

**Abhorred but Necessary: A Relational Interrogation of Zaman Lafia  
(Peaceful Living) and the Evil of the Death Penalty in the Traditional  
Hausa Belief System**

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**Abstract**

In Hausa worldview, Peaceful living (*Zaman Lafiya*) is conceived as the chief goal of life. *Zaman Lafiya* is that which determines goodness or badness of actions and practices. Everything, including morality, life, death and the afterlife is construed as being good or bad with reference to *Zaman Lafiya*. So, for instance, no matter the gravity of one's wrongful conducts, it is not justified to punish him, except when punishing him does contribute to the consolidation/realization/attainment of *Zaman Lafiya*. This paper investigates the Hausa culture and belief system, especially the aspect of punishment alongside the actions that are thought of as being grave to warrant evil punishment such as the death penalty. With the aid of some Hausa proverbs and the African notion of relationality, it would demonstrate how a conversation of metaphysical nature is sparked among such realities/constructs as morality, life, evil, death and the afterlife. It will also show how living an ethical life entails acting in a manner that consolidates communal or relational existence as framework for *Zaman Lafiya*.

**Keywords:** Traditional Hausa Belief System, *Zaman Lafiya*, Death Penalty, God, Evil, Death, Afterlife, Crime and Punishment

**Introduction**

This paper discusses the death penalty from an African perspective. Using the example of the Hausa<sup>1</sup>, the paper inquires and interrogates important concepts in relation to how they in turn impact on the Hausa worldview on the morality

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<sup>1</sup> Except otherwise specified, reference in this paper is to the Non- Muslim Hausa culture otherwise referred to as the Maguzawa. There is no gainsaying the fact that the maguzawa are the Hausa who have not succumb to the foreign influence of either Islam or Christianity. Their culture, belief and worldview remain as it was, especially before Islamic contact (MURRAY, 365). Worthy of note is the fact that very few are now left of the Maguzawa with majority succumbing to Islamic influence and a handful to Christianity. For centuries and as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Hausa have had their way of life changed by Islam so much so that it is now difficult to talk about Hausa without talking about Islam. This has led to the usual clarification by scholars of Hausa culture in terms of Muslim Hausa and Non-Muslim Hausa. Like many cultures in Africa south of the Sahara, the maguzawa worldview is relational.

or otherwise of the death penalty. The paper discusses Zaman Lafiya, death, afterlife and evil within the framework of Hausa worldview and the context of the roles they play in determining the moral justification of the Hausa cultural practice of the death penalty as a form of punishment for some wrongs committed.

In the first section, the paper examines Zaman Lafiya as a moral concept in Hausa worldview. The examination would show how Zaman Lafiya, guided by the Hausa teleological and cosmological thought, is considered as the chief goal of life through which the morality or otherwise of any practice, including the death penalty is determined. The second section discusses Hausa religious belief system and its perspective on evil, in relation to how the death penalty is construed as a necessary evil despite seeming to violate the African relational value encapsulated in the Hausa culture. The third section discusses the concept of death and afterlife, their place in Hausa communal thought and the role they play in the Hausa quest for the attainment of Zaman Lafiya as well as in the determination of the morality or otherwise of the death penalty. In the fourth section, the paper brings to the fore, Hausa thought on crime, punishment and the death penalty. The section identifies some wrongs that are punishable with death and the moral basis upon which the death penalty is thought of as an appropriate punishment for such wrongs. The conclusion follows immediately.

### **Zaman Lafiya and the Teleology of the Cosmos in Hausa Worldview: An Interrogation**

The term Zaman Lafiya literally means peaceful living or peaceful coexistence in Hausa worldview, and it is regarded as that which should drive everything, every action or practice. In fact, it is the main goal, which everyone should aim to achieve. To achieve Zaman Lafiya entails, among others, that people cultivate and sustain good relationships. So, relationship or the principle of relationality,<sup>2</sup> which is widely defended in the African philosophical literature, is crucial to the achievement of Zaman Lafiya.

Zaman Lafiya is what should be the chief goal of life, and it is, as we shall come to see, what determines the moral status of Hausa cultural practices including, the death penalty. Zaman Lafiya is regarded as the chief goal of life in Hausa worldview largely because of the Hausa cosmological and teleological thought. Duniya (the universe), for the Hausa, is designed in such a way that it is manifestly complex. One of the ways in which this complexity is reflected is in the conceptualization of the term itself. As a concept, it is in Hausa worldview, used to mean at least two things. First, it is used to mean the world

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<sup>2</sup> Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2021), for example, provide ample discussions on the centrality of relationship in the African worldviews and intellectual history.

(cosmos) and second, it is used to mean life (AMIN 2002, 248). When used to mean the world, otherwise referred to as *bigire*, reference is made to the space in which the existence of life of humans and other living things occur. Here, the environment (habitable and non-habitable), the waters and islands, directions and seasons, feature prominently (AYUBA 2019, 220). Closely related to this meaning is the conception of *duniya* as that about which is not so much known because of its being expanse, long and therefore unascertainable. This is reflected in the expression usually uttered by the Hausa when someone is missing. Thus, the Hausa say *yana can uwa duniya*, meaning he is out there in the world. When *duniya* is used in the second sense, it denotes life as an event and in this context, the totality of the experience that occurs from birth of especially humans, to death in the world.

Muhammad Lawal Amin (2002, 248-249) argues that the difference between *duniya* as cosmos and as life is seen in the expressions in which the words are used. Thus, where the Hausa say, *duniya ta yi dadi* (the world is enjoyable), reference is not to the world as a space but to life as an event. This, however, hardly goes to show a necessary difference because it is not meaningless for both the world as a space and as life to be conceived as being enjoyable. This is more so that life, as used in the second sense, necessarily occurs within the world/universe existing as a space and as used in the first sense. It is argued thus, that, it is when the Hausa hints the sense or context in which the term is used that the difference is revealed. It is not the case that once *duniya* is used in the Hausa expression above, it necessarily means life as an experience and not as a space within which life occurs.

Closely connected to this line of thought on the conceptualization of *duniya* in Hausa is the argument of K.C. Anyawu (2000 as cited by NDUBUISI and OKORO 2005, 67) that there exists the subject and the object in any conceivable experience. While the subject is thought of as the ego that experiences, that which is experienced by the subject is the object and is thought of as the world, of which the subject is a part. Here the object is thought of, from the point of view of African cosmology, with reference to the self and ultimately man who experiences, through life or living, the world.

The African conception of life as an experience or event is such that involves contradictions that must be reconciled in order to protect the self from danger. Such contradictions are not unconnected with the African notion of duality of experience as in body and mind, time and eternity etc. (NDUBUISI and OKORO 2005, 67). This is not different from the Hausa conception because, for the Hausa, life is conceived as being designed to be among others transient, hard, deceptive, contemptible, complex and capricious while yet being enjoyable, pleasing and attractive (AMIN 2002, 247; AMIN 2003, 1). Glaring contradictions are, for instance, demonstrated in the manner by which, on the

one hand, life is construed as being hard, deceptive and capricious, and on the other hand, it is construed as being enjoyable. For the Hausa, however, these contradictions are reconcilable by aiming to achieve *Zaman Lafiya*. To achieve this, as we shall see, one must possess some qualities, one of which is *sani/ilimi* (being knowledgeable) of how to navigate the turbulence of life. It is to this end that the Hausa say *Zaman duniya iyawa ne*, to live peacefully in the world is to know how to live.

Because these contradictions confront life, actions, practices and activities in Africa are conceived as responses to the contradictions. Life is deliberately confronted in such a manner that those contradictions are reconciled and or resolved. It is in the manner by which such contradictions are approached that social norms, morality and ultimately thoughts and beliefs of the African people are fashioned. For the Hausa, struggling to achieve *Zaman Lafiya* is the manner by which such contradiction should be confronted. In Hausa worldview, thus, it is only when *Zaman Lafiya* is attained that the contradictions of life can be resolved and the way it can and should be achieved is to make it of paramount importance so much so that it becomes the chief goal of life. It is by virtue of this that the Hausa say:

*Zaman lafiya yafi gara*

Peaceful living is worth more than wedding commodities (that a Hausa bride takes to her groom's house).

The Hausa also say:

*Zaman lafiya ya fi zama dan sarki*

Living in peace is worth more than being a prince. It can also be used to mean that nothing matches the price of peace (AMIN 2002, 245; AMIN 2003, 2)

Given the importance with which the Hausa attach to the size and variety of farm produce which form the bulk of wedding commodities as well as the status of the prince, one can boldly say that the Hausa revere *Zaman Lafiya* to the extent that they rather forfeit farm produce meant to be used as wedding commodities than lose the state of peaceful co-existence. Also, even the exalted position of a prince can be forfeited in favour of attaining peaceful living.

As noted earlier, making *Zaman Lafiya* the chief goal of life entails the cultivation, development and possession of some virtues that are necessary for the actualization of that goal by individual Hausa. It is only when individuals are in the possession of these virtues that *Zaman Lafiya* can be attained. Some of the most important of those virtues include the cultivation of relational capacities such as tolerance, empathy, recognition, patience, etc. To achieve

Zaman Lafiya, one must enter into relationships with other humans and even the non-human elements in the environment. Since the attainment of Zaman Lafiya is a good, it is in the possession of these relational virtues that morality and ethics in Hausa worldview are construed. Thus, the Hausa man attains the status of mutumin kirki (the good man) only when these relational qualities are possessed and expressed.

Scholars such as Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene (2000), Amin (2002), Jerome H. Barkow (N.D, 3-6) have at varying length, identified some of these virtues and or qualities. While some qualities serve the purpose of making the good Hausa man in general some are specific in preparing the Hausa individual in the struggle for the attainment of Zaman Lafiya. Some of these general qualities are gaskiya and Amana (truth and trust), Karamci (open-minded generosity), hakuri (Patience), hankali (reason), ladabi (discipline), kunya (bashfulness), mutunci (humaneness), hikima and adalci (wisdom and scrupulous behaviours). These qualities are critical to constructing and sustaining healthy relationships.

On the other hand, the qualities that the Hausa should deliberately cultivate, develop and possess in order for the Hausa to be adequately prepared for the task of working towards the attainment of Zaman Lafiya are ilimi/sani (knowledge), hakuri (patience), juriya/jimiri (perseverance), gaskiya (honesty/truth/sincerity/objectivity), taka tsantsan (caution), himma (resoluteness), kwazo (hard-work), yakana (contentment), biyayya (obedience), mutunci (respectability) zumunci (communality) and mutual assistance (taimakon juna). Worthy of note is the fact that it is difficult to identify and exhaust all the qualities that meet the sufficient condition for being mutumin kirki in Hausa thought. What we may easily find are necessary conditions that aid one in constructing the sort of relationships that lead to Zaman Lafiya. What we have so far discussed is the general moral outlook of the Hausa with Zaman Lafiya or the struggle for its attainment as the determinant of good or bad. In the next section, our discussion will be on the Hausa belief system in relation to how evil is conceived and how the death penalty is thought of as a necessary evil.

### **The Hausa Belief System, God and Evil: An Overview**

Although so much has been written about the Hausa from the point of view of academic disciplines such as History, Language, Anthropology and, to some degree, Religion, very little has been written about the Hausa from the point of view of philosophy, especially philosophy of religion. This is probably because the Hausa has had to contend with early foreign contact, with especially the Arabs. In this section, an attempt will be made at bringing to the fore introductory notes on the Hausa religious belief system, especially as it relates

to the Nature of deity or deities (God or gods) as well as the Hausa idea of evil. It is hoped that the issues raised would merit further debates. To begin, the traditional Hausa religion may originally have been anchored on the idea of evil which they believe hampers sustenance. From the understanding of human nature as beings who refuse anything good when angered, thereby making others suffer, the Hausa form the idea that there is something that is responsible for evil such as drought and drying up of rivers because of being angered. Just as Humans are approached for forgiveness when angered, so is that thing that brings about evil in the form of drought, ailment, etc. Hence, the struggle to constantly make that thing happy through sacrifices. Here is an anthropomorphic origin of the Hausa religious belief system according to which deity or deities are believed to exist by virtues of human attributes.

Another way by which the origin of the traditional Hausa religion is anchored is especially from the perspective of the struggle to do away with ailments. The Hausa, in this regard, conceive of something(s) beyond humans that are more powerful than humans and are able to end ailments as they are able to bring about good or evil to humans. From the knowledge they have of human nature also, the Hausa, conceive the idea of pleasing those things, which would turn out to be some kind of worship that would be later known as bori (being one of the two ways of worship) (IBRAHIM 1982, 36). What is common in the two conceptions of the origin of the traditional Hausa religion is the fact that evil existed and needed to be done away with. The salient point to note is that there is a presumption of some form of omnipotence and omniscience in the manner by which those powerful things who would be known as God (Ubangiji), gods and or spirits (iska or iskoki) are able to know how to solve human problem. One may argue that these deities are, however, not absolutely omnipotent and omniscient. This is in the manner by which they do not seem to know all human problems until they are told. It is also in the manner by which the deities, the spirits in this case, are thought of as being able to solve only particular problems. This is the case, except for God who is presumed to be one and is able to solve more general and complex problems. Thus, different iskoki, with different names have different designated purposes and powers exclusive to each other (MUCIZZ 1985, 50). In Hausa religious belief, thus, there are many (thousands) iskoki with Kure (hyena) as the chief iska who is worshipped by all, and that is why the Hausa construe hyena as a sacred animal (AMIN 2002, 148).

The problem of evil from the Hausa purview can better be understood in the following way. While the white spirits are the source of good, the black spirits are the source of evil. Some of the white spirits are Sarkin Makada (chief drummer), Sarkin Aljan (Chief spirit), Sarkin rafi (Chief spirit, of the Rivers) etc. on the other hand, the black spirits are Uwar gona (mother of the farms), Bako (the stranger), Gajimare, Duna, etc. (IBRAHIM 1982, 39-50)

The Hausa idea of God, especially as it regards omnipotence and omniscience is derived from the realization of human limitations, which is expressed in *Mutum tara yake bai cika Goma ba* (man is nine (9) and not ten (10)) (AMIN 2002, 130). *Goma*, which means ten, in this proverb is used as a metaphor for perfection/completion/finality/greatness. The proverb is situated in the context of Hausa idea about numbers and counting with ten as some kind of the greatest number. Since the Hausa have an idea of completion and since the Human is said to be incomplete, speculation about the idea of a Being that is complete, thereby matching ten as a number, with all the attendant qualities of perfection and completion, is inevitable. This speculation or wonder is to be found in the manner by which the Hausa say, *Allah na mutane, mutane na tukwane, tukwane na fashewa* (Allah creates men, men create pots and pots do break) (AMIN 2002, 130). Implied in this saying is the idea of creation and relative perfection. It implies that indeed, God created humans who are construed as almost perfect creatures, at least, relative to other creatures in the universe. It also implies that, relative to God's creation, man's creation (the pots in this context) are imperfect as they do break. The scope of this research goes beyond the possibility of an omnibenevolent God co-existing with evil, but the above suggests that God in Hausa religious worldview might be the maker of both good and evil. This suggests that a complete universe is one where both good and evil are inevitable.

Although from Hausa oral traditions and habits, one could infer the Hausa conception of a Supreme Being, such conception has not been articulated in clear terms. The Hausa conception of God is thus, vague. The idea of vagueness in the conceptualization of the Hausa God is expressed thus: *Ubangiji buwayi gagara misali* (God, the all-powerful the indescribable). Beyond the literal meaning of being indescribable, the proverb, goes to show God's omnipotence. *Buwayi*, is used in the context of being all-powerful and uncontrollable. The Hausa invoke such expression to show how powerful and uncontrollable a member of the community, a son, a leader or criminal has become so much so that the community is unable to control and or regulate the actions of that member.

Goriawala Mucizz (1985, 49) and Amin (2002, 147) maintain that the Hausa do have an idea of a supreme Being who they call Allah or *Ubangiji* who created the universe and controls it. Mucizz (1985, 49), however, argues that the idea that the Hausa have of Allah is probably influenced by Islamic thoughts. This is even though the conception of a supreme being called Allah predates Islam. Mucizz's argument that the Hausa conception of a supreme being as being vague may have been influenced by the Islamic thought may not be plausible since the Hausa conception is influenced by Islamic Arabia, whose conception of a Supreme Being is not vague, and not Pre-Islamic Arabia whose

conception of a Supreme Being was vague. I argue that while contact with Islam may have influenced the language of the Hausa with reference to how they refer to a Supreme Being both as Allah and as Ubangiji, it has not changed the Hausa conception of a Supreme Being, especially with reference to its vagueness.

The traditional Hausa religious belief system is such that although Allah or Ubangiji created the universe and controls it as he is most powerful, He is not the central Being as they do not worship him nor seek for his help nor invoke him in their prayers except in rare occasion such as the time of drought where the Hausa woman wear men's wears, carry men's implement for farming, chanting Allah ka bamu ruwa (Allah give us rains). Thus, although, Barkow (1970, 107) argues that the Hausa do rarely worship God directly, their indirect worship of God is not unconnected with their conception of God as being more concerned with spirits and less concerned with men, according to Mucizz (1985, 50). I argue, however, that, the fact that, the Hausa worship or invoke the Supreme Being only in rare occasions (at exceptional and most trying times) does not necessarily mean that the Hausa construe God as being less concerned with the Hausa but shows how they revere God. It shows that, while there is something that the spirits cannot do, it is God who is able to do what the spirits are unable to do, which thereby shows God as the most powerful, and that is why God is invoked directly to solve the most troubling of problems such as drought. Nevertheless, on the basis of the fact that God and especially, gods in Hausa belief system is/are unable to cure some ailments even when asked, shows that the God or gods are not all powerful and that is why, in the Hausa conceptualization of God, the choice of the word 'most powerful' is more appropriate than 'all powerful'. This is why Mucizz (1985, 52) demonstrates that, sometimes, irrespective of the extent of the bori that is applied, it becomes futile in curing ailments.

Tsafi and Bori are two major ways through which worship is done by the Hausa. Worship is usually done with a view to connecting or reaching out to the spirits to especially present wishes. Tsafi is usually done at designated places such as caves, designated trees (especially tamarind or baobab), and designated places at homes otherwise referred to as Wurin al'ada (place of worship) (IBRAHIM 1982, 30; BARKOW 1970, 108). While the head of the family is always the chief priest of the worship done at home, there is always a special person considered to be the priest who is the custodian of other worship places and through whom the Hausa gets to the spirit (IBRAHIM 1982, 30; BARKOW 1970, 107). Hausa traditional religion is thus, a clan or family affair as each household has its own spirits whom they worship. However, the Hausa expresses, duk bori daya ake wa tsafi (sacrifices are to but one bori) to indicate that, while religion is a clan affair, it is the same spirit that manifests in all the places of worship of the Hausa. In all the places of worship, animals are



slaughtered as sacrifice. Bori on the other hand, is usually carried out for the purpose of cure of ailments. This is done by yan bori (special humans) who have, over time, mastered the spirits and have established relationships in such a manner by which the spirits enter their body as a result of which things such as herbs for curing specific ailments and especially barrenness are revealed to the person who in turn reveals it to humans (BARKOW 1970, 108).

In the context of Hausa traditional religious belief system, iskoki, construed as gods, are created by Allah or Ubangiji and it is from iskoki that evil and good emanate. This is as a result of the iskoki being angered. The Hausa traditional belief system is thus, anthropomorphic in the manner by which the spirits are construed as being emotional since evil is conceived as a product of the anger of the spirits (IBRAHIM 1982, 31). Although the extent of their autonomy and free will is not clear, there are at least, some actions of the spirits that are within the control of Ubangiji, such that the actions, such as the infliction of suffering and its removal, are possible with the will of Ubangiji. The point earlier made on the rare occasion in which Allah is directly reached out to, which is the time of drought being a natural evil may mean that God, for the Hausa, could be the source of natural evil while the gods (spirits) are construed as the sources of moral evil which manifests in the form of ailments, barrenness, etcetera. This is given that these are believed to be inflicted by spirits which informs why sacrifices are offered to them for healing. Ultimately thus, the traditional Hausa religious system centers around evil and how to deal with it. From what is construed as the basis of religion itself, to the reasons of worship at a particular place and time, to the requests often made, religion is in relation to doing away with evil such that if there were no evil, there may not have been the need for worship in the first place.

As mentioned earlier, the Hausa God is not an absolutely good God since it is the case that some evil are traceable to such deities. This is even though, He is construed as good, in the manner by which God, according to Hausa belief, brings about nourishment and mercy, even when offended. This is to be seen in the manner by which at any time, the Hausa attempts worship, it is so that good things are provided or evil is averted. That is why the Hausa say Ubangiji gatan bawa (God the nourisher of the servant).

However, the contradiction is in the Hausa conception of God as the creator of the universe, including everything such as the spirits that do cause evil, in it. The contradiction is in the manner by which God is conceived as the nourisher and also as the creator of the sources of evil or even the source of evil. But, it does not seem that God or even the spirits are blamed by the Hausa for the evil that exists around them. This is due to the Hausa thought on freedom according to which evil exists on the basis of the undoing of men that is freely exercised. To this end, the Hausa say, duk wani hani daga ubangiji baiwa ne (every denial (pain) from God is a blessing).

With reference to moral evil, the Hausa belief system is such that God allows free will among the Hausa to confront evil and this is done through a deliberate attempt at working towards becoming good humans. To confront moral evil thus, it is enough when the Hausa tailor their actions towards becoming good people without necessarily looking up to God. Thus, for the Hausa to confront evil, they must freely work towards navigating the turbulent, complex and chaotic world created by God. Because, freedom and free will is supposed, the conception of right and wrong is conceived by virtue of obedience to some recognized and assumed relational norms, codes and values through which human wellbeing, sustenance, harmony and ultimately life, among others are realized. This is not unconnected with the central position that man occupies in Hausa worldview. So that anything that is perceived as that which threatens man and life is construed as evil that is justified in being confronted using any option available to man, including the application of the death penalty. It is this central position that man occupies that justifies taking away the life of a person whose actions threaten human wellbeing and sustenance. This is in spite of the fact that taking away human life also violates the African relational value that the Hausa culture encapsulates. In the next section, thus, our discussion will focus on the Hausa worldview on the concepts of person (man), death and afterlife. This will be done in the context of how evil is construed with reference to the role the concepts play in the attainment of Zaman Lafiya.

### **Man, Death, Afterlife and Zaman Lafiya in Hausa Worldview**

Apart from being referred to as mutum, man is also referred to as kai (self) who is said to have life (rai) and kurwa (soul) (AMIN 2002, 131). The Non-Muslim Hausa use rai and kurwa interchangeably and to them, anything that lives has kurwa, which is essentially immaterial and is akin to soul or life (BARKOW, 1970, 116). Sometimes, however, kurwa is used in a different sense as that which the witches and wizards are capable of subduing when one is asleep at night. Rai is the necessary and sufficient condition for living that ceases to be when death occurs. Man, for the Hausa, just like for other African cultures, is considered as the central figure of the universe so much so that he is that around whom everything in the universe revolves. Everything is meaningful or otherwise with reference to man. Even Zaman Lafiya is conceivable only when there is life and ultimately man. It is against this background that the Hausa pay attention to the concept of death which threatens the existence of life and ultimately man.

The Hausa word for death is rasuwa. But, due to the influence of Islam, the Muslim Hausa use rasuwa and mutuwa interchangeably. For the Muslim Hausa, death occurs when life (rai) leaves the body. In Hausa worldview, the necessity and inevitability of death is presupposed. That is why they say duk mai rai mamaci ne (every human is mortal). With reference to especially natural

death, the Hausa are thus, determinist, although not in absolute terms since they also believe that one should not do anything that brings about death to one's self. It is with reference to this that the Hausa say *mai kasada shi yakan mutu kwanan sa basu kare ba* (it is he who is reckless that dies before his time) (AMIN 2002, 144). This proverb is expressed by the Hausa in the context of the case in which a person becomes a threat to his own life by engaging in any endeavour that brings death unto him. The meaning of the proverb may however, be extended to also serve as caution to not just the owner of a life but to others whose reckless actions may bring about death of others.

In Hausa thought, the soul (*rai*) is referred both to as the mind and as life. When referred to as the life, it is usually in conjunction with *jiki* (body) of which the human being is made up. *Rai* is essentially immaterial while the body is essentially material and it is in the body that *rai* lives. It is the coexistence of *rai* and *jiki* that is referred to as *rayuwa* (living/life). In Hausa worldview, however, this coexistence is not eternal which means, separation between *rai* and *jiki* would inevitably occur at some point. It is with this separation that *rasuwa* is said to have occurred and it is at this point that the Hausa say *ran sa ya fita* (his soul has gone out of his body) (IBRAHIM 2019, 23).

Difference of thought exists between the Muslim Hausa and the Non-Muslim Hausa on the position/destination of *rai/kurwa* upon death. For the Muslim Hausa, when *rai* leaves *jiki* it goes to *lahira*, which is afterlife otherwise referred to as the hereafter or as Barkow (1970, 116) calls it, the heaven. However, referring to *lahira* as heaven alone is problematic because, in Islamic thought, the hereafter is a combination of heaven and hell. For the Non-Muslim Hausa, although *kurwa* doubles as spirit of a dead person, it is possessed by the living and it is that which the witches and wizards have the ability to subdue and capture.

For the Non-Muslim Hausa, *kurwa* travels and wonders while one is asleep at night and it is in the course of such travels that witches and wizards attack and subdue it. It is only when the *kurwa* returns to the body from travels that one is able to be awake otherwise, such person remains asleep even though he is not necessarily dead. The person stands the chance of being awake only when the witch or wizard responsible is identified and asked to release his *kurwa*. It is against this background that the Hausa often make the expression thus: *kurwa na kur, nama na da daci, tsakani na da maye* (my *kurwa* is safe as my flesh tastes bitter for the wizard or witch). One wonders why the use of *nama* (flesh) in this expression when *kurwa* which the witches or wizards are concerned with is essentially immaterial. It may, however, be inferred that such reference to the flesh is because one's flesh is thought of as that which determines the taste of *kurwa* or atleast exert some form of influence since it is that in which the *kurwa* normally lives.

The kurwa when referred to as the spirit of the dead comes back to the world to relate positively and peacefully with relatives and the community at large. Here, kurwa is used to mean rai. However, in Hausa thought, instances abound in which such relationship takes a violent and dangerous turn. Such is the case where the kurwa belonged to an old man who died with anger and vengeance (BARKOW 1970, 116). One wonders, however, why this is thought of by the Hausa as applying only to the old since to be angry and vengeful, one need not necessarily be old. For instance, anyone who had his/her life unnaturally cut short has cause to be angry and vengeful. Regardless, herein lays the conversation that is sparked between life, evil, death, afterlife and Zaman Lafiya. For the Hausa, when natural death occurs, kurwa comes back to relate with the world in a manner by which peaceful living is maintained. On the other hand, when the death is unnatural and is caused by some evil done to the dead, the kurwa comes back to relate with the world in a manner by which peace is disturbed. Such is the case in which one is murdered.

Closely similar to Hausa thought on kurwa is the concept fatalwa (ghost) which is also thought of as the spirit of a dead person (BARKOW 1970, 117). Fatalwa's abode is its owner's grave from where it torments unwary travellers, the Hausa think. Unlike kurwa, however, fatalwa is visible to men. It is distinguishable from kurwa in that while kurwa, when used in some sense, does exist before death, fatalwa is an afterlife concept that is identifiable by the living because it takes the shape and appearance of the dead. However, fatalwa goes beyond the grave to attack those who have done evil to the dead while living. That is why the Hausa say, fatalwan sa ta biyo ni (his fatalwa pursued me) or na ga fatalwan sa cikin bacci (I saw his fatalwa in my sleep). Such expressions presuppose some form of acquaintance with the dead. The expressions are usually by persons who have done evil to another or were responsible for someone else's death.

The point that is being made here is that conversation or relationship takes place between life and death, which determines the direction of a society with regards to the attainment of Zaman Lafiya. Where, for instance, evil is perpetrated in the form of murder, which brings about unnatural death, the dead returns to life to disturb peaceful living as we see in the case of kurwa. However, where it is a natural death or the dead was not inflicted with any evil and has no cause to be angry and vengeful, instead of disturbing peaceful living, kurwa brings about Zaman Lafiya in the manner which by it visits kins and community with a view to providing protection. Consequently, thus, the Hausa are justified in adopting any means necessary to ensure that Zaman Lafiya is attained and or maintained. These necessary steps may include threats of sanctions or

punishment to deter persons from perpetrating evil such as murder that stand in the way of the attainment of Zaman Lafiya. In the next section, our discussion will be on the Hausa idea of crimes and especially death penalty. We will show that while actions are considered wrong because they stand in the way of the attainment of Zaman Lafiya and while the death penalty is ordinarily deemed evil because it threatens life, instances abound in which the death penalty is considered morally good. One of the instances is where carrying out the death penalty is considered necessary for the attainment of Zaman Lafiya.

### **Crime, Punishment and the Death Penalty as Necessary Evil**

C.S. Momoh (2000, 378) argues that because the end of belief and worship is the act or conduct, what should matter for the African, is the end being the act or conduct. Put differently, in Africa, the act of belief and worship is done with a view to making those who engage in doing so act in a certain manner. Momoh's argument is probably informed by the belief that in Africa, the concept of the Day of Judgment, presided over by a Supreme Being who hands down reward and punishment is hardly thought of. That is why belief and worship, for Momoh, matter less than conduct since reward and punishment (judgment) are carried out here on earth and are incorporated into our ways of life with a view to bringing about harmony. Momoh's argument is that because Africans do not wait for a Day of Judgment, human conduct must be rewarded and or punished here on earth. This is the case in Africa before contact with Islam and Christianity because the idea and or concept of a Supreme Being is not thought of (MOMOH 2000, 377). Instead of a Supreme Being, what Africans had was a handful of gods.

Momoh's argument that the concept of a Supreme Being is not thought of in Africa is not applicable to all African worldviews. As earlier noted, the Hausa, for instance, have a conception of the Supreme God, otherwise referred to as Ubangaji, whom they regard as the maker of the universe. This is in addition to the conception they have of other gods (spirits) through which they worship the Supreme Being. The argument of Mbiti (1980, 69-70), which is to the effect that throughout Africa, humans only interact with God through intermediaries such as Priests, Diviners, Rainmakers, living dead, elders and spirits, etcetera, further supports the conception of a Supreme Being in Africa.

Conceptions of crime in Africa are not unconnected with systems of belief and cultural values. Crimes are conceived with reference to the conformity or otherwise of those crimes with acceptable societal norms. Those that are in conformity with the norms are rewarded, while those that deviate from the norms are punished at varying lengths. Specific conducts within the Nigerian socio-cultural practices that are said to be punishable because they do not conform to societal norms include theft, abduction, murder, adultery, fornication, farmland encroachment etc. The severity of punishment is not

unconnected with the extent of the damage each conduct brings about to victims and the community (JONAH 2013, 1). Consequently, the actions that are thought of as those that should attract reward are those that sustain the community relationships (BARKOW, n.d, 2). On the other hand, actions that stand in the way of the sustenance of the community relationships are thought of as those that attract punishment. Reward and punishment are thus determined with reference to how actions assure or impede communal relationships in society.

Among other kinds of punishment such as fines, warnings and banishment, the death penalty is not unknown to Africa. Unlike other kinds of punishment, however, the death penalty is not considered as a pleasant thing to do. The death penalty for crimes such as murder, manslaughter and abduction is resorted to only when it is necessary such as the the circumstance in which it is the only fitting punishment in the absence of other appropriate options such as banishment. Although public execution is not considered appropriate in some culture, such as the Goemaini of North central Nigeria because it conflicts with the sacredness of life (JONAH 2013, 3), such is not the case in Hausa culture as we will come to see.

Some of the wrongs that are considered appropriate in being punished with death include fornication and theft of farm produce. Unlike what is obtainable in other cultures, such as the Goemaini, the concept of public execution is not unknown to the Hausa. The Hausa do engage in public executions, often during ceremonies. If the death penalty is considered appropriate to be inflicted at all, then, the crime of taking away a life is one of such cases in which the death penalty must apply. This is so because of life's importance, which is a necessary condition for peace and ultimately sustenance. It is also because of the status of man as the central figure of the universe. John S. Mbiti (1980, 206) has gone further to argue that among other wrongs such as theft and rape, murder is a wrong that is appropriately punished with death in Africa. For Andrew Novak (2014, 3) also, like many other societies, murder, among other acts, was considered as a grave action that African societies frowned at.

In Africa, crime and punishment are conceived with reference to social order and peace (MBITI 1980, 295), so that, any action is being regarded as a wrong with reference to its propensity to hamper peace and social order, and any punishment is adjudged as good or proper with reference to how it brings about social order and peace. Social peace and order are of enormous importance to the extent that they are considered sacred and as measures of moral determination. One of the prisms through which the social order is viewed is the institution of kinship. Wrongs against individuals are deemed as wrongs against every other one and ultimately the community since everyone is thought

of as being related to everybody. Wrongs or evils, therefore, are conducts that disrupt peaceful relationships. Thus, if you steal from one person, it is as though you steal from every other person. If one kills another, it is as though every other person and ultimately the community is killed and or pained because relationships will be strained. This thereby brings about social disorder, which ultimately disturbs peaceful living. It is an offence against the community to act in any way that disrupts the relational order of the community.

It was earlier noted that there are qualities or virtues that must be cultivated in order to attain the status of being good (*mutumin kirki*). Apart from the role these qualities play in bringing about *mutumin kirki*, they also play the role of guiding the Hausa towards living an ethical life which is a condition for social order and peace. One must, therefore, constantly be seen striving to cultivate these virtues so he can act ethically and do away with evil. Since one must be in relationship with others in order to exhibit virtue, the capacity for relationship is then prized highly in Hausa culture as it is in other African cultures. Any struggle that is not geared towards ethical living which brings about social order and peace is evil. Sanction, in the form of punishment, is one of the ways by which this evil can be prevented. It should be noted that the option of punishment is resorted to after other options are exhausted. As earlier noted, the Hausa revere knowledge *ilimi/sani* which is acquired through a process of learning. It is through this process that the Hausa individual is taught how to cultivate the virtues that help in living an ethical life. As it is the case with human nature, some would refuse to go through such process and some would refuse to act ethically even when they have gone through such process. It is as a response to this that punishment is applied; to either ensure that the Hausa cultivate these qualities which guides him towards living an ethical life or to protect social order and peace. It is through this that the community is thought of as being consolidated and or sustained and it is with reference to this that any punishment qualifies as being good or bad. The death penalty is therefore, thought of as being morally justified for murder because it is necessary to bringing about peaceful living or restore broken relationships. One of the ways through which the death penalty is executed is by chopping up of the head. This is carried out by a designated person known as *hauni* under the instruction of the community leader. It is by virtue of this that Hausa community leaders are sometimes referred to as *sarkin yanka* (slaughter commander) (MUHAMMAD 2014, 57).

Theft of farm produce is another wrong that the Hausa consider so grave to such an extent that the death penalty is considered appropriate as punishment. This is because of the significance of agriculture and farming in Hausa thought. One of the significance of farming is the general role farm produce plays in the provision of one of the universal basic human needs, food.

In Hausa worldview, *noma* (farming) is also significant because it is thought of as the root of riches/wealth. Such significance is expressed in the saying *noma tushen arziki* (farming, the root of riches/wealth). Moreover, it is the yields from *noma* that is used in the Hausa cultural practice of what is called *gara*. *Gara* is a collection of varieties of farm produce that the Hausa bride takes to her matrimonial home. The worth of the Hausa bride is determined with reference to the quantity and quality of the *gara* that the bride takes to her matrimonial home. *Gara*, for the Hausa, is so significant that it is only *Zaman Lafiya* that is thought of as that which is higher in rank than *gara* so that the forfeiture of *gara* is only justified when it is done to maintain peaceful co-existence. The Hausa invoke this proverb to assert that *gara* is so important that its forfeiture is only justified when it is done to maintain peaceful co-existence (BAMBALE 2016, 17). Thus, the Hausa say *Zaman lafiya yafi gara*, Peaceful living is worth more than wedding commodities (that a Hausa bride takes to her groom's house).

It is due to the importance of farm produce that there is, in Hausa thought, a conception of a god otherwise referred to as *uwar gona* that is so revered by the Hausa such that sacrifices are offered to please her for the role it plays as the protector of the farm. It is through *uwar gona* that the death penalty for the theft of farm produce is executed by causing the stomachs of persons guilty of stealing from the farm to swell until they die (IBRAHIM 1982, 47-48).

Chastity of especially brides is also a virtue that is so revered by the Hausa so much that being unchaste attracted the death penalty. In Hausa thought, marriage ceremonies are also thought of as ritual or trial conducted to determine the chastity of the bride. The trial is conducted by asking someone to use a magical knife to strike a goat with it with the aim of slicing it into two. The chastity of the girl is established when the man is able to slice the goat with one stroke. But in the event that the girl is unchaste, that man would not be able to slice the goat with that magical knife no matter how many times he tried (IBRAHIM 1982, 171).

At the beginning of the ritual, the bride is asked to say whether or not she is chaste. Her answer is what determines whether or not the ritual shall proceed. Where she says that she is chaste, then the ritual proceeds to determine the veracity of her claim. Where she says she is unchaste, there is no need for that ritual and she would be left to live in which case she would continually be mocked along with her family for having been involved in a shameful act. When a girl is actually unchaste, *uwar gona* would cause her to instantly fall and die. It may be inferred that the justification for carrying out the death penalty on the Hausa bride for being unchaste is to be found in an attempt by the Hausa to protect the kinship system. Kinship is important because virtually all values and norms connected with human relationship are understood and interpreted with reference to the kinship system of the people. It is one of the strongest forces in



traditional African life that is established by blood and betrothal (engagement and marriage) Mbiti (2000, 104). Being unchaste undermines kinship and renders engagement and betrothal useless and for the Africans and indeed the Hausa, anything that threatens it should be visited with the severest punishment.

### **Conclusion**

Within the context of Hausa moral thought and belief system, the foregoing discussion brings to the fore the extent of the importance of the concept of Zaman Lafiya with reference to the necessary role it plays in the conceptualization of evil as well as the determination of morality in Hausa thought. This is illustrated in the manner by which some crimes such as murder are thought of as grave crimes that are justified in being punished because they stand in the way of the attainment of Zaman Lafiya. We have seen how death and afterlife are formidable concepts in the moral considerations of especially crime and punishment in Hausa thought. Critics may question whether Zaman Lafiya is a moral theory and if it is, a general or restricted one for explaining the morality of any or a particular action such as punishment. Our response would be that while Zaman Lafiya can be put forward as both a general and particular guide/ framework for determining morality in Hausa thought, it has not attained the status of a comprehensive theory. Our attempt is geared towards promoting the idea of Zaman Lafiya as a possible moral angle from which moral judgments and considerations can be made in Hausa thought. Further research with a view to exploring the possibility of developing Zaman Lafiya as a comprehensive moral theory would be worthwhile.

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