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WITCHES, MYSTERIES, RUMOURS, DREAMS AND BONES: TENSIONS IN THE SUBJECTIVE REALITY OF WITCHCRAFT IN THE MPUMALANGA LOWVELD, SOUTH AFRICA [1]

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Evans-Pritchard's classical text *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1937) lay the foundations for contemporary scholarly understandings of witchcraft. Yet the author's central contention that witchcraft presents a logical explanation for misfortune has been less inspirational than his suggestion than that witchcraft accusations express regularly recurring socio-structural conflicts [2]. This idea was developed most fully by Marwick (1970) who argued that witchcraft accusations present a social "strain-gauge".

This formulation is based on two closely related assumptions. First, that at a general level, the distribution of witchcraft accusations, between persons standing in various relationships, reveals tension points in the social structure. Anthropologists and historians have contended that witchcraft accusations indicate different sorts of tensions in different social contexts. Witchcraft accusations have been shown to cluster between different matrilineal segments among the Chewa of Northern Rhodesia (Marwick 1965), agnates and affines among the Zulu of South Africa (Gluckman 1960), youths and elders among the Gisu of Uganda (Heald 1986), competing work parties among the Hewa of New Guinea (Steadman 1985), commoners and new state elites in Cameroon (Geschiere 1988), and between men and women in colonial Peru (Silverbladt 1987).

Second, the social strain hypothesis assumes that tense relations are the prime determinants of whom the accused shall be. For example, Macfarlane argues that in *sixteenth century Essex witchcraft accusations arose from quarrels over gifts and loans*, rather than strange events.

> "Although there was sometimes an emphasis on the strangeness of an event, for instance when a woman's body was sometimes covered with lice which 'were long, and lean, and not like other lice', strangeness, in itself, was not enough to produce a suspicion of witchcraft" (Macfarlane 1970:296) [3].

This article critically reexamines the relationship between social tensions and witchcraft. It draws on fieldwork conducted between 1990 and 1995 in Green Valley, a village situated in the lowveld of Mpumalanga, South Africa. In 1991 Green Valley had a population of approximately 20 000 Northern Sotho and Tsonga-speakers [4]. In the article I aim to focus on how individuals subjectively inferred the existence of witchcraft and the identity of alleged witches, rather than to explore the quantitative distribution of witchcraft accusations. From this perspective, I suggest that social tensions by themselves are less accurate predictors of witchcraft attributions and accusations than the literature may lead us to believe.

Anthropologists and historians, who propose that social tensions are the prime determinants of witchcraft accusations, often view witchcraft as an idiom of social relations and processes. Questions of evidence are deemed to be peripheral. It is either assumed that proof is impossible, or alternatively, that tension is the only proof of witchcraft. They hereby downplay the views social actors have of their own situations. This is an important oversight as it is emic understandings which motivate, guide, and justify action. For believers, who regard the existence of witches as a reality, questions of

evidence are much more crucial and complex. As Geertz (1973:90) reminds us, religious conceptions are only accepted if they are constantly justified, clothed in an "aura of factuality", and seem "uniquely realistic" [5]. Residents of Green Valley were extremely sceptical when I told them of the theory that prior social tensions are expressed in witchcraft accusations. My informants insisted that, on the contrary, it is witchcraft that generates tensions. Some elders drew my attention to the Northern Sotho proverb *moloi ga a na lenaka* ("a witch has no horn"). The proverb, they said, means that a witch's identity is never obvious and cautions people not to accuse their enemies of witchcraft.

The article is divided into two parts. The first considers the ontological status of witchcraft in local knowledge. I argue that the perception of witchcraft as a transcendent reality immunizes the belief against disproof. Yet in specific situations the occurrence of mysterious events, circumstantial evidence, revelations through divination and dreams, and confessions attested to the reality of witchcraft. Part two provides a detailed analysis of five case studies, and critically scrutinizes the role of social tensions relative to other types of evidence. I argue that social tensions were neither a sufficient, nor even a necessary, condition for witchcraft accusations. Villagers did perceive a conflictual relationship between the victim and the accused, prior to the advent of misfortune, as a motive for witchcraft. Tensions were therefore part of the wider framework of evidence they used to justify particular accusations. But villagers believed that witches often struck without motive.

Witchcraft and the Relativity of Reality

Overing (1985) argues that the positivist preoccupation with knowledge as verifiable observation obscures alternative conceptions of reality and also the authorizing processes through which truth is created. She argues that definitions of "what is true" in terms of verification often eclipse questions of "what truth means" in other situations. Her message is that reality is culturally constituted and relative [6].

This insight is very pertinent to witchcraft. Villagers of the lowveld perceive reality as dualistic. They do not merely acknowledge the existence of a visual, empirical, realm of ordinary humans; but also a realm of transcendent realities. Like the Holy Spirit and the ancestors, witches are thought of as real and all around people, but to be hidden. This conception can be illuminated by the metaphor of a one-way mirror - they can see people, but people cannot see them.

Witches are ordinary people by day who might even appear to be sociable, kind, friendly and hospitable. However, at night, when everyone else is asleep, witches are imagined to perpetrate evil. In local nomenclature the activity of witchcraft (*loya*) encompasses the malevolent use of poison (*tshefu*), *muti*, familiars (*dithuri*), and zombies (*ditlotlwane*) [7]. Villagers believed that witches inserted the lethal crocodile brain or *sejeso* into the food of their victims. While the former poison causes instantaneous death, *sejeso* is a mysterious type of slow poison. Once ingested it transforms into a snail, a frog, lizard or snake which gradually devours the victim from inside his or her body.

Witches manufacture various types of *muti* from herbs, roots, animal fats and substances from the human body. A type of *muti* called *sefolane* is placed on footpaths. It enters the body through the soles of the feet, causing paralysis of the legs. *Ko tola* is made from the victim's own nails, urine, feces, hair clothes or footprints, and used to influence his or her behaviour. Other types of *muti* cause people to commit suicide, friends to fight, cars to crash, cattle to trample their owners to death, and lightning to strike people's homes.

All witches are imagined to own familiars- snakes, owls, hyenas, baboons and wild cats-

which they send to steal from victims, attack, injure and kill them. Witches themselves can also assume the shape of their familiars. Since the 1960s the *tokolose* and *mamlambo* became the most prominent familiars in the lowveld. The *tokolose* is described as a large baboon with pronounced sexual features, in whose form witches have unwanted sexual intercourse with desirable women or men. Witches acquire the *mamlambo* as a root which seems to be alive and to glow at night. The *mamlambo* transforms into a large snake which brings the witch wealth, and also into a white lover. However, the hedonistic pleasures derived from keeping a *mamlambo* have great costs. The *mamlambo* is exceptionally greedy and demands regular sacrifices of human blood [8].

Witches are believed to change their victims into zombies. They first captured the victim's *seriti* ("shadow" or "aura") and then progressively took hold of different parts of his or her body, until they possessed the entire person. Witches deceived the victim's kin by leaving an image of him or her behind. Kin would assume that the victim is dead, but they would actually, bury the stem of a fern tree which had been given the victim's image. At home witches changed their victims into diminutive zombies whom they employed as servants to do domestic work, herd cattle, and work in their gardens.

Other significant features are attributed to witches. They always work naked. They inherit their power and inclination to harm from their mothers, or deliberately set out to acquire malevolent substances and skills [9]. Witches are motivated by feelings of deprivation, envy, and resentment to strike their more fortunate kin and neighbours. In recent years witches have also employed technologies described as *sekgowa* ("ways of the whites"). These included the use of white persons as familiars, chemical poisons, motor vehicles, trains to abduct victims and transport zombies, as well as remote-control devices.

Nobody can see witches when they commit their malicious deeds. Even at night they are invisible as they moved about, or assume the shape of their familiars. Witch-familiars are hidden in trunks, in rivers, or in dams during the daytime. At night they too move in disguise. An Apostolic prophet is the only person I know who claims to have seen the *tokolose*. She said that she saw it at 10 p.m. one evening, but was quick to point out that when she saw the *tokolose* it had assumed the form of a dog. Similarly, there are no eyewitness accounts of witches' trains. Individuals, who board these trains are said to disappear forever. Should they be found they would suffer from total amnesia.

The transcendence of witchcraft has important implications for notions of evidence. Evans-Pritchard (1937) drew a valuable distinction between the totality of witch beliefs and their invocation in specific situations. Transcendence immunizes the totality of witch beliefs against disproof, and evidence is less important at this level. Here Kuhn's (1962) notion of the paradigm is an appropriate analogy. Like the central premises of paradigms in the human sciences- such as the subconscious, class conflict or social structure- the key assumptions of witch beliefs escape critical scrutiny [10].

However, in the context of specific situations, such as unexpected deaths, evidence becomes vital. Incidents are selected which support the system of witch beliefs, and evidence is evaluated in a sceptical manner (Gluckman 1960:102-8). But even in these situations the belief that witchcraft occurred and the identity of the responsible witch cannot be verified by direct observation. Different kinds of evidence are required.

The occurrence of unfortunate, mysterious and perplexing events usually generated the initial suspicions of witchcraft. These included unexpected deaths, the sudden advent of illness, and incidents that ran counter to the predicted, or predictable, flow of life [11]. A school principal justified his belief in the reality of witchcraft by recalling a very strange event. Three weeks previously, the prop shaft of a mobile truck had broken and smashed

through the windscreen of the car following it. The prop shaft flew past the driver, hit the passenger in the rear seat, and severed the his head from his body. Such events, the principal said, cannot possibly occur naturally. The non-normal events cited as evidence for witchcraft need not be as dramatic. Samson Nyathi told me that he had repeatedly encountered problems with his car. One morning he found dents on his car's bonnet. To him it seemed as if something had walked on the bonnet at night. The next evening the car's alarm went off repeatedly. Samson inspected the car, but found nothing wrong. He later heard dogs whining outside. The next week Samson was involved in a car crash. A panel beater repaired the damage to his car, but soon a pack of dogs bit off the car's grill. Samson found this incomprehensible and thought someone had bewitched him.

Various kinds of circumstantial evidence also attested to the reality of witchcraft. For informants the display of envy and resentment is related to witchcraft rather as a motive is related to crime. This is evident in the allocation of blame for the death of Rupert Malope. In 1989 Rupert won a van in a competition organized by Radio Tsonga. Whilst driving his new van he swerved to avoid colliding with cattle. The van capsized and Rupert died instantaneously. Relatives suspected his sister of witchcraft. This is because she complained to them that she also entered the competition, but had not won a prize, and said she envied Rupert. Likewise, verbal statements are incriminating evidence. An elderly man recalled that in the 1950s he drank *maroela* beer with a group of his friends. Before leaving the circle of beer drinkers Peter Radebe, a herbalist, jokingly told the other men: "I can make anything happen". Minutes later the weather changed. A whirlwind blew sand into the men's beer and lightning struck nearby. When Peter returned he asked the men: "Did you see me?". The beer drinkers were convinced that he had sent the lightning. The identity of witches has also been inferred from the appearance of baboons and snakes in people's yards, the discovery of naked people in the village, the anomalous appearance of people in graveyards, excessive secrecy, and from people's intimacy with other well-known witches.

Confessions, and revelations through divination and dreams were the most authoritative evidence. A teacher mentioned a schoolboy's confession as the reason for his belief in witchcraft. When he asked the boy why he slept in class, the boy replied: "I did not sleep last night. My mother made me feed her things at the river". Likewise, the revelations of *dingaka* (herbalist-diviners) and Christian prophets furnished substantial proof of witchcraft. After his sister's funeral, Lucas Ramphiri consulted a Zionist prophet, who said witches had transformed his sister into a zombie. Lucas told me: "I believe this because I am a full member of that church." The acceptance of such revelations is based on the belief that *dingaka* and prophets have special access to hidden truths. Due to their relationship with the ancestors or the Holy Spirit, they are seen as mediators between the empirical and non-empirical realms [12]. Dreams too were thought capable of revealing transcendent truths. For example, Milton Machate interpreted his dream of a snake which bit his children as a sign that someone had tried to bewitch them.

Case Studies on Social Tensions and Evidence for Witchcraft

The above-mentioned examples of the use of evidence in the construction of witchcraft have merely been illustrative. If the argument is to be pushed further, specific examples of witchcraft accusations must be examined in greater depth.

Turner (1967) has argued that, in the study of witchcraft, it is insufficient merely to illustrate some or other structural feature, such as which relatives are being accused. He insists that witchcraft accusations are the product of a complex interplay of processes and forces which demand a dynamic treatment. To probe what the significant variables are in particular situations, and how they are combined, Turner advocates use of the

extended case study method. Witchcraft accusations should be examined within the context of their field of action. Account should be taken of structural principles, processes of change, and of "cultural facts, such as beliefs, symbols, values, moral rules, and legal concepts,...in so far as these constitute determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action..." (Turner 1967:118).

Though my analysis falls short of meeting these extensive demands, I have tried to follow Turner's suggestions as closely as possible. In each of the five cases below I have sought to present detailed information about the field situation. Attention is focused on the social relations, the rivalries, and alliances between the victims, accusers, and the alleged witches (Marwick 1964). These cases are fairly representative of witchcraft accusations that occurred during fieldwork, and the criteria for their selection has been their potential to illuminate the different types of evidence used in the construction of witchcraft. Case 1 highlights how accusations are justified even where social tensions are involved. Cases 2 and 3 show the social effects of labelling and illustrate the manner in which individuals may be blamed for many misfortunes. Case 4 and 5 highlight the importance of confessions and rumours and show how accusations can occur in the virtual absence of social tensions.

1. Mrs. Mnisi: Illness, Marital Strife and Dreams

On Friday 15 January 1991, Gladys Mnisi told me that her mother was ill. I expressed concern, as I was well acquainted with Mrs. Mnisi. A 52-year-old *ngaka*, she was among my best informants. She was extroverted and intelligent, and had taught me a great deal about her practice. Three days later I visited Mrs. Mnisi. By then her condition had greatly improved. She was keen to tell of her illness as it involved witchcraft and the ancestors- topics we had previously discussed.

Mrs. Mnisi said that on Thursday she became feverish. That night she dreamt that a zombie approached her, shouting: "Because you've seen me you'll die!". Mrs. Mnisi replied that under no circumstances would she allow the zombie to kill her. She then pushed the zombie into a room in which many men were seated. Believing that the men would beat the zombie, she tried to lock the door from outside. However, the zombie escaped and continued to pursue her. Mrs. Mnisi was perplexed by the dream. She recognized the zombie which tormented her as that of Mrs. Nyathi, a woman who had died long ago. Mrs. Mnisi became convinced that the dream was a premonition of witchcraft. On the Friday morning she saw, in a vision, that her husband's former lover tried to bewitch her by smearing *muti* on him. Mrs. Mnisi believed that if she touched her husband she would get fatally ill.

Mrs. Mnisi's interpretation of the dream was informed by marital tensions she had experienced throughout her adult life. She previously resided in Tulumahashe, but moved to Green Valley with her three children after her first husband abandoned. In Green Valley she married Mr. Mnisi, who worked as a migrant labourer in Johannesburg. After 1987 Mr. Mnisi seldom came home. He informed her that in Johannesburg he lived with another woman whom he planned to marry as his second wife. When Mrs. Mnisi learnt of his extra-marital love affair, she was certain he too would desert her. But in 1990 her marital relationship improved dramatically. Mr. Mnisi was transferred to Witbank, jilted his lover, and rededicated himself to his wife. Since then he has visited Green Valley every fortnight.

When Mr. Mnisi arrived at home on Friday afternoon, she informed him of her fears. They decided to consult a *ngaka* in Witbank the next morning. However, on Friday night Mrs. Mnisi dreamt that she fought with her husband and heard a voice saying she would

die on the way to Witbank. At midnight she awoke, complaining of heart palpitations. Mr. Mnisi and Gladys gave her white *muti* to drink. Mrs. Mnisi told them Magidane (a Ngoni spirit) had revealed to her the dangers she faced through dreams. Magidane also told her that Mr. Mnisi should wash himself with *muti*. He did as instructed. On Saturday the couple consulted a local *ngaka*. He confirmed that a woman tried to bewitch Mrs. Mnisi and revealed that there were tensions between their ancestors. The *ngaka* instructed them to conduct a ritual to calm the ancestors. They performed the ritual after they arrived home. Mrs. Mnisi soon recovered.

Mrs. Mnisi's experiences highlight the interrelatedness of social tensions and witchcraft. A tense spousal relation was the pretext of the accusation, and it was predictable that she would blame her husband's envious lover. Mrs. Mnisi's expression of distress resonates with the tactical use of spirit possession by marginalized persons. Lewis (1971) has shown how women can employ ecstatic possession as a strategy to achieve consideration and respect. Possession, he argues, accords women with an opportunity to insinuate their demands without jeopardizing men's dominant position (p.79,86). Yet, the case shows more than a mere attempt to resolve tensions. Mrs. Mnisi used convincing evidence to justify her accusation. She only accused her husband's lover once she became ill, dreamt of a zombie, saw the witch's identity in a vision, and after another *ngaka* had confirmed her suspicion. For Mrs. Mnisi the reality of witchcraft was indeed relevant.

2. Mrs. Maatsie: Deviance and the Tenacity of the Witch Label

From the time that the Maatsie household relocated to Green Valley from Craigieburn in 1970, neighbours regarded them as strange. There were rumours that Mrs. Maatsie's maternal grandmother had struck people with lightning in Craigieburn. Neighbours were surprised to learn that the household had changed their surname from Mathebula (Tsonga) to Maatsie (Northern Sotho). Some thought they must be trying to hide some former shame.

The household was widely regarded as deviant. One index of this was the troubled marital histories of Mrs. Maatsie's four children. By 1993 Thabo, the oldest Maatsie son, was 35 years old and had divorced five times. His first and second wives both separated from him after they quarrelled with his mother, and third wife left after Thabo's sisters assaulted her. Thabo divorced his fifth wife, who was much older than him, after she cheated on him with other men. Currently Thabo has a girlfriend. He has built a house for her in another location and has not brought her to live with his mother. Simon was married, but his wife deserted him after she became ill. Rebecca was married and gave birth to a child. But when her husband became unemployed, she left for Germiston and married another man without his knowledge. Daniel was married, but his wife returned to her parents. Currently he stays with his mother as he is unemployed and cannot afford his own home. Elizabeth, who was 18 years old in 1993, had already had an abortion. Roselina still stays at the mother's home although she is married and pregnant. (This contradicts the expectation that women should give birth at the home of their in-laws.)

Mrs. Maatsie was first publicly accused of witchcraft in 1978. The accusation stemmed from tensions between her and Thabo's first wife. When she noticed that Thabo's wife had not become pregnant within the first three years of their marriage, she reportedly said: "This chicken does not lay eggs". Thabo's wife complained to Mrs. Sekgobela, a next-door-neighbour, that Mrs. Maatsie had insulted her. Mrs. Sekgobela told her that, like her grandmother, Mrs. Maatsie is a witch. Mrs. Maatsie later blamed Mrs. Sekgobela for Thabo's divorce. The Maatsie and Sekgobela families met to resolve the dispute, but failed to reconcile the two women. When Mrs. Sekgobela became ill she blamed Mrs. Maatsie. When Mrs. Maatsie's youngest child died, in 1983, she in turn accused Mrs.

Sekgobela witchcraft.

Neighbours unanimously sided with Mrs. Sekgobela. Most were convinced that Mrs. Maatsie practised witchcraft. Many saw the Maatsie children's frequent divorces as indicative of this. Thabo's wives, I was told, left him because they became aware that "abnormal things" happened in the home. Other mysterious occurrences in the neighbourhood were cited to support this view. Once children played in Mrs. Maatsie's yard and saw a large snake slithering from her home to bask in the sun. A child told her parents that the snake wore beads. Employees of the Acornhoek bakery, who delivered bread to nearby shops in the early morning hours, claimed that they had seen "small people" filling buckets with water at the tap in front of Mrs. Maatsie's home [13]. It was rumoured that the small people were really zombies who brewed sorghum beer for Mrs. Maatsie. The evidence most suggestive of witchcraft is that a shopowner found Rebecca walking naked in front of his store at 5 a.m. He was so furious that he threatened to shoot her, but his wife restrained him.

Mrs. Maatsie had become very unpopular at the market where she sold fruit and vegetables. Other vendors told me they suspect that she steals primus stoves and uses *muti* to attract customers. In 1988 Izaac, who was responsible for locking and unlocking the market stalls each day, died without displaying any prior signs of illness. When Mrs. Maatsie became the new market overseer, it was alleged that she had bewitched Izaac and turned him into a zombie.

One man actually confessed that Mrs. Maatsie was his accomplice in witchcraft. This happened in 1990, when youths forcefully apprehended residents of Green Valley and took them to a witch-diviner in Mbuzini. The man, who was pointed out as a witch, was threatened with violence to make him reveal his accomplices. He immediately put forward her name. Mrs. Maatsie disputed the accusation and phoned Thabo, who worked as a railway policeman in Johannesburg at the time, to ask him to come home to protect her. Thabo complied and only returned to Johannesburg again once her life was no longer in danger.

During fieldwork I interviewed several of Mrs. Maatsie's immediate neighbours. They blamed her for a wide variety of the misfortunes which had personally experienced.

i) Mrs. Ndlovu had suspected Mrs. Maatsie of witchcraft since she had seen her walking naked in her yard one morning. She thought Mrs. Maatsie's witchcraft had been the cause of her daughter's heart disease and her son's motor vehicle accident. Mrs. Maatsie was allegedly envious of the fact that all the Ndlovu children had passed their matriculation examinations. Mrs. Ndlovu was, however, of the opinion that Mrs. Sekgobela did not kill the youngest Maatsie child. When the child was still a foetus, Mrs. Ndlovu dreamt it climbed from its mother's womb. The foetus then walked to Mrs. Ndlovu's gate. At the gate a dog dug out red *muti*. The foetus ate the *muti* and then returned to its mother's womb. Mrs. Ndlovu said the child died shortly after birth because it ate the *muti* its mother buried at the gate.

Mrs. Ndolovu also believed that in 1991 Mrs. Maatsie bewitched her own husband, who died in Johannesburg, to obtain his pension. She alleged that a week prior to his death Rebecca washed his clothes with washing powder into which Mrs. Maatsie had poured *muti*. Mrs. Maatsie's sons were reportedly furious, and Daniel even beat his mother with a stick. Mrs. Ndlovu claimed that late one evening she saw Mr. Maatsie's ghost. When Mrs. Ndlovu heard drums being beaten at the Maatsie home, a week later, she thought the family had hired a *ngaka* to exorcize the ghost.

ii) Milton Machate, a teacher, complained most vehemently about Mrs. Maatsie. As a

youngster he suffered from profuse nosebleeds. A *ngaka* revealed that a witch had placed *muti* on the footpath along which he walked to school. Fearing for Milton's life, his mother sent him to live with her brother in another location. The same year lice covered the body of Sipho, Milton's eldest brother. Milton came to believe that Mrs. Maatsie was responsible. He also recalled that Rebecca was once his girlfriend, and that she possessed an uncanny power. "To my surprise I learnt she was more powerful than me. Whenever we argued I was the one who apologized. I became scared of her."

During 1993 the Machate household was struck by an inexplicable series of misfortunes. In March Milton's wife developed boils on her legs. A prophet told her the boils were caused by *sefolane*. In April his daughter complained that she felt something moving in her ear. At a local clinic nurses examined her, but found nothing wrong. However, a prophet said witches had sent worms to bite her ear and wanted to turn her into a zombie. Over the Easter weekend Michael, Milton's younger brother, who studies in Pietersburg, visited home. The very same day that Michael returned to Pietersburg, he was hospitalized on account of an inflamed appendix. A prophet told Michael that he had been bewitched by neighbours in Green Valley who were envious that he was at University. In May, Milton went to Dingleydale by car to visit a colleague. As he returned, he experienced a mysterious blackout. "The next thing I remember is walking bare footed on the road. As I looked around I saw that my car was in flames." Milton arrived at home late that evening. The next morning Mrs. Maatsie visited Milton's mother, said that she had heard of the accident, and asked if Milton was alive. "Where the hell did she get the information from?", Milton asked me. He believes Mrs. Maatsie bewitched him because he did not marry her daughter, Rebecca.

iii) One evening in 1993 John Malapane, a young bank teller, heard a voice call his name. When he looked outside, he saw a large female ape circling his home. The ape entered his room and ran around his bed. It seemed asif the ape dug around the garden and in his room. As he looked at the ape, he tasted bitter roots. The ape then disappeared. John later peered through the window, but could see only shadows. He also inspected his floor and garden, but could not find any holes.

John was disturbed by his experience and consulted an Apostolic prophet. Before he could speak, the prophet revealed that John was deeply troubled. This is because his girlfriend's parents dislike him. However, the parents of another girl wanted John to marry their daughter. Although he was unaware of it, they had sent her to sleep with him on several occasions. Her parents also gave John *muti* which made him cough. The prophet did not name the witch, but said she lives three homes away. (Mrs. Maatsie lives three homes away from him). John was convinced by these prophecies because he regularly experienced wet dreams. Furthermore, he had noticed that Elizabeth behaves strangely in his presence. She never greets him, but often stares at him. John's father later took him to a *ngaka*, who confirmed the prophecies. She said a *tokolose* surrounds John and that, unless his body was strengthened, he would never be employed in a permanent capacity. That afternoon the diviner exorcized the *tokolose* from his body. Since he was treated, John claims, he no longer has wet dreams and was employed in a permanent position. However, John said Mrs. Maatsie still troubles him. After he served her at the bank his thumb became very painful. He has started hiding in the toilet to avoid her whenever she visits the bank.

In this case the manner in which tensions are related to witchcraft is by no means obvious. Mrs. Maatsie was definitely despised by her daughters-in-law and by other fruit vendors. Yet it was Mrs. Maatsie's neighbours who were her prime accusers. Their strained relations with her followed, rather than preceded, suspicions of witchcraft. (The quarrel between Mrs. Sekgobela and Mrs. Maatsie only erupted after Mrs. Sekgobela told her daughter-in-law that she is a witch.) Mrs. Ndlovu, Milton Machate and John

Malapane did not compete with Mrs. Maatsie for scarce resources. They avoided her at all costs because of their perceptions of strange events in the Maatsie household. For a variety of reasons they were more fortunate than Mrs. Maatsie, and regarded her envy as a sufficient motive for witchcraft. The revelations of their dreams, and of prophets and *dingaka* reinforced their beliefs that she was a witch. What is most telling about this case is that Mrs. Maatsie was blamed for witchcraft on at least 15 different occasions. These attributions were interrelated. Mrs. Ndlovu, Milton Machate, and John Malapane regularly spoke to each other about Mrs. Maatsie. She had become a convenient scapegoat their misfortunes. This points to the tenacity of the "labelling effect", a social science term for what might otherwise be described as giving a dog a bad name and hanging it [14]. When a witch lives next-door it is very likely that motor vehicle accidents and sickness will be blamed on witchcraft.

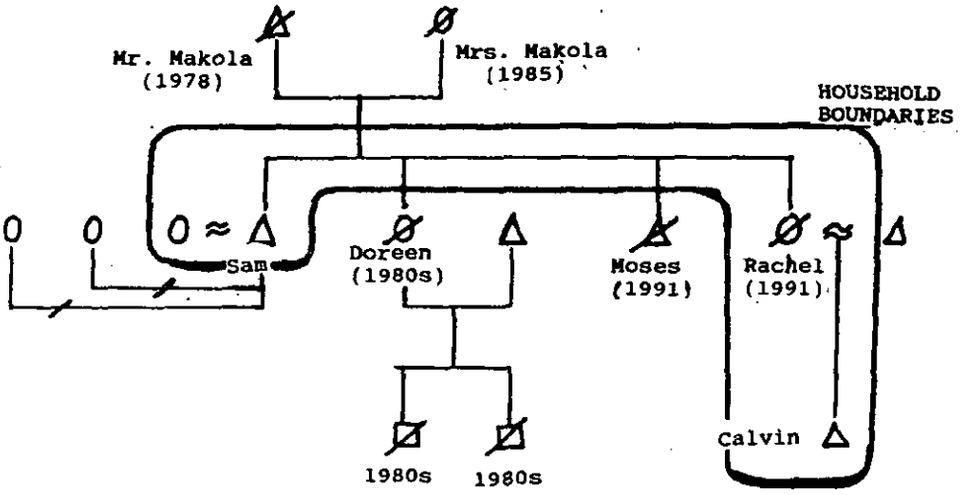
3. Sam Makola: Genealogy and Mysterious Deaths

In 1952 Sam Makola, a 13-year-old boy, became ill after being circumcised at an initiation lodge. Sam's wound healed very slowly. He was feverish, suffered from diarrhoea, and was confused. One evening Sam cried bitterly, saying that his mother called him to go home. The initiation master was surprised since women are strictly forbidden from initiation lodges and nobody had seen his mother in the vicinity. When Sam's condition deteriorated, a *ngaka* was summoned to determine the cause of his illness. The *ngaka* examined Sam, and the following afternoon the *ngaka* addressed the parents of all initiates at a clearing outside the lodge. In an angry tone he exclaimed that Sam's mother was responsible for his condition. At night, he alleged, she had sneaked into the lodge to fetch her son and forced him son to milk cows at home. The *ngaka* then gave Sam herbs to drink. Informants recalled that the herbs made Sam excrete and that a worm-like creature protruded from his anus.

Most onlookers were convinced of Mrs. Mokola's guilt. She had already been suspected of witchcraft, two years previously, following the death of her sister-in-law. Some adults believed that Mrs. Makola came to the lodge being invisible and took Sam home, leaving only his image behind. Others thought that Sam, himself, flew home. Upon his return, they said, he was trapped by an anti-witchcraft serum which the initiation master had planted in the lodge. An assistant of the initiation master told me the worm-like creature was really a snake-like witch familiar. "It looked like a tapeworm (*dibokwana*), but it was something strange. It had no head." After the local headman heard of the incident he summoned a *pitso* (gathering). Here he furiously reprimanded everyone that an initiation lodge is not a place where witches should play.

Sam Mokola recovered from his illness. As a young man Sam left to work in Johannesburg. Only much later did he return to Green Valley and start working at the Air Force base in Hoedspruit. By 1990 Sam had been twice divorced, and lived with a third woman in a home which he, himself, built. Though elders remembered the incident in Sam's childhood, it was only in 1991, when Sam was 52 years old, that he was publicly accused of witchcraft.

The accusation was sparked by many incomprehensible deaths in the Mokola family. In 1978 Sam's father passed away after a long bout of illness. In the early 1980s Sam's sisters Doreen and Ester died, while Doreen had previously lost two of her children shortly after their births. One morning in 1985 Sam's mother bid him farewell as he set off for work. She died at 10 am the very same day.



(*) indicates date of death

Three years later Sam's youngest sister, Rachel, who had long suffered from illness, separated from her husband and moved into Sam's home with her three children. From here she underwent training as a *ngaka*. Once she had completed her apprenticeship, Sam paid all expenses and slaughtered a cow to welcome her home. For a while it seemed as if Rachel's health had improved. But on 15 June 1991 she again complained of stomach cramps, and fell down dead as she made her way toward the outdoors pit-latrine. Sam immediately informed his neighbours when he discovered Rachel's corpse. Because no rigormortis had set in they suspected that a witch might have captured Rachel's body, leaving only an image behind. Throughout the night a *ngaka* performed the *dlo kola* ritual to retrieve Rachel from the witch. The *ngaka* beat drums, burnt animal fats and herbs, and ran through the veld blowing a whistle. Yet it soon became clear that Rachel could not be saved.

The next morning Sam's younger brother, Moses, told friends that Sam had bewitched Rachel and promised to take revenge. (For long Moses had been angry because Sam had not invited him to Rachel's reception party.) On 19 June Moses walked to work. As he reached the outskirts of Green Valley he collapsed. Two teachers came to his assistance and rushed him to hospital. But Moses was certified dead upon arrival.

Rachel and Moses Mokola were buried on Saturday, 26 June. The atmosphere at their funeral was extremely tense. The master of ceremonies rushed through the proceedings, and an Apostolic priest conducted a very short sermon. His message was simply that God had promised eternal life to the righteous, but would caste out all evil-doers. Sam was notably anxious and was surrounded by men whom he had asked to protect him. During the funeral Rachel's oldest son, Calvin, conversed with fellow members of the ANC Youth League. Late that afternoon Calvin knifed Sam. Sam spent the night in hospital, where he was treated for neck wounds. Upon his release, he found that his home had been burnt to the ground. Informants had anticipated the attack. They were convinced that Sam practised witchcraft, kept a *mamlambo*, and had killed his relatives to feed it human flesh. Sam subsequently relocated to Hoedspruit.

It is doubtful that prior social tensions account for the accusation of witchcraft against Sam Makola. It is certainly true that Sam quarrelled with his brother, Moses, before the death of their sister, Rachel, and even thereafter. Yet, contrary evidence can also be

found. One of Sam's neighbours, who was convinced that both Sam and his mother were witches, dispelled any notion that they were visibly troublesome. He recalled that Mrs. Mokola had invited him to eat at her home whenever he was hungry. About Sam he remarked: "To his family members he was always very, very, friendly. He pretended to be very, very, good." It may seem that there might have been political tensions between Sam- an employee of the South African Air Force- and Calvin- a member of the ANC Youth League. But this is was not so. At the time Sam, like many other employees at the Hoedspruit Air Force base, was a member of an ANC-affiliated trade union, NEHAWU [15]. Moreover, political tensions were never mentioned in any of the interviews that I conducted. In the case of Sam Makola circumstantial evidence was clearly most decisive in producing an accusation of witchcraft. Primary among these is the correlation between Sam's return to Green Valley and the deaths of his family members, and also Moses's mysterious death immediately after he had threatened to kill Sam. Sam's genealogy and his mother's dubious reputation for practising witchcraft also gave the accusation against him an "aura of factuality".

4. Albert Nziane: Dreams and Self Confession

Albert Nziane firmly believed that he kept of *mamlambo*. He readily confessed this to kin, neighbours, the Civic Association, my research assistants, and to me. Albert's belief stemmed from complex personal dynamics. Though Albert is 35, he has never held a stable job. Instead, he repaired radios and worked as a builder on a part-time basis. Albert lived alone in a two-roomed house, was single, and had never engaged in heterosexual relations. Many people were greatly concerned about Albert's predicament. His next-door neighbour told me: "It is very bad to live like him. He does not even have a girlfriend. Sometimes women come to visit him, but they only talk. Then they leave." Some thought Albert was somewhat mentally retarded. Others insisted that he was of average intelligence. This was certainly my impression.

Albert remarked that his misfortunes started from childhood. After his mother's death, in 1969, *nzonzo* spirits started to torment Albert. The spirits have tried to drown him. Albert once swam in a river with other boys, but got stuck in the river sand and only emerged after a prolonged struggle. Since then, he has feared water. "Today I cannot even look at water. To me water seems like a shiny mirror." Albert claimed that the spirits will only allow him to marry once he has been initiated as a *ngaka*. But this was too expensive. "I can propose to any woman, but she'll reject me." From our discussions it emerged that, as a youngster, Albert had been sexually abused by the white school principal for whom he worked as a gardener. The school principal regularly forced Albert to accompany him to the Sybrand Van Niekerk dam, to undress, and to masturbate him. Albert also blamed the principal for not being married. "He taught me to produce pleasure by myself. This had a bad influence on me. Today I feel no need to have sex with women [16]."

In 1992 Albert repaired the radio of a Malawian herbalist. When the herbalist came to fetch the radio, he asked whether Albert wanted to marry. Albert replied affirmatively. The herbalist then gave Albert a matchbox containing roots, which said was love potion (*moratisho*) that would cause women to love him. Albert claimed he could not understand the herbalist's instructions properly because he spoke a Malawian language. "I just pretended to listern and took the roots under duress." At home Albert hid the roots inside an old gramophone. Soon he realized that they affected him in mysterious ways. "My relations with people immediately became bad. Those who passed my home insulted me for no reason. I also became aggressive toward them. I could not understand what was happening." Within a month Albert began to experience nightmares. He once dreamt that a blue snake emerged from a hole in a log and slithered towards his aunt.

Albert screamed to warn her, but she could not hear him. The snake then came directly toward him. Albert awoke at 3 a.m., his body drenched in sweat. The next evening he dreamt that a white woman was seated on his bed. At the exact moment, Albert began experiencing convulsions. His head knocked against the woman, but she did not say a word. Albert awoke and went to sleep in the kitchen.

The next morning he consulted a local *ngaka* about his nightmares. After she inspected the roots, she told Albert to break and discard them away, because they were really a snake. Albert complied, but remained sceptical. He observed that the broken roots remained green. Moreover, as he threw away the roots he heard a woman's voice. In a mocking tone, she said: "This man is throwing his wife." Albert looked around, but saw nobody. For the next two nights Albert slept peacefully. However, on the third night he was again beset by fear, noticed a strange green light floating in his room, and became feverish. Albert rushed to the *ngaka*'s home to ask her about the light. She gave him ***muti*** to burn so that he could sleep peacefully. Yet the light reappeared beneath his table and bed. Some evenings Albert was so scared that he slept at the *ngaka*'s home. Even here, he saw the mysterious light. The light, he said, caused him to dream of a snake. Albert's whole body started itching.

Eventually, Albert paid his father's brother (*ramogolo*)- who is also a *ngaka*- R100 to fortify his home against the snake and to cure his aches. The *ngaka*'s brothers were furious when he informed them that Albert possessed a *mamlambo*. They feared Albert might have to sacrifice one of them to the snake. When they confronted Albert, he took them to the place where he originally discarded the roots. Because they found nothing there, they became restless, and asked Albert to accompany them to the Malawian herbalist. Yet they found only the herbalist's wife at home. Albert's uncles then reported the matter to the local Civic Association. A leader of the Association told me that they tried their "level best" to help Albert. They, too, went to the Malawian herbalist's home, but found that he had moved to live with his second wife in Tulumahashe.

In December 1993 Albert believed that he was still being pestered by the snake. "There is no way of getting rid of it. Many nights, I dream that I'm sleeping with other men's wives." He was, nonetheless, grateful that his *ramogolo* had neutralized the snake's power. "That is why I have not seen the real snake. It only troubles me in my dreams". Albert criticized the Civic Association for failing to evict the Malawian. He complained that he still suffered from fever, felt "things" moving inside his body, and that youngsters mocked him about his "madam" throughout the village. Yet by now, Albert said, he had grown used to suffering.

The case of Albert Nziane cannot be explained in terms of prior tensions between the accusers and the accused. In fact, Albert's confession that he kept a *mamlambo* amounted to a self-accusation. The cultural fantasies of the *mamlambo* and witchcraft accorded him with a language through which he could articulate his mysterious dreams of snakes and white women, and his perceptions of mysterious lights [17]. He could not comprehend nor express these experiences in any other way. Albert's interpretations of his experiences occurred against the backdrop of personal distress, loneliness, paranoia, insomnia and, mainly sexual, anxieties. But what makes psychological sense often makes sociological nonsense. Although those who confess to witchcraft often seek to redefine that nature of witch-beliefs, and thereby lessen their crime, this seldom has the desired effect. For instance, among the Azande accusers did not share the view of confessors that witchcraft was unconscious. They perceived it as a conscious activity (Evans-Pritchard 1937). Similarly, Albert's uncles did not totally endorse his perception of himself as the victim of a herbalist. For them both Albert and the herbalist were equally at fault. Through confession Albert laid himself open to the possibility of retribution.

5. Harry Chiloane: Rumours of Zombies and of Resurrection

On 19 October 1992 Harry Chiloane, a 22 year-old-man from Buffelshoek, died in a motor car accident in Benoni. Nobody who attended Harry's funeral in Buffelshoek had noticed anything suspicious. However, in 1993 a schoolboy told me that Harry was still alive and had visited his mother. He said Harry lived at the home of a *ngaka*, but would return permanently to his mother on Saturday 28 February. At the time the story seemed so bizarre to me that I saw no need to make further enquiries. Yet throughout the week I became aware that the story was extremely widespread. At two schools and at the market, I heard, people saying that Harry would, miraculously, return from the dead.

On 23 February my field assistants and I drove to Buffelshoek to investigate. Here we met Elphas Shai- a friend of one of my assistants. Elphas had heard the story from Harry's *malome* (mother's brother). A *ngaka* apparently promised Mrs. Chiloane that he would ensure Harry's safe return if she paid him R3 000. Elphas believed that the *ngaka* had deceived Mrs. Chiloane to deprive her of her hard-earned cash, and predicted that many people would be disappointed. Such things, he said, could only have happened in the past. "If it does happen it would be one of the biggest miracles in the world." Elphas recalled that in 1962 a rumour circulated that a baby had been born in the Acornhoek hospital with teeth. After its birth the baby was purported to have said it would not rain for seven years. Yet nurses at the hospital had not even heard the story. Likewise, Elphas remarked, the story about Harry was only a rumour.

Hereafter, one of my field assistant asked me to drive to the home of his aunt, Mrs. Mashego, Mrs. Chiloane's close friend and neighbour, and we asked her to introduce us to Mrs. Chiloane. Mrs. Mashego advised us against this. She said Mrs. Chiloane was concerned about the rumours which were flying about and did not want to speak about Harry to outsiders. Mrs. Mashego was, nonetheless, willing to tell us the entire story. She visits Mrs. Chiloane daily and was well-informed of all the details.

Mrs. Chiloane was badly shaken by Harry's death, which was more mysterious than it appeared to outsiders. At the time Harry was employed by a furniture company as a truck driver. In Benoni a traffic policeman instructed Harry to stop and to pull off the road. When the traffic policeman inspected the truck he found the rear indicator to be defective. Harry alighted from the driver's seat, walked to the rear of the truck, and helped the traffic policeman fill out a ticket. While they were talking, the driver of an oncoming truck lost control of his vehicle and collided with the stationary truck. Harry failed to move out of the way and was crushed to death between the trucks. Mrs. Chiloane could not comprehend many aspects of the story as it was relayed by the traffic policeman in his report to the furniture company. What she found puzzling was why the driver of the oncoming vehicle lost control, and why Harry could not get out of the truck's way, as the policeman had done. She also failed to understand why Harry's body did not burn when both of the trucks exploded into flames. Mrs. Chiloane suspected that witches had turned Harry into a zombie.

Mrs. Chiloane told Mrs. Mashego of many uncanny experiences at home since Harry's funeral, which had led her to believe that her son had visited and would soon return. At first she could feel his *seriti* ("shadow" or "aura") at home, but ignored it. One evening she heard Harry's voice saying "Mother! Please feed me!" Mrs. Chiloane was shocked and sat in the kitchen until late. At 9 p. m. the kitchen lights suddenly went off. She was convinced that it was Harry who had switched off the lights. Since then Mrs. Chiloane reportedly heard Harry's voice on many occasions. At 4 p. m., the time he usually came home from work while he was alive, she often heard him saying *"Thobela!"* (greetings). Each evening Mrs. Chiloane prepared porridge and tea for her son and left these on the

kitchen table. Each morning the food would be eaten. Mrs. Chiloane became convinced that Harry was not really dead. She did not believe these experiences were of a ghost as ghosts can neither speak nor eat. I put it to Mrs. Mashego that I had learnt that there are three components to a person- *nmele* ("body"), *seriti* ("shadow") and *moya* ("breath")- and asked which of these had returned. She was unsure, but was convinced that it was more than the mere *seriti*. "It greets, eats porridge, washes its hands, and pours out the water." Yet, Mrs. Mashego said nobody had actually seen Harry's figure.

Mrs. Chiloane eventually consulted a *ngaka*. The *ngaka* claimed witches had captured Harry and were trying to turn him into a zombie. At his funeral, she said, people did not bury Harry, but the stem of a banana tree. The *ngaka* told Mrs. Chiloane that she had spoken to Harry, who told her that he returned to his mother because the witches who captured him wanted him to drink human blood. Had Harry drunk the blood he would have become a zombie. Moreover, the *ngaka* said Harry told him of many deceased people who are kept by the witches to plough their plots at night. Some lived by sucking the blood of living people. Others, like Harry, had not been completely transformed into zombies and collect food from home. On a second occasion the *ngaka* told Mrs. Chiloane that another diviner had found Harry and was busy healing him at her home. He promised Mrs. Chiloane that Harry would be cured and returned to her on Saturday 28 February if she paid an amount of R3 000. Mrs. Chiloane was convinced the *ngaka* spoke the truth. She even took off her mourning clothes and had began preparing a reception party for Harry.

It is unclear whether Mrs. Chiloane actually accused anyone of witchcraft. However, on Tuesday 24 February Mrs. Mohale heard from friends that a *ngaka* said her mother had bewitched Harry. Mrs. Mohale became furious. She stood at the gate of Mrs. Chiloane- her neighbour and affine- shouting insults at her. Mrs. Mohale even threatened to take Mrs. Chiloane to a witch-diviner. Mrs. Chiloane then reported Mrs. Mohale to the chief's court for cursing at a bereaved family. The chief heard the case, but did not pass a judgement as it involved accusations of witchcraft.

On Saturday 28 February about 300 people awaited Harry's return at the Chiloane home. Mrs. Chiloane remained in-doors and cried bitterly throughout the day. I first met Mrs. Chiloane was on 17 July, 1993. Mrs. Mashego called for me to assist her with problems she encountered at the University of the Witwatersrand Law Clinic. Mrs. Chiloane now blamed the entire episode on rumours. She said there are many who still believe Harry is alive. Once people came from Bushbuckridge and opened the door to look for Harry. Some claimed to have seen him at a birthday party. Others told her they saw him repairing her roof. "People laugh at me, but I feel pain", she said.

The experiences of Mrs. Chiloane again underline the complexity of witchcraft beliefs and accusations. More intensive investigations may well yield greater insights into the relationship between Mrs. Chiloane and Mrs. Mohale, her neighbour, but such an exercise may be futile. Even if their relationship is shown to be one of sustained conflict, such conflict would not account for her previous expectation that Harry would return from the world of the dead. The precise evidence for her belief that Harry had been captured by witches is hard to pin down. The mysterious circumstances of his death, the manner in which she imagined hearing his voice, the strange disappearance of the food she left for him, and also divinatory revelations seems to have been crucial. The possibility that Mrs. Chiloane had indeed experienced auditory hallucinations cannot be excluded. As a great deal of comparative literature has shown, maternal reactions to child death often includes hallucinated or dreamed visitations from the deceased (see Raphael 1983). The case also shows the major role of rumours in the construction of witchcraft. Rumour transformed Mrs. Chiloane's belief that she heard a voice into firm evidence for the reality of witchcraft. Throughout the wider Acornhoek area people

heard that she had actually seen her Harry. This is similar to the incident in Case 2, where rumours transformed the "small people", seen by drivers of the Acornhoek bakery, into zombies. Like "paradigm" and "label", the distorting effect of "rumour" bestows witchcraft with an "aura of factuality". Musambachime (1988) suggests that this effect is due to the tendency of rumours to transmit interpretations of impressions rather than impressions themselves. He argues that rumours arise in times of uncertainty and are "fired by a desire for meaning, a quest for clarity, and by a desire for logical explanations" (p.201) [18].

Conclusions

This article has cautioned against the sociological determinism evident in Marwick's (1964) widely accepted formulation of witchcraft accusations as a social "strain-gauge". My analysis of five case studies from Green Valley lends very little credence to the *a priori* assumption that conflictual relationships necessarily determine, or enable us to predict, whom those accused of witchcraft would be. They show that social tensions are even less pronounced in arousing the initial suspicions that witchcraft had occurred.

The anthropological perception of witchcraft as an "idiom" of social relations obscures rather than illuminates the role of interpersonal conflict in the actual witchcraft accusations that I recorded. In local discourses there was a clear distinction between social tensions in general and the types of tensions associated with witchcraft. In Green Valley individuals were regularly accused of being rapists, adulterers, thieves, sell outs, arrogant or unbearable persons. Witchcraft does not refer to these visible actions, but denotes mystical deeds that are imagined to be motivated by envy, malice, resentment and greed. These emotions were part of complex webs of evidence that believers and accusers used to construct, and to reconstruct, the reality of witchcraft in specific situations. They were no more important than the occurrence of unexpected and painful events, strange verbal statements, confessions, people's social and genealogical ties to other known witches, social deviance, nakedness, the anomalous appearance of wild animals near people's homes, dreams, divinatory revelations, and people's uncritical acceptance of rumours.

It is hard to single out any particular factors from this complex maize of ideas. Yet certain patterns do occur with great regularity in the cases examined. One pattern is the prominent manner in which the paradigms, labels, and rumours structure the interpretation of perceptions. Another is the emphasis on divinatory revelations and dreams in narratives of witchcraft. Divination and dreams were the most appropriate source of information in the verification of transcendent realities. They are related to events in the transcendent realm as direct observations are related to events in the empirical realm.

Peek (1991) provides important clues to why this should be so. He argues that divinatory consultations are motivated by an intense desire to know the real reasons for the occurrence of events. Diviners are resorted to in times of crisis when there is "no sufficient body of knowledge available to enable people to cope in practical terms with the hazards of life" (p.194). In these situations, Peek suggests, diviners generate a temporary shift to a contrary, non-rational, non-normal (perhaps paranormal is a better word) mode of cognition [19]. This enables people to acquire information which is not normally accessible. Because the language of divination is cryptic and ambiguous all revelations have to be translated and discussed. During the dialogue between the diviner and client there is a transference and counter-transference of information. All known facts are scrutinized in the light of a different perspective and old elements are reorganized into new arrangements (Peek 1991:202). In Green Valley divinatory

consultations were certainly the moments when people reviewed known observations in the light of the witchcraft paradigm.

Fisiy and Geschiere (1990) highlight the crucial role of divination in the construction of witchcraft. They point out that since Cameroon's independence state courts have convicted witches on the basis of testimony provided by "witchdoctors". The authors insist that such testimony furthered the interests of members of the new state elite with respect to commoners. There has been an alliance between the "witchdoctors" and the new elite. Like the elite they viewed witchcraft as a threat against progress and prosperity. In Green Valley no such alliances were apparent. It is precisely because diviners and prophets stood independent from sectional interests that villagers appreciated them as a source of extra-social revelatory knowledge [20].

Peek's insights can be applied as fruitfully to dreams. From the cases presented it is clear that villagers did not dismiss dream experiences as irrelevant to their everyday lives. As in divinatory consultations, cognitive processes are shifted to a non-rational, paranormal, mode during the state of dreaming. Dreams too are perceived as according people with a glimpse of transcendent realities [21]. Dreams provided cryptic images that were translated and discussed, leading people to evaluate known observations in the light of a new paradigm. In this manner dreams played a major role in the construction of witchcraft. It is no coincidence that Wilson (1951) described the witch as the "standardized nightmare" of society. In Green Valley images of small people, large apes, snakes, and white women featured as prominently in the dreams as they did in narratives of witchcraft.

But dreams were not the only sleep-related experiences that provided an experiential base for local theories of witchcraft. John Malapane, Albert Nziani, and Mrs. Chiloane insisted that their perceptions of apes, white women, mysterious green lights, and voices were not dreams. These occurred while they were fully conscious and aware of their surroundings. Such perceptions were most likely to have been visual and auditory hallucinations which arose from a common syndrome referred to as "sleep paralysis" in biomedical literature. (Sleep paralysis- which occurs as a transition between sleep and wakefulness- is characterized by an inability to perform voluntary movements, vivid hypnagogic hallucinations, exhaustion, anxiety and sweating [22].) Like dreams, the experience of hallucinations initiate and sustain witchcraft beliefs [23].

In the study of witchcraft it is imperative that we pay close attention to the details of people's narratives. It is essential to recognize the emic status of witchcraft as a reality, and to acknowledge the importance of circumstantial evidence and paranormal modes of cognition. These cannot merely be swept under the rug of "social tensions". Unlike many of his contemporaries, Evans-Pritchard (1937) attributed central causality to ideational systems. He did not perceive the "social" as determining the "ideational", but recognized the mutually conditioning impact of these dimensions of social life. It is from this insight that we as future generations of anthropologists should derive our inspiration.

NOTES

1. I gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development, Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa. The Centre is not responsible for any of the views expressed here. I also wish to thank the University of the Witwatersrand Rural Facility for providing me with accommodation. All personal names in the article are pseudonymns, and all emic terms are transcribed in Northern Sotho unless otherwise specified.

2. Mary Douglas (1970) has commented that Evans-Pritchard's monograph has been applied in ways unintended and unanticipated by the author. Whilst she regards the primary contribution of *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic* to be in the field of social cognition, it has "fathered" a host of ethnographic studies on micro-level politics.

3. This assumption is also evident in the work of Boyer and Nissenbaum (1974) on the Salem witch-craze, and of Steadman (1985) on witch-killings among the Hewa of New Guinea. Boyer and Nissenbaum attach greater importance to factional rivalries than to other types of the evidence used by the courts to convict witches- confessions, spectral testimony, and physical abnormalities (p.10-20). Steadman (1985) boldly asserts that Hewa witch-killers deemed the reality of the crime irrelevant and were "always uncertain of the evidence to justify their accusation". He questions explanations of witch-killing which "assume that the killers believe in witches even though the accuracy of such accusations cannot be verified" (p.112). Yet, he insists, the "idiom of witchcraft" is powerful enough to mobilize wide support for the killing of "innocent" individuals who may be the distant relatives of some of the killers (p.116). Steadman does not account for the acceptance of witchcraft accusations by non-accusers.

4. This population estimate is based on the records of the Electricity Supply Commission (ESCOM), who had been electrifying homes in Green Valley since 1991. See Niehaus (1993) for a brief historical overview of witchcraft beliefs and witch-hunting in Green Valley.

5. Geertz (1972) draws our attention to a number of processes whereby religious beliefs are justified. These include placing beliefs and acts within the total framework of the religious conception; and explaining these with reference to the authority of priests and scriptures. Geertz (1972) also emphasizes the role of rituals. By enacting beliefs, rituals define images of the cosmic order, bring religious convictions to a human plane, and compel the acceptance of the religious perspective. Unfortunately, Geertz does not consider any other types of evidence.

6. In his critique of post-modernism, Gellner (1992) suggests that relativism necessarily implies an acceptance of the position that all systems of knowledge, including science, are culture-bound and should hence be accorded an equal status. Gellner (1992) somewhat misrepresents the position of anti-anti relativists such as Geertz. To merely acknowledge that science is culturally constructed does not negate its superior explanatory capacity.

7. *Muti* is a Nguni word which refers to organic substances that are used to heal, harm, or to effect people in mystical ways. This Nguni term was used more commonly than its Northern Sotho equivalent *sehlare*.

8. See Niehaus (1995) for a more in-depth analysis of the symbolic meanings of the *tokolose* and *mamlambo*.

9. I see little merit in the distinction between witchcraft as mystical power innate to individuals and sorcery as the use of material substances and rituals to harm others. The Northern Sotho term *loya* (noun *baloi*) encompasses both ideas.

10. Barnes (1968) and Bauer and Hinnant (1980) show how Kuhn's (1962) concept of "paradigm" can illuminate beliefs in "witchcraft" and "spirit possession".

11. Turner (1967:114) writes: "....a few sudden deaths in a happy village may provoke severer and sharper witchcraft accusations among its members than death in an already quarrelsome group where, so to speak, mystical harmful action is anticipated".

12. Shaw's (1991) comments on the status of Temne diviners in Sierra Leone illuminates the situation in the lowveld. Shaw suggests that by virtue of their "four eyed vision" Temne diviners can penetrate, and participate in, spiritual worlds which are places of vision and understanding, but are hidden from ordinary people. The revelations of diviners thus have an extra-social origin (p.143).

13. Employees of the Acornhoek bakery saw the "small people" at the tap during a time of severe drought in the lowveld and a very acute water shortage in Green Valley. Women in Green Valley queued for water at all times of the night. This differed from other places, such as Acronhoek, where the water shortage was less acute. The sight of people at the tap during the night may indeed have appeared "strange" to outsiders.

14. Rosenhan (1973) has shown the role of labels in psychiatric assessment. In a well-known study eight sane subjects gained admission to psychiatric hospitals. Being labelled "schizophrenic" they remained as patients an average of 19 days until they were discharged as "in remission". Hospital staff often interpreted normal behaviours of the subjects as a manifestation of their "condition". Note taking was seen as evidence of a loss of memory. Pacing down corridors was not seen as due to boredom, but due to anxiety. Rosenhan (1973) argues that labels such as "schizophrenic" carry a surplus of meanings and expectations, which colour and distort perceptions. When the stimuli for a patients' behaviour is unknown it is assumed to be a direct outcome of the psychodiagnostic label. "Once the label of schizophrenia has been applied the label becomes a self fulfilling prophecy" (p. 254). In Green Valley the label "witch" had a similar distorting effect.

15. NEHAWU is an abbreviation for the National Education, Health and Allied Worker's Union. In 1991 workers at the Hoedspruit Air Force base joined NEHAWU in an attempt to bargain with the South African Defence Force for free transportation to work and higher wages. NEHAWU failed to win any concessions and called on workers to stage a "sit-in". Consequently about 600 workers were summarily discharged.

16. My field assistants were both shocked and appalled by Albert's talk of masturbation and homosexual acts. They said that in the lowveld masturbation and homosexuality are strictly taboo. Adolescents who are found to manipulate their own genitals are subject to the most severe forms of punishment.

17. Schoeman (1985) shows that many Pedi psychiatric patients believe that they, themselves, are witches. He argues that such patients usually experienced deep interpersonal conflicts, aggression, and hostility. Through these admissions they affirmed that their behaviour was meaningful within social thought patterns and that they continued to participate in the social structure" (p.653-669).

18. Also see White (1994) for an excellent analysis of rumour.

19. Peek (1991) suggests that the drama of divination and the diviner's liminal persona shift participants out of normal modes of thinking.

20. Heald (1991) has shown how scepticism of diviners is endemic among the Gisu of Uganda. She accounts for this in terms of the social marginality of Gisu diviners and the fact that clients have greater knowledge of their own immediate social environment than the diviners whom they consulted. This scepticism was not shared by the residents of Green Valley. Prophets and diviners appear to limit their revelations and diagnosis to the transcendent realm, and seldom spoke of the immediate life-worlds of their clients.

21. The dismissal of Tylor's (1858) theory of animism; which located the ultimate origins of the doctrine of the souls, spiritual beings and of religion in dreams; should not blind us to the significance of dreams in religious experiences. Studies on African religion point to a prominent belief that dreams can reveal information about the transcendent realm, which is inaccessible by other means. See Lee (1958), Fabian (1966), Curley (1983), Berglund (1989) and Jedrej and Shaw (1992).

22. Emotional disturbances, exhaustion and deprivation of REM sleep are seen as predisposing factors in sleep paralysis. Yet the syndrome is known to occur in individuals who are emotionally and physically healthy. See Ribstein (1976), Bloom and Gelardin (1985) and Ness (1985).

23. Sleep paralysis is a potentially panhuman neurological experience. However, interpretations of sleep paralysis and the ideational content of hypnogogic hallucinations are culturally variable. Among the Escimo population of Alaska sleep paralysis was interpreted in terms of influences from the spirit world: souls were perceived as leaving or entering the body (Bloom and Gelardin 1985:118-9). In Newfoundland it was constructed as Old Hag syndrome. Subjects saw humans or animals astride on their chests (Ness 1985:124-7).

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