

Exorcising Spirits Instead of Exercising Rights?

The Recent Phenomenon of Child Witch Accusation in the DRC



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CONTENTS:

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	2
1.1. Research questions and hypotheses.....	4
Chapter 2: Understanding the belief: A review of the current discourse.....	5
2.1. Poverty and the extended family’s inability to cope.....	5
2.2. Urbanisation and the changing role of the child.....	6
2.3. The rise of Revivalist Pentecostal and Deliverance churches.....	7
2.4. Congolese television and the rise of the Nollywood film industry.....	9
2.5. A state in turmoil.....	11
Chapter 3: Research Methods.....	12
3.1. The interviews.....	13
3.2. Media analysis.....	14
Chapter 4: Findings & Discussion.....	16
4.1. The media in propagating belief in child witches.....	16
4.2. The churches role in disseminating belief.....	20
4.3. The significance of poor governance & professional recommendations...	20
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	23
5.1. Implications.....	24
5.2. Recommendations.....	24
References.....	26
Appendices:	
A) Copy of approved consent form	
B) Format of interview & copy of semi-structured interview questions	
C) Overview of the demographics of the participants	

*Image on front cover: Children from Crarn, Nigeria, accused of being witches and wizards, protesting outside the Governor's headquarters – The Telegraph Online, Nov 2008.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Child witch accusation is a recent phenomenon in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the origins of which can be traced back to as recently as within the past two decades. It is the first recorded site of what might be called an epidemic of such accusations that spread through the Congo basin (La Fontaine, 2009). Child abandonment due to witchcraft accusation is reported as the number one reason for child homelessness in Kinshasa, the DRC's capital, amongst other Congolese cities. An estimated 250,000 children across the country live on the streets, where they are vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, forced to resort to "survival sex" in exchange for food or shelter, are subjected to violence from local authorities who act with impunity, and are susceptible to drug and alcohol abuse (APPG, 2006; *Children of Congo: From War to Witches*, 2008). While the belief in, and practice of, witchcraft itself has existed in the DRC since long before colonial rule, witchcraft as it exists today is moreover a modern invention, chiefly urban in origin, in which common cultural roots have become distorted from their primary meaning (Save the Children, 2005). Belief in witchcraft and sorcery is widespread and entrenched in African culture, it is considered fundamental to many African countries heritage, traditions and national identity. For the preponderance of the Congolese an invisible, spiritual world exists, and always has existed, alongside material reality. One of its facets is to allow people to make sense of the seemingly arbitrary misfortunes that affect them, as for the majority of the Congolese, nothing happens by chance or accident, everything must be caused by an agent (Kumwenda, 2007). However witchcraft as it exists today is more a product of modernity, and there has been a dramatic increase in recent decades in cases of persecution and the murder of those accused of sorcery, with a particular increase in violence toward children, causing witchcraft accusation to be, for the first time, an item on the UN agenda in 2009 (Bussein *et al*, 2011). Child witch accusation in the DRC is symptomatic of a more serious problem that embroils tremendous and ceaseless violence within a traumatic social sphere on the brink of collapse. This coupled with the failure, or absence of government to maintain law and order results in violence toward the most vulnerable groups spiralling out of control (Save the Children, 2005).

The DRC is by no means alone in the practice of child witch accusation. In many places across Africa such as Nigeria, Ghana, Burundi, Benin, Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda to name a few, this phenomenon can be found, as well as in countries throughout the wider world such as India, Nepal, Thailand, Papua New Guinea, and in recent years, the UK (Bussein *et al*, 2011). Very little is required in order to spark accusation. Bed-wetting,

stubbornness, belligerency, having a disability, illness in another family member, crop failure, or even being particularly intelligent or outspoken are sufficient premise for allegations to be made (Lloyd, 2007). Any characteristic or behaviour which deviates from the norm, whether it is negative or positive can lead to a child becoming a focus for accusations. Once accused, children are frequently subjected to “exorcisms”, a process in which the child is often deprived of food and water for a number of days, and can be burned, beaten, tortured and forced into a confession (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Despite having undergone this process, it can be exceedingly difficult to reunify the child with their family. Stigmatisation of accusation can often last for life, and result in extrication from the home, continued persecution, horrific acts of violence, and in some extreme, but by no means isolated cases, being killed.

There is a paucity of academic literature on many aspects of this phenomenon, with the majority of the discourse coming from NGO reports. This paper will examine a multitude of the contributing factors, including poverty, the changing role of the child, the media, and the churches role in disseminating the belief in child witches. This report has a primary focus on media resultant of interviews carried out with various managers and directors of children’s charities working in this field which highlighted the influence of media on propagating child witch accusations, a contributing factor there is no mention of in NGO reports, and insufficient information on in the academic discourse. This is an important issue to address as the ensuing violence, homelessness, and cruelty suffered by these children directly convenes provisions in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Torture, and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (UNICEF, 2006), as well the recently introduced Child Protection Code in the DRC, legislated in 2009. That it is a recent phenomenon, and the first recorded instances of it originate from the DRC make this location pertinent to examine. Only a comprehensive understanding of the belief systems and the economic, political and social situations of contemporary Africa will enable proper understanding of the situation, the development of successful actions for child protection and raising awareness of the rights of the child (Cimpric, 2010).

Following the introductory chapter, chapter two will touch upon some of the reasons that serve to explain the occurrence of this phenomenon including a more in-depth view of media and the church. The third chapter offers an overview of the methods employed, reflecting on

the decision to utilise interviews and content analysis of Nollywood films in order to assess their impact on disseminating the belief in child witches. The subsequent chapters will discuss findings of media analysis and the interviews, before concluding alongside implications and recommendations for further research.

1.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Interesting questions derive from the occurrence of child witch accusation;

- What are the reasons that underpin its inception?
- Has media served to reinforce the belief, and if so, how?
- What is the churches role in this phenomenon?
- What challenges exist to successfully combat its occurrence?
- Why has government been largely ineffectual at contending with it?

The following hypotheses are shaping the focus of this project:

H₁: Child witch craft accusations have increased in the DRC over the past two decades as a result of a combination of socio-economic conditions and experts working in the field will be best placed to determine what these are, and to suggest successful courses of action to combat it.

H₂: There is a correlation between the rise of the Nollywood film industry, Pentecostalism, urbanisation, and the changing role of the child with the occurrence of this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING THE BELIEF: A REVIEW OF THE CURRENT DISCOURSE

While the main focus of this paper will be the Nollywood film industry and deliverance churches, it is pertinent to touch upon some of the other aspects that contribute significantly to the problem. There is no single simplistic answer to explain this phenomenon, but a multitude of facets, all of which must be taken in to consideration in order to comprehensively understand the complexity of the situation, and to effectively ameliorate it.

2.1. POVERTY AND THE EXTENDED FAMILY'S INABILITY TO COPE

Poverty is arguably an important contributor to the phenomenon, underpinning many of the other causal factors. The DRC is one of the world's poorest countries, and is one of the lowest ranking countries on the Human Development Index (UNICEF, 2012). It is a country ravaged by decades of civil war, in which an estimated 3.5 million Congolese citizens have been killed (Human Rights Watch, 2006), and a further 2.7 million have been internally displaced (UNHCR, 2013). The DRC has also suffered a huge HIV/AIDS pandemic, estimated to have left a million children orphaned across the country (APPG, 2006). As a result, many children have been pushed in to the care of extended family, already living in highly difficult economic conditions, and unable to cope with the additional burden, making these children, who occupy a structurally weak position within the family, a group highly vulnerable to ousting by accusation. Research has shown that it is rare for children who live with both biological parents to be accused of sorcery (Human Rights Watch, 2006). In this interpretation, witchcraft accusation becomes a form of '*a posteriori* birth control' (De Boeck, 2009, p. 135) in which excess mouths to feed are gotten rid of. However, pertinent to add is that while some parents or carers do indeed act irresponsibly and use witchcraft as an alibi to rid themselves of a child, most care very much about their children but perceive them as a very real threat where there is no other alternative but to denounce their child due to the seeming risk of bewitchment (De Boeck, 2009).

Levels of education and literacy are low, and HIV/AIDS is among a multitude of widely misunderstood illnesses in the DRC, deemed to be spread by witchcraft. Hence a child whose parents die from what can be perceived of as a "mysterious illness" is liable to be accused of sorcery (Phiri, 2009). However, there are clearly aspects greater than poverty endemic to the DRC that have resulted in the occurrence of child witch accusation, as in other African countries where conditions are equal, or worse, this phenomenon has not developed (Save the

Children, 2005). Furthermore, it is simplistic to attribute such beliefs to illiteracy or poverty alone, as these beliefs are held by the majority of the population, regardless of their level of education, and children from both rich and poor families alike undergo deliverance and exorcisms. State authorities, elites, intellectuals and even those working in child protective services were found to foster the belief in child witches as much as those who had no access to formal education (Onyinah, 2002; Save the Children, 2005). Poverty's role may be in underpinning many of the other contributing aspects. The belief in witchcraft is a widely held worldview throughout Africa, making this phenomenon cultural in nature, rather than necessarily resultant of poverty. However, Miguel (2005) notes there is a strong negative relationship between poverty and violence, and that poor economic growth and violence within a country often go hand in hand. Furthermore, he adds that income shock theory rather than the socio-cultural scapegoat theory better explains the occurrence of witchcraft accusation as in Tanzania it is misfortunes in which there follows an aggravation of poverty that result in an empirical rise in the number of witch killings, rather than for other adversities such as disease epidemics.

2.2. URBANISATION AND THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE CHILD

In addition to already heightened deprivation, there ensued a worsening of poverty as living costs increased following the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes in sub-Saharan African regions, causing mass migration from rural areas of the DRC to the cities, as families and young people sought work. However, despite this migration for “greener pastures”, unemployment rates are incredibly high, and an estimated 85% of the population are without regular work (Gouby, 2012). The global financial crisis of 2008 also played a significant role in the creation of this high unemployment figure; 300,000 miners lost their jobs in the Katanga province alone as international trade dropped by 3.5%. Mining was the worst affected industry; 63% of mining sites in the DRC closed as a result of the drop in mineral prices (Kalala and Cassimon, 2010; World Bank, 2010). Mass exodus to the cities has been further aggravated by the decades of armed conflict that have pushed multitudes of people out of rural areas and in to the cities for security reasons (World Vision, 2012). Correspondingly, it is within the country's cities, in the early 1990's, that the origins of accusing children of witchcraft can be traced back to (Cimpric, 2010). Witchcraft as it exists today is a thoroughly modern and primarily urban phenomenon which has little in common with longstanding notions of witchcraft as they continue to exist in more rural areas, this new

form of witchcraft transcends rank and class, and is not limited to any particular ethnic group (De Boeck, 2009).

Also correlated with the emergence of this phenomenon and urbanisation is the changing role of the child. Children form a vast percentage of the population; 47% is at or below the age of 15 (Phiri, 2009). This is an important demographic pressure to address when deliberating the shifting capability of the family to care for children within the “multi-crisis” African context. Also, the problem of street children and street gangs is a growing one. An estimated 70% of Kinshasa’s 25,000 to 50,000 street children are homeless due to ousting from the family following witchcraft accusation (Bengali, 2006). 69% of street children are aged five to seventeen, and 39% of these children have lived on the street for 3 years or more (World Vision, 2012). Children have never been so prominently public in the urban public sphere. Due to the recent war, the utilisation of child soldiers, and vagrancy within urban areas, children are seen as actors and aggressors in Congolese society, rather than as victims. They are perceived as a threat, rather than a vulnerable group in need of protection (De Boeck, 2004). Furthermore, the problem of witchcraft and violence against children seems to have become established as a pattern within urban Congolese society (Save the Children, 2005). Additionally to the negative view of street children, the view held of children in general, and their place within the social hierarchy and family unit has changed within Congolese society. The very notions of family and kin have been redefined. An occurrence to which the charismatic churches have contributed to a significant extent, as extended family members are regularly labelled as witches. The extended kin group and the gift obligations which underpin it have been under condemnation from the church which promotes individualism, referring to the Bible passage of working ‘by the sweat of your brow’, that is, by one’s own efforts. Nowadays, in instances of an extended family member coming to ask for food or shelter, rather than receive help from the previous kin network of solidarity they might be labelled a witch (De Boeck, 2009).

2.3. THE RISE OF REVIVALIST & PENTECOSTAL DELIVERANCE CHURCHES

Over the past few decades the DRC’s religious sphere has undergone a massive transformation, a wave of Pentecostalism has swept through the country, and an estimated 3,000 revival churches exist in Kinshasa alone (Pype, 2010). These churches play an important role in increasing witchcraft accusations against children. In the Akwa Ibom State in the Niger Delta, data shows that in 31% of cases, the child was accused of witchcraft by a

pastor from a revivalist Pentecostal church (Secker, 2012). Pastors also legitimise and confirm accusations made by family members or the local community, keeping neighbours afraid of each other and ‘promoting fatalism rather than action’ (Cimpric, 2010, p. 36). Exorcising children is a lucrative trade for pastors, with a ceremony costing anything up to half a year’s salary for the average Congolese citizen (Bengali, 2006). Deliverance practices include anal flushing with holy water, incisions with razor blades, purging through the ingestion of oils and other substances, and the administration of dangerous substances to the eyes. Once purged, undigested pieces of meat or bone found in the child’s vomit or faeces are used as corroborating evidence during their public confession that the child has bewitched or ‘eaten’ a victim (De Boeck, 2009). Oftentimes the child will be starved of food and water for any number of days, or sometimes weeks, in the interim between being brought to the church and the exorcism process as the child is quarantined and forced to fast. Reports indicate children will frequently confess just so they are able to eat. Inability to pay for the ceremony will sometimes see children held by the church after deliverance until their families are able to do so (Save the Children, 2005). These deliverance programs are so popular with the people, failure to provide them amounts to losing members to churches that do (Onyiah, 2002), hence a number of churches in Kinshasa have made the exorcism of child witches their speciality (De Boeck, 2009).

The huge upsurge in the popularity of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in recent decades is related to the crisis of the post-colonial nation-state, transnationalism and diasporic culture, the rise of neo-liberal “millennial capitalism”¹ and mass-mediated popular culture. In 2000 there were an estimated 126 million Pentecostal-Charismatic churches throughout Africa, a much higher figure than for any other religious denomination, highlighting traditional Christianity brought over by the missionaries and instilled during colonialism is on the wane, and Pentecostalism thrives in the continent (Meyer, 2004). Pentecostalism presents itself as transcending material and occult worlds, capable of simultaneously destroying witches and producing individual wealth and health through the beneficent presence of the Holy Spirit (Newell, 2007). However, in reality it synergises ancient beliefs and local religious ideas and practices with popular Christian ideals such as the Prosperity Gospel and deliverance ministry.

¹“Millennial capitalism” refers to capitalisms fruition around the millennium, and that for those that opposed it, it appeared to be an apocalyptic horror of dog-eat-dog neoliberalism (Mead, 2004).

Furthermore, Pentecostalism's success in flourishing can be attributed to the widespread feeling that the state is incapable of helping those in need of protection against forms of spiritual insecurity. Contrary to the state, revivalist churches offer remedies to protect oneself against the perceived spiritual risks that come with city living. Churches have taken over the role of the state in defining what is good, rightful and lawful, and they have acquired the monopoly on the correct ways to convert disorder in to order. The church draws a lot of attention to demons and the struggle between good and evil, ceaselessly increasing the centrality of the figure of the witch in Congolese minds, making the witch itself more omnipresent in the social field. However, arguably, churches in providing and authorising the witchcraft diagnostic open up a possible therapeutic space and offer an alternative to the sometimes extreme violence and conflict that occurs in an accused child's kin-group, and pastors may play an important role in healing and mediating (De Boeck, 2009).

2.4. CONGOLESE TELEVISION AND THE NOLLYWOOD FILM INDUSTRY

Following the wave of Pentecostalism that has spread throughout the continent in recent decades, a corresponding transformation has emerged in the media sphere. In a country where access to information technologies such as the internet is constrained only to the elite and illiteracy is high, film and television has become the vehicle for transmitting alternative forms of information and is the most consumed medium of media by the Congolese, far surpassing the radio. In the last 15 years there has been a vast increase in the number of TV stations in the DRC with some 81 currently operating nationwide; 52 of which are private commercial stations, 24 are religious stations and the remainder are state owned and controlled (Frère, 2011, p. 189). There is a distinct lack of clear legal and regulatory frameworks to govern Congolese TV stations scheduling rights and obligations. More than half of television programmes synergise Pentecostal Christianity with melodrama and have an apocalyptic theme, attributing all mischief to devilish activity, and a new type of cultural hero has emerged; the Pastor (Pype, 2009).

Simultaneous to the increase in television channels at the end of the 1980's there emerged a new kind of movie production; low-budget video movies, coined 'Nollywood' films. Nollywood is now the third largest film industry in the world, after Hollywood and Bollywood, and makes thousands of films every year which are in turn exported to most African countries, including Ghana, Zambia, South Africa and the DRC. The films are low-budget, generally filmed within a two week period, and go straight to video cassette, VCD or

DVD, making them affordable to even the poor in rural areas. The mainstay of the industry is depicting the everyday domestic, social, political and economic lives of the African people (Abah, 2009). The films are incredibly popular; satiating a gap in the market that television programming was unable to fill satisfactorily due to erratic power supply and lacklustre programmes. Their popularity also lies in giving regular people the opportunity to tell stories which matter to them and telling them in an Afro-centric way (Haynes, 2007). What is fascinating however is that it is Nigerian witchcraft films, of all the genres, that have become an essential part of the viewing experiences of Kinshasa's population (Pype, 2009).

Abah (2009) argues the Nigerian film industry is capable of mediating and encouraging social change in society; a pertinent observation when one correlates Nollywood's emergence and depiction of child witches, with a corresponding increase in the number of child witch accusations within the society. Due to its commercial nature, the industry faces the tension of needing to reinforce mainstream values in order to be fiscally successful. A problematic trait when reflecting, legitimising and fortifying the recent phenomenon of child witch accusation. Kumwenda (2007) asserts the use of special effects allows filmmakers to make the invisible forces people fear visible, such as the transformation of human to animal. This revelation of the esoteric confirms its existence, enhancing the credibility of belief in the occult. Abah (2009, p. 738) notes that media use and exposure to media, combined with other variables, can have an effect on 'perception, acculturation, enculturation, and potentially social change' for the users and recipients. These means of popular culture cannot be dismissed as mere entertainment, as in the absence of other information technologies, people expect these films to reveal what is going on in their own society and teach morals (Meyer, 1999). This is true of both the Nollywood industry as well as Ghanaian cinema, which originates from the same time, and also finds its way into Congolese society. In many of the popular Ghanaian and Nigerian films, problems encountered by the protagonists are attributed to evil forces supposedly located in the village, and salvation is found through a Christian God and a turn away from traditional ways (Meyer, 1999; Van Dijk, 1997). The depiction of Christianity as the new way forward and traditional spirituality as backward and barbaric implies that what is African is primitive, whilst all that is western like Christianity is civilised, hence constructing a simplistic binary that is false (Kumwenda, 2007).

2.5. A STATE IN TURMOIL

A lack of legal and regulatory framework both within the media sphere and of the churches is symptomatic of a much larger governance problem in the DRC; an examination of which serves to explain the government's impotence in acting on these issues. The system is plagued by governance, management and coordination troubles at all levels; national, provincial, and local, thereby undermining political commitment, planning, budgetary expenditure, coordination and alignment of partnerships, and the accountability and transparency of service providers (UNICEF, 2012). The juvenile justice code exists only in draft form, and is not applied in practice. Access to justice is a structural problem throughout the DRC, and most directly affects those who are economically and socially excluded such as street children. Street children have no money for legal representation and many magistrates have neither the knowledge of juvenile justice, nor the inclination to provide it (APPG, 2006). Despite the introduction in 2009 of the Child Protection Code, corruption and bribery of police and magistrates by those making allegations is rife. Instead, outdated laws against vagrancy from the Colonial era are employed as a pretext to pursue populist policies that are seen to deal with issues of social disorder and crime. There is a distinct lack of political leadership in tackling the street child crisis in a socially reformist fashion that safeguards the rights of the children themselves. Many politicians when interviewed by the APPG (2006) were blunt in stating that they would not intend to estrange fetish pastors and their popular constituencies, especially in the run up to elections, on behalf of street children. Cases of churches or pastors being investigated or prosecuted for child abuse are practically non-existent (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Campaigns to arrest accusers place government officials in a precarious political position, and lead to a popular perception that they are "siding with" witches. Adding another facet to the reasons for low arrest and prosecution rates (Miguel, 2005).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In order to satisfy the research questions, this study utilised a combination of qualitative data collection tools: semi-structured interviews, and critical analysis of Nollywood films. The interviews take a grounded theory phenomenological approach², an advantage of which is to combine the study of the structure of experience from the first-person point of view with academic discourse on the identified phenomena. The analysis of media utilises content, thematic and semiotic analysis.

THE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

The subjects for the study were personnel from a variety of selected charities whose work includes specialism on the issue of child witch accusation in different regions of Africa. Criterion sampling was used in that this specialism is what dictated the selection of participants. The role of the interviewee within the organisation was either of project manager or founding director in all instances, and each participant had extensive experience in the field, which lends further authority to their responses. The participants were from four different African charities, making this a purposive sample. These contributors were recruited by the researcher through emails, and invited to take part in a short interview using the international internet video calling medium of Skype, owing to all of the participants being based outside London, including one based in the DRC. This allowed the researcher to carry out as close to face-to-face contact as was feasible given the location of the subjects. An overview of the demographics of the participants is given in appendix C.

The participants were:

Ian Harvey of the Kimbilio Project, DRC

Gary Foxcroft of the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network

Emilie Secker of Stepping Stones Nigeria

Susie Howe of The Bethany Children's Trust

²Grounded theory is based on three assumptions; that an explanation must be grounded in the meanings of those studied, that the world is socially constructed and that theory plays a central role in the research, as do unintended consequences (Aspers, 2009).

An intentional delimitation of the sample is of interviewing solely African children's charity workers rather than street children themselves, or Congolese citizens to ascertain their experiences and reasons for the occurrence of child witch accusation. This is due to the infeasibility of travelling to the DRC for an undergraduate project, as well as the likelihood that their responses would be belief-based rather than socio-economic, or socio-cultural based, which whilst also crucial for understanding this phenomenon, is not the focus of this paper.

3.1. THE INTERVIEWS

Upon initiating the semi-structured interviews, each subject was informed the conversation would be recorded. Upon agreement with this the researcher proceeded to read out a consent form to obtain verbal informed consent and agreement to proceed based on the stipulations of the consent form, a copy of which is available in appendix A. Although the participants had been informed they could be anonymised in the research, each declined this, allowing the researcher to use both their name, and the name of the organisation.

Interviews were chosen as a research method owing to their ability to garner deeper, richer knowledge on complex issues, and provide more flexibility than questionnaires. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for unanticipated responses and the ability to pursue interesting avenues of conversation. Semi-structured interviews facilitate comparability by ensuring that all questions are answered by each respondent (Barribal and While, 1994). They also have high validity as these were participants with extensive knowledge who were able to discuss the issues in depth and detail. Each interview took approximately between 45 minutes and one hour. When analysing the data from the interviews, thematic analysis within a social constructivist epistemology³ was employed (Braun and Clark, 2006, p.83). A copy of the semi-structured interview questions and the format of the interview are available in appendix B.

³Social constructivism 'locates meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social, community context' (Dickerson and Zimmerman, 1996, cited in Niekerk, 2005).

3.2. MEDIA ANALYSIS

Alongside a review of the academic discourse on the effect of media and the rise of the Nollywood film industry, content, thematic and semiotic analysis of Nollywood films was utilised. Semiotic analysis allows this research to deconstruct meaning, both connotative and denotative from the Nigerian films whilst respecting the context in which the films are made (Kumwenda, 2007). Thematic analysis used both in the interviews and in analysing the content of Nollywood films allows for identifying, analysing and reporting re-emerging patterns, through deriving codes from the data (Braun and Clark, 2006).

While finding Nollywood films depicting child witches is challenging, and one can only speculate as to the reasons why finding them in the UK is so challenging when there is such a proliferation of them in African countries, perhaps it somewhat of an underground market in the UK. Nonetheless, 5 Nollywood films whose themes included the idea of children as witches were found using the internet. These are detailed below in figure 1, including where the film company is church owned, privately owned, or is privately owned but features a pastor as a producer. Subsequent to being informed the charity Stepping Stones Nigeria had made its own Nollywood film as a counteraction, and to spread awareness of the issue, multiple attempts were made to locate a copy, however it did not come to fruition.

Figure 1

Name of Film	Year Made	Name of Film Company	Film Company Owned By
End of the Wicked	1999	Liberty Films	Liberty Foundation Gospel Ministries (Church owned)
Forces Against My Soul	2012	Mount Zion Films	Mount Zion Faith Ministries (Church owned)
Dangerous Adoption 2	2013	B.D Movies Ltd.	B.D Movies Ltd. (Privately owned)
Seekers of Life	2012	Snude Entertainment	Snude Entertainment (Privately owned)

666: Beware the End is at Hand	2007	Global Update Films	Global Update Films Film produced by Kenneth Okonkwo (Pastor)
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CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will explore through a synergy of the discourse, interviews, and content analysis the effects of media in disseminating the idea in child witches. A brief synopsis of each film will be outlined, before deconstructing the themes, symbols and metaphors of the films. Further to this, illuminating information regarding the church, the changing role of the child and the significance of poor governance resultant of the interviews, as well as professional opinions on combatting child witch accusation, will also be imparted.

4.1. THE MEDIA IN PROPAGATING BELIEF IN CHILD WITCHES

All of the participants, unprompted, deigned the prevalence of Nollywood films in to the DRC as a contributing factor to the accusation of children as witches, and served to legitimise the idea. ‘...you’ve got the Nollywood films coming out of Nigeria, which are shown on the streets. If you go to Kinshasa they have TV’s on the street’ (Susie Howe, The Bethany Children’s Trust, 2013). The ease of access to watching such films, coupled with their ability to mediate social change due to the lack of any other information technologies (Abah, 2009), and an ‘ooh, if it’s on the television, it must be so!’ mentality (Howe, 2013) is a concoction of circumstances that serves to strengthen the validity of, and further perpetuate the idea of the child witch. Here a brief synopsis of each film will be given, before an analysis of recurrent themes.

Content analysis of Nollywood films reveals a fearsome depiction of children. In *End of the Wicked* (1999) children are seen transforming into animals such as snakes, owls, dogs and cats, as Kumwenda (2007) suggests, making a feared invisible occurrence visible, and confirming a belief held by society; that child witches exist, and they have the ability to morph in to animal form. Children’s spirits are called from their bodies while they slumber at night to an evil spiritual overlord, whose character is named ‘Beelzebub’; an African man painted white, possibly to represent albinism, another characteristic that will oftentimes see children and adults alike called witches. The children are commanded to ‘drain the money, health and happiness from their people... cause fever in all the children in their home’ and the spirit of ‘stubbornness, lack of interest in school, waywardness and bad company’ is invoked; all common childhood traits that will often see a child accused of sorcery in everyday society. When television and films are as Frère (2011) says, the most popularly consumed form of media, and they serve to further enshrine and reinforce the concerns of the common man,

rather than educate and demystify, it is easy to see how beliefs are fortified. The title sequence of *End of the Wicked* declares the film part of an 'expository sequence' on witchcraft, affirming the existence of fetishistic magic, and witchcraft as a real evil to the viewer.

666: Beware the End is at Hand (2007) follows the story of Lucifer's son being born on earth and his childhood where he causes all manner of devilish mischief before being defeated by a pastor. A lack of legal and regulatory framework in the making of these movies is greatly exemplified in this film. The young "anti-Christ" child aged 8-10 bewitches an elder woman in to being his "girlfriend". They are filmed kissing, an act that would not be allowed in Western cinema; the filming of a child and an adult engaging in sexual activity. Following this, the woman is marked with '666' on her forehead, and a horn appears on the young boy's. This is significant as 666 is popularly believed to be the mark of the Biblical anti-Christ, and infers sexual activity can "contaminate" a person with demonic forces.

Dangerous Adoption 2 (2013) is the story of an adopted child living with his adoptive mother, and her brother in law following the death of her husband. The brother-in-law, believing him responsible for his brother's death, pays a witch doctor to declare the adopted son 'an evil child', which he does, declaring the child the 'source of all the calamity, and all the doom'. When his adoptive mother tries to protest his innocence, she is berated for 'challenging the gods'. The child is rejected by his people and sent back to the orphanage. Even his adoptive mother now labels him an 'out-cast'. As Abah (2009) and Haynes (2007) say, films are highly reflective of the norms in African culture, hence it is reflective of adoptive children, living with extended family members being an at risk group, vulnerable to accusation (Human Rights Watch, 2006). It also highlights the stigma that comes with accusation. Despite his adoptive mother not believing it, as the rest of the village did she had no choice but to cast out.

In *Seekers of Life* (2012) an entire village is cursed and doomed to die; this is told to them by a witch doctor. The men of the village go on a quest to find the 'stone of life' and save their people. While out walking in the forest to find the stone the men come under spiritual attack, and become engaged in spiritual warfare. A young boy with pointed ears appears. The men start shouting 'demon, demon' at the child. The child fights with and kills one of the men, biting his neck. The boy then vanishes. The men continue walking and come across a chicken, believed to be the boy witch. They try to kill it, but another one of the men dies chasing it. A second man killed is by a girl witch in the form of a snake, she transforms back

in to a girl and starts feeding on the dead body. The majority of the remaining men disappear in to the bright light of a malevolent spirit. Again the transformation of the child witch in to animal form as a theme recurs.

Forces Against My Soul (2012) tells of a teenage girl who leaves her family, travels to Canada to study and is tempted by spirits to stray from her Bible studies. She listens to evil spirits who appear to fill her mind with thoughts and opts for going to parties, receiving gifts, the latest laptop and mobile phone from men rather than attend her prayer group. She refuses to turn back to God, and so, she dies. The other character who suffers a series of misfortunes is the school science teacher, shown as a godless man; a clear criticism of the scientific mind perceived to be neglecting their spirituality. This film is very much a condemnation of modernity, intimating that modernity is linked to evil forces. It also insinuates that leaving the family unit, their guidance and the strength of their Christian values leaves a person open to spiritual attack. It also insinuates that the foreign lands of Western countries are ungodly, and the importance of 'keeping your fire burning for the Lord' (*Forces Against My Soul*, 2012) to avoid Western temptations and sins like alcohol, boys, parties and drugs. A critique and mistrust of westernisation and modernity feature heavily in many of the films.

Other common themes among the films watched were of children tricking, or harming their elders, and of being able to act with particular ferocity. They are portrayed as unholy forces to be reckoned with; drinking blood, blinding family members, killing people and bringing misfortune. Adults, with the exception of pastors, are depicted as no match for these children and the harm they bring. We can clearly see here films mirroring society's fears and beliefs. Children have become feared in Congolese society; child soldiers, gangs of violent street children, and now, child witches (De Boeck, 2004). Another common theme is of these evil spirits residing in a second world - a commonly held world view in Africa, and being able to enter people's minds, and access people's bodies while they sleep, bridging the gap between the spiritual and the physical. Children on occasion do not necessarily know they are witches as their activities can occur when they sleep and dream, perhaps corroborating an adult viewer's belief. It is also portrayed that malevolent forces that attack you in your dreams can cause death in the physical world. People toss and turn in their dreams while blood pours from the eyes of the sleeping body (*End of the Wicked*, 1999; *Forces Against My Soul*, 2012). As Meyer (1999) indicates, and content analysis corroborates, evil spirits are represented as wanting to destroy Christian's zeal in God, and there are invariably two outcomes for the characters who step away from the Bible and God; they either end up saved through returning

to a Christian God after a denouncement of evil ways, often after a miracle, or they end up dead, making these films proselytic in nature. Christianity is depicted as morally superior and pastors are depicted as the source of salvation. Pastors are also often depicted as prophesising the impending downfall at the hands of evil spirits of those around them through dreams, and visions therein. Kumwenda (2007) remarks in African ontologies, the dream is in the realm of existence as part of the “linking current” in which contact is by nature established with the spirit world. Dreams are very significant in African culture, and this is reflected in Nollywood films. In them access to the second world where both good and malevolent forces alike reside is granted.

Another common theme is secrecy; witchcraft is portrayed as a clandestine cult that only those initiated in to may know the true members and movements thereof. Whilst those who are not members may hold their suspicions, they do not tend to have concrete information on their activities. The downfall or salvation of the protagonist does generally not result in the end of the coven to which they were ascribed; implying witchcraft is a continuing event. All of the films affirm the existence of witches, and necessitate the need for Christianity to counteract them as a morally superior religion. Sexuality is also a recurrent theme; turning away from the bible is often coupled with sexual temptations, and often women in these films are portrayed as temptresses, or possessed defilers of “good men”. Especially women in positions of power are depicted as being in their situation due to collaborating with evil spirits. However, what is arguable is whether the films are a creation of the culture, or vice versa. The participants would argue perhaps both, and that the film industry has a lot to answer for.

Films depicting children in such ways only serve to further strengthen an already negative view of them held by society. As Howe (2013) informed me; ‘...now there are children being born on the street so there are second, and sometimes third generation street children... you’ve got these children growing up quite feral. And when you’ve got thousands of feral children on the streets, it actually changes perception of childhood and what children are like’. Children are viewed as a threat (De Boeck, 2004), and films which depict them tricking, and harming their elders, such as ‘*666: Beware the End is at Hand* (2007), and ‘*End of the Wicked*’ (1999), only serves to exacerbate the problem.

4.2. THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN DISSEMINATING BELIEF

Interestingly, many of these film companies are owned by Pentecostal ministries, and some of the films watched that were by privately owned companies, featured a pastor as a director or producer. The significance of such films originating from churches cannot be underestimated, as if anything their originating from the church lends such films greater validity to the Congolese. As Gary Foxcroft of WHRIN (2013) indicated; 'the pastor is an all-powerful guru; an idol that people look up to for their salvation. The pastors have immense power, and pretty much whatever they say goes'. Low levels of education and illiteracy means people do not necessarily have the tools to challenge what the pastor tells them, or these particular beliefs (Secker, *Stepping Stones*, 2013).

However, the church is also capable of acting as a positive force for mediating change. The Bethany Children's Trust is partnered in Kinshasa with Équipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse (EPED), which has trained over 200 churches in Kinshasa, Basankusu and other regions in child care, child protection, children's rights and good parenting. These churches have in turn trained other churches, creating a snowball effect. They identify families at risk of child witch accusations and support them with home visit volunteers, counselling, teaching in child care and protection and providing them with loans to start small businesses to mitigate poverty. EPED take up cases of children accused of witchcraft to advocate on their behalf and to give them counselling, care, and support where they have been abused and traumatised (Howe, 2013).

4.3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POOR GOVERNANCE & PROFESSIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The interviews also served to shed further light on issues of police and judiciary corruption within the DRC. '...you can understand it to a degree because when you talk to policemen, some of them haven't been paid in six months, so they rely on bribes to feed their families... [a lot of cases] are thrown out because they... haven't been paid, or the judges haven't been paid, and somebody gives a bribe and you've lost the case' (Howe, 2013). This explanation of corruption is usually subtracted from its mention in the discourse, and highlights one of the fundamental underlying problems; a poor and insufficient system of governance, and a severe lack of the infrastructure that would ensure civic staff is regularly paid. When this provision is not made, society is reduced to working on a bribe system in order to survive. Furthermore, despite the introduction of the Child Protection Code, structural problems prevent such information being circulated through the country; '...because Congo is so huge, laws can be

made but the information is not really disseminated to the people on the ground. So these laws are passed but the people who are actually supposed to be implementing them aren't informed of the actual laws themselves' (Ian Harvey, Kimbilio Project, 2013). Enforcing the law in this conflict-ridden country will be the next challenge. The UN is helping the DRC to train their police officers to implement the new law, but it will take time for this to have a significant impact on the streets of Kinshasa (*United Nations Television: 21st Century*, 2011). However, more than just an enforcement of the law is required to tackle this problem. With one of the major problems being of ineffective governance, some of the interviewees suggested exertion of pressure by the international community on governments of countries where child witch accusation is known to occur as a way in which the international community can assist, or by facilitating peace-keeping in the DRC, and providing forums for discussion with rebel groups to bring the required stability to build proper governance. Safeguarding children's rights, amongst a plethora of other things, are difficult to successfully accomplish in a nation continually in a state of unrest (Foxcroft, 2013; Howe, 2013). Furthermore, national governments could ban any pastor known to be preaching that children are witches from entering other countries (Foxcroft, 2013). National governments also need to regulate the churches and the film industry. However, all of the participants emphasised the importance of solutions coming from "on the ground". '...a lot of attention is often paid to changing laws and policies... ultimately unless you change people's beliefs and practices it doesn't really count that much because people will still believe, and still abuse children, and government will do little or nothing to properly implement laws. I'm not convinced that a legal approach is the solution' (Foxcroft, 2013).

The occurrence of child witch accusation is now entrenched in society, and will require long term approaches. Highly apparent from the interviews was a reiteration of the depth and breadth of the strength of the belief in child witches. Estimations from interview participants ranged from 85% to 99% of society at large in the DRC holding the belief children can be witches, including child welfare officers and police that these charities had worked with, indicating the depths to which the idea has taken root over the past few decades. One approach with a lot of potential is to develop training programmes to help demystify the common ailments and diseases that are considered to be witchcraft in order for people to understand their problems in a different way (Foxcroft, 2013). Some very basic understandings such as how a child manifests grief and basic biological human functions are often misinterpreted as witchcraft (Howe, 2013). At the community level raising awareness of the Child Protection Code and how to apply that to daily life, greater vocalism from the

Christian community, and support for the groups working on the ground on this issue would also serve to benefit the problem (Foxcroft, 2013; Howe, 2013; Secker 2013).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In summary, as hypothesised, there exists a correlation between the emergence of this phenomenon with a shift in the religious and media spheres, exacerbation of already heightened poverty, mass migration to cities and the changing role of the child. The group most vulnerable to accusation are children in the care of extended family, of which there are millions due to en masse orphaning during decades of civil war and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The emergence of the Nollywood film industry, Congolese television and Pentecostalism can be traced back to inception in the late 1980's to early 1990's, and the surfacing of child witch accusation ensues subsequently. The people of the DRC live in an exceedingly strained society, with a distinct lack of governance or a sufficient judiciary system. The shift to viewing children as a threat, alongside an already widely held world view of the belief in witchcraft also helps serve explain what may have triggered child witch accusation. However, important to remember is that it is not necessarily the belief in witchcraft that is problematic, and it is Eurocentric to view it as such, but when the belief in witchcraft leads to persecution, including physical, psychological, and emotional abuse, as it has done in recent decades, it becomes a problem. TV and film are the most consumed form of media, and films which depict children as witches, and pastors as the new cultural hero, are exceedingly popular. Without access to any other information technologies, people expect films to reflect what occurs in their society and teach morals, and films are arguably a force that mediates social change, meaning they cannot be dismissed as mere entertainment, especially when they originate from the church as it lends them greater validity.

A key underlying failing, is of the state in governance, and a lack of infrastructure to allow for the arrest and prosecution of those who fail to uphold the Child Protection Code and to ensure police and judges receive regular wages so they are not forced to resort to bribery and the system of corruption that results in exacerbating inadequate child protection. A lack of governance also serves to explain a paucity of regulation of the media, and the churches. One way in which the international community could provide assistance in the DRC is with peace-keeping to support accomplishing a stable platform on which better governance can be built. Poverty must also be taken seriously as it underpins many aspects of this phenomenon. Sustainable solutions such as job creation and promoting access to both formal and informal education are required. Professionals working in the field were best placed to offer further insight into ways in which the problem could be helped, and stressed that a bottom-up approach is what is required. The church as a significant contributor to the problem must

stand up and be more vocal on this issue, as it is very much a Christian issue, and requires an adequate response from the church. As shown in this paper, the church has extensive capabilities and potential to help, so it must be encouraged to do so through education in child rights, demystification of common illnesses, and churches which do accuse must be held accountable.

What is lacking is research being conducted in to the most successful ways of combatting child witch accusation. As Secker (2013) says, ‘no-one’s counting, and no-one’s measuring, and no-one’s documenting, and that in itself is a problem’. An additional thought-provoking point raised by Foxcroft (2013) was ‘...the biggest challenge is whether you challenge the belief, or you deal with the outcome of the belief.’ That is the challenge for anyone hoping to work in this field.

5.1. IMPLICATIONS

Any society that does not care for, protect and invest in children, the next generation, is condemned to face significant challenges in the future. However, unless a true contextual and cultural understanding is employed, and sufficient support is offered to both accusers and those accused, meaningful headway will be impossible to achieve, and there is the possibility exorcisms could potentially just become more secret and underground and result in being less easily combatted. The implication of the depth and breadth of the belief in child witches is that it will be difficult to tackle, and requires a multi-faceted, long-term approach. It has developed and become deeply seated in Congolese culture over the past few decades, and it may take many more decades before it can be successfully impacted upon. The inference of media’s role in reinforcing and strengthening the belief in child witches shows a clear legal and regulatory framework in the media is very much required.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for further research are as follows:

- To undertake research in the field and speak with Congolese citizens to ascertain their understandings of this phenomenon and their experiences of what have led to it.
- To speak with Congolese citizens to examine to what extent the war has affected their view of children as this was an interesting point commented upon on which there is a lack of information, and that merits further investigation.

- To speak with street children in the DRC to understand the dynamics of being a street child or being in a street gang to create rehabilitation strategies.
- To analyse a greater number of films, as well as television programmes and radio programmes to create a comprehensive analysis of their content and their portrayal of child witches.

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APPENDIX A

THE CONSENT FORM – READ TO EACH PARTICIPANT

I would like to ask you to take part in this research.

Your participation will involve a short interview with me on child witch accusation.

If you agree to take part in the research, you may withdraw from it at any stage.

All the information that you give to me will be treated confidentially and will be rendered anonymous in the assignment. The name of the organisation and not your personal name will be used.

Only the student researcher and my tutors will see material from the research.

All the material you provide in this interview will be erased after the research has finished.

You are welcome to contact myself or my dissertation supervisor if you require any further information about the research, and I can give you his contact details if you do wish to contact him.

APPENDIX B

FORMAT OF INTERVIEW & COPY OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Inform each participant that the conversation will be recorded and obtain their agreement to this.
2. Read out consent form to obtain a verbal agreement.
3. Set the demographics of the participant; name of organisation, job title, and years spent working in the field.

QUESTIONS:

1. What, in your opinion, are the reasons child witch accusation occurs in the DRC?
2. What do you think are elements specific to the Congo that have meant this has happened?
3. If this is a recent phenomenon, why do you think this trend has gained so many people following it?
4. What would you estimate as the amount of people who hold the belief that children can be witches? Is it a majority? A minority? 50/50?
5. Have you found that people in government, the police, or child protective services hold this belief?
6. Do you think there has been an element of the changing role of the child affecting this phenomenon?
7. Do you think the emergence of child soldiers over the past few decades has anything to do with this phenomenon?
8. What is the government doing about curtailing this belief?
9. Have there been any cases of local public outcry, or protests over this?
10. What are effectual ways in which it is being combatted?
11. What more could be being done locally to curtail its occurrence?
12. What more could the international community do to help?

APPENDIX C

An overview of the demographics of the interview participants:

Name	Organisation	Job Title	No. Years Working in the Field
Ian Harvey	Kimbilio Project	Director & Co-founder	7
Gary Foxcroft	The Witchcraft & Human Rights Information Network	Executive Director & Co-founder	10
Emilie Secker	Stepping Stones Nigeria	Violence, Abuse & Neglect Programme Manager	4
Susie Howe	The Bethany Children's Trust	Founding Director	15