

Journal of Advances in Social Science and Humanities

Ritual child abuse: motivations, context, criteria for recognition.

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ABSTRACT

In literature concerning violence against children, the term “Ritual Sexual Abuse” has, for some decades, become almost always identified in a somewhat approximative way with “Satanic Ritual Abuse”. One of the most controversial issues is whether there are criteria that distinguish sexual abuse generally from sexual abuse that is specifically ritualistic. This article aims to propose a definition of ritual child abuse, specifically considering symbolic logic. Since forensic evidence often proves in such cases to be fragmentary or unreliable, it is necessary to identify the presence of certain constants, being extraneous to rational thought yet completely coherent in terms of the occult and from the point of view of the history of magic. Thus, the indicators that will be examined are those that allow us to recognise and identify a ceremonial context (ritual area, images, instruments, characters, times, etc.) and will be examined the particular motives why children are particularly sought-after victims for certain destructive cults.

Key words: Ritual child abuse; Satanic ritual abuse; destructive cults; occultism

Introduction

For some decades in literature concerning violence against children, the term “Ritual Sexual Abuse” has been used, with the description for which being nonetheless subject to discussion

(Caffo, Camerini & Florit, 2004; Randall Noblitt & Perskin Noblitt, 2014). The definition of reference is that proposed by David Finkelhor, according to whom it concerns abuse that occurs

in a context linked to some symbols or group activity that have a religious, magical or supernatural connotation, and where the invocation of these symbols or activities are repeated over time and used to frighten and intimidate the children (Finkelhor, Williams & Burns, 1988). This definition could be better clarified in light of symbolic-ritual logic. First of all, as Finkelhor himself notes, sexual violence is not, in itself, the primary objective of ritual abuse. Unlike sexual abuse in general, the child is not just carnal prey, targeted for paedophilia or due to paraphilia, but a precious element that encapsulates, as we shall see, a magical-occultist potential. Secondly, reiteration is not a distinctive feature, but ritual abuse can also be discussed in terms of occasional and sporadic violence, whereby linked to a symbolic context. Thirdly, violence does not primarily aim towards scaring the children, but it is instrumental in magic ceremony. The intent for intimidation assumes, in fact, fundamental importance especially in cases of pseudo-Satanist sexual abuse, defined by Finkelhor “pseudo-ritualistic”, in which abusers frighten and threaten their victims with narratives of Satanism in order to intimidate them and dissuade them from talking (cfr. Finkelhor, Williams & Burns, 1988).

Ritual child abuse is, therefore, essentially sexual violence committed in a ceremonial context that is identifiable according to certain criteria. It

must be clarified that Satanism does not exhaust nor encompass all the various magical-occultist cults that, insofar as they are similar, differ in terms of purpose and doctrine. It would therefore be a considerable simplification to maintain that any occultist fact of criminological interest is attributable to Satanism alone. Amongst the traditions that concern the occultist utilisation of sexual energy, in fact, there is not only Satanism, but also, for example, internal alchemy and Gnostic rituals that aim towards obtaining magical purposes through “diversion” within sexual energy. Not to be confused with Satanist’s Black Mass, one of the best-known examples of sexual magic is the Gnostic Mass practiced by Aleister Crowley (1976), based on ceremonial coitus followed by the ingestion of male and female sexual secretions. These rituals of magic and sexual alchemy are still in use today within numerous ceremonial magic groups, other than Satanism (Introvigne, 1990). Although it is usually prescribed that such alchemical operations take place via consensual coitus between man and woman, we must note that some deviant and extreme ceremonial forms can also use sexual secretions obtained through violence.

The most distinctly destructive magical-occult cults turn (or wish to turn) their abusive practices preferably towards children. These are groups which, in terms of the specific occultist reasons we are dealing with, would prefer in principle to

perform ritual acts on children rather than adults. In this work we will be concerned with ritual abuse on infants and young children.

Satanic Ritual Abuse: a specific case of ritual child abuse

Abuse of children carried out in a specific Satanic context (“Satanic Ritual Abuse” or SRA) is at the centre of considerable controversy (Caffo, Camerini & Florit, 2004; Dettore & Fuligni, 2008). For the most part, cases of this kind have proven to be essentially unreliable for three reasons: firstly, because they are based on “false memories”, also induced by suggestive interviews; secondly, because they are favoured by forms of “social contagion”; thirdly, because they lack forensic evidence.

Generally speaking, in the context of child abuse, the eventuality that one can be dealing with a false complaint on the initiative of a minor or an adult is considered. Amongst the so-called “at risk” revelations, being those to examine with particular attention, are also ones that emerge within closed communities, with reference to ritual abuses (Caffo, Camerini & Florit). In these contexts, the possibility of encountering false memories in relative cases increases considerably. False memories of ritual and/or Satanic abuses do not derive from fantasy or delusion, but rather from dreams, the influence of movies, television programmes, other people’s narratives, or the

effects of drugs. What’s more, false memories can often be induced by adults who can manipulate the normal imaginative activity of children, not just to gather their discomfort, but to find the strength in their stories that they want to reveal. This is not a question of exploitation motivated by conflicts between parents, revenge or economic interests: what prevails is usually an “ideological” motivation, an excessive religious sensitivity or exaggerated social alarmism. One should suspect that a person in psychotherapy has false memories especially when reporting that these differ from other memories and if they affirm that recalling such episodes of abuse has totally altered their life. Other elements that may arouse suspicions that one is dealing with a false memory are, for example, the fact that accused persons has no precedence for child abuse and that they are willing to talk about the allegations that are being made, or the absence of objective findings (Zappalà, 2004).

Often, it is not a single adult that induces false memories, but a group of adults who construct and pursue a theory of presumed ritual abuse. Most of the time, they are people who are convinced that they are fighting for a just cause within their professional competences. In Anglo-Saxon countries throughout the period from the 1980s to the early-1990s, there was a veritable wave of memories coming from the so-called *survivors*. These were supposedly survivors of Satanic ritual

abuses who, under hypnosis, made confessions to psychiatrists concerning unscrupulous violence with a magical-occultist basis that happened decades earlier. The accounts of these patients were welcomed, without objective verification, by numerous groups of social workers, psychiatrists, and fundamentalist Protestant organisations. The most famous account of such memories, which started a long wave of striking recollections, is that of *Michelle Remembers*, published in New York in 1980. It was subsequently discovered that the woman had invented everything. In the same period, there were suddenly many accounts of children telling stories about SRA (Jonker & Jonker-Bakker, 1991; Putnam, 1991). In many of these cases, it was later discovered that the youths had been carefully “trained” by social workers who were naïvely convinced that they were battling against rampant evil, whilst piloting the testimonies unawares. As often happens, this disproportionate and unprecedented wave of anti-Satanism followed an equally exaggerated reaction of gelid scepticism which, in some respects, continues to persist today in Anglo-Saxon countries as well as in Europe (Introvigne, 2016).

According to David Jones (1991), one of the factors that most influenced the memory of abuses is *social contagion* expressed by parents who, discussing their suspicions with other adults and children, form a kind of “network” that influences

collective thinking and increases the level of anxiety transmitted to their children. All this, it is to be underlined, occurs *before* children can be questioned by police, social workers or psychologists. Another relevant issue is the overabundance of information surrounding certain cases and which increases the risk of distorting an objective evaluation of the facts (Caffo, Camerini & Florit). On the validity of the child’s testimony, in cases of presumed ritual abuse, it is however necessary to highlight that which is emphasised in the Italian *Nono Rapporto sulla Condizione dell’Infanzia e dell’Adolescenza*: no child is abstractly a credible or unreliable witness, but it is necessary to widen the field of inquiry to families, to the micro social network, to the entire interweaving that represents the basis from which the narrative originated, especially when it assumes traits of a collective narration (Rossi, 2004).

The cases of abusive ritual Satanic abuse, of which there is at least some knowledge, seem to come from Great Britain, Germany, the United States and South Africa (Mastronardi, De Luca & Fiori, 2006). One constant in these stories lies in the presence of very young adolescents, who are impregnated by a priest during a ceremony, before then being induced to abort only for the foetus to be subsequently sacrificed by the group. What appears to be rationally unlikely, from an occultist point of view, has its logic: the foetus is not a

creature of the mother but - especially if conceived during a rite - is of Satan, and hence is offered to him. Found in the treatises of demonology from the inquisitorial period is the constant affirmation that witches usually offered their sons to Satan (Krämer & Sprenger, 1977; Guaccio, 1998). A child conceived during a Satanic ritual is not always sacrificed as a foetus - it can be born and then initiated into the cult as a follower. There is, therefore, the rare but concrete possibility that these infants born at home will not even be officially registered. The ritual use of foetuses cannot be dismissed as imaginative construction. In the early days of Christianity, certain Gnostic sects, such as the Barbelognostics and the Fibionites, considered procreation to be sinful and practiced the ritual dining on aborted foetuses (Hutin, 2007). Subsequently, in the rituals practiced in the court of Louis XIV, the priestess Madame Voisin often sacrificed foetuses resulting from abortions. This example is particularly important, as it is one of the first cases documented by law enforcement sources that testifies to the historical commencement of Satanism as a systematic and liturgically-organised veneration of Satan. One of the first examples of black mass is that celebrated by Catherine Le Voisin in the presence of many ladies, including the famous Marches de Montespan, who asked the devil that she continue to be the King's favourite. It was common to carry

out a bloody sacrifice that, aside from the foetuses, could be of an animal, but more often was of babies, the children of commoners, lured to take part only to have their throat slit at the time of the offering. In the Satanist chapel of Voisin, a crematory oven was found with the remains of burnt bodies (Introvigne, 2016).

In addition to representing a pleasing offering to the devil, ritual abuse could also be a means for initiating the child to Satanism. In this case, it concerns children born to parents who are already part at a Satanist group or whose family members belong to the cult. Del Re (1994) distinguishes three phases through which destructive Satanism indoctrinates the child: alienation; entry into the world of the dead; rebirth in Satan. Sexual aggression, in a Satanist context, is usually accompanied by a systematic and organised psychological violence that seeks to provoke feelings of total isolation and absolute dependence in the victim. Brutally truncated are all parental relationships of affection, all positive figures, with the rest of the community: the minor must be completely isolated from the "normal" world in order to be reborn as a follower. The techniques used by Satanists to implement such psychological conditioning consists in: having the child assist in the torture of their peers and in sexual intercourse between adults, including parents; sexual violence through all kinds of combinations and modes; submitting the child,

dressed in ritual garments and laying on an altar, to erotic games using rods, sticks or other objects; locking the victim in a coffin next to a corpse and leaving them there alone for the night. It should be noted that in this case, the aspect of sexual violence also becomes an instrument for achieving the total psychological subjection of the child to the sect. Here, ritual abuse is therefore to be contextualised in a much wider path of coercion and which also presents traits that are not strictly ceremonial.

Ceremonial features and occultist reasons for ritual child abuse

One of the most controversial questions, with regards to these issues, is whether there are criteria that distinguish sexual abuse generally from sexual abuse that is specifically ritual. Kenneth Lanning (1991) is one of the “pioneers” who, in his role as a special agent in the *Behavioral Science Unit* of the FBI in Quantico, was directly involved in hundreds of cases of alleged abuse and murder with a Satanist trait. Without proof or reliable evidence, Lanning believes most of the victims of Satanic abuse could be traced back to other forms of abuse. In most cases when it is the children themselves that reveal such abuses directly, the law enforcement did not find documentary evidence (Young, 1991). The most significant problem, in fact, is the scarcity or lack of objective forensic findings that

can confirm not so much the occurrence of the abuse itself, as much as its placement within a ritual context.

It would therefore seem rather difficult to conceptualise a separate category of ritual abuse. In any case, it is possible to detect constants that are repeated in the various accounts and that cannot always be attributed to false memories, suggestions, or social constructions. The constants are represented by particular symbolisms and ceremonial behaviours, the utilisation of which is entirely plausible from an occult perspective and from the point of view of the history of magic. Given that forensic evidence is often fragmentary or unreliable, it is therefore necessary to examine the testimonies of this kind of abuse also by using other parameters. The question is whether the declarations relative to certain magical-occult practices, reported by children (or eventually by adults), conform to an internal consistency not of rational logic, but of symbolic and ritual logic. We will therefore try to understand in what this ritual logic consists and to consider which ceremonial practices associated with child abuse can be considered probable in the light of occultist doctrines, and which cannot.

The use of children in ritual ceremonies, right through to murder, has never been extraneous to the history of magic and the history of religions. The worship of the Phoenician-Canaanite god Moloch provided rituals of sacrifices of children

thrown into the raging fires before the statue of the god (Moscatti, 1991). Even the Carthaginians, who had upheld the practices of the Phoenician motherland, had the custom of sacrificing children. They were placed in the hands of an enormous statue of Baal. By operating a system of levers, the little ones fell into a furnace where a sacred fire perpetually burned. In Syria, children were sacrificed, carried in sacks by priests to the goddess Atergate (Manzini, 1988). It is very likely that the Celts immolated children during the feast of *Samain*. In this regard, archaeologist Powell argues, «in the ancient manuscripts, there are more general and imaginary allusions to the sacrifice of children and animals during the *Samain*. It is indisputable that there are elements of truth here, but the descriptions do not help to make the ceremonies clear» (Powell, 1999, p. 151). In ancient times, the ritual of decapitating children was also in use, defined by the occultist Eliphas Lévi (1996) as the “oracle of the bloody head”: the devil, through the mouth of the decapitated child, was ready to be able to pronounce an oracle, answering to particular questions. Lévi recounts that this ritual was used by Caterina de’ Medici to try to heal Carlo IX, struck by a mysterious illness. In this regard, the collection of amulets owned by Caterina de’ Medici consisted in «patches of children’s skin, and a concoction of human blood and the blood of

‘sacred mutton’ mixed with crystallised gold» (Ferrero, 2004, p. 182).

In medieval and Renaissance times, it is believed that witches participating in the witches’ Sabbath utilised particular ointments that were spread on the body. There are different opinions on the composition of these ointments, yet aside from some hallucinogenic herbs, one of the essential ingredients is “baby fat”. Such an assertion, which may appear to be, at the very least, ridiculous, nonetheless deserves some reflection. At the forefront of the supporters of this thesis, in addition to the inquisitors, certain 16th-century philosophers (Krämer & Sprenger, Cardano, Della Porta) can be cited. Secondly, human sacrifices in general also often served to «make ointments or sacred or magical foods» (Manzini, pp. 295-299). Thirdly, it should be pointed out that in magic, the demand for ingredients that are strange, that cannot be found or which are discovered with great difficulty, has a very precise meaning: it is a way to temper the will of the wizard and fortify them to the point of rendering them able to impact upon reality by influencing it. At the base of each magical act there is, in fact, a fierce and implacable will, in addition to a marked visual imaginative ability. Requiring eccentric ingredients for the ritual means nothing more than accustoming the will of the subject to self-discipline and steadfastness. In addition to this, which is a subjective precondition

for each act of magic, reference is made both to a nucleus of historical truth and an occultist principle: the historical truth lies in the incontrovertible fact that children have been victims of sacrifice in the past; the occultist principle expresses that which is the founding dynamic of magic, according to which the greater the amount of energy generated, the greater the efficacy of the ritual (Crowley, 1976).

The universe of magic, in fact, focuses on the dynamics that presuppose the management of occult energy that is - bit by bit - accumulated, employed, directed, unleashed, dissolved. All acts of magic require the mobilisation of the energy obtained, from an objective point of view, through the suggestiveness and emotiveness of the ceremonial apparatus and, from a subjective point of view, by the intensification of the emotions and the imaginative capacity of those who perform the act. During a Satanic or black magic ritual, in particular, the means of fostering this state are, amongst others, the passion of hatred and revenge, unbridled and promiscuous sexuality, dances and songs with obsessive rhythm, drugs, the vitality of the still-pulsating blood, the extreme violence on a living being and their death. According to Crowley, «the best blood is of the moon, monthly: then the fresh blood of a child, or dropping from the host of heaven: then of enemies; then of the priest or of the worshippers: last of some beast, no matter what» (Crowley, 1999, Part III, § 24). In

other words, in the context of black occultism, the energies deriving from hatred, from sexual rampancy, cruelty and brutality are transmuted by means of the ritual, into occult energy that can change the reality and the course of events.

In this perspective, children and babies encapsulate a combination of spiritual purity, sexual integrity, and psychophysical vitality that render them extremely relevant for occult purposes. The ritual “value” of abuse on a child therefore becomes such as to release an intense discharge of magic-sexual energy; even more elevated would then be the ritual value of their sacrifice that would multiply the potential of combining sexual violence and death. Both abuse and the eventual deaths should be procured via cruel means, since this represents a further added value for the purposes of the ritual. In general, in fact, the maximum level of occult force is released through the violent killing of a human being. In addition to the extraordinary burst of frenzy provoked within the occultist, the death suffered by a living being in general, and by a child in particular, represents a potential to be used for ritual purposes that are considered unusual and rarely pursued. From an objective point of view, the killing of a human being therefore releases a considerable amount of occult energy and, in the subjective sense, mobilises an elevated biophysical force in those completing the task. The more nefarious the sacrifice, the greater the

amount of magic energy released (La Vey, 1969). The magic force in ritual child abuse is therefore liberated from the joint presence of: a) a sexual act; b) being committed on a spiritually-innocent creature; c) a virgin; d) being physically very young; and, e) undertaking in ways that involve the spilling of blood. This already involves a combination of factors that implicate the obtaining of a significant potential of occult energy that can be further multiplied by adding the element of, f) the killing of the minor.

We have emphasised that, in magic, the death of a living being in general and of a child in particular, is a recourse for non-ordinary and “elevated” ritual purposes. Yet in what may these exceptional objectives consist? They become clearer if we consider the purpose of sexual alchemy. It contributes to creating the incorruptible “body of glory”, or “body of light”, which should begin to guarantee, already in this life, the effects of immortality (Introvigne, 1990). Sexual alchemy, which in the East is expressed in Tantric and Taoist traditions, is aimed at obtaining definitive mutations in the consciousness and in the body of practitioners and to produce effects of inner illumination parallel to certain permanent physiological mutations (cfr. Archarion, 2009). It is, therefore, that physical regeneration which humanity has always pursued with the metaphors of the “Elixir of Long Life” or of eternal youth. However, this elixir is no longer a simple

metaphor, but one of alchemic concerns, through an initiatory language amongst the most obscure, to dictate the ingredients, also obtained through processes that require blood, violence and death. This explains the extent to which the child can be precious for certain extreme occultist traditions: the more the objective of the ritual is difficult to achieve, the more potent the energies released in the ceremony must be.

We can therefore define as ritual abuse a combination of acts of physical, psychological and - above all - sexual violence that are carried out on children in the context of occultist ceremonial practices. The site of the ritual may include the use of verbal formulas and the presence of the names of entities, seals, pentacles, hexagrams, pentagrams, occult alphabets, along with astrological, cabalistic and runic characters.

Considering certain sources of classic texts in the history of magic such as, for example, the *Clavicula Salomonis* and the *Lemegeton*, it is indeed possible to examine the characteristic elements of Satanic ceremonies and destructive magic. The altar, covered with a black or red cloth, is positioned towards north or west (La Vey). The ritual instruments used here are, first and foremost, the sword and dagger. The sword, in fact, replaces the wand in black magic operations and also serves to trace the area of the ritual. It is employed in rituals in which a considerable occult strength is mobilised. In

Satanism, it is used to emphasise the most solemn and important passages of the ceremony. The presence of a dagger, whose function is sometimes replaced by a ritual knife, signals the fulfilment of a blood sacrifice, most often associated with an animal. The cup or chalice in this ritual context usually contains human or animal blood, water, wine, urine or a mixture of sexual secretions. The candles will be black - the colour of destructive magic - or red - the colour of the sexual magic. The garments worn by those participating in the rite will also be of these colours, but the child subjected to ritual abuse is more likely to wear a white outfit, given that white may represent all which is of concern. The ritual instruments, if the scope is specifically Satanic, are only to be in silver, since gold is symbolically associated with the kingdom of God and the regality of the Father. Herbs such as mandragora, deadly nightshade, henbane, Devil's snare, rue or coriander can be used, or else burnt for fumigations. A characteristic ritual instrument in Satanic ceremonies is the phallus, used as an aspersorium for blessings/curses. Its presence in Satanist rituals symbolises the forces of virility and fertility. It can be made of plaster, wood, clay, wax or can be substituted by any object with a phallic form. Particular attention must be paid to the determination of the so-called ritual area, consisting of one or more geometric figures drawn on the ground with various materials. In the case

of rites on children, the area is likely to be delimited by stones, feathers, the bones or blood of animals, hematite, or human blood. This signals the area within which the priest performs the ceremony, usually represented by one or more circles, but may also be a triangle with a circle. If the circle is found open, the rite has concluded. Conversely, if closed, it means that the ritual is in progress (cfr. Sabellicus, 2001).

As with any other magical ceremony, rituals on children must take into account the lunar phases. The operations focused on growth and constructivism require a crescent moon or full moon. The full moon in particular is suitable for rituals that require a magical force of great intensity. The waning moon is required for destruction and removal. Death rites are, however, conducted during the black moon phase (Sabellicus, 2001). Usually, Satanic rites concerning children specifically take place on dates that are significant in terms of Christianity and childhood, such as Christmas and the Epiphany. Other days favourably disposed to such rituals are: 28th December (Feast of the Holy Innocents), in which the children massacred by King Herod are remembered; 2nd February, the day on which the new-born Jesus was presented at the Temple; 2nd October, the Memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels; 29th September, when the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael are celebrated. The rituals can also be carried out on

dates that have traditionally held significance for Satanists and, in general, for occultism, such as the night between 31st October and 1st November, the eve of All Saints, and the night between 30th April and 1st May, the Walpurgis Night. In ritual action, the numbers that take on the most significance in occultism, regardless of the purpose of the rite, are those referring to a completed or concluded cycle, since they indicate how many times a certain action has to be repeated: 3, 7, 9, 12, 21, 28, etc. Of particular significance are the numbers nine and eleven. Nine, as the last simple number before double-digits, indicates the transition to another order, the entry into another dimension, which is why it often appears in necromantic rites and in those connected to human sacrifices. Eleven is considered as being the number of sin because it exceeds the order and perfection of ten. This number is also flawed with respect to the number twelve, being the number of grace and perfection, signifying rather demonic magic and chaos (cfr. Grant, 2002).

The rites in which children are sacrificed or raped are mainly appeals to the demons named Asmodeus and Astaroth (King, 1979). Such a reference is not by chance: in addition to being considered as two of the most powerful fallen angels, they also represent the demons most connected to the sexual sphere. With a great presence in Jewish demonology, Asmodeus is the

demon of lust and sensuality. In *Pseudomonarchia Daemonum* (Weyer, 1994) he is represented by the foot of a rooster, an animal known for its sexual vigour, and with three heads: one of the bull, one of a demihuman, and one of a ram. In the *Testament of Solomon*, he is described as furious and clamorous, intent on working against brides and grooms and to foment madness and desire (Sabellicus). Astaroth is the Hebrew and masculine version of Astarte, a divinity of sexual love worshiped by the Phoenicians and Canaanites, equivalent to Mesopotamian Ishtar. His worship included very licentious rituals, which included sacred prostitution, but also human sacrifices. Another demon that could be summoned in rituals involving children is Baal (or, Bael), an important divinity of the fecundity common to all Semitic populations.

More specifically with regards to criminal Satanism, other peculiar valencies must also be highlighted. In the view of a follower of Satan, abusing a child, assaulting them in body and mind, signifies carrying out extreme actions of contempt for and rebellion against God and against his creature who, in essence, incarnates physical and spiritual innocence. In this perspective, other Satanic actions also play a part, such as the defleshing of corpses, incest, destructive raiding of cemeteries, the extreme practices of cannibalism and vampirism. Not to be overlooked is also the significance of a regression

to bestiality that these gestures assume: this is a call to a fierce instinctiveness through which the adherent emphasises the characteristic animal dimension of the human being, more relevant and precious than its spiritual dimension.

Unlike groups of ceremonial magic, ritual abuse in Satanism can be accomplished not only to trigger a greater potential for occult energy to be employed for additional purposes, but also to offer the minor to Satan as a sign of devotion. Generally, however, those who carry out ritual child abuse in the name of Satan also expect to more easily receive riches and power from him. In this sense, the most significant historical example is that of Marshal Gilles de Rais, a valiant fighter alongside Joan of Arch, but also irresistibly attracted to children and very young males, with whom he used to abandon himself at licentious parties. After being raped, they were killed in various ways, sometimes by decapitation or throat-slitting, sometimes by dismembering and breaking their necks with a stick. His every fortune having dissipated due to his ostentatious lifestyle, he thought it wise to ask the devil for new wealth. In order to better succeed in his intent, he availed himself of the help of the priest Blanchet and of the Florentine alchemist Prelati. But De Rais was convinced that all was not right in the summoning, given that the devil did not appear. It thus proved that an “increase in quality” was necessary, involving offering up a young

man. The hero of France then turned to Prelati, bringing the required gifts: a heart, the eyes, a hand, and blood of a child. Thus, he began sacrificing an impressive number of infants, children and adolescents to the devil, not before, however, having subject them to torture and cruel molestations. Before the court of Nantes in 1440, de Rais confessed to the sacrifice of hundreds of children whose remains were tossed into the moats of castles or into cesspits (Ferrero, 2004; Chocod, 1979).

Psycho-criminological literature reports a series of characteristics in reference to the victims of Satanic ritual abuse. In respect of other forms of abuse, they had generally suffered a greater number of types of sexual acts, the penetration with objects, a systematic use of violence, more frequent threats of death. In omitting the most proper psychological aspects, we list the magical-occult characteristics that emerge from children's stories in order to assess whether they are compatible with that which we have highlighted: children fear ghosts, monsters, vampires, symbols of the occult; they draw pentagrams, inverted crosses; they show that they are afraid of death and blood; they show fear of or discomfort from the colours red and black and will not eat foods of those colours; they claim that black is their favourite colour; they state that they have been forced to ingest blood, urine, faeces, the remains of humans or animals; they talk about cemeteries,

believe that something foreign has entered their body (Zappalà, 2009).

These are indications that are entirely compatible with what we have seen so far in examining the occultist tradition regarding the rites in which children may be involved. In summarising, various kinds of occultist symbols and alphabets are widely used in ceremonies, drawn in the area of the ritual, embroidered in the garments, engraved with pentacles; death and blood represent two common ways of unleashing greater amounts of occult energy; Satanic initiations usually involve the physical and symbolic contact with death. In addition, blood, urine, human or animal remains, along with sexual secretions, are the materials commonly used for the composition of black magic filters, elixirs of sexual alchemy, liquids present in the chalices of black masses and in Satanist rituals. Black and red are the typical colours of all clothing, candles, and altars. Thus, not always may we think that the testimonies of children regarding such details are invented, suggested or deriving from films or music, especially when they refer to details that recall specific elements and principles of the tradition of the occult.

Conclusions

It is necessary to always rigorously and cautiously evaluate the ritual scene of a presumed crime. Finding traces and residues of rites does

not mean that an act of criminal significance has been performed, nor does it always concern criminal Satanism. Groups that practice magic often utilise and share the same ritual principles and tools, yet many of them are not properly attributable to the doctrine of Satan. One example is the possible finding of a skull on the site of a ritual. All those who practice rites of magic may use this, since it represents the element of Earth, one of the four elements of the universe that must be symbolically represented in any ceremony. Therefore, not necessarily does the skull have a Satanist significance but, more generally, occultist. Another example could be the knife which does not point to a bloody act in a ritual, unlike the dagger, but may simply be used, to direct and point the occult energies by tracing signs in the air, especially by practitioners of Wicca. Analogously, it should also be noted that the presence of a circle in a hypothetical crime scene does not provide specific information on the nature and criminological value of a ceremony, but merely indicates a ritual action, either underway or concluded.

We can define as ritual abuse a combination of acts of physical, psychological and - above all - sexual violence that are undertaken in the context of occultist ceremonial practices. To speak of ritual abuse, it is thus necessary for it to occur in a context in which ritual symbols, images and tools with magical-occultist meaning are used and

which take place in a particular time and under specific conditions. In the general context of ritual abuses, we can identify Satanic ritual abuse as a particular case of violence due to its specific purposes and ceremonial features.

The reason that renders children particularly sought after in certain magical-Satanic spheres is the considerable occult potential, being the charge of force they encapsulate. In the context of destructive magical-occultist cults, the child is considered not so much as sexual prey that satisfies a paedophilic instinct, which can also be present in the followers, as much as a vessel of occult energy to be exploited for ritual purposes. Prudence, the times and reasonableness have led many groups of Satanist and ceremonial magic to desist from realising such occultist principles in reality. In the practices of most of these groups, animal sacrifice has replaced human sacrifice and certain ritual actions often find their magic propellant in consensual sex between adults or the massive use of drugs, rather than sexual or homicidal violence. It is true that such ritual acts are still part of the magic tradition, which are more or less evident in occultist texts that are also handed down, even in private, in the initiatory teachings of many groups.

It is, therefore, a way of thinking, a set of occultist principles that could be applied, bringing about a transformation from initiatory doctrines to

practices of abuse, violence and - in the most extreme cases - in the execution of homicides.

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