Self-Proclaimed Prophets and Human Security in Africa
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ABSTRACT
Over the recent years, the challenge of self-proclaimed prophets has impacted the Christian faith in Africa. Many unsuspecting and innocent people have fallen prey to the displays exhibited by self-proclaimed prophets in the name of God. This challenge has given way too many Africans' exploitation since religion constitutes an inextricable part of African people's lives. Cases of self-proclaimed prophets staging miracles and prophecies have been on the rise, and innocent people have fallen prey to the lies due to their faith in God. In this paper, it will be argued that con artists disguised as prophets of God have threatened human security, and this has crippled sustainable development in the African region. In this paper, four aspects are discussed: why Africans have become gullible to false Prophets, how con artists disguised as prophets of God compromise human security in Africa, trending involving Prophets in Africa, and possible suggestions given the current research findings. It will be concluded that self-proclaimed prophets threaten human security in Africa by using the name of God to achieve selfish desires.

Keywords: HUMAN SECURITY, A.F.R.I.C.A., SELF-PROCLAIMED PROPHETS, CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

Across diverse countries and contexts in Africa, religion has direct implications for human security. While, in some instances, a religious belief is a facet of those working towards peace and reconciliation, some mushrooming self-styled prophets seek to manipulate and control through the deployment of religion. Many have sadly succumbed to these individuals' antics. However, we are still


counting figures of innocent people being abused and exploited using the name of God. While many are called 'prophets' of God, not all are genuine and serve as God's prophets. Some are con artists hiding behind the pulpit, deceiving believers when, in fact, they are philanderers; due to that factor, believers' lives have rested in the wrong hands hence compromising human security. In this paper, therefore, it shall be argued that con artists have preyed on religion's capacity to rouse the most profound feelings and emotions in individuals to dig into their already torn pockets, sexually violate them, among other dreadful acts hence threatening human security. Human security in the region has been drastically threatened considering the significance of religion in many if not all aspects of people's lives, such as shaping culture, societal norms, morals, amongst other factors. One scholar noted that religion constitutes an inextricable part of African society, so if cancer develops in religion, the chances are high that it also affects the whole African society socially, economically even politically.

Some self-proclaimed prophets have even gone to the extent of claiming that God spoke to them that the victim provides sex or money to the prophet for miracles, healing, and prosperity. The faithful poor, and needy become the victims duped sexually and financially by con artists parading as prophets. Such con artists have capitalized on the people's weaknesses without being held accountable, which has compromised human security in the region and crippled sustainable development. Only a few con artists own wealth and riches while the people continue to suffer. Con artists are becoming richer at the expense of the poor, and the poor are becoming poorer hence more exposed to life threats like hunger and disease.

As the number of Christians, for instance, continues to increase in Africa, the cancer of false prophets has also escalated. Noted in the United Nations General Assembly resolution 66/290 is that "human security is a framework devised to assist the Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood, and dignity of their people." It calls for "people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people." However, given the framework of human security in Africa, it is noted that con artists, sexual exploiters, and business people have threatened the very existence, livelihood, and dignity of the African people. Therefore, four dimensions of the problem shall be critically analyzed in this paper: why African Christians are most gullible to fake prophets and pastors, how fake prophets compromise Human Security, trending unusual and human security cases involving Prophets in Africa suggestions to remedy the situation.

**Why Africans Have Become Gullible to False Prophets**

It is noted that Christianity is continuously growing across much of the continent. It is also achieving

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significant public acceptance as a force of social good.\textsuperscript{6} Due to that factor, random individuals are tempted to pose as prophets and pastors to manipulate African Christians. Ever since the missionary era, Christianity has had a positive impact on the socio-cultural arena throughout Africa.\textsuperscript{7} In addition to involvement in evangelism and discipleship, various Christian communities were behind the founding and growth of primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions, health facilities, poverty alleviation projects, children's homes, and even civic initiatives.\textsuperscript{8} For instance, at every street intersection in Ghana, flyers with advertisements and announcements from churches are seen, many of which are created and directed by only one person—a prophet, a pastor.\textsuperscript{9} Christianity, in a nutshell, has penetrated deeply into people's hearts and minds; hence the cancer of false prophets and pastors quickly affects many Africans.

Africans' challenges have also left many enduring long-term suffering and feeling hopeless, resulting in many people becoming gullible to false prophets. According to a 2006 University of Leicester study, those who suffered more tragedy and hardship while growing up are more likely to be gullible later in life. For example, they may succumb to peer pressure more, be more easily misled by others, or be more influenced by the media.\textsuperscript{10} Thus, Africans have faced long-term economic, social, and political problems, leading them to seek the much-needed hope in a religion where false prophets and pastors have welcomed them with open hands. In Zimbabwe, for instance, the economic environment, characterized explicitly by poverty and unemployment, has been on the downturn for at least the past two decades.\textsuperscript{11} This has led the populace to, among other pertinent decisions, turn to religion, where promises of redemption and prosperity abound.\textsuperscript{i} False prophets preaching the prosperity gospel have staged miracles to suffering and hopeless Africans, mistaken for a long-term solution. Self-proclaimed prophets stage miracles for their benefits and disguise them as acts done for God's glory. Although the real man of God still exists, fake prophets and pastors have affected the Christian religion. It is noted that a massive following due to the excellent gospel they preach has attracted distressed followers and offered what appears to be a sigh of relief. Although Africa is richly endowed with a bounty of natural resources, rich fertile land, precious minerals, and bio-diversity, it

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\item Moses Owojaiye, \textit{The Problem of False Prophets in Africa: Strengthening the Church in The Face of A Troublesome Trend}.
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still is the world's poorest continent\textsuperscript{12}, and this has led African Christians to turn to religion for comfort, assurance, and hope for a better life.

Religious leaders are respected and trusted in the African region. According to Pastor Kamthian, Africans accord religious leaders’ high levels of public trust and respect, even more than politicians, government bureaucrats, judges, magistrates, and even corporate leaders. Due to that factor, religious charlatans find it easier to win their hearts. Agazue, on that note, argues that that false prophets and pastors have, as a result, cunningly learned parroting what impoverished or troubled followers are desperate to hear about exploiting them.\textsuperscript{13} Despite awareness of the abuses, self-proclaimed prophets retain thousands of followers who fund their activities.\textsuperscript{14} As one Rwandan citizen is quoted to have said,

"There are many evangelists today who claim to perform miracles to gullible congregations by using people they pay so that they can be believed."\textsuperscript{15}

False prophets understand their people's hardships and the exact message they need to hear to gain their support. As a result, their strategies to win people's hearts are planned accordingly and made to blend with the bible's message, making it hard for the poor Africans to detect falsehood. Many, as a result, have fallen prey and have unfortunately been exploited financially, sexually, and even psychologically without their knowledge.

Due to long-term suffering, many believers have become desperate for solutions to the extent that their ability to question suspicious acts is clouded. Many are entirely suspending their reasoning due to the desperate need to attain positive results, prophecies, and miracles. According to psychology research, \textit{desperation} is often behind poor decision-making and impulses that accompany poor outcomes.\textsuperscript{16} Fake prophets, however, also add to the problem by offering that which the Christians are craving to lure them into their trap. In a situation where one has disabilities and health issues, fake prophets have offered miracles to heal and correct disability. When Africans have gone through hardships, false prophets have offered prosperity gospel that gives them hope. As a result, many Christians in Africa have been misled into accepting false prophets and their demands.

Some have also fallen prey due to a lack of knowledge and education. According to the U.N. body, approximately 203 million people above 15 are illiterate in sub-Saharan Africa. Half of the number is


\textsuperscript{14} Moses Owojaiye. \textit{The Problem of False Prophets in Africa: Strengthening the Church in The Face of A Troublesome Trend}.


concentrated in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Emanating from that fact, it is noted that con artists easily convince some believers into accepting lies leading to their exploitation.

Many believers have also become gullible to false prophets due to ignorance. Instead of recognizing false prophets and preachers for what they are by their strange evil fruits (Matthew 7:16), some think highly of them. They assume they are genuine and blindly follow them without questioning their credibility. Many Christians are biblically ignorant and illiterate, and because of this, they accept anything as the "word of God" and would do anything the false prophet tells them to do, even if he tells them to go eat grass. Some people overlook the need to question prophets because the title servant of God very much blinds them. They believe their men of God ought to be respected and trusted due to the title he claims. However, this has led to disaster since men of God abusing and exploiting believers rise in the continent, leading to lagging in sustainable development.

False prophets continuously perfect their art of deceiving people, distinguishing God's honest servants from the false has become problematic. While some false prophets are being castigated in some parts of Africa due to their dubious utterances and magic, some note the mistakes made and aim to improve them to become better deceivers. As a result, new antics to lure unsuspecting Africans are devised, and more people are abused.

Regional authorities continue to undermine the need to take more stern measures against false prophets since it appears like people consciously take decisions to follow them. Although some people knowingly follow false prophets searching for quick magical solutions, some people are unaware of what the false prophets are doing to them and are left unprotected. Some people genuinely seek the face of God and get betrayed by these con artists due to lack of knowledge. People are therefore left vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. While fake prophets continue to proliferate across Africa, no substantial measures have been taken by states, and this has given con artists the liberty to abuse people and exploit them. Social media platforms across the continent have also been showing many public abuse incidences, including fake prophets, yet regional authorities have paid an almost deaf ear to the issue.

How Self-Proclaimed Prophets Compromise Human Security in Africa

As noted by one scholar, false prophets rob and steal from the people. They speak lies and utter vain prophecies and visions, leading people astray. They draw people to themselves, claiming to have a special relationship with God, but they lie and deceive the people. They claim to know everything about a person,

but they lie and know nothing! They sleep with married women and break the hearts of single women. They destroy homes and families, marriages, businesses, and destinies, yet they are mere diviners and sorcerers.\textsuperscript{20} 

The growing cancer of bogus prophets has negatively impacted human security because many Africans are religious. People have been exploited financially, sexually even psychologically, all in God's name, which has slowed down sustainable development. The few con artists' antics pretentiously parading themselves as "servants of God" have resulted in many unsuspecting congregants being abused and exploited. False prophets have used the same faith drawing the people to God to exploit them hence causing a catastrophic disaster of human insecurity that continues to threaten sustainable Christianity serving as a reasonable force shaping lives.

Self-proclaimed prophets, instead of focusing on the true Gospel 'earnestly contending for the faith which was delivered unto the saints,' proclaim and preach gospels that have nothing to do with the issue of salvation.\textsuperscript{21} In the process, it is noted that many sincere people are deceived and led astray, and with time they eventually take the easy fairytale path far from reality that leads them to destruction.\textsuperscript{22} The religious, especially Christians who constitute most of Africa's population, face a risk of exploitation and abuse by a few con artists who care less about the region's development. In that vein of analysis, it is also noted that some people, for instance, have even gone to the extent of abandoning their medicines and medical advice due to the false hope prophesied by con artists. Some even allow themselves to be sexually violated in the name of exorcising demons and administering spiritual help. As a result, human security from preventable threats has continuously been compromised, which has led Africa to lag in achieving sustainable development goals.

Gospreneuers (those who have turned religion into cash-spinning businesses), for instance, are presenting their magic as prophecies to enhance or promote their work, yet in fact, they are lining their pockets and subsequently living large at the expense of the same poor they purport to serve and save.\textsuperscript{23} While the poor are becoming poorer and poorer, even in the soul, the self-styled prophets live lavishly, which has caused an economic security crisis that has crippled sustainable development in the region. Due to the prosperity gospel preached by the false prophets and pastors, a significant number of Christians are tricked into believing, hence digging deep into their torn pockets to put something on the table for the bogus prophets to eat. This is done to exchange false hopes, promises, and magic attributed to God yet far from God. Due to that factor, false prophets and pastors have compromised human security to a greater extent.

Many cases across the region of sexual abuse, rape, and harassment perpetrated by bogus prophets have been reported. As women become the predominant followers of these religious leaders, sexual exploitation of vulnerable women by male religious leaders, often called prophets, has become

\textsuperscript{20} Ib\textit{id.} 
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. 
commonplace. Stories of women being sexually exploited with the promise of 'spiritual cleansing' by their prophets abound; similarly, stories of the sexually exploited women handing in their daughters and recommending their friends to also have sexual encounters with their pastors for the said reason are equally heard. In Nigeria, one woman is quoted to have claimed that;

"He told me my waist and private parts had been ravaged by a demon." Only God knows what the prophet did next to exorcise the alleged Demon. In South Africa, rape and fraud scandals involving fake pastors have also been on the rise, with high-profile cases in recent months involving disgraced pastors and prophets. Emanating from that factor, it can be reasonably pointed out that women in Africa have been highly exposed to sexual exploitation by fake pastors and prophets.

Religion in Africa is strongly intertwined with other aspects of life, including culture, politics, art, and philosophy, and due to that factor; the impact made by false prophets through staged miracles and fake prophecies affects not only one part of the people's lives but also the other aspects of life including philosophy, culture, and reality. As scholars have repeatedly pointed out, African cosmology does not separate the spiritual from the non-spiritual; therefore, economic, medical, and cultural spheres of reality are open to multiple interpretations. According to one scholar, religion can influence socio-political and economic processes in Africa, and if it is positive, it could ameliorate poverty and corruption by assisting with the socio-political and economic transformation of the continent. On the other hand, due to false prophets' cancer, religion can negatively influence the same factors. Since political and socio-economic activities are often flavored with religious expressions and rituals. Misguided doctrines and interpretations in social, political, and economic fields based on the false gospel become a threat, thus compromising human security and sustainable development.

Some other self-proclaimed prophets in deceiving people are also hazardous to health, promoting health insecurity in Africa. An example of such hazardous methods is used by a self-proclaimed prophet based in South Africa to make congregants drink petrol and eat grass because of his claim that humans can eat


26 Agazue, "He Told Me that My Waist and Private Parts Have Been Ravaged by Demons:" Sexual Exploitation of Female Church Members by "Prophets" in Nigeria."


and drink anything by faith. In Zimbabwe, an unmarried woman and her mother died after they allegedly drank a lethal concoction given to them by a self-proclaimed prophet with the claim that it would cleanse their stomachs and induce vomiting. Many have gone through similar incidences that cost them even their lives, which is an ongoing practice. People's health has been compromised by false prophets in the region claiming to have powers to cure diseases hence preventing believers from seeking medical attention. Many have neglected taking medicines or seeking medical attention due to faith in their church leader's works, resulting in faith deaths and preventable diseases escalating to fatal complications.

In the same vein of analysis, it is also noted that during the present COVID-19 era, false prophets have also invoked religious ideology to confront the virus, assuring followers and devotees that faith offers adequate protection this has arguably undermined the precautions set by medical experts. In a time when fact-based action is critical to curbing the contagion, false prophets have raised concerns over the danger of spreading false hope and misinformation to achieve their desires yet endangering the people Self-proclaimed prophets, therefore, as shown by the evidence above, have become a severe threat to health security in the region.

Selected Trending Cases Threatening Human Security in Africa

In February 2019, a South African-based prophet allegedly raised a man from the dead at a funeral ceremony held in his church. Although he claimed the man was dead, the man in the coffin, after scrutiny, was discovered to be alive and breathing. Thousands of people were deceived into believing the prophet had special powers from God and willingly offered their little earned savings hence living them more impoverished and more vulnerable to the harsh circumstances of life. This has become a vicious cycle in the African region, counteracting development economically, socially, and even politically.

Ghanaian self-proclaimed prophet Nana Poke claimed to conduct deliverance in his church through kissing female church members to exorcise demons. The controversial pastor is seen on video holding and kissing one of his female members passionately in the name of removing demons. According to the Prophet, the spirit works in different ways, which include kissing female congregants. While other church members

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looked on, Prophet Poku is seen in 28 seconds video footage kissing the woman deeply while one of the church elders kept shouting: "Yes Lord, Yes Lord." Many people have been exploited in Africa, as evident by this case study in the name of God yet far from God.

In 2014, a South African self-proclaimed prophet Lasego Daniel of Rabboni Centre Ministries, encouraged his followers to eat grass to "be closer to God." The inhuman act shocked people worldwide following the viral video footage of dozens of people dropping to the ground to eat grass after Lasego claimed it would draw them closer to God. In another incident, the self-styled prophet urged his followers to drink petrol after alleging that he had changed it to pineapple juice. Some even went to the extent of claiming that the petrol tasted like pineapple juice due to their faith and trust in the alleged man of God. Self-proclaimed prophets have therefore Emanating from that factor; it can be pointed out that the controversial methods, which also include Lasego Daniel walking on his followers, have drawn criticism and have shown how churches have also used people's desperate situation to abuse them hence compromising human security.

Another 'prophet stepped on people to perform deliverance and commanded the congregation to eat hair, cloth, and other items he claimed to have changed into food. The self-proclaimed prophet took deliverance to a whole new level and has been in the limelight following his unusual claims and performances. The prophet is noted for praying over pieces of cloth, wrapping paper, or someone's hair and then tells his congregation that it is food. People then come forward, eat, and proclaim the hair or cloth tastes like Macaroni and Cheese, as shown in the quoted article. Photos have also circulated on social media platforms showing the man publicly abusing his congregants by dropping snakes into the mouths of people during a deliverance session. As video footage and photos circulated, it was noted that he ridiculously claimed that under his order, God had turned the snakes into chocolate, and people accepted it and ate just because he is a supposed man of God.

Self-proclaimed prophets have become a severe threat to human security in Africa. The public has also been reduced to become puppets in the hands of a few con artists hiding with the name of God.

37. Isaac Dachen, “Ghanaian pastor claims to heal woman by kissing her (Video)"
   End Times Ghanaian pastor claims to heal woman by kissing her (Video) [ARTICLE] - Pulse Nigeria


40. Ghana Celebrities. South African Pastor Steps On People To Perform Deliverance; Commands Congregation To Eat Hair, Cloth, And Other Items He Claims To Have Changed Into Food. June 23, 2015.
Possible suggestions to remove the threat posed by fake prophets on human security in Africa

Following the above findings, it is noted that African states' can devise measures that separate the sheep from the goats, and these might include;

- Accountability- the title prophet or 'man of God' must be regulated by the state. Mushrooming prophets should go through a theological education procedure and evaluation before operating in the society, community, or nation. In this procedure, the state will have theological experts evaluate a prophet's credibility according to Christian requirements then provide a license to operate. This will also safeguard the people from random individuals wearing sheep's clothing, ye; in fact, they are wolves seeking to divulge believers.

- A peer review of all prophets- They should be a regional peer review mechanism where a religious body or organization comprised of representatives from all the Christian denominations will create rules based on theological expertise and human security measures- this solution will prevent random individuals from exploiting people in the name of God and assure that prophets prioritize human security. Also, this peer review mechanism should regulate conduct and ensure a degree of accountability if an act of abuse or exploitation is discovered.

- State Registration of funds collected in churches- in order to prevent fake prophets from financially exploiting followers, it can be suggested that church leaders apply to the state with valid reasons to collect people's money. The followers should also be given the right to see the state's authorization before giving or donating money to the church. This will ensure that congregants are not cheated of their money by a businessman posing as prophets of God.

- Prohibiting prophets from performing sexually related miracles and exorcisms to safeguard followers from sexual violation claimed to be from God.

- Licensing areas that prophets operate can be suggested that prophets perform exorcism or miracles in licensed areas found suitable by the state to safeguard people from being dragged to secret places that might compromise their personal security. The presence of government security officers is also required during any activity.

- If the law is broken, both the prophet and the person being helped by the prophet should face the law to ensure maximum compliance from both the people and the prophets.

- The undermining of science and medicine by prophets should be criminalized to avoid cases of people being fed hazardous substances and people being encouraged not to get medical attention. Instead of undermining medical attention and misinterpreting the scripture to suit their desires, prophets should use religion as a constructive force.
People should be encouraged to pray for themselves and read the Holy books. This will enhance their understanding of what God says and expects from them. They will also distinguish between a false prophet and a true prophet hence avoiding exploitation and abuse from self-proclaimed prophets.

People should also be encouraged to work and attain success. Awareness campaigns should be done to educate people to understand that nothing comes magically. In this way, they will not be taken advantage of by con artists who see the desperation in them.

Awareness campaigns must also be done to educate people on how to separate reality situations from the spiritual. People should be urged to take religion as a source of motivation in real situations rather than escape routes. This will prevent situations where one continues to dig into already torn pockets, giving a self-proclaimed Prophet living a luxurious life at their expense. People, as a result, will have economic security hence enhancing sustainable development in the region.

Conclusion
Self-proclaimed prophets are constantly abusing the public hence posing a severe threat to human security in Africa. Their invulnerable nature has covered up abusive acts perpetrated on believers using the name of God yet far from God. Religion has been used as a weapon of mass destruction by a few selfish individuals pursuing ungodly goals. This, as a result, has left people in the region exposed to abuse of all kinds by con artists hiding behind the pulpit. The people in the region lack protection from these disguised con artists due to the respect and trust states also accord to those who call themselves 'men of God', forgetting how the so-called men God mushroomed into the society. This has given con artists immunity and comfort when they exploit believers. However, this paper suggests that the African States, as part of their duty to protect their people, should set laws and measures curbing prophets in the region and award licenses to deserving real men of God following due theological procedures. This will avoid any random individual disguise as a prophet in pursuit of financial goals or sexual pleasure.

Looking at the sustainable development goals set for 2030, it is expected that people in the African region work towards poverty reduction, zero hunger, good health, and access to education. However, at the rate at which false prophets are continuing abusive and exploitative practices, Africa is set back. Instead of the prophets to promote good health, some are even encouraging extremely unsafe practices to health. Instead of giving the poor, the self-proclaimed prophets take from the poor, increasing poverty and promoting an economic gap between the rich and the poor. The self-proclaimed prophets in the region have become some of the richest and wealthiest individuals at the expense of the people they purport to serve and save, which has aggravated the people's security and crippled sustainable development. Random individuals, due to the open nature of the title 'man of God' have seized the opportunity to disguise as prophets, and this, as a result, has left people vulnerable to exploitation by the self-proclaimed church leaders seeking to alleviate their financial
and sexual desires far from God yet attributed to God.

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**References**


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