et al. 2020; Ouattara and Århem 2021). This understanding is particularly pertinent in addressing the influence of occult medicine, witchcraft- and sorcery beliefs in local resistance to relief efforts. The multitude of NGO- and UN-reports in recent decades addressing human-rights issues arising from violence linked to witchcraft- and sorcery beliefs, including the persecution of alleged witches and the brutal treatment of individuals with albinism, further underscores the imperative nature of comprehending the underlying cultural ideas motivating these acts (Cimpric 2010).

The article reveals that, during electoral seasons, these discourses gain significant traction in Côte d'Ivoire, attracting extensive media attention. Within this popular discourse, politicians are accused of utilizing occult medicine, facilitated by ritual specialists, to empower themselves and secure success in elections. Put briefly, my argument will be this: in daily discourse, these occult medicine practices are perceived as ontologically motivated. When employing the term "ontologically motivated," I aim to convey the idea that historical influences inherently mold contemporary socio-cultural phenomena. Consequently, past cultural orders wield a profound impact on the present. Individuals consistently strive to comprehend new realities by

interpreting them through established frameworks and drawing upon culturally transmitted conceptual systems.

This approach delves into the fundamental conceptual underpinnings and paradigms shaping cultural phenomena. This perspective starts with the premise of ontological plurality, asserting that various cultural frameworks are structured by distinct and sometimes markedly different, conceptual foundations. These foundations derive from generic ontological premises that contribute to and impact specific cultural structures, institutions, and phenomena (see Descola, 2014).

Conclusion

The subsequent reflections were formulated to contribute to the contemporary discourse on occult medicinal practices and their correlation with human murders in the context of democratic elections in Côte d'Ivoire. The study highlights the prevalence of discussions concerning politically motivated occult medicine murders during electoral seasons in the country. Contrary to expectations, modernization and democratization processes have not diminished occult convictions, a finding supported by other prior research. Within the intricate intersection of politics and occultism, the latter remains a significant force.

The perceptions of occult medicine and its practices in Côte d'Ivoire are dynamic and deeply ingrained in ontology. Practitioners often engage in these rituals guided by cultural or spiritual beliefs, seeking healing and well-being beyond conventional medical perspectives. Murders associated with occult medicine must be scrutinized within the broader framework of socio-cultural, economic, and political factors, interwoven with ontological notions of supernatural forces. Given that these occult medicinal practices are intricately linked to enduring beliefs in supernatural forces, a comprehensive understanding is imperative.

The persistence of occult convictions, even amidst modernization and democratization, underscores their enduring influence. These practices, deeply rooted in ontology, offer an alternative lens through which healing and well-being are sought. The connection between occult medicine and supernatural forces necessitates a holistic examination, considering socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts.

Acknowledgments

The study received funding from the Swedish Research Council (project nr: 2016-01627), the Magnus Bergvalls Stiftelse, and the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in Gothenburg. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Kaj Århem, Johan Wedel, Simon Larsson, Sten Hagberg and the two anonymous reviewers for the *European Scientific Journal (ESJ)* for their

careful reading of the manuscript and their insightful comments and suggestions. Additionally, I extend my thanks to the respondents for their valuable assistance during the fieldwork.

The study adhered to the ethical codes recommended by the American Anthropological Association (2009) and the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet 2017).

Conflict of Interest: The author reported no conflict of interest.

Data Availability: All of the data are included in the content of the paper.

Funding Statement: The author did not obtain any funding for this research.

References:

1. Abidjan.net (2015). Réunion interministérielle sur enlèvement d'enfants. *Abidjan.net*, 28 January. [https://news.abidjan.net/videos/23091/reunion-interministeriel-sur-enlevement denfants](https://news.abidjan.net/videos/23091/reunion-interministeriel-sur-enlevement-denfants) (Accessed: 17 December 2021).
2. Aboa, A. (2015). Child ritual killings spread alarm, anger in Ivory Coast. *Reuters*, 27 January. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ivorycoast-killings-idUSKBN0L025X20150127/>), Accessed: 9 February 2023.
3. Adou, E. F. S. (2022). Les brouteurs d'Abidjan. Étude socio-anthropologique d'une sous-culture juvénile déviante. *RESET. Recherches en sciences sociales sur Internet*, (11).
4. Aglietti, S. (2018). Côte-d'Ivoire: une supposée résurgence des crimes rituels crée la psychose. *Libération*, 3 April.
5. American Anthropological Association (AAA) (1998). Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association. AAA, June.
6. Ashforth, A. (2005). *Witchcraft, violence, and democracy in South Africa*. University of Chicago Press.
7. Bastien, C. (1988). *Folies, mythes et magies d'Afrique noire: propos de guérisseurs du Mali*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
8. Bazare, N. R., Bamba, L., & Dolle, K. (2017). Cybercriminalité ou «broutage» et crimes rituels à Abidjan: Logiques des acteurs et réponses au phénomène, cas des communes de Yopougon et d'Abobo. *Eur Sci J*, 13(23), 104.
9. BBC (2019). Découverte de 25 bébés morts dans un cimetière en Côte d'Ivoire. *BBC*, 26 July. <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-49134715> (Accessed: 19 November 2023).

10. BBC (2015). Ivorian police unit to investigate suspected ritual killings. *BBC*, 29 January. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31038576> (Accessed: 22 November 2023).
11. Bernault, F. & Tonda, J. (2000). Dynamiques de l'invisible en Afrique. *Politique africaine*, 79, 5-16.
12. Bernardi Junqueira, L. F. (2021). Revealing secrets: talismans, healthcare and the market of the occult in early twentieth-century China. *Social History of Medicine*, 34(4), 1068-1093.
13. Cimpric, A. (2010). Children accused of witchcraft. An Anthropological Study of Contemporary Practices in Africa. Dakar: UNICEF.
14. Cissé, Y. T. (1994). *La confrérie des chasseurs Malinké et Bambara. Mythes, rites et récits initiatiques*. Arsan: Paris.
15. Cissé, Y. T. (1985). Les nains et l'origine des boli de la chasse chez les Malinké. *Système de pensée en Afrique Noire*, 8:13-24.
16. Comaroff, J., & Comaroff, J. L. (1999). Occult economies and the violence of abstraction: notes from the South African postcolony. *American ethnologist*, 26(2), 279-303.
17. Descola, P. (2014). Beyond nature and culture. In *The handbook of contemporary animism* (pp.77-91). Routledge.
18. Deveaux, J. (2018). En Côte d'Ivoire, le meurtre rituel d'un enfant de quatre ans révolue le pays. *France Télévisions Rédaction Afrique*, March 5.
19. Geldenhuys, K. (2019). The link between human trafficking and witchcraft. *Servamus Community-based Safety and Security Magazine*, 112(7), 26-30.
20. Guibléhon, B. (2011). Le pouvoir-faire: religion, politique, ethnicité et guérison en Côte d'Ivoire. *Le pouvoir-faire*, 1-149.
21. Duhem, V. (2018). Tensions en Côte d'Ivoire après une vague d'enlèvements d'enfants. *Jeune Afrique*, Mach 7. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/539899/societe/tensions-en-cote-divoire-apres-une-vague-denlevements-denfants/> (Accessed: 11 November 2023).
22. divoire-apres-une-vague-denlevements-denfants/ (Accessed: 11 November 2023).
23. Fancello, S. (2011). Pasteurs et sorciers en procès. L'affaire Béhanzin (Côte d'Ivoire). *Politique africaine*, 122: 121-143.
24. Gnonsoa, A. (2007). *Le masque au cœur de la société wè*. Abidjan: Frat Mat Éditions.
25. Hanegraaff, W. J. (2003). How magic survived the disenchantment of the world. *Religion*. 33(4), 357-380.
26. Hellweg, J. (2004). « Encompassing the State: Sacrifice and Security in the Hunters Movement of Côte d'Ivoire ». *Africa Today* 50 (4): 3-28.

27. Jonckers, D. (1976). Contribution à l'étude du sacrifice chez les Minyanka. *Systèmes de pensée en Afrique noire*, (2), 91-110.
28. Kedzierska, A., & Jouvelet, B. (2006). Guérisseurs et féticheurs: la médecine traditionnelle en Afrique de l'Ouest.
29. Kélétagui, J-M. (1978). Le Sénoufo face au cosmos. Nouvelles Éditions Africaines: Abidjan et Dakar.
30. Koenig, B. (2014). Les économies occultes du « broutage » des jeunes Abidjanais: une dialectique culturelle du changement générationnel. *Autrepart*, 71: 195-215.
31. Kohnert, D. (2003). Occult beliefs, globalisation and the quest for development in African societies: The example of South Africa. *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 27-46.
32. Kohnert, D. (1996). Magic and witchcraft: Implications for Democratization and poverty alleviating aid in Africa. *World Development, Elsevier*, 24 (8),1347-1355.
33. Kuczinsky, L. (2002). Les Marabouts Africains à Paris. CNRS: Paris.
34. Kuper, A. (2006). Like Cutting a Cow. *London Review of Books* 28(13): 12-13.
35. La Fontaine, J. (2011). Ritual Murder? *Open Anthropology Cooperative Press, OAC PRESS Interventions Series, #3 ISSN 2045 — 5771*, 1.
36. Larsson, S., & Viktorelius, M. (2022). Reducing the contingency of the world: magic, oracles, and machine-learning technology. *AI & SOCIETY*, 1-11.
37. Lauvergnier, C. (2018). Crimes rituels en Côte d'Ivoire: "Ils sont plus nombreux avant les élections". *Les Observateurs, France 24*, 9 March.
38. Le Parisien (2018). Côte d'Ivoire: indignation après le meurtre rituel d'un petit garçon de 4 ans. *Le Parisien*, March 5. <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/cote-d-ivoire-indignation>
39. <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/cote-d-ivoire-indignation-apres-le-meurtre-rituel-d-un-petit-garcon-de-4-ans-05-03-2018-7591590.php> (Accessed: 19 March 2021).
40. Lo Iacono, E. (2014). Victims, sex workers and perpetrators: Gray areas in the trafficking of Nigerian women. *Trends in Organized Crime*, 17, 110-128.
41. Masoga, M. A. & Rugwiji, T. (2018). A reflection on ritual murders in the biblical text from an African perspective. *Scriptura*, 117, 1-13.
42. Max-Wirth, C. (2016). Juju and statecraft: Occult rumors and politics in Ghana. Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington.
43. Mellott, N. (1984). Summaries of sacrificial rites described in the preceding four issues of *Systèmes de pensée en Afrique noire*. *Systèmes de pensée en Afrique noire*, (6), 149-183.

44. Memel-Fotê, H. (1998). *Les représentations de la santé et de la maladie chez les ivoiriens*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
45. Myhre, K. C. (2017). The power of a severed arm: life, witchcraft, and Christianity in Kilimanjaro. *Pentecostalism and witchcraft: Spiritual warfare in Africa and Melanesia*, 163-187.
46. Nabofa, M. Y. (1985). Blood symbolism in African religion. *Religious Studies*, 21(3), 389-405.
47. Nagle, L. E., & Owasanoye, B. (2015). Fearing the dark: The use of witchcraft to control human trafficking victims and sustain vulnerability. *Sw. L. Rev.*, 45, 561.
48. Newell, S. (2021). Hackers of the heart: Digital sorcery and virtual intimacy in Côte d'Ivoire. *Africa*, 91(4), 661-685.
49. Newell, S. (2007). Pentecostal Witchcraft: Neoliberal Possession and Demonic Discourse in Ivoirian Pentecostal Churches. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 37, 461-490.
50. Oduro-Frimpong, J. (2014). Sakawa rituals and cyberfraud in Ghanaian popular video movies. *African Studies Review*, 57(2), 131-147.
51. Ouattara, S. and Ârhem N. (2021). Fighting Ebola in the Shadow of Conspiracy Theories and Sorcery Suspicions: Reflections on the West African EVD Outbreak (2013 – 2016) in Guinea Conakry. *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, LXI 1 (241), 9–39.
52. Ouattara, S., & Touré, I. (2020). The Wambjug emblem of the University Félix Houphouët Boigny and its implications for contemporary iconoclasm in Côte d'Ivoire. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 10(3), 972-979.
53. Ouattara, S. et Wedel, J. (2020). Établir l'innocence ou la culpabilité dans les affaires de sorcellerie contemporaines. *Revue Korhogolaise des Sciences Sociales*, 4 (2): 45–71.
54. Ouattara, S. (2008). *Deux sociétés secrètes dans des espaces publics: Bois sacrés, initiations et rites de passage chez les Sénoufo de la Côte d'Ivoire et du Mali*. Gothenburg studies in Social Anthropology 20, Göteborg: University of Gothenburg, ACTA Universitatis Gothoburgensis.
55. Owusu, E. S. (2022). The superstition that dismembers the African child: An exploration of the scale and features of juju-driven paedicide in Ghana. *International Annals of Criminology*, 60(1), 1-42.
56. Paris Match (2019). Découverte de 25 bébés morts dans un cimetière en Côte d'Ivoire. *Paris Match*, 26 July.
57. Parish, J. (2018). Uncanny objects and the fear of the familiar: Hiding from Akan witches in New York City. *Journal of Material Culture*, 23(1), 100-113.

58. Perlmutter, D. (2003). A Symbolic Analysis of Ritualistic Crime: The Forensics of Sacrifice. *Anthropoetics. The Journal of Generative Anthropology*, 9(2), 1-31.
59. Prinsloo, M. W., & Du Plessis, J. H. (1989). Townenaarsoorde, rituele doding en medisynemoorde in Venda. *JS Afr. L.*, 617.
60. Ranneditsheni, A. E., Masoga, M. A. & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H. (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.
61. RFI (2018). Côte d'Ivoire: Alassane Ouattara s'exprime à propos des enlèvements de mineurs. *Radio France Internationale*, 8 March.
62. RFI (2019). Côte d'Ivoire: 23 cadavres de nourrissons retrouvés dans un cimetière de Gagnoa. *Radio France Internationale*, 28 July.
63. Saba, C. K. S., Nzeh, J., Addy, F., & Karikari, A. B. (2020). COVID-19: Knowledge, perceptions and attitudes of residents in the Northern Region of Ghana, West Africa. *Preprints*.
64. Sanders, T. (2003). Save our skins: structural adjustment, morality and the occult in Tanzania. In *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities* (pp. 160-183). Routledge.
65. Sarkisova-Kouamé, V., & Kouamé, R. (2019). *La cybercriminalité et l'occultisme en Côte d'Ivoire*. Éditions universitaires européennes.
66. 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.
67. Siegel, D., & De Blank, S. (2010). Women who traffic women: the role of women in human trafficking networks—Dutch cases. *Global Crime*, 11(4), 436-447.
68. Tanner, R. (2010). Ideology and the Killing of Albinos in Tanzania: A Study in Cultural Relativities. *Anthropologist*, 12 (4):229-236.
69. The Japan Times (2015). Child murders in Cote d'Ivoire spark fears of pre-election ritual killings, organ trade. *The Japan Times*, 11 February.
70. The Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) (2002). *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk samhällsvetenskaplig forskning*. Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet.
71. Traoré, D. (1983). Médecine et magie africaines: ou comment le noir se soigne-t-il?
72. Touré, A., & Konaté, Y. (1990). Sacrifices dans la ville: le citadin chez le devin en Côte d'Ivoire.
73. Yangni-Angaté, A. (2004). *La revalorisation de la médecine traditionnelle africaine en Côte d'Ivoire*. Abidjan: CEDA.

74. Tounkara, G. I. (2018). Le meurtre d'un enfant de 4 ans ravive le débat sur les crimes rituels en Côte d'Ivoire. *VOA Afrique*, 27 February.
75. Touré B. et Konaté, Y. (1990). Sacrifices dans la ville: Le citadin chez le devin en Côte d'Ivoire. Bordeaux : Sépia Douga.
76. Wedel, J. (2004). Santería healing: A journey into the Afro-Cuban world of divinities, spirits, and sorcery. Univ. Press of Florida.
77. Wise, C. (2006). Nyama and Heka: African concepts of the word. *Comparative literature studies*, 43(1/2), 19-38.