



Save the Children

The Invention of Child Witches

in the Democratic Republic of Congo

**Social cleansing, religious commerce and the
difficulties of being a parent in an urban culture**

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**Summary of the research and experiences of Save the Children's
2003-2005 programme funded by USAID**

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Executive Summary

This report summarises our knowledge on the issue of children accused of witchcraft in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The information and analyses presented are all drawn from various research studies¹ as well as from the experience our programme has gained through the reunification and reintegration of almost 2,000 children in the cities of Kinshasa and Mbuyi-Mayi.² The greatest source of information, however, was our direct work with pastors from the revivalist churches, communities and parents who have accused their children of witchcraft.

This brief summary of our work demonstrates the importance of research in the development world, and particularly in the area of child protection. It is not an academic study but rather an attempt to understand the reality and beliefs that affect children's lives.

After a brief word on methodology, the report examines three broad subject areas: the dynamic of witchcraft accusations, the multiple causes of this phenomenon and the role of the revivalist churches.

It is our contention that witchcraft amongst children should, first and foremost, be analysed in as great a depth as possible, placing all value judgements to one side and considering the issue from a perspective outside of all beliefs or non-beliefs. Through our desire to understand the interaction of a number of issues in which the child is, at the very worst, the main player, our research led us to make the following observations:

The crucial role of the family

Children are stigmatised for many reasons and the family dynamic and attitude of the parents or guardians play a decisive role in this. The severe financial pressure faced by parents and the sudden deaths that can occur (often AIDS or malaria-related) cause crisis in the family structure and dynamic on three levels: a) weakening or collapse of the extended family, b) family recomposition, c) difficulties in being a parent in a society whose foundations and future prospects have been destroyed. The combination of external threats faced by families pushes parents or guardians to negatively magnify a child's individual characteristics (such as disability, bad behaviour, changes due to puberty or even the mere fact of being in the wrong place at the wrong time) to the point where they see them as being signs of witchcraft. The final blow is delivered by the revivalist churches, which confirm or discover signs of witchcraft. Parents are deeply distressed by what they believe to be witchcraft and, first and foremost, fear for their own well-being. At this point they have three alternatives: to cast the child out onto the street or put them in an institution; to have the child 'delivered' or to refute the allegations against their child. We came to the

¹ In particular, the research on "La problématique des enfants dits sorciers à Kinshasa" by Dominique de Juriew, Save the Children, July - August 2003.

² This programme is financed by USAID.

conclusion that there was no “typical” profile of a high-risk family and that the problem of witchcraft is no more predominant in one particular ethnic group or social class than in any other.

Violence and social cleansing

The phenomenon of child witchcraft is a symptom of a more serious problem that involves extreme and boundless violence within a traumatic social space, on the verge of disintegration. There is clearly a strong tendency towards the social cleansing of children considered to be undesirable, or towards getting rid of children by way of a level of neglect that could lead to death. In addition, the failure or absence of the government and community social guarantors, whose role it is to maintain respect for law and order, also has a large part to play in the spiralling violence engulfing the most vulnerable children.

Accusations of witchcraft

Although mostly unsuccessful, attempts are made at rehabilitating “worrying” or different children, who represent a problem for their parents or extended family. However, we did come across some cases, albeit very few, where the child was able to return to the family after having been “delivered” by a pastor. It is clear that accusations of witchcraft represent an attempt to resolve a crisis within the family, though the solutions proposed by the revivalist churches are far from successful in resolving problems. All the evidence gathered suggests that the price paid by the child is extremely high.

The role of the revivalist churches and the State

It is clear that the different religious and magical movements, whether Catholic, Pentecostal, African or fetishist, fuel hatred and violence against children. Most of the churches operate on a profit-making basis and nearly all of those practising exorcism will put on a real performance for the purposes of financial gain. What is more, and with very few exceptions, when it comes to exorcism, they tend to target “clients” and not the faithful as you might expect. These churches demonstrate the corruption of State officials, who draw clear profit from them in the form of illegal payments. On the other hand, the churches also operate as reference points for families who have neither access to, nor confidence in, basic or social services.

A lack of alternatives for parents

There is a desperate lack of alternatives for parents in terms of educating and bringing up their children. Although their primary responsibility should be to protect them, they are offered no choices in terms of access to State services or civil society initiatives.

Recommendations

Our main recommendations centre on four issues:

- 1 Continuing and strengthening the awareness raising work that has already begun with religious leaders.
- 2 Increasing State regulation of the way in which the churches operate and creating mechanisms for monitoring churches that may be mistreating and abusing children and adults accused of witchcraft.
- 3 Strengthening work with parents through discussion and awareness raising groups such as the “parents’ discussion groups”.
- 4 Increasing knowledge of violence against children as a first step towards an action plan to prevent violence. This programme must, however, form part of the national strategy for social protection.

Methodology

This report is not a research study in the formal sense of the term. It should be seen as a summary of the knowledge Save the Children and its partners have acquired through research, activity reports, field visits and evaluations. There are of course gaps in this knowledge, particularly in terms of the role of parents and the violent practices towards children in Congolese society.

The information, observations and analyses presented in this report have been drawn from a variety of sources including:

- A number of major studies published since 1999.
- One-off field surveys conducted by international and national consultants.
- Reports on and experiences gained by national partners in the reunification of almost 2,000 children.
- Work that has been supported and documented with community child protection networks.
- Dozens of awareness raising sessions with parents who had rejected their children.

The information we have gathered on the revivalist churches forms part of a long process, the main stages of which have been:

- Three workshops through the intermediary of the Congolese Church of Christ in 2000 and 2002.
- Three discussion groups organised in Kingabwa Pêcheur, Kingabwa Village and Madaila, involving almost 150 pastors from revivalist churches.
- A reunification programme involving around ten churches, in partnership with the Ministry for Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice.
- Revivalist church identification reports.
- Interministerial commission reports into revivalist churches.
- A training and awareness raising programme for pastors of revivalist churches.

The case studies and quotations that follow are drawn, for the most part, from field visits during which we met with the main people involved in issues surrounding child witches. We tried to obtain as wide a variety of opinions as possible by interviewing

revivalist church pastors, church secretaries, families, children, neighbours, State officials and those responsible for child reunification.

One of the main limitations that we encountered was undoubtedly the translation of terms from Lingala and Tshiluba into French. Two international consultants used local interpreters working in the area of children. Some doubts were raised, however, as to the objectivity and accuracy of the translations of some testimonies.

1. The dynamic of witchcraft accusations: a clash between the imaginary and the real

1.1 'Urban witchcraft' or the invention of child witches

A first step towards understanding the phenomenon of so-called child witches is to recognise that witchcraft is a real system of belief, rooted in popular mentality. For the majority of Congolese and, to a certain extent, Africans, an invisible world exists below the surface of material reality.

The discussions we had with children, adults and religious leaders clearly demonstrate that there is no clear dividing line between the "visible" and "invisible" worlds. The two worlds are even entwined. Foreigners unused to seeing the world in this way, might think that these beliefs are specific to those who have had no access to formal education. This is not the case. During advocacy meetings with the most senior State authorities we found that the elites also have an ambiguous concept of child witchcraft, even accepting the phenomenon. In fact "intellectuals", university educated people and even those working in child protection organisations are no exception.

For the vast majority of Congolese witchcraft is, thus, a reality and one that can also affect children. This was confirmed in interviews with social workers, pastors, parents' groups, community members and people working in child protection.

Our first research, in 1999, clearly showed the changes that had occurred in the mentality of Kinshasa's inhabitants. Witchcraft was perceived as fundamentally negative, unlike in the villages where witchcraft could be a positive or a negative thing.³ Witchcraft as we know it today has little to do with "traditional practices". It is quite clearly a modern invention, largely urban in origin, in which common cultural roots have been distorted from their primary meaning. And this is by no means something that is unique to the Congo.

Revivalist church pastors, recognised as experts by the people, generally agree that witchcraft is the art of doing evil. It comes directly from Satan, assisted by demons (or fallen angels), and stops at no despicable act in order to achieve its aims. Emphasis is placed on the unworldly aspect of witchcraft and it is described as an evil power capable of doing harm, bringing bad luck, spreading illness and killing. This power may be exercised by individuals from any social class, as well as by politicians. Some pastors give this assertion a more concrete dimension by saying that witches have a very deep sense of psychology. Some see witchcraft as just another illness that can be cured. They affirm the existence of child witches but consider that 90% of the children brought to them are not witches.

³ 'Enfants vulnérables de Kinshasa', Kinshasa, Save the Children, 1999

Parents take their children to the churches as soon as they notice strange behaviour. Some pastors believe that the problem of bewitchment is poverty-related: because parents do not give their children enough to eat, they wind up accepting food from any old person in the street, giving ill-intentioned people the opportunity to commit their crimes. Another explanation is that the parents are never there, out all day trying to eke out a living, so the children are left to their own devices, opening the door to bad influences. Some people believe that witchcraft is transferred to children because it cannot be transferred to adults, others that children are used by the devil to do evil, the devil's aim being to destroy a whole generation.

According to some, accusations against children are not a recent thing amongst family members, whether adults or children, having long been used to settle accounts. However, children used to be able to denounce the person who had bewitched them and be believed, with the person responsible for the act being brought to justice.

Traditionally, an act of aggression against a person was always motivated by the need to maintain social order. It was, therefore, a question of symbolic violence, with the primary aim of restoring order. People were bewitched as a punishment. The witches could also use their power to claim their rights, or those of their group. A witch could not "eat" a man from a different clan, unless there was an agreement between witches from those clans. By requiring an understanding of the fundamental cause and invisible relations underlying it, the act of witchcraft caused the group to reflect indirectly on the social order and, through this, to find and implement solutions enabling conflicts and tensions to be resolved and equilibrium to be restored. In some cases, when conflicts were highlighted and resolved in the visible world, a system of compensation could be put in place. Worldly goods were given to compensate for the damage caused. For example, witchcraft could be used in the context of unpaid debts between people of the same lineage (an uncle and nephew, for example). If the person suffering the effects went and found the person committing them, a friendly arrangement could be reached. When the act of witchcraft was considered unfounded, the guilty person was sought and uncovered through the poison test⁴.

One of the prophetesses we met explained another aspect of the perception of child bewitchment.

Three children had been bewitched by their maternal grandfather. Their father had fallen ill and died of tuberculosis. The mother had died of AIDS⁵ caused by the children through witchcraft. Two of the children sought refuge with their maternal grandmother and one of the boys decided to look after himself. Basically, the family lived well but the mother had refused to give money to her parents, and so the grandfather decided to take revenge. The father's sister was angry with

⁴ The poison test consisted of getting the suspects each in turn to drink a poisoned drink. The logic behind the test was that the witch guilty of the crime would die or fall ill while the innocent would not be affected by downing the brew.

⁵ AIDS is an illness of the night, in other words, an illness of witchcraft. When parents die of AIDS, it is believed that the children caused this illness in their parents.

the children because she thought they should have warned her so that she could get them exorcised and thus break the circle of death.

The prophetess ended her story in this way: "They are orphans through their own doing".

When asked how children can become channels for the work of adult witches, people give a wide variety of explanations. Children are considered fully responsible for their own actions, in the same way as adults are. When a child is bewitched, their journey into the second world begins. The second world is identical to the world we know except that, there, the poor and marginalized are in charge, rich and worshipped. The descriptions given by pastors of the second world paint it as a luxurious place of wealth.

Other people interviewed stated that, in the old days, witches used to get around in peanut shells, on *fufu* spoons, in the bristles of brooms or on banana leaves to commit their ill-doing but that nowadays they travel by plane, and this is how some of them are found out, for if they run out of fuel they are often found in their pyjamas on the roof of their house, solid proof of their status of witch. Sleepwalkers are the primary victims of night planes running out of fuel.

The need to eat human flesh, that is, to draw on the energy and power of others, is related to the hierarchy of the second world. If you want to get on there, you need to be a big eater. This also stops you becoming too indebted to others during feasts. In fact, in the world of witchcraft, everything must be paid for - sometimes with interest. He who helps himself from his neighbour's plate must return it as soon as possible. The aim of the second world is simple: to grow rich and gain prestige. Social norms are different there and a young child may have a husband or wife. When pastors succeed in disbanding a network of witches, they seek to establish what marital links exist between them (known as husbands and wives of the night) so that they can break them and avoid recontamination. Moreover, they state that a witch cannot confess their ill-doings before another witch without reprisal, something that can complicate or delay the process of exorcism. An individual who has acquired a great deal of power and ability in the second world will be difficult to "deliver" and a special team of intermediaries will be needed to support and strengthen the spiritual power of the pastor and prophetess, since this is clearly a war against Satanic forces.

Our sources indicate that the world is an upside down one, a filthy waif becoming a big boss at night. He takes from this world all the material goods he needs in the second world. He steals at night to take goods to the second world. If he wakes up with his face and eyes swollen, that means he wanted to confess but his superior in the second world hit him to prevent him from doing so. The person who bewitched him generally takes flight once the child goes to the pastor. If it is someone close to the child, they cannot admit it. This is why children often change their stories. They confess and then take back what they have said. Witch parents are often poor during the day and rich at night. The second world needs human blood to develop and so they need to sacrifice in order to retain their power. If a child gives his (or her) family to the second world he gains promotion. If he is unable to sacrifice his family, he becomes

mad or retarded. A child witch prevents the group from reproducing and damages its development.

Witches also have the power to transform into or act through animals, meaning some animals, such as bats and butterflies or moths (especially moths) should be avoided since they may be harbouring or acting on behalf of a witch. People who are afraid of witches generally mutter an incantation when they come across these animals: "In the name of Jesus, have no effect". -

1.2 Signs of witchcraft

The classification given below (Table 1) was provided by religious leaders and community representatives. It undoubtedly corresponds to a social representation of the abnormal and of deviance, in other words, evil. The physical abnormalities noted reflect the rejection of disability. For outside observers, however, some of the features given could also quite easily correspond to the description of a child during a period of normal development. In fact, it is very common to see children suffering from enuresis (urinary incontinence), an insatiable appetite or bad behaviour.

Table 1- Signs of witchcraft in a child, according to pastors and families

Physical signs	Character	Behaviour	Invisible signs
Strange appearance, ill-health, thinness, too small for their age, pot-bellied stomach or a mal-nourished look, scabies on their head, dirtiness, red lips or eyes, deafness, ugliness, young body but old face, epilepsy	Aggressive, untidy, disobedient, sad, mentally retarded, impolite, full of hatred, mysterious, disrespectful, quick-tempered, unruly, liar, hypocrite, too nice, too wise, provocative, too open, courageous, jealous, too fearful, stubborn, incomprehensible, solitary, too clever, weak, naughty, violent, fearless, quiet, rude, mad, curious, incredulous, selfish, insensitive, lazy, inattentive, ruthless, wants to be superior, doesn't like visitors, creative and full of initiative, ungrateful	Steal, never look people in the eyes, transform themselves or their toys, do not sleep at night or sleep badly, eat a lot, practise sexual abandon, do not hear or do not listen to what is being said to them, have epileptic fits, wet the bed, defecate in their clothes, talk to themselves, sleepwalk, collect rubbish, wander, don't study, go out even when they are ill.	They eat human flesh, they cast spells over their family, they have spiritual sex and this causes sterility, they are dangerous murderers and assassins at night, they go out at night to bewitch people, they have the power to go out even if they are shut in, they are behind natural disasters such as the destruction of roads and unemployment, they paralyse social life, cause road traffic accidents, epidemics

In some social groups, when a child is born with a disability it is believed that the mother has behaved badly, eaten something bewitched, or that she is a witch and has bewitched or cast a spell over the child. The child is hidden in the house and the woman is judged. She is suspected of having committed adultery or the verdict is a family bewitchment. In other cases, if a woman has had four girls and then a disabled boy, it is said that someone is refusing her a boy, because a boy is a woman's honour. If she has only girls, this may be the product of a bewitchment. Disabled children are marginalized from the start. They signify a jinx on the family or on the woman during pregnancy. Mental disability signifies a curse.

Children accused of witchcraft and who are not disabled often demonstrate behaviour that the parents find incomprehensible. They defy parental authority, knowingly or unknowingly, and are consequently perceived as a threat to family order. This pushes people to exclude them from the group, exclusion being one of the favoured means of getting rid of offenders in some ethnic groups.

1.3 The transmission of witchcraft

Witchcraft may be acquired at birth. This is innate witchcraft; inherited from someone older, meaning a man may be unaware that he has this power within him.

Witchcraft may be passed on from an older family member to a younger one, from uncle to nephew, from father to son, from grandfather to grandson, from mother to daughter, or from a teacher to his disciple – most but not all cases are within the lineage.

The transmission of witchcraft via inheritance is often done to protect lineage. The traditional chief or other elder, who possesses the power of witchcraft, chooses his heir according to criteria of wisdom and intelligence, to ensure that the power is not used to do evil but to protect the lineage. Some elderly people recount that witches could choose the child in its mother's womb for their power enabled them to catch a glimpse of the strengths and weaknesses of the unborn child.

When a child is bewitched by its family, the scenario may be a little different in terms of transmission. The family member who is a witch may bewitch a child by offering them food but can also bewitch them before they have even been born, revealing their status to them after birth. This is why some pastors talk of unconscious witchcraft because children may be unaware that they are witches until the person that bewitched them decides to put them to work, or even until a wise pastor perceives an act of witchcraft. There are two reasons behind family witchcraft: it may be an expression of conflict, or of revenge faced with a given situation. Envy and rivalry are in fact common among families, as the following example shows:

A woman bewitched her niece because she was jealous of her brother and sister-in-law's good fortune. Her brother, a driver, began to have problems with his work, and her sister-in-law, a petty trader, saw business decline. Then they both fell ill. The brother suspected his sister, who eventually admitted that she had bewitched the child because they had more money than she did

and did not give her any. They came to a friendly agreement and then took the little girl to the pastor for spiritual work.

When a child is bewitched by a neighbour, the witchcraft is caught through contaminated food, in other words, an ill-intentioned person offers them food. Transmission via contamination, therefore, takes place by mouth. A person believes, for example, that they have eaten fish but, during a nocturnal visit, the spirit of the witch (the person who offered them the food) reveals that it was actually human flesh. The person has unknowingly become a witch and entered into a relationship that requires them to return the human flesh they have eaten. The eating of human flesh may lead to illness or death if the person who has eaten it refuses to return it or to replace it with more. They must, therefore, give them, which in fact means help to eat (kill), a member of their own family. In some cases, the task to be accomplished is less difficult and it is enough simply to do evil to one's family in different ways such as, for example, diverting family assets to the benefit of friends in the invisible or second world.

It is generally believed that the main aim of bewitchment by neighbours is *kimpela* (envy). In accounts from mothers, pastors and children, the same story is heard over and over again: just when a family is beginning to sort out its finances, witchcraft comes along and halts the process. In fact, all difficulties that occur are interpreted as abnormal events and the underlying causes must be sought. This means identifying the network of invisible relations behind the events.

This bewitchment is dreaded by mothers and it creates panic in some quarters, instilling a climate of mistrust. During one of our church visits, while we were talking to the pastor, a mother arrived panic-stricken asking to see the pastor urgently. When he asked her what the matter was, she said that her child (a young boy of 8 or 9 years of age) had had a very troubled night. He had had nightmares and some fever. In the morning, when she asked him about this and what he had done the day before to have caused such a state, the child said that a local woman had offered him a banana and he had eaten it. The mother thus deduced that the child had been bewitched and rushed off to the church.

1.4 Apprenticeship and imitation

Witchcraft can also be acquired through apprenticeship. The existing witch chooses a child whose behaviour meets the criteria required for the role and then passes on his or her knowledge. Only with difficulty can an adult be initiated into witchcraft, without going mad. In fact, it is believed that an adult who has spent their life in the visible world goes mad if they begin to live in both worlds (the visible and the invisible) at the same time. Consequently, it is preferable to pass on the power to a child who demonstrates a favourable predisposition to receiving it and who is malleable enough to learn the trade without psychological damage.

The apprenticeship may involve initiation into a fetish (*nkisi*) at the end of which a contract is made between the two parties, agreeing that the fetish will have a power of domination. From this moment on, the power inherent in the fetish enables the apprentice to act as a witch.

2. The multiple and combined causes of witchcraft accusations

Poverty is put forward as the underlying - and sometimes only - cause of witchcraft accusations against children. Such an explanation must be analysed in order to avoid any hasty conclusions from being drawn. It is impossible to deny the impact of poverty on Congolese families. Their low income, their lack of access to basic services and insecure livelihoods are all daily concerns. Families are clearly under pressure. Nonetheless, some arguments lead us to conclude that poverty cannot be the primary cause of witchcraft accusations against children:

- The phenomenon occurs mainly in urban areas which, in comparison with rural zones, have better access to basic services.
- Accusations of witchcraft involve significant expense for many families and the poorest simply cannot afford to pay the costs of exorcism.
- Families with sufficient income have also accused their children of being witches.
- With the exception of Angola, other African countries where people live under similar or even worse conditions, have not encountered the same phenomenon.
- Many cases of children accused of witchcraft have also been documented among Congolese and Angolan nationals living in Europe. Survival would not seem to be an issue for these families.
- If poverty were the underlying and only cause of witchcraft in children, then the number of child witches would be in the millions and not thousands. Not all poor families accuse their children of being witches.
- Giving poverty as the only explanation is also a way of justifying violence against children. The response of the authorities in particular is one of: "we cannot put a stop to poverty and so we cannot prevent violence against children". Legal issues, or at least the prohibition of cruel and inhuman treatment, are camouflaged behind economic issues.

The different areas of research produced extremely contradictory results, depending on the approach taken (anthropological or socio-economic) and the child's role in the research.

We can confirm that there is no "single reason" for these accusations but that a variety of causes combine, often for the worse. Two pivotal reasons behind the demonisation of children can initially be ascertained:

The transition to urban modernity and the resurgence of the "second world"

Accusations of witchcraft against children seem to take shape during African families' often violent transition from traditional organisation to urban life. To pastors and parents, child witchcraft represents an "invisible order" that acts according to its own

logic and lives alongside the social world. It is important to note that the fusion of the imaginary and the real leads to violent actions against children and even murder.

The changing image and role of children in the family structure and dynamic

Traditionally, a child's place within his or her family is governed by a system of family ties. This gives the child a sense of belonging, a role, a living environment and a series of expectations, on the part of the parents, as to their future. This system, which we must take care not to idealise, is also intended to shape the child's behaviour towards adults. Accusations of witchcraft can be a consequence of changes in the image of the role of child and of adapting to the urban lifestyle.

These two pivotal causes – the transition to urban family life and the changing image of the child – may take different forms depending on a family's experiences in terms of illness, death, society's representation of children and the absence of social norms. The report will go on to describe a series of scenarios in which child witchcraft may develop. However, it should be emphasised that there is not just one specific reason for accusations of witchcraft against children; in fact a child may be accused of witchcraft for variety of reasons simultaneously.

2.1 Witchcraft in the search for an explanation for misfortune, illness and death: “Nothing happens by chance”

We were struck, throughout our project and research, by the way in which death is dealt with and dramatised by Congolese families. Funerals and mourning costs are a source of great family tension, and, very often, all the possessions of the deceased are “swiped” by their family, leaving the widow or widower and their children with literally nothing. Our partners have told us of many cases where a child has been robbed of his or her parents' home by the extended family. Children from these other households are then completely wiped off the family map.

Death pushes many families to operate according to a “centrifugal” logic, with a tendency to expel vulnerable members. The pillars of the family structure are shaken, even razed to the ground. It is interesting to note that the family members targeted tend to be those who are already in a vulnerable position even before a death occurs. Death is followed by a period of intense questioning surrounding the place of certain children within the family: is the child from another relationship, maybe a nephew or niece come from elsewhere, a child that is often ill or badly behaved to others? Things that until that moment had been suppressed or latent, resurface. The already vulnerable position of a child is exploited to the extreme through accusations of witchcraft.

<p>At 14, Marceline was married to a man 7 years her senior. She had trouble fitting into her husband's family, who considered her an outsider. She did not manage to carry her first pregnancy to full term and the same thing happened with her second pregnancy. At this point, her husband's family began to abuse her, saying that she did not want to</p>

give them an heir, that she was a witch and had come to sow trouble in the family. One day, her husband's brothers came to find her and told her to leave, as she was the bearer of misfortune. Marceline returned to her parents who asked her why she had been cast out. When she explained, they told her that she was the bearer of misfortune and a disgrace to the family and that they did not want to see her any more. Her paternal uncles also turned their backs on her. Marceline ended up finding some girls of her own age who were living on another man's land. He let them live on a small plot in exchange for minor work. She settled there with the other girls.

The information obtained shows the extent of the difference between the death of an adult, which is considered very significant, and that of a child, which sometimes goes virtually unnoticed, depending on the position they occupied in the family's alliances and expectations. Deaths in old age do not arouse suspicions and can, on the contrary, be a cause for great joy as the deceased is going to join his or her ancestors. When illness occurs outside of these circumstances, the underlying cause must be sought.

With the death of an adult, a source of family income – however meagre – disappears. The extended family then faces a truly testing time as the weight of obligations towards orphans begins to be felt. This is a very sensitive moment for a family and it is at this point when the climate of generalised poverty really comes into play and explanations of all sorts are given as to the cause of the unexpected death of an adult.

Brigitte, 13, has lived on the streets for a year. Her father is a trader who left to go on a business trip two years ago leaving Brigitte, her mother and two brothers with his older brother. The young girl and her family lived in a small house at the bottom the paternal uncle's plot of land. One day, the uncle's wife fell ill and he began to accuse Brigitte of witchcraft. Her mother tried to defend her but the uncle said that if she defended her he would drive her out too. The mother went to see the grandmother and asked her to look after the girl until her father came back but the grandmother said she did not want a witch in her house. The uncle became more and more threatening and Brigitte had to leave. She now lives in the market and sees her mother in secret as her uncle has forbidden them from meeting.

Illness – or any situation of adversity such as a redundancy or accident – is also perceived as a trap or a trick concocted by a witch to enable them to “eat” their victim. It is therefore necessary to seek out the invisible connections that led to the death. A witch cannot act without reason or motive. It is not a question of gratuitous violence against a family member borne of the sole desire of the person who holds the monopoly of power. It is not possible to see this as a question of a scapegoat.⁶ Brutal violence against children is merely channelled through accusations of witchcraft as if the violence of all against all could be resolved in the violence of all against one. The sacrifice of a child is thus a one-off and socially accepted action serving to channel

⁶ See R. Girard's *La violence et le sacré*, 1972

aggressive impulses towards a victim who is “predisposed” to this by his or her position in the family.

2.2 The changing image and status of children in urban society: from tradition to the invention of urban witchcraft

The first consultation we held on witchcraft with communities, children and religious leaders led us to an unusual observation. In the villages, most witches are elderly people, particularly women, although this does vary from one district to another. None of those interviewed was able to remember a single case of child witchcraft in their village of origin. Moreover, witches embodied in elderly people were viewed with a certain respect and fear. We only very rarely heard of cases in which these people were pursued, exorcised or abused. All people could do in relation to a presumed witch was to keep their distance and/or submit to their demands. Accounts gathered agree that witchcraft was also used as a weapon of intimidation against anyone attempting to thwart attacks against an extended family member or in-laws. These practices of intimidation and threats are common against family members who do not share their earnings sufficiently. It is interesting to note, however, the contradiction that exists in accusations of witchcraft against children. In fact, how can you explain on the one hand the assumed power of the child witch, capable of destroying and killing and, on the other, the often poor state of health of these same children? We received no answer to this question from their accusers.

Our work with hundreds of parents in the context of the *parents' discussion groups* and informal consultations leads us to believe that the phenomenon of child witchcraft began to manifest itself in the early 1990s in the country's large towns. We have no knowledge of its existence in rural areas, apart from a very few ill-documented exceptions in areas affected by the war, where girls have been the first to be targeted by such accusations.

The emergence of child witches is, to our way of thinking, very closely related to the changing status and image of children in Congolese society. Our work has not been able to clearly show these changes so we need to refer to academic studies for further information.

The best study published thus far on the phenomenon of child witches is that of Belgian academic, Filip De Boeck⁷, who insists that the changing status of children in Congolese society is a symptom of more profound changes. Children appear to be at the heart of social inclusion and exclusion. The changing status of children also relates to ideas of exclusion, confinement and distance, which manifest themselves in the excessive institutionalisation of children.

⁷ De Boeck, Filip (2004) On Being Shege in Kinshasa: Children, the Occult and the Street. In: T. Trefon (ed) *Reinventing Order in the Congo. How People Respond to State Failure in Kinshasa*. London: Zed Books; Pp. 155-173. De Boeck, Filip (2004). De Boeck, Filip (2002) Kinshasa: Tales of the “Invisible City” and the “Second World”. In: Okwui Enwezor e.a (eds) *Under Siege: Four African Cities Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos. Documenta 11 Platform4*. Kassel: Hatje Cantz Publishers. Pp. 243-285.

Never have children occupied such a prominent place in Congolese society. Children, perceived by us as victims, are perceived by this society as actors and aggressors, as a threat rather than needing to be protected. Children are thus at the heart of issues of death, sexuality and money. Over the last decade there have been three stereotypical images of children:

- *The eroticisation of children* became visible, with the phenomenon of the *bafioti-fioti*, launched by Papa Wemba, where very young girls of 13-15 years took over from adult dancers as sex symbols. Alongside this is the fact that the prostitution of young girls has been on the increase for many years.
- The *kadogo*, made famous on Kabila senior's arrival in Kinshasa in 1996, are known for being child soldiers capable of incarnating evil and death. One of them was accused of having killed the president in 2002.
- The *shege* - street or market children - however, are the ones who attract the population's wrath, for they are seen as the incarnation of social disintegration.

2.3 Witchcraft as a reaction to difference, individuality and abnormality

Representations of witches are strongly associated with a breakdown of the rules that people believe in and which guarantee family and social stability. A child witch may, through his or her knowledge and power, break free from social control and lead their own existence at the expense of others, although he or she may also safeguard them from the worst disasters. Although witchcraft is also a way of preserving the family in traditional society, cases of children whose witchcraft played a protective role are few and far between. To avoid problems of witchcraft, the individual must respect the social order; in other words, undertake to respond to the group's expectations of solidarity and sharing that are inherent in community life and in the current definition of normality and normativity:

- Respect one's elders, that is, obey one's mother, uncle, father, in order to obtain their protection from witches.
- Respect the laws and taboos, for witches profit from situations in which the law is transgressed, when elders are unhappy or there is a lack of harmony within the village or lineage.
- Make use of fetishes for personal or group defence. There were family fetishes linked to ancestors whose main function was to protect the family.
- Do not arouse jealousy (*kimpela*): a witch can quickly turn a situation that attracts too much attention to their advantage.
- Conform, do not deviate.
- Avoid eating anything, from anybody, anywhere.
- At birth, or during a healing session, give a child a name whose meaning forms part of the struggle against witches, in order to combat them, neutralise their actions or avoid their attention.

- Be oneself a witch and thus stronger than all others, or place oneself under the protection of a witch.
- Drive the witch far away from oneself and the group, kill him or her. When the witch is far away from you, s/he forgets about you.
- Practice public reconciliation and confession to bring about peace and harmony.

It is therefore a question of respecting the hierarchy and custom, of following the social norms and of avoiding any non-compliant act that could risk endangering the balance of social relations. Witchcraft is a world in opposition to that of normal society, favouring individual interest over the collective good, and to participate in this society one has to give other witches a member of one's own family – through death, illness or misfortune – at the risk of becoming indebted and being forced to give all the members of one's family if the agreement is not kept. Buakasa describes the world of witches thus:

The ndoki (witches) form a world modelled on lineage but which appears as the double and opposite of normal society: the daily solidarity of ordinary men gives way to evil night-time activity; clan-based solidarity for the protection of all gives way to fraternity between ndoki (possibly from different lineages) in order to eat people, their own; the notion of lineage gives way to the notion of a ndoki society.

Mamie is 10 years old and has lived in the market for 3 years. She is a hunchback and suffers the taunts of others because of this deformity. When her father died, her mother said she was a witch and that the proof of her witchcraft was her hump. She abandoned her in the market without a second thought.

2.4 'Violence pure and simple': children as a threat to society and the role of social guarantors

Our experience of street children or children accused of witchcraft has gradually led us to understand that witchcraft has a smokescreen effect. Too many observers and particularly organisations working in child protection – our own included – allow themselves to become obsessed with witchcraft. A series of events and situations has led us to understand that we are facing a phenomenon of generalised violence against children.

In September 2004, a brutal example of violence against children took place in the town of Mbuyi-Mayi. Small-scale miners successfully encouraged the population to hunt down and kill street children. At least 16 children were killed in horrific circumstances, burned alive, stoned, their throats slit, or knifed to death. Dozens more were wounded and hundreds fled the town to hide in the bush. According to a report from the United

Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo⁸, some of the victims were scarcely 10 years old. Reunification programmes supported by Save the Children have shown that a large number of these children had been rejected by their families, accused of witchcraft.

The Betu Bana centre, located in Bakwandiaga district, offers accommodation and literacy classes to street children between the ages of 7 and 18. On Tuesday 21 September, a crowd broke through the compound wall stating that they were seeking the oldest street youths, particularly the youth leader of Kanda Street, and also seemingly the Banza chief (both adults). According to the children and staff in the centre, the crowd carried stones, machetes, iron bars, spades, knives and sticks. Among the assailants were people from the neighbourhood whom the children and supervisors said they recognised. A child of around 14 years old, coming from the market to seek refuge, had his throat cut in front of the centre, in full view of the staff member in charge. Afterwards, the miners took the body away in a vehicle to an unknown destination. They also beat up the staff member in charge and injured six children, one of whom received a knife wound to the head. The centre was ransacked, medicines, clothing and school supplies being taken.

Among the other cases of murdered children reported to MONUC, is that of a nine-year-old child apparently burned alive in the Longo school courtyard near the airport on Friday 24 September by a group of lorry drivers who ambushed him. At the entrance to the school was a crowd who seized the child and entered the school. The child was knocked over and, once on the ground, pinned down and burned alive. This was reported by two eye witnesses.

Source: MONUC, op.cit, 2005

Other similar examples can be drawn from the repeated round-ups of street children in Kinshasa, which have dramatic consequences ranging from rape to systematic abuse and threats of extermination by the forces of law and order.

What is striking in the above examples is the State authorities' complete failure to take any action to halt this violence or, given their complete inability and lack of competence to ensure respect for the law, to at least indicate to people what is and what is not permissible. In fact, the authorities are often themselves involved in violations of the law. The most concrete example of this being the issuing of hundreds of permits authorising the revivalist churches to operate, a very lucrative business for at least 3 ministers as well as for the commune-level authorities who continually impose "taxes". We noted on dozens of occasions a complete lack of will on the part of the judges and prosecutors to bring acts of torture, clearly punished in the Criminal Code, to justice. Through our advocacy work with the highest judicial authority we have uncovered an indifference that is killing children and exposing them to repeated abuse.

⁸ - Attaques perpetrées sur les enfants de la rue à Mbuyi-Mayi 20-25 septembre 2004, MONUC, April 2005.

When barbarous acts against children become everyday occurrences and the authorities gain financially from them, there can no longer be any defence against violence. The next stage is that the children, too, become increasingly violent, pressurised by a sick society to inflict their experiences of struggling for survival on others. Abuse becomes institutional, the primary responsibility for which lies with the State authorities (the absence of laws being a main contributor to the phenomenon of child witches).

2.5 Beyond the breakdown of family structures: the difficulty of parenting and family restructuring

Some observers have noted that accusations of witchcraft respond to tension in social relations within the family: constraints, rivalries, obligations and the struggle for survival. In other words, conflicts around witchcraft represent conflicts in social life at family level.

In the context of accusations against children, the logic behind the choice of child and person to pass on the witchcraft is, in many cases, related to family rivalries⁹. A person is named, implicitly or explicitly, crystallising tension around the conflict.

Witchcraft plays a key role in both regulating and triggering family conflicts. These conflicts concern both very material aspects, such as the deliberate desire to dispossess a child of his/her inheritance, and also latent conflicts. Conflicts can erupt between children, between parents and children and also between uncles and nephews.

Throughout our programmes, when it comes to dealing with children accused of witchcraft, we have developed a working approach that consists of strengthening feelings of parental responsibility among families that have rejected a child. This approach, known as “parents’ discussion groups” aims to explore the experiences of parents or guardians, their perceptions of childhood, to demystify common illnesses and explain some crucial stages in child development and positive education. This work, which has been going on for more than two years now and is still developing, has demonstrated the extent to which parents are themselves victims of the violence they perpetrate against their own children.

We recognise that a superficial analysis of the situation could lead one to believe that the parents who are accusing their children must all be bad and unscrupulous people. And yet we were struck by the efforts made by some parents who wanted to cure their children at all costs and were ready to accept them back into their families. Such an analysis cannot, however, justify violence against children, whatever form it may take and for whatever reason.

⁹ The results of the CRESCO/Save the Children survey quantitatively support the statements made by those interviewed individually. In 52.64% of cases, those possessing witchcraft were recruited within the family, 31.58% of which are recruited by grandparents. There are other sources of contamination, however: 15.79% of children state that they contracted witchcraft from unknown people.

As noted by many studies conducted throughout the world,¹⁰ in an urban environment deep crisis or the discovery of parenthood in the family dynamic is the cornerstone of violence and abuse against children. Parental identity itself becomes a real issue during periods of migration or following the death of a partner, the very many family reconstructions and repeated births. To talk of the collapse of family structures in this context is therefore commonplace and offers no solid explanation for violence against children. When adversity (death, illness) or change hits the family, it is not the family structure that is a risk factor but the dynamic of family relations.

Most noticeable is the disappearance of collective support with regard to the child. The ability to mobilise the family network, enabling a child to move around the extended biological family, has suffered significant transformations in recent years; the child is now first and foremost a burden for the host family. However, these statements must be qualified. In deed, studies conducted on child reunification show that almost 48% of reunifications of street children took place with the extended family.

When families were organised around traditional values (without wishing to idealise these), the child was a “treasure”. In fact, children were seen as a source of investment – as in any other society – from which you expected something in return. In periods of crisis, in both traditional and modern families, these expectations are no longer enough to protect a child, who then becomes a burden on the family. In short, the more limited the resources and the weaker the parents’ ability to fulfil their role, the more the child finds itself at the heart of a family dynamic that could be termed centrifugal: family members who are an encumbrance are ejected outwards.

The perception of parenthood that is emerging in modern Africa is something quite new; it is more common to see single parents faced with bringing up their children alone. The challenges a father or mother faces in terms of responsibilities and their ability to meet the child’s needs in possible times of crisis can therefore become extremely worrying.

It is not easy to educate and bring up a child in an urban context in which reference points have become blurred. Submission and docility - as sought in the traditional world - are less applicable in a modern urban society. Children are faced with other social models, more marked by ‘resourcefulness’ as a means of survival.

In other words, the fact of being a parent, of taking on responsibilities, disciplining and educating their children, is a new experience for many parents. Alongside this birth of parenting in an urban environment, the onset of adolescence is a disconcerting phenomenon for many parents, who suddenly find their authority challenged by their children’s behaviour.

¹⁰ At least two studies pointing in this direction have been conducted in Latin America and West Africa respectively: ‘Niños de la calle y sus familias en Lima’, Lima, Ayni-Opción 1995; Mor Mbaye S., Salam Fall, ‘Un système qui se fragilise : stratégies de socialisation et travail des enfants au Sénégal in Schelemmer B., L’enfant exploité, Paris, Orstom 1996.

3. The role of the revivalist churches¹¹

The boom in revivalist churches is undoubtedly closely related to the accusations of witchcraft against children.

Social workers with long experience of working with children see some prophets and pastors as real criminals. Some parents believe these churches can provide a solution to the problems they are facing within the family while State officials see them as a personal source of income through completely invented taxes and administrative costs. Children that have been through these churches are of divided opinion: some recall the pain of the torture they were subjected to, others have come to accept it.

We will attempt to understand the role of these churches in accusations of witchcraft without making any hasty judgements. In deed, it is very clear that the churches are responding to a need that has been expressed among urban families.

3.1 The origin of the revivalist churches: the search for reference points and prosperity

It is very difficult to define revivalist churches, a generic term often used to denote all churches that are not “historical” and do not answer to any clearly defined hierarchical structure, religious practice or doctrine. For purely practical purposes, we will attempt to analyse the independent religious expressions that are emerging in the large urban centres, some of which have different affiliations, while others have no affiliation at all.

Before exploring the history and possible explanations of the independent or revivalist churches, we can identify some common characteristics of this movement:

- The prophets, pastors and believers say they are experiencing a supernatural force such as that of the Holy Spirit, which motivates and guides them. Cultural practices involve the body, song and lively ceremonies enabling experiences to be externalised without censure. A feeling of ‘solidarity’ and/or community belonging is thus created amongst the faithful.
- These churches recognise invisible negative forces as being the source of evil and poverty; elements of local culture, such as witchcraft, are highlighted in their religious practice.
- The demonisation of and anxiety in relation to evil, death and poverty are the main motivations behind these religious movements. The church thus serves as a protection against these obscure forces.
- The hierarchy normally found within historical churches is broken down, meaning anyone can be a pastor.

¹¹ Many of the children's accounts narrated here were collected by Samina Manji during field surveys among families and pastors.

The phenomenon of the revivalist churches is not a recent one in Kinshasa. According to R. Devish¹², their rise took place during three main periods: at the start of the 1920s, during the 1960s following independence, and since the start of the 1980s. During these times, there appears to have been a proliferation of healing churches in the Bas Congo, in Bandundu and in the two Kasai provinces. In Kinshasa, hundreds of charismatic churches of the Holy Spirit, so called healing churches, have emerged.

In the 1920s, new churches developed Messianic tendencies aimed at restoring the Kongo kingdom, in reaction to the country's political situation and an anti-colonial atmosphere. The struggle against the acculturation of the Congolese people and the effects of colonisation was one of the main concerns of prophets such as Simon Kimbangu. The new prophets were said to be possessed by the Holy Spirit and capable of speaking in many tongues. According to Devish, healing with hands, sermons and successes in the fight against witchcraft drew the crowds as well as the attention of other pastors.

A number of prophets have followed since. Mobutu's policy of national authenticity made the Messianic movement official by placing national identity on the political agenda. During the 1980s, when this aspect of Mobutu's policy began to run out of steam, the charismatic churches experienced a new boom. The search for national identity is an important factor in the advent of these churches.

For the past ten years or so, an outside observer would easily have noticed the proliferation of churches in popular areas of large cities such as Kinshasa and Mbuyi-Mayi. Churches appear by the dozen along the roads; their existence - concealed through the use of warehouses or modest plots - can be felt day and night through prayers. Authorised to operate by the commune-level authorities and sometimes the Ministry of Justice, they exist within a sort of legal vacuum and this encourages their proliferation. More recently, the churches have gone even further by proposing different issues specifically intended to attract followers: travel, marriage, prosperity and any other subject for which the faithful seek favour.

During the many discussions with pastors from revivalist churches, we often asked the origin of their movement. To our surprise, each one gave a completely different story. After much deliberation, the main ideas seemed to fit into the following categories:

- *International influence*: The revivalist movement emerged from the evangelisation campaigns of the 1970s organised by the great foreign evangelists, particularly Americans such as T. S. Osborn and European preachers, including R. Boonke.
- *National influence*: the movement started with Mzee Aidini Abala, the father of the Pentecostal 'Nzambe Malamu' church, in the 1970s. The influential members of this church were Sony Kafuta, Olangi Osh and Léopold Mutombo, who developed the Pentecostal movement.

¹² 'Imaginaires politiques et pentecôtismes: Afrique/Amérique Latine' Paris, Karthala, 2001

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, most authors are agreed that there has been interaction between the independent churches, prophetic traditions and the Pentecostal-inspired revivalist movement.

Having analysed the “revivalist” phenomenon, Congolese intellectuals have taken a fairly critical stance. Dr. Adrien N. Ngudiankama¹³ states in quite direct terms:

“In the Congo and amongst the Congolese, everyone is a pastor, everyone is a musician! *Congo Bar tomelaka masanga, lelo ekoma ndako ya Nzambe* sang one of our great musicians. Any house is a potential church / temple. The Congo has become a veritable factory for producing pastors, not of priests or vicars. God has increased his theophanies to the Congolese. You go to sleep a pagan and wake up a pastor! It is the decline of the dictatorial regime, its artists and architects become the great evangelists and pastors. In a flash, we have gone from secular music to the song of Christ!

But I do not believe that the current religious phenomenon in the Congo and amongst the Congolese must be immediately interpreted as a revival. Not at all. Is it a revival when the Church, the pastor and the musician exploit the majority? A revival that lulls the people into understanding they are dupes, that they have been robbed? A revival that knows only the bank accounts and addresses of the pastor and his staff? A revival that leaves the majority in misery whilst the pastor and the Christian artist become plenipotentiary ambassadors lunching in Tokyo, dining in New York and sleeping in Berlin? Is it a revival when the majority of believers walk on foot from Kingasani to Gambela to sell vegetables while the pastors, the so-called converts of the dictatorial regime, and the musicians, drive about in plush cars?”

Whatever their sources of inspiration, the revivalist movements do not necessarily form the main churches. During visits and meetings with parents in the churches, we often found that they considered themselves to be practising Catholics who, according to their accounts, attended mass each Sunday. When we asked why they came to a revivalist church, they responded that they wanted their child delivered, something that is not a usual practice among the Catholics.

3.2 Becoming a pastor

During the course of the many meetings with revivalist church pastors, we asked how one becomes a pastor. The main answers given can be summarised as follows:

- By receiving a calling from God, through a vision, a word or other means, someone is invited to serve God.
- Through desire and/or greed: a person proclaims himself a pastor or sets up a church so that he can run it like a business, to cover his basic needs.

¹³ Interview, in French, with Congo Vision (<http://congovision.com/interviews/adrien.html>)

- Through the desire of his parents (succession): one parent is a pastor and, upon their death, their child succeeds them.
- Through economic or financial power: a rich man sets up a church or is elevated to the position of pastor because of his money.
- Through study: someone who has studied theology and who becomes a pastor without either the vocation or a calling from God.

The issue of training has always been a controversial one amongst pastors, with the answers given being very defensive, or focused on the economic gain of “bad pastors”. The pastor awareness raising team described the situation thus:

“Most of the pastors we have met had become separated from their religious mentors through lack of money and so went and set up their own churches without completing their initiation, although training is very important in exercising the role of a minister.”

In addition, they told us of three types of training: spiritual, material and scientific. The first is gained through direct contact with an experienced servant of God, the second through experience on the ground and the last through schools of theology.

In order to gain a better understanding of the revivalist churches, we will try to understand who the prophets are and they became what they are.

Maman Joséphine L. was born in 1954 and began working in 1974 in response to a miraculous divine calling. In 1997, she began to help children overcome bad spirits through deliverance. In her opinion, it is God who has given her this gift. The bewitching of children is shown to her by a spirit and through prayer.

Prophetess Marie P., a teacher by training, began working in 1980. She says she was chosen by God before she was born, because her two parents worked for God. Moreover, she insists that she does not do things deliberately but through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. She does nothing until God shows her the way.

Prophet Daisy U. was born in 1963 and has 5 children. In 1982, when they were singing in a choir, he had a vision of Simon Kimbangu. He says that the next day he became someone different and “mad”. He recalls the story of a neighbour who was paralysed and he healed him with inspiration from the Holy Spirit. He became involved in spirituality and visited neighbours in the community to destroy fetishes. Shortly afterwards, Kimbangu appeared to him and told him to go to Kamba for 4 months to be trained. Following his return, he took over the running of his church and became a prophet, at the request of the church members.

Other pastors, however, believe their mission to be part of a plot:

In 1985, Mobutu signed an agreement with the second world, which is a world identical to ours but in another dimension. Mobutu was not the only one to sign this agreement. There were also other African presidents, they wanted to overturn the situation of the world and to pit their strength against the eternal. These were demonic projects to gain power. They sacrificed people and drank blood. Since Mobutu's people returned, strange things have been happening again, inexplicable accidents for example (...). Since the agreement, children have been used to do evil because witchcraft destroys everything, it brings about death, illness, misfortune. (...) I control the bad thoughts of child witches when they are on the phone to the second world, it is the eternal that makes contact, I ask them to stop and to pray instead. In the second world, children have wives, women of the night and they have positions of responsibility. A child may be in his mother's womb, he can come out, do his business with the second world and return to his mother's womb, afterwards. The mother has difficulty in giving birth and afterwards may die.

Finally, we found a former street child among the pastors:

*Pastor Mabanga was born in 1968. During the 1970s, he came to Kinshasa with his parents. On the way to the capital, the bus was involved in an accident in Kinzulu village and he was the only survivor. The village chief took him in until he ran away in 1975 and came to live on the streets of Kinshasa. He grew up on the streets and in 1989 met his wife, who also lived on the streets. In order to survive, she prepared *chickwan* while he sold wood. They now have 11 children. He states that in 1994 he fell seriously ill with typhoid fever and died for nearly 40 minutes. At this time, he received a revelation from God, although he did not realise it then. The next year, when he had had his second child, one of Mobutu's special advisor's took him and his family into a church called 'love of God'. During this time, he learned about spirituality and became one of the church evangelists, along with pastors from Europe. He learned to read and write through evening classes. In 1997, he became a priest and was forced to leave due to political tensions, which also led to the dissolution of the church. He settled in Limeté. Mabanga also explains that life on the street pushed him to want to help children to avoid going through what he had to go through.*

3.3 Deliverance: a profit-making frenzy organised in response to parents' concerns

We have not come across a single church in which exorcisms and/or healing for witchcraft is free. Surveys we have supported through the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Women's and Family Affairs have confirmed the financial aspect of the revivalist churches and, very often, the hostage taking of children when parents did not pay for acts of deliverance. One pastor in the Kingabwa area even wanted cows from the State and Save the Children by way of compensation for his "work" with children.

Case No 1. N & M Church

We asked the secretary, the person responsible for managing church contributions, how much families pay to deliver their children:

"On admission of the child, each family must contribute a 24-page notebook, a pencil and around one dollar. The book and pencil are used during the deliverance when the pastor reveals

the child's tribulations and the secretary notes down everything that is revealed"

We noted contradictions between the pastor and the secretary. The Pastor spoke of a payment of 5 dollars upon arrival at the church, to pay for coffee, milk and sugar for church members who pray for the child. The secretary said that families also pay in dollars on leaving the church but she later withdrew her statement saying that they did not make poor families pay.

Several months after the reunification programme was conducted, we visited two families who both contradicted what the pastor and secretary had said. It is important to note that it was the biological parents who took their children to the church after having noticed a deterioration in their health and having even considered abandoning them. After having been advised by close family and friends to consult a pastor, they decided to take the child to the church.

The first family we visited, for whom the pastor had diagnosed 5 cases of witchcraft, told us they paid the equivalent of 35 dollars plus a piece of sheet metal for each child. This was as an initial contribution. Food had to be brought to the children each week. The second family acknowledged having paid 40 dollars for each of their four children whom the pastor had diagnosed with witchcraft. This money paid for their entry, along with attendance fees for ceremonies and prayers.

Finally, we found a group of seven siblings who had not been allowed to leave the church because their family had not paid money for them to do so. An inter-ministerial study supported by ourselves confirmed the financial nature of child deliverances.

Case No 2. M & K Church

In this church, the pastor told us that parents must pay 5 dollars to buy sugar, coffee and milk. The secretary told us that an extra 5 dollars must be paid when the child leaves.

We visited 3 families. The first told us they had paid 45 dollars for the four months the 4 children stayed in the church. A second family said they had paid almost 50 dollars for a 6-month stay. In both cases, food had to be brought to the children. The third family said they paid nothing because the father had carried out work for the church and so the pastor owed him a debt. During a ceremony, the pastor had turned to his child and suddenly accused him of being a witch. The father then severely beat him before taking him to the church.

Case No 3. 'Originale Spirituelle Prophétique'

This church has a more sophisticated system of index cards that was shown to us by the secretary. The time and cost of deliverance was explained for each case. According to the secretary, families pay between 2 and 3 dollars. The pastor later denied the existence of this payment system but ended up acknowledging it.

Two families were visited to corroborate the information. The first was that of a woman who visited the church in search of an explanation as to why one of her daughters living in Europe had had a miscarriage. The pastor suggested he visit her

house and there accused the younger sister of being the cause of the problem. Around 10 dollars was then paid, along with a pigeon for the deliverance ceremony. In the second family, the mother noted that the behaviour of one of her children was getting worse. She paid around 12 dollars for the child's admission, in addition to monthly payments and pigeons for the deliverance.

Knowledge of deliverance practices is quite difficult to come by as pastors each create their own practices. It is possible to make out common practices, although they are usually explained in different ways. During our observations, we were able to distinguish confinement, confessing to being a witch and actual deliverance ceremonies.

Confinement means remaining within the church enclosure. Having visited almost a hundred of these churches, our programme found deplorable and inhumane conditions: children living outside in bad weather, a lack of sanitation or drinking water, children sleeping in basic conditions, one on top of the other in constructions situated in dangerous areas. We sometimes observed children chained up. It is often a very sad sight: adults, people suffering from psychiatric problems, mingling with children, a wild look in their eyes, starving and paralysed through fear or mistrust. Deliverance itself usually takes place at night. The only way of finding out what goes on is to talk to the victims. There is a whole range of practices including: anal flushing with holy water, purging through the ingestion of oils and other substances, collective incisions using just one razor blade and the administration of dangerous substances to the eyes – particularly *nkelo*. A limited number of churches use only prayer as a means of deliverance. Accounts from neighbours of children crying at night, however, raise doubts as to these assertions.

A deliverance ceremony¹⁴

Five days before the deliverance, the children: Olga, 6; Chance, 7; Jonas, 8; Jivenz, 9; Nadine, 9; Glodi, 10 and Sarah, 11 were required to remain in the church, in a small dirty roofless room. They spent their days and nights lying on foam on the ground, depressed, confused and scared. Most were hungry and thirsty. The pastors stated that they were fasting in preparation for their deliverance from evil spirits. (...)

The children were deprived of food for 5 days. Olga, only six years old and starving, cried out for help. "*Give me water, give me water, please father give me water.*" Most of those present, including her father and mother, heard her cries. She was ignored to begin with but as her cries became louder and more frequent, she was threatened several times and hit until she shut up and obeyed. At one point, Olga ran towards a drum of water. She was stopped and taken back to where the children were spread out on the ground. Afterward she was beaten several times while being shouted at to keep

¹⁴ - This ceremony was documented by an American journalist and one of our main local partners, ORPER. Strong advocacy on the part of local and international organisations enabled the immediate release of the children. Monitoring of the children continued following their reunification. Nonetheless, legal action requested against this church came to nothing.

calm and still. The water drum was then placed such that she could no longer reach it. It was out of her reach but still a huge temptation. She got up once more in search of water, crying and begging for help. The result was the same. This time, the guard, a teenager who had himself been accused of witchcraft, took Olga to a dark room where he beat her, kicked her and threatened her to keep quiet. All she wanted was a drink of water.

The ceremony began at around 10 pm, the pastors were dressed in brilliant robes, blue, green, red. The congregation listened to readings, sang, played tambourines, prayed and chanted psalms, whilst others shouted, convulsed and fell to the ground.

The time of deliverance was around 2 in the morning and the crowd of several hundred people divided into two groups in order to make space for the so-called child witches and the pastors. The children were brought one by one, from the eldest to the youngest, before the pastor. Once everything for the deliverance was prepared, the parents were asked to come forward and forgive their child. Then a woman pastor began to run around in a circle, sometimes taking small steps backwards, shouting out and singing psalms, trembling slightly.

The children were approached and pushed to the ground, on their back or on their side, some were caught by other pastors and placed on the ground. Some of the children fell on the ground through physical exhaustion and giddiness after having gone round and round in circles.

Once on the ground, the pastor moved over each child, shouting over them and touching their whole body, generally starting with the head and working down to the feet. In most cases, trousers and skirts were slightly lowered and the genitals were caressed inappropriately. In one case, the pastor pulled down the skirt of a girl, showing her genitals, before groping her lower abdomen. Then she put her hands on the girl's vagina and made a movement as if she were removing an evil spirit through her genitals. In another case, a boy was placed on top of another boy in the form of a cross and, while the pastor chanted psalms, she sniffed around the children placing her hands on their genitals.

The pastors denied that the children's parents had paid for the service. However, the father of four of these children was asked to bring white plastic chairs for each of his children as a donation to the church. He brought the 4 white chairs, which cost 10 dollars each.

Maman Gina - who established the *Assemblée d'Israël- Ministère de combat contre la sorcellerie* three years ago - affirms that her ministry has undertaken the deliverance of thousands of children. She also states that the Holy Spirit has given her the power to see witches and has authorised her to join with it to deliver the children from witchcraft. This church operates with all the necessary authorisations from the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Social Affairs.

3.4 The children and their families following deliverance and their time at the church

We do not have in-depth information on what happens to the children after their time at the church. Despite a certain level of post-reunification monitoring conducted by our government partners, the children's voices are not heard as they should be. Moreover, reunifications are conducted at a time when it is felt that the child is at too great a risk from the church. There are two possible scenarios:

- The transfer of the child from the revivalist church to the street or an institution. There it is possible for the children to express what they have experienced if they find a facilitating environment. Children's experiences are always disturbing and violent. Most of the children bury themselves in silence for months, even years, on end before being able to talk about it.
- The reunification of the child with their family straight from the church without transition.

Some examples of this second scenario paint a fairly contrasting picture:

Pascal and Nadine are eighteen years old. The two teenagers live with Pascal's mother, who took them both to the church. They tell us that they understand why they had to go to the church and that they really did need help. Pascal's even told us that he wanted to stay at the church as he got on well with the prophetess, while Nadine told us she was sad that she 'd been unable to stay with the church due to not having the money to be able to participate in youth meetings or in prayers. Both acknowledged that their lives had changed for the better and their parents confirm this. Nadine recounts that she has remained on good terms with the prophetess and that she has the power to cure witchcraft.

Damien and Octave are 19 and 17 years old respectively. According to their accounts, their elder brother, Providence, took them to the church without saying a word, after he discovered they were witches. To begin with they were angry, but accepted the diagnosis of witchcraft made by the prophetess. According to Providence, before going to the church Damien had a bad character and was very stubborn. He was not respectful towards his elders. Octave says that, before deliverance, he did not sleep well at night because people came to disturb him. Now he sleeps well and no-one comes to bother him at night.

Justine, 17 years old. The diagnosis of witchcraft for this young girl was made by a revivalist church. Her father then threw her out of the house, forcing her to live in the fields. Her two brothers threatened and abused her. They cut her forehead with a razor and burned her arms with a lighted plastic bag. Her wounds were still visible. A person living on the same plot of land as her gave her something to eat from time to time but nobody protected her from the acts of abuse committed against her. Her maternal aunt then took her to the church but, according to the aunt, she refused to be cured and abandon witchcraft. She was then thrown out of the church. One of her

uncles, who lived with her grandmother, refused to accept her until she went through a deliverance ceremony. She was therefore taken to a second church. Her uncle then acknowledged that she had been delivered and accepted her in the house. Unfortunately, Justine was unable return to school and, according to her, her witchcraft has made her forget how to read and write.

It is important to note that most of the children ended up accepting their “wrongdoing” and had changed. It would seem that this is the price one must pay in order to be accepted by the family and a certain sense resignation can be observed. The violence these children have suffered cannot be talked about and clear evidence of inhumane treatment is borne in silence.

Conclusion

The issue of children accused of witchcraft forces us to face up to two different and opposing schools of thought. On the one hand, we have social protection programmes in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, drawing inspiration largely from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the other, we have the perceptions that people may have of evil, death and poverty, seeking explanations in religious, so-called revivalist, movements. Beliefs anchored in cultures are mobilised for new purposes: to accuse children of witchcraft.

There exists a huge gulf between the two opposing views on the place of children and a number of conditions need to be met if this gulf between cultural practices and the often rigid framework of children's rights is to be reduced:

- We need to gain an understanding of both the cultural changes within the country in which we are working and of the issues facing the people who are affected by our work. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, parents and families don't generally have any real alternatives when it comes to taking on parental responsibilities. Access to basic services is very limited and few initiatives truly respond to their concerns, though it is not at all certain that access to money would bring about a change in their mentality.
- Any idealisation of cultural practices and notions of survival must be avoided. This bad practice, which continues to undermine certain university-inspired pieces of research, is unable to distinguish between the admirable resilience of people and destructive or pathological social practices. The accusations of witchcraft made against children are thus more in line with a notion of social cleansing and the search for profit than an attempt to reintegrate children.
- There is a need to recognise religious leaders, even the most radical, as people with whom dialogue should be established, creating forums for this purpose. Through these forums it is still possible to reduce violence against children, though it is also necessary to separate violence from beliefs and cultural practices.

Main observations

- The phenomenon of witchcraft comprises a series of symptoms, which highlight the difficulties of parenthood, family conflicts, the psychosocial impact of poverty and the opportunism of some religious trends. However, these symptoms cannot conceal the underlying problem: increasing social violence against children. The problem of witchcraft and violence against children seems to have been established as a pattern within urban Congolese society.
- The revivalist churches play a role in amplifying conflicts within the family. They offer no explanation other than child witchcraft.

- It is not commonplace to accuse other adult family members and yet the accusation of children is the norm. Indeed, it is common to find a whole group of siblings accused of witchcraft through “contamination”.
- A significant number of families have their strongest affiliation with one of the historical churches. It is, therefore, common to find, for example, practising Catholics who turn to the revivalist churches to resolve a witchcraft problem, since witchcraft is not recognised by their own church. The revivalist churches are not necessarily, therefore, comprised of faithful followers, but of passers by seeking to escape their neighbourhood and their family in order to avoid being stigmatised.
- Far from the rather idealistic description of some academics and anthropologists – who see the churches as alternatives to violence – for the most part we found real profit-making enterprises, hiding behind the façade of religion.
- The religious leaders who preach against witchcraft acquire a certain respectability. Those who do not want to accept it are a disgrace in the eyes of their parents.
- Not all revivalist churches accuse children of witchcraft.
- Not all children accused of witchcraft go to revivalist churches.
- Practices of exorcism have been reported in other historical churches including the Protestant and Catholic churches. To our knowledge, this does not form part of an institutional practice but individual initiatives.
- Some revivalist churches operate like institutions for children. Street children or those otherwise separated from their families seek refuge in these churches where they are exploited and manipulated. Only a few find real support.
- Social stakeholders such as institutions, “orphanages” and international organisations are also involved in the stigmatisation of children.

Recommendations

1. Develop a working strategy based on recognising religious leaders as people with whom to dialogue should be established - this would be the opposite of a “repressive” approach. To do this, we recommend implementing large-scale awareness raising programmes for religious leaders on three levels: within communities, religious platforms and schools of theology. These programmes must address the following key issues: a better understanding of parents’ difficulties in educating their children, a demystification of the childhood illnesses that are considered as witchcraft and an insight into the implications of witchcraft for the behaviour and development of the child. Finally, abuse and violence towards children must be examined from the view point of Congolese law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. Continue active advocacy with the Congolese authorities with the aim of combating the abuse and stigmatisation of children. The following aspects should be targeted:
 - The regulation of permits authorising churches to operate, which define their mission and their right to receive money for religious acts.
 - Issuing clear rules on authorising child placements.
 - Establishing a system for monitoring churches suspected of abusing children.
3. Establish an in-depth awareness raising programme for parents who turn to the revivalist churches, focusing on the following key issues: a better understanding of parents’ difficulties in educating their children, a demystification of the childhood illnesses that are considered as witchcraft, an insight into the implications of witchcraft for the behaviour and development of the child.
4. Implement reunification programmes for children living in revivalist churches, insisting on family mediation and post-reunification monitoring.

Areas to be explored in future research:

- The perception that parents have their own role to play merits in-depth research in order to understand what they see as their responsibilities in terms of bringing up, educating and disciplining their children. It is also important to understand the realities that parents are facing in a society that has been severely disrupted by changes and economic constraints.
- Examine the issue of child victims of violence and separation on a more global level.
- Look more deeply into the role of extended families in the Congo today, along with the effects of family reconstitution.

- We need to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the long-term impact the time spent in the church has on children. It is evident that children use defence mechanisms such as denial, separation and even identification with the aggressor and psychological studies are required to understand how the child overcomes this trauma.



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