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On the Renaissance of African Modes of Thought: The Example of Occult Belief Systems

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Abstract: The analysis of African occult belief systems provides a unique example for demonstrating that seemingly outdated and exotic African modes of thought, such as the belief in magic and witchcraft, are modern and have significant impact on social, economic and political structures. Official approaches, designed to cope with the problems of witchcraft violence in Africa, have since the advent of colonial rule, been based on eurocentric views and colonial jurisdiction, legitimised by Western social science. These answers are inadequate; in fact, they constitute part of the problem itself. African religions could provide a framework for valuable indigenous solutions to actual problems of contemporary life, including the problem of witchcraft violence. Besides this, they might, under certain conditions, provide the outside world with an inspiring new dimension of philosophic thought and emancipative action for example, within the realm of conflict resolution and reconciliation. However, even in the case of the 'domestication' of witchcraft violence, this holds only in so far as appropriate African answers can be shielded against the negative impact of globalised liberal capitalism.

Résumé: [Sur la renaissance des modes de pensée africains - L'exemple de la croyance en magie et la sorcellerie] - L'analyse des systèmes de croyances occultes africains offre un exemple unique pour démontrer que les modes africains de la pensée apparemment obsolètes et exotiques, comme la croyance en la sorcellerie, sont très modernes. Ils ont un impact décisive sur des structures sociales, économiques et politiques africaines. Les approches officielles, visant à faire face aux problèmes de la violence de la sorcellerie en Afrique, ont depuis l'avènement de la domination coloniale, été fondés sur des opinions eurocentriques et la juridiction coloniale, qui étaient légitimées par la science sociale occidentale de ces temps. Ces réponses sont insuffisantes, en fait, ils font partie du problème il-même. Religions africaines pourrait fournir un cadre pour des solutions autochtones précieux, ainsi que pour résoudre les problèmes réels de la vie contemporaine, y compris la question de la sorcellerie. Outre cela, ils pourraient, sous certaines conditions, fournir au monde extérieur avec une nouvelle dimension inspirante de la philosophie et de l'action émancipatrice, par exemple, dans le domaine de la résolution des conflits et de la réconciliation. Cependant, même dans le cas de la « domestication » de la sorcellerie, ce ne détient au mesure que les réponses appropriées africaines peuvent être protégés contre l'impact négatif du capitalisme libéral mondialisé.

Keywords: African Renaissance, occult belief, rationality; rational actor, witchcraft
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A. Modernity and African Renaissance: divided between rationalism and superstition

The history of African philosophies and development visions, from Nkrumah's Panafricanism *via* Senghor's Négritude to the current concepts of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)[2] and the related vision of an African Renaissance, is said to be a history of failures (cf. Kabou 1991; Jakobeit 2000; Melber 2004). Certainly, the proponents of African Renaissance suggest that Africans are successfully continuing to rise out of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism into liberation. Their vision is based on the rich intellectual and cultural heritage of Africa and the common dream of its renaissance (cf. Mzamane 2001; Lölke 2003) [3]. Unfortunately, implementation of these concepts has so far been primarily restricted to myth-making, used by the new African elite as a mobilisation tool to unite their people in their fight against neo-colonialism, or even as an ideological political tool in the pursuit of particular class interests (cf. Liebenberg 1998).

"*21st century Africa will be rational, or it will not be at all*"[4] wrote the Cameroonian sociologist Axelle Kabou (1991) in her provocative best-seller more than a decade ago. This was by no means a reflection limited to the eurocentric modernisation ideology of the former colonial masters; it has been the prevailing view of both the European educated African power elite and the donor community who have been involved in Africa up to the present day. The globalisation of universal standards of governance and of neo-liberal economic concepts corresponding to Western standards was promoted, last but not least, by the political conditions imposed by the international donor community. Nevertheless, this was readily accepted by African rulers, as reflected in the NEPAD programme (cf. Melber 2004; Matthews 2004). The (post) modernisation ideology contributed to the questioning of African local custom and of indigenous knowledge as outdated barriers to development. It was commonly assumed that modernisation would inevitably rationalise both social processes and human beliefs. This also holds for "traditional" African religions , and particularly for the occult belief, i.e. the belief in magic and witchcraft [5], characterised by modernists as superstition.

The proponents of modernisation in Africa and elsewhere would like to uproot this belief as soon as possible in the name of progress, preferably by legal means and educational campaigns (cf. below). To date, the cultural heritage of African societies is still unjustly seen by the majority of experts merely in terms of development constraints, dominated by characteristics such as rent seeking, informal sector trap, irrational economic actors or the

[2] New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); cf. www.nepad.org; 10.03.05. - For an evaluation of NEPAD cf. Melber 2004; Matthews 2004.

[3] For an annotated detailed bibliography on the definition and concept of African Renaissance cf. Jansen/Roeske 2001; as well as online bibliographies, like <www.africavenir.com/elibrary/african-renaissance/index.php>; 26.01.05; African Renaissance Bibliography <www.fu-berlin.de/afrosi/documents_pdf/AfricanRenaissanceBibliography.pdf>; 26.01.2005.

[4] « L'Afrique du XXIe siècle sera rationnelle ou ne sera pas », cf. Kabou 1991

[5] African scholars, religious leaders and healers, as well as politicians, maintain that they, with other Africans, share a common ground of 'basics' of occult belief, i.e. that witchcraft is a reality and principally evil; it is to be considered as an integral part of African culture. Therefore, analytical concepts of witchcraft should take this emic view on the subject into account (cf. Kohnert 2003). For a detailed discussion of definitions and concepts of witchcraft, sorcery and magic in different local contexts, as well as of the limitations and fallacies of the general delimitations of witchcraft, particularly in the African context, and finally on the ambiguities of the transfer of eurocentric concepts of magic and witchcraft to African societies, cf. Geschiere 1997:12-15, 215-224; Kohnert 1996.

prebend economy (cf. Chabal/Daloz 1999; Menzel 2003)[6], without due regard to its historical roots and its dependency on the global economic system, as explained by Bilgin/Morton (2002:73-75), Comaroff/Comaroff (2003), Mazrui (1999) and others [7]. However, apparently there coexist multiple modernities – including the modernity of occult belief systems – in Africa, each of which follows its own cultural traits[8]. Therefore, what would be required is both the emancipation of awkward aspects of witchcraft violence and the liberation from the Procrustes' bed of an individualistic and uncritical scientific Western tradition of Cartesian reason. As Jürgen Habermas (1987) explained some twenty years ago, the European tradition of enlightenment is an "unfinished business". This is particularly the case when it is articulated in the form of technological reason, which often acts to support the concerns of dominant vested interests, shielded behind the supposed objectivity of rational actors. In fact, this specific culturally bound logic in itself constitutes a new form of superstition.

This has serious repercussions on both research and development politics. The realities of local politics and economics, notably the linkage between religious thought and political practice in Africa (cf. Ellis/Ter Haar 2004; Mitchell/Mullen 2002; Comaroff 2002; Faure 2000, Bayart 1993), remained until recently neglected by the mainstream of academic research. This is particularly the case for economics and political science, but also for policy advisors and development experts, who base their analyses on eurocentric assumptions. The modernity and relevance of occult belief had crucial, hitherto unnoticed implications on shifting legitimacy and power relations at the local level of African societies. Representatives of the state, party leaders, political entrepreneurs, warlords, and civil society organisations contested the established power brokers, such as traditional rulers, healers or religious leaders, who were now competing strategic players in the local political arena (cf. Ellis/Ter Haar 2004; Geschiere, 1997; Bierschenk, 2004, 2003).

In contrast to the post-modernist approach, contemporary African philosophers and sociologists maintained that far from rejecting development and rationalism in itself, "Africa is forging new trails towards the affirmation of its dignity" (Monga 1994; cf. Hountondji 1997; 1996). But it would seem that the African quest for its own distinguished way of development has a long way to go. In the short run, the rapid rise of globalised neo-liberal capitalism, accompanied by the hyper rationalisation of economic and social relationships on the one hand, and its aftermath of increasing social differentiation on a global scale on the other, simultaneously led to an unprecedented growth of occult belief systems and economies in Africa and elsewhere, as described in detail by the Comaroffs and others (cf. Comaroff/Comaroff 1999a&b; 2001; Ellis/Ter Haar 2004; Niehaus 2001). This had a negative impact on development, including gross violation on an unprecedented scale of human rights

[6] For examples of dubious oversimplifications of the role of African culture as an impediment to modern economic development cf. Harrison/Huntington (2000:xiii) on Ghana (and its harsh critique by Sen 2002:10-11); North (1990: 36-37); Chabal/Deloz (1999:128-30).

[7] For a critique of the lack of regard for the pluralism of African cultures, of ethnocentrism and of the ideological facets of ethno-philosophy, cf. Hountondji (2001, 1997). - Ela (1998) analysed the wealth and dynamics of indigenous social innovations in sub-Saharan Africa at the grass-root level; he engaged in a passionate call for a new approach, in considering rural life in Africa with its enormous potential of creativity as a laboratory of social change with often surprising and highly competitive results, promising an African renaissance. – The growing awareness of the importance of cultural change for African development is also reflected in development policy : On 20 June 2003, the ministers of culture of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, on their first meeting in Dakar (Senegal), adopted the Dakar Plan of Action to start an innovative approach with culture as a driving force for development (cf. *The Courier ACP-EU*, no. 199, July 2003:8-9 and <www.acpse.org>; 10.03.05.

[8] Cf. the ongoing debate on "African modernities" (Deutsch et al 2002) and on "multiple modernities" (cf. Kaya 2004; Dirlik 2003).

by witchcraft violence and instrumentalised ritual (*muti*) murder in various African countries (cf. Ellis/Ter Haar 2004; Evans 1992; Kohnert 1996, 2003; Peltzer/Makgoshing 2001).

Surprisingly, in the emic world view, the major fault lines, created under the impact of globalisation, did not lead to a reinforcement of accusations against external enemies, as under the rule of colonialism or racism in South Africa. Rather, it materialised in growing confrontation with the alleged enemy within one's own society, village or peer group. In South Africa for example, the major lines of conflict of the apartheid regime between race and class, were replaced during the transition period by cleavages between different age-groups or generations, mediated by gender (cf. Comaroff/Comaroff 1999a). Black male underclass youth and ANC activists tried to translate their understanding of western ideas of democratisation and socialism in specific actions to eradicate the evil, equated with black magic, by witchcraft accusations against certain elders, preferably deviant elderly women, whom they saw as a menace to their communities (cf. Kessel 1993; Ashfort 1998; Evans, 1992; Faure 2000; Minnaar, 1999; Mihalik et al., 1992; Niehaus, 1998, 2001).

In the following paper I should like to substantiate two hypotheses: Firstly, the analysis of African occult belief systems provides a unique example for demonstrating that seemingly outdated and exotic African modes of thought, such as the belief in magic and witchcraft, are "modern", i.e. not only current and widespread, affecting relevant aspects of everyday life in sub-Saharan Africa, but they also have significant impact on social, economic and political structures. Although often ill-adapted to the actual human environment of the stakeholders, occult belief systems in African societies reflect a cultural process which is not at all limited to remote places in the hinterland, but is based on African traditional religions and shaped by current linkages between transnational social spaces in a globalised world, as Geschiere (1998) and others have demonstrated (cf. Kohnert 2003). Secondly, African religious systems provided a framework for valuable indigenous solutions to current problems of contemporary life, for example within the realm of increasing violence of non-state actors, including the problem of witchcraft violence. Besides, under certain conditions, they might provide the outside world with an inspiring new dimension of philosophic thought and emancipative action for example, within the realm of conflict resolution and reconciliation. However, even as regards the 'domestication' of witchcraft violence, this holds only if appropriate African answers can be shielded against negative impacts of globalised capitalism.

B. On the relevance of the political economy of African belief in magic and witchcraft

1. The political economy of occult belief systems is neither outdated nor exotic. The belief in magic and witchcraft is deeply ingrained in African society. It exerts a decisive structuring influence on everyday life, even in the informal sector of politics and economics. Occult belief systems in Africa have since pre-colonial times been continually adapted to the current needs of their stakeholders. Last, but not least, they are indicators of a growing alienation caused by individualisation processes and triggered by globalisation and subsequent social, economic and political transformations.

Contrary to a widely held view in economics and political science, the political economy of the belief in magic and witchcraft in Africa is neither outdated nor restricted to exotic fields of study of somewhat limited societal interest and which are occupied by traditionally minded anthropologists. In the past decade, the modernity of the belief in magic and witchcraft and its relevance for the everyday life of Africans has been proven by a vast body of cultural studies

and scholarly analyses, based on innumerable case studies, summarised and conceptualised by internationally renowned scholars, such as Geschiere (1997), Ellis (2004), the Comaroffs (1999) and others. It is not by chance that the connection between globalised capitalism and occult economics within the framework of economic and political transformation processes in sub-Saharan Africa which took place in the wake of the second wind of change in the 1990s reminds one of an amazing resurgence and manifestation of Marxist concepts of alienation (*Entfremdung, Entäußerung*), objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*), and commodity fetishism in the spiritual African world [9]. During the transition period in South Africa, for example, the growing alienation of producers from the logic of the globalised economy led to the imagination of migrant labourers, bewitched as zombies and employed by powerful entrepreneurs and witches in the pursuit of their sinister and selfish interests (cf. Comaroff/Comaroff 1999a). Strikingly similar notions of zombies employed by witches were reported, according to Geschiere (1997: 147-51, 165, 254), from Cameroon, southern Ghana, eastern Nigeria, former Zaire and Sierra Leone.

In Ghana, Nigeria, and other African countries, faithful new-born Christians looked for comfort and spiritual protection from the diabolic powers of the world market. Quite worldly problems, such as diminishing terms of trade, falling farm-gate prices of local export crops, increasing unemployment, and indebtedness were explained within the context of their religion. New charismatic churches offered ready assistance to cope with these problems. Pentecostals in Ghana for example, revealed the dangers inherent in foreign commodities and offered to remove the spell from the fruits of globalisation. As they understood it, any foreign goods imported from the world market and sold in the local markets of Accra or Kumasi could be infected with evil. However, unlike historical materialism, they did not relate the assumed evil powers of these commodities to alienated relations of production. Instead, they identified this evil as a direct materialisation of demonic forces, as a true and real fetish which requires a ritual of "de-fetishisation", before being suited and safe for local consumption (cf. Kamphausen, 2000:91-95; Meyer, 1998).

Another vivid example of the alienation of the ethics of African traditional religions and of the systems of checks and balances within the realm of informal politics which are connected with it, is the transformation of secret cults, and the politics of vigilance and ritual murder in Nigeria (cf. Harnischfeger 2003; Offiong 2003; Sesay et al 2003). The police raid in August 2004 on the Okija-shrine, in Ihiala Local Government Area, Anambra State, also well-known also outside the boundaries of Igboland, was revealing. Traditional shrines and their nefast practices were by no means the last vestiges of bad governance in Nigeria, as the speaker of the Anambra state government wanted to make the Nigerian public believe(cf. Guardian 13.08.04). On the contrary, the power which secret cults in Nigeria wield in contemporary life and in regional politics is still considerable, and this power has been continuously adapted from pre-colonial times up to present-day political structures of formal multi-party democracy; the Okija-shrine was only the tip of the iceberg. Many Western educated Nigerians considered the continued existence and strength of the country's traditional and informal social control systems as a repulsive contradiction to the country's quest to become a "modern" state with good governance. The words 'shrine' or 'secret cult' assume quasi-automatically a diabolical meaning in the ears of those who advocated good governance and the rule of law. But, there is strong evidence that Okija and similar secret cults remain very popular among Nigerians, honoured and feared at the same time (cf. Okereafoezeke 2004). Shrines and cults are not bad in themselves, but are symbols of faith for African or Christian religions alike, as Wole Soyinka rightly observed in deploring 'a lazy mental attitude',

[9] For a succinct description of the theory of alienation and related concepts cf. "Alienation in Hegel and Marx", in: The Dictionary of History of Ideas, Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas, edited by Philip P. Wiener, published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, in 1973-74. <cf. http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv1-06>, 25.02.05

'simplistic to the point of puerility', among many of those who commented the police raid on the Okija shrine[10]. The question is rather why many Nigerians have no confidence in the contemporary formal justice system, inherited from the British colonial masters, and why they would rather submit their fate to the crude and cruel approaches of informal justice offered by Okija or similar cults, as well as by vigilant groups such as the Bakassi boys, scattered across the country [11]. Soyinka offered another perspective in asking what would happen if Nigerians, guided by the Okija deity, were to develop the power to take to task their selfish and corrupt political leaders? In fact, a similar vision had already been explored by the Nobel Laureate in one of his early novels "Season of Anomy" (1973), and in principle there is no reason why such a bold vision would be more utopic than the influence of the Christian Liberation Theology in Latin America.

However, the example of the Okija-shrine, the representation of the dreaded Ogwugwu cult, showed at the same time the harmful alliance between scrupulous entrepreneurs with political ambitions, politicians at all levels of regional administration, and cult leaders in a society which had for a long time been deprived of traditional checks and balances by a ruthless and greedy group of military rulers condoned, if not backed, by global players. In spring 2003, during the election campaign for the legislative and gubernatorial elections of 2003, leading politicians, such as the Governor of Anambra state, Dr. Chris Ngige, as well as Senators of the House of Representatives, had apparently been pressed by an influential political god-father, the rich entrepreneur Chief Chris Uba, to swear political allegiance to him before the Okija shrine. Ngige won the elections with the help of Uba, but apparently he refused to honour his oath as he was forced to resign and was abducted on 10 July 2003. Uba openly boasted with impunity that his former protégé won the election only because he had bribed the election authorities (INEC) [12]. Ngige was reinstalled , but in the ensuing battle between supporters of the two adversaries and the ongoing quest to dispose the Governor, the latter was subject to assassination attempts and arsons by roving armed bands, allegedly masterminded by Uba and the Okija shrine.

In August 2004, a police raid of the shrine revealed some 80 corpses disposed of in the sacred forest of the shrine, several of them mutilated apparently for ritual purposes, and ostensibly displayed as a sign of the spiritual and worldly powers of the cult in order to frighten and subdue potential clients. The majority leader of the Anambra State House of Assembly, Hon. Humphrey Nsofor, confessed that he and 21 other parliamentarians had also been forced to swear allegiance to Uba under the threat that the cult would otherwise perform a spiritual killing. In addition, Nsofor confirmed that these spiritual practices had a generation-long tradition within the parallel structures of informal customary justice and the structures of law enforcement used by the godfathers of political leaders to ensure their political power in the state, "*You can't have access to the grassroots, no matter how politically strong you are*." [13]. The 13 registers of clients of the Okija-shrine, confiscated by the Federal Police, comprised some 8,000 names of Nigerians from virtually all walks of life, including a respectable bishop of Rivers State, several members of parliament for Anambra and Rivers states, businessmen, traditional rulers and well-known politicians from all over Nigeria, including Lagos [14]. Ngige and others demanded the publication of the names of the patrons of the shrine who belonged to the political and economic elite of the country and who

[10] cf. Wole Soyinka, Sunday Sun, 19 September 2004, p. 17;
[11] cf. Ekwuribe, Chichere: "…In defence of Soyinka." *Sun News*, Sunday, 26 September 2004; George Daniel: Soyinka & the Okija shrine. Sun News, 26 September 2004
[12] cf. US-State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Nigeria, 2004; February 28, 2005; http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41620.htm; 08.03.05
[13] cf. Edomaruse, Collins: Anambra Lawmakers – We swore at Okija Shrine. *This Day Sunday*, 16.08.2004.
[14] cf. *The Sun*, 31.08.04; "Living in Bondage", cover story, *Tell*-Magazine, 23 August 2004:12-20; "Manhunt for patrons", cover story of *Tell*, 6 September, 2004:18-25;

regularly consulted the cult, but the police refused to comply [15]. Allegedly, some important patrons of the cult, interested in the pursuit of the Ngige case, paid up to five Mio. Naira monthly to the Okija shrine to punish the "culprit", according to the cult's motto: '*Eziokwu bu ndu, asi bu onwu'*, i.e. 'truth is life, falsehood (lying) is death' [16]. Apparently, some of the shrines connected with the Ogwugwu cult, were hijacked by unscrupulous young indigenous businessmen in the 1990s to turn it into a money-making machine of fraudulent practices, similar to the illicit Advance Fee Fraud or '419 scam' [17]. Similarly, vigilante groups, like the infamous *Bakassi Boys*, cooperated closely with the Okija shrine and similar secret cults (cf. Harnischfeger 2003:29-35; Sesay et al 2003:37). Preliminary findings of police investigations showed that in the past almost all Igbo shrines were involved in ritual killings within the system of parallel justice. However, some communities tried to moderate these practices while others abused the traditional principles of local deities as "custodians of truth and protectors of the oppressed" and misused the shrines for their own selfish purposes [18]. The secretary-General of the pan-Igbo group *Ohanaeze*, umbrella cultural organisation for all Igbos worldwide, the former Biafran military commander, Chief Joe Achuzia, as well as independent observers were unanimous in stating that similar shrines exist all over Nigeria and they demanded that they all receive the same treatment from the police [19].

2. Conflict resolution within the realm of the political economy of occult belief systems in Africa becomes increasingly violent

The processes of modernisation, globalisation and the accompanying transition of African societies probably result in increasingly violent forms of conflict resolution by anti-witchcraft movements, for example in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania or South Africa. Apparently, the link between political power and witchcraft is becoming tighter (cf. Geschiere 1997:7), which is explained by the crucial importance of occult power in the social control of violence in Africa. Modern and traditional rulers alike have to understand and speak the language of ritual violence if they want to guarantee anything approaching a state-monopoly of violence (cf. Ellis/Ter Haar 2004). Although statistical data on the long-term trends of witchcraft related violence in Africa are not available, 'witchcraft violence', notably the extra-legal killing of alleged witches[20], is on the increase compared with pre- and early colonial

[15] cf. The Sun, 13.08.04; 30.08.04.

[16] cf. Anayo Okoli and Tony Edike: Police uncover 10 fresh shrines, Ohanaeze scribe slams raid. *Vanguard*, Lagos, 6 August 2004.

[17] cf. Eze, James: "Okija – those who fed fat on the shrine", *Saturday Sun*, 14 August 2004. – Igbo economic and political history provides other famous examples of similar connections between economic, political and ritual interests of unscrupulous leaders, as shown by the revival of the Aro Long juju in the early 1920s, later destroyed by the British. This was a mighty and extensive trading network of Aro long distance traders collaborating with local secret cults in contracting humans for service to their oracle, but who, in fact, immediately channeled these people into the slave trade as cargo; cf. Adewoye 1977. - Yet another example is the Odozi Obodo Society, a secret society and law-enforcing structure, which terrorized Abakaliki in the 1950s and allegedly killed over 400 people in the guise of exacting punishment for their evil deeds cf. Mobolaji E. Aluko (2004): The barbarous acts of Okija. http://www.dawodu.com/aluko93.htm; 08.03.05.

[18] Cf. Richard Elesho and Uba Aham: "Gory rituals", The News, Lagos, 23 August, 2004; Dike, Victor E.: "Our Belief System And The Deity-Based Shrines", Lagosforum.com; 07.09.04; at <www.lagosforum.com/comment.php?NR=1237>; 08.03.05

[19] Another example of the political and law-enforcing power of secret cults in Nigeria's informal sector is the traditional Ogboni-fraternity of the Yoruba, in South-Western Nigeria (not to be confused with the toothless Reformed Ogboni Fraternity ; cf. Kolawole 1995; Fadipe 1970; Morton-Williams 1960; Dennett 1916).

[20] Here and in the following, 'witchcraft violence', considers both the emic view of serious harm and violence, inflicted by (imaginary or real) witches on innocent citizens, and all forms of violence applied against people accused of witchcraft. The former can be at least as fatal as the latter in the view of the stakeholders. In any case,

times when less violent forms of punishment for witches (e.g. ransom, enforced migration etc.) were applied, according to the available ethnographic evidence. The politics of anti-witchcraft movements in the impoverished regions of the (former) Northern- and Eastern Cape Provinces in South Africa, for example, resulted in the murder of thousands of witches in the 1990s. The death-toll reached hitherto unknown dimensions, for example in the former homelands of Lebowa, Gazankulu and Venda, or in the districts of Tsolo and Qumbu (Transkei). The impact could be felt not just within the microcosmos of village communities, but also at the meso and macro level of society. Apart from the immeasurable harm that "witchcraft violence" inflicted on the individuals and families concerned, it also destabilised the social, economic and political set-up of a whole region, seriously endangered the state monopoly of force, and undermined the legitimacy of the new post-apartheid government. Public as well as civic institutions were at pains to stop the violence, but apparently with limited success. The strange collusion between occult belief systems and different trans-local and trans-national social networks, embedded in specific transformations of local and global modes of production, resulted in unique but reinforcing modifications of witchcraft belief, its underlying structures and its impact on the process of democratisation (cf. Kohnert 2003).

3. The modern belief in magic and witchcraft in Africa is characterised by an increasing ambivalence of causes, intentions and effects

The underlying causes of witch-belief, its historical roots, as well as the effects it has may differ significantly according to the social strata and modes of production in which it is embedded (cf. Austen 1993; Ardener 1970; Geschiere 1997:146-151; Hunter-Wilson 1951; Kohnert 2005). Quite often it has been instrumentalised, by conservative and radical African leaders alike (e. g. Eyadéma, Moboutu, Kérékou, or liberation movements in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Zimbabwe etc.), to achieve their goals, for example by mystifying exploitation or by eliminating opponents, usually without any regard to the disintegrating long-term effects on society. But grass-root liberation movements throughout Africa have also been seen to use witchcraft accusations as "cults of counter-violence" (Wilson 1992) against political enemies. This often happened under the pretext of combating "the relics of feudalism", as in the politically motivated witch-hunt, either guided by "Marxist-Leninist" doctrines, as in Benin under the reign of its President Matthieu Kérékou (1973-89), or in the fight against apartheid and racism by the "comrades" in Gogoza, in the border region of Transkei/Natal in the late 1980s and early 1990s (cf. Evans 1992:56; Childester, 1992:43-66,151-52). The concerned population might even see in these witch-hunters heroes who cleanse their areas of evil, rather than view them as evil itself. Thus, under certain historical conditions, witch-hunts constitute what Peter Geschiere (1996; 1997), quoting D. C. Martin, called a "popular mode of political action", directed towards promoting the dawn of a new democratic order, towards equalizing the distribution of income and wealth, or towards ,defending the ideal of solidarity within acephalous village communities.

As shown above, scholarly analyses abound on the modernity of witchcraft in African societies, stressing its influence on current power relations, politics and development. However, one of the puzzling questions still to be solved concerns the ambiguous nature of witchcraft, which makes it difficult to predict the impact of occult belief systems in general , and the impact of witchcraft violence, in particular on politics in Africa[21]. This holds particularly true for the intriguing contradiction between the emancipative versus repressive

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most Africans consider witchcraft as an evil, sometimes satanic force (cf. Geschiere 1997:12-5, 215-24; Meyer 1999).

[21]. See Geschiere 2000: 28: 'Presque partout en Afrique, ces forces occultes sont considérées comme un mal primordial. Mais un autre principe général veut que ces forces puissent être canalisées et utilisées à fins constructives.' See also Geschiere 1997: 9-12, 23, 233; Niehaus 2001: 192).

impetus of different anti-witchcraft movements in the stakeholders' view, and the significance of this impetus for lasting reconciliation. Much of the ambiguity of occult belief systems may be explained by reference to the concept of Transnational Social Spaces (TSS; cf. Pries 2001; Sassen 2001), complemented by an analysis of the articulation between witchcraft accusations and the modes of production in which they are embedded (cf. Kohnert 2005). More often than not, the change over time of content and meaning of witchcraft accusations, appears to go unnoticed by the population and researchers alike, because its outward guise is one of continuity.

Due to the process of globalisation, the conventional comparative analysis of different states, or geographical and social entities, no longer suffices to explain the 'interlacing coherence networks' (Norbert Elias, quoted in Pries 2001: 3), constituting new social facts that emerged outside the unit of analysis of national societies or their local representations. Rather than simple comparative studies, simultaneous multi-site research with due regard to trans-local social spaces is required. In fact, this constitutes a basic insight of the TSS concept and the general methodological working hypothesis of this paper which should be tested in subsequent case studies (cf. Kohnert 2005: Pries 2001). The profound links between witchcraft and modernity, promoted by globalisation, such as the 'odd complicity' between occult belief systems in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and recent transformations of the world market, have already been aptly analysed by Geschiere (1997), the Comaroffs (1999a) and others.[22] These authors stress the dialectical interplay between the local and the global as heuristic dimensions of analysis. Nevertheless, either the state or the nation, even in its magic representation as an 'alien-nation' of zombies (cf. Comaroff/Comaroff 1999b: 21), remained a crucial but defective methodological point of reference for analysis.[23] Certainly, the trans-local dimension of occult belief systems has also been noted by various other authors, but they perceived it as a heuristic concept illuminating the linkage of local and global phenomena in its historical setting rather than one which reflects empirical facts (cf. Comaroff/Comaroff 1999a: 294). Yet, many stakeholders are caught up directly in trans-local social networks, which apparently exert an ever-increasing impact on modern structures of witchcraft accusations. These different roots of witchcraft violence have had serious repercussions on conflict resolution, as has been demonstrated elsewhere (cf. Kohnert 2003).

C. African Renaissance: divided between rationalism and emotion?

(1). Since the advent of colonial rule, official approaches, designed to cope with the problems of witchcraft violence in Africa, have been based on eurocentric views and colonial jurisdiction, legitimised by Western social science. These solutions are inadequate; in fact, they constitute part of the problem itself.

Scholarly interpretation of African belief systems was dominated during colonial rule and its aftermath by eurocentric prejudices, oscillating between paternalistic homage of the natives' "primitive" mode of thought and its ethical devaluation by the colonial policy under the

[22]. It goes without saying that 'modern' witchcraft accusations are often rooted in the colonial or even pre-colonial past, whereas 'tradition' has been invented time and again, by old and new authorities alike, e.g. to legitimise a change of power relations (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff 1999a; Geschiere 1997:6-9, 2000).

[23]. See Geschiere 1997: 6-8: '… nearly everywhere on the continent the state and politics seem to be a true breeding ground for modern transformations of witchcraft and sorcery'. Nevertheless, Comaroff & Comaroff (1999a), Geschiere and others underline the surprising capacity of the customary discourse on witchcraft to link the 'global' and the 'local', or micro and macro levels of popular interpretations of transition in modern Africa: 'Le marché mondial représente, comme la sorcellerie, une brèche dangereuse dans la clôture de la communauté locale.' (Geschiere 2000: 26).

pretext of the *moral education* of the natives [24]. Guided by an ideology of modernisation, formal institutions (such as the Christian churches and missionaries) and the (post) colonial state treated African belief in witchcraft as superstition which would be most probably eradicated by the process of modernisation. Therefore, the judiciary enacted anti-witchcraft laws which stipulated that both witchcraft and the accusation of witchcraft was punishable according to the law, thereby effectively preventing colonial courts from taking an active part in resolving the witchcraft fears of their subjects (cf. Kohnert 2005). The present jurisdiction in most African countries is still based on these biased colonial anti-witchcraft laws.

Under these conditions, in view of the apparent illegitimacy of state intervention along the lines of Western reasoning the stakeholders sought help in the informal sector. That is, they were left on their own, and subsequently often engaged in self-justice. This contributed to a rapid erosion of the state's monopoly on force, which seriously affected the legitimacy of public institutions. Even traditional authorities, formerly considered to be the guardians of customary law, are now at pains to cope with the situation because of considerable changes in the incidence, content, and form of witchcraft accusations over time, and the compromising attitude of traditional authorities during the apartheid regime. African independent and Pentecostal churches, mushrooming all over Africa, as well as "modern" witch-finders, such as leaders of politically motivated ANC-youth organizations, have emphatically offered to cater more effectively for the felt needs of the people than have either the state or traditional leaders. But it is open to question whether institutions or personalities belonging to the informal sector are always likely to act in the best interests of society.

In post-apartheid South Africa, for example, government, political parties, and trade unions alike, were under increasing pressure to take account of witchcraft beliefs, not only in order to prevent further loss of lives and property, but in order to combat the loss of their legitimacy as well. However, in actual practice, the stakeholders differed widely on how to deal with witchcraft. In September 1998 the National Conference on Witchcraft, organised by the Commission of Gender Equality (CGE) in the Northern Province, pushed government further to change its attitude towards witchcraft. Representatives of the CGE conceded an urgent need to develop new strategies which should not simply deny the existence of witchcraft, especially since this approach has utterly failed to work in the past. Besides educational and legal tasks, namely educational programmes and the revision of the anti-witchcraft act, the experts favoured among other things, spiritual alternatives, substitution of witchcraft violence by spiritual healing, and "activities to treat the communities' psychosocial needs." (CGE, 1999:49). According to a problem analysis by representatives of the South African Human Rights Commission (HRC), the "belief in witchcraft has the capacity to paralyse people", consequently witchcraft violence was seen as "a sign of a pathology in a community". Representatives of the Department of Constitutional Development declared witchcraft violence as "the number-one enemy of our society", and the Department of Justice deplored among other things its "negative effects on the economy of the country" (CGE, 1999:55).

However, in the past, neither the state nor liberation movements, political parties, or trade unions seemed to have cared very much about witchcraft. Only if social and political conflict boiled over to a veritable witch craze, was it deemed necessary to take notice officially. There is a growing awareness that current legislation such as the anti witchcraft legislation in Nigeria, Cameroon or South Africa, which still reflects colonial reasoning, is unable to cope with the problem (cf. Geschiere 1997:169-72, 185-197; Harnischfeger 2001; Hund 2004;

[24] Cf. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl „*La mentalité primitive*", Paris (1922), who contrasted the supposed rational reasoning of European civilisation, based on exact observation and logical conclusions, with the way of thinking of the „primitives", based on emotion, intuition and magic-religious interpretation of the world around them.

Minnaar 2001; Kohnert 2005). By its salomonic phrasing it punishes both the alleged witch and the allegedly bewitched, i.e. those who express their fear by witchcraft accusations [25]. It thus protects the real culprits, at least from the perspective of people believing in the existence of witchcraft. Therefore, the South African state, for example, has been challenged by both independent bodies and political parties such as the ANC, to "review the legal system from being euro-centric to reflecting the reality of a multicultural nation" (CGE, 1999:55). The Commission of Gender Equality (CGE), the Department of Justice, and the Law Commission of South Africa set up a committee to draw up proposals for a new law. In February 2000 it presented parliament with a first draft of the "Regulation of Baloyi Practices Act" [26]; however, apparently there has so far been no follow-up to these initiatives (cf. Hund 2004). The call of grass-root organisations, politicians and academics for an indigenisation of national laws and regulations, i.e. their adaptation to the African socio-cultural setting in general, and the official recognition of the existence of witchcraft in particular, are certainly justified, but only in as far as basic human rights are respected. Any attempt at a "domestication" of witchcraft violence by an opportunist indigenisation of legislation, based on the official recognition of witchcraft and of the accusers, e.g. traditional healers (*sangomas*, in South Africa) as plaintiffs, without due regard to universal concepts of human rights, is hardly to be considered as sustainable. It could perhaps help the state to regain credibility and legitimacy in the short run, but it may even promote the witch craze, accentuate social cleavages or lead to despotism of charismatic rulers in the long run.

(2). African ethno-philosophers opposed both colonialism and basic concepts of Western social science by propagating the return to the roots of an authentic African culture. This provoked among other things a re-evaluation of African religions, including occult belief systems, which were seen as real and effective, but essentially defensive and utilitaristic.

Representatives of African ethno-philosophy, such as Placide Tempels, Alexis Kagame, and the Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001), successfully opposed colonial rule and strengthened African identity. This holds particularly true for the concept of *Négritude*, as developed by Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Senghor, particularly in francophone Africa. *Négritude* was defined as comprising the totality of cultural values of the Black world, but the concept was nevertheless based on European cultural tradition, particularly of French intellectual origin [27]. It embraced nostalgic glorifications of the African philosophical tradition and the alleged harmony of African life. According to its advocates, there was a fundamental difference in the philosophical thinking between Africans, who underlined their collective identity, "*I feel (the other), … therefore I am*"[28], and the identity of

[25] Cf. the South African Witchcraft Suppression Act, passed in 1957, which sets a 20-year jail sentence for anyone who, professing a knowledge of witchcraft, names one person as having caused death, injury, grief, or disappearance of another. It also provides for up to five years in jail for anyone who "professes a knowledge of witchcraft, or the use of charms...(and) supplies any person with any pretended means of witchcraft". Cf. "Witchcraft law up for review, Parliament"; February 11, 2000, Sapa.

[26] *Baloyi* being the more precise Venda terminus for socio-cultural practices which could be loosely translated by the English word "witchcraft" (cf. ANC-news 14.02.00).

[27] In fact, Senghor was the first African elected to the distinguished Académie française in Paris in 1983. - Jean-Paul Sartre, in his introduction to Senghor (1948) characterised Négritude as "a weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis" (cf. http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/senghor.htm; 15.03.05; cf. Sartre, J.-P. 1948. "Orphée Noir", in: Senghor, L.S. (ed.) (1948): Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malagache de langue française. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1948: ix-xliv.

[28] "Voilà donc le Négro-africain qui sympathise et s'identifie, qui meurt à soi pour renaître dans l'autre. Il n'assimile pas; *il s'assimile*. Il vit avec l'autre en symbiose, *il con-naît à l'autre*, pour parler comme Paul Claudel.

Europeans, based on the Descartian imperative of the separation of body and mind: "*Cogito ergo sum; I think, therefore I am.*" [29].

Nevertheless, the proponents of Négritude maintained that Africans were not less rational than Europeans. However, according to Senghor, the African's reason is not discursive but synthetic, not antagonistic, but sympathetic. In short, it is another mode of knowledge. Reason does not impoverish the things, it does not grind them up in rigid schemes. The African is less interested in the appearance of an object than in its profound reality, i.e. in its sense. In short: "The European reason is analytic through utilisation, the reason of Negroes is intuitive through participation" (Senghor 1964:203).

The ethno-philosophy of the Négritude has had important repercussions on the interpretation of African religion and occult belief systems. Magic was seen by Senghor at the crossroads of the rational and the mystical, but nevertheless belonging to the realm of science: white magic, as an important means of defence against all sorts of misfortune; black magic, notably witchcraft, as an offensive weapon, which, however, was not peculiar to Africa. In both forms, magic was seen as strictly utilitaristic and individual [30].

However, for the Africans concerned this victory had ambiguous effects. In implementing their vision of *Négritude* the new African rulers may have reinforced the self-consciousness and the collective identity of their people. But at the same time, the collusion of African ethno-philosophers and elites served the continued suppression of their subjects under the pretext of an African renaissance. Therefore, African philosophers and sociologists highly critical of ethno-philosophy, such as Paulin J. Hountondji, sharply criticised both ethno-philosophy and the malevolent facets of globalised capitalism in Africa (cf. above). For them, ethno-philosophy only interpreted African realities differently, without contributing to its necessary transformations, treating it as an invariable ontological bond instead of a historical process. For Hountondji, African philosophy is an activity, a process that expresses and transcends itself, rather than a fixed system of truth, although it is inseparable from African science, the strength of which lies in its hypothetical nature and in the strive for knowledge and wisdom, since as with any science, there is no absolute truth in scientific research (cf. Hountondji 1996; 1994; Masolo 1994:199-203). As far as the belief in witchcraft is concerned, indigenous African knowledge, used effectively by traditional healers to answer problems caused by witchcraft, showed the limits of Cartesian rationalism. The latter was qualified as a "reductionist approach, reducing and impoverishing the recognition of reality" (cf. Hountondji 1994: 27; 23-27; Adjido 1994). Hountondji (1997) called for the resistance of African cultures against globalisation as the only way to guarantee self-determination and

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Sujet et objet sont, ici, dialectiquement confronté dans l'acte même de la connaissance, qui est acte d'amour. 'Je pense, donc je suis', écrivait Descartes. La remarque en a déjà été faite, on pense toujours *quelque chose*. Le Négro-africain pourrait dire: "Je sens l'Autre, je danse l'Autre, donc je suis.' Or, danser c'est créer, surtout lorsque la danse est danse d'amour. C'est, en tout cas, le meilleur mode de connaissance." Leopoldo Sédar Senghor, *Liberté I, négritude et humanisme*, Ed. du Seuil, 1964, p. 259.

[29] In short: *"L'émotion est nègre, la raison est hellène."* (emotion is Negro, reason is Hellenistic); cf. http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/senghor.htm; 15.03.05

[30] "La magie … n'est pas propre au Négro-africain. Elle n'est, en somme, qu'un recours contre l'anormal et, à ce titre, elle se trouve partout, même en Europe, chez le peuple. Pourtant il est intéressant de l'étudier, car l'accident est fréquent en Afrique noire, que *la magie se situe au croisement du rationnel et du mystique*. … Il est question d'une *technique*, d'une *science*. …Voilà la religion des Négro-africains dont Delafosse disait: 'Ces peuples, dont on a parfois nié qu'ils eussent une religion, sont, en réalité, parmi les plus religieux de la terre. Les préoccupations d'ordre divin l'emportent chez eux, le plus souvent, sur les préoccupations d'ordre purement humain'. … La magie entre dans le cadre de la religion négro-africaine en tant qu'elle est *défensive*, c'est à dire s'il s'agit de se protéger contre des actes de magie comme de tout malheur. … Et, en effet, sous sa forme offensive, la plus caractéristique (la sorcellerie, D.K.), la magie n'est pas proprement négro-africaine. … C'est que la magie, même sous sa forme défensive, a un *but strictement utilitaire et individuel*.» (Senghor, 1964:72-74; italics by Senghor).

sustainable development with a human and African face: *"For Africans, there are two forms of losing one's way: by immurement in particularism, or dispersion in the universal."* (Aimé Césaire)[31]

In the same vein, Ali A. Mazrui (1999:3-11) called for a qualified modernisation, i.e. for a development that is based on modernisation without dependency. Indigenisation of material and social resources, above all the use of African languages, of domestication, diversification, regional integration and counter-penetration, was seen as a strategy for promoting sustainable self-reliance[32].

(3). The Cartesian credo of the separation of body and mind, of emotion and reason, is to date the base for scholarly discussions of African belief in witchcraft. Generations of anthropologists since Evans-Pritchard (1937) have been at pains to prove that the Western logic of cause and effect is perfectly compatible with African magic reasoning. However, this credo reflects only half of the truth, as body and mind are intimately linked together, which makes rational action without strong emotions impossible. The combined effects of Descarte's error (cf. Damasio 1994) and Evans-Pritchard's fallacy lead to unfeasible rationalistic propositions for solutions concerning the eradication of witchcraft violence.

In general, Western educated experts, European and African alike, consider witchcraft basically as an "illogic and mistaken belief" which should be eradicated as soon as possible through education and critical assessment (CGE, 1999:49,53). As stated already by Wyatt MacGaffey in the preface to Geschieres (1997) reader , African systems of occult belief are anything but "irrational" as was demonstrated in 1937 by Evans-Pritchard's classical study of the Azande. Although its inherent logic can hardly be grasped in patterns of thought of natural science, its methodological structure is no less rational than the impulse-giving ethics of the Protestant spirit of capitalism in 19th century Europe, and Geschiere (1997) points out astonishing parallels between powerful African „*marabouts*" and the role attributed to public relations experts in American politics. The relevant distinction in this respect is that each adheres to a different rationality with different degrees of concern for values such as equality, solidarity, achievement and development orientation. In short, methodologically, the difference between the rationality of African witchcraft beliefs and Western forms of reasoning lies more in the degree of its "reduction of complexity", to borrow an expression from Niklas Luhman, than in the degree of rationality.[33]

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[31] Quoted by Hountondji (1997:24), with reference to one of the founding fathers of the Négritude, Aimé Césaire:."Aimé Césaire in a letter to Maurice Thorez, 1956.

[32] " … development is modernization minus dependency. But what is modernization? One possible answer is that modernization is change which is compatible with the present stage of human knowledge, which seeks to comprehend the legacy of the past, which is sensitive to the needs of the future, and which is increasingly aware of its global context. This is the positive interpretation of modernization. Skills and values are at the core. … Where does culture enter into this? If development equals modernization minus dependency, there is not doubt about the relevance of the African Renaissance in at least that part of the equation which concerns 'minus dependence'. African culture is central to this process of reducing dependency in the dialectic of modernization. One strategy of transcending dependency is indigenization, which includes greater utilization of indigenous techniques, personnel, and approaches to purposeful change."(cf. Mazrui 1999:3-11)

[33] "Zande belief in witchcraft in no way contradicts empirical knowledge of cause and effect. The world known to the senses is just as real to them as it is to us ... They are foreshortening the chain of events, and in a particular social situation are selecting the cause that is socially relevant and neglecting the rest" (Evans-Pritchard, 1937:73). (Thus) "witchcraft explains why events are harmful to man and not how they happen. A Zande perceives how they happen just as we do" (ibid.:72).

Although Evans-Pritchard (1937:21-39,63-83,99-106) was right in confronting common Western prejudices of the 1920s on primitive African thinking with the intrinsic logic of the belief in magic and witchcraft, this was just half of the truth. However, Evans-Pritchard's fallacy consisted in his focus on the rationality of occult belief systems, which deflected attention from its decisive role as an emotional base for survival. This fallacy may be illustrated in analogy to the results of research in neuro-physiology as developed by A. Damasio (1994) some ten years ago. Evans-Pritchard, and with him much of conventional economic anthropology, was probably wrong in underestimating the profound structural links between emotion and rational reasoning in human beings in general. Rational behaviour is at least as much influenced by deep seated emotions as by empirical knowledge. In fact, man can not act rationally without moving emotions. In contrast to the Cartesian postulate on the fundamental separation of body and soul (*cogito, ergo sum*), human decision making, by its very biological structure, is never determined by rational reasoning alone, but guided by emotions grown on, and deeply embedded in, the respective culture of the actor (Damasio, 1994:325-328). One may even go one step further in discussing the relevance of Gerald Edelman's (1992:232-236) hypothesis that the biological self, or at least vital parts of the human brain, have been conditioned and structured in the course of human genesis by basic values needed for survival. Thus, the evolution of mankind provided for the acceptance of basic human value-systems which guide its actions; Edelman´s thesis possibly even sheds new light on the controversy concerning the existence of universal human rights. According to neuro-physiological theories on cognition, the perception of the world in the human brain has been directed through the filter of positive and negative sentiments from the very moment of birth onwards. There exists a close neuro-biological link between feeling and thinking, which makes the existence of emotions (based on the respective socio-cultural setting) a precondition for any rational action of both Africans and Europeans. But even more important in this context, the linkage of ratio and emotions, born out of and developed within specific socio-cultural settings (cf. Damasio, 1994:327), is of immediate relevance for the resolution of the pressing social and political problems mentioned above, such as education or the propensity to violent mob actions against witches.

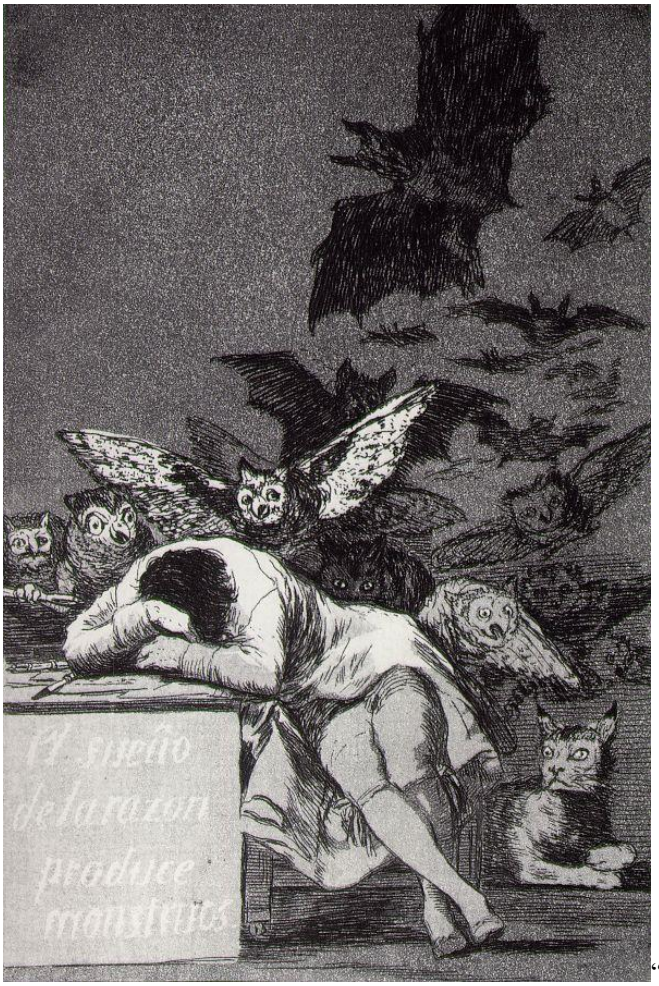
Rational action without deep emotions is impossible, because the lack of these emotions (by no means limited to the age-old controversy on value judgements in social science) deprives the mind of a vital driving force and measure gauge which enables the actor to choose an adequate action from a universe of different options. The underlying vision of Cartesian rationality as a remedy for major ills of development was in itself a fallacy. Some three centuries ago, Francisco Goya chastised a similar form of hubris in his famous Caprichos[34].

These fundamental emotional guidelines of every human being are not only rooted in the general biological history of mankind but to at least as great an extent in the specific socio-cultural setting responsible for the education and upkeep of any rational actor from birth. Because they are embedded in the respective cultures, these emotions are not easily exchangeable, and one would deprive Africans believing in witchcraft of the necessary means of survival if one were to try to eradicate this belief without providing similar strong and sustainable emotional alternatives.

Now, occult belief systems, like religions in general, induce not just a certain vision of the world and of human relations, but they also provide, as shown above, for strong emotions. This relates not just to individual hate, fear, or other emotions directly linked to witchcraft,

[34] Francisco Goya; Capricho 43, 1797-98: "*El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*", in English, "The dream [sleep] of reason produces monsters", which derives its ambiguity from two antagonistic interpretations, arising from the fact that the Spanish word *sueño* means "sleep" as well as "dream".

but to the whole fabric of the human emotional system, as indicated above. The state, NGOs or other progressive institutions of civil society would literally deprive the concerned of their ability to survive if they were to categorically deny them their belief in magic and witchcraft without providing, jointly within the framework of educational programmes and a gradual scientific dismantling of witchcraft belief (as advocated by the CGE and other institutions), a convincing source of equally strong alternative "development-enhancing" emotions. No wonder that most education programmes which concentrated on rational reasoning, whether implemented by missionaries, schools or the state, have utterly failed since the beginning of colonial rule.



"*The dream [sleep] of reason produces monsters*"
Francisco Goya (1793), Caprichos Nr. 43

If it is specific manners of reducing complexity, and not different rationalities which are the major distinction between African magic and Western rational reasoning, then generations of social anthropologists since Evans-Pritchard have been right in stressing (apparently without much effect) that Western educated scientists, experts, and politicians should be especially careful not to cultivate the hubris of rationality in their dialogue with African stakeholders. "Irrational behaviour" due to methodologically unsound reduction of complexity is common in Western societies, too.[35] Thus, I revert to the central theme of my

[35] In order to avoid ethnocentric misconceptions I want to stress again that many aspects of occult belief systems and their rationality are not restricted to African countries. Even in the USA, the belief in witchcraft was officially recognised as a religion in 1982 by the High Court, under the term of *Wicca*. The latter, as contemporary anti-witchcraft cults in Africa, is far from being a traditionally-minded belief system. It propagates its objectives with the help of modern concepts and technology, and even has its own website. The revival of

argument: the open society and its enemies, to borrow a phrase from Karl R. Popper, the Nestorius of neo-positivist philosophy. The given socio-cultural setting and social structure have become the cornerstones of the Western delimitation of objectivity and rationality, just as the denunciation of persons as witches by their fellow citizens depends finally, at least according to the classical interpretation of African witchcraft by Evans-Pritchard (as quoted above), on the social recognition of certain worldviews on cause and effect.

(4). African religious systems provided a framework for valuable indigenous solutions to current problems of contemporary life, including the problem of witchcraft violence. Besides this, they might, under certain conditions, provide the outside world with an inspiring new dimension of philosophic thought and emancipative action, for example, within the realm of conflict resolution and reconciliation. However, even in the case of the 'domestication' of witchcraft violence, this holds only in so far as appropriate African answers can be shielded against the negative impact of globalised capitalism.

The concept, methods and lessons learned for example from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (cf. Maluleke 2001; Campbell 2000), later on copied by other African states like Rwanda, Sierra Leone or Ghana, might be highly relevant, not just for fellow Africans, but also for conflict solving cultures of industrialised countries (cf. Salazar et al 2004). Deliberative processes of truth and reconciliation in politics, as organised by the TRC, could, in transforming a plurality of people into a community, make our hopes and opinions at the same time ethical and rational. Public and attentive discussion of individual truth with respect to violent conflicts opens up the chance to create ethical knowledge and shared ethical truth (cf. Garver 2004). Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the general implications of this thesis in more detail. In the following, I would like to focus on the societal problems caused by occult belief systems, and especially on witchcraft violence.

In May 2000 the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) began its hearings on politically motivated witchcraft violence in Northern Province. ANC supporters, convicted in 1990 and serving long-term sentences for their attacks, applied for amnesty with respect to the murder of 26 villagers in the former Bantustan of Venda between 1989 and 1993. The applicants claimed they perceived their victims as persons who were practising witchcraft and who, in doing so were collaborating with traditional chiefs and politicians of the hated "homeland" government of Venda in order to strengthen their position. The TRC finally granted amnesty to 33 applicants in June 2000, ten others were refused amnesty. In summary, reconciliation in Northern Province proved to be difficult, but not impossible.

The official post-apartheid vision of the reality of witchcraft represented an important shift in the public discourse on witchcraft (cf. Niehaus 2002:184-85, 199). The massive and hitherto unimaginable involvement of the state, trans-local and even trans-national social, political and academic networks in a local discourse on witchcraft, driven by an

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occult belief systems around the world has different, hitherto unexplored sources which call for comparative in-depth investigations by ongoing research. The obsession with isolating and fixing the "true" ideas and emotions of human beings by technical investigation must, however, inevitably fail, as it is based on a methodological fallacy. Our conception of both human nature and scientific objectivity in general can not be isolated and fixed by science once and for all, as both depend on the unremitting evolution of knowledge, the possibility of mutual exchange and critique, and last but not least, on actual social conventions and social structures encouraging or averting critical reflection of our present knowledge (cf. Popper, 1972:112). The latter is decisive in setting the limits between legitimate critical discourse on the one hand, and dogmatic pursuit of "enemies to society" or witch-hunts on the other.

understanding attitude vis-à-vis the stakeholders concerned (unlike early colonial administration and missionaries), and the weakness of counteracting vested interests of other implicated groups, opened new chances for conflict resolution. Beside the impact of trans-local forces on conflict resolution, such as the Commission of Gender Equality (CGE), it was probably facilitated by the relatively strong inward orientation of the population: characterised firstly by the remarkable absence of strong migrant, civic or underground informal political organisations, and secondly, by the low key profile, if not absence, of trans-local social networks who wanted to profit from the violence, the strong backing of witch-hunts by the co-villagers, and the corresponding legitimacy the persecutors had in the emic view.

In contrast, the different nature of trans-local networks and modes of production fuelling the hotbed of violence in the Transkei (cf. Kohnert, 2003), put local reconciliation efforts at risk right from the beginning. Witchcraft related violence, although not open visible, was considerable here, as in the Northern Province, but it did not draw the same sympathetic attention of external actors like the CGE, as in Northern Province. Therefore, the "case" of Tsolo and Qumbu was handled by the post-apartheid authorities with the conventional means which most democratic governments used to handle outbreaks of domestic violence in disfavoured regions: i.e. policing, awareness campaigns and development programmes, as usual hampered by the constraints of inadequate resources and ineffective projects. Yet, it would be misleading to excuse the lack of interest in the violence, particularly in its occult dimension, merely by ignorance. Last but not least because of its sensitive political nature, the conflict was obscured by a longstanding "culture of silence and untruth" (Peires, 1999:1f), comparable only with what was apparently a politically motivated disguise of the aftermath of the conflicts in KwaZulu Natal in the 1990s by the post-apartheid regime. Neglected by the outside world, the villagers decided in May 1999 to take matters in their own hands in order to achieve peace and reconciliation. Trusting in their own local culture, in which public confession of the truth behind the aggression was considered to be the ultimate condition of any conflict resolution, they, in fact, applied similar principles to the TRC on the national level, but unfortunately with different results. The outside interference of conflicting political forces (e.g. ANC, South African Communist party and the ultra right Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), rival trade unions in the mines, and other trans-local networks with vested interests (e.g. a "Third World Mafia" trading in drugs and weapons)), by no means congruent with the legitimate interests of the local community, and of a quite different nature those involved in Northern Province, proved to be too strong to be handled by the villagers alone. They had to tackle unknown forces, the involvement of 'modern' elements of globalised markets of violence, brought to their villages by way of integration into new trans-national social spaces propelled by the forces of globalisation in general, and the transition process of the apartheid regime in particular. Once this Pandora's box had been opened, there was apparently no way out that the villagers themselves could have made use of.

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Zusammenfassung: Die Analyse okkulter Glaubenssysteme in Afrika stellt eine einzigartige Möglichkeit dar, zu zeigen, dass angeblich rückständige afrikanische Denkweisen, wie der Magie- und Hexenglaube, höchst modern sind und erheblichen Einfluss auf die Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsstrukturen der betroffenen Völker haben. Offizielle Ansätze zur Bewältigung der durch Hexenanklagen bedingten gewaltsamen Konflikte bauen seit der Kolonialzeit auf einer durch eurozentrische Sichtweisen geprägten Kolonialgesetzgebung auf, die, legitimiert durch eine vorurteilsgeladene westlich geprägte Sozialwissenschaft, zum Bestandteil des Problems selbst wurde. Afrikanische Religionen bieten Ansätze für die Fortentwicklung tragfähigerer eigenständiger Lösungsansätze. Darüber hinaus können sie unter bestimmten Bedingungen auch westlichen Kulturbereichen neue, innovative Dimensionen philosophischen Denkens und emanzipativen Handelns bieten, zum Beispiel im Bereich der gesellschaftlichen Konfliktlösung und Versöhnung. Afrikanische Lösungsansätze für die Gewaltanwendung im Rahmen von Hexenanklagen greifen allerdings nur, insoweit sie gegen negative Einflüsse einer globalisierten liberal-kapitalistischen Wirtschaftsordnung geschützt werden können.