Pentecostal Witchcraft: Neoliberal Possession and Demonic Discourse in Ivoirian Pentecostal Churches

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Abstract
While Pentecostal churches derive their growing popularity in large part from their ability to combat witchcraft in society, I argue here that Pentecostalism is itself an alternative form of witchcraft discourse. As such, it falls prey to the same ambivalent relationship between power, success and social obligation that witchdoctors and politicians must face. I discuss Pentecostalism and witchcraft in terms of their relationship to neoliberal understandings of individual agency and economy in contrast to the moral economy of social obligations. At the same time I draw parallels between the ritual techniques of Pentecostalism and witchcraft cosmology, demonstrating that, despite Pentecostal churches’ efforts to transcend the power of witchcraft, they in many cases become encompassed by witchcraft discourse, often taking on the appearance of witchcraft itself.

Keywords
Pentecostal, witchcraft, neoliberalism, Côte d’Ivoire, modernity, possession

Introduction
‘Ceci est mon corps, ceci est mon sang . . . PRENEZ, MANGEZ . . . BUVEZ!’ [This is my body, this is my blood . . . TAKE IT, EAT IT . . . DRINK IT!] Printed on the wall of a church in Abidjan.

‘Des pasteurs grossissent, des fidèles maigrissent’ [The pastors are getting fatter, the faithful are getting thinner.] Gbich! headline (Simplice 2001).

One of the primary roles of Pentecostal churches in the Ivory Coast seems to be their ability to combat the forces of witchcraft in modern society, and this may indeed be a principal source of their increasing popularity. However, I argue here that not only are Pentecostal churches an important new social
resource in the struggle against the forces of otherworldly avarice, but they are in themselves a new form of witchcraft discourse, unintentionally caught up in the same ambivalence over power that links witchcraft not only to illness and misfortune, but to prosperity and the capacity for healing as well. Pentecostalism represents itself as transcending material and occult worlds, capable of simultaneously destroying witches and producing individual wealth and health through the beneficent presence of the Holy Spirit. And yet, because these churches recognize witchcraft as a real and powerful force, the creeping ambivalence of power over the occult world transforms popular perception of the churches themselves. In examining the relationship between Pentecostalism and witchcraft, we are thus witnessing the collision of two totalizing discourses, the internal logic of each claiming to encompass the other. However, rather than trying to argue that one of these logics is somehow more potent or more inclusive than the other, I suggest that it is more useful to consider the issue from the perspective of practice: in other words how these competing imaginations of power, wealth and illness are strategically and varying employed by actors in everyday life.

The overlap between these seemingly opposed belief systems resides precisely in their respective approaches to the tension between encroaching neoliberal individualist ideologies of ‘modernity’ and the local prioritization of kinship and other obligations of reciprocity over individual agency. An increasing number of anthropologists have underscored the complex and interwoven relationship between witchcraft and modernity in African societies (Ashforth 2005; Bond and Ciewaky 2001; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, 2002; Fisiy and Geschiere 1990; Geschiere 1997; Moore and Sanders 2001), arguing that witchcraft has always been a way of discussing the tensions between individual agency and accumulation on the one hand and social obligations to kinship and collectivity on the other, and these tension have only become more visible in the ongoing social processes dubbed ‘modernity’ (1997). As the Comaroffs put it in their initial framing of the debate:

"In reciprocal ripostes between growing urban masses and their rural relatives, witches have become Janus faced signifiers. From the town, they seem to epitomize the grasping resentment of reactionary villagers, who greedily eat the patrimony of those absentees compelled to mine sources of wealth in the world outside. To the village, they appear as the city incarnate, feeding off the countryside for their own selfish ends, absorbing people, goods and money with no return, and robbing the periphery of their means of production. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xxvi)"

Witchcraft seems to act as conservative reaction against the evils of modernity through accusations against those who have profited from the capitalist econ-
omy, while at the same time serving as the explanation for Africa’s inability to progress as disenfranchised youth blame the maleficent jealousy of elders for their lack of success. Thus, contemporary witchcraft discourse is often understood in anthropological literature as an idiom for coming to terms with the increasing social and economic disparities produced by intrusive neoliberal forces, as well as a counter-ideology to the ideal of the independent individual agent that tends to accompany neoliberalism.

Paralleling the increasing attention to witchcraft since the 1990s in Africanist anthropology, another body of anthropological literature has been busy tracing the relationships between Pentecostalism, modernity and globalization, following the dramatic growth of Pentecostal churches during this period. In fact, many of the same underlying motivations have been suggested for the spread of Pentecostalism as for contemporary witchcraft beliefs (see, for example, Robbins 2004; Meyer 2004, 1998, 1998a, 1998b; LeBlanc 2003; Parish 2003, 2001, 1999; Smith 2001; Marshall-Fratani 1998). Just as witchcraft accusations can be interpreted as a double-edged blade in the social adjustments to capitalist transformations, Pentecostal discourse ‘is simultaneously a product of strains created in community and extended family ties by social transformations that threaten individual allegiance to and ability to rely on kin based social networks and an important engine in furthering this process’ (Smith 2001: 590). Pentecostalism directly addresses new inequalities in wealth and economic transformations through its gospel of prosperity, suggesting that conversion will bring economic success and legitimating glitzy new wealth as an indication of God’s favor, while simultaneously moralizing against irresponsible forms of consumption (Parish 2002; LeBlanc 2003; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005). Meyer has argued that Pentecostalism in Ghana fosters a process of individualism and an engagement with modernity by encouraging a ‘complete break with the past’ (2001). Marshall-Fratani counters that, rather than individualism, it is the imagined global community produced through Pentecostal utilization of modern media that produces new forms of identity and social practice. At the same time, Parish and Smith have both demonstrated that Pentecostal churches themselves can get caught up in these moral condemnations of inequality: the legitimacy of their wealth is sometimes questioned by alternative ‘traditionalist’ interpretations of Christianity and by competing Pentecostal churches. Just as the Comaroffs framed the question around witchcraft as multifaceted signifier utilized by modernity’s malcontents, Meyer highlights Pentecostalism’s polyvalent role in expressing the tensions between individual- and community-directed motivations: ‘Pentecostalism provides a bridge between individualistic and family oriented concerns and allows people to express and reflect upon the tensions between both’ (1999: 212). Through
an analysis of my own observations of the intersections between Pentecostal churches and witchcraft in Côte d’Ivoire, I want to examine the coincidence of these lines of debate more explicitly, by thinking through the ways in which these discourses seem to become inextricably interwoven in the discourse and practice of believers and non-believers alike. Ultimately, I argue, in Côte d’Ivoire Pentecostal discourse is incapable of severing itself from the witchcraft cosmology it seeks to transcend, for, in its local adaptation to both existing cosmology and the contemporary social tensions it seeks to address, it has become in itself a form of witchcraft.

**Abidjan: Neoliberalism, Moral Economy and the Ambivalence of Success**

Abidjan, as well as being the economic heart of the region, is a symbol of capitalist enterprise and modernism throughout West Africa, and it has long been a destination for immigrants hoping to bring home some part of the wealth it is thought to contain. It is therefore a place where people go to fulfill dreams of material success, a place where prosperity, wealth and, most especially, the ability to consume extravagantly are highly valued. My own work there has focused on unemployed youth who practice *le bluff*, an ostentatious display of material success that they do not have (Newell 2005). The illusion of wealth is what counts, because, since they are performing for their peers, no one is fooled, as the very term to describe it implies. Nevertheless, people expressed a great deal of ambivalence around such display, even as they devoted themselves to it. Even while young male Ivoirians dedicated the larger portion of their income to expensive brand-name clothes, covering the table with beer bottles at the bar, displaying wads of cash and spending money on their girlfriends, they expressed anxiety about the dangers of such ostentation. They might be mugged by their jealous peers, women might use public shame to demand money ruthlessly from men, or, they might become the target of witchcraft. Even though Abidjan youth described the city as a kind of jungle in which no one could be trusted and everyone must act in their own interests, their own social networks operated through a form of moral economy in which exchange and mutual support were necessary to survival (Newell 2006). Although most wealth was procured through illicit means including theft, they expected their friends to share the proceeds of a successful coup, employing the language of fictive kinship to draw on a 'traditional' ethics in which social interests are prioritized over individual ones. Thus, even in the black market economy in a focal point of West African capitalism, Abidjanese understood wealth as always at the expense of others, and therefore morally suspect unless distributed generously. Nyamnjoh has argued that this dynamic...
is common to many African societies, describing a tension between agency and domestication, individual motivation and collective good. He writes that ‘agency as the ability to manipulate oneself into a position of abundance while others struggle to get by, is perceived as destructive to others and ultimately, to the accumulating individual as well’ (Nyamnjoh 2001: 42). Only domesticated agency, agency in which success is fed directly into the community (especially the kinship community) is perceived free from ambivalence. Smith has similarly described this in contemporary Nigeria as the emphasis on patron-client ties and the legitimation of wealth through its redistribution (Smith 2001), which, as in Côte d’Ivoire, extend from the street into the highest reaches of the state system.

Witchcraft in Ivoirian Thought: the Polyvalence of Power

The social understanding of power as an ambivalent force with the potential for both good and evil is a long-standing Ivoirian concern, and it is one that is often understood locally through witchcraft discourse. Prefiguring Geschiere’s influential analysis of djambe among the Maka of Cameroon (1997), Augé described witchcraft beliefs in Coastal Ivoirian societies as resting upon a notion of the wawi or ‘double’, a kind of inherited spiritual life-force attached to the individual. The key aspect of this concept for Augé is that the power in the double is amoral. Thus, while Alladian and Ebrié societies have separate terms for the power within witches (ãwa) and the power to fight witches (seké), these two forces are understood to be of the same nature, alternative expressions of the double of the individual:

Le même pouvoir qui permet de terrasser la force d’autrui est aussi celui qui permet de voir clair, d’estimer à sa juste valuer le rapport des forces. La force du sorcier c’est aussi de savoir éviter de s’en servir. L’art du discours, de la parole convenable, est aussi l’une des composantes de la force. Cette force là est aussi bien celle des contre-sorciers. (Augé 1976: 130)

Thus, not only do the abilities to battle witchcraft, to heal witchcraft and to detect witchcraft partake of the same force as witchcraft itself, but even the more ‘secular’ power of oration relies on the internal force of the double, thus implying that political success itself is implicated in same metaphysics of power. Augé continues:

Ces incertitudes, cette ambiguité, se retrouvent dans la double image globale qui nous est proposée du sorcier: tantôt il apparaît comme démuni et jaloux, dangereux par là...
meme; tantot il apparait comme fort parmi les forts, riche, influent. La vieille femme ou le vieil homme isolées sont souvent soupçonnés et accusés de sorcellerie; mais les chefs de lignages les plus puissants sont eux aussi soupçonnés de sorcellerie. (ibid.)

Furthermore, it is this same double witches use to leave the body and engage in their nefarious lifestyle, and it is the double of others that the witches consume to increase their power. Thus, in the Ivoirian cosmology of witchcraft, evildoers gain power by literally consuming the lives of others. Once a witch consumes your double, your own life will ebb away, through either terrible misfortune or incurable illness. This formulation of witchcraft and its relation to the double was not limited to the Coastal peoples but seemed to be one of the most pervasive conceptions across all ethnic groups, classes and religions, at least in Abidjan. I could detect no differences in the general descriptions of how witches behaved or their motivations in stories told to me by Muslims or Christians, old or young, rich or poor; differences emerged only in the practices and powers used to combat them. Indeed, both the Baoulé and the Agni (Ivoirian Akan groups) have practically the same word for the double as the Alladians: woa-woè (Guerry 1975, d’Aby 1960).

Furthermore, the stories I was told about witchcraft very clearly outlined its focus around issues of modernity, prosperity and kinship, corresponding very well to emerging anthropological theories of witchcraft and modernity outlined above. Typically, witches could attack their own kin only within unilinear constraints (the specifics of which varied by ethnic group), but they overcame this obstacle through the organization of covens. Indeed, because witches loved their kin, they rarely wanted to hurt them, but once they had a taste for human flesh and the riches and technologies (otherworldly airplanes for example) available to them through witchcraft they were forced to sacrifice their own kin to the group in exchange for those offered by others. As Billy, an out-of-work youth in his early thirties, explained to me:

In any case you must understand that they do not work alone, they are in a confrérie, usually at least 10 like that, and they vote for who they will eat. Now since you have eaten from their families, they will take from your family. They vote to choose who it will be, and you have no choice. They choose the one who is dearest to you on purpose, against your will. You become a witch against your will as well, because when a witch dies, the group votes on who in their family will replace him. Then they will give you human flesh and you won’t even know it. But once you have eaten it it is too late. You crave it and must find it again, and so you are at their mercy.

This theme of democratic decision-making and social obligation to the group is a fascinating one that I hope to take up further elsewhere, but clearly there
is a reference to modernity even within the imagined social organization of evil. More importantly, witches were often said to be opposed to modernity and development of any sort. Guillaume, a successful young man studying to be a judge, told me that:

[Witchcraft is] holding Africa back because every time someone tries to build something, they kill him. The witches only want what is bad in life. If someone is rich and bad and has a brother who is rich and good and does things to help the community, they will kill the good one first. The bad guy who keeps all his money to himself they will let live. If someone gets the money together to bring electricity to the village, once they've put up the poles and only need to add wire to finish, puff, he is dead. They don't like progress . . .

Yet in the same conversation, Guillaume told me that witchcraft was increasingly found in the city, that it was being brought to urban areas by youth. This theme of the spread of witchcraft amongst youth was a prevalent part of urban Ivorian conversation, and regularly showed up in newspaper articles that told of such horrors as a 6-year-old-boy killing his family off one by one, feasting on his mother’s breasts and father’s genitalia, and playing marbles with his sisters eyes, all in an attempt to prove himself worthy of being chief of his confrérie. A young Muslim man named Keita whose family originated from northern Côte d’Ivoire told me that witchcraft was being controlled in the villages where elders refused to pass on the secret knowledge to the next generation, but that it was becoming out of control in the cities, where greedy government ministers and criminal youth deployed it for personal gain. In fact, some youth involved in the criminal scene showed me scars containing special medicines to improve their fighting skills or to make them difficult to detect in the dark.

In one particularly striking case, the College Moderne, a secondary school in the center of Plateau, the section of the city filled with skyscrapers and most associated with modernity and money, was shut down when youth rioted in the streets accusing the principal of feeding off their intelligence, killing some of them and siphoning off the collective intelligence so that they did poorly on their exams. She was said to have imprisoned souls in the laboratory and to have hidden a canari (an occult tool of witches) under the flagpole. Despite their hatred of progress, witches were often discussed as having access to western technology in the otherworld, most frequently in the form of the airplanes they use to travel about. Paul, a man in his late forties who had spent twenty years living outside Côte d’Ivoire (much of it in Texas) told me about an experience from his childhood:
One day in the village, a giant kite welded out of iron with a long chain trailing off it was found in the morning in the center of town. In those days villages often had a large cross like a flagpole in a big square, and that is where it was found, at the base of the cross. The elders said it was a sorcerer’s airplane that had crashed. The chain was supposed to be the kite string. For the next month, all the deaths were explained in terms of this. They were sorcerers who had crashed in the plane, so they were doomed to die.

In the same vein, a number of my Ivorian friends seemed uncertain about how to interpret European technological superiority. On the one hand, it was often asserted that products such as radios, televisions and airplanes were the ‘white’ form of witchcraft. In one case, a man suggested ‘white people have their own version of sorcery, sending mercenaries to kill people for them. Guns are sorcery too. These are just different ways of achieving the same ends, killing people at a distance. Here we achieve the same goal mystically.’ On the other hand, some Ivorians blamed the technological ‘inferiority’ of Africans on their inability to move beyond witchcraft, which had been successfully eradicated in the west. I was even asked to explain how we had achieved this great task. Although some thought contemporary witchcraft was coming unmoored from kinship, there was no elaborated system of thought about this as we find in Geschiere (1997) or the Comaroffs’ studies of new forms of ghostly zombie plantations (2002).

The point here is that witchcraft discourse is not, in fact, a coherent logic or straightforward set of theological statements about the world. Rather, its power as a kind of master signifier for social explanation comes precisely from its residence in the otherworld, in a place of mystery that is not fully understood (see Siegel 2004). As the signifier for the unsignifiable, it nevertheless plays into very concrete conversations about the inequality of social relationships in everyday life by treating power as something that is drawn at once from the external and from the people around one. Most importantly for the present discussion, witchcraft discourse always suggests a potential course of action for the betterment of life: the eradication of witches.

The Growth of Pentecostalism in Côte d’Ivoire and its Historical Precedents

Pentecostal churches only recently made any real headway in Côte d’Ivoire, but since the 1990s they have grown by leaps and bounds, perhaps, as LeBlanc suggests, because the economic failure of the country left many people with few other avenues besides religion through which to find success and survival.
(LeBlanc 2003). Nevertheless, during my fieldwork, many of my closest friends remained quite skeptical of these churches (indeed resentful of the loss of some of their favorite establishments of entertainment to the arrival of the churches). While most non-Muslim Ivoirians are nominally Catholic (though as LeBlanc argues, Côte d’Ivoire’s identification of itself as a Catholic nation was largely a political construct), many people I encountered were quite casual about religious practice. Men tended to stay home and drink palm wine on Sunday, leaving religion to the women. At the same time, they were usually quite adamant about their belief in God (whether Muslim or Christian), and I generally tried to avoid the awkwardness that inevitably ensued whenever I was forced to admit my own agnosticism. My curiosity about the new Pentecostal churches was initially piqued when I was personally warned on several occasions about the dangers of Pentecostal churches. Many Ivoirians I knew scorned these establishments as places set up primarily for taking people’s money, claiming that the preachers themselves did not even read the Bible until they decided to profit from it. But they were not only avoided as sites of escroquerie (confidence scams), but as sites of occult danger. I was scolded that these churches were particularly dangerous for me, since someone could take my picture and pray over it until I forgot all about my wife and gave all my money to them. Perhaps most surprisingly, I was told by such skeptics that churches were a favorite place for sorcerers to spend their time: they hide there because they feel safe. It is this classic ambivalence about power, money, healing and danger, so typical of cosmologies of witchcraft, that I am interested in exploring in the context of the Pentecostal churches in Abidjan.

Despite their self-representation as a dominant mode of combating witchcraft, I suggest that Pentecostal churches are also in themselves a form of witchcraft discourse and practice. Indeed, Ivoirians regard these churches with all the awe and ambivalence they typically reserve for those with the power of witchcraft; churches are accused of being sites of greed, of corruption and even sorcery itself, while, without apparent contradiction, they are respected and revered for their abilities to heal. This kind of conflicting practice and ideological ambivalence is common in witchcraft discourse; anthropologists have often demonstrated that those who combat witchcraft deploy the same powers that witches claim (see especially Geschiere 1997). Thus féticheurs (traditional healers) are feared for their sorcery capabilities: they can be paid to heal, but the ability to manipulate matters of the invisible world means they can be paid to do harm as well. As Fisiy and Geschiere demonstrate so well in the Cameroonian context, dealing with witches can be a corrupting business, and not only politicians but even the Cameroonian courts that try witchcraft cases become embroiled in the dilemma of power’s ambivalence, for they must rely
on nganga witchdoctors’ occult vision to ‘prove’ that a witch is guilty (Fisiy and Geschiere 1990). Similarly, when a Kenyan state commission investigated the crisis of Satan worship, Kenyans muttered ‘Do they really expect us to believe that devil worshipping can investigate devil worshippers?’ (Blunt 2004).

While I am arguing that Pentecostal churches unintentionally participate in witchcraft discourse, I am not suggesting that they are theologically syncretic, rather they encompass the entire discourse of witchcraft and magic into the overarching biblical category of Satan. As Meyer argues, however, we need:

to consider also the negative incorporation of the spiritual entities in African religious traditions into the image of the Christian devil as part and parcel of local appropriations. In this way, the ‘old’ and forbidden, from which Christians were required to distance themselves, remained available, albeit in a new form. (Meyer 2004)

Indeed, Meyer has written that, among Ewe Christian churches, ‘demonization by no means implies that the former gods and spirits will disappear out of people’s lives. As servants of Satan they are still regarded as real powers that have to be dealt with in a concrete way—rather than as outmoded “superstitions”, as modern Protestant theology would have it’ (Meyer 1999). The efficacy of church practice relies upon possession, not, as in North American Pentecostalism, by the Holy Spirit, but rather the temporary possession by the demons themselves. Or rather, possession is more complicated, a kind of double possession in which the ‘demon’ emerges first, only to be cast out by the Holy Spirit in a spiritual battle that takes place within the body of the believer (Meyer 1999: 207). The crucial point here, however, is that this practice of possession gives real credence to traditional religion by giving the witches themselves voice within church walls. While churches regularly called for people to abandon the use of féticheurs because their power came from Satan, I never heard them suggest that a belief in witches themselves was problematic. In this Pentecostal worldview witches would seem to fit neatly within the category of satanic influence, something the church should have been uniquely situated to fight against. However, as I argue here, witchcraft discourse has a tendency to spill outside these delimitations and infect all forms of success and hierarchy surrounding it, including the church itself.

In this section, I want to demonstrate first the way in which the Pentecostalist gospel of prosperity and attention to witch-cleansing corresponded to a southern Ivoirian cultural relationship to religion and especially to Christianity in order to help explain its success as a discourse. At the same time, however, it is necessary to examine how this cultural positioning of Pentecostalism
has left it open to suspicion in Ivoirian culture, and why it is often thought to be as much a haven for witches as a force of opposition to them.

Despite the diverse number of ethnic groups in southern Côte d’Ivoire, religion in this region has a history of crossing such boundaries even before the arrival of Christianity. Besides different versions of belief in an omniscient but removed creator god, people were most actively involved in relationships with smaller deities who were offered sacrifices and ritual offerings in exchange for their protection, in return for prosperity, and to avoid the dire consequences of angering the spirit (Walker 1983). Many of these were local, inhabiting a particular tree or pool, but:

The cults of some spirits came to extend beyond specific villages, and even ethnic areas, becoming regional as their effectiveness became known. Tano, for example, was a river spirit who acquired great fame in the coastal areas of both the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast at the turn of the century. (Walker 1983: 25)

Christianity, however, fell completely flat in Côte d’Ivoire (not for lack of trying—missionary attempts in the region date back to 1637), and, until the arrival of William Wade Harris in 1913, only a scattering of migrants from the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone who had converted before their arrival considered themselves Christians (Walker 1983: 33). Harris was a Liberian prophet who, having failed to spread his message at home, entered Côte d’Ivoire where he met immediate success. By 1914 when the French expelled him, he had converted more than 100,000 people (ibid.: 53). Walker attributes his success to the way in which his message of Christianity was framed in terms that were immediately familiar to those he spoke to. His message of a new god was easily incorporated into a system accustomed to welcoming foreign prophets of new spirits. He emphasized the abolishment of witchcraft (the first and most important commandment, over and above the Bible’s ten, is “Thou shalt not eat human flesh”), and replaced peoples’ fetishes with collective baptisms. Finally, he preached a gospel of prosperity, promising that if his converts followed his teachings and prayed to the Christian god faithfully for seven years, they would live like Europeans. While Harris encouraged all of his followers to get a western education, most of the youth leave the church upon completing their education, as many Ivoirians regard it as a ‘backwards’ religion and prefer the mainstream Catholic and Protestant churches (Walker 1980).

What make the Harrist movement relevant for an understanding of Pentecostalism are the parallels between his doctrine and practice and that of contemporary Pentecostalism. First of all he insisted on a ‘complete break from
the past’ and asked his converts to burn all of their fetishes which were under Satan’s control, including the major shrines to spirits that had until then protected the village. According to Krabill (1990), his technique for doing this involved using traditional instruments used to call the spirits (but played in accompaniment to hymns). Once these satanic spirits were called out they could be properly destroyed. He also transformed the indexes of internal morality, insisting that illness was divine punishment for one’s own acts of witchcraft, and to be healed you must confess and be purified by the church. This corresponds to the doctrine of driving witchcraft out of church members rather than the other-directed healing of the *féticheurs* that seek to block the witch that is harming you. Furthermore, Pentecostalism conforms rather well to the same pattern that made Harrism so easily acceptable to Ivoirian populations in the first place: the gospel of prosperity fits well within an understanding of deities that will reward you with material wealth should you fulfill the proper obligations to the deity. Most importantly, at the time of publication, Walker claimed that Harrism was to date the only Christian church in Côte d’Ivoire that ‘openly acknowledges witchcraft as a problem and openly deals with it’ (Walker 1983: 137).

Parish’s analysis of Akan anti-witchcraft shrines just across the Ivoirian border in Ghana supports this suggested correspondence between Pentecostalism and Ivoirian deities (1999). Parish describes two types of anti-witchcraft shrines: *aboso-abrafo* (where forest spirits, often from Côte d’Ivoire, are brought to the village and both support the prosperity of their clients and protect them from witchcraft) and *aduruyefo* (where women accused of witchcraft in their Pentecostal church have their Bible replaced with a pure one and the witchcraft cast out of them). The first conforms quite well to the spirit shrines described by Walker. The second version seems to be a new by-product of Pentecostalism. In Parish’s region, people believe that rival Pentecostal churches will try to discredit each other by distributing Bibles contaminated by Satan. The recipient of such a Bible becomes a witch against their will, and is typically spotted by her excessive consumption habits and promiscuity. Only by attending these shrines (whose efficacy comes directly from the Bible rather than any ‘satanic’ spirits), destroying her contaminated Bible and publicly confessing can the woman purify herself from this satanic influence.

I am suggesting here that Pentecostalism is quickly replacing other forms of Christianity in Côte d’Ivoire because it at once fits pre-existing religious beliefs about efficacy against witchcraft and access to material prosperity (neither of which mainstream Catholicism and Protestantism have much to say about) while at the same time corresponds to an Ivoirian interest in modernity that has made Harrist churches increasingly uninteresting.
Indeed, the bluffeurs mentioned above cast their consumption habits in the frame of access to modernity, and a successful bluff is a demonstration less of material success (which the audience knows is an illusion) than one's modern sensibilities. During my fieldwork in 2000 and 2001, one of the most popular Ivoirian songs (entitled ‘Victoire’ and sung by Petit Yode and Enfant Siro) described the invasion of Abidjan’s bars and movie theatres by these new churches. Satan, angered at his loss, arrives in Abidjan (dressed as a hoodlum all in black with Timberlands on his feet and an earring) only to encounter Jesus, dressed in white, wearing Sebago shoes and his hair nicely cut. The two commence a fistfight and Jesus wins, accompanied by a joyous hymn-inspired chanting of ‘Victoire.’ The conflict between Pentecostalism and evil is thus represented as one of competing modes of consumption, much like the ostentatious young Ghanaian men and their critics in Parish’s account (2001).

In this way, Pentecostal discourse very neatly fits into a particular set of religious and material concerns that non-Muslim Ivoirians find largely unmet elsewhere, allowing them to consume conspicuously, displaying both their material and spiritual modernity while fending off the dangers of witchcraft. The problem, however, is that such powers come with the possibility of ambivalent and hidden dangers in the minds of most Ivoirians.

Possession, Pentecostal Churches and the Purification of Witches

Although I visited a variety of Abidjan’s churches, my primary example here is L’Eglise Universelle de la Royaume de Dieu, mainly because it was one of the few entirely francophone Protestant churches and therefore dominated by Ivoirians (as opposed to the many Nigerian and Ghanaian Pentecostal churches scattered across town). The church was started in the 1970s by a Brazilian lottery employee, Edir Macedo, who has since accrued hundreds of millions of dollars from the church. The church is widely accused of being designed solely to take money from the impoverished, has been banned in Belgium and was fined $90 million for tax evasion by the United States. Little of this was known in Cote d’Ivoire, though vague rumors about the church being a Brazilian scam circulated among cynics. I went to this church regularly with Bernard, the father of my friend Noël. Most of his children had died or were struggling with illness that western medicine had failed to cure (and which he explained was therefore clearly the work of witches). Although he continued to visit féticheurs, he also attended this church at least twice a week, primarily because he had witnessed its efficacy against witchcraft. ‘They are strong in this,’ he told me. At the time, Noel and his surviving brothers disapproved of the
church and considered it a scam, but they would occasionally accompany their father out of respect or in hopes that it might work.

The following descriptions (in italics) are drawn from my field notes during these visits. As the only white attending these services, I felt myself continually observed and so, to avoid causing embarrassment to Bernard, I participated in most aspects of the service.

We enter what was once a sizable cinema. As things get started there is a bit of singing and then prayer commences. The pastor asks people to repeat his words but there is no pause and he goes faster and faster such that the room quickly becomes a deafening garble of noise. The prayer begins slowly, focusing on the love for and from Jesus and Jehovah, and asking for help from God, progressing into a naming of evils, in particular sorcerers from the village. The prayer is accompanied by stomping of feet and culminates in screams of ‘burn, burn, burn’ and finally ‘be gone, be gone, be gone’ as we fling our arms out from our bodies. By this time there are a few isolated cases of trance. The pastor says, ‘you see, it’s beginning already’. He takes a moment to rail against the lack of faith among those churchgoers that continue to visit féticheurs at the same time. He then tells us about Elisha and a city of poisoned water (2 Kings 2:19):

You are sick, but can’t get better, because behind the sickness and infertility and lack of success there is something else, and that something is causing these problems. It suffices to tear this something out of your life and the problems will go away of their own accord. That something is sorcery. Now, people are always trying to avoid sorcerers from the village by never going back to their village. But do you think that stops the sorcerers? Can’t their powers reach the town? (everyone shouts that they can). The sorcerer can hook you on their line, reeling you in like on a fishing pole. In the bible, Elisha puts salt in the water and with the word of God, made the poisoned water good again ‘neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it’. We are going to do the same thing here tonight, the very same thing.3

At this point, two of the pastor’s assistants carry out an enormous heavy platter of salt. The pastor proceeds (with all of us pointing our arms at the salt) to bless the salt. Then, all the while praying frantically and angrily he spreads the salt all over the floor in front of the altar. Now he and his army of uniformed assistants form lines along either side and ask everyone to pass through barefoot, telling us that those with demons inside them will have trouble even setting foot in the salt, and it will be very difficult to make it through. Everyone does go through the salt, but some fall and go into writhing trance. As we pass, the assistants grip our heads and whisper in terrifying guttural tones into our ears about Jesus. Occasionally the pastor puts the microphone to the mouth of a woman in trance (lying at the edge of the salt in
convulsions) and piercing shrieks fill the room. He says today he doesn’t just want to chase out the demons, he wants to make them suffer. Apparently sometimes he interviews the demons, but today he says he won’t. He invites people there for the first time to approach and see the work of sorcery. One young woman who was dressed to a T on arrival with pagne [African print material] and make-up and an elaborate hairdo comes back hair standing on end as though she had put her finger in a light bulb, and in a daze she tries to straighten it again. Her neck is coated in salt as she had obviously fallen. Sometimes the assistants have trouble wrestling with those in trance to keep them on the ground, twisting around, gripping them by the neck. The rest of us sing and dance about marching against Satan and flinging devils out of our bodies in the meantime.

Possession by the Holy Spirit is a defining feature of Pentecostalism (Anderson 2001), but the Royaume de Dieu has turned this on its head, making possession a kind of struggle with the witches inside people. Churchgoers become possessed by the demons lying latent inside them when exposed to the purifying power of the church, and, once they show themselves, the demons can be successfully driven from the body. As it so happens, possession is the method par excellence for detecting witches outside of Christian contexts as well. Of note here is the authority that trance had for Ivoirians as a source of knowledge about witches. Because witches do their work ‘on the other side’, that is to say, the invisible world, the only way to see them is to be able to enter that world oneself, or to communicate with someone from that world. Because only a select few could ‘voir claire’ (to ‘see clearly’, to see the invisible), possession by spirits was a common and reliable means of detecting witches. Indeed, even féticheurs themselves detect witches by going into a trance and being taken over by a spirit (this is precisely what happens in Parish’s anti-witchcraft shrines as well).

This was also especially evident at Ivoirian funerals, where, no matter what denomination, it was common for one or more members to become possessed by the spirit of the deceased. This typically happened after the Christian hymns and blessings were completed, which a large portion of the audience largely ignored and even purposefully interrupted in their impatience to get to the dancing and eating that came afterwards. At most funerals, at an unforeseen moment, women close to the deceased would fall into trance, possessed by the spirit of the dead, who was trying to denounce the witch who had killed him/her. Their bodies would writhe, they would break into a sweat, their mouths would move and sometimes speak but no intelligible words came out. People listened intently and made sure the possessed did not hurt herself, but did nothing to stop it. The witch was said to be using his or her powers to block the possessed’s speech and
avoid detection. Thus, the body was taken over by the deceased, but this possession was typically blocked by the superior power of the witch.

It is worth noting that this Pentecostal ritual purification, like spirit possession at a funeral, is also a double possession; but here the roles are inverted. At funerals, bodies are possessed by the now deceased victim of sorcery attempting to cast accusations at the responsible culprit. However, the witch then blocks the speech of the possessed, struggling with the spirit of the deceased and typically overpowering them. But here it is the victim who is possessed by the witch inside them, the latter forced to reveal themselves before the altar of the church. The witch is then overpowered by the almighty power of the Holy Spirit. In both cases, the body serves as the locus for a spiritual struggle, visible in violent seizure-like convulsions and contortions of the possessed. It is also quite reminiscent of Harris’s technique for expelling the satanic spirits worshipped by Ivoirians before his arrival.

Interestingly, the structure of the Pentecostal ritual of purification, involving a line of people exposed one by one to ‘medicine’ and the penetrating gaze of the witch-cleanser, maps clearly onto the structure of witchfinding movements across Africa going back at least to the turn of the century (Auslander 1993, Chakanza 1985, Douglas 1967, Fields 1997, Marwick 1950, Richards 1935). In addition to these ritual parallels to witchfinding movements and other trancelike means of detecting witches, the church services regularly employ numerous devices to combat witchcraft. Not only did they use salt in the biblically inspired ritual above, but there were many other efficacious objects and substances which could be purchased for a fee (that is, a sacrifice): envelopes, ribbons, water, salt and oils. Again, to quote from my fieldnotes:

*When we first enter the church, after greeting those around us and shaking hands, Noël’s father gets out three different letters and goes to put them under the cross on one side of the stage. He says this is what one does if there is some problem for which you want to ask God for help, you write it down and put it there. He showed me one with a list of names—the owners of the house which he has been saving up to buy. He found out the other day that another one of his neighbors is trying to buy it too, so he put this guy’s name on the note, following the words: my enemy. As we wait he fingers a couple of red ribbons. He says the church hands these out every Friday (for a fee), and you put them above your door or window and it absorbs whatever is bad. Then you give them back to the church which burns them. People are also going up to the stage and leaving all sorts of containers full of water until the whole stage is littered. This water is blessed during the course of the service and is said to have important healing properties. Bernard sometimes brings it home to give to his son, even though Alex refuses to come to church himself.*
While the efficacy of these objects within church discourse comes from God rather than the occult, the form these devices take corresponds very well to Ivoirian practices for fending off witchcraft. Many anti-witchcraft ‘fetishes’ are made with bits of cloth, scraps of Qur’anic or other writing, and pastes made from herbs and oils. Names are written down and then incorporated into spells. Bits of horn filled with medicines are wrapped in leather and worn underneath clothes and close to the body. Perhaps the most striking evidence of witchcraft’s place in the church, however, was the slip of paper that Bernard placed beneath the altar to give it efficacy. The written note was referred to as a prayer and thereby incorporated into church doctrine, but it was not merely a prayer aimed at material benefit (something the church encouraged) but it explicitly named Bernard’s enemy, requesting that his competitor fail in his endeavors. Like demands made to féticheurs and the inherent moral ambiguity of using such mercenary practitioners, such a request was explicitly for Bernard’s benefit to the detriment of his neighbor. As with a féticheur, the demand could only be activated by material sacrifice. The only thing separating this from traditional witchcraft practice is that its efficacy is believed to stem from access to God’s power rather than the otherworld of the occult.

Undomesticated Agency and the Gospel of Prosperity

In order to fully understand the intersection between Ivoirian Pentecostalism and witchcraft beliefs it is necessary to further consider the local cosmology of success. As I have argued, individual motivations are regarded with a great deal of suspicion. Even as wealth and accumulation are regarded with praise and envy, they cannot be procured by sacrificing one’s own social obligations, especially those of kin. Thus, as Nyamnjoh has written, individual agency is always curtailed by domestic relations in ‘African society,’ causing a direct conflict with neoliberal ideology (2001).
A potent metaphor of success in Côte d'Ivoire is the idea of eating. Just as in Mbembe’s vivid description of the vulgar aesthetics of political authority of the commandement (2001), the body in Côte d'Ivoire quite literally is said to inflate with power—those who are wealthy and successful eat well and get fat. A series of cartoons in Gbich! depicted government officials being weighed regularly to determine whether or not they were corrupt. Although the idea was meant to be humorous, most people really believed that the body would reflect wealth, especially wealth that involved individualist centered accumulation, and the relative weight of various celebrities and politicians was routinely scrutinized. Such corporeal swelling is not solely the effect of indulgence and abundance, however, because such eating does not merely take place on the visible plane, but is often directly relating to the eating of other people in the otherworld: it is one’s double that gets fat and heavy and therefore powerful. The occult consumption of another’s vital parts at once drains the victim of prosperity and vitality, while producing power, economic abundance and sometimes even real corporeal expansion in the witch. Success in this cosmology cannot be attained without taking from the success of others. Even if a politician or businessman is not getting his success directly through witchcraft, he may well have agreed to purchase it from a féticheur, typically at the cost of another human soul, even a close family member. Geschiere’s depiction of Cameroon applies very well here: “The close link between witchcraft and political power expresses, therefore, a deep mistrust of politics and power that is characteristic of these societies. But this is combined with the insight that
power, and therefore the occult forces, are indispensable to the very functioning of society’ (Geschiere 1997: 200).

Such a perspective, however, conflicts with the methodological individualist ideals of capitalism, which is Nyamnjoh’s point: ‘The tendency to believe in a hidden hand is akin to an indictment of liberal democracy and its illusions of empowerment and development’ (2001: 35). Indeed, it is the discourse of hidden hands that exposes the fraud of Adam Smith’s invisible hand, pointing to its unequal distribution and exclusions. The idea of witchcraft as social critique, that incorporations of the occult in representations of democracy form an indigenous critique of capitalist processes, is an increasingly common position in anthropology (van Binsbergen 2001; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997; Taussig 1980). As Sanders and Moore caution, however, such critiques should not be understood as indictments of capitalism itself, for, in the world of witchcraft, accusers and accused alike are quite often eager to succeed within the capitalist system (Moore and Sanders 2001). Rather witchcraft stories constitute a resistance to the primacy of individual autonomy that market systems promote. Witchcraft discourse is a reassertion of associations of dependence and moral economy as essential to all success, political leadership and social hierarchy. To rise in power without the implied support from and for one’s family and peers is to invite disaster. Talk about witches is a way of discussing the contradictory nature of power and influence itself, in terms of the complex sets of interdependence and obligation it entails, and the threat of broken bonds of reciprocity when such relations are denied.

To return to Pentecostalism, the argument I want to make here is that both in their own discourse, as well as their perception and representation from outsiders, these churches engage in the same discourse about success, money and greed that emerge in discussions of witchcraft and in capitalism. Pentecostal churches are often linked to a gospel of prosperity suggesting that faith in the Lord is directly linked to financial success, while a tendency to sin correlates with illness, poverty and other forms of misfortune. As Marshall-Fratani writes of Nigeria, ‘The fruits of a successful conversion and Christian life are as much material as spiritual; apart from a guaranteed place among the saints, Pentecostals are promised health, wealth, success, happy family lives and the social, economic and political conditions in which to enjoy them’ (1998: 285). One prominent Ghanaian Pentecostal radio pastor has encouraged his audience: ‘don’t stop making demands on God until your mouth is filled with good things’ (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 202). In a Nigerian-Ivoirian church I attended, the pastor himself suggested in his sermon that ‘some people are very intelligent, they know that God is their bank. When they get money, they put it in the basket.’ Not only is Pentecostalism represented as the path to virtuous success,
but also as a means of living a specifically modern lifestyle, one divorced from the superstitions and evils of past generations (Meyer 2004: 459).

At every Pentecostal service I witnessed, a version of this correspondence between faith and financial success was repeated. The efficacy of one’s prayers corresponded to the size of the offering or, as it was often referred to, the sacrifice you contributed. This money was not represented as for the church, but for God. Thus it was the proportion of money one gave in relation to what one had that counted, not the absolute sum. The churches’ pastors generally emphasized the idea that, if you wanted financial success, the best way to get it was not by saving money, nor by trying to use occult means (though the pastor admitted that such methods worked, they were just immoral and you were likely to get done in yourself by the witches in the end), but by investing in God. This sentiment was most clearly articulated in the notion of the blessed objects, envelopes and substances that could be used to fight witchcraft and illness. These objects were said to become more potent the more money one paid for them. Towards the end of the salt ritual I witnessed at Royaume de Dieu, the theme turned entirely to the efficacy of money:

As things quiet down, the pastor tells us that we have just cleaned house, but the devil is still waiting outside the door like a thief, and it is our responsibility to lock it.

Now, does anyone bear witness that if you take this salt home with you, it can work wonders? (a number of people raise their hands). So if you want this salt, you must approach and make your sacrifice. Even if you have nothing to give you may have salt, but the bigger the sacrifice, the more powerful the salt will be. If 400 is all you have, and that is what you give, that is good, that is powerful. But this is where the devil enters in, you might be good in all other places, but when it comes to the offering the devil gets in, don’t give it all, he says. If your wife gave you five hundred for the taxi to get here, take the bus and give the rest. That is the attitude we are looking for.

He now asks those with 10,000 Francs CFA to approach, then 5000, 3000, 2000, 1000 and 500. Finally, he asks if there are any who have only jettons [throwaway change] to give. He then asks if there are still some left who didn’t get salt, and asks them to approach. As they get up, a number of people laugh. He says we should hate poverty, not laugh at it, we should be angry with poverty. His stories have often suggested that poverty can be overcome through faith in God and the sacrifice of what material wealth one has to the church.

The idea that increasing sums of money lend greater efficacy to objects can be found in Ivoirian occult practices as well. One of the more nefarious forms is
the Ivoirian system of placing money into *canaris*. A *canari* is a container made by witches (that often includes human organs in its contents) in order for it to multiply. Such *canaris* are said to be bought from sorcerers and then buried in the yard of the purchaser. They can be used to achieve various ends, and their power increases according to how much one puts in. A number of these *canaris* were found in the presidential palace when it was cleaned for President Gbagbo’s arrival. Similarly *féticheurs* required a payment not only to themselves but to the spirit who possessed them, but I was told that their currency was in reverse. This meant that the most valuable form of money in the world of spirits was the extremely rare five CFA coin, worth about half a US cent. Here again, currency itself was thought to contain a kind of efficacy. Thus the church’s own language and practice concerning the relationship between money and power corresponded in many respects to that of witchcraft and sorcery, emphasizing the ability of money to influence the efficacy of prayer, healing objects and blessed substances.

Churches were sometimes compared in terms of their wealth and popularity. A couple of Nigerians I sometimes accompanied to church argued that the size and success of a church were the result of the power of its connection to God. Thus the popularity and wealth of a church were an index of power and purity, rather than its wealth being a product of popularity. They praised the head pastor of Action Chapel, one of the most popular Nigerian churches active in Abidjan, even though this was not their church, because he had his own private plane. Believers understood this as a sign of his blessedness in God’s eyes. Some of the other Nigerians present, however, were quick to point out that all this money was not coming out of thin air; in their eyes the wealth of the church was just as likely to be a sign of corruption as of grace. Likewise Noël told me that he had heard that his father’s church was a scam, organized by a Brazilian who invests in movie theatres and turns them into churches as profit centers. He laughed about his own experiences in the church. As a hardened street criminal, he considered himself *yere*, an urban slang term that describes someone who ‘sees clearly’. The word is used casually to refer to the ability to con others and see through the schemes of those trying to scam you. But not insignificantly, the word’s origins come from the occult; in Dioula, a *féticheur* is *yere* because he can ‘see clearly’ into the invisible world. Noël, as a twin, was also endowed with this form of *yere*-ness. He was more capable of spotting witches than his peers. He told me:

I am sick of hearing about church. All they want to do is take our money in their little envelopes . . . You know during the prayer, when you are supposed to keep your eyes closed, I watched one of the assistants wrap all the money up in a red cloth and take it
away [indeed, I had heard the pastor insist that some people were keeping their eyes open and he didn’t know what they were trying to see]. I asked the pastor afterwards where all the money goes and he said the church has nothing to do with money. But if that is the case, why ask for money four or five times a day, every day of the week?

Chuckling, he continued:

I watched that guy blessing people by putting his hand on their heads after they gave their money. An assistant collected the money while the pastor blessed. He had his eyes closed in prayer, and he kept going until he was so happy at all the money he was making that he put his hand on the money collector’s head for a second. But then he realized his mistake and quickly went back to blessing the givers.

Noël was not idiosyncratic in his dislike for the church. Abidjan was a world of intense competition and struggle for money, and anyone making a lot was worthy of respect, but equally of suspicion. Thus the weekly humor magazine, probably the only paper read by people of every political party, class and ethnicity, devoted an issue to the problem of these new churches. The front cover’s headlines read ‘Eglises par-ci, Eglises par-la: DES PASTEURS GROS-SISSENT, DES FIDELES MAIGRISSENT’ [Churches here, churches there: Pastors are getting fatter, the faithful are getting thinner.] The cartoon below
depicts a bloated man smoking a cigar and wearing a giant gold cross, with money bursting from his pockets and briefcase. He is at a Mercedes dealership, telling the salesman that he would like the three latest models, since someone splashed his car and he hasn’t had time to wash it. Two kids watching comment. The first asks ‘isn’t that the government official with all the money problems?’ The second responds ‘Yeah, but he quit and started a church.’

Inside, the paper discusses satirically all the advantages to starting your own church, how these days you do not even need to know the Bible, and how ‘since we have this attitude of running after God to know what clothes to wear, and in order to reach God you have to pass through someone, and as we are ready to give everything we have in the name of God, it’s completely normal that we find people on our streets who are eager to provide these services’. The back page describes a pastor who eagerly cures a rich man who thinks he might have a demon inside him, but kicks out a penniless man who seems to be clearly under the influence of demons.

Thus, like the power of the double itself, money is a Janus-faced signifier, at once potential evidence of one’s virtuousness and one’s corruption.

Finally, as Marshall-Fratani so aptly demonstrated in the Nigerian case, Pentecostal churches represent themselves as extremely modern and interconnected to a wider and global community (1998). The young Ivorian men I spent most of my time with were very drawn to this kind of logic, spending much of their time dreaming about Europe and America and what their life would be like if they could get there. Setting foot on European soil, or even befriending someone who had done so, was prestigious in itself (Newell 2005). Nicky, a Nigerian man I knew who constantly pushed me to attend a Ghanaian Pentecostal church he frequented, insisted one day that I go with him to see the special visitors that day. As it turned out, an American branch of the church was visiting and he was particularly keen to be seen with his own American. Both Nicky and the pastor in his opening words made it clear that the honor of hosting these American guests was an indication of the importance of the church on both international and spiritual planes, an indication of their communities’ global significance. The discourse about modernity was explicit: adherents were
encouraged to give up the ‘old’ ways of their parents, to be ‘born again’ and to take up a new life with Jesus. Ironically, the very appeal of Pentecostalism as a modernizing force that will free ‘Africa’ from witchcraft by severing it from the past asks people to live in modern nuclear families, severing themselves from the corrupting influence and obligations of larger kin networks, an activity that uncannily resembles the self-centered actions of a witch.

As Meyer has illustrated in the Ghanaian case, Pentecostal ideology encourages that individuals break with extended family obligations and free themselves from the dangerous powers of kinship (2004). Recognizing that witchcraft—or satanic influence—is strongest within family ties, Pentecostal deliverance is conceptualized as an ‘untying’ of social bonds—the opposite of traditional anti-witchcraft praxis which repairs collective bonds (Meyer 1999: 170). Indeed, the relationship to God is conceptualized as individual; the Holy Spirit speaks directly to and through the individual body. Whereas possession within traditional cosmology confirms family bonds, Pentecostal possession expresses those bonds only to cast them out and free the individual from the demonic (and social) influence that is afflicting them (ibid.: 208). Pentecostal healing is therefore a direct expression of neoliberal methodological individualism; the ritual process is aimed precisely at severing the individual from the constraining effects of ‘domesticated agency’. Small wonder, then, that Ivorians sometimes equate Pentecostalism with witches, for it encourages precisely the kind of asocial economic behavior that Ivorians understand as witchcraft.

Conclusion

If witchcraft discourse can be understood as an idiom through which to understand the tension between individual motivations and social obligation, then ‘it is exactly this tension between the individual and the family that is addressed by Pentecostalism’ (Meyer 1999: 207). Yet the two overlapping cosmologies come at each other from antithetical perspectives, the one attempting to reintegrate the individual within the safety net of kin and reciprocal obligation, the other attempting to free the individual from the dangerous burden of these bonds. In Meyer’s terms, Pentecostalism is a ritual framework allowing for the socially legitimate production of modern individuals. She argues, however, that, unlike the ‘traditional healers’, the church is able to transcend the ambivalence of witchcraft power. This is certainly the church’s self-representation. As the pastor told us:
There are still many sorcerers in the room. But they cannot resist, no matter how powerful they are, because the power of God is the strongest, stronger than marabouts, stronger than spells, stronger than féticheurs, stronger than sorcerers, stronger than demons. The devil has power, but not if you are with God. Even if the sorcerers have passed to the highest degree of sorcery, traveling to France or America to study with the Rosicrucian demoniacs—yes, sorcerers have degrees too—they are nothing against Jesus.

The combination in the pastor’s discourse of an elaborate belief in witches and simultaneous assertion of the ability of the church to transcend it brings us back to the question of intersecting totalizing systems. Should one submit completely to the Pentecostal perspective, which undoubtedly many attempt to do, it would encompass witchcraft beliefs in exactly the way both the pastor and Meyer describe. However, I would argue that many of those who attended the church, as well as those outside it, are not so convinced of its purity. As Engelke argues in the case of the Masowe religion in Zimbabwe (2004), even as membership is represented by the church as a ‘complete break with the past’, conversion must be understood as a process, one that is never necessarily completed. The fact that some Ivoirians say the church is a haven for witches is a clear indicator that some people have doubts of the church’s efficacy in these matters. In any case, those I knew within the church used it only as one amongst several technologies with which to fight off witches and illness and bring better financial success, in direct contradiction to church doctrine. Noël’s father, for example, in addition to the ribbons he bought from the church, hired féticheurs to make objects to protect against witches. Noël had one of these in his living room, because as a twin, he was simultaneously more capable of detecting witches and more exposed to their malevolence. Out of embarrassment about his belief in traditional practices, he kept it covered up with a handkerchief. His father argued with him about this, saying it was no use having a guardian that was blind. On another occasion, when both Noel and I fell ill with malaria, he brought in a local healer to determine whether witches from a village we had recently visited were responsible. The church regularly condemns such extracurricular behavior, warning their parishioners that féticheurs and magical protections are doorways that let the devil back into your life. But Ivoirians of all faiths were likely to employ multiple technologies; churchgoers not only made use of a variety of so-called traditional healers, but even alternative religious practices. Christians were not averse to using marabouts, who were not simply magical practitioners with access to the occult world, but explicitly Muslim healers. As Ashforth has insightfully pointed out, contemporary urban Africans are faced with a situation of epistemic anxiety, a sense of unease arising from the condition of knowing that
invisible forces are acting upon one's life but not knowing what they are or how to relate to them' (2005: 127). Ashforth describes the confusion of his friend when she sacrificed to the ancestors to regain their support and shed her bad luck. The sacrifice helped her to get off Prozac, but her born-again family criticized her for engaging with demons, so that 'when her bad luck returned, she did not know who or what to blame' (ibid.). People seeking a cure are faced with a devastating range of solutions, but precisely because the occult world is one in which secrecy is a source of power, no one can be sure whom to trust.

Robbins (2004), Meyer and Engelke (2004) have all criticized the anthropological tendency to treat African religion as 'old wine in new wineskins' (Engelke 2004: 83), to emphasize cultural continuity over rupture. Certainly we must take Pentecostalism's concerted effort to transform the world in its image seriously. Indeed, Blunt suggests that Pentecostalism can provide a meaningful solution to the epistemic uncertainties faced by Kenyans who have become convinced that the world is populated with satanic counterfeits: 'deliverance has become one of the principal modes through which Kenyans hope to restore truth to the world, to reconstruct a morally viable modernity' (Blunt 2004: 325). This is the hope that Pentecostals hold out to potential converts at least. But this legitimacy can only be effective for a social actor who is at once a fully fledged believer and socially integrated within a community of believers. If we are to take Ashforth's more complicated proposal about urban African belief seriously, and imagine a complex social world in which the actor is unsure what to believe, and there are no longer any experts who can be relied on for guidance, Pentecostalism's efforts to produce socially legitimate individuality cannot easily succeed. For in Abidjan, at least, social networks intersected a complex array of cosmological positions, and individuals often responded by applying themselves to several belief systems at once. De Boeck counters Blunt's hopes for the salvation of meaningful signification, arguing that, despite their best efforts in Kinshasa, Pentecostal churches are incapable of 'overcoming mimesis' (De Boeck 2006: 112). Paralleling my arguments, he states that 'the position of the church in relation to evil... produces contradictory tensions in the social field. The churches' role with regard to the child witch phenomenon is an equally ambivalent one, which makes them both part of the witchcraft problem itself as well as the local solution to this problem' (ibid.: 173).

I have argued that Pentecostal churches are not only about the destruction of witches in the name of the struggle between God and the devil, but are in fact caught up in the same web of power, wealth and the invisible world that witchcraft discourse brings to all interactions with the occult. Despite their
efforts to persist in a representation of themselves as transcendent, the *Royaume de Dieu* church depended on symbolically homologous techniques and tools for fighting witches, and even as they claimed that no witch could resist them, outsiders warned that such churches were havens for sorcerers. This tension was exacerbated by the church doctrine of recognizing the efficacy and reality of witchcraft under the category of Satan, thereby letting the seeping expansion of witchcraft discourse into the heart of their religious ritual—the moment in which demons are cast out of the body of the follower. The very power to combat witchcraft implicated churches with the ambivalence of the figure of the witchdoctor, whose individualist motives must be questioned because his services can be bought. Money is never neutral in Ivoirian society, but fraught with ambiguity, danger and magical efficacy. Pentecostal churches become one more arena for discussing the social tensions of capitalism and for combating the ills it produces by eliminating the greed of witchcraft. But like all anti-witchcraft powers, it becomes caught up in the web of power and money itself. Despite its discursive efforts to transcend witchcraft, outsiders, cynics and even churchgoers themselves do not seem entirely convinced. Rather, Ivoirians act as though Pentecostal churches are one more efficacious but corruptible otherworldly technology with which to protect themselves. African Pentecostal churches, then, are not simply a powerful means of battling witches (and therefore, all manner of misfortunes), nor can their popularity be understood solely on this basis. Rather, at least within the practice of the *Royaume de Dieu* church, Pentecostalism is another form of witchcraft discourse, one homologously structured with the local cosmology of witchcraft and yet oriented in direct opposition to it. Both address the problematic interaction of the global neoliberal economy with local ideals of domesticated agency, both attempt to resolve this tension, but they do so with contradicting vectors. These religious positions therefore vie with one another as competing ritual techniques, each having the potential to encompass the other according to the alternating and conflicted perspective of the believer. However, it will be interesting to see how this drama plays out in Côte d’Ivoire’s future. Since my departure, Noël, formerly one of the *Royaume de Dieu’s* most vociferous critics, has become a convert.

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Notes

1. As much as 11% of the African population was affiliated with a ‘charismatic’ church in 2000, a staggering statistic when one considers that this figure includes the Muslim-dominated north (Anderson 2004: 103).

2. Though several of them have converted since my departure. Clearly the ‘long conversation’ of Pentecostalism (to borrow Engelke’s use of the Comaroffs) is not yet completed.

3. These quotations were not recorded and are thus not strictly verbatim, but reconstructed from my notes to the best of my ability.

4. The Franc CFA was linked to the French franc at a rate of 100 to 1. In 2001, 10,000 Franc CFA was approximately $15. For comparison, an average month’s rent in Treichville was around 30,000, and people struggled to come up with enough money to pay that.

5. With the commencement of multipartyism in the 1990s in Côte d’Ivoire, the country went through what is commonly referred to as the ‘springtime of the press’ in which literally hundreds of independent papers were started. By far the majority of these papers do not make enough money in sales to support themselves, and so each is funded by particular political interests, printing ‘news’ that supports these political views. Thus, people tend to read only the papers catering to their own standpoint.