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Hexenfurcht in Afrika

Annäherungen an ein sperriges Thema

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Vorwort

Für viele Menschen in - und aus - Afrika sind Hexenvorstellungen selbstverständlich. Nach dem im sub-saharischen verbreiteten Weltwissen gilt weithin: Das menschliche Leben ist eingebettet in eine spirituelle Welt, die sich als freundlich oder feindlich erweist. Sie wird beeinflusst durch Riten und Gebete, damit - das je eigene - Leben gelingen kann. Hexerei wird bekämpft, und Geister werden ausgetrieben, um Menschen vor Unheil und Krankheit zu schützen und sie aus den Klauen feindlicher Mächte zu retten.

In der kirchlichen Partnerschaftsarbeit sorgen konträre Weltbilder und disparate Erfahrungen von Wirklichkeit für z.T. erhebliche Irritationen. Aufgrund von Migrationsbewegungen sind afrikanische Hexenvorstellungen seit einigen Jahren auch in Europa anzutreffen. Insofern ist die wissenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit dieser Problematik entwicklungspolitisch, gesellschaftlich und kirchlich relevant - nicht zuletzt auch als kritische Anfrage an den Westen nach der Existenz des Bösen.

Der vorliegende Band dokumentiert deutsch- und englischsprachige Beiträge einer Konsultation der Missionsakademie zu „Hexenfurcht in Afrika - exotisch oder aktuell?“ aus dem Jahr 2014. Bei den Referenten und der Referentin handelt es sich um Theologen bzw. Ethnologen, die mehrere Jahre bzw. Jahrzehnte lang in Afrika lebten, arbeiteten und forschten. Ihre langjährigen Erfahrungen, tiefgehenden Kenntnisse und weiterführenden Erkenntnisse bezüglich des Themas sind den Beiträgen zu entnehmen. Bei all dem handelt es sich um wissenschaftlich verantwortete und lebensgeschichtlich informierte Annäherungen von letztlich fremdkulturellen Beobachtern auf Zeit an ein sperriges Thema - nicht mehr, aber freilich auch nicht weniger.

Ich danke recht herzlich Jon P. Kirby, Gabriele Lademann-Priemer, Hannes Menke und Bernhard Dinkelaker für ihre anregenden Beiträge, von denen die kirchliche Partnerschaftsarbeit in ihrer globalen wie in ihrer lokalen Ausrichtung profitieren möge.

Werner Kahl

März 2015

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Fear of Witchcraft

Relevance of the Topic

Werner Kahl

Why should we busy ourselves with witchcraft beliefs? Is it due to a fascination with an exotic subject in distant places, like in sub-Saharan Africa or in Papua New Guinea? Oft in distant times like the 15th to the 18th centuries in Europe? This seminar does not aim at quenching the thirst for exotic stimulation, and it is also not about any historical investigation in archives documenting the past.

The need to investigate contemporary witchcraft beliefs, as it concerns us at the Missionsakademie as theologians, is due to irritations that arise in the encounter of Christians from Africa and from Europe. Until a generation ago, such encounters were basically restricted to relatively few selected individuals mostly European missionaries or students from countries in Africa. From the 1980s going, African-European overlaps of different types have increased dramatically in quality and quantity due to the following developments:

- Hundreds of partnership projects between local churches in Germany and a number of African countries have come into existence, e.g. between Lutheran churches in Tanzania and Germany or between reformed-Presbyterian churches in Ghana or Togo and Germany.
- Tens of thousands of Christians esp. from Anglophone West-African countries have migrated to Germany and have established about one thousand congregations.
- A „second generation“, i.e. younger people with a migration background, has come up, whose parents were born in Africa. These members of a younger generation have been brought up - mainly - in Germany and many of them are Germans. They live at the interface of two opposing world-knowledge systems - one that acknowledges the numinous dimension of life and society as a constant of reality, and one that takes a secularized and secularizing organization of life and society for granted.
- Hundreds of young German adults travel each to spend a „freiwillige soziale Jahr“ - a free year of social service - in Africa, and esp. in Ghana.

In the cross-cultural encounter, the belief in witch-craft or the absence of witchcraft beliefs cause deep running irritations. European migrants in Africa typically attribute witchcraft beliefs to superstition they think and claim to have been overcome with the enlightenment in modernity. Many a quick in condemning witchcraft beliefs as „mittelalterlichen Aberglauben“ – superstition of the middle ages – and they would have the so-called witch-camps in northern Ghana dissolved and the old women reintegrated into their villages of origin. African migrants in Europe typically wonder how Europeans could be so blind as not to notice the clear presence of evil causing witchcraft in their very midst: Children movies and books are full of images and stories of witches, and in this way witches hook into the spirits of the little ones. Then there are even societies of women in Germany who call themselves witches. And much of heavy metal music abounds with allusions to witches.

In the cross-cultural encounter we witness a clash of world-knowledge systems, i.e. one system which that reckons with the activities of unseen spirits, and one which takes as reality what can be seen and measured. In a seminar taught at the University of Hamburg in 2014 for students of religion who want to become teachers of religion or ministers, I made a survey. One question was: „Do you believe in witchcraft?“ The thirteen German students answered with „No“. Two African migrant ministers who were part of the class answered: „I believe that witches exist, but I do not believe in them.“

Often adherents of any one system feel superior over against the others. The American ethnologist Kenneth Pike has described this typical phenomenon in cross-cultural encounters:

„People of one nation (or class or society, etc.) may sometimes appear to another to be 'illogical' or 'stupid' or 'incomprehensible' simply because the observer is over a long period of time taking an alien standpoint from which to view their activity, instead to learn their emic patterns of overt and covert behavior.“¹

In Ghana, as in other West-African countries, we occasionally find reports of a spontaneous killing of people, esp. older women accused of witchcraft. In some neo-Pentecostal churches and charismatic healing camps in West-Africa, attempts are made to „deliver“ so-called witches, esp. traditional priestesses. I have not witnessed this in an African migrant church in Germany personally, but the belief in witchcraft and the reality of witches is self-evident for many Christians from sub-Saharan Africa, and deliverance from evil, esp. ancestral spirits features prominently in migrant churches. When, e.g., an unusual high number of Africans died in Hamburg

¹ Kenneth L. Pike, Pike, K.L., Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior, Paris ²1967, 51.

recently, African migrant church leaders got together to hold joint services to drive away Mami Wata spirits which - to much of the African community - obviously thrive in Hamburg due to its many water channels and lakes, the harbor and the Elbe river. This belief in local spirits is, at times, also shared by some German Pentecostals.

Interestingly, there seems to be a tendency among the children of African migrants being trained in German schools as well as in the churches of their parents, to distance themselves from the strong witchcraft belief thriving among their parents. These children, however, typically do not abandon the belief in the reality of the unseen world all-together. They negotiate a balance between secularism and a strong spirit belief. A number of times, I have heard young adults with African parents complain: „My mother is too superstitious.“ They would read Harry Potter books without fear, but they might hide this activity from their parents.

Today it is clearer to us than it was for former generations of European theologians, that world-views and identities are constructions. Especially in German rationalistic theology of the last century there was a strong claim to superior theological knowledge and to absolute truth, distinguishing neatly between proper faith and superstition, church and sect. This kind of theology was on a secularizing mission. Today, clear distinctions and oppositions are being blurred, and the question of the reality of the unseen world, of God and spirits has become relevant to many. Often enough, though, these important spiritual questions are seldom addressed properly within the churches which often are still custodians of the project of secularization.

The Swiss theologian Karl Barth reminds us - in remarkable statements made about half a century ago - that our understanding of the world is a construction and that it might be in need of some balancing:

It seems that we are dealing here with one of the, not too few, cases where we have to admit that, not all but, some amongst those people, to whom is ascribed a so-called ‘magical worldview’, once we have subtracted various forms of occasional hocus-pocus, have seen actually more and clearer and are closer to reality in their thinking and in their language than we, the happy owners of a rational-scientific worldview, for whom the unambiguous [or possibly not so unambiguous] distinction of truth and illusion as derived from our worldview, has become almost subconsciously the criterion of anything possible and real.²

² Karl Barth, *Das christliche Leben* (Die Kirchliche Dogmatik IV,4, Fragmente aus dem Nachlass, Vorlesungen 1959-1961 [Gesamtausgabe II,7], ed. by Hans-Anton Drewes and Eberhard Jüngel, Zürich 1976, 369 (translation by Werner Kahl): “Wir dürften es in dieser

Magical worldview? I wonder if our fellow Christians of the young churches from Asian and Africa, whose first hand experience in this respect is fresher, might come to our aid one day. But let us only hope that in the meantime they allow themselves not to become all too impressed by our world view and then become infected themselves by the ailment of sight by which we have been suffering in this respect.³

How can one pass here [Angelology] between Scylla and Charybdis, between the all too interesting mythology of the former people and the all too little interesting 'de-mythologizing' of most of the more recent people?⁴

This is not to say - neither for Karl Barth nor for me - that the eradication of witchcraft beliefs was not an important result of enlightenment thinking or that witchcraft beliefs should be revived. But the subject of witchcraft beliefs - so strong in sub-Saharan Africa or in Papua New Guinea and so irritating in global church partnerships - opens up new perspectives on the reality of spiritual evil. A critical reflection on the absence or presence of witchcraft beliefs and on their implications for development is crucial for the church in the global village.

Sache mit einem der nicht seltenen Fälle zu tun haben, in denen man sagen muß, dass nicht alle, aber bestimmte unter den Menschen, denen man heute ein sogenanntes 'magisches Weltbild' zuschreibt, - allerlei zufälligen Hokusfokus abgerechnet - faktisch mehr und deutlicher gesehen haben, der Wirklichkeit in ihrem Denken und in ihrer Sprache näher waren als wir, die glücklichen Besitzer eines rational-wissenschaftlichen Weltbildes, denen die aus diesem abzulesende klare (aber vielleicht doch nicht so ganz klare) Unterscheidung von Wahrheit und Illusion schon fast unbewusst zum Maß alles Möglichen und Wirklichen geworden ist."

³ Karl Barth, *Das christliche Leben*, 373 (translation by Werner Kahl): "Magisches Weltbild? Ob uns wohl unsere Mitchristen aus den jungen Kirchen von Asien und Afrika, die ja in dieser Sache noch von frischerer Anschauung herkommen, hier eines Tages zu Hilfe kommen könnten? Hoffen wir nur, dass sie sich unterdessen von unserem Weltbild nicht allzusehr imponieren und dann ihrerseits von der Augenkrankheit, an der wir in dieser Hinsicht leiden, anstecken lassen!"

⁴ Karl Barth, *Die Lehre von der Schöpfung* (Die Kirchliche Dogmatik III,3), Zürich 1950, 426 (translation by Werner Kahl): "Wie kann man hier [Angelologie] zwischen Skylla und Charybdis, zwischen der allzu interessanten Mythologie der Alten und der nun doch allzu uninteressanten 'Entmythologisierung' bei den meisten Neueren hindurch kommen?"

The Witch Villages of Northern Ghana

Jon P. Kirby

Dancing Witches

It is Christmas Day and some 80 elderly women are gathered to enjoy the occasion. Some are dexterously tapping out rhythms with long wooden spoons on implements used in their daily chores. Gourds for ladling soup become rattles, and calabashes of various sizes overturned in large basins of water become drums. They produce a wonderful range of sounds. They play their makeshift instruments as their sisters dance in the hot afternoon sun. Others are chanting a mournful refrain while the song leader improvises verses about their life in the village. Large calabashes of strong sorghum beer, called “pito,” are passed around. Besides their obvious excitement, they all have something else in common—they have been accused of witchcraft and are forced to live out the rest of their days in one of the so-called “witch camps” of northern Ghana.

The event is the annual Christmas party for witches that was held in 2005 on the grounds of the Catholic Church at Ngani, northern Ghana. They will have a full meal, a calabash of “pito,” and they will laugh and dance and sing. This happy day contrasts bleakly with the hopeless grind of their daily lives. For one day a year they are human again.

Across a dirt road, just 200 meters away from their gathering, is their home—the Ngani witches’ quarters. It needs no walls or guards, for their jailor, the Earth spirit, is ever present and mercilessly watchful—one misstep, they fear, will bring instant death. Their abode is a warren of mud hovels with leaky grass roofing and knee-high walls that deny even the slightest hint of privacy or human dignity. Here there is no dancing, singing, laughing or feasting—only inhuman suffering and misery. Their situation offers them scant access even to life’s most basic necessities: food, water, shelter and clothing, but worst of all, human recognition, companionship and love. Coming from African socially-oriented societies, in which they are almost never

alone, here for the first time in their lives they are isolated, and, because they all ascribe to Africa's basic formula for identity: "I am because we are," they are denied their very existence as human beings.

The Persistence of African Beliefs

Christianity has been established in northern Ghana for more than a century. Great strides and many positive changes have been made, especially in education and healthcare, which, along with church planting, were primary missionary goals. But, despite strenuous efforts to stamp out the so-called "pagan," "irrational," and "satanic," beliefs, rituals and practices commonly associated with the African world, these have remained largely unchanged, even among Christians. It was thought they would eventually disappear as people became "civilized" or Westernized. But this has not happened, and witchcraft is, today, among the most problematic and persistent of these beliefs and practices—not only in northern Ghana but throughout Africa.

In this paper I will take an anthropological approach in examining why this should be so—why some of the core beliefs surrounding the witchcraft phenomenon persist—in order to discern a more effective, Spirit-filled approach to addressing these beliefs. In doing so we take inspiration from two sayings of that great anthropologist and missionary, Fr. Louis Luzbetak SVD: "knowing the mind of the people," which means doing the necessary digging by making use of the human sciences, especially cultural analysis; and "scratching where it itches," or offering culturally appropriate responses to peoples' problems as they experience them. Following this prescription, we shall examine the phenomenon of witchcraft in northern Ghana, especially as it affects women, while being particularly attentive to presence of the Spirit already in dialogue with the "mind of the people," and taking our cues from this, we shall try to offer an acculturated Christian response. Our focus, then, is witchcraft in Kingdom of God in the kingdom of Dagbon in northern Ghana¹, where I have been "digging" as an anthropologist and missionary for more than 30 years. Although the situation in Dagbon is particular, it offers insight into the witchcraft issue across Africa.

The African Mind

To the Western mind, beliefs about witchcraft are superstitious, irrational, and not to be taken seriously by educated people. Yet, when I asked Simon Atunga, the head of "The Gambaga Outcasts Project" of the Presbyterian Church, and a quite educated

¹ See my work on popular religion in N. Ghana (Kirby 2011).

man, if he believed in witchcraft, he responded, “Yes, here in Ghana, everyone believes in it. If someone tells you they don’t, they are lying.”

Simon is not alone in this view. Almost two generations ago, Jahoda’s (1970) study of Ghanaian university students showed that, regardless of their educational level, most believed in witchcraft, and a more recent comparison of Ghanaian and Western university students (Adams 2005) shows that little has changed.

A more appropriate question might be: Why doesn’t the Western mind accept witchcraft and why has it roundly rejected African presuppositions concerning the unseen world? A socially attuned answer to this is that African witchcraft proceeds from a collectivist cultural grounding of relationships, whereas modern Western assumptions arise from an individualist cultural grounding. Witchcraft beliefs occur where people experience themselves as inherently connected to others and to unseen worlds. Adams contends that the primary experience of oneself as connected to others and as the objects of others’ attention, such as we find among the group-oriented peoples of Africa, leads to the presupposition of personal causality. If bad things happen it is because of other people. This is far from being irrational or superstitious. It is simply their reality, just as the primary experience of unrelated individual selves provides the basis for the presupposition of non-personal causality and non-existent unseen worlds in the West (Adams 2005).

A Serious Threat

In the West, the idea of witchcraft is usually benign or even trendy, but in Africa there is nothing more sobering than the threat of witchcraft. It is a threat to the very principle of life. In Africa, where all things are interconnected, witchcraft broadly includes any serious threat to an individual’s life or a community’s well-being. It involves any life-negating thought, intention or action, and it is almost always suspected in cases of untimely death and terrible misfortune, which in some way interfere with the primary goal of life, becoming an ancestor.

Fr. Joseph, the Catholic priest at Ngani, complains that Ghana social services and the various NGO projects don’t do their job. He tells of aid projects that were meant for the “witches” but ended up going to the townspeople instead. A grinding mill was taken over by the Dagomba chief’s sons who charged the “witches” for its use. But the “witches” were too poor to pay. When it broke down no one repaired it and, until now, it remains inoperative. Another NGO sunk a bore-hole but this was taken over by the sons of the Konkomba Earth-shrine custodian. Many are unable to walk the two miles to the river, so every Saturday Fr. Joseph sends his pickup around to help each of them with a drum of water. Another NGO gave money to build a school for the grandchildren who often accompany the “witches” but the school was never built. “How can the children of ‘witches’ have a better school than us?” the

townspeople said. A communal toilet was also donated by an NGO but was hijacked by the townspeople who used it until the roofing sheets were stolen and it was destroyed by a bushfire. Only the derelict walls were left for the “witches.”

Even though the Western influenced media makes the accused women out to be victims, nobody believes that—often not even the women themselves. We must remember that witches are outcasts. Because the accused are seen as a source of great danger to the community, all the quite considerable supportive powers of a collective society are turned against them. Outcasts *must not* be helped. NGOs and governmental institutions, like the social services, do not officially recognize the existence of witches, but their employees do. It is not unusual for them to be lax in their duties when it comes to helping “witches.” Nobody expects them to help. Rather the opposite is expected—to give help to “witches” is itself anti-social witchery.

Over the past two decades the internal dynamics of witchcraft accusation have changed. There have been many adaptations to the socio-economic, political, and familial changes that have occurred in Africa. But the belief itself is not fading away. It is rapidly adapting to the changes. The underlying beliefs not only persist, they are the filter through which the various imported institutions and social arrangements of modernity, and now post-modernity, are colored, interpreted, judged, given new meanings and dealt with.² From the African perspective, witches are outcasts. They are banished from their communities and, like a social cancer, they are cut off from their people. The life of the community and the very principle of life itself is at stake. To better understand how and why this is the case we need probe deeper into this worldview.

Four Presuppositions

If the African is “incurably religious,” as Mbiti (1969) says, then witchcraft is at the very heart of this religious worldview. We will examine this view in terms of four presuppositions: the unity of the seen and unseen worlds, the interconnectedness of these, a hierarchy of being, and the internal dynamic of life.

² Various contemporary authors are beginning to account for the durability of such “irrational beliefs” by expanding the orthodox parameters of traditional Western disciplines like philosophy (Wiredu and Gyekye 1992, Geschiere 1997), social psychology (Jahoda 1970, Adams 2005) healthcare (Kirby 1997, van der Geest 2002, 2004) and religions (Meyer 1999, Akrong 2000, Van Dijk 2000, Gifford 2004) to include Ghanaian perspectives and meanings.

The “Seen” and “Unseen” Worlds

The first unshakable presupposition is that the African universe occupies two dimensions: the seen and the unseen. The unseen, or the spirit world, is so closely linked to the seen—the physical and material world we see about us—that it is conceived to be part of the same reality. For example, in northern Ghana one routinely sees trees around compounds that are “clothed” with a traditionally woven white cotton strip, because a diviner has revealed it to be an ancestor “come back” to protect the house. To the question: “Where are the ancestors?” one usually hears the response, “They are sitting right here among us.” All of creation participates in relationships extending in two dimensions—horizontally among the living in the visible, material world, and vertically between them and the agents of the invisible world.

Interconnectedness of All Things

The second presupposition is the interconnectedness of being. The unseen world is connected with the seen; the vertical dimension with the horizontal dimension. All things are interconnected in a great chain of life. Whatever happens in one dimension affects relations in the other. When relations are broken in one dimension both are affected. Both need to be mended. Both vertical and horizontal mediation is needed.

Hierarchical Order

The third presupposition is the hierarchy of being (see Magesa 1997:61). The uncreated God, source of all life, is at the top of the hierarchy. Below this are the created entities which include Earth spirits and divinities, or “God’s children,” followed by ancestral spirits, nature spirits and errant “bush spirits,” who are identified with those who have died but have not become ancestors. At the next level are the entities of the seen world which include humans, animals, vegetation and insensible matter.

The hierarchical order of life establishes the rules of subsidiarity for propitiation and mediation. It also establishes a hierarchy of problems and of problem-solving. God relates to problems proper to God, i.e., the trans-territorial problems associated with the overarching sky such as worldwide drought, widespread epidemics, and disasters. Territorial problems such as war, localized drought, epidemics, and disasters are the domain of Earth spirits and divinities. Ancestors deal with problems of the household or the extended family such as quarrels, poverty, disasters, illness, famine, and infertility. The tutelary or guardian spirits relate to problems affecting individual destiny such as “bad death,” a detour from one’s

destiny, ill-health, infertility and other personal misfortunes. Witchcraft can feature as the cause of problems at the territorial, the familiar and individual levels, for in its broadest conceptualization it is any anti-life force.

Dynamic Universe

The fourth presupposition is that the world is dynamic and that all being is in flux. Life is conceived of as a passage or cycle and anti-life forces make this passage problematic. An elder explained it to me thus:

When a new child is born, the naming ancestral spirit (guardian or tutelary spirit) approaches God and tells God that it will go into the world as a new child and then tells God all that will happen during life. God offers His seal of approval and the new child is born with his/her assigned destiny. As life progresses it gradually becomes clear from one's fortunes whether the person has a good or bad destiny. Life moves ahead until the person dies and either becomes an ancestor or fails to become an ancestor and becomes an unnamed spirit of the wild.

The goal of life is to complete the cycle and become an ancestor. One must accrue life in the seen world in order to achieve fullness of life in the unseen world. Thus, the older one gets, the closer one is to the ancestors, and ideally, the more life-filled one becomes. Ancestors, who have already achieved "abundant life,"³ are appealed to for help in this passage. Mediators such as diviners, Earth-priests and family elders can also assist.⁴ Successful strategies always involve both the horizontal (seen) and vertical (unseen) relations.

Anti-life forces, or those forces which block or negate abundant life, are a result of human choice. African patriarchal etiologies about the origin of these forces usually involve women who make choices that offend God, or go against "life." Among the Builsa of northern Ghana, God allowed all the soup ingredients but forbade the use of pepper. One day a woman decided to prepare the soup with pepper—and evil or anti-life forces entered the world. Among the Akan of Ghana, God was thought to be quite close. One day a woman who was pounding the basic staple food called "fufu" kept knocking God with her pounding stick, thereby forcing Him to move away—and evil or anti-life forces filled the void.

³ See Laurenti Magesa for this concept (1997).

⁴ See Tengan (1991) for elaborations of this worldview as it connects with the Earth.

Divining for “Life”

A system of life where the meaning of misfortune is interpreted through past events, and which is dependent on relations in both the seen and unseen worlds, needs interpreters or diviners who use their “four eyes” to see into both dimensions and discover the source of misfortune such as anti-life forces or witchcraft. As in the Old Testament, the ideal diviner is a “misfortune teller” who is more concerned with interpreting the past than revealing the future, i.e., the break in past relations that brought about this or that current misfortune. Once the cause has been determined, one only needs to follow the prescribed sacrifice, or as they say, “put food into the mouth of trouble,” to solve the problem. Diviners, who have been influenced by Islam are more concerned with the present and future than the past (see Kirby 1992). They look for a possible breach in present relations that may result in an immediate or future problem. To avoid this, they prescribe “gifts” or “offerings” (*sadaqa*) to God in order to build up a store of extra life (*la'da*) to offset any negativities on the horizon and assure a future life-affirming state.

Life-Negating Forces

Because of African collectivist values, good and evil are always understood in terms of relations with others, and a person’s essence is revealed by what he/she does. When a person is very welcoming and hospitable people will say, “He/she is *just* good,” meaning the good character has been revealed. My Dagomba name, “*Zanyea*” literally means, “We have all seen” which is an affirmation of the person’s good character. One’s deeds reveal one’s true identity. When a thief has been caught they say, “Once a thief always a thief.” Witchcraft is any personalized anti-life force that stands in opposition to a person’s life course or to the principle of life. Witches are evil incarnate. Misfortunes are never “by chance.” Behind every misfortune are the evil intentions of enemies and there are enemies lurking in every shadow. In such a system spiritual protection is a high priority.

Because the seen and unseen are interconnected, anti-life forces exist in both dimensions. Problems and misfortunes that do not seem to have any visible person as their immediate cause are ascribed to unseen agents or the hidden bad intentions of others. The frequently heard saying: “You will see!” is an example of the power of such evil intention. It is, in effect, a powerful curse, a declaration of spiritual warfare, and it is always taken very seriously. If some misfortune should occur after this, e.g., if a lorry accident or illness befalls the person threatened, it is believed that the person uttering the curse has caused it and he/she is held responsible. In effect, he/she is the witch.

Death, *per se*, is not life-negating but rather a transition point. It can either lead to fullness of life among the ancestors or to a state of anti-life. Some forms of illness

and death are “life-negating” in that they cut destiny short and prevent one from becoming an ancestor. The clearest example of this is “bad death” (lit. “bad corpse”), which refers to such anti-social ends as the death of a woman in childbirth, suicides, and death alone in the bush. At times, it also includes victims of witchcraft, who need special rituals to wash them of the taint of their unfulfilled-destiny.⁵

The Earth Shrine and Witchcraft

Life-negating forces are not only a danger to individual lives, they also defy the collective life of families, communities and the very principle of life itself. They defy the unity and integrity of life in both its horizontal (seen) and vertical (unseen) dimensions. At the community level, witchcraft and certain other life-negating acts⁶ break the relationship between the seen and unseen worlds, and threaten the horizontal political, economic and social relations among the people. A state of ritual pollution ensues.⁷ If nothing is done to correct it, life-negating forces will prevail: things will begin to die, crops fail and people fall victim to unlikely accidents and misfortunes. When the vitality and fertility of the Earth is killed, only pain and suffering are harvested. War, in particular, causes this perilous state of pollution and it requires special rituals of restoration.⁸

At the family level, untimely deaths, particularly of children, indicate a “spoiled house,” where the life-principle within the extended family unit has been threatened. If the situation is not remedied quickly, more will die beginning with those whose life-force is the weakest (children) to those whose force is the strongest

⁵ Certain forms of “bad death” (war victims, by drowning, by witchcraft) are redeemable by a ritual called “turning the corpse” (Kirby 1986). See also Van der Geest (2004) on good death and bad death among the Akan.

⁶ These include sex in the bush and the spilling of human blood in homicide or war. Even worse ritual contamination was thought to result from spilling a witch’s blood. In the South, early sources (Cruickshank 1841: 177-9, Beecham 1841: 214-15) speak of witches being executed through strangulation and drowning to avoid this. In the North they were (and are) beaten or stoned to death to avoid having their blood touch the earth.

⁷ Various authors (see Tait 1961, Rattray 1932:258, Froelich 1949, 1963: 151, Kirby 1986) have described in detail these acts of desecration which unleash chaos or a state of “ritual pollution” on the eco-system.

⁸ Thus there is a great urgency for this restoration. Rattray quotes one informant as saying: “the land is a bitter thing, it will cast out, finish, your house (if you refuse to purify it)” (1932:258). To address this situation and to revive the Earth, the elders, chiefs and people must rely on the Earth-priest (*ten'daana*). Harmonious relations can only be restored by a ritual of purification called the “burying the blood” or “smoothing of the land” (Rattray 1932: 258).

(elders). Such a situation requires rituals, directed to the ancestors, which aim to restore the life-principle. But witchcraft at the family level is also a potential threat to the larger community. Because of social contamination, a condition of “spoiled house” can quickly advance to the level “spoiled Earth,” which is a community problem. Thus, witchcraft at any level is ultimately a community problem, and Earth shrines, which are the center of the community life-force and are key junctures for the maintenance and renewal of relations between the seen and unseen worlds at the community level, are the primary locus for the control of witchcraft in general. Thus, all witch camps are located within the premises and under the immediate control of an Earth shrine.

Prevention

The various oracles or divinatory practices, which form part of the apparatus of Earth shrines to discern the presence of witchcraft, are all functions of the shrine’s life-enhancing/death-defying power. The process of discernment usually requires the accused to take a “drinking oath,” which is also called the “washing of the stomach” (lit. insides). Through these rites the accused are “put into the shrine” or under its control and witchcraft is thereby nullified. The accused lose their life-negating powers and become “servants” or “wives” of the shrine. As one of my “witch” informants, Pakpiema, explained, “As we are here like this the shrine is very strong. It covers us. When you take the water [the drinking oath] from the shrine you are under the power of the shrine and it takes care of you. Since you are the wife of the shrine you must cook for the *leewaa* [the name of the shrine] every evening.”

The ritual restores vertical integrity—at least so long as the “witches” are “covered by the shrine”—but not the horizontal relations with the community. Both vertical and horizontal integration are required to restore the full harmony and unity of life. “Witches” can be ritually purified and their witchcraft nullified by an Earth-priest, but this is only part of the process. Horizontal mediation, or acceptance by the community, is also needed. This is not a simple matter for suspicion is not easily quelled, and in some ways trust will never be completely restored, for once the “curse” of accusation is uttered it takes on a life of its own. But in small, isolated, homogeneous communities, the Earth-priest is able to attend to both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. In larger, heterogeneous state societies, however, the horizontal mediation can only be done by chiefs.⁹

⁹ Drucker-Brown (1993) puts greater emphasis on the separation and opposition of these roles in Mamprusi, and while there too the secular chiefly office dominates the ritual office, they nevertheless have managed to combine the complementary roles of chief and Earth-priest.

Dagombas

We now turn to the history of Dagbon, especially its connection with the pre-colonial slave trade, and the affect this has had on the peoples' understanding of themselves and of their horizontal and vertical integrity. By linking the past to the present we hope to gain insight into the contemporary meaning of the camps and witchcraft in general.

Since pre-colonial times, the most powerful chiefs of northern Ghana have been those of Dagbon, the kingdom of the Dagomba people (Staniland 1975). Their ruler, the Ya Na, was the supreme head of a powerful centralized state system, which loosely controlled most of what is now northern Ghana and, in particular, over the Konkomba peoples who originally inhabited this area. Today, with a population of around one million, Dagbon is bordered in the north by the kingdom of Mamprusi, on the west and south by that of the Gonja and on the east by the Togo border. The language, called *Dagbanli*, is a member of the Gur or Voltaic family and their culture is an admixture of the original Voltaic raiders and the Konkomba groups which they raided and initially incorporated.¹⁰

Konkombas

The Konkomba people (*kpankamba*), who live in the eastern side of Dagbon, have no chiefs. Rather, they maintain a segmentary-lineage system which organizes itself politically around clan or lineage heads, and religiously around family elders and Earth-shrine custodians (Tait 1961). They were subservient to the Dagomba in pre-colonial times, and in many ways still are. Nevertheless, they so greatly value their freedom and autonomy that they are intensely resentful of any expression of authority over them and they meticulously avoid the show of any authority over others. In these basic ways, as well as many others derived from these, they are the exact opposite of their traditional overlords. These opposing cultural pathways are the essential ingredient for the periodic conflicts that occur between the Dagomba and Konkomba peoples (see Kirby 2003: 168-179).

The Witch Camps

There are four established¹¹ witch camps in northern Ghana, all located in eastern Dagbon. A fifth, and quite different camp, is located north of Dagbon at Gambaga in

¹⁰ See Strevens (1955) for a linguistic account demonstrating Konkomba origins in W. Dagbon.

¹¹ Gifford (2004:88 ftn 14) mentions six "camps" including Duabone in the South and Tendang in Upper West citing *Mirror*, 5 May 01, 19 and 5 Aug. 00; *Graphic*, 29 June 00, 32;

the Mamprusi kingdom. It serves both the Dagomba and their near cousins, the Mamprusi people. All the camps are associated with powerful Earth shrines. Although little is known of their exact origins, these camps go back to pre-colonial times (GHANA 1917), when they arose as more compassionate alternatives to execution—the “normal” way of dealing with witchcraft. Of course, to Western sensibilities, the camps are hardly compassionate. But as bad as they are, not one of the women at Ngani would choose to return home, for that would mean certain death.

Ngani Camp

We shall focus on the camp at Ngani and compare it with the camp at Gambaga. Ngani is a town of about 2,000 inhabitants (500 Dagomba, 1,500 Konkomba), located near the Oti river and some 50 km east of Yendi, the capital of Dagbon. It lies along a major east-west trade route that, in pre-colonial times, ran from Yendi to Hausaland, and it marked the eastern outpost of the Dagomba kingdom and the frontier with Konkombaland. The town is divided into two parts—the Dagomba section along the main road and the Konkomba section to the north toward Konkombaland proper. The camp, which is simply referred to as “Earth” (*Ten*), is located within the precincts of the Earth shrine in the Konkomba section of town and counts as its inhabitants some 500 persons (200 men and 300 women¹²). Some of these are family members, usually young granddaughters of the accused women.

One is immediately struck by some prominent, parallel divisions. The population of the town is split—Dagombas on one side, Konkombas on the other. Like the town, the camp is also divided into Dagomba and Konkomba sections. And most importantly, the offices that control vertical and horizontal mediation are split: Konkomba Earth-priest versus Dagomba chief. This arrangement contradicts the expectations of their common worldview, which requires a brief examination of their religio-political history, especially in relation to slavery.

BBC Focus on Africa Oct.-Dec. 00, 24-25. Naboli emerged after Gifford’s research. I concentrate on these four “camps” because they are linked historically and culturally.

¹² Although both men and women are accused, the vast majority are women. The men at the camps comprised about 40% of the “witch” population. This proportion is high because it is easier for men to escape death and safely reach the camps, while the women are more dependent and fewer are able to escape. In general the men have a great deal more freedom coming and going. Many stay for a time and then leave for places unknown. They are also accused for reasons very different from the women which I will not go into. Here I have concentrated on the women.

A History of Separation

First, we will examine the two-stage expansion of Dagbon. In the first stage, which took place in western Dagbon (1500-1700), Dagomba warriors killed the Konkomba Earth-priests and usurped their roles (Cardinall 1920:16). As they expanded eastward they continually assimilated the indigenous Konkomba peoples. The second stage (1700-1900) in eastern Dagbon, proceeded quite differently. Due to the Asante conquest of Dagbon (1742-72) and the increased demand for tribute in the form of slaves (1000-2000 per year), domestic animals and foodstuffs, the old pattern of “benevolent” raiding gave way to a more predatory kind that allowed little assimilation of people or Earth-priests. The Konkombas were either captured and sent to the Asante or pushed ever-further to the north and east.

A Predatory Relationship

In 1900 the British took charge and put a stop to the raiding, but their colonial pattern of “indirect rule” established the Dagomba chiefs over the very groups that they had formerly enslaved, thereby making it possible for them to continue extorting labor, wives, foodstuffs and animals. Through this system the Dagomba statuses as chiefs, royals and commoners at the upper level of the traditional state hierarchical ladder and the Konkomba status as little more than slaves, “*grundo*,”¹³ at the lowest rung, became fixed. Dagomba chiefs maintained the political powers while Konkomba Earth-priests retained their ritual powers—which were made subordinate to the political.

This separation of roles, statuses and identities was maintained and reinforced after Ghana’s independence in the late 1950s into successive governments up to the present time. Political patronage maintained and widened the split between Dagomba political authority and Konkomba ritual authority, and between the chiefly and non-chiefly groups in general. In 1979 new constitutions were introduced to make northern lands the property of the chiefs on behalf of their people. This effectively alienated the Konkombas and the other non-chiefly peoples from their hereditary lands. These unequal relations were challenged by a series of local conflicts. But the government continued to uphold the constitutions, and thus the rule by Dagomba chiefs. In 1992 a major referendum to change the constitutions was initiated by the non-chiefly groups without success. This led to the devastating 1994 civil war which engulfed the entire North. As noted above, widespread conflict indicates that witchcraft is abroad.

¹³ A general appellation given by Dagomba to all those formerly raided for slaves.

Church Involvement

During the colonial era the development of the North had been purposely retarded by the British who saw it as a labor pool for the rich cocoa farms and gold mines of the South. The first government schools in the North, established in the 1930s, were limited to children of chiefs. The Missionaries of Africa, or the “White Fathers,” as they are known locally, had been establishing churches and schools in the northern areas bordering Burkina Faso since 1906. But they were the exception. Officially, the colonial policy had excluded missionaries until the 1950s, when they began to establish schools and literacy programs for all the ethnic groups, including the Konkombas and other non-chiefly peoples. Soon the Bible and other publications emerged in these so-called “minority languages,” and gradually, with more education, the non-chiefly peoples became conscious of their suppressed ethnic identity and denied civil rights. By the late 70s, this awareness became acute, particularly in terms of ethnic identity, human dignity and political representation. This, in turn, led to the series of ethnic conflicts mentioned above.¹⁴

As a result of the conscientizing influence of Christian missions, chiefly politicians began to regard them as troublemakers and a serious threat to their power. They formed alliances with Islamic Gulf states in the 90s and, as the rhetoric began to recast oppositions in terms of a jihad, weapons and other support flowed in. Polarization linked the Christians with non-chiefly groups and the Muslims with chiefly groups. During the war many churches were destroyed, missionaries fled for their lives and one pastor was killed. Because of these linkages, many came to regard it as a religious conflict even though the social, economic and political changes were the major influence. We will address these below, but first we will make the connection between witches, chiefs and Earth-priests.

Witches, Chiefs and Earth-priests

The political divide between Dagombas and Konkombas, originally brought about by slavery and reinforced throughout the colonial era and into the modern through political and religious factors, also brought about a split in mediation between the vertical and horizontal dimensions—but only in eastern Dagbon. This is why all the

¹⁴ H. Pul (2003:6) counts eight major conflicts involving the Konkomba and Dagomba (and/or other chiefly peoples of the N. Region) from 1981 until 1994. The 1994 Northern Conflict was Ghana’s most extensive and destructive conflict ever, bordering on civil war, and with estimates of from 2,000 (officially) up to 20,000 (unofficially) dead, and 200,000 refugees (see Katanga 1994, Van der Linde and Naylor 1999, Bogner 2000).

witch camps are in eastern Dagbon¹⁵ and there are no camps in western Dagbon. In western Dagbon the Earth-priest, who is also a chief, combines the two roles needed for this dual reintegration. Here, the traditional system is equipped to provide an appropriate solution. As Earth-priest he administers the ritual “washing of the stomach” thereby re-establishing relations with the “unseen” world. Then as chief, he provides the impetus and communal authority needed for building trust and reintegrating the accused into the community.

Earth-priest Chief

The effects of this dual role are clearly evident in the handling of accusations by the Earth-priest chief of Yongduni, a town in western Dagbon near Tamale. The “drinking oath” which is normally taken to abjure any connection with witchcraft becomes a two-edged sword in his hands. The accused is brought before the chief by his/her accusers. He/she either admits to being a witch and is thereby subjected to a ritual which nullifies the “witch medicine,” or swears that he/she is not a witch and the shrine is expected to kill the person if he/she lies. If the oracle shows that the accused is not a witch, the accuser must recant and the accused is accepted back. If there is any more trouble, or if the accuser(s) refuse to accept the person back, then the accuser(s) themselves become a source of disunity within the community—in effect they become the “witches.”

This repair system, which aims at restoring a harmonious unity, is able to function moderately well in western Dagbon by keeping accusations in check and offering some protection for the weak, who are always the most at risk. Even so, the system is not perfect.¹⁶ Accusations are a factor of the influence that the accuser vis-a-vis the accused exercise in the larger community. A powerful accuser can insist on another trial by ordeal, but a weak accused must submit to whatever “they say.” In the end it is this community social and political dynamic that finally determines whether or not the horizontal integration takes place. Although the chief normally has great influence, sometimes the community is adamant. It is then that the accused are sent away—usually to the camp at Gambaga.

¹⁵ From 2002-2004 the author intermittently conducted research at the village of Yongduni, eight miles north of Tamale, where a prominent Earth shrines is maintained by an Earth-priest who is also a ranking chief in Dagbon.

¹⁶ Drucker-Brown (1993:546) refines this idea saying that although it is the junior wives who accuse the senior wives in Mamprusi, it is only those seniors who do not have familial or local support that end up being accused.

Permanent versus Temporary Camps

By serving an important communal function, the “witch camps” are more like sanctuaries than prisons. Accusations take place in the heat of anger and people need time to cool down before trust can be restored. A full re-integration requires harmonizing both the vertical and horizontal relations. As we have seen, in western Dagbon this is made possible through the dual role of the Earth-priest chief. But in the case of eastern Dagbon this is prevented by the continued separation of both the ethnic groups and the mediators—Dagombas with their chiefs who only mediate horizontally, and Konkombas with their Earth-priests who only mediate vertically.

This insight leads to a further distinction in types of camps: permanent camps (Ngani in eastern Dagbon) versus temporary camps (Gambaga). In eastern Dagbon the accused witches cannot return home, but at Gambaga the expectation is that they will eventually be reintegrated into their home communities. “The Gambaga Outcasts Project,” for example, has successfully helped more than 50 to return. But due to the separation of the vertical and horizontal dimensions, eastern Dagbon is incapable of healing itself. A split in the two authority roles brings about and maintains a split in the two unified dimensions of their worldview—the seen and unseen worlds. This is, in turn, maintained and aggravated by the ethnic divisions. The witches, therefore, are only the tip of the iceberg. The core issue is not how to reintegrate the accused but the inability of a broken system to reconcile separated peoples and their broken worlds.¹⁷ This is where we may now set our sights.

The Accusation Factors

Given the pervasive Christian presence in Ghana, its relatively high literacy and education rates, the prestige and influence of modern science and medicine, it could be assumed that witchcraft is a thing of the past. But this is not so. All indications point to an increase in accusations. Since doing this research, another witch village has been established at Naboli in eastern Dagbon. Why might this be so?

In the 1950s, the anthropologist David Tait (1963) found seven factors related to the rise of witchcraft accusation in Dagbon. These are: (1) seasonal rainy season famines, (2) tensions in the house, (3) women’s leisure, (4) men’s frustrations, (5) general insecurity, (6) economic deprivation and food insecurity, and (7) availability of an easy solution. Life in Dagbon today has witnessed far greater changes than

¹⁷ For more about this see Kirby (2004) which attempts to explain the insecurity of Dagomba women and high incidence of accusation in terms of the master-slave relations between the Dagomba and Konkomba.

the 50s. In order to account for the rise in accusations¹⁸ we will try to see if these seven still apply and/or if there are other factors.

The 90s Economic Boom

From 1972-1982 mismanagement and kleptocracies left Ghana virtually bankrupt. Recovery was slow through the 80s, but during the 90s, incentives, loans and aid from the developed world, the IMF and World Bank, unleashed a bounteous flow of goods and services (see discussions in Sandbrook 1999, Aryeetey 2000, and Van de Walle 2001). Gradually Ghana's economy expanded and, by the beginning of the new millennium, northern Ghana was on the fast track to success. Improvements included the north-south highway, electrification and general face-lifts of the major northern cities and a boom in local NGOs. Commodities flowed into northern Ghana as never before: bicycles, motorcycles, vehicles, building materials, farming supplies and implements, and, most importantly, "women's things."

This last item includes the ubiquitous cheap kitchen ware and enamel bowls from China, silk scarves, wax prints and dresses from Indonesia, oils and creams, lipstick, nail polish and cosmetics, wigs and hair styling supplies, including electric dryers and fans, jewelry, and all manner of goods which fall under the domain of women. Northern women bought these items by the dozen and stored them away in their rooms. From the 90s onward, the only limitation to expansion was ready cash. It is here amidst the appearance of plenty that we find the first of Tait's witchcraft factors: "economic deprivation."

The development and aid money was supposed to launch production and increase general wealth, but this never happened. Northern production of maize and livestock marginally increased, but most of this output went south in exchange for the cash needed to pay for the improvements. The youth deserted the villages for glamorous "city life," and those who stayed migrated south during the farming season when their services were most needed at home; but more on this factor below.

Although these changes affected every social institution and niche of society, perhaps the most directly affected was the time-honored patriarchal division of

¹⁸ The author recently encountered in Accra the use of an electronic device called "computah"—ostensibly a black box with lights inside—which was reputed to be able to "eat witchcraft medicine". Drucker-Brown (1993) mentions the switch from the witches being transformed into various animals etc., in the '60s to the transformation of the victims into various insects or "bush meat" in the '90s. Gifford argues that dimensions of traditional religion including witchcraft, spiritual causality and destiny have been transferred to Christianity in the contemporary Charismatic phenomenon. This peculiarly Ghanaian form of Christian expression provides deliverance from all evils—especially poverty (2004:83-90).

labor and gender roles. A central tenet of this division assigns men to the public sphere and women to the private. Men's activities, relations and responsibilities extend beyond the family to the entire community, whereas women's are confined to the family and, within that context, to their own "birth children."

During the 80s, with no modern products available, people had reverted to a subsistence economy where the only thing they couldn't produce for themselves, and thus needed cash for, was salt. Only one decade later everything was suddenly available—"women's things," medicines, fertilizers, pesticides, fuels, and tools—but no cash to buy them. Suddenly cash was needed for almost everything. Fees were levied for electricity, water, education and medical care. These fees and cash expenses far exceeded the average person's modest earning power and, because they involved "cash," the brunt of the burden fell on the shoulders of those in the public sphere, the men. A core element of this is the conviction that money is a public category and must be used for the common good. This very likely derives from the colonial "head tax" which, in most cases, was their first encounter with "money." Because most of the men paid the tax through service on road gangs, cash got connected with male labor for the public good. Women could earn cash privately, but if they wanted to keep it, they would have to invest it immediately into "women's things."

The new flood of goods stretched the categories of the system to the bursting point. For example, "women's things" originally included shea butter as a beauty aid and cooking condiment. But by the 90s the category of cosmetics had extended to include everything from imported skin-lighteners to electric hair-dryers and the category of condiments to tinned sardines and fridges. The old system was unable to cope with the sudden expansion, which led to extreme ambiguity regarding role responsibilities. This and the paucity of cash heightened the frustration levels of the men in particular. This confirms two more (4 and 5) of Tait's conditions for the rise of witchcraft accusations.

Increase in Accusations

From 2001 to 2002, I interviewed some 50 accused persons in four different witch camps. Virtually all of these cases, in some way, confirmed the economic and social change profile described above and stretched the traditional rules to the breaking point. This brought unbearable tensions to households and communities, which confirms another of Tait's factors—tension in the household. The case of Pakpiema is an example.

Pakpiema is a Konkomba woman who was married to a Dagomba. She says she left her Dagomba husband because after her first child her other children kept dying. This indicates that she probably left him because she was tacitly suspected of

witchcraft. She went back to her Konkomba home village and there became an additional wife of a Konkomba man with whom she had five more children. Here is her story.

What made me to come here is that the son of my husband wanted to take another wife. But my son also wanted to take a wife. The son [of the Konkomba man] needed money to buy things for his wife. He came to me and asked but I told him that I had no money because I had given it all to my other children. The way I made the money was from making shea butter. So I told him to go to the [his] father and ask him for the money to buy the things. When he went, his father he said he had no money because he used it to get a new wife for himself . . . So I said that I will not allow my husband to take that particular woman because I know she is “not good” and I did not want her to come to live in our house. . . I told my husband that he should go and build a new house for the new woman to move in but I am not leaving my children or the house. . . And this new woman had a son. So the son got sick and died and my husband’s brothers accused me of killing her son because they knew I didn’t want her to come and she came.

Analysis of Kpakpiema’s Accusation

In a polygynous patilineal Konkomba household, a man’s wives all live together in one compound. Each has her own hut but they are all co-responsible for helping all the children of the house or extended family. Pakpiema is an entrepreneur with her own income from shea butter. She works very hard at this—probably much harder than her co-wives. She does her part in all her communal responsibilities but she clearly feels that her shea butter earnings are “extra” and she has the right to dispose of this income as she sees fit. She feels that this “extra” wealth falls into the traditional rule regarding the private ownership of “women’s things.” This rule has its roots in the tacit acceptance of the fact that despite the idealized obligation for wives to treat all the children of the household equally, a woman’s emotional ties are first to her own “birth children” and she will always find ways to favor them. The implicit conditions for this “rule” are that it be a negligible amount, have low visibility and not be overtly detrimental to the common good. I call this the “jealousy factor.”

A crisis arises when one of her husband’s sons asks her for money to help him secure his future wife. This is really the responsibility of his father but he would not have asked if she didn’t have the extra, highly visible, disposable wealth. There are two principles in conflict here. The first is that of solidarity. All family wealth is to be dispensed according to need. The second is the untouchable status of “women’s

things.” We will analyze this in greater detail below, but traditionally the category of “women’s things” included articles connected with women’s roles such as the three stone hearth used for cooking, breakable clay cooking and storage pots, hand-woven cloth, cooking implements, sleeping mats, baskets, calabashes, and shea butter oil for cooking and cosmetic use. These were the inalienable property of a woman and could never be even requested, much less co-opted, by another member of the family, male or female. But traditionally they had almost no monetary value, did not attract attention, and were not needed for the common good.

Pakpiema feels the family has no claim on her shea butter earnings. The sons, however, on the principle of solidarity, feel they have a justifiable claim on this resource simply because it is there in full sight and (with a stretch of the imagination) is needed for the “common good.” But, of course, their claim is eroded by their intended use. Konkomba marriages are ideally arranged between the male heads of families. A father normally offers as a marriage prestation the labor of his son for seven years to the family of the bride. This is still the rule, but times are changing. Nowadays, a mother’s influence over her daughter and her demand for gifts, and in some cases money, must also be considered by suitors. Traditionally, small gifts of little monetary value (e.g., smoked fish or firewood) were offered to gain the confidence of mothers of potential brides. But since the 90s the stakes have increased dramatically. Besides the traditional arrangement of the seven years labor, a young man must also ply the girl of his dreams, and her mother, with expensive gifts and cash, which force him to look for work and money outside the traditional homestead.

Although Pakpiema’s husband’s son’s request for her financial help is not the traditionally acceptable way of getting a wife, it is quickly becoming the norm. It runs contrary to the expectations of the male elders who are not in favor of such negotiations or any women’s involvement in marriage agreements because it reduces their overall authority and sets families against each other, or, as they say, “it causes quarrels.” In this regard, Pakpiema has the basic support of the male elders of the household, who wish to maintain their authority and controls. But the male youth are caught between the two opposing paths for procuring a wife: the traditional way of providing labor for the girls’ father and the new way which involves costly gifts to future wives and their mothers—gifts they cannot afford. Therefore, they feel that any “extra” money floating around the household, even if it is embedded in “women’s things,” should be used for typical household needs such as helping to procure a wife for a member of the house.

Pakpiema tries to get off the hook by responding that “she has given it to her other children.” But, in fact, most of her wealth will go, or has already gone, toward things that are important for her rather than for communal interests, e.g., sending her “birth children,” especially the females, to school. But this runs contrary to family

expectations. Money should not be spent on daughters because they will eventually marry out of the house.

Pakpiema's response also reveals that she oversteps her female role in three other ways: (1) when she criticizes her husband for taking a second wife, (2) when she calls her "rival" a "bad person," which is a euphemism for "witch," and (3) when she demands that her husband build a separate compound for his new wife. The first step is seen as "anti-life" because the number of children, and therefore of wives, a man has is an important measure of his ultimate success, i.e., abundant life. Furthermore, the elders insist that it is their responsibility to decide whether or not her husband should have another wife; not hers. The second, calling someone a "bad person," amounts to a witchcraft accusation. This is quite serious, for once it is spoken it cannot be taken back and, like a two edged sword, it endangers the accuser as much as the accused. But the third is the most provocative, for to demand that her husband leave and build another compound for his new wife is, in effect, an announcement that she wishes to be on her own and cut off from the family. From this point on she is already a "witch" waiting to be accused. This happens when the untimely death of her rival's son "proves" that she is indeed a witch and has been killing him by her bad intentions all along.

The analysis of Pakpiema's situation reveals four modern changes that have had an overwhelming influence on accusations. They are: (1) the accumulation of valuable and highly visible but "untouchable" private wealth by women called "women's things," (2) family breakdown brought about by the switch from bridewealth to what is now being called "dowry," or from men's control over reproduction to women's control, (3) the enormous infusion of development money and cultural propaganda which has had the effect of shifting wealth from the public sphere to the private, and from the group to the individual, and (4) the increase in women's leisure, which has resulted from the introduction of labor-saving innovations. Instead of leading to more production, they have led to gossip and witchcraft accusations. A final influence (5) is the increased power of the media which, as Akosah-Sarpong (2006) describes it, "drives the culture of rights." The popular press has sanctified Western notions of individual rights, especially women's rights, over the traditionally prescribed common good. We will examine each of these in turn.

1. "Wicked Wealth"

Today women are accumulating wealth in the form of "women's things" over which they feel they should have sole rights. Until recently, their cash value was negligible, they were not highly visible and they were not durable, so they couldn't accumulate. But nowadays the goods are considerable, durable, visible and valuable—in many cases worth thousands of dollars. When a situation arises in the extended family

which requires cash, the core rules of the society are now conflicted—the rule of solidarity clashes with the rule of private ownership of “women’s things.”

Although “women’s things” is an “untouchable” category, their use must also comply with group expectations. If a woman chooses to use them in a way that breaks family unity, e.g., she leaves the house to set up a business in town, she defies the group expectations of unity. If she gives goods to her daughters (who will eventually leave the house), it is perceived as a betrayal. These threaten traditional conventions and are seen as extremely disruptive. Women could choose to invest their earnings into common property such as livestock, or let it simply remain as communal cash, but they don’t. “Why should we?” They will ask. “This is men’s work!” So they invest it in untouchables where it remains an inert security blanket.

Communal expectations are also affected by the extreme contrasts between women’s highly visible wealth and the extreme poverty of their households. It is not unusual to enter a woman’s hut in an impoverished northern compound only to find a stockpile of “women’s things” worth thousands of dollars packed in jumbo suitcases and sideboards. The contrast breeds suspicion, for it suggests disunity, and disunity is a sign that witchcraft is in the air. The community will respect the “untouchable” status of her wealth until she has been accused. Then it is “recycled” back into the community.

Diminishing Property

Eighty per cent of the people of northern Ghana are farmers—formerly subsistence farmers. But nowadays northern men produce their crops not only for their families but for the whole nation. The need for cash has replaced the sturdy and nutritious Sahel millets and sorghums with fast growing maize. Harvests are bigger but they have pushed out more nourishing and resistant crops. Maize is not suited to dry northern conditions and requires costly fertilizers. But it suited to southern palates, so it is sent south for badly needed cash. This results in less food locally. When families run short, as usually happens in the rainy season (also called “hunger season”), they must buy back their crops at double the price. Finally, in spite of all the changes, actual production levels have barely increased. Bullock farming never caught on and tractors are just too expensive.

People are starting to get the feeling that they are working harder for less—and they actually are. Wealth and security seem to be diminishing, and their ability to provide for their families is reaching the danger point. The greatly increased cash expenses are never quite covered by their modest earnings, and the slightest misfortune brings problems to a head. When illness strikes, when an expensive funeral must be organized, or even when the predictable droughts, famines, pests and floods arrive, there is no reserve and they depend on their traditional links in the community for

help. At such times the inert wealth in women's rooms becomes an obscene source of "anti-life."

The basic rule regarding property in Northern Ghana, and with variations all across Africa, is that of solidarity. It derives from the African worldview: "from those that have to those that need." Ideally, all wealth is public. Women's private wealth is a kind of fiction invented to keep peace in polygynous households but it can only do this when it is negligible. As wealth increases and becomes more visible and public, it must not be withheld from those in need. When it is used for private interests or hoarded it becomes "wicked wealth" and is identified with witchcraft.

2. Breakdown of Institutions of Solidarity

Hoarding private wealth is an unforgivable sin against solidarity and interdependence. But if this is unforgivable, using it in the two ways most preferred by contemporary women, i.e., setting themselves up as entrepreneurs of privatized wealth and passing it on to their daughters, are indisputable signs of witchery. Daughters not only send wealth out of the house, their doing so jeopardizes long histories of exchange with other families which are needed for survival when misfortune strikes. In these ways wealth that passes down to women as private individuals destroys the traditional familial institution of solidarity leaving a chaotic individualism in its place.

The arranged marriage system of the Konkombas, which traditionally required a bridewealth payment of seven years' labor, was extremely stable. But today, the importance of romantic love and an individualistic spirit have had a destabilizing influence. Konkomba youth will no longer wait seven years for a wife. Like their Dagomba neighbors, they are seeking "fast" marriages of elopement—a pattern that takes its cue from the pre-colonial Dagomba practice of sealing wives from the Konkombas. A young Konkomba will dodge his obligations to his family by hiring his labor to farmers in the southern Ghana. The cash he earns will be given to the mother of his girlfriend in return for arranging an elopement. The mother then invests this cash in "women's things."

This practice is now widespread and is destroying the bond of solidarity and interdependence among families—especially the relations between the families of the groom, the bride, and the eloper. The eloper essentially steals the woman from her husband of the arranged marriage, who, in most cases, has already given his seven years' labor. Even though he will never get its full value back, he will demand it in the form of cash from the father of the girl, which he will then use to seek an elopement with someone else's wife. The father of the girl will then demand compensation from the family of the eloper rather than the mother of the girl. Nothing can be expected from her because all her wealth is in untouchable

“women’s things.” The father of the eloper will then pay this compensation money on behalf of their absent son who must reimburse his family if he ever wishes to be accepted back.

Such elopements are very unstable. Because the couple is on its own and can no longer depend on the extended family for support, when financial difficulties or misfortunes arise—as they always do—which prevent the husband from fulfilling his obligation to support his wife, the woman simply packs up her private wealth (dowry) and returns to her mother or establishes a small retail shop in town. The eloper either remains destitute, wifeless and isolated or returns to his extended family after agreeing to pay the bridewealth compensation back to his family. At the end of it all he is wifeless and deeply in debt.

3. “Development” (If you Empower a Woman you Produce a Witch)

“Wicked wealth” and the cycle of family breakdown described above are tremendously aggravated by Western development and aid which favor individual entrepreneurs, especially women. The naïve realist presupposition in the West is that at its core the African system is basically the same as that of the West, but less developed. Thus, development jargon such as, “If you develop a woman you develop the whole family,” is rarely challenged and women’s entrepreneurial projects are favored over those which are thought to benefit only the men. But regardless of whether it most visibly features men or women, when the private sphere is empowered to the detriment of the public sphere, it produces witches.

4. Leisure and Gossip

Women’s leisure is also increasing due to new labor-saving devices and services, which, because they are cash items, are usually paid for by men, but favor the women. For example, in many northern towns and cities natural gas is now used for fuel in preference to the greatly diminished supply of firewood. Firewood is the responsibility of women but the gas that replaces it is paid for by men. Similarly, electricity, which is paid for by men, is used mainly for appliances like fridges, cookers, water heaters, etc., which are extensions of the female role and help make women’s work less burdensome and time-consuming. Grinding mills, for example, have ended women’s tedious and time-consuming work at the grinding stone, and piped water and boreholes have put an end to the long treks for water. Because these are cash items, they are shouldered by the men. Plastering and masonry work, which has replaced the mud plastering formerly done by women, is also both done and paid for by men. The end result of these new arrangements is greater leisure for women and an unbalanced division of labor, roles and costs which disproportionately burden the men.

Tait (1963) cited women's leisure and men's frustration as the most prevalent causes of witchcraft accusation. Although women's work has, indeed, become easier and less time-consuming, this has not led to the expected outcome. It was assumed (by Westerners) that more time-saving devices and opportunities would lead to greater efficiency, more productivity, increased prosperity and communal well-being. But the increased leisure has simply led to more of what women normally do with their leisure, namely, relaxing, sitting together with other women and gossiping—usually about other women. Where it has led to more production, as in the case of Pakpiema, the profits have been invested in more “women's things,” not in communal things like school fees and medical services for all the children of the house.

This has heightened frustration levels among the men. Although their share in the costs has gone up, their relative share in the newly acquired benefits has gone down. Given the expectation that visible wealth must be shared, these frustrations reach critical levels when, due to adverse conditions, husbands are unable to provide for their families while their wives sit on great wealth. Even worse, there is no means for allowing such wealth to cross the rigid traditional role boundaries. As a result the men are shamed publicly for not fulfilling their roles and their wives are within their rights to leave their “useless” husbands. These emerging patterns strain the traditional rules of solidarity and interdependence to the breaking point and, from the perspective of the traditional worldview, seem to go against life itself. In other words, they portend witchcraft.

Modern life as a whole is being perceived by the people as empowering the individual over the community and the private sphere over the public. When communal wealth is diverted into inaccessible private vaults, people sense that life is being subverted. Since the division between roles remains impenetrable, imbalances between the communal sphere and the private are rebalanced through witchcraft accusation. Entrepreneurial women are accused of witchcraft and sent to the camps so that their wealth can find its way back to the public sphere. The peoples of northern Ghana clearly need to new ways to redistribute wealth. But before looking at possible alternatives we need to consider the influence of the media.

5. The Media Hoopla

Today, Ghana's media is a powerful force for human rights. In the words of Akosah-Sarpong, a prominent Ghanaian journalist: “Enhanced by the swelling democratization of communications, the mass media is ever more becoming aware that human rights and journalism are intrinsically entwined and brutally inseparable—that each drives the other” (Akosah-Sarpong 2006). By its

sensationalism, its promotion of highly individualistic Western values, and by denigrating African culture through newspaper and journal articles (Adinkrah 2004, Badoe 2004, Palmer 2004), documentary films (Berg 2004, Badoe 2011) and television programs (Mahama 2005), the media, rather than being a source of support only adds to the difficulties faced by those pitiable women accused of witchcraft.

Rather than being value-neutral, the media promotes Western values of individualism over collectivism, independence over solidarity, progress over tradition, and human rights, equality and freedom—especially from what is considered to be male domination and repression. For example, the woman who complained of repression is cited as saying, “I didn’t realize how much people hated my independence” (Badoe 2005), or as another commentator summed it up: “It is a way of persecuting older women who have become superfluous to the community” (Mahama 2005), and “Violence against women is a particular problem in Africa where women are often expected to be in total submission to their men” (AWDF 2006).

In a feature article entitled, “The Dawn of the ‘Culture of Rights,’” Akosah-Sarpong (2006) proclaims, “progress is on the ascendancy especially from . . . superstition, malevolence and unreason.” Witchcraft is interpreted as part of this “traditional superstitious worldview”—all of which needs to be replaced with the enlightened Western view. “Older women are ‘accused of using’ witchcraft to cause illness and are almost always subjected to various forms of abuse that includes physical attacks, humiliation in public, destruction of property and ostracization,” says Akosah-Sarpong (2006). A film on the Gambaga camp interviews a woman who claims she was “tied to a log and tortured for 3 months . . . ” says Badoe (2004).

Easy Solution

Tait’s final factor (#7) for the increase in accusations is to find an “easy solution”. We have seen how witch camps in northern Ghana try to provide such an easy solution. Ngani averages two new arrivals each week. The others have similar figures, and the camps are increasing in number and size. It solves the problem of police or government investigations which would be brought on if they murdered the accused, and the matter is easily closed.

Witchcraft in the “Mind of the People”

Our digging into the contemporary situation in Dagbon has led us to consider three areas of life: religious, political, and economic. Their religious worldview is in two dimensions, which means that problem-solving requires both vertical and horizontal

mediation. A political history of slavery and oppression in eastern Dagbon sustains disunity by blocking the traditional ritual and horizontal mediation needed for unity. The disunity continues to threaten the quality of life for everyone in Dagbon through permanent witch camps like Ngani, on the one hand, and has led to a series of inter-ethnic conflicts, as well as a recent intra-ethnic conflict involving the murder of the Ya Na, on the other. Since the 90s, the influx of goods and the channeling of wealth to empower the private sphere (women) more than the public (men), has disrupted and imbalanced the traditional distribution of labor, roles and resources. This has led to a disharmonious, “anti-life” environment at different levels—individual, family, and community—that is interpreted as the result of witchcraft. We now have some insight into what witchcraft is the “mind of the people.” Any appropriate ministry or developmental approach must take these into consideration. As we consider responses, let us try to discern where the Spirit has already been working.

Toward an Appropriate Response

Because the camps are part of the traditional response to the threat of witchcraft, they need to be regarded as imperfect solutions rather than as a problem in themselves. Gambaga camp effectively reintegrates women back into their communities because it has a unified religious-secular authority in the Earth-priest chief. Permanent camps, however, like Ngani in eastern Dagbon, are less effective because they lack the possibility/means (Earth-priest chief) for reunification. Applying a Spirit-led response will be different in each case.

The Presbyterian Church’s “Go Home Initiative” at the Gambaga witch camp is in some ways quite life-giving. In contrast to the governmental services and NGOs, this program has offered real help and has brought about reconciliation in many communities and families. We have tried to show that the main reason for their success, although they may not fully realize it¹⁹, is the program’s accommodation of both the horizontal and vertical dimensions operative in the peoples’ worldview. Dedicated care-givers, like Simon Atunga, have, in effect, extended the chief’s horizontal role: “The Gambaga chief supports our efforts and we do press the villagers, but we must also be very sensitive to their feelings. If we try to press too strongly they will turn on us and there will be no cooperation after that.” With regard to the other dimension, their prayers²⁰ and assurances of God’s support have

¹⁹ Although this is, in fact, the case it is not the specific goal of the program or of the Presbyterian Northern Mission Fields as such.

²⁰ Prayers are always acceptable to Christians, Muslims or Traditionalists, regardless of the religion of the one offering them. Not to accept would be to curse oneself.

extended the Earth-priest's vertical mediation. These combined efforts are, indeed, bringing about some measure of reconciliation and are enabling the re-integration of the accused.

In eastern Dagbon, however, the situation is more complex. We have seen how, along with recurrent inter- and intra-ethnic conflict, "witch camps" are the by-products of pre-colonial slave-raiding. Here, too, the situation requires an acknowledgment of the horizontal and vertical dimensions. This, in turn, requires the integration of the two ethnic groups, at least at the level of mediation. The situation is far from being resolved. The main issues of land, identity and chieftaincy remain untouched, and both groups are moving further apart. Even though millions has been spent on "peacebuilding," up to the present time these efforts have not even brought about a reintegration of the Konkombas into Tamale and Yendi, the major cities of the North.

Powerful vested interests continue to block progress. Konkombas say chiefs cannot become Earth-priests because, "the Earth knows its people [i.e. Konkombas]!" And the chances of Konkomba Earth-priests becoming chiefs is curtailed by the powerful Dagomba chiefs and their royal families.²¹ These are the same issues that brought about the fierce 1994 conflict in the first place. Therefore, although there is no apparent war at present, all of Dagbon is still internally conflicted. The tension produced is a major factor influencing the accusations. "Witch camps" are increasing in size and new "camps" are being formed.²² The legacy of slavery continues to breed disunity in the communities, permanent witch camps at the territorial level, and the "witchery" of civil war at the trans-territorial level. The need for a better solution—one that responds to the humanitarian concerns as well as to the deeper systemic causes—has become critical²³. In eastern Dagbon what is needed is a peacebuilding vehicle that builds on traditional pathways in order to transform them. Culture-drama (Kirby and Gong, Shu 2010) is such a vehicle.

²¹ Under the present constitutions the land is held by the paramount chiefs on behalf of their people.

²² Underlining the trend toward separation, a new "camp" was established at Naboli in 2002 for only Konkomba. The Konkomba complained that they didn't want their "witches" to be slaughtered ever again as they were at the Kpatinga camp during the 1994 war.

²³ The peacebuilding authority, J.P. Lederach (1997), urges a four-tiered approach toward peacebuilding. His crucial 3rd and 4th levels—the systemic (including culture) and the envisioning of a "peace culture"—have not yet been applied by peacebuilders to the Ghanaian scene.

Culture-Drama and Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding has become one of the biggest industries in N. Ghana. NGOs dispense millions for workshops, seminars, projects, and infrastructure, but virtually none of these efforts build on local cultural pathways, and it has been my experience that few, if any, touch the deep underlying causes. In 2001, with a grant from CRS-Ghana, I spent a sabbatical year uncovering these by conducting an analysis of chiefly and non-chiefly cultural pathways. Four cultural themes emerged in which key values, expectations and behavior of each mega-group (chiefly and non-chiefly) were shown to be diametrically opposed to each other (Kirby 2003). To bring about a healthy meeting of these pathways I, together with a psycho-dramatist colleague, used a new therapeutic enactment genre²⁴ called “culture-drama” (Kirby 2002). We organized a one-week workshop in March 2003 involving ten (non-chiefly) Konkombas and ten (chiefly) Dagombas. In the workshop they came to realize that they needed one another to build the peaceful and nurturing environment of a “peace culture.” The level of mutual trust that they reached, and their new common vision of a peace culture which provided the confidence that they could work together to resolve any future issues, exceeded our highest expectations.

By acting out a series of conflict scenarios in reversed roles, they slowly gained insight into their own pathways, those of the other, and the ways they came into conflict. They came to acknowledge these pathways as a starting point for change and, with each others’ help, they came to negotiate new ways of living together. This insightful experience of an actual peace culture, which came to life in a workshop, still needs to be realized back home in their villages, but as a new vision it holds forth the promise of a unified future. This is a tremendous step forward for peoples who, for generations, have lived their lives in hostility, fear and without any hope for the future.

An important segment of the workshop concerned the integration of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of their worldview—the realignment and unification of Earth-priest and chief. In their reversed roles of Earth-priest and chief, each side came to experience themselves as interdependent and empowered by the other. I believe that this experiential grasp of their interdependence is the key, the experiential foundation, to liberating the camps and reintegrating the accused back into society, and that without this foundation all efforts will simply fall away.

²⁴ Dr. Gong, Shu, is a specialist in psychodrama and art therapy, who came to Ghana in 1989 at the invitation of the Major Religious Superiors of Men to investigate conflicts arising in ethnically mixed Religious communities. She discovered that the members of these communities were healthy individually but that the Ghanaian cultural pathways were in conflict with those of the Europeans. Together we worked out a method for integrating cultural pathways which I baptized “culture-drama”.

Through this enactment a fractured system, if only briefly, was once again made whole.

Responding to an Imbalanced System

As we have seen, when the gendered division of roles involving an impermeable public (male) versus private (female) divide, is brought into contact with powerful Western individual, entrepreneurial and privatized influences, the system becomes imbalanced toward the private sphere and is unable to respond to the common ideal of solidarity and interdependence. This is experienced as a threat to communitarian life and results in witchcraft accusations. In the name of harmonious progress then, African churches need to accompany and assist the modernization process by making that divide more permeable. Their mandate is to put local culture first, because that is where the Spirit is working, and this mandate needs to be extended to the avalanche of volunteers, missionaries, and agents of “development” for whom “traditional” simply means backward. Would-be helpers in their mad race toward “modernization” need to be mindful of the dark side of globalization, to “do no harm” and to be more open, honest, and loving with regard to the “mind of the people.”

The Role of Churches

For the near and, probably, the distant future Africans will continue to hold collectivist worldviews where solidarity and interdependence are the rule. And until a balance is achieved between the private and public sphere that supports a more equitable access to wealth and opportunity, witchcraft accusations will very likely increase. Here the churches have an irreplaceable role.

The three “jealousy factors” associated with private wealth: the amount, its visibility and local need require special attention. The greater the amount and the more visible it is, the greater chance of it causing difficulties. But highly visible wealth is not a problem where there is public access. Traditionally, women could claim private ownership to the extent that this did not jeopardize the “life” of the community. In the popular imagination, this “*causes*” death. When a death actually occurs, people know who “did it.” The churches, with their extensive resources, moral authority, and trusted guidance and direction through church groups, are better positioned than NGOs and organizations of state to attend to these factors.

Women in northern Ghana will not easily pour their hard earned cash into the common pool, especially if it is seen as mainly “men’s responsibilities.” Nevertheless, the gendered public/private boundary needs to be recognized and addressed, and to become more porous, open and fluid. Churches can assist this

process through education on budget planning that emphasizes a balanced and loving “Christian cooperation” between spouses and members of the extended family. Some women are already reaching across this divide to take on some new cash responsibilities that seem closer to women’s work, such as the education and primary healthcare for all the children of the house. Female private wealth needs to be linked more tightly to such costly public concerns while male dignity sometimes needs affirming.

Through men’s organizations churches can help men to realize that they need not be threatened by change and that it is in the interests of all for women to take a greater role in the public sphere—one that does not diminish the roles of men but complementarily balances communal responsibilities. Group discussions about this at the village level are crucial. Women’s groups such as the “Christian Mothers,” and various other church guilds and tribal associations can facilitate this. With more leadership, organization and direction, women’s increased leisure can become a creative source of refreshment, creativity and new life, not only for the women but for the whole community and beyond. A project in Sirigu, northern Ghana, was recently initiated to encourage elderly women—those most susceptible to accusation—to revive their practice of traditional house decoration, which not only produces money through tourism but fosters and builds on the cultural values. It produces “life.”

A Ministry of Compassion

We have seen how the help offered by governmental services and NGOs at Ngani was diverted away. The peoples’ negative expectations concerning the treatment of witches constrains even dedicated Christians. The Earth-priest and chief are at logger heads and each tries to extort whatever he can. This disunity in the vertical and horizontal mediation, rather than healing, leads to greater disunity and dissention. This creates more distrust and much of what Fr. Joseph does is suspected by one or the other group. As one of the “witches” explained: “Here at *Ten* you can’t go out at night [for night prayers]. When it is night time the shrine goes out and if you also go out you might meet it [and die]. Are you under the shrine or under the Father?” But despite the limitations, Fr. Joseph is able to offer a personal human response that is able to cut through these powerful negative influences.

One of the main reasons for this is the trust and prestige associated with the churches. As the Catholic Church’s representative, Fr. Joseph is able to defuse the antipathies and neutralize the fears created by the factions aligned to the chief on the one hand, or the Earth-priest on the other. His response demonstrates God’s love through simple things like Christmas parties, complementary drums of water

and roofing grass given with love. His Sunday masses bring the whole community together—“witches” and townspeople, Dagombas and Konkombas. They bring joy to the disheartened and humanity to the outcasts. They bring renewed hope and the will to go on. Such life-giving service and joyful celebrations are at the very heart of the rehabilitation process because ritually they bring the whole community together as God’s children—vertical and horizontal mediation is reestablished.

Lighting up the Dark Side of Globalization

We are fast coming to realize that, far from reducing us to a monocultural mode, our new global experience is moving us toward a multi-cultural pluralism. What happens in one area of the world transfers immediately to the next; but with vastly different interpretations and consequences. Here there are unexpected dangers. Unfulfilled expectations raise national and international tensions, as instant miscommunication across old boundaries becomes the norm. But there are also opportunities. By probing more deeply and exploring the “mind of the people” it is possible to discover the “mind of God”.

As a case in point, we have tried to enter into the “mind of the people” to discover “God’s mind” with regard to the “witches” of northern Ghana. In doing, so we have probed deeply and have gotten some understanding of the complexity of cultural issues. From this complexity new opportunities begin to emerge and the dark side of globalization is illuminated as the light of the Spirit begins to shine forth in ways we never expected.

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Zauberei in Afrika

Gabriele Lademann-Priemer

Einleitung

„Zauberei in Afrika“ ist ein umfassendes Thema. Es gibt Zauberei zum Heilen und zum Schaden, Zauberei, die das Gleichgewicht zwischen Menschen und Göttern und Geistern wiederherstellt, aber auch Zauberei, durch die sich jemand auf Kosten anderer einen Vorteil verschaffen will.

Unser europäischer Sprachschatz ist beschränkt hinsichtlich dessen, was wir unter Zauberei oder Hexerei verstehen: Zauberei, Hexerei, Magie, witchcraft, sorcellerie, so weit der ungefähre Wortbestand. In Afrika ist das Phänomen differenzierter. Man muss jedoch unterstreichen, dass unser Sprachschatz mit seinen Interpretationen auch in Afrika Platz gegriffen hat durch TV, Filme, Internet. Der Einfluss des Internet wird oftmals unterschätzt. Laptops sind verbreitet.

Zauberei und Magie haben für viele Christen einen anrühigen Klang. In manchen extrem christlichen Kreisen werden Magie und Zauberei stets für satanisch gehalten. Dabei spielt es keine Rolle, ob sie zum Schaden oder zur Heilung dienen.

Die Vorstellung von Zauberei gründet auf einer Weltsicht, dergemäß die unsichtbare Welt der Götter und Geister und die sichtbare Welt des Menschen aufeinander einwirken und bezogen sind und einander gegenseitig zur Verfügung stehen.

Hexenfurcht und Schadenszauber – eine Frage für die Justiz?

Da das Oberthema dieser Tagung „Hexenfurcht“ heißt, werde ich mich jedoch auf den Schadenszauber beschränken. Es kann so scheinen, als würde man Afrika als primitiv, unaufgeklärt oder zurückgeblieben hinstellen, wenn man über deren Ängste und Vorstellungen redet. Dieser Eindruck wird verstärkt, wenn schon im Titel von Fernsehproduktionen das Wort Aberglauben erscheint.¹ Viele Erscheinungen von Magie in Afrika sind modern und fußen auf neuen

1 Hexen, Heiler, Zauberer, Mythen und Aberglauben in Südafrika, ORF/3SAT 2008, Wiederausstrahlung am 22.04.14.

Entwicklungen. Die Zerstörungskraft von Angst, Denunziation und Schuldzuweisung ist jedoch weltweit bekannt.

Hinter der Furcht vor Hexerei und Schadenszauber steht die Überzeugung, es gebe eine schwarze Macht, die von einem Menschen Besitz ergreift und ihn zum Tun des Bösen veranlasst. Wer Schadenszauber ausübt, hat nach dem Glauben der Zulu von Südafrika „Schwärze im Blut“, „umnyama egazini“ auf Zulu. Diese Schwärze verlässt ihn nie mehr. Er kann nicht mehr heilen und weiße Magie anwenden.

Unter den Zulu wird ebenso wie in Westafrika betont, dass ein Heiler zwar die Kräfte der Finsternis kennen müsse, um sie wirksam zu bekämpfen, sie aber niemals anwenden dürfe, sonst habe er sich ein für allemal auf die Seite des Bösen gestellt. Das klingt ideal. Medizinleute werden aber gefürchtet, weil man nie so genau weiß, wann sie ihre Macht vielleicht doch gegen jemand wenden. Gut und schlecht, schwarz und weiß sind eine Frage der Perspektive, aber nicht die einer festgelegten Ordnung. Jeder, der sich mit den Kräften der Geister einlässt, kann theoretisch in den Verdacht der Schwarzmagie geraten.

Ich habe einst unter den Zulu einen Mann getroffen, der sich als Heiler und Medizinmann vorgestellt hat und mit seiner prominenten und sogar zur Zeit der Apartheid weißen Klientel prahlte. Von anderen Leuten aus derselben Gegend wurde ich zur Rede gestellt, wieso ich einen Schadenszauberer besuchte. Das wurde damit unterstrichen, dass er einmal zu 10 Jahren Gefängnis verurteilt gewesen sei. Das sei eine viel zu milde Strafe gewesen, meinte man. Warum er wirklich im Gefängnis gewesen war, habe ich nicht erfahren. Seine Fürsprecher und Gegner waren gebildete Menschen. Im Zulu gibt es den Begriff des Inyanga-mthakathi, des Medizinmann-Schadenszauberers, eine Gestalt auf der Grenze.

Eine ähnliche Gestalt ist der Azeto in Benin, der ebenfalls in einer Art magischer Grauzone tätig ist.

Das zeigt, dass sich beide Sphären nicht eindeutig trennen lassen, sondern die Magie abhängig ist von der Verantwortung dessen, der sie betreibt.

Éric de Rosny erzählt in seinem bekanntesten Buch von einem dualasprachigen Heiler in der Stadt Duala in Kamerun, der als Schadenszauberer vor Gericht angeklagt war. Er wurde gefangen genommen und offenkundig im Gefängnis geschlagen. Der Dolmetscher aus dem Duala war zugleich derjenige, der ihn verklagt hatte. Der Heiler wurde jedoch von einflussreichen Persönlichkeiten aufgesucht. Es war bekannt, dass er die Leute nicht betrügt und dass er in seinem Heimatdorf als seriös galt. Die Frage, ob seine Heilungen dauerhaft waren, lässt sich nicht beurteilen. De Rosny verwendete sich bei Gericht für ihn, und der Heiler wurde freigesprochen. Die offene Frage aber bleibt: „Wer ist dieser Mann wirklich?“² Das

2 É. de Rosny, Die Augen meiner Ziege, deutsch Wuppertal 1999, S. 132-142.

Wirken eines Heilers bleibt umstritten. Die Hilfe für einen Klienten mag zum Schaden eines andern Menschen sein, besonders wenn Flüche zurückgeschickt werden.

Der Tronkult, l'Église du Tron, aus Ghana gilt als ein sehr mächtiger Kult. Er hat sich in Benin verbreitet und will die Menschen vor den Folgen von Schadenszauber schützen. Einmal im Jahr und bei besonderen Gelegenheiten werden junge Hunde und Katzen geopfert. Die Opferkatze soll sich in einen Panther, der Opferhund in einen Löwen verwandeln, um die feindlichen Kräfte zu fressen. Was aber sind denn feindliche Mächte, wer entscheidet darüber. Wahrscheinlich ist es eine Art von gesellschaftlichem Konsens in der jeweiligen Kommune.

Die Prahlerei mit Lizenzen, prominenten oder „weißen“ Kunden soll die Macht eines Heilers unterstreichen. Sehr wahrscheinlich hat die Prahlerei einen wahren Kern, denn man hat Autos prominenter Kundschaft vor dem Gehöft eines Heilers gesehen. Ebenso suchen einflussreiche Leute Propheten von Pfingstkirchen auf, und diese brüsten sich damit. Weiße Ethnologen und Touristengruppen, die einen Mediziner oder Propheten aufsuchen, um Informationen zu erhalten, und die an Zeremonien teilnehmen, tragen zu seinem Image als kraftgeladene Persönlichkeit bei. Besuche werden zu Reklamezwecken verwendet.

Ferner sollen sich lt. einer Reportage von ORF und 3SAT in Südafrika Mediziner, Wahrsagerinnen und Händler von traditionellen Medizinergewürzen registrieren lassen, um der Scharlatanerie entgegenzuwirken.³ Hier gibt es angeblich Lizenzen. Lizenzierte Heiler und Praktikerinnen dürfen keine Hexen benennen.⁴ Dagegen behauptet eine Reportage des französischen Senders TV5, dass von 2013 bis 2019 in Südafrika alternative Heilkunde zertifiziert werden solle, es gehe jedoch nur um chinesische, indische und ayurvedische Medizin, nicht um afrikanische, die jedoch am meisten praktiziert werde.⁵ Es gibt Unklarheiten. Offenbar gibt es in manchen Ländern Afrikas zum mindesten eine Registrierung für Kräuterkundige.

Dafür, dass sich Politiker und Wirtschaftsleute die Kraft von Medizinern oder die des Heiligen Geistes zunutze machen, bietet u.a. der beninische Präsident Kérékou (1972- 1991 und 1996 - 2006) ein Beispiel. Er hatte angeblich den Tempel des Legba, des Gottes des Kreuzwegs, aufgesucht, während er gleichzeitig in seiner marxistischen Periode Vodunkonvente hat schließen lassen und deren Priester verfolgen ließ. Sein Amtsstab war mit dem Chamäleon geschmückt, einem

3 Vgl. Film 3SAT.

4 Ebd.

5 TV5, 7 jours sur la planète, 19.04.2014.

Königssymbol aus Abomey, Hauptstadt des Königreichs Dahomey (heute Republik von Benin), und er liess sich von Amadou Cissé beraten, einem Marabout aus Mali, der für Präsident Mobutu im damaligen Zaire gearbeitet hatte.⁶ Als Kérékou sich nach 1989 zum „born again Christian“ gemausert hatte, wurde der Vodun als Satanismus verfeindet. In seiner letzten Amtsperiode ab 2001 hingegen griff Kérékou wieder auf das traditionelle Symbol des Chamäleons zurück. Mit dem Rückgriff auf Vodun-Traditionen unterstrich Kérékou das Bild eines mit einer geheimnisvollen Aura umgebenen Herrschers.⁷ Auch andere Politiker suchen die Verbindung zur spirituellen Welt, sie pflegen Freimaurerei, Rosenkreuzertum, Ahnenkult und suchen Moscheen und Kirchen auf.⁸

In Banamé, einem kleinen Ort in der Nähe der Grenze von Benin und Nigeria, hat sich eine von der katholischen Kirche abgespaltene Gruppe unter ihrem Papst Christophe XVIII. und seiner Prophetin niedergelassen. Inzwischen hat die Gruppe ein solches Gewicht, dass sich auch Politiker auf Gespräche einlassen. Die Gemeinschaft hat sich den Kampf gegen Hexerei auf die Fahnen geschrieben, die sie sowohl im Vatikan in Rom als auch in Benin bekämpfen will. „Délivrance de la sorcellerie“ ist auf dem Gottesdienstzettel für die Osternacht zu lesen.

Uns wurde ein etwa zehn- bis zwölfjähriger Junge vorgestellt, der eine Kinderhexe gewesen sein soll. Er sagte, er habe Menschen getötet und das Geschäft seines Vaters in Cotonou zerstört. Sein Vater wollte ihn foltern und töten, aber er sei nach Banamé gebracht und von seinen Hexenkräften befreit worden. Jetzt gehe er dort in die Schule. Er sprach Französisch. Interessant ist die Selbstbezeichnung. Wenn ihm die Geschichte nicht eingeredet worden ist, sondern seine Schilderung echt sein sollte, dann dient sie nicht allein dem Eingeständnis, sondern unterstreicht seine magischen Fähigkeiten, aber auch die Macht der Leute von Banamé als wirksame Antihexerei-Bewegung.⁹

In Banamé wird heiliges Salz verkauft, das man auf sein Grundstück streut, damit sich keine Hexen nähern, weil ihnen davon unerträglich heiß würde. Andere

6 C. Strandsbjerg, Continuité et rupture dans les représentations du pouvoir au Bénin entre 1972 - 2001 - Le président Mathieu Kérékou. Du militaire-marxiste au démocrate-pasteur, Cahiers d'études africaines 2005/177, S. 71-94, unter: www.cairn.info/revue-cahiers-d-etudes-africaines-2005-1-page-71.htm , Biographie von Kérékou: M. Chabi, Il était une fois un caméléon nommé Kérékou, Paris 2013.

7 Strandsbjerg, ebd.

8 S.Ellis / G.ter Haar, Religion and politics in Sub-Saharan Africa, in: The Journal of Modern African Studies 36/2/1998, S175-201, ebd.S188ff.

9 Ein Zeitungsartikel zu der Bewegung in Banamé: Bénin: le culte qui défie l'Église, unter: www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/afrique/benin-le-culte-qui-defie-l-eglise_1239516.html, abgelesen am 01.04.14.

Menschen in Benin pflanzen zur Abwehr eine bestimmte bunte Blattpflanze vor die Haustür. Viele Menschen tragen kleine Päckchen und Schutzamulette gegen das Böse mit sich.

Ich werfe einen Seitenblick auf Europa: Auch bei uns tragen viele Menschen alles mögliche in ihren Taschen mit sich wie zum Beispiel Heilsteine oder Talismane, um sich zu schützen. In Europa werden Amulette vermarktet, die Firmen im Hintergrund „glauben“ sicherlich nicht an ihre Produkte. Der Inhaber einer esoterischen Firma gab unumwunden zu, dass es sich um ein Geschäft handele. In Afrika hingegen kann man davon ausgehen, dass der, der Schutzpäckchen herstellt, sie auch selber für wirkungsvoll hält.

Die Furcht vor Hexerei ist verbreitet, manchmal ist sie namenlos, manchmal wird sie mit bestimmten Personen in Verbindung gebracht. Besonders die Furcht vor Kinderhexen nimmt zu, die schutzlos der Verfolgung ausgesetzt sind. Eine Vodunpriesterin erzählte mir, dass Kinder in den Dörfern von alten Leuten mit Hexenkräften ausgestattet und in die Stadt geschickt würden, um dort Chaos anzurichten. Die Kinder selber wissen angeblich von diesen Kräften nichts. Die Hexenkräfte reichen in Form von Vögeln und Flüchen sogar bis nach Europa und richten hier Wirrwarr an. Zu heilen seien Hexenkräfte nicht, so sagt sie, anders als das, was man in Banamé behauptet.

Andere Heiler hingegen führen Rituale durch, um Kinder von ihren angeblichen Hexenkräften zu befreien. Es gibt Waschungen und Opferungen, Anrufungen und Schutzzauber. Ein Azeto in der Nähe von Abomey sollte ein junges Mädchen heilen, das „Hexenzeichen“ an sich hatte. Es lebte in seinem Konvent, bis das Geld für die Reinigungszeremonie beisammen war. Das Ende der Zeremonie bestand in einem Opfer an die Wassergöttin Mami Wata, das in den heiligen Fluss Couffo geworfen wurde. Alle Anwesenden wurden mit dem Wasser des Flusses gesegnet. Anschließend zog eine Prozession durch das Dorf, sozusagen der Werbeblock für den Heiler. Eingekleidet in weiße Tücher, tanzte das Mädchen im Tempel von Mami Wata und den Zwillingsgöttern, und es wurde gefeiert.¹⁰ Weiß ist die Farbe von Mami Wata und der Reinheit.

In einem ethnologischen Film wird ein junges Mädchen vorgestellt, das an Kopfschmerzen, Bauchschmerzen, Alpträumen und Schlaflosigkeit litt. Es wurde durch ein Orakel festgestellt, dass sie Hexenkräfte hätte. In einem Ritual gesteht sie, dass sie durch die Speise einer alten Frau Hexenkräfte bekommen und sich in einen Vogel verwandelt habe und mit der Alten gemeinsam geflogen sei. Mit Hilfe eines Huhns wird sie gereinigt, eine Opferziege schützt ihre Familie. Sie schwört, niemals als Hexe zu wirken und nie wieder zu fliegen, wenn nicht, solle Heviosso, der

10 Bei dem Azeto in der Nähe der Stadt Abomey haben wir an dem Ritual teilgenommen.

Gewittergott, sie töten.¹¹ Das Versprechen ist mit einer Selbstverfluchung verbunden. Die Götter aber werden auch gebeten, ihr zu vergeben, falls sie etwas Böses tun sollte. Am Ende wird sie in den Mami-Wata-Kult initiiert.¹² Die Frage nach der Heilung von bösen Kräften wird also unterschiedlich beantwortet.

Die genannte Vodunpriesterin hat eine kleine Organisation von Frauen, mit denen sie in die Dörfer geht, um die Eltern zu lehren, dass sie ihre Kinder nicht wegschicken oder verkaufen sollen. Frauen und Kinder sollen von dieser Gruppe über ihre Rechte aufgeklärt werden. Einen Widerspruch zum Glauben an Kinderhexen gab es für die Priesterin nicht. Nur Europäer halten es wahrscheinlich für einen Widerspruch.

Wir haben es bei der Furcht vor Hexerei unter anderem mit einem Umbruchsphänomen zu tun. Die Stadt Cotonou ist chaotisch mit vielen Verkehrsunfällen, oftmals mit Schwerverletzten und Toten. Viele Menschen sind von wirtschaftlichen Problemen betroffen; die Zahl von Straßenkindern nimmt zu.

Das führt einerseits zu einem verstärkten Handel mit Kindern, die als Sexsklaven und Farmarbeiter über Grenzen gebracht werden, andererseits zu Hexereianklagen gegen die, die gesellschaftlich marginalisiert sind. Hexerei dient als Erklärung für eine Situation, der sich der einzelne Mensch hilflos ausgeliefert sieht. Das so genannte Böse wird nach außen projiziert, um den Status quo einer Gemeinschaft aufrechtzuerhalten. Die Projektion hat stabilisierenden Charakter. Ihre Schattenseite ist, dass der einzelne Mensch sich seiner Verantwortung entzieht und Kräfte der Veränderung gebunden sind. Konkret gesagt, dass man Schuldige sucht, statt den Stil, Auto und Motorrad zu fahren, zu ändern.

In allen Vodunkultstätten und allen Zeremonien geht es um die Abwehr des Bösen, der Hexen, aller Kräfte, die dem einzelnen Menschen und seiner Familie schaden können.

Ein Vergleich mit der Hexenverfolgung in Europa in der frühen Neuzeit drängt sich auf. Magie war nicht strafbar. Alltagsmagie war verbreitet, man machte sich dabei auch christliche Sprüche und liturgische Formeln zunutze. Verfolgt wurden dagegen einerseits Menschen, die aufgrund von Reichtum oder wirtschaftlichem Geschick den Neid der Nachbarn erregten und dennoch offenbar nicht besonders

11 Heviosso (Fon) oder Shango (Yoruba), der Gewittergott, ahndet Verbrechen, die nicht vom Gericht verfolgt werden, und bestraft verborgene Untaten.

12 Voodoo spirits - Die Kraft des Heilens, ein Film von Henning Christoph mit gleichnamigem Begleitbuch, Leipzig 2013.

einflussreich waren, andererseits gab es aber auch Anklagen gegen Kinder¹³, manchmal gegen solche, die als randständig und asozial betrachtet wurden z.B. Straßenkinder¹⁴. Parallelen kann man in der Umbruchssituation entdecken, die zur Projektion des Bösen auf Mächte führt, derer man sich nur mit Mühe erwehren kann. In Europa hat man es mit juristischen Mitteln versucht. Der Hexenprozess war eine Sache der Justiz,

jedoch gilt: „Diese juristischen Strukturen (zur Verfolgung der Hexen, die Verf.) wurden für Hexenjagden nur eingesetzt bzw. überhaupt erst geschaffen, wenn bei Obrigkeit und Bevölkerung akut die Bereitschaft entstanden war, effektiv gegen Hexen vorzugehen.“¹⁵ Das Einvernehmen beider Seiten gründete sich auf das Krisenerleben.¹⁶ Eine ähnliche Situation mit vergleichbaren Voraussetzungen findet sich in Afrika, wenn der Ruf nach dem juristischen Vorgehen gegen Hexerei laut wird.

Die Hexenverfolgung wurde später in Europa mit juristischen Argumenten zu Fall gebracht. Es ging nicht um die Frage, ob es tatsächlich Hexerei gibt, sondern um den Umgang mit Menschen, die beschuldigt wurden. Beides muss man trennen. Ob die europäische Verfassungsgeschichte ein Licht auf afrikanische Verhältnisse werfen könnte, bleibt einem eingehenden Vergleich vorbehalten.

Menschen in Afrika sind manchmal selber überzeugt, Hexenkräfte zu haben. Glaubten die Menschen der frühen Neuzeit in Europa daran, dass sie Hexenkräfte hatten? Manche bezichtigten sich selber aus Gründen von psychischer Krankheit oder „verdecktem Selbstmord“. Heiler, Magier, Schatzsucher¹⁷ hingegen galten nicht als Hexen. Bei Kindern war jedoch die Selbstbezichtigung die Regel, ihre freiwilligen Aussagen unterlagen aber der Interpretation Erwachsener, die sie für ihre Sichtweise und Interpretation missbrauchten.¹⁸

In Afrika beobachten wir dieselbe Problematik: Hexerei und Magie finden Eingang in Gesetzbücher mit denselben oder ähnlichen juristischen Problemen, die wir aus den

13 Vgl. J.Dillinger, Kinder im Hexenprozess – Magie und Kindheit in der frühen Neuzeit, Stuttgart 2013. Dillinger analysiert in seiner lesenswerten Studie die Rolle von Kindern im Hexenprozess.

14 Ebd, S. 180ff.

15 Ebd. S. 247.

16 Ebd.

17 Zur Schatzsuche vgl. J. Dillinger, Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America – A History, New York 2012.

18 Dillinger, persönliche Mitteilung, Kinder im Hexenprozess, S. 248f u.ö.

Prozessakten europäischer Hexenprozesse kennen.¹⁹ In der südafrikanischen Bevölkerung ist mir das Argument begegnet, dass ein Staat, der den Schadenszauber nicht unter Strafe stelle, sich nicht allein als schwach erweise, sondern geradewegs gemeinsame Sache mit den Tätern mache auf Kosten der Opfer. Ein Staat, der Hexerei jedoch zum Inhalt von Gesetzen macht, bestätigt das Vorhandensein okkultur Mächte und Machenschaften. Der Staat ist in einem Dilemma gefangen.

In Kribi in Kamerun zerrten junge Leute einen alten Mann vor Gericht, der als Hexe eingesperrt werden sollte. Der Staatsanwalt weigerte sich, woraufhin einige Monate später der alte Mann in seinem Haus verbrannt wurde. Die jungen Leute landeten im Gefängnis. Der neue Staatsanwalt sagte dazu: „Was soll ich tun? Wenn ich sie wegen Mord anklage, sagen die Leute, der Staat verteidige Hexen. Wenn ich sie laufen lasse, könnte eine Hexenjagd ausbrechen.“ Der Staatsanwalt meinte mit einigem Zögern, der Staat müsse es akzeptieren, wenn die Gemeinschaft eine „Hexe“ vertreiben wolle. Eine Gesellschaft ist jedoch nie homogen; über Hexerei herrscht in der Regel ein Dissens.²⁰

Auch im frühneuzeitlichen Europa war das Gericht im Zwiespalt, denn die Anklagen kamen oftmals unter dem Druck der Straße zustande mit denselben Konsequenzen.

Zunächst stellt sich die Frage, was denn das Gericht überhaupt unter „Hexerei“ versteht, die mit Gefängnis zwischen 2 und 10 Jahren und von 5000 bis 100.000 CFA (das sind 8 bis 160 €, also viel Geld für die Menschen) zu belegen ist gemäß dem Strafgesetzbuch Kameruns.²¹ Sodann fragt sich, worin die Tat besteht. In Kamerun wurde die Tatsache, dass Medizinmänner, die selber Magie betreiben, als Zeugen in Hexereiverfahren auftraten, heiß debattiert. Bisher galt ein Geständnis als Königsweg zum Urteil, aber man weiß, dass Geständnisse und Selbstbezeichnungen manchmal unter zweifelhaften Umständen zustande kommen, selbst wenn man nicht – wie im frühneuzeitlichen Europa – die Folter anwendet; allerdings sind Gewalttätigkeiten gegen Gefangene in afrikanischen Haftanstalten nicht auszuschließen. Die Folter zur Herbeiführung eines Geständnisses wurde in Europa im Laufe der Zeit immer stärker als zuverlässiges Beweismittel in Zweifel gezogen.

Zitat: „Das Vergehen der Hexerei beruht auf dem Beweis. Wenn man eine Tatsache jedoch beweisen kann, indem man sie wissenschaftlich belegt, darf man nicht mehr

19 Vgl. É. de Rosny (ed.), *Justice et Sorcellerie – Colloque international de Yaoundé*, Paris / Yaoundé 2006.

20 Vgl. P. Geschiere, *The State, Witchcraft and the Limits of the Law – Cameroon and South Africa*, S. 87-120, S. 109, Anm. 28, in: É. de Rosny, *Justice etc.*

21 P. Monthe, *L’avocat a-t-il une place dans le procès en sorcellerie?*, Siehe S. 275-282, ebd. S. 276 ff, in: É. de Rosny, *Justice etc.*

von Hexerei sprechen.“²² Hexerei ist geheimnisvoll. Ist Hexerei jedoch „zu beweisen“, weil ein nachweisbares Gift verwendet wurde, handelt es sich um Mord. Die unsichtbare Welt kann aus europäischer Sicht kein Gegenstand staatlichen und juristischen Eingreifens sein.

Es wird demgegenüber jedoch betont – Zitat: „Der effektive Beweis dieser Kontrolle des Okkulten sichert nicht nur die persönliche Legitimität politischer Führer oder traditioneller Autoritäten. In dem Maße, in dem staatliche Gesetze und Rechtsprechung die Ausbreitung von Hexerei in den Augen der Bürger effektiv in Schach halten können, fördern oder behindern sie auch die Legitimität staatlichen Verwaltungshandelns, und damit den Staatenbildungsprozess an sich.“²³ Auf die Gefahr, die Einbeziehung des Okkulten für politische Partikularinteressen zu nutzen und Menschenrechte zu beschneiden, wird hingewiesen.²⁴

In Südafrika gab es wilde Hexenjagden nach dem Ende der Apartheid, und der Staat sollte gezwungen werden, gegen Hexerei zu intervenieren. 1996 wurde Hexerei zum Delikt erklärt, ein seltsamer Umstand in einem sich als modern verstehenden Staatswesen. Unter der Apartheidsregierung wurde alles Leiden, wurden Missstände und Rückschläge auf die Politik geschoben, selbst dann, wenn sie sie nicht verursacht hatte. Nach dem Ende der Apartheid musste die Hexerei als Erklärung herhalten, und die Anklagen von und die Gewalttaten an angeblichen Hexen nahmen zu. Ferner gehörte dieser Vorstellungshorizont angeblich zur „Revitalisierung des afrikanischen Erbes“.²⁵

Unter dem Druck von Ritualmorden im Norden Südafrikas wurde eine Kommission eingesetzt, die das Verhältnis von Hexerei und Straftaten untersuchen sollte.²⁶ Aber auch diese Kommission entkam der Fußangel nicht, afrikanischer Wirklichkeit und europäisch geprägtem Recht in gleicher Weise gerecht werden zu sollen.

In der Limpoporegion von Südafrika gibt es vier Hexendörfer ähnlich denen im Norden Ghanas.²⁷ Einerseits bieten die Dörfer eine Schutzzone, andererseits bestätigen sie aber das Vorhandensein von Hexenkräften.

22 Ebd. S. 282. (Übersetzung von der Verf.)

23 D. Kohnert, Zum Einfluß des Okkulten auf staatliche Legitimität und Demokratisierungshilfe in Afrika, Sociologus 47/1997, S. 24-50, online-Ausgabe, S.4.

24 Ebd., S. 5f.

25 Geschiere, a.a.O.

26 Ralushai Commission „Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft and Ritual Murder in the Northern Province“ 1995-1996 (final report), 2010 wurden die Resultate überprüft.

27 Vgl Film 3SAT.

In Deutschland gibt es immer einmal wieder Versuche, schwarze Magie vor Gericht zu verhandeln, zum Beispiel wenn sich ein geschiedener weißer Ehepartner von den angeblich magischen Kräften des einstigen schwarzen Partners bedroht fühlt. Solche Verfahren führen zu nichts. Anders ist es allerdings, wenn Prostituierte aus Nigeria behaupten, abhängig und gefügig gemacht worden zu sein mit Hilfe magischer Mittel. Dann kann u.U. gerichtlich die Anwendung von Magie als Gewalt beurteilt werden, selbst wenn das Gericht nicht an solche Mittel glaubt. Gewertet wird der psychische Druck, der sich entfaltet aufgrund der okkulten afrikanischen Praktiken.

Die Anthropologen Jean und John Comaroff widmen sich in ihren Werken dem Widerspruch zwischen afrikanischer Tradition und europäischem Recht. Gründe für und Konsequenzen von Straftaten müssen empirisch zu verifizieren sein. Magische Akte wurden in der kolonialen Gesetzgebung in den afrikanischen Ländern nicht anerkannt. Wie also sind das europäische Recht mit der afrikanischen Moderne und der Lebenswirklichkeit einer traditionellen Gemeinschaft zu vermitteln?

Die Comaroffs behandeln Magie oder okkulte Kräfte nicht als Glaubensinhalte, sondern zeigen an Fallstudien, wie man mit Beziehungsgeflechten oder Kontrakten zwischen Menschen umgehen kann.²⁸ In einem Fall von Zauberei wird das Problem juristisch als Erfüllung oder Nicht-Erfüllung eines Auftrags sowie hinsichtlich der damit verbundenen Zahlung einer Rechnung behandelt. Denn Gesetze müssen für alle Menschen in gleicher Weise gelten; daher wird der Versuch gemacht, die Zauberei mit universeller Gesetzgebung in Einklang zu bringen. Aus verschiedenen Gründen ist es aber wohl in dieser Sache nie zu einem Urteil gekommen, sondern der Fall wurde immer wieder hinaus gezögert. In einem Artikel der Comaroffs werden außerdem zwei Tötungsdelikte geschildert, in denen die Täter jeweils geltend gemacht hatten, das Opfer für die Verwandlungsform einer Hexe, für einen Zwerg und eine Fledermaus, gehalten zu haben. In beiden Fällen wurden die drastischen Urteile, in einem Fall das Todesurteil, deutlich vermindert. Inwieweit aber ist die Strafe für ein Tötungsdelikt abhängig von der Vorstellungswelt des Täters?²⁹ Das würde nicht allein zu einer mehrstufigen, letztlich diskriminierenden Gesetzgebung führen, sondern auch dazu, dass die Vorstellungswelt als Ausrede verwendet werden kann. Einfache Lösungen gibt es nicht, worauf auch J. & J. Comaroff hinweisen.

28 J. L. & J. Comaroff, Criminal Justice, cultural justice: The Limits of Liberalism and the pragmatics of Difference in the new South Africa, in: *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 31/2/2004, S.188-204.

29 Bei der Strafverfolgung so genannter Ehrenmorde in Deutschland stellt sich dasselbe Problem mit denselben Diskussionen, vgl. U. Rasche, Kultureller Rabatt für „Ehrenmord“, FAZ vom 26.03.14 und die sich anschließende Debatte in den Medien.

Eine Voraussetzung wäre, dass die Staaten auf die Entwicklung eines Gemeinschaftssinns hinwirken, dem Gefühl, dass die Bürger eine Solidargemeinschaft bilden.

Zusammenfassung und abschließende Überlegungen

In Ex 22,17 heißt es: „Eine Hexe sollst du nicht am Leben lassen.“³⁰

Aus diesem und ähnlichen Zitaten leiten sich die Furcht vor Hexen und das Bestreben, sie zu beseitigen, ab. Die alttestamentlichen Stellen zeigen, dass es Furcht vor Hexen gegeben hat, sie machen aber nicht deutlich, ob es tatsächlich „Hexerei“ gab. Gesetze gegen Hexerei hatten in „biblischer Zeit“ genauso wie im frühneuzeitlichen Europa oder in Afrika stabilisierende Wirkung auf die Gesellschaft. Im Alten Testament ist Zauberei nicht grundsätzlich verabscheuenswürdig, sondern es gibt die legitime und die illegitime Magie. Was als „illegitim“ galt, wurde von der Priesterschaft, also von den herrschenden Schichten definiert. Die Magiedebatte ist stets interessengeleitet. Diese Feststellung dient nicht dazu, die Bibel in Frage zu stellen, aber sie dient dazu, sehr genau achtzugeben darauf, was wir jeweils tun und was unsere Beurteilungskriterien sind, wenn wir uns auf biblische Texte berufen.

Hervorzuheben ist die ethische Seite, nämlich, dass die Projektion auf „Hexen“ den Menschen und die Gemeinschaft, auch die Eliten von der persönlichen und sozialen Verantwortung entlasten soll, wohingegen ihre Übernahme notwendig ist.

Der Unterschied zwischen der heutigen europäischen Zugehensweise und dem biblischen und afrikanischen Denken besteht grob gesagt darin, dass im westlich-spätneuzeitlichen Vorstellungshorizont Hexerei als unmöglich gilt. In der Bibel, im frühneuzeitlichen europäischen Denken und in Afrika hingegen ist Hexerei Bestandteil der menschlichen Realität.

Im Westen geben die Akten der Hexenprozesse keinen Hinweis darauf her, dass jemand mit besonderen Kräften verurteilt worden wäre.³¹ Im Hintergrund standen menschlich-allzumenschliche Eigenschaften und Verhaltensweisen. In der frühen Neuzeit schlugen sich Theologen wie Luther herum mit dem Zwiespalt zwischen dem Fürwahrhalten von Hexerei im allgemeinen und der Beschuldigung konkreter Personen im besonderen. Luther predigte gegen die Hexen, ging jedoch in einem

30 Zum Folgenden: R. Schmitt, „Eine Hexe sollst du nicht am Leben lassen“ (Exodus 22,17) – Das Hexereistigma im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt; Theories Regarding Witchcraft Accusations and the Hebrew Bible, beides im Druck.

31 Das sei betont entgegen Spekulation wie G. Kosack sie anstellt in: Magie – Die Kraft zum Schaden oder zum Guten, Bad Schussenried 2012.

konkreten Fall pragmatisch und menschlich mit einer Selbstbezeichnung um.³²In Afrika bleibt die Frage offen, die de Rosny stellt: „Wer ist der Heiler wirklich?“ D.h. mit welchen Kräften arbeitet er.

Die Frage nach dem afrikanischen Vergleich bleibt einer späteren Untersuchung vorbehalten. Auch die Beleuchtung dessen, dass heute Menschen in Europa behaupten, Kontakt zu einer spirituellen Welt zu haben und mit besonderen Kräften ausgestattet zu sein, sprengt im Augenblick den Rahmen.

Ob es Hexerei und Schadenszauber gibt oder nicht, lässt sich nicht ontologisch beantworten und

auch mit dem Hinweis auf Beweise nicht lösen. Die Frage nach dem „es gibt“ oder „es gibt nicht“ löst keine Probleme, sondern wirft neue auf, wohingegen man davon ausgehen muss, dass Menschen „Hexerei“ erleben.

Die Frage nach der Zauberei ist die nach dem herrschenden Welt- und Menschenbild. Jedes Bild hat eine ihm innewohnende Logik. Es ist nie „irrational“.

Das heißt, dass die Ängste vor der Hexerei ernst zu nehmen sind. Wie aber geht man als Gemeinschaft oder als Staat mit der Anklage gegen konkrete Personen um? Wie geht man außerdem mit Selbstbezeichnungen um? Wie sieht die Beziehung von sichtbarer und unsichtbarer Welt und deren Zusammengehörigkeit aus?

Hier stellen sich viele Fragen und zeigen sich stets Dilemmata.

Die Zunahme von Hexenverfolgung und Hexereianklagen zeigt eine Umbruchssituation an. In Zeiten sozialer, wirtschaftlicher und politischer Unsicherheit werden Agenten des Bösen gesucht, die man verantwortlich macht für das tägliche Elend. Das können randständige Personen sein - alte Menschen, Kinder, besonders Straßenkinder -, es können jedoch auch Menschen sein, die man beneidet wegen ihres Einflusses und Reichtums. Sie werden allerdings aufgrund ihrer gesellschaftlichen Stellung wohl kaum verfolgt.

Politische Eliten versuchen oftmals, ihre Macht aufrechtzuerhalten, indem Gegner als Hexen diffamiert werden; manche afrikanischen Politiker stärken zum Erhalt ihrer Macht Polizei und Militär im Kampf gegen angebliche Hexen.³³ Eine Parallele bieten die Verschwörungstheorien von Politikern in Europa und Asien, die „den Westen“, „den Islam“ und andere Finsterlinge für ihren Misserfolg verantwortlich machen.

32 Vgl. Interview mit K. Lehmann, Kurator der Ausstellung „Luther und die Hexen“ in Schmalkalden 2012/2013, unter: www.luther2017.de, abgelesen am 03.04.14.

33 Persönliche Mitteilung in einem westafrikanischen Staat.

Politische Eliten laufen jedoch Gefahr, selber in Verdacht zu geraten wegen ihrer Anhäufung von Reichtum und Ämtern. Das Regime von Mobutu in Zaire, dem heutigen Kongo, wurde bei den Leuten als „Verschwörung von Hexen“ verschrien.³⁴

Die Angst vor Hexerei dient der Stabilisierung der etablierten Ordnung. Alles, was als bedrohlich oder fremd erscheint, menschliche Verhaltensweisen, Unglück, Not und Krankheit können auf schwarze Magie zurückgeführt werden.

Eine Nebenbemerkung: Die Gesetze gegen Homosexualität bis hin zum Aufruf zur Denunziation angeblicher oder wirklicher homosexueller Menschen in 36 afrikanischen Ländern, aber nicht nur dort, dienen demselben Ziel. Offenkundig gelten andere Lebensformen als eine Bedrohung für die Gesellschaft und deren Reproduktion und für den Status quo. Hier stellt sich die Frage, ob religiöse Traditionen und theologische Interpretationen gesetzgebende Wirkung haben dürfen.³⁵

Hexenverfolgung und Verfolgung Homosexueller bieten eine Parallele hinsichtlich der Öffnung für Denunziationen.

Beide berufen sich auf traditionelle, auf biblische und islamische Grundlagen. Die Verfolgung soll in beiden Fällen die Ordnung aufrechterhalten. Ferner sollen die Gesetze die Macht der herrschenden Eliten sichern. Kritiker werden mit dem Leben bedroht.³⁶

Offenkundig fürchten manche, dass auch die spirituellen Grundlagen eines Staatswesens bedroht sind.

Es ist keine Lösung, die Vorstellung von Hexerei als obsolet hinzustellen. Es muss aber – auch im theologischen Sinne – hingewiesen werden auf die menschliche Verantwortung, die Übernahme von Schuld für eigenes Versagen, und den Bruch der Gebote, wenn Menschen denunziert und diffamiert werden. Ferner ist es eine christliche Aufgabe, das Vertrauen unter Menschen zu stärken, so dass die menschlichen Beziehungen nicht von Misstrauen vergiftet werden. Vertrauen auf Gott und den Menschen gehören zusammen.

Die Berufung auf Religion als Grundlage für staatliche Gesetze kann zum Fundamentalismus führen. Das ist das Gegenteil des Pauluswortes „Zur Freiheit hat uns Christus befreit.“ Menschenrechte sind universell, oder es gibt sie nicht. Dass

34 Ellis / ter Haar, a.a.O., S. 197.

35 Vgl. www.brigitte.de, Alice Nkom: Menschenrechtspreis für den Kampf gegen Diskriminierung, abgelesen am 21.03.14, www.jeuneafrique.com 16.03.14.

36 Cameroun: l'avocate Alice Nkom dénonce un „apartheid anti-homosexuels“; Assassinat d'Éric Lembembe au Cameroun: l'enquête a été „bâclée“ selon ses avocats; beide Beiträge in: www.jeuneafrique.com, abgelesen am 24.03.14.

die Gepflogenheiten und Überzeugungen einer religiösen Gruppe nicht die Gesetze des Staates bestimmen dürfen, gilt in Europa seit der Entwicklung des Staatswesens. Hier hat auch die Aufklärung eine Rolle gespielt. Theologisch beruht diese Sicht und beruhen die Konsequenzen daraus auf der Unterscheidung zwischen dem Reich Gottes und dem staatlichen Reich, eine Unterscheidung, die man bis ins Neue Testament zurückverfolgen kann. Viele Menschen weltweit trennen allerdings Religion und weltliche Macht nicht, sondern halten sie für zusammengehörig. Es sei aber auch darauf hingewiesen, dass die meisten Kulturen weniger homogen sind, als wir es uns denken.

Ferner sind auch kleine Gemeinschaften nicht ohne eine Geschichte und was heute gelten mag, kann morgen überholt sein. Festschreibungen, auch in Form von Gesetzen, können einer Entwicklung hinderlich sein. Was also ist der Entfaltung des Lebens förderlich?

“Witchcamps” Gambaga and Ngani in the North of Ghana

Hannes Menke

The "Gambaga Witch Camp" is known in Ghana. In the meantime, it is known widely outside Ghana, too. For instance, a video can be watched in YouTube by everyone, showing realistically the social relations, interdependences, and the spiritual implications of the persons accused of being “witches” in the Northern part of Ghana.

I am referring specifically to my visits to the witch camps in the urban environment of Gambaga on February 7th, 2014, and in the rural Ngani on February 8th, 2014. Gambaga is situated three hours North of Tamale whereas Ngani is situated one hour East of Yendi.

It is not my intention to describe or to classify the phenomenon of witchcraft in Africa scientifically. I shall start by describing my observations. Only occasionally, I shall try to explain or to interpret them, using my own world outlook as a yardstick. I was impressed when I discovered that Samson Lear, the responsible leader of the charitable project “go-home” of the Presbyterian church, adopted the same principle. He decided to perform something which we would call “social work in an accepting manner” with the witches and in their favour. I shall deal with this subject in the second part of my report which will deal with the question how our church could handle the challenge of social segregation and loss of human dignity.

I made this trip together with four Ghanaian representatives of the study and encounter project “Ageing” of Bremen Mission who had visited charitable institutions in Germany in 2013. They will organise a reverse program in Ghana and Togo in September 2014.

It was on the occasion of the theological consultation of Bremen Mission in 2009 dealing with the topic of human dignity that I heard for the first time of the phenomenon of “witch villages”. The Ghanaian theologians drew our attention to

this challenge asking critically: who if not the church will listen attentively and will give help in such cases where violations of human dignity occur, violations that originate from the traditional world outlook of Africans, violations that are well known but have never been dealt with in public discussions?

It is a pity that difficulties of communication during my two-days visit limited the possibilities of study and encounter. Our visit to Gambaga took place without previous appointment. In both places, we had no chance to talk to the residents of the camps. Our group was too large, the visit was an unexpected visit of strangers. A longer visit and sufficient encounter time to create confidence would have been necessary to achieve our purpose in full.

Instead of that, our dialogue partners were

- Samson Lear, the leader of the project “go home” which is supported by the PCG,
- Gambarana Yahaha Wuni, the village major who provides protection to the women living in the village,
- some women whom we met in a large meeting.

In Ngani, the pastor of the local Methodist congregation was our translator whereas the traditional priest in whose sphere of control the camp was located was our main dialogue partner.

The “witch camps”

In Gambaga, 79 women and 44 children but only 2 men were resident but in Ngani the relation between genders was almost balanced (140 women, 150 men and 120 children). The imbalance in Gambaga was not caused by the fact that women are more likely to be accused of being witches than men being accused as sorcerers. We were told by our dialogue partners that the accusation of being witches or sorcerers can hit men and women in equal proportions. But in Gambaga, the urban milieu makes it easier for men than for women to find refuge in the anonymity of the mayor city Kumasi. The women whom we saw are of different ages but the older ones prevail. The age of the children starts from baby age. We did not meet men because our visit took place during day time when men work in the fields.

It is obvious that in both milieus, urban in Gambaga, rural in Ngani, people live in great poverty. The huts were more primitive than in the surroundings, they threatened to collapse. The roofs were not water-tight, there was no access to drinking water, the hygienic conditions were extremely bad because of missing toilettes and waste water disposal.

How do you become a witch?

The accusation of being a witch originates initially from the group of one's immediate family or local community. It seems that a social and a spiritual aspect is involved. People who are accused of being witches/sorcerers are always persons who do no longer live in harmony with the community. Even though I did not receive a full explanation, I had the impression that these people are “not adapted”, “difficult”, “strange”.

Another reason which was named was the use of witchcraft. This is usually described as deadly witchcraft or spells of “obviously abnormal” suffering like epilepsy. It seems that a view of life, a cosmology, a “Weltanschauung” is responsible according to which there cannot be an effect without a reason, supernatural forces can embed themselves in people who can use them to harm the community or individuals. People who behave in an unusual way, in an anti-social manner, could have access to spiritual powers. To verify whether the suspected sorcery is real, a two-phase process is used, suitable rites are applied. An example: if someone dies unexpectedly, the pallbearers are forced to pass the home of the suspected culprit on their way to the home of the deceased.

Exclusion from the community

If and when the spiritual potency of the accused has been verified, confirming the danger to the community originating from her or him, then he or she will be excluded from the community and banned by collective resolution. Every social contact will be terminated, the person concerned will then be brought to the witch camps which are sometimes quite far away, where they will be subjected to the patronage and control of the chief or priest.

The chief of Gambaga and the priest of Ngani have one feature in common: it is known that they possess spiritual powers far exceeding the powers of the convicted witches and sorcerers. This knowledge is passed on from generation to generation, it is like a “founding history”, the capability and skill to dominate these spiritual powers is transferred from the father to his son (or sometimes to his daughter, too).

Arrival in the “witch camp”

Once they have arrived in the witch camp, the persons concerned will be subjected to another “spiritual probe”. This time, they have to drink a liquid which has been prepared for them. If he or she refuses to drink the liquid or if they show symptoms of dysentery or vomiting after drinking it, the witchcraft or sorcery has been proven. We learnt from the priest of Ngani that it does happen occasionally that this probe has a negative result, proving that the person is neither witch nor sorcerer. But even

then, the persons concerned will usually decide to continue living under his protection – in this case, because they are afraid of their next of kin.

This spiritual probe is – at the same time – some kind of “acceptance rite” to the witch camp, subjecting the person concerned to the major power of the chief or priest. In addition, the probe has the function of removing the capability of witchcraft from the affected persons living in this context. They are now “powerless witches” living within the spiritual protection of a major sorcerer. They have lost their power to do harm to the communities in Gambaga and Ngani.

Social and spiritual implications

The life in the witch camps is, in several respects, a social and spiritual burden to the persons concerned.

In the following, I shall use the noun “witch master” (which is probably not quite adequate) both for the chief of Gambaga and for the priest of Ngani. The witch master wants that the families which the “witches” or “sorcerers” originated from should continue to be responsible for their subsistence. But this condition is fulfilled only rarely and only in a very inadequate manner. This means that these persons have to support themselves, usually without a regular income, in foreign surroundings. In Gambaga, the women are allowed to have a small income from collecting and selling firewood whereas a piece of land will be made available to the inhabitants of the “witch camp” of Ngani, allowing them to produce their own farm products.

In my opinion, a state of dependence is created in both camps, a decisive socio-economical factor, when the persons living under the “protection” of the chief or priest are forced to work for him. This dependence reduces the possibilities of the people concerned in developing their own gainful occupation, it results in their impoverishment. At the same time, the social role of the chief or priest is strengthened considerably beyond his status in the immediate community by the economic advantage derived by him from the work of his subordinates.

The social isolation and the ostracism by their families and communities causes a thorough destabilisation of the people. They lost all imaginable life relations, not only towards living people, but also in relation to the people living before or after them. In a society which is stabilised mainly by its social networks, they remain without any social, emotional and – finally – spiritual support. If they want to survive socially, they have no other choice than to accept the other “witches” and their “witch master” as their valid social frame of reference.

It was, therefore, no surprise for me when I was told, in reply to my question, that the persons concerned were ready to accept the accusation of being

witches/sorcerers as true. They were of the opinion that they really possessed supernatural powers. I personally have problems in understanding the meaning of this spiritual experience of being “possessed by foreign spirits”, of being capable to cause harm and damages, even death, to other people. But I suspect that this feeling is extremely unsettling and alarming.

The project “go home” as a reply of the churches to the challenge of the “witch camps”

The project “go home” of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) has the objective of strengthening the socio-economical situation of people accused of witchcraft and of reintegrating them into their families and communities of origin.

The persons responsible for the project are a project manager and a female social worker who has, in the meantime, become pastor. One of the salaries is financed by PCG, the other one, together with project means, by a Presbyterian development assistance organisation from Canada. The project endeavours to improve the life situation of the people concerned directly, to strengthen their socio-economical position, to contribute in the long run to a new view of life, for instance by increasing knowledge of health sciences and wellness matters.

At the moment, the financial support of the project has been interrupted after having run for several years. But the local Presbyterian congregation supports the project by regular gifts of food (a bag of corn per month per person) and collecting money in a sometimes limited scope.

The project manager Samson Lear, however, emphasizes that the particular views of life of groups of people such as “witchcraft suspicion”, “self-image of witches”, “social and spiritual protection” should not be questioned in order to maintain confidence in the basis of the work. He would never accuse someone because of his or her unsocial behaviour. This attitude can be maintained by him because of the foundation of his faith. Jesus Christ has all the power in heaven and on earth and has, once and for all, defeated all threatening negative powers and spirits.

Whether he shares the belief in witchcraft as part of his “view of life”, that is something that he did not tell me; it seems to me that he leaves the question open even towards himself. But he knows that he is called “Papa of witches” by other people because of his light-hearted attitude towards the supposed witches. When he dreams, he experiences the presence of spirits which could be allocated to this cosmology.

Besides the direct material support, he accepts it as his task to strengthen the internal organisation of the women and to enable them to become able to speak to the chief, to external structures and the urban community. Since many years, an

open roofed space allows women to get together. Furthermore, they teach each other activities that allow them to earn their means of subsistence such as the production of simple ornaments or jewellery. In this manner, the social situation of the inhabitants is improved, and there are some people living in Gambaga for many years who have no wish to return - possibly because there is no chance of returning.

But for many of them, the desire to return to their original families remains alive - the project "go home" provides a definite chance of fulfilment to these wishes. In such cases, the project adopts a definite role of conciliation, on one side towards their family, on the other side towards the chief who is in danger of losing one of his protégés and his/her productive capacity.

Project leader Samson Lear emphasized repeatedly that he does not adopt a complaining or accusing attitude towards the acting people. Their attitude and their decisions which were made a long time ago must be accepted as they are but after a long period of separation, it must be possible to talk to them about a new beginning and reintegration of persons who were previously accused of witchcraft.

In this manner, 51 women could leave the witch camp in Gambaga in the last years, to return to an independent and, above all, self-determined existence.

One of the essential preconditions is the preparation for independence, which is supported by the project in a material way, too. On the other side, the chief of Gambaga must be compensated for the reduction of his working force. He expects, more or less, a ransom.

One aspect of reintegration that must not be overlooked is, in my opinion, to raise the awareness of the population that is directly or indirectly connected with the phenomenon of witchcraft. It is conspicuous to notice, for instance, the posters in Gambaga and Ngani with the demand that the dignity and the rights of people accused of witchcraft must be honoured.

Furthermore, Samson Lear reported of information meetings relating to topics of health education and support of the medical sphere: where do illnesses originate from? How does the transfer of Malaria happen? How can we avoid illnesses, how can we be healed? In this manner, the magical imaginations which are the basis of witchcraft belief should, to a certain extent, lose their power of persuasion.

In this manner, mission takes place in the best manner possible by charitable social service, social reintegration and, last but not least, enlightenment (Aufklärung).

Hexenfurcht

Annäherungen an einen Fragehorizont und Beobachtungen zu einem komplexen Diskurs

Bernhard Dinkelaker

Die folgenden Anmerkungen geben Gedanken aus der Diskussion wieder. Sie bleiben fragmentarisch und bedürfen vertiefter Auseinandersetzung.

Das Thema „Hexerei/Witchcraft“ macht wie kaum ein anderes die Schwierigkeit deutlich, über historisch-kulturelle Unterschiede hinweg zwischen „Europa“ bzw. „dem Westen“ und „Afrika“ eine gemeinsame Sprache zu finden. In der europäisch-nordamerikanischen Geschichte ist das Thema Inbegriff einer politisch-sozialen Realität, die in Gestalt von Hexenverfolgungen Strategien der Durchsetzung von Machtinteressen in Umbruchs- und Krisenzeiten verkörperten, als Phänomen der Neuzeit (weniger eines „finsteren Mittelalters“), in protestantischen Gebieten stärker ausgeprägt als in katholischen.¹ Mit dem Geschäft der Angst wurden systematisch Menschenleben zerstört. Das Ende von Verfolgung, Folter und Hinrichtung von vermeintlichen Hexen wird als Errungenschaft eines aufgeklärten Bewusstseins gewertet, ungeachtet subtiler, metaphorisch verstandener Hexenjagden bis in die Gegenwart. „Hexerei“ kann deshalb als Inbegriff eines vor-aufklärerischen Bewusstseins verstanden werden. In positiver Wendung werden Hexen verschiedentlich als „weise Frauen“ gedeutet, empirisch allerdings spekulativ und unter Verwischung von Kennzeichen unterschiedlicher Phänomene.²

In der Annäherung an das Phänomen Hexerei/Witchcraft in afrikanischen Kontexten ist deshalb zu fragen, wieweit das europäisch geprägte Vorverständnis die Wahrnehmung bestimmt: Wird „Witchcraft“ zum Ausdruck dafür, dass afrikanische Gesellschaften in voraufklärerischen Vorstellungen gefangen sind, die im Sinne rationaler kausaler Erklärungen überwunden werden müssen, wie es für westliche

¹ Vgl. Geoffrey Parrinder (1963), *Witchcraft: European and African*. Second Impression, London: Faber and Faber

² ders., S.103f

Gesellschaften seit dem 18. Jahrhundert gelten soll? Wird damit „Witchcraft“, wie in ähnlicher Weise in Westafrika im 19. Jahrhundert die Themen „Polygamy“ und „Sklaverei“, zum Prüfstein dafür, auf welcher „zivilisatorischen“ oder „Entwicklungs“-Stufe sich afrikanische Gesellschaften befinden, wobei nach wie vor ein westlich geprägtes Fortschrittsmodell als normativ gilt?

In der Literatur und in direkten Begegnungen wird immer wieder ein wechselseitiges Nichtverstehen konstatiert, das auf grundsätzliche epistemologische und ontologische Ausgangspunkte verweist.³ Westliche Autoren haben immer wieder versucht, Witchcraft auf ihre materiellen und sozialen Ursachen zurückzuführen,⁴ ohne damit jedoch existenzielle Antworten auf real existierende Hexenfurcht anbieten zu können. Eine gemeinsame Sprache zu finden setzt voraus, einerseits soziale Zusammenhänge wahr- und ernstzunehmen (signifikante Häufung von Beschuldigungen der Hexerei in Umwälzungsprozessen und Krisenzeiten), andererseits nicht darauf zu reduzieren, sondern etisch und emisch die Realität zu verstehen zu suchen, die sich in Hexenfurcht artikuliert,⁵ und zugleich die religiösen, sozialen und kommunikativen Prozesse differenziert wahrzunehmen, die in afrikanischen Gesellschaften als Bewältigungsstrategien angeboten werden, ob in Gestalt traditioneller Verfahren der Identifizierung und „Reinigung“ oder in Gestalt charismatisch-pentekostaler „deliverance ministries“. Dabei sind signifikante historische und regionale Unterschiede zu berücksichtigen.

Der erste Schritt ist die sprachliche Unterscheidung verschiedener Phänomene, die im deutschen Sprachgebrauch von Hexerei oft vermischt werden: Witchcraft, sorcery, „black magic“, medicine (in englischen Termini). Dies wird dadurch begünstigt, dass in Ghana auch die geläufigen Akan-Begriffe definitiv nicht eindeutig abzugrenzen sind: z.B. obayifo, obonsam, obaninyen.⁶ Es geht grundsätzlich um außergewöhnliche Kräfte im Bereich der unsichtbaren, „spirituellen“ Welt, die im traditionellen Verständnis vielfach ebenso positiv wie negativ wirken können. Doch ist „Hexerei/Witchcraft“ im eigentlichen, engen Sinn die - ob bewusst oder unbewusst vollzogene - Zerstörung des „Seele“/des Lebens

³ Siehe z.B. Abraham Akrong (1999), Researching the Phenomenon of Witchcraft, in: Journal of African Christian Thought Vol 2 No.2, S.44; Walter Bruchhausen, Hexerei und Krankheit in Ostafrika. Beobachtungen zu einem missglückten interkulturellen Diskurs (2003), in: ders. (Hg.), Hexerei und Krankheit. Historische und ethnologische Perspektiven. Münster-Hamburg-London: LIT-Verlag, S.118f

⁴ z. B. Hans W. Debrunner (1959), Witchcraft in Ghana. Kumasi

⁵ Abraham Akrong, a.a.O.

⁶ Vgl. Joh. Gottlieb Christaller (1933), Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language called Tshi (Twi). Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged. Basel: Printed for the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society

(okra) eines Menschen in einem nächtlichen Gemeinschaftsmahl zusammen mit anderen abayifo, zu unterscheiden von der symbolisch-analogen Anwendung von Substanzen zur Schädigung von Menschen, erst recht zu unterscheiden vom Wissen um die Wirkkräfte, die bestimmten Pflanzen innewohnen. „Hexerei/Witchcraft“ ist in diesem Sinn der Inbegriff lebenszerstörerischer Energie und Aktivität, die deshalb so bedrohlich ist, weil sie im Schlaf, zumindest für das Opfer unbewusst geschieht, und weil die beschuldigten Hexen (nicht ausschließlich, aber überwiegend weiblich) in aller Regel der eigenen Familie angehören.

Im Unterschied zur westlichen Geschichte der Hexenverfolgung wird eine Neutralisierung der zerstörerischen Macht jedoch als möglich erachtet, sei es in traditioneller Religion durch „Reinigung“ an einem mächtigen Schrein, sei es in pentekostalem Verständnis durch „deliverance ministries“. Dort, wo in bestimmten Gesellschaften eine Reintegration beschuldigter Hexen nicht möglich erscheint, ist – wenngleich um den Preis von Segregation, Armut und vielfacher Ausbeutung – ein Leben in besonderen Dörfern möglich. Diese Unterschiede zur physischen Vernichtung von beschuldigten Hexen in der westlichen Geschichte sind nicht zu vernachlässigen.

Um nicht der Versuchung zu verfallen, einerseits Praktiken der Identifizierung und Stigmatisierung vermeintlicher Hexen zu legitimieren, andererseits die reale Hexenfurcht zu verharmlosen, ist zu fragen, ob es möglich ist, heuristische Kategorien zu finden, die im Wissen um unterschiedliche „Weltbilder“ und Wirklichkeitskonstruktionen einen interkulturellen Dialog ermöglichen, die die jeweiligen Wahrnehmungen ernstnimmt und zugleich die problematischen Seiten von Zuschreibungen thematisiert. Hilfreich scheint mir der Hinweis Robin Hortons im Blick auf grundsätzliche Fragen der Theoriebildung zu sein, die gängige Unterscheidung von „westlichem“ und „afrikanischem“ Interesse in natürlichen bzw. übernatürlichen (natural vs. supernatural) Ursachen oder der Gegensatz von „non-empirical vs empirical“ sei irreführend.⁷ So kommt er zu dem Schluss: „Western psychoanalytic theory ... resembles traditional West African religious theory: ideas about the individual mind as a congeries of warring entities, and West African ideas about the body as a meeting place of multiple souls”⁸. Ein solcher Ansatz könnte die Möglichkeit eröffnen, Deutungen von Witchcraft und “westliche” Deutungen des Unbewussten in den Verstehenshorizont der “unsichtbaren Welt” zu stellen, damit die gefährlichen und zerstörerischen Energien in dieser Wirklichkeitsdimension ernst zu nehmen und vor diesem Hintergrund nach christlich verantwortetem

⁷ Robin Horton (1993). *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West. Essays on Magic, Religion and Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, S.201ff

⁸ A.a.O., S.205

Handeln zu fragen. Dieses schließt den Blick auf die politisch-ökonomisch-sozialen Umwälzungsprozesse ebenso ein wie die konkreten Beziehungen zwischen „the accusers, the accused and the victims“⁹. „Hexenfurcht“, die reale und in Krisenzeiten allzu oft begründete Angst vor nicht sichtbaren und greifbaren, aber erlebten zerstörerischen Kräften und Energien, stellt in die Auseinandersetzung mit der Realität des Bösen als Problem der Gemeinschaft. Die in afrikanischen Kirchen gängige Konzeptualisierung von „Witchcraft“ als Werk Satans erfordert die theologische Reflexion von Dämonologie, Christologie und Soteriologie im interkulturellen Gespräch.¹⁰ Eine ausschließliche Sicht auf die gesellschaftlichen Rahmenbedingungen und auf ein soziales Konfliktmanagement greift zu kurz, da die konkreten Beziehungen in ihrer Komplexität außer Acht bleiben. Eine ausschließliche Sicht auf die Opfer, ob in deliverance ministries oder im Namen von Menschenrechten, greift ebenfalls zu kurz, wegen der letztlich individuellen Verengung und wegen der drohenden Perpetuierung der Opferrolle.¹¹ Angemessene Antworten auf „Hexenfurcht“ rühren an Grundfragen christlichen Glaubens, christlicher Gemeinschaft und Seelsorge ebenso wie an die nach der Relevanz christlichen Zeugnisses in der Gesellschaft.

⁹ Abraham Akrong, S.46

¹⁰ Siehe. z. B. Tedd M. Vanden Berg (2005), Culture, Christianity, and Witchcraft in an West African Context, in: Lamin Sanneh and Joel Carpenter, The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World. New York: Oxford University Press, S.45-59; Birgit Meyer (1992), 'If You Are a Devil, You Are a Witch and, if You Are a Witch, You Are a Devil', The Integration of 'Pagan' Ideas into the Conceptual Universe of Ewe Christians in Southeastern Ghana, in: Journal of Religion in Africa 22 (2), S. 98-128

¹¹ „If the sociological and psychological causes have not been dealt with, the deliverance will need to be continual, and thereby become a way of life.“ (Abraham Akrong, S.47)

Programm

Montag, 05. Mai 2014

- 11.45 Uhr Eingangsimpuls: Relevanz des Themas
(Prof. Dr. Werner Kahl)
- 14.00 Uhr Zauberei in Afrika
(Dr. Gabriele Lademann-Priemer)
- 16.00 Uhr Hexencamps in Ghana
(Prof. Dr. Jon Kirby)
- 19.00 - Zukunft der Hexen-
20.30 Uhr camps aus der Perspektive der Menschenrechte
*(Prof. Dr. Jon Kirby /
Pastor Hannes Menke)*

Dienstag, 06. Mai 2014

- 09.00 Uhr Befreiung von Hexerei in den Pfingstkirchen mit Bezug zu den hiesigen
Verhältnissen
(Pastor Peter Mansaray)
- 11.00 Uhr Heranwachsende der 2. Generation in Europa - Entzauberte Welt?
(Jugendpastor Nick Elorm)

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Hexenfurcht in Afrika

In der kirchlichen Partnerschaftsarbeit sorgen konträre Weltbilder und disparate Erfahrungen von Wirklichkeit für zum Teil erhebliche Irritationen. Aufgrund von Migrationsbewegungen sind afrikanische Hexenvorstellungen seit einigen Jahren auch in Europa anzutreffen.

Insofern ist die wissenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit dieser Problematik entwicklungspolitisch, gesellschaftlich und kirchlich relevant – nicht zuletzt auch als kritische Anfrage an den Westen nach der Existenz des Bösen.



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