

Witchcraft, witch killings and Christianity: The works of religion and parallel cosmologies in Tanzania

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Introduction

According to one statistical survey, 60 per cent of the population of Tanzania is Christian, 36 per cent Muslim and 4 per cent subscribes to another or no religion. What is more striking about this survey is that 93 per cent of Tanzanians believe in witchcraft (Christians 94 per cent, Muslims 92 per cent) and traditional African religious beliefs and practices are prevalent among 62 per cent of the population (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2010: 34, 64, 178). Although one should be cautious about these statistics, they may nevertheless indicate the ubiquity of witchcraft in Tanzania and the prevalence of traditional beliefs among even Christians and Muslims. The figure of 93 per cent regarding belief in witchcraft is remarkable, if accurate, and implies that witchcraft beliefs are far more common in Tanzania than in other countries. Even if the actual percentage is considerably lower, it would seem that witchcraft is widespread.

The Sukuma group, numbering about five million, mainly live along the southern shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania. For more than a century, they have been integrated into the global world, but in varying degree, and missionaries have been spreading the Gospel and Christianising the Sukuma since the 1880s. Traditionally, the society was culturally and cosmologically structured around the chief and rainmaking. Everything depended on the rain. The chief was responsible for providing the life-giving rains believed to heal the land, a power that afforded him legitimacy as ruler. Both chieftainship and rainmaking have now disappeared, while at the same time Christianity is spreading and both witchcraft and witch killings are flourishing (with more than 500 alleged witches killed annually in Tanzania, predominantly among the Sukuma). Similarly, the role of the ancestors has diminished and tradition is no longer as important in culture and cosmology. In a religious context, rainmaking is perceived as not working anymore and the role of ancestors is declining. Thus, the overall questions are: Is the declining role of ancestors enabling *both* the spread of Christianity and the increase in witchcraft? How and why are witchcraft and

1. This chapter was presented as a paper at the Satterthwaite Colloquium in Grasmere, the Lake District, England in 2014, and builds on T. Oestigaard (2014) *Religion at Work in Globalised Traditions. Rainmaking, Witchcraft and Christianity in Tanzania*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.

Christianity as religious practices seemingly working perfectly together? What are the consequences when traditions disappear and how are society and cosmology being restructured? These questions will be analysed through an approach that emphasises the work and works of religion.

How religions work – beyond structural functionalism

Notwithstanding exegesis, dogma and theology, religions are always concerned with practical human problems in some way. “Our approach is not concerned with the origins of religions so much as their *functions*. We relate and explain the force of religious ideas by reference to the needs of individuals in their everyday lives, not to society and its forms,” Reynolds and Tanner argue. They continue: “We have become convinced by the evidence worldwide that *the function of religions is to respond to human needs*, to help people at times of personal crises (e.g., at funerals), or when they are undergoing a change of status (e.g., at weddings), or generally in relation to everyday strains of normal life. Ours is thus a *functional approach*” (Reynolds and Tanner 1995:15). Moreover, “religion caters to needs at all levels, but perhaps mostly at the more basic level ... However ... the concept of need ... is not sufficient to explain what religions appear to be doing in the world” (Reynolds and Tanner 1995:305).

By emphasising that religion functions and works, it is necessary to clarify my meaning in the term *religions work*. Concepts such as “work” and in particular “function” have, as part of the criticism of structural functionalism, gained negative connotations in the history of anthropological thought. In *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity*, Roy Rappaport asserted that “neither religion ‘as a whole’ nor its elements will, in the account offered to them, be reduced to functional or adaptive terms.” He continued: “An account of religion framed, *a priori*, in terms of adaptation, function or other utilitarian assumptions or theory would ... paradoxically, defeat any possibility of discovering whatever utilitarian significance it might have by transforming the entire inquiry into a comprehensive tautology” (Rappaport 2001:2). This example suffices for me to make my point: I do *not* perceive religion in adaptive terms.

Rather, allow me to approach religion from the perspective of the divine realm (or, at least, how it is perceived and presented by believers), and start with Christianity and its Jewish antecedents. Christianity *works* and very much so, if we are to believe Christians. In Hebrew myth, there is creation from nothing: “And God said. ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). By the word alone, God created the cosmos and the world and all within it in only six days. This is the kind of work I refer to when I say religions *work*. Importantly, in Christianity there is a fundamental doctrine that “God works in mysterious ways.” Thus, humans may or may not know how and why God works, but that does not matter. Even if humans have only partial knowledge of this, they have

sufficient to adhere to the cosmic laws given by God. And here God works again. Jesus was crucified and by taking on human sin, he ensured salvation for all. As a consequence, if one follows the rules, one may attain eternal life in heaven. This is a huge promise and a durable work of a God – what more can a devotee wish for? Miracles are another way of illustrating that religion works, and in this particular case, the Christian God works. Believers truly believe that miracles take place, that prayers and wishes are suddenly fulfilled, and that sometimes miracles happen without human requests. These are simply the works of God originating in and fulfilled through his own plans. However, for sinners, that is, those who act against God and his will, and this is also a sign of free will (Hertz 1996), God has worked in other ways to prepare a rather unpleasant destiny for eternity, hell in its various elaborations throughout history.

However, in emphasising the function and work of gods, one must also address questions of time and scale. Gods may once have worked in a primordial era, but may not do so anymore. This does not alter the ontological status of the gods as existing: in a cosmic perspective, humans are not in a position to demand that gods work for them (indeed, in Christianity this is seen as heresy). The Supreme Being among the Sukuma is one such god. It is impossible to reach him through sacrifices and prayers and he is so remote that he does not interfere in the fate of individuals. He is not working any longer because he has done his job. What he created, exists and has never changed, and therefore he has withdrawn (Cory 1960:15). If there were no such conception of gods, cosmic principles or divinities working on a grand scale, including the Buddhist conceptions of karma, there would be no religion as broadly defined. In practice, a kind of Western atheism would prevail.

Thus, I am not concerned here with the origins or existence as such of religion. My approach is the believers' approach in practice: God, gods and the ancestors exist, including various malignant forces such as the devil, roaming ghosts, etc. But they do not merely exist in another sphere: in varying measure, they influence this world. From this and the believer's perspective, what are the beliefs about how the spirits and divinities of the other world, which are superior to humans, function and work in this world? How do they intervene and in which realms do different religions (defined broadly) impact worldly matters? This approach also emphasises which rituals are performed and how people can approach their gods, divinities and ancestors with a view to changing daily life in this world. As I will argue, Christianity and the world of the ancestors, including the practice of witchcraft, operate on different premises and affect this world in substantially different ways. Precisely because of this, they can coexist and work hand in hand.

A common feature of many African cosmologies is the division of the world into two distinct realms. One is the visible or the manifest world, which is "ob-

vious” to all, and the other is the invisible or unseen world, which is nevertheless as real as the visible world. Indeed, it is more real in that it structures and defines the premises of this world. The visible world is the everyday world of living – farming, collecting water and fuel, political and economic matters, etc. The invisible world comprises the ancestors, God and the realm of witchcraft and the occult, among other spiritual forces. These two realms are intrinsically linked and the invisible forces largely determine outcomes in the visible world. The visible world is therefore shaped by a deeper, “more real” reality, and consequently, it is of utmost importance to control the spiritual and occult forces that would otherwise harm society (Sanders 2001:169). In many cosmologies, humans facing problems turn to the ancestors or gods. Religion works and may have practical consequences here and now.

On the other hand, Christianity, in practice, works quite differently. The here and now is largely omitted from the realm of this religion. Whether people starve or die, plagues haunt society and diseases kill animals, women are debarred and life-giving rains do not come at the right time, there is a double perception at work. On one hand, these misfortunes are not believed to be the Christian God’s work. Although in principle the Christian God can control these events and processes, since he is believed to be almighty, it is also believed that such mundane problems are not the concerns of God in his daily and practical work. Or rather, although mitigating worldly problems *may* be a concern of God, usually he does not solve them here and now. Rather, these misfortunes are placed within the larger cosmological framework in which God works. Thus, on the other hand, such misfortune is also commonly and in varying degree seen as God’s penalty for sin. Throughout Christian history, God is believed to have punished sinners and unbelievers collectively with plagues, droughts and floods. In other words, it is not for God to solve the problems he has brought down on sinners and misbelievers. That is for humans to do, cosmologically through obedience and repentance and practically by surviving as best they can.

This does not imply the Christian God does not work (in all senses of the term, including penalising humans). To the contrary, he does very much work, with eternal consequences for humanity, if one is to believe Christianity. However, his main active engagement in the cosmos is after humans die. The grace of God may send some to heaven for eternity, whereas others may be doomed to hell. Indeed, this is a very powerful way of having an active god at work, and was ultimately used by missionaries as *the* main argument why one should convert to Christianity.

Apart from eschatology and what may happen after death, the ways in which the Christian God works as compared to the ancestors point to a crucial aspect in one’s attempts to understand religion and how it works in society. There are two main differences. First, Christianity mainly works in the other world and

the hereafter, whereas ancestors work in the here and now in society. Thus, the religions resolve different problems in different realms. Christianity may promise an eternal life in heaven, but cannot (or at least does not) procure the life-giving rains upon which people are utterly dependent for life and well-being or solve any other acute problems here and now. The ancestors can resolve the latter problem. This brings us to the second difference: the ancestors are active and can be contacted and requested to solve current problems. Thus, *the ancestors can be activated, or, in other words, humans may manipulate the divine world for their own betterment*. This is also in the interests of the ancestors, since the descendants are their heirs and family. An approach such as this is not possible in Christianity. There is no way humans can manipulate God to secure health and wealth through ritual and sacrifice. One may pray, but the outcomes are highly uncertain. Miracles are believed to take place in Christianity, but where, when and why is a mystery. Even Christians acknowledge that miracles to solve problems in this world happen rarely. The rule of the game is that humans have to solve their problems themselves. The ways and means by which humans engage in the world and solve their problems are, however, judged after death, and include severe penalties for eternity.

This has created a space for different religious practices to operate on different scales by different means. Wijzen and Tanner state that “the Sukuma see religion in terms of the options it provides rather than the obligations it creates. They have periodic problems and their religious practices tend to be periodic” (Wijzen and Tanner 2000:30). Thus, conversion to Christianity is not a straightforward displacement of one religion by another. Instead, it is a process of syncretism or parallel cosmologies. The different religious systems offer different possibilities and solutions to various problems. The benefits of Christianity are also largely its main shortcoming – it does not solve the most acute problems here and now, the problems that *have* to be resolved. Consequently, religious solutions are sought elsewhere. This highlights the premises on which the Sukuma world works. “Causation in their thinking is animate rather than inanimate. An event, particularly an unfortunate one, has to be caused by someone or something, living or dead, with malevolent intentions toward the sufferer. There are no pure accidents in Usukuma” (Wijzen and Tanner 2000:47). As will be discussed, this is the realm in which belief in witchcraft flourishes.

Although it was held that one could achieve much the same results by propitiating the ancestors, there was a sense that in the modern world it is better to use the modern way and not approach the ancestors. They are connected with the past and tradition, but witchcraft is connected to the challenges of today and tomorrow. Thus, witchcraft has to some extent replaced the role of ancestors and is perceived as a way of being modern.

Witchcraft and witch killings

According to the 2002 Tanzania Witchcraft Act (Cap. 18 [R.E.2002]), witchcraft is defined as “sorcery, enchantment, bewitching, the use of instrument of witchcraft, the purported exercise of any occult power and purported possession of any occult knowledge” (Tanzania Human Rights Report 2011: 33). All acts of witchcraft are punishable if murders are committed, and in January 2009 Prime Minister Misengo Pinda stated that those caught in the act of murdering albinos should be killed on the spot (Bryceson et al. 2010: 374).

A phenomenon peculiar to the Sukuma in Tanzania has been the intensity of witch killing, although such killings also occur in other regions. Since the 1960s, witch killings have increased significantly in Sukumaland (Abrahams 1994:15). According to Tanner in the 1950s, old men could still remember that before the Germans occupied the country witchcraft was rare (Tanner 1956a: 443). Similarly, in the 1960s witchcraft incidents were rare (Per Brandström personal com.). Still, the problem of witchcraft was acknowledged by the British and the territory’s high court produced a table of murder statistics in mid-1944 (Mesaki 1993: 64).

Table 1: Murder cases in Sukumaland 1935–1943

Year	Murder cases	Witch-related
1935	35	5
1936	20	4
1937	39	4
1938	40	7
1939	26	3
1940	41	5
1941	30	3
1942	35	4
1943	56	11

Source: Mesaki 1993.

There are, of course, uncertainties about the actual number of witch killings and many killings may not have been reported to the authorities. In any case, even if the actual number was two or five or even ten times higher, it would nevertheless have been modest compared to the rate from the 1970s onwards. In short, there seems to have been a dramatic increase in murders associated with witchcraft.

Importantly, statistics in Tanzania are highly unreliable, and there are serious methodological obstacles regarding witch killings. Apart from the fact that the statistics are not published and are largely based on second- or third-hand observations (for example, anonymous police sources largely impossible to check), it is also unclear how witch killings are documented, or what is categorised as

a “witch killing.” Witchcraft may also be used as a local term for violent death and police officers often use it loosely (Stroeken 2010: 199). Thus, the actual numbers may be higher or lower than the figures presented here.

The killing of suspected witches became gradually more noticeable in the 1960s and notoriously so by the mid-1970s. By the end of the 1980s, the situation seemed to be out of control and the government instituted the Mongela Commission on witchcraft in 1988 to investigate the phenomenon. The commission’s conclusions were alarming (Mesaki 2009: 72-3) Between 1970 and 1984, 3,693 suspected witches were killed – 1,407 men and 2,286 women (Mesaki 1993: 98). Here it is important to add a comment on the statistics, since the number of killed witches is 3,693 whereas the number of witch-related cases was 3,333. Mesaki explains: “It should be noted that the number of cases does not necessarily match the number of those killed because a single case can lead to several deaths while in other cases no murders occur” (Mesaki 1993: 99).

Table 2: Witch killings in Tanzania 1970–1984

Year	Cases	Men	Women
1970	106	31	84
1971	181	50	133
1972	133	49	106
1973	308	135	192
1974	216	74	156
1975	242	87	168
1976	219	68	175
1977	189	94	131
1978	164	41	172
1979	225	81	163
1980	220	116	119
1981	294	199	158
1982	221	97	151
1983	324	144	212
1984	291	141	163
Total	3,333	1,407	2,286

Source: Mesaki 1993.

Mwanza and Shinyanga regions accounted for no fewer than 2,246 of these witch killings, and in the following period, from 1985-88, a further 826 were killed in Sukumaland, for a total of 3,072 in this area between 1970 and 1988. The statistics on the killings from 1970–84 were broken down on a regional basis by Mesaki (1993: 99).

Thus, the killing of witches has mainly been a Sukuma phenomenon and among the 2,246 Sukuma killings before 1984, 1,869 were women and 377

Table 3: Regional distribution of witch killings 1970–1984

Region	Cases	Men	Women
Iringa	132	120	16
Kagera	82	77	70
Kigoma	17	10	7
Mara	3	2	1
Mbeya	13	13	-
Morogoro	1	1	-
Mtwara	1	6	-
Mwanza	1,098	269	927
Pwani	2	1	1
Ruvuma	4	3	1
Singida	731	675	185
Shinyanga	1,022	108	942
Tabora	227	122	133
Total	3,333	1,407	2,286

Source: Mesaki 1993.

were men aged over 15 years, a ratio of 5 to 1. Of the women victims, 62 per cent were 41 and older, that is, post-menopausal. On a monthly basis, some 10–12 people were killed for suspected witchcraft among the Sukuma (Wijsen and Tanner 2002: 135), with an average of 160 deaths a year in Mwanza and Shinyanga regions. For Tanzania as a whole, there were 246 killings per year on average.

From 1984 to 1993 there are no reliable figures for killings of alleged witches. A newspaper reported in 1998 that 325 people had been killed in Shinyanga region from 1996 to 1998: 133 in 1996, 102 in 1997, and 90 between January and October 1998. Another survey conducted by TAMWA (Tanzania Media Women's Association) revealed that between 1993 and 1998 in Mwanza region alone, 318 elderly people had been killed. According to a police official in Shinyanga region, however, when other innocents who are killed in remote villages are taken into account, murder would be seen to occur more or less daily in Shinyanga and Mwanza regions (Mesaki 2009:73), although not all these deaths are related to witchcraft. A leaked Ministry of Home Affairs report indicated that 5,000 people had been killed between 1994 and 1998 (Duff 2005), although not all these deaths were necessarily related to witchcraft.

Prime Minister Pinda told parliament in late January 2009 that 2,866 elderly people accused of being witches had been murdered in the past five years, for an average of 573 a year (Banda 2009). The police in Mwanza reported in February 2009 that more than 2,585 old women had been killed in eight (of 21) mainland regions of Tanzania over the previous five years (Tanzania Human Rights Report 2009: 21).

Table 4: Witch killings in 8 regions 2004–2008

Region	Deaths in the five years prior to February 2009	Average deaths per year/region
Mwanza	698	140
Shinyanga	522	105
Tabora	508	102
Iringa	256	52
Mbeya	192	39
Kagera	186	37
Singida	120	24
Rukuwa	103	21
Total (eight districts)	2,585	517

Source: Tanzania Human Rights Report 2009.

Based on these numbers, every third day an old woman accused of being a witch was killed in Mwanza region, and every fourth day in Shinyanga. The actual number of killings of suspected witches was believed to be higher, because not all such killings are reported to the police. As one respondent from Shinyanga put it: “It’s risky to inquire of the police about a relative killed due to witchcraft ... because you will be regarded as an accomplice. And they might end up taking your life as well” (Tanzania Human Rights Report 2009: 21).

The number of witch killings may total more than 1,000 a year. In a newspaper interview in 2005, Simeon Mesaki asserted that in Shinyanga region a minimum of 300 witch killings take place annually, and the total was most likely the same in Mwanza. According to an official who wanted to remain anonymous: “The government figures are very low, not accurate. I know a much higher number, and even that is not the full situation” (Duff 2005).

Official statistics and statements suggest that in the period 1970–84 an average of 246 people were killed as witches, whereas today almost 600 people are killed annually. In each year from 1970 to 1988, an average of 160 persons were murdered in Mwanza and Shinyanga region, whereas this number has now increased to 245. In Tabora region, the annual average has increased from 17 killings to 102. However, according to the Tanzania Human Rights Report 2010, in that year about 50 people were killed in Tanzania because of witchcraft accusations. Although this number is provisional, compared to previous years there has been a significant decrease (Tanzania Human Rights Report 2010:57). In 2011, however, the national figures were higher according to the Tanzania Human Rights Report:

Between 2005 and 2011, about 3,000 people were lynched to death by fearful neighbours who believed them to be witches. This suggests that an average of 500 elderly people, old women ... in particular [are] killed [on] suspicion of being witches annually all over Tanzania. For instance, 242 people were killed due to witchcraft beliefs in Shinyanga alone from January 2010 to June 2011 ... [P]

olice statistics [also show] the growing trend of killings due to witchcraft beliefs from 579 in 2010 to 642 in 2011 (Tanzania Human Rights Report 2011:34).

The discrepancy between the numbers given in the 2010 report and the 2011 report was explained by new data provided by the police in a letter. In the *Tanzania Human Rights Report 2012* it is reported that 630 persons were killed as alleged witches (Tanzania Human Rights Report 2012: 31). In the *Tanzania Human Rights Report 2013* it is written that witchcraft related killings claimed the lives of 765 people – 505 women and 260 men (Tanzania Human Rights Report 2013: 36). In 2013, a new form of abuse was encountered, with many people being buried alive for various alleged misdemeanours, often including suspicions of witchcraft. In sum, despite gaps in official statistics and the shortcomings of other surveys, the conclusion appears to be unequivocal: the killing of accused witches has increased dramatically.

As a comparison, in the whole of Europe there were about 90,000 prosecutions of witches and some 45,000 executions during the 300 years the main witch craze lasted (Levack 2006:23). If the rate of witch killings in Tanzania is 500 per year or more, then there will be more witch killings in Tanzania in only a century than there were during Europe's much longer witch craze. The estimates may be too high, but even if only 150 witches are killed each year in Tanzania, this is equal to the rate of executions throughout Europe. Indeed, the witch craze seems to be spiralling out of control, as evidenced by, inter alia, the killing of albinos and the even more recent trend to kill people for their wealth.

Albino killings and the mining industry

Albinos have traditionally been stigmatised and discriminated against in society and there are numerous rumours that albino children have been killed at birth as 'mercy killings.' In agro-pastoral communities, albino babies have also been placed in the cattle kraal gateway and trampled to death, but those who survived were allowed to live. Births have been reported as stillbirths and albinos have often been called *zeruzeru*, which is believed to refer to *zero*, an archaic term for ghost-like creatures, probably referring to the lack of pigment and denial of personhood (Bryceson, Jønsson and Herrington 2010: 367–8). In the past, giving birth to an albino was seen as a bad omen. The whole family was stigmatised. Other villagers were not allowed to marry the albino, but people were also reluctant to marry any other member of that family for fear that their own children would be albinos. Albinos were stigmatised in the same way as people with leprosy. Even a visit by an albino was seen as a bad omen and people refused to eat and share food with them.

Today, however, this has in principle changed, and people marry members of families with albinos. Even so, the lives of albinos have gone from bad to worse.

When albinos are born, men often accuse their wives of unfaithfulness with the devil or white people, and there are also widespread beliefs that children born with albinism are punishment for an ancestor's wrongdoing or for having sex during menstruation (Ackley 2010: 44). The sexual connotations of albinism have taken new form in recent years, the most disturbing being the belief that sex with an albino may cure HIV/AIDS (Baker, Lund, Taylor and Nyathi 2010: 177). Albino women are even raped because of this belief (Alum, Gomez and Ruis 2009: 8–9).

Albino killings in Tanzania began in 2006, but there were also earlier reports. From 2000 to 2009, the number of albinos killed was 68 (Tanzania Human Rights Report 2011: 36). However, from 2007 to 2009 alone 59 albinos were killed (six in 2007, 37 in 2008 and 16 in 2009) and nine were mutilated. In 2010 and 2011, there were no reports of albinos being killed (Tanzania Human Rights Report 2010: 58–9), whereas one albino was killed in 2012.

The killing of albinos among the Sukuma is a recent phenomenon and seemed to “come from nowhere” (Bryceson, Jønsson and Herrington 2010: 368, 379 fn. 10). In the 1980s and 1990s, there were rumours that bald people would bring prosperity and as a consequence such people were reported decapitated and their heads used in magic potions. Thus, apart from witch killings, there are indications that people were killed and used for various purposes among the Sukuma, although these practices would also be part of the world of ancestors. Still, the killing of albinos is new. Why albinos and why as part of witchcraft?

According to the Tanzanian government, there are about 1.5 million artisanal miners out of a total population of some 40 million, and Mwanza and Shinyanga have seen more mineral rushes than other regions (Bryceson, Jønsson and Herrington 2010: 379). The work is dangerous and the miners have no medical insurance, so many of them believe they need powerful witchcraft protection. Moreover, if they have money, there is always the danger it might be stolen. They also believe they need good luck to find the minerals. Thus, there is a double need for witchcraft: protection and good fortune.

It is impossible to know which parts of an albino's body will be used, but often it is the legs from below the knees. It is believed that one cannot start working in the mines without first going to a traditional healer, and success or failure depends on the effectiveness of the medicines. And even if a man has no place or mine where he can start digging, if he has consulted a traditional healer he can start searching anywhere, even outside the mines, and achieve success and riches. The miner does not pay the healer in advance. However, after the miner has struck gold or diamonds, he will return to the traditional healer, who will instruct him on how to use his finds. In many cases, the traditional healer will claim the first find as payment for providing good luck, and the next find of gold or diamonds will belong to the miner. Consequently, many traditional healers

are exceedingly rich, at least by local standards. If a miner does not return to the healer with his share, it is believed that all of his haul will magically disappear and the miner will be left with nothing.

Some believe the origin of albino killings has its roots in macabre Nigerian movies, which are popular among the miners when they have time off. One police officer allegedly commented that “an influx of Nigerian movies, which play up witchcraft, might have something to do with it, along with rising food prices that were making people more desperate.” According to other Tanzanian policemen, the value of a killed albino, including all four limbs, genitals, ears, nose and tongue, may amount to USD 75,000 (Ackley 2010). Others believe albinos are killed because they are not useful and will not be missed in society, while another explanation is the analogy between the rare occurrence of gold and the rareness of albino charms. How this practice began will most likely remain hidden, but it is undoubtedly propagated by the *waganga* (medical practitioners). Even though nobody really knows why and how albino charms work, the belief that they do keeps such beliefs and practices alive (Bryceson, Jønsson and Herrington 2010: 368–9, 371).

The use of body parts in medicines is based on the assumption that it is possible to appropriate another person’s life-force literally through the consumption of that person. It is also believed that the acquired life-power is much greater if the body parts are removed while the victim is still alive (Vincent 2008:43). This has other implications: “The albino fetish has become the most expensive because it is perceived as harnessing spirits that are far more powerful than any plant or animal charm that *waganga* could otherwise offer” (Bryceson, Jønsson and Herrington 2010: 371). As a consequence, there has also been a transition from healers to dealers (Bryceson, Jønsson and Herrington 2010: 364).

Although it is often claimed that the use of body parts in witchcraft is recent, this is only partly correct. In Tanzania, among the Sukuma, for instance, there were practices in the past involving such uses. These were, however, very limited. Recent ritual innovation has led to an increase in such practices and to their incorporation into spheres where previously there were no such traditions. In this sense, current witchcraft practices build on and continue older worldviews and practices, which are reinterpreted and more widely adopted.

Chief Charles Kafipa of Bukumbi chiefdom explained past traditions of using body parts in medicines and how they worked (personal communication). The killing of albinos and use of their body parts in medicines is not part of tradition and, indeed, the chief argued strongly that it was against tradition. Moreover, according to him, those who kill albinos and use this type of medicine will not be successful in their endeavours: killing people for medicine is murder and has no ritual effects, and such killings are seen by all as truly horrible.

Still, according to the chief, the bodies of chiefs and albinos are very impor-

tant and powerful traditional medicines if they are properly handled by qualified healers. Albino bodies are only effective as medicines if their owners die naturally. The extraordinary power of such medicines derives from the belief that albinos are composed of something different on account of their complexion: it was believed there is something missing or something extra in their composition. Traditionally, albinos were buried beneath the interior mud floors of their homes, with only the nearest family at the funeral. Thus, a healer could only get body parts with the consent of family members. This practice was both legal and had superior ritual potential. There were also beliefs that albinos are somehow alive after death, and it is this that gives the medicines their special power. Today, with cement floors in modern houses, albinos are buried in outside graves. This has resulted in the looting of albino body parts. Even where the albino died naturally, such stolen parts are ineffective as medicine, because they were taken without family consent. Thus, the agreement of relatives is necessary if the medicines are to be effective, and the other practices now escalating do not even work as ritual, the chief said.

Religions at work

The poignant question then becomes why both witchcraft *and* Christianity are on the increase in Africa? What kinds of solutions do the different religious systems offer, and how do they differ, since Christians also use witchcraft? The short answer is simple: witchcraft is believed to be more efficient than Christianity. More importantly, witchcraft is believed to work in this world, solving mundane and practical problems here and now and creating health, wealth and prosperity. It is generally agreed that the Christian God, although omnipotent, does not bother about these trivial matters. His ambitions for humanity are more fundamental, namely the ultimate destiny of humans in heaven or hell. Still, for poor people without food and water or facing other miseries, the mundane is far from trivial. Consequently, the problems of the mundane have to be solved in one way or other. The Christian God is utterly silent in providing help or solutions and uninvolved in daily life and the miseries of common people. Thus, the parallel religious cosmologies work perfectly well together: one solves the problems of this world and the other the problems of the next.

One may therefore say that Christianity has once again created a devil, although not intentionally. By strongly opposing ancestral tradition for more than a century, the church has largely undermined this tradition, but has also created a cultural and religious vacuum. But no such vacuums can persist. The miseries and problems the ancestors were believed to resolve continue, and may have become more acute with increased poverty. Christianity as a religion is basically not intended to resolve current miseries such as these, but witchcraft can do so perfectly here and now, it is believed.

Regarding how God works within Pentecostal Christianity, or at least in the preaching, I draw on two complementary examples. First, there were the two American Pentecostal missionaries I met struggling to convert people. They were frustrated by what they called the lack of self-sacrifice among the Sukuma. One of the missionaries had refused to bless a congregant because he had not paid his weekly dues to the church. According to the missionary, converts had to follow the same principles as they themselves did and make sacrifices to God. The missionaries had paid their air-tickets to Tanzania with their own money, and each week they donated money to the church. These missionaries stated that the person denied the blessing had once given money at the altar, and they concluded he had money, or had to find it somewhere and prioritise God! As they put it, what good are excuses that they had to support their family and not the church when they face God on Doomsday?

This example highlights the emphasis on godly matters and their interaction with worldly concerns. From these missionaries' perspective, the world hereafter is the sole reference point: what happens after death and the consequences of being judged on Doomsday. However, worldly matters *do* matter to the people. Children need school uniforms and fees have to be paid, the family needs food on the table and medical bills have to be met. In the missionaries' overall cosmic framework, these are mere excuses.

Second, the charismatic founder of the successful Pentecostal International Central Gospel Church in Accra, Rev. Mensa Otabil, gave some illuminating insights into the ways God is believed to work in one of his many fire-and-brimstone sermons. While blaming the sad state of affairs on African politicians, he said: "But you can't claim anyone's money by faith – it's illegal. If you want to have money, there is only one way: work ... I prayed to God to prosper, but we have to change economic structures and social structures. If I don't have that opportunity, I can pray all I want and I'll still be poor ... You can pray all you want, but it won't help ... unless we start looking at the structures of our nations" (Van Dijk 2004: 178–9). In other words, you can pray all you want in church for food and money, it will not help: this is not the way God works. He is not uninterested in his children and human suffering, but he has a bigger and more important issue to deal with, the devil. Or something else.

A further example of how Christianity is generally believed to work can be seen in the old woman I met during the drought of 2011 in Sukumaland, one of the three worst droughts she had experienced in her whole life. She argued strenuously in favour of rainmaking – rainmaking worked and provided prosperity to the community. However, the tradition had been lost, which she regretted, and now all had become Christians. During the drought of 2011, they went to the church and prayed to God for rain and food, but as she said, nothing happened and they left the church even hungrier. The Christian God does not

solve problems here and now and does not provide food on the table when it is really needed.

From this perspective, Christianity, missionaries and evangelisation have been highly successful in eradicating ancestral tradition as religious practice, but have largely failed to replace the role of the ancestors with the Christian God: these are basically different entities or realms working at different scales within and among humans. God belongs to the other world, and so do the ancestors, but whereas the ancestors, properly propitiated, help the living in their daily lives, God does not intervene in this world among his children. Christianity has therefore created one cosmology, but also left a whole cosmology ripe for reinvention. It has replaced the role of the ancestors in the world beyond with God, but not fully displaced the role of ancestors in this world and their abilities to solve problems for the living. Christianity has diminished that role in this world, but not the logic of how the ancestors work. And that logic of causation has proved more durable than the power of the ancestors themselves: this is point of departure for witchcraft. It provides the means to manipulate or approach the forces of the otherworld for the betterment of this world.

Whereas Christianity is immune from criticism about what happens in the otherworldly realm (and on this side), this is where witchcraft is superior. Witchcraft can, or at least is believed to, resolve any kind of problem in this world: it is the source of wealth and success and can deprive others of the same riches and resources and ultimately cause their deaths. The outcomes are possible to measure and adjudge in a world where poverty increases while some become exceedingly rich. The precise ways in which witchcraft works are impossible to know, but the mere fact that someone, somehow has gained immense wealth whereas others suffer more and even die, is all the evidence needed that witchcraft works, and is at work.

Accidents and misfortunes still happen and this is where witchcraft as logic and religious system has its supreme force. Whereas in the ancestral cult such misfortune could be explained in terms of the ancestors not solving the problems, a failing that over time could challenge the rationale of such beliefs, in witchcraft there are always others to blame. Somebody else has employed stronger and more effective medicines. Misery and evil, or the success of others in becoming wealthy and powerful, becomes the ultimate evidence of why a person's own medicines and witchcraft did not work. This circular, self-referential evidence is complete, and the only way to break out of this vicious circle is by employing even stronger and more dangerous medicines, ultimately by using human body parts. The very logic of how witchcraft works is also the source of its increase. The consequences of witchcraft can only be combated by employing more witchcraft.

Conclusion

The burden of evidence in Christianity, in which it is strictly impossible to prove the existence or effectiveness in this world of the Christian God, favours the spread of witchcraft. Witchcraft also works in mysterious, albeit more mystical and magical, ways. Although there are many unknowns, witchcraft is still more tangible both as regards how and why the rituals work and the outcomes of the rituals. The healer makes medicines, using whatever ingredients, which may include human body parts; he propitiates and incorporates the ancestors, the other worldly realm well known in the community's culture; and the client physically employs the medicines either by ingestion, or by applying it to the body or sprinkling it. The materiality of witchcraft and its operation on existing cultural premises and horizons of understanding strengthens the beliefs. Everything is here and now – from the healers and his medicines to the partaker and his problems. And it continues the logic of causation on which the ancestral tradition was based: it is possible to actively interfere with the spirits to improve conditions in this world.

Explaining why witchcraft increases, based on a religious logic that religions work although nobody can know for sure how, why and when, seems somehow straightforward. People seek refuge in the magical world given the premise that religion works. This is a world in which changing the premises and the outcomes of daily life and affairs is believed to be possible. The church may also promise this, but very rarely are the outcomes explicitly evident. The church does not promise a one-to-one relationship between prayer and good health, successful work, prosperous marriage or excellent exam results. Witchcraft does or is believed to do so. Whether this happens is another question, but then within this logic there are sufficient ad-hoc explanations legitimising the cosmological system and its effectiveness, even when it fails. Explaining why witches are being killed, and at a seemingly accelerating rate, is more difficult, because an increase in witchcraft does not necessarily imply intensified witch killing.

In a cross-cultural perspective, human sacrifice is at the pinnacle of any sacrificial system, but it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons for, or cultural patterns behind, the prevalence among the Sukuma of human killing within a ritual framework. Rainmaking rituals have historically included human sacrifice, as for instance in ancient Egyptian, Mayan and Aztec civilisations. However, sacrifices carried out in this manner require a sacred person to consecrate the offerings. The sacrificial victim incarnates the society as a whole and therefore human sacrifices can be made only for the benefit of the collectivity (e.g. Valeri 1985:49). Strictly speaking, the killing of albinos for personal wealth in the mining industry is at odds with current sacrificial theory. Since the empirical data are not wrong and these theories are based on other data, it would appear

that something peculiar and particular is going on in Tanzania. From a purely logical perspective, human sacrifice is understandable given certain premises regarding how gods and the cosmos are perceived to work. From a human perspective though, it is harder to understand how anyone can believe in such practices, let alone carry them out.

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