


'Stop killing us without witness': Analyses of Rawls's theory of justice within the context of jungle justice in Nigeria in the light of Deuteronomy 19:15–21

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This research examined the increasing human rights abuses, reminiscent of jungle justice, in Nigeria in the light of John Rawls's theory of justice and Deuteronomy 19:15–21. The legal code contained in Deuteronomy was Moses's instruction to his people when it became obvious that he was old and could not enter the promised land. This legal code found in the study text can serve as a model to any nation saddled with the social vices of jungle justice. Jungle justice means a group of people discharging judgement against an accused person or suspect without going through either the legal process of taking the person to court or waiting for any security agency in charge. These cases of killings without trial reflect on Nigerian society. This research employs Rawls's theory of justice. As the study text is Moses's farewell speech, this study employed rhetorical analyses in study of the biblical text and used descriptive analysis in the study of jungle justice in Nigeria. The target population of this study is Christians in Nigeria. Furthermore, the article used secondary data such as Bible dictionaries, concordances, encyclopaedias, journal articles, magazines and newspapers. However, the study's findings revealed that the scandal of jungle justice has continued because judgement is based on one witness alone. In addition, legal cases are not taken to the court where they are decided. In addition, judges take bribe and derail justice especially against the poor, hence they do not make diligent inquiries before giving their judgement. Rawls's theory of justice and Deuteronomy 19:15–21 provide a lucid response to this bizarre situation of human rights abuses.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article contributes to scholarship as it provides a new dimension of scholarly discussion on the issue of human rights abuses on record in Nigeria. Again, this article provides a lucid exploration of Deuteronomy 19:15–21 and uses its hermeneutical propagation of more than one witness before adjudicating a case against any criminal suspect as a solution to this spate of human right abuses.

Keywords: Deuteronomy 19:15–21; Rawls's theory; jungle justice; human rights; Moses's farewell speech; false accusation.

Introduction

The extreme importance of protecting the dignity of human beings led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948, just after World War II. Thereafter, those rights were accepted and adopted by the United Nations (Kamruzzaman & Das 2016) because of their vitality (Dhupdale 2012). Human rights 'is a primary condition for a civilised existence and all civilised societies use it as a standard by which the moral content of any law must be assessed' (Enemo & Olorunfemi 2011:1). According to Umzurike (2017), there is hardly any government today that does not, at least, profess human rights. Interestingly, the protection and promotion of human rights have become the yardstick for rating the success of any government.

However, human rights in Nigeria are as old as primordial time, because human rights and fundamental freedoms were recognised in traditional Nigerian societies. For instance, values such as the right to family, kin and clan membership and freedom of thought, speech and association were jealously guarded (National Action Plan for the Promotion & Protection of Human Rights in Nigeria 2006). In modern times, the Independence Constitution of 1960 and the Republican Constitution of 1963 marked the entrenchment of fundamental human rights in Nigeria (National Action Plan for the Promotion & Protection of Human Rights in Nigeria 2006), especially after both the Clifford and Lythleton Constitutions of 1922 and 1954, respectively. This

Note: Special Collection: African Hermeneutics.

was to ensure an equitable society where life and the freedom of the citizens can be protected.

The continuous interruption of the military regime with its attendant violation of human rights led to the creation of another Constitution in 1999. This was followed by the inauguration of democracy and a civilian regime in the same year. The 1999 Constitution extolled human rights; hence, chapters II and IV were devoted to discussions on human rights, and sections 33–43 (12 sections in total) were all devoted to the same subject. The new epoch of democracy came with many hopes and potentialities to improve Nigeria's human rights record on the global stage. This is because democracy is believed by many to be the best in upholding human rights among other system of government (Ozoigbo 2017).

Unfortunately, the record even persisted and became worse. This has made Ozoigbo (2017) affirm that democratic practice and its consequent protection of human rights in Nigeria are not what they ought to be. According to research by Human Rights Report (2020), as was rightly captured by Elbeka (2021), over 70% of the prison population in Nigeria is made up of detainees awaiting trial, with over 20% awaiting trial for more than a year. The report shows that unlawful torture has been ensconced in Nigerian law enforcement as a means of punishment as well as information gathering, while extrajudicial killings have become commonplace since 1999. These unlawful killings go unpunished, according to the findings. According to Yusuf (2021), between 2007 and 2018, Nigeria scored 54.6% for the right to food, 48.2% for the right to health, 31.7% for the right to housing and 32.0% for the right to work. Also, another report shows that the government or its agents committed arbitrary, unlawful or extrajudicial killings where 2015 soldiers were killed and 347 members of the Islamic movement of Nigeria were murdered (Yusuf 2021). The crux of this article is to interrogate this ugly trend of human rights abuse using examples of more than one witness provided in Deuteronomy 19:15–21. Accordingly, one reads that the book of Deuteronomy proposes a system of justice that is so comprehensive that it can serve as a veritable model for any country aspiring to accelerate justice, especially as it concerns human rights. Similarly, Miller (1990) observes that Deuteronomy 19:15–19 proposes all the ingredients of a system for the administration of justice: codes of judicial conduct. This legal code in Deuteronomy 19:15–21 serves as a guide on how the children of Israel can establish a just society replete with peace, harmony and tranquillity (Carmichael 1974). Therefore, the goal of this article is to engage the poor record of human rights in Nigeria using the Deuteronomic example found in the study text. In addition, this article adopted John Rawls's theory of justice, 1971.

Definition of the term 'jungle justice'

'Jungle justice' is variously defined to connote the activities of people dishing out judgement on the street without any single witness to justify their claims:

[J]ungle justice is the act of disregarding the rule of law and taking matters into one's hands. It is also the act of handling suspected criminal offenders over the hands and mercy of angry mob. (Kapae & Adishi 2017:16)

Put concisely, jungle justice is when the population takes upon themselves the responsibility of punishing an alleged criminal without reference to the law. Abdulah (2016) observes that 'jungle justice is a metaphor for the failure of justice and the failure of society to apply uniform and equal standards and processes to everyone':

[U]nder the jungle justice system the entire concepts of state, government and rule of law is defeated because people are allowed to act in a state of nature that is unregulated, unbridled. (p. 16)

Unfortunately, Onu (n.d.) opines that jungle justice is a travesty of justice because it does not guarantee fairness to anyone.

Theoretical framework (Rawls's theory of justice 1971)

The major concern of Rawls's theory is social justice. Its central theme is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. The major institutions refer to the political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements. The major institutions define people's rights and duties and influence their life prospects, what they can expect to be and how well they can hope to do. In this theory, the basic structure is the primary subject of justice. The two major principles of justice, according to Gough (1957), are: each person is to have an equal right, which is basic liberty, compactable with similar liberty for others. Again, social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (1) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage and (2) attached to positions and offices open to all. These principles are meant to regulate basic institutional arrangements. The second principle works when society treats all persons equally, provides genuine equality of opportunity and gives more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favourable social positions. In pursuit of this principle, greater resources might be spent on the education of the less rather than the more privileged.

Analysis of Deuteronomy 19:15–21

The legal code contained in the study text falls within Moses's major speech. This is because it encapsulates the other code. To be more precise, this speech deals with law between people and God; hence, it is considered a core speech (Blenkinsopp 1990; Carmichael 1974; Miller 1990).

Need for witness and the required number (v. 15)

According to Deuteronomy 19:15–21, 'Sentence should never be passed upon the testimony of one witness alone'

(Henry 2019:1). Similarly, Blenkinsopp (1990:104) observes that '[t]his is the explicit requirement that an adequate number of witnesses agree on the testimony before a conviction can be sustained'. In the words of Miller (1990:144), more than one witness is regarded as a general rule in the Israelite judicial system (cf. 17:6). Therefore, 'v. 15 treats the case of witness, stating that the need for two or more witness is for validity' (Clifford 1982:105) (see 2 Cor 13:1).

The main Hebrew verb in v. 15 is קָם *yāqûm*, 'to arise or stand', 'he arose'; hence, one witness should not rise up against his neighbour (Poole 2019). Put differently, one witness is insufficient to make a sustainable claim against a person for any crime in a law court. This verb קָם was repeated two times in verse 15 and once in verse 16 to form what Obiorah (2014 [2015]:14) called 'dominant word'. According to Obiorah, 'a word becomes a dominant word based on its appearance or when its idea dominates in a text because of its frequency'.

Moreover, the main purpose for two or more witnesses is to guard against human fallibility and the possibility of false witnesses taking bribes to truncate justice. Therefore, the idea of two or more witnesses does not imply that crimes will not happen; it is a requirement to enhance just justice. Arguing this further, Miller (1990) opines that the requirement of two or three witnesses is not an infallible guarantee of justice ... the insistence on a plurality of witness is precisely a safeguard against the possibility of witnesses showing partiality and taking bribes. Whedon (2019) recommends three witnesses because one witness can be confused or mistaken in his testimony.

To surmise this, two or more witnesses are preferred against one in order to establish an expedient justice free from human fallibility. Arguably, a judgement based on the evidence of two or more witnesses will be more objective, free from false accusations, bias and other human inadequacies.

False witnesses, their punishment and system of justice (vv. 16–19)

כִּי *kî* 'which introduces [a] positive clause in an oath' (Holladay 1971:155); is used with *yāqûm* with the nuance 'arise, stand'. Imperfect verbs are used in future tense (Lambdin 1973). Therefore, *kî-yāqûm* is used in a future tense to warn that no one on any occasion should stand with the intention of false witnessing against their neighbour.

It has been observed that a false witness, if unchecked, has the tendency to derail true justice. Therefore, true justice is required in human relationships. Likewise, since human beings are God's most prestigious creature, true justice is imperative to embody the true nature of God which he represents on earth. The intention of a false witness is to convict someone against the law, and Carmichael (1974) argued that this action is closely related to false prophets. In his comparative analysis between the false witness and the false prophet, he observed that both rise up and speak falsely.

The false witness charges a person with defection from law and right; the prophet speaks defection from true religion. Each law has similar procedural directions (Carmichael 1974). In a situation of false witness, the false witness is to receive the same punishment that he premeditated for his fellow, for 'the false witness is subject to the same penalty as for the crime in question' (Blenkinsopp 1990:104).

Punishment against false witness is enormous, and it is a community responsibility to punish this evil. This is because it is against the community at large, and it requires a collaborated system within the community to enforce it. In this line of thought, Miller (1990) avers that:

[T]he concern for responsibility and accountability on the part of the community to punish false witness is reflected in the demand that the witness be the first to carry out the sentence, followed by the rest of the people. (p. 144)

However, in ancient Israel, it is believed that when a man sins, it is usually the head that suffered the shame. In this line of thought, Clifford (1982) notes that:

[T]he lying witness is to undergo the very evil he or she meant to inflict ... the idea that the devices of the wicked often return upon their own head is a commonplace in Jewish thought. (p. 105)

Put differently, it is a common understanding in Israel and in the Hebrew Bible that when a person sins, he or she must receive the same punishment. The issue of justice was very serious in Hebrew society. This was evident in the reinterpretation of the Torah to suit different situations that the people faced in the wilderness. This also accounts for the repetitive characteristic of Deuteronomy. Therefore, the personalities involved in the process of justice must replicate God's nature enshrined in just justice. For instance, civil cases are to be taken to the central sanctuary where the priest, God's representative, the congregation of Israel and possibly the Ark of God will serve as witness while the priest discharges the legal duty.

The basic notion of this law is that both parties under dispute are to stand before the Lord or priests. The judges acted as God's representatives. The presence of the Lord or the priest denotes how responsible the witness must be. Driver (1978:199) observes that 'judgement in ancient Israel, even on secular issues, seems often to have been administered at a sanctuary', while Clifford (1982) avers that a:

Difficult case of false witness is to be taken to the central court described in 17:8–13. The phrase 'before the Lord' usually means in Deuteronomy 'in the central shrine'. (p. 105)

Elsewhere, we read that a 'difficult legal case and the case of a false witness have each to be taken to the central tribunal, to the priests and judge(s) who practiced in those days' (Carmichael 1974:115). Miller (1990) observes that the location of the court at the central sanctuary is:

[C]onsistent with Moses' instruction to the people in the wilderness to bring the difficult cases to him (Exod. 18:22; Deut. 1:17), the Deuteronomic legislation sets up a central or supreme court in the place that the Lord will choose. (p. 145)

Any case of crime is to be taken to the central shrine, where it is settled before the priest. 'There, before the priests and the lay judges, the matter is to be settled' (Carmichael 1974:115). These are clear indications that civil cases are very serious; hence, they are administered inside the sanctuary where God lives.

Furthermore, the people saddled with the responsibility to administer judgement and those with good repute are to be trusted. The main word here is *וַיִּשְׁרֹף* *wādāršū* with the nuance to 'resort to, seek'. It carries the syntax that a judge before the Lord at the central sanctuary should inquire, seek for the truth and examine the witnesses diligently to avoid passing a false judgement against one another. Arguing further on the good qualities and care taken by judges, Carmichael (1974:115) observes that 'the judges shall inquire diligently and ... make search and ask diligently'. This is because it is very difficult to detect a false witness (Coke 2019). They should possess a good knowledge of judicial law to enable them to dispense just justice. Clifford (1982) observes that:

[T]he priests would thus possess an hereditary knowledge of civil and criminal laws not less than of ceremonial law ... would naturally give them an advantage over either the local elders, or the ordinary lay judges. (p. 105)

In ancient Israel, there are rules and measures carefully taken to determine cases. Those rules are the system for finding out the causes of crimes in ancient Israel. In view of this, Clifford (1982:105) opined that, 'ordeals existed for determining the truth or falsehood of statements when no independent checks were available'.

Just justice and second punishment for false witness (vv. 20–21)

The expression 'eye shall not pity; it shall be life for life; eye for eye, tooth for tooth' can also refer to a false witness whose intention is to pervert just justice and propagate jungle justice. To be more precise, this warning is directly against false witness. 'In Deuteronomy, the warning is not to pity a convicted false witness' (Clifford 1982:105). This idea has often been misinterpreted by modern scholars who associate this verse with Matthew 5:38. Hence, it is observed here according to Blenkinsopp (1990:104) that 'the idea was to restrict indiscriminate vendetta by applying a rough principle of equity but it has acquired a bad reputation by mistaken reading of Matthew 5:38'. The people should not pity the false witness but they should do to him exactly that which he planned against his neighbour. Because showing pity could establish ambiguity, it is warned that one should not pity to avoid any chance of association with a false witness. Thus, 'a distance is kept between the addressees in the crime of false witness. He should not be even indirectly associated with by showing pity' (Miller 1990:145). Therefore, the false witness is to undergo the same punishment he meant for his brother. Clifford (1982) explains this reality beautifully, connecting it to Hebraic wisdom:

The lying witness is to undergo the very evil he or she meant to inflict. That the devices of the wicked often return upon their

own head is a commonplace of Hebrew thought. The punishment of the false witness illustrates the axiom perfectly. (p. 116)

The idea that a false witness will receive the same judgement is to make sure that such a thing does not come up in Israel. Arguing further on this, Carmichael (1974) observes that:

[T]he aim of this form is to enhance the heinousness of the crime; the attitude being that it is unthinkable even to raise the possibility that the addressee, a true Israelite, might be a false witness. (p. 115)

Summarily, the book of Deuteronomy proposes a legal system that is comprehensive. Miller (1990:145) avers that 'Deuteronomy proposes all the ingredients of a system for the administration of justice: codes of judicial conduct ...'. It is so comprehensive that 'if enacted today ... that a false witness would receive the same penalty that would have been given to the accused – would substantially reduce the number of lawsuits in our courts' (Collins 2019:1). There are important lessons the Nigerian populace can learn from this ancient Hebraic legal wisdom, particularly in an era of rampant jungle justice.

Origin and cases of jungle justice in Nigeria

Jungle justice is very predominant in Nigerian society. The reason for this varies. Some argue that the reason why people take laws into their very own hands is because justice is always delayed. For instance, Udemezue (2019:1) observes that 'a single trial can take years in Nigeria. As a result, some group of people would rather bring justice to seat on the streets'.

There is also 'the lackadaisical attitude of law enforcement officials towards putting criminals away and getting justice for victims' (Tinibu 2018:1). Therefore, it is because law enforcement agencies will not give just justice to people that so many have resorted to getting their fair justice on the street on the evidence of false or no witnesses. Salihu and Gholami (2018:1) observe that this is because there is 'public dissatisfaction and loss of confidence in the institution of police and judiciary to administer justice'. This has led many to take laws into their hands. Others have argued that the police and other security agencies collect bribes from victims or their relatives to enact justice. Although the reason for jungle justice may vary, one thing is certain: the prevalence of jungle justice in Nigeria.

The history of jungle justice in Nigeria is somewhat vague, but many people believe that this social vice gained its recognition through the introduction of Bakassi Boys by the Mbadinuju-led government in Anambra state in 1999. For instance, Tinibu (2018) writes that:

The act became very popular after the creation of a non-governmental armed group, named *Bakassi* boys. This group was established in 1999 on the basis of several ethnic associations of Igbo people, such as the Onitsha traders association ... the

purpose of creating this group is [sic] to confront gangsters groups because of the inabilities [sic] of the police to establish law and order in commercial centers in the state ... to achieve this goal, the Bakassi boys burnt the several limbs of convicted bandits and criminals to frighten the population ... their first leader is Gilbert Okoye. (p. 1)

From the given discussion, it is obvious that this group became the first recorded perpetrators of jungle justice on the street without referring such cases to government agencies in charge. Unfortunately, most of their victims were without witnesses. In most cases, they relied on a single witness without sufficient proof. Those witnesses were either biased or foisted their false claims on their victims. To them, jungle justice is now considered one of the avenues for people to avenge crimes and vent their anger, probably to send a message to government agencies, which they consider too sluggish for their liking in discharging justice.

These inhuman treatments are against the provision of the Nigerian constitution; the Nigerian constitution guarantees every person, including criminal suspects, certain basic fundamental rights (Kapae & Adishi 2017:17). Section 36(5), for instance, presumes every suspect to be innocent until proven guilty. The same section provides that in determining any civil and criminal matters the accused should be given fair hearing (*Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2011 Amendment*).

The crimes of jungle justice abound in Nigeria today. An example of some incidents of jungle justice that made headlines in Nigerian media will suffice to buttress this point. The case of a 7-year-old boy who was burnt to death in the Badagry area of Lagos state is still fresh in the collective memory of Nigerians. According to a report by Kemi (2016:7) published in *Nigerian Bulletin*, 'the boy was caught while trying to break into a shop where food stuffs are sold in the early hours of Tuesday November 15, 2015'. The crowd gathered, and before the security operatives could come, the boy was already in flames without any single witness to justify that the boy was guilty of the alleged crime. Another case of jungle justice that shook Nigerians is the case of four students of the University of Port Harcourt (Uniport) who were brutally beaten and burnt alive. They are Ugonna Kelechi Obuzor, year two Geology; Biringa Chiadika Lordson, year two Theatre Arts; Mike Lloyd Toku, year two Civil Engineering; and Tekena Erikena (Okafor 2016:14).

According to Okafor (2016), the four boys (seen in Figure 1) were stripped naked, marched around most parts of the community and later clubbed to death before a cheering crowd of the community. Their remains were set ablaze and dumped in a pit in the area. There are about five or more versions of stories regarding the actual cause of their death, but none can claim to be authentic because there was no single witness to take the stand for them.

There is another story of a man who was claimed to be a motorbike thief. According to Ukpong (2016), the incident

took place in September 2016 at Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State. According to this report as was obtained from *Premium Times Newspaper*, the young man attempted to snatch a motorbike from his victim. When it looked obvious that they might be caught, his partner zoomed off, leaving the young man to the hands of angry youths who set him ablaze immediately.

It must be clear at this point that these men did not wait for the appropriate agency in charge of crime to come in and discharge their statutory duty according to constitutional provisions. They simply relied on the testimonies of those who claimed to be eyewitnesses, which in most cases were false witnesses. Furthermore, there were no sufficient witnesses (two or more) who should decide whether they were guilty or not and no time for security agencies to look into the matter and decide accordingly before the killing of people who might be innocent.

Another case of jungle justice was reported by Nwafor (2019) in *Vanguard Newspaper* thus:

[A]t Ondo State, Akinnifesi Olubunmi was accused of being gay and was attacked on the 17th of February, 2016 when he was caught pants down with a politician in the state. (p. 2)

He was mobbed and beaten into a stupor, and he ended up in the hospital where he died the following day.

In Imo State, three people were burnt to death for forcefully snatching a baby from the mother. 'The incident happened in Ezelu Okwe in the Onuimo local government area of the state' (Nwafor 2019:2). Furthermore, he gives another case that took place in Benin where two boys were killed for 'stealing iPhone and a laptop'. The case of 'Odugu Blessing Dada "F," 45 years, of No. 77 Morka Street, Boji-boji Owa in Ika North East LGA of Delta state' attracted the attention of the inspector-general of police, who decried this inhuman treatment. This shows the extremism of exponents of jungle justice. It is egregious how humans can lynch their fellow humans without establishing enough evidence through concrete evidence and reliable witnesses. The situation has become so ugly that one can be lynched by a mistake; hence, a 26-year-old boy met his untimely death in the hands of a mob who mistook him for a thief (Oluwatobi 2017).

A descriptive analysis of Rawls's theory of justice and Deuteronomy 19:15–21: Their implications to Nigerian Christians

The analysis found in this article is performed by juxtaposing the major principle found in Rawls's theory of justice and the Hebraic example found in Deuteronomy 19:15–21.

According to Rawls's theory of justice, one fundamental problem that orchestrates jungle justice in a society is the failure of the major institutions to grant equal rights to the



Source: Okafor, T., 2016, 'Port Harcourt killings: Have we accepted jungle justice', *Vanguard Newspaper*, 28th March, viewed n.d., from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/03/port-hacourt-killings-accepted-jungle-justice/>

FIGURE 1: Four students of the University of Port Harcourt (Uniport).

most extensive basic liberty to all. Its evidence is shown in the inability of the judicial arms to discharge and execute judgement within the shortest period, especially when the less privileged are concerned. Again, an exorbitant price charged in a law court cannot be provided by the majority; hence, jungle justice is preferred.

From the biblical example, only on the account of two or more witnesses can any case be established. 'No single witness shall suffice against his neighbour'. The study context shows that suspects are innocent until proven guilty. Unfortunately, evidence from the study context shows that people are even executed without reliable witnesses. Only on a few occasions do we find witnesses, and they are biased in most cases. Coupled with this is the fact that it is inhuman and legally wrong to take someone's life without giving him or her a fair trial. Accordingly, Ezeamalu (2017:4) observes that legally, even if it has been proven that the suspect committed the crime, it is not within the right or power of the mob to kill a suspect, without giving the person a fair hearing.

False witnesses are at the core of this text. Any false witness is to undergo the same punishment premeditated against his neighbour in relation to the Jewish requirement for false witnesses to be dealt with severely (Miller 1990).

It is obvious from the study context that cases of false witnesses are swept under the carpet. This is because punishment for false witness is treated with kid gloves, especially with the less privileged; this, according to Rawls's theory, triggers them to take law into their own hands. They are released almost immediately after arrest without going through sincere trial. This is often provided as the reason

why people become involved in extrajudicial killings such as jungle justice. If it becomes normative that one will receive the same treatment as the offender when found guilty of false witness, people will become more conscious or rather desist from the act. In conjunction with this is the fact that no one is allowed to take the life of their neighbour. This is evident in the Nigerian constitution, section 33, which clearly provides that 'no citizen of the country shall be deprived of his or her life, except in a manner excused by law' (*Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2011 Amended*). However, contrary to the dictates of the constitution, what plays out in the contemporary Nigerian society is a preponderance of sad episodes of extrajudicial killings, with the media being flooded with horrendous stories of such circumstances.

Furthermore, justice is delayed when taken to the law court, and many people are released on the slightest excuses of either paying money or having a big man behind them. This purported failure of the government to give equal rights to every member of the society gives birth to jungle justice. The fact that Nigerian security personnel are not measuring up to their duty is a household discussion. In the case of the four boys killed at Aluu community in Port Harcourt, indices show that police had enough time to rescue those boys but they were rather derelict to discharge their official duty. This is because the boys were captured a day before their death and there was a police station at Aluu where the incident took place. Hence, Onoyume (2012:1) observes that police also had explanations to make on why they could not rescue the victims of the murder. This is because there was enough time between when they were arrested and when they were killed. Hence, they could have acted effectively to save a life.

In the Deuteronomistic example, criminal cases involving human beings were taken to the central sanctuary to be decided by judges. This is because it was believed that God lived there and judges would be more cautious not to make mistakes of either collecting bribes or perverting justice. Another argument to this point is that difficult cases such as crimes were to be taken to the sanctuary in consonance with the instruction of Moses. This point is elucidated in the words of Miller (1990) who observed that the location of the court at the central sanctuary is:

[C]onsistent with Moses' instruction to the people in the wilderness to bring the difficult cases to him (Exod. 18:22; Deut. 1:17), the Deuteronomic legislation sets up a central or supreme court in the place that the lord will choose. (p. 145)

In contemporary society and as it relates to jungle justice, no attempt is made to send the accused to any law court for fair hearing before executing them. Nigeria has law courts, the Supreme Court or court of appeal, where there are competent judges. The only appeal is that they should be made affordable to enable people of different classes to bring their grievances for justice.

Furthermore, the judges should possess a good knowledge of the law to avoid human mistakes. In line with this:

[T]he priests would thus possess an [*sic*] hereditary knowledge of civil and criminal laws not less than of ceremonial law. In furtherance, the masses should be properly trained for better knowledge of the constitution. This is one of the basic notions enshrined in Rawls's theory of justice that when less resource are spent on the education of the less privileged, abuse of human right will suffice. Biblically, the judges should inquire diligently to avert unjust justice; the judges shall inquire diligently; and ... make search and ask diligently. (Carmichael 1974:115)

The hasty nature of dishing out jungle justice in Nigeria is too egregious for a good judicial system. In essence, the judges should inquire diligently to validate the claims of the witnesses for effective and efficient justice. Suffice it to say that those who are not trained in the judicial system should not be allowed to judge or convict any criminal offence. Only those trained in this field should be saddled with this responsibility. Therefore, this field should be esoteric. It is only on competent inquiry of excellent judges that one can receive justice akin to God's justice.

Implications for decision-makers

1. It is a general rule in the Israelite community that more than one witness is required to establish a transparent justice. Therefore, Deuteronomy 19:15–21 should be included in the Christian Religious Studies curriculum to enable Nigerian children to come to realise that a single witness is not enough to convict a man of any crime. This is important because those who carry out this illicit act are mainly youths. In addition, people must be sensitised through seminars, teaching and workshops in accordance with Rawls's theory. Therefore, the

government should provide basic education to all while the judges should also insist on more witnesses before conviction.

2. The Nigerian government should enshrine a law that false witnesses should be made to undergo the same treatment intended for their neighbours. Government agencies should also enforce this on the street to attenuate this heinous crime.
3. Before any decision is taken against a person, both parties must go to the central sanctuary, before the Lord and the judges shall decide after proper enquiry. In this line of thought, people should be educated on the need to seek justice at the appropriate place (i.e. the law court) rather than dishing it on the street.
4. This study presupposes that the judges should possess a good knowledge of the law. Judges or those who discharge justice should undergo the minimum requirements for their profession. This is to make them competent for their work. The study reveals that judges should diligently inquire before pronouncing judgement to ensure true justice is served. In other words, anyone who is not a judge should not be allowed to pronounce judgement on another to ensure a transparent and competent judicial system.
5. Church leaders should emphasise this text in their sermons so that the public can benefit from its moral lesson.

Conclusion

The issue of jungle justice is very crucial in Nigeria today because of the recent happenings. For instance, there are cases of jungle justice almost on daily basis, which are not reported. It is instructive that the legal code found in Deuteronomy 19:15–21 proffers a judicial model that is comprehensive enough to help reduce the hastiness with which justice is discharged on the street without a thorough inquiry. This legal code posits that no single witness shall prevail to convict a man in a law court. The lesson from this text means that Nigerians must redefine their values as a people. The option of the rule of law must be explored in all circumstances (Nwaogu 2018).

In a society that is so plagued by social vices, ways of curbing them must be explored. At this point, the ancient text of Deuteronomy becomes important. This is because the sovereign character of God's purpose will not be questioned or altered. It creates newness (Mays 2010:347).

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V.U.E. is the sole author of this article.

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