


# Of sin, gender equality and environmental goodness - towards curbing the effects of necrophilia

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The Old Testament connects environmental disasters with sin. The expulsion from the *paradeiso* (Gn 3:23–24), the plagues on Egypt (Ex 7–11) and droughts (Am 4.6; Jr 14:1–7) are all portrayed as linked with sin. Theologically, human sin, therefore, can lead to actions that have adverse effects upon humans and the environment. It is against this reality that this research explores the effects of necrophilia not only upon humans but also on the environment. The argument raised here is that while world leaders are making concerted efforts to achieve gender equality, among other goals by 2030, necrophilia is likely to offset this vision as women continue being reduced to mere sex machines in life and beyond death. Spiritually, as a result of the evil nature of necrophilia, God and the ancestors also are forced to turn their faces from a land where such abomination is practiced, hence exposing the land to environmental catastrophes. Using largely the qualitative approach as well as comparative analysis, the research engages in an informed conversation with African traditional religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam (religions that have a large following in Zimbabwe), examining to what extent they can be used to curb necrophilia.

**Contribution:** The research makes a unique contribution to Religion and/or Theology and Constructions of Earth and Gender through raising an awareness of the high chances of necrophilia offsetting efforts to achieve gender equality by 2030. It also proffers tangible ways of curbing the harmful effects of necrophilia upon human societies and Mother Earth.

**Keywords:** necrophilia; environmental disasters; sin; gender equality; women.

## Introduction

With the growth of a more liberal society in our present day and age, a lot has come to change especially in the area of sexual expression. Sex has fast become part of the mainstream culture as evident through explicit coverage of sex behaviours in the media and internet pornography has almost turned out now to be a billion-dollar industry. As a result of this sex crave, cases of necrophilia and/or sexual deviation wherein a person is sexually aroused by a dead corpse are on the rise world over. In reference to this less often-discussed phenomenon of necrophilia, Goyal (2022) argues that human societies are changing in ways we are yet to comprehend as we witness a deviation from what we used to think is our biological call. This finds echo in Anyogu and Arinze-Umobi (1995), who observe that it is now a known fact that some people are sexually attracted by the sight of a corpse and in fact engage in sexual intercourse with dead bodies.

From most trending stories on necrophilia, save for a few cases, one is able to conclude that the sexual harassment of women knows no bounds between life and death. Though ceramics made during the South American Moche Civilisation (AD 150–800) show graphic depictions of a woman masturbating on a male skeleton (Knafo 2015), a sign that women too could express necrophilic fantasies, necrophilia appears to be more of a gendered issue as women are mainly the ones who tend to suffer sexual indignity from men.

Given the sexual indignity suffered by the dead when they are violated sexually, efforts to curb it have been a major preoccupation of academics (Bradford 2001; Fong 2006; Rosler & Witzum 2000). As evident from the cited scholars, notable researches so far have been predominantly from the field of psychology, but no one has been able to provide a one size fits all remedy or treated a sufficient number of necrophiles to determine effective treatment. This research takes the issue to new horizons as it seeks to look at the problem from the angle of religion and culture focusing particularly on African traditional religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam. It is the assumption of

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this research that religion and culture are resources that can effectively address the problem of necrophilia given the authoritative sway of their teachings on both adherents and non-adherents. African traditional religion upholds teachings and rites that give much reverence to the dead. In the same way, Abrahamic religions uphold teachings that respect the dead and proscribe tampering with or wishful contact with the dead. From the onset, it is important to note that while the above-mentioned religions have no laws that provide for necrophilia expressly, they do so impliedly. One therefore should not expect to find clear legislation against necrophilia in these religions but to consider that necrophilia is addressed under the sexual perversions or deviations vehemently proscribed against. Necrophilia has in fact generally remained a topic kept under the tongue across many societies hence, possibly the lack of clear legislation against it. The reason why it has remained an issue less talked about is that sex issues as ancient times have generally remained a taboo to talk about in public. For Goyal (2022), sex in ancient times was perceived as an act of evil, and even though society managed to outgrow its old thinking, sex has generally remained an uncomfortable or unpleasant topic of discussion and worse when a dead body is involved.

## Historical anecdotes of necrophilia

The pursuit for sexual gratification has often landed most men and women in trouble and outside of the confines of religio-cultural stipulations. In the biblical texts, one finds Sodom and Gomora (Gn 19:1ff.) as well as Gibeah (Jd 19:1–30) being destroyed all because of sex-related perversion. Since time immemorial thus, the love of extreme and/or inauthentic sex has been a major cause of concern in many societies and religions. It is this love for perverse sex that leads some to engage in necrophilia or develop necrophilic tendencies just for pleasure or ritual purposes. This form of sexual deviation is taken as a form of disease and classified under the term paraphilia by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the International Classification of Disease Manual (ICD) (Goyal 2022).

Though not often discussed, necrophilia has nonetheless been present throughout the world for ages. According to Aggrawal (2009), the practice of necrophilia was done in some ancient societies as a way of speaking with the departed while for some it was an endeavour to bring back those who would have recently died. Though no proper motive is given, King Herod, according to a legend, is said to have had sex with his wife for seven years after he had killed her (Rosman & Resnick 1989). In the famous legend of Isis, Osiris and Horus, for example, one finds a clear case of necrophilia whereby Isis conceived a son, Horus, from the dead body of Osiris (Spodek 1998). The Greek historian, Herodotus (484–425 BC), noticed that sexual intercourse with the dead was known but despised by Egyptians. He opines that old Egyptians left dead beautiful ladies to decompose for somewhere around three to four days before offering them to the embalmers. This practice was meant to dishearten men playing out the funerary traditions from having sexual enthusiasm during their discharge of duty. Herodotus goes

on to state that in some communities such funerary customs were instituted as a result of a belief that the spirit of an unmarried dead woman would not find peace in the world of the dead (Herodotus c. 440 BC:Book II). This also is a clear affirmation of the genderedness of necrophilia since ancient times. This, however, does not rule out the possibility of male corpses suffering the same sexual violence. A ritual practice that involved pseudocopulation was performed on male corpses to ensure that they kept their virility (Goyal 2022).

The theme of necrophilia, as observed by Rosman and Resnick (1989), has been captured by some famous artists. One could refer to the classical fairy tale 'Sleeping Beauty' as a work of art that embodies necrophilic fantasy given that there is reference to female corpse restored to life by a man through love's kiss. Equally displaying the same is a 2002 film also by Pedro Almodovar 'Talk to Her', which is about love with comatose women (Knafo 2015). Certain films and rock music particularly in the punk and heavy metal genres have necrophilic undertones as well (Graham 2019a). There exist also a number of paintings and performances in which artists embrace the skeleton of a dead one. Paintings, for example, by Hans Bildung, Egon Shiele and others, as well as performances by Ana Mendieta and Marina Abramovic depict scenes in which a live person embraces actual skeletons (Knafo 2015). The above historical testimonies as well as artistic expressions help to show that necrophilia, though a rare disorder, has been known since time immemorial.

Looking at Zimbabwe in particular, cases of necrophilia appear to be on the rise. In just five years, which is from 2016 up to April 2021, Zimbabwean media reported three cases of alleged necrophilia happening in the country, this excludes numerous other cases that could have escaped the radar of the media.

In 2016, there circulated on social media an incident that left the Nemangwe community, Gokwe, shell shocked. Because of circumstances beyond her, one woman by the name Sarah Simirayi was cornered into engaging in necrophilia with her dead husband before burial. It is reported that the deceased husband (Nunurai Musamo) had left a note, which he wanted to read at his funeral. The content of the message was that he died missing so much his wife and because of that he wanted her to make love to him before he was buried. Upon hearing the shocking message, Sarah tried to resist but later gave in to the wishes of her dead husband. It is reported that Nunurayi's penis had remained erect despite him having died (Sibindi 2014).

In another case reported by Saunyama (2017), Enock Potani (20) of Chouriri village under Chief Mutoko reportedly confessed to killing Sister Ruvadiki Kamundiya who was a teacher at Hartmann House in Harare. This man is said to have raped this nun after killing her.

Equally not to be missed is an incident that happened in Epworth, Harare, whereby it is reported that a drunk man identified as Bigman in a police memo, visited Melisa

Mazhindu's homestead upon hearing about her death. He insisted on having 'sex' with the woman he craved for in order to satisfy his desires. He uncovered Melisa's body, slept on top of it and made up-and-down movements of copulation (Vinga 2021).

A follow-up to recent trending stories beyond the borders of Zimbabwe lies beyond the scope of this current paper, but collaborative research across countries could be interesting. Scholars could find out how necrophilia is manifesting itself in different countries and the efforts being made to curb it. One captivating incident worth mentioning is what happened at one point in The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Lagos, headed by the General Overseer Pastor E.A. Adeboye in 1991. In one of his evening worship services, he invited the congregants to close their eyes and asked those who had slept with the dead to move forward so that he could deliver them from ties with the spirits of the dead. Several men sneaked out of the church at that moment, a clear sign that many had engaged in sexual encounters with female dead bodies (Ologede 2022). What transpired in this Nigerian church is a further proof that necrophilia continues to happen behind the scenes of everyday life.

Looking at the above historical testimony as well as contemporary cases, there is a clear indication that necrophilia is an age-old monster, which has continued to spread its tentacles even into contemporary times. It is a cancer that has infiltrated most African societies and it has to be dealt with. But in order for religions and cultures to effectively deal with this problem, it is of paramount importance to understand in the first place its root causes.

## Causes of necrophilia

The world is a complex web and so is with what drives people to engage in necrophilia. Given that necrophilia is outside the realm of what often is considered normal, its drivers equally go beyond what can be ordinarily rationalised. These range from the choice of work, drug abuse, ritual purposes, war situations, Satanism, denial, loneliness as well as mental disorders. A brief follow-up on each of them can help shade light on the complexity of this phenomenon and how challenging it is to try and eradicate it from within our societies.

### Choice of work

It is a fact of life that people often choose employment that suits them while others enter a profession not so much by personal choice but rather because they feel that they were called to serve a certain purpose. It has been discovered, however, that some mortuary attendants go for this profession in a bid to have free access to corpses they will be attending to without anyone disturbing them (Aggrawal 2011; Islam, Qusar & Islam 2021). As they wash the bodies of dead beautiful women and get in contact with their private parts, they end up getting sexually aroused and for them sleeping with a dead body becomes a normal thing. At the

end of the day, one sees that the choice of work can be a key driver to necrophilia.

### Loneliness

Loneliness is defined by Hawkey (2015) as a distressing experience that occurs when an individual perceives his/her social relationships as less in quantity and more especially in quality than desired. This distressing experience may drive an individual into doing things that are regarded as evil or taboos in most societies and religions such as rape, man slaughter or vandalism of people's properties. Mortuary attendants, for example, often find themselves isolated and stigmatised because of their job, and as a way of compensating for this ostracisation, they might end up having sexual intercourse with the dead. The same was with sailors in the days of old when they used to transport corpses of persons who had died in foreign lands for their last funeral rites. As noted by Aggrawal (2011:2), 'Long transportation periods along with loneliness and lack of witness, allowed, and even encouraged, sailors to commit acts of necrophilia with dead bodies'. In this case, loneliness has been for long one of the key drivers to necrophilia.

### Mental disorder

Among the noted drivers of necrophilia is a mental disorder. This is indeed a cause of concern as an individual person will be incapable of determining what is wrong and what is right. Abraham Brill (1941) who is known to have published one of the earliest detailed studies of necrophilia, characterised necrophiles as rationally lacking, insane and unable to get a consenting partner. In the court case of Enock Potani (Saunyama 2017), for example, discussed earlier on, it was reported that he is a mentally challenged boy. To such people, therefore, having sex with a dead body would be just normal as they may be unable to distinguish what is acceptable or not acceptable by the society.

### Denial

In some cases, it can happen that some persons can suffer from a state of denial that a person they once loved has passed on. An individual may therefore utilise sexual engagement with that dead person as a way to keep up an envisioned relationship with the deceased. As noted by Ramsland (2007), having sexual intercourse with a deceased loved one may likewise be symptomatic of a romantic obsession or an outrageous denial that the cherished one has passed. Such an individual thus may see the sexual encounter as adoring and affectionate connection with the deceased loved one.

### Ritualistic purposes

The quest for power, materialistic gains and fame has seen some people engage in any kind of ritualistic activities. Just as some think sleeping with teenage girls can help remove HIV/AIDS, so it is with some who are instructed by dubious sangomas to sleep with dead corpses as a way to cleanse

themselves from *minyama* [misfortunes] or to get rich quickly. Back in 2018, for example, Alexander Okere (2018) of Benin published a story in which a teenager by the name Samuel Akpobome, on the instructions of an unidentified native doctor, killed her mother and later had sexual intercourse with her dead body for money rituals. Some may indulge in sex with a dead body as a way of ritualistic cleansing. The Nemangwe story narrated earlier on involving Sarah Simirayi and her deceased husband can beyond doubt be associated with some ritualistic cleansing so that her husband's soul could rest in peace.

## Drug abuse

The use of substances that intoxicate is increasingly becoming the order of our contemporary societies. Under the influence of drugs, anything is just but possible. In a case study done by Aggrawal (2011), in 1988, Eli Ulayuk of Northern Canada is said to have killed a 23-year-old female in order to have sex with her dead body after he had consumed 'home-brew' alcohol. He again is said to have killed his parole officer and had sex with her dead body in 2004 just a few months after he had been released from prison for the first crime. His confession to police was that he committed the second offence under the influence of crack cocaine. In 2020, Bangladesh recorded its first case of necrophilia when police on 19 November 2020 arrested a 20-year-old man on charges of necrophilia, and the perpetrator was a known marijuana smoker and used to engage in drugs also (Islam et al. 2021). Some men, instead of them being under the influence of drugs themselves, display necrophilic fantasies when they intentionally drug women in order to have sex with them while they are in a state of oblivion, helplessness and motionless (Madea & Musshoff 2009). The American actor and comedian Bill Cosby is alleged to have drugged over 30 women in order to have sex with them while they were unconscious.

## Satanism

Ferrari (1997) provides a general type of definition of Satanism as referring:

[T]o people, groups or movements which, whether they are isolated or more or less structured and organized, practice in some form the cult (e.g. adoration, veneration, evocation) of that entity indicated in the Bible by the name of demon, devil or Satan (Ferrari 1997:10).

Satanism, thus being the machination of the Devil bent on blaspheming against God, dissuading people from doing what is morally acceptable and taking pleasure in harm suffered by innocent souls, stands as one of the key drivers of necrophilia. This is evident in a report covered in *The Irish Times* whereby a young woman and her male mate were brought before a court in Hyvinkaa and charged for killing an old friend of theirs, ate parts of their victim and sexually abused the body before cutting it into pieces (Helsinki 1999). According to the prosecutor who was handling the case, the three, including the deceased, were committed to Satanism

and had listened to heavy metal music and drunk home-made alcohol before committing the crime.

## War situations

Without following best international practices, anything heinous is possible in war situations. As pointed out by Aggrawal (2011), victims of war often suffer from spasms of anal sphincter and potential necrophiles often take advantage of this to engage in anal sex with the dying on the battlefield. From historical documentation, this appears the fate suffered by soldiers during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878 and Moroccan campaigns of 1919–1926 (Reid 2000).

The above-noted drivers are possibly just part of an iceberg to the varied and complex causes driving necrophilia. At least one positive thing is that they help to highlight the complexity in trying to eradicate this phenomenon from our societies. Be that as it may, one cannot afford to give up on it, but serious effort should be made to take the bull by its horns if we are to reconcile with Mother Earth and realise the 2030 vision whereby we envisage gender equality.

## Necrophilia and the environment: Its effects

### Christian perspectives

Given that Christianity has the Bible as the source of most of its teachings, the Bible thus becomes a *sine qua non* in trying to understand the Christian position in regard to necrophilia. The Old Testament connects environmental disasters with sin in general. The expulsion from the *paradeiso* [paradise] (Gn 3:23–24), the plagues on Egypt (Ex 7–11) and droughts (Am 4.6; Jr 14:1–7) are all portrayed as linked with sin. Theologically, human sin, therefore, can lead to actions that have adverse effects upon humans and the environment. But what is the connection between human sin and the environment? Isn't the authorisation given to human beings to not only rule but also subdue the earth a free licence for humans to unboundedly act in whatever manner they like with the earth without fears of any repercussions? Back in 1967, Lynn White Jr sensationally claimed that the biblical text, in particular the reference to 'dominion' over nature, contributes significantly to the senseless exploitation of nature just for the benefit of humans (White 1967).

Though one could agree with White that much of the Bible has been used to justify human domination, devaluation and destruction of the planet, one can concur also with Habel that there are exciting voices in the texts that can be retrieved that connect us with creation in a positive way (Habel 2008).

The creation story of Genesis (1:26–30) is one such passage that connects us with creation in a positive way as it celebrates God's presence on earth rather than in heaven. In this biblical passage, humans are given a command by God to rule over and subdue the earth and all its creatures (Gn 1:28). In verse

29, God is seen providing humans with food from the flora and fauna he had created saying:

See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food (Gn 1:29, NKJV).

In Genesis 9:3–4, God is portrayed as taking another initiative to provide humanity with animal life as food:

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood (Gn 9:3–4, NKJV).

Reference can also be made to Leviticus 11–15 whereby we find regulations pertaining the distinctions between animals fit for consumption and those that are not, as well as regulations meant to control and prevent certain skin diseases and other harmful emissions. Though these regulations were originally meant to regulate ritual cleanness, such laws contain aspects mandating proper care of the environment in order to prevent infection and the spread of communicable diseases (Ademiluka 2009).

The foregoing passages clearly demonstrate the interconnection and interdependence of humans with the earth. The earth is placed under the care of humanity, and in turn, humanity is to live from the produce of the earth. However, caring for the earth does not just end in deriving a livelihood from it, but it carries also the notion of accountability. This finds echo in the Encyclical of the late John Paul II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987, whereby he argues:

The dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to 'use and misuse' or to dispose of things as one pleases (John Paul II, 1987:26).

In the symbiotic relationship of Mother Earth and humanity, both are made to depend on the other. Any harm therefore on Mother Earth brought through the mischief of humans signals not only a sway to the ecological balance but also a danger to humanity itself. Ecological sin thus becomes an omission against God the Creator, a sin against one's neighbour, one's community, the environment as well as even against future generations. The same would apply with the commission of sins of any kind, while some may not directly involve Mother Earth, because of a spiritual connection that exists between humans and Mother Earth, the latter by necessity get affected also.

Looking at necrophilia in particular, one thing that is quite unusual is that it is never explicitly mentioned or suggested in the Bible. In fact, the Bible takes time to proscribe inappropriate sexual contacts such as sex with one's mother, step-mother, sister, aunt, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, menstruating women and animals and so on but maintains a weird silence on necrophilia. The absence, however, of any laws prohibiting it directly or a narrative that portrays such behaviour in a negative light does not make it any lesser a sinful act. By its heinous nature, it is a grave sin. A biblical

inference that could possibly be linked to necrophilia is Numbers 5:2–3 whereby the Lord commands Moses, saying:

Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one having a discharge, and every one that is unclean through contact with the dead; you shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell (Nm 5:2–3, ESV)

It should be admitted, however, that this text should be approached with caution because it does not outrightly outlaw any contact with the dead.

Biblical texts usually associated with the Priestly writers and/or school, categorise impurity into at least two distinct types, namely: ritual impurity and moral impurity. Ritual impurity is said to arise from physical substances and states that are not in themselves sinful like procreation and burying the dead (Graham 2019b). In actual fact, states that attract ritual impurity are unavoidable and at most obligatory. While, for example, sexual contact makes an individual ritually impure, God commanded human beings to be fruitful and multiply. The same can be said with burying the dead; God himself commands proper care of the dead. As these acts are generally permitted, ritual impurity is said to be impermanent and can be removed or reduced either through a ritual bath or through the passage of time. Moral impurity, on the other hand, arises from the commission of grave misconduct such as murder, adultery and other sexual offenses. While one could make up for ritual impurity through atonement or abstention from those ritually defiling activities in the first place, severe moral impurities are said to defile a range of sancta including not only the sanctuary but the whole land of Israel itself. As for God's sanctuary, it could be purified by means of a purification sacrifice and/or offering whereby the blood of an animal is central to the whole ritual performed by the High Priest on *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Days.

In contrast to the sanctuary, however, the land could not really be purified. The books of Numbers and Leviticus single out three classes of grave transgressions, which defile the land and these include different kinds of sexual sins, homicide and idolatry. In accordance with Leviticus 18 and 20, sexual encounters such as incest (18:22), bestiality (18:23) and sexual intercourse with a menstruant (18:19; 20:18); idolatrous acts such as consulting the dead (19:31), offering a child to Molech (20:2–5) as well as manslaying/murder (Nm 35:33–34) incur severe punishment (Graham 2019b). In the Priestly understanding, the land that is repeatedly defiled by such transgressions cannot be purified, but rather it will eventually 'vomit out' those who dwell in it and this is in reference to exile. As noted by Hayes (2012), the above idea tallies well with the expulsion of the Amorites from Canaan and repeated warnings in the book of Leviticus that Israel should refrain from committing similar abominable practices. They too would be simply vomited out if they were to pollute the land through sexual transgressions, bloodshed and idolatry.

Though the Priestly laws do not provide for necrophilia or mention it by name, they do so impliedly. Necrophilia thus befits to be ranked among sexual transgressions capable of defiling the land. In cases of proper caring for the dead, corpses, according to the Priestly writers, are generally the sources of ritual impurity, are capable of communicating an impurity that can go up to at least 7 days and one could in turn defile others with a milder 1-day impurity (Nm 19:14). Corpse impurity could be so severe resulting in the exclusion of the corpse-defiled person/persons from the camp during the whole period covering the impurity (Nm 5:2–3; 31:13–24). Now in the case of necrophilia, the situation is even worse in that the motive is not proper care of the dead but rather a selfish lustful drive to sexually defile the corpse, dehumanising it at a time it should be worthy of reverential care. Necrophilia is thus an abhorrence capable of making God turn away his face from the people thus exposing them to any forms of danger, be it ecological disasters or any other harmful evils like wars, hunger and so on.

### Islamic perspectives

Just as in biblical culture, in Islamic understanding, a person's life and identity are not separate from the environment that one resides in. According to Surah Ar-Rahman 1–9:

The Most Compassionate created humanity ... The sun and moon travel with precision. The stars and trees bow down in submission. As for the sky, He raised it high and set the balance of justice ... He laid out the earth for all beings. In it are fruit, palm trees with date stalks and grain with husks, and aromatic plants (Khattab 2018:531).

The first thing that comes out clear from these verses is that Allah created all things in a balance, guaranteeing the survival of humanity and sustainability of natural resources. With reference to water in particular, the Quran emphasises its centrality as a basic element of life (Surah Nahl:65; Surah Ar-Anbiya:30). Any abuse therefore of natural resources has serious negative effects on the balance of the environment.

The second important aspect to note is that the utilisation of the given natural resources is the right of all creatures. Given, however, that humans are the only rational creatures on earth, they shoulder the responsibility of protecting the environment as the right to benefit from it is not divorced from being accountable to it. Allah forbids reckless destruction of the environment as reflected in the instruction: 'And do good as Allah has been good to you. Moreover, do not seek corruption in the earth. Allah does not love corrupters' (Surah Ar-Qasas:77). In Islamic understanding, corruption is more comprehensive in scope. It does not just apply to malpractices such as frauds, rape, illegal practices and murder, but it applies also to the excessive exploitation of natural resources, deforestation as well as pollution of natural resources (Ahmad 2020). In accordance with such thinking, therefore, the environment from a Islamic perspective must be maintained as it was found. Destroying it would be tantamount to encroaching on the rights of future generations who also have the right to benefit from it. The environment

should instead be the source of all life for all creatures at all times (Salem, Hasna & Osman 2012).

While the position of the Quran on the problem of corruption is loud and clear, there appears lack of a clear and decisive legislation against necrophilia in the Quran as well as in the Islamic theory of law. Islamic jurisprudence is ambiguously worded and this ambiguity surrounding the laws oftentimes provides a moral and a pious cover for deviants. This ambiguity can actually attract them, and some even could hide with the highly contestable interpretation of Mahommad's actions whereby according to some hadith (recorded tradition regarding the sayings and doings of Mohammad), Muhammad in one occasion took off his shirt, laid it on a dead woman and then went down her grave and lay with her. While Muhammad positively defended his actions, the Arabic words *ataja' ma'ha* [lay with her] are used in Arabic to mean sexual intercourse (Ibrahim 2019).

Though it could be possible that some may hide behind Mahommad's actions as license to indulge in necrophilia, it is highly doubtful if Mahommad had sexual intercourse with this woman. There appears wisdom in a response given to this interpretational enigma:

How could a Muslim [...] believe that he [...] the purest of all mankind, slept in a grave with an old, dead woman who had looked after him like a loving mother, and in the presence of her own son and a number of the Companions? Can any sane person believe that? (Fatwa 2015: No. 298936)

It is not a surprise therefore that most Muslims in contemporary times respond with incredulity and revulsion whenever necrophilia makes the news headline in the Arab world. This on its own is a clear sign that in the Islamic world, necrophilia is taken as being ungodly, a kind of corruption that Allah certainly does not like also.

### African traditional religion perspectives

African traditional religion is not unique, it shares much in common with the Christian and Islamic religions discussed above whereby the environment is considered as sacred and having a spiritual agency. The African traditional ecological spirituality celebrates divine presence in the environment. In accordance with such thinking then, every animal, plant and natural phenomena is the abode of the divine. The flora and fauna, as Sipeyiye (2020) would put it, have a hierophantic role as they indicate the channel through which messages are transmitted between the human and spiritual worlds. Seen from this angle, one would agree with Kinsley (1995) who avers that African traditional ecological spirituality is based on 'rapport with, reverence for and propitiation of the powers latent in the land'.

Given that supernatural phenomena is the heartbeat of African spirituality, it is within the nature of Africans to propitiate through rituals the spiritual world before undertaking any task, be it eating, working on the land, travelling, hunting or any other activity that the African

deems important to inform *vari kumhepo* [the living dead]. It is with such understanding that Mbiti (1969) would opine that one does not achieve or become successful in his or her undertaking without the help of the spiritual world or God the Creator. Excelling in any undertaking is thus credited to the benevolence of the spiritual world.

Being the custodians of African culture, elders ensure that every child who grows up is schooled in the tradition of the elders. The curriculum emphasises *unhu* or *Ubuntu*, which encompasses values such as respect for everyone and in particular elders, the need for unity in decision making, the science of the environment, the dos and don'ts (taboos) and other activities that do not offend the spirit world. Every child thus grew up with intermediate skills by which he or she interacted with the environment, which formed the immediate source of livelihood that is the forests, rivers, mountains, the flora and fauna and so on.

Though there are no explicit teachings regulating necrophilia in African culture, they do so impliedly. Necrophilia can be classified among those 'unheard of things' or abominable practices, which the African child is instructed to shun off from, lest the wrath of the ancestors and gods and/or God is avenged on people. To understand the gravity of necrophilia from an African understanding, one needs to look at how *makunakuna* [incest] is perceived. Among the Shona, for example, the ancestors are said to frown at such a practice and if unpropitiated, they bring upon misfortunes to the land such as lack of rainfall. The same is shared by the Yoruba of Nigeria. Writing about the Yoruba, Awolalu (1976) says that a person who commits incest will have to undergo an elaborate cleansing ritual lest he is overtaken by disaster. If the culprit is not discovered and no cleansing ritual done, the earth will withhold its increase and all sorts of misfortunes will not only befall the culprit but also the whole community. Looking at *makunakuna*, one could argue that it looks like a lesser evil as compared to necrophilia in that it is an act that often emanates from consent among the living, but the same cannot be obtained with necrophilia which is driven by selfish desire. Not only does the culprit defile the corpse but he also wrongs the deceased's ancestral spirits. This leads the community to respond with revulsion and incredulity upon hearing of this antisocial act and the ancestors and God will surely not take lightly such a matter, letting it go unpunished. If unfortunately the community is not aware of it and no propitiation done to atone for the evil act, the result would be a catastrophic blow to the society as well as on the environment because, as the Yoruba would put it, 'if the earthly king does not see you, the heavenly King does', the heavenly King does, meaning to say that He sees and passes judgment (Awolalu 1976).

## Towards curbing necrophilia

The foregoing paragraphs have managed to make a case that ATR, Islam and Christianity have zero tolerance when it comes to all cases of sexual misconduct and, in particular, necrophilia. From the written and non-written teachings of

these religions, necrophilia is regarded as an abomination that creates disharmony to the spiritual worldviews of these religions and people cannot talk of well-being when such an antisocial misconduct happens within the community. It is against this background that these religions proscribe against certain acts that they deem harmful to the established order between the spiritual, natural and human worlds. What can be seen as cutting across these religions is the respect for the dead. Tampering of any kind with dead corpses is frowned at and culprits ought to be brought to book with rituals to be followed to avert disaster upon the people. Writing from the perspective of ATR, and Ndau in particular, Sipeyiye (2020) opines that though the three worlds (spiritual, natural and human) are so linked and constitute cosmic totality. The spirit world, however, is more powerful and hence can punish the human world in case of disobedience. What obtains in ATR can also be said of in the Christian and Islamic religions. For the good of humanity, what is called for thus is faithful adherence to the teachings of these religions.

While faithful adherence to the teachings of these religions is called for, a multi-pronged approach needs to be adopted given the seriousness of the problem at hand. Adherents of the said religions in positions of power in the secular world need to use their positions to influence government policies that can be crafted to address this problem. In places where no clear legislations exist that govern necrophilia, there is need to influence law makers to come up with such laws as a matter of urgency. It is equally important for the society and governments to check on the drivers of necrophilia and see how best these can be addressed. Where mental healing is needed, people should be assisted on time and where exorcism of satanic spirits is called for, spirits of the dead, spirits of drug addiction as well as materialistic spirits, religious functionaries of the given religions should come in and assist.

## Conclusion

To sum up the discussion, it has been the preoccupation of this paper to zero in on the less talked about problem of necrophilia. It has been noted that, if not checked, necrophilia is capable of derailing the 2030 gender equality vision of the governments of the world. The paper is therefore a call for faithful adherence to teachings of ATR, Islam and Christianity, given their known respect for the dead. It is only when people adhere to the teachings of these religions that the ugly monster of necrophilia can be eradicated from within our communities, and it would be a marked step towards achieving the 2030 vision.

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