

WITCHCRAFT AND COMPUTERS: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

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ABSTRACT: *Justifying a claim that cannot be empirically verified plunders one into deep philosophical waters. The question of verifiability comes to mind especially on metaphysical issues such as witchcraft which might be somewhat difficult to establish. Incessant calls for physical evidence to substantiate the assertion become the order of the day. Attempts to therefore make a synergy between a computer system which is a physical component, and witchcraft, a metaphysical reality, by drawing out the points of convergence and divergence could be demanding. The obvious difficulty in achieving this aim would be made open when one clamours for the existence of metaphysical entities with no experimental means of sustaining it. This may prompt us to question the ground for holding on to such claims. Will it be possible to scientifically prove the existence of witchcraft powers? Will the argument to support the metaphysical reality of such an entity be sufficient to establish its existence? How do we then reconcile the modus operandi of witchcraft to that of computer system? Based on the disparity between computer and witchcraft, is there any possibility of making a synergy between them? The crux of this paper is to expose the arguments on the existence of witchcraft based on their modus operandi and some other immanent facts, with the view of likening this with the operations of computer system.*

KEYWORDS: witches, witchcraft, coven, computer, networking, internet

INTRODUCTION

The fear of witchcraft has been argued to be not only a disturbing phenomenon but also a threat to family life and social harmony. One wonders why the belief in witchcraft has such a dynamic force on all and sundry especially Africans in spite of the influence of western civilization, industrialization and modernisation. Is the belief in witchcraft part of African cultural civilisation? Do the Africans lack the means of eradicating the belief? Do witches really exist or are they mere figment of imagination? What has modernisation done to reduce the effects of witchcraft in the society? Is the idea of witchcraft peculiar only to the Africans? In an attempt to answer some of these questions raised, research has made us to understand that the notion of witchcraft is not only tied to African continent. Series of events had unfolded in the western world where the practice of witchcraft had been used to victimize innocent people.

A rough estimate of the total number of people burned, hung or tortured to death on the charge of witchcraft, is said to be about nine million. Obviously not all of these were followers of the Old Religion. (Buckland, 1990: P.39). Witchcraft is not just a celebration of legendary belief but it is to be seen as a religion which dwells on the acceptance of spiritual, personal and social

responsibilities. It is a religion that is somewhat difficult to identify and whose doors are not thrown open to all who come knocking. It is a very loose religion in terms of ritual practices but it has been argued to have certain basic ritual tenets and established ritual patterns to be adhered to. Just as it is often adopted in most religions, a new adherent of witchcraft takes a new name to show the new life he wants to adapt. This is epitomized in the words of Buckland that:

Many Witches choose a name which they feel, reflects their personality or, in some way, describes their interests or feelings. Names are important. It used to be that, to know someone's name was to have a power over them, for if you knew the name of your enemy you could conjure him with it. (Buckland, 1990: P.6).

However, the inevitable role of computer systems in our present-day world cannot be over-emphasized. Virtually almost all spheres of life such as health, religious, commercial and agricultural sectors need the use of computer. Some scientists have even referred to the creator of the world as a *programmer*. Here, all creatures were taken as computer simulation. As Terrell Rich would say:

One has to think that what are the requirements for God? God is an inter-dimensional being connected with everything in the universe, a creator that is responsible for the universe and in some way can change the laws of physics, if he wanted to. I think those are the requirements for what God ought to be. This is the same as programmers creating simulations. (JPL Scientist: 2012). In this write-up however, we shall examine the points of convergence and divergence between witchcraft and computer by adopting a comparative analytical method. We shall examine the meaning and nature of witchcraft, Operation of witches, the meaning of computer, computer networking, and the points of convergence and divergence between witchcraft and computer.

THE MEANING AND NATURE OF WITCHCRAFT

The word *witch* has been designated with different names in the past such as troll, flight-by-night, hag, wicce and wicca (c.890). By the year 1000, *witch* came to be known as a “female magician or sorceress” (Farlex, 2012). According to Phillips Steven Jnr., “witchcraft is a complex system of beliefs in an evil power vested in certain persons that enables them to work harm against others mystically, with no need for magical materials and without spiritual assistance.” (Stevens, 2010: P.430).

Understanding African witchcraft beliefs is complicated by the fact that in popular usage, the basic concept might also refer to good works and in most cases it is often described with negative connotations. For instance, the Yoruba attest that *aje (witch)* can be a person who uses his power for good and in many societies, the so-called *witch doctor* might combat witchcraft with the use of the same power witches use.

However, Erohubie Michael in his study of witchcraft amongst the Esan people argues that there are two types of witches: the black witches who are thought of as the ones that do evil purpose and every negative thing; the white witches are considered to be the good ones. They are the witch-doctors and they use their powers for positive things (Erohubie: 2010: P. vii). Although, this categorisation as simple as it may appear, could be highly contentious especially when it may seem to be peculiar to Africans.

The first scholar to publish a full book on the African conception of sorcery and witchcraft was Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard in his *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. (1937). According to Evans-Pritchard, witchcraft (mangu), is a mystical power that develops inside the body, perhaps without its bearer's knowledge, and when activated by negative emotions, it can transform itself, fly and do terrible things by itself, without the assistance of magic or spirit. (Evans-Pritchard, 1937). Beliefs in witchcraft and resulting witch-hunt, are both found in many cultures world-wide today, mostly in Sub-Saharan African, (e.g. the witch-smellers in Bantu culture), and historically notable in early modern Europe of the 14th to 18th centuries, where witchcraft came to be seen as a vast diabolical conspiracy against Christianity. Witchcraft has become the self-designation of a branch of neo-paganism, especially in the wicca tradition, following Gerald Gardner who claimed a religious tradition of witchcraft with pre-Christian roots. In African concept, "witch" is both the witchcraft powers itself and its human host. They must have a human host for them to operate in the society. Phillips Steven Jnr., in his article, *Witchcraft* identified twelve fundamental components that are basic to witch beliefs in Africa and elsewhere:

- Witches are pure evil
- Witches, like spirit are most active at night
- Witches can transform themselves into any other form or become invisible (lycanthropy)
- Witches fly, often at incredible speed
- Witches have alter egos
- Witches met together for a terrible orgies and to plot their attack on society
- Witches steal children
- Witches engage in abhorrent sexual behaviour such as incest, bestiality, paedophilia etc.
- Witches engage in ritual murder , use of blood and parts of the body of their victims
- Witches engage in cannibalism
- Witches spread diseases in form of witch "eating"
- Witches are associated with death. (Stevens, 2010: P. 431)

A critical look at the twelve fundamental components outlined would reveal to us that the author dwelt on the attributes of black witches according to the categorization of Urohubie Michael. No room for positivity was given to the operations of witches. These attributes could easily evoke some fears in anyone and would make one to easily tremble at the mention of witches. Has the existence of witches been confirmed?

In an article titled *Metaphysical Thinking in Africa*, Lebisa Teffo and Abraham Roux argue that witchcraft, magic, sorcery and other phenomena are normally not considered as scientific objects because they are not based on empirical observation. By scientific criteria, these powers are regarded as unreal (Teffo & Roux, 2003: P.169). In the Western world as well, there have been arguments for and against the existence of witchcraft. When King James I passed his Witchcraft Act in 1604, it was repealed in 1736 and replaced by an Act that stated there was no such thing as witchcraft and to pretend to have such power was to face being charged with fraud. By the late 17th century, the surviving members of the craft had gone into hiding (Buckland, 1990: P.39).

We shall begin the analysis of the arguments on the existence or the non-existence of witchcraft by considering the argument put forth by John Mbiti in his book *African Religions and Philosophy*. He first tried to establish the existence of metaphysical powers as a foundation for the establishment of witchcraft. He illustrated his account with some few stories; prominent among them was that of a locust attack on his village farm when he was a schoolboy. Only a particular farm was not attacked because the farmer was said to have burnt some medicine and scattered them on his farm (Mbiti, 1969: P.194). He also made use of Nael's *Juju in My Life* (1966) to support his claims. Nael, an Englishman, shared his experience of when he was in Ghana as the Chief Investigations Officer. There, he saw, met, tasted and fought against these powers until finally he had to take refuge under the same powers. He was attacked with these powers until he became convinced that he could seek better security measures under these same powers he once fought against.

Sophie Oluwole in her *On the Existence of Witches* spells out the justifications and consequences of the claim that witchcraft is real (Oluwole, 1978: P.18). She argues that all we have to do is to show that there are those who know how to exercise witchcraft powers, for witches are by definition "those who exercise witchcraft powers...they can affect their victims or perform actions without any physical contact and using no medicine (Oluwole, 1978: P.18). Is it possible to carry out an action without any physical contact? If the answer is in the affirmative, then it could be somewhat difficult to deny the existence of witchcraft based on the above definition.

In support of her argument to establish the existence of witchcraft, she raised a fundamental question that what exactly do we mean when we say either that witchcraft is real or unreal? The word real is a problematic issue in philosophical discourse. According to her, all we can say here is to bring out the important features of reality. When something is described as real, the first distinction that is commonly drawn is the real as physical and the unreal as abstract. Hence, qualities such as redness will be unreal while chair will be real. Next we speak on the different levels of reality. Redness for instance, is real because there are instances of red things in the world. She concluded that we can only deny the physical reality of the existence of witchcraft and not the metaphysical reality (Oluwole, 1978: P.23).

Consequently, Sophie Oluwole argues that the existence of witchcraft can be scientifically proved by the following three methods, the positive result of anyone of which would be sufficient to establish the claim that witchcraft is real, that witches exist:

- We may give an explanation of the modus operandi of witchcraft power
- We may experimentally establish a causal relationship between the postulated occult power and the mysterious event she cites to prove its practical efficacy
- We may show a practical manipulation of witchcraft power (Oluwole, 1978: P.23).

However, Bodunrin P. O. raises some objections concerning the arguments posited by Oluwole on the existence of witchcraft. In his *Witchcraft, Magic and E. S. P: A Defence of Scientific and Philosophical Scepticism*, he argues that Oluwole's three scientific methods do not hold water. He argues that:

The evidence that has been given in support of witchcraft power consists of oral reports and reports of personal experiences. It is difficult to see how these reports would be tested (verified) by either of the methods so far discussed by Oluwole Sophie. (Bodunrin, 1978: P. 41).

For Bodunrin, accepting the existence of witchcraft power on the basis of their modus operandi begs the question. He used an analogy to counter the second method, that if he were to lift his upper eyelid and press them against his eyeballs, he would experience double objects. He asked: are they double because he experienced them as double? (Bodunrin, 1978: P. 41). On the third method, he argues that if we could demonstrate efficacy of witchcraft power by manipulating it, we would have gone a long way in our understanding of the phenomena. If an amulet for example works for a purpose, we cannot be sure to include that it is as a result of witchcraft power. Again, it would not be out of place to ask if Bodunrin has answers and explanations to some mysterious events that beat the explanation of science, and that are often attributed as the handiwork of the witches and some other forces. Some of these mysterious events include the instances of a bird suddenly turning into a human being, carrying of pregnancy for close to two years and a hunter shooting at an antelope and suddenly turning into a human being.

Modus Operandi of Witchcraft

The nature of witches depends on the nature of the person or object which the spirit possesses in order to operate in the physical world. Witches are believed to operate in secrecy, and they possess the capacity to change into birds, animals and use their unusual dresses. They go about their "night businesses" while their physical bodies are on their beds. This is what Erohubie Michael refers to as "Soul Travel" (Erohubie, 2010: P. 132).

In support of the nocturnal activities of the witches, Benjamin Ray writes:

Witches act *mostly* at night, fly or walk on their hands or heads, dance naked, feast on corpses, exhibit insatiable and incestuous lusts (despite sexual impotence) murder their relatives, live in the bush with even predatory animals or excrete the vomit in peoples' homestead (Ray, 1976: P.150). It is believed that African witches often emit jets of fire from their anuses or arm pits, visible to people as lights in the night sky. Witches often fly upside down. The Yoruba of the South Western part of Nigeria for instance believe that witches have nocturnal meetings. The meetings are called '*ajo*' (*coven*). The nature of their meetings is spiritual. It is believed by the Yoruba that witches turn their victims into animals and they are eaten in a spiritual way. Once a victim has been eaten up, there is no way to save his life. The number of victims a witch surrenders determines his hierarchy among her peers.

The Meaning of Computer

The advent of computer has brought tremendous change to human life in all ramifications. Hardly would one see any sphere of life the impact of computer has not been felt. A man who was born 40 or 50 years ago would have experienced the era of landlines, Personal Computers (PC), smartphones, laptops, internet, brain implant, to mention but a few. Gone are the eras where the knowledge and use of computers were strictly reserved to the well-to-do people alone. In our present dispensation, any child who has attained the age of discernment would either have access to computer or have relative knowledge of it. What then is a computer?

Emilo Ramos simply attempts the above question by defining a computer as an electronic system that can store and process information under program control (Emilio,1996: P.351). This would mean that it is also a programmable machine designed to sequentially and automatically carry out a sequence of arithmetic or logical operations. The earliest tool used for computation was the abacus and it was thought to have been invented by Babylon Circa 2400 BCE. Its original style of usage was by lines drawn in sand with pebbles. This was the first known computer. The first use of the word "computer" was recorded in 1613, referring to a person who carried out calculations or computations, and the word continued with the same meaning until the middle of the 20th century. (Adam, 2021). From the end of 19th century onwards, the word began to take its more familiar meaning describing a machine that carries out computations.

A computer is really a system of many parts working together. The physical parts we can see and touch are collectively called hardware. Software on the other hand, refers to the instructions or programs that tell the hardware what to do. Hardwares include the Central Processing Unit, RAM, mouse, disk drive, keyboard, monitor, printer etc (Ramos, 1996: Pp: 135-136). Computers are however broken down into the following types:

- Analogue Computers: these types of computers use what is known as analogue signals that are represented by a continuous set of varying voltages and are used in scientific research centres such as hospitals and flight centres.

- Digital Computers: they operate on electrical input that can attain two inputs, states of ON=1 and state of OFF=0. They are high speed programmables; they compute values and store results.
- Hybrid Computers: they combine both analogue and digital features and operations. They operate by using digital to analogue and analogue to digital converter (Fahad, 2020, November 12).

Computer Networking

A computer network is a collection of workstations or computer devices also called nodes connected by some type of physical medium usually a cable. It is a way of connecting computers so that they can communicate with each other and share resources like printer and storage space (Ramos, 1996: P: 23). Ethernet network is the most common and widely used technology to establish any computer network. The network based on the use of Ethernet network is formed by physically connecting the individual computer units to each other through wiring. Wireless networks are established without physically welding or wiring techniques involved. Wireless technology is based on the use of radio and infrared signals. Wireless communication can be established through communication satellites, terrestrial microwaves, cellular systems, wireless LAN and Bluetooth.

Computer networks are of many types such as:

- Personal Area Network (PAN): this is designed for personal use. It is typically on an area of 20 to 30 feet
- Local Area Network (LAN): used within small geographical location
- Campus Area Network (CAN): it is larger than LAN, usually established in the university campus to establish a connection among different computer labs, library, academic units .etc.
- Metropolitan Area Network (MAN): It is spread in an area between 5 to 50 km.
- Wide Area Network (WAN): this is commonly known as internet (Oladipo, 2001).

Witchcraft and Computer

Having gone through the above discourse on witchcraft and computer, it would be necessary to examine the possible synergy and disparity between the operations of the computer system and witchcraft.

Point of Convergence

As we have mentioned above, subjecting witchcraft to empirical observation may open up some cankerworms which may give us the benefit to doubt its existence. With the events that happen which we are unable to give rational explanation to, we may be tempted to link them to some supernatural forces in which witchcraft powers would not be an exemption. Computer and witchcraft, despite their obvious differences, still share some interconnectedness.

So far, through our study on satellite and computer networking, it has been established that the world has been turned into a global village. With security surveillance machines or closed circuit television, one could observe events happening in kilometres away without being physically present. Research has made us to understand that similar experience could be found in the practice of witchcraft. In the assemblage of witchcraft (coven), through their '*metaphysical satellite*' which could be in form of mirror, water, calabash, white robe etc., the witches could visualise where their victims are and how they can be caught. Distance is not a barrier for the witches to strike their victims to death, just as globalisation makes it easier to reach out to anyone in any location. In the same vein, witches can either cause harm/help to their victims/clients, depending on the type of witches, without needing to be with them physically. So much so, computer too can be used to cause harm on the computer system of another user from a distance, by hacking or infecting the system with virus which could damage all the vital information stored on it. It is also used in diagnosing and treating health conditions. Both the computer system and witchcraft can cause both harm and good to their victims/clients, without necessary having a close contact. This is a pointer to the position of Nagle and Owasanoye that witchcraft can be used in ensuring that those who submitted themselves for emigration into Europe in search of greener pastures are perpetually put under check in compliance with their agents' agreement even without having to see them physically. As they opined, "invoking witchcraft to assert control and coercion is so insidious in many cultures that even once victims have been identified and removed from a trafficking situation by state authorities, there is no guarantee that this will provide sufficient protection for victims to co-operate (Nagle & Owasanoye, 2016: P. 562).

As we have earlier noted under modus operandi of witches that they fly with a very high speed while emitting jets of light from their anuses or armpit, so also does information through a computer travels with a nanosecond speed. Computers also power rockets which move at an extra ordinary speed similar to that of light emitted through the anuses and armpits of the witches. So, the accuracy of the two in the delivery and realising their goals rest on their speed.

Among the Yoruba people, it is believed that when a witch confesses, the witch may start acting strangely in form of insanity which may sometimes lead to her death. At this point, such a witch needs to be attended to by a witch-doctor or a spiritualist. This scenario can also be found in the working of the computer system when it is affected with virus. When this happens, the hard disk starts malfunctioning and may be on the verge of crashing. The computer ceases to function unless the hard disk is fixed by a computer programmer or engineer. As the witch requires the attention of a witchdoctor to regain her normal functioning, so also does a computer needs the touch of an engineer or programmer when infected with virus.

Again, one of the functions of a computer is to manipulate data to suit the purpose of the user. There are some materials that are gotten through Google search in a mysterious way and they appear on the screen of the computer with just a single command. The witches have the metaphysical power to manipulate their victims by inviting their physical bodies into their coven when the persons are still believed to be where they are. Just as computer manipulates data in an

enigmatic way to give result, so also do the witches manipulate their victims to suit their purpose. Additionally, white witches which are majorly grouped to be witch-doctors have the natural capacity to set the captives and victims of black witches free. Some computer applications also can be used to correct the ills done by the same computer. For instance, a computer infected with virus can be remedied through anti-virus applications such *Norton*, *Smadav*, *Kapersky* and so on. Experience gathered revealed that witches can affect their victims/captives by mere taking a sample of their personal effects and property such as pairs of shoes, bags, undies, clothes etc., and use same to cause harm which may sometimes lead to a loss of life when it is not attended to on time. In the same token, computer can as well work on human samples such as blood, hair, finger prints etc., in order to arrive at the genotype, blood group, DNA and even to know if the client was present at a particular location at a point through the evidence of the finger prints left behind.

Another point worth mentioning on the area of convergence between witchcraft and computer is that of the synergy between the coven and computer networking. Coven as described above is a group of witches with a common goal. This can be likened to the computer networking where some computer units are connected to work towards the same goal. While the members of the coven are bound together probably through blood oath, the computer workstations or computer devices are connected by some type of physical medium usually a cable.

It is to be noted that both the witchcraft and computer have the tendencies of making their clients/users accede to their command. Witches have the powers to hypnotize their victims to make them dance to their tunes and follow their directives without hesitation. For instance, the African belief in the practice of witchcraft holds that the witches could conjure the spirit of their victim while asleep in the deep of the night and summon their presence to their coven. At the coven, they could instruct them to carry out any duty in which they would obey. As Ala Bardo would say, “the modern witch develop their natural psychic abilities to aid in casting powerful spells, travel out of body, explore past lives, predict the future, and also hypnotize others (Bardo, 2010). This can be related to the traffic light which is powered by the computer system, and gives direction to the road users on the highways which they must willingly obey. In a civil society, any road user who willingly flouts the directive of the traffic light is punishable by the code of driving.

Point of Divergence

The Azande people of Congo Republic and the Africans generally believed that witches are anti-social. They are said to be agents of chaos and misfortune in the society. This is not at par with computer which promotes development. It has gone a long way to demystify some of the ancient and erroneous beliefs about some happenings in the society. While witches inflict infirmities and diseases on their victims, computer helps to diagnose and to unravel the enigma that surrounds some diseases that hitherto had no medical explanation in the Stone Age.

The variance between witchcraft and computer lies primarily on health. Infertility is a medical issue that the doctor may conduct series of test on the patient and her husband without discovering the problem. In some instances, the womb may be intact but unable to harbour any foetus. The

witches could probably have inflicted punishment on such a person and in another instance they may render the man impotent. Although, we must bear in mind that these negativities experienced can be said to be the handiwork of the black witches. There are white witches who are believed to be experts on procreation. Barren women approach them for the blessings of the womb. A woman who happens to be the victim of the black witches may conceive and end up carrying the pregnancy for more than the gestation period, say two years. Such a woman might be said to be okay medically after being scanned and the doctor might even induce her so that she can give birth. There are instances where witchcraft powers are at loggerheads with computer applications. Such a victim who might have been rendered infertile by the actions of the witches could be relieved of such predicament through artificial insemination which is aided through computer diagnosis.

By and large, witches and the practice of witchcraft are predominantly done in the metaphysical realm. Although, there are some movements that happen which are often described as unidentified flying objects (UFO) that are similar to the activities of witches. It is somewhat difficult to give an empirical explanation to these happenings and that is why they have been credited to the works of the forces of the witches which cannot be proven scientifically. For instance, how could one explain a scenario in which one sees a bird flying and suddenly falls down and turns into a human being? Or how can one explain a situation whereby a woman whose pregnancy relocates into the tummy of the husband whenever she sleeps at night and the husband was eventually caught with the pregnancy even when he never underwent male pregnancy procedure? All these cited examples are believed to be the handiworks of the witches, in which some of them even confess of the atrocities before they eventually die. However, all actions carried out through the computer system are within the physical parlances which are verifiable scientifically.

CONCLUSION

Taking a cursory look at the above discourse, we may be tempted to ask: does the belief in witchcraft give us indubitable truth? Can this question be answered affirmatively or negatively? Could it be said that the Supreme Being actually made the witches to perpetuate evil so that people can seek refuge in him? Does the deity actually need such a diabolical method to make people succumb to his authority? How can we link the occurrences in the society to the handiwork of witches?

There are some instances and occurrences that may push us to accept the reality of the existence of witchcraft. As convincing some of these occurrences might seem, the means of justifying them empirically may be difficult. For instance, necromancy which is a practice found among the Europeans and the Africans is the conjuring of the spirit of the dead for divination. The term has been applied to raising the dead for other purposes. The biblical *Witch of Endor* is supposed to have performed this act (1 Samuel 28). Despite the doubt cast on these metaphysical practices, in early modern European tradition, burning of witches by scholarly estimates vary between 40,000 and 100,000. The total number of witch trials in Europe which are known for certain to have ended in execution is around 12,000 (Dobbins, 2018).

The above reference depicts the fact that the belief in witchcraft is not peculiar only to Africa. Those who experienced witch-trial was as a result of the physical happenings that occurred and those phenomena were linked with them. The little evidence that we see around us and some events that happen around us that we cannot give rational explanation to, could make us conclude that there are some forces in nature that are perpetuating them. And some of such forces could be said to be the outcome of witchcraft powers.

However, it is to be noted that the two concepts we have examined have the tendency of being mystified if care is not taken. Computer as a machine remains only a machine despite its obvious importance and relevance. Its importance would have been unnoticed without a programmer who sends the command. The contention on the existence of witchcraft is still a heated debated among some scholars who believed that it exists only in the mind. This paper however worked with the assumption, based on mysterious events that we experience in nature that it does exist.

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