

# Charismatic Christianity and Witchcraft in Togo

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- Research background

In Togo, as in several other coastal countries on the Gulf of Guinea, charismatic Christian movements have been spectacularly strong since the 1990s. Charismatic Christians believe that evil spirits cause all sorts of misfortunes and troubles in everyday life and that the Holy Spirit drives out these devil's servants and brings success and prosperity to believers' lives. The evil spirits referred to here are not understood as abstractions of evil, but rather as concrete beings such as witches and indigenous spirits. Witchcraft in particular is blamed by many charismatic Christians in Togo for causing all kinds of misfortunes in their daily lives. The older, more established Christian denominations are not able to address perceived witchcraft problems because they maintain a skeptical attitude toward the existence of such spiritual forces. Charismatic Christianity, on the other hand, acknowledges their existence and offers people a way of combating witchcraft through deliverance by the power of the Holy Spirit.



Fig. 1. Children shouting “Fire!” and casting “the power of the Holy Spirit” around them to expel evil spirits.

- Research purpose and aim

Previous studies have pointed out that these charismatic churches' self-proclaimed ability to combat the forces of witchcraft is a principal source of their increasing popularity. Yet their appeal is not universal: some non-charismatic Christians and other non-members say things like “At every turn charismatic Christians are quick to blame witchcraft for trifling matters seemingly having nothing to do with it” and “I don't like to visit

charismatic churches. They are havens for witches.” Though charismatic Christianity is supposed to provide people with an opportunity to solve their witchcraft problems, outsiders’ opinions such as these imply another relation between charismatic Christianity and witchcraft. The purpose of this study is to clarify this relation in detail by analyzing confessions of witchcraft problems and confessions of witchcraft practice in deliverance sessions at charismatic churches.



Fig. 2. People confessing witchcraft problems.  
The man on the left is the pastor.

- Results and achievements through fieldwork

Deliverance is the practice of casting out evil spirits from the believer’s body by means of prayer and the pastor’s spiritual “touch”. Before deliverance, pastors call those who are thought to suffer from the influence of evil spirits such as witches to the front of the church and urge them to confess how they have been afflicted by these evil spirits. Typically, persons confessing as victims of witchcraft ascribe many kinds of problems in their daily lives to witchcraft, some serious, others relatively trivial. In addition to confessions by the alleged victims of witchcraft, there are also confessions by those who claim to have practiced witchcraft, that is, by the witches themselves. Here I will focus on confessions by witches in order to shed additional light on the relation between charismatic Christianity and witchcraft.

Persons confessing as witches typically describe themselves as having been directly involved in a sequence of concrete misfortunes and mishaps. Confessions by witches provide church members with detailed information about the practice of witchcraft. In their confessions, witches claim to have performed various unnatural acts such as traveling long distances in impossibly short times, changing themselves into animals such as horned owls, and practicing cannibalism. As it happens, the behaviors to which self-proclaimed witches confess typically agree with widely-held stereotypical impressions of what witches do. These generic ideas about witches, and the belief that witchcraft is real, are contextualized in the first-person stories told by confessing witches and are thereby strengthened.

Between the narratives of these confessants, pastors make such comments as “Most children are witches”, “There are those who have much more serious cases than that of this child. If your children have the same problem as him, let them go to the front of the church”, or “You know that someone around you behaves in the same way.” Thus they urge church members to relate problems in their everyday lives to witchcraft by

generalizing specific episodes in confessions and pointing out the omnipresence of witchcraft.



Fig. 3. A woman flinging herself down on the floor while being delivered by a pastors' "touch".

- Implications and directions for future research

Although charismatic Christianity, through its practice of deliverance, offers solutions to the witchcraft problems of individuals, it simultaneously reinforces the reality and omnipresence of witchcraft, thus making it more likely that additional witchcraft problems will be perceived. A similar pattern has been observed in studies of witchcraft accusations and witch-hunt movements in rural Africa.

In closing, I would like to mention three important topics that I intend to study to further elucidate the relationship between charismatic Christianity and witchcraft. The first is the extremely strong influence of the pastors in the deliverance process and the widespread belief in the accuracy of their claims. It is the pastors, after all, who urge members to make confessions of witchcraft, who judge the reliability of these confessions, and who identify the presence and influence of witchcraft in confessants' lives. The second topic is the influence of the repeated practice of confession of and deliverance from witchcraft within the church on the social reality outside the church. Given the popularity of charismatic Christianity in Togo, these practices must affect social relations outside the church in some way. The third topic is the social problems suffered by the growing number of people identified as witches through charismatic practices. In particular, many children are regarded as witches and suffer emotional pain and violence as a result. I intend to carry out further research focusing on the above three points.