

Ties that bind: African witchcraft and contemporary slavery

By Elizabeth Willmott Harrop
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In Africa, witchcraft has become inextricably linked to the trafficking in persons for exploitation. Through ritual “oaths of protection”, witchcraft provides a cost effective and convenient way for trafficking victims to become mentally chained to their traffickers, and the ensuing life of sexual slavery or forced labour, among other abuses. Meanwhile, the expulsion of alleged witches from African communities creates a desperate and vulnerable population who become easy prey for ruthless exploitation.

And in some African countries, trafficking for ritual killing is commonplace because witchcraft bestows magical properties on human body parts, particularly those of Albinos and children.

However Cherifa Atoussi who has worked with victims of trafficking from Africa coerced using witchcraft, stresses that the problem is not confined to Africa. Atoussi comments: “In the past couple of years there have also been ritual killings in many countries including India and the Americas, and in August 2012 a young child was killed in Malaysia in an exorcism ritual. This is not an African problem, but a problem of abuse.”¹

Similarly, Dr Richard Hoskins, a criminologist who has lived in Africa and worked on many investigations into the abuse of children through witchcraft, observes that “it is a great mistake to believe that because people hold unfamiliar beliefs they are somehow predisposed towards child abuse... What we are seeing is the perversion of a belief system that is otherwise benign: it is the perversion we should be looking at, not the belief.”²



Juju ceremony on trafficking victim, from the Jenny Kleeman film “Nigeria: sex, lies and black magic” for Unreported World, Channel 4, UK

The trafficking industry

The UN Protocol to Prevent Trafficking in Persons³ adopted in 2000 and known as one of the “Palermo Protocols”, defines trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons ... for the purpose of exploitation”. Exploitation includes sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, servitude, the removal of organs and ritual murder.

¹ Cherifa Atoussi interview with Elizabeth Willmott Harrop September 2012.

For reports see India <http://www.asianage.com/india/3-children-killed-human-sacrifice-feared-786>, Mexico www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/centralamericaandthecaribbean/mexico/9177633/Children-sacrificed-to-Mexicos-cult-of-Saint-Death.html, Malaysia <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19159967>

² The Boy In The River, by Dr Richard Hoskins, published by Pan 2012

³ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/protocoltraffic.htm>. Please also see the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc-sale.htm>

In a positive move, The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings⁴ 2005 which has an identical definition of trafficking to the UN Protocol, has been updated with a 2011 European Union Directive⁵. This broadens the scope of trafficking victims to include coerced criminal activities, with member states required to comply with the directive's provisions by April 2013.

From that point "victims of trafficking in human beings should ... be protected from prosecution or punishment for criminal activities such as the use of false documents, or offences under legislation on prostitution or immigration, that they have been compelled to commit as a direct consequence of being subject to trafficking. The aim of such protection is to safeguard the human rights of victims, to avoid further victimisation and to encourage them to act as witnesses in criminal proceedings against the perpetrators."⁶

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), over 140,000 victims are trapped in violence and degradation for sexual exploitation in Europe, with one in seven of them enslaved into prostitution through trafficking⁷.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates annual profits from trafficking in human beings amount to 32 billion USD⁸ and the US government claims trafficking is the fastest growing, and second most lucrative criminal operation in the world, on a par with the arms trade, and second only to the illegal drugs industry⁹.

The starting point for a trafficking victim in Africa will likely be a fellow African. Who, in the context of facilitation through witchcraft, is prepared to exploit the spiritual beliefs of his or her community for financial gain, at enormous cost to individual human rights and the depletion of human capital from the continent.

This initial contact may not be an anonymous criminal force, but a friend or relative. In many cases these are the first link, especially for women who are trafficked into the sex industry, with the role of this familiar person being to broker contact with a trafficker¹⁰.

Women are said to play an important role, monitoring the trafficking process from recruitment to exploitation and with victims often assuming the role of exploiter of others¹¹. Research by Europol¹², the European Law Enforcement Agency, confirms that the proportion of female offenders involved in trafficking for sexual exploitation is increasing across countries.¹³

New international standards define human trafficking according to the exploitation of the victim, not by their transit¹⁴. So a person may be trafficked overseas, across borders or be exploited in their current location and still be considered a trafficking victim. New figures from the ILO almost double a 2005 estimate, revealing there are currently 20.9 million victims of trafficking or modern day slavery in the world¹⁵.

3.7 million of these victims reside in Africa. Yet in 2011, there were only 257 prosecutions, 218 convictions and 10,094 victims identified on the continent¹⁶.

⁴ <http://www.conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/197.htm>

⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/entity.action?id=77172b8d-5d04-4cf0-b276-49f733ab93c8>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ http://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/factsheets/TOC12_fs_humantrafficking_EN_HIRES.pdf

⁸ ILO action against trafficking in human beings 2008 http://www.ilo.org/sapfl/Informationresources/Factsheetsandbrochures/WCMS_090356/lang--en/index.htm

⁹ The US Department of Health and Human Services Human Trafficking fact sheet 2006 <http://www.hhs.gov/news/factsheet/humantrafficking.html>

¹⁰ IOM Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe 2006 http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=131

¹¹ Europol Trafficking in Human Beings in the European Union <https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/trafficking-in-human-beings-in-the-european-union-2011.pdf> and IOM op cit

¹² Europol op cit

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report 2012 <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2012/index.htm>

¹⁵ ILO 2012 http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/press-and-media-centre/news/WCMS_182109/lang--en/index.htm

¹⁶ US Department of State op cit

A human being can be sold again and again, whereas drugs for example can only be used once. And while drugs can be located as evidence of criminal activity, trafficking victims can be silenced. The high profits and low risk of punishment for human traffickers therefore make it a highly attractive business in a globalised world.

UNESCO comments that “African traffickers face low risk of arrest, prosecution or other negative consequences. They have exploited the lack of rule of law, the non-implementation of existing anti-slavery laws, and corruption of judicial systems. These lapses allow perpetrators to go unpunished. Prosecutions are rare and fraught with difficulties.”¹⁷

Witchcraft as reality

For many Africans, witchcraft is reality and not superstition. Some African courts, for example in Cameroon, have given convictions for being a witch based on the testimony of traditional healers¹⁸. To address its human rights implications therefore requires understanding and not dismissal.

As a Detective in the Metropolitan Police Human Trafficking Team at New Scotland Yard, Anti-trafficking consultant Andrew Desmond was responsible for the first successful prosecution of a Nigerian Organised Criminal Network that had used Juju, a traditional belief in the spirit world originating in West Africa¹⁹, to silence their trafficking victims in Europe.

Desmond comments: “When I first explained the difficulties of getting victims to give evidence against their traffickers because of their fears of being cursed and punished by the spirit world, my colleagues at Scotland Yard were pretty bemused. But we have to fully understand the issues and what we have in common in order to work with victims, and is the concept really so far removed from asking those appearing in a UK court to swear an oath on the bible before giving testimony? After all, they are both about regulating what is said through fear of a powerful spirit.”²⁰

Those in more developed countries tend to view witchcraft as diametrically opposed to a rational, science-based view of the world. However this opposition may not exist in other cultures and should not be taken for granted.

Dr Jennifer DeWan comments: “For many, magical or witchcraft powers are real. They can have effects that are positive or negative, ranging from the insignificant to the devastating and should not be attributed to superstition.”²¹

Some argue that spiritual beliefs are strongest among the poorest communities. A September 2012 report by ActionAid²² comments that “it is no coincidence that the witch camps are found only in northern Ghana, which is one of the poorest regions of the country and suffers from low education and literacy standards”. The report says the camps “are effectively women’s prisons where inmates have been given no trial, have no right of appeal but have received a life sentence”. However, it also notes that the camps offer protection with many “witches” and their families being unwilling to leave.



Women accused of being witches in Northern Ghana, and now living in a witch camp. Photo Jane Hahn / ActionAid

However, Gary Foxcroft, Co-founder of Stepping Stones Nigeria stresses that the belief in child witches in Nigeria cuts across all facets of society and is not a characteristic of marginalised groups.

Foxcroft comments “The literate and illiterate, the wealthy and poor, law enforcement agents, social welfare workers, law makers and most specifically the leaders of revivalist Pentecostal churches believe that a mysterious, spiritual spell is given to a child through food or drink. After his or her soul is then believed to be called from their body in the night, the child is said to have the

¹⁷ UNESCO Human trafficking in Nigeria: root causes and recommendations <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147844e.pdf>

¹⁸ Witchcraft and the State: Cameroon and South Africa Ambiguities of ‘Reality’ and ‘Superstition’ 2008 http://past.oxfordjournals.org/content/199/suppl_3/313.extract

¹⁹ <http://www.antitraffickingconsultants.com/juju/>

²⁰ Andrew Desmond interview with Elizabeth Willmott Harrop August 2012

²¹ Open Secrets, An Irish Perspective on Trafficking and Witchcraft, Dr Jennifer DeWan and David Lohan, published by Cois Tine 2012

²² ActionAid Women and witchcraft in Ghana http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc_lib/ghana_report_single_pages.pdf See also ‘What I Used To Know – The Road To Ghana’s ‘Witches’ Camps’ by Zoe Young <http://www.zoeyoung.net/content/what-i-used-to-know> and The Witches of Gamabaga by Yaba Badoe <http://www.witchesofgambaga.com/>

power to cause widespread destruction, such as murdering innocent people and causing diseases. All accidents, drunkenness, madness, smoking of marijuana, divorce, infertility, and misfortunes are perceived to be their handiwork.”²³

Financial gain

It is easy to see why a population seeks reason and control over events when living in intense hardship as a result of famine, civil war, economic decline and disease.

However, there is also a purely materialistic motive, both in terms of the reasons clients of witch doctors request rituals and oaths, such as in ensuring prosperity, and in terms of the monies made by witch doctors and priests involved in profiteering from witchcraft.

Pastors who promote the belief in child witches are accused of doing so to extract fees for “delivering” the children. Foxcroft comments: “Parents of the children are told to frequently bring funds needed to carry out such deliverances. Most do so willingly in the hope that they will be able to save their children from the evils of the “witchcraft world”.”²⁴

Human rights abuses associated with witchcraft accusations and exorcism rituals are horrific and include child abandonment, murder, being bathed in acid, burned alive, poisoned to death, buried alive, drowned or imprisoned and tortured in churches²⁵. One case reported by Stepping Stones Nigeria involved “14 children being murdered by having hot pokers forced inside them”²⁶.

In the UK, 15 year old Kristy Bamu died at the hands of relatives after a home-based exorcism which included his teeth and nails being pulled out, pliers being used to cut off parts of his body and his fingers being smashed with a hammer. He was alive when paramedics were called, but they were unable to resuscitate him due to dislodged teeth stuck in his throat. His death was described by Hoskins as one of the most brutal cases of child torture and murder in the UK’s history²⁷.



Photograph from Saving Africa's Witch Children, about the work of Stepping Stones Nigeria, Channel 4, UK

Hoskins discusses how the concept of “kindoki” in the Congo has been corrupted from a “nebulous external force” which could be warded off through for example the use of amulets, into a power that possesses particularly children, and which can only be delivered through exorcism. Hoskins describes how “fundamentalist Christianity has blended with traditional beliefs to create a monstrous new mix” comprising a “cocktail of ritual and manic fundamentalism” where the actions of those accused of child abuse “should not be confused with the belief system in which they seek shelter”.²⁸

UNICEF observes that “The earnings from a deliverance ceremony, and also during a regular service when the collection plate goes around, are not insignificant. Consequently, a number of pastor-prophets, including women, have found their calling in the anti-witch hunt, as is the case with Prophet Helen Ukpabio in Nigeria. She founded the Liberty Foundation Gospel Ministries, whose primary goal has become the detection and deliverance of child witches. For these pastor-prophets, “detecting” child witches brings not only money, but also a certain social status and popularity that draws new members and “clients”, and leads to yet more income. Accusations against children therefore form part of this vicious circle of the prophets’ “business” and their status.”²⁹

²³ Gary Foxcroft interview with Elizabeth Willmott Harrop August 2012 and Stepping Stones: Supporting Victims of Witchcraft Abuse and Street Children in Nigeria <http://combattrafficking.eu/content/supporting-victims-witchcraft-abuse-and-street-children-nigeria>

²⁴ Stepping Stones Supporting Victims op cit

²⁵ See for example Report on Accusations of Witchcraft Against Children in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria - Stepping Stones Nigeria http://www.stepsstonesnigeria.org/images/pdf/ssn_report_to_commission.pdf

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Hoskins op cit

²⁸ Hoskins ibid

²⁹ UNICEF Children Accused of Witchcraft 2010 http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/wcaro_children-accused-of-witchcraft-in-Africa.pdf

The plight of street children and abandoned children

In the European witch hunts of 400 years ago, victims tended to be of lower social status and elderly women³⁰. The demographic profile of the contemporary witch-accused are also mainly older women, but include successful younger women³¹ (they must be a witch to be successful) and increasingly children³².

UNICEF states that children accused of witchcraft are often pre-adolescent or adolescent, vulnerable and living in socially precarious circumstances. They may have lost both parents, be living with a step parent, have a disability or show unusual behaviour as benign as laziness or stubbornness³³.

UNESCO reports that in Nigeria, most of the trafficked children it surveyed were products of broken homes and/or orphaned children.³⁴

According to UNICEF "Living in the street is one of the common consequences of witchcraft accusations and is also an indicator of the scale of the phenomenon"³⁵. Over 95% of the children on the streets of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria have been stigmatised as "witches" by pastors³⁶.

Living on the streets makes children vulnerable to trafficking. The denial of human rights associated with witchcraft accusations therefore extends to abuses linked to street children and trafficking such as risks of violence and sexual abuse, and a lack of access to education, food and healthcare³⁷.



Northern Angola: Boys find a home in an abandoned building after being accused of witchcraft and cast out of their families. Photo: Vanessa Vick for The New York Times

Nigeria, a trafficking hub

Africa's regional trafficking hub is Nigeria, the equivalent of a FedEx SuperHub for the distribution of the enslaved. A 2011 report by Europol identified Nigeria as one of the top four "most threatening" countries in the world in terms of criminal groups involved in trafficking, and top two in the world with China in its adept production of counterfeit or falsified documents to facilitate trafficking.

Godwin E Morka of the Nigerian National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) comments "Human trafficking has unfortunately become culturally accepted as a way of life with Nigeria as a source, transit and destination country for traffickers."³⁸ One Nigerian study revealed that 19 per cent of school children and 40 per cent of street children surveyed had been trafficked³⁹.

Meanwhile an August 2012 report by the UK Human Trafficking Centre⁴⁰ states Nigeria is the top sending country for those trafficked into the UK for purposes of sexual exploitation, comprising 83 victims in total (13 per cent), 21 of whom were children. In

³⁰ See for example Open Secrets op cit

³¹ Yaba Badoe op cit

³² UNICEF op cit

³³ UNICEF ibid

³⁴ UNESCO op cit

³⁵ UNICEF op cit

³⁶ Stepping Stones <http://www.steppingstonesnigeria.org/street-children.html>

³⁷ See for example Consortium for Street Children, State of the World's Street Children: Violence <http://www.streetchildren.org.uk/project.asp?projectID=4>

³⁸ Afruca "Breaking the Cycle of Fear" Witchcraft, Juju and Safeguarding Victims of Human Trafficking 2010 http://www.afruca.org/images/stories/reports/trafficking_report.pdf

³⁹ US Department of Labor <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/iclp/Advancing1/html/nigeria.htm> quoting U.S. Embassy-Lagos, unclassified telegram no. 000569, February 18, 2000

⁴⁰ UKHTC Baseline Assessment 2011 <http://www.soca.gov.uk/news/462-human-trafficking-assessment-published>

September 2012, two people were arrested in London over the disappearance of two Nigerian teenage girls from care in West Sussex who are believed to have been trafficked from Nigeria⁴¹.

The country is the world's tenth largest producer of oil and the top producer of oil in Africa⁴². Yet 70% of its population live below the poverty line⁴³ and Nigeria is ranked below the regional average on the human development index⁴⁴.

UNESCO notes that "Poverty is the most visible cause of the vulnerability of women and children to trafficking in Nigeria".⁴⁵ An ILO report on trafficking of children in Nigeria⁴⁶ revealed that of children who were released to traffickers by their parents, over 72% of parents did so because they could not afford school fees. Half of those children never returned home.

The link between trafficking and poverty is an important one, as many commentators have also linked poverty to an increase in accusations of witchcraft⁴⁷. Poverty, witchcraft and a burgeoning trafficking industry therefore act as compounding risk factors for the exploitation of the vulnerable.

The use of Juju oaths in Nigeria

According to Debbie Ariyo of child advocacy organisation Afruca, "Traffickers use the ritual of oath swearing as their most powerful weapon of coercion"⁴⁸. In 2008, NAPTIP advised that 90 per cent of girls that had been trafficked to Europe came from Delta and Edo States and were taken to shrines to take "oaths of secrecy"⁴⁹.

The use of Juju oaths enslaves the victim to the spirit world and the trafficker. Desmond comments: "The human traffickers of Edo and Delta States of Nigeria have hijacked the cultural beliefs in Juju to blackmail their victims to satisfy the greed for money for those involved, including traditional priests paid to carry out the ceremonies. The strong belief in the spirits makes this a powerful weapon for modern day slave traders."⁵⁰

Victims willingly undergo the ritual believing the oath will facilitate the spirits' protection on their journey.⁵¹ Europol notes therefore that "Nigerian victims often do not perceive themselves as such, but rather as immigrants who must repay a debt to their



VISUALISATION OF INJURIES FROM HOSPITAL FORM 5363B, MUVS

LEFT UPPER ARM - Scar: about 0.6cm x 0.1cm.
LEFT UPPER BACK - One horizontal scar, one oblique scar, multiple vertical scars measuring 0.4cm x 0.1cm.
RIGHT UPPER BACK - Multiple vertical scars measuring 0.4cm x 0.1cm.
LOWER BACK - Scar: 0.5cm x 0.2cm.

Evidential graphic depicting razor cut scarring on the shoulder blades of a trafficking victim, used in a case prosecuted by Andrew Desmond

⁴¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-19466955>

⁴² CIA <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

⁴³ ibid

⁴⁴ UNDP HDI <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NGA.html>

⁴⁵ UNESCO op cit

⁴⁶ Baseline Study : Forced Labour and Human Trafficking in Kwara, Kano, Cross River and Lagos States in Nigeria 2006 <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/afpro/abuja/download/pubbaseline.pdf>

⁴⁷ Including several presenters at the conference Capturing Witches: Histories, Stories, Images. 400 years after the Lancashire Witches, UK August 2012 http://www.transculturalwriting.com/?page_id=1535

⁴⁸ Afruca "Breaking the Cycle of Fear" op cit

⁴⁹ NAPTIP quoted in lastradainternational.org/lsidocs/Nigeria.pdf

⁵⁰ Desmond op cit

⁵¹ For a vivid depiction of a victim's motivation for undergoing a juju oath see Jenny Kleeman's documentary "Nigeria: sex, lies and black magic" for Unreported World on Channel 4 <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/unreported-world/episode-guide/series-2011/episode-3>

facilitators⁵². The female victim⁵³ and her traffickers agree that she incurs a debt in the order of US\$ 40,000-100,000⁵⁴, with the woman unlikely to be aware of the magnitude of the debt due to not understanding currency conversions for example⁵⁵.

Desmond explains the significance of the Juju ritual: "One 14 year old Nigerian victim I interviewed had taken up the offer of a family friend to become a house maid in the UK in order to escape sexual and physical abuse at the hands of an aunt and uncle, her parents having died. Before leaving she was taken to a Juju priest to undergo a ritual which included being systematically cut with a razor blade over certain parts of her body and soot containing a spirit rubbed into her wounds to allow the spirit to enter her body, and eating the raw heart of a sacrificial chicken.

"She was told by the priest that if she disobeyed her trafficker, she would incur the wrath of the spirit world through nightmares, madness and death. Once in the UK, it became clear she was to be a sex slave or her trafficker would use Juju to kill her."⁵⁶

Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) incurred by a trafficking victim will often confirm that the spirit world is inflicting retribution on them. A 2011 report by the National Board of Social Services in Denmark⁵⁷ says that Nigerian trafficking victims "often have a very high frequency of PTSD symptoms ... The related mental and psychosomatic symptoms such as panic disorder, social anxiety, stomach problems, headaches, sleep problems and breathing difficulty (are) interpreted as a result of Juju (and) amplify the belief that supernatural forces have a tangible impact on victims' lives."⁵⁸

Because of the deeply held spiritual beliefs which facilitate the Juju oath, there are huge problems for law enforcement officials to get victims to testify against their traffickers. Desmond continues "Witnesses are unable to give testimony due to the fear that they will have broken an oath and invited misfortune upon themselves. As an investigator, you therefore have to understand witchcraft and the mind-set of the victim in order to gain their trust and hope to gather enough evidence."

This is compounded by the difficulty of Nigerian law enforcement in securing prosecutions, making the intervention of law enforcement officers in receiving countries all the more important.

An ILO review notes that "The challenge faced by NAPTIP includes the fact that most of the victims when returned to the country hide the fact that they were trafficked and also refuse to give out the names of their traffickers. Because of this, gathering evidence from victims and getting victims to testify in the law courts has been a big problem. Funding is another major challenge for the agency especially when traffickers and victims are still outside the country as it is often too costly to send investigators to those countries and to get evidence from victims."⁵⁹

UNESCO further notes that "a combination of corrupt officials, complicit authorities, and weak laws combine to guarantee impunity for traffickers while increasing the plight of trafficked persons"⁶⁰

Child Sacrifice & the use of body parts

Some African regions hold widespread beliefs that human body parts, particularly those of children and of Albinos (the latter for example in Tanzania and Burundi), contain magical powers which can be used to enhance witchcraft rituals⁶¹.

⁵² Europol op cit

⁵³ Although men are also victimized, the overwhelming majority of those trafficked are women and children see for example UN "Violence against women: Good practices in combating and eliminating violence against women" <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-gp-2005/index.html>

⁵⁴ IOM op cit

⁵⁵ Andrew Desmond, speaking at Capturing Witches: Histories, Stories, Images. 400 years after the Lancashire Witches, UK August 2012

⁵⁶ Desmond op cit

⁵⁷ MENNESKEHANDEL OG JUJU, RELIGIØS PRESSION OG KULTURMØDE I RELATION TIL NIGERIANESKE OFRE FOR MENNESKEHANDEL <http://shop.servicestyrelsen.dk/collections/udsatte/products/menneskehandel-og-juju-religios-pression-og-kulturmøde-i-relation-til-nigerianske-ofre-for-menneskehandel>

⁵⁸ Translated from Danish by Elizabeth Willmott Harrop

⁵⁹ ILO Review of legislation and policies in Nigeria on Human Trafficking and Forced Labour http://www.ilo.org/sapfl/Informationresources/ILOPublications/WCMS_083149/lang--en/index.htm

⁶⁰ UNESCO op cit

⁶¹ See for example Child Sacrifice in Uganda by Jubilee Campaign <http://www.jubileecampaign.co.uk/child-sacrifice-report>; Al Jazeera Spell of the Albino <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/africainvestigates/2011/11/201111185428766652.html> and BBC Albino Witchcraft Murders <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01kjsnh>

However such witchcraft rituals are not always steeped in ancient traditions. The Jubilee Campaign's report on child sacrifice in Uganda notes that while animal sacrifice is well established, the practise of child sacrifice is a relatively recent phenomenon and is a purely criminal activity "undertaken by those posing as traditional healers with the intent of exploiting people's religious beliefs in order to profit financially"⁶².

The Jubilee Campaign defines child sacrifice as "the act of murdering a child by a witch-doctor or their accomplices in order to use the child's blood, organs and/or limbs mixed with herbs and other elements in a ritual witchcraft ceremony"⁶³.

In 2008, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child made public its concern over the sale of children for sacrifices and the ritual killings in Uganda⁶⁴. And the Jubilee Campaign reports that child sacrifice is "growing exponentially" in the country, with unofficial figures of 3,000 disappearances a year vastly outstripping official government figures of 72 ritual murders in the 5 years to 2010⁶⁵.

Just like the belief in child witches, child sacrifice operates at all levels of society. The African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) has even linked increases in ritual killings to Ugandan elections and "the temptation to some politicians is to seek services of traditional healers"⁶⁶.

Meanwhile in July 2012, Kampala-based businessman Godfrey Kato Kajubi was sentenced to life imprisonment for ordering the ritual murder of a 12 year old boy, who was killed by a witchdoctor for a payment of 15 million Ugandan shillings (USD 6,000)⁶⁷. The boy's head, neck and genitalia were severed and given to Kato Kajubi, while his torso was dumped in a river.

Witchcraft in the UK

The case has echoes of boy "Adam", believed to be a five year old trafficked from Nigeria called Ikpomwosa, whose torso was found in the Thames in London in 2001. His killers have never been found but it is believed his murderer was a trafficker of children and drugs from Nigeria who had ritually sacrificed Ikpomwosa to protect his or her business interests⁶⁸.

As discussed, ritual killing and other human rights abuses in the name of witchcraft are not confined to Africa. In August 2012, the UK government released a National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief⁶⁹ which aims to prevent abuses including "ritual or muti murders where the killing of children is believed to bring supernatural benefits or the use of their body parts is believed to produce potent magical remedies; and use of belief in magic or witchcraft to create fear in children to make them more compliant when they are being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation."

The UK-based child rights advocacy organisation Afruca was established in May 2001 in the aftermath of the witchcraft based deaths in the UK of African children such as 8 year old Victoria Klimbe and 15 year old Kristy Bamu. An average of eight children a



In 2009 Mariamu Staford was asleep in her hut in Tanzania when a group of men broke in and chopped off her arms. Albino body parts are sold on the black market for use in witchdoctor potions. Photo ABC News.

⁶² Jubilee Campaign Ibid

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/crcs49.htm> document CRC/C/OPSC/UGA/CO/1

⁶⁵ Jubilee Campaign op cit

⁶⁶ Child Sacrifice epidemic during festival and election period <http://www.anppcanug.org/2011/03/child-sacrifice-epidemic-during-festival-and-election-period/>

⁶⁷ <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/633426-city-tycoon-kato-kajubi-gets-life-sen> and http://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20102&Itemid=114

⁶⁸ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1375024/Voodoo-human-sacrifice-The-haunting-story-Adam-Torso-Thames-boy-finally-identified.html> and The Boy In The River, by Dr Richard Hoskins, published by Pan 2012

⁶⁹ <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00094-2012>

year are victims of abuse based on witchcraft-style exorcisms in Greater London alone, but this only reflects police cases so the figures are actually much higher⁷⁰.

Justin Bahunga of Afruca is currently lobbying for new legislation in the UK to make it illegal to brand a child a witch because it is a serious form of emotional abuse and sanctions further physical and psychological harm. Bahunga comments "With the present system there is no accountability for the Pastor who labels a child a witch, who is then subject to horrific abuse in the name of exorcism rituals as a result of that accusation."⁷¹

Dr Richard Hoskins is a leading expert in child abuse masquerading under the guise of belief systems in the UK and in the past decade has worked on high-profile cases such as that of Adam, but also many others which do not make the headlines.

Hoskins comments: "What worries me is the extent of unreported cases in the UK. I get to see perhaps ten times the number that reach the media, but there are plenty of anecdotal reports from communities that even these are just the tip of the iceberg and the true figure could be another ten times higher again."⁷²

Trafficking of "miracle babies"

Religious figures in Africa and elsewhere have also been implicated in the production of so called "miracle babies" who are procured for infertile couples or for use in ritual killings⁷³.

Precious Donatus Ogbonna, a Pastor, claims to have given birth to nine miracle babies in 18 months. However DNA test unsurprisingly revealed that the babies were not hers, and she was arrested facing child trafficking charges⁷⁴.

A UK-based pastor Gilbert Deya faced extradition to Kenya for kidnapping new born babies for infertile couples in the UK, claiming they were miracle babies belonging to the childless couples. Women travelled from the UK to Nairobi to "give birth", meanwhile the biological mothers were told by the hospital their baby had died at birth and a body never produced, or the corpse of another newborn shown to the biological parents⁷⁵.

In 2008, NAPTIP found a dozen so called baby factories in Nigeria "masquerading as maternity clinics, foster homes, orphanages or shelters for homeless pregnant girls" where babies were being bred for cash⁷⁶.

Young girls in poverty or facing single motherhood are persuaded to hand over their newborns. One 18 year old recounted how she arrived at one such clinic five months pregnant, where she was given an injection to make her unconscious, and woke up to realise she had been raped. She was kept enslaved and was raped again the following day, prior to a police raid on the clinic. Other young girls lease out their wombs, with some staying at clinics for up to three years⁷⁷. Baby factories operate throughout the world and are not unknown in Europe, where poor Romanian mothers produced newborns for sale⁷⁸.

Charred baby-bones were discovered in a Lagos orphanage in 2005, leading to suspicions the orphanage was involved in the sale of human body parts, possibly for use in rituals or for organ harvesting. And babies are alleged to be bred in Nigeria for child labour



"The torso in the Thames", five year old "Adam" trafficked from Nigeria so that he could be ritually killed in the UK. Photo Daily Mail.

⁷⁰ www.guardian.co.uk/law/2012/aug/26/people-smugglers-organ-donors

⁷¹ Justin Bahunga interview with Elizabeth Willmott Harrop August 2012

⁷² Dr Richard Hoskins correspondence with Elizabeth Willmott Harrop September 2012

⁷³ For reference to ritual killings <http://www.waohnaija.com/news-features/a-visit-to-a-baby-making-factory-in-delta-state-nigeria/>

⁷⁴ See <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/12/miracle-birth-woman-three-babies-still-missing/> and <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/12/miracle-birth-woman-mummy-p-set-for-baby-no-10/>

⁷⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14992891> and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3672838.stm>

⁷⁶ <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/07/how-child-trafficking-network-operates-in-south-east/>

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-424450/The-shocking-truth-baby-factories.html> and <http://libertyandhumanity.com/human-writes-articles/child-trafficking-and-intercountry-adoption-in-romania-s-post-communist-years>

and sexual abuse or prostitution⁷⁹. Again this is not unique to Africa with the BBC for example having reported pimps handing babies to clients in cars in the Czech Republic⁸⁰.

Fighting for victims

The common factor linking witchcraft and human trafficking for exploitation is not spirituality but poverty and the greed of those who feed off it.

The persecution of those lobbying against those profiteering from spiritual beliefs is testament to just how much is at stake. Stepping Stones Nigeria has heavily criticised “the numerous so-called pastors in the region who are wrongly branding children as ‘witches’ mainly for economic self-gain and personal recognition”⁸¹. As such it has been victim to “a tireless campaign, including death threats, court cases and intimidation lasting many years”, according to Stepping Stones Co-Founder Gary Foxcroft⁸².



Babies rescued during a raid on a baby factory in Nigeria. Courtesy of Vanguardngr.com

However, for those working to fight such abuses, there is also much at stake: the lives of the millions of Africans who are sold into slavery and abuse. Foxcroft continues, “We will never give up fighting for the lives of those children”.

Structural factors have created a jigsaw of inequality in which the vulnerable have to fight against multiple risk factors in order to maintain the most basic levels of human dignity.

A lack of social protection to help families in poverty, a lack of access to education for vulnerable children, the need for education around the human rights implications of enacting spiritual beliefs around witchcraft, corruption, the malign influence of senior religious and political figures, poor law enforcement capacity and understanding of trafficking victims, and deep rooted gender inequalities are all at play, among other factors.

It is easy for those in the West to lambast Africans for continuing to live according to deep rooted traditional beliefs which they consider inappropriate in light of our science-based world. However some of these traditions have undergone a modern evolution designed to bring money to the continent via criminal enterprises, in a gruesome rebalancing of financial equality between the more developed and less developed countries.

This is a universal problem, and not one confined to Africa. As Hoskins notes “We cannot comfort ourselves with the thought that the heart of darkness lies beyond our horizon. It lies squarely within the world we inhabit, and within us.”⁸³

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⁷⁹ <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-11-09-babies-bred-for-sale-in-nigeria>

⁸⁰ http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/reports/archive/international/czech_paedophilia.shtml

⁸¹ <http://www.steppingstonesnigeria.org/witchcraft.html>

⁸² Gary Foxcroft Interview with Elizabeth Willmott Harrop August 2012

⁸³ Hoskins Boy in the River op cit