

The devil's children
Edited by Jean La Fontaine
Ashgate, 2009.

Book review by Sally Ramage, *The Criminal Lawyer*

Witchcraft, this book states, is a widely held belief in African culture and has resulted in many deaths of young children sacrificed to ward off evil spirits. It is alleged in this book that the death of Climbie in the year 2000 in London, was because of such thinking.

At this point, the reviewer reminds the reader that witchcraft is not mentioned in the largest review of child protection arrangements undertaken in the United Kingdom in 2003, following the death of Victoria Adjo Climbie. English legislators and the courts in family, criminal, and tort proceedings have constructed different liability and evidential rules.

In law, child abuse includes such topics as family law, liability in criminal law, liability in tort and human rights law, and issues about the child witness, the child complainant, the alleged abuser and the admissibility of expert evidence. The reviewer reminds the reader that, in England, ostracising a child is in fact rejecting the child. Rejection, be it as a result of believing the child to be possessed of evil, or for other reasons, is an explicit refusal to accept the child. Children thrive on acceptance; they need it to grow and develop into healthy adults. On the other hand, their self-concept, behaviour, and emotional stability are negatively affected by rejection. Children need a rich and varied emotional experience with their parents if they are to form a valid and reliable picture of the world and place themselves appropriately within that picture.

Child abuse report

In the UK in 2005, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned a report in order to gauge the extent, nature and geographical spread of child abuse, linked to accusations of “possession” or “witchcraft”. In the UK in 2008 Seventy-four cases of abuse clearly linked to accusations of 'possession' and after the report was published, UK police made available 33 crime reports that they thought might be relevant to the DfES report. The editor of *The Devil's Children*, Jean La Fontaine is an anthropologist who describes the phenomenon of child

witches in African London communities and asserts that there is a complex relationship between witchcraft and Pentecostal Christianity with subsequent developments that Satan and his evil spirits are now seen as the donors of the powers of witchcraft. and therefore, murder. African witchcraft beliefs continue in the African diaspora. It is not that Africans are vilified for voodoo and other witchcraft beliefs mixed with the Christian mission ethic of good and Satan.

Islam

Many East London Bangladeshis believe in the *Jinn* religion. Jinns are described in the Qur'an as a race of intelligent beings that are normally imperceptible to the senses and Sura 72 of the Qur'an is about the Jinn. Islam describes various classes of beings, which populate the universe, these being *jinn* (spirits), *shaitan* (satanic beings), *marrid* (demons), *bhut* (ghosts), and *farista* (angels). The Qur'an refers to human beings who become enemies of righteousness as *shaitan*.

Hindu

In India, witchcraft is prevalent t in the tribal belt of Jharkand, in Jalgaon and other tribal areas. The victims are in mostly Indian women, conveniently branded witches. There is a long-held Hindu belief in superstition: nimboo mirchi (lemon-green chillies), black magic and the kaala dhaaga (black thread). The Hindu religion, and indigenous religions, has doctrines, which support beliefs in possession by supernatural beings such as gods and spirits, including evil spirits. It is very common for witchcraft accusations involving children to result in violence. Practices to evict the evil spirit include prayer, psychological harm and even death. When the practice is merely violence perpetuated in order to eradicate an extra mouth to feed because of poverty, is difficult to gauge, as the religion is an excuse that offenders can fall back on.

East London Bangladeshis

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The Nigerian diaspora

Nigeria acts as the second largest source of child trafficking victims to the UK and the state of Akwa Ibom State, has the highest rate of trafficking in Nigeria. The deeply held belief by the people of Akwa Ibom State and the Efik speaking communities in Cross River State cuts across all tiers of society. Even academics fear such children. This fear stems from the belief that a spiritual spell can be given to a person through food and drink. The soul of the person who eats this spell will then leave the body to be initiated in a gathering of witches and wizards. In Nigeria, when a child is branded a witch, he may be taken to the forest and slaughtered disgraced publicly and murdered; bathed in acid; poisoned to death, often with asire berry; buried alive or chained and tortured in churches in order to extract confession.

Conclusion

This very important book brings enlightenment to the mindset of many cultures. All criminologists, criminal lawyers and social workers that practice in the jurisdiction of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland must read this book.