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# Witchcraft, whites and the 1994 South African elections: Notes on the symbolic constitution of power in an Eastern Transvaal lowveld village

**Isak A, Isak A.**

**1995-02-27**
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NIEHAUS

**UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND**
**INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED SOCIAL RESEARCH**

SEMINAR PAPER
to be presented in RW 7003 SEMINAR ROOM
at 4.00PM **27th February 1995**

TITLE: Witchcraft, Whites and the 1994 South African Elections: Notes on the Symbolic Constitution of Power in an Eastern Transvaal Lowveld Village.

BY: **Isak A. Niehaus**

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# Witchcraft, Whites and the 1994 South African Elections: Notes on the Symbolic Constitution of Power in an Eastern Transvaal Lowveld Village

**Isak A. Niehaus**

The relationship between colonialism and witchcraft, as depicted in the ethnographic literature of central and southern Africa, presents an intriguing puzzle. The human myseries resulting from colonialism- such as the loss of land, poverty, disease, and labour exploitation- are widely documented. It is also well known that witchcraft beliefs inscribe the causes of misfortune in tense social relationships. While studies recognize that colonialism has generated increased suspicions of witchcraft, they do not show that colonists are identified as witches.

In Zambia, Zaire, South Africa and in Zimbabwe the fellow colonized have been accused of witchcraft. In the Fort Jameson district of Zambia the Cewa were displaced by European farmers, resettled on Native Trust Land, and forced to pay taxes. Marwick shows how the insecurities the Cewa experienced during the late 1940s and early 1950s were expressed in the idiom of sorcery [1]. Despite their hostility to Europeans, the Cewa accused poorer members of different matrilineal segments and, to a lesser extent, affines (Marwick 1965:75). Since 1932 the forced villagisation of the Bashu in eastern Zaire facilitated the spread of sleeping sickness and bubonic plague. The introduction of migrant labour and cash crops generated more opportunities for Bashu men to accumulate wealth, but greater work for women. In this context a concept of female witches, who devour the life energy of men, emerged. By accusing assertive women of witchcraft, men reasserted their own dominance (Packard 1986). In the 1950s Xhosa-speaking migrants in the South African city of East London believed witches followed them from the reserves. Yet the migrants, who stayed on white people's premises, felt safe from witches. The smells of the many chemicals whites keep in their homes was thought to drive away witch familiars (P. and I. Mayer 1974:160-5). In Zimbabwe the execution of witches reached a zenith during the war of liberation. Yet this has been the result of tensions within peasant communities and not of conflict between peasant communities and the colonial state. Guerrillas and youths executed elders, conservatives, and better off farmers (Lan 1985, Ranger 1991, Kriger 1991 and 1992).

This article investigates, in greater depth, the intricate connections between experiences of colonial subjugation and African witchcraft beliefs. In contrast to the impression conveyed by the above-mentioned studies, I aim to demonstrate that colonists do not necessarily fall outside the parameters of witchcraft. Narratives of witchcraft can present a salient critique of the colonial order. Yet, I suggest that, criticisms of colonialism are less apparent in the sociology of witchcraft accusations, than in the symbolism of witchcraft beliefs.

There are sound reasons why Africans seldom accuse colonists of being witches. Witchcraft is not merely a theory of evil, but it is also a very specific theory of power. Throughout central and southern Africa witchcraft is conceived of as the power of the dominated. Witches are persons who are deprived and driven by motives of envy and desire to harm the more fortunate [2]. Since colonists are dominant and wealthy, their status is antithetical to the image of the witch. It is inconveivable that colonists would envy the subordinate position

of Africans [3]. It is also conventional wisdom that witches are insiders who harm their kin and neighbours [4]. Marwick (1964) recognizes this as a definitive feature of African witchcraft. As outsiders, colonists are unlikely to be suspected of witchcraft.

Ethnographers of Africa have seldom systematically explored the cosmological and symbolic dimensions of witchcraft. This is unlike ethnographic accounts of Melanesia, which point to a symbolic association between witches and colonists [5]. Lattas (1993) shows how sorcery narratives among the Kaliai of Papua New Guinea incorporate European offices, symbols and commodities. Workers are assumed to learn sorcery skills and to buy sorcery substances, such as herbicides, from colonial market places and plantations. Because the colonial state prevents repraisals against sorcerers, the state is seen as working in alliance with sorcerers. It is widely suspected that magistrates practice sorcery, government appointed headmen are issued with licences to work sorcery, and that sorcerers are employed to police the population. The Catholic church, too, is said to destroy its opponents by magic. In dreams Europeans are shown to inhabit sorcery shrines and to steal the souls of Melanesians (p.63). Despite this, Lattas does not show that Melanesians actually accuse Europeans of sorcery [6]. Studies of Melanesian sorcery may well bear important lessons for ethnographers of Africa. Marwick's (1965) monograph on Cewa sorcery contains isolated references to beliefs which do, indeed, attribute blame to colonists. Marwick writes the colonial government was condemned for banning the poison ordeal, used to detect sorcerers in the past. He quotes an informant as saying: "The Europeans are afraid of being detected themselves if the ordeal is used, for they, too, are the proprietors of sorcery just as they are of whiskey" (p.92). Marwick also suggests that supernatural properties are attributed to Western medicines. For instance, Africans employed in hospitals are often accused of using strong medicines to kill patients (p.210). Such perceptions, I believe, are more general than Africanists have acknowledged.

The association of witches with colonists arises from two conceptions. First, that, although witches are socially deprived, they display superhuman power. Second, that witches are "internal enemies with outside liasons" (Douglas 1970a:xxvii). Witches are thus seen to derive their power from sources external to the community. Witches are often symbolically associated with animals. By combining human and animal attributes in a disorderly mixture, witches transcend the abilities of ordinary persons (Evans-Pritchard 1958:50-63, Ruel 1970, Niehaus 1995). But witches can also be identified with colonists- who are powerful human outsiders. By appropriating everyday symbols of colonial rule; such as European commodities, herbicides, potent pharmaceutical, and licences; witches also transcend the abilities of ordinary African villagers.

This article aims to demonstrate the validity of these general theoretical propositions with reference to the ethnographic case of Green Valley- a village situated in South Africa's Eastern Transvaal lowveld. Green Valley, which has a population of nearly 20 000 Northern Sotho and Tsonga- speakers, has been the site of my fieldwork since 1990. The stories of witchcraft that I recorded in Green Valley are informed by villagers' experiences of subjugation at the hands of white employers and officials of the apartheid state. My discussion is divided into four sections. The first three sections focus on the connections between white domination and witchcraft beliefs prior to 1994. I argue that, during the era of apartheid, whites were seen as the victims rather than the perpetrators of witchcraft. Nonetheless, witches are believed to derive power from their symbolic association with

whites. This is evident in: (1) the perception of witches as liminal to the categories of 'village' and 'places of whites'; (2) the idea that witches use whites as familiars (dithuri); and in (3) notions that witches appropriate the attributes and technologies of whites. The fourth section of the article examines the changes, that occurred in witchcraft beliefs, in the months preceeding the South African elections of 1994. This time was marked by apocalyptic expectations of African empowerment and white disempowerment. In this new context, whites were directly accused of witchcraft for the first time. Rumours circulated that whites, driven by resentment, poisoned the food and water supplies of Africans.

**White Domination and the Moral Geography of Witchcraft**

Residents of Green Valley have not been oblivious to white domination. There is a common myth that, before his death, the famous Pedi paramount chief Sekhukhune saw a vision of white ants tormenting his people. In an interview an elderly man said: "These ants are the makgowa [whites] who took our land" [7]. A dominant theme in stories of the past is how people lost their land to whites, who settled in the lowveld since the turn of the century. By the 1930s the members of formerly independent African chiefdoms had become labour tenants on farms privately owned by whites, or rent tenants on company-owned farms such as Green Valley (Harries 1993 and Stadler 1994). The implementation of apartheid was another vicious intrusion on people's autonomy. In 1948 Green Valley was sold to the Bushbuckridge Native Trust. The village now became a reception site for hundreds of households who were expelled from white-owned farms, or had been displaced by the afforestation of land on the slopes of the Mohololo mountains. White agricultural officers of the Native Trust have played an increasingly disruptive role. Villagers blamed the stock losses they incurred, during the cattle epizootic of 1951, on the incompetence of these agricultural officers who injected their cattle with syringes. In 1960 a 'betterment' project was implemented in Green Valley. Villagers were resettled onto residential locations and deprived of their fields. Stock limitations of ten cattle per household were also imposed. In terms of the Bantu Authorities Act, implemented in the same year, chiefs became accountable to a white magistrate in Bushbuckridge. These processes were entrenched when Green Valley became part of the Lebowa bantustan in 1973.

From being largely self-sufficient tenant farmers, villages had become proletarians. Prior to the 1940s, men worked on the Pilgrim's Rest mines and on the Witwatersrand to supplement agricultural yields. Subsequently, labour migration became indispensable. In the 1990s Green Valley's migrants worked on white-owned farms, at the South African Air Force base in Hoedspruit; and at industries and mines in Phalaborwa, Nelspruit, Pretoria and the Witwatersrand. With few exceptions, they held unskilled and poorly remunerated jobs.

Through time people's interactions with whites have largely been confined to formal encounters with employers, government officials, and traders. Whites of the lowveld are generally viewed more negatively than those who reside further afield. They are stereotyped as powerful, wealthy, stubborn, unsociable, racist, and cunning. Whites are envied, but are also feared and mistrusted. These attitudes are evident in the informative Sotho and Tsonga names given to white farmers. They include: Golohlogo ('big head'), Sehangalase ('chaser'), Mahebehebe ('gosipper'), Langoane ('shouter'), Malobishe ('dispossessor') and Malandele ('pursuer'). My informants believed that whites were constantly out to cheat them. Labourers

said farmers paid them starvation wages. Elders complained that white officials cheated them of pension money by entering incorrect birth dates in their identity documents. Villagers also gossipped that a white trader fraudulently sold donkey's milk as cow's milk in the village.

Occassionally, these tensions are articulated in accusations that whites are ritual murderers (maimai). In the 1950s a white garage owner from Hoedspruit and his African henchman suspiciously drove through Green Valley's streets at night in a car with only one headlight. When two local women disappeared, people suspected that these men murdered them for medicine. After a woman's bloodless corpse was found in Acornhoek in 1992, people claimed she was the victim of a white money lender from Hoedspruit and local African businessmen. They allegedly cut parts from her body and extracted her blood with a machine. The businessmen allegedly manufactured muti from her flesh, which they used to attract customers to their stores, and sold her blood to pharmaceutical companies. In these stories the extraction of blood is symbolic of the appropriation of wealth from the poor [8].

While there is conguence between the status of whites and of ritual murderers, whites are thought to be unlike witches. Ritual murderers are wealthy outsiders, witches are deprived insiders. People expressed disbelief when I told them of the European witch-hunts of the past, and of contemporary white satanists in Johannesburg. Prior to 1994, only Mrs. Shubane knew whites, too, can be witches. She learnt this when she worked for an elderly Greek woman in Johannesburg. Her employer, who sufferred from severe backache, told Mrs. Shubane she was bewitched by her sister-in-law. The sister-in-law was envious of her sons, who qualified as an engineer and a doctor, and planned to kill the old woman with muti. Mrs. Shubane was very surprised. "I did not know whites do such things". Even people who recognized that there may be witches among whites, found it inconceivable that whites would envy and bewitch Africans. Whites were, however, seen as potential victims of African witchcraft. In one account two African men bewitched their employer- a white shopowner- after he dismissed them. As a white researcher, who enjoyed intimate contact with Africans, I was considered to be particularly vulnerable. At a church service the minister prophecized that witches planned to make my car capcize. He advised me to fortify my car by placing mercury inside the cubby hole [9].

To adequately grasp the relationship between white domination and witchcraft, it is necessary to look beyond the sociology of witchcraft accusations and adopt a broader perspective. We also need to consider the symbolic meanings of witchcraft. It is precisely as powerful outsiders that whites occupy a strategic position in the 'moral geography' of witchcraft (Auslander 1993:169-170).

Cosmological views in the lowveld express an encompassing opposition between the realms of motse (the 'family' or 'village') and tlhaga (the surrounding 'bush' or 'forest'). The former is associated with humanity and culture, the latter with animality and the wilderness. This opposition is very significant in local understandings of witchcraft. Witches are perceived as liminal beings, who exist betwixt-and-between motse and tlhaga. Witches reside in the village during the day, but meet at the edge of the forest at night. Witches are also identified with animals. They perform their evil deeds with the assistance of animals, which they use as familars. In addition to this, witches, themselves, possess the abilities of animals. As babies, witches cling to walls like bats. They are driven by animal-like cravings and desires, and move about naked without feeling shame. Witches can also fly like birds, and

see in the darkness like nocturnal predators. At times witches transform entirely into the shape of animals (Niehaus 1995). Witches, thus, exibit a disorderly combination of human and animal attributes.

Although this dichotomy has remained in tact, a newer set of oppositions have also emerged. These are between: motse and makgoweng ('place of the whites'); setso ('traditions') and sekgowa ('ways of the whites'). The emic contrast between motse and makgoweng is a geographic and spatial one. It resembles the distinction social scientists make between the 'rural periphery' and the 'industrial core' of the southern African political economy (Murray 1980). Motse is a familiar space where people live and socialize. Makgoweng is an alien space where people labour for whites and purchase commodities. Makgoweng is associated with wealth, power, technological innovation, and with danger. Like thlaga, it exists outside the motse.

The concepts setso and sekgowa are more complex. They do not form a rigid dichotomy, but are used only in specific situations. Neither do they correspond to notions of morality and immorality. Moreover, the rhetoric of setso and sekgowa does not necessarily express the collective identity of the dominated vis a vis colonial order. This rhetoric is primarily about things which happen within the community. The concepts are idioms through which norms of conduct, generational, and gender relations are contested [10].

Setso can denote both olden and contemporary practices. The phrase setso ya kgale ('traditions of old') refers to practices, such as rainmaking and work parties (matsema), which occurred only in the past. In this sense setso can invoke an image of the past as a bygone era of prosperity and social harmony to criticize present day quarrels. But this is not always so. Sometimes the past is seen as a harsh time when people lacked material posessions and were cruel [11]. Contemporary practices, which exist as habitus, can also be explained as setso (Bourdieu 1977). When asked why only women attend certain rituals, informants often replied: "This is our tradition". In other instances setso is explicitly used to foster an image that contemporary practices are continious with cultural forms of the past [12]. For example, diviners use setso as a rhetorical style to assert their identity with the ancestors. They build ndhumba (rondawel-shaped homes with thatched roofs) for the ancestors, and decorate these with cowhide-drums, flywhisks, grain baskets and animal skins. In addition, many diviners avoid using items they do not consider to be setso. The ancestors of one diviner forbid her to eat beetroot, jam, canned fish, cooking oil and runner-beans [13].

Informants recognized that new practices and commodities are constantly being introduced from makgoweng. This process is not viewed as subversive. Villagers readily become Christians, send their children to school, go to hospital, adopt new rituals, and use new commodities. Once such items are incorporated they become part of what people do. For example, prior to 1960 adults buried corpses privately at night. Since then public funerals have become commonplace. Yet people seldom describe contemporary funerals as sekgowa. The concept sekgowa tends to be used only to refer to new items and practices which seem ambiguous; or threaten to undermine established interests within the community. By calling a specific practice sekgowa, people are, in fact, saying it should not belong in the village. At the same time, they may be asserting their own rights. An influencial member of the African National Congress (ANC) criticized the lack of cooperation between the Civic Association and the chief. He expressed himself in the following words: "They no longer

work according to setso, but according to sekgowa. They have been led astray by the maboer (Afrikaners)". Men described gender equality as sekgowa and as unacceptable to them. Likewise, elders perceived the disrespect young adults display toward their parents, to be sekgowa. A woman, who abhores the youngsters who do not send their parents money from the urban areas remarked that, such youngsters; "live a sekgowa lifestyle".

Witches are also perceived as liminal to the opposing domains of motse and makgoweng. Witches are batho (literally people, but also used to denote only Africans) who live in the village. Yet they derive much of their power from their liasons with makgoweng. Witches are associated with whites in a similar manner as witches are identified with animals.

**Whites as an Instrument and a Metaphor for Witchcraft**

Narratives of witchcraft express the relationship between witches and whites in different ways. This relationship can be direct. Witches are portrayed as using whites instrumentally as familiars, in the same way they use animals. But the relationship can also be indirect and metaphorical. Witches are also portrayed as posessing the same attributes as whites.

Some stories tell of white familiars as ferocious as the snake, tokolose, and wild cat. In the Hlapa O Ja river, which forms Green Valley's western boundary, is a small dam known as Lekgowa. It is commonly believed that familiars hide in the dam and attack passersby at night. This dam earned its name in the 1940s, when a mysterious white woman was regularly seen sunbathing on the dam wall in the late afternoon. Yet, when people approach, she would dive into the dam and disappear. Villagers believed that the woman caused illness and death. Ngwa Mathebula, an old woman who was said to have the facial appearance of a witch, once told her friends she owns the white woman. At first nobody believed her. However, after Ngwa Mathebula's died in 1949, the mysterious woman was not seen again. This added substance to her claim that the white person was her familiar. In the 1970s people again reported seeing a white person at the dam. This time it was a man who, allegedly, walked up and down carrying a kettle. The man, too, was thought to be someone's familiar.

The potential status of whites as familiars is also evident in the notion that the snakelike mamlamo assumes the form of a supernatural white lover. The white lover has sexual intercourse with the witch and brings the witch wealth, but makes excessive demands. It will chase the witch's spouse from home, make the witch infertile, and will ask for regular sacrifices of chicken, beef and human blood. One of the numerous stories about this familiar, tells how a housewife acquired a mamlambo from a sinister herbalist. Fellow household members became suspicious when she did not sweep underneath her bed, and when large portions of the meat she cooked disappeared. Later a white man scratched her husband and robbed him of his money. Because of this he divorced her.

There were periodically rumours, during the course of my fieldwork, that white familiars had brought about the death of villagers. In 1992 a young woman died mysteriously. People, who knew her, said she often complained that a white woman pursued her. On the evening of her death, the white woman peeped through her window. Hence dreams of white people were interpreted as omens of extreme misfortune.

The metaphorical relationship between witches and whites is expressed most cogently in the portrayal of witches as masters who keep zombies (ditlotlwane, singular setlotlwane). Informants' descriptions of zombies broadly resemble the earlier accounts of these entities in studies of Tsonga and Sotho-speakers (Junod 1966:514-6, E. and J. Krige 1965:252, Monnig 1980:74-5, and Hammond-Tooke 1981:99-100). However, interviewees portrayed zombies as less dangerous and more distinctively human than the ethnographies suggest. They believed witches transform nearly all their victims into zombies. Witches first capture the seriti (shadow or aura) of their victims and then 'kill' them. However, the victims are never fully dead and no rigormortis sets in. Before the funeral witches steal the 'corpse', but they place the stem of a soft fern tree in the coffin to deceive the bereaved family. At home witches revive the 'corpse' with strong muti, cut its tongue, and change its appearance. During the day they hide their zombies in valleys, near rivers, or on steep cliffs; but employ them as servants at night.

The image of witches, who keep many zombies, resonates with the status of whites, who employ many labourers. It is telling that villagers often address local whites as baas or miessies (Afrikaans for 'boss' and 'madam'). A story of an old witch, as told by several informants, points to the metaphorical relationship between witches and white farmers. As a farm labourer in the Orighstadt district, the old man daily had to do strenious work. He was not paid and worked merely for the right to reside on the farm [14]. When the other farm workers noticed that the old man refused to work, they complained vehemently to the farmer. The farmer threatened to dismiss the old man unless he, too, weeded the fields. To everyone's surprise the old man promised that he, alone, would weed the fields in a single day. That evening he led a hundred zombies to the field. While resting under a tree, his zombies did the work. The next morning the old man told the farmer he had completed the task. However, the farmer hid in the field that night and saw what really happened. He was particularly disturbed when he saw that the witch had turned three white men into zombies. The farmer wanted to shoot him, but the old man fled from the farm with all his zombies. In this story the witches' immoral desire to escape the reality of arduous labour, and to live a life of leisure, drove him to acquire zombies. In fact, the witch became like the white farmer.

The story of zombies embody the situation of African workers who leave their families for the alien realm of makgoweng. The tasks of zombies resemble those of African farm labourers and domestic servants. Zombies clean the homes of witches, fetch water and firewood, herd cattle, plough, sow, harvest, and run errands. One witch even used his zombies to sell fish in his shop. The unique features of zombies express some of the less apparent consequences of domination. Unlike ordinary people, all zombies are only a meter tall. Their smallness alludes to the diminutive, childlike, status of African labourers. Their sameness is based on the perception that labourers are not treated as individuals by their bosses.

Zombies are ideal servants. Despite their capacity for hard work, they are passive and display unquestioning obedience to their masters. Witches are said to hypnotize them with strong muti so they forget the world they came from and focus only on their tasks. Moreover, zombies are sexless, devoid of human desires, and make few demands. The idea that witches cut the tongues of their zombies is meaningful. Zombies lack the ability to speak, express themselves, reason, and criticize. By all accounts zombies are fed a meagre

diet of maize porridge- the staple diet of African workers. In fact, the constant hunger for porridge is a distinctive feature of zombies. A story tells of an old woman who instructed her daughter-in-law to cook large quantities of soft porridge daily, cool it in a washing basin, and to place it in a dark room. Once the daughter-in-law brought the porridge to the room straight from the fire. The old woman's zombies were greedy, jumped into the basin, and burnt themselves to death.

Narratives of zombies also reflect upon the dependence of the dominated. Should witches die, their zombies will wander about endlessly in search of porridge. Being undead, they cannot return to their families. A teacher told me of a zombie who tried to return to his mother when the witch was no longer there to support him. While the dead boy's mother worked in the fields she saw his wandering figure. She then called the police and pleaded with them to kill it. The police, however, removed the zombie to the Potgietersrust mental hospital. Here the state is assumed to shield many zombies from the public. The identification of zombies with inmates of the asylum is telling. Like the insane, zombies are objects rather than active subjects [15].

The imagery of witches and zombies capture both the illicit desire to dominate and the fear of being dominated. These also focus critically on the structures of domination. It is only by exploiting the undead, that witches become the powerful wielders of authority. Influencial local persons (such as headmen, businessmen, herbalists, church leaders, and strong willed mothers-in-law) are most often accused of keeping zombies. Mothers-in-law are particularly vulnerable to such accusations. Given the pattern of patrilocal residence, elderly women command great authority over the wives of their sons. The experiences of young wives resemble those of male migrants. They leave their parental households, bear the brunt of unrewarding tasks at their new homes, and live under the surveillance of their mother-in-law. From the perspective of the newly married wife, the status of the mother-in-law is similar to that of the white employer. As in the case of Lesotho, relations between young women and their mothers-in-law are characterized by conflict (Murray 1981:149-70). These tensions are expressed in witchcraft accusations.

There is little doubt that villagers' involvement in the wider South African political economy inform the images of domination in expressed in witchcraft. It is striking that western and central African cosmologies also link witchcraft with the deployment of victims in a nocturnal "second world". This echoes experiences of the Atlantic slave trade (Austin 1993:92, McGaffey 1968, Miller 1988:4-5).

**Witches and the Appropriation of Sekgowa Technology**

The liminality of the witch is also evident in the notion that contemporary witches purchase and use sekgowa technologies. Through time witchcraft has become a purchaseable commodity. During the era of subsistence agriculture, it was widely assumed that the power of witchcraft was transmitted through birth. Children sucked witchcraft from their mother's breasts and developed a taste for human flesh while in the womb. Mothers only taught them to develop their natural abilities.

Later in life, the witch child would also inherit its mother's familiars. Because witches by

birth have witchcraft in their blood, they display an innate proclivity to perform evil deeds. As people came to rely on purchased commodities, it was believed that, a vibrant secret trade developed in witchcraft substances. Even those not born as witches, could now purchase poisons, muti, and familiars. In recent years the witches who purchase have even begun to outnumber those who inherit. Witches who acquire their craft on the market are generally deemed to be less powerful and more selective in choosing their victims. Yet when incisions are cut in the skin and witchcraft substances rubbed into the blood, such witchcraft can also become uncontrollable.

A perception has thus emerged that newer forms of witchcraft constantly invade the village. In the same way as witches bring dangerous substances form the forest to wreck havoc in the village, they import a wide variety of familiars and technologies from makgoweng. For example, it is believed that witches purchased the mamlambo, tokolose, and impondola from the townships of Durban and the Witwatersrand. These are not recognized as indigenous to the lowveld. The new technologies of witchcraft range from insecticides to remote-controlled devices.

1) From the Crocodile Brain to Insecticide. Poisoning (mpholo in Northern Sotho, tshefu in Pulana) is widely recognized as one of the oldest types of witchcraft. Pulana women are stereotyped as the most skillful poisoners of the past. They are said to have possessed lethal poisons such as sejeso (a type of slow poison) and the crocodile brain [16]. The crocodile brain is the subject of an elaborate mythology. To obtain this witches used goats as bait, trapped the crocodile, and beheaded it. From the brain they took a small portion which they mixed with their victim's food. After the victim had eaten, the witch would turn his plate upside down. It is only when witches exposed the plate's inside to the sun that the victim would die. In rapid succession he would develop stomach cramps, a headache, and his brain would crack. Some elders mentioned that, in the remote past, chiefs immunized themselves against this type of witchcraft by swollowing a 'crocodile stone'. Should chiefs be poisoned they would merely vomit out the crocodile brain [17].

When informants described specific episodes of poisoning, which occurred after the 1960s, they seldom referred to the crocodile brain. They assumed that witches used insecticides. Guernsey, a citrus farm where workers often spray the orchards for worms, is thought to be the major source of these poisons. In 1982 a farmworker called Sidlaye reportedly stole two large canisters of poison and sold this to witches in Green Valley for R3 per teaspoon. At least two villagers are said to have died from Sidlaye's poison. The first was a Chiloane boy who drank a poisoned cold drink; the second a Mohobele man who ate poisoned fish. Sidlaye only stopped selling the poison after Mrs. Chiloane revenged her son's death. She reportedly bought poison from Sidlaye and poisoned his own daughter with it. In 1989 Peter Mabuza, another Guernsey employee, allegedly sold 25 liters of poison to three women in Green Valley. One of these women gave poisoned sweets to a Segodi boy. With the assistance of a diviner Mr. Segodi discovered the poisoner's identity. When he threatened to kill her she confessed, revealed the names of her accomplices, and said she hid the remaining poison in an unused pit latrine. Mr. Segodi inspected water from the latrine and found that it was blue in colour. He then reported the three women to the chief, and informed Guernsey's owner that his workers regularly steal poison from his tanks. The farmer promised he would take greater safety precautions. Since then, he personally oversees the distribution of poison and locks the store room.

During the 1990s there was intense fear that poisons were still being brought into Green Valley from the farms. Termite poison, soda crystals and brake fluid were also mentioned as new poisons. Shebeeners allegedly flush their glasses with break fluid, causing their customers to become highly intoxicated. This gives them the opportunity to pickpocket the customers. Certain poisonous chemicals and tablets are deemed to be mysterious and are described only by their effects. They make skins peel off the victim's mouth and change porridge so it becomes red, brown or blue in colour. In one instance, a man discovered that someone had tampered with his teapot. As he poured out the tea it burnt and destoyed the grass as it fell. Such chemicals are deemed to be as lethal as the crocodile brain.

2) The night train. Before the turn of the century construction was begun on a rail link between Pretoria and Delgoa Bay. This rail line was soon extended from Komatipoort, via Acornhoek, to Pietersburg. Trains running on these tracks came to transport migrant labourers from the lowveld to the Witwatersrand. Only decades later did stories emerge of witches' trains (setime|a sa baloi). An elderly informant said during the 1950s his father cleared a site to build a new home. Their neighbour immediately began to quarrel with his father. "You cannot build here", the neighbour said. "During the night my train passes through his place. It may destroy your home." His father did not understand what the man meant, but decided to build elsewhere. An Apostolic prophet told me, since she was a child, she heard witches' trains move along the rivulettes. She claimed that she and her brother encountered a flying train when they walked home from church one evening in 1961. At a rivulette they heard a peculiar 'Shiiii' sound above their heads.

> At first we thought it may be birds, but birds do not make such a sound. There was also much steam. I asked my brother 'What kind of a thing is this?' It was like a locomotive which blasts cool steam.

They hid behind bushes and only resumed their journey once the noise ceased.

I was told: "A witch's train is like a very sophisticated familiar". Witches' trains resemble ordinary trains, but do not travel on rails. They are large, have many coaches, transport hundreds of passengers, and are staffed by personnel dressed in uniforms of the South African Railways. Their passengers, conductors, and drivers are purported to be zombies. Witches' trains are hidden during the day, but are used at night to transport zombies to their workplaces. These trains are said to ferry hundreds of zombies to the irrigation farms at Dingleydale. "The zombies work in shifts just like mineworkers. While some are transported to work by the train, others are returned to their homes." Sometimes many witches collectively own a single train, each using a particular coach for his or her zombies. Witches' trains sometimes abduct people who wander about at night. Should they board, the conductor will ask them "single or return?" Those who reply "single" disappear forever. They are killed, join the zombies on the train, and are forced to work for the witch. Those who reply "return" are beaten and thrown from the train at a distant location.

There were many reported encounters with witches' trains between 1978 and 1985. In these years the Pietersburg train passed through the Cottondale and Acornhoek stations at 4 o'clock each morning. People from the Acornhoek area daily used the early train to commute to work in Hoedspruit. These commuters, who had to wake at 3 o'clock each morning, were deemed to be very vulnerable to witchcraft. When commuters were found appearing at

mysterious locations throughout the lowveld, they reportedly spoke of trains and of people who had died long ago. People believed they were taken by witch's trains. A man from Dingleydale was one of the train's first victims. Early one morning he waited at a gravel road for cars to give him a lift to work. That afternoon, women, collecting firewood near Cottondale, found him lying in a forest. Since he was unable to speak, they took him to a diviner. The diviner told them witches, who wanted to turn the man into a zombie, had sent a train to collect him. However, at dawn the driver threw him from the train. The diviner healed him by giving him muti to inhale.

At the time, there were many reports of Cottondale and Buffelshoek residents who were abducted by witches' trains. In 1980 Ben Maunye, a young migrant from Cottondale, boarded a train for Witbank and never returned. Two years after Ben disappeared people found the bruised body of a drunkard in the Cottondale forest. The man said he boarded a train, but fell from it. He also claimed that he saw Ben working on the train as a conductor. During 1983 a group of men from Buffelshoek walked near a river. Suddenly one of them exclaimed "Ah! Here is a train" and ran into the forest. Three days later his corpse was found 20 kilometers from where he disappeared. In 1985 a young woman and her boyfriend walked home from a shebeen. Near the river she left her boyfriend and went to urinate in the bush. Herders found her lying in the veld the next day. She was concussed, sustained severe head injuries, and her legs were covered in blood. At home she told her kin that she lost consciousness after someone beat her on the back of her head. Her kin believed that she, too, was a victim of the train. To put an end to these abductions, Cottondale residents asked a witch-diviner to reveal the train owner's identity. The diviner pointed to a retired mineworker who is also a headman. At a public meeting in Cottondale former victims of the train relayed their experiences. Even the headman's sons confessed to their father's guilt. Delegates were then sent to evict the headman from Cottondale. He left to stay in Phalaborwa for four years, but was allowed to return after he promised he would no longer practice witchcraft.

The morning train service was disestablished in 1985, and commuters have been transported to Hoedspruit by bus since then. Stories of witches' trains became less common, but have not entirely disappeared. Occassionally such trains are sighted in Green Valley. When a housewife stared through her back door one evening she saw a train winding through the bushes. It had coaches and lights, but moved in complete silence. Stories have also circulated of witches' trains that are substantially unlike ordinary trains. Such trains comprise a human chain. The witch acts as the locomotive and walks in front. The zombies act as coaches and walk behind the witch, holding hands as they move. They grab any person whom they meet and drag him or her along.

3) Witch Automobiles. Stories that witches own automobiles are of recent origin. Although a few wealthier villagers had already owned cars in the 1940s, cars only became a feature of witchcraft during the 1970s. By then buses and combi taxis had replaced trains as the major form of migrant transportation. In 1972 members of the Phako household regularly saw the headlights of a motor car moving between two locations and clearly heard its engine running. To their surprise, the car drove through the rough veld where there was no road. It usually descended from a hill, crossed a rivulette, and ascended up a second hill. As the car approached their home its headlights faded and the noise of its engine stopped abruptly. A few minutes later the Phako household would hear the sound of whistles, similar to those

diviners use. Mr. Phako is convinced the car belonged to Mr. Thobela- an unpopular diviner whom many suspected of being a witch. The reason for his view is that after when Mr. Thobela was chased from Green Valley, on account of his witchcraft in 1974, the car was not seen again. Mr. Thobela was too poor to afford a real car, but drove a witch-car at night.

Witches are said to manufacture these cars from muti and from the parts of old car wrecks. Such vehicles have peculiar qualities. Like familiars, it is believed they can change shape. One story tells how a loaf of bread became a combi. The story is of a migrant whose two wives became puzzled by his peculiar pattern of migrancy. He came home very frequently and travelled to the Witwatersrand with great ease. At times he stayed for weekends, but only left for work on the monday mornings. The wives found it strange that he always bought a wonderful loaf of bread before he departed. To find an answer to these perplexing questions they consulted a diviner. He told them only witchcraft can enable a man to travel so fast, and said their husband changes the loaf of bread into a combi. The diviner gave them muti to place on his bread the next time he was about to depart. When the wives did this, their husband could not leave for work.

Witches' cars are deadly weapons. At times witches manufacture these cars for the explicit purpose of killing their enemies. As they make the cars they call out the name of their prospective victim. In 1994 Amos and Gerry Mashego, two high school pupils, were sent to buy a 80 kilogram bag of maize meal. Gerry pushed the wheelbarrow all the way to the shop. When he asked Amos to take over, Amos became scared and fled. Later Gerry found Amos standing underneath a tree. Amos was notably aggitated and shouted: "Go and buy the maize meal on your own. Don't force me to accompany you". Gerry was surprised that Amos adressed him in fluent English. Later Amos' family noticed that he displayed signs of insanity. An Apostolic prophet told Amos' mother three women attempted to kill him. As he was about to push the wheelbarrow, they sent an invisible car to knock him down. Fortunately, Amos's ancestors caused him to escape.

4) The Technology of the Flying Witch. It is common knowledge that witches fly and send lightning to strike people on the ground. Yet few informants knew precisely how witches fly. Some interviewees thought flying witches appropriate the attributes of birds. A teacher reasoned that witches do not fly as human beings. "It is not flying in the true sense of flying. People say witches fly when they use the owl [mashiriri]. Witches send the owl, or come personally in the form of the owl." Joe Mohale, who is the only person I know to claim actually having seen a witch fly, confirmed this view. While Joe worked in Tzaneen during 1966, he was abruptly awoken by the sound of thunder one summer evening. When Joe opened the door of his home and shone his torch he noticed something hanging from his washing line. He described what he saw he as follows:

> It hung on the line by its feet with its head facing downwards. As I walked nearer I saw it was a human being. Suddenly it fell from the line, but started to fly away like an owl...I saw the man with my own eyes. He was naked and did not have feathers. He used his arms as wings.

Half an hour later the lightning struck about a kilometer away from Joe's home, killing three goats.

Other informants thought flying witches also use sekgowa technologies. An Apostolic prophet interpreted the well-known expression moloi o nya mollo literally. According to her, powerful flames emerge from the anuses of witches, propelling them through the night sky like human rockets, as they travel about on their malicious errands [18]. The sekgowa technologies used by flying witches were also said to include steering wheels, reflectors and aerials. When Elias Maluleke was chased from Green Valley in 1992, his neighbours alleged that he flew around the village at night on a large steeing wheel to which he attached feathers which he treated with muti. A woman heard witches use a reflector, which resembles a car's indicators and a stoplight, to call the other witches, whom they fly past, to join them. Residents of Timbabati, a nearby village, described how an aerial protrudes from the back of a well-known witch, like a tail, whenever he flies (Stadler 1994:186).

5) Remote Controlled Sexual Intercourse. Since the 1970s witches have used sekgowa technology to conduct sexual liasons. Informants believed that male and female witches send the tokolose, a baboonlike familiar, at night to rape those whom they desire sexually. In the daytime, male witches now also employ the msheshaphantsi for this purpose [19]. A man puts this device in his pocket and approaches the woman. When he rubs it his penis will become erect and he will have intercourse with the woman from a remote distance. The msheshaphantsi will momentarily hypnotize (go tanyega) the man's victim so that she responds positively to his advances. People cannot observe this action, but can infer it from the man's facial expressions. A shopowner once saw a man enter his store, stare at his wife, and make peculiar gestures. Believing that the man was using a msheshaphantsi, he lashed the man with a sjambok and chased him from the store. The msheshaphantsi enables male witches to have intercourse with any woman, and with several women in succession. Although informants believed the device was manufactured from parts of the tokolose, this idea is clearly modelled on modern technologies from makgoweng. Informants compared it to a remote-controlled television switch and an immobilizer for motor cars. A young man explained: "With an immobilizer you can open your car doors over there when you are standing here. The msheshaphantsi works more or less the same."

In local knowledge witches do not employ the msheshaphantsi nearly as frequently as they use the tokolose. During fieldwork I recorded only five accounts of men who had been accused of using this device. One of the accused was a teacher. Although he was married, he stayed in the teachers' quarters at school with his two sons while his wife worked in Bushbuckridge. His colleagues were surprised that his wife hardly ever visited them and that he was complacent with this arrangement. They were also appalled when they heard him telling a woman teacher, with whom he did not sleep, that she was no good in bed. Once he detained schoolgirls in the library for no apparent reason. The girls later complained that they felt wet between the legs and said he had used the mseshaphantsi to molest them. When the principal learnt of this, he summoned the man to the office and threatened him with expulsion. Woman teachers have become very wary of him. Whenever he stares at them, they frantically stab with pens in the air in front of their legs to ward off the msheshaphantsi.

Not all new technologies are called sekgowa and are associated with witchcraft. Great selectivity is obviously involved. The items witches use are those that seem the most alien, ambiguous and threatening. Like animals which invade the village from the forest; these technologies are "matter out of place" (Douglas 1970b:5). It is only in whichcraft narratives, that impoverished villagers are represented as the powerful owners of whites, servants, trains

and automobiles. The liminal status of the witch, vis a vis the village and makgoweng, is also apparent in the bizzare and anomalous images of insecticides in people's food, trains and automobiles which run where there are no rails nor roads, flames coming from a person's anus, and of the remote controlled penis.

The items involved are apt symbols of power, wealth, domination, and danger. Insecticides are highly ambiguous. Informants recognized that their use enabled citrus orchards on white-owned farms to be more productive than village gardens. Yet it is because people are accutely aware of their dangers they did not use these in the village. Guernsey's employees wash themselves thoroughly after work and never pick relish (meroho) on the farm. Trains, automobiles, planes and the mseshaphantsi connote the power of mobility, but also convey the profound dangers of speed and the unregulated movement of persons and objects. Trains are objects of facination because they symbolize the connections between the village and makgoweng. The train journey was integral to the subordination of African labourers. Men were compelled, by economic necessity, to board trains and earn a living in makgoweng. By all accounts train journeys were ardous experiences. A man, who worked at a textile factory in Johannesburg during the 1950s, referred to the train, on which he travelled, as the mafufanyane (madness). This was because migrants had to change their destinations several times along the way. Starting at Acornhoek, they had to board new trains at Komatipoort, Witbank, and Benoni. The train was always overcrowded and migrants were frequently robbed. Trains also separated fathers and sons from their dependants, sometimes forever [20]. Like trains, automobiles link people to makgoweng. They accord people with great mobility and speed and have become vehicles for the expression of status and wealth. But automobile accidents are a very common cause of death and highways are profoundly dangerous. The msheshapantsi portrays male sexuality which is amoral, unregulated, and unencompassed [21].

**The 1994 Election and the Witchcraft of Whites**

The South African general elections of April 1994, which brought about the end of white minority rule, had a drastic impact on local perceptions of witchcraft. In the months preceeding the elections, villagers anticipated a complete reversal of fortunes. Like many other South Africans, they anticipated a "world turned upside down", marked by immediate and complete social integration, African empowerment, and white disempowerment (Babcock 1978). In the context of these, almost apocalyptic, expectations pre-existing notions of witchcraft changed. In these months whites were no longer seen only as a source from which African witches derived their power. For the first time, whites were directly accused of witchcraft.

For villagers an ANC victory was a foregone conclusion. By 1994 the ANC was the only effectively organized political party in the Mhala and Mapulaneng areas. The ANC enjoyed overwhelming support. ANC election meetings were regularly held and Green Valley's electricity poles and maroela trees were decorated with colourful ANC posters promising "Rights for Women" as well as "Jobs, Peace and Freedom". Even the elders, who resented the unscrupilous behaviour of the local Comrades, supported Nelson Mandela and intended voting for the ANC. In Mhala and Mapulaneng the ANC had hardly any political rivals. Prospective voters strongly rejected bantustan-based political parties. Widespread corruption

in Lebowa stigmatized the United People's Party. The organization of Gazankulu's Ximoko Progressive Party, which some Tsonga-speakers supported in the past, was in complete disarray. Before the election E.E. Nxumalo resigned as Ximoko's leader and joined the ANC. At a mass meeting in Tulumahashe he called on Gazankulu's teachers and civil servants to do likewise. The Pan African Congress, National Party and Democratic Party had little support. In fact, those who did not support the ANC were mainly pensioners and church leaders who had decided not to vote.

Informants were very ambivalent about the elections, however. Some clearly had utopian expectations of the benefits an ANC victory would bring. Unemployed men expected that it would be much easier for them to find jobs. Employees expected wage increases, women that water supplies would improve, and teachers that more schools would be built. An ANC activist, who is also a school principal, remarked that many pupils believed the South African situation would improve overnight.

> The youth have very high expectations. They think there will be free education, housing and jobs. These things may come after five years, but the youth think they will come immediately after the election.

There were also feelings of cautious optimism, pessimism, and of extreme fear that violence would erupt on the election days. An insurance salesman told me many of his clients cancelled their policies. Some wealthier women stockpiled with large quantities of non-perishable foodstuffs. The butcher at Acornhoek's largest supermarket reported sales of unprecedented amounts of canned food and gas cookers. While only two gas cookers had been sold in the previous six months, customers purchased 48 cookers in the week before the election. Doris Nyathi, the wife of a school principal, bought large quantities of wood, gas, candles, sugar, maize meal, flour, tinned food and 18 boxes of washing powder. She did so after she saw white women stockpiling on television. Poorer housewives also wished to stockpile, but did not have enough money to do so.

Television broadcasts of exceptionally violent episodes clearly inspired fear. Images of the Shell House shootings in Johannesburg, and of the Mmabato revolt, captured the public imagination. There were also reports that right-wingers from ESCOM (the Electricity Supply Commission) would cut off all electricity and attack Africans in the darkness. In an interview one man said the new government would not meet people's aspirations. He was scared that, as in the case of Mmabatho, the youth could go on the rampage and loot stores. What informants feared most, however, were repraisals by aggrieved whites. People were accutely aware that lowveld whites dreaded the elections. The defeat of the National Party and of General Viljoen's Freedom Front, which most whites supported, was as imminent as an ANC victory. Informants also believed whites would loose a great deal under an ANC goverment. They said the ANC's envisaged progamme of land redistribution, and Peter Mokaba's slogan "Kill the farmer! Kill the boer!", could prompt whites to resort to violence [22].

Local events gave substance to these perceptions. As the election date approached, many villagers experienced that whites became increasingly resentful of them. At the Green Valley market vendours told me the white farmers, from whom they bought fruit and vegetables, suddenly became uncooperative. Mrs. Machate regularly bought mangoes, bananas, mealies

and sweet potatoes from Mahebehebe- who owns a farm north of Hoedspruit. In March Mahebehebe told her he no longer wished to sell anything to Africans and that she should rather buy these goods from Nelson Mandela. Mrs. Machate was very surprised:

> Mahebehebe was always friendly, but he has changed. Today he insults and beats people. Mahebehebe has become nasty and rude...The whites despise us because we support Mandela.

Early in April a teacher bought logs from a white farmer in Graskop. The farmer assisted him, but criticized Peter Mokaba's slogan and said the ANC had caused Africans to hate farmers.

Since the beginning of 1994 members of the right-wing AWB (Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging- Afrikaner Resistance Movement) had attacked commuters on the roads north of Green Valley. On 17 April the local ANC Youth League hired two buses for members to attended an election rally in Pietersburg. At Jongmanspruit ten rifle-wielding AWB men waved for the buses to stop. When the first bus raced past the men opened fire. Bullets ripped apart a rear tyre of the bus. After the second bus stopped, the AWB men forced its 90 passengers to alight, kneel alongside the road, and raise their hands. The AWB men searched the bus for weapons and told the youths they had tresspassed on Volkstaat territory. Non-ANC members were also attacked. In April armed white men stopped ZCC pilgrims travelling in a small van from Morea to Green Valley. They drew pistols and instructed the occupants to alight and lie down on their stomachs. Only after the pilgrims pleaded with the white men, were they allowed to go. Reverend Sekgobela, who drove the van, identified one of the men as the son of his former employer. The reverend asked the young man why he had stopped them, but he did not reply. On request of the ANC, police started patrolling the roads north of Green Valley. Yet rumours persisted that mysterious lights were seen at the Klaserie bridge and that combi taxis were shot at. These incidents generated confusion and anxiety. Villagers did not only fear physical revenge. Some were scared white farmers would refuse to sell their produce after the elections.

Against the backdrop of these perceptions, rumours arose that whites sought to poison Africans. These rumours were novel. Yet the rapidily with which they spread throughout the lowveld shows how plausible they were in the new political context that had emerged. Musambachime argues that rumours which captivate coincide with times of insecurity. "Rumours are believed or passed on because they express concern(s) or fear(s) of the population in a manner which is comprehensible to them within their particular context" (Musambashime 1988:203). Villagers were well aware that the AWB did not perpetrate violence from a position of strength. On the contrary, they saw the attacks on commuters as a sign of just how desparate the AWB had become. From being powerful outsiders, whites were becoming deprived insiders who envied Africans. The image of whites as poisoners had become plausible. White farmers supplied villagers with food and owned unlimited supplies of insecticides and chemicals. The rumours of 1994 were modelled on an earlier scare that manufacturing companies placed birth control tablets in maize meal. These tablets allegedly caused impotence among men and sterility among women. The earlier scare arose after people discovered peculiar tablets in the yellow maize meal that was sold during the drought of 1992. Yet many people disputed this interpretation, saying the tablets merely prevent fermentation. These sinister attempts to reduce the African population was not described as

witchcraft.

An incident, which occurred early in March, ignited the rumours of 1994. A white man sold quarter loaves of bread with mango achaar for only 20c at several schools in Mhala. Pupils and teachers at the Landela and Edenburg schools developed food poisoning after they ate the bread. Widely exaggerated reports of the incident rapidly spread through the lowveld. In Green Valley, I heard, 20 children were poisoned and admitted to the Matikwane hospital. (A nursing sister at the hospital could not confirm this). People, who heard this story, became petrified of anyone distributing food in the villages. When an African employee of the Albany bakery arrived at a high school in Ludlow, to deliver bread, scholars claimed whites had hired him to poison them. They caught the man, tied him to a chair with ropes, and called a Gazankulu health inspector to determine if the bread was toxic. When the bread was shown to be harmless the man was released. A few days later a member of the Allendale school committee saw strangers dumping milk containers in the veld, near a water hole for cattle. He told colleagues they poisoned the milk and placed it where herders would find it.

Politicians actively perpetuated the rumour which started in the schools. After a young man drank home brewed beer in Green Valley on 13 March he started vomitting severely. That evening he was taken to hospital, but was certified dead upon arrival. At his funeral Mr. Sithole, a well-known politician from Mhala, delivered a fiery oration. (Mr. Sithole was a prominent member of the Ximoko Progressive Party and the Gazankulu Legislative Assembly, but now supported the ANC). Mr. Sithole said whites from Hoedspruit supplied the poison which killed the young man. He warned that whites planned to reduce the number of Africans to ensure that few votes are cast for the ANC. He furthermore asserted that, by issuing Africans with dangerous weapons to kill each other, the South African government assisted the farmers in their clandestine activities. Mr. Sithole spoke of the attacks on commuters and pleaded that people should not use the northern roads nor accept food from "generous" whites. Many believed a neighbour poisoned the young man and described Mr. Sithole was an opportunist. Yet his oration hightened people's fears.

During March and April ANC election candidates and organizers addressed a series of meetings attended by teachers, Civic Association members, and ordinary villagers. At these meetings they warned people that whites would employ devious methods to defeat the ANC. In the Blyde district farmers allegedly misinformed workers about voting and taught them to draw crosses next to the symbol of the party they dislike. The ANC officials also said whites would use tactics similar to those employed by the DTA (Democratic Turnhale Alliance) in the Namibian elections of 1990. The DTA allegedly doctored food with invisible election ink and delivered these to SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) strongholds. When people's hands were scanned under ultra-violet rays at the polling stations it showed that they had already voted. In this way SWAPO lost many votes. Likewise, the food whites deliver in the lowveld could be stained with election ink [23]. Furthermore, the ANC officials cautioned people against accepting bread, mango achaar, and T-shirts from whites. It is likely that the food would be poisoned and the T-shirts doctored with chemicals [24].

A clerk and the Comrades also alerted people to this danger. On 25 March a clerk of the Setlhare local government overheard a telephone conversation between a school inspector and a nurse. They spoke of children who were poisoned in Bushbuckridge. The clerk was so shaken that she telephoned all principals in the area and asked them to dissuade pupils from

accepting food from whites. Early in April Comrades told high school pupils in Green Valley whites had distributed poisoned bread in Acornhoek, as well as fruit, vegetables and coins which contained election ink. One morning in April Comrades drove through the streets of Shatale and announced, over loud halers, that the AWB had poisoned Shatale's water tanks.

In April Mosotho, a generous white farmer who spoke northern Sotho very fluently, was accused of witchcraft. Since 1991 Mosotho's labourers delivered undergrade potatoes to the ZCC and Roman Catholic churches in Acornhoek. They did this on the request of church leaders. However, prior to the election, the labourers started distributing potatoes from the lorry at the Tintswalo hospital. Young men confronted the labourers and told them the potatoes were smeared with poison and election ink. The labourers denied this, saying that they, and even Mosotho himself, are card-carrying ANC members. Hence they had no reason to "wipe out" their Comrades.

These rumours were widely accepted as truthful. A few ANC supporters refraimed from eating fruit, vegetables and jam during the elections. Yet informants described the witchcraft of whites as a very recent phenomenon which accompanied the elections. During an interview a housewife explained this to me:

> We have lived with whites all along. We were oppressed, but we were never poisoned. The olden whites hated us, harassed us, and beat us. But the recent whites are poisoning us. This is because of politics.

The belief is thus intimately connected with the vision of an inverted order in which whites are dominated by Africans. It is significant that ANC officials and the Comrades were the rumour's most vociferous proponents. As the most likely beneficiaries of a post-apartheid South Africa, they feared the witchcraft of whites the most intensely.

The volatile nature of this rumour, which disappeared as quickly as it started, should be emphasized. People's worst fears were not realized. Throughout the lowveld the elections proceeded without the occurrence of any major incidents of violence. On 27 April AWB members tried to set up roadblocks to prevent Africans from voting in Hoedspruit, but were dispersed by a large contingent of the South African Defence Force. It soon became known that the ANC had won an overwhelming victory [25]. However, villagers realized whites would not be impoverishment overnight. White farmers have not been deprived of their land. In addition, the demise of the former bantustan bureaucracies have brought about many new commercial opportunities. Within months after the elections, whites set up many flourishing businesses in Acornhoek. In the context of a new South Africa, which is rather more familiar than people expected, whites would continue to be perceived as powerful outsiders who are unlike witches. By December 1994 people had only vague memories of pre-election rumours. Some have even begun to doubt whether whites really poisoned Africans. A ZCC reverend ate the potatoes Mosotho delivers to his church everyday and said nothing has ever happened to him. "Some people wanted to destroy the image of whites in the new South Africa. This was election fever."

**Conclusions**

Jean and John Comaroff write that people's reactions, to the colonial assault:

> ...have flowed well beyond the channels of political discourse and onto the diffuse terrains of everyday life...It is a process of 'challenge and riposte' often much too complex to be captured in mechanical equations of domination and resistance (J. and J.L. Comaroff 1992:236).

The case of witchcraft certainly shows the great complexities involved in the study of "the colonization of consciousness and the consciousness of colonization". I have argued that, criticisms of colonialism are not apparent in the sociology of witchcraft accusations. The image of the witch as a deprived insider has remained fairly constant through time. Experiences of apartheid in the Eastern Transvaal lowveld did not lead to the belief that whites are witches. As powerful outsiders, whites were more likely to be seen as the victims of African witchcraft. It was only during the elections of 1994, which signalled the demise of apartheid and the end of white domination, that whites were directly accused of witchcraft. The rumours of the witchcraft of whites were a product of great political turmoil in which villagers anticipated "a world turned upside down". There are historical parallels to this phenomenon in the ethnographic literature on central Africa. For example, MacGaffey describes 1960, the year in which the Congo (currently Zaire) attained independence, as a time of great excitement. He notes that there were expections that Congolese would occupy the homes of Europeans and be endowed with unlimited wealth. "Europeans were frequently referred to as witches....A white man with a lantern was said to go about stealing people's souls" (McGaffey 1968:175).

I suggested that criticisms of colonialism and of white domination are more apparent in the cosmology and symbolism of witchcraft. In narratives of witchcraft, it was shown, witches are symbolically associated with whites. As internal enemies, witches have liasons with the 'places of whites' in much the same way as they have liasons with the 'forest' and with 'wild animals'. Witches symbolically appropriate the attributes of whites. They are portrayed as masters with servants and as using sekgowa technologies that are incessible to ordinary villagers. The images of witches and zombies brings to mind the miserable consequences of excessive domination. Moreover, witchcraft beliefs reflect on the subversive potential of the capitalist economy, and on the destructive effects of sekgowa technologies such as insecticides, trains, automobiles and planes.

Narratives of witchcraft present a complex discourse on domination and power. Despite the portrayal of whites as the source of evil, it is doubtful whether concepts of "resistance" adequately describe, or even illuminate, this discourse. Here I recall Worseley's (1957) misguided attempt to explain the advent of the John Frum movement on the Tanna Island of Melanesia, during which islanders anticipated the arrival of cargo, as the first stirring of anti-colonial nationalism. The movement broke out in 1940 when there were present on the island the following oppressors- one district agent and four merchants (Jarvie 1963:129). Like cargo cultists, villagers of the lowveld do not merely despise and resent the cultural forms, commodities and the power of dominant social groups. Villagers also envy and desire these. Narratives of witchcraft do not seek to reject, nor overcome, the power and the technologies of whites. Rather, through stories of witchcraft, villagers seek to recast them in their own terms. This strategy of symbolic appropriation was also apparent in notions of witches' covens and the Black Sabbath in the witch beliefs of feudal Europe. Silverblatt

(1987:163-5) has observed that the coven was not dissimilar to the courts of king and feudal lords. The devil promised adherents exactly what patrons offerred their vassals; protection and help in exchange for total submission. Black Sabbaths were described as collective orgies, where banquets were served, sexual perversions indulged in, and the Holy Sacraments were performed in inverted form.

## NOTES

1. Many anthropologists distinguish between "witchcraft" as an innate evil power and "sorcery" as the use of material substances to harm others. Like Turner (1964) I see little merit in this taxonomy. The Sesotho words loya and baloi encompass both ideas. I translate these words as witchcraft and witches. Where other authors have used the term sorcery I, nonetheless, retain their original terminology in the text.

2. In southern and central Africa witches are perceived as deprived and envious individuals. Cewa sorcerers were thought to be driven by meat hunger, and Bashu witches by the desire for social and economic rights (Marwick 1965:25 Packard 1986: 257). Witches, according to Xhosa-speaking migrants in East London, work from envy. "Among the special objects of their envy are a thriving herd and a thriving family" (P. and I. Mayer 1974:162). Of witches in the Dande area of Zimbabwe, Lan (1985:36) writes: "Envy is the motive most commonly ascribed, either envy of the rich by the poor or of the fertile by the barren".

3. The situation of colonists is similar to that of African elites such as the Avongara in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. In the 1920s the Avongara aristocrats, who relied on labour and tribute from commoners, enjoyed overwhelming power and prestige among the Azande. The Avongara were never accused of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard 1958:32-33).

4. Marwick (1964:263) writes"in Africa, it has been repeatedly recorded...that both believed attacks and accusations of witchcraft and sorcery occur only between persons already linked by close social bonds". This is true of all the southern and central African cases that I cited (see Marwick 1965:50, Packard 1986:242, P. and I. Mayer 1974:161, Lan 1985:36).

5. Ethnographic studies on witchcraft in Africa and Melanesia have been influenced by different theoretical orientations. Ethnographers of Africa have primarily been influenced by the Durkheim, Marx and Gluckman. Melanesian scholars have been inspired by American culture theory. As a result Africanists emphasize the social dimensions of witchcraft, while Melanesianists highlight culture and cosmology.

6. Lattas (1993) argues that sorcery accusations emerge out of uneven political and economic development. The Kaliai of the interior regularly accuse the coastal Kaliai and Tolai, who have been the beneficiaries of colonialism. But these groups are also frequently the victims of sorcery attacks.

7. The meaning of the Northern Sotho term makgowa is obscure. It does not refer to the colour white (tshweu) and clearly has negative connotations. It belongs to a class of nouns (sing. prefix le, pl. prefix ma) reserved for animate objects and human pests; it includes

terms like lehodu (thief) and lekgema (cannibal). J.L. Comaroff (1987:53) argues that in Setswana makgoa originally denoted "white bush lice". Eliazaar Mohlala, my research assistant, suggested that makgowa may derive from the verb go goa ("to shout").

8. My observation that whites are more likely to be suspected of ritual murder is not novel. The rumours of banyama men which spread through Zambia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zaire between 1920 and 1950 are well documented. According to these rumours diverse colonial actors; such as government officials, firemen, Catholic priests and European doctors; were said to drain Africans' blood and to remove their brains. These were allegedly sold for profit to European pharmacies, butcheries and museums (Musambaschime 1988, White 1990). Jones' (1951) investigation into the Lesotho medicine murders of the 1940s revealed that some Basotho thought South African whites were responsible for the killings.

9. Other anthropologists have recorded similar experiences. After Evans-Pritchard consumed bananas and became ill his Zande friends told him he had been bewitched (Evans-Pritchard 1958:66). While Monica and Godfrey Wilson conducted research among the Nyakyusa they contracted malaria. Informants told them that a man who had previously asked them for a present, but whom they refused, bewitched them (Wilson 1967:207).

10. My view differs from that of J. Comaroff and J.L Comaroff (1992) who discuss the contrast between Setswana ('ways of the Tswana') and Sekgowa ('ways of the Europeans') in Bophuthatswana. They see the distinction as rooted in the colonial encounter, as carrying a fan of associations in the collective consciousness of the dominated" (p.156), and as providing an implicit critique of the colonial order. My view more closely approximates Fischer's (1981) and Stadler's (1994) account of the uses of xintu and xilungu in the Tsonga speaking villages of Seville and Timbabati. In the lowveld local African identities, such as Sesotho and Xitsonga, were contrasted to each other. Setso or Xintu (broader concepts denoting common African traditions) was contrasted to Sekgowa or Xilungu (ways of the whites).

11. A middle aged man remarked: "Not all our traditions were good". His parents told him in the olden days infirm elders were placed at the kraal gates so cattle could trample them to death. They also said women would secretly strangle the second born of twins (see Hammond-Tooke 1981:116).

12. See Spiegel (1989) and Spiegel and McAllister (1991) for a discussion of the various uses of 'tradition' in contemporary southern Africa.

13. Lan (1985,1989) shows how, in the context of the Zimbabwean war of liberation, Korekore spirit-mediums completely avoided contact with any European commodities. He sees this as a result, not only of their identification with the ancestors, but also as a symbolic rejection of white domination. The situation in the lowveld is clearly different. Rodgers (1993) provides an excellent discussion on the uses of material culture by diviners in Timbabati.

14. This is an obvious reference to the labour tenancy arrangements which prevailed in the lowveld during the 1940s. In terms of the "three month system" African tenants were obliged to work for the white farmers for three months each year in exchange for their right to

reside, keep stock, and cultivate land. Tenants were not remunerated in cash (see Harries 1993).

15. Foucault's (1972) description of the treatment of the insane in modern France comes to mind, especially his contension that the insane are observed but not listened to. Bastian (1993:164) also refers to the Nigerian idea that mad people are like walking dead. "They have bodies, but there is no life force inside them."

16. The identification of the Pulana with crocodiles stem from the fact the Pulana originate from Shakwaneng, which is located on the banks of the Crocodile river. In the Pulana dialect south, the direction from where they came, is called kwena (crocodile). The perception that the crocodile brain is poisonous is based on the observation that crocodiles often bask in the hot sun. Hence, crocodiles are considered to be fisa- a concept which denotes both extreme heat and ritual pollution (see Hammond-Tooke 1981:113-130).

17. A similar custom is purported to have existed among the northern Tsonga and the Kgaga. Chiefs swollowed the 'crocodile stone' at their installation and should vomit up the 'stone' before they die (Junod 1966:393, Hammond-Tooke 1981:18).

18. This was also the belief among the rural Ngoni-speaking communities in eastern Zambia (Auslander 1993:173). However, other informants said moloi o nya mollo is a proverb which means that witches cause trouble wherever they go.

19. Msheshaphantsi, a Zulu word, literally means "quick-down". It also denotes underhand actions such as bribery and fraud.

20. It is telling that the Cottondale railway station was one of the first targets of local ANC guerrillas. In 1984 four members of an ANC military unit unsuccessfully attempted to "blow up" a goods train transporting fuel to the airforce base at Hoedspruit. See Ellsworth's (1983) analysis of the chronic defficiencies of railway transport in South Africa.

21. See Auslander (1993) and Weiss (1993) for informative discussions on the cultural meanings of mobility, highways, automobiles and sexuality in modern African context.

22. Peter Mokaba, former national president of the ANC Youth League, made newspaper headlines after he repeatedly chanted "Kill the Farmer! Kill the Boer" during election rallies. Mokaba described these chants as "merely part of our struggle". However, elder ANC leaders said the chant was not ANC policy and that it was inappropriate to use it (Argus 24 April 1993).

23. Bantu Holomisa, current South African minister of Tourism and the Environment, repeatedly called on people not to eat porridge offered by the National Party because it contained ink that would disqualify them from voting. The IEC (Independent Election Commission) found that Holomisa contravened the Electoral Act (Cape Times 21 April 1994). My research suggests that such claims were common. It also suggests that the assumed tactic was closely associated with witchcraft.

24. In his book Biko (1978) the journalist Donald Woods describes how members of the

South African security forces sent T-shirts, that had been treated with acid, to his children. This incident forced the Woods household to flee for England. It is interesting that this incident should be recalled by the Comrades. A possible explanation for this is that it resonates with the common belief that witches smear muti on the clothes of their victims.

25. During the 1994 elections the Mhala and Mapulaneng areas were part of the Northern Transvaal. Of all votes cast in the provincial elections of the Northern Transvaal 1 759 597 (92%) were for the ANC; 62 745 (3%) for the National Party; 41 193 (2%) for the Freedom Front; 24 360 (1%) for the Pan African Congress: 6 000 for the Ximoko Progressive Party; and only 4 021 for the Democratic Party (Weekend Star 7-8 May 1994). Subsequently these areas became part of the Eastern Transvaal.

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