

Satanism in Zambia: a new tree with old roots

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Satanism is a relatively new phenomenon in Zambia, being spoken about only since the early 1990s. But it is not the first time that Zambia sees a panic of such an evil spiritual nature. Many rural villages in Zambia experienced massive witchcraft attacks, and for a number of villages a cyclic nature had been reported for such attacks. Possession with *ngulu*, *mashawe*, *fufumi* and other spiritual realities have been linked to Satan since the coming of the Christian churches. Panics especially in girls' boarding schools about demons and spirits descending on the girls have been reported ever since there were boarding schools in Zambia. The history in Zambia of witchcraft, spirit possession, out-of-body experiences and experiences of extrasensory perception is old and deep. Such experiences were present long before the recent advent of Satanism. For centuries they have been part and parcel of the discourses surrounding the works of *ng'anga*, diviners and healers.

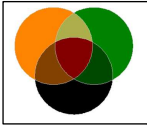
The cases of Satanism in Zambia that the Fingers of Thomas encountered are quite different from what we know about Western Satanist Churches, where Satanism is either a philosophy or where people join openly and consciously a Satanist church, be it to gain special powers or simply out of motives of rebellion. Initiation in Zambia largely proceeded involuntarily (like Spirit possession of old), and the Satanic riches depend on sacrifices and blood (like witchcraft of old). Satanism is a Western word, but the Zambian cases were definitely marked by their African roots. This means that also the dealings with Satanism should take account of this history.

Satanism and witchcraft

Already for many centuries witches are said to kill for riches. Businessmen have been accused of buying and using human hearts or other body parts to make their businesses grow. Many other attributes of Satanism, like flying, invisibility, changing into animals, or killing and causing accidents at a long distance, have been part and parcel of discourses about witchcraft long before the advent of Satanism.

In our interviews with 'delivered Satanists', most Satanists considered themselves to be of a different class to witches. They saw themselves as a higher class, with more powers. One 'Satanist' youth put it this way: "Witches and Satanists are of the same school. But while witches have the powers only of grade 1 or 2 and don't really know much about the nature of their powers, Satanists are advanced: they have reached grade 11 or 12". Yet the images used in discourses on Satanism are very much the images of classical witchcraft. The difference is that Satanists explicitly see their powers coming from the Satanic underworld, to which they feel they belong, and from various forms of covenants with a devil-figure.

The closeness of the terms partly explains why Satanism has become so much part of everyday life: For most people in Zambia witchcraft is part and parcel of everyday life and worldview. Many forms of authority, power and wealth in Zambia easily attain a certain association with witchcraft. At the same time, as much as witchcraft is feared, it



also attracts and fascinates.¹ Witchcraft is often seen as an "African science" that can compete with the Western planes, computers and telephones, though it remains only "underground" because of secrecy, jealousy, hatred and selfishness. Satanism now has absorbed the images of witchcraft, but it has elevated them onto a different level. Satanism is seen not as an "African science", but an international conspiracy.

Why the sudden need to speak of Satanism nowadays instead of witchcraft? Some born-again Christians explain it by saying that Satan has suddenly arisen from his slumber to embark on a full fledged attack on Zambia since it has been declared a Christian nation, which made him very angry. A sociological answer sees an explanation in the fact that during the last 15 years (since the sudden appearance of Satanism on the scene) life has changed drastically in Zambia. Satanism is an urban phenomenon. Zambia's towns, especially Lusaka, have witnessed an economic boom with the 2000s, and they are swamped by modern (but expensive) consumer goods. New desires as well as an adjustment in lifestyle have brought new tensions and fears, and thus there is also a need for new concepts of the occult.

In the past a number of missionaries and educators had predicted that witchcraft would die out by itself with the advent of modernity in Zambia. Instead people experience that witchcraft increased and that it has gone out of hand. The breaking-up of family structures resulted in an increase of witchcraft accusations and possibly also witchcraft practices. Now witchcraft is even succeeded by Satanism. Modern life in Zambia is envisaged and experienced through the "glasses" of Satanism. It attracts and is sought after, yet at the same time the new consumer society contains hidden

¹ The Bemba word *bwanga* comes from *ukwanga*: to be joyfully astonished and surprised, to rejoice over some sort of force and power. See also Geschiere, P. 1997. *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*. London: Virginia University.

dangers that break up families, raise suspicions, and encourages desires and expectations of different generations to develop along radical different lines.

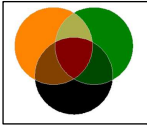
Satanism and Spirit possession

Ngulu, Mashawe, Fufumi, etc. have been present in Zambia for many centuries. Nowadays they are called demons. They have entered the Christian discourse. But many people struggling with these spiritual realities do not experience them as something solely negative. They are ambivalent. At first they bring sickness and confusion, but once they are appeased (through dancing, abstaining from certain foods, special clothing or beads) they bestow some extraordinary knowledge or powers on their spiritual spouses. The possessed person could become an asset for the community: a healer, a *ng'anga* or a prophet.

Satanism in Zambia that is brought to pastors for healing is largely of an involuntary type. 'Satanism' is "picked up" accidentally, not voluntarily sought after. As also common types of old spirits (outside the family lineage) were picked up accidentally and involuntarily. People suffered from these spirits as if suffering from a sickness that one caught against one's own will.²

Obviously there are big differences between Satanism and possession of classical Zambia spirits like the *ngulu* or *mashawe*. Ex-Satanists describe themselves as having had attained a much higher status, since they were possessed by Satan himself. They regard the *ngulu* and *mashawe* just as minor demons in the Satanic hierarchy. But those with *ngulu* and *mashawe* (or traditional spirits) don't regard themselves as minor Satanists! They don't see their spirits

² Apart from the accidentally picked up spirits, there were also spiritual realities which were linked to moral issues, say the Bemba ancestral spirits (*mipashi*) or the Chewa *mizimu* or the spirits of other lineages (*vibanda*). But the *ngulu* or *mashawe* were mostly picked up accidentally - not by a moral fault.



necessarily as coming from Satan. Especially the Zion and Mutumwa churches in Zambia give the spirits or *mizimu* a positive dimension: they come from God and are meant to be used as gifts for the benefits of the community. "Our spirits can heal, while Satan only destroys."

Still there are fundamental similarities between classical spirit possession and those involved in Satanism. Apart from the fact that both are largely involuntarily "picked up" (people see themselves as victims of the spiritual world), people with such spiritual contacts can attain a prophetic role in society. In pre-Christian Zambia, spirit possessed people could be the moral consciousness of society when their spirits taught them how things should be. The appeased spirits were of benefit to society. In Satanism, on first sight, the opposite seems the case: Satan wants to destroy society, not build it up. Yet many of those who were possessed by Satan became, once they were delivered, the prophetic consciousness of the Christian community: they give testimonies in church (a regular feature in some Pentecostal church services and more and more also within the charismatic renewal) and they warn people about the dangers of Satanism and the importance of prayer. These testimonies are very well attended and much spoken about. Delivered Satanists have seen a world that is closed for other people. Having witnessed the Satanic world "first-hand", they confirm a community's worldview and uphold its true values, which Satan, the anti-thesis, wants to destroy.

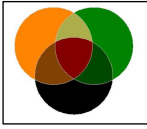
Banyama (bakamunyama)

Events that bear the most striking resemblances with the rumours of Satanism of today are the *banyama* stories (or *bakamunyama* in other areas) of the past, starting in the end of the 1920s, peaking maybe in the 1930s, but going well into the 1950s and well beyond. In various forms (but often different names) the fears reached our own times. The *banyama* were people who abducted innocent victims, extracted human

blood, and by magical means took away peoples' wills, minds and life-forces. The *banyama* were said to sell the blood to Europeans for large amounts of money, who in turn needed the blood for their medication and for modern medicines. The *banyama* were said to find their victims through prostitutes, through hidden pits into which their clients (the victims) fell, through magical rubber tools that took away the victim's willpower and mind, and through nightly raids that aimed at lonely or drunken people. Like the Satanists of today, the *banyama* of the past were said to operate at very specific hours of the night; once the specific time was over, their mystical powers also vanished from them, making it more difficult to get their victims. Like the Satanists today, they were said to use specific types of vehicles for their sinister purposes; through the use of magic, people could not resist getting into the cars (the Satanists of today are said to use black cars, while the *banyama* were fond of red cars). During the 1940s there was a fear in the Copperbelt that certain fashion articles and cosmetics for women were mystically charged by the *banyama* to initiate them into their sinister trade without their knowledge or make them easy targets.³ Similarly, Satanists of today are said to initiate people through fashion articles and cosmetics. The *banyama* were tinning African victims to be consumed by unsuspecting customers, and the tins were labelled as "corned beef"; the Satanists of today are said to transform human babies into deep-frozen chicken. Fears of the *banyama* seemed to be as widespread and deep as fear of the Satanists today.

The colonial administration tried through newspapers and through various commissions to counter-act such rumours which they considered irrational and harmful, but success was very limited. Today some anthropologists are fascinated by the colonial rumours: They consider that the images of

³ Luise White (2000), *Speaking with Vampires. Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*. University of California Press, 269ff.



the rumours (extraction of the life-force, blood and willpower for money) were so suggestive, symbolic and powerful, that they could uniquely embody the experiences and fears of people during colonial times. Louise White suggested that the traditional image of the witch could not describe this experience: witches were too familiar since they belonged more strictly into the realm of the family (witches are the people one lives with, own relatives and people of the own village). The images of the anonymous *banyama* working for some vague white people and using modern tools brought out better the experience of alienation that were experienced in a time when people were massively drawn into the Copper mines and into the money economy, where families collapsed and where new moral demands and relationships arose but also new fears. A parallel can be drawn with the time of the third Republic, when Zambia has been massively drawn into a globalised world: new images and symbols are needed to describe the global realities and fears, and Satanism has become part of that new discourse.