

SORCERY, SPELLS & SACRIFICE...

Innocent children – branded evil and possessed by the devil – are being tortured and killed in African witchcraft, black magic and exorcism rituals in the UK. **REAL** reports



PICTURE POSED BY MODEL

Beliefs in sorcery, spells and exorcism is seemingly part and parcel of living in Britain today. But the cult of bizarre, unholy 'black magic' style rituals – embedded in African religious beliefs – has revealed a sinister side that is unacceptable to Western culture. It ranges from so-called witch doctors selling a variety of cure-all magical spells, to the most chilling newspaper headlines of ritual child abuse and killings in exorcism cases.

We need only flick through the back pages of national black newspaper *The Voice* to see dozens of marabouts, or witch doctors, advertising their legitimate services to 'exorcise voodoo, spells, curses and witchcraft' and 'save' people from evil spirits. They claim to use their holy powers to sweeten soured relationships, cure illness, and ward off evil spirits. Far worse, though, are reports of home-made 'deliverance' videos on sale from south London market stalls which show terrified children being accused of being 'witches', and white-robed pastors beating kids with sticks to 'free them of their demons'. It sends shivers down the spine.

'CHILD B' BRANDED A WITCH

All the more chilling, then, are cases such as the high-profile 'witchcraft' trial at the Old Bailey this summer, in which three relatives were found guilty of abusing a young Angolan girl who they had branded a 'witch' and the 'devil'.

In November 2003, the allegedly orphaned girl known only as Child B – who had ironically been brought to Britain by her aunt 'for a better life' the previous year – was found bare foot and freezing cold on the doorstep of her aunt's council flat in Hackney, north-east London. It later emerged that the eight-year-old had been trussed into a laundry bag, zipped-in and was about to be tossed in a river. Video evidence played in court showed her clutching a doll as she recalled to police how she was told, 'Today you will die'.

The aunt, Child B's 'guardian', who cannot be named for legal reasons, was found to have horrifically and ritualistically tortured her niece; the girl had had her chest cut with a knife, chilli peppers rubbed in her eyes and she had also been repeatedly beaten, kicked, starved and whipped. The abuse had started because she was said to be possessed by 'kindoki', otherwise known as 'ndoki', or African witchcraft – something their local church leader had confirmed, said the aunt.

Thankfully, in this case, justice came before it was too late, but it was only by chance that the girl escaped death. 'That ill-treatment led to conduct which, if it had not been stopped, would have led to fatal consequences,' said Prosecutor Patricia May. The girl's abusers – her aunt, 38; her aunt's cousin Sita Kisanga, 35, and Kisanga's brother, Sebastian Pinto, 32 – were jailed for the maximum sentence, 24 years. The case, said the judge, was the very pinnacle of child cruelty. Today, Child B remains deeply scarred by her experience and the mention of witchcraft sends her into floods of tears, say police. She's now ten, and in foster care.



1 & 2 Sita Kisanga and Sebastian Pinto were jailed for torture and abuse of child 'B' **3** Marie Therese Kouao and her niece Victoria Climbié **4** Warning signs of abuse before Victoria's death **5** Kouao's boyfriend Carl Manning – they both received life sentences for murdering Victoria



“THE GIRL HAD HER CHEST CUT WITH A KNIFE, CHILLI PEPPERS RUBBED IN HER EYES AND HAD BEEN REPEATEDLY BEATEN, STARVED AND WHIPPED. THE ABUSE HAD STARTED BECAUSE SHE WAS SAID TO BE POSSESSED

TOLD SHE WAS THE DEVIL

Less fortunate than Child 'B' was Victoria Climbié, a little African girl who had also been branded as 'possessed by the devil'. She was repeatedly tortured, and finally murdered in February 2000.

Pastor Pascal Orome, who preaches in Borough, south-east London, and first saw Victoria Climbié in August 1999, told the inquiry that he had 'exorcised' the little girl after her great-aunt, Marie Thérèse Kouao convinced him that Victoria's injuries were the result of 'demonic possession'. He said a prayer for her but did not harm her.

Kouao had told Pastor Orome that the eight-year-old was incontinent, put excrement into food, burned herself and made a mess at home, which provided evidence that she was possessed.

However, so maltreated was Victoria, that she was indoctrinated to believe that she really was the devil incarnate. Pastor Alvaro Lima, a church minister who preaches at the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Finsbury Park, north London, told the inquiry that when he saw Victoria on February 24 2000 – the day before she died – she had told him she was possessed by Satan.

Kouao and her boyfriend Carl Manning were both found guilty of her murder at the Old Bailey in January 2001 and sentenced to life imprisonment.

After carrying out Victoria's post-mortem, Home Office pathologist, Dr Nathaniel Carey, found 128 separate injuries covering her malnourished body. He said these injuries amounted to the worst case of child abuse he had ever dealt with or heard of.

ACCUSED OF BEING WITCHES

These two cases have striking parallels. Both girls had been brought to Britain from Africa by aunts claiming them to be their daughters. They had also lived in council flats in the same area of London. Both girls were accused of being 'kindoki' (witches), mistreated, starved, beaten and mentally abused. Neither child's plight was picked up by police, social workers, medical staff or reported by the church. A detective who worked on the Climbié case told *The Times*, 'There are a number of remarkable similarities. It is very sad. Who knows how many children there are in this country who are suffering abuse at the hands of someone bogusly claiming to be their parent?'

Within days of the latest trial, BBC's *Newsnight* had travelled to Angola (Child B's birth place) where it found widespread belief in 'kindoki', or witchcraft, and pastors encouraging the exorcism of 'bad spirits' from children. Worse still, they found kids shackled, beaten, burnt and starved in so-called 'healing' centres. Belief in African witchcraft has always been there, but there is a fear that it may be growing among immigrant London communities, says Dr Richard Hoskins, an African religions specialist at King's College London, who gave evidence at Child B's trial. He is horrified at the thought of African children being abused in the name of religion in our country.

RITUALS ON THE INCREASE

Dr Hoskins fears that more and more 'faith healers' from churches in Africa are arriving in Britain to carry out exorcism rituals. He says, 'The belief in 'kindoki' is all over Africa, particularly in Central and Western Africa, such as Angola and the Congo. Many of the churches that indulge in this type of 'witch-cleansing' in the UK will say they are not involved in abuse, such as rubbing chilli peppers in children's eyes.

'But emotional abuse is still one of four types of recognised child abuse in this country: emotional, physical, deprivation and sexual,' explains Hoskins. 'This is not just happening in African communities. We are encountering it in Asian communities and we have even come across it in white communities in Britain, too,' he says. 'There is no doubt that people in London and across the UK are saying that it seems to be growing and is more widespread than it used to be.' ➤

FEATURE Louise Hall PHOTOGRAPHS Getty/Central News/Empics/David Gillanders

HOW MANY MORE SUFFERING?

Experts fear that these known child abuse cases could just be the tip of the iceberg. 'There are reports that many more, possibly hundreds, of African children living in the UK may have suffered abuse. Those accused of witchcraft might even have been killed,' stresses Dr Hoskins. 'Specialists in the field, police and social services need to do further research to see if that really is the case. This is an area that needs to be dealt with using sensitivity and care.' A survey investigating these 'black magic' rituals in the UK was proposed to the Department of Education in schools last month. Experts hope it will get the green light and the results will be available by January 2007.

Dr Hoskins says police and social services are now dealing with seven more cases of African children being abused because they are suspected of being witches. One case involves a boy, aged ten, who suffered a year of abuse at the hands of his parents; in another, a boy of nine threw himself out of a first-floor window to escape further beatings and burnings after a pastor damned him as 'ndoki', reported *The Sun* in June. No more details have been released because these cases are subject to family court proceedings.

Dr Hoskins says, 'In many cases children are starved of food for days before being forced to vomit out bile, as people believe this flushes out the 'witch'. They are then forced to attend casting out ceremonies which last several days.' He adds, 'You can't imagine how bad it is. One minute your parents love you, the next they are trying to hurt you.'

SAFETY NET PROJECT

Metropolitan Police's child abuse intelligence department believes that there have been at least 31 similar cases in London since 2000, although only five have led to charges. Detective Superintendent Chris Bourlet, the unit's deputy head, is more specific, saying, 'I suspect there will be a lot more than that. The 'Adam' team report (see box over) identified a gap in our knowledge.'

The harrowing Child B trial has led his unit to launch 'Project Violet'. Their aim is to safe-keep multi-faith children, raise awareness of this unusual type of child abuse, prevent it from happening in the first place, and build links with African 'splinter' churches where witchcraft beliefs are believed to be widespread. 'Work to address ritual and ritualistic child abuse forms one end of our strategy, Bourlet confirms.

Agencies such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children are also taking steps to work more closely with African community groups. Mary Marsh, director of NSPCC, says, 'This (Child B) is a horrific case which has exposed beliefs held by some in the African community that can lead to child abuse. If we are to prevent cases such as this, it is vital that child protection agencies gain an understanding of African culture and work closely with the community to eradicate any practices that may pose a risk to children.' She adds, 'I'm not against people's beliefs. I'm against them harming children. We must not be disrespectful but we must be very clear what the boundaries are. Children are entitled to protection.'



REAL reporter Louise Hall meets witch doctor Professor Emill at his Tooting Bec studio



The witch doctor told Louise to bring specific items with her for their meeting

A SPELL HAS BEEN PUT ON YOU. I'LL BREAK IT FOR £510

REAL goes undercover to meet an African witch doctor in London, who claims he can lift evil spells. Professor Emill, 35, from Mali, West Africa, has been practising as a 'spiritual witchcraft healer' for 19 years

I approached Professor Emill, 35, after seeing his advert under the astrology section of the well-known London weekly classified paper, *Loot*. It described him as an 'international clairvoyant' who 'after careful consultation... may help assist you with all your worries and problems including bringing back loved ones... may break the powers of Black Magic, Bad Luck and Witch Craft that might be cast upon you by enemies.'

We arranged to meet after speaking on the phone. The only question he asked me was why I wanted to see him. I replied that I had a problem with a loved one. The following day I made my way to Tooting Bec to visit him, armed with a photo of myself and my 'loved one', a white candle and £50.

At 10.30am, as prearranged, I rang the bell. Professor Emill, as he refers to himself, opened the door wearing an African-style maroon robe and hat. He led me up a flight of stairs to his tiny bedsit. He locked the door, requested that I took off my shoes and gestured for me to sit opposite him. He sat cross-legged and barefoot in his tiny, grotty room – which consists of a basic bed, a rusted old fridge and a kettle – surrounded by all the paraphernalia of his bizarre trade, including incense, photos, candles, mascots, 'potions' and hieroglyphic-inscribed fabric drapes.

Within minutes, Emill had vowed that a jealous lover of my boyfriend's had cast an evil African spell on me, through another African witch doctor, and that I had come to the right person, because he had the powers to lift it. But first I had to hand over the cash, a photo of myself and my boyfriend together, place my hand on a piece of paper (which he then traced around), write down both our full names and dates of birth and present him with the white candle.

Throughout the consultation these were the only facts he knew about me, yet within five

minutes of meeting, despite asking no questions, he had chillingly told me: 'A girl wants you dead. She is willing to go to extreme lengths to ensure this. She has been to see a witch doctor like me, who has put a spell on you. She is jealous of you. She wants you gone so that she can have your man. You must break that spell. If you do, you will have a happy life. I am the man to do it.'

'I have a friend who will make the special potion – like this,' he said, showing me two old soft drink bottles which were full of a revolting-looking brown liquid. 'You must use it once a day for five days, washing yourself with it in the shower. For you – I can see that you do not have much money, you are young – it is a bargain. It will only cost you £510. Bring that money in cash with you tomorrow to collect it and the curse will be broken.' He warned what would happen if I broke the deal. 'The spirit will take revenge on you,' he threatened.

All the time he spoke quietly, interspersing his talking with strange African chants. At one point, he cut off a lock of my hair and put it in an envelope 'for safekeeping', after chanting more strange words and wiping his hand over it in the air.

When I said I couldn't afford to hand over the additional £510 cash for the 'potion', I asked for my photo back and returned the 'lucky pendant' he had given me to put under my pillow at night to 'protect' me, Professor Emill became threatening. His voice took on an aggressive tone and he said that this curse would now never be lifted, 'What does £510 matter compared to a life of happiness over misery? What is money? I don't understand you. You will never be happy,' he said.

I left the house and all but ran down the street, desperate to get away. It wasn't that I believed him. Far from it. Rather, it seemed to me that what was important to the Professor was not my happiness or well-being but his bank balance.



RUMOURS OF RITUALISTIC SACRIFICES: THE CASE OF 'ADAM'

The torso of a small boy found floating in the Thames four years ago is widely believed to have been the victim of a ritual 'muti' killing, in a witchcraft ceremony, such as is practised in South Africa. Witch doctors are said to use the victim's body parts for black magic potions. The boy's torso was believed to have been in the water for ten days. There was no clue to his identity, and police named him 'Adam'. Forensic experts estimated that 'Adam' was of Afro-Caribbean origin, and aged between five and six. A study commissioned by the Metropolitan Police, stated, 'People who are desperate will seek out experts to cast spells for them... Children are being trafficked into the UK for this reason.'

LEFT A computer-generated image of the grisly find of the African boy who police named 'Adam'

OUR 'BLACK MAGIC' NIGHTMARE WAS LIKE A WITCH HUNT

When disabled Peter Nelson, 61, and his carer daughter Mary Anne, 39, moved to a remote Scottish island in the outer Hebrides, they thought that they had found their dream home. But little did they know that they would soon be arrested and charged with disturbing allegations

It was 3 October in 2003 when Mary Anne and her dad were woken by the dogs barking. They found the police at their door, and before they knew what was happening they were taken to their local Stornoway police station. They were accused of lurid allegations of devil-worship, raping and abusing children in black magic rituals, wife-swapping orgies during which they allegedly dressed in Satanic costumes and masks, sacrificed animals and drank blood.

'I couldn't believe it when the police came to our house in Lochs, on the west of Lewis, with a search warrant and accused us of abusing local children,' Mary Anne told *The Guardian* last year. 'We've only ever tried to help people and have raised lots of money for Save the Children with our award-winning garden, so it seemed absolutely ludicrous.'

Her father Peter, who is severely disabled, was held for a week, without being able to receive help from Mary Anne, who is his full-time carer, before being released – without charge. 'I don't think the police realised that I was disabled when they raided the house,' he says. 'I have spinal injuries and my daughter is my carer, but one of them asked me: "Is it an unnatural relationship with your daughter? Do you share the same bed?" Then they accused me and Mary Anne of raping three children.'

The pair were charged with sexual offences against children over a period of six years between 1995 and 2001, which were said to involve three girls under 16 who had been in the care of the Western Isles social services department. However the Nelsons only moved there in 1997.

In the nine months that followed – until the case called 'Operation Haven' collapsed on Friday, 2 July 2004 – the pair were targets of a local hate-campaign. They had the word 'rapists' daubed in paint on their wall, their car torched and their prize-winning garden, which had taken Peter and his daughter seven years to cultivate, was vandalised.

Peter became so fearful for their safety, that he had outdoor CCTV cameras installed. Eventually, he attempted to take his own life, but Mary Anne found him and he recovered after a few days in hospital. Mary Anne says, 'We were the victims of a witch hunt which nearly killed my dad. It has been like a living nightmare. No-one else should ever have to go through anything like it again.'

■ 'Following the police investigation in 2003, a number of people were reported to the Crown for offences relating to the protection of children. The Crown did not proceed with the case and no further investigation is ongoing.'



Peter Nelson and his carer daughter Mary Anne suffered a living nightmare when they were falsely accused of ritualistic child abuse

I WILL KILL A CHILD FOR £3000

London-based African witch doctor, 'Professor Ki Kee', who advertises in *The Voice* vowed to arrange the slaughter an eight-year-old African child said to be possessed by an evil spirit – for just £3000 cash. 'I can kill her', Ki Kee allegedly claimed, adding that he could kill a grown-up enemy, so long as his pockets were lined to the tune of £15,000 cash. In his advert he described himself as a specialist 'to solve all your occult problems – love, work, strange sickness, exams, politics, protection against evil, voodoo, witchcraft etc'. Robed and barefoot, Ki Kee was threatening in his manner, warning that if the deal was broken 'the spirit would take revenge'. The incredible statements were made to an undercover reporter, the *News of the World* claimed in June.

AFRICAN WITCHCRAFT

- Today over 60 million people practise voodoo worldwide.
- Voodoo, with its tradition of numerous deities and animal sacrifice, is rooted in 6000 years of African history. Spells are used to increase the power of others. It is linked to fear, greed and power.
- 'Ndoki', or 'kindoki', is a term used throughout West Africa to describe witchcraft, or a possessed person.
- In many African societies a medical condition that cannot be treated is often ascribed to the work of an evildoer, or 'ndoki'.
- In many African churches exorcism takes place after a 'possessed' person has been starved for three days. In some cases exorcism involves beating the victim, which has sometimes resulted in death.
- Apart from Africa, voodoo is particularly prevalent amongst the ancestors of African slaves in countries such as Brazil, Haiti, Cuba and America.
- Voodoo is practised even in Europe, but more discreetly.
- Experts believe that there are hundreds of small, unregistered churches practising exorcisms across Britain.

Source: www.timesonline.co.uk and www.ivilage.co.uk

TERMINOLOGY

WITCHCRAFT is the activity of performing magic to help or harm other people.
BLACK MAGIC is a type of magic that is believed to use evil spirits to do harmful things.
VOODOO is a religious cult involving magic and the worship of spirits. It is linked with African cultures, but is especially common in Haiti.
EXORCISM is the expulsion of an evil spirit from a person or place by using prayers or magic.

USEFUL INFORMATION

- NSPCC Child Protection Helpline. Call freephone 0800 800 5000. www.nspcc.org.uk
- Save the Children. Call freephone 0800 814 8148. www.savethechildren.org.uk
- Childline. Call 0800 1111. www.childline.org.uk
- Crimestoppers. Call 0800 555111.