

RITUALISTIC CRIME

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Defining Ritualistic Crime

Ritual crime entails a wide variety of both sacred and secular acts committed by groups and individuals and is most often attributed to practitioners of occult ideologies such as Satanism, Palo Mayombe, Sante-ría, and other magical traditions or to serial killers and sexual sadists who ritually murder their victims. Due to many legal, practical, and ethical controversies the investigation, research, and study of contemporary religious violence are in their infancy. There have been no serious empirical studies of ritualistic crimes or classifications that adequately distinguish ritual homicides committed for sacred versus secular motivations. Problems arising from investigating ritualistic crimes are generally beyond most investigators' typical experience. Due to the lack of standardized categories, law enforcement professionals cannot agree on the extent of ritualistic crime, the types of crimes committed by individuals and religious groups, or the motives of the perpetrators. Hence, ritual violence is not often recognized, reported, or investigated accurately. Additionally certain other crimes or events may be overinterpreted or misinterpreted as ritualistic crime when they are not.

In the law enforcement community illegal ritual activities are typically referred to as occult crimes. However, occult crime is an inaccurate and pejorative designation because occult is applicable to many religions and practices that are fundamentally nonviolent. Furthermore, not all violent ritual acts are

committed in the worship of a religion. A more objective and accurate expression is ritualistic crime because it encompasses crimes that may entail ritualistic behavior and that are completely unrelated to the occult or any religious tradition. There is no agreed-upon definition of ritualistic crimes. Building upon a 1989 California law enforcement study of occult crime, ritualistic crime is most precisely defined as any act of violence characterized by a series of repeated physical, sexual, and/or psychological actions/assaults combined with a systematic use of symbols, ceremonies, and/or machinations. The need to repeat such acts can be cultural, sexual, economic, psychological, and/or spiritual (Table 1).

Forensic Evidence Specific to Ritualistic Crime

Analyzing ritual crimes not only entails all the forensic, investigation, and legal issues associated with violent crime but also posits its own unique problems. In ritualistic crime, locations are always designated as either sacred (holy) space or profane (ordinary) space. Violence in the form of occult religious ritual always has to occur in sacred space; even mass murder/suicides have to occur in sacred space. Outdoor secluded locations are typical of ritualistic crime scenes due to the nature-based ideologies of most occult religions. They also provide enough privacy to prolong torture and conduct rituals. Indicators of occult outdoor crime scenes include trail markers, unusual tree marking, and anything that is out of place, for example, a circular clearing, an arrangement of tree stumps, or unusual holes in the ground. Natural objects are frequently part of the crime scene and should be checked for blood stains and other forensic evidence. The presence of unusual artifacts,

Table 1 Ritualistic crimes*Trespassing*

Trespassing related to ritual violence or, more specifically, occult activity usually involves persons entering private areas such as wooded and forested lands, barns, and other old or abandoned buildings. The purpose of such trespassing is to worship either in the area as it is naturally arranged, or to arrange it so that it becomes a place of worship with the appropriate altars and symbols. Occult-related trespassing of this nature is committed by persons who seek a private and isolated place to worship

Vandalism

Vandalism most often associated with ritualistic crime includes cemetery and church desecration. The most common types of cemetery desecration attributed to occult groups are overturning, breaking and/or stealing headstones; digging up graves; grave-robbing; and tampering with human corpses or skeletons. This is frequently motivated by religious beliefs that require cemetery desecration and human bones to fulfill certain rituals

Church desecration

Church desecration frequently includes the following actions: destroying bibles; urinating and defecating on holy objects and furniture; tearing crucifixes off walls; and destroying rosaries and crucifixes. It is important to note that the motivations behind such vandalism can also be attributed to hate crimes

Theft

Thefts from Christian churches, Jewish synagogues, hospitals, morgues, medical schools, and funeral homes are often linked to ritual violence. Items that are most often taken include cadavers, skeletal remains, blood and religious artifacts that are considered sacred; crucifixes, communion wafers, wine, and chalices. Frequent motivations for these thefts are that particular groups require actual holy artifacts or human organs and bones for their rituals

Graffiti

Graffiti is one of the most common offenses related to ritualistic crime. While a small amount of graffiti is related to other occult groups, the vast majority is directly related to involvement in satanic groups. Nearly all instances of Satanic-related graffiti, which frequently depict Satanic symbolism, are committed by juveniles and young adults, most of whom are dabbling in the occult

Arson

Occult-related arson is almost always attributed to satanists, especially juveniles and young adults. Among the most common places for juveniles to commit arson are churches and synagogues in which particularly holy sections or artifacts are burned, and houses or buildings where damaging evidence could be uncovered by investigators. Additionally, some law enforcement officers have found satanic graffiti at some arson scenes. It is important to note that the motivations behind the arson of churches and synagogues can also be attributed to hate crimes

Animal sacrifice

Animal sacrifice is primarily practiced by believers in Afro-Caribbean religions, principally practitioners of Santeria, who sacrifice animals as part of rituals designed as offerings to their gods to intervene in the universe through magic. However, animal sacrifice can also be attributed to practitioners of Satanism. The symbolic objects at the crime scene, type of mutilation, and other forensic evidence generally indicate which belief system is practiced

Extortion

Although group practice of extortion is not a known activity of any occult group, individual practitioners of some occult belief systems have used their religious involvement as a method of extorting money and information. Investigators have noted that such crimes are especially difficult to prosecute because the victims will not come forward. More often than not, the victims do not perceive themselves as victims because they trust the santero and believe that their economic sacrifices are being used to protect them

Suicide

Occult-related suicide appears to be the primary domain of juveniles and young adults involved in Satanism who are often true believers, but sometimes dabblers. Satanic-related teenage suicide is a major concern among many criminal justice practitioners

Kidnapping

Although extremely difficult to prove, kidnapping people of all ages, but especially children, is thought to be a prevalent crime among some occult practitioners. Especially accused are traditional/cult satanists who are said to kidnap victims needed for ritual sacrifice, self-styled juvenile Satanists whose dabbling has taken them "to the point of no return," and mayomberos, whose rituals require a human skull to add to their nganga

Ritual homicide

Probably the most controversial crime allegedly committed for occult purposes is murder perpetrated for spiritual reasons and sometimes as a human sacrifice. Sacrificing a human being has occurred in almost every culture throughout history and contemporary incidents have been documented. Currently, both Palo Mayombe practitioners and Satanists are often linked to human sacrifice. There is evidence that juvenile and young adult Satanists who have become true believers commit murder for sacrificial reasons required of their spiritual beliefs

Ritual abuse

This is a particularly heinous and controversial crime, which is known as ritual abuse, ritual child abuse, or, more specifically, satanic ritual abuse. The alleged perpetrators of such abuse are most often Satanists. In the broadest sense, ritual abuse of children, adolescents, and adults involves repeated physical, sexual, psychological, and/or spiritual abuse, which utilizes rituals. Currently, there is probably no more divisive issue within the criminal justice community than that of Satanic ritual abuse. While no one disputes the existence or increase of ritualistic abuse, few agree about several other aspects: the extent of ritualistic crimes committed specifically by satanists; the motivations of perpetrators; and the veracity of the victims who claim to have survived ritual abuse at the hands of satanists

drawings, graffiti, or other items is especially prevalent in ritualistic crimes. Symbols and artifacts found at the crime scene can help the investigator determine if the crime was conducted by an individual or members of a group, and identify the type of religious ritual and whether that belief requires additional similar rituals which may signify future crimes.

Ritualistic crimes can be committed by one or more offenders who may be members of a religious group or by a lone offender who is following the ideology of a group. However, some lone offenders enact rituals that do not conform to any organized group. Disorganized crime scenes will generally be indicative of dabblers and teenage offenders; they frequently leave trash, food, and bottles in the area near the ritual site. Members of an established group will be highly organized and the crime scene will be particularly clean; because it is sacred space it would be treated with the same respect as the space around the altar of a church. The weapon of choice for ritualistic crime is a knife; it would be magically ineffective to shoot someone in a ritual. A ritual knife (athame) is one of the most sacred items of the offender and would rarely be left at a crime scene unless the perpetrator was interrupted in the act and had recently fled the scene; usually a ritual knife or sword is found during searches of personal areas or on the suspect.

The use of blood in ritualistic crimes is more revealing than any other form of evidence, not to be confused with blood stain pattern analysis. In ritualistic crime the physical pattern is not as important as the symbolic meaning of blood. In addition to many other ritual uses, blood is anointed, exchanged, and imbibed in magical rites of initiation, transformation, and sacrifice. Victims are frequently the result of a ritual sacrifice and should be examined for unusual loss of blood. The level of experience of the perpetrator is immediately evident in the cleanliness of the crime scene or victim; for example, it takes a high level of skill to remove blood from a person or animal without soiling the scene. A juvenile dabbler will not be able to remove blood in the same manner as an experienced high priest who could have the skills of a surgeon. Additionally dabblers do not always treat the scene with the proper regard for sacred space as true believers. Both historically and today the role of the sacrificer is an honored and privileged position and will most likely be the leader of the group.

Body disposition is one crime-scene indicator whose psychological and symbolic interpretations can substantially differ from each other. In ritualistic crimes the body may be positioned in a manner that holds specific magical meaning for the group, as a

necessary function of the ritual, and has nothing to do with avoiding discovery or leaving a message. Also in ritualistic crimes bodies or body parts may be buried for magical purposes that have nothing to do with eluding the police. There is rarely evidence of staging in ritualistic crimes. Perpetrators of ritualistic crimes will not interfere with their crime scenes because in many occult traditions any alteration of the ritual is a form of sacrilege and renders the magic ineffective. If a ritual crime entailed staging it would be indicative of a criminal who is not a true believer and whose primary motive has nothing to do with a group belief system.

Forensic findings are especially relevant to ritualistic crimes due to the amount of trauma, the symbolic nature of physical mutilations, and the prominence of pre- and postmortem sexual assault. The cause of death in murders that are the result of sacrificial ideologies will frequently be from torture, blood loss, or dismemberment caused by knife wounds committed during the ritual. Murders committed for the purpose of millennial group beliefs can entail everything from poison and immolation to gunshot wounds. Ritual homicides committed by serial killers will not correspond to any specific occult tradition and there is no particular cause of death. In ritualistic crimes committed by true believers the motivations for sexual assault differ substantially from other crime classifications. In some occult traditions sexual assault is perceived as a form of sexual magic and has less to do with the gratification of the offender than with achieving magical power and/or as an indoctrination technique. This is based on the magical concept that any form of severe extreme emotion caused by either torture or sexual pleasure will increase the magical power of the offender. Mutilation is extremely common for ritualistic crimes, including symbols cut into the body, bite marks, particular forms of dismemberment, and bloodletting (Table 2).

Contemporary Blood Rituals

Across cultures and throughout history the one practice common to all religions is sacrifice and the most potent form of sacrifice is achieved through blood rituals. Whether animal or human, blood historically is the mandatory substance for religious ritual and sacrifice is the ultimate religious experience. Historically people attributed sacred and magical qualities to blood, and blood rituals entailed everything from drinking, pouring on the body, and a variety of uses in ceremonies. In some cultures it was believed that

Table 2 Forensic ritualistic evidence in general

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- Mockery of Christian symbols (inverted cross, vandalized Christian artifacts)
 - Use of stolen or vandalized Christian artifacts
 - Discovery of candles or candle drippings
 - Unusual drawings, symbols on walls/floors (such as a pentagram)
 - Nondiscernible alphabet
 - Drawings of occult symbols
 - Animal mutilations, including removal of specific body parts (anus, heart, tongue, ears)
 - Use of animal parts (feathers, hair, bones) to form symbols on ground
 - Absence of blood on ground or in animal
 - Altar containing artifacts (candles, chalice, knife)
 - Effigies like voodoo dolls stuck with pins or otherwise mutilated
 - Bowls of powder or colored salt
 - Skulls with or without candles
 - Robes, especially black, white, or scarlet
 - Rooms draped in black or red
 - Occult books on Satanism and magic rituals
 - Calendars with peculiar days marked
 - Computer used to visit occult sites
 - Handwritten occult essays or diaries
 - Animal or human body parts found in refrigerator
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drinking the blood of a victim would endow you with his/her strength; similarly, in drinking the blood of an animal you would acquire its qualities. Today there is a revival of magical ideologies that entail a variety of individual and group blood rituals. The most familiar examples are evident in the current popularity of tattooing, piercing, branding, and body modifications. These and other forms of self-mutilation comprise the basic prerequisites for entry into the contemporary subcultures of modern primitives, the body modification movement, vampire culture, and the fetish scene. The modern primitive movement is a term that is used in the avant-garde art world to refer to visual artists who distort, manipulate, mutilate, and mark their bodies as a form of ritual performance. The modern primitive movement blends tribal traditions with technology to combine magic and science. The body modification movement includes people who are involved in piercing, tattooing, branding, implants, and extreme body modification but do not have a unifying ideology. They differ from modern primitives who claim their performances are a spiritual experience of transformation. Vampire culture is the fastest-growing manifestation of the occult and entails the practice of what is referred to as “blood sports” – the exchange of blood for both ritual and sexual purposes. Finally the fetish scene entails nightclubs where members of all of the previously described movements come together to engage in all manner of sadomasochism, sexual bondage, and blood rituals. Acts of self-mutilation include

everything from cutting the body with razors, burning the flesh, having nails hammered through limbs, being suspended from the ceiling with hooks attached through the skin, being pierced with heavy weights, having objects implanted under the skin, and self-amputation. Every kind of body modification imaginable is being performed, sometimes resulting in death.

When analyzing ritualistic forensic evidence it is important to distinguish mutilations that are the result of willing participation in the many new subculture trends of self-mutilating the body or unwilling victims of group religious rituals and individual occult crimes. This can be accomplished by distinguishing between the types of crime scenes, victimology, and trauma associated with particular occult traditions. There are distinct and discernible forensic differences in the blood rituals, animal and human sacrifices perpetrated by practitioners of Vampirism, Santería, Voodoo, Palo Mayombe, Satanism, serial killers, and natural animal predators.

Vampire Culture and “Blood Sports”

Vampire culture, more commonly called the “vampire scene,” refers to individuals, group organizations, events, and businesses which all share an interest in the vampire lifestyle. Currently, there is a prevailing phenomenon of modern vampires whose serious commitment to their beliefs, community, and culture meet the criteria to be designated a contemporary new religious movement. Since there is no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes a vampire, the modern vampire is an amalgamation of characteristics derived from a variety of historical and cross-cultural archetypes. The subculture, like the vampire, evolved from a combination of folktales, cultural myths, legends, and eventually the romanticized images found in Hollywood films and popular novels. There are many facets to vampire culture and members range from dabblers such as participants in role-playing games to the extremely devoted, who are referred to as “real vampires” within the vampire community. Vampire belief systems are dependent upon the personal or group interpretation of a vampire and may manifest simply as an esthetic choice or an entire lifestyle based on a sophisticated vampire philosophy. Vampire culture is a serious and growing phenomenon that has gatherings where thousands of vampires attend. Vampirism, like other religions, consists of people who have committed themselves to an ideology, who maintain ethical tenets within a hierarchical system, and who participate in rituals specific to their clans. Practitioners of Vampirism are referred to as vampires and are part of an extensive subculture.

The practices that are most relevant to forensics in the vampire scene are blood-drinking and bloodletting. For modern vampires, the use of blood is what separates the dabblers from the real vampires. In vampire culture the use of blood is commonly referred to as blood sports, blood play, blood lust, and blood fetishism and is an expression of sexual, spiritual, recreational, or artistic activities that involve cutting and drinking blood. Blood rituals in the form of sacred acts of worship are fundamental to real vampire religious beliefs. Blood sports in the form of recreational and/or sexual activities are one of the most dangerous aspects of vampire culture and are noticeably increasing in popularity. Blood play involves cutting the body, then having another person licking or sucking the blood from the cut. Cutting is most often done with a surgical scalpel or fine razor blade, making shallow cuts in the top layer of the skin. At many of the vampire nightclubs it is not unusual to see a group of people cutting and sucking each other's blood in what is referred to as a feeding circle. Blood play is frequently intertwined with sexual activities and becomes an integral part of the intimacy shared. Occasionally blood sports entail using a syringe to draw blood and then imbibing it or sharing the blood with your partner. Essentially blood sports involve any sadomasochistic practice that involves blood and encompasses all forms of body mutilation such as self-scarring and play-piercing in addition to cutting.

The immediate and obvious dangers in blood sports are bloodborne diseases and accidental deaths caused by sadomasochism gone wrong. A general principle for determining how deeply individuals are involved in vampire culture or any form of occult religion is their use of blood. Once blood is being exchanged, imbibed, extracted, or used in any manner whatsoever in ritualized activity, the person has now committed to that religion or group. Additionally blood rituals are addicting, both psychologically and physiologically. Physically, when someone is experiencing pain, endorphins (natural painkillers) are released; however, eventually more pain is needed to achieve the same endorphin high. Psychologically, individuals feel that without blood their vitality will diminish, magical powers will subside, or they simply are not themselves. It is not unusual for participants of vampire culture who are in this situation to carry around vials of blood. The more insidious danger of blood play is that occasionally self-mutilation is not a sufficient religious experience and can escalate into blood rituals that entail harming others.

Vampirism, the most recent manifestation of the occult, has led to many crimes ranging from vandalism to murder. Many juveniles and young adults dabbling in the occult are seduced into the more

Table 3 Forensic evidence unique to the vampire scene

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- Human blood (in vials)
 - Hypodermic needles used to remove blood
 - Razor blades
 - Fangs (false teeth)
 - Knives, swords
 - Dramatic clothing, robes
 - Metal claws that attach to fingers
 - Whips, leather restraints, chains, sexual bondage items
 - Unusual contact lenses
 - Skulls, coffins, and other gothic items
 - Symbolic silver jewelry with precious stones
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serious level of the subculture, the vampire and fetish scenes, where blood rituals, sexual sadomasochism, and bondage discipline are regular occurrences. The dangers implicit in drinking and exchanging blood and violent sexual activities are more insidious when they are viewed as sacred rituals that are required for initiation, membership, and status in the group (Table 3).

Santería and Voodoo “Blood Offerings”

Afro-Caribbean faiths originated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during African slave trading when owners imposed Catholicism on to their slaves and forbade traditional religious practices. In an attempt to maintain their cultural and religious beliefs, Africans disguised their religion by assigning each of their gods the image of a Catholic saint. Over the years the religions and cultures synchronized into new religions. Syncretic belief systems refer to religions that have combined two or more different cultural and spiritual beliefs into a new faith. Santería, Voodoo, Palo Mayombe, Candomble, and Shango are some of the syncretic Afro-Caribbean religions. Magic and the belief in supernatural intervention occupy a significant place in the worship of all occult syncretic religions.

Santería combines the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the southwestern Nigerian Yoruba tribe with the religious practices of the Catholic faith and consists of using magical rituals to worship or satisfy a pantheon of gods and goddesses, known as orishas. Santería is an earth religion, a magical religious system that has its roots in nature and natural forces. Santería retains the fundamental precepts of the ancient Yoruba tradition, including the concepts of ashe and ebbo. The gods of Santería are the repositories of ashe, the divine power/energy, and santería spells, rituals, and invocations are all conducted in order to acquire ashe (energy) from the gods. This energy is the power to change things, to solve all problems, subdue enemies, and acquire love and money. Ebbo

is the concept of sacrifice and is the way that the orishas are worshiped so that they will give their ashe. Every rite and spell of Santería is part of the ebbo concept. Fortunately sacrifice does not always require a sacrificial victim. Ebbo can be an offering of fruits, flowers, candles, any of the favorite foods of the orishas, or a blood offering.

Voodoo is also known as vodun, voodoo, vodoun, and hoodoo and is derived from the African language of the Fon word vodu, which means spirit or deity. The term voodoo and its derivative hoodoo originated as derogatory expressions to refer to systems of sorcery and magic, or to specific spells or charms stemming from these systems. Similar to Santería, Voodoo is a syncretic religion that developed as a response to the African slave trade; however, Voodoo evolved among the slaves who were taken to Haiti. Although some of the rituals and ceremonies of voodoo are comparable to Santería, there are marked differences. The African tribes from where the religious movements originated were different and the rites varied with each tribe. The Haitian form of Voodoo has many deities, known collectively as loa, who participate in ritualistic ceremonies in several different ways. Rituals are most commonly held to invoke a particular god who best fits the need of the moment and gods are known either as rada or petro. There are many different types of Voodoo rituals, including individual acts of piety such as lighting candles for particular spirits and large feasts, sometimes lasting several days. Similar to Santería, initiation, divination, sacrifice, and spirit possession are fundamental Voodoo rituals (Figures 1–6).

Currently there are several million people living in the USA who practice some sort of Afro-Caribbean faith, most of whom are not involved in criminal activity. Controversies associated with the practice of Santería and Voodoo most often entail the misunderstanding of the use of magical spells, amulets, food offerings, and debates surrounding the practice of animal sacrifice. Due to the growing population of Santería and Voodoo practitioners, many officers routinely discover the remains of sacrificed goats, chickens, roosters, and other animals covered in sacrificial matter, in areas such as cemeteries, beaches, near railroad tracks, and other places that have magical significance to believers. Although it is illegal to discard animal corpses in public places, most of these cases are not indicative of violent criminal behavior but are remnants of ritual ceremonies. A general rule of thumb for investigators is that Santería and Voodoo devotees will not torture their sacrificial animals and most often either quickly slit the throat or break the neck of an animal. If an animal is discovered that has obviously been mutilated or tortured then it is a practitioner of one of the black magic traditions, another occult religion, or a nonreligious act of sadism. A basic knowledge of Santería and Voodoo beliefs can assist in distinguishing between violent crimes and typical Santería and Voodoo worship. Knowledge of these practices can also help investigators avoid inadvertently offending practitioners or violating their rights during searches, such as disturbing items without realizing that they may constitute a religious altar, amulet, or other religious artifact (Table 4).



Figure 1 A human skull, cauldron, animal skulls, blood-soaked bag, beads and other religious artifacts were ritually discarded on railroad tracks and are indicative of the Palo Mayombe religion. Courtesy of Detective Christine Kruse-Feldstein, Miami Dade Police Department, Crime Scene Unit, Miami, Florida.



Figure 2 Palo Mayombe nganga (sacred cauldron) containing 21 sticks, horseshoes, handcuffs, gun, money, letters, goat's head, blood and other ritual items. Courtesy of Detective William Pozalante, Ocean County Sheriff's Department, Criminalistics Investigative Unit, Toms River, NJ.



Figure 3 Palo Mayombe nganga (sacred cauldron) containing 21 sticks, horseshoes, handcuffs, gun, money, letters, goat's head, blood and other ritual items. Courtesy of Detective William Pozalante, Ocean County Sheriff's Department, Criminalistics Investigative Unit, Toms River, NJ.

Palo Mayombe “Blood and Human Remains”

Palo Mayombe is a syncretic Afro-Caribbean belief system that combines the cultural and spiritual

belief systems of the ancient African Congo tribes with the religious practices of Yoruba slaves and Catholicism. It uses magical rituals that manipulate, captivate, and/or control another person, most often for the practitioner's malevolent purposes. Like the people from Nigeria, the Congo slaves were forcibly brought to the Caribbean and subsequently forced to adapt their cultural and religious beliefs to the culture and Catholic religious tradition of the new land. Through their assimilation process, the Congo slaves also incorporated some of the beliefs, symbols, and rituals of Santería. The result of this particular syncretism was Palo Mayombe, derived from the Spanish palo, meaning “wooden stick” or “branch,” and referring to the pieces of wood practitioners use for their magic spells.

Priests of Palo Mayombe are known as paleros or mayomberos. Although the origins of the Mayombero and Santero share similar roots, there are two features that distinguish the rituals and beliefs of these different and individualistic belief systems. First, although many Mayomberos are originally initiated into Santería, very few Santerians also practice Palo Mayombe. In fact, most Santería practitioners fear the Mayombero, claiming he practices a sinister form of Santería, which they call brujería, black magic, or witchcraft. Second, the rituals of Santería most often focus magic on positive actions designed to improve one's personal position or please an orisha. Palo Mayombe, on the other hand, centers its rituals around the spirit of the dead, often using magic to inflict misfortune or death upon an enemy. In fact, the Mayombero does not use the orishas but rather invokes the spirit of one



Figure 4 Satanic pentagrams cut into stomach and arms, deep lacerations on body and chain tied around neck when victim was found in a car in an isolated wooded area of Waco, Texas. Upon medical examination it became apparent that this was an incident of self mutilation. Courtesy of Detective James Blair, Waco Police Department, Waco, Texas.



Figure 5 Headless chickens, food and other ritual items wrapped in a blue blanket found on the beach are remnants of a Santeria ritual sacrifice. Courtesy of Bradford K. Varney, Pennsylvania State Constable, Bucks County, PA.

specific patron who resides in his nganga, the cauldron used during most rituals. Some practitioners of Palo Mayombe claim that, although they are evoking the spirits of the dead, their intentions are not to harm but rather to use Palo in particularly difficult cases because it works much faster and is more effective than Santería rituals. Regardless, Palo Mayombe essentially is the practice of magic in the context of myths and rituals of Congo origins and its magic is accomplished with the use of human bones.

The forensic aspects of Palo Mayombe stem from the ritual requirement of human bones in the making of the sacred cauldron. The following is a detailed description of the Palo Mayombe rituals involved in making the sacred cauldron. The mayombero waits until the moon is propitious, and then he goes to a cemetery to a prechosen grave. The grave is opened, and the head, toes, finger, ribs, and tibias of the corpse are removed. After the human remains are removed from their graves a ceremony is conducted



Figure 6 Santeria altar containing statues of Catholic saints, glasses of water, candles, food, cigars and other ritual items.

Table 4 Forensic evidence unique to Santeria

- Coins in multiples of seven
- Seashells
- Corn kernels
- Pieces of fruit (coconut, oranges, apples)
- Mutilated and beheaded chickens, hens, cows, goats, roosters (heads torn off)
- Scarves or pieces of clothing in specific colors (determines saints being worshipped)
- Necklaces in specific colors (also determines saints)
- Dolls with pins or strange symbols or writing
- Head of homicide victim missing from the scene
- Herbs, roots, flowers
- Parts of celba tree, or palm and cedar
- Animal blood and feathers
- Body oils
- Iron tools and objects
- Catholic saint statues
- Goblets of water

at the mayombero's house to determine if the spirit is willing to work for the mayombero. Once the spirit accepts the pact, the mayombero writes the name of the dead person on a piece of paper and places it at the bottom of a big iron cauldron, together with a few coins, which are the price of the spirit's help. The body's remains are added to the cauldron, together with some earth from the grave. The mayombero then makes an incision on his arm with a knife and lets a few drops of blood fall into the cauldron, so the spirit may drink and be refreshed. After the human or animal blood has been sprinkled on the remains, the mayombero adds to the cauldron the wax from a burnt candle, ashes, a cigar butt, and some lime. Also added to the mixture is a piece of bamboo,

sealed at both ends with wax, and filled with sand, sea water, and quicksilver. Frequently the body of a small black dog is also added to the cauldron to help the spirit track down its victims. Next to the dog, a variety of herbs and tree barks are placed inside the cauldron. The last ingredients to be added are a variety of herbs, spices, and insects. The initiate in palo is known as mpangui, nganga nkisi, or tata nkisi. The nganga (sacred cauldron) does what its owners order it to do and working with it is referred to as "playing" with it. When the spirit of the nganga carries out its owner's wishes, the owner gives it blood as an expression of gratitude, hence animals are frequently sacrificed and placed in the cauldron.

Similar to Voodoo and Santería practitioners, paleros claim that they are being persecuted for their religious beliefs and stigmatized for their ritual practices. There is a significant difference, regardless of whether the palero's intent is to heal or harm. Palo Mayombe ritually requires the use of human bones, hence this practice always entails the theft of human remains. Additionally the types of animals sacrificed for palo include domesticated pets such as dogs. The sacred cauldron is routinely fed with blood so sacrifice occurs much more frequently than in Santería rituals. Finally the religion of Palo Mayombe appeals to drug traffickers who believe that it has the power to protect them and paleros are hired to conduct special protection rituals. Palo Mayombe is frequently brought to the attention of medical examiners to identify human remains. Crimes frequently associated with the religion include grave robbing, extortion, and animal sacrifice (Table 5, Figures 1–3).

Table 5 Forensic evidence unique to Palo Mayombe

Sacred cauldron (nganga) contains:

- human bones (invariably a human skull)
- wooden sticks (21)
- various herbs, feathers
- animal bones (skulls or other bones of various birds)
- small iron agricultural tools (rakes, picks, hoes)
- sacred stones
- often a chain with a padlock will be wrapped around it
- other items that may be of special significance to the palero

Satanism: “Mutilation, Cannibalism, Ritual Abuse, and Dismemberment”

Satanism is a religion acknowledged by the US federal government and it maintains a doctrine of ethical tenets, specific rituals, and true believers. This religion is widely practiced in western society both individually and communally through satanic churches, covens, and grottos. Similar to other organized religions, beliefs vary among different sects and, according to church leaders, range from a form of ethical egoism through worshipping a particular deity. In most sects Satanism is a reversal of Christianity and similarities are found in the symbolism and ritual practices of each group.

Contemporary Satanism entails either worshipping Satan as a personified evil being (theistic Satanism) or glorifying what he represents, which includes, among other things, indulgence, vengeance, and engaging in all sins as long as they lead to self-gratification or self-deification (atheistic Satanism). Other characteristics of Satanism include beliefs based on a form of hedonism (pleasure-seeking) or egoism (putting oneself above all others). There are four general categories of Satanism: (1) religious/organized satanists; (2) traditional/intergenerational satanists; (3) self-styled satanists; and (4) youth subculture satanists. These classifications are generalized and not mutually exclusive. Although specific ideologies and rituals vary among different groups, all satanists practice magic. In fact, variations in magical rites are the core of satanic religions and what differentiates them from each other and other occult traditions.

Traditional satanists are proposed to be a highly organized, international, secret cult network that is actively engaged in a variety of criminal activities, including arson, ritual abuse, sexual abuse, incest, kidnapping, child pornography, and ritual murder, involving mutilation, dismemberment, and sometimes cannibalism. Also referred to as generational or intergenerational satanists, many members contend that they were raised in this belief system going back several generations. Self-styled satanists

are either individually involved with Satanism or belong to small loosely organized groups and are either intermittently and experientially involved in occult activities and/or use the occult as an excuse to justify or rationalize their criminal behavior. Their rituals and belief systems are completely self-invented, a combination of a variety of traditions, or are emulated from media/cultural images of satanic practices. Self-styled satanists' primary interests usually entail the acquisition of personal power, material gains, or gratification through criminal interests and not spiritual satanic worship. Some self-styled satanists engage in criminal activities ranging from child molestation and animal mutilation to homicide, and their crimes conform to their self-invented ideologies.

Youth subculture satanists are similar to self-styled satanists; however their interest in Satanism is usually transitory and may not evolve into criminal activities. Youth subculture satanists are teenagers and young adults who are usually introduced to Satanism via music, film, the internet, and other media influences. Most often these young adults turn to the occult because of a deep sense of alienation from mainstream culture and spiritual traditions. They either eventually return to more traditional beliefs or they can easily be recruited into one of the many satanic religious organizations. Their rituals usually escalate depending upon the length of time they are involved in Satanism, beginning with simple magical incantations and evolving to animal and human sacrifice. Common crimes of youth subculture satanists include vandalism, arson, grave desecration, animal mutilation, school violence, and sometimes murder (Table 6, Figure 4).

Animal Sacrifice

Animal sacrifice is practiced by believers in Satanism, Santería, Voodoo, Palo Mayombe, Vampirism, and by young serial killers. The symbolic objects at the crime scene, types of mutilation, and other forensic evidence generally indicate which belief system is practiced.

In Santería, Voodoo, and Palo Mayombe, animal sacrifice is a fundamental aspect of the belief system and ritually required offerings for gods, ancestors, and spirits. For most satanic and vampire religions animal sacrifice is viewed more as an assimilation of power through the torture, pain, and blood of the victim and frequently escalates to larger animals and occasionally humans. In Satanism the torturing and killing of animals are also common indoctrination methods. For serial murderers the killing of animals is not

Table 6 Forensic evidence unique to Satanism, however these examples may not in isolation be indicative of Satanism

- Animal and fowl mutilations, including the removal of specific organs (genitals, anus, heart, tongue, ears)
- Altar upon which stones or other implements are placed
- Occult writing, biblical passages (sometimes written in blood)
- Circle on the ground (approximately 2.4–2.7 m (8–9 ft) in diameter, may contain a pentagram)
- Symbols: inverted cross, pentagram (a single point down signifies Satan), 666 (sign of the anti-Christ), NATAS (teen symbol of Satan (satan spelled backwards)), nondiscernible alphabet
- Goat's head (real or mock), symbolizing the devil
- Black candles and incense
- Robes, detached hoods
- Inverted cross, serpent, serpent with horns
- Skull with eyes hollowed out and red stones, rubies, or candles placed in the sockets
- Tattoos (pentagram or goat's head)
- Human cadavers and/or body parts
- Human or animal blood
- Wax drippings on the cadaver and/or in body orifices
- Positioning of bodies (north indicates Satan's supremacy)
- Slashes or cuts in patterns on the cadaver

connected to any theology. Although the crime scene may initially appear similar, serial killers' motivation for torture and slaughter is primarily a secular experience and the honing of one's skills that also frequently escalates to humans.

Animal sacrifices for Santería and Voodoo rituals are the relatively least disturbing and least heinous. There are three basic types of sacrifice in Santería: (1) ritual cleansings; (2) offerings to the egun or the orishas; and (3) initiation offerings. Ritual cleansings, known as "despojos," are when the animals are believed to take on the negative vibrations surrounding an individual and therefore cannot be eaten. During a ritual cleansing the blood of the animal is offered to the saints and the remains of the animal are disposed of in accordance with the wishes of the saint. Cleansing rituals are best explained as cathartic techniques in which the bad feelings caused by the evil in the person are passed into a bird, and the herbs' curative properties pass into the consultant. Many of the sacrificed animals that are routinely found along the beach, rivers, or railroad tracks are often the result of ritual cleansings. The other two types of offerings are made to egun and the orishas and are known as ebbo and initiation offerings. During initiation offerings the blood is always given to the saints and the meat is always eaten because it is believed to be full of the energy of the gods, as opposed to ebbo offerings, where the meat is not always eaten. Many of the animals used in ritual sacrifice are fowl and include male and female chickens, roosters, ducks, guinea

hens, and pigeons. They are known collectively as "plumas," feathers. Other animals sacrificed in Santería include goats, sheep, pigs, and occasionally cows. Sacrifice to particular orishas is also used in a variety of magical spells for very specific results. In communities with large populations of Santería and Voodoo practitioners it is not unusual to find headless chickens on the doorways and steps of courthouses and government buildings where practitioners discard the sacrificed bird as part of a spell that will protect them from being prosecuted.

Animal sacrifice in the worship of Palo Mayombe is much more disturbing because it entails the use of domesticated pets such as dogs. Since Palo Mayombe focuses its rituals around the spirits of the dead instead of the palo gods, rituals require human remains, specifically the human skull and other body parts. The central theology of palo is that the spirit of the person whose bones are placed in the nganga, the sacred cauldron, carries out the owner's wishes. Animal sacrifice occurs because the nganga must be initiated and continually "fed" blood. Although penalties for animal abuse and grave desecration vary from state to state, the more serious ritualistic crime is generally the theft of human remains.

Although animal sacrifice for Santería and Voodoo is disturbing to persons unfamiliar with these practices, it pales in comparison to animal sacrifice that occurs for particular satanic and vampire religions. In syncretic religions animals are sacrificed by either quickly slitting their throats or by snapping their necks; at worst the heads of pigeons or other birds may be bitten off by the priest. However, in Satanism animals are slowly tortured and heinously mutilated. In most occult traditions blood consists of life-force energy. For satanic and vampire religions bloodletting or imbibing blood from a victim represents the assimilation of raw power. Ritual torture is viewed as a powerful form of magic that releases energy that can be directed by the perpetrator and used for specific goals. A basic magical principle is that intense emotion releases energy: in nonviolent groups such as neopaganism this emotional energy is achieved through sexual magic and in traditional Satanism it is achieved through pain. In many cases traditional satanic and vampire practitioners will commit sexually sadistic acts to increase their power by harnessing the energy of both.

Cats are frequently the victims of satanic crimes and it is common to find dismembered and skinned animals that were used in satanic rituals. It is important to determine if mutilations are attributed to human or animal predators. This can be difficult because certain mutilations resulting from animals

resemble surgical cuts. Evidence of animal predators include hair fibers from foxes or coyotes found in the claws of the mutilated animals or the head or body will be found randomly discarded near the scene, as opposed to animal remains being symbolically placed by human perpetrators of ritualistic crimes. Investigators can also look for hairs of mutilated cats in animal dens that may be near the crime scene and consider weather conditions such as a drought, which may change migration patterns and cause animals to migrate to residential areas. There have also been numerous incidents of cows and horses that have been ritually mutilated and it is much more difficult to attribute their deaths to animal predators. Forensic findings are extremely important in determining the cause of large-animal deaths and common indicators of ritualistic crimes are the removal of organs, the level of skill used in dismemberment, unusual mutilations, and inexplicable loss of blood (Figures 7–10).

Another indicator of animal sacrifice resulting from ritualistic crimes is the dates on which the incidents occurred. Since Satanism, Santería, Voodoo, Palo Mayombe, and Vampirism constitute organized religions they practice specific rites on particular holidays. Originating from ancient agricultural timetables occult religions celebrate the phases of the sun, the moon, the earth, and the changing of the seasons. There are eight major holidays (sabbats) common to the hundreds of satanic, vampire, and neopagan

religions, and many lesser holidays are celebrated, including what is known as esbats (full moons). Syncretic traditions such as Santería, Voodoo, and Palo Mayombe holidays concentrate on the worship of individual gods and often require animal sacrifice on those days. Occult holidays such as Samhain, an ancient Celtic harvest festival honoring the Lord of the Dead which evolved into Halloween (October 31) are worshipped by many occult religions; however, the rituals are unique to each group and are useful methods of identification. For example, traditional satanic groups celebrate samhain with an animal or human sacrifice, while vampire groups hold huge gatherings at formal vampire balls in cities across the country and have ceremonies entailing bloodletting and drinking. Dabblers in many of the occult groups choose samhain to hold their first blood sacrifice and many humane societies will not allow people to adopt cats in October due to the large number of animals killed on October 31. In addition to general occult holidays each group also has its own unique rites requiring specific types of violence, ranging from animal sacrifice to ritual murder (Table 7).

Ritual Murder

Human sacrifice entails the killing of humans or the use of the flesh, blood, or bones of the human body for ritual purposes. This has been a widespread and



Figure 7 Animals that were tortured, skinned, mutilated and eviscerated. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether animals were mutilated due to sadism or Satanism. Significantly, in Santería and other syncretic religions animal sacrifice never entails torture. Courtesy of the Animal Cruelty Section, Palm Beach County Animal Care and Control Division, West Palm Beach, Florida.



Figure 8 Animals that were tortured, skinned, mutilated and eviscerated. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether animals were mutilated due to sadism or Satanism. Significantly, in Santeria and other syncretic religions animal sacrifice never entails torture. Courtesy of the Animal Cruelty Section, Palm Beach County Animal Care and Control Division, West Palm Beach, Florida.



Figure 9 Animals that were tortured, skinned, mutilated and eviscerated. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether animals were mutilated due to sadism or Satanism. Significantly, in Santeria and other syncretic religions animal sacrifice never entails torture. Courtesy of the Animal Cruelty Section, Palm Beach County Animal Care and Control Division, West Palm Beach, Florida.

complex phenomenon throughout history. The significant ideology behind sacrificial ritual is that blood consists of life-force energy constituting the highest offering to the gods or ancestors. In specific occult worship, bloodletting or imbibing blood from a

victim represents the assimilation of raw power. Additionally, the longer a victim is tortured and the pain is prolonged, the more life energy/power is emitted. In this manner ritual torture, cannibalism, and eventually ritual homicide are contemporary acts of human

sacrifice and for the perpetrator it is a sacred communion meal in which the power of life is assimilated and regenerated. Ritual murder becomes a method of achieving immortality and/or becoming a god by



Figure 10 Animals that were tortured, skinned, mutilated and eviscerated. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether animals were mutilated due to sadism or Satanism. Significantly, in Santeria and other syncretic religions animal sacrifice never entails torture. Courtesy of the Animal Cruelty Section, Palm Beach County Animal Care and Control Division, West Palm Beach, Florida.

unifying the divine and the mortal. The theology of many contemporary occult groups describes their most sacred rituals in sacrificial terms and they have specific rituals and degrees of initiation that culminate in achieving some level above human, such as godlike or superior beings.

Currently, Palo Mayombe practitioners, satanists, vampires, disturbed individuals, and serial killers have been linked to ritual murders. Although sacrificial magical ideologies of various occult traditions have fundamental principles in common, the rites and theologies differ between religions and individual religious sects. Common goals include the acquisition of power to manipulate events that result in harm, healing, protection, or as a form of initiation, transformation, achieving knowledge, or the ultimate goal of self-deification. The least common motivation for human sacrifice and the one most people associate with Satanism is to draw down dark forces or entities.

Numerous ritual murders have been committed by juvenile and young adult satanists who are dabbling in magical ideologies. In many of the cases the perpetrators previously engaged in some form of blood-ritual by cutting/mutilating themselves, drinking and/or exchanging blood during initiation ceremonies, sacrificing animals, or all of the above. There have also been a number of ritual homicides committed in the vampire religious tradition. Typically the magical goal is connected to achieving power and immortality. Drinking blood and cannibalism frequently occur in vampire murders for the reason

Table 7 Occult calendar

The Greater Sabbats

Samhain (aka Halloween): October 31

Imbolc (aka Candlemas): February 2

Beltane (aka May Day): May 1

Lammas (aka Lughnasadh): August 1

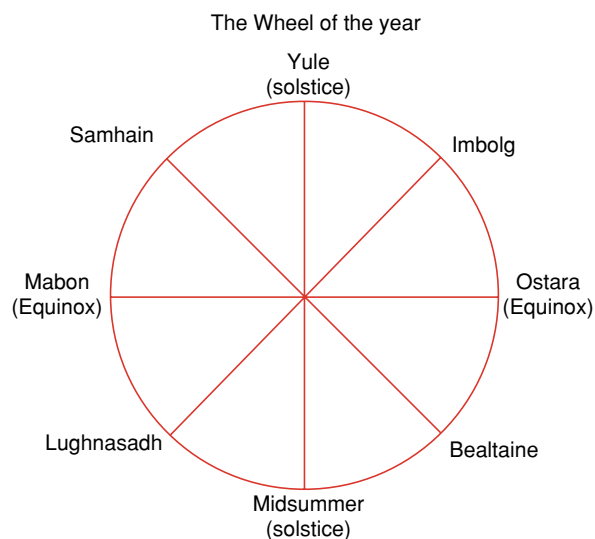
The Lesser Sabbats (date varies each year)

Yule (aka winter solstice): December 21–23

Ostara (aka spring equinox): March 21–23

Litha (aka summer solstice): June 21–23

Mabon (aka autumn equinox): September 21–23



that blood is a fundamental aspect of the religious tradition. The symbolic evidence found at the scene helps differentiate between these two religions.

In most juvenile cases the perpetrator's method of operation is indicative of "dabbling." Dabbling involves people who are intermittently and experientially involved in occult activities. These perpetrators most often act alone or in small, loosely organized groups.

Another important distinction when investigating ritualistic crimes is the difference between motives of true believers and true criminals. True believers are religious practitioners who commit crimes because such acts fit into and/or are required by their particular belief system. These persons are involved in crime primarily because the ideology, rituals, and tenets of their beliefs require them to do so. Dabblers most often are true believers who are emulating a particular tradition or theology but are not yet experienced enough to conduct the ritual accurately and the crime scene reflects a lack of knowledge or skill involved in sacred rites.

True criminals are persons who use the occult as an excuse to justify or rationalize their criminal behavior. They are committed not to the belief system but to the criminal action. True criminals are not as concerned about the accurate symbolism, place, date, or victim of the rituals and are not connected to any organized group or specific tradition; consequently the symbolic evidence will be unique to that person.

Ritual murders committed by true criminals are individual secular (nonreligious) ritual acts and are often mistaken for sacrifice. Secular ritual murder is often the work of a lone offender and typically attributed to a serial murderer. Ritual murder occurs when criminal conduct goes beyond the actions necessary to perpetrate the crime and some type of nonreligious ritual behavior is expressed in the form of a "signature" or "calling card." The victim will be chosen according to the ritual need of the offender. Sexual assault, use of restraints, and depersonalization are often present. Forensics often include mutilation to the face and specific body parts, objects inserted into the victim's body orifices, and sexual acts after the victim's death. Body parts or other souvenirs such as personal items may be missing from the scene. The purpose of the ritual often fulfills a personal spiritual and/or sexual need of the offender. Offenders often make up their own belief system and perpetrate criminal activity that conforms to that ideology (Figures 11–15).

Ritual homicides committed by true believers reflect a serious knowledge of the particular theology, high level of skill, and meticulous attention to detail. Essentially ritual murders committed by true believers are contemporary acts of human sacrifice. The perpetrator considers the murder to be a sacred holy act and the crime scene will reflect this. The victim is selected according to the purpose of the ritual and

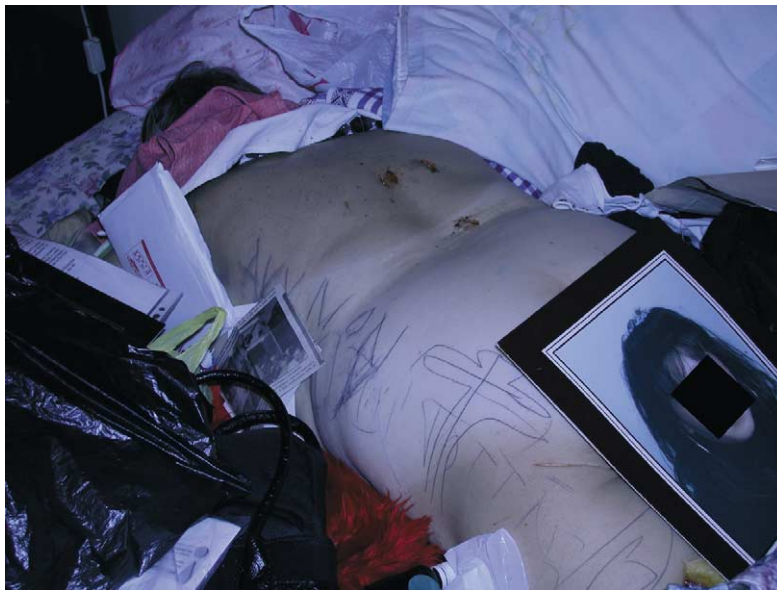


Figure 11 Although ritual murders initially appear similar, there are important forensic differences between murders committed for sacred versus secular motivations. In sacred ritual murder (sacrifice) mutilation always occurs while the victim is alive and the cause of death is typically from injuries acquired during torture. In this example of secular ritual murder the mutilation was postmortem and the cause of death was strangulation. Courtesy of Dr. Bernard Marc, medical examiner, Paris, France.



Figure 12 Although ritual murders initially appear similar, there are important forensic differences between murders committed for sacred versus secular motivations. In sacred ritual murder (sacrifice) mutilation always occurs while the victim is alive and the cause of death is typically from injuries acquired during torture. In this example of secular ritual murder the mutilation was postmortem and the cause of death was strangulation. Courtesy of Dr. Bernard Marc, medical examiner, Paris, France.



Figure 13 Although ritual murders initially appear similar, there are important forensic differences between murders committed for sacred versus secular motivations. In sacred ritual murder (sacrifice) mutilation always occurs while the victim is alive and the cause of death is typically from injuries acquired during torture. In this example of secular ritual murder the mutilation was postmortem and the cause of death was strangulation. Courtesy of Dr. Bernard Marc, medical examiner, Paris, France.

can be a stranger or a member of the group. The death will occur in a designated sacred space, determined by the group's doctrine, often an isolated outdoor area. The date is often significant and may correspond to an occult holiday or a group holiday. Since human

sacrifice is a blood ritual, the most common weapon is a ritual knife. Depending on the group's doctrine, death may be slow and torturous or a quick slitting of the throat. A common forensic indicator of ritual sacrifice is for blood to be drained from the victim.



Figure 14 Although ritual murders initially appear similar, there are important forensic differences between murders committed for sacred versus secular motivations. In sacred ritual murder (sacrifice) mutilation always occurs while the victim is alive and the cause of death is typically from injuries acquired during torture. In this example of secular ritual murder the mutilation was postmortem and the cause of death was strangulation. Courtesy of Dr. Bernard Marc, medical examiner, Paris, France.



Figure 15 Although ritual murders initially appear similar, there are important forensic differences between murders committed for sacred versus secular motivations. In sacred ritual murder (sacrifice) mutilation always occurs while the victim is alive and the cause of death is typically from injuries acquired during torture. In this example of secular ritual murder the mutilation was postmortem and the cause of death was strangulation. Courtesy of Dr. Bernard Marc, medical examiner, Paris, France.

Other indicators are mutilation, carving symbols into flesh, cannibalism, sexual abuse, and dismemberment. The purpose of sacrifice is to increase personal power and/or fulfill the requirements of the belief system. True believers are the most dangerous

perpetrators of any kind of religious violence because of the degree of their commitment to their beliefs, their disregard for civil authority, and their nontraditional world view that permits them to murder without remorse (Table 8).

Table 8 Forensic evidence unique to ritual murder, however these examples may not in isolation be indications of ritual murder

- Location and position of the body
- Missing body parts
- Cannibalism or absence of blood in victim or at scene
- Decapitation/mutilation or removal of specific organs (head, heart, tongue, tibia, eyes, fingers)
- Location of stab wounds or cuts
- Branding-iron or burn marks
- Wax, powders, oils on or around body or crime-scene area
- Human or animal feces consumed or found on victim
- Indications of bloodletting
- Stomach contents analyzed for urine, drugs, wine, potions
- Any sign of semen on or in the cadaver
- Evidence that the hands or feet have been tied or shackled
- Any jewelry, charms, amulets, stones, on, near, or inserted in the cadaver

See Also

Deliberate Self-Harm, Patterns; Forensic Psychiatry and Forensic Psychology: Sex Offenders; **Serial Murder; Torture:** Physical Findings

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