

The Social Economy of Child Witch Labeling in Nigeria: The Case of Akwa Ibom State

Uwem Essia

Department of Economics University of Calabar Calabar, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper set out to analyze the social economy of child witch labeling in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Such an exercise is needful because Akwa Ibom State has, in recent times, made news, locally and internationally, over the rising spate of child witch labeling and its popularization by pastor-prophets of deliverance ministries. Child witch labeling incapacitates the accused children, and generates waves of suspicion and counter-accusations that depletes the social capital required for self sustaining development. The paper agrees with earlier researches that the religious discourse of the new Pentecostal movement, which generally attributes failure and misfortunes to Satan (witches), has heightened belief in the existence and potency of child witches, but goes further to analyze the social diseconomies of child witch labeling; it victimizes the accused children and renders many of them permanently incapacitated, the pastor-prophet and others who legitimize child witch accusation are often victimized through counter-witchcraft labeling, and society suffers when more people abandon hard work to fight witches. Based on findings gathered from focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in Eket, Ikot Ekpene, and Uyo Local Government Areas (representing the 3 senatorial zones of the State), the paper submits that since the religious discourse of the pastor-prophet and deliverance ministries have enormous impact on how Akwa Ibom people think, enlisting their support through regular educational and reorientation programmes is key to dealing effectively with child witch labeling.

Keywords: Social Economy, Witchcraft, Protestant Ethic, Child Witch, Pastor-Prophet, Deliverance Ministries, Pentecostal Churches, Misfortunes,

JEL Classification: A14, D63, K42

Introduction

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, witchcraft is defined as "the exercise or invocation of supernatural powers to control people or events typically involving sorcery or magic". It is often associated with human beings who meet secretly in the night, indulge in cannibalism, wickedness, and organize rites and rituals with the devil and perform black magic. Witchcraft is a global phenomenon that has existed for centuries in nearly all cultures or societies of the world. As a traditional religion of ancient European, witchcraft was historically considered as anti-Christian and heretic. Killing of witches was authorized by Pope Gregory IX since 1200 and Inquisition followed thereafter on orders of the Church. Witchcraft history also echoes the terrible campaign against witchcraft in Salem in 1692 in which 150 people were tried as suspects of practicing witchcraft. People suspected as witches were usually burned at stakes, and those pleading their innocence were either stoned to death or even sometimes thrown in water to prove their innocence. Witches usually face severe and painful deaths or punishments (Witchcraft, 2012; Wikipedia 2012: 2).

In Nigeria, the witchcraft discourse has become a major issue for the mass media in recent times; receiving front

page coverage in weekly magazines, and radio and television programmes broadcast confessions and personal experiences of 'repented witches'. Increasingly, churches, schools, and hospitals have to deal with witches or the scare of it. In Akwa Ibom State and other States in Southern Nigeria, it is hard to hear that someone dies a natural death. If an individual who cannot swim gets drowned, he/she is believed to have been killed by a witch or wizard, or something or somebody is behind the person's death. Every disease has a bewitched origin before manifestation as a medical condition. This has reified and venerated witches, giving it an over bloated socioeconomic relevance. Scientifically there is no basis for existence of witches, but witchcraft now exists as a social and cultural reality, and gives life to child witch stigmatization (UNICEF, 2010; Sunday Tribune, 2011).

Witchcraft accusations have contributed to new social and family conflicts. This materialistic evolution of witchcraft in modern times is reinforced by the evangelical, Pentecostal, and revivalist churches who have generally depicted godliness and success in terms of overcoming the 'devil'. The general conception is that witches belong to groups that celebrate nocturnal feasts with the 'devil' during which members must periodically offer human sacrifices. The contemporary witch can operate over longer distances, thanks to travelling by the invisible "aeroplane". Attacks can now come from a neighbour, friend or colleague, and the witch substance can now be bought or transferred to anyone (UNICEF, 2010). Witchcraft today is commoditized; a product on the market, whose power is increased through human sacrifices, and reduced through 'deliverance'. The modern witch is in microeconomic terms, a rational economic agent motivated by non-satiation and greed.

This paper argues that child witch labeling impacts adversely on the social economy of Nigeria generally, and Akwa Ibom State particularly, in a number of ways. Firstly, children accused of witchcraft are often victimized, and in extreme cases killed. Secondly, where the victims survive, they are stigmatized for life, and remain so regardless of whether they were indeed 'witches' or not; and carry the label even after being 'delivered', 'saved' or 'healed'. Thirdly, children predisposed to witchcraft accusation are generally poor, incapacitated, sick, or orphaned; accusation therefore leads to double victimization. Fourthly, the capacity to identify and exorcise the witch substance from the victims is a source of competitive advantage to pastor-prophets of deliverance ministries, but the returns on the child witch enterprise respects the law of variable proportions - it rises initially to a peak and thereafter declines - because the witchcraft practitioner would sooner

or later be labeled a 'witch', when scandals and counter accusations emerge. These socioeconomic factors suggest that the net gain from child witch labeling is negative for the victim, the accusers, and the society; the accused is stigmatized, the accusers are eventually suspected and overtime labeled and stigmatized, and society loses when more people focus on fighting witches.

Akwa Ibom State is selected because child witch labeling has become a topical issue of discourse among the people in recent times. At the turn of the millennium, there were few cases of children stigmatized by witchcraft. But since then the numbers have grown at an alarming rate and reached an estimated 15,000 in 2008. Akwa Ibom State also belongs to the oil-rich Niger Delta area where wealth is believed to rest in few hand, while majority live and die poor. Moreover many revivalist and charismatic churches in Nigeria, who blame 'other' and 'witches' for failure and misfortunes, have Akwa Ibom people both as pastor-prophets and leading members (UNICEF, 2008; SSN, 2009). The State Government domesticated the Child Right Law in 2008, but so far no pastor has been prosecuted and no church has been demolished. These churches have structured the mindset of people to blame witches for their poverty and failures. It is also believed among Akwa Ibom people that the older witches recruit children as agents.

The paper submits that the underlying philosophy behind the religious discourse of the new Pentecostal movement, or deliverance ministries is markedly different from that of the conventional Pentecostal churches that Max Weber referred to in his Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism (1905). The Pentecostal churches (particularly the Calvinist) while encouraging piety, frugality, and discipline, promoted hard work and prudence (requirements for wealth accumulation) as the major qualification for election (or spiritual success). This eased transcendence from the material to the spiritual, and encouraged the balanced development of both aspects of human life (Wikipedia, 2012:1). The new Pentecostal movement however popularizes the thinking that material fortune is universally available, but access to it is inhibited by the Devil (witches), and all it takes to appropriate success is to get witches out of the way. The paper submits further that this has tended to reduce emphasis on hard work and prudence that, in Weber's view, supported the blossoming of capitalism in America, and skewed the people's mindset towards 'miracles', and the veneration of witchcraft. Reviewing the socioeconomic causes and consequences of child witch labeling, with a view to showing that it is a net loss to the society and economy of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria is the focus of this paper.

Accordingly, this paper was guided by the following research questions:

- How strong is the belief in child witches and witchcraft among Akwa Ibom people?
- Do psychological and physical violence against children accused of witchcraft affect their development and productivity adversely?
- Does child witch labeling and discrimination of affected children render many of them socioeconomically incapacitated permanently?

- Are children from poor homes and orphans most vulnerable to witchcraft accusation and stigmatization?
- Are child witch accusation and witchcraft exorcism common practices in revivalist and charismatic churches?
- Are pastor-prophets who engage in witchcraft accusation and deliverance predisposed to counter witchcraft accusation and labeling?
- Do you believe that some labeled child witches were falsely accused of witchcraft?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1. The Belief in Witchcraft among Akwa Ibom People

A recent work by Ajala and Ediomu-Ubong (2010) on witchcraft, social relations, and health security in Ibibio, Akwa Ibom State shows that Akwa Ibom people strongly believe in the existence and potency of witches. The three major ethnic groups in Akwa Ibom State - Ibibio, Annang, and Oron - share common language (with minor differences) and culture, and Ibibio people are in majority. A study on witchcraft among Ibibio people is in this context representative of Akwa Ibom people.

The study reveals that Ibibio people believe generally that witchcraft can affect the well-being, success, behavior, health, and overall success/failure of people. The Ibibio's strong belief in witchcraft is a serious factor in explaining why 1) many people ignore modern healthcare facilities; 2) the traditional kinship support system is failing; and 3) morbidity and mortality especially due to HIV/AIDS is on the increase. The paper concludes, therefore, that strong belief in witchcraft adversely affects the health seeking behavior of Ibibio people. It is noteworthy that Ajala and Ediomu-Ubong (2010) identified parallels between witchcraft in Ibibio (as reported by Offiong (1983)), and Azande (as reported in Evans-Pritchard (1937)). Both the Azande and the Ibibio believe that witches perform no rites, cast no spells, and possess no medicines; the two societies view witchcraft as purely a psychic act. The Ibibio see witches as being both men and women, and recently, both old and young can be witches. Like the Azande, the Ibibio believe that every witch has a physical substance that allows it to engage in harming other people. The Azande conceive of the witchcraft substance as a "round, hairy ball with teeth" which is passed on from parent to child, with all the sons of a male witch and all the daughters of a female witch being potential witches. Since witchcraft substance is organic, the Azande believe its existence can be determined through a postmortem examination. In contrast, the recent Ibibio belief is that witches possess a witchcraft substance, which contains their mysterious powers that cannot be inherited. Every witch must obtain this substance from an established witch by receiving it through physical cutting, eating it in a dream, or physically swallowing the substance in other ways.

The present-day Ibibio also believe in the physicality of the substance in the stomach, which only a few renowned traditional doctors or spiritualists are able to extract by using supernatural powers in the process of catching the witches and purging the witchcraft from them. Occasionally, at the death of a known witch, the siblings may ask a

traditional doctor or spiritualist to remove the substance by cutting the stomach open. Not everybody can see this, since certain supernatural powers have to be used on the substance to make it visible to the uninitiated. Witches, with the help of the witchcraft substance, can turn themselves into animals such as dogs, cats (particularly black ones), and owls, and give off a glowing light just as fireflies do. Witches leave their physical bodies during sleep.

They can even change into rats and eat up crops, books, electric wires, and certificates, and spread diseases among people. They can suck the blood of their victims, thereby making the person look dehydrated or suffer from anemia. The Ibibio believe that witches meet in companies at night while their mortal or physical bodies remain in bed. They travel to the assembly by airplanes, canoes, or bicycles, which are said to consist of such organic substances as groundnut and banana pills. They can turn into owls and fly to the assembly, or into cats, frogs, and dogs and turn back into human beings at the assembly. Offiong (1983: 81) reported that in 1978, Edem Edet Akpan (alias Akpan Ekwong), who claimed to be a witch-hunter and eradicator, visited almost all the villages and towns in Ibibio land, using his claim of supernatural power to force many people to confess and denounce their witchcraft. His approach however raised fundamental concerns about human rights and psychological influence. But ironically, he was eventually labeled a witch and put out of business after some months.

The study by Ajala and Ediom-Ubong (2010) was based on an ethnography conducted among the Ibibio of Uyo, Itu, and Ibesikpo-Asutan Local Government Areas (LGAs) in 2008. The study adopted multistage random sampling to select the study site, the research communities, enumeration areas, and respondents. Being a qualitative ethnography, the focus was both on the individual and community forming the unit of analysis. Data for the study were obtained from interviews, key-informant interview, focus group discussion (FGD), and case study analysis.

In essence, witchcraft is a socioeconomic reality among Akwa Ibom people, whether it exists scientifically or not. The people see the world as involving a combat between the forces of evil and forces of good. The personalization of the forces of evil (demon) in the figure of the witch has heightened the fear of witchcraft and readiness to overcome it by any means. Every misfortune is seen as an attack from the devil, and a signal to intensify the search for suitable means of warding off witches. For many Akwa Ibom people, this search has seen them move from one church or deliverance ministry to another.

2.2. Victimization of Accused Children

Whether it is psychological (humiliation, contempt, disdain, insolence, etc.) or physical, violence against children violates children's fundamental rights as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19 paragraph 1:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal

guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

The process of victimization that culminates in an accusation of witchcraft and acts of extreme violence begins with the children's vulnerable situation (orphan, disabled, ill, etc.), which make them the quintessential scapegoats (UNICEF, 2009). A single, serious misfortune - death - or a series of misfortunes trigger suspicions and accusations that lead almost systematically to violence that in turn can lead to infanticide or rejection of the child. The child is initially a victim of his situation, thereafter a victim of witchcraft accusation (UNICEF, 2010).

While the child is considered a "victim" of witchcraft accusation from the perspective of the extant human and child rights laws, the local people have designated the child as guilty. According to local beliefs, the real victim is the person who suffered the consequences of an act of witchcraft. As soon as the child has been accused of witchcraft, he/she is no longer a child, but a witch. The act of violence against witches represents a kind of reassertion of norms of the social order; 'to destroy the witch and make the others afraid'. Indeed once a child is blamed for being a witch, the act is interpreted as socially acceptable not only by the family and neighbourhood, but also to most Police operatives who broadly believe also in the destructive powers of witches. As Bouju and de Bruijn (2007) (in UNICEF, 2010) rightly observe, anti-witch violence in its widest sense is characteristic of a situation where the rule of law and the international system of norms have lost all or part of its legitimacy and effectiveness. Anti-witch violence, despite being unlawful, finds legitimacy in the general fight against witchcraft that is exploited in churches and in law.

Abandonment is another form of victimization associated with witchcraft accusations, which infringes the principles relating to children as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United Nations proclaimed that:

childhood is entitled to special care and assistance, convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community, recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

Abandonment also violates Article 18 paragraph 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that:

States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

Abandonment can be a consequence of witchcraft accusations, but can also be the cause. Children accused of witchcraft are abandoned by their families or forced to flee, following violence and abuse in the family home. Equally children who are forced into the streets by deprivation or poverty are highly vulnerable to accusation. Children accused of witchcraft typically have had little or no schooling, if for no other reason than parents unable to pay school fees. The children therefore stay at home, or go out and beg or look for work. These children are poorly orientated for contributing effectively to development of the society. For all of them, their situation does not improve over time. Those that may have attended school initially drop out due to lack of parental care (UNICEF, 2010).

2.3. Child Witchcraft Stigmatization as Permanent Disability

In addition to being victimized, stigmatization and discrimination of children accused of witchcraft disenable them in much the same way, or perhaps worse than losing an arm, leg, eye, and so on. A child who has been accused of witchcraft will be stigmatized and discriminated for life. Even after he/she has undergone various treatments or is 'delivered' of the witch spirit, his witchcraft past will continue to haunt him. The child is stigmatized within his family, neighborhood, community, school, and eventually at the workplace if he/she is lucky to have a job. The possibility that he will be accused repeatedly remains. This dampens the potentials of accused children, and may limit their participation in and contribution to socioeconomic development. In addition, the family, community, and state that tries to exclude a child accused of witchcraft violates Article 2, Paragraph 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which clearly states that:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

Equally, stigmatization and discrimination lead to traumas, psychological and emotional suffering, and renders the victims mentally ill equipped and prone to character neurosis, thereby making attempts to reintegrate the children into family and social life difficult (UNICEF, 2010). UNICEF (2010) observes further that accused children face more unjust treatment in countries where witchcraft is outlawed. Legal injunction against the practice of witchcraft exists in the former-French colonies of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mali and Mauritania. The Witchcraft Suppression Act is the corresponding text in former-British colonies, such as Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. In French-speaking countries, the law only punishes those who practice witchcraft, whereas the Witchcraft Suppression Act punishes those who make false accusations of witchcraft

against someone, as well as all persons who claim to be a witch. However, children are often accused on the basis of the judge's personal conviction and testimony - sometimes from traditional healers - circumstantial evidence and confessions. Confession is still considered to be the most significant evidence in cases of witchcraft. Even in those climes, cases of children accused in court are still quite rare. This may be explained by mistrust of the judicial system and/or general preference for other kinds of punishments or treatments. Nevertheless, cases of witchcraft account for approximately 25 percent of all cases brought to court in Bangui, and 80-90 percent of cases in rural courts in Gambia. In Nigeria, the Child Rights Act (2003) protects children against all forms of physical, mental, and emotional torture and abuse. Prior to its passage, child protection in Nigeria was defined by the Children and Young People's Act (CYPA), a law relating primarily to juvenile justice. Originally passed by the British colonial government in 1943, the CYPA was later revised and incorporated into Nigeria's federal laws in 1958 (formerly Chapter 32 of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria and Lagos). However, its legal provisions fell short of the rights afforded by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), and United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice. Nigeria ratified the ACRWC and the CRC in March 1991. Nigeria also ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, in 1983, as well as domesticating the charter in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Ratification and Enforcement Act, Chapter 10 of Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990. In 1988, the Nigerian Chapter of the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect organized three conferences with the Ministries of Justice, Health and Social Welfare in conjunction with UNICEF to produce new draft laws on Protecting Children in Nigeria. This draft stimulated the government to develop the current Child Rights Act 2003 (RCW, 2005). The Nigerian Child Right Law was domesticated in Akwa Ibom State in 2008. The law protects the Akwa Ibom child from birth to adolescence, up to age 16 years. The law prescribes up to 15 years imprisonment without an option of a fine or both for child stigmatization, and accusation of witchcraft or torture. The State Government is empowered to seal off premises of any organization used to perpetrate child abuse. The expectation of Akwa Ibom Child Right Act is that all stakeholders will strive to create awareness and develop community interest, mobilize and seek support to develop and implement effective pro-child policies and programmes, bring the law to bear on all cultural practices, and enthrone the principle of tolerance (AKSG, 2008).

Arising from domestication of the Child Rights Act in Akwa Ibom State, acts of extreme violence against children is attracting more media attention, yet due to lack of knowledge of how to deal with the situation effectively, governments and concerned NGOs seem to be lacking a workable strategy for dealing with the situation. One reason is that there is wide gap between local beliefs and practices,

and understanding of human rights. Another reason is inadequate assessment of the net socioeconomic effects of child witch accusation on the accusers (particularly the pastor-prophets and deliverance ministries), and the society. However, the effort of Stepping Stones Nigeria (SSN) and Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN), working in partnership, brought the severity of the child-witch phenomenon to international focus, and was a major push for domestication of the Child Right Law. Their work received support from the government of Akwa Ibom State, Eket Local Government Council, and aid from the United Kingdom. They set up a centre for abandoned children in Eket. In November 2006, SSN and CRARN, in partnership with the government of Akwa Ibom State, launched the Prevent Abandonment of Children Today (PACT) campaign to stem the tide of child witch accusation and stigmatization. Their work equally raised awareness of the harmful influence of certain churches, and they lobbied to regulate the activities of certain pastors. But the level of public buy-in was generally low because the scare of witchcraft is entrenched, and many are unable to assess objectively the socioeconomic's of child witch accusation. This explains the dearth of coordinated anti witchcraft accusation and stigmatization initiatives, and why public support for child-witch accusation reduction programmes is low.

2.4. Child Witchcraft Accusation and Poverty

There are two sides to the link between child witch accusation and poverty. On the one hand, children from poor homes are most vulnerable to witchcraft accusation, and on the other, child witch accusation and discrimination exacerbate poverty by distancing the children from avenues that should offer them help. In the first part, the general dysfunction of the family and "African" solidarity, and questioning of authority based on age associated with growing individualism, have turned the tide against disadvantaged children, particularly orphans and offspring from separated homes who are already facing poor conditions. Whether the orphan has lost one or both parents, the child most often finds himself in a reconstituted family; with a relative who already has children. In this "host" family, the child may have a feeling of awkwardness, or is treated differently from the couple's other children. In cases where the child has lost only one parent, the surviving parent usually begins a new family, with new children. Unlike their half-siblings, the orphans are often unable to attend school, and suffer mistreatment on a daily basis, including neglect in the provision of health care, and physical and psychological violence. When some misfortune befalls the family, the orphan is a favourite target for witchcraft accusations. In some cases, the child is accused of killing his parents (UNICEF, 2010). It is rare to see children living with both parents labeled as witches. Even when there is suspicion, the parents go about the treatment (or deliverance) secretly.

In the second part, child witch accusation exposes the victims to further abandonment, neglect, de-parenting, and in extreme cases infanticide. The scare of child witchcraft has contributed significantly to further breakdown in communal solidarity and the extended family system. Traditionally among Akwa Ibom people, children belonged

to the extended family and communities; not necessary the immediate parents. The extended family system sustained the mechanism where those who are well off support weaker uncles, aunties, cousins, nephews, and so on. The concepts of 'father', 'mother', 'brother', and 'sister' applied to people belonging to the same community or ethnic group, beyond the normal meanings in the English language. This was particularly so when people find themselves outside their immediate communities. Among Akwa Ibom people, the extended family also covered in-laws (Ukod) and covenanted friends and allies (Imman). The extended family system was sustained by mutual trust, reciprocity, and collective love for home; value and norms that witchcraft accusation has put under severe attack! People are now scared of allowing relatives into their homes and business premises, and without modern social security products to replace the dying extended family system, the poor and vulnerable individuals and families have sunk deeper into misery and squalor. Estimates of the number of children accused of witchcraft in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria are difficult to obtain, but the growing number of street children suggests increase in child witch labeling (Mailonline, 2011). Studies carried out by UNICEF in selected Africa countries including Nigeria as well as anthropological studies (see UNICEF, 2010) indicate that children accused of witchcraft are often pre-adolescent or adolescent, vulnerable, and living in socially precarious circumstances. The accused children thereby enter adolescence with the label of child witch. It is during adolescence that youth become significant social actors; that they begin to take their place in public space, and their influence in the public sphere becomes more apparent. Other studies and surveys have identified the profiles of children who are at particular risk of accusation of witchcraft, as:

- Children having lost both parents, sent to live with another relative. Sometimes the child is sent to a host family according to rules of kinship (matrilineal or patrilineal).
- Children having lost one parent, the other having remarried. Disagreements with the step-father or -mother may be the origin of an accusation.
- Children living with a physical disability (any physical abnormality: large head, swollen belly, red eyes, etc.), those with physical illness (epilepsy, tuberculosis, etc.) or psychological disorder (autism or Down syndrome, etc., even those who stutter), or especially gifted children.
- Children showing any unusual behaviour, for example children who are stubborn, aggressive, thoughtful, withdrawn or lazy. In short, all kinds of behaviour that, in a specific context defined by witchcraft discourse, appears as unusual or abnormal.
- De-parented children - children rejected by the parents.

A number of studies also indicate that witchcraft accusations target boys above all, but no accurate statistical analysis have been carried out to confirm the tendency to accuse boys more than girls. However, living in the street is one of the common consequences of witchcraft accusations, and boys do have greater visibility. Yet, the figures put forward

for girls may obscure other phenomena, such as prostitution, which is affecting increasingly younger girls.

2.5. Child Witch Accusation and the New Protestant Ethic

Beliefs in witchcraft, and resulting witch-hunts, were historically notably in Early Modern Europe of the 14th to 18th century, where witchcraft came to be seen as a vast diabolical conspiracy against Christianity, Bible verses such as Deuteronomy 18:11-12 and Exodus 22: 18 (Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live) in the Old Testament, and Galatians 5:20, Revelations 21:8; 22:15, and Acts 8:9; 13:6 in the New Testament, have provided scriptural justification for Christian witch hunters historically and in modern times. However, the new Pentecostal movement (revivalist and charismatic churches) otherwise called 'deliverance ministries' are different from the old Pentecostal churches that Max Weber alluded to in his **Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism(1905)**. Max Weber argues that capitalism in Northern Europe evolved when the discourse of Protestant churches (particularly Calvinist) influenced large numbers of people to engage in work in the secular world, developing their own enterprise and engaging in trade and the accumulation of wealth for investment. In other words, the Protestant work ethic was an important force behind the unplanned and uncoordinated mass action that influenced the development of capitalism. This idea is also known as the "Protestant Ethic thesis." (Wikipedia, 2012:1).

The deliverance ministries promote a New Protestant Ethic, where life is viewed in the dualistic context of forces good (God) combating forces of the Devil (witches). The Devil (witches) is the omnipresent obstacle that needs to be removed for the believer to enter into an inheritance that was already provided. Failures and poverty are generally attributable to the influence of witches, and it is common to see many people spend days in the church singing and praying; literally, shopping for miracles. But while church attendance, praying, and singing are necessary components of worship, it is also needful to encourage people to work hard, endure pain, and be prudent. People should be made to see successes or failures as arising largely from their actions or inactions as was the case with Max Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis. But this New Protestant Ethic stands the Spirit of Capitalism on its head by seeing success as the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, and failure as punishment from witches; it does not really matter what you do, 'the battle is not for the swift', what matter are the mercies of God, and 'He shows mercy to whom He wants to show mercy, and 'it is not of works, but of God that shows mercy'. So let him that is weak say 'I am strong' because His Grace is sufficient. With such statements, the pastor-prophet indirectly under values the importance of hard work, and the Biblical injunction the Faith without work is impotent. Deliverance ministries equally oversimplify the complexity of material existence by over emphasizing the doctrine of 'heaven and hell'; those who do good will inherit heaven, where eternal joy is experienced, while evil doers will rot in hell. To inherit heaven, the believer must be delivered of his sins, pay his tithes and offerings, attend church services regularly, and give generously, among other requirements;

hard work, prudence, and propensity for industry are generally considered secondary to religious rituals. Deliverance ministries themselves have come to be seen as success workshops and supermarkets where believers come regularly 'work' out their faith by exchanging material and monetary gifts for miracles. All form of achievements; political appointment and winning of elections, promotion at the work place, marriage, healing from sickness, winning court cases, and so on, can be shopped for, regardless of what crimes one commits, or whether or not what one seeks is deserving or timely. Those who are 'called' for serve as pastor-prophets and workers of miracles are the 'Levites', carriers of the 'Holy Spirit', or the 'elects' of God, who ought to be treated with utmost respect and reverence. No reward is too much for them. Giving to them is equated to giving to God, and ones blessing is tied to the capacity to give. People abandon their secular works for the 'work of God'. The principle of sowing and reaping is re-enacted in the materialistic context, and the blessing of God is commoditized for the private benefit of pastor-prophets and their churches. Society loses man hours of productive enterprise as more people abandon productive ventures to spend hours shopping from miracles, but the pastor-prophets gain from offering and tithes, and goodwill. Social productivity is lowered as hard work is deemphasized and more people abandon secular jobs to either become pastor-prophets, or shop ceaselessly for miracles.

It is noteworthy that the pastor-prophets encourage attendance of repetitive of church programmes and regular payment of tithes, offerings, and vows, alongside. This can be contradictory because the time spend in church is lost as man-hours of secular work (where real productivity is created). The population present in a church show indicates the popularity of the pastor-prophet, which in turn determines the earnings from the programme - the more patronage the better. Yet the more people cluster in churches over time, the less active they become in their secular jobs, and the less money they would be able to pay as tithes and offerings from their legitimate incomes. This promotes the situation where both the pastor-prophets and miracle shoppers go all out to seek for income from illegitimate sources; many pastor-prophets seek to enhance their competitive competence by seeking and acquiring magical powers from occultists and witches, and miracle shoppers engaged in sundry corrupt practices, including embezzlement of public funds and stealing, to raise their tithes and offering for more miracles. The general thinking is that the 'blood of Jesus' has powers to wash away every kind of sin once it is confessed and forgiveness sought for, whether publicly or in secret.

2.6. Returns on Child Witch Accusation

Clearly deliverance ministries operate in a market that is monopolistically competitive, where customer loyalty is critical for sustainability and success. Witchcraft accusation and the capacity to deliver people from the power of witches generate monopolistic rents and sustain shoppers' loyalty. Several commentators have explained how the pastor-prophet derives huge earnings from deliverance sessions, but fail to see that such gains often last for a short while. Returns accruing to the anti child witch pastor-prophet and

deliverance ministries are largely short-lived, and subject to the law of variable proportions; it rises initially to a peak and then declines sharply. The pastor-prophet becomes very popular when he/she has acquired some magical powers to perform miracles, but sooner or later he/she is accused of witchcraft and is labeled, and miracle shoppers go elsewhere for new experiences.

Miracle shoppers are lurked in the lifelong search for new experiences from one 'strong' pastor-prophet and deliverance ministry to another. It is common to see miracle shoppers take the names of their children, domestic helps, neighbors, colleagues, and bosses to the pastor-prophet for witchcraft screening. Diagnosis of the pastor-prophet is taken as final regardless of how illogical it may sound. As the experiences from counseling/deliverance sessions are considered insightful, shoppers visit for repeat experiences and invite their others. But ones misfortune strikes (which is not uncommon with human existence), the shoppers create and spread rumors, which often lead to accusation and labeling of the pastor-prophet. This may cause the deliverance ministry to scatter, or the pastor-prophet is changed. Counter witchcraft accusation is facilitated by the veneration of the pastor-prophet - the same mental infrastructure that soured his/her popularity at the first instance. The pastor-prophet is reified and alternated as God and his/her actions or inactions, history, relationships, utterances, and misfortune (including unavoidable natural occurrences) are continually examined and reexamined, and any un-godly appellation can generate rumors, witchcraft suspicion and labeling. How long it takes for the returns to rise, where the peak is reached, or when the returns would begin to fall varies with individuals and churches. But past experiences supports the argument that the pastor-prophet of several deliverance ministries sooner or later become victims of the witchcraft accusation - the very ill they fought. Equally churches where deliverance is common practice have higher breakaway or mortality rates, than those where deliverance is uncommon.

2.7. Child Witches as Mythomanes

Senald (1996) argues that witchcraft, in the form of its perceived effectuality, is a figment of the theological imagination and extremely few of those accused know what it really is. Yet the persecutions proceed with the utmost certainty that they had - a prejudged certainty particularly in the persecution of child witches today. Persons eager to persecute often forget that such claims can be true or false, and no effort is spared to distinguish between false and true accusations (UNICEF, 2009). Based on recent researches in therapeutic psychology, Senald (1996) submits that many children accused of witchcraft suffer from "mythomania", also known in technical terms as "pseudologia phantastica"; referring to a person's compulsive lying and making up fantastic stories. This phrase originated with experts in forensic medicine who had opportunity to observe children giving false testimony. Psychiatrists discovered that a mythomane may initially lie deliberately and consciously, but gradually come to believe in what he or she is saying. The vast majority of persons engaging in such confabulation were children, the aged, or the mentally retarded (incidentally, these are also most vulnerable to witchcraft accusation). Interestingly, experts have found that lying by

children does not necessarily indicate a chronic pathology and is not classified as mental illness, whereas it is if it persists in adults.

Children have an incomplete grasp of the contours of the real world and often resort to making up stories if they are under pressure or if they sense that such stories are expected. When they do make up stories they can be motivated by a variety of reasons; to gain attention and praise, satisfy precocious sexual appetites, revel in the power it affords them, or use it as a vehicle of pure malice. In situations where mythomanes are motivated by attention-seeking, they are particularly susceptible to suggestion. With a flair for figuring out what is expected, they set out on their mythomaniacal journey, during which compelling autosuggestion evolves, with the storytellers programming their brains to confer reality status to the stories. Ultimately it is no longer a question of the child lying; the child starts to believe in the reality of the story. The material children use to build imaginative structures frequently consists of what they glean from adult conversations, watch on televisions, or learn from their friends. Mythomaniacal children seek suggestions; their radar, as it were, is constantly scanning the social horizon for cues to spin stories rewarding them recognition. Theirs is the skill to quickly evaluate what they overhear and use it to their 'advantage', and sometimes to the detriment of others, innocent or guilty.

This skill, in addition to verbal expressivity, enables mythomanes to tune into a theme with persuasive loquacity. Through confabulation and strategic gossiping they can humor people's biases and expectations with such effectiveness that their utterances are accepted as true revelations. The ultimate escalation of mythomania is not only telling stories and believing them, but acting them out, with the classic case of "possession." The state of being "possessed" signifies the escalation from being a mythomane to being a "demonopath," a person claiming to be suffering from demonic torments. Historically, demonopaths were the active initiators of witch panics, playing aggressive roles in the prosecution of witches. The strength of mythomanes in general, and demonopaths in particular, hinge on two emotional infrastructures, namely; group reinforcement (they often enact their roles collectively), and an accepting audience. In fact, there are no such things as private demonopaths; they perform only when they are able to captivate an audience.

The basic ingredients of such role enactments are taken from three sources: the cultural context (beliefs, traditions), the social context (direct involvement in social interaction), and the personal motives. What this means in regard to children is that they take the concerns of the day, interweave them with cultural images, and then mold stories from which they can derive personal benefit. In the process, they take advantage of the credibility accorded them and pursue personal goals, such as prestige, praise, rebellion, or revenge. This does not mean that the children themselves recognize their own motives, or the fact that witchcraft labeling that they expose themselves to is a lifelong sickness. They act on the basis of a variety of emotional needs unexamined by the rational mind.

Once a child begins a course of confabulation, a process of self-brainwashing sets in; self-brainwashing differs from brainwashing, as the former starts with voluntary

confabulation and gradually assumes truth value in the mind of the narrator. The latter starts with external pressure to persuade a person to change his or her mind, and ends with a new orientation. Many children who confess witchcraft are indeed victims of mythomania, in much the same way as their victimizers, the witch-hunters, who interpret misfortunes and success as outcomes of witchcraft. But while the children can be excused because mythomania is not regarded as a sickness among children, the witch-hunting adult mythomanes need psychiatric attention, because they are prone to seeing everything in the context of witchcraft. For example, a young man that has successfully gone through the school system and found a job, but who gives nothing to his family may be accused of witchcraft. In a similar way, failure at school or professionally can also be explained in terms of witchcraft and attributed to jealous relatives.

Learning Points from the Literature Review

Key learning points from the foregoing are as follows:

- There are no scientific bases for the existence of witchcraft, yet the scare of witchcraft, confessions, and tales of child witch destructive behaviors cannot be put aside as frivolous stories or lies.
- Witchcraft is a socioeconomic reality; denying its existence and powers is folly, but venerating it as many deliverance ministries do is more destructive.
- Child molestation and abuses associated with witchcraft accusation and exorcism are criminal, inhuman, and counter-productive. There is need to find more creative approaches for dealing with presumed child witches.
- The phenomenon of the child witch illustrates the paradox of the pastor-prophet and deliverance ministries caught in the trap of witchcraft accusations while claiming to fight against witches. Between the witch and the counter?witch, there is a constant switching of places. While acting as fighters of evil, the pastor-prophet cannot escape from the suspicion that he/she is in fact collaborating with witches.
- Witchcraft labeling leads to socioeconomic incapacitation, which remains even after deliverance and treatment.

3.0 Methodology

The empirical work reported here sought to provide answers to the 7 research questions listed earlier.

Qualitative information were collected from a cross section of participants during Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted at three locations, namely; Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State. FGD was considered most appropriate as it afforded the researcher ample opportunity to guide participants along the path of scientific research, and prevent possible descent into sentiments that are not uncommon with issues of witchcraft. The researcher would have also preferred to administer questionnaire, and interview/observe some accused children and operators of deliverance ministries as well, but was constrained by lack of funds. But by focusing on social diseconomies of witchcraft accusation, this paper opened a new chapter in the anti-child witch accusation campaign - one that the pastor-prophet and deliverance ministries will readily consider because counter-witchcraft accusation is unhealthy for them. Besides the use of questionnaire and interview assumes a good measure of knowledge and understanding of the subject by the respondents; an assumption that may not apply here because witchcraft exist largely in the realm of imagination. The population for this study consisted of residents in Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene Local Government Areas (LGAs). LGAs in Akwa Ibom State are grouped under 3 senatorial zones, and each LGA selected represents a senatorial zone. The FGDs were conducted at the headquarters of the three LGAs, and participants were largely public servants. Eket LGA had 18 (11 male and 7 female) participants, Uyo 15 (7 male and 8 female) participants, while Ikot Ekpene had 16 (6 male and 10 female) participants; making a total of 49 participants. All participants were Christians belonging to different churches and denominations. The discussions were held on different dates and time, as follows: Eket LGA, March 19, 2012 (11.00 am - 1.24pm); Uyo LGA, March 20, 2012 (10.45 am - 12.30 pm); and Ikot Ekpene March 21, 2012 (12.20 pm - 2.30 pm). At the three locations, participants were selected randomly and discussions conducted informally in an office belonging to one of the participants, who served as the Field Assistant by aiding the researcher to enlist discussants and providing the venue for discussion. All participants had strong views about witchcraft and expressed sufficient interest in the subject, but the researcher guided them through the discussions to ensure consistency with the research questions.

4.0 Results

The outcome of FGDs conducted at the 3 venues was summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of FGDs on the Social Economy of Child Witch Accusation in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Questions	Summary of Discussants' Responses
	Violence and discrimination distort the mental and physical development of accused children.

Does violence against accused children affect their mental and physical development?	Discussants generally agreed that violence and discrimination against children can render them emotionally dysfunctional and physically incapacitated. But majority argued that the harm child witches cause justifies actions against accused children and serves as deterrent, to scare others from joining the witchcraft cult. Some discussants however agreed that many confessed child witches were conscripted into the witchcraft involuntarily.
Do accused children have equal access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities as the non-accused children?	Majority agreed that all children that are directly or remotely linked to miracle shoppers are exposed to the risk of accusation once there is misfortune. But direct offspring of the miracle shoppers, domestic helps, fostered children, and relatives are easily exposed to labeling when there is suspicion. Majority agreed also that labeled children are often abandoned, separated from other children, and mistreated; In many cases survivors of witchcraft accusation develop vileness, anomie, and other criminal behaviours, which further distance them from avenues of help.
Child witch labeling and discrimination render the victims socioeconomically incapacitated permanently.	
Does child witch labeling and discrimination deny the victims opportunities that other children have?	Majority agreed that within the family, community, or neighborhood where the victims reside, few people would not want to associate closely with the accused children, and this continues even when they are delivered. The female victims may find it very difficult to get married, and employers who know their history with be much hesitant employing them. Many adults accused of witchcraft at young ages end up living miserable lives. In cases where discrimination is associated with violent attacks, the victims may be disfigured or maimed for life.
Children from poor homes and orphans are most vulnerable to witchcraft accusation and stigmatization?	
Why are children from poor homes and orphans most vulnerable to witchcraft accusation?	Majority attributed the vulnerability of poor children and orphans to accusation as arising from poor parental care and training, and unguarded exposure; such children easily collect food and drinks from others due to hunger and thirst. The unsuspecting child is drawn into witchcraft largely by the poor condition, death, or separation of parents, which reduces the level of care they should normally have. Equally, many adults use accused children as
	scapegoats to explain away their failures.
Has the media - Nigerian movies and confessions - supported the thinking that domestic helps, orphans, or children from broken homes are most likely to be witches?	Discussants did not blame the Nigerian movie industry for promoting the scare of child witches, rather the saw the Movie industry as helping with information on reasons for sudden deaths, stroke, accidents, etc., that occur to many people. They general thinking is that movie makers help to alert society by imaging current happenings, and should therefore be encouraged.
Would many of the victims be accused if an effective child social welfare system for the poorest poor and orphans exist?	Majority agreed that a comprehensive social welfare programme that targets disadvantaged children will check child witch accusation. They all agreed that child witch accusation is one of the unfortunate outcomes of the growth of individualism and breakdown of the traditional extended family system.

Child witch accusation and witchcraft exorcism are common practices in revivalist and charismatic churches.	
Is child witch accusation influenced by the religious discourse of deliverance ministries?	Discussants disagreed, but argued that child witch is a reality. They point at several real life experiences and confessions to buttress the view that witchcraft and child witches are real. While admitting possible abuses by a few pastor-prophets, the general thinking was that churches have put activities of witches on check. They argued further that witchcraft is not new, and that the fight against witchcraft, though illegal, is Biblical.
Pastor-prophets who engage in witchcraft accusation and deliverance are predisposed to counter witchcraft accusation and labeling.	
Are pastor-prophets who engage in deliverance predisposed to counter witchcraft accusation?	There was no broad agreement on this question. Some agree that there are several fake pastor-prophets, but many saw the misfortunes of pastor-prophets as an attack from the kingdom of the devil that the pastor-prophets have helped to expose. The fake pastors will be flushed out, but genuine ones will withstand every attack of the devil and overcome.
Does child witch accusation and deliverance generate revenue for the pastor-prophets and deliverance ministries?	Discussants opted to see the work of the pastor-prophet as a commission from God. Many who are pastors could have been working elsewhere and perhaps making much more money. Some discussants even argued that the income earned by the pastor-prophets does not equate the burden they carry off people that consult them.
Some labeled child witches were falsely accused of witchcraft	
Do you know that some confessed child witches are lying?	Majority disagreed. Children who confess being witches talk about real things that are provable. It is easy to know children that are mentally or emotional sick, but child witches clearly know what they are doing.

Source: FGDs conducted for 49 residents of Akwa Ibom State at Eket LGC Headquarters, Uyo LGC Headquarters, and Ikot Ekpene LGC Headquarters. On the 19th, 20th, and 21st of March 2012, respectively.

The key findings are summarized as follows:

- Many educated Akwa Ibom people strongly believe that witches are agents of the devil, and are responsible to most misfortunes and diseases that people experience.
- There was broad agreement that violence and discrimination against children accused of witchcraft can render them emotionally dysfunctional and physically incapacitated. But the popular thinking was that such actions would scare off other children from joining the witchcraft cult. It was however agreed that many child witches were conscripted into witchcraft involuntarily.
- There was strong association child witch accusation with visitation of deliverance ministries. Children that are directly or remotely linked to miracle shoppers were predisposed to witchcraft accusation once there is misfortune. But direct offspring of the miracle shoppers are rarely labeled.
- Labeled children are often abandoned, separated from other children, and mistreated; such children are prone to vileness, anomie, and criminality as they grow into adulthood.
- Labeled children may remain disadvantaged and discriminated for life, and in cases where discrimination is associated with violent attacks, the victims may be disfigured or maimed.
- Children from poor homes and orphans were more vulnerable to witchcraft accusation because they lacked the care, love, and protection of their direct parents. Adults readily used them as scapegoats to explain away their failures.
- The Nigerian movie industry contributed positively to reinforcing the scare of child witches.
- The social welfare system to cater for poor children and orphans in Akwa Ibom State were generally inadequate.
- Teachings of the pastor-prophet of deliverance ministries had immense influence on the collective conscience of the people, and promoted belief in the existence and potency of child witches.
- Scientific knowledge of the psycho-social make up of children is very low among Akwa Ibom people.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study examined the phenomenon of child witch accusation in Akwa Ibom State to identify the major socioeconomic causes and consequences. It was observed that while witchcraft discourse dates centuries back, the recent explosion in child witch accusation among Akwa Ibom people is attributable largely to the growing association of failure and misfortunes with the wickedness of witches, and rising individualism associated with modernization. Strong belief in the existence and potency of child witches among Akwa Ibom people is documented in the literature, but few studies have attempted to identify the possible socioeconomic causes and consequences of the phenomenon. Using information obtained from FGDs conducted in Eket, Ikot Ekpene, and Uyo Local Government Areas, the paper submits that child witch accusation leaves the entire society worse off socioeconomic; it victimizes the accused children and renders many of them permanently incapacitated, the pastor-prophets and others who legitimize child witch accusation are often victimized through counter-witchcraft labeling, and society suffers when more people abandon hard work to fight witches. The religious discourses of the new Pentecostal movements generally portray Satan (witches) as the cause of misfortunes and failures; those desiring success necessarily need to fight, overcome, and eliminate witches and other agents of Satan by every possible means. Deliverance ministries are distinguished from the traditional Pentecostal churches that Max Weber associated with the material progress in his **Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism**, because while the later encouraged hard work, prudence, and wealth accumulation, the former see material fortune principally as a 'gift' that all believers can appropriate provided they are able to overcome the Devil (witches). This has promoted laziness and undervalued hard work on the one hand, and sustained hatred and intolerance for any person associated with witchcraft (children inclusive), on the other hand.

The paper observes further that while there were no scientific bases for the existence of witches, the testimonies and confessions associated with witchcraft, particularly the involvement of children should neither be ignored nor trivialized. But, dehumanization and destruction associated with child witch accusation and labeling is criminal, inhuman, and incapable of solving the child witch problem; the scare of child witches has grown along with child witch labeling. Aside from the possibility that many children accused of witchcraft know nothing about it, the pastor-prophet and deliverance ministries are often caught in the wave of counter witchcraft accusation once misfortune strikes or abnormal occurrences are associated with them. Accordingly, the paper recommends more public enlightenment for the pastor prophets particularly, and the general public on the social diseconomies of child witch accusation, and the psychosocial makeup of children.

Recommendations

- Child witch accusation hurts the accused, the accusers, and the society. Regular training and orientation programs are required to expose pastor-prophet to the legal, spiritual, emotional, and socioeconomic damages of child witch accusation, and justify why it is in their

interest to restructure their discourses away from the wickedness of witchcraft, to the love of God.

- The child right law is a welcome development. But there is need to provide more safety net programs for abandoned and street children, and orphans.
- More public enlightenment is required on the psychosocial make up of children; particularly the capacity of children to create myths, and become possessed by them.

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