

Synopsis:

Child-witches of Kinshasa

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Between 20 000 and 50 000 children live in the streets of Kinshasa. Organized in gangs, they survive on theft or prostitution. According to *Médecins du Monde*, more than a third of these children were thrown out of their homes after being accused of witchcraft and thus being responsible for all their families' troubles (death, unemployment, disease, etc.). The immense majority of the people living in Kinshasa believe these curses to be real. More than one hundred new "child-witches" are discovered every month and thrown out in to the streets.

Although faith in witchcraft is deeply rooted in the Congolese culture, this phenomenon of abandoning children due to accusations of witchcraft only began to reach this magnitude at the end of 1990s.

In this hugely overpopulated shanty town of Kinshasa 95 % of the population live below the poverty line. The children are seen as "unproductive" mouths to feed and burdens on their families. Abandoning children with the justification of witchcraft is the only way that is seen as "socially acceptable".

The charismatic churches authenticate this "possession" and organize exorcisms in exchange for money. If they do not "work", the child is thrown out on to the streets. Sometimes they even attempt to murder them.