

Research paper on occultism and witch doctors in africa

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Introduction

Hidden in mystery and practices that challenges human understanding through its complex relations, occultism is considered as the domain of obscure practices, defying science and religion. Being widespread in many African countries, occultism is believed to be practiced in secret within various circles, performed by witch doctors or other insiders of occult practices, as a solution for healing but also for generating certain benefits or advantages. This paper analyzes the influence of occultism and witch doctors in Africa, by examining if and how occult practices are used for healing or as a remedy for treating ailments or “magical illness” (such as infertility), and how are the witch doctors regarded in the African communities or how are their traditional methods perceived by modern science.

Body

Context

African countries are well known for their traditional practices that are strongly connected with witchcraft methods. Witchery is inherited from generation to generation (Solomon, 2010) and the fact that the communities are deeply enrooted in the magical believes and practices that are beyond human understanding and beyond science or religion make witchcraft very common practices in African society even nowadays. People appeal to witch doctors or occult practices for healing various humanly illness or ailments provoked by witchcraft.

Influence and Meaning of Witch Doctor

There is an aura of mystery surrounding the concept of witch doctor, a mystery generated by at least two factors: (1) witchcraft and occult practices are not perceived in a good light and the witch doctors are interested in maintaining their practices in secret; (2) the methods used by witch doctors must be unknown to regular people, so that only them to have and to deliver the solution for human problems, through their witchcraft practices (Frankly, 2003).

Existent literature generally refers to the term witch doctor in relation with “sorcerer” or witch, which have negative connotation and represent “‘ bad’ or black medicine, as opposed to the ‘ good’ medicine practiced by ‘ medicine men’” (Payne – Jackson & Alleyne, 2004, p. 36).

Robert Montgomery Martin (1836) was among the first to mention the term witch doctor and he used it in relation to the African Shamans. The author described their practices as being strongly imprinted in the African societies (referring to Kafaris), because they “ are lamentably superstitious; and hence they have the most implicit dependence on these wretched impostors; [] so credulous are the people and so infatuated in a belief of the infallibility of the wizard or witch doctor” (Martin, 1836, p. 168).

As the nowadays perceptions, the initial thoughts regarding witch doctors was that they are charlatans, having clear intentions of tricking people by taking advantage of their innocence, naivety and their simple mind, not accustomed with religion or science knowledge, but deeply enrooted in superstitions.

While in the above quoted passage Martin considers witch doctors as

wizards, other researchers consider that witch doctors are not themselves witches, but rather they heal people that are believed to have been touched by various spells. Moreover, in the modern times, witch doctors' practices are considered as healing the natural illness also, through popular, traditional medicine (Wright, 1993).

Witch Doctors in Occultism

Witch doctors are considered to be satanic priests, have a strong bond with demons, which they serve through their acts (Solomon, 2010). Scott and Scott (2004) also state that witch doctors, among occultism practitioners (medicine men, shamans, priests, wizards, etc.) are Satan's devotees and through their work they throw curses at Christian leaders and churches. Witch doctors are called upon when wanting to harm or take revenge on a neighbor or another person, when wanting to hurt somebody, even when intending to generate magical illness that leads to death. These practices can be ceased by consulting another witch doctor and in this case the witch doctors would fight magic with magic, through their occult practices (Franklin, 2003). Nevertheless, witch doctors are consulted also when desiring a woman or a man or when in need of a cure for illness or mental problems ("South Africa", 1998).

Chris Reid, a former British model notes that he received training for becoming a witch doctor, which consisted in creating remedies based on potions made of herbs or roots from the forest, crocodile or snakes ("South Africa", 1998).

Therefore, the relation between witch doctors and occultism is recognized

among practitioners, although there are others practitioners who solely refer to the healing treatments that witch doctor perform through traditionalist medicine combined with animal sacrifices.

The Witch Herbalist's Solution for Infertility

Studies reveal that many Sub – Saharan African couples cannot procreate and this medical condition is associated with many social beliefs and meanings, such as being cursed, bewitched or as a cause of masturbation or of the previous use of contraceptive measures. People who suffer of infertility treat it by appealing to spirituality, traditional healers and hospitals, separately or simultaneously (Tabong & Adongo, 2013).

Therefore, herbalists and witch doctors are two of the options of the couples that suffer infertility problems. The Witch herbalists propose various solutions for infertility, ranging from sacrificing animals to incising the clitoris, believed to be the cause of infertility. Sacrificing animals is utilized for pacifying the Gods and the ancestors. Other herbalists' recommendations refer to performing rituals such as bathing or bringing food sacrifices to evil gods at the crossroad, or where ants live, or wearing a prescribed costume by women partners and removed at the entrance of their home. Couples suffering from infertility prefer traditional remedies to the ones of professional doctors, because they are more discrete (Tabong & Adongo, 2013).

Social Influence of Witch Doctors

In African societies, is considered that each member of the society has a little magic of his own, and that everybody possesses magical powers,

similar to those of a witch doctor, but at a smaller and well defined scale, in public and in private life. As such, Franklyn (2003) notes that building boats or houses can be performed only by craftsman, who knows the magic of building boats or houses, and who keep this magic within their family, so that nobody else can apply the same magical practices.

Witch Doctors inspire fear and fear themselves of the demons that they serve. They take their power from demons and become strong human beings, having the ability to read people's minds and to communicate with spirits. They are believed to maintain their strength by appealing to strange rituals, among which bathing in human blood. However, their practices remain occult, and in their communities they are highly respected because of the fear and the mystery that they instigate (Solomon, 2010).

Traditional Healing Methods and the Influence of Modern Science

Regardless of the negative connotations of witch doctors, there are other beliefs upon which they base their work on natural healing methods. In the traditional rural areas from Africa, they are consulted before going to the doctor and they are respected by the local legal healers or nurses. As such, Wright (1993) notes that witch doctors are applying their own therapeutic methods, such as cutting the skin of patients and rubbing the incision with herbs that they gather. Indeed, witch doctors consider more efficient the Western medicine for the natural caused illnesses, although they too have healing solutions, but for the magical illness they affirm that the occult solutions are superior due to the experience gather in centuries of practices (Wright, 1993).

Nevertheless, traditional healing methods performed by witch doctors or herbalists are considered alternative medicine and they are believed to work where modern medicine and science have failed. As such, traditional healers propose alternative treatment for curing asthma, blood pressure, mental illness or venereal disease and some even claim that they have cured AIDS, through their traditionalist methods such as “ animal sacrificing, chants, and charms” (Lewis, 1999, p. 61).

Conclusion

This paper discussed about the influence of occultism and witch doctors upon African society, revealing that in African communities, they still have a great significance and a well defined role in people’s lives. People appeal to witch doctors for treating natural or magical illness, for casting spells for other individuals to fall in love with them or to take revenge on enemies. The paper revealed that witch doctors are believed to have strong relationship with demonic forces and Satan, which are considered their sources of power. They inspire fear, respect and mystery, but they have the ability to heal, as trustful sources revealed. African communities are deeply dependent on the practices performed by witch doctors. Nowadays, although still regarded with mistrust and perceived as illegal, occult practices are considered alternative medicine, succeeding to cure where modern science failed to.

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